

PRESS RELEASE

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SPECIOUS ORIGINS INVESTIGATED AT MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

SPECIOUS ORIGINS: FAUNA AND HERBARIUM, two photography projects by the Barcelona-based artists Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera will be presented at the MIT List Visual Arts Center December 17, 1988-February 12, 1989. The public is invited to a preview reception Friday, December 16 from 5-7 pm; Mr. Fontcuberta will be present.

Fauna, created between 1985 and 1988, is the research project of Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera, two contemporary Spanish artists who purport to document the life and archives of Dr. Peter Ameisenhaufen. In the early part of this century this obscure (and fictitious) German natural scientist discovered bizarre animal hybrids who had apparently strayed from Darwin's evolutionary path. "Alopex stultus," for example, is an armor-headed fox capable of mimicking a shrub for self defense. "Solenoglypha polipodia" is a deadly snakelike reptile with twelve taloned claws. The aquatic "Microstrium vulgaris" is a mollusk with appendages which allow it to walk up behind its prey to club it with a small stick held in one of its 'hands'. Dr. Ameisenhaufen disappeared mysteriously in 1953, and his archive of pictures, X-ray plates, maps, sound tapes, and stuffed specimens were believed to be lost until their rediscovery by Fontcuberta and Formiguera. These artists subvert the notion of documentary photography and address current questions of originality and authenticity.

Herbarium, 1985, by Fontcuberta, is a collection of elegant formal botanical photographs of fabulous (and fabricated) specimens presented in a clinical, documentary form which belies the fiction of their fabrication. Assembled from bits of organic and inorganic materials, the splendid forms recall Karl Blossfeldt's botanical survey "Urform der Kunst," published in 1928. One critic observed "Fontcuberta endorses the notion that documentary photography does not necessarily yield the truth about its subject, but is simply another style of photography."

In conjunction with this exhibition, Harriet Ritvo, Associate Professor, MIT Department of Humanities will present a gallery talk entitled "Natural History and Unnatural History" on Sunday, January 22, at 3 pm. Her recent book, The Animal Estate, considers animals as metaphors for human psychological needs and sociopolitical aspirations in Victorian England.

Catalogues published by European Photography magazine accompany each project, and will be available at the gallery desk or by mail.

The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building at 20 Ames Street in Cambridge, five minutes from the Kendall Square Red Line Subway stop. Parking is available at the corner of Ames and Main streets.
Hours: Weekdays 12-6 Weekends 1-5
Closed December 24, 25, 26, 31, January 1, 2, and 16
Gallery information 253-4680