We have been very lucky here at Pasadena City College, to have had a number of the finest photographers working today take part in the Artist in Residence Program, including William Wegman in 1994, Jerry Uelsmann in 2001, and Eileen Cowin in 2009. Examples of these artists’ works are hanging in our library.

In 2012, we continued that tradition with the residency of photographer Abelardo Morell. Born in Havana, Cuba in 1948, Morell and his family immigrated to the U.S. in 1962, first to Miami and then to New York City. He took his first photography course in college, and was hooked. Morell went on to earn an MFA in photography from Yale where his art continued to evolve. At Yale, he was taught that black and white photography is art, color is for decoration. Indeed, until recently, most of his photography is black and white.

Through his own teaching, Morell began experimenting and then documenting the process of photography. He has said that becoming a father in 1986 opened his imagination in ways he had not previously considered. In 1991, he started experimenting with the camera obscura, basically using his entire classroom as the improvised camera. The result is a work called Light Bulb, 1991, the product of a demonstration of the “science” of photography. His camera obscura photographs of whole rooms, are among his most well-documented and recognized works, perhaps in part because of the magic of their creation and the beauty and didacticism of their look.

Morell has been photographing (some say documenting the qualities of) books since the late 80s, from individual tomes, pages, bindings, and even whole stacks full of books in a library. He is clearly
enamored, seeing books as fascinating physical treasures to be celebrated in his art. His gift to Pasadena City College is the photograph called Art History #1, (2012). It is yet another of his visual innovations, in which two photographs are intimately married to create a new reality.

I spoke with Abe at the end of his residency on March 23, 2012.

Interview follows.....

Bibliography


