

LISA SETTE GALLERY

2006-2007

FALL/VOLUME 9



Mike & Doug Starn

Fragile parchment paper love letters to the world about itself, the works of Mike and Doug Starn recreate photography as a philosophical discourse. The Starns' recent photographs document the most ephemeral of subject matter—the crinkled wavetop, the moth that is drawn to the light, the snowflake that melts before our eyes—while at the same time addressing fundamental human concerns: thought, decline and desire.

Printed on multiple pieces of thin and precious paper, and mounted delicately within case-like frames, the Starns' work brings to mind important maps or specimens, long lost but finally recovered and treated with the reverence that they deserve. In *Sea Scape with Fog*, a length of ocean horizon is printed on three separate parchments, and the crumpled, troubled surface of the swelling water is echoed in the network of creases on the paper. Rather than being disconnected,



the piece comes together like an equation; the oceanscape in three parts is at once gloomy, in atmospheric grays and blacks, and at the same time moving against gravity with an almost palpable sensuality. It is not pretty or continuous or blue, but it is seductive and heavy with meaning, and, with its implications of the infinite, this is what one would hope to see in one's mind of minds, when thinking of the sea.

The natural world is rife with metaphors for our own variety of existential struggle, and Doug and Mike Starn are distinctly attuned to this quality. As its title suggests, the *Structure of Thought* series, a set of images of trees and branches, draws a connection between these tangled organic structures and the complicated architectures of the human mind. Intimate portraits of single leaves in various stages of decline, the Starns' *Black Pulse* series pulls in yet closer to the biological details of life. The leaf, with a system of capillaries and veins as lyrically beautiful as it is complex, stands in for a human body, and the Starns' photographs show the singular nature of each leaf's decay. Whether curling and withering around the edges, or becoming simply a fragile silhouette of itself,

the leaf transforms in death according to its individual nature in life. Inextricably involved with others of its kind, gaining sustenance from the sun and the sky, and all the time adhering to a strict timetable of life and death, a leaf's existence can serve as a poetics for human life.

While these series reveal biology to be a lovely and correct metaphor for the twisting evolutions of our minds, the Starns are also deeply concerned with the notion of desire. In *Attracted to Light*, tiny emissaries from the insect world try their luck with the light. The Starns have captured images of moths, creatures of darkness, foraging for warmth and light against a camera lens. Their subjects' vulnerability is immediately apparent—what the moths crave will ultimately, of course, be their end. And yet they continue to approach the object of their desire, doggedly and desperately, in postures of irrational ambition that look, in these photographs, almost human.

The Starns' most recent work, the “*allevythingthatishyou*” digital projection and accompanying series of images, moves into the very atmosphere, the medium of our existence. The subjects of “*allevythingthatishyou*” are ice crystals that form as moisture falls from the clouds. In a constant process of becoming, snowflakes are transient and yet, in one sense at least, unvarying; the

hexagonal structure around which each snowflake forms is constant. As the images from “*allevythingthatishyou*” demonstrate, despite sharing a universal potential, each snowflake comes to exist among other variables; snowflakes collide, they melt, they form quickly or slowly or meld to one another. In the instant that Doug and Mike Starn have captured them on film, each collection of ice crystals exists in a diverse stage of pattern and detail within their momentary lifespan. Although minimal in presentation, the “*allevythingthatishyou*” images are startlingly rich and vivid—an unexpected frost of detail and color, in configurations that seem too beautiful to be accidental. Inherent in this beauty is the realization that the pieces of snow themselves do not last; they will have all melted or fallen to the ground and become lost among the drifts. The Starn brothers remind us, then, how much we desire these fragments of ice to remain mid-flight forever, permanent and fragile, universal and unique.

Mike & Doug Starn

Cover and Above: *allevythingthatishyou*, matte laminated Lambda digital C-prints, 15.25" x 15.25" (from a grouping of six)



Rick Hards
Mandrake, 2006, oil on tintype, 17" x 15"



Jessica Joslin
Marcel, 2006, antique hardware, brass, beads, horn, bone, shoe taps, glove leather, steel, glass eyes, 23" x 8" x 15"

BEVERLY PENN

Whether an ornate cascade of bulbs and thistles dripping from the wall or a circular expanse of fragile, reedy stems, interwoven to form a mandala of infinite movement, in the cast bronze sculptures of Beverly Penn the botanical takes on both physical and symbolic weight. The notion of rearranging the wild miscellany of the natural world to fit an intellectual symmetry is a fundamental human urge, and Penn's sculptures speak to the power of this desire. In each of her works hundreds of minute and delicately cast organic components seem to tremble with a meticulous and expressive energy.

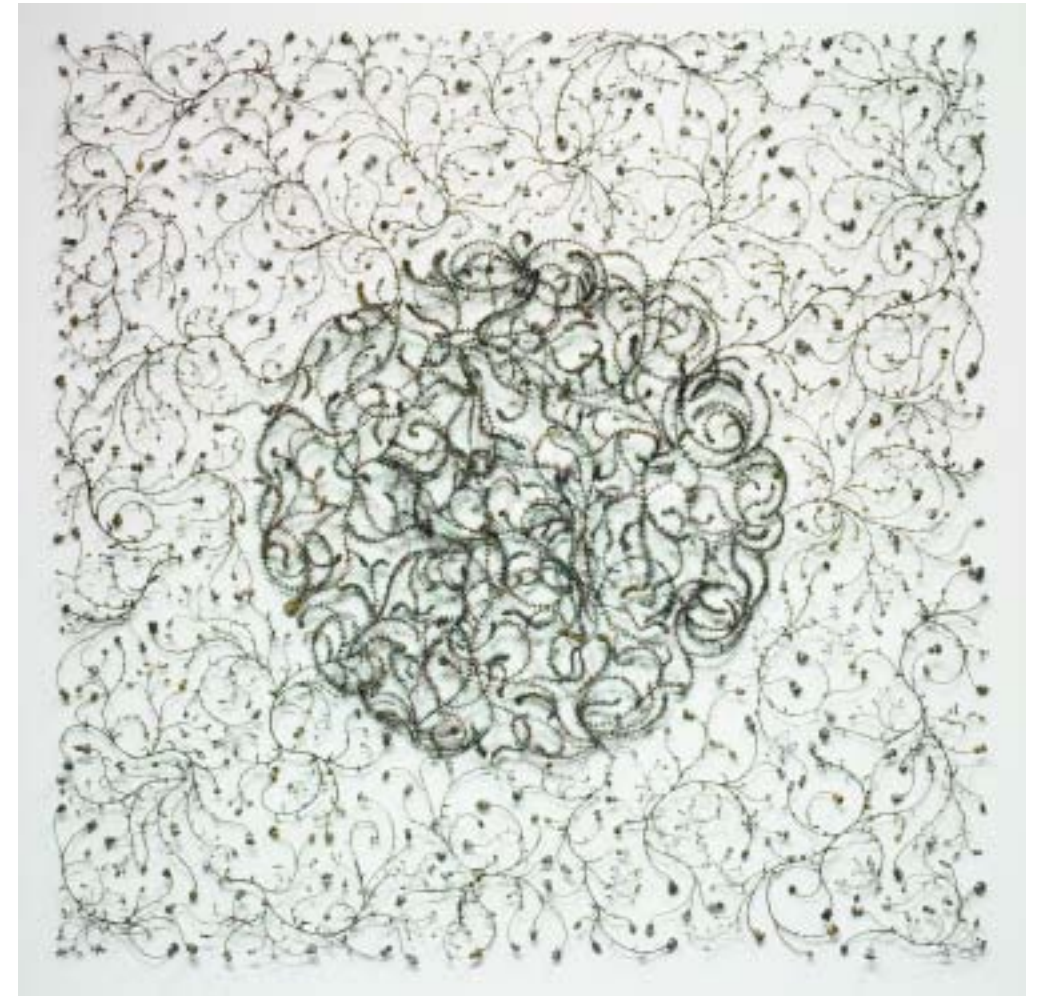
If at first Penn's sculptures appear rooted in the organic world, on second glance one may trace in them the history of human aesthetics. In the lace-like arrangements of plant forms one recognizes the botanical embellishments of the Victorians, and in their simple and compelling composition Penn's works recall the forms of Classical architecture. Employing equal parts nature and ornament, Penn pulls her artistic vocabulary from both worlds. Her historical influences are not accidental; Penn has traveled widely for the purpose of studying the decorative habits of Western civilization, and her work references a long account of organic ornamentation.

Yet while the aesthetic preoccupations of the past can be traced in these works, their more pressing concern is the perennial human condition: our contradicting needs to both idealize and modify the natural environment. Penn's work, organic matter made formally beautiful, speaks of the connections that we make between nature and commodity, origin and ornament. Her artist's statement includes this explanation:

My work poses elements from landscape against human constructions as a means of articulating both the tragic and humorous complexities of contemporary culture. As the constructed environment steadily eclipses the natural world, mediated experience gradually replaces our direct interaction with our surroundings.

And so, while Penn has traveled far to examine the traditions of Western art and ornamentation, the voyages she makes to the empty lots and fields of her home in the American Southwest are as significant. Traversing the low scrub of the new American landscape, Penn scavenges her botanical treasures from sites already promised to commerce: small and sequestered natural spaces that are soon to become discount stores or strip-malls. In these places she finds the plantlife—often common weeds—that will ultimately be cast and incorporated in her work. Inherent in each object is an undomesticated natural beauty, as well as the human tendency towards destruction and decoration.

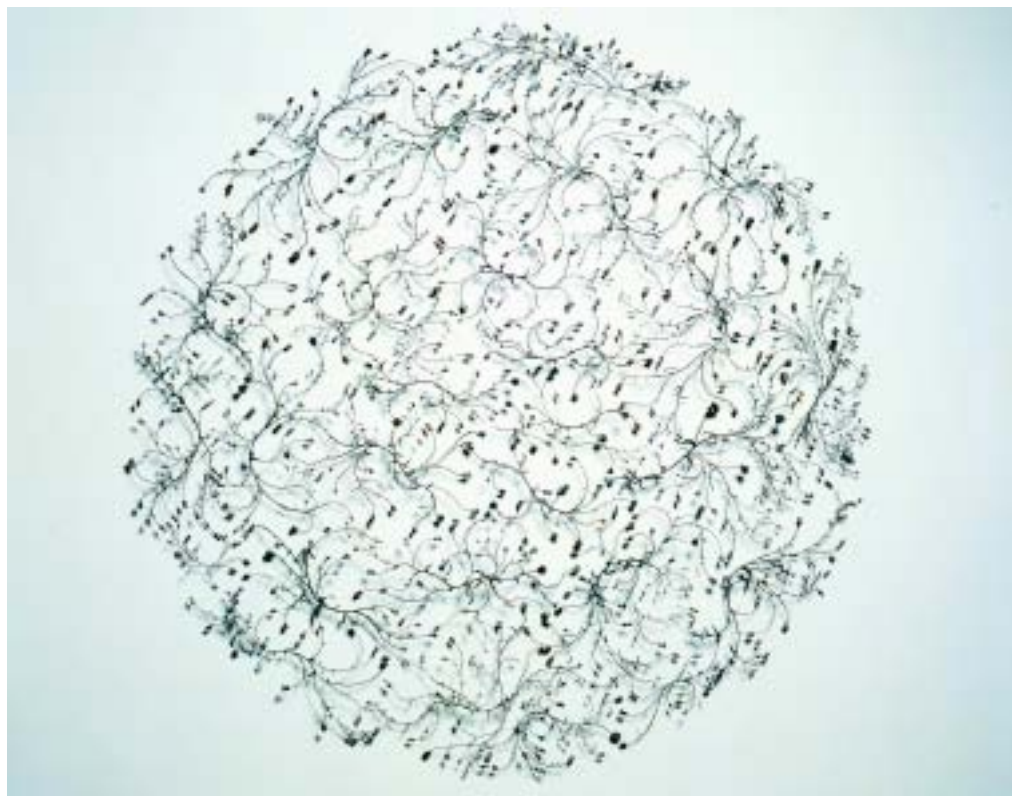
As it documents our increasing separation from the true manifestation of nature, Penn's work is also a celebration of both human and environmental potential. Her impressive centrifugal castings allow for a profusion of detail, and the everyday stems and thistles she recreates are transformed,



when cast in metal, into objects that are almost mystically beautiful. Penn's expertise in bronze work and patina is evident in the precise forms of her subject matter and in patinas that at once replicate the plant's original hues and amplify them, creating buds and thistles and vines that entangle and ensnare one another, and swell with sensual enchantment.

For it is in the idealized natural space that our best intentions thrive, flourish and proliferate. This place, which Penn calls the Garden, is the meeting place of nature and intellect; it is the origination of fairy tales and daydreams and it is also where many of us locate the idea of heaven. And in the immense and supernatural beauty that resides here is the foundation of our universal desire to surround ourselves with the earthly beauty of the natural world, strip-malls and parking lots withstanding. It is one of humanity's noblest desires, and it is one that, as the work of Beverly Penn indicates, we should attend to.

Beverly Penn
Twin, 2006, bronze, 72" x 72" x 15"



Res (in collaboration with Constanza Piaggio)
Blue Picasso, 2006, Lambda print, 37.5" x 30"

Beverly Penn
Damascene, 2006, bronze, 96" diameter x 8" deep

Lalla Essaydi
Les Femmes du Maroc #16, 2006, C-print, available 29.5" x 37.5" or 48" x 60"

Nissa Kubly

Nissa Kubly's work suggests an obsession. Her clever and intricately machined sculptures reiterate a theme, each one a sophisticated reinvention of an ancient and fundamental mechanism: the camera obscura. Kubly's romance with this timeless scientific device is apparent in both her continuing fascination with the concept and in her ability to make each camera, along with the images they are displayed with, compelling and unique.

In Kubly's work one observes the auspicious meeting of technical craft and pure conceptual delight. Having initially trained as a metal smith and jeweler, it wasn't until graduate school that Kubly learned about the camera obscura, in a class on the history of photography. "I was intrigued, yet didn't fully understand the physics of light, so I decided to make one in the metals studio. When I tried it, it worked, and I was hooked."



The concept of a camera obscura is simple. The Latin *camera obscura* translates literally to "dark room," and, Kubly explains, "Light from a subject outside passes through a tiny opening in a darkened room or box, and appears as an inverted image on the opposite wall." The camera obscura reveals certain rules about physical world, both in an optical sense (exemplifying the behavior of light) and in its projection of three-dimensional images onto a flat surface. It is also, of course, the earliest embodiment of the idea of photography, and it is this use that Kubly favors, turning her lovely chambers into pinhole cameras by inserting film in the dark box. Then, following a host of philosophers and artists, Kubly actually uses each of her camera obscura as tools for exploring her environment.

As an observational instrument the camera obscura has a prestigious history: Renaissance luminaries daVinci, Vermeer and Kepler all used the camera obscura in their research. While this rich past informs Kubly's interest in the mechanism, her own pursuit is one of personal investigation and revelation. She comments, "the overall mechanics and physics of the camera obscura interests me... I am also interested in historical instruments such as observational machines and measurement tools of the 16-18th centuries. The components in these machines were crafted so beautifully, each part was designed to carry out a specific function."

In brushed brass and silver, and executed with an attention to design in even the minutest detail that is scientific in itself, Kubly's cameras echo the sensibility of early scientific instrumentation. At a time when every discovery was a precious clue to the much larger mystery of the physical world, each tool used in its revelation became a spiritual object. In their careful and considered intention, highlighted by decorative elements that serve only to emphasize the preciousness of the object as a whole, Kubly's works appear to be created with the same almost worshipful aesthetic sense. They are also imbued with a similar notion of experimentation and discovery.

For while Kubly's flawlessly smithed cameras are created with precise measurements and careful deliberation, the function they carry out is an exploration of new territories. The images these cameras capture, contingent on ambient light and other conditions, cannot be planned in advance.

Kubly explains, "In the field of pinhole photography, and especially when creating your own camera, there is an element of the unknown. The juxtaposition that arises from creating images full of mystery and emotion from such technical methods is something that I am attracted to."

The emotional end product of Kubly's work is displayed with her cameras: the various points in time that her cameras document. Each photograph taken with a pinhole camera takes five to ten minutes to expose. As a result, "details like cars and people moving are not recorded, but the clouds moving in the sky over a period of time are documented, sometimes in ways you never observed when taking the photograph. Also the images taken from the double pinhole camera show an unique overlapping of imagery, blending the two images of the same subject in ways so unique, it creates a mystery world of its own."

In a time when the latest technical advances can be purchased at the click of a button, and often serve only to pack our fast and full lives with yet more speed and efficiency (not to mention plastic objects that collect in our homes and pockets), Kubly's cameras should serve as a reminder of the emotional origin of technology and scientific discovery.



Nissa Kubly
View from Amalfi, Italy, 2006, brass, film, lens, 4.25" x 4.5" x 5"

Nissa Kubly
Ten Minute Camera, 2006, brass, 5" x 3.75" x 3"



Mike & Doug Starn, *Structure of Thought #9*, MIS & lysonic inkjet prints, Thai Mulberry paper, tissue & Gampi papers, wax, encaustic, varnish, 14" x 78"

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE 06/07

2006	
November 2 - December 30 Opening November 2, 7 to 9 pm	Jessica Joslin/Nissa Kubly
2007	
January 3 - 27, Opening January 3, 7 to 9 pm	Kevin Sloan/Karl Blossfeldt
February 1 - 24 Opening February 1, 7 to 9 pm	RES (in collaboration with Constanza Piaggio) / Enrique Chagoya
March 1 - 31 Opening March 1, 7 to 9 pm	Beverly Penn/Alain Clement
April 5 - 28, Opening April 5, 7 to 9 pm	David Kroll
May 3 - June 30, Opening May 3, 7 to 9 pm	Lalla Essaydi

ART FAIRS 06/07

2006	2007
photo MIAMI The International Contemporary Fair of Photo-Based Art, Video, & New Media December 6 - 10, 2006 The SOHO Building 2136 NW 1st Avenue Wynwood Art District Miami, Florida	photo LA January 18 - 21, 2007 Santa Monica Civic Auditorium Santa Monica, California
	AIPAD Association of International Photography Art Dealers April 12 - 15, 2007 7th Regiment Armory New York, New York

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