

aperture

MIXING THE MEDIA



SAM FALLS HYPER-CONSCIOUS

BY LESLEY A. MARTIN

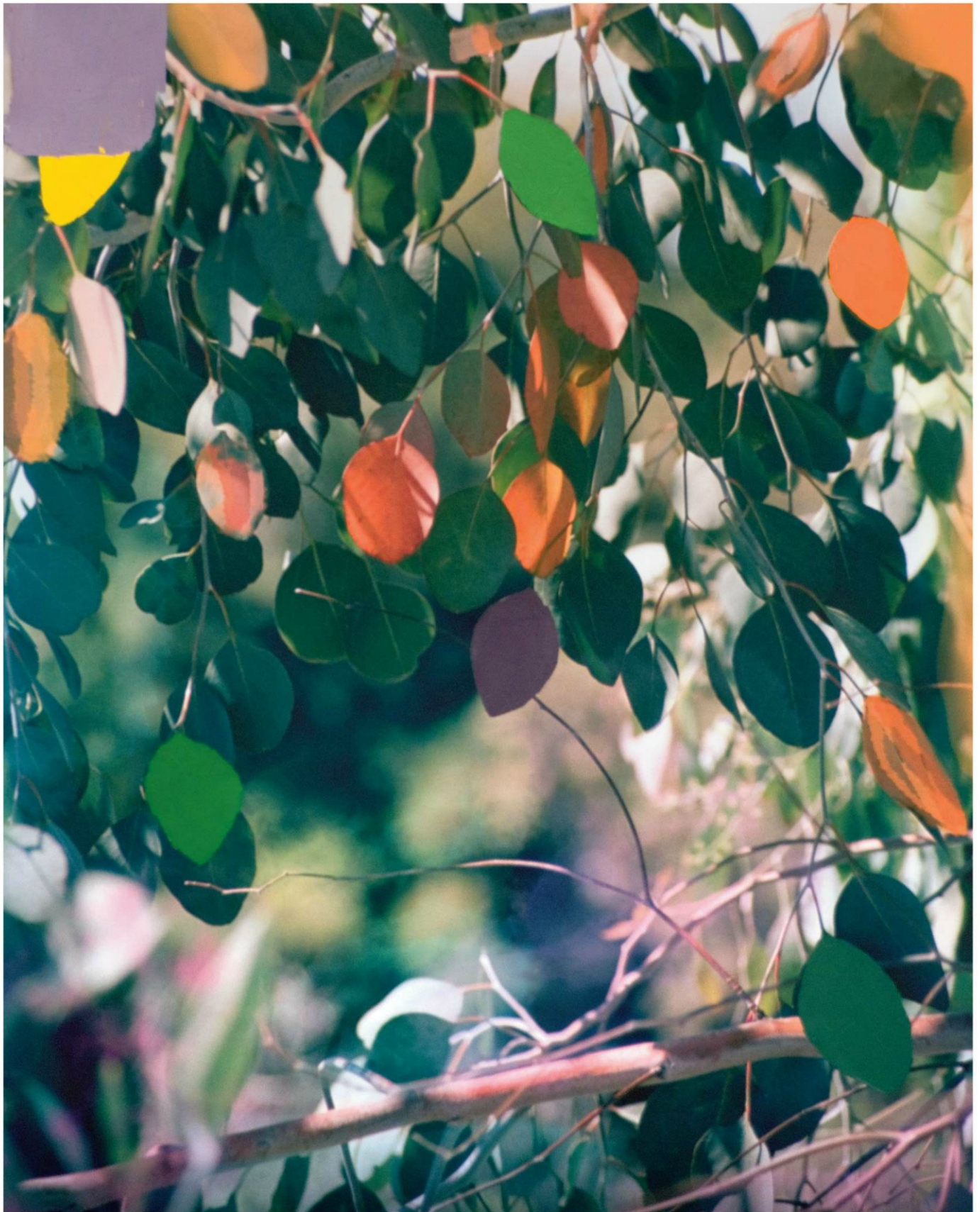
Sam Falls's eclectic output includes writing, photography, painting, videos, collaborative curatorial efforts, and extraordinarily prolific bookmaking. (He has produced and self-published ten books in small editions of fifty to five hundred copies; in the second half of 2011 alone, he has released three new volumes with independent publishers.) His books frequently serve to contain and unify the diversity of his production.

Dipping into his work of the past five years, one finds large-format black-and-white photographs made (using expired film stock) at the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; closely observed nature studies, subtly manipulated in hue; wildly colored semidigital abstractions; portraits, paintings, and other pictures (some found, some created by Falls) staged and rephotographed; as well as images that are layered with Photoshop "brushwork" in addition to actual paint. Sifting through this widely ranging material can be vertiginous; ultimately it is greatly rewarding.

If the ethos of contemporary art photography could be summarized in a bullet-point list, it might include the following ideas (each accompanied by an image by Falls): *The Non-Series Series*, in which the notion that a photographic exploration should express itself as a thematically and aesthetically coherent set of similarly constructed images is patently rejected; *The Neo-Dada Still Life*, in which the whimsical juxtaposition of commonplace objects suggests a rethinking of our relationship

to the physical world and its portrayal via images; and *The Blurring of Fracture Boundaries*, in which photography is pursued as a remix of sculpture, painting, and other media, putting to the test traditional strictures on photographic genres. There would be other ideas on the list, including *The Return of the Romantic*, characterized in part by a brightly saturated palette and an earnest interest in graphic patterning—driven to some degree by nostalgia, but also by the infinite variations of color easily controlled and available in the digital-imaging space. And most pervasive of all: *The Hyper-Conscious Image*, defined by a heightened awareness of the history and practical uses of photography, as well as of the impact of changing technologies on this history. (And this entire list might be filed under the heading *Sons and Daughters of the Pictures Generation*.)

There is no such checklist, of course, that can capture the visceral impact of ideas put sharply, beguilingly into visual forms, which is what Falls excels at. When it works (and it works more often than not), it works brilliantly—resulting in images that are conceptual yet personal. This is a body of photographs driven by an idiosyncratic and poetic instinct; it also leaves one to imagine a finely tuned image-making machine, somewhere deep in the heart of Brooklyn, thrown into overdrive and firing on all cylinders to create a joyously undifferentiated shuffle of the seriously theoretical, the unironically pop, and the unapologetically gorgeous. ■







PAGE 62: *Orange County House*, 2010; PAGE 63: *Red Box Foliage*, 2010;
OPPOSITE: *Untitled (corner)*, 2009; THIS PAGE, LEFT: *Painted Seamless (back)*, 2010; RIGHT: *Open Book in Flowers*, 2009.



THIS PAGE, LEFT: *Color and Temperature*, 2009; RIGHT: *Godfather's Studio Window (Maine)*, 2009; OPPOSITE: *Red Fern*, 2009.

All photographs © Sam Falls

