



ARTIST

Biff Henrich

TITLE

No title

DATE

1991

DIMENSIONS

30 in H x 40 in W

MEDIUM

Chromogenic Color Prints

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1994.014

CURRENT LOCATION

Warehouse

BIFF HENRICH

BORN

1953

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1984
Light Work Retrospective Exhibition, 1985
Light Work Gallery, 1980
Light Work Gallery, 1991
Light Work Gallery, 2005

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 12
Contact Sheet 41
Contact Sheet 67
Contact Sheet 73
Contact Sheet 97
Contact Sheet 131

ESSAYS

Like car crashes, Biff Henrich's photographs make us a bit queasy as we look through our fingers to get a better look. For the past ten years, Henrich has created a significant body of work by presenting our cultural practices as both artifacts and symptoms. Like a chiropractor who examines a patient's fingernails for clues that indicate health or aberrations, Henrich looks at the outskirts of societal practices in order to understand the behavior at the center. In a recent series, exhibited in the Light Work Gallery from October 1 - November 22, 1991, Henrich turned his attention to the practice of taxidermy. In this series, Henrich photographed a variety of animals in various stages in the process of preservation. Unlike the 'stuffed animals' we all have encountered in museum showcases or hanging as trophies from barroom walls, Henrich's creatures are still in the dressing room waiting for the glue to dry, the pins to be removed, and their fur to be combed. Standing in regal formality before backgrounds of rich monochrome, the animals posture in a display of evidence, examination and curiosity. By showing us the process instead of the finished product Henrich makes possible a wide range of reactions from fascination to disgust, simultaneously appealing to both halves of our brain at the same time. This divergent tug looms quietly in the undercurrents of Henrich's photographs causing us to sneak a smile when no one is looking. The graceful yet mischievous quality of his photographs catch us with their elegant visual appeal and always manage to elicit an honest response, whether we like it or not. Jeffrey Hoone ©1991 Artist Work: CEPA Gallery at Thirty This exhibition and catalogue pay tribute to a group of artists who have made the Center for Exploratory and Perceptual Arts (CEPA Gallery) in Buffalo, NY, a respected venue for artists, and run by artists, for over thirty years. During that time CEPA has been a consistent example of what alternative art spaces were meant to be—innovative, energetic, fast on their feet, and always on the edge. Like many other alternative art spaces across the country, CEPA was formed in the early 1970s by a small group of artists with common goals. By combining activism with an entrepreneurial spirit, similar groups of like-minded artists sprang up all over the country to create an alternative to existing cultural institutions by placing the entire decision-making structure of the group in the hands of artists. Fueled by the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the anti-war movement, the alternative space movement was one of self-determination where artists decided that they understood best the needs of other artists and were best equipped to respond to those needs. The alternative space or artist space movement cut across all mediums. In the process unused storefronts, empty factories, and abandoned classrooms were turned into galleries, performance spaces, and workshops through the force of sheer will and youthful enthusiasm. Incredibly, the government became a willing partner with these organizations whose aim was to question the very status quo the government sought to uphold. By the mid 1970s the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) had several grant programs to specifically support alternative spaces, and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) was actively encouraging proposals from similar organizations especially in Upstate New York. The federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA program) probably played the biggest role in sustaining alternative spaces by providing salaries for artists to work directly for, or under the auspices of, a specific organization. Although the CETA program is long gone, the NEA and NYSCA still support alternative spaces, albeit with a bit more caution and regulation. Those spaces active today typically receive less than 10% of their total support from government sources. By the end of the 1970s hundreds of artist-run organizations across the country had received tax-exempt status from the federal government. Driven by the desire to respond to the needs of artists, these organizations provided a myriad of services including exhibitions, publications, access to work space facilities, performance venues, educational programming, and public art projects. Concentrating primarily on serving emerging and under-recognized mature artists, these organizations helped foster and support a generation of artists and usher in significant cultural shifts that continue to influence mainstream institutions. Alternative spaces included women and artists of color in their programs and set an early example for many other institutions. Educational programs and practices pioneered by alternative spaces, especially in the area of media arts, have been adopted and embraced by colleges and universities. The entire genre of performance art was nurtured by the alternative space movement, and most artists who have risen to prominence since the 1970s received their first exhibition or performance opportunity at an alternative space. The many contributions that alternative spaces have made to the cultural richness of the country are surpassed only by the unheralded accomplishments of the many who made it all possible—the individual artist wearing the hats of cultural worker, curator, administrator, fundraiser, janitor, chauffeur, gofer, accountant, writer, designer, and publicist, all at once and all of a sudden. There were no training programs or MBAs for these artists turned administrators. They learned by doing and invented their jobs as they went along, dashing the stereotype that artists could only function using one side of their brains. There is perhaps nothing harder to sustain than an organization built on idealism and enthusiasm. Sooner or later the energy needed to stay up all night painting gallery walls, cleaning glass, mopping the floor, running to the hardware store, raising the money, buying the food and wine, setting the table, and turning on the lights so everything will be ready for the opening—that you hope people will show up for—takes its toll. No matter how optimistic you are, you can still get burnt-out, and many alternative spaces did not survive these daily challenges. In order to endure for thirty years as a small non-profit organization, CEPA has managed to avoid burn-out with creative survival strategies without losing their desire to take risks and to support artists at all costs. This energy has not only survived but has been successfully transferred and maintained by twelve different directors over four decades. CEPA is one of the few alternative spaces that has always had a working artist as its director. The dedication of those individuals as well as the many other artists who have helped the organization as curators, assistants, instructors, interns, volunteers, friends, and board members is what makes it unique and a cause for celebration. I first became aware of CEPA in 1980 just after I was hired as the assistant director at Light Work. Light Work and CEPA are both photography organizations influenced to a large extent by the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester whose founder and first director Nathan Lyons was one of the pioneers of the alternative space movement. At that time there was also an amazing explosion of photography organizations across the country that fueled CEPA's enthusiasm and sense of shared mission including Light Work in Syracuse, New York; the Mid-town Y Gallery and En Foco, New York City; the Catskill Center for Photography (now the Center for Photography at Woodstock), Woodstock, New York; the Houston Center for Photography; Light Factory, Charlotte, North Carolina; the Photographic Resource Center, Boston, Massachusetts; the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies; San Francisco Camerawork; Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, Oregon; and Aperion Workshops, Millerton, New York. Out of all these organizations I formed an easy bond with Biff Henrich, CEPA's director at the time, and Bob Collignon who was curating some of CEPA's exhibitions. Right from the beginning I always felt that the three of us were on the same page about what it meant to be in a position to support other artists (although we often disagreed on which ones), and we freely exchanged ideas about artists, exhibitions, and publications as well as other mundane topics like screw guns, drywall, writing grant proposals, and creative ways to complete final government grant reports. I have worked with all subsequent directors at CEPA in a variety of different capacities and have always admired how each one has managed to keep the organization prospering and pushing the limits against daunting odds.

For thirty years and counting CEPA has been out on its own renting, sharing, or borrowing space to accomplish their goals, and they have never given in or compromised their ideals in the process. They have remained on the edge supporting artists, championing causes, beating the bushes for new work, and taking risks because that is what they do best. As a culture, the artists we have come to respect and admire are the ones who can interpret and describe with clarity their particular moment in history no matter where those questions lead or how far out of our comfort zone they take us. For the past thirty years CEPA has been led by artists with that same commitment and resolve. They have been visionaries, cultural workers, role models, rule breakers, deal makers, and agents of change—confirming that artists will always find innovative ways to work, and when artists run an organization, they truly do make a difference. Jeffrey Hoone ©2005