

Menina IV, and the *Scanogram* series at large, are eloquent reminders to me that the choices and consequential steps made by a contemporary art photographer are contiguous with the sleight of hand flourishes performed by a magician. Photographic artists create in an era defined by a vast visual environment, where images circulate, re-version and have their own algorithmic behaviors. The fertile creative terrain of artists is not defined by separation from this overwhelming visual realm but is found in spaces where the quotidian terms by which images are made can be flipped and misdirected. Just as a close-up magician appears to use mass-produced objects such as poker-size playing cards, dice, small cups and balls to realize their illusions, in *Menina IV*, Ria Patricia Röder uses the lens-less “camera” of the flatbed scanner for expansive and unexpected demonstrations of her sleight of hand motions with fabrics; small, curious objects; fragments and figurines. She finds ways to alter the now-familiar visual language of the scan—this functional image-tool of every office and studio—that complicates and contradicts our ordinary expectations.

Photographers and magicians alike call on us to pay attention—specifically, they *direct* our attention—and activate our imaginations as we attempt to comprehend the meaning of the dexterous flourishes and the steps of the illusion. Ria Patricia Röder’s *Menina IV* is a layer-upon-layer process of compounding and montaging the appearance of material objects as they physically pass over the glass “bed” of the activated scanner. The overall affect calls forth other periods of artistic practice—part-baroque, part-avant-garde—that depart from a monocular perspective or singular vantage point. Röder’s shallow depth-of-field photographs herald an intentionally unstable visual language that is purposely detached

from the simulation of human vision that has been the hallmark of authored photography. The last vestige of the photographic in the *Scanogram* series is her use of the classic rectangular photographic frame that fixes and holds a momentary action and abstracts and renders objects and movement into a readable image-form. Through the photographic frame, the captured material and her actions of arranging and adjusting them *become* a subject of sorts.

The sleight of hand within Ria Patricia Röder’s *Menina IV* is grounded on a soft material, printed with playing cards, dice and domino tiles, known as “bones”—the tools of magic tricks and parlor games. Their iconography makes inference of dexterous pursuits, represented on a thin fabric of repeated patterns, with rectangular, curved-corner “shadows” seemingly made by unseen objects holding back the light of the scanner. In accordance with the conventions of close-up magic, Röder thus camouflages her true sleight of hand that centers on the simultaneously transitory and tangible arrangement of broken ceramics and ghostly *Las Meninas* forms. The scanner registers the pretty detail of the ceramic pot’s transfer pattern where its cylindrical form rests closest to the bar of light that moves across the scanner’s bed. Röder amplifies the inability of the scan to register dimensionality and detail beyond points of closest contact, lifting inbuilt mechanical restrictions of her chosen image-making tool into an expressive and dynamic pictorial conceit. The technical—glitch-like—character of the quotidian scanner becomes the process by which an improbably and incalculable sequence of movements and placements by Röder is seemingly traced. She holds our attention, and deliberately invites us to experience the beautiful subterfuge of photography, creating an ode to photography’s enduring capacity to render ideas and provoke our imaginations.

