

Patrick Millard: Technology Altering Humanity
By Chris Brunelle

My first encounter with Patrick Millard's artwork came with his series "Formatting Gaia Stage II" and my initial reactions and interpretations to these photos were re-enforced and enriched upon the viewing of his other series like "Anatomy Studies" and "Formatting Gaia Stage I." In all of these series, his work goes beyond photography as he's not only capturing his figures, but also constructing and arranging the elements within the photographs. Millard is interested in the connection between humans, nature, and computer technology. Computer technology has changed the face of the world and human experience so completely. We've accepted and embraced it as a society and rarely question this way or even remember what life was like before. The portion of Patrick Millard's work discussed here will force you to take a step back and maybe reevaluate where we are, what we are doing, and maybe even reminisce on a different time if we can even remember one.

"Anatomy Studies" seems to be the predecessor of both "Formatting Gaia" series. The photos consist of studio models having some computer alteration affixed to their body. "Anatomy Studies I" shows an arm with a circuit board affixed to the front of the forearm. "Anatomy Studies II" has computer wires coming out of the mouth of a man. "Anatomy Studies IV" has a wire coming off each finger of a hand looking like a puppeteer manipulating a marionette. If that is the intention, maybe Millard has hope that the human element hasn't lost total control in the face of technology. Or possibly some humans are puppets and some are puppeteers. The figures are alone in each photo though, and seem to only connect in anyway through their wires and circuits. "Anatomy Studies VI" takes things even deeper. We see the stomach of a pregnant woman with what could resemble the application of medical equipment taking readings on the mother. Being placed later in this series, Millard takes what could be a familiar image and manipulates it to further flesh out his point. Are these wires meant for medicine or just to connect a woman and childbirth back to the cultural machine? Is technology possibly invading the most personal and natural aspects of humanity? Each of Millard's photos raise so many questions and force you to consider these issues on not only in world-wide terms but also from a personal standpoint.

"Formatting Gaia Stage I" depicts the world uninhabited, possibly just after creation, but the world looks different. It has been formatted of course. And seeing as even the word "format" has come to have a meaning exclusive to computer and television functions, how else could this world be altered but with wires, circuits, and varied technological accoutrement. With "Formatting Gaia Stage II," humans start to inhabit this world and as expected, they share the same modifications. Like "Anatomy Studies," the humans are altered but now they are not static subjects in a studio but children in their own Garden of Eden, exploring the world. The characters in these pictures hold a robotic expressionless quality while also appearing to seem new to what they're encountering. Is this the first time they've experienced any world or just the first time in this altered world? Gaia is a word with a multitude of meanings that all point roughly to "the world" or "the planet." If we are formatting this world, our characters are therefore part of a change.

Additionally, all the people are naked. Combined with their expressions, we feel the vulnerability of the people in this world and how unnatural this change truly is. With “Stepping Into Place,” the character is laying down looking overcome with dread, possibly on his deathbed. In “Patience Within The Antechamber,” “Currents of Emergence,” “Accessing The Terrestrial Sphere,” “Coalescing Conception,” and “Abysmal Seed,” humans look to be on either end of the life cycle spectrum. They could be emerging from the earth as if it was a cocoon, or they’re being absorbed back into the ground. If we choose to believe the former, will these people ever be independent of their technological connection to the earth? If the latter is the case, have these characters been beaten by this brave new world? Are they ultimately not compatible with this new operating system? Whatever the case, the ever present wires and circuit boards show these characters reluctantly dependent on being connected. It looks and feels unnatural to them, yet there is no other way in this world.

Millard so successfully brings the viewers focus to the issues he contemplates within each photo. His form and technique is so well executed, it allows you to enter immediately into the world of ideas the pictures create. There is no photo depicting human interaction in all of these series. The only connection for these people is an interface with technology and they look emotionless, alone, and powerless. Millard is suggesting the marriage of humans and technology to the point of the human race turning robotic. Is it really such an unbelievable analysis of a species whose experience is continually evolving digitally?

In “Megalopolis,” Millard takes a series of photos of circuit boards he has captured to look like cityscapes. The varying circuits make up the buildings and skyscrapers in this world. Aren’t city buildings pretty much just filled with technology at this point? It’s not just people, phones, desks, paper, and cabinets anymore. Instead, it’s operating systems, networks, bytes, and a flow of information that travels through fiber optics in binary code. This series is one piece of the puzzle that further emphasizes Millard’s view of the modern world.

To view the series mentioned here and explore an even larger body of work, visit www.patrickmillard.com.