

ROBERT CALAFIORE



GLASS RELICS

FOTO RELEVANCE HOUSTON TEXAS

MAY 17-JULY 8, 2019

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GLASS RELICS

"From day one, when I saw the first print emerge from the chemicals, I was captivated. The negative image was able to see not only through and into the subject, but across it as well. It exposed something I couldn't otherwise see. Something seemingly not meant for my human eyes. It came close to elevating the ordinary to that extraordinary place I wanted to reveal. It left me wanting more."

— Robert Calafiore
from *At Length* magazine

Untitled (2016)

(cover image)
20 x 16"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print

All images are unique, pinhole camera chromogenic prints.

IMAGES WITHOUT A LENS

GEOFFREY C. KOSLOV

Before there were cameras with a glass lens, whether on a phone or any one of the many styles of "camera" available today, images were seen on walls and floors as light traveled through tiny holes in barriers between an interior space and the outside world. Before people understood how images could be captured, light entering a darkened space intrigued, amazed, and even frightened early humans. Robert Calafiore practices the art of using a pin-sized hole on a dark, light-tight box to capture an image on light sensitive paper. He brings forward the most ancient of image creation traditions and reintroduces it into our digital-dominated modern age.

Much of Robert Calafiore's camera obscura/pinhole style of photographic practice focuses on color still life imagery of glass, referred to as "Ogetti di Vetro" (which translates from Italian as "glass objects"). The glass objects selected relate to Calafiore's family history; as a child growing up, these objects fascinated him. They were magical and special. Glass was one of the first "luxury" things his Italian immigrant parents owned in America. In the early years, the glass in Calafiore's photographs came solely from his parents' collection. In later years, he added his own acquisitions of glass. These new acquisitions became symbolic of his own metamorphosis and change.

Using the old technology of camera obscura enabled Calafiore to challenge his own dependence on today's technology and preserve his core skills of photography. He "wanted to make work that was relevant, felt contemporary, looked high tech, but yet was made with the simplest camera to capture an image." He built more than 20 cameras of different sizes and character, each with its own unique features.

While the operation of a pinhole camera seems straightforward and simple, the construction and use of one is extremely complex: exposures can go from several minutes to hours, how the

light sensitive film or paper is fitted into the camera affects the images. If the film or paper lies flat, the image has one quality. If the paper or negative is curled or otherwise not flat, the image is, in turn, distorted (sometimes done intentionally by Calafiore to give his images a certain appearance). All of Calafiore's images are made directly onto light sensitive paper and not film, meaning that each image is unique. There is no ability, as with a film negative, to make exact reproductions, unless the image itself is copied—which the artist does not do. This emphasizes Calafiore's interest in the photograph as object: each image is the only created photographic object that will exist.

Calafiore, as an artist, chooses to present his images as a negative. His works are the literal reverse, or negative, of an image as we would expect to see it: dark is light, light is dark, and colors are recorded as their approximate opposites. This is a consequence of the photographic technique he selects. For Calafiore, the "negative image exposes a layer or a 'world' that cannot be seen otherwise." This mystery leads the viewer to engage more directly with the image created; we have to stare more closely and take our time examining and processing what we see.

At the same time he was working on his glass still life images, Calafiore also made male nude figurative studies using the same pinhole camera techniques. These studies are fanciful scenes, ones that illustrate the influence of several artists. For one, Calafiore's careful placement and expressive positioning of the male nude is influenced by the work of George Platt Lynes. For another, Calafiore became adept at storytelling using multiple images, echoing a Duane Michals-style visual dialogue. The staging and set for each of the images seem to echo what Calafiore might have appreciated in the work of Robert Cummings' Hollywood movie sets, while the pinhole effect of reversing colors is reminiscent of Barbara Kasten—notable for her abstract constructions and use of color, and who was another artist Calafiore studied. While one can argue what we sense in each image, it is not arguable that some form of loneliness, contemplation, and desire for engagement with the viewer exists in each photograph.

Robert Calafiore's glass and figurative still life works take us to a special place. They challenge us to use our vision, to participate, and to be imaginative. We have to use our visual senses and study each image to translate what we see into something familiar to us. We cannot push any buttons here to be told what to think or see. We cannot search the internet to explain what we are seeing. What we see is all that there is. Calafiore's literally unique artistry rewards us greatly without reliance on digital noise whispering at us, and telling us not only what to think, but what to see. With Calafiore's work, it is just him and us, alone.



Untitled (2009-2012)

40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2009-2012)

40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2013)

40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2013)

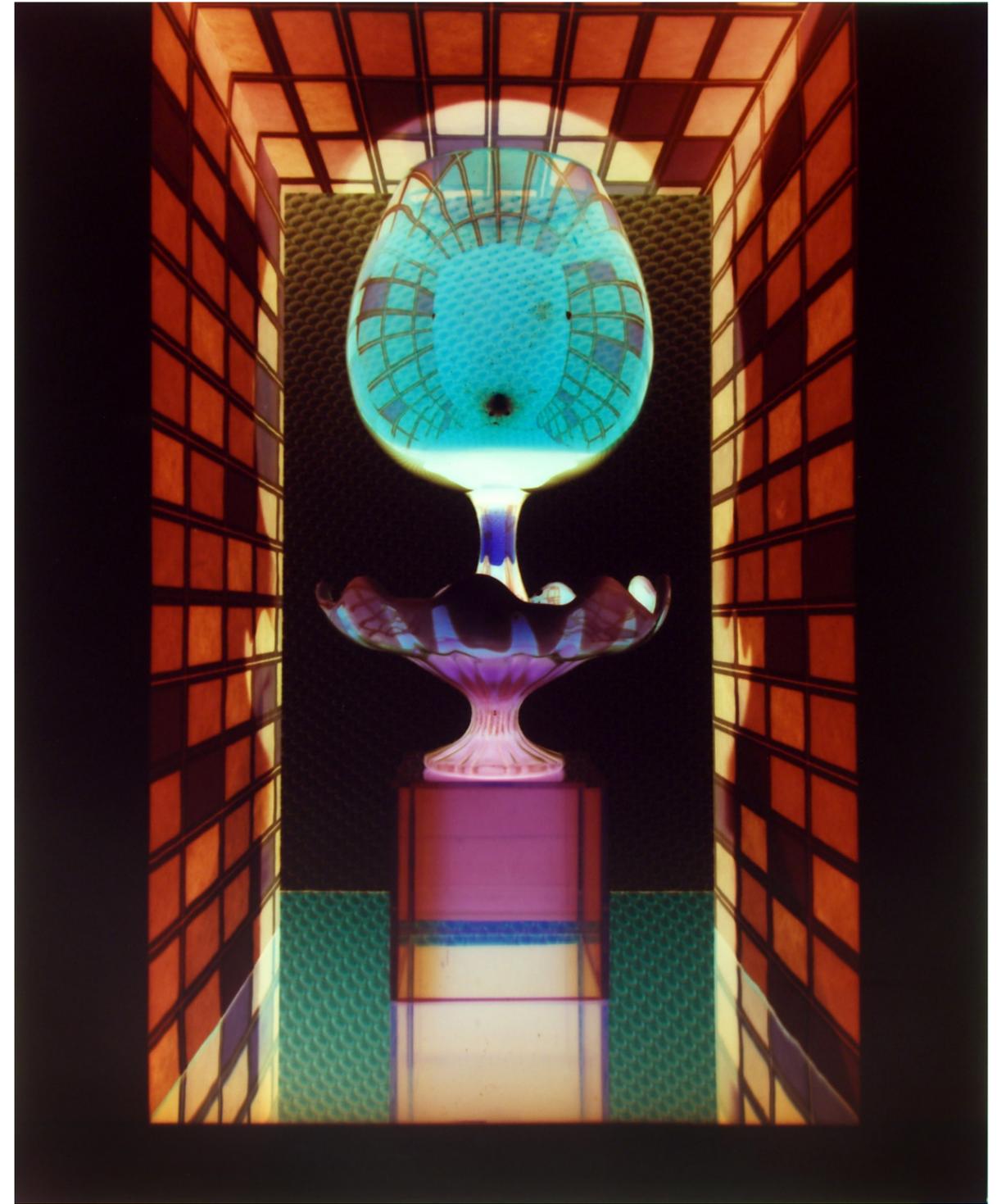
40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2016)
20 x 16"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2016)
20 x 16"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2017)
24 x 20"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2017)
24 x 20"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2018)
10 x 8"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2018)
10 x 8"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2018)
10 x 8"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Ogetti di Vetro, Smeraldo (2015)
72 x 120"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic prints (grid)



Ogetti di Vetro, Smeraldo (2015), detail



Untitled (2008-2011)
40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2008-2011)
40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print



Untitled (2008-2011)

40 x 30"

Unique pinhole camera
chromogenic print

ROBERT CALAFIORE

THE ARTIST

Robert Calafiore is a Connecticut-based photographer whose process, traditional materials, and the reaction between light and chemistry, as well as the personal and universal stories told through every day objects and intimate relationships, drive the work in his studio practice. He received his MFA in Photography from the State University of New York at Buffalo and his BFA in Photography from Hartford Art School. He was recently awarded the Connecticut Artist Fellowship Grant for 2018 and was also named the Second Sight Award artist speaker for Medium Festival of Photography in October 2018. His work has appeared in *Photograph Magazine*, *Diffusion Annual IX*, *Lenscratch* and *Collector Daily*. Calafiore currently serves as Assistant Dean and Professor of Photography at the University of Hartford.

FOTO RELEVANCE

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum quality contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. The gallery has mounted monographic exhibitions as well as group shows to investigate current trends and themes in contemporary art, showcasing a broad range of both darkroom and digital photographic techniques. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Audubon District of Montrose in Houston, Texas.



FOTO RELEVANCE

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