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DIGITAL SOMATICS: GETTING JACK OUT OF THE BOX

by Dan Collins



Gene Cooper inserts his index finger into a digital sensing device. Three wagon-wheel-size gears—components of a clockworks—lurch into motion. This ungainly machine is controlled by infrared light beamed through the skin of Cooper's throbbing finger; each heartbeat translated into a brief surge of electrical power. Every four minutes a cam screwed to one of the wheels triggers an event: hidden speakers whisper the recorded voices of heart patients and medical professionals, "live" text generated by the audience appears on computer screens hidden in hollow logs, rain falls gently into dried leaves, video monitors glow with "digital mandalas" derived from images of open-heart surgery.

The clock at the core of this performance/installation, cobbled together from recycled two-by-fours and broken stumps, is actually a sophisticated chronometer that keeps its own special time: one revolution of the largest wheel measures Cooper's average heartbeats per minute; the middle-sized wheel marks the interval between the moment a heart stops and death; and the smallest indicates the average number of times the valves of the heart open and close per minute.

Inspired by Cooper's own chronic heart condition, the work articulates a series of interconnected themes: cycles of growth and decay, the connection between memory and dreams, psychic and physical healing. The project's title, *The Bardo*, references the Tibetan term for the transitional period between life and death.

I start with a description of Cooper's work to suggest a direction that veers radically from the mainstream, collective dive into cyberspace. This work operates in the gap between two selves—the self that is a projection that resides at the limit of our tools and language, and the self that is rooted in the physiology of what Husserl called "the lived body." It builds a bridge between our ability to abstract the world and our ability to engage it directly.

There is a new contested territory suggested/invoked here: the no-man's-land between the desiring body and digital projective space. Cooper's project takes up residence in this no-man's-land. It incorporates a range of tools and symbolic codes into a space that reveals and celebrates the body and felt experience.

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Cover image and detail on this page: *The Natural Bardo*, 1996, installation/performance, video, wood, water, river rocks

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RECYCLED SOULS: THE ART OF RICK HARDS

by Kathleen Vanesian



Mammals, oil on tintype, 17" x 13.5"

Who are the eerie, spectral beings that inhabit the paintings of artist Rick Hards? At once alluring and uncomfortably familiar, the peculiar figures that dwell within Hards' oil-on-tintypes spark indistinct recollections of people the viewer has known, perhaps has dreamed about—dim, flickering presences deeply embedded in the farthest reaches of memory.

In an almost obsessive way, Rick Hards meticulously paints over old, castoff tintypes of long-departed people whose personal histories have been discarded as mindlessly as their fragile photographic images. Ultimately, it is the painter's very use of this old-time substrate that informs his vision, which is inexplicably—and often uncontrollably—dictated by the faces that stare back at him.

A sort of precursor to the Polaroid, the tintype was a fast, no-negative-necessary, photographic process using a tin plate coated with light-sensitive emulsion exposed inside a large-format camera. Images on tintypes would come out laterally reversed, as if the person being photographed were looking in a mirror; they were unreproducible, being as singular as the sitter captured. This quick-and-dirty photographic form became instantly popular with itinerant street photographers of the mid-19th century and with a public that craved visual immortality, especially war-bound Civil War soldiers whose futures were less than assured.

In vogue from the 1850's to the 1880's, inexpensive tintypes eclipsed painted portraiture of the time, which had traditionally been accessible to only the wealthy. Ironically, Hards' overpainted tintypes return to painted portraiture in a strange, post-modern marriage of antique photographic emulsion and latter-day, liquid-bound pigment. And, to some, they are self-portraits, mirrors reflecting facets of the painter himself.

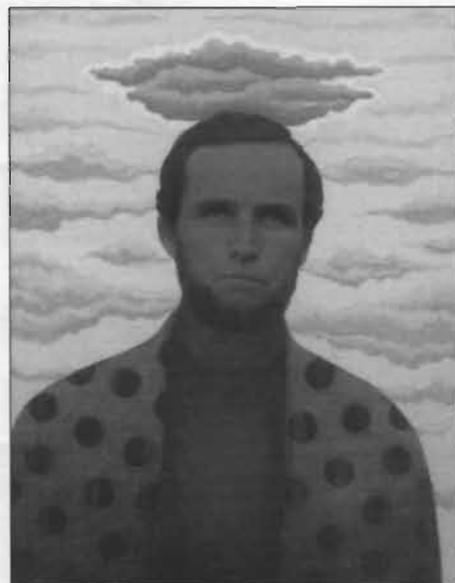
Hards, who has no photographic background to speak of, is unable to say exactly why he is so drawn to these old tintypes as both a physical and psychological structure for his work. By way of explanation, he offers that he has always hated the yielding softness of canvas and "wanted to incorporate something into my art that I hadn't had a hand in creating." While the artist also admits to being drawn to small things "and things other people normally find repulsive," the basic explanation for his attraction to tintypes is more elusive.

"One day while I was in an antique store, I noticed them for the first time," he recalls. "The faces and postures of the people in the photos seemed mysterious. They seemed removed, temporally speaking; I felt I was looking back in time while I was looking at them."

Haunting antique shops and estate sales, Hards rescues the old-fashioned, tin-based photos that form the sturdy underpinnings of his paintings, resurrecting and painstakingly reincarnating their long-forgotten subjects, who at one point must have been someone's mother or son, spouse or lover. With the artist's autonomic intervention, they are reborn in new manifestations that explore the cryptic connection between man and other creatures, or between man and the universe itself. In the process, Hards reinvents these once loved, but now abandoned souls, breathing new life into the faded faces that remorselessly gaze back at the viewer.

Over some images, the artist blots out surrounding background with layer upon layer of paint, leaving strange amoeboid shapes with snaky dendritic tentacles or pointy spikes framing the anonymous sitter; in others, curious animal, bird or insect forms not replicated in nature give way to the human image lurking beneath, biomorphic windows through which we are allowed to peer into the past. In still others, the human figure is cast as the main actor in pared down, surreal landscapes suffused with glowing light, into which theatrical or architectural components have been incorporated. Sometimes, the artist will mix fine sand with paint to produce a subtle textural quality to his surfaces.

According to Hards, who, besides an occasional name, knows nothing about the real past of the people who appear in his work, the incorporeal influence of his unidentified subjects eventually dictates the forms or scenarios in which they will appear: "When I begin to work on them, the images are abstract to me. But then I get to know them; the photos then dictate the fantastical shapes and scenes I finally use."



Leaving the World, oil on tintype, 14.5" x 12.5"

Deceptively nostalgic, vaguely menacing, the old souls rediscovered in Hards' work suggest ghostly refugees from some Victorian seance. Or maybe a new life as a microscopic, one-celled animal. The small, intimate scale of the pieces in "Former Lives" necessarily commands one to come very close to them. But beware of getting too close: you may unwittingly be sucked into Hards' populous parallel universe.

AARON FINK NEW PAINTINGS AND COUNTERPROOFS

Aaron Fink uses the commonplace as a stepping stone to the universal. His paintings are monumental homages to everyday objects like grapes, hats, paint brushes and steaming cups of coffee. At the same time, they revel in exposing what they truly are—canvases with layer upon layer of paint, expressionistically brushed, scraped, raked, blotted and smeared by the hands of the artist. The artist's process revealed in the paintings gives emphasis to a sense of movement and passage of time. The objects transform before our eyes as the details emerge from and recede into the layers of paint. With his dual emphasis on the object and the processes of painting, Fink offers the commonplace as universal—the Real as a sign pointing toward the Ideal.

Fink lives and works in Boston. He received a BFA from the Maryland Institute, Baltimore, and an MFA from Yale University. His paintings are in many major museum collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



Luis Gonzalez Palma
Hablando de Infancia (Speaking of Youth), 1996,
gelatin silver print with asphaltum and mylar, 35" x 20"
from "Memories of My Solitude," Jan. 2 - Feb. 1



Aaron Fink, *Paintbrush*, 1996, oil on paper, 24" x 60"

BRAD DURHAM ALTARS AND OFFERINGS

In Brad Durham's work—large-scale oil paintings and, more recently, small-scale relief sculptures—he offers the viewer a dialogue between the corporeal, or natural, and the sacred, or spiritual. The paintings reveal hushed landscapes that glow in radiant tones of mustard, ocher and sienna, as if capturing the last moments before sunset. Yet often the reverie they represent is intruded upon by graphic, geometric symbols incised in the paint near the top borders of the canvases. The relief plaques offer the comparison more directly—natural forms such as branches with leaves and berries gilded and placed below precisely incised drawings of circles, arcs and lines. The juxtaposition of these elements points to what the artist describes as a Goethean 'passage'—from the observation of nature to the ability to see the forms found there as metaphors for a transcendental experience of grace.



Durham exhibits his work internationally and has been included in exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA, the San Diego Museum of Art, and the Sezon Museum, Tokyo, Japan. He teaches at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA.

Dimensions of Intimacy, 1996, oil on canvas,
64" x 74" x 2.25"

GALLERY NEWS > ARTIST NEWS > GALLERY NEWS > ARTIST NEWS > GALLERY NEWS

- > As the gallery enters a new season, there are several goings and comings to report. After working with us for over ten years, **Jane Kealy** is retiring from the gallery at age 72, to devote time to her new desert landscaping business. Jane has been a joy to both our staff and visitors to the gallery and we will miss her very much. **Kathryn Funk** has returned to San Jose, California, and will continue to be active in the arts. We wish her well.

We are pleased to announce that **Duane Smith** has joined the gallery as Director of Operations. Duane received his Bachelor of Arts in Art History from Arizona State University. We also are happy to welcome **Jennifer Friedman** back to the gallery as an assistant in the photography department. She formerly worked with us in 1991.

- > The gallery will be participating in the **Photo LA** exposition, January 16 - 19, 1997 at Butterfield & Butterfield, 7601 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles.
- > **Andrew Young** and **Tim McDowell** will be included in the November exhibition "Elusive Nature," the Cuenca Bienal of Painting in Ecuador. The exhibition was organized by the Phoenix Art Museum and Curator of Contemporary Art, David Rubin.
- > **David Levinthal** will have a retrospective of his photographs at the International Center of Photography in New York City in January 1997.
- > **Marie Navarre's** work will be featured in "Experimental Photography" at the Art Museum of the State University of New York College at Potsdam, through November 22.
- > **Liz Birkholz** and **Rick Hards** will be featured in "Current Fictions: Work by Emerging Artists" at the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, California, December 5 - February 12, 1997.
- > **Mayme Kratz** is included in "The Triennial Sofia 1996 International Exhibition of Painting" in Sofia, Bulgaria.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

OCTOBER 3 - NOVEMBER 9

opening October 3 / 7-9 pm

BRAD DURHAM

Altars and Offerings

THROUGH THE ARCH

GENE COOPER

The Natural Bardo

NOVEMBER 14 - DECEMBER 28

opening November 14 / 7-9 pm

AARON FINK

New Paintings and Counter Proofs

THROUGH THE ARCH

TIMOTHY MCDOWELL

Fragmentation

JANUARY 2 - FEBRUARY 1

opening January 2 / 7-9 pm

LUIS GONZALEZ PALMA

Memories of My Solitude

THROUGH THE ARCH

RICK HARDS

Former Lives

TIMOTHY MCDOWELL *FRAGMENTATION*



Nature Boy, encaustic on birch, 48" x 48"

Timothy McDowell's encaustic paintings propose an equilibrium between representation and abstraction—the phenomenal and the metaphysical. The elements within each work—objects from the realms of allegory, botany, decorative motif and pseudo-science—precariously balance in a metaphorical world where chaos is the dominant principle. Plants, flowers, fruits, and other natural objects are placed in seemingly random arrangements with scale distorted in such a way as to make the viewer question whether he is viewing the tableau through a microscope or telescope. McDowell works the encaustic medium, pigment suspended in wax, in layers, leaving the spills, drips, pours and scrapings as a visual reference to that chaos and the natural process of decay, or entropy. The transparency of the wax gives the paintings a luminous surface that enhances the metaphorical quality of the natural objects and their off-kilter juxtapositions.

McDowell lives in West Mystic, Connecticut. He has exhibited his work internationally and has been included in exhibitions at Documenta Galeria de Arte, Sao Paulo, Brazil, the 1996 Cuenca Bienal of Painting, Ecuador, and the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia. His work is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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GALLERY HOURS

TUESDAY- FRIDAY
10:00 AM TO 5:00 PM
THURSDAY 7:00 TO 9:00 PM
SATURDAY NOON TO 5:00 PM
CLOSED NOV. 28, DEC. 25, JAN. 1

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