

The plasticity of the digital photograph is astounding. Limited only by the imagination or possibly, processor speed, new tools offer seamless efficiency in intra-image editing for manipulation and montage. Occasionally, such new software capabilities will spawn a new fashion of graphical effect or visual cliché before assuming a reserved availability among all of the other tackle in the digital toolbox.

The skill and motivation to attempt recombinant photography appear early in the history of the medium, notably in the work of pictorialist photographer, Henry **Peach Robinson**, who refined the craft of combining elements of multiple images to effect the illusion of a single exposure. His print titled "Fading Away" portrays a young woman dying of consumption accompanied by other figures including that of an older man gazing through a window to clouds visible in the distance. To capture such a scene in a single exposure would have been close to impossible with the technology of the 1850s, so Robinson had little choice but to physically cut and paste picture elements. (Remember that he did not even have the advantage of an enlarger.) At our archives here at

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e Eastman House

, close inspection of Fading Away does reveal Robinson's method, but the results are surprisingly good.

Photography as Clay

Written by Roger Bruce



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