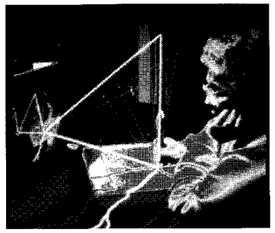
PIONEERS
OF
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Peer Bode
Nancy Burson
Walter Chappell
Laurence M. Gartel
Carl Geiger
Robert Heinecken
William Larson
Graham Nash
Nam June Paik
Sheila Pinkel
Mary Ross
Sonia Landy Sheridan
Howard Sochurek
Mary Jo Toles
Woody Vasulka
Joan Truckenbrod
Julius Vitali
Linda White

This exhibition and brochure has been sponsored in part by:
The Century Fund * CoreStates Bank * County of Lehigh
Dan's Camera * Holiday Hair * Just Born
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts * The Rider-Pool Foundation
The Huston Foundation * The Trexler Trust



Sonia Landy Sheridan *Drawing in Time: My New Black Book,* 1982. Easel (John Dunn software), Cromemco Z-2D hardware, color photograph, 16 x 20 in.

"I actually feel that in the next few years—it won't be very long—the electronic image is really going to be the medium in photography".

Ansel Adams, 1980 [1]

This quote from America's most recognized photographer came at a time when a number of fine art photographers and visual artists were already combining photographic processes with electronic media and imagery to create new forms of expression. Their early work with photocopier, medical and electronic imaging, communications, video and computer technology helped change the notion of how photographs and art can be made. While it would take more than 15 years before imaging technologies existing in 1980 would combine personal computing and photography into a digital photography within reach of the general public, understanding the experience of these first generation artists provides a coherent view of the development of digital photography as a whole. *Pioneers of Digital Photography* explores this transitional period in the history of fine art photography by examining digital photography's precedents. More than 60 two-dimensional works by 18 artists have been assembled including exceptional vintage work from the 1960's, 70's and 80's.

Photography and early electronic art were both shaped by the social, political and cultural climate of the 1960's and 70's. The mood of the time was to reject the past, the influence of powerful institutions and mass media in particular. "Television has attacked us for a lifetime, now we strike back" said Nam June Paik, one of the first artists experimenting with television technology.[2]

While technical mastery and fine print quality remained a powerful force in creative photography, influential teaching artists like Robert Heinecken encouraged photography students to think beyond traditional silver-print techniques. Many of Robert Heinecken's images were taken directly from mass media, manipulated with traditional and/or unconventional techniques, and recomposed into social commentary.[3] Photographers were experimenting with

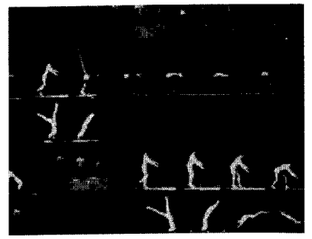
Howard Sochurek *Hand,* ca. 1979. Tomography.

William Larson *Untitled,* 1972. Electro-carbon print transmitted by telephone using a Graphic Sciences Fax Machine, Model/Dex 1, 8-1/2 x 11 in.

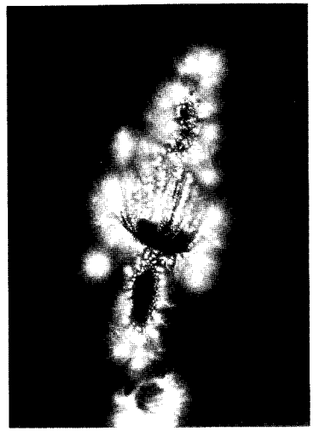
mixed media, photo sculpture, non-camera and "appropriated" imagery from a variety of sources. Older photographic processes like gum bichromate, cyanotype and platinum printing were rediscovered and employed in new contexts. In 1974, classic photographer Walter Chappell revived the Kirilian process (also known as electro-photography) to create high voltage photograms of living plants for his *Metaflora* series. Artist Mary Jo Toles adapted the Kirilian process and has been extending the concept of high-voltage photography in her work since the early 1980's. With experimentation in the arts so characteristic of the times, it was inevitable that the New Photography and new technologies would soon converge.[4]

New technologies typically evolve from the needs of government and industry then eventually spread to the rest of society. Pioneering artists were often able to access equipment before it became available to the general public. Since emerging technologies were prohibitively expensive for individuals, they collaborated with technicians and scientists at corporations, had residencies at universities or research centers, or established their own cooperatives through which they could share expenses and apply for grant money. Once they accessed equipment, artists typically began to expand the machine's original purpose. They would modify equipment, adapt it for use in a larger system, or design new tools that were more "user-friendly" for art making.

By the late 1960's black and white copy machines were the most accessible means of altering images electronically and artist Sonia Landy Sheridan among the first to exploit their creative potential. Just as exposure, processing temperature and other variables affect photographic images, light source, dyes, electrostatics, magnetics and other factors affect photocopier output. When 3M Corporation invited Sheridan into their color research labs in 1969, copy machines were mere facsimile producers. As she began taking copiers apart, exploring how they made images and identifying the ones most useful to artists, Sonia Sheridan discovered still-imaging, graphic capabilities that went far beyond their original purpose. For Sheridan and her students at the Art Institute of



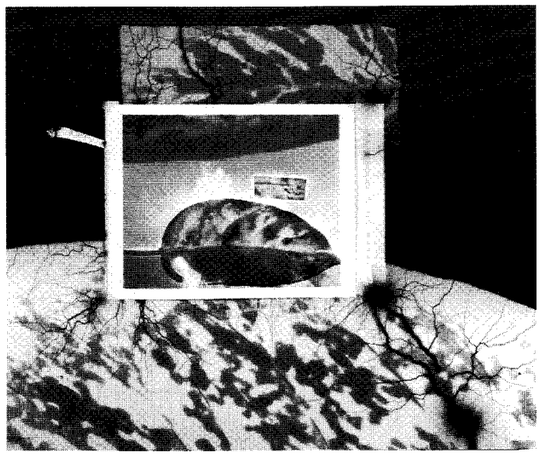
Peer Bode *Video Locomotion (man performing forward hand leap),* 1978/1997. Digital dye sub print, 6 x 8 in.



Walter Chappell *Squash Blossom,* 1974/93. Unique platinum print, 10 x 13-1/2 in.

Chicago, photocopiers eventually became just one device in a larger system of image-making tools that would include video, computers and sound.[5] Intrigued by similar possibilities, photographer William Larson began using early Fax equipment to combine and transmit photographs, graphics, text, voice and sound by telephone.

In 1965, SONY Corporation introduced the first portable videotape recorder and camera. Nam June Paik, who had been turning TV sets into art objects for some time, was among the first artists to buy one. Considered state-of-the-art, the Portapak weighed 20 pounds, recorded black and white video, and cost a few thousand dollars. While this new technology made personal, portable video recording possible on a limited scale, it was was still too expensive for many individuals. By the early 1970's, pioneering video artists had set up a number of independent, not-for-profit media centers. The Kitchen in New York City (founded by Woody and Steina Vasulka), Ralph Hocking's Experimental Television Center (ETC) in upstate New York and other media centers (including some PBS stations) scattered around the United States provided artists with



Mary Jo Toles *Recent Plant Cutbacks,* 1983. Monoprint, 20 x 24 in. Ektaprint with 8 x 10 in. Polacolor ER, enlarger projection and high-voltage exposure.