



Towards another (big bang) theory

Photographs by Geoffrey H. Short

Great Balls of Fire
Where once people got their fix of awe and wonder from a majestic landscape painting, today they are more likely to get it near the end of a blockbuster movie - from a huge explosion as their hero narrowly escapes a predicament. These are, for viewers, carefully staged forms of release, offering us a respite from our day-to-day tribulations - sublime moments where things are far bigger than ourselves, and beyond our control. Geoffrey H. Short's powerful, potent photographs of large, stage-managed explosions connect directly to our love of the release a big bang offers. Frozen by the camera shutter and removed from any narrative, his burning blooms in the sky (quite literally great balls of fire) lead us to think about an explosion's symbolism. Sex, death and cosmic creation, just for starters. They also make us think about photography in relation to painting. Technically impressive in their detailed capture of these temporary events, the beautiful, abstract marks made by explosives can seem as impressionistic as a Turner stormy sky, or as expressive as a white spray of Pollock strokes. Short's technical virtuosity and subject matter is likely inspired by years working as a commercial stills photographer in film and television. Film special effects technicians were hired to create these explosions out on Auckland's west coast black-sand beaches. Short initially studied at Elam School of Fine Arts [University of Auckland] in the 1980s, returning there a few years ago to graduate [Bachelor of Fine Arts] with first class honours and a senior prize in fine arts, based on this body of work. The work has also been selected for an internationally touring survey exhibition of emerging photographers [reGeneration2 - Tomorrow's Pho-

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tographers Today] produced by Switzerland's Musée de l'Elysée. Short's work features prominently upfront in the accompanying book. In other words, this is a special suite of works. There's a strong conversation going on here between the real and the artificial, and the trickiness of our perceptions of both. Just as in a John Gully painting of Mitre Peak, everything is carefully arranged. In *Untitled Explosion #8LF*, a cumulus-like cloud of multiple explosions is shot so it looks like its resting on the top of a greenish black bed. Not only is it a carefully arranged composition, the black sandhill resembles nothing more real than a crumpled piece of satin sheet, photoshopped-in. This could be a carefully doctored image from the studio of a commercial photographer, as adept at working in miniature on tables with props as capturing film action on location on a big-sky scale.

In one of my favourite images, a green triangle in one corner acts as a strong counterpoint to an explosion. Yet the land is quite clearly a section of grassy farmland hill, complicating the illusion and adding a touch of the surreal. The explosion here has a propulsive sense of lift-off, helped by wispy trails of black smoke underneath. I can't help but be reminded of art history's ascending angels and Christ figures. In particular, with the farmland and clouds, I'm reminded of the religious painting of Colin McCahon. Likewise with Short's close-up stills of explosions, the majesty of the cosmic dust reminds me of Max Gimblett and Gretchen Albrecht paintings. Any number of creation stories can be attached to these photographs.

Mark Amery

The Power of Metaphor
Geoffrey H. Short's picture essay, *Towards another (big bang) theory* is all about power in a fascinating and extraordinary way. His photographs of petrol explosions reference the beginning (and perhaps eventual end) of our earth in the cosmos. Like Alfred Stieglitz's photographs of clouds, these are equivalents - poetic metaphors - expressing emotions from fear to laughter. They are frozen in time and range from images of the sublime to ridiculous (when a threatening explosion takes on the resemblance of a heart, or dog, or rabbit). Short, like a movie director, creates his equivalents with light, gunpowder and petrol. As he says, 'Fossil fuel (with all its geo-political associations) mixed with gunpowder (with its own history of war, plots and dangerous entertainment) makes for an unpredictable, dramatic and multi-layered imaging material'. This dramatic material demands a large format presentation, and thus we have introduced the first special format poster edition of MoMento.

John B. Turner
Director and Co-Editor, PhotoForum.



On location at Bethells/Te Henga, October 2007



Untitled Explosion #1LF, 2007



Untitled Explosion #3CP, 2007



Untitled Explosion #2CN4, 2009



Untitled Explosion #1CF2, 2007



Untitled Explosion #LE0812LF, 2010



Untitled Explosion #7LF, 2007



Untitled Explosion #5CP, 2007



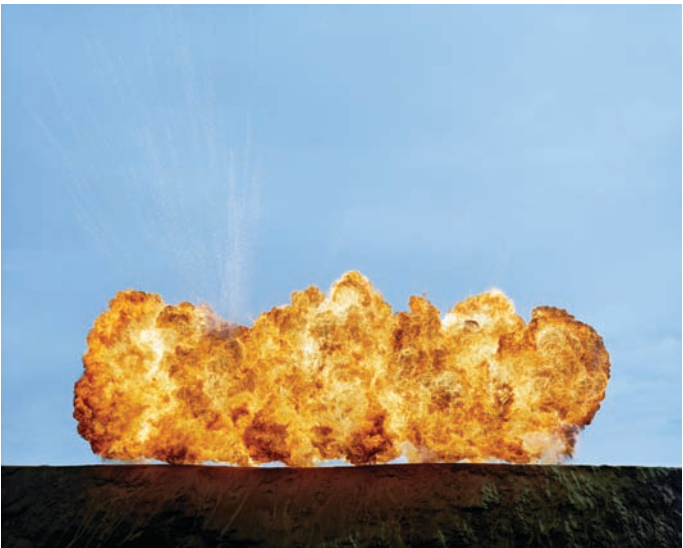
Untitled Explosion #YCF9, 2007



Untitled Explosion #23CN41, 2009



Untitled Explosion #LE1212LF, 2010



Untitled Explosion #8LF, 2007



Untitled Explosion #8CP, 2007



Untitled Explosion #XCF18, 2007



Untitled Explosion #6CP, 2007



Untitled Explosion #LE0912N11, 2010



Untitled Explosion #9LF, 2007



Untitled Explosion #2CP, 2007



Untitled Explosion #YCF14, 2007



Untitled Explosion #8CF5, 2007



Untitled Explosion #LE1212C32, 2010