

burning debris. Without consciously connecting the disaster to what I was photographing, I had started making images of my arms and legs and then collaging a pair of them together to make one image. After I had made four such images, I realized the connection when it was announced in the news that workmen were digging up debris and constantly finding human body parts.

It was around this time that my sight deteriorated so much that I had difficulty seeing. I could not see the features of anyone, even when near to me, nor could I read. My eyesight became out-of-focus and the day became dark, somewhat like dusk, but darker. For some time, the sight in my left eye had seriously deteriorated because of macular degeneration, an affliction which attacks the center of the retina, destroying the ability of the eye to see. Then the same thing happened to my right eye, and I seemed to be in serious trouble; it looked as if I couldn't continue to work. Only with the aid of a magnifying machine could I see fairly distinctly flat images the size of a postcard. I decided to continue the series I had been working on.

I use Polaroid positive/negative 4x5-inch black-and-white film. It develops in less than a minute and delivers a finished print, as well as a fine negative. Since I could not see, the question arises as to how I could have taken these photographs. In fact, I have not taken any of my images since I began making the various "Self-Portrait" photographs in 1984. I have always used an assistant who does the actual shooting. Normally, I preview my pose with a video camera connected to a television set. But once my eyesight had severely diminished, this system became useless and I had to find another method.

The solution was to recognize the fact that we don't actually see an image with our eyes; instead we perceive it with our minds. If you look, for example, at a rectilinear tabletop, you do not see the actual rectangle; the four ninety-degree corners are not apparent to the eye. What you see is a trapezoid. Thus, the mind must deduce that the tabletop is rectilinear. It was necessary for me to go through a similar process to make these new photographs, but reversed. I had to imagine the image in advance and then find the pose. In the past when I could see, my assistant would have to take many photographs to match the image on the video, but when I realized that it was more a matter of perception than of sight, I could easily previsualize an image and make a drawing that my assistant could match on film.

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Public Programs

Lecture by Peter Plagens, Bartos Theatre, MIT E15

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Peter Plagens, Newsweek art critic and painter

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Friday, November 12 at 6PM

Howard Yezerksi, Howard Yezerksi Gallery, Boston

Gallery Talks, LVAC Galleries

Wednesday, November 10 at 12PM and Friday, December 17 at 6PM

Bill Arning, Curator

Wednesday, November 17 at 12PM

Jane Farver, Director

Sundays: October 17 and 31, November 14, and December 12 at 2PM

Hiroko Kikuchi, Education/Outreach Coordinator

Directions:

The List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, and walk one block to the cross walk. The List Visual Arts Center, housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway) during business hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

Gallery Hours:

Tuesday-Thursday: 12-6PM; Friday: 12-8PM; Saturday and Sunday: 12-6PM

Closed Mondays; Nov. 25; Dec. 24 and 25. Closing at 4PM on Dec. 31

Information:

617.253.4680 or <http://web.mit.edu/lvac>

All exhibitions at the List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request. Please call Hiroko Kikuchi at 617.452.3586 for inquiries.



MIT List Visual Arts Center
20 Ames Street, E15
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<http://web.mit.edu/lvac>

Body Parts—A Self-Portrait by John Coplans

October 7-December 31, 2004

Organized in collaboration with
the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery

Curators:

Jane Farver

Director of the LVAC

Charles Stainback

Director, Site Santa Fe, formerly Director,
Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College