



JOHN BRILL

*Splendid Isolation*

PATHOLOGICAL SELF-ABSORPTION  
BEFORE THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

John Brill takes on this year's SPRING/BREAK Art Show theme, *Black Mirror*, through a comprehensive and complex installation of hand-crafted photography accompanied by a clutter of heavy wooden furniture, dimly glowing lamps and television screens, and an assortment of the detritus incidental to a lifetime spent making photographs. Toying with the idea of the negotiable nature of autobiography, Brill traces an arc through forty years of work, utilizing autonomous images of scripted self-portraits documented since the 1970s. The resulting body of work—the oxymoron “manufactured autobiography”—comprises an indecipherable conflation of dualities, all playing out on the sliding scales of autobiography and imagination, reality and fiction, representation and contrivance.

As he discussed recently in a private conversation with the writer Roger Thompson of the photography journal *Don't Take Pictures*, Brill had an epiphany two decades ago when curator, Douglas Walla, had encouraged Brill to visit the Gramercy Park Art Fair. In this moment, as he wandered through the hallways of the Gramercy Park Hotel and into the small rooms that housed the participating galleries, he realized that as nice as his photographic prints looked in the “white box” of the gallery, the best context within which his work could operate is real living quarters, whether in hotels, apartments, houses, etc., where he can play upon the expectant and reassuring familiarity of this homey gestalt, and which he can then subvert with dissonant content. This led to Brill's first installation in 2002 titled, *Endless Summer*. In a review of Brill's 2013 installation, *Every Boy's Dream*, published in *Hyperallergic*, Thomas Micchelli writes about the psychological effect of these environments: “Brill's pristinely arranged elements...fuse into a vision of crisp, melancholy perfection. But what's even more intriguing and irresistible, is that even after you've looked more closely at Brill's photographs—bleached and burned images of screaming babies, crucified nudes and radioactive heads—or stared at the grainy video of a ski-masked face floating on an antique

TV screen, the installation continues to suck you in without losing its initial welcoming presence. It's a deliciously ineffable sensation, suspended between piercing images of extreme noir and the silky ambiance of a burnished, incandescent oasis, an exquisite coupling of comfort and dread."

It's with this full-fledged knowledge that Brill's images must reside within their own universe that we're best able to consider this incarnation of the manufactured autobiography that he constructed specifically around the curatorial theme of *Black Mirror*. He has stated, "More than anything, doing an installation gives me the opportunity to combine the autobiographical—a lot of stuff is taken right from my residence and work space—with the whimsical, to create a purely fictional reality; some of it is me, some is imagined, and if I'm successful, they mesh seamlessly." Writing in *Don't Take Pictures*, Roger Thompson observed, "When we [live with the dark residue of our histories]...we meet ourselves as caretakers of histories, both real and imagined."

Brill started making photographic images when he was eight years old, describing his initial assessment of the photographic process as being "like magic." However concept-driven his current work might appear, his inspiration was and still is derived from the personal images that he long ago saw in photo albums, on people's walls and dressers, and the slides that his father would project onto screens when his family would get together. Being self-taught was fundamentally imperative for Brill, not in the sense that his work is intentionally de-skilled or lacking in the craft of photography, but quite the opposite, wherein it is fundamental to shaping different ways of seeing the world and the role that image-making plays in shaping one's sensibility and, ultimately, one's identity. Most importantly, being self-taught allowed Brill to enter the mainstream art world with his sensibility fully formed, immune to art world trends and fashion.



**SELF-PORTRAIT, BLOOMFIELD, NJ 1981 [1981-F]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8.5 x 11 INCHES



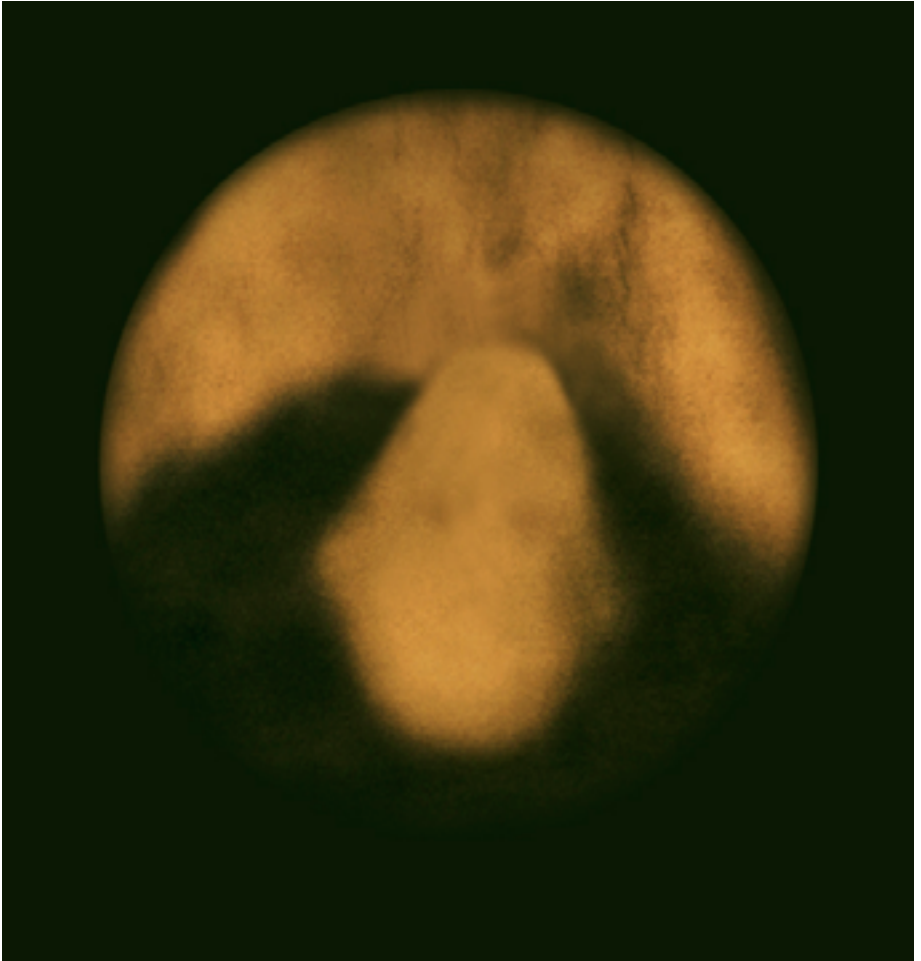
**SELF-PORTRAIT, RIDGEFIELD PARK, NJ 1985 [1985-C]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, MAHWAH, NJ 1987 [1987-C]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES

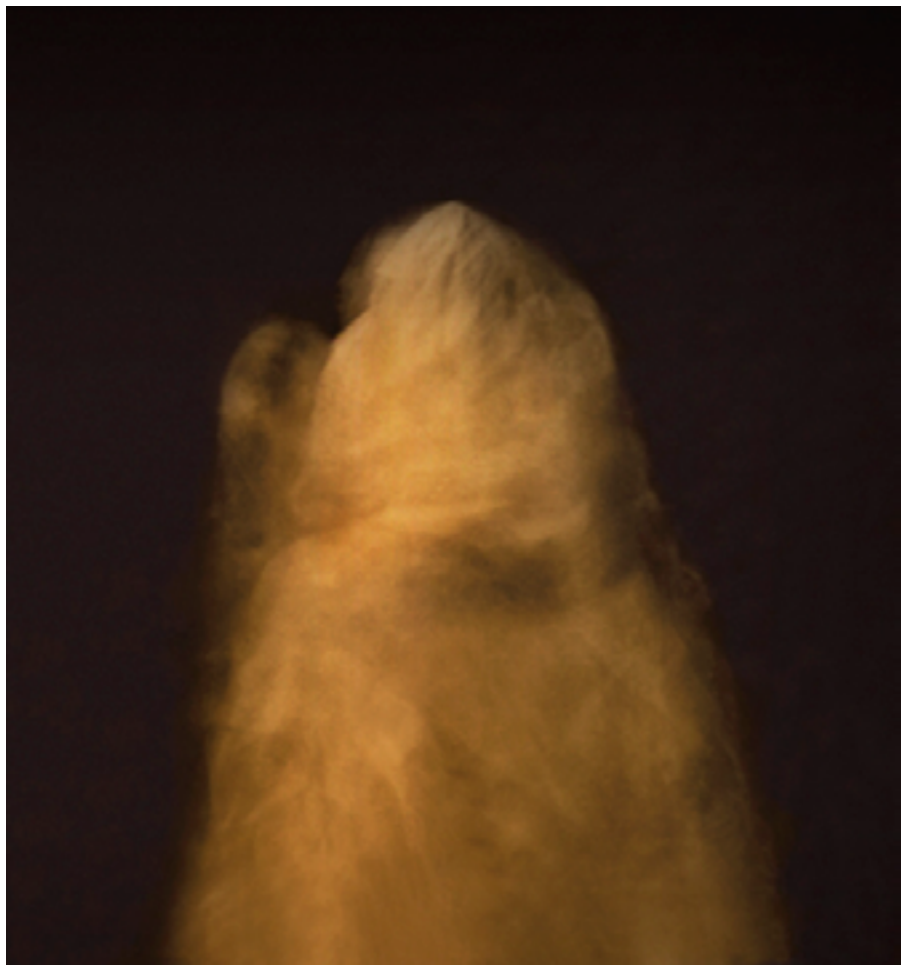


John Brill, *Splendid Isolation*





*ation: Pathological Self-absorption Before the Age of Social Media, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, 2017*



**SELF-PORTRAIT, RAMSEY, NJ 1982 [1982-B]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, NEWARK, NJ 1987 [1972-I]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8.5 x 11 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, CHIHUAHUAN DESERT, MEXICO 1987 [1987-A]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

7 X 7 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, NORTH BERGEN, NJ 1985 [1985-A]**

PRINTED 1986

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, TOMS R**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON P

FRAMED BY

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST

8.5 x 11



**IVER, NJ 1973 [1973-A]**

PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

THE ARTIST

T IN AN EDITION OF 10

. INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATERSON, NJ 1981 [1981-1]**

PRINTED 1981

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 4

5 x 7 INCHES





**SELF-PORTRAIT, MOJAVE, CA 1984 [1983-10]**

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 4

5 X 7 INCHES





*ation: Pathological Self-absorption Before the Age of Social Media, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, 2017*



**SELF-PORTRAIT, RAMSE**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST

11 x 8.5



**NY, NJ 1982 [1982-C]**  
PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH  
BY THE ARTIST  
IN AN EDITION OF 10  
INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, CLIFTON, NJ 1985 [1985-B]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, NEWARK, NJ, 1987 [1987-11]**

PRINTED 1988

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

5 x 7 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE, 1982 [1982-3]**

PRINTED 1983

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 7

5 x 7 INCHES





**SELF-PORTRAIT, NORTH BERGEN, NJ, 1985 [1985-9]**

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8 x 10 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATER**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON P

FRAMED BY

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST

8.5 x 11



**SON, NJ 1987 [1987-D]**

PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

THE ARTIST

T IN AN EDITION OF 10

. INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATERSON, NJ 1983 [1983-A]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATTERSON, NJ 1984 [1984-2]**

PRINTED 1985

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 5

7 x 5 INCHES



**CONTACT S**

PRINTED

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON P

FRAMED BY

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST

8.5 x 11



**HEET, 1985**

and 2013

PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

BY THE ARTIST

PRINT IN AN EDITION OF 10

INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, TEANECK, NJ 1983 [1983-6]**

PRINTED 1984

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 4

7 X 5 INCHES





**SELF-PORTRAIT, WEEHAWKEN, NJ 1987 [1987-12]**

PRINTED 1988

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

7 X 5 INCHES



John Brill, *Splendid Isolation*



*ation: Pathological Self-absorption Before the Age of Social Media, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, 2017*



**SELF-PORTRAIT, TOMS RIVER, NJ 1987 [1987-P]**

PRINTED 2013

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8.5 x 11 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATERSON, NJ 1987 [1987-H]**

PRINTED 2013

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8.5 x 11 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATERSON, NJ 1987 [1987-25]**

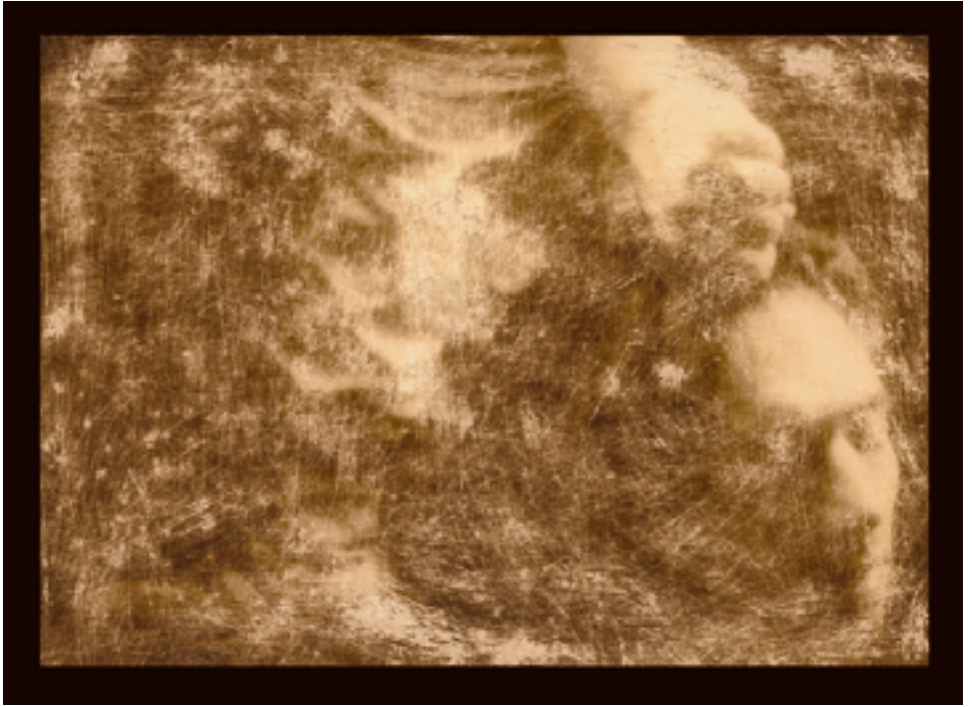
PRINTED 1987

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

5 x 7 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATTERSON, NJ 1985 [1985-D]**

PRINTED 2013

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

8.5 x 11 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATTERSON, NJ 1985 [1985-8]**

PRINTED 1988

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

7 x 5 INCHES





**SELF-PORTRAIT, MANHATTAN, NY 1987 [1987-15]**

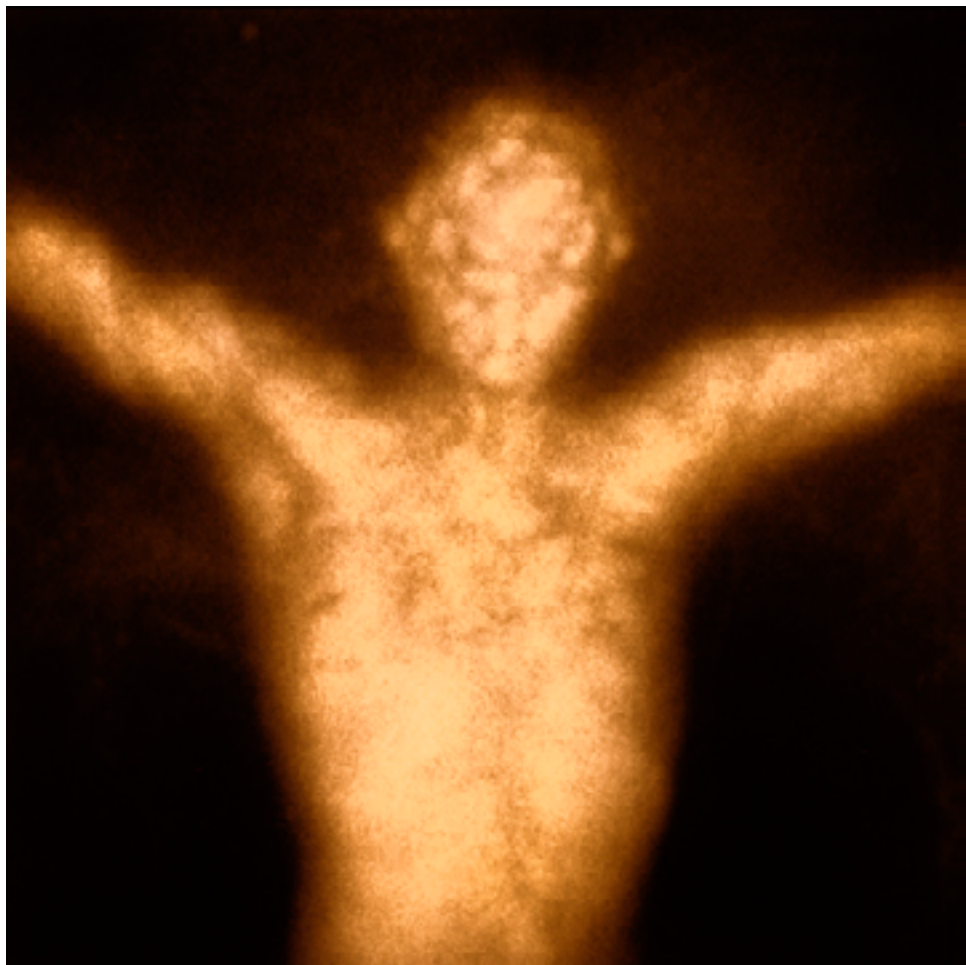
PRINTED 1988

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 25

8 x 10 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, TOMS RIVER, NJ 1987 [1987-G]**

PIGMENT PRINT ON 100% COTTON PAPER WITH UV-SHIELDING VARNISH

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 10

11 x 8.5 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, LIVINGSTON, NJ 1981 [1981-3]**

PRINTED 1981

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 3

8 x 10 INCHES



**SELF-PORTRAIT, PATER**

PRINTED

VINTAGE TONE

FRAMED BY

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST

5 x 5



son, NJ 1984 [1984-5]

ED 1985

ED SILVER PRINT

THE ARTIST

T IN AN EDITION OF 10

INCHES

JOHN BRILL

*Makes a Photograph*

JOHN BRILL IN CONVERSATION WITH DOUGLAS WALLA

In the recent Spring Break event at Times Square, New York, John Brill was invited to install a room which he titled “*Splendid Isolation: Pathological Self-Absorption Before the Age of Social Media*”. During the six-day event, there were many conversations, in particular with reference to Brill’s analog layering of darkroom processes. It was informative to me, and I wanted to share one of these conversations with you.

**Doug Walla:** So Brill, I’m looking at this photograph, *Self Portrait, Teaneck, NJ 1973*...

**John Brill:** ...1983

**DW:** 1983, but isn’t there an earlier version of this same image? Can we first talk about how the basic concept develops before talking about the steps that you take to render an image in the darkroom?

**JB:** There was a version of this same basic image that I made in 1973, just after I graduated from college, in the house that I grew up in in Bloomfield, NJ. Although I hadn’t started working as an artist at that point—and the series of self-portraits was almost a decade off—I had just started making images that were set up, that is, in contradistinction to the obsessive, itinerant documentation of my everyday life that I had done since getting my first camera at the age of eight. The basement in that old three-family house was dark and spooky, and I loved the stairs out to the yard, especially with the light playing off of the old concrete when the outside doors were opened. The set up images were usually images that haunted me, and came from who knows where—dreams, reverie, etc. That particular image—with my back to the moon—is probably something that I dreamed, and that I carried around in my head for a while before actually making a picture. I did sleep research in college; dreams were very important to me, both my own and others’. Whenever people characterize my images as “dreamy,” it makes me very happy.

**DW:** And the steps required to make such an image...?

**JB:** As with the later Teaneck image, I used a three-generation paper negative process, projection printing the first-generation paper positive from the original (in-camera) film negative, then contact printing a paper negative from which the final edition would be contact printed. The reason for utilizing this labor- and time-intensive methodology for such an image is that it allows me to make a lot of absolutely transformative manipulations that would be clumsy on a single-generation projection print, but which are easy to hide going from one generation to the next in the paper negative process, and ultimately don't show in the final print. In this case, since the image was shot during the daytime, most of what I had to do involved creating a dark sky and cutting and pasting in the moon—not in the figurative sense of cutting and pasting in Photoshop, but *literally* cutting a space in the original print with a razor blade and taping in a separate image of the moon, creating the dark sky and hiding all of the rough edges by painting with liquid red opaque. I could also change and otherwise control the quality of light by hand-bleaching the highlights and mid-tones with potassium ferricyanide bleach. Since the tonal values are reversed on the second-generation paper negative, I could use bleach on the paper negative to create or enhance what would be darkness in the final print. So with these few but powerful interventions I have a prodigious ability to create an image that is paradoxically powerful for the *apparent* subtlety of the interventions, even though they were, in practice, anything but subtle.

**DW:** But in this particular case, the Bloomfield image was printed with inks from a digital file relatively recently.

**JB:** That's because even though I liked the 1973 silver print as a personal document, I didn't think it was strong enough to grandfather into what would become my self-portrait series from the 1980s. So I let it sit, in deference to the Teaneck silver print edition that I made ten years later. It was only after forty years that I made a scan of not the final 1973 Bloom-





**SELF-PORTRAIT, TEANECK, NJ 1983 [1983-6]**

PRINTED 1984

VINTAGE TONED SILVER PRINT

FRAMED BY THE ARTIST

PRINTED BY THE ARTIST IN AN EDITION OF 4

7 x 5 INCHES

field silver print, but the first-generation paper positive, and did everything else digitally. Since I already had the Teaneck silver print edition at this point, I left the moon out of the Bloomfield image, and made it slightly different in other respects, although it did serve as both the conceptual and methodological template for the Teaneck image. I liked both, so each was printed as a separate edition.

Very few people notice this, but the Teaneck image containing the moon couldn't have been shot from life and projection printed from a single negative. The overall shot was made with a wide angle lens, which would have rendered even the largest full moon as a tiny white dot. The moon was shot separately with a telephoto lens. It's a curious perceptual trick that the composited image looks so natural that many people don't even suspect that it's a composite. So all of the complicated image construction isn't merely gratuitous dark-room play for me; it's the only way to make such an image. It couldn't simply be shot from life.

**DW:** So this was your thinking as early as 1973, but then you kind of circled back to this same idea in 1983.

**JB:** Yeah, the 1983 Teaneck silver print edition was made by the same paper negative process, and for the same reasons, as described above. I was driving a beer truck at the time, and there was a set of basement stairs that we used for a delivery to a bar in Teaneck that I had my eye on for a long time. They were beautiful—arguably more beautiful than the stairs in my old house—going down from the parking lot, with an ever-present glistening puddle of god-knows-what at the bottom. When I was on the road delivering beer, I always had all of my camera equipment with me, including a tripod, so I could shoot by myself or with a helper if there was another guy assigned to my truck route on any given day. To do this particular shot, I wanted to work with a helper, so I waited until I had a helper on my route for this delivery. Fortunately, the helper on my truck that day was one of my best photographic assistants, and a very improbable art collaborator—a

fellow truck driver from Paterson named Nicky DeNova who moonlighted as a bouncer and dabbler in assorted nocturnal activities, and who had developed an inexplicably deep fascination with what I was doing. He was also the subject of some of the strongest portraits I made during that same period. Whether as a photographic assistant or portrait subject, he would do anything I asked him to do, and his patience was unlimited. It was also helpful that he was huge and I was a little crazy, so no matter what we were doing whenever we worked together—usually out on the street, not in somebody’s basement—people mostly didn’t mess with us, even in some really rough neighborhoods. He also knew a lot of the cops and local people in and around Paterson, where I did a lot of photographing. Aesthetics aside, those kinds of utterly pragmatic considerations were critically important for somebody like me whose “studio” was almost always some public space.

When we were done delivering beer and we had a few drinks, I told the guy behind the bar that we were just going to hang around and photograph in his basement for awhile. He simply said, “Go ahead,” which I thought was kind of weird, since we didn’t know these people especially well. I have no idea what he imagined, but I didn’t ask any questions. We were there photographing for about two hours. Nobody even checked in on us, which was fortuitous since I was completely naked. I probably shot two rolls of film. Using a tripod allowed me to control the overall composition on all of my self-portraits with absolute precision. If I had somebody working with me—especially somebody like Nicky, who was roughly my size and followed my directions meticulously—I could also have that person move around within the frame while I looked through the viewfinder, picking out landmarks against which to orient when I was posing, so that even shooting on film, without the real-time feedback of a digital camera, I usually had a very good idea of what I was getting even though I might not develop the film for another week or two. I was almost never unpleasantly surprised. I shot an enormous amount of film during that period with a confi-

dence that bordered on naivety.

**DW:** And it was shot in the daytime, right?

**JB:** Yeah, it was in the late afternoon on an overcast day, so the sky is completely light and featureless. I took care of that with red opaque on the first generation paper positive as described above, cutting and pasting in a moon from a separate projection print, also as described above.

**DW:** So was it pasted in, or are you saying that you somehow printed it in?

**JB:** No, not printed in, although I also did that with some other images whenever I had to. But here I physically cut and taped it in, surrounded the edges with red opaque, and further bleached out what would be the dark area uniformly white on the second-generation paper negative. You hear me talking about painting with red opaque—don't forget that red is the same as black to orthochromatic paper. But since it's not perfect—the red opaque inevitably lets a little light through—I take care of any imperfections by bleaching on the next-generation paper negative. Since tones are reversed generation to generation, whatever is perfectly white on the paper negative will print as perfectly black on the final-generation paper positive, obviously.

Bleaching is powerful, since it's not only used remedially—to remove imperfections—but is also used creatively, for example, to delicately modify or even *create* “lighting” that wasn't in the original scene and therefore doesn't exist in the negative. For example, on the first-generation paper positive, I was able to go into very small areas with fine brushes, Q-tips, and pieces of cotton saturated with varying strength solutions of potassium ferricyanide bleach to do several unrelated things: separate my dark figure from the comparably dark background by bleaching those few small areas of skin and hair that suggest the definition of my figure; create a quality and directionality of light on the walls and steps that looks

realistic, i.e., consistent with what one would implicitly expect moonlight to look like if the shot were really lit by a full moon; and bleach the moon, which was shot separately, to a lightness and contrast consistent with the tonal values of the print into which it was being inserted. I couldn't make this image—or lots of others—without the fine *local* tonal control afforded by potassium ferricyanide bleach. And beyond the purely *quantitative* removal of density, you can't digitally duplicate exactly the *qualitative* effects of bleach on a silver print. I know that must sound dubious to people who think there are no analog effects that can't be duplicated digitally, but as somebody who now works comfortably within both paradigms, I can tell you that's true. Even though I presently do a lot of work digitally, I still buy potassium ferricyanide by the pound. I can't imagine working without it.

The biggest difference between working with bleach on wet prints and working in Photoshop is that in the wet darkroom there's no option to "go back one step." One wrong move while bleaching and you throw the print out and move on to the next. So pictorial effects aside, working with bleach was important for me early on in that it forced me to become a very good craftsman, even though "craft" was pretty much a non sequitur, if not pejorative, among the post-modernists who held sway when I walked into the art world in the early 1980s. I was a curiosity to a lot of people for my obsession with print quality. But way before I started working and showing as an artist, I was the archetypal darkroom geek, so, purely practical considerations aside, you can imagine how intrinsically rewarding it was for me to create prints in this manner. Sending negatives out to a lab for printing was never an option. These were always prints that I could only make myself. That was important. That's what made them uniquely my own images.

**DW:** So you ultimately made what, three or four final prints, but every one was hand bleached separately?

**JB:** That's right, every one was hand-bleached, so every one

is a little bit different, but because the bleaching process in this case was kind of basic, and I'm really focused when I'm doing bleaching, they're pretty close. Some other images that require a more transformative job of bleaching can vary considerably among the prints in the edition. Because highlights tend to muddy up from one generation to the next, even after all the bleaching I did on the first-generation paper positive, I still had to hand-bleach the final prints to maintain the separation of figure from background, and to make the highlights on the walls, skin, hair, and water sparkle, which is what makes the image come alive. I also had to make sure that all of the tonal values looked realistic, as if it were actually the scene you'd see lit by a full moon. That's all done with bleach, by selectively going into these different areas, separately, with different size brushes and different strength bleach solutions.

The edition sizes on many of the early, extensively hand-bleached prints were determined simply by how many prints I could make in a single darkroom session, in turn determined by how long I could stay awake, and more importantly, by how long prints can stay wet before the emulsion separates from the paper base (a phenomenon called "frilling"). The longest darkroom sessions were about twenty-four straight hours; rarely thirty-six hours, if the temperatures were low enough to keep the emulsion from swelling and separating, and I needed to print a diptych or triptych. Because getting everything right in the darkroom takes so long before the first keeper print is obtained, I never would go back into the darkroom to continue making prints for an edition. Only one darkroom session per image, no matter how small the resulting edition. The Teaneck image turned out to be an edition of four, which means I probably have one artist's proof that will never be for sale, and I always made separate prints for the people who assisted me on the self-portraits, or who posed for portraits. In this case I had to make a very rare exception and go back into the darkroom some years after the fact to make a replacement print for Nicky DeNova after his kid spilled grape juice on the first print I gave him. He was such a good friend that I felt obligated to do that, although I told

him that if the kid kept spilling grape juice on original pieces of artwork, he should consider putting the kid up for adoption, which I don't think he ever did. At least he never called and asked for another replacement print.

I should also point out that I was lucky to have completed printing the self-portrait silver print editions just before Agfa reformulated and ultimately discontinued its legendary Portriga Rapid chlorobromide paper around 1990 (ostensibly, Agfa told me, to comply with emerging environmental regulations in Germany). I can probably count on one hand the number of editions from that period that *weren't* printed on this paper, which justifiably had a quasi-religious following among its users. It had one of the nicest (if somewhat idiosyncratic) responses to selenium toner of any paper ever, and it bleached easily and beautifully. While anybody can make an uninteresting *image*, in the right chemistry and with a fine attention to detail, it would have been hard for an experienced printer to make an ugly *print* on Portriga Rapid. It was just such an inherently beautiful material. There were things that happened in the shadows and mid-tones during selenium toning on these classic chlorobromide emulsions that can't be described; you just had to see them. Watching the prints tone was like my reward for the many hours of hard work that led up to it. It was both exciting and motivational. And like qualitative effects of bleaching, the indescribable, complex chromatic effects that occur within and between areas of different tonality during selenium toning on these papers are also something that can't be duplicated digitally. For a printer, it was a great time to be alive, and I remember that period with a real sense of loss.







John Brill, *Every Boy's Dream*, Kent Fine Art, 2013

# JOHN BRILL

## BIOGRAPHY

(B. 1951 NEWARK, NEW JERSEY.  
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW JERSEY.)

### EDUCATION

1973 BS, Physiological Psychology, Colgate University  
Self-taught photographer

### AWARDS

Fellowship in Photography, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, 1984, 1989, 1994, 2001, 2007

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Splendid Solitude: Pathological Self-absorption Before the Age of Social Media*,  
SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York, NY
- 2015 *Project: John Brill, Kent Gallery*, New York
- 2006 *Bad Memory*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2003 *Cosmophilia*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2000 *Reliquary*, Kent Gallery, New York  
*Reliquary*, Solomon Projects, Atlanta
- 1997 *ennui*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 1995 *engrams*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 1990 *Family Holiday Album*, Coup de Grace Gallery, New York
- 1988 *Selected photographs, 1981-1987*, The Sherman H. Masten Gallery, County College of  
Morris, Randolph, NJ
- 1986 *Selected Self-Portraits, 1981-1984*, White Columns, New York

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *This is a Photograph*, Penland Gallery at the Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC.  
Curated by Dan Estabrook.

- Witness*, Kent Fine Art, New York
- Language of the Birds: Occult and Art*, 80WSE Gallery at New York University, Curated by Pamela Grossman, New York
- 2015 *Spaced: Covering the Universe: Painting, Sculpture, Photography, etc. ....*, Edward Thorp Gallery, New York
- 2014 *Revisiting Histories*, Kent Fine Art, New York
- 2013 *Hypnotherapy: John Brill, Aleister Crowley, Lyn Foulkes, Pablo Helguera, David Lynch, Jill Spector*, Kent Fine Art, New York
- Nevermore*, On Stellar Rays, New York
- 2012 *Against the Specialist: Contemporary References to Arnold Schoenberg in Image and Sound*, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York
- The Limits of Photography*, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago
- 2010 *About Face*, Edward Thorp Gallery, New York
- 2008 *Entre Chein et Loup*, Kent Fine Art, New York
- 2007 *Close Looking*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2006 *Urban Cosmologies*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2005 *The Constructed Image*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2003 *New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship Exhibition*, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ
- 2002 *Endless Summer*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2001 *Vox*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 2000 *The UFO Show*, University Gallery, Illinois State University, Normal, IL (catalogue)
- 1999 *Dream Architecture*, Kent Gallery, New York
- Faces & Places*, City Gallery East, Atlanta, GA
- The Xmas Project*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 1998 *The Waking Dream: Psychological Realism in Contemporary Art*, Castle Gallery, The College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, NY
- 1997 *Portraits: 19th and 20th Century Photography*, Marlborough Gallery, New York
- 1996 *Black and White Unfixed*, Nancy Solomon Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- Difference*, Kent Gallery, New York
- New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship Exhibition*, The Noyes Museum, Oceanville, NJ (catalogue)
- White Columns 1996 Benefit Exhibition*, White Columns, New York
- Light into Darkness*, Kent Gallery, New York
- 1995 *Fact, Fiction and Truth: Contemporary Portraits*, Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY (catalogue)
- the camera i: Photographic Self-portraits from the Audry and Sydney Irmas Collection*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (catalogue)
- (untitled group show)*, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
- 1993 *Contacts/Proofs*, The Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, NJ
- 1991 *Fact or Fantasy*, Coup de Grace Gallery, New York
- 1990 *New Life*, Coup de Grace Gallery, New York
- Brut 90*, White Columns, New York
- Twentieth Anniversary Benefit Exhibition*, White Columns, New York
- Heads*, Coup de Grace Gallery, New York
- New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship Exhibition*, New Jersey Center for the Visual Arts, Summit, NJ (catalogue)
- 1989 *Selected Photographs: Recent Acquisitions*, The Brooklyn Museum
- 1988 *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Life*, Coup de Grace Gallery, Hoboken, NJ
- 1987 *1986-87 Update*, White Columns, New York (catalogue)
- New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship Exhibition*, The Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ
- 1985 *Image Making*, Pavilion Gallery, Mount Holly, NJ (catalogue)
- 1984 *(untitled group show)*, Oggi-Domani, New York
- 1982 *The World Within, The World Without*, The Simon Gallery, Montclair, NJ





John Brill, *Untitled*, Outsider Art Fair, Kent Fine Art, 2015

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## **COLLECTIONS**

The Brooklyn Museum  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
New York Public Library

## **OTHER**

Scientific and natural history photography published extensively in magazines, journals, and books.

Former workshop instructor, advanced black & white printing, International Center of Photography,  
New York.

New Jersey State Council on the Arts, jury panel for Photography Fellowships, 2005