



Fellowship 20: Keystone Award Erik Hagen

About Fellowship

Fellowship is Silver Eye's international juried photography competition. For nineteen years this competition has recognized both rising talent and established photographers from all corners of the globe, and from the state of Pennsylvania. This year, Silver Eye made the decision to have the exhibition take place in two parts. The Fellowship Award, awarded to an artist working within the United States or abroad, will take place September–December 2020, and the Keystone Award, awarded to an artists working in the state of Pennsylvania, will be shown in the Spring of 2021. As an exciting new addition, we are also exhibiting the work of the artists chosen as honorable mentions for each award.

About the Artist

Erik Hagen is an American artist originally from Florida. His work has appeared in numerous group shows, both in the United States and internationally, and he was a selected participant in Review Santa Fe. He is interested in the ways in which jobs affect the psychological space of the people who work them. Drawing on his personal experiences, he uses both photography and writing to explore the work environment in contemporary America. Erik has been recognized for his work about Los Angeles, based largely on his five years driving a taxi there. He is currently finishing a project about working in customer service; a reaction to his years working at Whole Foods Market. He is based in Lancaster, PA.

About the Juror

Dan Leers is Curator of Photography at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Leers began at the Carnegie in 2015, and has curated the exhibition Strength in Numbers: Photography in Groups in 2015 as well as consulted with the Hillman Photography Initiative, an incubator for thinking about issues in contemporary photography. His exhibition and book William Henry Fox Talbot and the Promise of Photography came out in November 2017, Forum: Deana Lawson appeared at the museum in the spring of 2018, and his most recent project, a survey of the photographer An-My Lê is on view at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

Eric Hagen, *Team Member*

David Oresick
Executive Director,
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Like more than two and a half million other Americans, Erik Hagen works in a grocery store. He processes returns, he stocks produce, he gathers carts from the parking lot, he rings up your groceries. You may have interacted with him, and you have certainly interacted with someone else in his role. You likely barely registered their existence as you searched for the next item on your list.

Supermarket work is monotonous, the customers are emotionally exhausting, and the pay is not very good. In spite of this, in March of 2020 we realized at the dawn of a global pandemic that Hagen, and the millions of other grocery store workers, were indeed essential to the functioning of our society.

Hagen is not only a worker at a grocery store, that is just his day job. He uses this day job as a sort of muse for his other job—artist. With staged photographs and simple, poetic texts Hagen tells the story of his unnamed store. We gather it's part of a growing chain of upscale grocery shopping experiences. Their branded bags have come to speak as much to class and status in America as they do about the freshness of lettuce. However, that is not directly Hagen's concern, he is thinking about his life as a worker, and what it means to be a member of this team.

This exhibition begins with a monumental self portrait of the artist asleep, face down at a break room table. The space in this photo is the bleak, back of house, break room that anyone who has worked in retail will recognize in their bones. It's small, and it's dirtier, and cheaper looking than spaces designed for the customers out front. It feels like the very least companies could do for their worker's legally mandated 15 and 30 minutes breaks. Hagen has built this break room set in his studio (his employer would never allow photography in the actual store) and he has an eye for the details that make this room so dispiriting. The bland vinyl flooring, the dirty baseboards, and the scrap of cardboard wedged under the table leg to keep it from rocking. These things are the essence of the break room. His meal in the photo is poignantly specific: half-eaten spaghetti in tupperware from home, bodega coffee, and a well worn water bottle. Nothing from the glorious prepared foods section of the store is part of his break.

Exhaustion is a key theme in Hagen's work. The shifts are long, the commute is long, and the company knows how to get every last ounce of labor from its workers. He only photographs his co-workers in the break room sets, he never shows them out in the main part of the store. He is interested in their respite, the time when they try to take a moment to themselves. The workers are a diverse mixture of races and ages. It seems clear that to all of them, this is a job and nothing more. Hagen studies them with his camera as they are eating, reading books, staring at their phones, or staring off into space. Hagen has made some of these images in the last year and they show new kinds of details that subtly speak to our plague: a crumpled mask on the table, hand sanitizer by the phone, or tattered tape on the floor marking out proper social distance.

Briefly, at the very beginning of the pandemic, people treated Hagen and his colleagues kindly, even thanked them for coming to work. He got a modest, temporary raise for hazard pay. It didn't last long, and now the job is layered in sweaty gloves, masks, acrylic barriers, and the customers' new discontents. The store is having a hard time retaining staff. Hagen writes starkly about these new conditions, "for every five Team Members we hire, it feels like we lose another seven. Some go back to school, some find the pace too demanding, others feel too at risk. We had one whose husband died from the virus. Never saw her again."

Hagen stages other details of life in the grocery store for his camera: mold growing across raspberries like snow falling on rubies, a squid being lifted in the air in clenched fist, an oddly textured egg that a coworker found and decided it was too marvelous not to keep for himself in the fridge as a modern relic. There are also found grocery lists like forgotten treasure maps. There is the lantern fly, part of a new invasive species to his store's region, captured in a glass milk jug— a beautiful prisoner. It's not exactly a metaphor, just part of daily life. Hagen expresses a sad, sort of reverential humor when he talks about life in the supermarket. He talks about the strange magic of the overnight team, "build[ing] little shrines at the end of each aisle: A tower of beans. A ziggurat of cage-free chicken broth... And day by day, as all the hands of the shopping public pass by, this juice or that chip starts to disappear."

There is an important idea that feels like it pertains to Team Member, that of "la perruque," an expression coined by







Images left to
right: *Olive*, 2020,
Kahn, 2019

the French philosopher Michael de Certeau that describes when workers do their own creative thing during work hours in resistance against their employers exploitation. Team Member, of course, not an example of la perruque. The artist's employer is a modern, hyper streamlined corporation that has ruthlessly eliminated the inefficiency of workers having free time on the job. Hagen works on his days off. His artwork is however, perhaps, an example of an important inversion, our jobs infiltrate our leisure, our identity, our creativity, and our imaginations. Hagen's writing expresses how his job penetrates his mind, numbingly reciting the cashier codes for different produce, or which coins to grab to make change for random amounts of money.

Yet, Hagen's gaze retains a deep sense of human dignity and empathetic tenderness despite all this drudgery, bland corporate condescension, and thoughtlessness borne of the customer's desire. He shows his co-workers as vulnerable and beautiful as they slouch towards the end of one shift, only to begin another the next day. Team Member is a testament to the power of intentional empathy in a world full of environments such as this supermarket, which encourage us to ignore the individual humanity of those we are surrounded by. But many hands, many lives, and many stories brought you these raspberries, these tomatoes, this milk. Hagen asks us to remember that.



	<i>Erik</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 30×38' Edition of 3 + AP	On request
	<i>Mold</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Orange Break Room Clock</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 15×19' Edition of 7 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Green Break Room Clock</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 15×19' Edition of 7 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Locker Room</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Wrinkled Egg</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Kahn</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Adam</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Sample Stand</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Emanuela</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25' Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request

	<i>Squid</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Lantern Flies</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Olive</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Ruptured Eye</i>	2020 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>Jester</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request
	<i>FM Home Loans</i>	2019 Archival Pigment Print 20×25" Edition of 5 + 2AP	On request

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