



Miranda Lichtenstein. *Anechoic Chamber*, 2005. From the series *The Searchers*.

How Do You Choose an Image?

by Miranda Lichtenstein

I used to think my best work started with a title. I would have words in my mind, and the words acted as a frame, which gave me a structure. The best example is a series I titled *The Searchers*. Following a year of hypnosis sessions aimed at dispelling my fear of flying (I was in a crash landing and have had difficulty in planes ever since), I began to stage photographs of subjects on attempted voyages of secular enlightenment. The emergence of a broadly defined spirituality since the 1960s provided a basis for these pictures, which represent the ways people try to seek a wholeness in a spiritually deficient society—the aftermath of fitness and mindfulness merging into yoga, drum circles, solstice celebrations, transcendental meditation, flotation tanks, and more.

I now wonder if it's best to start with a question: How do you choose an image? This has been on my mind because the work I have been making over the past few years pulls from the 6,000-plus pictures I have in a library on my desktop. I am not on social media and I was late to smartphones; I shot Polaroid on my 4x5 until there was no more film left. In 2019 I got an iPhone 10 before a trip to Italy, and it changed the way I make pictures. I felt as though I was sixteen again, walking the streets with my 35mm, imagining myself a Cartier-Bresson at every shadow that aligned uncannily with another shape. It's a renewed pleasure to observe the world like this again.

I am not searching my library for images to post, or to print, but to use as source material to generate something new made from multiple images. The process is more akin to selecting materials to collage. The folders on my drive "Files for Multiples" range from "Yellow" to "Glass and Mirrors" to "Tools" to "Fish" to "Circles." Images are submitted to a process of layering, cropping, printing, scanning, cutting and pasting, and running the paper through the printer multiple times until the layers of ink create tone and depth that sit both in and on the surface. Among other things, my current work involves a layering and compression of analog and digital processes. Perhaps this amalgam ties the work to montage if one considers the screen as both a physical and a social space, a site in which fragments are used to constitute something approximating a whole.

I want to push photography to a limit, to where the physical surface is integral to building the space of the image. Someone once asked if a digital printer is more like a loom, and this resonated with me. Which brings me to another question: What more can images do?

[Generator](#) by Miranda Lichtenstein is the Brooklyn-based artist's second contribution to [Maharam Digital Projects](#).

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