



Robert Stivers, *Series 5 (face with hand #2)*, 1995,
gelatin silver print, edition of 5, 10" x 8"

ROBERT STIVERS: SWIMMING IN THE NIGHT

One cannot simply see one's way across these pictures; one must think and feel one's way into, around and through them all but blindly . . . They demand the application of a whole-body consciousness, a confidence in one's own sense of balance and a trust in one's ability to read fragmentary, partially glimpsed gestures. . . . Regardless of its apparent distance from us within the frame, no object appears in sharp focus, and no foreground-background relationship suggests even the possibility of a progressive clarification. Since these are the basic visual clues by which we locate ourselves in physical space, the world according to Robert Stivers is thus an anxious place in which vision of all is impaired and in which no one, introvert or extrovert, can immediately feel entirely comfortable or secure. Spun around, unmoored from our reference points, off-center, stripped of the comfort of clarity and specifics, we are thrust abruptly into this astigmatic dramaturgy, rife with hints of ancient ritual, elemental forms, animal spirits, charged objects, celebrants and mourners, births and sacrifices, rushes and pauses, gaps and proximities.

A.D. Coleman
adapted from the introduction to *Robert Stivers, Photographs*
New York, May 1997

THE TRUTH ABOUT TELEVISORS: AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE GOMPF

by Kathleen Vanesian

With his upcoming exhibition fast approaching, video artist Steve Gompf speaks about his continuing obsession with the televisors starring in *Persistent Visions: Televisors and Early Motion Picture Technologies* (November 13-December 31). Gompf is a rapacious collector of televisors, which, according to him, are rare, often quaint, mechanical televisions produced between 1884 and 1928. The artist uses these televisors to display “digitally manipulated re-animation” of late 19th century photographic motion studies by eccentric English scientist-cum-artist Eadweard Muybridge. Using the modern equivalent of the “Analytical Engine”—19th century inventor Charles Babbage’s precursor to latter-day computers—Steve Gompf attempts “to conjure the ghosts of the televisor,” just like Babbage aspired to build a machine capable of capturing ghosts:

KV: Why don’t you tell me about the latest series of televisors that will be appearing in this show?

SG: Well, most of them are going to be American televisors; I have a particularly rare one—the miniature televisor that I found recently. What’s unusual about it is that there were very few miniature televisors made here in the US and very few that still work. This is one of only seven that are known to exist.

KV: What first peaked your interest in these early television forms?

SG: Well, my parents were collectors and they kind of passed on the bug to me—that’s when I started collecting. I found a televisor in Europe and didn’t know what it was; when my parents explained to me what it was, I was just enthralled.

KV: So, how long have you been collecting televisors?

SG: Since I was 17.

KV: Where do you go looking for them—where do you find them?

SG: I was a military brat and my parents, who were collectors of antiques, took us to flea markets and junk stores galore. We used to make trips to Holland once a month while we were living in Germany from 1975 through 1979. We did a lot of collecting across the continent—mainly Germany, Holland, Italy, with side trips to Spain and England.

KV: Why this preoccupation with televisors?

SG: Being a video artist, I have always been intrigued by the romanticism of early motion picture devices and especially with Eadweard Muybridge’s motion studies and those of Etienne-Jules Marey, a physiologist who was his equivalent in France. Actually, Muybridge never thought of making his pictures move until he met Marey on a trip to France. What I think’s fascinating is that both their initials are E.M. and they were born within of month of one another in 1830.

KV: So you think there’s some sort of cosmic connection there?

SG: I do a lot of research on early technologies—1830’s through now. It was really interesting to see three or four people in different places in Europe simultaneously come up with processes for photography—and really weird how all these things seemed to happen within months of each other...Here are all these tinkerers building strange machines with stuff they had



Steve Gompf, *Teletron (Model: Majestic)*, American, 1923, 1997, mixed media, 10" x 9" x 16"

lying around. My thinking was: what would they do if they could go to Radio Shack? You can buy their inventions for ten bucks now.

Plus there are a lot of very romantic stories intertwined with the history of technology—like the one about a guy named LePrince, who arguably invented the first single lens motion picture camera and projector. He was in France and talked to some of Thomas Edison's thugs; I call them thugs because LePrince got on a train after the meeting and was never seen again...just things like that—the whole intrigue of it and the rediscovery of early technology is what got me into it.

KV: Seems like it's the romanticism that's really captivated and inspired you.

SG: Absolutely. 1958 was when video was invented; it's forty years later and video artists are using basic motion picture technology dating from 1895. All of this stemmed from artists finally getting the technology. Video doesn't have that romantic past connection with all these machines, so I'm kind of jealous. I try to extend the romanticism I associate with early technology to the video collage work I do.

KV: Is there any market for these televisors? Are there many people collecting them?

SG: Very few people know what they are, so I've been lucky enough to find some at thrift stores—in major disrepair, however. Usually it's only the collectors who know how much they're really worth. I know of three or four televisor fans whose collections I respect; I've made some trades with a few of them. They're really the only ones who know their true value....

A BRIEF INTERVIEW EPILOGUE:

Art is not necessarily a reflection of any empirical truth. It is easy to confuse verity with verisimilitude in a world where reality often seems to be primarily a matter of personal perspective. If the truth be told, most truly provocative art, while marginally based upon fact, is nothing more than well-crafted fiction.

Steve Gompf's art is no exception. In fact, it's a carefully fabricated, self-admitted ruse. To be perfectly honest, there is no such thing as a televisor. Those alleged late 19th and early 20th century forerunners of today's big screen TVs perched on pedestals at Lisa Sette Gallery are mere figments of the video artist's febrile imagination. Gompf is not only the fabricator of these objects; he's the fabricator of their historical pedigrees as well.

Don't be embarrassed if you thought they were real. Many people initially do, including bona fide art reviewers, who have solemnly pronounced that these televisors "...are hefty wooden cabinets that were proudly displayed in turn-of-the-century living rooms and used to project entertaining moving images." "Gompf has appropriated some of the televisor's early images and rendered them digitally for a modern audience."

He's done nothing of the kind, thank you. Despite claims made by some museum and gallery visitors that they can vaguely remember televisors, or at least remember reading about them, these objets de faux arts are carefully constructed confabulations made from thrift shop and hardware store flotsam and jetsam. Upon close inspection, one can find belt buckles, Zippo lighter parts, funky curtain tie-backs and similar components posing as decorative design elements on discarded containers disguised as antique mechanical devices.

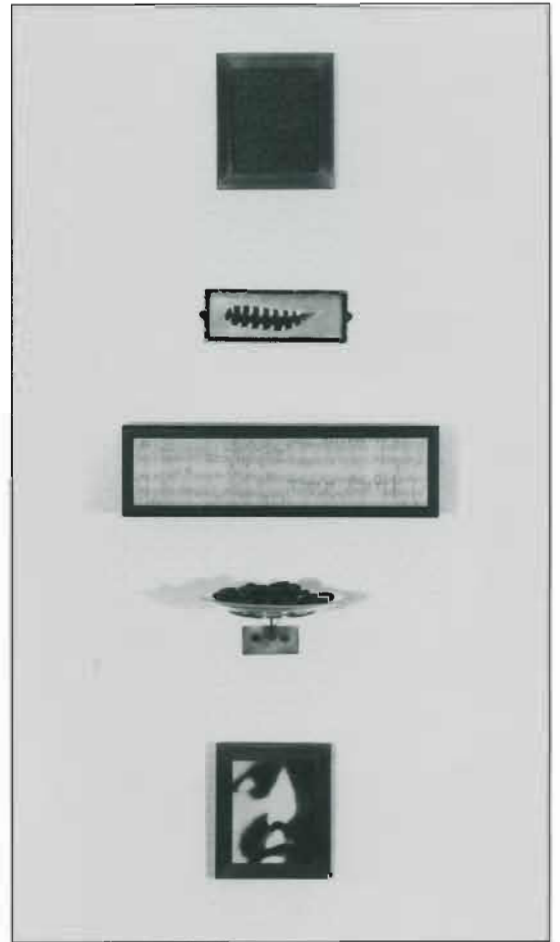
As for those bluish images flickering across Gompf's homemade screens, they are skillfully manipulated, video-recorded computer images, plucked in large part from Eadweard Muybridge's visual lexicon of stop-motion serial images. What results are nightmarish "Boschy hells," as the artist refers to his painstakingly contrived video dreamscapes. Gompf's appropriation of Muybridge's imagery is, well, appropriate, considering that Muybridge himself manipulated his famous photos of fragmented movement. In less than rigorously scientific fashion, Muybridge (not his real name, by the way) was not above posing entire sequences, some of which were considered salacious at the time, and was known to have renumbered and replaced frames.

Like Muybridge, Gompf masquerades as a student of science, when in fact he's pure artist. His televisors, more than a pseudo-sociological statement about the place and effects of television and motion pictures in Western culture, confront us with deeper issues of memory's malleability, suggestibility and, of course, human perception. A blend of P.T. Barnum and Heironymous Bosch, Gompf's work skillfully yokes an aesthetic hucksterism reflecting fascination with physical anomaly to an often grotesque, medieval spiritual vision.

Muybridge's motion studies challenged 19th century viewers' notions of representation; so do Gompf's televisors. At the very least, they are forgivable fictions.



Fred Stonehouse, *O.I.C.U./I.O.U.C.*, 1997,
acrylic on panel, 20" x 12"



Marie Navarre, *since all is void, where can the dust
alight?* 1997, film, glass, paper, found object, steel,
34" x 11" x 7"



Luis Cruz Azaceta, *Cubanizarus II*, detail, 1996, mixed media, 36" x 48"

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES: THE WORK OF MARIE NAVARRE

By Kathleen Vanesian

There is something disconcerting about the quiet art of Marie Navarre. The mostly monochromatic objects and images scrupulously selected and juxtaposed by the artist, often mounted in spare, clean, almost clinical steel frames or housed in unobtrusive boxes, are strangely familiar. While devoid of overt emotionality and visual flashiness, Navarre's constructions, if they can be called that, speak eloquently of the basic nature of human experience, of being beyond the boundaries of the verbal and visual.

"It's a little bit hard to explain or to put into words," says Navarre about the significance of the work she creates. "I am very interested in systems of knowledge that attempt to explain, predict and give meaning to our experience, systems such as science, philosophy, psychology and religion. The reason I'm interested in those systems has to do with some of my own experiences of the unexplained, of being outside of myself."

Navarre is quick to point out that her work has nothing to do with the paranormal or preternatural and everything to do with uncovering the inexplicable essence of human experience: "I'm not talking about the paranormal or supernatural in the popular sense; I'm speaking about everyday and, in some cases, extremely ordinary experiences that seem to brush up against the ability to explain what they are. For example, I think most people have come close to a very deep connection with everything when they're in nature, maybe just lying in the grass, smelling the earth—a momentary sense of wholeness with everything."

"All systems of knowledge attempt to set up a structure, to break things down into and develop rules for that structure," the artist explains. "Science, whose iconography I use, offers a system we're familiar with and has a sensibility about it in this culture that is, in some ways, akin to religion. There's a safety factor to it that we can trust, we can count on, that gives us comfort. But pushed against these systems is a sense of whole experience, a fleeting instinct that there is something not accounted for. I think people frequently have those experiences, but our culture does not validate, support or pay attention to them."

The artist's personal search for that elusive encounter with completeness—for those "...tenuous and eternal crevasses of unreason," in the words of writer-philosopher Jorge Luis Borges—is at the core of Marie Navarre's work. Usually bearing daunting metaphysical titles, her pieces are basically about connection, association, conjunction and relatedness on the most tenuous levels; creating them means casting aside limits and boundaries imposed by logic and reason. Navarre allows ordinary objects and discarded photographic images she finds to collide and form their own particular bonds, often without any conscious intervention on her part.

"These objects ring some kind of bell for me," the artist says. "A lot of my work is about pairing or creating a relationship between an image, an object or several objects; presenting them together is what creates the relationship between them. The objects collide or find themselves and then I recognize the connection; I couldn't think of those kinds of relationships by myself. It sometimes feels like allowing, as opposed to making, something."

Navarre's background as a photographer has profoundly affected her visual approach to this fugitive subject matter: "My approach comes out of my basic orientation as a photographer—hold up the viewfinder and you put a line around things in the world; you've created a relationship between those objects within that frame, sometimes even a narrative. That very fundamental way of creating relationships is still at work."

It is in the seeming insignificance of the objects Navarre works with—a delicate bird's feather, yellowing paperback books soaked and dried, an anonymous face in a crowd she's blown up from old 16mm film footage discovered in some dusty corner—that the artist now finds real importance: "A long time ago, I used to scour around for things that seemed special; now I find special things that are trash or some natural object that's just lying on the ground to work with. Sometimes I do use my own photographic images, but part of my process is getting out of my own way. If I set out to make photographs to make something happen, I often struggle against myself. I have to watch out for things being too contrived or forced."

Navarre admits to a certain discomfort, as well as delight, in allowing disparate objects and images to seek their own affinities. That same apparent randomness can be equally unnerving to those of us looking for instant, immutable meaning in the artist's work. Its unremarkable, yet lyrical, simplicity is deceptive and vaguely confusing. To those willing to invest time and thought, precious commodities in this world of cultural cacophony, Navarre's pieces offer a refuge of silence, a place pregnant with the quiet needed to hear one's inner thoughts or, maybe even more important, to encounter the absence of thought. For it is in the empty spaces between Navarre's carefully chosen objects where the collisions of experience occur, where wholeness lies in wait. In these synapses, connections with ultimate reality are born.

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FREDERIC WEBER: IN PRIMARY LIGHT



Frederic Weber, *Untitled, #84*, 1996,
cibachrome, 20" x 16"

At first glance, Frederic Weber's cibachromes either evade or overwhelm, yet there is little chance of you escaping their seductiveness. They will engage you in mental conversation. These images seem to be pulled from beyond the paper's surface, a surface that is scraped and tortured, then rebuilt with thin layers of color, texture, light and bits of subconscious memories. Both historical and personal, these photographs resolve themselves in an emotional release, offering more than one point of view.

One of the things that attract you to this work is the dazzling sense of color; earthy sepias, reds, golds, greens and blacks that create a near religious, iconic feeling. These portraits hint at a fading Byzantium or plain, timeless, decaying walls. Now these colors are evolving into whites, dense grays, lavenders, steely and silvery blues.

In the past year, as the work has metamorphosed, there remains a deep connection to the people he creates as the passion of his expression. The work has become more subtle and refined. It seems the images are observing us. This is something I began to feel when I first saw *Untitled, #91*. At times, we see the face completely depending on the light and atmosphere, but most of the time we are challenged to decide if the person is hiding or lurking within the framed space—which continues Frederic's questions on spiritual duality.

Another change is presented in *Untitled, #104*—a shift toward a sensual and intellectual coolness. We are given less direct information, a pale color spectrum—the details are like vapors. The image is visually clear when the viewer is grounded, a visage that is as exact and cool as an Antonio Canova reflected in the light of a cathode tube. These images that evolve emotionally in front of your eyes, like duplicitous magic tricks, in the end will haunt you even as you walk away.

John A. Bennette, New York, 1997



Luis Gonzalez Palma, from the series *Tensiones Hermeticas*, 1997, toned photographs with wire, 20" x 40"

GALLERY EXPOSITIONS

January 15 - 18

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February 12 - 15

The Photography Show '98
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GALLERY STAFF

Jennifer Friedman
Malcolm Lightner
Lisa Sette
Duane Smith

Director of Photography
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The gallery is pleased to welcome April Flanders and Benjamin Kee as gallery assistants.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER 13, 1997 -
JANUARY 3, 1998
opening November 13 / 7-9 pm

FRED STONEHOUSE
*Thirteen Devils &
El Libro de los Suenos*

THROUGH THE ARCH
STEVE GOMPF &
EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE
*Persistent Visions: Televisors and
Early Motion Picture Technologies*

JANUARY 8 - 31, 1998
opening January 8 / 7-9 pm

TIMOTHY MCDOWELL
Towards Arcadia

THROUGH THE ARCH
LUIS GONZALEZ PALMA
Tensiones Hermeticas

FEBRUARY 5 - 28, 1998
opening February 5 / 7-9 pm

LUIS CRUZ AZACETA
Hybrids

THROUGH THE ARCH
FREDERIC WEBER
In Primary Light

MARCH 5 - 28, 1998
opening March 5 / 7-9 pm

MARIE NAVARRE
to no special place

THROUGH THE ARCH
ROBERT STIVERS
Swimming in the Night

APRIL 2 - 25, 1998
opening April 2 / 7-9 pm

KEVIN SLOAN
Ancient Corruptions

THROUGH THE ARCH
KARL BLOSSFELDT
Intimate Garden

APRIL 30 - JUNE 27, 1998
opening April 30 / 7-9 pm

MAYME KRATZ
Meditations

THROUGH THE ARCH
FRANK MARTIN
Immortality

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