

ARTICLE OVERVIEW

The Print Center's yearly competition draws hundreds of entries from around the world, bringing photography and printmaking beyond traditional practice. Pam Forsythe reviews.

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

94th Annual International Solo Exhibitions. Through March 21, 2020 at The Print Center, 1614 Latimer Street, Philadelphia. 213-735-6090 or printcenter.org

The Print Center is located in a 19th-century carriage house with a historically certified façade. There is a small step at the entrance, leading to the first-floor gallery and Gallery Store. The second floor is accessible only by stairs. For more accessibility information, call 215-735-6090 x1.

ABOUT [PAMELA J. FORSYTHE](#)

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Seeing what's not there

Gallery notes indicate that more than 100,000 people have died, and countless others are missing, in the Mexican government's 14-year effort to stem drug trafficking. Since 2011, Aragón has reproduced death portraits of fatalities on all sides—cartel members, police officers, and bystanders. Using an industrial drill on paper matrices and in wood, he carves the contours of breathless bodies.

Aragón has said he uses subtraction to create more relatable images: “The negation takes its form from the erasure of a particular image; it is my intention to transform it, from crude and unbearable into a

The Print Center presents its 94th Annual International Competition winners [View from the outside](#)

Pamela J. Forsythe

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In the Print Center's 94th Annual International Competition, the outsider's perspective is what unifies exhibits by the latest winners: Miguel A. Aragón, Young Sun Han, and Ron Tarver. The prestigious contest, which in 2019 drew 512 applicants from around the world, recognizes artists extending photography and printmaking beyond traditional practice.

Each presentation depicts people who are not fully part of the culture they inhabit. Aragón's *Indices of Silence* stares into faces impacted by Mexico's drug war; Han's *The Unforever Parallel* probes his Korean heritage; and in *An Overdue Conversation With My Father*, Tarver, a second-generation photographer, considers the African American community of his youth.

Feet on the grass, heads somewhere else.
Ron Tarver's 2018 'Invisible Family.'
(Image courtesy of the artist.)

more beguiling or subtle form for presenting disturbing events. Thus ... engaging the viewer into a more lasting experience with a difficult subject matter to provide a sense of catharsis.”

Human features emerge slowly from a field of abstract punctures. In *Lote baldio* (2018), a man lies face-up, left arm angled across his chest. In the woodcut *Embolsado* (2018), another man slumps to one side, a sleeper’s pose. Areas completely eroded by Aragón’s drill look like patches of snow, but other sections are dense with tiny perforations, like the photoengraving dots seen in newspaper pictures. In the *Retrato* (2016, 2019) series, Aragón left ragged, violently ripped edges, simulating the decomposition of a body, or a society, riven by ills it can’t cure.



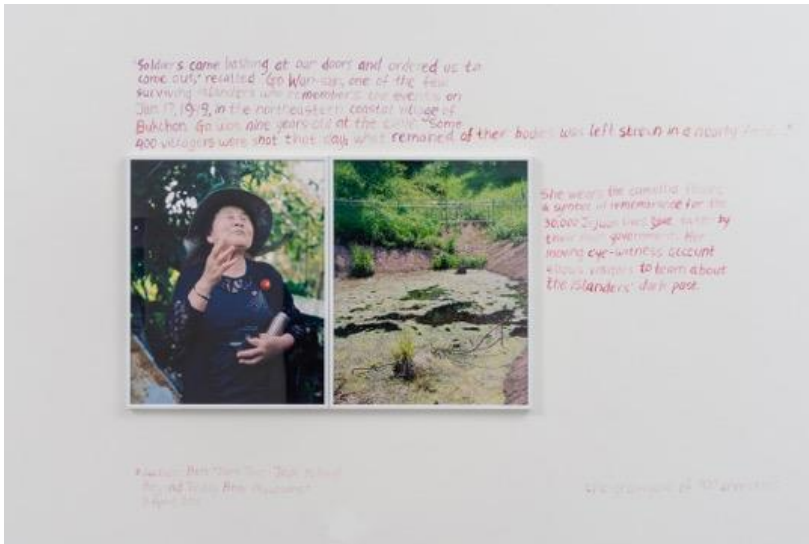
The contour of breathless bodies: Miguel A. Aragón's 2018 'Embolsado.' (Image courtesy of the artist.)

Shifting lenses

Han, an American of Korean heritage, combines photography, text, travel ephemera, and historical accounts to illuminate stories of his family and the land his grandfather left in the 20th century. Rooted in his grandfather’s first-person account, Han uses the singular experience as a lens through which to see more accurately and broadly, shifting viewers among memoir, travel brochures, newspaper accounts, and living memory, searching for what’s true.

In *Passages From a Memoir: Dadaepo Beach, Dadaepo Horizon, and Busan Harbor* (2019), the gallery wall features Han’s hand-painted lines, drawn from his grandfather’s account of a ferry capsizing, interspersed with contemporary photographs of the places he described: “...when we got there there was no trace of the wrecked boats and passengers...” As the passage ends, the words become faint and drift, as though being carried away on the tide.

Han employs the same technique to examine a little-known event in *Tourist in the Dark* (2019). Today Jeju Island is a vacation destination known as “The Hawaii of South Korea,” but from 1948 to 1954, it was where the South Korean government slaughtered suspected Communists. Han documents that in those years, government forces destroyed 70 percent of Jeju’s villages, and killed 10 percent of its population. He introduces Hong Chun-ho, now 81, who “hid in a cave for over 40 days when hundreds in her village were massacred. She wears the camellia flower, a symbol of remembrance for the 30,000 lives taken by their own government,” during the uprising on Jeju that began on April 3, 1948 and continued through the summer of 1949.



Young Sun Han's 'Tourist in the Dark' diptych: 'Hong Chun-ho at Bukchon Village, Jeju Island' and 'Massacre Site, Jeju Island.' (Image courtesy of the artist.)

Home and family, reimagined

As a photojournalist, Ron Tarver's work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Time*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated*, and he is familiar to readers of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for his 32 years as a staff photographer. In *An Overdue Conversation With My Father*, Tarver exhibits the artistic vision that's earned him national and international recognition.

Tarver's father Richard, a self-taught photographer, operated a portrait studio in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, a close-knit African American community where Tarver was born. "I grew up with a box of my dad's photographs, and when I became a photographer, I wanted to make works that created a dialogue between us that speaks to today's time," he says.

Ongoing Conversation, a continuing work, consists of Tarver's reinterpretation of his father's images, portraits that might populate any family album. He begins by re-photographing and manipulating originals. In *Community* (2018), he reprinted them on glass, softening the features, creating a ghostly black-and-white gallery that replicates the pictures that climb countless stairways: Mom, Dad, and kids cooling off in summer; a young woman's graduation portrait; a young man in military uniform; men dressed for an occasion, crowded together for a picture; girlfriends having fun, preening for the camera.

In other works, Tarver emancipates his father's subjects from the 1940s and '50s and transports them into the future. In *Invisible Family* (2018), he flattens an unpopulated setting, a sedan parked by a dirt road, and inserts a man, woman, and child at the car's front grill. The family exists on a different plane from the background, like paper dolls propped on a tabletop. Their feet touch the grass beneath the car, but their heads are in another dimension, as though they're just trying this place on for size.

The Gathering (2019) looks like the archetypical poster for a science fiction movie. Tarver excised a group of Oklahomans in their Sunday best and set them in an open field at night. They stand, backs to camera and dwarfed by the setting, looking into an enormous starry sky. They seem to be waiting

politely in the moonlight for something. The same disorientation exists in *Homesteaders* (2017), in which three tiny people inhabit a landscape that's part Earth, part moon, and part interplanetary. It's familiar and eerie, hopeful and sad, all at the same time, which come to think of it, isn't a bad description of what it is to be an outsider.



<https://www.broadstreetreview.com/art/the-print-center-presents-its-94th-annual-international-competition-winners#>