

▪ DELIBERATE ▪
INVESTIGATIONS
▪

Recent Works by Four Los Angeles Artists

Uta Barth

Dede Bazyk

David Bunn

Connie Hatch

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

MANY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS express the mediated nature of modern experience by borrowing mass media images and incorporating them into their art, exploring the secondary nature of our knowledge as opposed to the primary, authentic experience of real phenomena. In other words, what we see, how we think about the world, and how we move within it are not conceived of in terms of lived experience, but through a filter of images and information. The four artists in this exhibition—Uta Barth, Dede Bazyk, David Bunn, and Connie Hatch—predicate their work on this idea of mediated knowledge and investigate current systems of information. Their art challenges our belief and participation in these systems and in the larger world in which we live.

UNTIL THE TWENTIETH CENTURY a great deal of knowledge was empirical: it came from direct experience and observation of the world. With the information explosion that occurred first with illustrated magazines and later with electronic media, the photographic surrogate became accepted as experience of equal validity and quality. Much of the information we operate with, then, is taken from some intermediate source rather than the phenomena itself. Indeed we have come to wholly depend upon mediated data for its truth. In addition, much of what we believe has become unmoded and obsolete or is based on information so abstract that we have no way to experience or personally validate it. The individual has become estranged from the natural world through the construction of a very complex social sphere. THE ART OF EACH of these four artists critiques the relationship we have developed with the world and its phenomena by exploring our expectations of mediated information. Photography, as a visual counterpart to information, as a literal transcription of the subjects placed before its lens, is a natural and likely component of these projects. Because of its ubiquity as a conveyor and purveyor of mediated information and its presence as a system of visual communication, photography itself is not only the vehicle, but also the subject of these investigations.

THE FORMAL STRATEGIES used in these projects involve an expanded idea and use of photography. Each artist has utilized photographic images or the photographic process, but the work is presented in an unorthodox manner, sharing little with conventional photographs placed in a mat within a frame. These artists take experimental form for granted; they are far more interested in the critical and theoretical issues inherent in photography as a means of communicating ideas and information.

WHILE DELIVERING POINTED COMMENTARY on how we perceive the world and receive our information, the impetus of each of these artists is not solely to make sociological observations, but also to make manifest their personal perspective within a poetic form. Reproductions from printed sources figure in all their work, but the imagery is much transformed. Uta Barth presents carefully ordered series of painted and photographic images that refer to the acts of seeing and being seen and explore the intellectual processes through which we receive information. Dede Bazyk uses photographic reproductions from old biology textbooks and completely transforms them into palpable, brightly colored objects in order to challenge our assumptions about scientific knowledge. David Bunn creates a wooden, concave environment bristling with small, very abstract works that appear to be both modernist art images and primitive fetishes, yet are based on photographs of maps. Finally, the dark installation of Connie Hatch confronts the viewer with portraits of the famous and the unknown who have been obliterated by various circumstances—portraits that disappear in part when one moves around the gallery—contrasting fugitive memory with the power of the media to represent what no longer exists. In each of these bodies of work the photograph as a carrier of information provides the basis with which the artists carry out a potent, personal commentary on social and intellectual communication.

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Published in conjunction with the exhibition
Deliberate Investigations: Recent Works by Four Los Angeles Artists
at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 7–November 12, 1989,
Frances and Armand Hammer Building, Second Level.
Photography programs at the museum are supported in part by a grant
from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation.
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Uta Barth

Uta Barth is particularly concerned with the levels of engagement that are activated when one is confronted by various types of visual information. Her recent works consist of groupings of photographic representations and painted graphic abstractions. These are rendered in similarly sized panels in black and white that are ordered into brief sequences. Elements are sometimes repeated from sequence to sequence to set up resonances from wall to wall and across rooms. These resonances are enhanced by the retinal afterimage that is generated in the process of viewing the painted abstractions and is then carried from one image to the next.



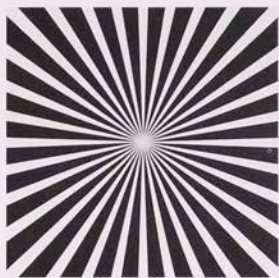
View of installation
Rio Hondo College Art Gallery, Whittier, 1989

While Barth's sequences seem to be carefully organized structures.

Each image must be decoded in a different kind of cognitive process.

A STRATEGY UTILIZED BY BARTH in tackling this discourse of visual communication is the democratic use of pictures from myriad sources: found illustrations from newspapers, images from television and cinema, yard sale paintings, art historical reproductions, and paintings and photographs by the artist herself. One of the painted images is a set of broad white lines radiating from a dark center, a composition that refers to the op art movement of the 1960s (a movement that was based in large part on the exploration of human psycho-optical perception). A photograph of an eye exposed with metal retractors echoes scenes from films: Luis Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou* and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. All of these images, with their references to other contexts, function in a purely cognitive rather than experiential way. They require a shift in the act of reading, demanding deeper levels of input from the viewer.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE IMAGES also make reference to the theme of surveillance, to the acts of seeing and being seen, to confession and self-revelation, and to the transforming



UNTITLED #6, CONFIGURATION #2
1988-89
Gelatin silver prints on Masonite and acrylic on Masonite
144 x 38 x 3/4 in. (361.8 x 96.5 x 1.9 cm)
Collection of Peter and Eileen Norton, Santa Monica

readable as linguistic constructions, they cannot, in fact, be collapsed into simple sentences.

representational images are read one way, abstract images another way, and quotational images yet another.

power of the gaze. Some of the painted emblems actually target the viewer and reverse the process of viewing.

A NUMBER OF THE IMAGES set up an uneasy distance between themselves and the viewer by virtue of their uncomfortable subject matter: police surveillance scenes taken from newspaper illustrations, a woman (Barth herself) posing as an object of interrogation, the deliberate anonymity symbolized by a silhouetted head. These unsettling pictures call into question the issue of private versus public personas.

By inverting the usual social process in which the self is projected into the social space, they transform attention into interrogation. While Barth pictures herself in these images, she ironically avoids autobiography. She inverts the gaze and becomes a subject of the work's inquiry, but there is no self-revelation. Instead, a generic private space is invaded by a field of perception; the illuminating eye becomes the illuminated object.

THE CONCEPT OF ILLUMINATION is engaged again and again on various levels in Barth's work; it is the ironic center of her

display. While the sequencing of images provokes expectations of a narrative, the shifting among various types of imagery obscures and even censors meaning. On other levels, though, the theme of illumination is clear and unobstructed, if sardonic. Taken individually, the panels reiterate illumination, and exposure, of subject. In a society in which privacy is understood to be autonomy, this exposure, this wresting of information through surveillance and interrogation, amounts to transgression. These images of light, lightning, sight, and seeing are alternately passive and aggressive; they are powerful and potent emblems of action and social transaction. They are designed to imitate the manner in which we are routinely presented with information in images in our world: quickly read they seem to yield some information, but in fact they target and manipulate as much and even more than they inform. Barth's groupings are finally an expression of the uneasy place of self in the world and the intellectual balance that must be maintained between gathering information and being manipulated by it. sc

Dede Bazyk uses photographic reproductions
from old biology textbooks to develop themes
that challenge our assumptions about science.

Her brightly colored photographic panels,
silhouettes, and three-dimensional objects
bring a larger-than-life scale to natural elements
that are invisible to the naked eye:

Dede Bazyk

blood cells, paramecia, metamorphosing pupae.
Juxtapositions of images

and sculptural interpretations of simple life forms

turn the expectations of our elementary school educations in science upside down.

Bazyk substitutes her own subjective image combinations and objects
for objective, textbook presentations of scientific fact
to stimulate our consideration

of the basic organisms **A major narrative of history has been the continuum of scientific research, discovery, and invention,**

that give form to our
biological lives.



NOT A TREE BUT WANTS TO BE
© 2007
Codium silver pins and oil on Masonite
48 x 97 1/2 in. (121.9 x 247.3 cm)



Science has never looked like this.

accompanied by a shared belief in the unity of knowledge

and the universal betterment of humanity that would result from scientifically achieved progress. With Einstein and his revolutionary theory of relativity came a crisis in this positivist evolution: no longer would knowledge be built on observable phenomena; no longer would science produce a viewable model. During the twentieth century scientific work has become esoteric, estranging us from our physical world and the laws that govern it. The paradigm of its rationality no longer has any real relevance to our lives. BAZYK'S ART REVEALS A YEARNING for a universe whose workings make sense in terms of our personal phenomenal experience. Her perspective is eccentric and centered on her own unique perceptions and obsessions. She focuses on making connections that explore patterning, underlying and hidden structures, and predetermined metamorphosis. Her subjectivity disrupts the normative scientific method; the work, in all its pop color and crude form, seems organic, antiscientific, and irrational. Its chthonic nature reveals *la nostalgia de la boue*, in French, literally, "the nostalgia for the mud"—that universal, ahistorical longing for the primeval.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SHIFT in Bazyk's work from depictive forms to actual objects creates a visual and even physical confrontation with these phenomena and principles that govern our biological being and emphasizes the very different experiences proffered by mediated information on the one hand and direct perception on the other. At the very center of this visual discourse is a postmodern text: that it is precisely the mediated nature of our knowledge of biology that has placed a great schism between our organic being and informed awareness of it. Our natural experience has been replaced by visual representations that are culturally determined and destined to become obsolete and useless within our lifetimes.

BAZYK'S CONCERN, then, is with this schism. She sees its ramifications for society, but feels it most strongly on a personal level. Her art seeks to restore a sense of immediate bodily sensation by presenting the viewer with these oversized objects. Her three-dimensional works function almost totemically: by selecting simple forms that represent the very beginnings of the life force, she is able to confront us directly with the basic substance of our biological beings without the interference of cultural symbols or scientifically obtained knowledge. Her photographic panels make these connections even more clearly. With titles like *The Body Made a Theory of Itself* and *I Need Do Nothing* she suggests the mystery of that enduring, invisible impulse all organisms have to generate their own structure—genetic predetermination, a phenomena that precedes all scientific inquiry. sc

Connie



Upon entering into the dark gallery space, the viewer immediately becomes aware that customary criteria for examining artworks must be discarded when looking at this work by Connie Hatch. The dim room is a charged environment that forcibly removes the viewer from familiar surroundings and isolates his or her attention onto the objects in the space. Here a long row of fourteen-by-eleven-inch black-and-white positive transparencies project out at forty-five-degree angles from three walls that are set in a U-shaped configuration. These transparencies are portraits of two dozen famous, infamous, and anonymous persons that comprise the installation *Some Americans*, from “A Display of Visual Inequity: Forced to Disappear,” a larger, ongoing project that has occupied Hatch since 1987. Each of the close-ups is of a person who has either quite literally vanished or who has been forced because of circumstances to socially, politically, culturally, or intellectually disappear, abandoning former lives and achievements.

Illuminated from below by light stanchions mounted on the gallery floor, each transparency casts a distorted shadow onto the wall. The shadow, however, is not a negative, but a positive, which mimics the object, albeit in an ephemeral and intangible way. By walking between the lights and images the viewer becomes an integral element in this installation, altering its appearance by blocking out the light and making the shadowy images momentarily shift and disappear. The evanescent quality of shadows and the oblique distortion allude to the transitoriness of memory and the skewed quality of recollection.

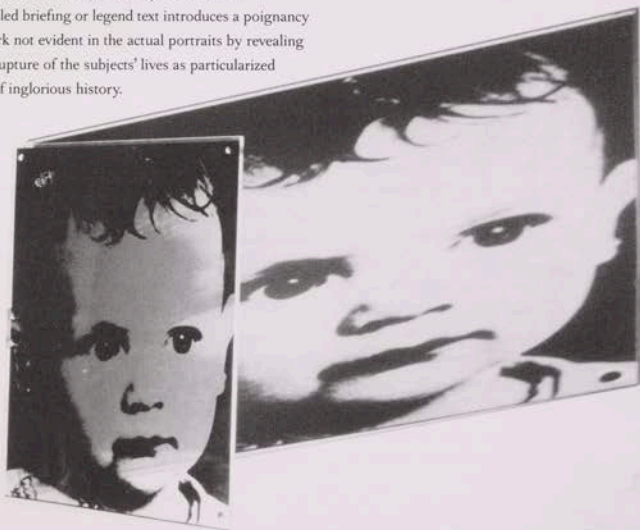
THESE TRANSPARENT IMAGES are eloquent metaphors for mortality, aggregately speaking to our sense of the past, what is known and what has been forgotten. As Walter Benjamin observed: “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own threatens to disappear irretrievably.” They are, Hatch acknowledges, “ghosts of a past that we have lost, in part, never to be retrieved.” In choosing these insubstantial visages, Hatch asks us to recall and consider moments of history that were filled with intolerance or malice, causing the subjects to flee their past lives or to have their existence senselessly snatched away.

Hatch

HATCH USES PORTRAITS taken from various print sources, from respectable magazines to circulars left in the mail slot. Her subjects range from prominent Americans such as Marilyn Monroe and Sitting Bull to individuals whose very names are unknown. Thus she juxtaposes the literal and the illusory. The accompanying wall texts, located on an opposite wall, reflect the journalistic tone of the disparate sources, be it the chatty society and sensationalist celebrity gab of personality magazines or the abbreviated, neutrally factual reporting on political prisoners of Amnesty International. This diverse mass media represents our collective consciousness from which these visual excerpts are drawn. The so-called briefing or legend text introduces a poignancy to this work not evident in the actual portraits by revealing to us the rupture of the subjects' lives as particularized evidence of inglorious history.

THE DARKNESS OF THE SPACE at once establishes a tomblike atmosphere wherein the viewer is engaged in a historical discovery, recollecting the past and reconstructing it from the excerpted bits. There is also a votive quality to the space, where one can contemplate the luminous visages of known and unknown, mutely enshrined in such a simple manner. Acknowledging the political nature of some disappearances, Hatch's room takes on the feel of a claustrophobic interrogation chamber, where the subject can be extinguished or eliminated from public consciousness and consigned to nonexistence or death.

BY FOCUSING ON AMERICANS, Connie Hatch makes reference to preceding photographic documents of Americans by Walker Evans and Robert Frank. Hatch has not chosen only United States natives, however, recognizing that people from both North and South America are Americans, as are those individuals who have immigrated here. Unlike Evans and Frank, Hatch amasses a collection of loss, comparing the readily identifiable and the unknown in our collective awareness. She calls into question the mythologizing power of the media and its ability to establish history of a certain type and inquires as to what constitutes common knowledge. And of course, she asks us to consider our own mortality. —KG



Opposite:
"A Display of Visual Inequity: Forced to Disappear"
View of installation
Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1988

SOME AMERICANS

Detail: Mariam Islas
From "A Display of Visual Inequity: Forced to Disappear"
1988-89
Black-and-white transparency
14 x 11 in. (35.6 x 27.9 cm)

David Bunn moves freely

between several media,

working with videos,

environmental installations,

and photographs.

David Bunn

Characteristic of his work

in all these areas

has been not only

his highly directed

address to viewers,

but also his insistence

on involving them as

coexplorers or decipherers,

demanding their participation.

■ For several years Bunn has been utilizing aspects of mapping in his work. Although we tend to regard maps as literal facts, as accepted systems

of representation, they are in reality abstractions of physical data, equivalents of the things they signify. Whether geographic, topographic, or political, maps as recondite documents hold for Bunn a wealth of hidden information.

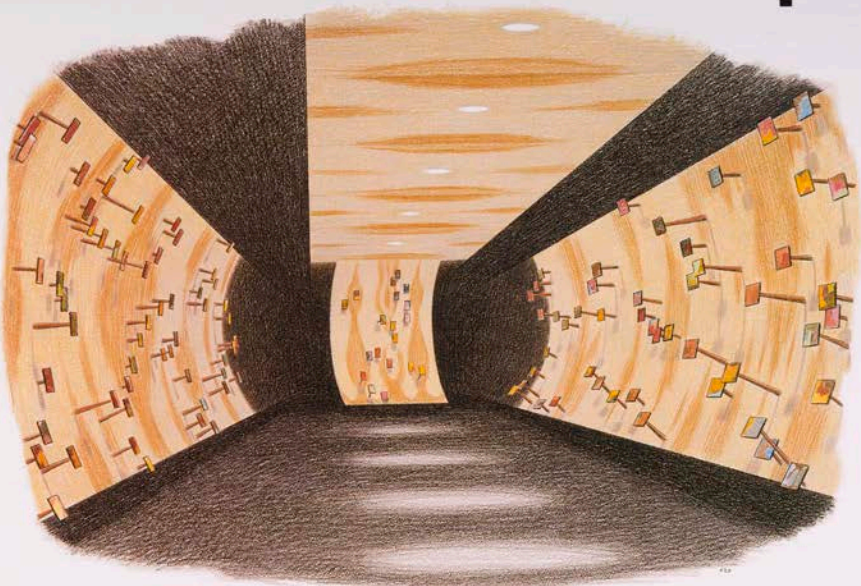
He also recognizes the colorful visual aspects of maps, how the tones and shapes interact when their meanings are removed. For instance, he sees in the shapes of Wyoming and Colorado an oblique affinity to Mondrian's geometric compositions. Even more slyly, he detects in a detail of the border of North and South Korea the yin yang symbol.

Maps for him are at once a combination of abstract forms and a system of signs. ■ COMBINING HIS INTERESTS in photography and installations, Bunn has created *Curvature (Some Projections)*. Here he supplants the customary gallery with a room-sized, concave, birch-paneled chamber.

This horizontal cylinder, with walls that curve toward the ceiling and floor, both extirpates the rational, rectilinear exhibition space and approximates the arc of the globe. The dropped ceiling, also of birch, completes the tubelike environment. This design is based on the historic 1942 gallery installation that artist Frederick Kiesler created for Peggy Guggenheim's surrealist gallery, *Art of This Century*. Kiesler recognized the way an unorthodox space would

stimulate the viewer and heighten his or her interaction with the work beyond simple observation. He saw that a radical transformation of both the physical space and the psychological space would reverse the usual gallery experience by establishing the viewer at the center as the center. Bunn too appreciates this significance and its relevance to his own methodology and chooses to quote the Kiesler design nearly a half century later for these reasons and to illustrate the historicizing role of the museum. In Bunn's creation the structure of the space physically and conceptually frames the multitudinous, abstract photographic objects. ■ CLUSTERS

OF SMALL POLAROIDS—approximately 150 in number—are arrayed in the installation, mounted at the ends of tapered pieces of wood projecting off the walls. Liberated from a conventional mounting, these abstract images take on a surprising appearance and arresting dynamism as they are discharged into space. Consequently the small images are metamorphosed from garden-variety instant snapshots into unique objects. The volume of images and their idiosyncratic



CURVATURE (SOME PROJECTIONS)

Plan for installation:
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989
Illustration by Alex O'Neal

disposition throughout the room, from knee level to well overhead, suggest the existence of an obscure scheme of order. This abstruse nature makes the viewer move slowly within the installation, first examining the whole, then certain parts, initially seeing a decorative construction, then slowly recognizing the existence of a puzzle and moving to decipher it. In fact, the images are arrayed in configurations that correspond to their actual cartographic locations.

■ THE CHOICE OF A SYMMETRICAL TUBE places viewers in the center, an intentional move by Bunn that establishes a privileged position for them as global observers and analysts, an approach central to his 1988 installation, *Sphere of Influence*, at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. A similar concern is seen in his proposal for the Los Angeles Public Library, which utilizes the elevator as an observatory pod with vast amounts of information hierarchically embedded into the walls of the shaft. ■ THESE DIVERSE MEDIA exemplify Bunn's interest in context as a determining structure for communication and meaning. A resulting multivalent reading of symbols and events suggests a layered anarchy. For Bunn this is underwritten by a fastidious, arbitrary classification where systems of preexisting signs collide

with each other. Indeed in *Curvature (Some Projections)* Bunn forges numerous uneasy alliances: between the documentary and the objet d'art, the original and the reproduction, the desirable object and the mute linguistic sign, the decorative and the functional, as well as between modernism and postmodernism. ■ THE ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES—out-of-focus details of maps—are but abstract camouflagelike patterns, in short, visual enigmas. Ironically the clear identity of the appropriated subject is utterly disguised, for it has been submerged beneath a thick glaze of resin that covers the photograph. And so, like the gallery space, the photograph is also transformed. Bunn is well aware of the decorative qualities of his “plaques” and their collusion in our reading of them in terms of form, seduced as we are by the visual appeal and inapparent content. He knows that this manipulation “fetishizes” them, transforms them from prosaic instant photos into shiny ceramiclike tiles, weighty and haptic. Furthermore, he is aware that this masks the evidentiary data within the photograph.

■ BUNN'S SPATIAL COLLAGE catapults the conventional photographic image as simulacrum into another realm, here an eccentric surrealist construction that is intentionally

devoid of certitude. The fragmentation of visual data is “recontextualized” by the artist in this comprehensive environment, utilizing the process of “quotation, excerptation, framing, and staging,” a methodology cited by critic Douglas Crimp that reflects contemporary concerns of artists. *Curvature (Some Projections)* transcends the hackneyed paradigm of appropriation. Bunn shrewdly, elliptically conjoins several unlikely areas. A constructivist approach, seen in the extensive fabricated structure and use of nonrepresentational imagery, is in turn melded with photography, with discordant, surrealist impulses borrowed from Kiesler, and, not to be ignored, with the early modern abstractionist tradition. The art historical references in this piece, the formal aspects of imagery and environment, and the content of the photographs are all very much of interest to David Bunn. The interaction of these readings, the way the information jams together, contributes to our interpretation. KG

Uta Barth

Born 1978, West Berlin. Awarded National Arts Council Grant, 1982. Exhibited: Roy Boyd Gallery, Santa Monica, 1986; Rio Hondo College Art Gallery, Whittier, 1986; *Proof and History*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986; Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, 1981; Werkstatt für Photographie, West Berlin, 1984.

UNTITLED #1, CONFIGURATION #1

1988-89
Gelatin silver prints on Masonite
and acrylic on Masonite
120 x 72 x 3/4 in. (304.8 x 182.9 x 1.9 cm)

UNTITLED #6, CONFIGURATION #2

1988-89
Gelatin silver prints on Masonite
and acrylic on Masonite
144 x 38 x 3/4 in. (365.8 x 96.5 x 1.9 cm)
Collection of Peter and Eileen Norton, Santa Monica

UNTITLED #7, CONFIGURATION #1

1989
Gelatin silver prints on Masonite
and acrylic on Masonite
120 x 72 x 3/4 in. (304.8 x 182.9 x 1.9 cm)

UNTITLED #8, CONFIGURATION #2

1989
Gelatin silver prints on Masonite
and acrylic on Masonite
144 x 38 x 3/4 in. (365.8 x 96.5 x 1.9 cm)

Dede Bazyk

Born 1913, Santa Monica. Awarded National Endowment for the Arts Sculpture Fellowship, 1986. Exhibited: *LA 2 DA*, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987; *TV Generation*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1986; Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1981; Architectural Association, London, 1981; *Dede Bazyk: Selected Works*, The Kitchen, New York, 1980.

ORANGE PUPA

1989
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
74 x 32 in. (188 x 81.3 cm)

BLUE LEAF SKELETON

1988
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
28 x 84 in. (71.1 x 213.4 cm)

YELLOW CATERPILLAR

1988
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
72 x 45 in. (182.9 x 114.3 cm)

GONIDDOMA

1987
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
47 x 47 in. (119.4 x 119.4 cm)

RED BLOOD CELL

1987
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
12 x 35 in. (31.3 x 88.9 cm)

PARAMECIUM

1987
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
74 1/2 x 24 in. (189.2 x 61 cm)

YELLOW BLOOD CELL

1987
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
12 1/2 x 31 in. (32.0 x 78.7 cm)

MUSSEL SHELL PUNCHED FOR BUTTONS

1987
Gelatin silver print and oil on Masonite
60 x 33 in. (152.4 x 83.8 cm)

RED BLOOD CELL

1988
Wood, paper, cloth, asphalt, and oil paint
13 x 86 (diam.) in. (30.5 x 209.2 cm)

RED WAX PUPA

1988
Wood, paper, cloth, asphalt, and oil paint
50 x 33 x 32 in. (127.2 x 83.8 x 81.3 cm)

NEW BONES

1987
Wood, paper, cloth, asphalt, and oil paint
Each (approx.): 135 x 24 x 35 in.
(342.9 x 61 x 88.9 cm)

I NEED DO NOTHING

1986
Gelatin silver prints and oil on Masonite
24 x 96 in. (61 x 243.8 cm)

I HAVE NO SPECIAL THOUGHTS

1989
Gelatin silver prints and oil on Masonite
30 x 81 in. (76.2 x 205.7 cm)
Collection of James W. Holbrook

THE BODY MADE A THEORY OF ITSELF

1989
Gelatin silver prints and oil on Masonite
24 x 117 in. (61 x 297.2 cm)

THE BODY IS A FENCE

1989
Gelatin silver prints and oil on Masonite
30 x 62 in. (76.2 x 157.5 cm)
Collection of Dr. Bruce Chernoff
Courtesy of Pence Gallery

NOT A TREE BUT WANTS TO BE

1987
Gelatin silver prints and oil on Masonite
48 x 97 1/2 in. (121.9 x 247.7 cm)

David Bunn

Born 1916, Greensboro, North Carolina. Awarded National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship, 1988. Exhibited: *Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1930s*, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., 1989; Installation, *Sphere of Influence*, Santa Monica Museum of Art, 1988; *L.A. Hot and Cool*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1987-88; *Worldwide Film Festival*, Kijkpunt, The Hague, 1987; *Annals*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1987.

CURVATURE (SOME PROJECTIONS)

1989
An installation of approximately 150 resin-covered, trimmed, Polaroid four-by-five-inch prints extending off curved walls into space at various angles.

Connie Hatch

Born 1911, Muskogee, Oklahoma. Awarded National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship, 1982. Exhibited: *Camera Lucida*, Banff Centre for the Arts, 1986; *The Binational: American Art of the Last Eighties*, Museum of Fine Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 1988; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1988; *L.A. Hot and Cool*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1987-88.

SOME AMERICANS

From "A Display of Visual Inequity: Forced to Disappear"
1988-89

An installation of twenty-four fourteen-by-eleven-inch black-and-white positive transparencies between Acrylics, with accompanying text and lights.

