Pictures

by Douglas Crimp

1. Morgan Fisher, "Talking with Jack
    Goldstein," *LAICA Journal*, no. 14
    (April-May 1977), pp. 42-45.

PICTURES

ARTISTS SPACE

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Following is a reprint of the original essay written by Douglas Crimp for Pictures *at Artists Space in New York (September 24–October 29, 1977). The exhibition, organized by Crimp, featured the work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith. The original catalog, which includes this essay, is available from Artists Space.*

Jack Goldstein is currently at work on a new film called *The Jump*. It is to be nineteen seconds long and will show a diver performing a somersault from a high board. But the high board and the water into which he plunges will be absent from the finished film. Using a process called rotoscoping—a form of animation made by tracing over live-action footage—Goldstein is removing everything from the shot but the jump itself. Against a black background a mechanistic figure tinted gold will leap, somersault, plunge, and disintegrate into fragments. In making this picture of a dive, Goldstein is performing a set of operations that isolate, distil, alter, and augment the filmed recording of an actual event. He does this in order to impose a distance between the event and its viewers because, according to Goldstein, it is only through a distance that we can understand the world.[1] Which is to say that we only experience reality through the pictures we make of it.

To an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seemed that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems that they have usurped it. It therefore becomes imperative

to understand the picture itself, not in order to uncover a lost reality, but to determine how a picture becomes a signifying structure of its own accord. But pictures are characterized by something which, though often remarked, is insufficiently understood: that they are extremely difficult to distinguish at the level of their content, that they are to an extraordinary degree opaque to meaning. The actual event and the fictional event, the benign and the horrific, the mundane and the exotic, the possible and the fantastic: all are fused into the all-embracing similitude of the picture.

A renewed impulse to make pictures of recognizable things characterizes a wide range of contemporary art, constituting a line of continuity drawn through its much touted pluralism. The extensive use of those media that have the power of replicating the world around us— photography, film, video—is but one of its manifestations. In addition, the realm of the imagination has reappeared to displace the analytic and perceptual modes of our

recent past. One of the first and most significant instances of this transformation was in the theater of Robert Wilson, which had, in its initial appearance in the late sixties, the force of a shock. Although Wilson's work is not Surrealist, it does invoke important aspects of that style: the space of representation populated by the images of a dream, images like Einstein and Patty Hearst, whose simultaneous presence can only be in the imagination. How did this shift to a new kind of representation come about?

In the art of the past decade, many of those conventions that had always been considered as belonging to the representational image—spatial illusionism, for example— were shown to be indistinguishable from our apprehension of any object whatsoever. In the work of the Minimalists it was no longer a question of creating an illusion of something exterior to the work, as the illusion of space behind a painting's surface; rather illusionism was shown to inhere in the very being of an object.[2] When confronted by one of Sol LeWitt's open cubic structures, for example,

Jack Goldstein, *Shane*, 1975. Still image from 16 mm color sound film, 3 minutes.

2. See Rosalind Krauss, "Objecthood,"
   Critical Perspectives in American Art
   (Amherst: Fine Arts Center Gallery,
   University of Massachusetts, 1976),
   pp. 25-27.
3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. See my essay "Joan Jonas's Performance
   Works," *Studio International*, vol. 192,
   no. 982 (July-August 1976), pp. 10-12.

what one sees is always, from whatever vantage point, a network of interlaced bars. Although we are copresent with this obdurately three-dimensional thing, we see only a lattice, a diagram, in which a maze of angles, shadows, and open spaces constantly shifts as we move about it. We generally think of perspective as the illusionistic device by which we represent a three-dimensional object with a two-dimensional image, but when we look at a LeWitt, what we see is perspective. LeWitt points to the process of converting the complex data of sensory experience into the schematic representation of it that is captured by the notion cube, but he does so not by making the image of a cube but by making a *cube* itself.

Another Minimal sculptor, Joel Shapiro, has created objects that are experienced simultaneously as physical things and psychological images. A tiny bronze horse or a miniature iron house reveal themselves in all their material aspects—small, heavy, handmade—while they also clearly represent things that we recognize and with which we have many psychological associations. It is the strength of their presence as little objects that ensures that they will be experienced psychologically, as Rosalind Krauss has suggested. "As one stands above that miniature object, looking down, one has an extraordinary sense of distance from it—a distance, one realizes, that will not be overcome merely by stooping to look at it from closer range.... Because of the types of objects Shapiro fashions, and because of the distance enforced by their scale, the sense of remoteness they create is quite specific; the most accurate word to describe it is: memory. Shapiro's houses seem to be in perpetual retreat because they are simultaneously present within our space *and* infected by memory. It is this that identifies them as psychologized objects."[3]

The shift in the conception of illusionism from a representation of something absent to the condition of our apprehension of what is present, and the psychologization of the image, were extended by a number of artists using the medium of performance. Working in a tradition in which the creation of images is always a function of presence, these artists wished to establish those images as representational without, however, returning to the anteriority of the theatrical text. In particular, Joan Jonas adopted strategies for presenting the space of performance as illusionistic.[4] Working outdoors, with performance and audience separated by great distances, she exploited such natural illusionistic phenomena as depth-of-field distortion and discontinuity of sound and image. In later indoor works, Jonas converted event into image using the simultaneous broadcast capacity of video. Often it was only by looking at the video monitor that the viewers could fully apprehend what was happening directly in front of them. And the images that Jonas used confronted psychological subjects directly: narcissism in *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, childhood memory in the games of *Delay, Delay*, the imagination of the exotic in *Twilight*.

The result of these and other similar developments in the art of the past decade has been that a group of younger artists sees representation as an inescapable part of our ability to grasp the world around us. It is not, therefore, relegated to a relationship to reality that is either secondary or transcendent; and it does not achieve signification in relation to what is represented, but in relation to other representations. Representation has returned in their work not in the familiar guise of realism, which seeks to resemble a prior existence, but as an autonomous function that might be described as "representation as such." It is representation freed from the tyranny of the represented.
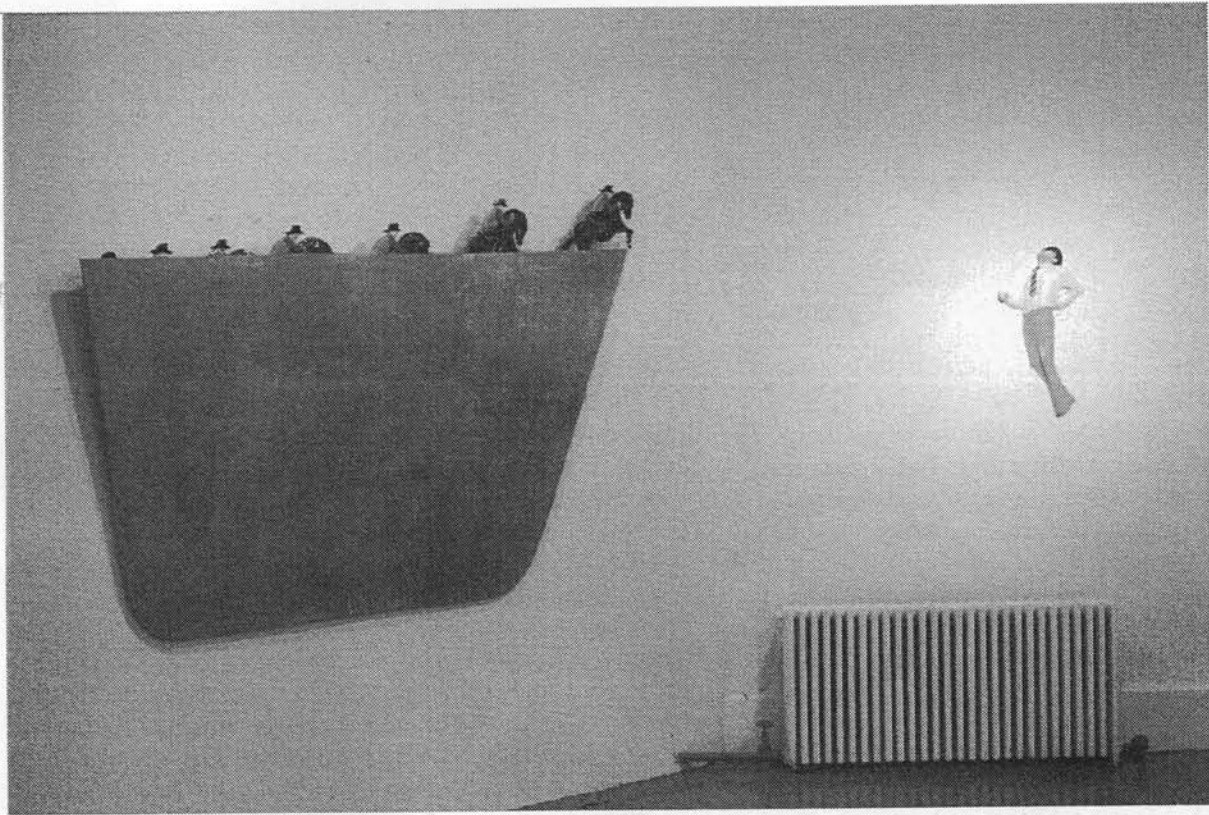
5. Jacques Lacan, "The insistence of the letter in the unconscious," in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books), p. 106. Lacan is not speaking about pictures, but about signifiers in general.

6. Goldstein's phonograph records, of which the music from this performance is one, are made by splicing together fragments, sometimes no longer than twenty-five seconds, of sound from existing recordings.

7. Saussure uses such a spatial image when speaking of the syntagmatic and associative relationships of language: "From the associative and syntagmatic viewpoint a linguistic unit is like a fixed part of a building, e.g. a column. On the one hand, the column has a certain relation to the architrave that it supports; the arrangement of the two units in space suggests the syntagmatic relation. On the other hand, if the column is Doric, it suggests a mental comparison of this style with others (Ionic, Corinthian, etc.) although none of these elements is present in space: the relation is associative." See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 123-124. For a discussion of the cinematic shot as a syntagmatic unit, see Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), particularly "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," pp. 108-146.

8. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 123. Saussure calls the relation opposite to syntagmatic, associative, but those who have extended Saussure's theory into the field of semiotics prefer paradigmatic. See, for example, Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970). The linguistic categories, syntagmatic and associative, proposed by Saussure are parallel to those used by Roman Jakobson when be speaks of the two poles of language as metonomy and metaphor. See his "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 67-96.

For their pictures, these artists have turned to the available images in the culture around them. But they subvert the standard signifying function of those pictures, tied to their captions, their commentaries, their narrative sequences—tied, that is, to the illusion that they are directly transparent to a signified. Walter Benjamin's dictum that the caption will become the most important component of the shot is taken as prophetic. Because this ubiquitous captioning is nothing but an insistent attempt to force upon the picture a relation to the signified that it does not intrinsically have, these artists seek the possibility in their work that the picture does not have "to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever."[5]

Last year Jack Goldstein presented a performance entitled *Two Fencers* at an exhibition in Geneva. During the first part of the event the audience watched two men in fencing gear dueling on a stage before them. The controlled theatrical effects of their presentation—dim red spotlighting, fifty-foot distance from the audience, recorded music like that of a Hollywood swashbuckler[6]— gave them the appearance of a remote, spectral image. Their presentation had the quality of representation, providing that kind of sensation that we experience as deja vu. During the second part of the performance, after one fencer had appeared to kill the other, the lights went down, but the music continued to play at lower volume for seven minutes. Sitting in the dark, the audience was left to remember the image of fencing, but since the performance itself had the character of a mnemonic image, the second part seemed to suggest a re-remembering. In the difference between those two kinds of mnemonic experience the paradoxical mechanism by which memory functions became apparent: the image is gradually forgotten, altered, replaced. Cued by the continued presence of the music, whose relationship to the initial image was ambiguous (fencing, an athletic exercise, is not identical with the dueling of cavaliers), one might replace the original image with a scene from, say, a Douglas Fairbanks movie. This kind of replacement is possible not only because the music suggests it but because the staged duel was so free of specific reference. It was not, somehow, these particular fencers in this particular place; rather it was simply *fencing, dueling, fighting*.

It is in this regard that we can understand why Goldstein has erased the surrounding context of the diver in the film in progress described at the beginning of this essay. It is an erasure that isolates the image in such a way that it parallels the image retained in memory. When Goldstein rotoscopes the stock footage of a diver, what he is doing is paring away everything in that shot that provides the dive with a specific context. This context, sometimes referred to as interior montage, might also be identified as the syntagmatic features of the image. Although the linguistic syntagm is a temporal sequence (backwards and forwards in the time of speech), we may use it when speaking of a spatial image to denote all of the separate elements that are contiguous in the image.[7] Thus for the original footage of the dive: the diving board, the swimming pool, the entire surrounding scene. When these contiguous elements are absent from the image, as is the case with Goldstein's rotoscoped version, we have the alternative possibility of relating it to another image based on association. Such a relationship is the opposite of a syntagm: a paradigm; and paradigmatic relations unite images in a *mnemonic series*.[8] Thus we might associate this particular image with a similar trajectory such as that of a gymnast.

Pictures, Installation view, Artists Space, 1977. Pictured: Robert Longo.

9. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen* (London), vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1972), p.25.

This relationship of images on the paradigmatic plane is spelled out in Goldstein's work called *The Pull*, a set of three photographs each showing a tiny floating figure in a large field of color: a deep-sea diver against a green background, a free-falling man against blue, and an astronaut in a field of silver. The parallelism of these images operates on the level of the images as such, not on that of the activities shown. Our impulse to link their sensations is thus highly arbitrary. That we do so has nothing, in fact, to do with our sensory experience, for it is unlikely indeed that any of us has felt the sensation of falling through space (to one's death?) or of floating in outer space. These are events that we have experienced *only* as pictures (in newspapers, on television) and our imaginative leap from one to the others stems entirely from their associative relationship *as pictures*. The picture is thus shown to be separable from that which it might be said to picture.

To the extent that *The Pull* suggests speculation on problems of a semiotic nature, it invites comparison with a work of the same year (1976) by John Baldessari, who has exerted a significant influence on the group of younger artists who have begun to make pictures. *Concerning Diachronic/Synchronic Time: Above, On, Under (with Mermaid)* takes as its subject semiotic analysis, but converts it, and particularly its penchant for diagrams, into a wry and deceptive object. It consists of six photographs hung in three pairs that are read across (diachronically) and down (synchronically). The only pair that is actually a diachronic sequence is, however, the center one, each photograph showing the same speed-boat at a different point along a path. The other two "diachronic" pairs are in fact related along the axis of association (a synchronic relationship):

an airplane to a bird, and a submarine to a mermaid (however that latter pair is ambiguous; it could also be a narrative sequence in which the submarine is speeding toward the mermaid, thus constituting a diachronic pair). Baldessari's deliberate confusion of the linguistic terms is characteristic of the humor that is constant feature of his work. Although he has consistently used photographic images, his emphasis has not been on the images as such, but on the way they subvert analytic thought, and is thus heir to a Duchampian tradition. If Goldstein's and his contemporaries' work moves in that direction in which sense emerges out of nonsense, Baldessari's moves in the opposite direction. Apart from this reversal, these younger artists have turned to the peripheral aspects of Baldessari's work: to the beauty of its images, its incipient romanticism, and the veiled anxiety that underlies the banality of his pictures.

It seems almost incidental that the central image of *The Pull* is taken from a photograph of a suicide, for it is there simply as another instance of the body's uninhibited movement through space. Yet it is characteristic of much recent work that the pictures used are often morbid or violent. Goldstein's recent series of variously colored phonograph records are of disastrous occurrences: a murder, an earthquake, a forest fire, a drowning. But for all their horrifying associations, these images are neutralized by the distance that representation necessarily imposes. If a sense of impending disaster haunts these pictures, it is usually detached from the subjects that might suggest them. The psychological resonance is like that of dreams, where often it is the most apparently banal dream that terrifies us the most, or the most overtly horrible that makes us feel oddly at ease.

This paradox of the picture—that it is simultaneously present and remote, that it affects us psychologically in a way that cannot be explained by its subject—is addressed in a series of works by Troy Brauntuch that use both photographs and photographic reproduction techniques. *Golden Distance* is a pair of prints each reproducing a black and white picture of the head of a woman seen from behind. This image is inscribed in a circle, printed on black, reprinted on gold, and provided with a caption. But to what does this caption "Whispers around a woman" refer? It seems only to reinforce the inaccessibility of the photograph itself. This image remains one of those "secret pictures" which Walter Benjamin says "are able to shock the associative mechanism to a standstill. At this point the caption must step in, thereby creating a photography that literarizes the relationships of life and without which photographic construction would remain stuck in the approximate.... 'The illiterate of the future,' it has been said, 'will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet,

but the one who cannot take a photograph.' But must we not also count as illiterate the photographer who cannot read his own pictures? Will not the caption become the most important component of the shot?"[9] Brauntuch's caption does not, however, provide this photograph with a legibility of the standard kind. It is instead an insistent reminder of the picture's withdrawal from signification.

The typical use of the caption as a means of articulating the mute photograph was illustrated by Jon Borofsky in an exhibition last year. Of the several pictures that made up that show, Borofsky included one entitled *Mulatto Man* whose source was clearly a newspaper photograph, and when he projected that image on the wall to make his copy drawing, he reproduced at the bottom the caption that accompanied it. That caption did not *state* the signification of the picture; rather, it *provided* the drawing with a meaning that it did not otherwise have. The picture is not transparent to such a meaning, while the caption is self-sufficient, has

Pictures, Installation view, Artists Space, 1977. Pictured: Jack Goldstein.

Pictures, Installation view, Artists Space, 1977.
Pictured, from left to right: Sherrie Levine,
Robert Longo, Philip Smith.

meaning with or without the picture. Can the picture itself be said to be intrinsically without meaning? Borofsky's drawing leaves that question open. But for Brauntuch the picture, opaque as it is to signification, becomes for that reason the object of desire. The caption is only one of many expressions of a desire that treats the image with the mechanistic devotion appropriate to a fetish. The obsessive manipulations, alterations, applications of words are the materialization of a reverie. But because desire comes about only in the sphere of frustration, the image remains forever at a distance. Frustration operates here not in relation to the subject of the picture, but in relation to the absence of signification. It is not because this is a particular woman, but because this is *no* particular woman, that the picture becomes a fetish.

The same fascination is attached, in a work called 1 2 3, to three rather conventional drawings. The work is a set of three photographic silkscreen prints which reproduce sketches of a stage set, a vestibule, and a tank. Each is printed on a deep, blood-red background, with the screen of the photographic enlargement process clearly visible. Their placements at various locations on the red fields distend the spatial conventions of the drawings. To the questions that might arise about the kinds of associations that are generated by the juxtaposition of these three drawings there is a deceptively simple answer: these are three drawings by Hitler. That information, not provided by the work itself, functions like a hidden caption. We may know it from having seen them before (these drawings are often reproduced, and indeed it is their appearance as reproduction that Brauntuch has chosen to emphasize) or we may be told it, but the images themselves do not render it. The name *Hitler* is connotative in a way that

the drawings from his hand can never be. If a picture has any transparency to meaning, it is not in the direction of the psychology of its maker, nor of its apparent subject. It is this remoteness, this opacity that Brauntuch's work confronts as it attempts to recapture the horror of Nazism in the mute presence of a set of images from Hitler's hand. 1 2 3 is ultimately about his failure to do so, about his resignation in the face of the utter banality of those pictures.

The picture's resistance to specific meaning does not, however, abolish meaning altogether. The very lack of access to an obvious nexus of meaning can be a stimulant to the invention of a whole structure of narrative. Sherrie Levine employs images that are even more deliberately banal than those of Brauntuch. Last year she conducted a sale at the Mercer Street Store of seventy-five pairs of shoes. They were all nearly identical, odd little things, sized for a small child but designed to look like those for an adult male, the kind of standard footwear worn by businessmen. Levine had bought them from a job lot in California, and sold them all at a slight profit in a single day. This latter fact adds to the mystery of the event, for these shoes were certainly not useful to their purchasers, nor were they particularly attractive, and they seemed singularly devoid of aesthetic interest. Were they intended as a latter-day species of Duchampian readymade? Or fetishistic objects of a Surrealist kind? Or was Levine's statement simply "Here are seventy-five pairs of little shoes"? But isn't it precisely the impossibility of accepting that statement, a statement that is merely an indication of presence, that opens the way to signification? Seeing all of those shoes spread out on a table, one inevitably wished to animate them, to invent stories in which they became the synecdochic characters. This temptation, the very

mechanism of fantasy, is familiar if we think of childhood games. A little boy plays for days constructing a labyrinth of roads for a toy truck that, though the visible excuse for this elaborate project, is all the time left aside. The object having fulfilled its signifying role is used up, free to disappear. Surely, though, a toy truck does not signify a road. And that is precisely the point, for the imagination seeks meaning in the correlation of one signifier and another, thus creating a narrative.

Narrativity in the absence of a specific narrative is also instanced in Levine's *Sons and Lovers*, a suite of thirty-six drawings of silhouetted heads executed in fluorescent tempera on graph paper. There are, in all, five different "characters": Washington, Lincoln, John Kennedy, an unknown woman, and a couple. The presidents' silhouettes are familiar emblems from the faces of coins, while the bland couple and the "other woman" are taken from wig advertisements. Each drawing pairs two of these silhouettes facing each other; the only variation throughout the series is the scale of these heads and their combination. The act of confrontation that is the only psychological relationship fully stated by the images is all that is required to establish a narrative. From these banal pictures emerges a scenario that moves from assassination to adultery. Levine's genre is the melodrama, where the cliche is the vehicle for the larger-than-life story. One thinks of the TV soap opera with its stultifying repetition of drab sets, bland characters, tedious dialogue. Where is there a single image in that daily routine that would indicate the dramas of life and death that are always enacted there? *Sons and Lovers* is just such a dumb repetition of images and it just as surely leads to a drama that it does not portray.

That sequential images, regardless of their ambiguity, will inevitably elicit a narrative is also demonstrated in a painting by Michael Hurson; because it inflects this situation differently it provides an interesting comparison with Levine's work. *Edward and Otto Pfaff* is composed of two side-by-side cartoon images showing nearly identical scenes of two figures sitting at a desk. In the first frame both men stare at a blank sheet of paper in front of them, while in the second the left-hand figure has suddenly turned his head over his shoulder in the direction of the first frame. What he seems to have noticed is, of course, himself in that other picture. In this wry confounding of the duration implied by a sequence of images, Hurson has constructed a narrative in which what is narrated is narrative itself. Caught in this tautology, the viewer suspends those questions about the picture that might point outside of it: "Who are Edward and Otto Pfaff and what are they doing?" has become irrelevant to this story. *Sons and Lovers* moves, however, in exactly the opposite direction. Its narrative seems to be about nothing that is contained within the pictures, but instead all that is outside of them.

Levine has recently published a book consisting of two sets of pages inserted into the facing pockets of the covers. On one set are printed the names of rooms in a house-"kitchen," "living room," "bedroom," etc.—while on the other are printed the names of family members—"mother," "father," "sister," "brother." Each of us, needless to say, has the story to complete that book. Philip Smith's early slide projection pieces include a work that bears an interesting affinity with Levine's book: *Relinquish Control* is built around a succession of pictures of domestic interiors.
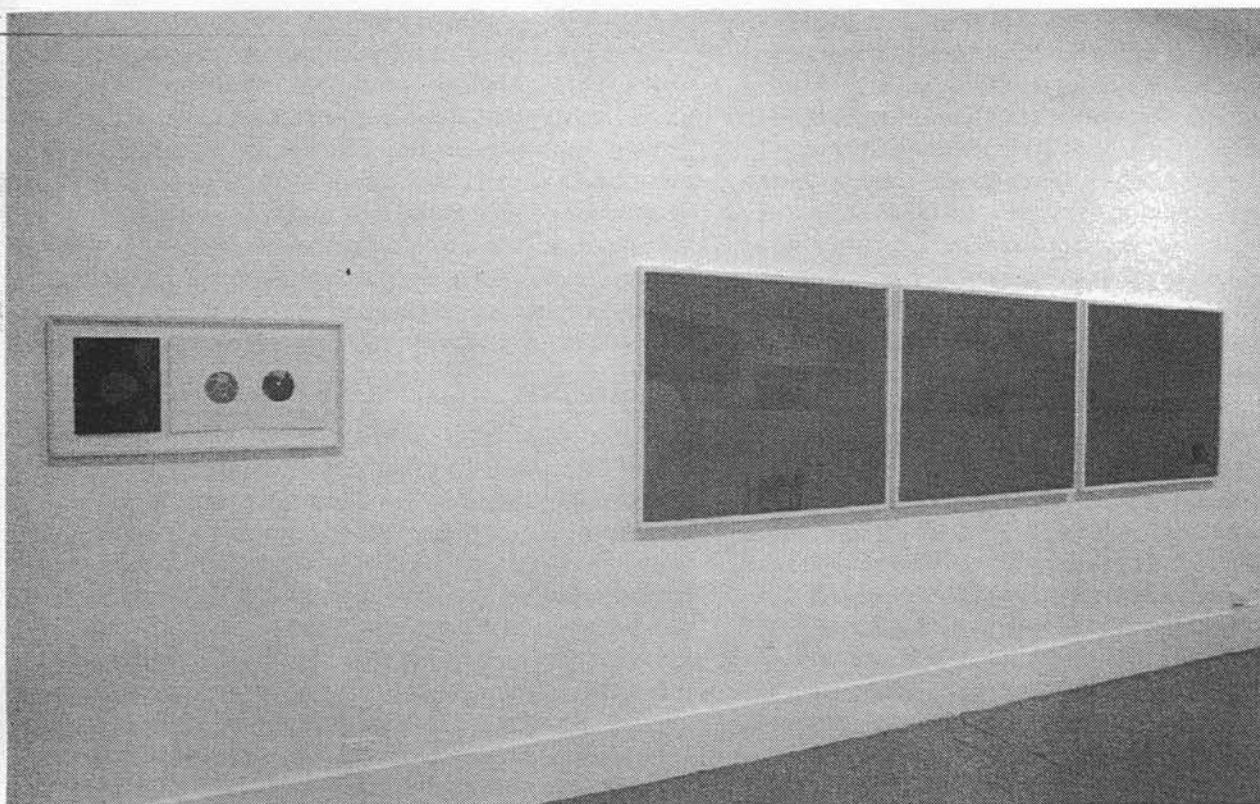
Pictures, Installation view, Artists Space, 1977.
Pictured, from left to right: Jack Goldstein,
Troy Brauntuch.

Smith refers to these works, which also include *Partial Biography* and *Still Stories*, as "extruded cinema." Each narrative segment of *Relinquish Control* consists of four slides projected simultaneously: two large ones of different shots of the same room and two smaller ones, projected above them, ambiguously detailing the disintegration of a woman whose bodily functions are gradually taken over by medical technology. Action and sets are split apart, appearing not only separate but also unrelated; medium shots and tight close-ups appear both in conjunction and in succession. Everything that has a logical function in constituting the narrative sequence of an ordinary film is here deconstructed, so that instead of a story unfolding before us, we are given only groups of unassociated pictures. If we are to piece together a narrative from this strange sequence, we can do so only by sensing its ambience.

Smith's large oil pastel drawings retain a similar relationship to the cinematic flow of images. They look as if they were intended to be read, like a storyboard, a rebus, or a pictographic text. The kaleidoscope of pictures that makes up each drawing is dispersed in a fairly regularized pattern of horizontal registers, with each image occupying approximately equal space on the sheet. If, however, we attempt to derive a coherent narrative from them, we encounter such disjunctive combinations of images that we despair of making particular sense of them. What, for example, is to be made of this sequence that is the top row of pictures of *Bring*: a running man carrying a large banner, a Japanese puppeteer, a girl with a parakeet, a parachutist landing, another parachutist, two Chinese children with streamers? But it is not only the multifarious subjects of Smith's images that inhibit their logical combination. His pictures may be entire scenes or close-up details of objects (a tourist view of the Taj Mahal and a hand holding a praying mantis are found on the same drawing); real or artificial beings (a man riding an escalator and an Egyptian statue inhabit that same drawing). They move without transition from the depiction of the easily credible (a little boy playing with a dog) to the fanciful (a personified dog getting out of bed). Is the source of this latter image a fantasy, a cartoon, an illustration in a children's book? It is impossible to say, for all of Smith's pictures are rendered in the same schematic style, thereby reducing every possible kind of picture to an equivalence.

Where else do we encounter this diffuse and undifferentiated array of pictures? Where else but on these drawings would the image of a parachute follow that of a parakeet? Or a real dog be transformed into a personified dog? It is, of course, in our imaginations, where the movement from one signifier to another is free to take its own course, and thus to escape rational order. The point is not, however, that these drawings represent fantasies or dreams or memories, but that they take as their model the imagination's mode of representation. *Representation* is, of course, one of the most important words in the writings of Freud, and in his descriptions of dreams and memory he constantly uses such metaphors as pictograph, hieroglyph, and rebus: "If we reflect that the means of representation in dreams are principally visual images and not words, we shall see that it is even more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with a language. In fact the interpretation of dreams is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs. In both cases there are certain elements which are not intended to be interpreted (or read, as the case may be) but are only designed to serve as

10. Sigmund Freud, "The Claims of Psycho-
Analysis to a Scientific Interest," (1913),
*The Standard Edition of the Complete
Psychological Works*, vol. XIII (London:
The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 177.

'determinatives', that is to establish the meaning of some other elements."[10]

Smith's drawings do not, of course, demand a particular interpretation, but rather a play of the viewer's imagination equivalent to that play that has produced them. This is not to say that Smith's pictures are the invention of his imagination; they obviously have their sources in the world of images that is available to all of us. Representation is not born in the imagination; it is a *function* of the imagination. It is by way of representation that reality comes to us. Pictures of things do not signify those things, but, like ideograms, signify only what is suggested by those things. And therefore those pictures are juxtaposed in relationships that are determined not by the logic of things but by the logic of representation. If Smith's drawings seem to be about particular subjects, war *(Watch I and II)* or entertainment *(Spins)* for example, it is not because they illustrate or narrate those subjects, but simply because a certain genre of image dominates. From the infinite array of possible pictures a given drawing assembles those that might be associated in an imaginative system, and for that particular moment conjoins pictures of Sufi dancers and bowlers, sculptors and magicians, with all the force of an irrefutable logic. If for Smith the logic of the picture is in its contiguity with other pictures, for Robert Longo it is in the picture's absolute isolation. His *Seven Seals for Missouri Breaks* is an elaborate description, but a description that converts its object into a paradox. In an attempt to relate the sequence from Arthur Penn's movie *Missouri Breaks* in which the bandits gallop out of their hideaway in the geological fault that gives the movie its title, Longo resorted to making a sequential sketch. In making that drawing of

the diachrony of a film sequence, however, one cowboy inevitably became seven; for it is characteristic of the picture that it produces stasis where there is motion: it stops time. This is hardly a revelation, but like other aspects of the picture it is taken too much for granted; it is, after all, this stasis that gives the picture its particular uniqueness. (The extraordinary power of Muybridge's photographs of animal locomotion is accounted for by this fact.) Longo made his descriptive image of *Missouri Breaks* into a large cast aluminum wall relief, thereby freezing it into a materialized presence. The peculiarity of Longo's pictures is that they are *things*.

Prior to making his picture objects, Longo worked with video performances (he continues making videotapes). Composed of a barrage of textual fragments and images, those works frustrated the ability to retain particular images that would provide a structure of meaning: nothing would *stand still*. That frustration is emblematized in a photograph that Longo published in a flyer documenting a work called *Artful Dodger*. The photograph, showing a pair of hands holding photographs of two video images that appeared simultaneously on two monitors during the performance, encapsulates the fundamental psychology of pictures: they allow us to hold onto, to possess an instant of time.

There is a convention in film called the freeze frame in which the flow of images suddenly halts and becomes, as if by magic, a huge still photograph. The shock that this device produces in the viewer is very different from the feeling engendered by another technique where the camera holds for an unexpectedly long time on an image that is itself static. This difference occurs because the

freeze frame is invariably used to suspend the action of
a moving image, while in the long hold there is no action
to suspend. Film stills almost always look more like the
former device than the latter because it is the motion of a
motion picture that is being conveyed. For his most recent
wall relief, Longo used such a film still from Rainer Werner
Fassbinder's *The American Soldier*.[11] The picture shows a
man as he is shot from behind, with his body arching
forward and his left hand grasping his back. In concret-
izing this climactic moment when the man is *stopped* by
a bullet, Longo suspends the moment between life and
death in the ambiguous stasis of a picture. And the
odd result is that this picture/object has all the elegance
of a dance.

The work of the five artists in this exhibition, and that of
many other young artists as well, seems to be largely free
of references to the conventions of modernist art, and
instead to turn to those of other art forms more directly
concerned with representation—film and photography,
most particularly—and even to the most debased of our
cultural conventions—television and picture newspapers,
for example. The self-reflexiveness and formalism of
recent art appears to have been abandoned, as are
interests in the specific characteristics of a medium
(Goldstein's films are not primarily about film; Smith's
drawings are not about drawing). Nor is it productive to
speak about style in regard to their work. It would be a
mistake, however, to think of this work as effecting a
complete break with recent art, or with modernism as
a whole. Not only does this art issue from an intensive
engagement with issues both primary and peripheral
in the art of past decade, but it also has important
connections with questions raised by Surrealism and Pop

art. Brauntuch's work has affinities with Cornell's; Smith's,
with Rauschenberg's; Goldstein's, with Warhol's.

Because the pictures that these artists are making raise
issues of the psychology of the image so forcefully, the
entire tradition of modernism that stems from Symbolism
appears once again relevant. A return to the writings
of Freud with a completely new understanding of how
they might be useful for criticism is one of the prospects
that this art offers. The primary issue in this work is, of
course, the structure of signification, with that distance
that separates us from the world and that constitutes
our desire. In this, the work of these artists maintains an
allegiance to that radical aspiration that we continue to
recognize as modernist.