

# ARTISANSPACE

Shirley Goodman Resource Center  
Fashion Institute of Technology  
227 West 27 Street  
New York, NY 10001

ARTISANSPACE, an exploratory new exhibition space, was developed to provide non-commercial opportunities for exhibiting innovative works not found in traditional gallery settings. It is an alternative space that will serve to define the skills and aesthetics of artisanship through high quality examples. The works selected for exhibit in ARTISANSPACE will be of a contemporary nature, combining an artist's personal aesthetic with traditional skills.

## THE NEW SPIRIT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

An Exhibition of Works by Artists Using Advanced Technology

The artists of this exhibition were selected subjectively based on a known commitment, depth of ideas and seriousness of purpose. They are unified by their fascination with process and generative systems; by their curiosity of science and by their investigative approach to making art through the exploration of technology. Their works reflect an idiosyncratic hybridizing and expanding of the photographic medium; therefore redefining what we think of as a "photograph."

Inventive development of new photographic forms has always been looked upon by purists and sceptics with arrogance and suspicion. In the 1970's the terms "alternative," "experimental" and "manipulated" were applied to non-straight photography in an attempt to explain the work of photographers who had abandoned the traditional photographic conventions of pure optics and chemistry. The 1980's are a technological age and now half way through the decade, the computer generation is revolutionizing all forms of life. It is understandable that photography, a most modern art form originally conceived from science for rapid dissemination of information, would be a very likely medium to embrace new technologies.

However, the artist-machine alliance has been an uneasy one since the dawn of photography. On this issue, Sonia Sheridan, a pioneering advocate for art and technology, believes artists can be divided into two dichotomous groups. One group sees growth and beauty in the emergence of new tools and the other sees new technology as anti-thetical to art and will have nothing to do with machines. The artists of "The New Spirit of Photography" are of the former group, forming an alliance with technology - bringing the personal to the impersonal. Woody Vasulka refers to technology as his evolutionary tools and considers them as colleagues rather than adversaries. Paul Berger explains his interest as a kind of subject matter: "Some photographers like parks, some of us like machines." It is doubtful whether the late Minor White, photography's spiritual guru, would have experimented with electronic tools, but Leonardo da Vinci would have been fascinated with the computer and would have loved to see a time when art and science were interdependent and coexistent.

The works of this exhibition would have been inconceivable without the advance of 20th Century technology. They exploit the use of technology created by industry for business purposes, a spectrum spanning from the simplest use of sparklers to the most advanced sophisticated electronics. Looking within this sphere of photography, an examination of the images will reveal two primary groups: those concerned with natural phenomena and those concerned with machine phenomena. Walter Chappell's electrically radiant fresh plant forms or Sheila Pinkel's x-rayed bone fragments express a interest in metaphysics, while Paul Berger using the computer of Carl Toth using the Xerox copier, comment on a vernacular technology.

These photographic works can be viewed as image synthesis - a reality independent of its original subject matter. The artists exhibited here are charged by a desire to move photography away from optical reality, challenging the conventions of imaging. Woody Vasulka who for 16 years has conducted extensive explorations of electronic tools in an art context, explains these conventions by comparing computer (internal) generated imaging and camera (external) generated imaging. "I see the tradition

of imaging mostly as camera-obscura-bound or as pinhole-organizing-principle-defined. This tradition has shaped our visual perception not only through the camera obscura, but it's been reinforced by television and cinema and eventually we came to accept that as the most real. It's a dictatorship of the pinhole effect. In painting, where the surface can be controlled to a much greater degree, people have rationally broken down this notion of Renaissance space into no image - eventually the camera was empty. Internally generated imaging can build its own syntax, can build its own space, its own realities, and can eventually be more accessible, or liked, or loved, by the masses, than the realities."

Art and science have always been interlocked in their quest to unfold life's mysteries - to reach beyond the limits of today's knowledge. In closing, two quotes by Kandinsky are meaningful.

From his book, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, published in 1910.

"This art creates alongside the real world a new world which has nothing to do externally with reality. It's subordinate internally to cosmic laws."

"To each spiritual epoch corresponds a new spiritual context, which that epoch expresses by forms that are new, unexpected, surprising and in this way aggressive."

Patt Blue  
Curator  
March 26, 1985

## ARTISTS

The 17 participating artists are:

Paul Berger	Tom Porett
Nancy Burson	Sonia Landy Sheridan
Walter Chappell	Gregg Smith/Kathleen Neely
William Larson	Eric Staller
Ron MacNeil	Mary Jo Toles
Mike Mandel/Larry Sultan	Carl Toth
Sheila Pinkel	Todd Walker
Jim Pomeroy	Woody Vasulka

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

William Larson and Paul Berger's work  
courtesy of Light Gallery, New York.

Nancy Burson's work courtesy of  
Holly Solomon Gallery, New York,

Carl Toth's work courtesy of  
Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

ARTISANS-SPACE Committee: Jeffrey Buchman, Susan Daykin,  
Daria Dorosh, Robert Gutman, Susan Reitman, Daisy  
Rosner, Larry Smith, Janice Weinman, Marty Zelnik.