

ROBIN DRU GERMANY

INSIDE / OUTSIDE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

JANUARY 12 - FEBRUARY 16, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Palimpsest Portraits, Number 64 Abby, 2001
Gelatin Silver Photograph with digital backdrop. 48" x 38" or 10" x 8"

ROBIN DRU GERMANY
PALIMPEST PORTRAITS

The work Robin Dru Germany has assembled for this exhibition at *Women & Their Work* consists of two different kinds of staged, black-and-white silver gelatin prints from a series called *Palimpsest Portraits*. The main group consists of some 15 images measuring 48-by-38 inches, printed on matte-finish paper. The paper features wide margins at the top and bottom that are allowed to curl, so that each work resembles an opened scroll. Interspersed with these large works are an equal number of small, silhouetted heads of men and women.

Like the main group, these pictures (which are mounted to squares of black archival board) are shown without glass, which enhances their presence as objects. The big images were created from 1998 through the present, while the silhouettes were newly made for this installation.

Germany's idea is to emphasize the large works' symbolic function as portraits of various individuals in her life. But rather than capturing likeness, the visible features of her subjects, Germany is creating psychic portraits and doing so in the form of still lifes.

Now, if nothing else, this merging of traditional genres suggests at least one

opportunity for appreciating Germany's innovations. Portraits of subjects both historical and mythological long have included attributes that often are arranged in scene-stealing still lifes that might include books, specialized tools, accoutrements of martyrdom, symbolic fruits, musical instruments and the like. Then again, during the Gilded Age in America, William Harnett painted "portraits" of newly rich men by representing their possessions and alluding to their pastimes: without even bothering to depict a person, he painted arrangements of cigars, newspapers and souvenirs of exotic places that don't so much reveal an individual's spirit as they celebrate successful capitalist behavior.

But then there's the common issue of the portrait of an other as a self portrait—especially when viewers are confronted with several interpretations of others that have been made by one artist. Instead of reading as uniquely varied, such images begin to be viewed in terms of visual similarities, their style. And similarities begin to point back at the one individual each representation has in common: the artist herself.

This undeniably is the case with Germany's *Palimpsest Portraits*. Each has a person's name as its title—among them *James*, *Terry*, *Boyd* and *D.W.* Each also features distinctive still-life components, including a pair of toy chimpanzees in *Rochelle*; several Styrofoam Christmas ornaments in *Abbey*; and a box of fuses, a battered toy space ship and festoons of withered sunflowers in *Brown*.

These oddball symbols of the contents of different individuals' minds stimulate some curiosity about *James* and *Rochelle* et al. But they prompt even greater curiosity about the person who perceives *Abbey* in terms of the kind of wistful

decorations children made in the halcyon 1960's or, at least, before the advent of Martha Stewart. For all of the images concerned seem to be art-directed by a collector of tin foil, dirt and rubber bands—and that description generally applies either to old men or young boys.

For example, the inventory of props in *Howard* includes:

- ◊ A cluster of ball bearings in a matrix of clay or putty.
- ◊ At least two lengths of articulated black hose.
- ◊ A toy military weapon (a howitzer?).
- ◊ A clumsily formed tray made of what appears to be crumpled lead foil.
- ◊ The frayed end of a cloth-bound electrical cord.
- ◊ Some unidentifiable goop holding the above cord in place.
- ◊ A nasty-looking toy rat.
- ◊ What might be a recharging device for a walkie-talkie.
- ◊ A pouring spout that measures a shot of booze.
- ◊ A miniature milk bottle.
- ◊ Quantities of stained and wrinkled aluminum foil.
- ◊ At least two sections of clear plastic tubing (the kind used for intravenous feeding), one of them curved into a semblance of a question mark.

The creepiness of this table-top tableau is heightened by Germany's use of a backdrop made from a photograph of the interior of an old, abandoned industrial building—a wonderfully forlorn genre of image she utilizes in all of her pictures. But none of these compositional elements—and I use the term loosely because Germany's chaotic-looking arrangement has nothing to do with visual aesthetics and everything to do with their imaginary mechanical function—would have the impact they do if they were not photographed as they are.

Germany employs a large format (8 x 10) camera that soaks up every grungy detail of her subject matter. If the contents of Howard's consciousness resemble a pile of rubbish, then Germany has photographed that rubbish with the implacable eye of a Weegee and the gothic obsessiveness of O. Winston Link.

During a recent visit with Germany, for the purpose of viewing her pictures, I invoked Link, not by name, but in terms of his subject: Trains. Germany immediately knew of whom I spoke and followed her verification with a dreamy exclamation: "I love O. Winston Link." We went on to talk about the dramatic light and shadow, the remarkable tonal variations in Link's blacks and the startling quality of his highlighted details. Shortly thereafter, I also mentioned Cindy Sherman: Germany seemed to accept that additional comparison, but with none of the enthusiasm she expressed for Link.

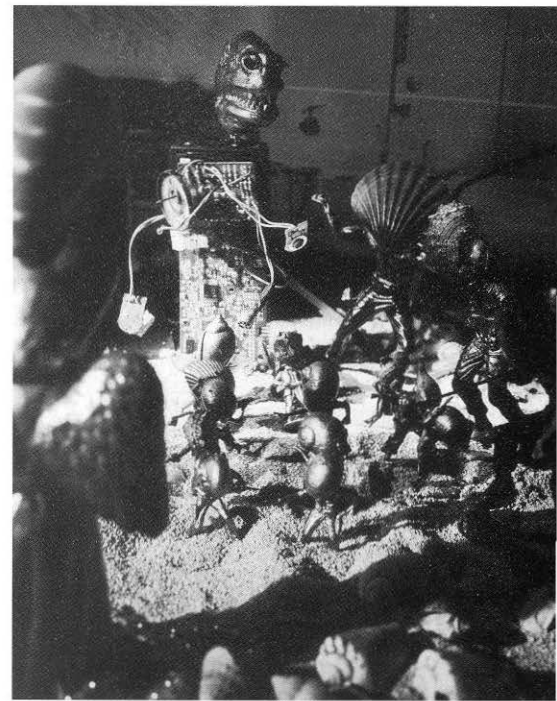
From there we went on to discuss portraiture. I told Germany that I scarcely read her pictures as portraits of other people, even though I appreciated her intent. After we agreed that they might be taken as somewhat autobiographical, I concluded that, more than anything else, the images served as points of departure for my own responses.

It turned out that they served something of a similar need for their maker. Germany is interested in identity and in the elements that define personal uniqueness. She also is interested in making pictures she can enjoy, pictures that provoke thought. But she said she couldn't accomplish her artistic goals by means of addressing imaginary personalities: She needed to be thinking of a real person in order to make a successful image. Once

she had that starting point, Germany could pursue her pictorial aims.

In the end, Germany can't help but suggest ideas and express herself. But she does so by first making something that rewards the viewer visually. Put the visual first and back it up with substance, I say: the rest takes care of itself, transforming even wads of foil, twigs and broken toys into haunting evocations of a human spirit.

Janet S. Tyson
Writer and Artist,
Fort Worth, Texas
November 2001



Palimpsest Portraits, Number 68 Bethany, 2001
Gelatin Silver Photograph with digital backdrop
48" x 38" or 10" x 8"

ROBIN DRU GERMANY

Resides in Slaton, TX

EDUCATION

- 1985 MFA, Photography,
University of North Texas, Denton, TX.
- 1980 BA Philosophy, Tulane University,
New Orleans, LA.
- 1978 Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 1996-2001 **Texas Tech University**,
Lubbock, TX. *Assistant Professor*, Photo and Digital.
- 1994-1996 **The University of North Texas**,
Denton, TX. *Lecturer*, Digital Imaging.
- 1986-1994 Part time instructor of Photography
at several colleges and universities in the
Dallas/Ft. Worth area.

GRANTS

- 1998 Research Enhancement Grant,
Texas Tech University for a Millennium
Archive project including archiving
and production of work.
- 1997 Research Enhancement Grant,
Texas Tech University to produce a
photographic installation.
- 1991 Middle America Arts Alliance
Artist's Fellowship, National Endowment
for the Arts.

AWARDS

- 1999 Award Winner (digital printing),
International Digital Works on Paper,
University of South Carolina, Columbia,
SC. *Charles Stainback*, juror
- 1998 Juror's Award, Greater Midwest
International, Missouri State University,
Warrenburg, MO. *Andrea Inselmann*, juror
- 1993 Polaroid Artists Award,
Polaroid Corporation

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Inside/Out*, Women & Their Work,
Austin, TX.
- 2001 *Palimpsest Portraits*,
Pennsylvania State University,
Altoona, PA.
- Palimpsest Portraits*,
UC Berkley Extension,
San Francisco, CA.
- 2000 *Palimpsest Portraits*,
Hardin Simmons University,
Abilene, TX.

Palimpsest Portraits,
Colburn Gallery, University of Vermont,
Burlington, VT.

- 1998 *Palimpsest Portraits*,
Zone VI Gallery, Sinclair College,
Dayton, OH.
- 1993 Austin College, Sherman, TX.
- 1992 Eastfield College Gallery, Mesquite, TX.
- 1990 Alumni Gallery, The University of North
Texas, Denton, TX.
- Pinnacle Gallery at Pinnacle Studios,
Dallas, TX.
- 1989 Photographic Study Center,
Tarrant County Junior College,
Hurst, TX.

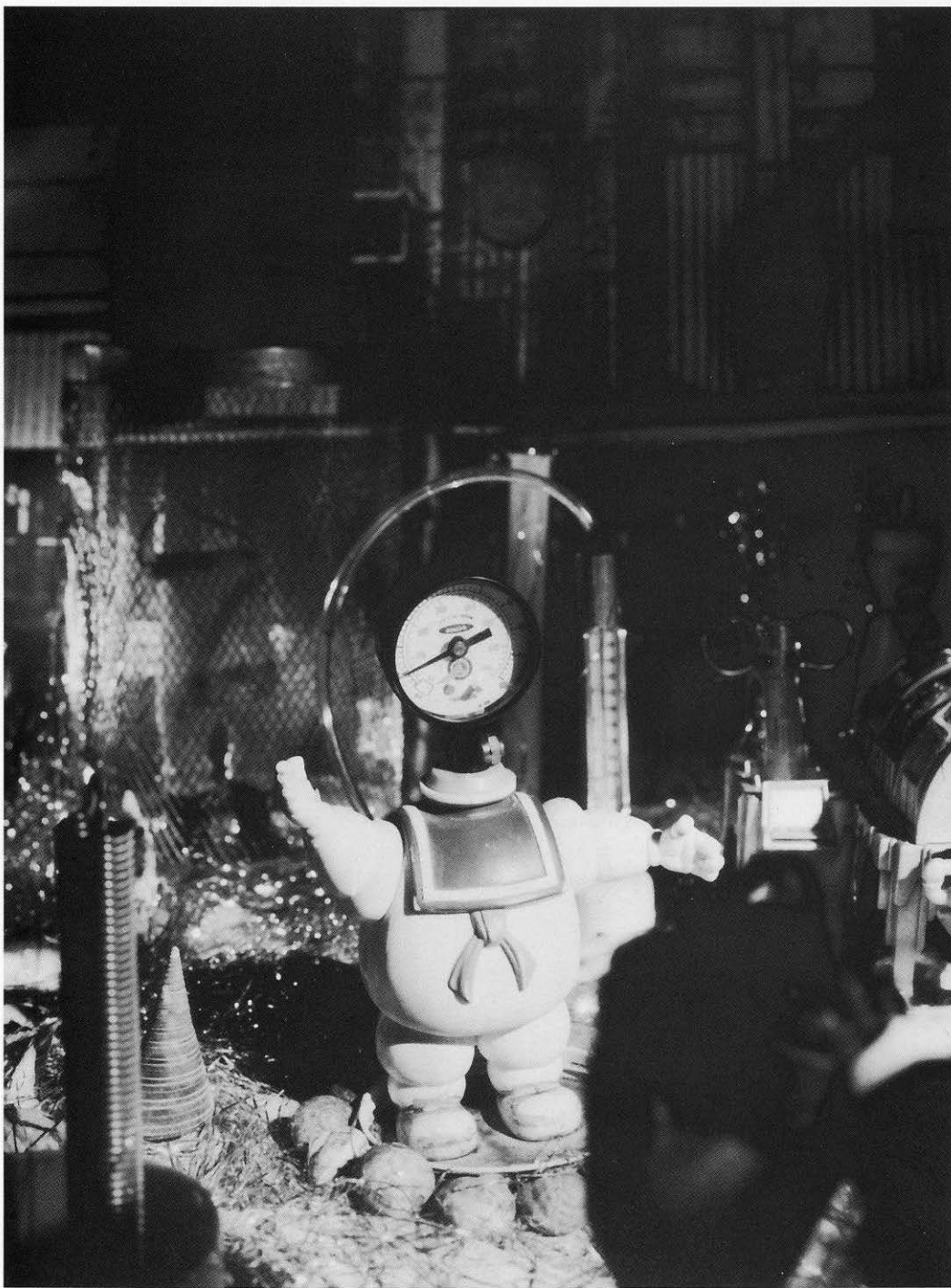
SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 *Current Works 2001*, Honorable
Mention, Society for Contemporary
Photography, Kansas City, MO.
- National Juried Competition, Phoenix
Gallery, NY.
- 2000 *Shelf Life of Objects:*
Contemporary Still Life Photography,
The Visual Arts Gallery,
University of Texas at Dallas,
Richardson, TX.
- 12th National Computer Art*
Invitational, Gallery of Art,
Eastern Washington University,
Cheney, WA.
- 10x2+2:22 Texas Artists, Diverse*
Works Artspace in conjunction with
Fotofest, Houston, TX.
- Digital 2000*, hosted by ASCI
Central Fine Arts, NY.
- Technology Gallery, New York Hall
of Science, NYC, and Silicon
Gallery, Philadelphia, PA.
- 1999 *6th National Juried Art Exhibition*,
Award Winner, Highland Cultural
Center Art Gallery, Highland, NY.
- Womanscape '99*, United Arts Council
of Collier County, Village Gallery,
Naples, FL.
- Phrenotypology*, Hallwalls Contemporary
Art Center, Buffalo, NY.
- International Digital Works on Paper*,
Award Winner, University of South
Carolina, Columbia, SC.

- 1998 *Greater Midwest International*,
Award winner, Central Missouri State
University, Warrensburg, MO.
- 1997 *Nexus II: Common Threads*, St. Louis
Artists' Guild, St. Louis, MO.
- 1995 *Gender, Myth and Exploration*,
University Gallery, University of North
Texas, Denton, TX.
- 1994 *American Photography: A History in*
Pictures, San Antonio Museum of Art,
San Antonio, TX.
- Re:Framing the Past*, Galveston Arts
Center, Galveston, TX. touring exhibit
organized by Women & Their Work,
Austin, TX.
- 1992 *Polaroid Exhibition*, Fotokina, Cologne,
Germany, Polaroid and ICP in NY.
- 1991 *MAAA Award Winning Photographers*,
Art St. Louis, St. Louis, MO.
- Profiles II: On Photography; Texas*
Winners, MAAA/NEA 1991 fellowships,
Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Bryant, John, Benito Huerta and Susie Kahlil.
Arthes Magazine, No. 29, Winter 2001, p.10
- De Busk, Cara. "The Dallas Six." *Spot Magazine*
(*Journal of the Houston Center for Photography*),
Spring 1992, p.24
- Fotofest 1992 Catalogue*, Fotofest, Inc.
published in Houston, TX.
- Germany, Lucy and Nancy Grandfield, Ann
Smith, Sr. Helena Marie. *Women Prints*
Pennsylvania Morehouse Publishing, 1997
- Hirsh, Robert. "Photographic Possibilities: the
Expressive Use of Ideas, Materials, and
Processes." *New York: Focal Press*, 2001, p.78
- Johnston, Derek, and Laurence Lewis, curators.
"Signs of The Times." *Photography #58*
(*Journal of the Center for Photography at*
Woodstock, NY), p.8
- Littlefield, Kinny. "Trick Photography." *Dallas*
Life Magazine (Dallas Morning News). May 1992
- Tyson, Janet. "Between the Big Cities, A
Show that Shines." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*,
August 31, 1992, Sec.E, p.1.3.
- ### COLLECTIONS
- Canon Photo Gallery, Lorenzo Merlo, Amsterdam.
- The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ.
- Pinnacle Gallery, Rochester, NY.
- Polaroid International Collection, Cambridge, MA.



Cover Panel: *Palimpsest Portraits, Number 83 Rikky*, 2001. Gelatin Silver Photograph with digital backdrop 48" x 38" or 10" x 8"
This Panel: *Palimpsest Portraits, Number 10 Larry*, 2001. Gelatin Silver Photograph with digital backdrop 48" x 38" or 10" x 8"
Back Panel: *Palimpsest Portraits, Number 90 Lory*, 2001. Gelatin Silver Photograph with digital backdrop 48" x 38" or 10" x 8"



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Now celebrating its 23rd anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,652 artists in 205 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 222 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and

was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

1710 LAVACA ST.

AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701

(512) 477-1064

wlw@texas.net

www.womenandtheirwork.org