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'RELICS OF PSYCHIC EVENTS'

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Bonnie Coen

'RELICS OF PSYCHIC EVENTS'

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'RELICS OF PSYCHIC EVENTS'

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PRELUDE

The object of this thesis is to render an image of the way I make, view, and understand my work. This is an attempt to create a context, theoretical, historical, and sociological, that lends significance to my efforts. The appendices contain artist statements that enlighten the art-making process, without burdening the main discourse. I view these statements as markers in the progression of my work, revealing an evolving process. I will construct a narrative by dividing the discussion into the following areas: FORM / CONTENT, INFLUENCE, PROCESS, and POSTMODERN / JUNGIAN ANTI-MODERN and CLOSING.

First, I will make clear the approach I use in making art and in writting this paper. I create art primarily from an intuitive level, interpreting symbolic meaning after the work is complete. In the art-making process, I use found objects that I collect because of their possibilities. In other words, I build the composition around the object that holds my attention. I usually do not search consciously for particular elements to compose an intended narrative. Interpreting my work after the fact has placed me in the curious role of the spectator. I am writing this thesis as a spectator of my images, in that, I too must decipher their content, as does the viewer.

It is my feeling that symbols elicit a sense that is universal in the human species. Our direct experiences determine how we read these sensed feelings. It is ambiguity that creates allowance for personal interpretation that encourages an inner dialogue, rather than a narrative that directs interpretation to a specific experience.

I describe my work as reconstructions, both formally and psychologically, in the section FORM / CONTENT. Formally, I use light and shadow as primary emotive and compositional elements. Art's ability to transcend the empirical is my primary interest. I discuss my attempt to elicit narrative reaction rather than create a literal thematic that allows work to go beyond the object (the material).

INFLUENCES, I describe as a kindred energy rather than an esthetic. Through an eclectic survey of art and philosophy, I note

work that has an affect on me. Francis Bacon, for example, is a painter whose work has always intrigued me. Nietzsche's philosophy (his belief that intuitive passion is a better guide to life than reason) supports my research into archetypists such as Jung and Hillman. Like Kandinsky, music initiates my voyage.

In PROCESS, I consider primitive impulse and the neo-romantics in their exploration of elemental and intuitive forces. I discuss context and the construction of meaning by a psyche cultivated by memory, intuition, and desire; shaped by time, space, and history.

I explore how personal context develops individual interpretation. At the same time, the Jungian notion of elemental forms allows the universal experience of felt perception. This engages the personal journey of a shared human experience.

Finally, in POSTMODERN / JUNGIAN ANTI-MODERN, I consider the construction of meaning; suggesting that a Jungian anti-modern approach, such as that of the new-romantics, allows art a return to the realm beyond the material.

My CONCLUSION will reinforce the notion that the value of this work, and works like it, is that it stimulates metaphysical reflection on our humanity.

"Identify the idea with the image, leave the idea behind to follow the image through its mythical context, to an imaginal epiphany."
Charles Winquist

"Each artwork is a personal research for a certain identity,
the work is the materialization of this research.
[The work of art] is the physical proof of metaphysical existence."
Sandro Chia

FORM / CONTENT

Between the conscious and the subconscious
lies darkness;
a void, not empty but infinite.
This interspace is filled with secrets.
The atmosphere is thick and seductive.
In its density, I sense phantoms;
their shadowy outlines and obscure metaphors
too illusive for words.[1]

On the premise of Jung's archetypes,[2] I have described my work as reconstructions. I define reconstructions as the act of imaging, constructing compositions, that reflect, at least in emotional tonality, that which emerge from wherever one's "intuitive / feeling" senses come from.

In 'Relics of Psychic Events', I use layering in the construction of collage. This collage is made up of appropriated and / or painted images, real objects, paint, shadow, and light. The images appear as ambiguous bits of reality, questioned by being obscured (or wiped out) by paint, shadow, or light. I use these elements to create depth and a sense of motion. Light, shadow, representation, reflection, concealment, substance and transparency are not givens but induce question.

It is extremely difficult to be specific about content in my images. I work primarily from my subconscious. It is a method of art-making in which elements of my past surface in response to current events in both my public and private worlds. It is only when I complete the image that I attempt to decipher its content. These images, or metaphorical relics, are constructions in the real sense; and more

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[1]Bonnie Coen; "Artist Statement," Fall 1994.
[2]The concept of the archetype indicates existence of definite forms in the psyche that seem to be present always and everywhere. C.G. Jung, The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious (Princeton; University Press, 1969), 38

illusively, as representations of my subconscious. They are ambiguous in terms of subject or object of the event. Throughout the work there is a reversal between substantiality and void; in the representation of body / object and shadow. This work is about integration, about coming to terms with our shadows.

> If we can bear to see our own shadow and bear knowing
> about it (not to project everything onto the environment),
> we are at the door of integration.[3] ...The darkness which clings to
> every personality is the door into the unconscious and the gateway
> of dreams, from which those two twilight figures the shadow and the
> anima[4] step further into our ego - consciousness. One who is
> possessed by their shadow is always standing in their own light and
> falling into their own traps.[5] Jung

I believe it is best not to search for a thematic narrative in this series. I find it more appropriate to consider the narrative reaction this work elicits. A process that creates a physical sensation rather than a literal understanding.

The feeling my work evokes within an individual is my primary concern. I believe it is ambiguity that allows for individual interpretation. While I think visual images elicit a similar sense, individual context influence personal understanding. A specific reading by the artist would only define one state of mind, at one moment in time. The beauty of the archetype is its ambiguity, its ability to engage the participant on their personal journey. I want to reinforce the emotive sense without establishing a specific narrative. To deepen the experience of the work, I will discuss the two main compositional and structural elements consistent throughout my images; light and shadow.

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[3]Ibid., 20.

[4]Anima is not the soul in the dogmatic sense. "She" is a natural archetype that sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion. It is spontaneous in ones psychic life. It lives of itself and makes us live. It is life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated but from which our consciousness arises. "She" lies within metaphysics, Ibid., 27.

[5]Ibid., 123.

Primitive cultures believe the shadow is the alter ego. As the sun is light of the spirit, the shadow is the negative double of the body, the image of its base side. Jung believed the shadow to be a primary archetype in the symbolism of the self. He described the shadow as a living part of the personality that we must live with, in some form. This shadow cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness. Jung's metaphor of the shadow is a dark passage:

> ...A narrow door whose painful constriction no one who goes into its deep well is spared. The darkness which clings to every personality is the door to the unconscious and the gateway to dreams, from which those two twilight figures the shadow and the anima step into our nightly visions or remaining invisible take possession of our ego conscious.[6]

Darkness is often described as a void or abyss. Modern thinkers such as Nietzsche describe this abyss as *"the nature of nothing, the primal tragic fact of the human condition."* [7]

Light represents undeveloped potentialities. Light is the basic principle behind differentiation and hierarchical order. Darkness is mystic nothingness, a path leading to the profound mystery of the origin. Before there was light, darkness, equated with matter, was the maternal and the germinant. After light, darkness is associated with base and unsublimated forces. The poet, Susan Griffin, writes about this darkness:

> ...The shape of a cave, we say, or the labyrinth. The way we thought we could not move forward. We had to shed our clothes. We had to leave all we brought with us. And when finally we moved through this narrow opening, our feet reached for ledges, under was an abyss, a cavern stretching farther than we could see. Our voices echoed off the walls. We were afraid to speak. This darkness led to more darkness, until darkness leading darkness

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[6]Ibid., 123.
[7]Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Looking Into The Abyss, Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Societ, (N.Y.; Knopf, 1994),13.

was all we knew. The shape of this cave, our bodies, this
darkness. This darkness which sits so close to us we cannot see,
so close that we move away in fear. We turn into ourselves. But
we find there the same darkness, we find we are shaped around
emptiness. That we are the void we do not know. [8]

I would like to emphasize that throughout my work light and
shadow are primary forms; not in the photographic sense, but in the
symbolic sense. Shadows obscure, creating a void, a vacuum that
draws one unavoidably. Light can also obscure because of its
brilliance. Blinding, it repels, it creates an illusion of almost being
there, almost knowing, aware. In reality, it is too intense, like
darkness, we cannot see through or beyond it.

Between consciousness and the subconscious lies darkness,
I describe this place as an abyss or void.
I fear it may engulf me, swallow me up.
I believe I dread this place, not only because it may consume me,
not because I envision a vacuum,
I pull back from this darkness because of what I sense awaits me.
I fear what I may find in this threatening space.
I suggest this void, is not vacant but infinite.
An interspace filled with secrets the ego has repressed.
Compelled to explore this place,
I have found the atmosphere thick, yet seductive.
In its density, I can only sense the phantoms,
the complexes, of my psyche.
Their shadowy outlines and obscure metaphors are too illusive for
literal translation.
They evoke tenuous emotions.
In this work I attempt to image the sensed.[9]

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[8]Susan Griffin, <u>Woman and Nature, The Roaring Inside Her</u> (N.Y.; Harper and Row, 1974), 159.
[9]Bonnie Coen, From M.F.A. Thesis work, 'Relics of Psychic Events', 1994.

INFLUENCES

In an attempt to understand my images, I study other artists' work that seems to connect with mine; theoretical, and philosophical concepts that help me understand the way I work.

Influenced by a kindred energy rather than an esthetic, the work I will discuss may seem eclectic. Myth is the common thread. Rather than portraying God and Goddesses in the tradition of ancient myth, this work creates myth in that it expresses our fears, frustrations, and desires. I will also acknowledge theories and philosophies that clarify and reinforce my ideas.

Elements of the way I work have been used since the beginning of photographic history. There is a long history of work that deals with the subjective, the irrational. For example, early 19th century photo montage contained aspects of surrealism. Officially, the Surrealist movement, a revolt against logic and reason, began in 1924, with the First Surrealist Manifesto written by André Breton. In general, surrealism is a metaphysical, anti-rational approach to reality, employing the poetic, startling juxtapositions, and object displacement. The interpretation of this art is as varied as the individual viewer.

An expressive approach used literally and subjectively by artists like Brassi and Sumaras, has a long tradition in photography. Brassi manipulated his images by drawing upon them. He titled this work 'Transmutations', 1935 (Illus. 1). Brassi defined transmutation as the act of viewing normal objects on an infinite number of psychological planes beyond the object. Lucas Sumaras manipulated the surface of SX-70's, calling them 'Photo-Transformations', 1973. Sumaras thought of these as objects, image crammed boxes; containers depicting violence, eroticism, and terror.

Time and decay are archetypal themes depicted by the emotional, expressionistic, and metaphorical; imaged by constructions or found objects. Early examples of this subject, in photography, are apparent in the work of Frederick Sommer and Ralph Eugene Meatyard.

Meatyard described himself as a primitive photographer, comparing his work to poetic incantations.

Subjective work can also be critical in its depiction. The expressions of the individual help define a culture. For example, the body of work 'Dessert Cantos', 1990, by Richard Misrach, is critical of American culture riddled with violence. The use of grotesque imagery (i.e., violence, social aberration, suffering and death) is a reaction of frustration, making a critical statement about society. The expression of the grotesque, according to A.D. Coleman from his book the <u>Grotesque in Society</u>, expresses dissonance, exaggeration, incongruity, and spiritual deformity, "...suggesting the proverbially beneficial natural order of things has been subverted."[10] Cindy Sherman is a contemporary artist using the subverted in her photographs. Joel Peter Witkin's images are of desecration. My interest in Witkin's work lies in the degraded surface qualities of the photograph and the complex construction he uses in his images.

I relate to the type of energy I feel in Frances Bacon's paintings. Structure in Bacon's use of architectural forms is both imprisoning and dissolving, confining; at the same time, lacking support. Bacon's figures are disintegrating, melting, morphing into whatever form the container allows. An opposition is created between substantiality and dissolution; reminding one of the "void" and the tenuous balance between sanity and breakdown. Bacon's figures agonized, are writhing bloody hunks of flesh. Sense of self-lost reduces the body to a carcass, a slab of meat.

I see in Bacon's work the result of not coming to terms with the "self". Bacon's subjects / objects have lost the battle. I feel in Frances Bacon's work anxiety, an alienation of mankind from nature and the struggle to come to terms with oppositional forces (Illus. 2).

More expressive than the idealistic Romantics, the Neo-romantics search for the balance that they believe will lead to ascension. From Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand's purism to Ansel Adam's quintessence revealed; Minor White was the first to use photography in a metaphorical way. White used photography to express the poetic

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[10]Quoted by Nancy Hall-Duncan, <u>Photographic Surrealism</u>,(Cleveland Ohio; New Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1979), 12.

and the transcendental. For White, the importance of the work of art lay in the creative process rather than the finished product. White viewed the creative process as a journey directed toward the revelation of the inner being of an individual. When I first began using photography, studying Minor White made me aware of the possibilities the photograph held as a signifier of signs and symbols, capable of multiple meaning, dependent on the perception of the individual viewer.

The Neo-romantics Enzo Cucchi and Sandro Chia deal with force in opposition. They juxtapose forces such as light and dark, life and death, creation and destruction. The activity and use of color in Cucchi's painting is a quality I work toward in my images.

Like Minor White, the journey for me holds the most meaning. The process of art making is also important to Sandro Chia:

"Each artwork is a personal research for a certain identity,
the work is the materialization of this research.
[The work of art] is the physical proof of metaphysical existence."
Sandro Chia[11]

Nietzsche's philosophy and writings (his interest in the existential, his belief that intuitive passion is a better guide to life than reason, his search for a center or focus to life, and quest for selfhood) have been an intellectual support for my work. Nietzsche's goal in writing, as is mine in art, was to draw the reader into the painful truth, a truth that one would rather avoid. Nietzsche saw the potential for nihilism with the death of God, i.e., purpose in life, rather than being powerless Nietzsche celebrated the freedom gained at the opportunity to master one's own destiny.

As in Nietzsche's time, intellectual culture regards life as irrational and purposeless. I see a paradigm of angst after the positivism of the enlightenment, through the arrival of modernism, it's industrialization, and the contextual instability of the postmodern. We have gone beyond modernist angst, caused by mass production, to a

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11Quoted by Joseph Kosuth "Portraits...Necrophilia Mon Amor", Art Forum 20, (May 1982), 60.

postmodern anxiety resulting from a deluge of information, it's accessibility, and the awareness that truth is not absolute, but a condition of perspective and context.[12] This awareness destablized the fundamentals we relied on. The solid ground from which we based our beliefs has turned into a quagmire of fluctuating realities founded on a perspective developed from individual experience. Again, culture is in search of meaning.

Music as an art form opens the door to one's emotions. The door that fascinates me is the one leading into the darkness, the unconscious. To enter into this space is to explore the unknown, the realm of hidden influence and dreams.

> Midway in our life's journey, I went astray
> from the straight road and woke to find myself
> alone in a dark wood.
> Dante Allighieri, 'Inferno'. Canto I.[13]

The postmodern alternative music of the late 70's / early 80's, the dramatically labeled "doom rockers," initiates my voyage through this entryway. I will explain a contradiction here. The music that compels me is primarily postmodern[14], yet I profess to address other than postmodern in my work. I consider myself a result of late modern / postmodern society. Being a product of the modern / postmodern transition, I am aware of the need to reconcile our instinctual and rational tendencies. Both are essential to create a functional balance.

Musically, Joy Division, known now as New Order, especially in their album "Closer", initiates a voyage to the dark side of the self. Their fatalistic lyrics and metal machine rhythms create anxiety laden, erie sound-scapes that make the listener confront the void. Like Joy Division, The Cure's three cord hypnominimalism creates anxiety marathons that can, at times, erode well-constructed rational. The uses of a static, mechanical, electro beat elicit a despondency, an

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[12]For a more detailed discussion. See Appendix; "Thesis Rationale", 21.

[13] Dante Alighieri, translated by John Ciardi The Inferno (N.J.; Rutgers University Press, 1954), 28.

[14]See Appendix; "Thesis Rationale", (November 11,1993), 21.

emotional distance, in which irony no longer matters. Like Nietzsche, this music draws the listener into the shadows.

In an attempt to explore my images in a context beyond materialism, positivism, and secular religion, to develop an evocative sense of the soul and divinity, I study the archetypists, primarily Carl Gustav Jung and James Hillman. They intrigue me in their attempt to balance the cosmological depth of philosophizing with the empirical qualities of psychology.

Though meaning is partially created by context, like the archetypists, I strongly believe there is a basic "ground of meaning" that is primarily intuitive, "felt" similarly by the human species, regardless of their culture. I have found support and explanation of this concept by Jung and Hillman. Jung describes these intuitive feelings as "primary forms". Primary forms are the elements that make up the "collective unconscious", as archetypes or primortal thoughts. Jung defines archetypes as, "True symbols which cannot be exhaustively interpreted either as signs or allegories...They are ambiguous, full of half glimpsed meanings, inexhaustible."[15]. Jung describes the symbolic process as, "An experience in images and of images presenting a rhythm of loss and gain, negative and positive, dark and light." [16]

The concept of the archetype indicates existence of definite forms in the psyche that seem to be present always and everywhere. Jung sees a close connection between instincts and archetypal behavior. He considers archetypes the unconscious image of the instincts themselves. Jung describes archetypes as "patterns of instinctual behavior". Mythological research calls these elemental forms, "motifs". In the psychology of primitives, archetypes correspond to the concept of "representative collectives", defined in comparative religion they are "categories of the imagination".

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[15] Jung, Archetypes of The Collective Unconscious, 38.
[16]Ibid, 38.

PROCESS

I was first labeled a romantic as an undergraduate at Ohio State University in the early 1980's; then, it was an insult. At that time, in my naiveté, I defined romanticism as ornamental, an idealized portrayal, lacking in political edge. I felt that Romanticism was a disease or that romanticism was simply, a "return to nature". If you wanted your work taken seriously in the early 80's, a gushy romantic was not the best description to have, especially if you were a woman. However, regardless of subject matter, my work is more metaphysical than overtly political.

To place my work, research took me beyond romanticism to the more expressionistic than idealistic neo-romantics. If I must select a label, I will have to identify with the neo-romantics. Allow me to describe neo-romanticism as it pertains to my work.

Neo-romanticism is diverse both stylistically and philosophically. What's consistent is the romantic sensibility that identifies with the desire of spiritual and imaginative ascension through the artful (creative) approach to an activity. In relation to image-making, neo-romanticism manifests itself in the resurgence of figurative and representational art, both abstract and realistic, all tied to the expressive power of images and representation.

After completing this series, I saw Enzo Cucchi's painting (Illus. 3). Our work relates in the use of opposition and elemental forces, creating a dialectic of the duality's in life. The neo-romantic aesthetic, based on the devaluation of reason and rationality, has replaced empiricism with an emphasis on the invocation of intuition, the subconscious, and dream states. Involving eros, death, and melancholy, neo-romantic work elicits fundamentally intuitive and imaginative responses through depiction of mythic and allegorical subjects. Not idealistic as in romanticism, the neo-romantic searches for the ideal, described as the dialectic balance that leads to ascension.

Works such as the neo-romantics' Sandro Chia and Enzo Cucchi deal with the Manichean universe, or forces in opposition. This work

is deeply psychological, autobiographical, not only an attempt at self awareness, but an attempt to consolidate duality. There is a basic belief that the psyche itself does not just happen, but is cultivated by memory, intuition, and desire; shaped by time, space, and history.

The psyche is described by Howard Fox in the introduction to the exhibit, The New Romantics, as an artifice: *"A contemporary manifestation of the romantic idea of the soul as Tabula Rosa."*[17]

'Relics of Psychic Events' relates to the more primitive in neo-romanticism. This work compared to the ritual art of primitive cultures, totems, fetishes and effigies, is an attempt to instill the experience of transcendence. This imagery is not an attempt to render the physical world. It is an attempt to go beyond it.

Appropriating images from the past can be problematic when it resorts solely to exploiting iconographic clichés, as I discovered in my earlier thesis work (Illus. 4 & 5). More stylistic than content oriented, returning to iconography of the past can become superficial. Reduced to style the aesthetic value of the original icon or symbol diminishes. The symbol then becomes superficial, its spiritual power weakened. Critic Suzi Gablik describes Chia's work as *"confounding"* of established meaning and deems it, *"Symptomatic of modern spiritual malady, evidence that an essential inner attitude is missing."* [18]

Contrary to Gablik's belief, I feel that "confounding" this imagery is what makes the postmodern critical rather than cliché; the value of the icon, put to question, reveals its pragmatic inadequacies, draining the symbolic meaning. Exposed, myths of the past are impotent in the present. If appropriated, I believe loaded iconography must be reframed. This positioning avoids simplistic academic exercise resulting in fossilized conventions. It is necessary to juxtapose fragments from the past and present. This juxtaposition acts as a catalyst that stimulates the viewer's desire for meaning. If the work is ambiguous, the viewer constructs meaning that is personal as well as universal.

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[17]Howard Fox, A New Romanticism, (Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985) 9.
[18]Suzi Gablik, Has Modernism Failed (London; Thames and Hudson, 1984), 91.

All the fragments that come forth link up a new horizon of meaning, in a "work", a representation of the world , in which the elements of "individual experience," the fragments of life, autobiography, are woven together with history and the events of the great existential myths... In the universe of the work, within its borders or confines, one can narrate, explain, or share in life and death, the alpha and the omega, the accomplished art or the expectation of its accomplishment - in epiphany, or in mystery... The work becomes a metaphor of the world.[19] Howard Fox.

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[19]As quoted from Frisha, *Picturae* . Howard Fox, A New Romanticism, 15.

POSTMODERN / JUNGIAN ANTI-MODERN

In the postmodern world, absolute meaning does not exist. Perceptions of reality and self are mediated by social structures and conventions. Postmodern thinking could be generalized as the deconstruction of autonomous meaning and the dismantling of the notion of universal truth. Therefore, the postmodern dilemma is the realization that absolute truth is impossible. Truth and the aesthetic experience (art) are culturally contingent. In essence, set meaning does not exist in postmodernism.

Jung acknowledged the effect of context and individual perception in the construction of meaning. However, Jung believed that context developed in part, from "historical categories", defined as primeval forms, that are universal.

> ...We assign meaning from historical categories...ultimately founded
> on primortal archetypal forms whose concreteness dates from the
> time when conscious did not think but only perceived.
> Interpretations are made up of linguistic matrixes that are
> themselves derived from primortal images. [20]

Gablik emphasizes the detrimental effect over-rationalized (modern) and postmodern thinking has on our culture, she writes:

> We are experiencing in our culture, a sudden radical break with
> the will-to-meaning which until now has always been understood as
> a fundamental drive of human life.[21]
>   Today's art has no transcendent symbols, former ones are now
> lifted out of time and space.[22]

The resulting destablization of the symbolic order through the deconstruction of signs is evidence for Gablik, of the postmodern

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[20]Jung, Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious, 31.
[21]Gablic, "Dancing with Baudrillard." Art In America (June 1988), 27.
[22]Gablick; Has Modernism Failed, (London; Thames and Hudson, 1984), 90.

dilemma. The union of signifier and signified is obsolete. The sign no longer has an "archaic grounding", resulting in "floating signifiers" that are dependent on context, therefore unable to maintain a fixed relationship or single meaning. Gablik describes this as a loss of a basic ground of meaning, *"...that belief in a fundamental psycho-spiritual truth that transcends institutional assumptions and socio-historical circumstances."*[23]   In her book <u>The Re-enchantment of Art</u>, Gablik discussed the need for the return to that ground, to the spiritual qualities in art. Those qualities German sociologist, Max Weber, identified as becoming suppressed during the rationalization of modern society.[24] Jung suggests that this spiritual poverty is a result of a "symbol-lessness":

> ...Before him there yawns the void and he turns away from it in
> horror. What is worse the vacuum gets filled with absurd political
> and social ideas, which one and all are distinguished by their
> spiritual bleakness.[25]

> Our Post Modern society has lost its center, its connection with
> it's transcendent -- emptiness will be filled only if this alienation is
> bridged by symbols and myth that open onto and appropriately
> amplify the reality of the presence of the divine.[26]
>
> Alexander Solzhenitsyn

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[23]Gablik, "Baudrillard", <u>Art In America</u> (June 1988), 27.
[24] For more in depth discussion, see appendix; "Thesis Rationale", 21.
[25] Jung <u>The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious</u>, 15.
[26]Quoted by David Ray Griffin, <u>Archetypal Process, Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman</u> (Evanston Illinois; Northwestern University Press, 1989),106.

CLOSING

The affect of art is a process of integration and requires participation from those involved. To decipher content and to analyze visual discursity, participants must attribute meaning to the elements within an image. Meaning is developed by the perspective or experience from which the viewer references. The affective quality of an image both demonstrates and explains its content. An affective reading must therefore view art in terms of form and motif, discourse of iconography and influence, and the interplay of context. This is an approach that has remained consistent, though described in various terms / languages, throughout the changing fashions of theory. The difference I find is, at one time, society had faith in "felt perception", certain elemental symbols were thought to be "felt" in universal ways, originating from primordial instincts (intuition). In modern society absolute truth was defined by empiricism. Today in postmodern society, meaning is dependent on context. Truth does not exist as an absolute . The rational and analytical has effectively eliminated felt perceptions (instincts), leaving in place uncertainty caused by an understanding that all knowledge is context bound. We view ourselves as lacking a common ground of experience from which meaning can be constructed. This outlook causes alienation, from ourselves, each other, and nature. We become an isolated particle in a universe of "other". A balance is called for. There are certain aspects in art and life that must be felt rather than intellectualized, and, at times, the combination of instinct and intellect is desirable.

In searching for truth beyond the object, my work specifically, and neo-romanticism in general, does not deliver meaning. The viewer must be an active participant. This imagery must be both decoded and encoded. Decoded to define established symbolic meaning, encoded into a personalized meaning. It becomes a kind of genealogy of consciousness probing the roots of our beliefs, combining past and present to express both our personal and collective experience. Neo-romanticism repudiates the modernist

impulse to literalize and empiricize. It allows the anchoring of primal symbols that are disengaged in postmodern work.

***

APPENDIX

When I began this work, I thought I was exploring the alienation of humankind. I was, and still am, intrigued by the interplay of society, culture, and human behavior. My Thesis "Rationale", the explanation to my board, validating my pursuit of this work, was based on rational examination, the logical sequential movement that defines modern thinking. A process, I determined, when used to excess, caused the alienation of humankind and the creation of the void, the darkness, and the nihilism that often describes "modern culture".

"Thesis Rationale", November 11, 1993

Modern thought is based on concepts rather than perceptions or "feelings", the essence of modern human existence lies in industrialism and the post-enlightenment concept of rational thought. In support, and as validation of this "concept", evidence the material prosperity generated by industrialism. Industrial culture believes that by the application of logic and rational thought; any problem is surmountable. It is this rationalism that has given our culture *"the unescapable tendency to codify and organize all experiences and action along rational lines."* [27] The German sociologist Max Weber identified this process as "the rationalization of society".

> The key to all modernization and industrialization, represents the historical penetration of all spheres of social life: the economy, culture (art, religion, and science), technology, law, politics, and everyday life, by the single logic of formal rationality. This logic is defined by the principle, of orientation of human action to abstract, quantifiable, calculable, and instrumentally utilized formal rules and norms.[28]

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[27]Howard Risatti, Postmodern perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art (N.J.; Prentice Hall, 1990), 254.
[28]Andrew Arato, Introduction to "Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism," The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, Arato and Eike Gebhardt, ed. (New York; Continuum Publishing Co.,1982) 191.

This codification and organization of human experience into the shape of formal rationality have effectively eliminated the unexplainable. The profound effect of which, Weber has termed "de-magicization." Though the tradition of rational and objective thought, with its consequences, has had some resistance, as exemplified by the areas of natural philosophy, some religion, and art, rationalism has prevailed.[29] The result is the shift of perceptions away from all that is unpredictable, irrational, qualitative, sensuous, and mysterious, in both theoretical explanations and the everyday conduct of life. Therefore, all that could not conform to rational thought became discredited by either direct refutation or by subtle suppression. This suppression successfully shoved issues not easily explained rationally, into the social and intellectual margins.

Culture, as a result of rationalization and de-magicization, has become segmented, further specialized, by the Kantian development of autonomous spheres of knowledge under the control of experts. Under this autonomy, Kant emphasized form to establish more objective criteria upon which to judge art. It is the expert's duty to establish paradigms based on the "scientific model" of empirical rational thought. The scientific model is based on verifiable, therefore "objective" fact.

Intellectuals attempted to explain the world materially. Karl Marx believed that economic factors were key in the understanding of material existence and the structure of society. Freud framed the motivations of human behavior through the Oedipal complex, as the basis of human sexuality. Influenced by Kant's formal objective structuring, Clement Greenberg accepted the rationalization process as the aesthetic basis of art. Praising Kant as the first real modernist, Greenberg structured an art theory that articulated Kant's self-critical rational model.

Now Postmodern, western culture's intellectual center has shifted. The Postmodern condition is one of metanarratives and simulacra The difference between Modern and Postmodern's intellectual

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[29]As a direct confrontation with modern rationalism, reacting to the mechanized (industrial) destruction of World War I, the Dadaist of Zurick (1916) rejected rational thought in art and society in favor of chance and chaos.

environment can be defined as a condition in which universals and absolute, objective truth are no longer accepted uncritically. The narratives forming historical, social, psychological, biological, natural, and artistic forces are no longer viewed as absolute truths but constructs, structures that support a world-centered theory formed primarily from the perspective of white western male cultural views. The autonomy of meaning, including that of art, is now regarded, at best, as a cultural construction, at worst, as an instrument of social control. Where Greenberg's formalism emphasizing form and media (through the concept of self-criticality) defined art as autonomous, an activity based on truths verifiable through formal analysis, Postmodern thinkers contend that the meaning of a work of art is not something eternal, but variable. Art is not constructed outside culture, as an absolute, but through and within culture. Structuralists and Post-structuralists, influenced by Marx's concept of base / superstructure interrelationships and Saussure's semiotics, correspond in the concept that art does not have autonomous meaning. Meaning is derived from a system of communication. A system that determines meaning from the social structure of which it is part. Structuralism, however, especially that conceived by Claude Levi-Strauss, is similar to the Modernist projects, in that it attempts to provide structure, a master plan, explaining nature through the form of language.

      In summary, the Postmodernist method examines art as a communicative system that constructs meaning influencing perceptions of reality. This system has been exposed through the manipulation of concepts concerning issues involving the copy and original, representation through appropriation or simulation, and commodity sculpture.

Artist Statement
March 3, 1993

   My work deals with issues of myth and ritual. I understand myth as being made up of symbols that act as motivators of a culture. I understand the active symbol as having a diffuse meaning. Meaning, not specific enough to be understood on the conscious level, but one that evokes an emotional tonality in the subconscious. A symbol is dead, no longer functional, when understood by the conscious. The reconstructions, as I call them, "create mosaics of juxtapositions"[30] that relate to the organic* and the visceral.*

   The significance of this project is an attempt at recentering, an attempt to reconnect, to be "reconstructive", after the Post-Modernist deconstructive revelation of the inadequacies and the fallacies of our culture. This type of analysis acts to strip away our ideological myths. Myths that are significant as they are the "motavators of a culture," Jung.

   I believe in reintegration through an understanding of the organic and unified nature of the universe. There is a need to renew the holistic paradigm, to bring our inner and outer worlds into syncronicity.*

*The concept of synchronicity *"Indicates a meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved. Chance is a statistical concept which 'explains' deviations within certain patterns of probability. Synchronicity elucidates meaningful arrangements and coincidence which somehow go beyond the calculations of probability. Pre-cognitions, clairvoyance, telepathy, ect. are phenomena which are inexplicable through chance, but become empirically intelligible through the employment of the principle of syncronicity, which suggests a kind of harmony at work in the interrelation of both psychic and physical events." - The Journal of Religious Thought*

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[30]William Bourroughs, Naked Lunch (N.Y.; Grove Press, 1969).

*__Synchronicity__ - "The simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state - and in certain cases vise versa." C.G. Jung

*__Organic__ - relating to bodily organ; affecting the structure of the organism; forming an integral element of a whole.

*__Visceral__ - felt in, deep sensation; instinctive appetite; earthy. parallels to the momentary subjective state - and in certain cases vise versa." C.G. Jung

In early work, I was thinking in terms of universals, because I saw myself as an observer viewing culture from the outside. The symbols in my imagery felt lifeless. Formally these images well composed, were beautiful to look at. Though they contained a sense of irony, the imagery felt empty. There lacked a sense of connection. I rationalized that the work felt this way because the symbols I used were no longer alive, effective in post-modern culture. It was my project, to breath life into an imagery that would effect a sense of union, a connectedness. To reveal that we establish our own life - meaning, at the same time, maintaining that we are part of a universal whole, that all organisms, the planet, the entire cosmos, function together. This grand effort was, in effect, an avoidance of the real issue. Who was I to save the world, art is not that powerful, I am certainly not that powerful. I had been rejecting the notion that I was simply trying to save myself. I then allowed my work to become more personal.

Artist Statement
Fall 1994

Between consciousness and the subconscious lies darkness,
I describe this place as an abyss or void.
I fear it may engulf me, swallow me up.
I believe I dread this place, not only because it may consume me,
not because I envision a vacuum,
I pull back from this darkness because of what I sense awaits me.
I fear what I may find in this threatening space.
I suggest this void, is not vacant but infinite.
An interspace filled with secrets the ego has repressed.
Compelled to explore this place,
I have found the atmosphere thick, yet seductive.
In its density, I can only sense the phantoms,
the complexes, of my psyche.
Their shadowy outlines and obscure metaphors are too illusive for
literal translation.
They evoke tenuous emotions.
In this work I attempt to image the sensed.

'Relics of Psychic Events'

SLIDE LIST

Slide 1. Untitled, "Ladder", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   2. Untitled, "Column", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   3. Untitled, "Missile", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   4. Untitled, "Soldiers", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   5. Untitled, "Abyss", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   6. Untitled, "Snake", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   7. Untitled, "Swallow", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   8. Untitled, "Skulls", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.
   9. Untitled, "Woman", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994
  10. Untitled, "Pears", 20 x 24 Cibachrome, 1994.

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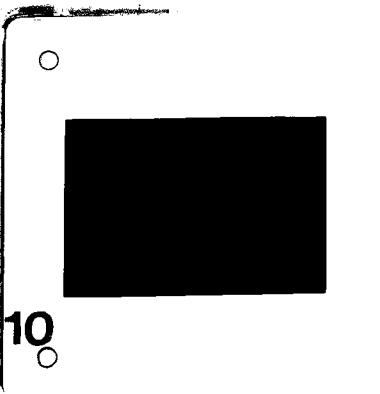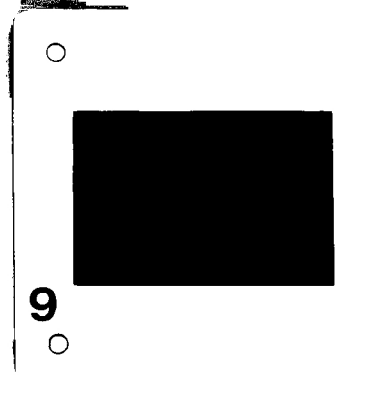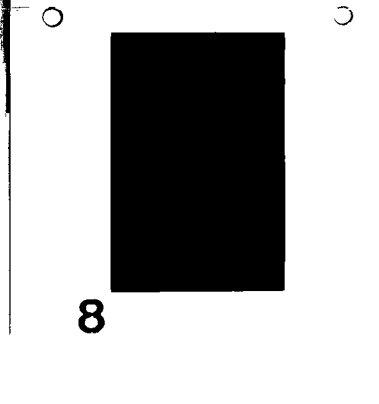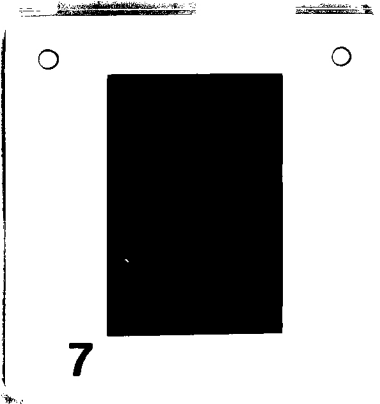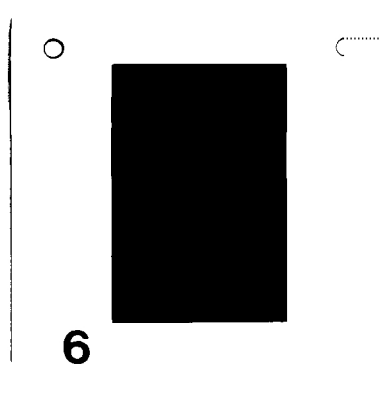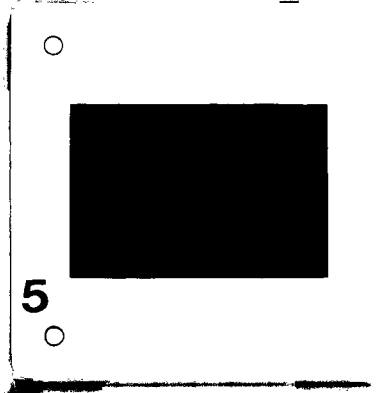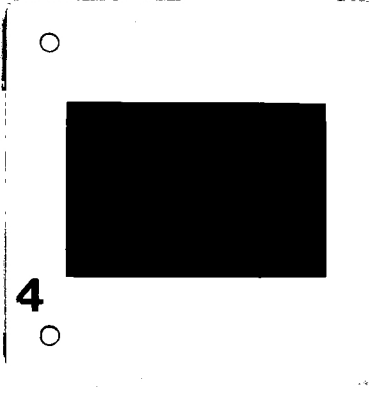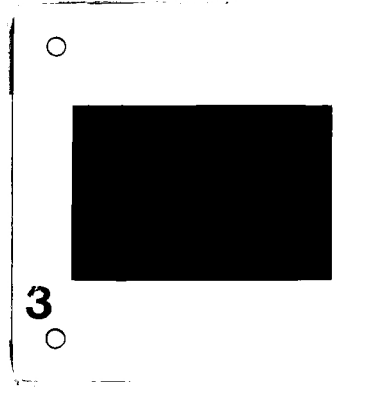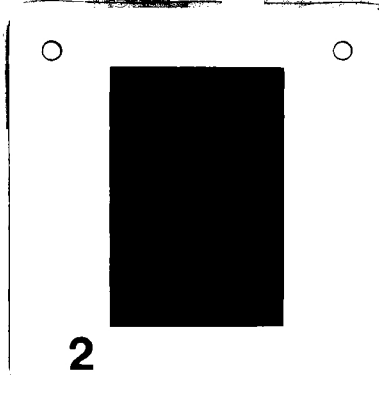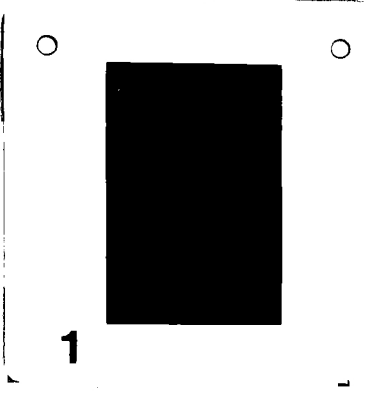
ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUS. #1 Brassi, From 'Transmutations', "Tentation de Saint Antonie", 1935

ILLUS. #2 Francis Bacon, Detail; Triptych inspired by T.S. Elliots poem, 'Sweeny Agonistes', 1967.

ILLUS. #3 Enzo Cucchi, "Image In The Dark On The Mediterranean", 1983.

ILLUS. #4. Bonnie Coen, Early Thesis Work, 1983.

ILLUS. #5. Bonnie Coen, Early Thesis Work, 1983.
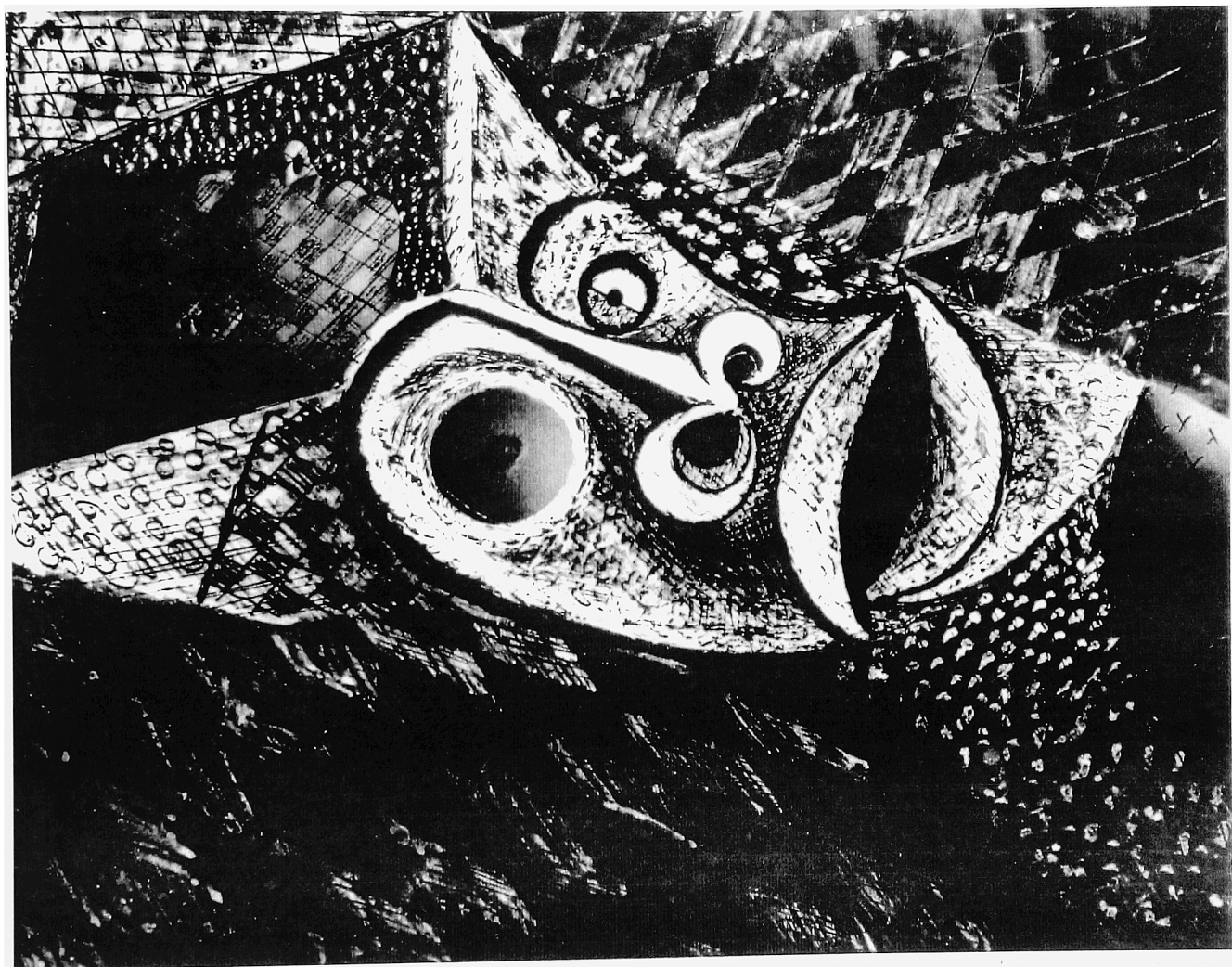
ILLUS. #1.
BRASSI, From 'Transmutations',
"Tentation de Saint Antonie", 1935.

ILLUS. #2.
FRANCIS BACON, Detail;
Triptych inspired by T.S. Elliots poem,
'Sweeny Agonistés', 1967.

ILLUS. #3 .
ENZO CUCCHI,
" Image In The Dark on The Mediterranean", 1983.
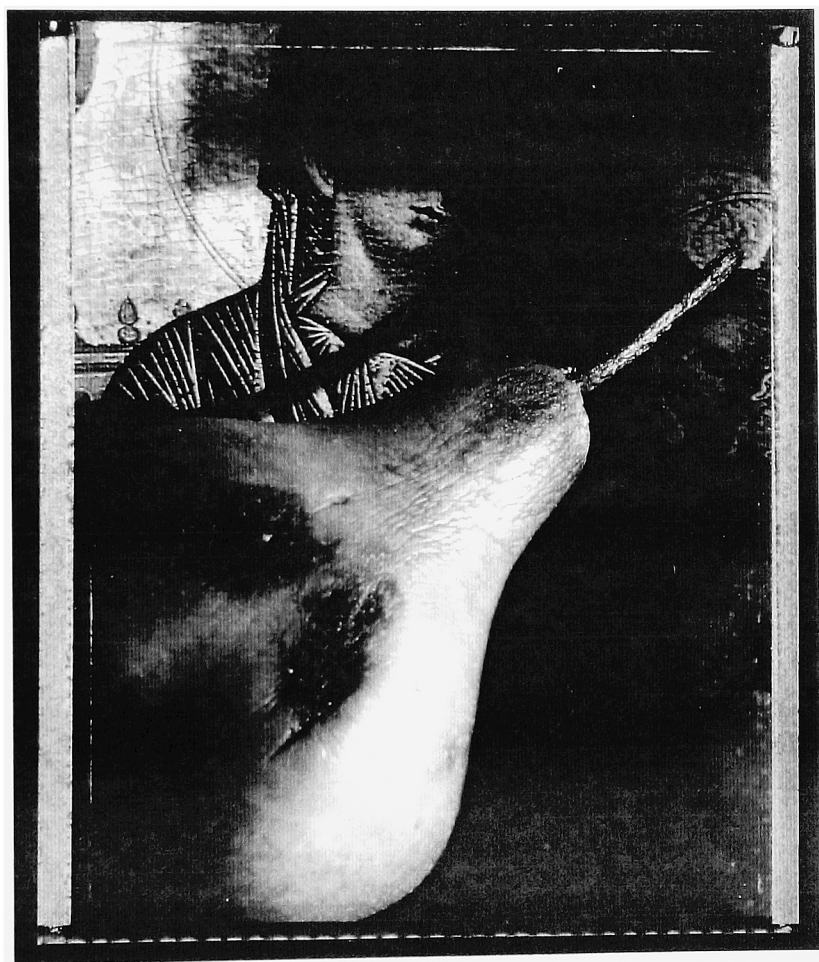
ILLUS. #4.
BONNIE COEN, Early Thesis Work, 1993.
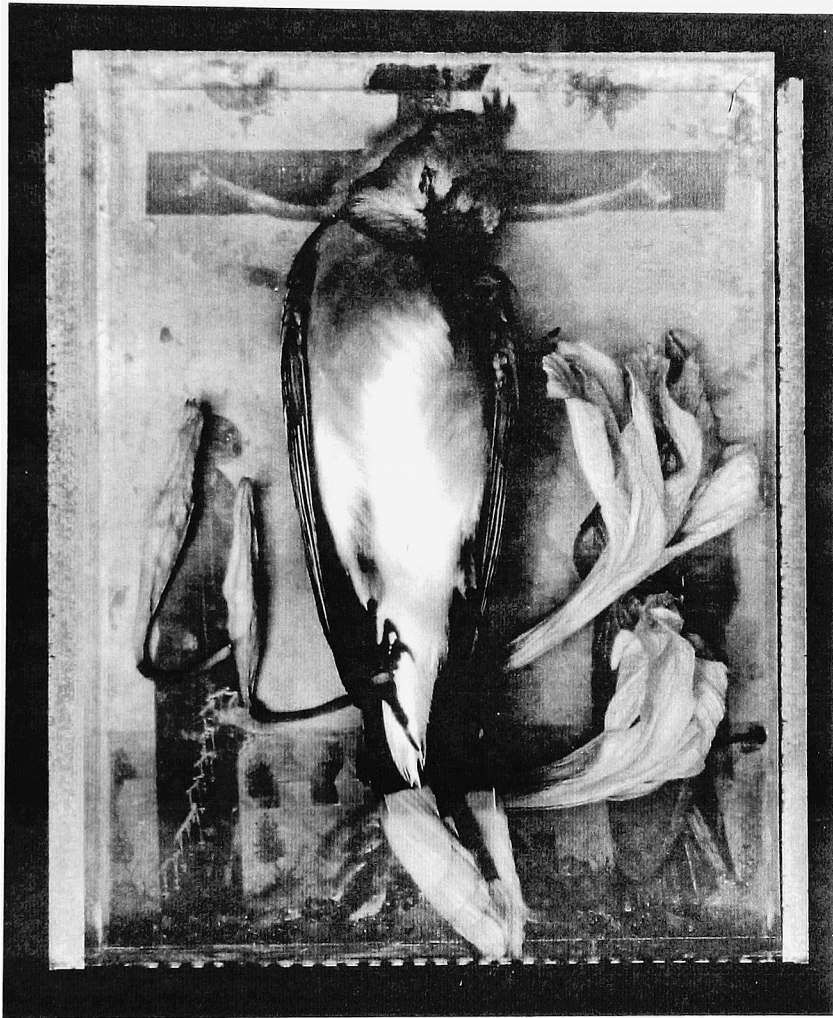
ILLUS. #5.
BONNIE COEN, Early Thesis Work, 1993.

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