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...are framed family photographs, each a comical reinforcement of the thin psychological margin between human and chimp. In *Reciprocal Altruism*, the chimp family sits under a tree in the woods, arms around each other and holding baby chimps. *The Other* captures the moment of one chimp looking into a compact mirror and seeing his own image reflected. Significantly, chimpanzees are one of the very few primates other than humans to recognize their own reflection in a mirror. As for the five adult chimps on anapologetically smoking cigarettes in *Simon's Ain't Right*, well, that's where evolution fails the chimp. They can't learn from their parents and grandparents that smoking might kill them. But it seems this group of chimps is taking steps to overcome their handicap. In *Southsiding*, three chimps squat before a deck of memory cards strategically laid out like tarot cards, as if a better, more generational memory will lead to a better destiny.

Humans' ability to retain and learn from our history has meant that we possess more complex things—and explanations for things—than chimpanzees, but it's yet to be determined whether that ensures a better destiny. Indeed, we who have the ability to take heed of our missteps, and change our ways in order to protect our home and family and future generations, are the ones that do the most damage. We exploit our natural resources, harming an ecosystem that is as crucial to our existence as to the evolutionarily inferior animals. Perhaps it's more challenging to change direction midway than to learn it all anew time and again.

Humans and chimps differ in only 4 percent of our genetic makeup, and Holman's thoughtful and light-handed project suggests that if either is to become more like the other, it might better serve the world if humans backtracked toward chimp-likeness rather than chimps advancing toward human-likeness, if for no other reason than to prevent chimps from making music videos.

—Amber Whiteside

Desiree Holman: *Troglodyte* closed in December at Queen's Nails Annex, San Francisco.

Amber Whiteside is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.

Theodora Varnay Jones at Don Soker Gallery

Theodora Varnay Jones's exhibition of recent work at Don Soker Gallery extends her interest in what she calls

"meaning as interaction." The interaction she speaks of, however, is not merely the interactions and reactions of viewers with her created objects or with presupposed mimetic representations of referenced objects outside the work. Although she admits that the layered three-dimensional images inherent in her translucent painted box structures produce "physical experiences and psychological observations" in the viewer, she also insists that "the structures themselves are the phenomena."

She draws a fine philosophical and psychological distinction between the effects of a work of art on the viewer and its objectified existence in the world of external objects "outside" the observer, over which the observer apparently has no control. This is not, of course, a new argument or condition for works of art—whether meaning exists in the mind and eye of the viewer or whether the works have objective meaning separate from the viewer. This subject has always been paramount to minimalist works of art.

Eight of the eleven works in this show are titled *Transparency*. These rectangular or square shallow boxes have horizontal and vertical "struts," support structures that maintain the walls and shape of the boxes. Some of these struts are curved and bowed. The entire box is covered with translucent, stretched acrylic polymer, shrink wrapped, to produce very intriguing and engaging reflective and transparent surfaces. Jones had to learn to construct these boxes to withstand the deforming and warping forces of the shrinking plastic. The interior background of the boxes contains lines and markings, "drawings" that have no reference to an "external" reality or representational images. The colors of these sur-

faces are deceptively subtle: light green, aqua or faded blue. The interior and external surfaces interact with each other, shifting and changing with variable light and viewing angle. The struts and edges of the boxes are also sometimes painted to highlight or contrast with the interior and surface colors. The translucent surfaces sometimes reflect and sometimes absorb the light, alternately opening and blocking views of the "interior" of the boxes. As a result, complex and subtle effects cause the light to shift from interior to exterior, and sometimes only remaining external and superficial. In *Transparency #25*, where the supporting struts are higher than the surrounding peripheral frame of the box, the stretched acrylic polymer forms curved, wave-like surfaces between the struts that create the effect of looking at breakers on a lake or ocean. Jones, of course, would call this association, "accidental," one that exists only in the mind of the viewer, not in the work itself.

Jones herself, however, adds a new, contradictory factor to the minimalist condition between object and observer by asserting that the obscured drawings and "markings" that she makes on the underlying surfaces are "buried, on the bottom, like childhood memories." These she calls "undercurrents," giving rise to the title of the exhibition. The drawings and markings are for her the "determining foundation," and the layers that she builds upon these do in fact "alter their perception, as events in time or distance in space do, but their physical presence, although not fully visible, takes the obscurity away and restores the reality of these works." The problem remains: What obscurity is removed and whose reality is restored? The very idea that the foundation drawings have a relationship to "childhood memories" injects a psychological human reference into her structures that, in principle, she should deny if she wishes the structures to remain pure phenomena. Of course, this is not possible because the works are not in fact separate from human perception, for they are not "natural objects" like leaves on trees but manufactured human objects, like works of art or machines. Found objects partake of this dichotomy, even when we are both looking at and through the surface of things.

All this philosophy of meaning only adds interest to Jones's already interesting works. Like all minimalist works, they acquire significance just as the famous doubloon in Melville's *Moby Dick*, where the more one concentrates on the meaning of an object, the more meaning dilates until a thing can finally mean everything and therefore nothing. The "real" intrigue for the viewer of such art is to stop the dilation at a point where a particular derived meaning persists and before the work becomes "meaningless." If this is the point at

which one sees or feels an affinity within the works with the waves of a lake or the ocean, then this is satisfactory. Yet there is more than this here. The play of light upon and within these structures is a physical activity that can persist without meaning, like an intriguing game either natural or human-made. After all this discussion about the philosophy of meaning, I almost hesitate to say that these works are in fact quite beautiful objects to observe.

—Frank Cebulski

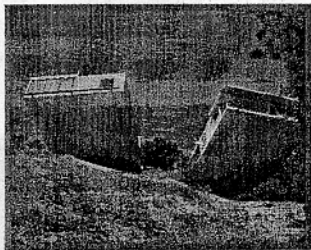
Theodora Varnay Jones: *Undercurrents* closed in December at Don Soker Gallery, San Francisco.

Frank Cebulski is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Southern California

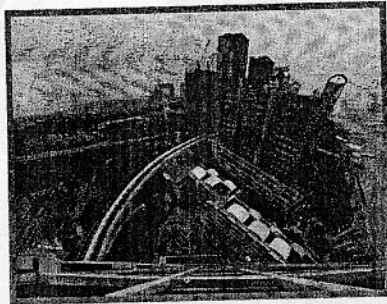
'Still, Things Fall from the Sky' at the UCR/CMP

Clara Ennis, new curator of exhibitions at the California Museum of Photography, has begun her tenure with a refreshingly lucid, even entertaining, thematic group



Amir Zaki, *Untitled (OH_04_x)*, 2004, lightjet digital Type C-print, 69-1/2" x 88-1/2", at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside.

show. Her *Still, Things Fall from the Sky* assembled a dozen artists whose radically diverse images and objects share a preoccupation with the volume of air we inhabit. (*Flying*, a one-woman show of Sachigusa Yasuda's vertiginous views into the canyons of New York and Philadelphia, shot as if the photographer were about to launch herself off the window ledge, logically augmented *Still*.)



Sachigusa Yasuda, *Flying #5*, 2005, C-print, 40 x 50", at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside.

Our experience of the earth's troposphere, visually or otherwise, constituted this show's single significant, and easily comprehended, parameter. Work in photographic—including cinematic/videstatic—media predominated, but given the museum's bias, the only surprise here was the number of works *not* dependent on the camera. The sky was the limit, a conceit apparent throughout.

Those pieces bearing no relationship to the blue yonder, it turned out, manifested what Ennis called "traces of forgotten accidents"—as in Christine Tarkowski's blueprint monumentalizations of destroyed World War II bunkers (not to mention her reconstruction of the Unabomber's rude hut), or Rob Fischer's photos of rural shacks and trailer homes hand-altered to appear on fire—or of implied Icarian falls from grace, such as Brian Kapernekas's portable swamp. Most everything else remained literally, but not at all figuratively, above our heads. Still, *Still* was no compendium of cloud formations or depictions of celestial bodies. The artworks either thoughtfully unraveled the mysteries of infinite space, like Scott Roberts's computer-derived sculptural reconstruction of a black hole, or examined dynamic interaction with airborne conditions, most notably that of gravity.

Gravity (defying it, tempting it, or succumbing to it), natural and manmade objects, things small enough to be held or large enough to be inhabited, or even one's own physical or spiritual self, are all grist for the various artists' mills. Amir Zaki photographs modernist houses cantilevered off hillsides—from below, emphasizing the foolhardiness of their launch into space. Janice Kerbel invents a new bird species, right down to its song. Ken Fandell compresses weeks and months of sky-watching into a pixelated video rush. Two emerging masters of digital-age drollery, Euan Macdonald and Joe Sola, reawaken the spirit of Ernie

Kovacs with unlikely happenstance, MacDonald with a video of an old filing cabinet spewing its papers aloft and Soba with a tape of him repeatedly launching himself through his studio window to the surprise of various visitors.

Chad Gerth, Cristián Silva and Joel Tauber rounded out Ennis's roster of blithe spirits, artists of the air who take up where their space-age and futurist forebears left off. Only now, with the moon trod, Mars probed, the Concorde grounded and NASA chastised, there is a twinge of skepticism to the exploration of up, down and all around. Fortunately, they express this

skepticism with wit, affection and an enduring hunger for magic. The operative forebear in *Still*, *Things Fall from the Sky* was Leonardo.

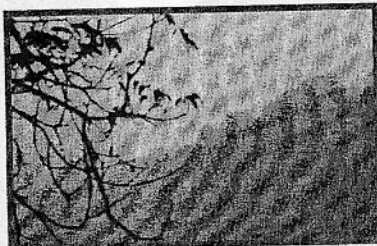
—Peter Frank

Still, Things Fall from the Sky; and Sachigusa Yasuda: *Flying* closed in December at UCR/California Museum of Photography, Riverside.

Peter Frank is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

Greg Kucera at Angles Gallery

Though most viewers know better, the instinct to believe in the accuracy and veracity of photo-based



Greg Kucera, *Fog 2*, 2005, ultrachrome print, 26-7/8" x 39-7/8", at Angles Gallery, Santa Monica.

and video art is persistent; it smacks of documentation and actuality. Even a familiarity with the myriad ways in which digital information can be manipulated, altered and otherwise interfered with cannot completely quash this impulse. It is this perceptual loophole that anchors the work of Los Angeles multimedia artist Greg Kucera to reality despite the

overwhelmingly obvious process of editing and obfuscation he employs. His digital photographs of storms and their atmospheric disturbances—fog, lightning and rain—do in fact document naturally occurring events in their way. He takes serial images in defined time periods, such as the storm's duration or a twenty-four-hour period, often from a fixed perspective, and in that way they present forthright narratives. Additionally, the choice of imagery in this series plays well to the viewers' psychological predisposition to take the drama, sentimentality and dark romance of a bank of fog rolling over a green hillside, for example, to heart.

Still works such as *Fog*, *Divergence* and *Solaris* are created with a process that first coats the print with a thin layer of poured plastic resin. Because of the simple interference with the way light hits its surface, the images are clear but distorted, just as looking out a window of thick glass might de-focus the view without rendering it illegible. After that, certain small passages are carved out, giving the plastic variable texture that most often highlights tonally darker elements of the image such as a bird or tree limb. Though these tiny excavations do not significantly illuminate the images themselves, they serve to remind the viewer of the semi-industrial, non-organic processes involved in generating the work by breaking down what may still be left of illusion.

The result is a curious effect that simultaneously engages the viewer on both a technological and an emotional level, ultimately defining the work in conceptual terms despite its representational character. Kucera is not really interested in fog, nor is he interested in how fog makes one feel. He is interested in the complex equations of how and why content is transferred and perceived in general; he uses familiar archetypes like weather and sex and furniture to launch these investigations.

The single video work in the show, *Vertigo*, is a condensed representation of a storm on a hillside, edited to fit a night's worth of changes into about twenty minutes. The morphing picture also spins slowly counter-clockwise as it progresses. A lone, white porch light shines from the top of the hill, which actually means the white light traces the

circumference of the circle as it turns. Here the interference is cinematic rather than physical—the DVD screen is not coated in plastic. But the feeling of a slow, wet enveloping in fog and rain retains its visceral ambiguity through these other ways in which Kucera has demonstrably manipulated his footage; ways which, like the coated photos, approximate and sustain the weather conditions themselves. Fog obscures the world, Kucera obscures pictures of the world. In the end these deceptively simple works become a kind of metaphor for themselves, again throwing the ball back into the court otherwise known as the eye of the beholder.

—Shana Nys Dambrot

Greg Kucera: *Always As It Is Today* closed in October at Angles Gallery, Santa Monica.

Shana Nys Dambrot is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Sandeep Mukherjee at Sister

Space is nothing but a gap. It's a territory of absence and a void of nothingness that gets defined and edged by anything and everything else. As a rule you don't expect much of space but the ability to look though it or travel around in it. Yet in the newest works by Sandeep Mukherjee at Sister in Chinatown, blank space is the gallery's occupying visual force.

The exhibition's magnum opus is an untitled, mural-sized horizontal work made up of five vertical sheets of creased and painted translucent Duralene that line one long wall of the narrow gallery. Each abutting sheet is a vast milky white emptiness that has been pleated into an array of radiating angles. These folds form a variety of contrary directional points that geometrically buckle the page's empty surface into sharply etched mountains and valleys of shadow and light. Like subtle perspective points that keep multiplying and shifting on a map without printed markings, they seem to want to orient us to the presence of things we cannot see.

The folds end cleanly at the edge of each sheet or dissolve mysteriously along the feathery painted edge of a large area of intense color that spreads luxuriously across a portion of the page's surface. Each area is painted a single vivid blue, violet, brown, green or yellow-gold. The color flows out, in a series of narrow, concentric linear circles like an echo ringing from a single point or the cross