

Cassia Davis Artist Statement

Untitled, (C₁₀H₁₄N₂) is a photographic installation from my series, As Needed, which explores the emotional imbalances caused by mood disorders, in conversation with the prescribed and self-medicating drugs that people take to alleviate their symptoms.

The theme of the project is reflected in each set's title (which are images themselves: the chemical structures of Mirtazapine, Nicotine, Caffeine, Tetrahydrocannabinol, etc) and also in the method used to produce the photographs. They are not abstracts. Each image captures the progressive breakdown of a drug in its surroundings. The liquid substance in the images is a highly corrosive acid (HCl) in a glass pool that closely mimics the conditions found in a human stomach. You may notice a pill, or white dust motes floating in a current, or ashes. Each set of grids chronicles a real drug as it's digested in my artificial stomach.

The goal of my work is to interrogate the pharmaceuticals I routinely put in my body. I want to better understand what my drugs make me feel when I use them, and how I feel about my drugs. That goal is integrated into every facet of my work: my compositions, the swirling analog colors I create with refracted light and gels (the acid itself is clear), the two rigid 4×3 grids I force myself to carve out of my hundreds and hundreds of raw files at the end of every shoot. In each set of grids, there are 24 photos. But if you look close, every photo has a twin. One twin has been auto-enhanced by expensive editing software. The other twin is a raw image, untouched. Which is which? Is the enhancement tool doing what it's supposed to do?