



**ARTIST**

Gary Nickard

**TITLE**

Untitled from the series 'Eye of the Whale'

**DATE**

1995

**DIMENSIONS**

10 in H x 8 in W

**MEDIUM**

Gelatin Silver Print

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

1995.028

**CURRENT LOCATION**

1114-14B

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**GARY NICKARD**

**BORN**

1954

**BIRTHPLACE**

Toronto, ON

**GENDER**

Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

## LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1995  
Light Work Gallery, 2005

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 86  
Contact Sheet 97  
Contact Sheet 131

## ESSAYS

For nearly ten years, Gary Nickard has made objects and images that reveal a suspicious fascination toward science. He brings to his art a vast knowledge of data as well as theoretical concerns regarding the study of science. He has been especially interested in the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault who theorized that '...power subjugates knowledge and makes it serve its end...' Nickard has expressed this questioning of how scientific statements are affected by external sources of power in both simple and complicated objects and images. In 1981 he appropriated illustrations of men in the midst of mysterious experiments that he found in scientific publications from the 1940s and 1950s. Selecting provocative images to reprint, he deleted the accompanying text and exhibited them, innocently piquing the viewer's curiosity. At the same time he suggests that perhaps a little fear is in order - especially the kind that results from the hindsight of fifty years. Nickard's sophisticated fabrications of the later 1980s were metaphors for another type of relationship that he found evident in science - that between the less informed general public and a learned community. Through these works that combined scientific apparatus with slick materials such as copper sheets, Nickard warned the confident viewer that things are not always what they seem. While apparently complicated and certainly intriguing, the objects of the Dislocation series were also, seemingly purposeless. Throughout these earlier efforts Nickard has always revealed a certain delight in the information he has gathered, and in the object he has produced. His suspicions and cynicism toward scientific research reflect a kind of general doubt from a generation informed by the impact of nuclear weapons, Agent Orange and the Love Canal. Yet Nickard's recent series of images, Till the End of the Night reveals a depth of cynicism not previously expressed. The series was conceived in the Autumn of 1994 when Nickard served as a care provider for his AIDS stricken brother. The darkly Romantic title of the series is based on the texts that dominate the images; they are excerpts from a novel published in 1934 by Louis-Ferdinand Celine, entitled Journey to the End of the Night. It relates the thoughts and experiences of a disillusioned young doctor, desperately trying to help a patient suffering from Typhoid, as he visits the most knowledgeable 'experts' researching the disease, presumably to find a cure. Nickard describes the novel as a '...violently anti-social, scabrously nihilistic and hilarious satire...' that he found far too poignant and relevant to his own life throughout his brother's illness. He was inspired not by the fascination with scientific research and peculiar information but by his own first hand experience attending a patient suffering from an incurable condition, while observing a medical community whose efforts were confounding and seemingly brutal. The brilliantly colored abstractions of the background in the work from the series form an equally disturbing association. They are taken from a set of glass lantern slides of details of metallurgical crystal structures created by Meret Kronberg, a physicist associated with the Manhattan Project, who later committed suicide. The images are deceptively beautiful and framed with a border reminiscent of a 1950s television monitor, adding to their seductive and innocent appearance. It is almost as if Nickard's previous suspicions, warnings and cynicism have been finally confirmed. Is it skepticism, or gratefulness that research nurtures in those who are at its mercy? Cheryl Brutvan (c)1995 Gary Nickard lives in Buffalo, NY and NYC. He participated in our Artist-in-Residence program from March 1-30, 1995. Cheryl Brutvan is a senior curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, NY. 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