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# Reading and remembering place through digital photography: exploration of an ancient site

Diane Goodman  
*University of Wollongong*

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**Reading and Remembering Place through Digital  
Photography: Exploration of an Ancient Site**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree

**Master of Arts Research**

from

**University of Wollongong**

by

**Diane Goodman**

**School of Art & Design**

**Faculty of**

**Creative Arts**

**2010**

**VOLUME 1**

## **Certification**

I, Diane Goodman, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts, Research, in the School of Art & Design, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Diane Goodman

May 2010

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Paphos Theatre provides a valuable overview of the process and has been included in the Appendix of this project.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research considers digital photography as an innovative tool that invokes a partnership between scientific (outer) and artistic (inner) modes of enquiry to reveal new ways of reading site, remembering place and interpreting presence. Digital photographic processes are both systematic and fluid, facilitate play, improvisation and new ways of perceiving the world. The work explores the capacity to stitch, layer, blend, variegate, transform and recontextualise photographic images and provides new possibilities for artists to explore imagination and memory, through the merging of art and digital photographic technology. My research focuses on the site of an ancient Greco Roman Theatre, an archaeological excavation at Paphos, Cyprus and asks: how do the processes of digital photography transform artistic practice to represent a contemporary understanding of being-in-place? By examining the digital photographs of key artists, Nancy Burson, Phillip George, Idris Khan, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, I demonstrate the innovative practice of digital photography in crossing discipline boundaries.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>xxii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC PROCESSES: A NEW APPREHENSION OF LANDSCAPE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The postcolonial landscape .....	1
1.2 Relating to land .....	3
1.3 Reading the landscape.....	5
1.4 Bundanon .....	6
1.5 Being-in-place .....	7
1.6 Knowledge of place: site inventory .....	11
1.7 Making sense of place: ground map .....	13
1.8 Conclusion.....	18
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical sources .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2. 2 Archaeology.....	26
2. 3 Digital photography .....	30
2. 4 A Revolutionary Form of Practice .....	34
2. 5 Utopian Views .....	35
2. 6 Multiple perspectives .....	38
2. 7 Conclusion.....	40
<b>Chapter 3: Archaeological photography: from traditional to digital.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3. 1 Reframing the past .....	42
3. 2 Paphos Theatre .....	43
3. 3 The Sonic Architectures Project.....	47
3. 4 The process of archaeological excavation .....	49
3. 5 Archaeological photography .....	54
3. 6 Conventional photography and archaeology: parallel developments.....	57

3.7	Post-photography .....	60
3.8	Conclusion .....	64
<b>Chapter 4: Case Studies .....</b>		<b>67</b>
<b>Case Study: Nancy Burson .....</b>		<b>69</b>
4.1	Chimaeras .....	69
4.2	Hybrid composites .....	69
4.3	A new mentality .....	71
4.4	Subjective perception.....	72
<b>Case Study: Phillip George .....</b>		<b>74</b>
4.5	Variegated copies.....	74
4.6	Mnemonic Notations .....	76
<b>Case Study 3: Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Idris Khan .....</b>		<b>81</b>
4.7	The Bechers: exterior vision .....	81
4.8	Idris Khan: interior vision .....	84
4.9	Conclusion.....	86
<b>Chapter 5: PHOTOGRAPHING PAPHOS THEATRE: DIGITAL PROCESS &amp; MEMORY.....</b>		<b>88</b>
5.1	Stepping through site .....	89
5.2	Site mapping with the digital camera.....	91
5.3	Digital assemblage .....	93
5.4	The body dimension .....	94
5.5	A time-sensitive snapshot .....	95
5.6	Layers of experience .....	96
5.7	Mapping being-in-place .....	97
5.8	Change, loss and renewal .....	99
5.9	Archaeologies and Topologies.....	100
5.10	Illuminations .....	101
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>		<b>102</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>		<b>104</b>
<b>1 Works Cited .....</b>		<b>104</b>
<b>2 Bibliography .....</b>		<b>115</b>

<b>APPENDIX a: PAPHOS JOURNAL ENTRIES .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>APPENDIX b: CR ROM - VIDEO OF MAPPING PAPHOS THEATRE.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>APPENDIX c: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....</b>	<b>147</b>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Chapter 1

#### Figure 1.01

Diane Goodman. Wootoona. Digital file: jpg. 2005.

#### Figure 1.02

Mandy Martin. Puritjarra 2. Found local and sourced pigment, sand, ochre and acrylic on canvas. 76cm x 385 cm. 2004.

#### Figure 1.03

Mandy Martin and Jake Gillen. Puritjarra Flora. Found local and sourced pigment, sand, ochre and acrylic on Arches paper. 40 x 150 cm. 2004.

#### Figure 1.04

Mandy Martin and Mike Smith. Detail, Palimpsest  
Found local and sourced pigment, sand, rock shelter floor matter, ochres and acrylic on Arches paper. 30 x 200 cm. 2004.

#### Figure 1.05

Diane Goodman. Journal detail. Inkjet print, aquarell and fineline pen on Canson paper. 2005.

#### Figure 1.06

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 2. Inkjet print and Fineline pen on Canson paper. 2005.

#### Figure 1.07

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 3: the Bundanon cultural landscape. Fineline pen and aquarell on Canson paper. 2005.

#### Figure 1.08

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 4: Bundanon cultural landscape: homestead precinct. Inkjet print. 2005.

Figure 1.09

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 4: Bundanon cultural landscape: northern perspective. Inkjet print. 2005.

Figure 1.10

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 4: Bundanon cultural landscape: river perspective from Bundanon beach. Inkjet print. 2005.

Figure 1.11

Diane Goodman. Journal detail 4: Bundanon cultural landscape: Homestead precinct analysis. Inkjet print and fineline pen. 2005.

Figure 1.12

Diane Goodman. Journal detail: Bundanon land grid. Aquarell and fineline pen. 2005.

Figure 1.13

Diane Goodman. Journal detail: ground map mock-up. Collage of Inkjet printed images. 2005.

Figure 1.14

Diane Goodman. Flooded Ground. Scanned printed fragments blended with digital layer. Digital file: jpg. 2005.

Figure 1.15

Diane Goodman. Island. Digital file: tif. 2005.

Figure 1.16

Diane Goodman. Lagoon. Digital file: tif. 2005.

Figure 1.17

Diane Goodman. Stonyground, 2005. Lambda print on Endura paper. 119 x 74 cm. 2005.

Figure 1.18

Diane Goodman. Homeground. Lambda print on Endura paper. 119 x 74 cm. 2005.

Figure 1.19

Diane Goodman. Buriedground. Lambda print on Endura paper. 119 x 74 cm. 2005.

Figure 1.20

Diane Goodman. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. Digital file: tif. 2006.

## Chapter 2

Figure 2.01

Burson, Nancy. Mankind (an oriental, a Caucasian and a Black, weighted according to the population statistics of 1983). Silvergelatine print. 27.9 x 35.6cm (source: (Amelunxen, Iglhaut and Rötzer)). 1983-84.

Figure 2.02

Nancy Burson. Warhead 1 (Reagan 55%, Breshnev 45%, Thatcher less than 1%, Deng less than 1%). Silvergelatine print. 27.9 x 35.6cm. 1982.

## Chapter 3

Figure 3.01

Google Earth images of the Island of Cyprus, situated in the Mediterranean Sea. Paphos is located on the western tip of the island. Google Earth.com. Accessed July 2007.

Figure 3.02

Google Earth image of Old Paphos, Cyprus. The arrow points to the site of Paphos Theatre. Google Earth.com. Accessed July 2007.

Figure 3.03

Diane Goodman. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. Digital file: jpg. May, 2006

Figure 3.04

Diane Goodman. View from top of cavea, Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. Digital file: jpg. May, 2006.

Figure 3.05

Excavated stone columns in a trench at Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg. May, 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.06

Diane Goodman. Chrysopolitissa Basilica (Ayia Kyriaki). Paphos, Cyprus. Digital file: jpg. May, 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.07

Streetscape in Old Paphos. Paphos, Cyprus. Digital file: jpg. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.08

Diane Goodman standing next to her digital map mosaic of Paphos Theatre. *UOW Sonic Architectures Project: Mapping the Ancient Theatre Through Sound and Image*. Exhibition, FCA Gallery. Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. 17<sup>th</sup> – 25th September 2006. Photograph by Diana Wood Conroy.

Figure 3.09

Diane Goodman. Detail of digital map mosaic of Paphos Theatre. *UOW Sonic Architectures Project: Mapping the Ancient Theatre Through Sound and Image*. Exhibition, FCA Gallery. Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. 17<sup>th</sup> – 25th September 2006.

Figure 3.10

Wood Conroy, Diana. Rubbing of detail, Paphos Theatre. *UOW Sonic Architectures Project: Mapping the Ancient Theatre Through Sound and Image*. Exhibition, FCA Gallery. Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong. 17<sup>th</sup> – 25th September 2006. Digital file: tif. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.11

Diana Wood Conroy. Wall of rubbings, of Paphos Theatre.  
*UOW Sonic Architectures Project: Mapping the Ancient Theatre Through Sound and Image*. Exhibition, FCA Gallery. Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong September 2006. Digital file: tif. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.12

Trench stratigraphy at Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. Digital file: jpg. May, 2006.  
Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.13

Geoff Stennett. The archaeological plan of Paphos Theatre. Cyprus. September, 2006.

Figure 3.14

Diana Wood Conroy. Site map with flawed mirror.  
Tapestry fragment with gouache, pencil and collage on Canzon paper. 110 x 170 cm. 1992

Figure 3.15

Diane Goodman. Roman glass fragment. Photographed in the Studio at The Apollo Hotel, Paphos. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. Digital file: tif.  
2006.

Figure 3.16

A volunteer barrows excavated debris to the spoil heap. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus  
Digital file: tif. 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.17

An illustrator uses drawing tools and systems to record excavated finds.  
Apollo Hotel, Paphos, Cyprus. Digital file: tif. 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.18

Archaeologists analyse photographic records and documented information Apollo Hotel. Paphos, Cyprus 2006. Digital file: tif. Photograph by Diane Goodman.



Figure 3.19

An archaeologist enters records of excavation finds from Paphos Theatre, using a database of excavated finds. Apollo Hotel. Paphos, Cyprus 2006. Digital file: tif. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.20

Storeroom, Paphos Theatre. Paphos, Cyprus 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.21

Archaeologists, specialists and volunteers meet on the Paphos theatre site to discuss the progress of Trench 1WWW. Paphos, Cyprus. June 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.22

Archaeologist, Kerrie Grant, refers to an excavated feature during an on-site weekly meeting at the Paphos theatre site. Paphos, Cyprus June 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.23

Archaeologists, volunteers and students meet to discuss and sort cleaned finds during regular meetings at the Apollo Hotel. Paphos, Cyprus. June 2006. Photograph by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.24

Diane Goodman. Trench 1TTT Deposit: 1385. Digital file: tif. 2006.

Figure 3.25

Diane Goodman. Sketch from journal: photographic conventions for studio and site photographs. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. April, 2006.

Figure 3.26

Diane Goodman. Sketch from journal: improvised studio setup. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. April, 2006.

Figure 3.27

Diane Goodman. Site photograph of drain pipe. Photograph shows a 'plan' convention: viewpoint directly overhead of the object. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. May, 2006.

Figure 3.28

Eight site photographs of Trench 1WWW in progress during the 2006 dig excavation reveal the methodological process employed by archaeologists during the excavation process. Paphos Theatre, Cyprus. 2006. Digital files: tif. Photographs by Diane Goodman.

Figure 3.29

The Holmes Boom in action on the site of the Large Basilica, *Nicopolis ad Istrum*, a Roman, Late Roman, and early Byzantine city in northern Bulgaria, 1988. Source: Andrew Graham Poulter and Ivor Kerslake, "Vertical Photographic Site Recording: The "Holmes Boom","" *Journal of Field Archaeology* 24.2 (1997): 221-6.

Figure 3.30

I. Kerslake

Photomosaic of the northern end of the Roman road and the second century gate. The Holmes Boom was used to create this detailed photomosaic of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*, a Roman, Late Roman, and early Byzantine city in northern Bulgaria. Source: Andrew Graham Poulter and Ivor Kerslake, "Vertical Photographic Site Recording: The "Holmes Boom","" *Journal of Field Archaeology* 24.2 (1997): 221-6.

## Chapter 4

Figure 4.01

Nancy Burson. Mankind 1983-84. Silvergelatine print. 27.9 x 35.6cm. (Amelunxen, Iglhaut and Rötzer)

Figure 4.02

Nancy Burson. Big Brother 1983. Silvergelatine print. 27.9 x 35.6cm. (Amelunxen, Iglhaut and Rötzer)

Figure 4.03

Phillip George. Tim. Mixed media on paper on canvas 2300 x 1650 mm, (Also exist as an Iris print 1000 x 650 mm), 1990. Source: (George, Mnemonic Notations: A Decade of Art Practice Within a Digital Environment)

Figure 4.04

Phillip George. Mnemonic Notations: Tim #3. Mnemonic Notations: <http://phillipgeorge.net/new/01/display.php?page=01&img=01&>

Figures 4.05, 4.06 and 4.07

Phillip George

Mnemonic Notations: a progression of works from the Headlands series. 1991.

Mnemonic Notations: <http://phillipgeorge.net/new/01.html>

Figure 4.08

Phillip George. Mnemonic Notations: Landpuls 3

Mixed media on canvas 2300 x 1650 mm, (Also exist as an Iris print 800 x 1000 mm), 1991-1992. Mnemonic Notations: <http://phillipgeorge.net/new/01.html>

Figure 4.09

Phillip George. Mnemonic Notations: Mnemonicon 4

Mixed media on canvas (Also exist as an Iris print), 1990s.

Source: Mnemonic Notations: <http://phillipgeorge.net/new/01.html>

Figure 4.10

Phillip George. Mnemonic Notations: Mnemonicon 5

Mixed media on canvas (Also exist as an Iris print), 1990s.

Source: Mnemonic Notations: <http://phillipgeorge.net/new/01.html>

Figure 4.11

Bernd and Hilla Becher: Gasometers, Germany

1983-1992. Source: Susanne Lange, Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007).

Figure 4.12

Idris Khan. every...Bernd and Hilla Becher Spherical type Gasholders. 2004. Photographic print. 208 x 160 cm. Saatchi Gallery Online. [http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/idris\\_khan\\_becher\\_gas.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/idris_khan_becher_gas.htm). 20/3/10.

Figure 4.13

Bernd and Hilla Becher. Half-timbered houses, Siegen industrial region, Germany. 1959-1973. Source: Susanne Lange, Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007).

Figure 4.14

Idris Khan. every...Bernd and Hilla Becher Gable sided Houses. 2004. Photographic print. 208 x 160 cm. Source: Saatchi Gallery Online [http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/idris\\_khan\\_becherhouse.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/idris_khan_becherhouse.htm)

Figure 4.15

Bernd and Hilla Becher. Water towers, United States. 1974 – 1983. Source: Susanne Lange, Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007).

Figure 4.16

Dane Goodman. Studio photograph of archaeological find no. 3522 Paphos, Cyprus. 2006.

Figure 4.17

Dane Goodman. Studio photograph of archaeological find no. 5147 Paphos, Cyprus. 2006.

Figure 4.18

Dane Goodman. Site photograph of archaeological find no. 5416 Paphos, Cyprus. 2006.

Figure 4.19

Dane Goodman. Site photograph of archaeological find no. 5417 Paphos, Cyprus. 2006.

## Chapter 5

### Figure 5.01

Goodman, Diane. Team members survey the site of Paphos Theatre on the afternoon of my arrival at Paphos, late in April. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.02

Goodman, Diane. Lone Terebinth in late afternoon glow on 31.3.2006, prior to its removal the following day. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.03

Goodman, Diane. Journal detail. Sketch and to-do list. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.04

Goodman, Diane. Journal detail. Sketch considering the vertical plane of the theatre in relation to a musical score. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.05

Goodman, Diane. Hotspot Panorama: centre of orchestra. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.06

Goodman, Diane. Hotspot Panorama: front of Roman tunnel. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.07

Goodman, Diane. Hotspot Panorama: Rock, top left of theatre. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

### Figure 5.08

Goodman, Diane. Archaeologists and volunteers at work in a trench and adopt repetitious and systematic processes to excavate the site. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.09

Goodman, Diane. Journal detail: shards on sorting tables during the process of classification. Apollo Hotel. 2006. Paphos. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.10

Goodman, Diane. Plan photograph of glass fragment and centimetre scale. 2006. Paphos Theatre. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.11

Dane Goodman. Elevation photograph of amphora shard and centimetre scale. Paphos theatre. 2006. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.12.

Dane Goodman. Site surveyor, Kerry Platt (left), and his assistant, Joe Stockreiter, align the laser theodolite to the east-west axis and the co-ordinates of the archaeological grid during the mapping process.

Paphos Theatre. 2006. Digital file: jpg

Figure 5.13

Cameron Candy. Diane Goodman maps the Paphos Theatre site using her digital camera with lens aligned to the theodolite, with the help of the site surveyor's assistant. Paphos Theatre. May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006. Digital frame from videotape: jpg.

Figure 5.14

Cameron Candy. Diane Goodman maps the Paphos Theatre site using her digital camera with lens aligned to the theodolite, with the help of the site surveyor's assistant. Paphos Theatre. May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006. Digital frame from videotape: jpg.

Figure 5.15

Dane Goodman. Journal entry, showing progressive notation of shot sequence and capture according to mapped rows on location. Paphos Theatre. May 4th 2006. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.16

Dane Goodman. Screen snapshot of folder hierarchy for storing studio photographic files. Wollongong June 2006. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.17

Dane Goodman. Screen snapshot, showing folder hierarchy of resized digital files for assemblage into the final map. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: jpg

Figure 5.18

Dane Goodman. Screen snapshot, showing extended snapshot of folder hierarchy of resized digital files for assemblage into the final map. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: jpg

Figure 5.19

Dane Goodman. Topology, Paphos Theatre. Assembled digital map. Wollongong, June 2006. Lambda prints (3 sections, each 10872mm x 25000mm)

Figure 5.20

Dane Goodman. Topology, Paphos Theatre  
Detail: Orchestra. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.21

Dane Goodman. Topology, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Cavea. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.22

Dane Goodman. Topology, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Eastern Parados. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.23

Dane Goodman. Topology, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Western Parados. Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.24

Goodman, Diane. Topology, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Roman Tunnel  
Wollongong, June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.25

Dane Goodman. Trench, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Roman Tunnel. Wollongong, June  
2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.26

Dane Goodman. Orchestra, Paphos Theatre. Detail: Roman Tunnel. Wollongong,  
June 2006. Digital file: tif

Figure 5.27

Dane Goodman. Paphos Theatre. May 3rd 2006. Digital file: jpg.

Figure 5.28

Diane Goodman. Palimpsest 1. Digital file: tif. 2007.

Figure 5.29

Diane Goodman. Palimpsest 2. Digital file: tif. 2007

Figure 5.30

Diane Goodman. Palimpsest 3. Digital file: tif  
2007.

Figure 5.31

Diane Goodman. Archaeologies 1. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag.  
297mm x 420mm. 2007.

Figure 5.32

Diane Goodman. Archaeologies 2. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag.  
297mm x 420mm. 2007.



Figure 5.33.

Diane Goodman. Topologies 1. Archival inkjet print. Moab Entrada Rag. 1000mm x 1000mm. 2009

Figure 5.34

Diane Goodman. Topologies 2. Archival inkjet print. Moab Entrada Rag. 750mm x 750mm. 2009.

Figure 5.35

Diane Goodman. Topologies 3. Archival inkjet print. Fine Art paper. 1060 x 1570. 2009.

Figure 5.36

Diane Goodman. Parados. Archival inkjet print. Ilford Lustre paper. 2009.

Figure 5.37

Diane Goodman. Illuminations, Row 1. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag. 400mm x 268 mm. 2010.

Figure 5.38

Diane Goodman. Illuminations, Row 3. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag. 400mm x 268 mm. 2010.

Figure 5.39

Diane Goodman. Illuminations, Row 8. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag. 400mm x 268 mm. 2010.

Figure 5.40

Diane Goodman. Illuminations, Row 9. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag. 400mm x 268 mm. 2010.

Figure 5.41

Diane Goodman. Illuminations, Row 41. Archival inkjet print. Crane Museo Silver Rag. 400mm x 268 mm. 2010.

## INTRODUCTION

“The photography of the future can explore and delineate universes where multiple principles are at work, and where existence is both solid and illusory”. Ritchin<sup>1</sup>

Encompassing deep levels of enquiry and research, Reading and Remembering Place recognizes the multiplicity and temporality of the material culture of the ground, to facilitate a visual aesthetic arising from digital photographic processes through the visual stitching, superimposition, juxtaposition and blending of both vertical and horizontal layers of past and contemporary presence. The nature of digital photography is quite different to analogue, through its potential and capacity for spontaneous change and mutability. The stitched mapped image of Paphos Theatre comprises over 2,000 separate photographs. The digital assemblage is not dependent upon a solid substratum for effecting change and manipulating the photographic record, a primary requirement for my project. Change is an inherent characteristic of an archaeological site, and although the archaeological photographer employs intricate photographic systems for documenting the changes as revealed through layers of excavated material culture, other equally significant changes become evident through daily engagement and immersion with the ground and its material culture. Digital photographic processes afford a dynamic reading of the ground and its changes, at micro

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (London: Norton & Company, Inc, 2009). 181.

and macro levels, and allow imaginative play with the “record of the visually real”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mauren Cheryn Turim describes how digitization allows ‘capricious play’ with visual truth, due to its potential to manipulate disparate materials and its lack of a trace of process, meaning specifically, its lack of a photographic plate or negative that “collects traces of images”. She refers to its potential to manipulate photographs as if they were drawings. Maureen Cheryn Turim, “Artisanal Prefigurations of the Digital: Animating Realities, Collage Effects, and Theories of Image Manipulation,” *Wide Angle* 21.1 (1999): 52.