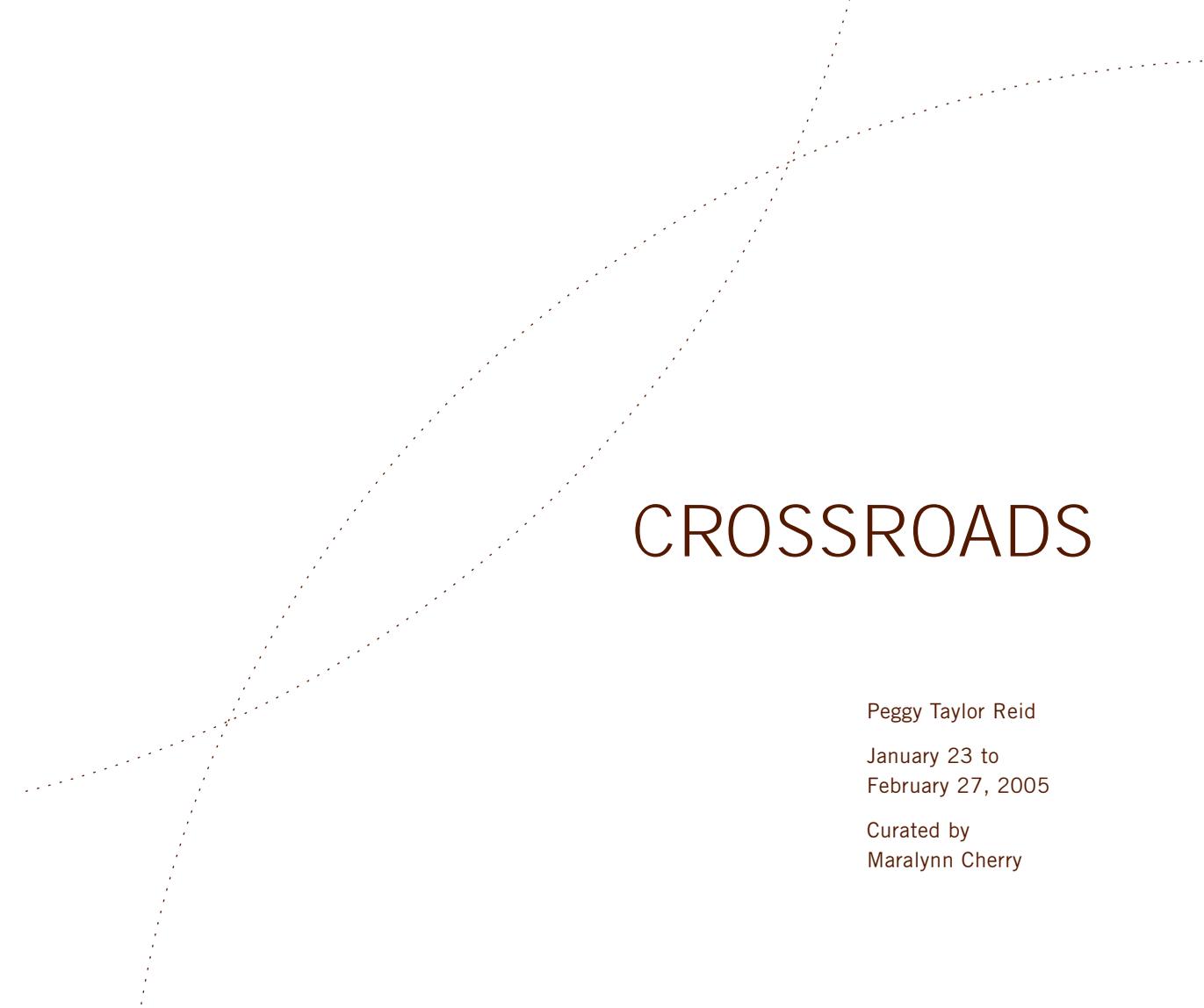




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# CROSSROADS

Peggy Taylor Reid



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January 23 to  
February 27, 2005

Curated by  
Maralynn Cherry

*But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future.<sup>1</sup>  
If one could isolate, that damaged chromosome in words, in an image, then perhaps  
one could restore order by naming. Otherwise, history is only a tangle of wires.<sup>2</sup>*

Ours is an awareness measured and informed by science. The presence of such empirical laws modifies both our perception of, and participation in the world that surrounds us. For Peggy Taylor Reid we are at a 'Crossroads' as science and culture define 'codes of meaning'. While caught in a flux of processing such information there is room for poetic intervention. In her artistic practice symbols surface into an awareness both reflected upon and transformed. Taylor Reid draws with light, as images and stories unfold into and through the photographic process. This artist is concerned with a cosmology of seeing as poetic, ethical and ecological concerns modify her readings of science. Through her manipulation of imagery, light and shadow, poetic instances are created, drawing the viewer into a dramatic montage. These are not quiet works but reflect

more, the power of lucid dreams; dreams that are meant to awaken the stirrings of a shift in ones perception of reality. Aesthetic language here, shapes a metaphysical dialogue with the aftershocks of a scientific paradigm. It is not the initial discoveries of science that disturb us as much as the ethical questions that arise from applied science. A drama unfolds in this installation. The viewer is drawn into the theatre of natural history.

In her 'Heaven and Earth' series, morphological traces of the detritus of earth are juxtaposed alongside surveillance satellites, while the fragile bodies of children circumnavigate a sublime garden. Technically, these large shadow-grams combine the Van Dyke and cyanotype processes of early photography to create a multi-layered and richly worked surface. Sizable acetates are arranged onto large vertical pieces of watercolour paper treated alternately with each process. The paper is then exposed to direct sunlight providing an element of chance. What is exposed is fixed to the surface of the paper and the rest is washed away in the darkroom. This intricate connection with the chemical process is well suited to Taylor Reid's treatment of subject matter. Metaphorically, this work expands the nature of reality. The imagination and memory fade in and out of the painterly surface towards a transcendent reality. Each of the chosen forms highlighted, manage to create what Gaston Bachelard refers to as an 'intimate immensity'.

*Heaven and Earth #1 1998;  
Van Dyke and Cyanotype; 244x107cm*



*To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space.<sup>3</sup>*

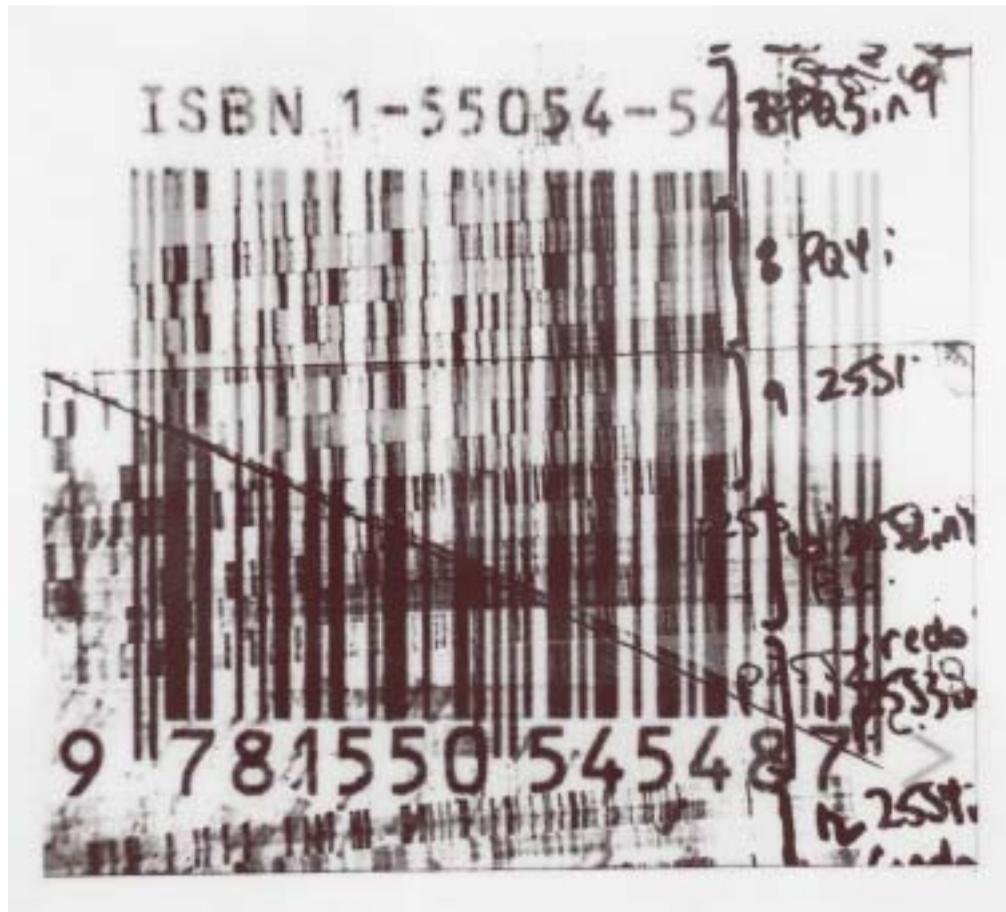
Photography stays close to its historical roots, as the artist combines processes, allowing images to appear through the traces of her initial strokes. There is a simultaneous mystery and beauty to these large rust coloured, scroll like hangings. One is drawn into the worlds of Bosch and the surrealists, while swimming through a mirage of disparate elements. The rings of Saturn, a snakeskin, a nautilus shell, corn stalks, a snowflake and the interlocking curves of a DNA strand, are all within the reach of a child's grasp. As the satellites circulate overhead, we (like the child) float between things seen and the invisible.

Concealing and revealing are constants in the nature of scientific discovery. We can benefit from what is uncovered both microscopically and macroscopically but there are hidden realities to the actual use of such information. In the left hand corner of each of the five works in 'Heaven and Earth', there are placed five types of surveillance satellites that orbit the earth. They are used for communication, astronomical reading, navigation, espionage and recording weather patterns. As inhabitants of the earth, we must be aware of just how much of our environment is constantly under scrutiny. The reading of such patterns is our cultural responsibility.

Three framed images, 'Untitled' and a piece called 'Night Journey' detail a visual vocabulary that encapsulates itself into the mythic narratives revealed in 'Heaven and Earth'. Taylor Reid's work conveys the beauty and richness of the patterns and forms in nature as, "Electron microscopic scans merge with images of seeds, skeletons of extinct animals and Hubble telescope transmissions."<sup>4</sup> These multifaceted surfaces reveal the history of the collector/explorer, as do the shelves of her studio. Wandering shorelines and wilderness sites, she gathers and reflects on the fragile nature of our environment. The haptic experience of holding such forms as the wing of a cicada or small crabs culled from the beach, gives a visceral sense to the poetic nature of her complex and sensitive work.

The surrealist movement was formed within an environment caught between two wars as technology fractured reality. The collaged fragmentation of imagery and found materials became the dream apparatus, allowing the unconscious to reconstruct new questions, new meanings. Objects, text and deconstructed bodies, vied for some form of metamorphosis or reconfiguration of the psyche. In our current worldview, we must access new theories and discoveries in bio-genetics, chemistry, nano-technology and artificial intelligence. Where do we as the observers of such discoveries position ourselves? What questions should be asked in order to define our active place in the ethical use of genetic manipulation and cloning?

*Heaven and Earth #5 1998;*  
Van Dyke and Cyanotype; 244x107cm



*DNA/UPC Sacred Balance #3 2000*; heat transfer on watercolour paper; 14.3x16cm

*Meaning is an object which is related to another object via a code.<sup>5</sup>*

A series of digital image transfers make up a collection titled 'DNA/UPC'. These works form an intricate textile like pattern, woven in horizontal and vertical bars of subtle black and gray-green highlights. What initially appears is a modernist field of elaborate networks, shaping a layer of abstract relationships. An interlocking series of parallel bands and random numbers merge through a heat transfer process. Upon closer analysis these lines reveal actual DNA codes superimposed with UPC bar codes that label books. The bar codes are taken from books used for the artist's research. These texts deal with the subject matter of Bioethics, concerning cloning and DNA replication. Such titles as "Biology as Ideology", "A Sacred Balance", "Guide to the Elements" and "Clone", generate just one of the many readings constructed into each of these unique visual meditations. The art of picturing such combinations allows the

artist to grapple with her fears regarding the transcription of our humanity. Such numerical bands of information become the codes that script an infinite array of relationships and automatic readings. One begins to look past the similarities in these patterns while searching for subtle differences. We struggle to find some kind of reconnection with the technical means of human representation. In Taylor Reid's earlier work the figure is perceived as, "both a biological being connected to its environment and as a spiritual enigmatic energy."<sup>6</sup> Such technologies shift the point of reference, as the body breaks down into codes more accessible to control and manipulation. Textual and human knowledge shrink to spectrograms archived into bio-molecular and computer generated systems. These works re-enter the imagination of the viewer; while questioning the codification of a self-visualization, that takes us away from the classical nature of human portraiture.



Icarus detail wings 2004; Gicleé on acetate

*There are the so-called inert gases in the air we breathe. They bear curious Greek names of erudite derivation which mean “the New,” “the Hidden,” “the Inactive,” and “the Alien”.*<sup>7</sup>

‘Icarus’, is a current work formatted in the grid shape of the ‘Periodic Table’ that charts the chemical arrangement of the elements. The chemist Dmitri Mendileev formed the first table, allowing each of the elements to be positioned according to the increase in their atomic weight. The metals are placed on the left side of the table; next is a narrow row of metalloids and the non-metals on the right side. The difference, in each of the elements depends on the arrangements of the protons, neutrons and electrons in each of the atoms. A mythical archive is being constructed as an array of fragile insect wings replaces each typographical icon of the Periodic Table. In Greek mythology, Icarus is the son of the great inventor and architect Daedulus. While both are inside the Minotaur’s labyrinth, Daedalus observes the flight

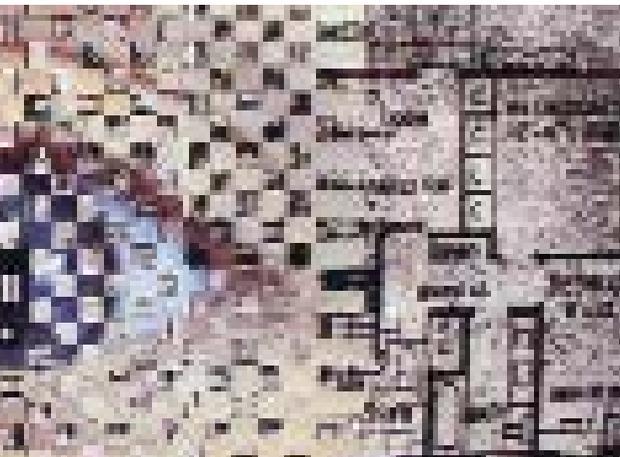
of birds. He shapes two pairs of wings for their escape. Icarus, being ambitious, flies too close to the sun, melting the wax that holds the wings together. He plunges to his death in the sea.

Taylor Reid scans and digitally rearranges a vast collection of insects and wing fragments. Taxonomy of flight and the fragile nature of navigation infuse the underlying rhythms of this Periodic table. Small glass frames encase each of these frail, yet beautiful specimens. One faces a cascade of wings that miraculously travel enormous distances against great obstacles. How do the forces of nature work for or against such delicate species? Broken and detached wings, skeletal and lace-like, make up most of the left side of the table. Colourful wings of the butterfly are placed on the right side, in the area of the non-metals (noble gases). Icarus becomes a matrix, where the artist’s poetry transforms the subtle realm of chemistry into a dramatic field alive with the memory of movement. The atomic realm is reflected in a choreography of experience, shaped by motion through air. The kinetic force of the electron orbiting the proton sleeps beneath a memory of these wings. The work shifts us towards the delicate balancing of the forces of nature.



Icarus detail cicada 2004; Gicleé on acetate

*...rivers following the inconsistencies of land like tears following the imperfections on skin. Wind and currents that stir up underwater creatures, bioluminescent gardens that guide birds to shore.<sup>8</sup>*



*Terra Incognita* detail 2004-2005; **NEED MATERIAL**

'Terra Incognita' is a final work being constructed by the artist, based on a series of river maps that chart the unknown forces she comes to meet, as history converges with the traces of a life lived. Here, water charts the routes of memory that scar a landscape, bringing us to a time where the very purity of such a natural resource can be in danger. Maps, of the St. Lawrence River, Lake St. Francis etc. become the watershed of Taylor Reid's vision. An eye oversees an unfolding world in transition. The voyage is just beginning to translate patterns and warning signs, as sediment gathers along the sides of the riverbeds. Transparent layers of natural patterns are woven into this yet uncharted terrain reflecting what is still mysterious and perhaps dangerous.

Throughout this body of work, one must not forget that Peggy Taylor Reid's aesthetic choices are based on her grounding in photography. She combines the ferocity of the journalist with the diligent eyes of the naturalist in an attempt to transform such visual information into new meaning. Her skills at manipulating photography moves the work towards a layered picturing, informed with mnemonic traces. She turns the viewer into a nomadic traveler as the familiar becomes unfamiliar and what we think we understand must fall under greater scrutiny.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Michaels Anne, *Fugitive Pieces* (McClelland and Stewart, 1996) 251.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>3</sup> Bachelard Gaston, *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press, 1969) 202.
- <sup>4</sup> Taylor Reid Peggy (quote from the artist).

- <sup>5</sup> Barbieri Marcello, *The Organic Codes* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) 5.
- <sup>6</sup> Taylor Reid Peggy (quote from the artist).
- <sup>7</sup> Levi Primo, *The Periodic Table* (Schocken Books, 1984) 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Michaels Anne, *Fugitive Pieces* (McClelland and Stewart, 1996) 51.

## BIOGRAPHY

Peggy Taylor Reid is a photo based artist and educator living in Terra Cotta Ontario. Her artistic practice balances contemporary issues of practical science and its effect on our lives. The beauty of nature's patterns and forms are juxtaposed alongside the disembodied codes and clinical data of biogenetics and technology. Much of her raw material is gathered from her immediate surroundings.

Taylor Reid has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows in Ontario, Alberta and overseas including '6x6', a group exhibition that traveled to Wales, Germany and France. Her most recent show, 'The Fall' was mounted in the Vitrines at Gallery 44 in Toronto. The photography magazine 'Prefix' highlighted her work in the fall issue of 2000. As a member of Gallery 44 she contributed catalogue essays for the exhibitions 'Parcours' and 'Multiplicity'. Her 2005 solo exhibition 'Crossroads' at the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is a survey of her work from the past 5 years and also includes two new installations 'Icarus' and 'Terra Incognita'.

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