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Virgil Grotfeldt

*Patrick Healy*

# Virgil Grotfeldt

*including the series with Waldo Bien  
with an introduction by Walter Hopps*



FIUWAC  
Free International  
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Art Collection

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# Virgil Grotfeldt

including the series  
with Waldo Bien



Patrick Healy

## VIRGIL GROTFELDT: AN INTRODUCTION



Victor Hugo: *paysage*,  
ca. 1850  
Brown ink on paper,  
22,7 x 18,3 cm  
Paul Meurice Collection

I've been following the art of Virgil Grotfeldt for the past fifteen years – as it turns out, the period of his mature achievements. The first works I saw were the acrylic and bronze powder paintings – canvas and heavy paper, the latter sometimes torn into freeform shapes. These dark paintings invariably gave rise to mysterious human and animal figures. After visiting the artist's studio, I queried him about whom he admired historically. I was surprised by his reply: He stated his high regard for Odilon Redon, the great French symbolist of the later 19th and early 20th century. I had never heard an artist of my time mention Redon. Redon's works of art most relevant to Grotfeldt's contemporary works are his fluid and mysterious evocations in pastel drawings and black lithographs.

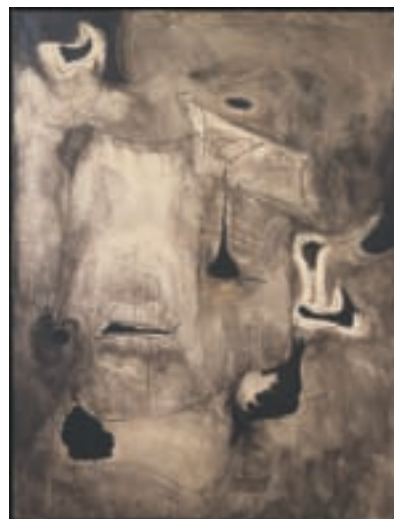
Similarly, around 1975 Grotfeldt saw his first reproductions of the work of the great French novelist and artist of the 19th century, Victor Hugo. Hugo's art, exclusively drawings, is very rare and almost entirely owned by a foundation in France. Abstract evocations of nature, the Hugo drawings are unprecedented for their time.

Grotfeldt's art is rooted in the 20th century tradition of biomorphic abstraction. This is the art that depicts various animal and plant forms in ways that are related to or suggestive of forms in nature but in no way a literal depiction. The first practitioner of this art was the Russian artist, Wassily Kandinsky. In a series of extraordinary paintings and watercolors done from around 1911 to 1920, Kandinsky did brightly hued (yellow, red, green, etc.) and freely flowing forms, works pioneering this biomorphism. Many of his larger works of this type he called improvisations, *Improvision I, II*, etc. He also did a set called the *Four Seasons*. Kandinsky's pioneering biomorphic art prefigures what Grotfeldt has achieved in that many of the forms are modeled and given a three-dimensional quality.

In the 1920s, the great surrealist Max Ernst, having moved on from Dada, invented a technique called *frottage*. This involved developing forms that looked biomorphic by finding textured surfaces, placing a piece of paper or canvas upon them, and then rubbing the surface with charcoal or graphite to derive an image. Shifting the paper about, he was able to generate an unusual and provocative body of work derived by his frottage technique. These forms became seminal to much of the surrealist art in the 1930s when fantastic nature themes were important to the genre.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the American artist Jackson Pollock began an unprecedented series of spontaneously generated small drawings involving biomorphic form, often in watercolor, pen and ink. This remains one of the great moments in American art even as these works are small. They exist separately from Pollock's more famous paintings of the period, such as *The She Wolf*, *Male and Female*, etc. By the late forties, when Pollock was pouring skeins of paint for such paintings as *Autumn Rhythm* or *Lavender Mist* nature remained a major theme in his art.

Pollock's early pursuit of biomorphic abstraction also exists in the late work of the American artist, Arshile Gorky, whose life was tragically cut short. In paintings and drawings admired by the leader of the French



Arshile Gorky: *Charred Beloved III*, 1946  
Oil on linen, 137 x 101,6 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



surrealist movement, André Breton, Gorky made agonizingly beautiful works in biomorphic form. The drawings are linear with sparse areas of color and sometimes they are just black line work on paper.

Following World War II, one of the greatest of the new artists of Europe was the German Joseph Beuys. Besides his sculpture and performance pieces, Beuys is famous for a remarkable body of drawings. They depict animal and human forms that are deliberately simple, almost primitivistic in style. Of all of Beuys' works, it is perhaps the drawings that have the greatest poignancy. At the Dusseldorf Academy, there were a great many younger German artists who, like Grotfeldt, were influenced by Beuys' teachings and his art. Not surprisingly Beuys was discharged from the academy for his radical belief that art should lead the way to form a non-hierarchical society.

One technique employed by Grotfeldt, specifically in his painted works on paper, has been the conceptual introduction of the issue of time. Grotfeldt has chosen antique sheets of ledger pages, narrative writing, and maps, particularly nautical charts, to serve as the ground on which he creates his aqueous shapes, exploring the details of the underlying support, which has been cropped for its own sake and has influenced the artist as he develops his composition.

In 1987, Grotfeldt had an exhibition at Gallerie d' Theeboom in Amsterdam. While there, he met the Dutch artist Waldo Bien, who had been a student of Beuys in his final period at the Dusseldorf Academy. The friendship quickly developed and collaborations between Grotfeldt and Bien have continued over the years since. At this first encounter, Grotfeldt received coal dust residue that Bien had derived from sanding a huge block of coal for his work *The Death Room Interior*. From this initial coal powder, Grotfeldt derived an astounding painting and drawing medium. The coal dust is suspended in an aqueous-based acrylic medium, which can be drawn and brushed to conceive extraordinary biomorphic forms. This medium for Grotfeldt allows for a degree of modeling and three-dimensional aspects to his art that is unique. With Grotfeldt's more celebrated contemporaries who work in biomorphic form such as the artist Terry Winters or Brice Marden in his late work, the art is graphic and figure ground. There is no sense of dimensional modeling to the forms.

Not since the early Pollock or the late Arshile Gorky have I seen the dimensionally modelled forms as in the biomorphic abstraction of Virgil Grotfeldt. Nature and abstract form define Grotfeldt's art as well as sustain its value as a personal meditation upon essential life forces.

Walter Hopps



Virgil Grotfeldt: *Untitled*,  
undated  
Watercolour on paper,  
37,5 x 34 cm



Waldo Bien: *Death Room Interior*, 1985  
Interior carved in coal (H5),  
iron, wood, pigment on  
canvas, sizes not specified  
Waldo Bien Archive

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Without the ongoing support and the continuous encouragement of my beloved wife Deborah, none of this work would have come into existence.

Virgil Grotfeldt



235-2001

*Shroud*, 2001

left: *Artvocado Rune* (Kloppenburg)

right: *Man of Sorrows* (Grotfeldt)





227-2001  
*Man of Sorrows*, 1975



Studying the work of Virgil Grotfeldt from the last thirty years, it is possible to mark his development through decennial shifts, transitions, thus: the 1970's could be described as the decade of the empirical, the descriptive and realistic; the 1980's as the mystical and magically sublime, and the 1990's as the religion of plants. An analysis might follow his response and relation to the dominant art scene in America, for example, his direct connection to the aims of abstract expressionism or to the photo realists, or indeed, to the surreal and abstract elements that have been so much part of American modernism; even his critical distancing of himself from this very discourse. Grotfeldt has explicitly challenged the account of modernism that follows a line of development from Monet to Cézanne,<sup>1</sup> preferring to cite the drawings of Victor Hugo<sup>2</sup> and the symbolist work of Odilon Redon<sup>3</sup> as a source of direct inspiration, indeed as kindred spirits, and responding to elements within his American heritage that again confront, the magical and the religious, which are so often overwhelmed in the techno-managerial discourse of the public domain.

This most subtle of artists with the brush went so far as to say 'I am not a painter,' resisting inclusion in the post-war phenomenon, so astutely noted in a recent work on Jim Dine,<sup>4</sup> of the need for American artists to find, in a restless way, their own personal iconography, a movement towards depersonalising the object world into a signature style, which is exclusively an issue of the surface.

1 In conversation with Walter Hopps at the Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston.

2 See: *Victor Hugo dessinateur*, published for the exhibition *Victor Hugo*, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, 5 Feb.– 25 April 1999.

3 Jean Selz, *Odilon Redon* (Munich : Südwest Verlag, 1977).

4 I have drawn here on Marco Livingstone, *Jim Dine, The Alchemy of Images* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998). I have also consulted David Shapiro, *Jim Dine, Painting What One Is* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1981) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim exhibition *Jim Dine Walking Memory*, Feb.12–May 16 1999. There are remarkable similarities in the personal biographies of Dine and Grotfeldt.



Thus, many artists become their own autograph and delimit a subject or a motif as their obsessive personal property, becoming equated with the choice of material, or even, in some cases, with a single repeated gesture. Grotfeldt emphasises what is inchoate, even confused, within the creative process, which is intensified and also clarified through the actions of painting, themselves ritualistic: the gestural and motoric caught up in sundering tensions. Realising that expression cannot be governed by rules, that there can be no craft of expression, no clear aim, no fitting end, rather, a coming to know what feeling is, as part of the inner life,<sup>5</sup> through expression led, in Grotfeldt's work, at the end of the 1970's, to a decisive move away from the precisionist realism which had been a goal he inherited from his formal period of academic training, and a turn to the inner fears and sense of mystery opened up by the challenge to his own descriptive automatism. It was also a decisive 'anthropological' turn for Grotfeldt, one which had been experienced by many post-war American artists, especially Newman, Rothko, Pollock. In the latter cases, thanks to the research of Rushing, the weight and significance of this has been increasingly appreciated.<sup>6</sup> Many artists, it could be said, had intensified their 'irrationality' to combat and to protest, a protest against ideological manipulations, ideological coolness.

5 For a discussion of this, in relation to the philosophy of Collingwood, see Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 6-7.

6 W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde*, University of Texas Press, 1995. Based on his doctoral research, this is a fundamental contribution to the sources and themes of many abstract expressionist painters.





*Untitled*, 1976  
Oil on canvas



*Deb*, 1976  
Pencil on paper

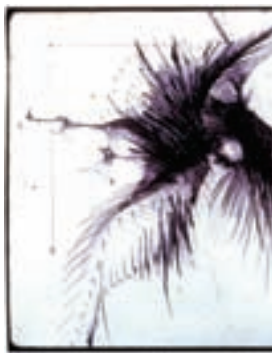
Danger, becoming, and daring to assert the grandeur of existence, was an emphatic rejection of the realism that had been such a feature of his work in the 1970's. Part of the belief of realism was to result in a motival registration that was effectively more naïf, more honest, as a subject matter for the painter.

In Grotfeldt's case this is also very much in tune with what Marshall Berman<sup>7</sup> has identified as the recovery of the mundane in modernism, a deliberate moving away from highly enhanced aesthetic strategies and a consequent valuing of the everyday object, a clear inheritance also from the Ash-Can School, or the work of Stuart Davis,<sup>8</sup> where traces of ephemera and advertising material from hoardings, found objects, became the legible carriers of a culture's own detritus, its inner obsolescence. By the same token, Berman notes persuasively, that the demand for realism in such ephemeral apparitions also implicated the artist in a ruthless searching for stylistics; within capitalist realism there is the necessary compression towards abolition, the need to be always on the move, to destroy its own traces in keeping with the ideology of 'development.'

There is some value in describing Grotfeldt's early work as 'social realist,' but several caveats need to be entered. Pop and realism are often seen as involved in a reaction to 'abstraction,' one distinction between pop and realism being that the former is more superficial in its studied selection of banal images.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid melts into Air*. (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> I have consulted *Stuart Davis*, curated by Philip Rylands (Milan: Electa, 1977). Davis's *Garage Work* of 1917 is a good example of ambiguous realism.



*Untitled*, 1971 (detail)  
Pencil on paper





229-2001  
Peterbilt II, 1972



Adolf Wölfli 1929



Stuart Davis: *Odol*, 1924  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 45,7 cm  
The Crispo Collection

The most exemplary display of this being Warhol's Soup Can, which had been anticipated by the Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli,<sup>9</sup> in his illustration of 1929. Stuart Davis's *Odol* had already been used by Kraus in *Die Fackel*.<sup>10</sup> In pop, however, it has been argued, there is a more detached, less personally involved relation to iconography. But the insistence on pop mimesis, or eyeball realists, as a contra-distinction to abstract expressionism is misleading. Hans Hofmann had no difficulty with regard to referential imagery; he sometimes made specifically realistic works.<sup>11</sup> The idea within pop and realism of motival registration as a kind of emblematic or even just as a neutral container presents other problems. Even in the realist camp there were those who understood this as a claustrophobic positivism. Like the early American 'social realists,' Grotfeldt shares with William Gropper<sup>12</sup> a similar wish to display the non-glamorous, and often mundane activities, with a detached and analytic simplicity.<sup>13</sup>

Embedded in this overt depiction are claims, with regard to the innocent eye, that seclude very sophisticated artistic conventions.<sup>14</sup>

- 9 This has been shown in *Paleo Psycho Pop*, no. 4 (1997). Hilarius Hofstede originally brought this to my attention in 1990. For PPP see P.I.G. (catalogue), Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1999.
- 10 Kraus was one of the first to deal with the overwhelming nature of the advertising image and message, especially in his essay 'The world of the poster.'
- 11 I have consulted *Reginald Marsh's New York* by Marilyn Cohen, who argues that the economic calamity of the 30's led to the development of the documentary style, in photography: the style of Walter Evans and Dorothea Large. Marsh combined the Bowery, the burlesque and the beach. For the first media generation, Cohen suggests there was an aimless, restless generation, capacious, glossy, loud and brash. People on display whose tragic mood had a quality of fantasy, underlying choices for Marsh's work. The fusion of documentary and fiction can even be seen today in a work such as the *Blair Witch Project*, important shows held in Vassar 1968, The Denver Art Museum 'Report on the Sixties', the 1969 Whitney Museum, 'Human Concern/Personal Torment,' and the 1970 Whitney '22 ts.' In 1972 New Realism and Photo-realism was exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery and called *sharp-focus-realism*, referred to in Europe as *Hyperrealism*. An empiricist definition and description of the subject was of major importance. It should be noted that photo-journalism was an important input in the Ash Can Realists, and Edward Hopper is directly influenced by Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century conventions.
- 12 For William Gropper I have consulted Ian Bennett, *A History of American Painting* (London: Hamlin, 1973), p. 197.
- 13 All of these images can be said to have their provenance in Reginald Marsh's *Locomotive* 15. See note 11 above.
- 14 Recent research in Dutch landscape of 'fact' has pointed to the immense sophisticating of visual experience in the ideology of smoothness, transparency and simplicity, much of it related to Calvinist views on the conduct of life. See Eric Jan Sluiter, *Seductress of Sight* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1901), especially for the concept of Visu, from p. 90.



228-2001  
E.D. Rudd, 1972



The work is hard-edged and static. It also seeks to function in an iconic way. Throughout the 1970's various tensions and different subjects are taken up with confident draughtsmanship by Grotfeldt, whose academic training was hostile to painting; Grotfeldt explored almost in the sense of genre subjects what inevitably was a search for the iconic and the representative. This latter requirement had been very visible in the famous 'Sharp Focus Realism' show that had been exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery and later travelled to Holland, becoming subsequently the centrepiece of the Documenta 5.<sup>15</sup> Here it was referred to as Hyperrealism, and was viewed in relation to pop. What emerges from this tendency can be described as the return of the subject as of primary importance. However, the distinction between subject and object that sustained critical aspects of the debate between realism and photography, for example, had the curious effect of eliminating the artist's personality, or making of the expressive will of the artist another kind of object. The capture of the real, either in the form of precisionist or capitalist realism, emphasised visibility at the expense of feeling, leading to the impasse first noted by Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*,<sup>16</sup> the dead-end and boredom of sheer mimesis. As in the early work of Hopper or the Ash Can Realists, there was, through the specific Dutch genre precedents, a danger of eliminating what is strange.

<sup>15</sup> Documenta 5, Kassel, Germany, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> I have used the expanded second edition of 1759.



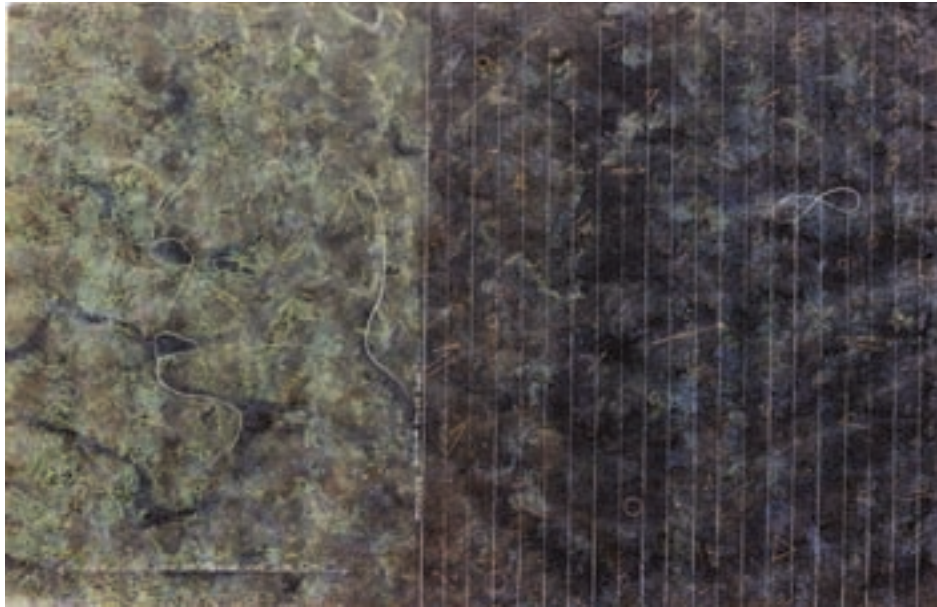
*Sea Bass*, 1981  
Oil on canvas

But even in this overt commitment one can detect struggles in the creative search of Grotfeldt. The image of 'the man of sorrows' allows one to see even at the time of his most highly worked and precise renderings, other expressive pressures and directions.

The lino-cut image of what resembles the well-known iconography of the *Man of Sorrows*, the crowned head with thorns of the *Suffering Servant*, is resonant with Grotfeldt's inner conflicts. Unlike the highly controlled technical drawing in the *Trucker*, or the *Fish* (where the arm of the artist is shown), the use of lino-cut technique by depending on a cutting in and out of the surface, and a play between thin and thick lines, introduces a denser and more weighted surface. The introduction of an explicitly religious icon, and the different technical means moves Grotfeldt away from his graphic exactitude that had made of sharply delineated forms and highly worked representations the almost exclusive aim of his art.

The very familiarity of the image allows for less precise rendering, the problem of the surface becomes very ambiguous because of the chosen technique. One looks both through and at the surface where the traces of the push and pull between the obtuse lines and the transparent areas cause an abstract splaying. Even in the crown of thorns, there is a direct prefiguring of the later biomorphic abstractions. One feels that Grotfeldt is simmering with irreconcilable tensions and even modes of expression. The weight of contrasts is a play between appearance and disappearance.





*Infinite Wisdom*, 1982

This work announces the move that Grotfeldt will make from his version of realism to participation, from mimesis to methexis. The most significantly worked realist images from the period are *The Red Trucks* of 1976, culminating in his large work of an arm holding a fish of 1981. Throughout the 1970's Grotfeldt stayed for the most part in drawing, the female portrait head in profile of 1976 displaying his close attention to detail, especially in the fine feathery line depiction of the 'bobbed hair;' occasionally he works in colour pencil; again, in 1971, one sees his early interest in root and plant shapes. His subject matter goes from traditional portraiture to still life, which is one way to understand *The Red Trucks*, to botany and the solitary religious image of the crowned head. In light of Grotfeldt's later developments, the melancholy associations of this image are dense with some of his own personal tragedy and suffering. Not only does the work of exact portrayal lead to a cul-de-sac, it often masks the inchoate fears and strange strategies of self-protection that seek through method to overcome a profound sense of alienation between the artist and the world, and the concomitant, often erratic, sense of mission to restore the world to coherence by creating one's personal expression, whether through symbolic or other means. The image of sorrow already bespeaks a saturnine element which will find its fullest outcome in the works of a decade later, where Grotfeldt surrenders to the fears, in a sense submitting to the shock of his own creative volte face, the turning



Joseph Beuys: *o.T.*, 1952  
Pencil and gold bronze  
on paper, 14,5 x 7,5 cm  
Van der Grinten Collection,  
Museum Schloss Moyland

*Beuys Will Be Beuys*, 1982





*Death Chart (Excarnation), 1983*

away from the world of things and indeed, what Hofmann would describe as too much mental effort: 'an artist is permitted to do everything. The result is important only; you should not have the feeling of mental effort. Art is empathy, feeling into a thing. If it is mechanical, there is too much brain, not enough vision.'

Grotfeldt had mastered technique and drawing, much of it mechanical and often unfeeling. His response to his own work involved merciless self-appraisal. His commitment to study and art had the rigour of a sincerely believed vocation. From within the early life and background of Grotfeldt nothing indicated such a choice. He has dramatically indicated in conversation that such a choice was an isolation from his family background, as was the deep trauma of being involved in a car crash in which a parent was killed and his wandering around helpless on a dark night, riven with fright. These deep emotional memories would be opened up again, the further he tried to control the world through the artistry of his representations, and the long repressed feelings returned to request of him another openness and even surrender to what he could not understand, not the comfort of religion, but a sense of 'a time out of joint,' in which his own belonging to the world became more and more strange, 'unheimlich,' uncanny and deeply elusive.



*Resurrection, 1984*



Untitled, 1984



Untitled, 1984

One can characterise the decisive shift as a movement in the artist's own self-understanding. The obvious pursuit of a suitable subject returned him to himself. It involved a radical shock, in which the aims of art, as realism, could not be sustained. The conflict between painting and drawing can also be understood as a specific struggle in Grotfeldt's thinking. This involves a different self-understanding, that is to say, a more prophetic element enters his work, from seeing to seer. Grotfeldt takes an urgent turn to the performative, and, one can say, colour. The severely limited palette of the 1970's, especially his use of primary reds and blues, opens into a new world of colour and visual sensitivity. Again, one can remark that he moves away from the object as such, to the space of the object, to the drama of light and shade. By the same route he explores the mystery of darkness, he becomes increasingly involved in an esoteric and alchemical project. His view of the artist transforms his own goals, as he accepts that the particular kind of performative action in which he is engaged, moves him, by analogy, to animistic magic; opens his own clearing for the numinous, and the enigmatic. Grotfeldt returns to the corners of his paintings, to realise the greatest expanse in space and the greatest contraction; he is prepared to look away from the object and abandon the need to see through the picture, a part of realist convention, retained from nineteenth century aesthetic thinking of the picture as a view on the world.



Rembrandt: *The Angel at the Open Grave*, about 1647-48  
Pen-and-ink drawing  
Barnsley Park, Cirencester





*The Temptation of St. Anthony (Entombed)*, 1984

Part of Grotfeldt's dilemma in the early 1980's had been well foreseen in a splendid statement of Hans Hofmann, writing in the 1950's:

"The representational elements are only the vehicle of the super-realistic effect. The super-realistic always confronts us as an emotion. We speak, for example, of the emotional quality of a landscape since the super-realistic confronts us, contained in the effect of a certain thing rather than in its actuality.....

By putting to use our powers of spiritual projection, our emotional experiences can be gathered together as an inner perception by which we can comprehend the essence of things beyond mere bare sensory experience.....

By means of our inner perception, however, we grasp the opposing forces and the coherence of things, and primarily in that manner the essence of things becomes comprehensible to us.

Space sways and resounds: space is filled with movement, with forces and counter forces, with tensions and functions, with the tone of colours and light, with life and rhythm, and the disposition of divine sublimity.....

The quality of the work originates in this transportation of reality into the truly spiritual."<sup>17</sup>

17 Hofmann's teaching notes with corrections and manuscript sketches are on deposit with FIU ( Free International University) archives in Amsterdam; one may consult them by writing to the Secretary of FIU, 123 Lauriergracht, 1016 RK Amsterdam, Holland. These notes date from 1947.





*If I Should Die Before I Wake, 1985*



*Untitled, 1984*



*The Sacrifice, 1985*

Something of the early response to this search for the spiritual in art, and Hofmann's insistence on such goals echo his dependence on Kandinsky, and also a return, often present in American modernism, to surrealist psychic automatism (Masson, Gorky). Hofmann sets out an extravagant understanding of the need for a vigorous handling of the brush,<sup>18</sup> creating a thickness or density of surface, and 'a kind of implosion.'

It has been argued that this too relates to the energy within American society, its constant renewal through an emphasis on extravagant physicality: the 'subject' as 'exaltation' from Whitman to Ginsberg, an emphasis on the action and the gesturalism of the painter carrying with it a commitment to the capaciousness of a society, always in a state of becoming. There is a fascination with this notion of élan, and psychic automatism rooted in the texts of James and the early American response to Bergson (T.S. Eliot 'converted' to Bergsonism in Paris for a short period)<sup>19</sup>. But Hofmann also demands a concinnitas, what Cynthia Goodman has called an 'idea of orchestration,' or, one could say, an aptness for the surface of the picture.

Rosenberg noted as early as 1952 that action painting enabled the artist to encounter his own authentic being, and that was its purpose.

18 For this, see Cynthia Goodman, *Hans Hofmann* (Munich: Prestel, 1990). This includes essays; of special interest is Irving Sandler's 'Hans Hofmann, the dialectical Master', where he argues that, thanks to Hofmann, American painting became distinguished by a new liveliness of surface. See also Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

19 As the footnotes to *The Waste Land* indicate, Eliot had immersed himself in the study of Grail legends, and symbolist literature. He wrote an independent essay on primitive ritual, and studied contemporary anthropology. See also Levy-Bruhl's theory of pre-logical mentality: he saw the 'savage' as 'involved in a mystical law of participation, connecting with his environment.' This has been studied in some detail in Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the work of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

The significance of James and Bergson for early expressionist theorising can be found in Max Raphael, *Die Frühen Schriften*, ed. Patrick Healy and Hans Jürgen Heinrichs, (Vienna: Gesellschaft für Kunst und Volksbildung, 1993). This material furnishes important source discussion for understanding Hofmann's later theorising.



*Magic Dancer, 1985*



*Gifts In the Night, 1989*



*Untitled, 1986*



*Warrior, 1986*



*Levigator, 1987*

The kind of synthesis possible for abstract expressionism, for the stress on planes and pictorial composition, still had as its aim balance. Grotfeldt would later in life refuse the description 'painter', preferring to see himself as a strong attractor, a medium.

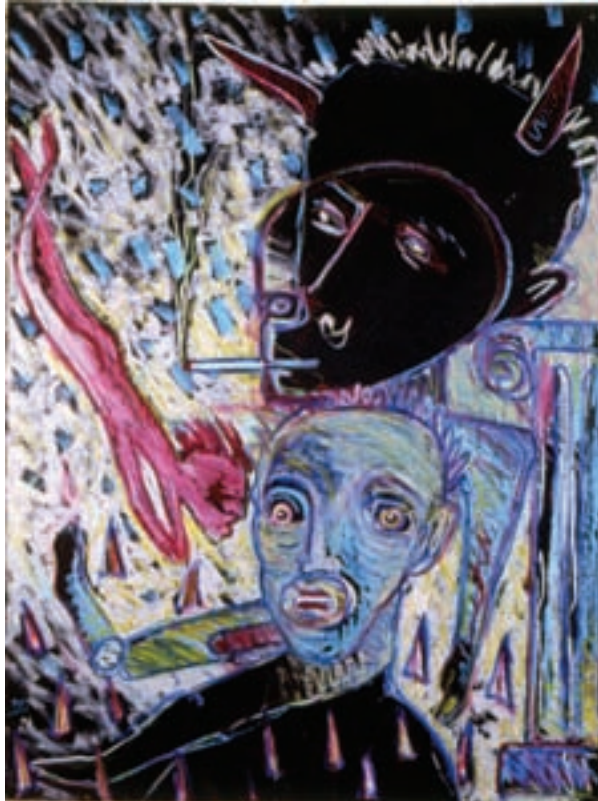
The decisive shift in his thinking began in the early 1980's. One can possibly identify this as a form of animistic magic, using magic as a form of personalised rituals to seek for what one old rune describes as 'opna kontakti med hoyere valsender' (open contact with higher attractors), and against the brash optimism of his own contemporary society where one mode of artistic strategy was for the artist himself to take on the quality of a commodity, or, constructing the personality as an artefact, or, on the other side, to abandon the search for balance in a rapacious practise of the pleasure principle, largely through the exaggerated significance of the pleasure principle itself. Like T.S. Eliot before him, Grotfeldt would have his imagination 'seeded by anthropology'<sup>20</sup>, and would in his serious purpose, transform his whole pictorial world and in the process renew his deepest search.

<sup>20</sup> 'Anthropology seeded his imagination and was giving him a tactical weapon in his literary struggles,' Crawford's phrase, see note 19 above.



*Untitled, 1987*





*The Devil Made Me Do It*, 1986

Of no one is the phrase of Gilles Deleuze more apt than of Grotfeldt: 'ultimately it is only the strange which is familiar and only difference which is repeated.' By compulsion and by obsession Grotfeldt takes an oppositional position to his society, and attempts to make of reality magic and to socialise magic. An indication of his own self-understanding and stated aims can be found in a published note accompanying the exhibition "Virgil Grotfeldt," 19 January – 4 March 1990 at the Tarble Arts Center, College of Fine Arts, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston:

"There exists in my work a relationship with the Symbolist movement of the turn of the twentieth century. The work of Odilon Redon and Victor Hugo specifically interests me. While this relationship exists, I have never denied my educational roots, which are from the Expressionist school of thought. My real interest is in the spiritual and mystical traditions. It is through investigation of these traditions that I began to tap my subconscious as a resource. Often I raise questions in my work for which I have no answers. This manner of working has taken me further away from the more formal issue of art making which tends to lead to art for art's sake.



Odilon Redon: *The Raven*, 1882  
Charcoal drawing,  
40 x 27,9 cm  
Canadian National Gallery,  
Ottawa



Rembrandt: *Temptation of Christ*  
18,5 x 22 cm  
Staatliche graphische  
Sammlung, München



*A Fall From Grace, 1986*

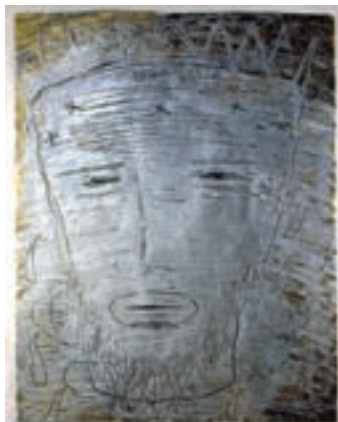
With the exception of paper (the base of most of my work), my medium is unconventional. I am involved with industrial paints and bronze powders; for me these metallic powders symbolise mastery, spiritualism and a relationship to the universe. It is through the use of these materials that I have freedom of expression. I will continue to explore these materials to further tap their visual and symbolic power."

Grotfeldt wrote that statement at almost the very same moment in which he would acquire a new medium, and as a brief resumé of his development, leaving out much of his own work from the 1970's, and acknowledging the importance of the preceding generation of artists working in America: Mark Rothko, Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Adolf Gottlieb, the broad group including Barnett Newman, all of whom owe an enormous debt to the earliest theorising about expression for which Hans Hofmann was one of the principle vehicles, through his teaching and his work. Stephen Polcari has noted, in his recent study on abstract expressionism in America, the importance and self-conscious significance given by artists such as Still, Gottlieb, Rothko, Robert Motherwell,





028-1999  
*Untitled, 1987*



*The King, 1987*



*Untitled, 1986*

inter alia, to myth and anthropology in their own work.<sup>21</sup> Gottlieb, in a radio broadcast in 1943, during an interview, is quoted by Polcari as remarking on the question put to him about 'primitive art': "demonic and brutal images fascinate us today, not because they are exotic..... rather it is the immediacy of their image that draws us in, all primitive expression reveals the constant awareness of painful forces, the immediate presence of terror and fear, a recognition and acceptance of the brutality of the natural world as well as the eternal insecurity of life."

Insecurity, also the fear of poverty. Grotfeldt, with his wife and young children, faced the beginning of the 1980's haunted by other fears than that of the fear of failure; he had depicted the outside world, and where his aim had once been empirical and even mathematical, he now faced another direction, which would take him to mysteries, enigmas, corrosive illness, the need to identify himself with forces and feelings, a fundamental turning and re-tuning of moods of dread and Angst, sometimes resulting in images of direct terror and horror, and sometimes of free-floating and inexplicable dreams, closed in and sealed, without windows, yet full of the most intense presence.

21 Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.



*By Water's Edge, 1987*



Grotfeldt attending the Bien/Kloppenburg exhibit (Oct. 9– Nov. 10, 1987) at the Larry Becker Gallery, Philadelphia (homage to Marcel Duchamp). Meeting with David Lebe (light drawings).



*Burning Crosses*, 1988  
Enamel and bronze powder on paper  
204,4 x 192 cm  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston TX

A question that surely will strike any student of Grotfeldt's work from the 1980's, which can generally be described as the decade of the magico-mystical, is, what has occurred, what has happened, since the earlier cool precisionist renderings? Even a cursory glance at the titles of the work during these ten years indicates a vast new range of reference and subject matter. There is, one might observe, a re-capitulation of what Mario Praz has called the 'romantic agony;' themes of dread, of fear, of death, concepts of terror, and mystery, an entire lexis of the sublime, and even in some ways a confrontation with diabolism. Grotfeldt has alluded to the importance of symbolism in his work, a symbolism which in terms of cultural theory is unthinkable without the specific influence of Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, the life and work of Charles Baudelaire, and re-animated again in the early fascination of T.S. Eliot in the tradition of poetic modernism, and in some very specific way re-translated in surrealism.

The theme of the cross-fertilisation of American and European culture in the 19th century is well epitomised in the reception of Poe by the symbolist poets in France, or indeed the whole tradition of the 'gothic' both as historicist escapism to the medieval world and as encapsulated in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, with its decisive influence on modernist literary sensibilities, Joyce, Eliot, Proust, Beckett.<sup>22</sup>

22 The fantasmogoria of the *Inferno* was more significant than the rest of the *Divina Commedia*, and, with Milton, was the main source for the literary reception of theology.



Mark Rothko: *Ritual*, 1944  
Oil and pencil on canvas,  
53 7/8 x 39 1/2 in.  
Walker Art Center,  
Minneapolis; gift of the  
Mark Rothko Foundation







Large bronze powder works on exhibit, Lamar University Museum, Beaumont, Texas, 1991



Antlerman, 1987



Trial By Error, 1987

The question of what occurs in this decade, is difficult to answer. Clearly Grotfeldt has left the dominant stylistic pre-occupations of his contemporaries behind, and turned to other sources.

To say that he had turned in on himself, and had a stark and fearful presentiment of his own mortality would probably describe the general sense of fatal existentialism in his works. They are dark and brooding, by turns mysterious, and even at a certain point, shapeless. Where before he was obsessed with the precision of description, he now appears to be involved in complex rituals of evocation, not everything he evokes, can be seen, and indeed, one feels that he wants to leave the world behind, surrendering himself, offering his intricate sensitivity to the world, to feeling, to the inchoate and the ambiguous. The term magico-mystical may well cover the descriptive aspect but it would also be equally fruitful to consider the entire decade as his encounter of the sublime. By sublime can be understood Edmund Burke's account in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.<sup>23</sup> Burke founds his analysis, his enquiry, on the relation of pain and pleasure, which – within his empirical psychology – he separates. Burke understands the sense for novelty as being easily exhausted.

Burke cites pain and pleasure as such, which he sees as not necessarily dependent on each other<sup>24</sup> for their existence. However, unlike in pleasure, when it

<sup>23</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London 1759).

<sup>24</sup> Burke, op. cit. pp 47-8.



Edmund Burke (1729–1797)





*Blackbirds Singing In the Night, 1987*



*Small Mysteries, 1988*



*Stag Hunt, 1988*

comes to its satiation and returns us to a previous sort of indifference, in pain, "when we have suffered any violent emotion, the mind naturally continues in something like the same condition, after the cause which first produced it, has ceased to operate."<sup>25</sup>

The passions which are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on pain and danger, and they are the most powerful of all the passions. Indeed, Burke further states that whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.<sup>26</sup>

But if pain is stronger than pleasure, then death is a much stronger idea than pain, not only because almost any pain is preferable to death, but also because even pain has its power as somehow disclosing of death, and yet, if a distance can be gained, and with certain modifications, Burke proposes that feelings of pain may 'delight.'<sup>27</sup>



*Tracking, 1988*

<sup>25</sup> Burke, op. cit. p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Burke, op. cit. pp. 58-9.

<sup>27</sup> Burke, op. cit. p. 60.



Victory, 1989

When these passions are aroused by nature, they lead to astonishment. Burke moves uneasily between his search for an efficient cause, and his awareness of the hermeneutic circle provoked by astonishment in the relation between the external world and the pathic body. This is what Nietzsche later intends in saying that the will to power lies not in being or becoming but in *pathos*. The social pleasures create pathos at a distance. The sublime literally terrorises. It is not substantial, indeed largely indescribable. Burke's vocabulary reaches a kind of delirium, he speaks of vacuity, darkness, steresis, solitude, silence, privations that are great, because terrible, and indeed, it is in the idea of infinity that the mind is filled with that sort of delightful horror which is the most genuine effect and the truest test of the sublime. Pain is always inflicted by a superior power, strength, violence, the terrible and the sublime can blaze out together, like a picture of the horse of the Apocalypse. The sublime hurries us on. The highest achievement of the sublime is astonishment, provoked initially by fear which resembles pain.

"Indeed, terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime."<sup>28</sup>

28 Burke, op. cit. p. 97.



*See No Evil, 1989*

But for something to be terrible, it must also be obscure, keeping things in the dark adds to the sublime and Burke gives an example of the practise so necessary to religion. "Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship. For this purpose too the Druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks."<sup>29</sup> No one understood this better than Milton.<sup>30</sup> "His description of Death in the second book is admirably studied; it is astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive certainty of strokes and colouring he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors:

The other shape,  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable, in member, joint, or limb  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either; black he stood as night;  
Fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell;  
And shook a deadly dart. What seemed his head  
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.

In this description all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Burke, op. cit. p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> Burke, op. cit. p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> Burke, op. cit. p. 102.

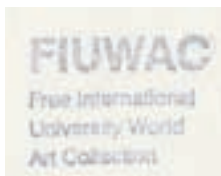


*Phases + Stages, 1989*





046-1999  
*Untitled*, 1990



*Tracking a Spotted Frog*, 1989

Commenting on the difference between poetic images and paintings, Burke thinks they both gain from a judicious obscurity<sup>32</sup> and restating the doctrine *ut pictura poesis*, in these terms he launches the romantic expressive that joins William Turner to Joseph Beuys.

"But painting when he has allowed for the pleasure of imitation can only affect simply by the images it presents; and even in painting, a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to effects of the picture; because the images in painting are exactly similar to those in nature; and in nature dark, confused and uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are clear and determinate."<sup>33</sup>

Reiteration of this central tenet, terror, 'the common stock of everything that is sublime', 'the sublime the concomitant of terror' (p. 115), Burke offers after his account of the causes of the sublime the following summary:

<sup>32</sup> Burke, op. cit. All of Section IV, pp. 101-especially p. 107.

<sup>33</sup> Burke, op. cit., p. 107.

"that the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation. That it is, therefore, one of the most affecting we have. That its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress that no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it."<sup>34</sup>

34 Burke, op. cit., p. 160.



Double Cross, 1990



Ecstatic Shaman with  
Radiant Hair, Panther cave  
American Indian rock  
painting



Joseph Beuys: *Excarnation*,  
1951  
Pencil and bronze on  
paper, 25,6 x 35,6 cm  
Van der Grinten Collection,  
Museum Schloss Moyland



*Crossing Over*, 1991

The development of Grotfeldt's work during the 1980's can be seen in the apparition of two powerfully contrasting pictures.

In 1981 the airy picture of the arm holding a large sea-bass and a collage in gouache containing the picture of Joseph Beuys. There is something spectral and prophetic about the appearance of the photographic image of Beuys, especially, as it coincides with a radical shift in Grotfeldt's procedures and aims as an artist – particularly, when one considers that within a short ten years, Grotfeldt will actively collaborate with a former master's student of Beuys from the Düsseldorf Academy, and paint an astonishing series of collaborative and combined works, which depart so radically from the fetish of individual signature and property, that it led to an enormous creative renewal for both artists, in terms of materials and shared mythopoetic creation; this former student was Waldo Bien, and the collaboration continues into the beginning of the present century.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The first published account of this can be found in my book *Waldo Bien including the series with Virgil Grotfeldt* (Köln: Wienand, 2000).



Clyfford Still: 1945-K, 1945  
Oil on canvas, 127 x 79 cm  
Albright Knox Gallery,  
Buffalo

Note: Silencio

To study the bronze powder works on these pages, cover the Clyfford Still work with your left hand





*Vision*, 1991

The desire to dominate the world in representations has given way in Grotfeldt to a subtle surrender into the attunement of beings. But literally standing as an unexpected guardian at the door, is the figure of Joseph Beuys. In a work from 1982, a photograph of Beuys is placed with the punning title *Beuys will be Beuys*. This again allows one a viewing of Grotfeldt's relation to the current art works in Europe, and points towards highly inexplicable elements of his biographical development.



*Queens Guard*, 1992  
Bronze



*Beekeeper*, 1992

Many of the pictures from the 1980's, which was a period of continuing and intense production by Grotfeldt, contain titles from various sources; one stream being that of Christian iconography, another the fusion of personal autobiography with a 'shamanic search' for ecstatic transformation, oblique and archaic.

Throughout, Grotfeldt is fascinated with the transitive between worlds, a kind of hallucinating tripping which moves back and forth, the very shapes and lines of the field forces captured like the image of sand and magnesium moved by a magnet.

This is something of what Stephen Flowers has described as the 'logographs of concealment'<sup>36</sup> in which the rune master through performativity creates participation, it is the instant of evoked suddenness, where forces that constitute what we can only sense are felt, like walking through a dark room. The search for the numinous, is the search for the invisible in what is visible, what sustains things in their appearance, simply by the operative faith. Magic believes that it works, which itself is the magic. Rituals are performative self-transformation, as in the auspicious itself, which, Tacitus observed – writing about old Germanic runes, and the relation of Odin and the snake to writing – 'auspicia sortesque ut qui maxime obscurant'.<sup>37</sup> This too became a form of sortum.

<sup>36</sup> I have drawn on Stephen Flowers, *Runes and Magic. Magical Formulaic Elements in the older runic Tradition* (New York, Berne, Frankfurt: Peter Lange, 1986, for operatives see pp. 138-139).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Flowers, op. cit., chapter One for literature overview.



*Nymph*, 1993

The runes were mysterious signs and magical marks, certain elements were appropriate; sticks of rowan wood, oak and elder, certain plants, leeks, flax, mistletoe and mandrake.

Current research on rune magic suggests that performativity is the meaning, which always involves the transformation of the rune master's ego to the participatory. This is accomplished by the act of cutting, the magical and operative animus is the ritual itself, in which the 'numina' is invoked; this is the inspiration.

However, this operative activity also involves a hiding, a necessary circum-spection, even the level of intention may remain secret or what the intended effects are, is often woven into the performative action, so that there is a guarded mediumistic sense of the operative being him/herself, woven into the very loom of language, literally spoken from out of silence, the necessary silence of things.<sup>38</sup>

38 One of the best discussions of this intractable material can be found in Giordano Bruno, *Essays on Magic*, for which see the recent translation by Richard J. Blackwell, *Giordano Bruno*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 105-142.



Joseph Beuys: *Queen Bee* (for bronze sculpture), 1958  
Gold bronze, 14,4 x 9,6 cm  
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung  
Basel





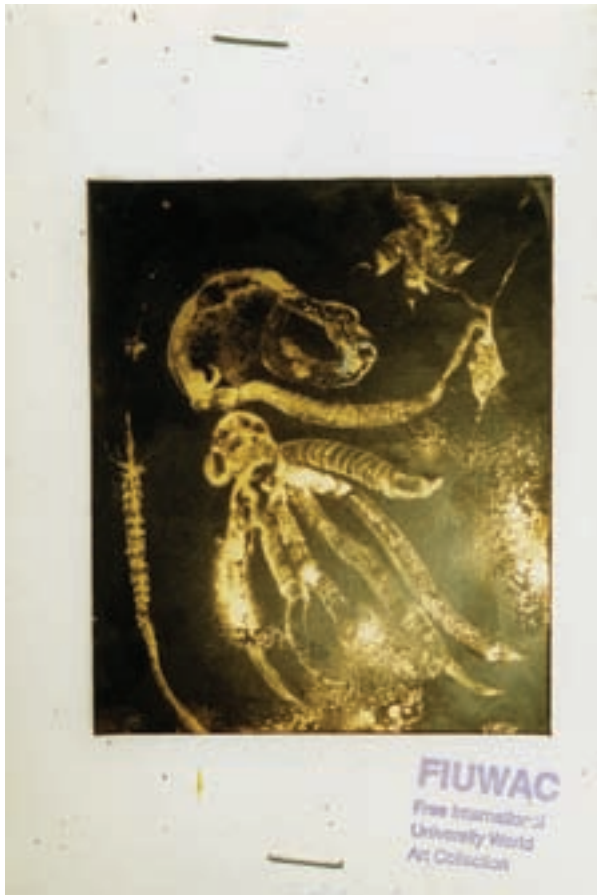
Headdress, 1993

When in conversation with Walter Hopps, Grotfeldt disclaimed being a painter, and suggested instead that he was channelling, acting as a medium, a strong attractor, his self-description remains sturdy and difficult to deconstruct. On the one hand, there is the relatively obvious significance for a multitude of post-war artists of the literature either of esoteric or theosophical inspiration. Even in Madame Blavatsky<sup>39</sup> there was a search for universal mathesis, the philosopher's stone, something, also pursued in C.J. Jung's texts on alchemy<sup>40</sup> that were increasingly widely read in a culture obsessed with dislodging the world of the Ersatz and the endless substitute for experience, that took account of fears, as in homeopathic magic, or self-protection, as in sympathetic magic. However, for the artist, many were directly involved in animistic magic: thus the importance of the talisman or the amulet.<sup>41</sup>

39 Blavatsky can be seen as a reformer of freemasonry with highly wrought versions of Rosicrucian neo-platonic theory. Rudolf Steiner can be seen as a break-away from this 'reform' in freemasonry.

40 C.J. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 2nd edition (London: Routledge (reprint), 1993).

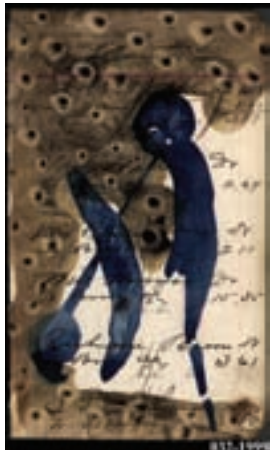
41 Joost A. Meerloo, *Intuition and the Evil Eye* (Wassenaar: Servire, 1971). Meerloo suggests that fear of the evil eye also represents fear of death. He notes that the Mexican belief that carrying an 'ojo de venado' ( a deer eye) protects against the 'mal ojo' (oculus fascinus). The 'fascination' of the image is often cataleptic.



018-1999  
Above Sea Level, 1998

Not only is there a searching for forms, but also a relaboration of time in Grotfeldt's experience. This initially appears as aggression. Jean Genet once remarked "in order to achieve significance, every work of art has to patiently and carefully descend the stairs of millennia, and fuse, if possible, into the timeless night populated by the dead, in a manner which allows the dead to identify themselves in this work." Because of the commitment of art history to a version of 'progress,' this is often seen as a deliberate form of archaism or even a flight from the real, which is meant to be more and more dominated by the technological. The poetry of making is placed under the domination of certain rational ideology, which masks real conflicts, both individual and societal, and requires an emblematic mask for the abstractions and levelling, as in the crude espousal of abstraction, where the form system is taken as homogenous; artistic making, then, is understood as either the imitation of what is there, the given of a ready-to-hand world, or, the portrayal of a contradiction between fixed forms with contents that are developing, or, developing forms and static contents.<sup>42</sup>

42 I have drawn on the Bollingen Foundation publication of Max Raphael's *Prehistoric Cave Paintings*; however, this needs to be supplemented by the superior recensions in Max Raphael, *Prähistorische Höhlenmalerei*, with the essays of Werner Drewes and Bruckner (Cologne: Thunker Verlag, 1993). Drewes provides extensive notes and bibliography.



032-1999  
Untitled, 1999



Carboneum



fossil fern "Sphenopteris carboniferous"





In the carbon period (350–280 million years ago), the landmass consisted of three continents: Angara (north), Laurasia and Gondwana (South). The ancient swamp forests in the coastal areas are today the layers of coal (carbon).



Ogata Korin: round fan with painting of bracken, early eighteenth century  
Colours on paper



**The making of the Death Room Interior**  
Waldo Bien 1985 at his studio in Amsterdam, here discussing sculptural process with Michael Rutkowski.



Waldo Bien: *Death Room Interior*, 1985  
Interior carved in coal (H5), iron, wood, pigment on canvas, sizes not specified  
Waldo Bien Archive



Bags of coal dust in the studio at Heights Blvd., Houston, Texas, and first brushstroke on paper



## "Laboratorium Carbonum"

After 1990 Grotfeldt began working simultaneously on the large works with bronze powders and was experimenting with coal dust. There was a shift of iconography towards the botanical and a transformation of the dark scale towards an understanding of light.

## Working with Grotfeldt

FIUWAC 020-1999. One of the early works in coaldust H5, 1991.

Note: After a visit to Berlin (1990), where I had handed over a bag of coal dust to Grotfeldt (which was left over from the sculptural process of the Death Room Interior), he secretly started working with it, after his return to Houston. During phonecalls when he would discuss works, he was fairly vague if I asked him whether he had started to work with it yet, saying things like, 'I'm experimenting,' 'I'll give it a go,' or, 'Let's see'. The first use of the coal dust I saw – which comes from a layer of coal named H5, from the German coalmine Fürst Leopold Wulfen in Dorsten, at a depth of 815 m below sea level – was in a series of plant drawings he did. Later, when putting together the Grotfeldt block for FIUWAC (1999) I discovered this drawing. It shows the iconography of the pre-carbon works in the carbon medium.

Waldo Bien



# BERLIN

1990

Waldo Bien

Some notes on time and place:

The end of the so called "Cold War" which had been holding the post 2<sup>nd</sup> World War World in its frightening grip.

To celebrate the unification of Germany's East and West, some East Germans spontaneously cut out the old Socialist emblem of their flag. Paper flags like the one below could be found on the streets all over Berlin.



H. Bien  
Trudos Foliores 467



Kloppenburg  
(K) "design for a flag" after the collapse of the Soviet Union







Waldo Blum Visage Jostfeldt

# Visiting Waldo Blum in his studio in Berlin

1990 Jostfeldt visit to Berlin shortly after the fall of the wall. Studio in the Adalbert shape Berlin Kreuzberg, close to the so called "Death Zone", the space between the two walls, guarded by the Vopos (Volkspolizei). It was there that Jostfeldt found a bound note book, a trigonometric journal, dating from 1952. on this he made the footnotes to the Death Room in letters and later series such as Winter flowers.

It was the beginning of an extensive series of works on lined ledger paper in which the cartoon was explored as a medium.



Rudolf Steiner plant observing around 1900.



Immanuel Klein  
The Inner ear 1998  
"allabaster" - 26cm high.  
FIUWAC NR 088-1999



## Franklone

0 zone (zero)

Der "Todesstreife"

← (Death Zone)

People who tried to cross here were shot at indiscriminately. The botanical variations which could be found there where exceptional



Wall at the end of Adalbert shape where the studio was situated. Waldo Blum with composer and sculptor Immanuel Klein. Also visible, a breach in this section of the wall, possibly the first.





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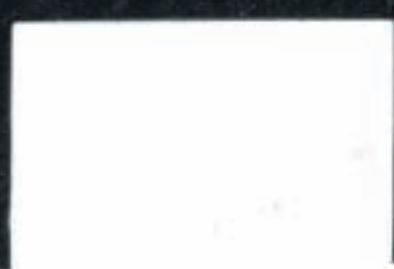
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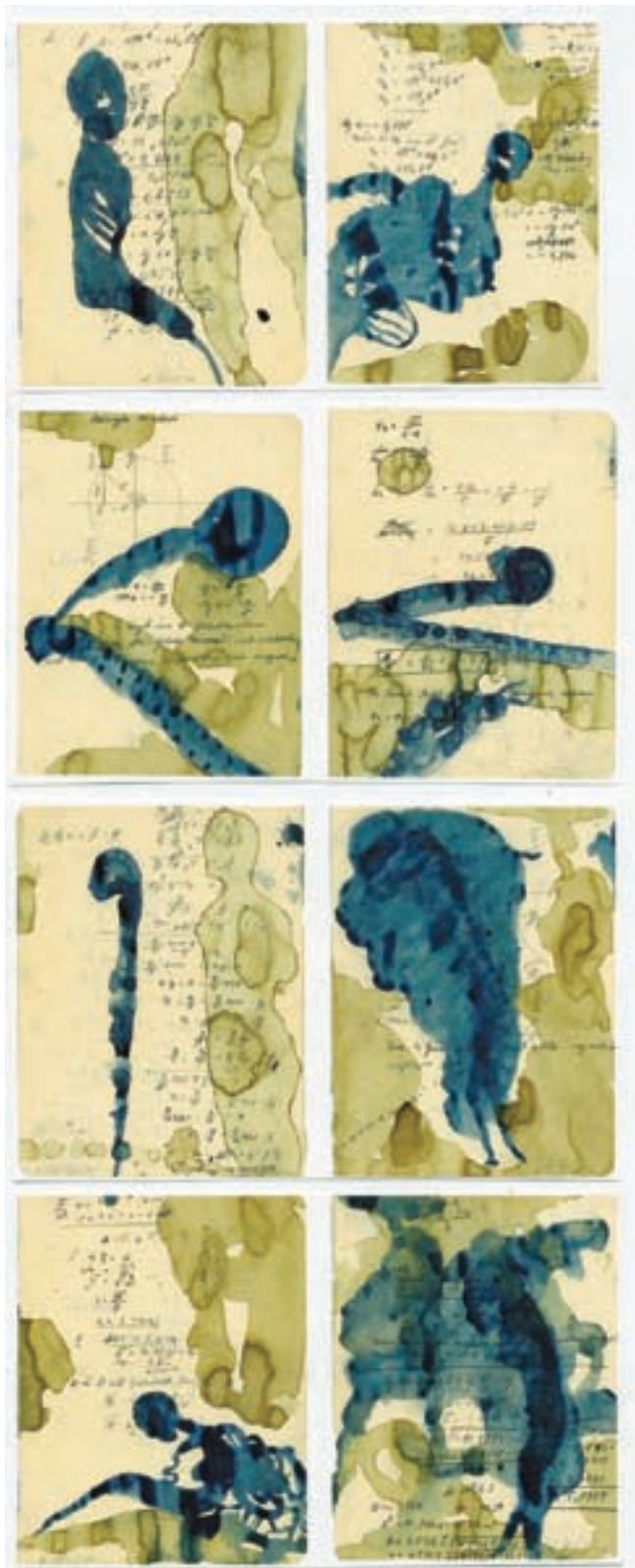
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ILFORD HP5 PLUS









Footnotes To the Death Room Interior, 1994

The world of the operator too needs to be understood, and indeed, much of the key to this understanding has been provided by the research written by Max Raphael during his final years in New York from 1944 to his suicide in 1952 (14 July), whilst planning a return to France to see the caves at Les Combarelles, Font-les-Gaumes, Trois Frères and Lascaux. In his celebrated analysis of the 'battle', in the ceiling of Altamira, he offers a brilliant exposition of the 'magic of the hand' and the importance of magic for artistic practise.<sup>43</sup> Raphael interprets the ceiling as a battle conflict between hinds and bison: "it deals with a conflict between hinds and bison, with magic, fighting and the propiation of dead animals." Raphael offers a possible interpretation that there are two different powers within one clan in conflict, namely spiritual magical power, and the physical political power.

"All this may appear chaotic to us, but in the eyes of paleolithic man there was nothing more forceful than the power of magic and propiation."

43 Max Raphael, *Prehistoric Cave Paintings*, Bollingen Foundation, 1945, pp. 20-5.



Box containing the D.R.I. footnotes, 1994  
Coal dust and bronze powder on wood

"During the paleolithic age, the animal was the measure of all things – but only through the intermediary of the human hand. Animals had forced man to follow them through the valley and mountains in search of food, before man was able to pen and protect the animals and thus dominate and exploit them without killing them. Between those two stages man had emerged from his zoological enslavement to animals and laid his hands upon them. When the artistic imposition of the hand followed the magical one, a higher stage of human emancipation was achieved. Man began to experiment with his powers, he was no longer subjected to the animals, but he was still subjected to his own spiritual means of domination over the animal world. Everything indicates that this subjection was complete."

The paleolithic artist was a sorcerer, today the artist is lucky not to be a pariah, in Raphael's powerful conclusion, he writes about the hand:



Enzo Cucchi: *luc'é*, 1987  
Pencil on paper,  
29,5 x 21,2 cm  
Private collection





045-1999  
Untitled, 1994

"Finally, few of those who today use the term hand in connection with verbs denoting taking in possession ('raise one's hand against,' 'force one's hand,' 'lay hands upon') suspect that this usage originates in the magic significance of the hand in the paleolithic age, and that the historical cause of the golden section can be found there...." Comparing Géricault's horses with the horses at Font-de-Gaume, "we see not only the progress that has been made since the old stone age in the representation of space and composition, but also the Faustian relation of the finite individual to the infinite universe and the division of modern man into being and thinking, consciousness and unconsciousness, in brief, we can see social isolation and madness as the acquired fate of the artist".<sup>44</sup>

44 Max Raphael, op. cit., p. 25.





042-1999  
*Untitled*, 1994



As Raphael further contends that, because the art of creation supplies more than that supplied by reality or by social consciousness, there is a release to the search for enduring unfolding; the unfolding leads also to concrete differentiation, there is a need to liberate any closed system of 'objective' meanings and meaningful things from the different, if united, world of subject and object. The notion of the artist's will has to be the site for such expressive unfolding, although the expression itself is ambiguous.

Again in Raphael's words:

"every individual form flows from the same undivided unity, and determines the following form just as it is determined by the whole, thus performing at least three different functions: it unfolds the unity of the theme, prepares the next step of the development and represents the whole. But as a form it is more than a synthesis of these three functions, it is a structure, a representation of its own count, to wit, the likeness of the whole which irreplaceably corresponds to its own particular local value". There is the possibility for the artist of 'the blending of emanation-like self-notion with other determinations.' Not all of the aesthetic achievements of the image maker can be placed under determinate concepts.



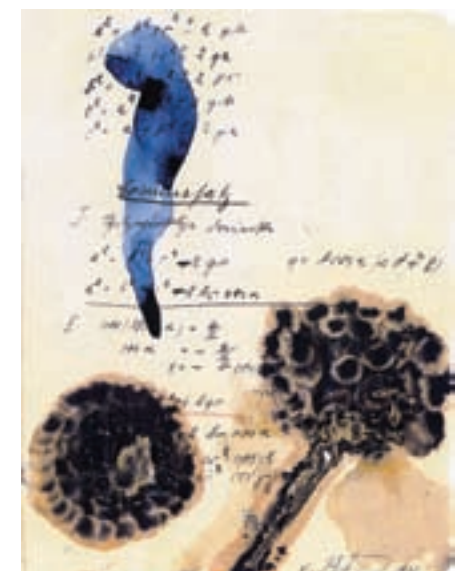
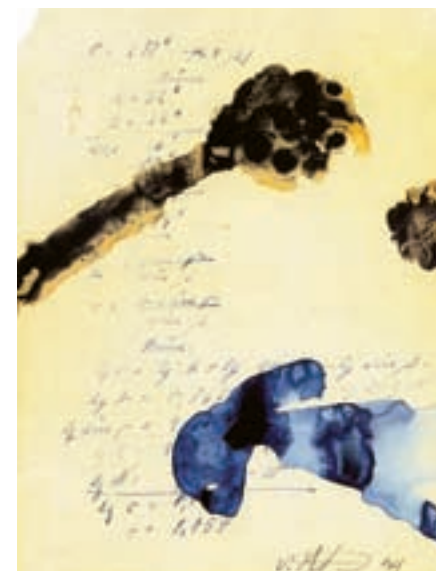
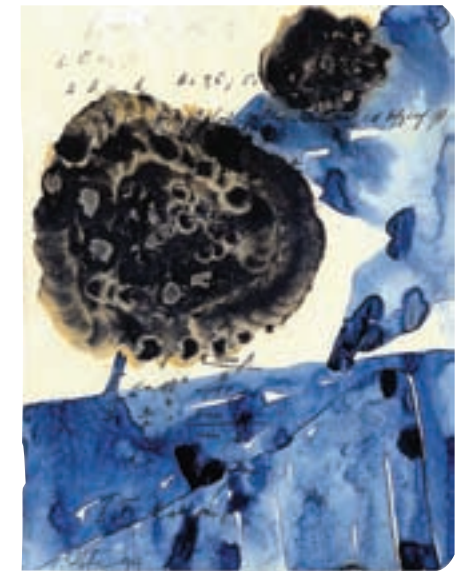
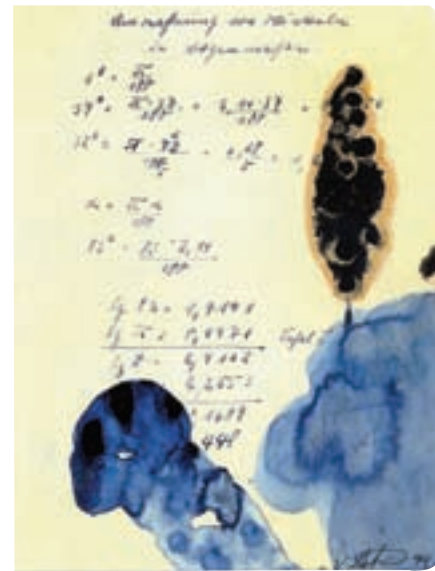
Terry Winters: *Good Government*, 1984  
Oil on canvas,  
ca. 257 x 348 cm  
Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York  
(detail)





Wintergreen, Photo by K (Kloppenburg), 1951





Series *Winterflowers*, 1994  
Collection NOG-SNS Reaal Fonds  
(in dispute)

**Note on: Collection NOG/SNS REAAL <sup>FONDS</sup> (IN DISPUTE)**

The designation 'in dispute' is not part of the running title of the work, but refers to an ongoing correspondence in which a contested claim has been placed in the public domain by the artists Virgil Grotfeldt and Waldo Bien. The correspondence has been underway for almost six years. The artists have consistently drawn attention to their argument that the acquisition of their works took place under misleading and false representations. When this was brought to the notice of the relevant parties they initially did not receive any disavowal or rebuttal. Only after a publication of the claim following an exhibition in Recklinghausen did they receive some staggered and ill-informed legal correspondence, which had the strategic intention to dissuade them from issuing their complaints in the future, except under the threat of an interdict. In the correspondence, the artists continued to revert to their original claims, pointed to broader ethical and moral issues, and outlined the possibility of an equitable remedy. They contested whether proper title was held where substantial promissory undertakings, at the origin of the acquisition, with its various entailments, and in which they were bona fide agents, or could be upheld, given the persistent and flagrant breach of the promissory entailments. They invited the relevant parties and their lawyers to enter into adequate research to discover the quid facti of their claim, whatever further determinations might be

made (quid juris). To what end all the material available in the archive of the F.I.U. Amsterdam, correspondence and other material has been available to public inspection since the course of the years of the dispute, and my own research also confirms that they were not the only ones to be so wronged.





Series *Léger*, 1994/95  
Collection NOG-SNS Reaal Fonds  
(in dispute)





Studio Heights Blvd., Houston, Texas, 1995, showing first long brushstrokes

The various images of the 1980's can be divided for the purpose of this study into various groups. The issue of affinity and bonding is also central to Grotfeldt's magical practise. They may be classed into groups around specific Christian rituals and myths, baptism and resurrection, into such composite iconographic references as the stage hunt, or works with the devil in the title as *see no evil*, *devil dancer*, or in another division, magic in general, *tracking a spotted frog*, the series of *the small mysteries*, and overlapping with the shamanic, which includes at the end of the decade 1991 *Shaman's staff*.



from series *Fire in the Hole*, 1995



*Untitled*, 1995  
Acrylic and bronze powder on canvas  
163 x 112 cm  
Private collection

The image of the *shaman's staff* allows an initial approach to the world of Grotfeldt. In the magazine *Paleo Psycho Pop*, reviewing an exhibition on shamanism held in Finland in 1999, Brendan O' Byrne, in a lucid review article, drew together many of the themes around shamanism, as a living practise.

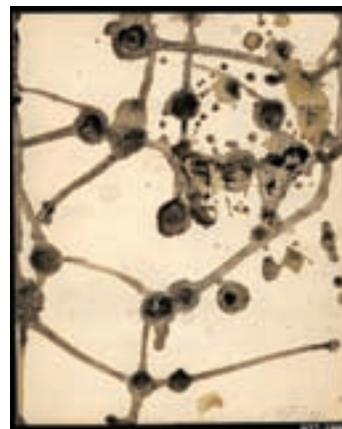
Recent research suggests that the principle meaning of shaman is a voyager, one who moves between two worlds, the world of family and community, and the spiritual 'world' of the gods, the dead, guardian spirits, and mythical creatures. Brendan O' Byrne has written about this journey that:

"important and vexing questions for the community would have their solution in a 'trip' to the spirit realm. The shaman in a state of heightened consciousness would travel to the spirit realm and consult with the dead and the guardian spirits..... another important role for the shaman is healing. The mental and physical demands are hard, the shaman has to bear the great 'weight of the spirit', his or her life is one of sacrifice for others."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Paleo Psycho Pop* (PPP), no. 7, February 1999.



041-1999  
*Untitled (Mexico)*, 1995



037-1999  
*Belladonna*, 1995



The occult and esoteric are the means by which the shaman invokes auxiliary spirits, so there is a protection for the sick soul being assisted; the voyage of the soul is also an important dimension, as is the undergoing of pain and illness to return and assist the community. The theurgic practises, the taking of strong herbs, plants, to assist with transformation is often part of the shaman's specialist knowledge. Even, and differently to what one might expect, the stones, on which pictographs were incised or drawn, have sonic and living qualities; everything is alive, alive with forces and spirits, that can be propitiated and which one must enter, even sometimes, into conflict. There is often a vocational urgency, some people are called, despite their own will to act as contacts and guides in the spirit realm, this realm is immensely close and distant in a complex way, as distant as listening to one's own voice which essentially can only be felt. Whether it is correct to say that there is a life force or *élan vital* in all things is difficult to define. The shaman is expected by exercising all physical and mental activities, by taking drugs, dancing, playing especially the 'drum,' through rapture and trance, to even help capture a soul before it departs for another realm.





051-1999  
Untitled, 1995



By transforming himself, the shaman transforms the world, often this transformation requires changing shapes and taking on the spirits of animals, some of which the shaman identifies with closely: "the identification of man's nature with that of the animals, the interchangeability of the two forms of existence is a characteristic phenomenon of the two forms of the spiritualism of the hunting culture.

..... there is often an initiatory trial symbolic ally comprising the suffering death and resurrection of the neophyte, and the tree symbol.

There are ancilliary elements, equipment which is associated uniquely to the shaman's work, for example, a headdress, skirt, necklace, drums, rattles, even statues."

According to the entry in the *Encyclopedia of World Art*<sup>46</sup> 'Shamanistic art is not concerned with realistic representation, but seeks the sign or symbol.' Juha Pentikainen<sup>47</sup> suggests that the first written occurrence of the word shaman or Semah: "occurs in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and by the priest Avvakum, a monk who had been banished to Siberia in 1654. During his exile he became familiar with the healing rites of the Evenski (one of the Manchu-Tungusian people) who referred to their religious leaders as Semah:ns."

46 *Encyclopedia of World Art*, sub. Art. 'Shamanism'. McGraw Hill, Vol. XIII, 1968.

47 Juha Pentikainen, Toemi Jaatinen, Ildikó Lehtinen and Marjo-Riita Saloniemi, *Shamans* (Tampere: Tampere Museums, Finland, 1998).

It is possible that, etymologically, the word may be related to the Indo-European verb root 'sa', meaning 'to know,' thus the French **savoir** (a knowing of seeing), **saber** (Spanish); it is also possible that it is cognate with the Sanskrit *sramana*, meaning a beggar monk and ascetic, ultimately from Pali *Semahna*. Juha Pentikainen identifies several elements of great significance in understanding this ancient and complex religious experience, firstly that the shaman is a 'traveller,' one who mediates between the world of family and community and the spiritual world of the gods, the dead, the guardian spirits. For this journey knowledge of pharmacology is important, one might suppose that hallucinogens and the specific properties of plants capable of invoking psychedelic experience is essential. This allows of immediacy without reflection, an entering into a real presence. The auratic and the numinous require participation, for which the soul must be clear, i.e., as Brendan O' Byrne remarks in his article: *psyche delos*, from the Greek: clear souled.

Master pharmacologists and skilled at bone setting, as they are, there are nevertheless grades of power for the shamans. But 'healing' is a highly significant part of their practise. There are of course 'black' shamans and 'white ones,' and some are said to have the power to raise the dead and persuade them to



*All This Must Fit That Pink*, 1995

attack the living. In the Siberian view as studied first hand by Pentikainen, who knows a number of living shamans, there is the 'painful gift of shamanising.'

Pentikainen outlines part of the belief systems and rites: the world had a number of layers, an upper world beyond the stars which are believed to be holes in the sky, a terrestrial world, and a subterranean world. The bear and the reindeer are associated with the heavenly. Maps are made, pictures of the shaman's road. Without an intimate knowledge of the topography of the various realms, the shaman cannot act as a spirit guide. The sacred space of the shaman hut (chum or yurt) reproduces the tripartite structure of the realms. The base of the chum is the axis mundi. Fire is maintained in the hearth throughout the practise of the rites, and when someone is being healed, the smoke goes out through the chimney, the whole cosmos feels the process.



North Pole, 1998



Untitled, 1983

"The headdress the shaman wears is part of the full ritual dress, and contains an image of the model of the world. The hoop expresses the enclosed space of earth-bound mortal humans. The cross bands that intersect as arches represent the cardinal directions and seasons of the year. The antler expresses the cosmic vertical and usually has multiple ribbons hanging down, these represent the shaman's path in the other world. The deer's antlers represent the sun-deer, one of the main characteristics in the myth of the heavenly hunt, as well as the mythical deer which is usually the shaman's main spiritual helper."<sup>48</sup>

The issue of shamanism has been understudied for the case of Beuys, and indeed the whole magico-esoteric tradition which he directly engages from

Rudolf Steiner.<sup>49</sup> Beuys's series of watercolours, done in the 1950's, allude specifically to both the antlered stag, and *In the Shaman's house*, much of his identification with specific<sup>50</sup> animals and materials should be seen in the light of these experiences and also his search for a form of 'cosmic rennovatio'.<sup>51</sup>



Twombly's Palatable Castor Oil # 1, 1995

48 I have depended throughout on Brendan O' Byrne's article for PPP, no. 7, Dublin 1999.

49 For this see: Wolfgang Zumtack, *Über das Denken bei Joseph Beuys und Rudolf Steiner* (Basel: Wiese Verlag, 1995).

50 For this see: *Early Watercolours*, Joseph Beuys, with an introductory essay by Werner Schade (Munich: Schirmer Art Books, 1998).

51 For this see my article on cosmic renovation, PPP. no. 7.



030-1999  
Untitled, 1996



In *Shamanic Motifs in Pecos River Rock Art*, Solveig A. Turpin draws attention to the interpretation of the coherence of "the preliterate artists of Los Tres Rios, who relied on a symbolic system, a pictorial language made up of a number of coherent elements that may seem fantastic or grotesque to modern eyes."<sup>52</sup>

A shaman's ability to transmogrify, to assume animal form and characteristics, is the belief most clearly depicted in the Pecos River cave paintings, substantiating their interpretation as religious art that originated in the shamanic tradition.

One of the most prominent appearances in the Pecos River iconography is the deer. Turpin suggests an association between the cyclic growth of the antler as a reasonable analogue for re-birth: "the association between antlers and rebirth may explain the number of racks found in burial contexts in Texas."<sup>53</sup>

Antlers are one of the dominant motifs in petroglyph complexes in Northern Mexico where they are incised into prominent rock outcrops that may have served as lookout stations".

52 This material can be followed in the periodical *Shaman's Drum*, especially the winter issue of 1993.

53 *Shaman's Drum*, Winter Issue, 1993, p. 35.



*Healing Plants* on exhibit in the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, 2000, in Waldo Bien's botanised Chinese frames

In her research Turpin follows the guiding research of Dr. Thomas Campbell who suggested in 1958 the elaborate paintings recorded visions experienced during trance state, induced by eating mescal beans – another plant suggested is peyote – 'although the drum is often more significant than narcotics.'

Dr. W. Newcomb was the first to weave various strands of interpretation together and was the first to identify the central characters as shamans, hypothesising that their art was the way of indicating to the uninitiated what they had encountered during their ecstatic trance.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the 1980's we can see whole clusters of images from Grotfeldt which evoke and allude to his 'shamanic' activity, the appearance of a magician's headdress, the spectral figures of shadowed shamans with antlered heads, the dominance of the antler as a motif, something of the understanding of the visionary and ecstatic, portrayed in the work of 1987 entitled *Rapture and On a Wing and a Prayer* of the same year, and the *Small Mysteries*, a series of 8 images of the following year, 1988. These images can be seen as being generated out of a series of works from 1985, *Magician's Hat*, *Night Blessed*.

<sup>54</sup> This account follows Turpin's research findings. *Shaman's Drum*, Winter Issue, 1993.



017-1999  
*Untitled*, 1997





047-1999  
*Healing Plants, 1997*

One can see the 'map' from the work of 1982. Motifs like the twig-antlered head and the single image of the shaman's Staff continue into the early 1990's (1991). Parallel to this is the spread of imagery dealing with witchcraft and diabolism, and some specific references to liturgical and ritual practises of some Christian religions. The curious struggle in Grotfeldt's development is that animistic magic gives way to the conflict with the diabolic, and this continues all the way through the late 1990's, while finally the healing plants and the motifs of flowers take over. Thus, the internal struggles in Grotfeldt's art can be seen in terms of forces that are unnameably being dealt with and envisioned, that these struggles occupied his greatest psychic and spiritual energy for almost 15 years, culminating in the series *13 Steps to Satan*, and that there is a release in recuperation and wholeness at the end of the 1990's. It will be necessary to deal with the issue of the healing plants later.



*Memories and Transformations*, 1997  
Coal dust on Braille text  
52,2 x 28 cm



In Burke's sublime, the Miltonic figure of the Prince of the Angels, dominates his conception of the sublime. It is the image of the fallen angel, who, because of pride, rebels. The immensely complex iconography generated by Milton's text has been studied in some detail, also its particular influence, specifically at the end of the eighteenth century, and as a central theme of the romantic sublime, where via American and French influence it also migrates to modernist writing.<sup>55</sup>

Within the study of demonology there is considerable confusion about the role of Satan, or indeed, the Devil, some of this is purely linguistic, because of the complex transmission of biblical texts from Aramaic to Hebrew, from Greek to Latin, thus there are various designations, ranging from Satan as enemy,

<sup>55</sup> See Roland Mushat Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts*, Princeton University Press, 1978.

文久·哥尔特菲德将自己归类为法国20世纪初的象征主义。煤炭的形成深深感动着文久，他以煤炭粉末或铜粉末为媒介，通过与胶水的接触，用其重力及偶然性去解释其本质。他常常表现可以辨别的形象，如花及假设的轮廓，更多的为具有精灵的生命形象。



022-1999  
*Untitled*, 1997



adversary, to diabolos in Greek to later terms such as Lucifer, bearer of light, to devil and the host of demons, which then migrates into sea monsters, and broad categories of the grotesque. Recent research has emphasised the importance of the 'non-canonical' text of the book of Enoch for iconography. Indeed, the complexity of the devil belongs to the 'imagelessness' of God. However, iconography fixed these imaged-non-imagibles early within the Christian tradition. The iconography of the devil mostly belongs to the early medieval period, and seems, as for example in the image in Chartres, of the malign devil tormenting Job, to have consolidated its main features from the end of the thirteenth century. This is listed by Luther Link in his work *The Devil: a Mask without a Face*.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, despite his reservations of diffusionist models, certain characteristics become immediately embedded, some deriving from association with the goat: horns, hoofs, greasy tail and hairy body. The

56 Luther Link, *The Devil: A Mask without a Face* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).



China: Luo Pin (Qing):  
*Lichee Tree*  
 Luo Pin (1733–1799), who took the name Liangfeng, was a native of Shexian, Anhui, who spent much of his life in Yangzhou where he sold paintings. Another of the 'Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou,' he was specially known for his paintings of ghosts, though he also took as his themes human figures, landscapes, flowers and bamboos.





theme of the Arcadian wild man which also became important for the state of nature arguments, panic marriage, forms of primitivism and nakedness without genitals, open mouth, large prominent teeth, hoofs, claws, eagle talons, the wings of bats.

It is also in the Middle Ages that the more generalised notion of daimon, and demons as microbes or as succubus, develop as important rationalisations. Not only is there the image of the devil, as the fallen angel, the romantic rebel, but also of the corrupt race of devils that were born of perverted liaison with mortals, because of lust. This, according to Link, is derived by Tertullian from the Book of Enoch, whence also the notion of an abyss of fire.

The complexity derives from the lack of clarity in patristic theology as to whether the devil was created by God to punish men for their sins, and thus himself remains unpunished, or whether, in a more dualistic world, the devil was an independent force which chose to do evil, having fallen from grace through the sin of pride, which was his rebellion.

*Inside Out, 1997*



*Just Outside the Edge, 1997*

*As I Go Wandering, 1997*

### True Life Story

1997– The 'dogshit paintings' footnote:  
Coal dust, river clay and pigments on canvas

These three canvases were on exhibit during the Grotfeldt show at the Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, in 1997. During the opening night, a client was heard declaring to a friend that he had just bought one of the pictures. Someone then Umm-hed: 'Don't tell me you bought one of those dogshit paintings!' The sale was cancelled out of loss of prestige. Since that time, Virgil and I always refer to these paintings as 'the dogshit works'.  
W.B.



JOSEPH BEUTS

7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)  
548 West 22nd Street, NYC

Five trees—grape, maple, Bradford pear, spirea, and oak—planted adjacent to five basalt columns. This is a continuation of a project which Beutis began in 1982. His plan was to plant 7000 trees in Kansas, each grown with a basalt stone approximately four feet high. This is a permanent installation, featuring design attention to continue the project beyond Kansas.

Photo: Bill Jacobson

On Center for the Arts







1997: Grotfeldt moving from Houston, Texas, to New York. Several different studios, Manhattan and Brooklyn (White Street). From the window of his domicile in Manhattan he had an outlook on the Beuys trees from the project *7000 Oaks*, Documenta Kassel



Documenta VII, Kassel, 1982, Museum Fridericianum. Under the guarding eye of Joseph Beuys and onlookers, FIU members Johannes Stüttgen and Carl Giskes are making preparations for the planting of the first of 7000 oaks

View at Grotfeldt exhibition at Jason McCoy Gallery, New York, Nov. 4 – Dec. 6, 1997. Grotfeldt (left) discussing works with Kloppenburg. Another collaborative working session, meeting 6 (page 128) took place in Houston shortly after this exhibit, with Kloppenburg involved



K

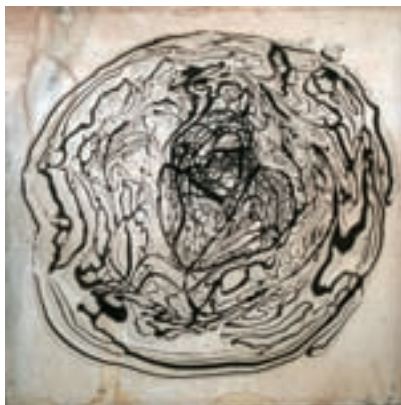
Despite Link's compelling observations one can point to a consolidation, especially in the case of Florence, to a figuring of the enigma of evil, and so there is a development of a specific bestiary; certain animals are associated with the demonic: the bat, the wolf, the frog, the owl and the bear and lion. The devil is also more monkey- or simian- than goat-like, clearly established by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel (in Padua).

Further it can be shown that much of the diabolic and infernal imagery was also to be found in the cataloguing of witchcraft.

One can also point to limited iconographical elements such as the choice of colours, initially green, blue and brown; although in the Fra Angelico fresco in cell 31 in the convent of San Marco one finds a glowing orange devil.



010-1999  
K (Kloppenburg): *Painting On Silk*, 1959



091-1999  
K (Kloppenburg): *Paintings On Silk*, 1959



089-1999



234-2001  
K (Kloppenburg): *Artvocado Rune Platvorm Portrait Of the Man Of Sorrow*, 1997



ARTCHIVE FOR  
THE FUTURE

KLOPPENBURG

Grotfeldt's visit to the atelier of Jacobus Kloppenburg (1930) turned out to have more fateful consequences than could have been foreseen. Thanks to Grotfeldt's relationship with Walter Hopps, the founding director of the Menil Collection in Houston, the latter became aware of the ongoing situation in Amsterdam with respect to the 'artchive for the future.' When he was approached by the indefatigable supporter and protector of the archive, Waldo Bien, he was the first historian of contemporary art to directly intervene in its rescue. His letter is printed in full below. As the city of Amsterdam threatened the entire work with destruction, Hopps, with his enormous experience and reputation, underlined its significance. His letter was both a statement and a warning message. He watched the situation closely, even as in 1997, a few weeks before the planned visit by Hans van der Grinten of the Museum Schloss Moyland, with a view to taking over the archive and saving it, the Amsterdam atelier was brutally cleared and stored in containers. Others have since added their names to the increasing protests against the treatment of Kloppenburg's life work. There has been a bizarre stand-off between the city of Amsterdam, Kloppenburg, members of the FIU A'dam, critics and supporters around the world, which has resulted in a protracted correspondence with Kloppenburg's personal representative in Amsterdam, Waldo Bien. It has involved the Ministry of Culture, international critics, and museum curators, and still is the subject of an ongoing threat, which has never been rescinded, of destruction.

A full study of the life and work of K is in the final stages of completion. The initial research was generously funded by Triodos Bank, and the book will be presented with an exhibition on the 14th of October 2004. It is still possible at this 'late hour' that the city and administration of Amsterdam will resolve outstanding issues with the implementation of the solution proposed by K and Waldo Bien as presented through their legal advisor Dolf Rueb in correspondence.

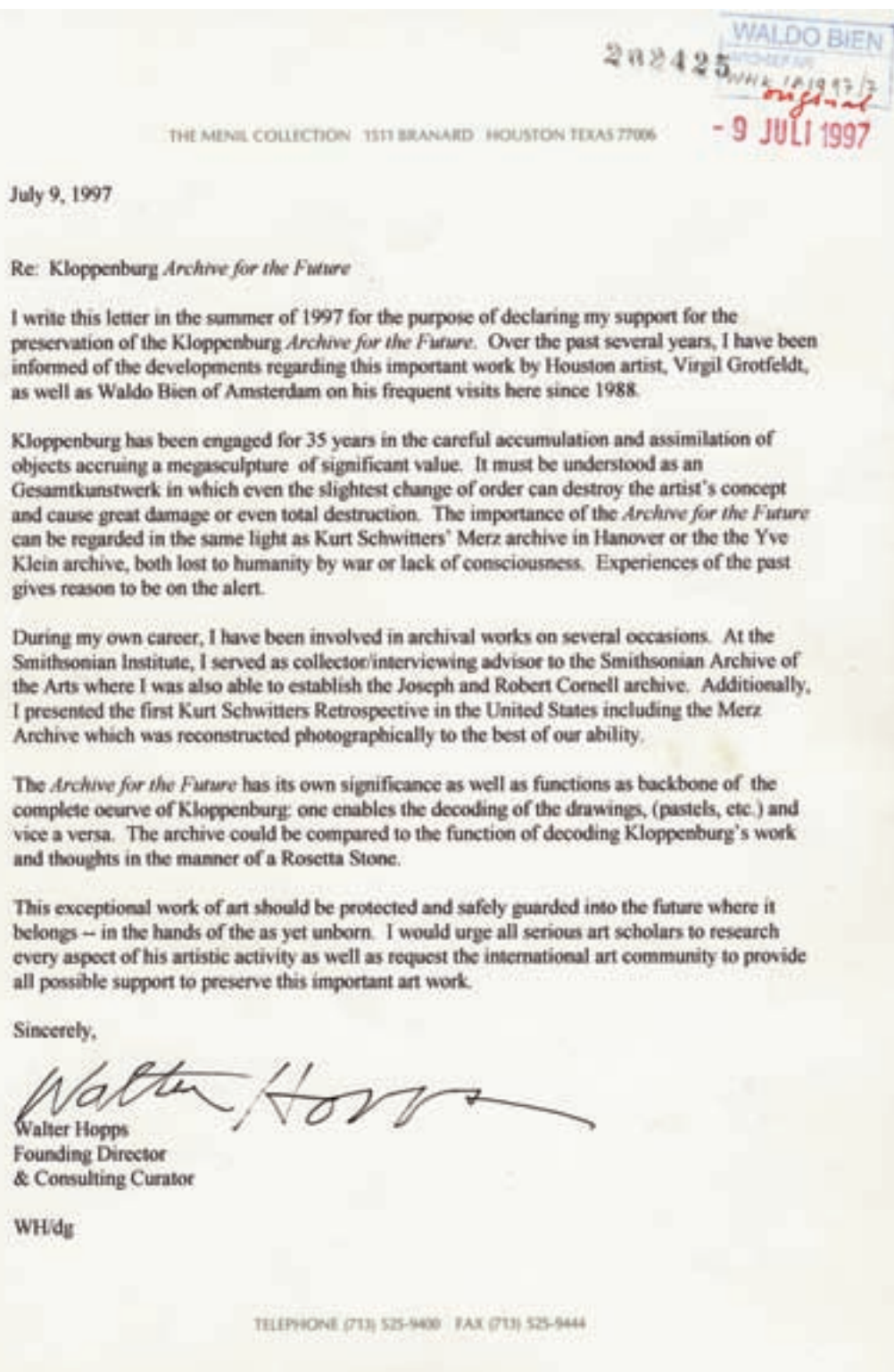
ARTCHIVE FOR THE FUTURE  
 TRASHETHICAL LITTERATURE  
 VISIBLE LANGUAGE OF A CULTURE (MM threshold MMM)  
 ARTICULATION : BIG-LOGOS-BANG SIGNATURE  
 ARTXPLAINS : FUNCTION, FORM/COUNTERFORM, STRUCTURE,  
 VOICE/FORCE OF BEAUTY/DUTY IN NATURE  
 REARTINATION ARTMERGENCY FIRST-AID RESCUE SERV. GESTURE  
 ARTSCIOUSNESS-QUOTIENT UP-GRADING CURE 4U-,WO-& MANKIND  
 SOFT-& ARTWARE : ARTWARENESS ARTPSITECTURE CREATURE  
 ARTCHAEO LOGICAL ARTCORE SCULPTURE  
 ARTXTENDED EYEDEAL DEAL : EYEDEAL/ART/EYEDEAL CONTEXTURE  
 ARTCHETYPICAL LECTURE  
 ARTVENTION !! : LIFE → ARTVENTURE !  
 ARTXPLORE : ARTVANTAGEOUS ARTMANUFACTURE



October 14th 1997:  
 On initiative of the City of Amsterdam, the Artchive for the Future was brutally cleared by a demolition company and has been locked up in 13 containers since.







#### Committee of recommendation

to save the Artchive for the future of Jacobus Kloppenburg

Walter Hopps	Founding director of the Menil Collection, Houston, Texas, USA Senior curator 20th century art, Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
Hans and Franz Joseph van der Grinten	Founders of Sammlung van der Grinten, Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Germany
Chris Dercon	Director Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands Director Haus der Kunst, München, Germany
Ron Manheim	Adjunct director Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Germany
Ferdinand Ullrich	Director Kunsthalle Recklinghausen, Germany
Rudi Fuchs	Director Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Saskia Bos	Director Foundation De Appel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tijmen van Groothest	Chairman of the board of directors, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Frank Lubbers	Adjunct director, head curator Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands
Lothar Baumgarten	Artist and professor Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, Germany
Luk Darras	Ambassador of Belgium, Australia
Katharina Sieverding	Artist and professor Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, Germany
Felix Droese	Artist and Free International University professor, Düsseldorf, Germany
Laurent Jacob	Director Espace 251 Nord, Liège, Belgium
Eric Amouroux	Art critic, Paris, France / Sao Paulo, Brazil
Adrian Dannat	Art critic, New York, USA
Michael Rutkowski	Artist, Cologne, Germany
Virgil Grotfeldt	Artist, professor Free International University, Baptist University, Houston, Texas, USA
Johannes Stüttgen	Artist, author, professor Free International University, Düsseldorf, Germany
Alfons Alt	Artist, professor Free International University, Marseille, France Boardmember Free International University World Art Collection
Jan Hoet	Director Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst, Gent, Belgium
René Block	Director Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
Edy de Wilde	Former director Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Sjarel Ex	Director Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Babeth Mondini van Loo	Film producer, program director Buddhist Broadcasting Service, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Directorial boardmember Free International University World Art Collection
Oeke Hoogendijk	Filmmaker, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Leon Riekwell	Director Buro Beeldende Kunst, Vlissingen, The Netherlands
Ton van Gestel	Director Stichting Kunst in Openbare Ruimte, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Evert van Straaten	Director Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands
Catherine David	Director Witte de With, centre for contemporary art, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Janwillem Schrofer	Director Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Hendrik Driessen	Director Foundation De Pont, Tilburg, The Netherlands

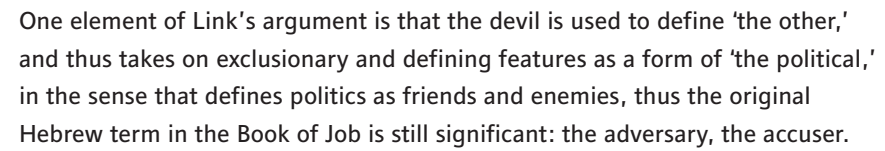
modern art – who cares?



Portrait of K (Kloppenburg) as a hostage of the city of Amsterdam by Alfons Alt, Marseille  
FIUWAC Collection



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Link's argument helps understand how mobile demonic imagery could be, and how difficult it was for it to become fixed. Nevertheless, there are centres of European art in which the iconography was more developed and significant than elsewhere; Lorenzo Lorenzi in his *Devils in Art*<sup>57</sup> provides a case study for Florence which had an immense number of demonological images and versions of hell and the last judgement.

THESE IS MORE IN A PIECE OF PAPER

SOMETIMES IS THE PAPER ITSELF THE MESSAGE

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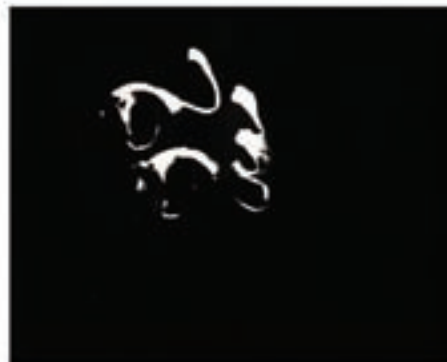
096-1999  
Charles Stagg: *Bouquet*,  
1996  
Wood, partly painted,  
height 106 cm  
Stagg was a fellow student  
of Grotfeldt's at the Tyler  
School of Art, Philadelphia





029-1999  
*Brushstrokes*, 1998

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095-1999  
Walter Hopps: *lightdrawings*, Boston 1956  
Silver gelatine photos, 22,5 x 19 cm each



For this decade one of the most illuminating accounts of Grotfeldt's technique and relationship to materials can be found in the report of an interview with art critic Susan Chadwick in the *Houston Post*. There are also some telling remarks for Grotfeldt's own biography. The interview was carried out in the spring of 1990. It also provides a backward glance at the work of the previous decade.

Chadwick described the paintings on exhibition at the Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, as being fairly large and quiet. They were hanging unframed on the gallery wall. She comments "as with all his work in the last eight years, they deal ambiguously with the theme of the soul and the unconscious, of life and death, anguish and redemption of an inexplicable universe and unidentifiable conflicts.

Circles, halos, angels, wings, roots, antlers, crown of thorns, branches, faces, eyes and figures emerge spontaneously from the inky blackness and billowing gold-like visionary messages on a stained wall, a sacred robe or cloud."

Grotfeldt disclosed his fascination with looking at the clouds. "Everyone on the face of the earth has done that. It brings your subconscious out to the surface. That's basically what I do."



Walter Hopps during studio visit, 1990 (on the wall bronze powder work *Witches Hat*). Jeff Nixon, Triodos F.I.U.-ture 000110



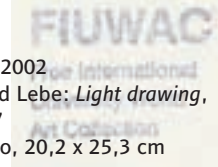
128-2000  
Waldo Bien: *Portrait of Walter Hopps*, 1995  
Oil paint on photograph, 44 x 34 cm



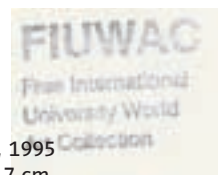
Grotfeldt suggested that he submitted to the painting, gave up the 'need for control,' let himself 'go blank.' He also directly linked the change in his art from the early 1980's to the emergence of the 'spiritual,' tied to the specific experience of his coming to Houston when he rented the top floor of an old church in the Heights. It was there he worked for three years late at night in total isolation: "there were no lights on the stairs or in the hallways, every board was creaking, and there was an old oak door leading to the back of the baptistery. I'd go in there at night and get those chilly feelings. I think the church time was the first time I recognised what I wanted in my work that I didn't have yet. It anchored me to the idea that there was something missing in my work, something meaningful and fulfilling to me. For many years I had carried a lot of ugly, negative attitudes about myself, basically from my youth, from the environment I grew up in. The work has enabled me to change all of that."



300-2002  
David Lebe: *Light drawing*, 1987  
Photo, 20,2 x 25,3 cm



301-2002  
Terrel James: *No title*, 1995  
Oil on paper, 28 x 22,7 cm







*Emperor's Garden*, 1998  
Coal dust on paper

The specific change in his relation to materials can by inference be taken as his acceptance of the 'magical' within his submission to a form of bonding and automatism, where the touch of painting and the act of seeing create true coincidence.

A description is provided in the article for the making of works such as *Burning Crosses*, *See no Evil* and *Ring of Fire*. Wet paper was placed on the ground, the surface of the wet paper was then dusted with bronze powder, this is the phase which Grotfeldt himself describes as 'the magic phase,' the powder was dispersed with liquids, and when the paper dried, he hung it on the wall and began to study it, to see 'what's going on.' Grotfeldt's method is, in fact, remarkably close to that outlined by Leonardo da Vinci in his *Trattato della Pittura*, this is worth quoting in full. It is a passage which Kenneth Clarke says, demonstrates how highly Leonardo valued a free play of the imagination.<sup>58</sup>

Offering various pieces of advice, Leonardo adds he will not refrain "from including among these precepts a new and speculative idea, which, although it may seem trivial and almost laughable, is none the less of great value in quickening the spirit of invention. It is this: that you should look at certain walls stained with damp, or at stones of uneven colour. If you have to invent some setting,

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Clarke, *Landscape into Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1949). See pp. 55-6, 58-60, 141, 151.



044-1999  
*Untitled, 1998*



you will be able to see in these the likeness of divine landscapes, adorned with mountains, ruins, rocks, woods, great plains, hills and valleys in great variety; and then again, you will see there battles and strange figures in violent actions, expression of faces and clothes and an infinity of things which you will be able to reduce to their complete and proper forms. In such walls the same things happen as in the sound of bells, in whose strokes you may find every word which you can imagine!"

Not only does Leonardo advise the painter to study the wall, but also "the embers of the fire, or clouds of mud, or other similar objects from which you will find the most admirable ideas..... because from a confusion of shapes the spirit is quickened to new inventions."

Clarke saw this text as indicating the play also of the conscious and the unconscious mind, agreeing with Walter Pater on the Mona Lisa, that its background was an extension of Leonardo's character, "which he had chosen to externalise in that inscrutable face, with its strange mixture of Gothic mystery and modern curiosity."

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055-1999  
*Buddha Grid*, 1998





056-1999  
Just Inside the Turn, 1998



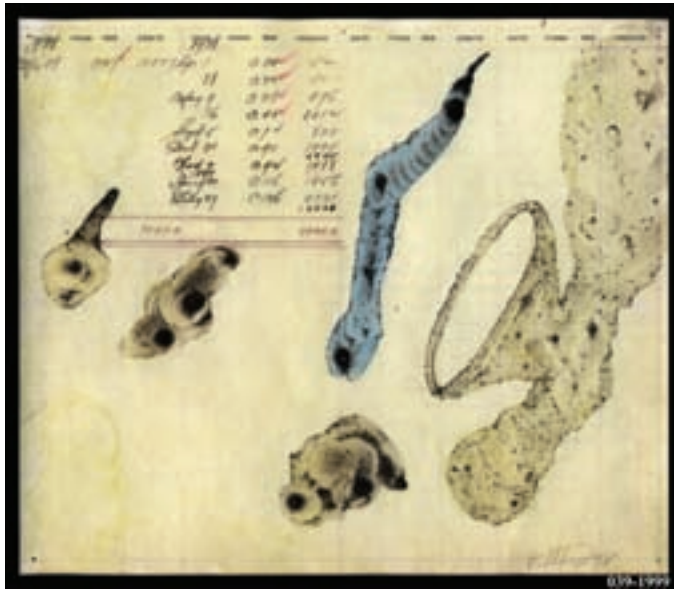
Although not referring to this alone in Leonardo's Treatise, Vasari noted the remarkable aspect of Leonardo's talent in the "extremes he went to, in his anxiety to achieve solidity of modelling in the use of inky shadows. Thus, to get the darkest possible grounds, Leonardo selected blacks that made deeper shadows and were indeed blacker than any other, endeavouring to make his lights all the brighter by contrast. However, he eventually succeeded so well that his paintings were wholly devoid of light and their subjects looked as if they were being seen by night rather than clearly defined by daylight."<sup>59</sup>

An example of this technique which is of such importance to the development of romantic and symbolist art, is to be found in the 'blot and brush' technique developed by Alexander Cozens in the eighteenth century.<sup>60</sup>

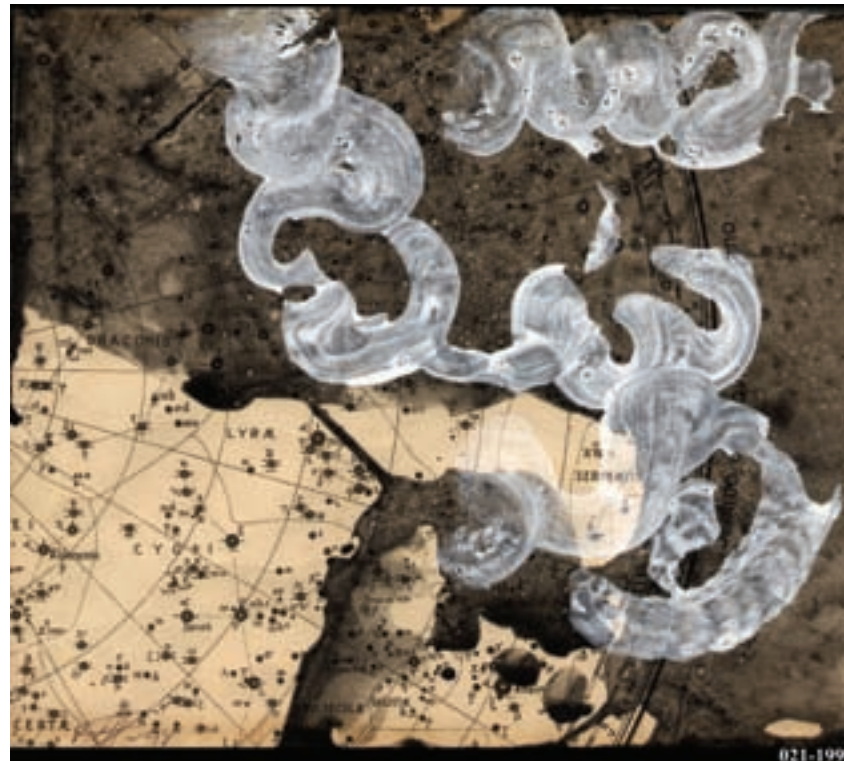
This also anticipates many of the elements of Pollock's drip work, with which Grotfeldt's technique has been compared. The critic Chris Waddington claimed that "closer to home there's the example of Jackson Pollock, whose drips, splatters, controlled accidents, and all-over designs get a renewed life in Grotfeldt's work" (April 10, 1998).

59 G. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans G. Bull (London: Penguin Books, (reprint) 1987), pp. 260-61).

60 A.P. Oppe, in *Alexander and John Robert Cozens*, reprints Cozen's *A new Method of assisting the Invention In Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*. Luke Herrmann suggests that Cozens would not have advocated pure accident as in Leonardo or some Chinese calligraphy. Keith Haring, in his *Journals for 1982*, suggests, however, that "Drawing is still the same as it has been since prehistoric times. It brings together men and the world. It lives through magic." In the remarkable current work of Serge Kantorowicz in Paris there is a direct homage to the work of Cozens and engagement with the drawings of Victor Hugo. For this see: *Improvisations à quatre mains*, Art-Estampe (Paris: Machet Cosson, 1997).



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039-1999  
Untitled, 1998



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021-1999  
Untitled, 1998

Luke Herrmann drew attention to the importance of the action of rolling clouds in Northern European skies in his study of the history of eighteenth century painting, especially in the treatise by Joseph Potts: *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, published in London, in 1782. This shows the context in which Cozens experimented with the blob and brush technique for which he prepared some pedagogic advice for teaching pupils at Eton College. The search for incident and accident in Grotfeldt's work is hardly singular.

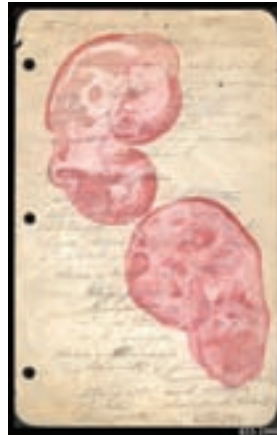
Grotfeldt supplied further remarks on his technique "almost every time there is some human face or form already there, at that point I come in and define them, identify them, and start painting out things I don't want any longer." The process had also led to a certain frustration, with Grotfeldt suggesting that he was fearful of automatism, and the danger of being trapped in the repetition, he informed Chadwick that, feeling frustrated, he went out into his backyard,

picked up a tree branch, brought it into his studio and began drawing with it, leaves and all scratching into the wet paper, letting the leaves and the various smaller branches do what they could.

Grotfeldt remarked to the critic of the Houston Post that "I can control a stick, but I can't control a whole branch."

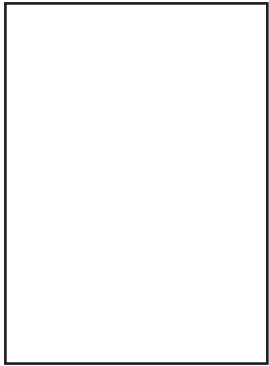
Once again, Hofmann's theory on the relation of material and expression is valuable in understanding the turns in Grotfeldt's work, the deepening of his creative powers.

In the case of Grotfeldt, however, one should enter the proviso that the spiritual is itself part of the reflexivity of the change in materials and techniques, that is to say, the movement of space and colours is modulated by his response to what he sees; his seeing is shaped by the tactile nature of his own sensations that search for the visible. Grotfeldt also turns the problem of chiaroscuro into a much more interesting problem, which Burke notes for the sublime, and *inter alia* derives from Milton, making 'the darkness visible.' Thus, in Grotfeldt's case, the studio itself impacts on his physical and imaginative activities, his search is genuinely nebulous.



033-1998  
*Untitled, 1998*





To memorise all the lost or destroyed artworks over the years.

Once again, the statement by Hans Hofmann:

"Each expression medium has its own laws which are to be exclusively mastered, intuitively out of the development of the creation. Accordingly, it is the nature of these laws that the relation between the different realities always produces a higher, a purely spiritual, third. The spiritual third manifests itself as pure effect. The effects are products of the spiritual, furthermore influence each other in the manner (in accordance to the creation direction) in which they are in further relationship juxtaposed to each other.

During the creation development, the effects acquire a further change. In that manner the creation is developed into something spiritual. The quality of the work originates in this transport of reality into something spiritual."

By emphasising the negative space, which for Hofmann has as precise a form as the object that displaces it, the painter, through the manipulation of planes on the surface, can explore the negative space of nature. This has been given the confusing description of 'abstract', although for Hofmann the painter is drawing what he sees with as much objectivity as Ingres. Space is not flat and homogenous, it pushes and pulls, pulsating in and out of depth as well as up and down, right and left on the surface. For Hofmann this push and pull is alive. Plastic means are also colour, which is space-creating and tension-gathering and



036-1999  
*Untitled*, 1998

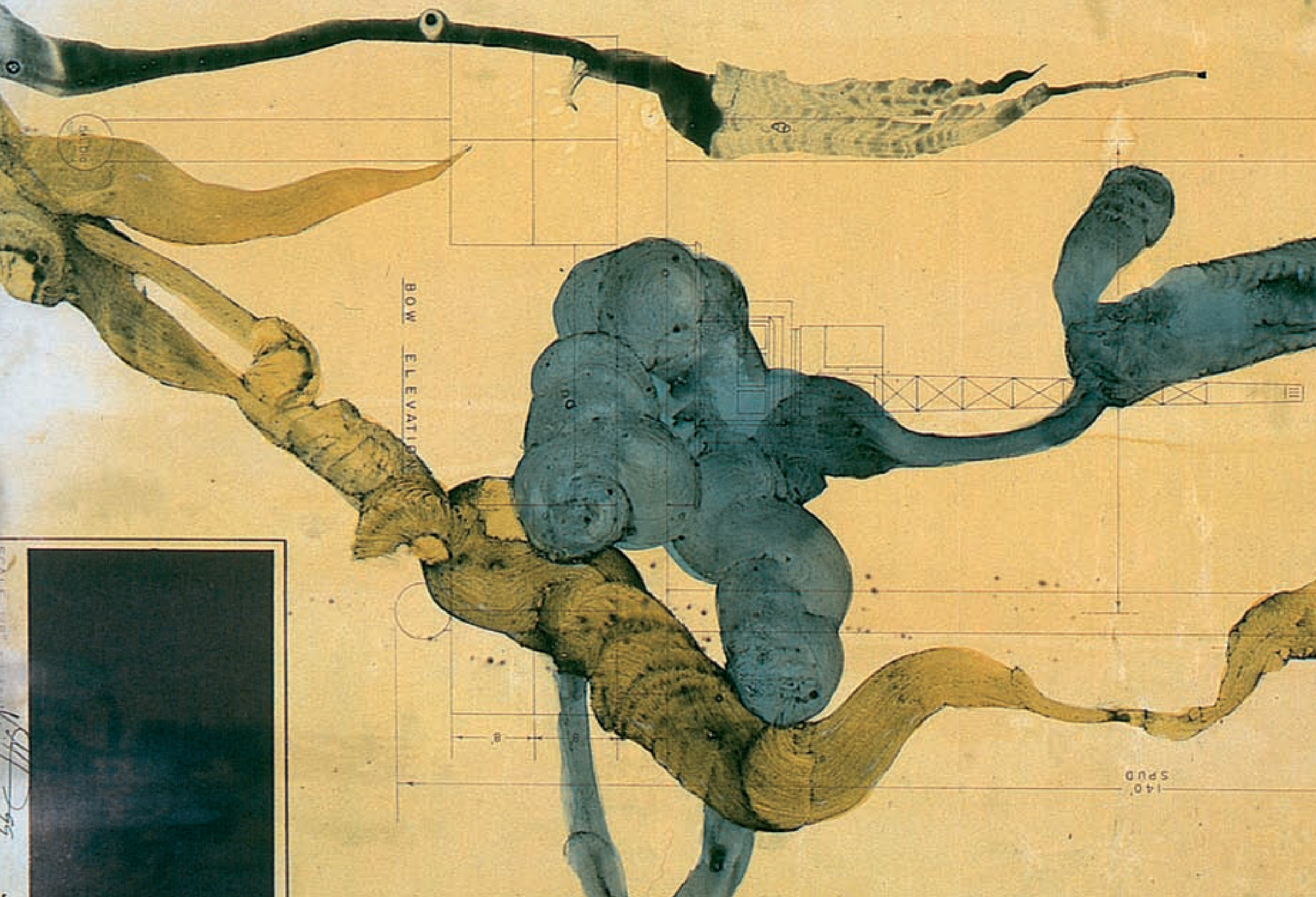
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dispersing. Colour is a force, it does not have the function of becoming schematic and harmonious. It is not something flat like lying on a shape or form, it is form. Academic rules about colour are meaningless, they fail to grasp it as relational. Thus, the idea that blue recedes as a rule in itself is simply insufficient to say, sometimes it will proceed. It will proceed or recede at the same time like a pulsing heart. This life within the forms of painting makes it 'plastic' in Hofmann's terms.<sup>61</sup>

"Hence we find the experience of space in the subjective spiritual projection of the impulses in which space is disclosed to us as a plastic and living unity. We can set every medium of expression into vibration and tension if we can spiritually master the nature of the medium. This, above all, demands a spiritual projection into the essence of the medium of expression. We can in this manner spiritually enliven the medium. This is then creation. The creative in the creative process is based, therefore, chiefly upon an experience which simultaneously also stimulates the essence of the medium through which the artistic expression results. This expression is the basis either for a fantasy representation of abstract spiritual projection or an expression based upon a natural experience."

<sup>61</sup> See note 17.









The use of the branch as a wand has its pendant in a work created by a near contemporary of Grotfeldt's working in Texas, Danny Williams, who commented on the

"image of a truncated leafing branch . . . suggestive of regenerative potency, mystic re-birth, and transubstantiation" (Danny Williams Wand, 1995).

Alison de Lima Greene quotes Grotfeldt in her essays on Texas<sup>62</sup>:

Texas, *150 works from the Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston.

In her chapter which derives its title from an exhibition curated by Surpik Angelini and Bert Long, entitled *Another Reality* (1989), where Long had stated "the works of art we were seeking possessed the qualities of magic, mysticism, spiritualism, and alchemical transmutation," identifies the influence for Texan, and artists working in Texas, of Mexico; the surrealism collection in the Menil, and the important shows, curated by Jermayne MacAgy's on surrealism from the 1950's, and Ary Stillman's *Black Magic* of 1953 are examples of a movement away from the 'surface' of things to an inner vision, what could be called the mystical subconscious: Michael Tracy's *Memento Mori*, a response to the ritual of a Penitente procession, encounters with Catholicism, ritual, and the 'other' America.

62 Alison de Lima Green, Texas, *150 Works from the Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston, 2000.



050-1999  
*Untitled, 1998*



She identifies Richard Stout, George Krause and Roy Fridge as artists who at mid-career in the 1980's, were involved in the exploration of myth and whose work shared a 'similarly reflective mood.'

Stout provided a description of painting that was abruptly distant from the theory of stylistics: "Often painting is like an earthquake as it can release tensions and tame the angry forces of our lives. Painting is not communication, but more an exorcism." Alison de la Lima Greene also places Grotfeldt in the company of James Raben, Danny Williams (who formally studied anthropology), Sharon Kopriva and Dee Wolff. Her comment on Grotfeldt draws on the interview for the *Houston Post*, and she adds the gloss that "the method of discovering and editing images is central to understanding Grotfeldt's work," observing perceptively that





049-1999  
Untitled, 1999

"The first works of this series were intimate in scale and evoked a deliberate primitivism: as the series progressed, the imagery became more unified and Grotfeldt began to use increasingly larger sheets of paper."

These works, especially *Burning Crosses*, she sees as monumental drawing, and comments on the image:

"*Burning Crosses* (see page 27), 1988, is among Grotfeldt's first monumental drawings, and it is both specific and provocatively ambiguous in its imagery ..... Grotfeldt explores the realm of dreams and the unconscious. A cherubic figure dominates the composition, hovering over what can be read as a pile of burning crosses, and a large X is also inscribed on the lower right. Skulls seem to emerge out of the darkened ground, appearing as a macabre chorus behind the main figure. Grotfeldt gives images of destruction and redemption equally free rein: by leaving the narrative implications of these images unresolved, he charges the composition with a starkly emotive power."





015-1999  
*Floating*, 1999

Inevitably, the artist began with smaller sheets of paper, and gaining confidence, moved in scale. Because of Grotfeldt's work as a house painter, he was consistently aware of the wall, and indeed, the enormous scale of his bronze powder and enamel on paper works, derives as much from that over-riding awareness as any inner logic of development. As in a dream, no light comes from the outside, rather it emerges in the work, the different depths of black creating a Fundierung or foundation for the genesis of the image which carries its own inner material luminousness.

From the lower left corner there is the faint spatial marking of a thin cross echoed again in the lower part of the picture, these placements create multiple viewpoints down into the picture and from the frontal plane inwards, the movement from the lower right corner creating an undercutting spatial dynamic for the free floating figure, which is suspended like a hovering being above the 'scene below' in which, at the right leg of a winged being, there is a precisely denoted skull; the winged figure with the diagonal uniting the top right with the top left, and thus creating for the composition a floating chiasmus, the realms of 'earth' and 'sky' united in the suspended creature, suspended in an inky anonymous space.



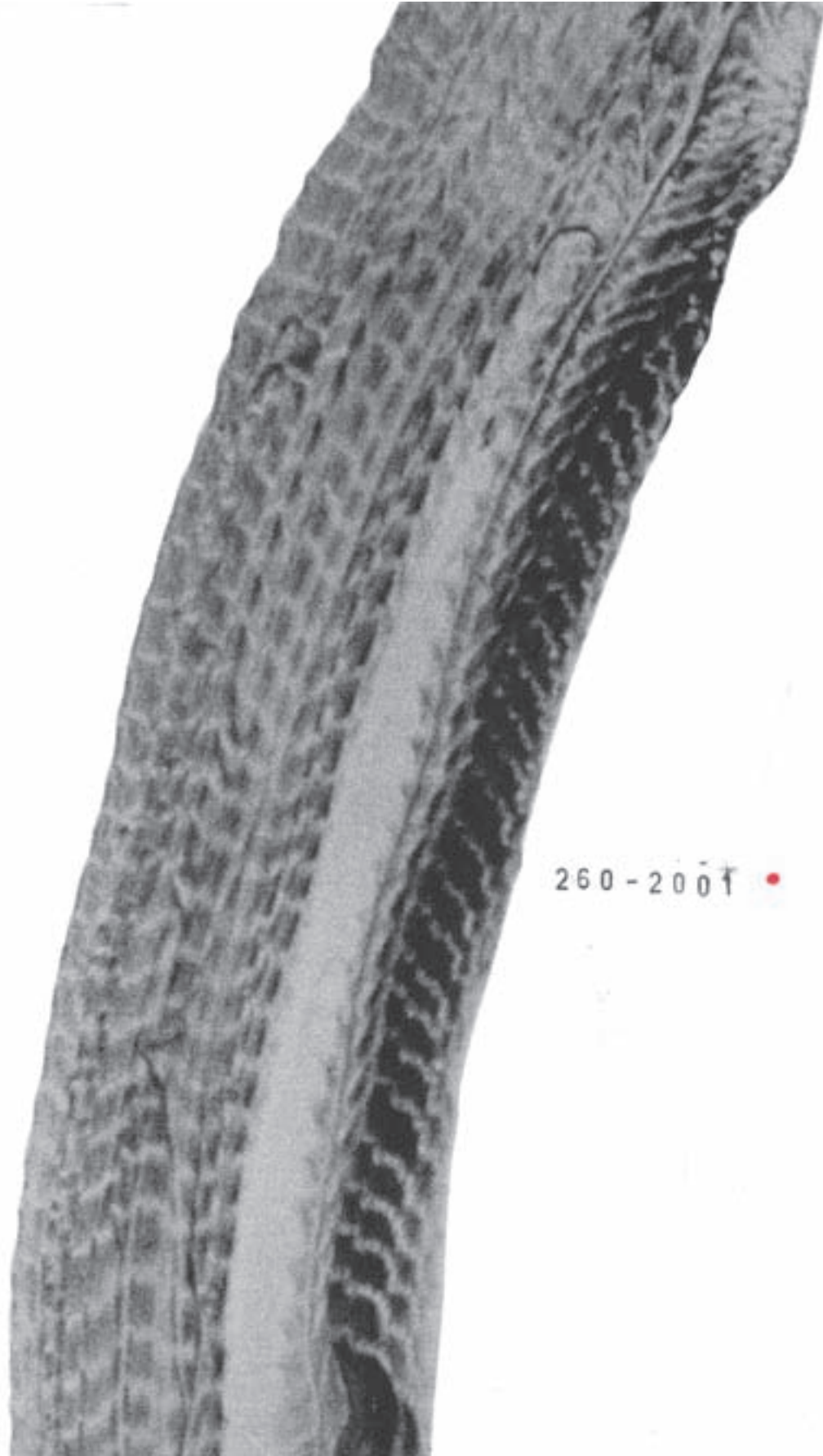


014-1999  
*Dollar Green*, 1999



The serpentine contour of the main figure's body counterpoints the puncturing rhythm of the inward moving diagonals, and at the same time releases from the lower right to the top left a negative spiral of coiling space which winds away from the swinging curve of the profiled body; from this a tiny umbilical chord protuberance suggests connection and release as in letting go of a balloon with a string. It is this floating quality which one finds in the work of Grotfeldt, something suspended in ether, or plants later, without shadows, floating in blue space.

The immense restriction to earth colours and the significance of black, the inky depth, allow Grotfeldt to modulate the ground in such a way that the figures are both connected and independent, it is as if the work is caught in suspense, like a snapshot of hallucination, or at least that 'moment' which every photo secretly holds, that releases it into an immediacy.



Patricia C. Johnson, writing for the Houston Chronicle, commented on the velvety black:

"In *Burning Crosses*, a winged form materializes to the right of the page, suspended against the velvety black ground and above the suggestion of landscape where the crosses of the title echo the gold of the silhouetted angel."

She draws attention also to the intuitive splashes and streaks and lush brush work of *Ring of Fire*, and to the state of transformation in the work *Double Vision*, with its horned head and tapering snail-like body, where halfway down it is being redefined into a human face, set against a mottled silvery ground, and amid star shapes and spirals; for Johnson there is 'no doubt this is a spirit in flux.' She concludes her review by noting the combination of aggression and contemplation in Grotfeldt's work and comments on the unconventional technique and gestural freedom which, she contends, lends this ghostly figure a palpable presence and the means to wield subtle but irresponsible power.

Where Grotfeldt in published interviews had stressed the importance for him of the psychological process, he commented rarely, if at all, on the 'meaning' of any image.





260-2001  
*Untitled*, 2000

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Something of the degree of development in the scale of Grotfeldt's work during this period should also be noted. The work entitled *Mr. Lucky*, where a figure with antlered crown appears to stride through the picture, is almost life-size (84 x 60 inches). In 1993, David Ross, the director of the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in New York, awarding first prize to an open competition of Texas Art (reviewed *Houston Post*, February 1993) for the 1991 gold and black painting titled *Inner Space*, described the work as very compelling, noting the elements of Odilon Redon and the Symbolists, but adding that it had more toughness and an elemental quality.

Grotfeldt supported his family as a day-time contract painter, by painting vibrantly coloured walls for the Museum of Fine Arts, for the 'Rediscovering Pompeii'-exhibition (where it should be observed he understood from Pompeian walls the power of black as a ground), and also painting walls at the Children's Museum and for *Diverse Works* in Houston. It is possible that these actions functioned as a counterpoint to his return at night to the studio to pursue his ineluctable visions, see for example, the 1987 work *Stargazer* where the paper is completely covered in charcoal dust with its isolated figure searching, as one critic put it (Patricia Johnson), for a sign.



Left: *Near Soft Water*, 2000  
 Right: *In Search of Safe Harbours*, 2000  
 Coal dust and acrylic on countertop

Two of the most remarkable features of the third decade being surveyed in the work of Virgil Grotfeldt is the movement into floating botanics, and his intense collaboration with the artist Waldo Bien. This is the 'floruit' of Grotfeldt, it is also his engagement with Europe and a period of painterly effort which moves out from the claustrophobic weightiness of the images of the late 1980's to the fantasy-full and real pictures of the late 1990's through to the beginning of the twenty-first century; it can be seen as his own self-overcoming, and a searching for wholeness and release. On the other hand, the early facility which he had in commanding technical description, gives way to a loose and beautiful calligraphy, and experimentation with formats, a return from paper to canvas, a searching again for transformation within his own imagery and a deepening of the poetry of his making.

In 1986 Cathy Hemmer organized an exhibition and catalogue of *Fifteen Contemporary Artists from the Netherlands*, shown at the IMF Gallery, Washington D.C., October 1986. The introduction by John Hallmark Neff, the former director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, drew attention to the need



*Untitled*, 2000  
Oil and coal dust  
96,5 x 101,6 cm

for a 'rediscovery' of Dutch artists who, he believed, were less victims of hype and franchise and worked, because of the limited gallery situation and more modest commercial expectations, with a longer view of patiently creating work with a sense of responsibility for their art, and not so much for well-contrived fame. He was particularly interested in sculpture, and signalled out the work of Barten van Elden, Hans van den Ban, and Waldo Bien. Of the artists in this exhibition Grotfeldt would come to know Waldo Bien and Jacobus Kloppenburg as friends, and with Bien he would collaborate in a free and open fashion that continues to the present.

The organizer of the exhibition, Cathy Hemmer, was responsible for introducing the work of Grotfeldt to the Netherlands, and arranged for a show of his work at the d'Theeboom Gallery in Amsterdam. It was while staying in a rather dingy hotel in Amsterdam that Bien and Grotfeldt met, they had not been formally introduced by the gallerist, and Grotfeldt knew only the details of the *Death Room Interior* from 1986, illustrated in the catalogue. It was to be a fatidic encounter. Bien invited Grotfeldt to stay in his atelier at 123 Lauriergracht.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> For supplementary notes and information in this section the reader might wish to consult *Waldo Bien, including the series with Virgil Grotfeldt*, ed. Ferdinand Ulrich, Hans-Jürgen Schwalm, Kunstaussstellung der Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen (Köln: Wienand, 2000).

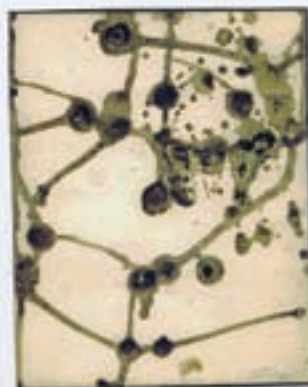




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057



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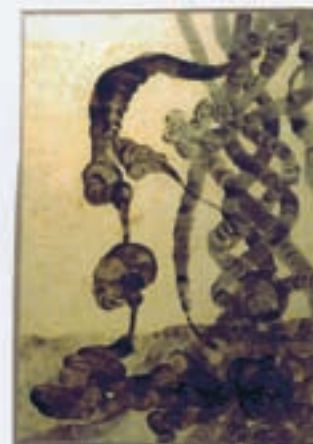
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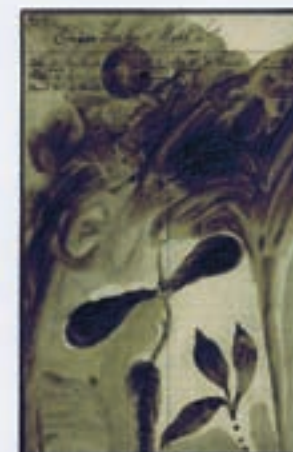
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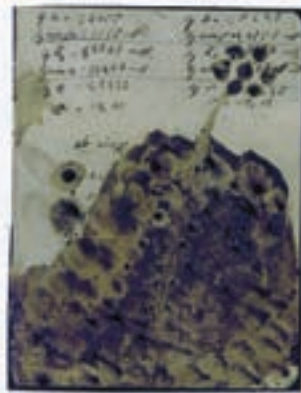
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014



043



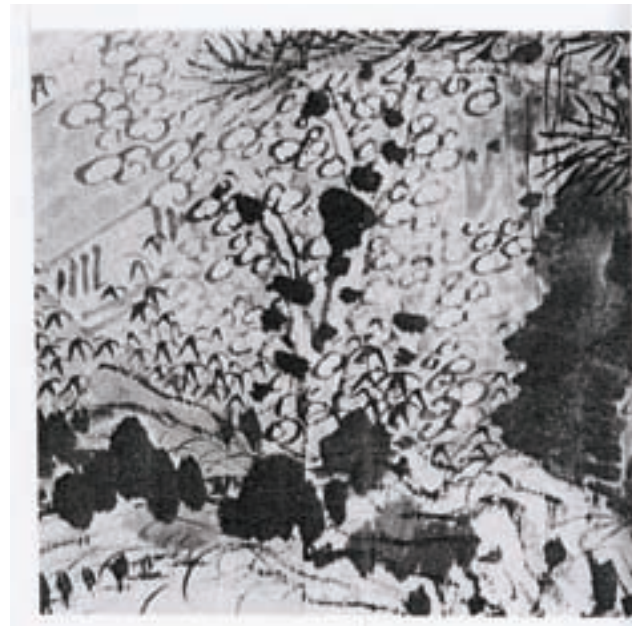
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026



In his series 'Letters to Victor Hugo,' the French artist Serge Kantorowicz discusses American Expressionism, Pollock etc. FIUWAC Collection



Tao-chi (1642–1708): *Ten Thousand Ugly Ink Dots*, dated 1685. Section of a handscroll, ink on paper, height 25,6 cm Soochow Museum (detail)

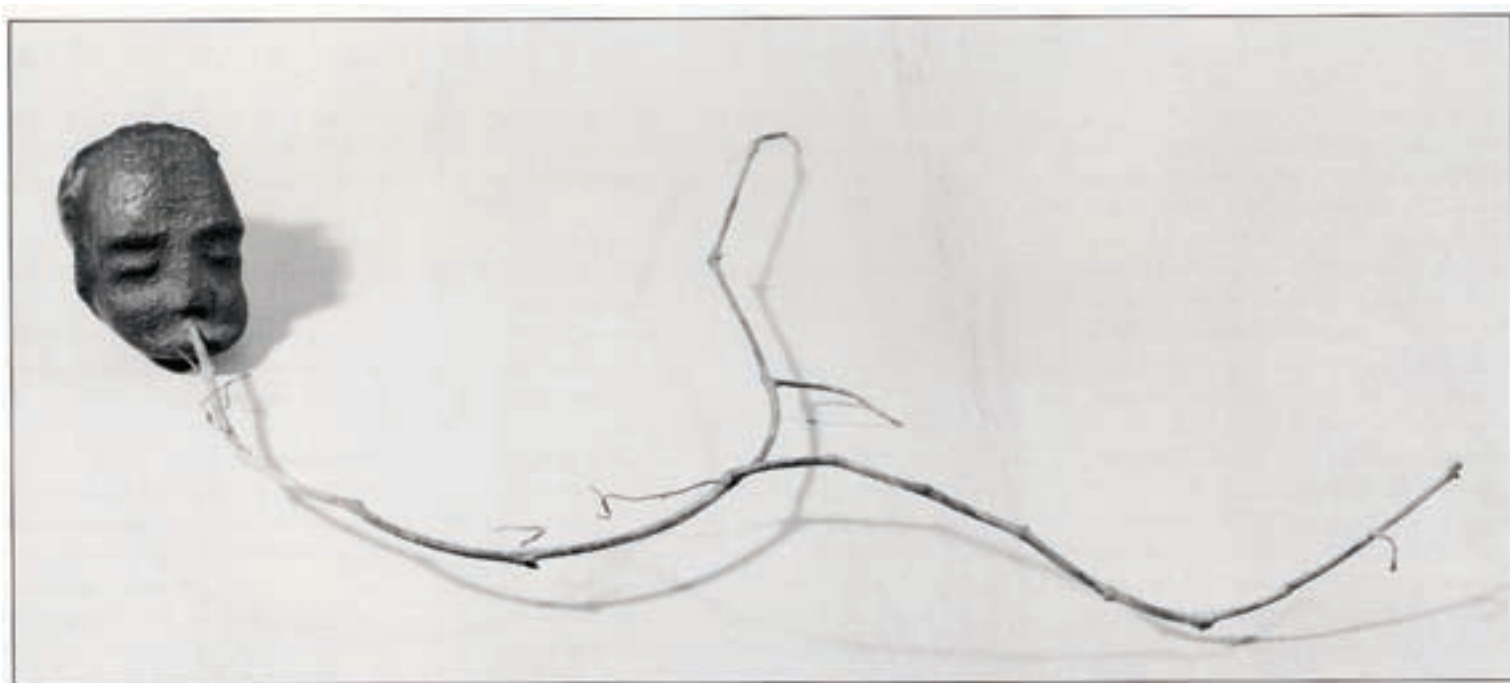








Lauriergracht, Amsterdam, 1994



*tête à tête*, 1994  
left: Waldo Bien, Dover  
chalkstone and gilded  
wood  
right: Virgil Grotfeldt  
(1993), wax covered styro-  
foam on riogrande lime-  
stone

Collaboration Waldo Bien | Virgil Grotfeldt  
Virgil Grotfeldt | Waldo Bien

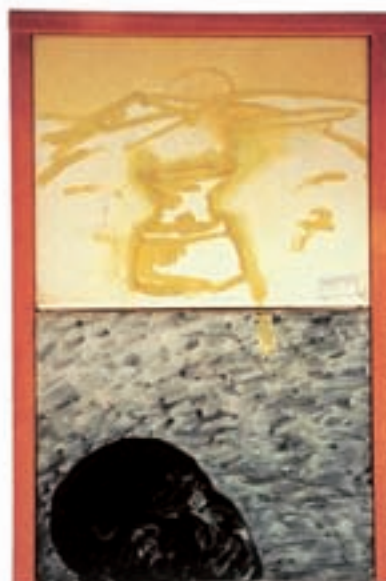
Since 1994 both artists worked together in the framework of F.I.U. on an ongoing series of collaborative works that will be illuminated on the following pages.



Waldo Bien



Virgil  
Grotfeldt



1994-014/19  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 1,  
Amsterdam. Artist's collection.  
Oil on canvas with open frame, 30 x 40 cm  
each (plus frame)

Over the next three years they remained in contact, with Bien exhibiting in Philadelphia in the same year and Grotfeldt returning to Europe in 1990. It was during this visit to Berlin that both artists began to actively work together and Bien recalls that the coal dust bag he gave Grotfeldt from what was left from his work on the *Death Room Interior* was the moment of symbolic bonding between them.

Because of an Engelhad Foundation grant, Grotfeldt had also been able to buy canvas, and noted in an interview that this created a certain tightness again in his painterly procedure. With the use of the coal dust, and his readiness to enter into dialogue with another artist, Grotfeldt managed to create another move within his work. From their respective accounts, there was a serendipity in their collaboration; when walking in Berlin, where Bien had a residency for most of 1990 and had been working on his series, *Tableaux Africains*, minimal and delicate works using clays from rivers in Africa he had collected when travelling with Jacobus Kloppenburg, Bien handed Virgil the bag of coal dust from the *Death Room Interior*. Later, taking a walk in the city, they found discarded ledger books, and Grotfeldt began making drawings over the inscribed manuscript.



1995-057  
Waldo Bien: *The Carbon Painter* (Portrait of Virgil Grotfeldt)  
Coal dust on river clay on canvas, 28 x 35,5 cm  
Private collection

Bien's interest in the river clay materials, and his releasing of the coal dust paralleled Grotfeldt's fascination with bronze powders, enamels and charcoal.

Although not Bien's main work, painting came to interest him more and more in the 1990's, his earliest paintings, from the 1970's, had been divided between landscape and free expression of figures, mostly as part of his wider sculptural research.

It was in the various water colours and books that the wilder, looser side of Bien's less formal minimalist idiom gave way to wild abandon, these he viewed more in the realm of drawing, and for the most part have been kept relatively secret, but in the beginning of the series with Grotfeldt, it is the vocabulary of these which comes into play in their exchange.

Bien had previously collaborated with artists, especially his near neighbour and closest friend Jacobus Kloppenburg, who in the course of the 1980's and 1990's was accruing what has been described as a 'mega sculpture,' namely the *Artchive for the Future*. A small inkling of the nature of their constant exchange and collaboration can be seen in the FIUTURES collection, currently held in Zeist. Bien had also worked with Joseph Semah. This had led to difficulties and an impasse in the 'dialogue' which had brought unwelcome aporia for Bien, and





1995-094



1995-090



1995-091



1995-093



1995-089

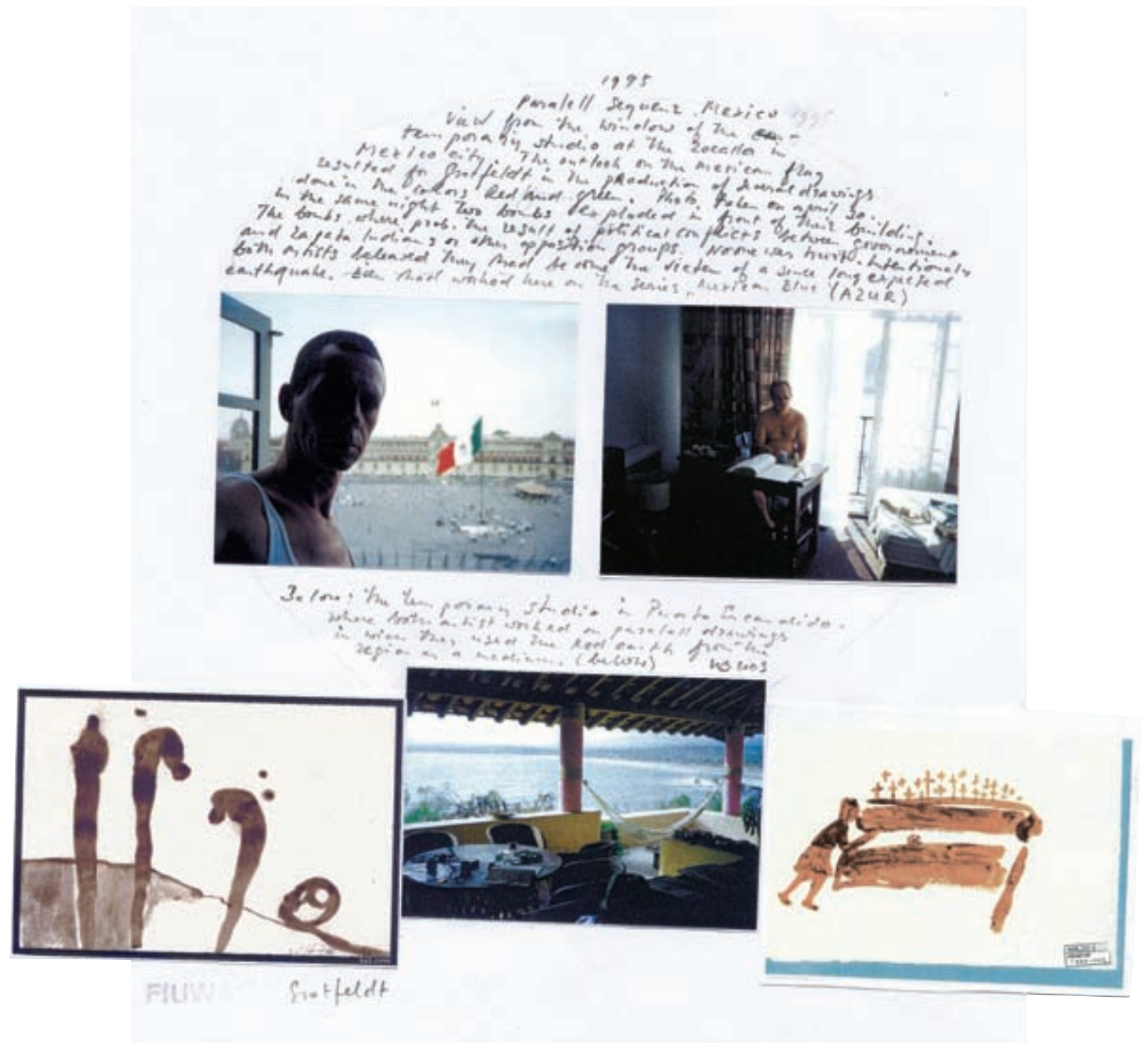


1995-092

thus the early friendship with Grotfeldt was a release from what Bien construed as the arid scholasticism of a dialogue which remained deliberately esoteric and intellectually bullying. The bonding with Grotfeldt was altogether more relaxed, and both men shared a vivid curiosity and sense of adventure. In one sense it was perfectly understandable that with Bien's direct awareness of the work of Beuys and his students, he fully appreciated the work of Grotfeldt which he first saw in the d' Theeboom Gallery in Amsterdam; on the other hand, Grotfeldt was fascinated by the mixture of refined and elegant minimalism in Bien's painting, and the almost elemental wildness of the works he did in water colour. His entry into the 'Artchive for the Future' (see page 76/77) gave Grotfeldt a first-hand awareness of the mysterious graphic world of Jacobus Kloppenburg, with its core in the daily drawings, emanating in a fantasy world which was as much Chagall as Max Ernst, with echoes of Cornell and Kurt Schwitters; a curious and enormous artistic oeuvre, only part of which had ever been seen in public. Kloppenburg with his deep visual sensitivity and life-long spiritual interest in the work of Rudolf Steiner, especially Steiner's study on Goethe and plants, was keenly receptive to the images of Grotfeldt.

Grotfeldt would also meet with a broader range of contacts and friends of both the artists from Amsterdam, and have the opportunity to travel and absorb the artistic work of European contemporaries. They increasingly viewed Grotfeldt as having stronger European roots than his American heritage would have initially indicated. Bien had, with many of his old friends from the years of studying in Düsseldorf, maintained an open extension of the principles for free and creative interdisciplinary research which had been such a central pedagogic impulse of Beuys's when he founded the FIU (Free International University) in 1977.

The entire aim of the FIU was directed toward creativity, as essential human expression, and not as a specialized talent. The money economy had turned man into an 'indirect being,' and the repossession of human distinction in the creative, the means of revolution, and thus the re-shaping of society depended on creativity, which was truly open as possibility. Bien fully endorsed Beuys' conception that FIU was not to be institutionalized and tied to a specific building and programme, but was to be the platform and network of people resonating with





*Counting Second Chances, 1995*

each other, working together in creative sharing and alignment. Thus his readiness to welcome Virgil Grotfeldt and engage with him in the spirit of FIU, which, with his friend and colleagues, he had kept active in Amsterdam since his return to the city in 1980, and of which the formation of FIUWAC (Free International University World Art Collection) is only one of the latest manifestations.

For Grotfeldt the handing of the bag of coal dust was like an initiation, more in the order of enigma than of secrets. Capitalist realism had turned the artist into a kind of awkward being, isolated and secretly in competition with everyone else, expected to paper over the cracks in the smooth ideologies that blocked awareness, but also making him or her, through dependence on the gallery or museum system, a kind of command performer for what the agreed stylistic of the time might be.

Grotfeldt had worked as a day wage labourer to 'avoid' being caught up in such an enslaving system. Nevertheless, this was energy-sapping and led him to increasing frustration and cul-de-sac. Part of the problem was that the very individual isolation and time required to create also needed a concomitant public response to sustain the day-to-day needs. Unlike in Holland where, for



Waldo Bien: Cover of sketch book 'Mexican blue'





1996-003  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 3, Amsterdam  
Artists' collection  
all works: Coal dust on river clay on canvas, open aluminium frames

example, Bien and Kloppenburg had received some, sometimes yearly, subsidies, Grotfeldt was more precariously situated. Critical response to his work only began in the late 80's, but his contact with fellow artists was restricted by his double work life, day work to survive, and painting afterwards.

From his side, the meeting with Bien and Kloppenburg, Babeth, Michael Rutkowsky, Cornelius Rogge, Joseph Semah, etc., enriched his personal commitment. It brought him into the kind of free exchange and contact which he had enjoyed in his student days, but without the grinding orthodox insistence on the academic. Nevertheless, the early social realist phase had been abandoned for, literally, his private realm of dream and discovery; and even when in Berlin, there is no overt turning to the public realm.

Bien made more specifically engaged works, but when collaborating with Grotfeldt, was happy to return to a more intimate dialogue with none of the cold labouring of the series with Joseph Semah which resulted in unpleasantness and ended in litigation between Bien, and Semah and the collector Frits Becht, who was one of the first collectors to pay attention in Europe to Grotfeldt, largely on Bien's recommendation.

1996-005



1996-010



1996-008



1996-001



1996-002



1996-006



1996-007



1996-009



1996-004



1996-003



1996-012



1996-001-012  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt  
Artists' collection

The various series on which Bien and Grotfeldt have collaborated have been discussed in the publication *Waldo Bien including the series with Virgil Grotfeldt*. In that account for the Recklinghausen exhibition of Bien and Grotfeldt, several errors appeared, caused by lack of organization in the archival sources, and others by confusion which arose from journal and diary entries which were 'misplaced.' It is now possible to correct these. A good example is the first series, which was listed as being done in Houston. Research in the photo archive shows that the series was painted in Amsterdam, then brought to Houston, where it was framed, and that it was thus wrongly described as having been made in Houston. In another instance, a diary entry had been filed on the wrong pages, as it was placed retrospectively, and from the survival of cash receipts and visa card payment the actual time and location of the series could be established; some of this information contradicts material in the typed interview with Bien from 1997.

The following is the most accurate and reliable account that is possible to reconstruct on the basis of the best available current information and research.

The first series painted in Amsterdam consists of 6 framed double canvases with open-ended frames. Bien described the first search between the artists as a 'liquidising' activity. This refers to the actual process of making, both artists being fascinated with the chosen materials and the response of the ground or carrier for the medium, watching the slow drifting and absorption of the paint and coal dust on the canvas. For Bien there was the idea of a triad, coal-light-flower, the transformation in the earth and the movement from darkness to light.

Grotfeldt wrote about his response to the coal and the issue of collaboration: "Waldo originally introduced the concept of collaboration to me during a visit I made to Amsterdam in 1994. While I was intrigued by the idea, I must say it also made me a bit nervous, since I was unfamiliar with his thinking. I was still mentally conditioned to thinking of final work in terms of aesthetics and a unified whole. For both of us it was a real journey into space, into the unknown frontier. At this point we were neither sure of the direction we were going or its outcome. These first works were awkward, to say the least, on an aesthetic level maybe not the best. But time and others will decide that issue. When Waldo suggested the three-sided frame, it gave direction and helped solidify the concept of dialogue – an ongoing conversation."

In the work with Bien the mutuality of work itself created a community of friendship, in what would assume the quality of a pictorial conversation. Grotfeldt emphasises the shift in his own thinking, the question of how the painting brings a unity from diverse sensations and materials to recognising the unknown in his shared work and characterising it in terms both of a journey and re-territorialisation: the issue of the frontier. Bien commented on their method of proceeding: "we bought twelve little canvases and we started working, we had no plan and didn't look at what the other was doing. The dialogue is afterwards. We discussed afterwards what should go together and where. With Virgil, I made a green square of the border of the first two canvases done together."



1996-019



1996-024



1996-022



1996-020



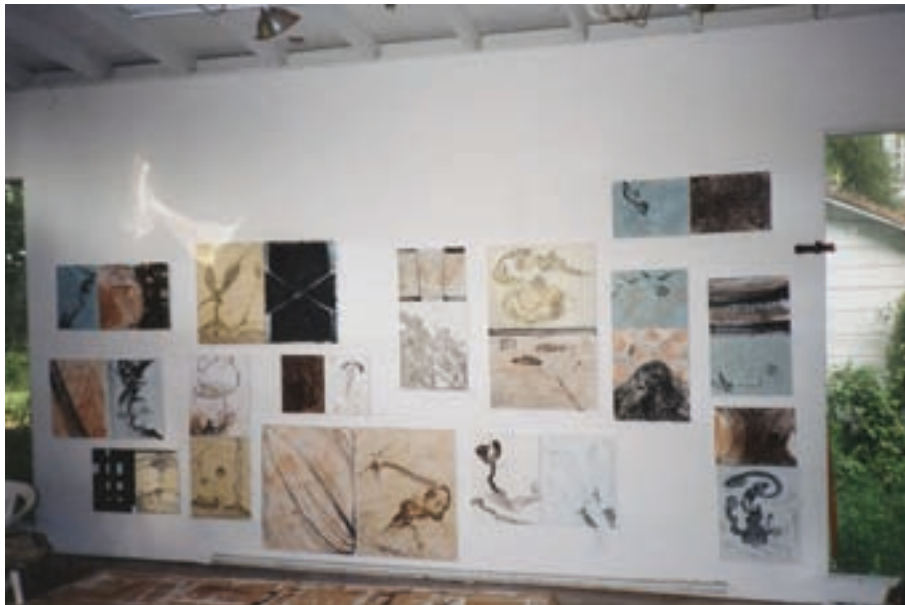
1996-021



1996-023

1996-019-024  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt  
Artists' collection, private collection

Series: Meeting 5. Work in progress, Studio Heights Blvd.,  
Houston, Texas 1997



all works: Coal dust and pigments on river clay on canvas  
in open wooden frame

The small square which acts as the bind for the superimposed canvases indicated the acceptance by the artists of their respective need for exchange, and for Grotfeldt the idea of the frontier and the move away from heroic possessive individualism was truly a frontier experience, a mythos of peculiar power within the American life, the idea that the capacity to explore (even outer space), to reduce one's life to a wandering nomadism, refine it to the bare essentials, in terms of materialism and wants, allowed a necessary re-birth and rejuvenation, inaugurating tropes of survival and renewal. The frontier has the power of a historical metaphor, the issue of transformation, such as one views with the transformation of coal into diamond.

The exchange into the unknown meant that Grotfeldt was prepared to simplify his dense symbolic world and return to more direct communications. Both artists worked independently and together, painting fast and like an open performance, without sketches and preparation; quick and urgent survival in the face of the blank canvas.



1997-125



1997-134



1997-127



1997-130



1997-129



1997-132



1997-133



1997-124



1997-126



1997-128



1997-123



1997-121



1997-131

1997-121-133  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien  
Artists' collection



1997-122





Bien had found a tin of old yellow lint and was still busy with impressions he had from a long trip made in 1994 with Kloppenburg to Lima, Machupicchu, Cusco, and Easter Island – thus one can see landscape reference, a stone seat (also an echo of *The Death Room Interior*), a representation of a simply outlined head traceable to a head Bien had got as a gift in Africa and which appeared in his work *Made in Belgium*. Bien describes the first exchange as also an experience of the 'frontier' life, the relationship between freedom and sense of a fixed place.



In the first series, unlike in some of the later ones, the artists do not share materials, Grotfeldt uses the coal dust and Bien remains with the yellow lint paint. In the reading of the series one has to accept the order decided upon by the artists, it has not been possible to re-construct the actual sequence of painting, only its agreed final form. Looking at the first of the six, one notes that it is the least worked. The shared square acts like a lock for which the series opens. Much of the ground is left visible and the unprimed areas of the canvas enter as a pictorial auxiliary.

This agreed overlap in their respective territory is the most consistent aspect of



Roadstop at Baxter's on the way to Rio Grande, 1996. Fuel, coffee, cigarettes and Indian artefacts from Vivalde County

the communication. Unlike in the bronze-powder works, Grotfeldt remains in the darker register, Bien's canvas using a much higher tonal key, and the lower part simmering in a dark indigo, and the slightly indicated branch shapes of Bien floating above the weighted work of Grotfeldt.

The shapes are rhizomatics, with Bien's appearing to float in the lighter aerial atmosphere, Grotfeldt creating the impression of an engraving by allowing the weave of the canvas's full appearance. The gesture of the small square goes beyond territorial access, it is also exposed in the relation to the open frame, agreed on by both artists as a way of indicating open space, an effort to abandon the compression of framing; there is also a studied risk in the contrasting monochromes, modified by freeing as much of the canvas as possible from marks. Bien's is a more minimal inflection, Grotfeldt introduces a horned spiraling projection which bores into the side of the lower left frame, creating counter directional emphasis to Bien, the whole of the openness and pressure of containment balanced on the slight territory of their agreement.

Both artists show in the first series a fascination with the head that Bien had had cast in bronze during his stay in Berlin; not only would Grotfeldt use it in the painted series, but later, in the following year, he made a sculptural version of

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S



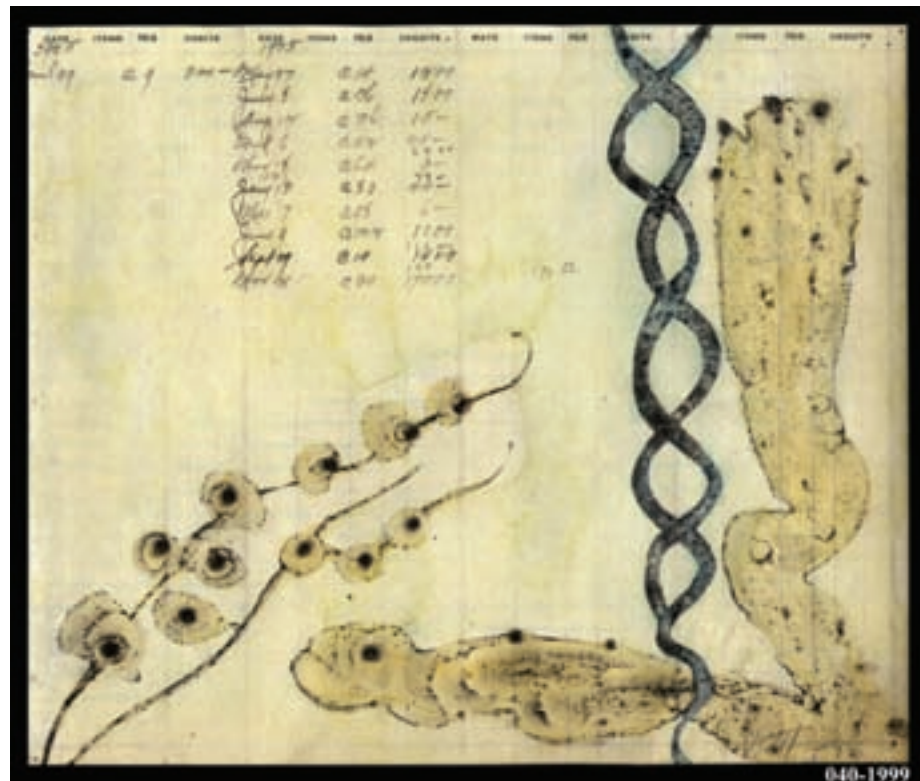
Two entwined snakes,  
India, 18th century  
Ajit Mookerjee Collection,  
New Delhi

the head adding a projecting twig such as one sees in his *Beekeeper Works* or *The Lizard like Tongue of the Sphinx Figure on a Pedestal*. The original head, given to Bien, is small and can be held in one hand; both artists seem to have been fascinated by the scale and origin of the sculpture. The head had been handed to Bien in Zaire, wrapped in an elephant ear, the original is still kept in the studio at Lauriergracht.

Grotfeldt, now working on a smaller scale than the large works on paper from his studio in Houston, had initial difficulty with the material surface of the canvas, and also, as he remarked, there was less free flow in terms of the tight weave of the canvas, in some sense it returned him to his more precisionist drawing.

Initially, Grotfeldt's treatment suggests a larger space than the size of the canvas. The head is shown neither frontally or in profile, the diagonal corner placement twisted toward the viewer, is a way of dealing with a lack of support line below for the stable view; the head is, as it were, caught in the darkness, half escaping and afraught with vertigo from the absence of the visible support. Bien remains in simple emblematic gestures, the seat and the anvil both functioning as a landscape, on a memory from Machupicchu, the anvil having a polder fascination for Bien.





040-1999  
*Untitled*, 1998



Grotfeldt also reflected on his engagement with black as a colour:  
 "as to the issue of black, I am in agreement with Goethe who said all colour exists also in darkness. As the transmitter, it is my role to release the spectrum, not in a literal sense but on the conceptual plane."

In the last part of the series one sees that there is in fact a direct visual response from one painter to the other, which Bien had negotiated through the funnel, anvil, head, the square, semi-circle, pyramid, and finally they respond to each other through the inversion of an elongated "V" perspective and an acrobat figure with the scissors legs.

The series was painted in Amsterdam and brought to Houston by Bien, where it was framed. It was there in the following year that they began the second series. With the second series there is one important shift: both artists agree to a common medium, they both choose carbon.

Grotfeldt has written about the choice of carbon:

"the resulting image is dictated by the choice of carbon, and the geology of the particular carbon being used. Tasmanian coal produces completely different effects from Appalachian."

Indeed, the issue of the subjective response of Grotfeldt to black is a critical exploration in his work.



Brancusi in his atelier

Bien had remarked in discussing his works which he made during his time in Berlin that he had wanted painting to be an adventure: "I wanted a method of painting that was according to my understanding of the light, and then into a kind of crystal-mineral understanding, of fractured zones, and the anti-motoric, you can see how in a dynamic monochrome surface with short brush strokes in a logical direction, the dynamic is created by the anti-dynamic in the sense of form, the painting is created by anti-dynamics."

Both Bien and Grotfeldt, in their choice of monochrome, were bypassing the debates on minimal and conceptual painting which had been such a regnant critical orthodoxy during the 1970's and 1980's; discussing the problem of the relationship between form and colour, between representation and non-representation, thinking of colour as independent, capable of individual apprehension, was increasingly favoured against the formal idea of a painting, with some arguing that the placement of colours created an inner dynamic which also had form properties, and for others, the forming idea and organisation of the surface already delimited the activities of colours.

For Bien the earth colours and soils he was fascinated with from Africa were about time, the crystallisation of the monochrome was the play between light



In 1995, Grotfeldt produced a series of drawings which were given the title *Thirteen Steps to Satan*

and dark, and the most important need was to eliminate the edge. Thus the painters were not building up layer by layer, nor modulating cold against warm, they were involved in what Bien had described as 'edge experience:' "my own experience of painting had been an edge experience. By giving space a meaning, a space that is behind every canvas on the wall, I had not shifted different colours, like Rothko" – whose treatment of the monochrome Bien contrasted against that of Mondriaan, suggesting that Rothko calls attention to the interaction of the monochrome as it takes place on the canvas, whereas Mondriaan ends up in decorative surface. Both artists would later spend time in the Menil collection, Houston, studying the Rothko Chapel - or that Rothko achieved an in-between zone of activity, where the quale of the red, for example, literally interacts with everything we see and feel, even if the red of the red looks like eighteenth century Indian miniatures, and its vibrations - ..... "rather I were shifting territories. I was not just interested in the shifting and weaving of colours, creating a mesh, in that sense I am not a painter."

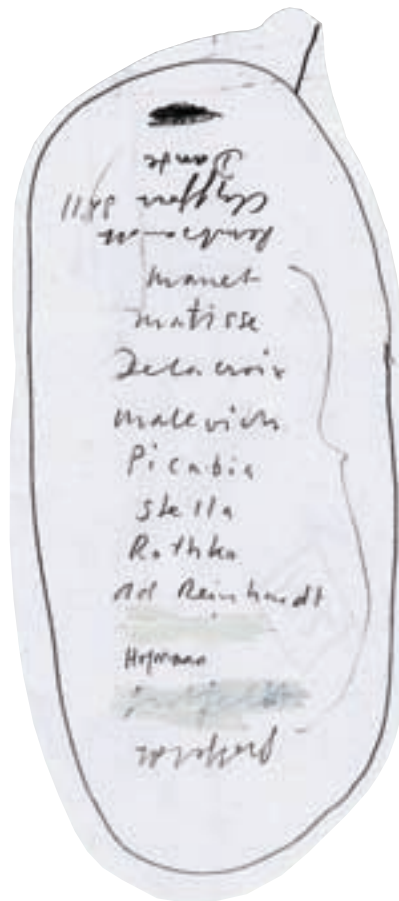
Grotfeldt too had made a similar observation in a recorded session with Walter Hopps, in conversation at the Barbara Davis Gallery; he too suggested he was not a 'painter,' clearly not in that sense:

"For me the carbon expresses all that is 'universe' as I understand it."



Bien responded with his series *and 9 steps back into the light*





Thus, in the second series, painted in Houston (1995), there was also the introduction of river clay, which was a decision to eliminate the structure of the canvas.

Both artists agreed that they didn't want an industrial underground. They wanted an underground which would give the coal the greatest depth and colour to allow it maximum expressivity. They have described how they wanted the black to appear, not as in Soutine to be influenced by the image, instead they wanted a speech that recognised its emergence from silence. For modernist artists the debate of black, for example in Manet and Matisse (under the influence of Delacroix) was a search to free black from being used as a pictorial auxiliary, or, as a tonal value for shadow. They wanted it to be treated as an independent colour. In the work of Malevitch, Picabia, Stella, Rothko, and Ad Reinhardt, various ways of making black an emotionally charged colour are approached. The artists wish to consider black as part of the light-dark scale, and also as colour, but more as the fundamental attunement for the appearance of colour, what could make the light visible.

Colours too could be mediumistic, and the role of the painting was to create vibrant release.

The working together saved both artists from their own 'egoism,' it also initiated an emancipation in response to pain and isolation which was their own self-transfiguration. In Nietzsche's pregnant formula art became the task of life and became more important than 'truth.' The extraordinary impulses in their co-operation can only be seen again in terms of mytho-magical operation.

The experiences between them are irrecusable and enigmatic. One can think of Merleau Ponty's meditation at the end of his posthumously published work *Le Visible et l'Invisible* on the problem of understanding the 'quale' of say, the colour red:

"We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not as is always said, a quale, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say. It requires a focusing however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before – as we put it so aptly – fixing it.

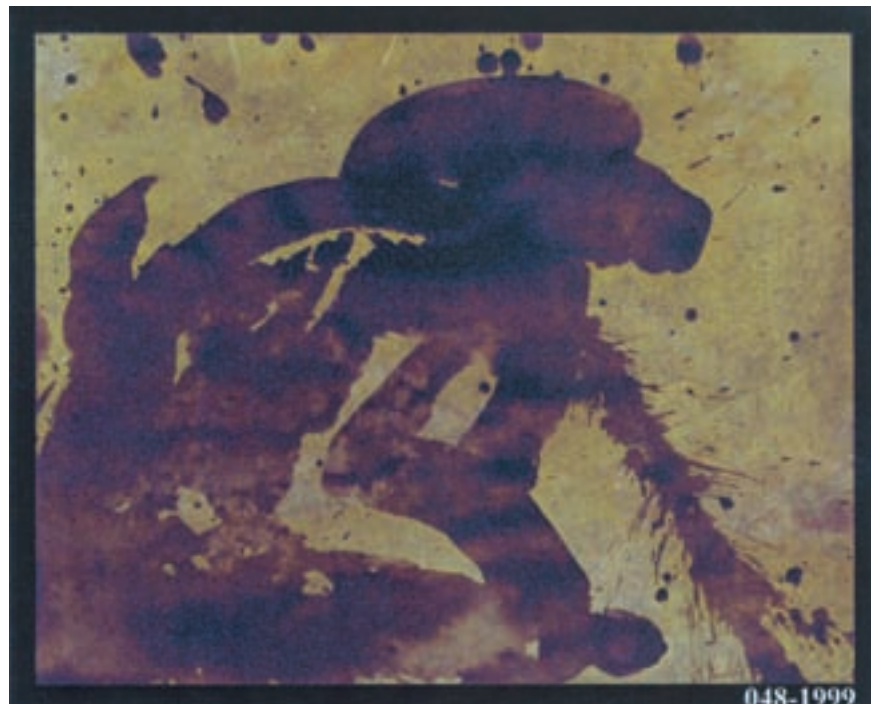


*Untitled*, 1996  
Coal dust on paper  
31,6 x 31,7 cm

And now that I have fixed it, my eyes penetrate into it, into its fixed structure, or, if they start to wander about again, the quale resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly metallic or porous configuration or texture, and the quale itself counts for very little compared with these participations. Claudel has a phrase saying that a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red. The colour is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relation with its surroundings: this red is what it is, only connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colours it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it.

In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom.

The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibres onto the fabric of the visible, and, thereby, onto the fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation into the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, of Snobs and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornment and that of uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in the one constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates it, or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like Hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs Elysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we could recognise that a naked colour, and in general a visi-



048-1999  
*Untitled, 1993*





ble, is not a chunk of absolutely hard indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior ones, ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the coloured or visible world resound at distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral association of this world – less a colour or a thing therefore, than a difference between things and colours, a momentary crystallisation of coloured being or visibility. Between the alleged colours and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things.”<sup>64</sup>

Speaking of the choice of material *coal* Grotfeldt remarked: “the history of all living things which precede me, and ultimately my own final destination.”

In order to use the coal as a medium, it was necessary to grind it and to add liquid that helped it flow. This often produced happy accidents, there are sometimes mottled effects, and the scale of the dark-light continuum is also modulated by the use of river clay for priming the canvas. Again, twelve small canvases, arranged differently from the first series where the Bien works were on top.

The play of space and counter space from the three-sided framing arrangement is now taken into account, and the elements of abstraction and figuration broadly treated. In the brushwork with the carbon there is a mystery of unfolding compression, the drag on the surface does not smooth out into a painterly skin, as with oils or acrylic, it has a more specific three-dimensional effect, this pushes the artists away from the image, to the inner process of the material, and enhances their search for the interactions and interlacing of the black.

<sup>64</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible*, transl. *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 131-133.



Bien

Kloppenburg

Grotfeldt

1997-117  
*No title* (Grotfeldt, Bien & K (Kloppenburg)),  
 Meeting 6,  
 Artists' collection



The work still in progress,  
 here in a state of assimilation



1997-111  
 Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt  
 Meeting 6, Houston, Texas:  
*Strata*  
 Artists' collection



1997-115



1997-113



1997-114



1997-116





Significantly, Bien draws on work from a former student of the Düsseldorf Academy days, and makes a move to architectural motifs, in the bell-shaped motif with its plan of a Byzantine church, derived from a work of Martin Schönenborn, the indication of a Doric temple façade, with the lower mirroring of a pediment, and what may be an echo of his work Tectonic Genesis, a basalt rock atop a fluted pillar, a broadly sketched head and a coal burger, the latter an image which also deals with the internal aspect of making a series, also an effort to determine an iconic element of American culture, without using a brand name, namely, the socialising of food and the chaining it to the process of industrial mass production; techniques which Henry Ford had discovered from looking at abattoir production and transferring it to his car factory, a process now familiar as the production line, whereas, in Grotfeldt, there is a more abstract appearance, of botanic plants that belong to the atmosphere of light.

The major shift in Grotfeldt's work becomes apparent here. In earlier work there is little interest in botanics per se. With the use of coal Grotfeldt went into the botanical, it may be that working with the coal made it much more difficult to create hard linear forms, also there is a sense of liberating the medium in the painting itself, which brings the darkness into light.



016-1999  
*Untitled*, 1999

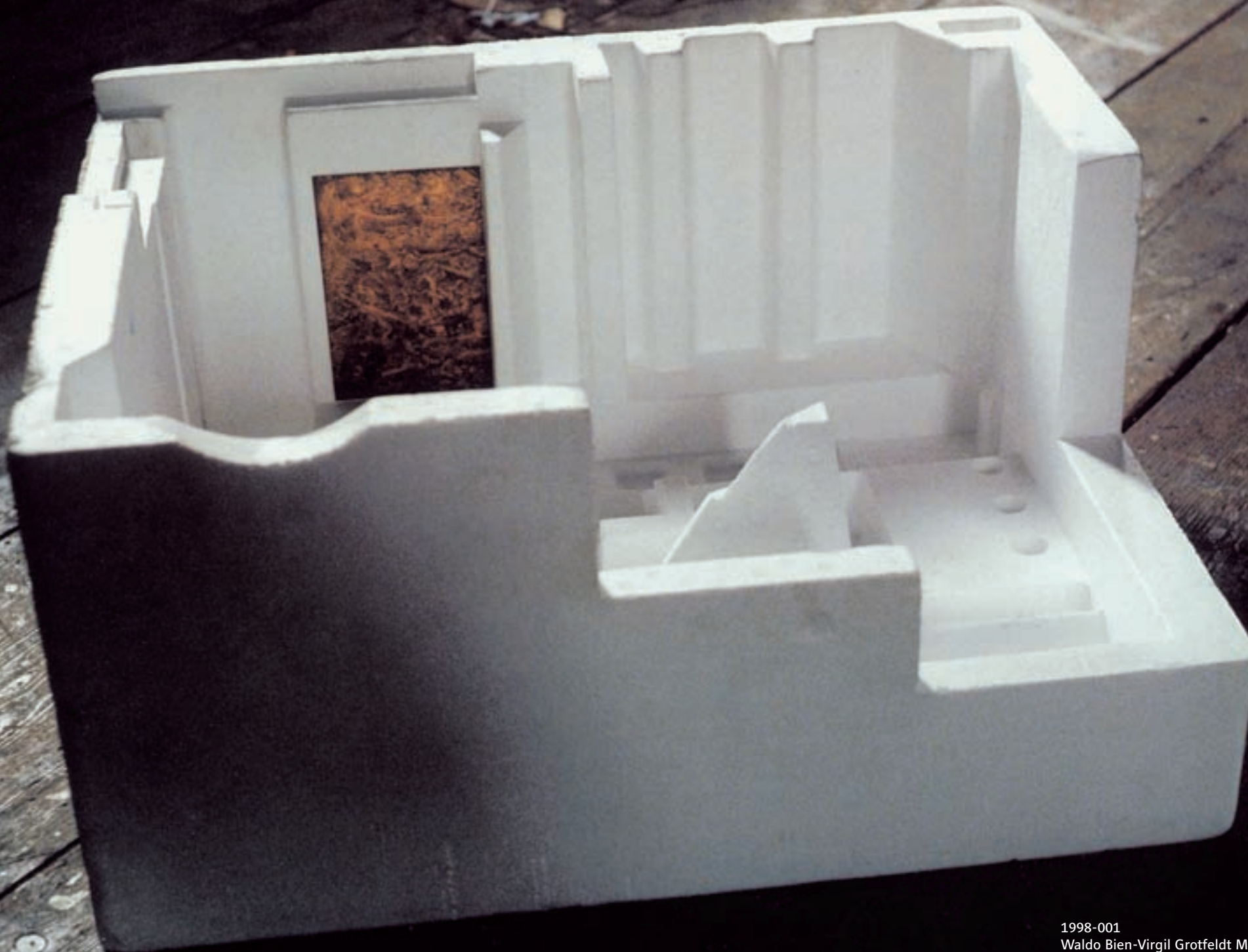


The earliest response to the *Death Room Interior* had resulted in a series called *Footnotes to the Death Room Interior*. It is only four years later, that this first independent search in the botanical becomes a major theme for Grotfeldt. This would give rise to the series *Healing Plants*, and dozens of other works. Should one want to point to the year in which Grotfeldt achieves a new holism and personal direction, it falls around this time, and it would be very fruitful to study this whole year's work separately, as it is an *annus mirabilis* in the artist's life. It signifies new aims and feelings for Grotfeldt, the series *Thirteen Steps to Satan*, to which Bien responded with: *Nine steps back into the light*, suggests that both artists were aware of their respective intense struggles.

Grotfeldt alludes to this in his work *Preponderance of the Small, the Economy of Grace*, a small sculptural ensemble, with wenge wood, slate fossil, and bronze, the same head referred to earlier and used by Grotfeldt also in the work *Speaking in lunar Fashion* (1992), or in another work *Always starting to smell* where the outlined figure floats into the plant and aerial worlds, the themes of falling from the previous ten years, *Man falling from grace*, to ones of flotation. The work *Remedies by Earth*, a small work with carbon on ledger paper, contains diminished accents in the skull, as in the *You what Pictures*, where the memento



VIRGIL GROTFELDT | WALDO BIEN MEETING 7  
Amsterdam / Houston, Texas, telephone 1998

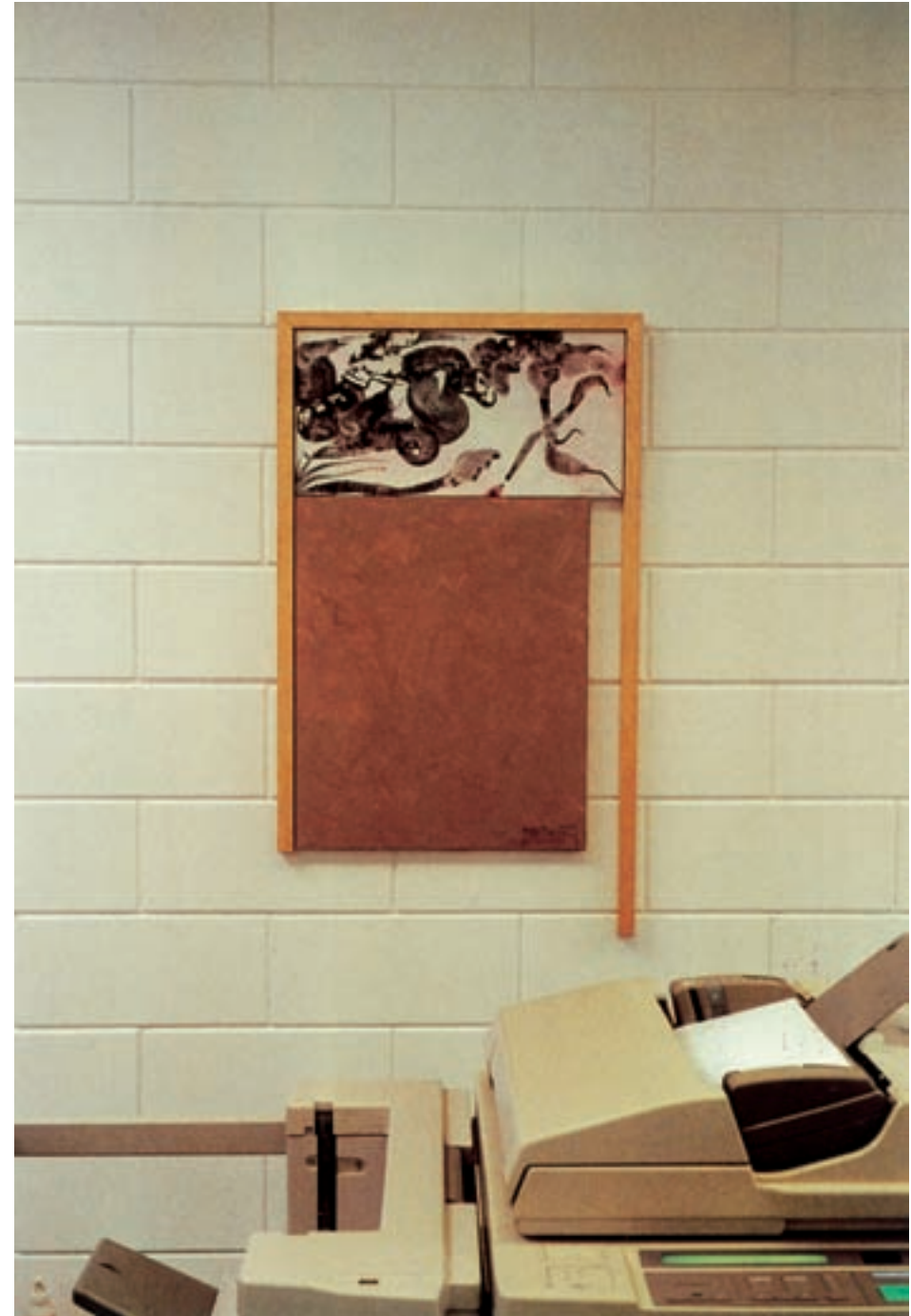


1998-001  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 7,  
Amsterdam: *Ritual Space (Architecture)*



mori skulls float into the light. The works entitled *Entrada I,II,III* create the fullest possible expanse for the canvas, and links with the series *The Plenitudes, Subject to Change*, and, in the work *Nothing here as it could be*, one sees Grotfeldt, absorbing the idiom of Bien, and even creating a suggestive and ironic work.

VIRGIL GROTFELDT | WALDO BIEN MEETING 8  
Airport Houston, Texas, 1998



1998-004  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 8, Houston, Texas  
Private collection

The series *Healing Plants* points again to the ceremonial and ritual aspect of Grotfeldt's work. Both Bien and Grotfeldt want to move their work away from the idea of value objects that are placed in the 'museum.' As with Navajo dry-paintings, Grotfeldt genuinely understands his work as healing.<sup>65</sup> In parts of the third series of 1996 there are definite appearances of myxocidium plants, and indeed, there is a sense that in undergoing the danger, Grotfeldt has found the salvation, as with the Navajo dry-paintings Bien and Grotfeldt participate in a chanting ritual, a performance.

In the curing chants of the Navajo, Kluckhohn and Leighton point out that, while the background is of a buckskin spread out on the ground, the designs are made of charcoal and pulverised minerals, not sand at all in the strict sense. The smaller painting can be made by two or three people in an hour, in the Navajo ritual the Singer consults with the patient and family and selects from the various dry paintings prescribed for this ceremonial, those that seem most appropriate to the illness and the assumed cause, often containing the abstraction of holy powers, and the four sacred plants: corn, beans, squash and tobacco, or other plants such as cactus..... "their use is almost invariably centred in the curing of the sick or disturbed," the use of dry-painting is described as follows: "When the painting has been completed to the accompaniment of song and prayer, the patient sits upon it in ceremonially dictated fashion and the treatment begins. The Singer gives the patient an infusion of herbs to drink. He touches the feet of a figure in the painting and then the patient's feet, saying, 'May his feet be well. His feet restore unto him.' In turn he passes his hands upon the knees, hands, shoulders, breast, back and head of the figure and the patient, praying for the restoration of each part. When the treatment is finished, the painting is destroyed bit by bit in the order in which it was made. The sand is swept up and carried out to the north of the Hogan." (219)..... Kluckhohn argues that the Navajo interest is focused on restoring the harmony within the individual and between the individual and other persons or supernatural forces. The supernaturals must be appeased, this appropriation through ritual and ceremony is a central preoccupation for well-being and the life with others<sup>66</sup>.

65 For this material see: Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothy Leighton, *The Navajo* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962, revised edition).

66 Kluckhohn/ Leighton, op. cit. 65.





1999-022



1999-024



1999-025



1999-023

1999-019-020/ 1999-022-026  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 9,  
Amsterdam  
Artists' collection

1999-020

1999-019



1999-026





1999-018-020-021  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 9,  
Amsterdam  
Artists' collection

One of the first public presentations of Grotfeldt's European experiences took place in the exhibition Delphi the following year (1996), with an essay and catalogue by David Courtney. The show included works by Waldo Bien, Joseph Semah, Cornelius Rogge, Henry Stein, Daniel Wnuk, Joe Zito. Harm de Grijns provided the idea for the genesis of the show in his preface: "the exhibition was born out of the curiosity about motif, a collective physical mythology which I refer to as chotonic (sic); the ageless nature of the land, its cycles of life and fecundity, death and dissolution."

Courtney approvingly quotes Marcuse and strongly supports the work of Grotfeldt:

"The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established (day to day) reality and its invocation of the image (Schöner Schein) of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art transcends its social determinations and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence..... the inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and the sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions."





Meeting 9. Working Session at Studio Lauriergracht, Amsterdam, 1999





Sections that were cut out of the canvas (skin) were transformed into sculpture, from the 2nd into the 3rd dimension (donor and transplantation).

Courtney noted on Grotfeldt: "Virgil Grotfeldt's two-dimensional work, *Thirteen Steps to Satan*, poses an unlikely combination of artists' elements for viewers. These paintings/drawings are literally made from coal. In them one can see the entire organic, evolutionary cycle as plant-like forms arise, emerge, dance in the wind, and nourish the world around them.

But in that these drawings/paintings are made of coal, these plants are literally their decayed selves. In fact, one feels these plants move toward and past death, it is the process of transfiguration that becomes the meaning. Plants *in relation* to the rest of nature and time become a thick, black stew of carbon, which further compressed becomes coal, and still further compressed is diamonds. 'Diamonds' sounds and looks more wonderful than a lump of coal. But for imaginative artists like Virgil Grotfeldt, there is an aesthetic astonishment lurking in all that matter. All we need are the eyes to see the aesthetic potential that can be summoned from any material. Grotfeldt is a teacher. Like a Zen master, he sagely passes along what at first sight seems the most ordinary and childlike of scratchings. The longer the viewer gazes upon the image, the deeper they are drawn into the drama that eclipses the objects represented, and time itself."

By the time of their working together in the early summer of the following year (1996), the artists' rate of production doubled. The time they spent painting this series, on the basis of surviving diary notes, seems to have been nine days.

There is also a change in format, with the appearance of a triple canvas, and for the first time of a black canvas, which will become a motif for Bien in the later 1990's, specifically in 1998 as part of his module series. Grotfeldt moves into a freer and even more expressionist mode of work, and Bien accumulates further layers of reference to strata, the use of a double funnel, again emblematic of their own exchange, the movement of flows between them, the double funnel is laid over cross bones; Grotfeldt further explores the spiral forms with skulls emerging, plant shapes like floating parachutes, possibly versions of magic mushrooms, and shapes that surely are derived from cannabis plants. Bien too has moved to the botanical, and in one remarkable double canvas it is almost impossible to tell who has painted what, except that where Grotfeldt leaves the flower open, Bien closes the massive shape of the artichoke plant.

Botanics and bones become melded in the soft atmosphere of warm light, Grotfeldt allows a free fantasy to emerge. In this series, one also sees Grotfeldt's return to the series of indigo blue on the formula filled pages. Grotfeldt accepts the paper with the various writings and scribbles, preferring in some ways paper to canvas. The spiralled vertebrae return to motifs of his early notes to *The Death Room Interior*, and also the series of 1994 *Winter Flower*. The almost perfect symbiosis of the two artists is nowhere more evident than in this series.

Later in the year, in Houston, after a trip to Mexico, their dialogue changes in intensity and goes off in new directions, through the introduction of white and yellow river clay as a priming agent. The series takes on a much more honeyed hue, there is a more subtle energy from Grotfeldt, and the gauge for the shift on Grotfeldt's part to more private and occluded indications, anticipates the fifth series. The desire for colour enters, on the side of Grotfeldt. The coal used comes from Germany, America, Belgium, Tasmania.

Grotfeldt finds his way to the light, almost Aztec blue, the use of coal from Dorsten has a soft blue quality, the fifth series becomes positively lyrical, and immensely delicate.



Virgil Grotfeldt: Dollar Green, coal dust and pigments on river clay on canvas  
1999-056  
Studio White Street New York, 1999

Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt works produced on meeting 10:  
1999-053  
1999-054  
1999-055  
1999-056  
1999-057  
1999-058

Series six, done in November 1997 in Houston, includes a collaboration with Jacobus Kloppenburg, a work which directly engages Malevich, and the large sequence of the ledger books treated as an architectural façade, the small paintings compressed within the framing columns: another instance of the canvases stacked one on another, to create a strata.

Series seven and eight consist of single works, again with variation on the shapes and framing.

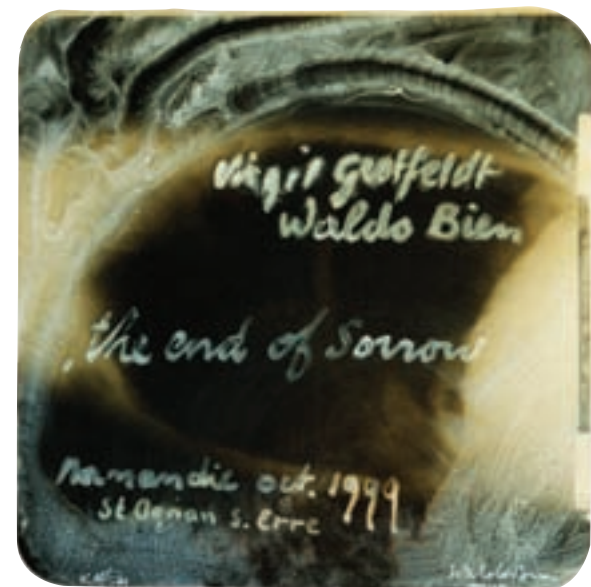
The next major collaboration occurs in 1999 in advance of visiting the FIUWAC collection which was opened in the Triodos Bank in Zeist, and to which Grotfeldt made a generous donation.

Grotfeldt's move to New York, on the suggestion of the Jason Mc-Coy Gallery, the deterioration of the relationship with his partner of almost 40 years, and fighting with bouts of lymphatic illness, and psychological distress, led to his return to Europe. There, in Normandy, he painted a series in the house donated to FIU Amsterdam for use as a summer school and artists' residence by the widow of Piero Heliczer, who had worked on films in Warhol's factory, and



1999-053  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt:  
*Gay Parade (Manhattan)*,  
observed from the roof of  
White Street Studio. New  
York 1999  
Artists' collection





1999-061

Title page of the series *The End of Sorrow*, Waldo Bien Archive

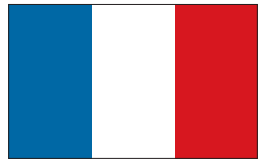


written and published underground poetry magazines. The house became a place of retreat for both artists during the autumn of 1999. On X-ray plates, which had been found by Jacobus Kloppenburg, they completed a series of 82 paintings.

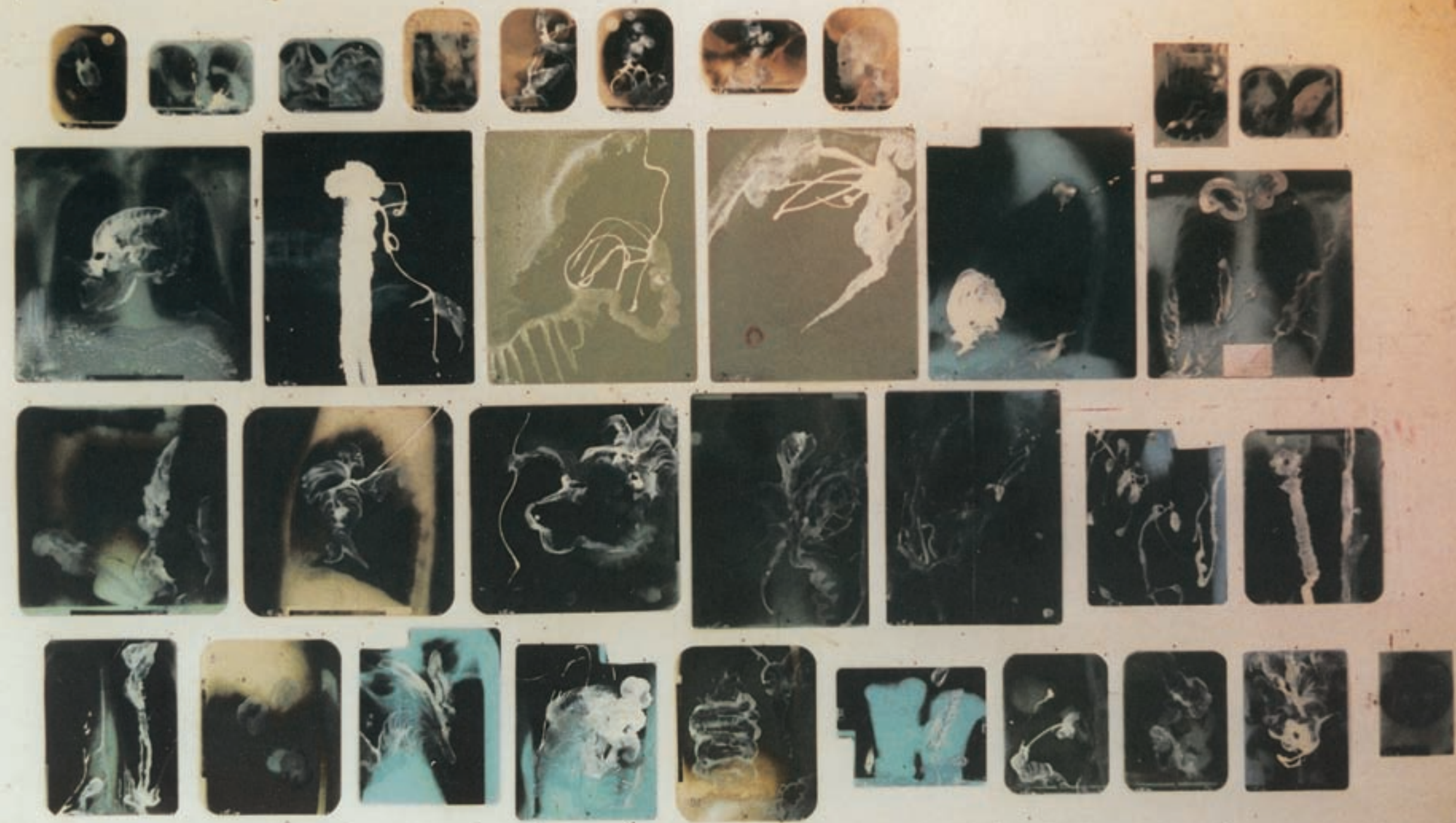
Grotfeldt used drip technique and finger painting. The finger painting of flowers on the white paint, on the dark ground, create a spectral and ghostly sequence of images. Some of the plates are very close to the drip technique of Hans Hofmann and Pollock. Working in very reduced circumstances with neither electricity, nor many other basic amenities, the artists recovered from emotional and other stress in their private and personal lives.

The twelfth series was literally a set of index cards, posted by Bien Federal Express, on which Bien had painted over his translations for the forthcoming text of the exhibition to be held in Recklinghausen in May of the year 2000.

Both artists were glad to have crossed the bridge to the new century. Grotfeldt painted the cards on Bien's request, and posted them back in time to hang as part of the exhibition *Waldo Bien including the series with Virgil Grotfeldt*. This was



liberté  
égalité  
fraternité



Virgil Grotfeldt  
*The End of Sorrow 1-33, 1999*  
 Enamel on X-Ray





1999-061/109  
Waldo Bien: *The End of Sorrow*, 1999  
Waldo Bien Archive





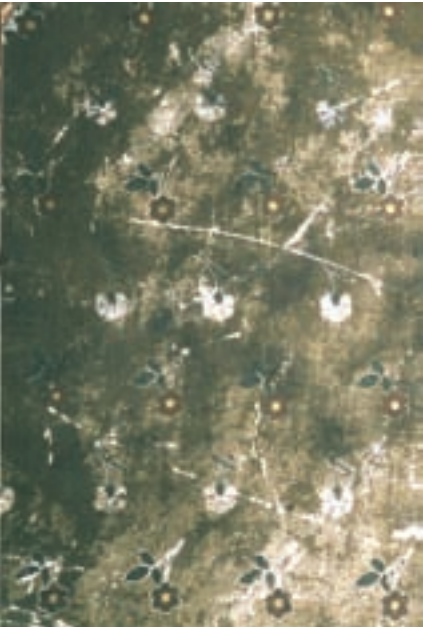
at work in the studio in Normandy, Oct. 1999



Grotfeldt sculpture made of limestone, 1999



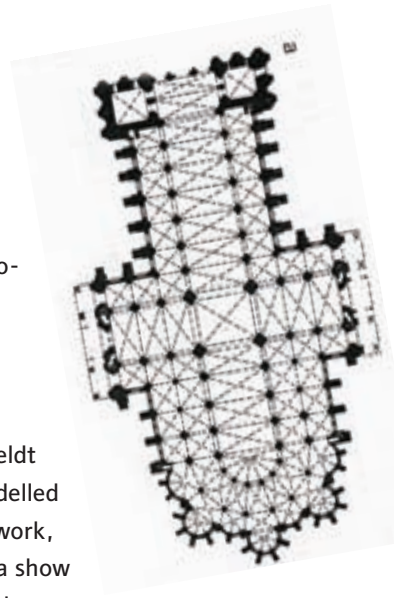
Chartres Cathedral, fresco in the crypt



also to constitute the largest display of the works by Grotfeldt in any European museum, with the exception of the works he either donated to, or were sold for inclusion in, the FIUWAC collection, nearly all of which are in Zeist.

One of the remarkable developments during the late 1990's is that Grotfeldt renews the interaction of drawing and colour into rhythmic and highly modelled dimensionality in his works. This was increasingly noted by critics of his work, and strongly emphasised by Walter Hopps in an essay he contributed to a show of Grotfeldt's work in 2001, remarking that not since early Pollock or the late Arshile Gorky "have I seen the dimensionally modelled forms as in the bimorphic abstractions of Virgil Grotfeldt. Nature and abstract form define Grotfeldt's art as well as sustain its value as a personal meditation upon essential life forces."

In April 2001 the artists worked in Houston on a series called *Flowers for Charlotte Corday*, introducing small oval canvasses and reaching renewed levels of abstraction, with Grotfeldt literally moulding his brush strokes using gesso and coal dust. Where David dedicated his painting to Marat, the artists have dedicated their series to the 25 year old Normandian Charlotte Corday who in 1793 assassinated Marat. The introduction of the oval shapes are a reference to the sabot-shaped bath tub. In *The Death of Marat* Corday was placed in a frontal position standing by the dead body of Marat. She had gained access to Marat's apartment, using letters as a pretext. Michael Marrinan has studied in his *Images and Ideas of Charlotte Corday, Texts and Contexts of an Assassination* the complex cult that developed towards the idealist assassin following her execution on the night of 16 July 1793. It is one of the most explicitly political titles in the work of either artist. Once again, it points to revolution and real terror.



As Hofmann commented: "Abstract work should have as much meaning as a realistic work. It must express something that the artist has really experienced in nature. We are not abstract out of a desire to be abstract, but to express our experience, and to express the greatest with the simplest means."

For Hofmann, the conception of plasticity or plastic animation into the depth of the picture surface was answered with a radar-like echo out of the depth and vice versa. Impulse and echo established a two-dimensionality with the dynamic enlivenment of created breathing depth. The depth problem is one of the most controversial problems in pictorial creation. What we experience as depth in nature conceptionally transforms on the picture surface in an act of shifting. Depth is created by pictorial placement combined with colour saturation: "Depth as we experience it in nature is for our conceptional experience as concrete, dynamic, fluctuating, and ambiguously dominated by forces and counter-forces, by movement and counter-movement, all of which summarise into rhythm and counter-rhythm as the quintessence of life experience. The inherent laws of the picture surface permit the handling of the pictorial development in complete accordance with the experience of nature when we know how to activate the pictorial means to reciprocal plastic and psychological response. For this reason it is important to be aware that every plastic activation of the picture surface creates not only 'real' two-dimensional 'suggested' motion in the sense of push and pull – that is in the sense of 'in and out' of depth.



Untitled, 1999  
Limestone



The interplay of this dual motion produces two- and three-dimensional rhythm with an ambiguous interpretation of its plastic fixations. This is then pictorial space.

To understand the foregoing completely, we must further consider the magic of creative relations in our special case, the mystery of plastic depth-relation which produces simultaneous Expansion and Contraction and with it, Monumentality and Universality.

Relations in a creative sense are of a supersensory nature. Creation depends entirely upon the inner vision of the artist. It engages his sensibility and the ability to control it rationally. Any isolated thing can never surpass its own meaning. Its meaning can only be extended through relation with other things in a process of metamorphosis.



*Death Room Interior (appendix)*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 12  
unnumbered, 21 x 29,7 cm, coal dust H5 drawings (by Virgil Grotfeldt)  
on: enamel paint over pencil (text) on archival cards (by Waldo Bien)  
Waldo Bien Archive



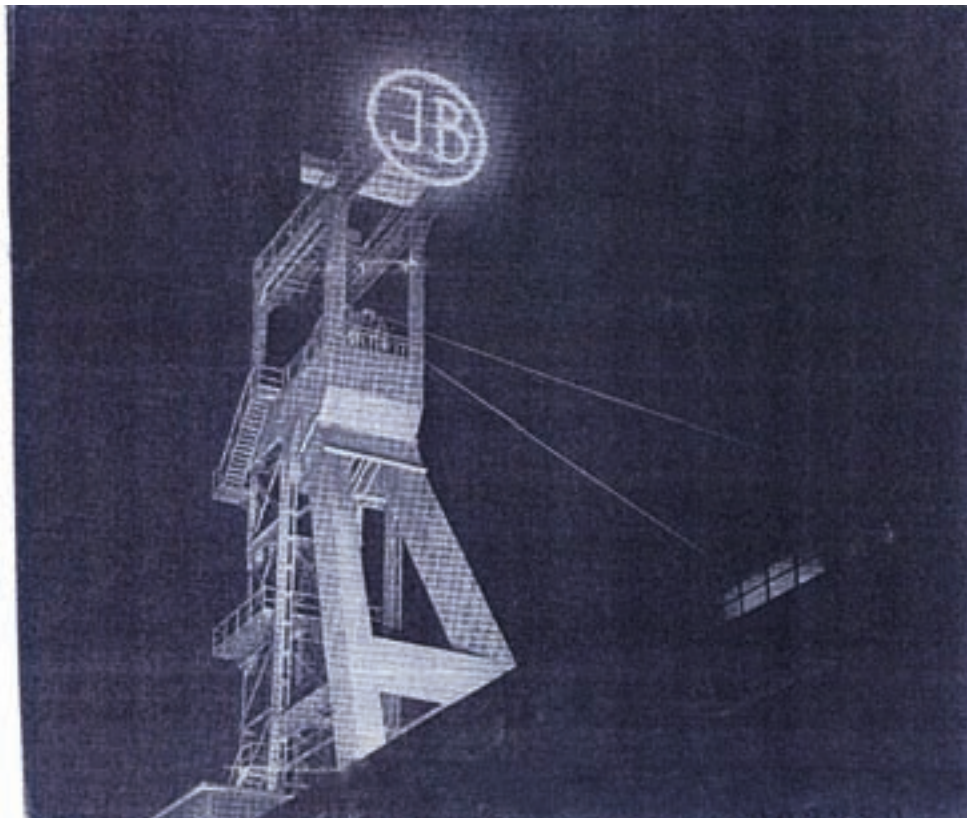


## Kunsthalle Recklinghausen 2000

This is then creation. Creation is not an affair of taste. Taste controls only the superficial aspect of things into merely arrangement. This is not composition and, therefore, is not art. Creation cannot be accomplished through additional accumulation of isolated things or through accumulation of isolated thought fragments. Creation demands correlated and potential sensorial extension and intensification for suspensory gain in the establishment of carefully 'sensed' relations.

In a relation, two physical carriers always produce a non-physical higher Third as the aesthetic affirmation of the relation.

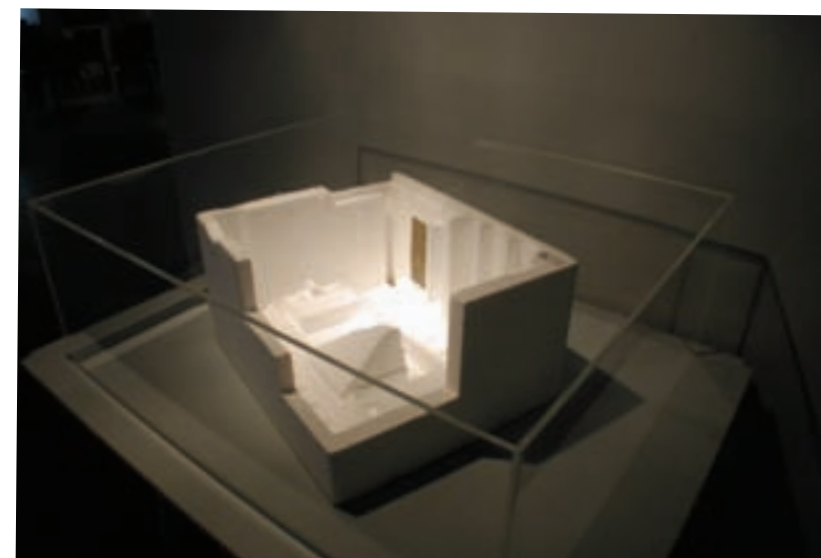
Relations operate on levelled differentiations (experienced as tensions, or contrasts and opposites) within the inherent laws of any given medium of expression. Thereby, a new reality is produced in the aesthetic form of intervals on which plasticity and any other form of creation is based. Intervals are the expression of emotional differentiation in regard to intensity, to force and timing, to emphasis and suppression, and so forth.



Festive illumination of the *Emma* coalmine shaft (NL)  
on the occasion of the wedding of Juliana and Bernhard,  
the Dutch royals

right: View on exhibit  
Kunsthalle Recklinghausen  
BRD 2000 showing  
Collaboration series and  
*Death Room Interior*  
Photos: Ferdinand Ullrich







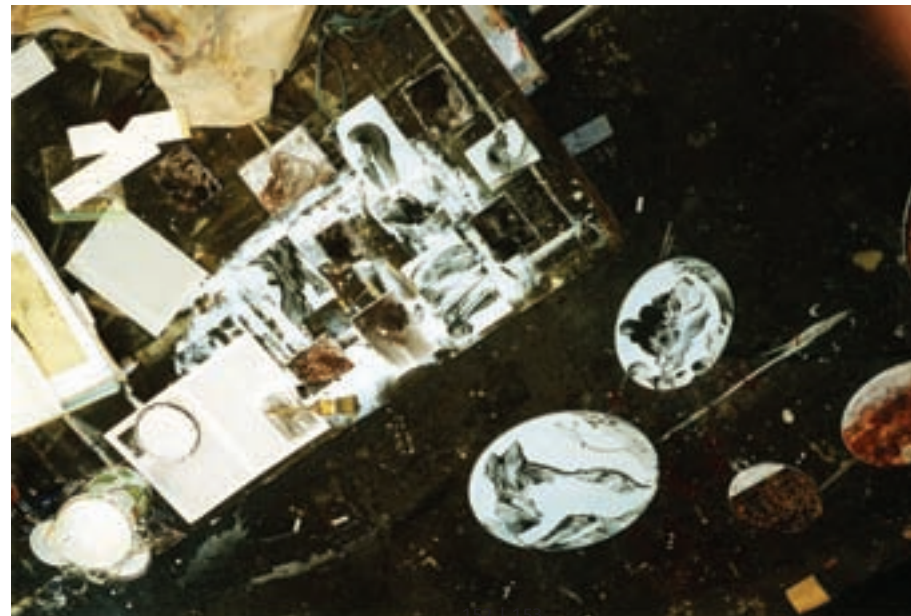


As such intervals represent psychological peculiarities in the expression of which they must not function in a set plasticity, but ambiguously within the pictorial whole, it follows that the equivalent of one relation can be related again with the equivalent of another relation. We deal then with 'relations under relations' as the highest form of aesthetic extension. The outcome of each and every relation is constantly modified. It is a metamorphosis from one state of the development into the other, and leads progressively to a potential increase in sensorial intensity until the qualitative content of the work has reached its highest point of perfection where the message of the work and the work itself must be considered physically and spiritually realized works of art.

This, surely, bespeaks the work of Grotfeldt perfectly, the artist who once declared: 'I am not a painter.'

Patrick Healy

Dublin, 30 July 2003.



Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 13, archive photo, 10 April 2001: series in progress, Studio Heights Blvd., Houston, Texas





Fig. 1. Jacques-Louis David, *Marat Dying*, 1793. Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *The Death of Marat*, 1907. Munch-Museum, Oslo.

night while an angry mob, demanding swift justice for the assassin, gathered in the street and clogged the stairway to the victim's apartment. When the time came to move her to prison, the crowd's anger flared violently, nearly preventing her safe removal from the scene.<sup>12</sup>

Charlotte Corday spent the 14th to the 16th of July in the Abbaye prison. From her cell she could hear the sounds of Marat's triumphal funeral in the streets below.<sup>13</sup> On the 17th, Corday faced the Revolutionary Tribunal. Although the extreme composure and firm resolution of the pretty Normandy maiden stunned the packed galleries of curious spectators into silence, she was nevertheless sentenced to death for her crime and executed that very evening.<sup>14</sup> As the fateful cart carried her through the streets of Paris toward the Place de la Révolution, amid the jeers and insults of the enraged sans-culottes, Charlotte's courage never once cracked. At a time when noble composure counted for much, this conduct had such a profound impact on the spectators that a general indignation swept the multitude when a zealous republican grabbed her severed head from the basket and slapped its cheeks.<sup>15</sup>

Already Charlotte had her devotees. After witnessing the spectacle of her execution, André Chenier composed Ode IX dedicated "à Marie-Anne-Charlotte Corday."<sup>16</sup> Adam Lux, a young envoy to Paris from Mayence, wrote a eulogy to Charlotte Corday condemning her act of murder but praising her noble courage and idealism, while expressing his dismay at what had become of the French Revolution. For this crime Adam Lux had his own turn before the Revolutionary Tribunal, and eventually suffered the same fate as his heroine.<sup>17</sup>

The journals of the day dedicated a generous amount of column space to Marat's murder, and woodcuts would frequently adorn their pages. Coupled with a well-established market in low-cost "popular" engravings of contemporary events, it is possible to find dozens of images depicting the event of July 13th.<sup>18</sup> One example is the engraving published by Basset, often thought to be the most "truthful" in its details to the actual scene (Fig. 3).<sup>19</sup> Marat is in his sabot-shaped tub, his head wrapped in a towel. A small round table with inkwell and paper upon it is next to him. Charlotte Corday stands over her victim and strikes the fatal blow, pushing the knife deep into the right side of Marat's upper chest. She wears the striped dress and tall hat with wide brim that is recorded in the various eyewitness accounts. Laurent Bas, who blocks the door, will soon grab the chair to his left and strike Charlotte. This engraver has apparently compressed time because witnesses testified it was in the antechamber, not in the bathroom itself, that Bas accosted the assassin; here he enters in the middle of her diabolical act.<sup>20</sup> Although this image pretends to be "true" in its detailing, the large, strong-armed woman attacking a helplessly immobile Marat makes clear in pictorial terms the pro-Marat sentiments expressed by the quatrain below.<sup>21</sup> Nor does the publisher forget to note that Charlotte is of the nobility and from Royalist-minded Calvados—two points which would make her doubly suspect to any good republican in 1793.

Other contemporary prints are less explicit in their propaganda message and even reflect a certain sympathy for Charlotte Corday. One such example is Louis Brion de la Tour's rendition of the scene (Fig. 4),<sup>22</sup> which is interesting because it does not show the actual murder taking place. As in the previous print, the time frame has been collapsed to show Marat being removed from the tub at the same moment that Charlotte is led away, although these two events actually occurred several hours apart. As Marat's friends lift his body toward the bed, they form a grouping secretly charged with heroic and religious associations: the manner in which they support his half-naked corpse, the women just to the left expressing their sorrow at the death, and the frieze-like arrangement of all the figures in this section of the image refer quite literally to contemporary neo-classic reinterpretations of Greco-Roman funerary reliefs.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the visual allusions to familiar images of Christ being placed into the tomb (one thinks of the Louvre's Titian, for example) are also operating to "energize" this deposition of Marat with a transcendental meaning.

For our present investigation, however, it is the left section of Brion's composition which holds the greatest interest. Here one finds Charlotte dressed in her finery and surrounded by the

Section of images and ideas of Charlotte Corday. Texts and contexts of an assassination by Michael Marrinan, published in ARTS magazine USA, April 1980





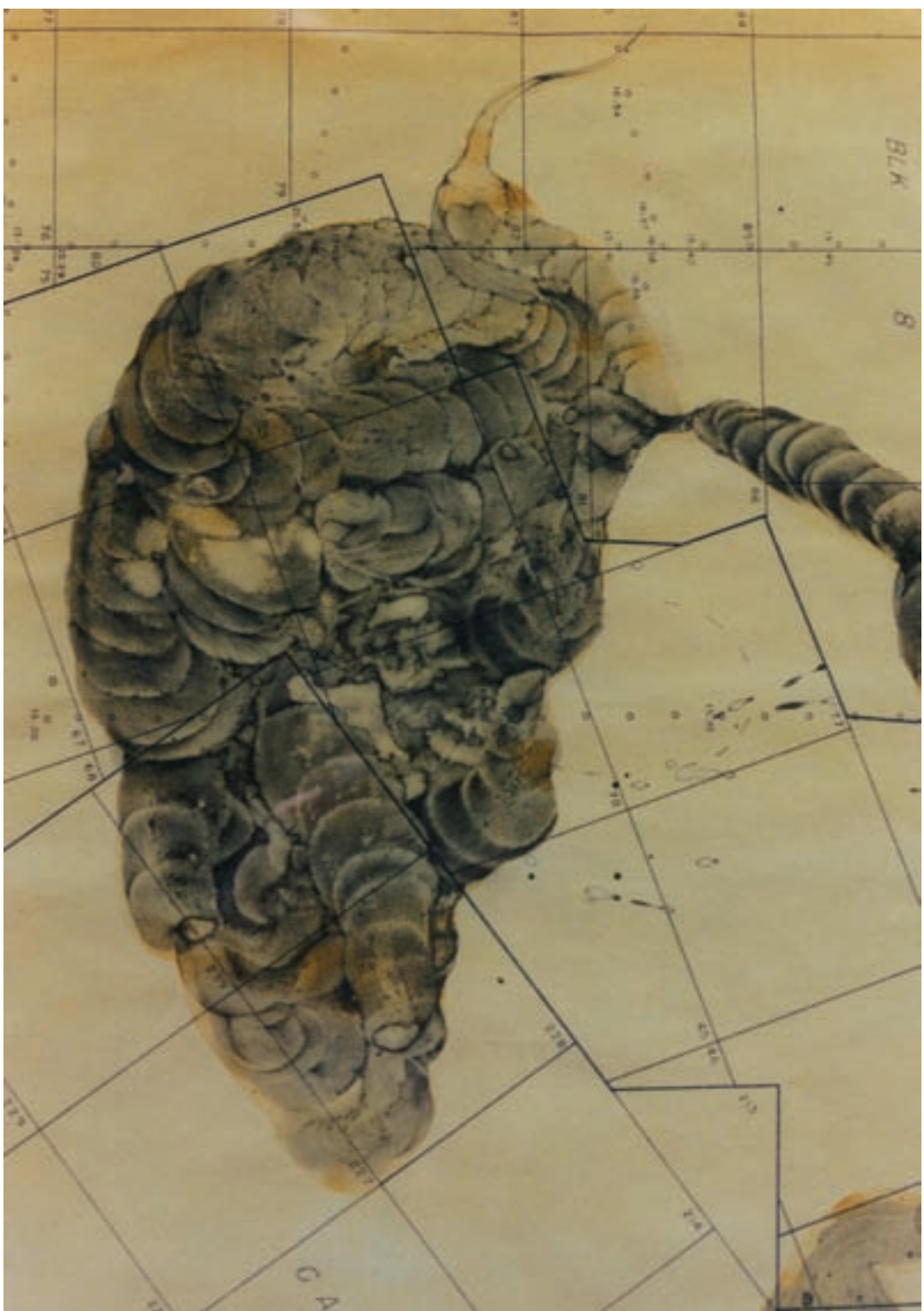
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 13, Houston, Texas, 2001,  
*Flowers for Charlotte Corday*  
Coal dust and river clay on canvas. total size: dynamic and variable

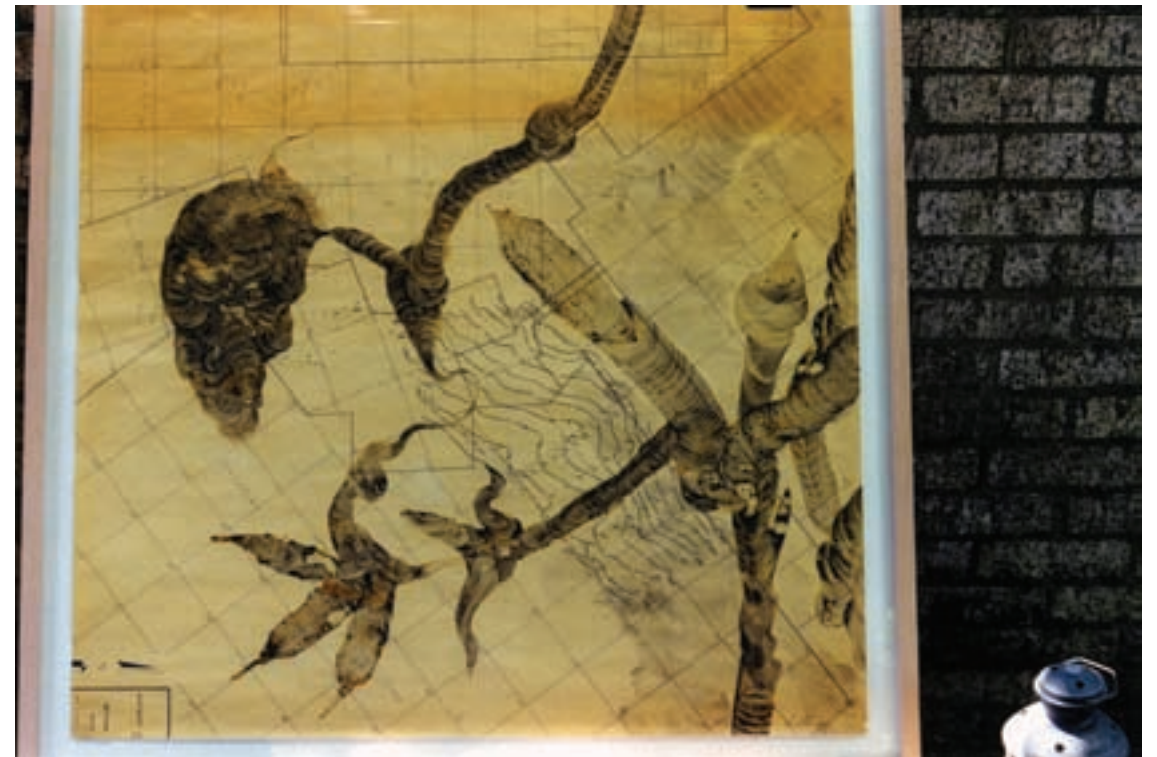






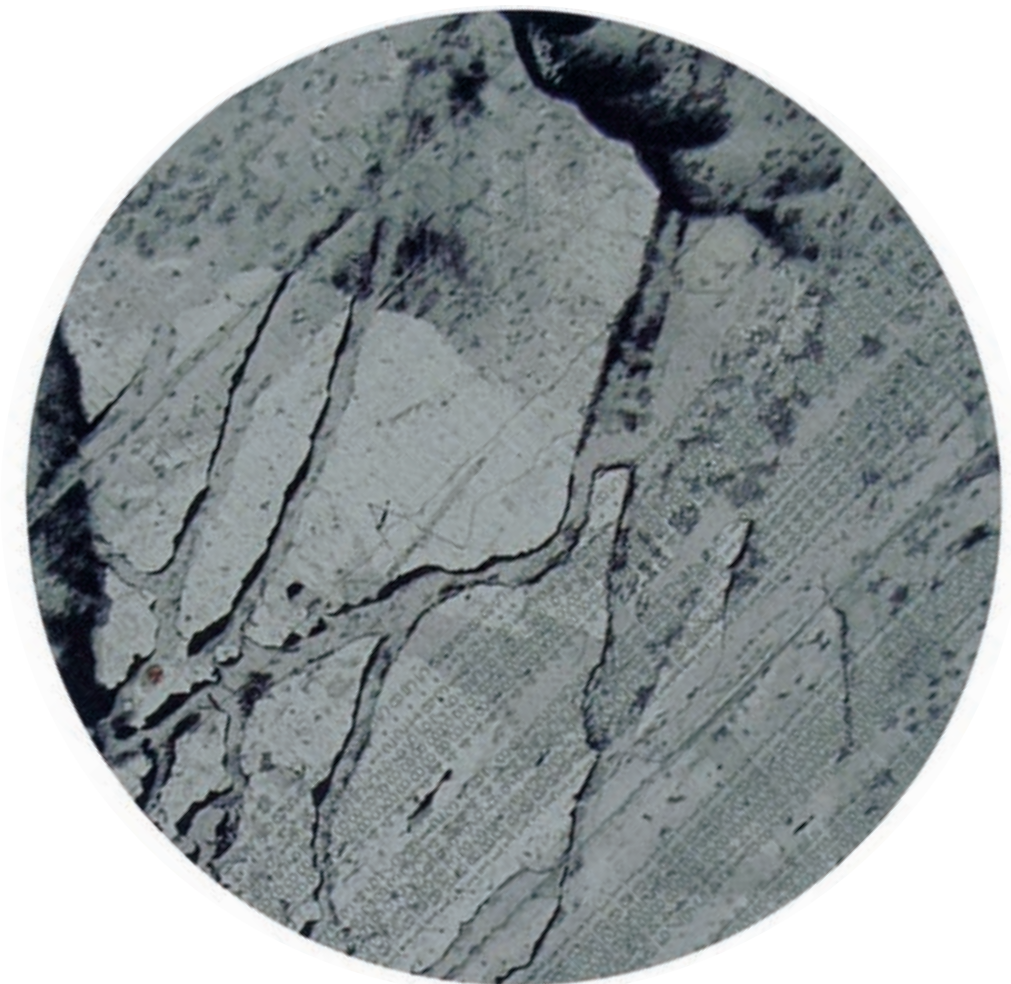
*Untitled*, 1999 New York  
Coal dust and acrylic on canvas





Coal dust on paper, 1998





Detail of opposite canvas



*Searching For Gallions*, 2002  
Acrylic and coal dust on  
paper-coated canvas  
162,5 x 111,8 cm



*Gathering*, 2001  
Coal dust and acrylic on linen  
182,9 x 157,5 cm

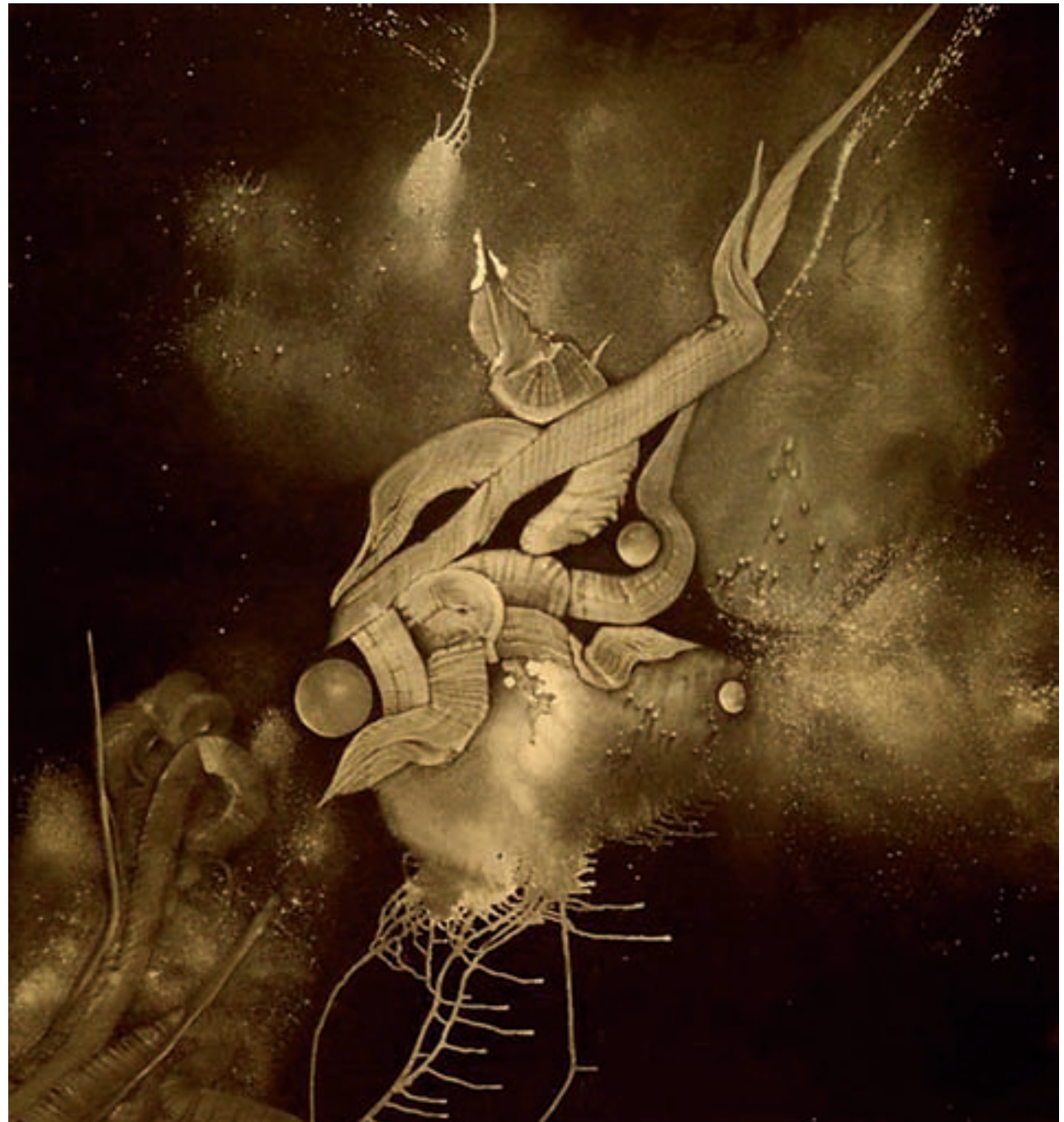




*Twelve Miles Down*, 2002  
Coal dust and acrylic on linen  
152,4 x 121,9 cm

*A Different Light*, 2002  
Coal dust and acrylic  
on linen  
152,4 x 121,9 cm





*Nine Miles Deep*, 2002

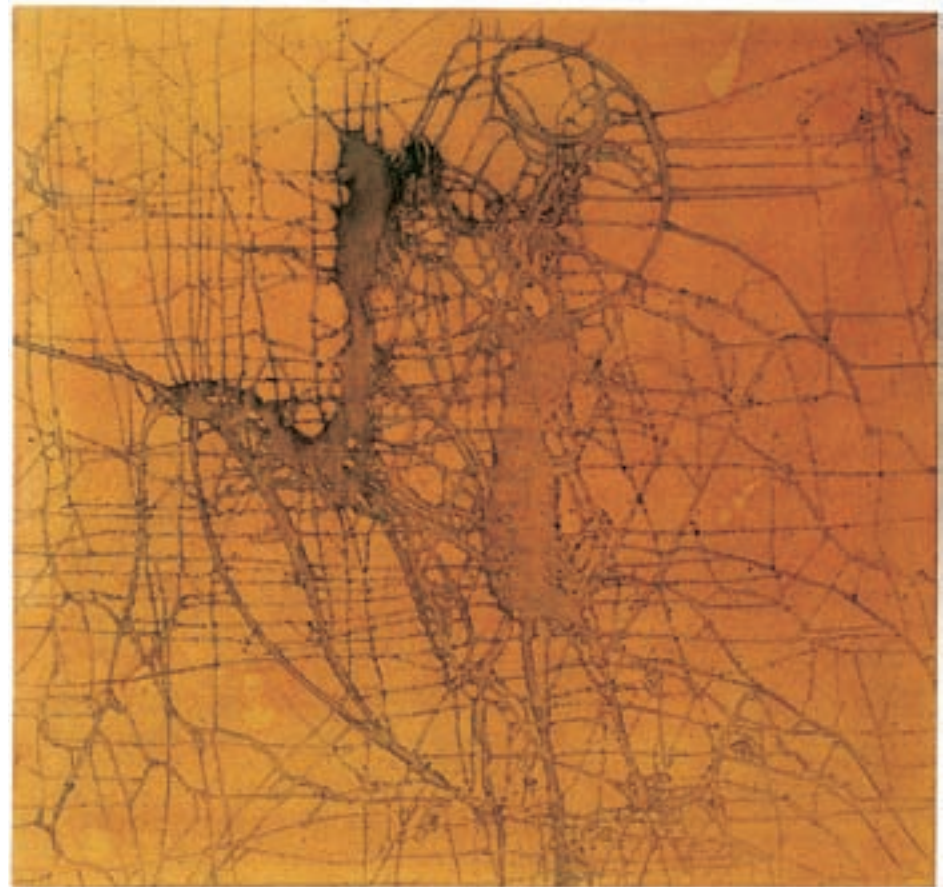


*Shifting*, 2002





*Days Before Harvest, 2001*  
Coal dust and acrylic on canvas



*Fantastic Garden, 2002*  
Coal dust and acrylic on paper  
60,9 x 83,8 cm









# Virgil Grotfeldt

1948 Born in Decatur, Illinois.  
Lives and works in Houston, Texas.

## Awards and Grants

- 2003 Artist of the Year, The Art League of Houston, Houston, Texas
- 2002 42nd Annual Invitational, Longview Museum of Art, Longview, Texas
- 1999 Grant in the Visual Arts, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc.
- 1996 Honorable Mention, Assistance League of Houston Annual Juried Exhibit
- 1993 First Place, Assistance League of Houston Annual Juried Exhibit
- 1991 The Engelhard Award, Boston, Massachusetts
- 1976 Illinois Arts Council, Mural for Lakeland College

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2003 Jason McCoy, Inc., New York, New York  
Pillsbury and Peters Fine Art, Dallas, Texas
- 2002 Sicardi Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 2001 *Memories and Transformations*, Pillsbury and Peters Fine Art, Dallas, Texas
- 1998 Heriard-Cimino Gallery, Inc., New Orleans, Louisiana  
Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1997 Jason McCoy Inc., New York, New York  
Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1995 Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1994 Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1991 Lamar University Museum, Beaumont, Texas
- 1990 Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, Texas  
Tarble Arts Center, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois
- 1988 Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1987 Gallery D'Theeboom, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 1974 Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
The George School, Newtown, Pennsylvania
- 1971 Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2003 *Miriam Hoekman & Virgil Grotfeldt*, Galerie Luca, Zaltbommel, Netherlands
- 2002 *Virgil Grotfeldt, Billy Hassell and Joe Mancuso*, Longview Museum of Art, Longview, Texas  
*42nd Annual Invitational*, Longview Museum of Art, Longview, Texas  
*Texas meets Leipzig*, Leipzig, Germany
- 2001 *Grotfeldt and Michael Collins*, Curated by Donna Roger, Lowell Collins, Houston, Texas  
*Virgil Grotfeldt, Meredith Jack, Otto Hetterscheid*, Galerie Luca, Zaltbommel, The Netherlands  
*Virgil Grotfeldt: Memories and Transformations*, Pillsbury and Peters Fine Art, Dallas, Texas

- 2000 *Group Exhibition*, Pillsbury and Peters Fine Art, Dallas, Texas  
*Group Exhibition*, Earl McGrath Gallery, New York, New York  
*Waldo Bien: including the series with Virgil Grotfeldt*, Kunstaussstellung der Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen, Germany
- 1999 *Three Artists from Texas USA*, Upriver Gallery, Chengdu, China  
*Free International University World Art Collection*, Triodos Bank, Zeist, The Netherlands
- 1998 *Bound: Books by Artists*, Brazos Bookstore, Houston, Texas, curated by William Steen  
*Works on Paper by Contemporary and Modern Masters*, Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1997 *Establishment and Revelation*, Dallas Visual Art Center, Dallas, Texas  
*Virgil Grotfeldt & Mirjam Hoekman*, Galerie Luca, Zaltbommel, The Netherlands  
*Convergence*, Barbara Davis Gallery, Pennzoil Place, Houston, Texas
- 1996 *Contemplating Translucence: A Selection of Works of Contemporary Texas Watercolorists*, Two Allen Center, Houston, Texas  
*New Work: Gallery Artists*, Barbara Davis Gallery, Pennzoil Place, Houston, Texas  
*NOG Insurance Company Collection*, Van Reekum Museum, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands  
*Delphi*, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, Traveling to Blue Star, San Antonio, Texas  
*Works on Paper, A Selection of Contemporary and Master Works*, Jason McCoy Gallery, New York, New York  
*Material and Spirit*, Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1995 *Genesis in Fire, Works from the Green Mountain Foundry*, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Texas, curated by Alison de Lima Greene and Joe Harvel  
*Texas Myth & Reality*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, curated by Alison de Lima Greene  
*Watercolor, 'All Ways,'* College of the Mainland, Houston, Texas  
*Drawing from Strength: 26 Artists Make Their Mark*, Transco Tower, Houston, Texas, curated by Sally Sprout  
Group Exhibit, Lanning Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1994 Group Exhibit, RAM Gallery, Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
*Texas Landscapes*, Hooks Epstein Gallery, Houston, Texas, curated by David Brauer  
*Out of This World*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, curated by Lynn Herbert
- 1993 *Virgil Grotfeldt, Joseph Havel & James Surls*, Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1992 *Selections from the 20th Century Collection*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
- 1990 *Texas Art Celebration*, Juried Exhibition of the Assistance League of Houston, Texas
- 1989 *Texas Realism*, Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, Texas
- 1988 *The Contour Line*, Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1987 *The Fictional Figure*, Caroline Lee Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1986 *Texas Annual*, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, Texas
- 1985 *Synergy*, Juried Exhibition of the Arts Symposium of Houston, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

- Plastica Huesped, Guadalajara, Mexico  
 Four Artists, Diverseworks, Houston, Texas
- 1984 *The First Annual East End Show*, Lawndale Center, The University of Houston, Texas
- 1983 Group Show, Boulevard Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1982 Juried Exhibition, Art League of Houston, Texas
- 1981 Juried Exhibition, Art League of Houston, Texas
- 1979 *Dimension II*, Juried Exhibition of the Assistance League of Houston, Texas  
*Dimension I*, Juried Exhibition of the Assistance League of Houston, Texas
- 1977 Annual Juried Show, School of The Ozarks, Branson, MO.
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- 1996 Martin, Laura Carey. American Images: The SBC Collection of Twentieth Century American Art, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, NY.
- 1994 Johnson, Patricia Covo. Contemporary Art in Texas, Craftsman House G & B Art International, Roseville, Australia.

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 Willems, Sophia. 'Im Versteinerten Zwischenreich,' Westdeutsche Zeitung, May 25.  
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 Brambrink, Tina. 'Spiegel der Eigenen Kultur,' Recklinghäuser Zeitung, May 6.  
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- 1997 Johnson. 'Virgil Grotfeldt,' The New York Times, December 5.  
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- 1994 Kalil, Susie. 'The Secret Life and Plans,' Houston Press, May 12.
- 1993 Chadwick, Susan. 'Grotfeldt, Havel, & Surls,' The Houston Post, November 11.
- 1992 Chadwick, Susan. 'Art and Nature,' The Houston Post, May 28.
- 1990 Johnson, Patricia. 'Grotfeldt's Raw Images are Potent,' Houston Chronicle, April 10.  
 Chadwick, Susan. 'No Fool's Gold,' The Houston Post, March 31.  
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- 1988 Chadwick, Susan. 'Critic's Choice,' The Houston Post, April 1.  
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 Kalmykov, Fran. 11 x 14 Magazine, Fall.



Richard Stout: *Remembering Anton*, 2000  
 Oil on canvas,  
 36,5 x 40,5 cm  
 FIUWAC 226

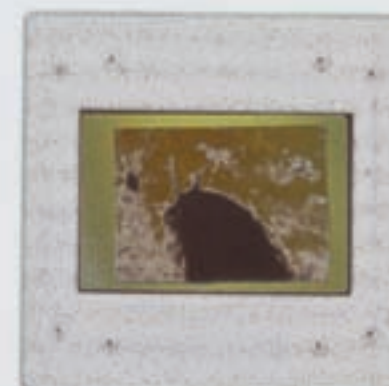
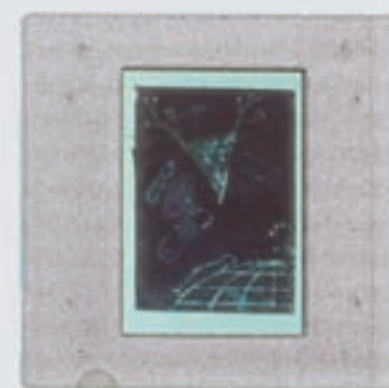
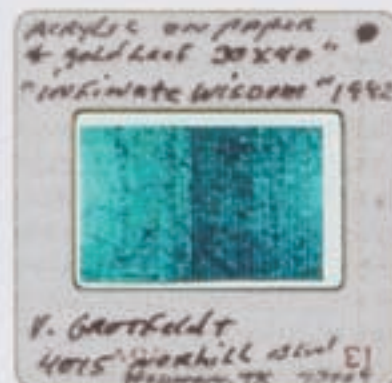
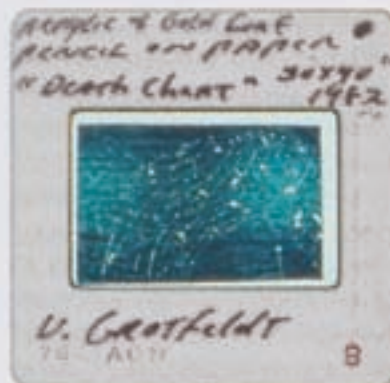
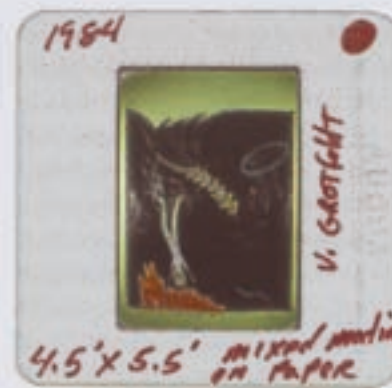
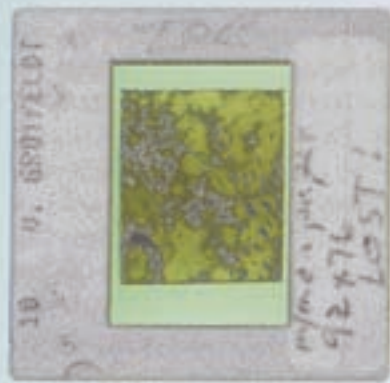


FIUWAC Board Meeting, Feb. 2003, Houston. From left: the author Patrick Healy, Virgil Grotfeldt, Richard Stout, Walter Hopps. Photo: Waldo Bien

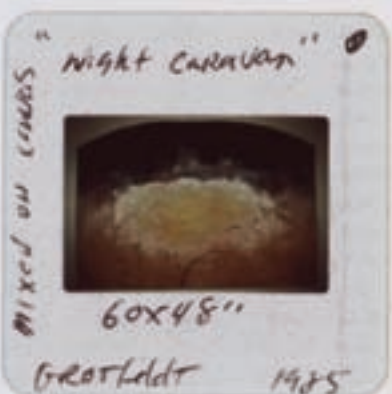
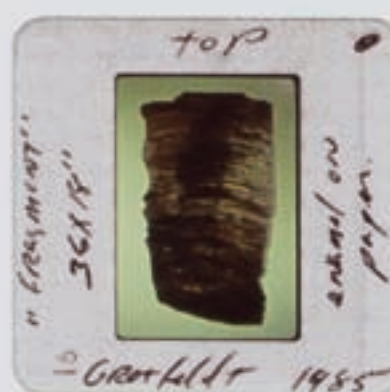


Note: the slides presented here on the study pages are not chronologically ordered nor pretend to give accurate colour references. They are presented as they were found in the artist's archive. This was done on purpose. The pages were selected and put together according to other educational criteria than art historical chronology. We as artists have a different approach towards an oeuvre. The overview is conducted in an artistic way – 'up and down the road'.

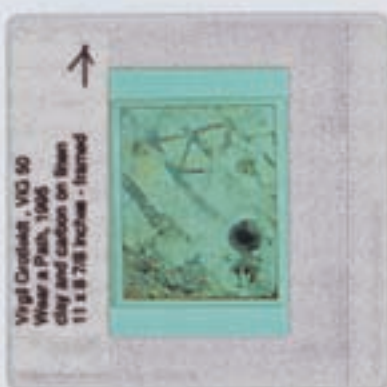
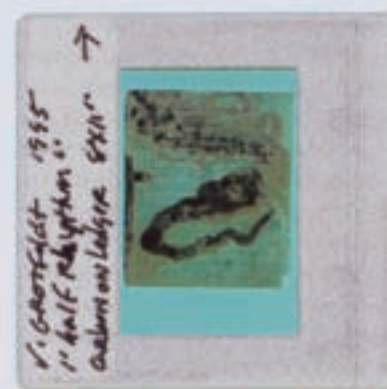














V. Grotfeldt 1995 ORIGINAL SLIDE  
"thirteen steps to SATAN" ↑

V. Grotfeldt 1995 ORIGINAL SLIDE  
"thirteen steps to SATAN" ↑

V. Grotfeldt 1995 ORIGINAL SLIDE  
"thirteen steps to SATAN" ↑

"THIRTEEN STEPS TO SATAN" #4  
5x6" 1995 ↑

WATERCOLOR, CARBON ON PAPER  
V. Grotfeldt

V. Grotfeldt 1995 ORIGINAL SLIDE  
"thirteen steps to SATAN" ↑

V. Grotfeldt 1995 ORIGINAL SLIDE  
"thirteen steps to SATAN" ↑

① "Untitled" 21 1/2 x 32 1/2" 1995 ↑ TOP

coal dust on paper  
V. Grotfeldt

18

7

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 54  
Preponderance of the Small, 1995  
oil, watercolor on paper  
18 3/4 x 13 1/4 inches - framed ↑

DAVISMcCLAIN GALLERY  
2827 Colquitt  
Houston, TX 77098  
(713) 520-9200 ORIGINAL SLIDE

Grotfeldt, VIG 185  
PEACE OFFERING #2

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 249  
North Pole, 1998  
watercolor and coal dust on nautical map  
25 inches in diameter

Barbara Davis Gallery  
2827 Colquitt  
Houston, Texas 77098  
713-520-9200 / 713-520-8409 fax

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 79  
Another Always Starting to Smell, 1995  
carbon, watercolor on ledger paper  
14 x 12 1/2 inches - framed ↑

DAVISMcCLAIN GALLERY  
2827 Colquitt  
Houston, TX 77098  
(713) 520-9200 ORIGINAL SLIDE

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 85 orig.  
The Outfield Museum, 1995  
carbon, watercolor on geological driller  
28 x 20 inches - framed ↑

Grotfeldt, VIG 152  
UNTITLED 1996

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 25  
Blue Kneep, 1992  
bronze powder & acrylic on watercolor  
41 3/4 x 29 1/4 inches ↑

DAVISMcCLAIN GALLERY  
2827 Colquitt  
Houston, TX 77098  
(713) 520-9200 ORIGINAL SLIDE

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 80  
The Cards are Falling, 1996  
carbon on ledger paper  
14 x 12 1/2 inches - framed ↑

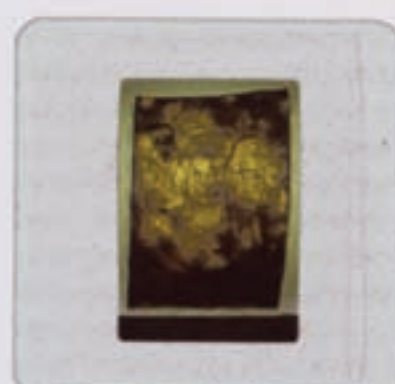
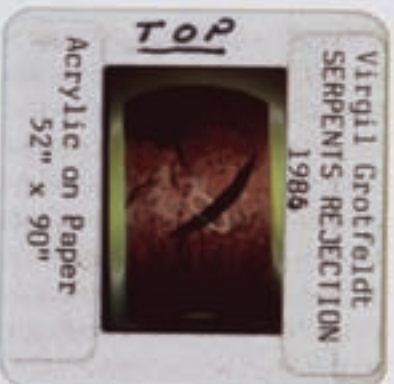
DAVISMcCLAIN GALLERY  
2827 Colquitt  
Houston, TX 77098  
(713) 520-9200 ORIGINAL SLIDE

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 50  
Wear a Patch, 1995  
clay and carbon on linen  
11 x 8 7/8 inches - framed ↑

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 80  
Economy of Grace, 1995  
wenge wood, sandstone base, bronze  
22 x 26 x 19 3/4 inches

Virgil Grotfeldt, VIG 80  
Economy of Grace, 1995  
wenge wood, slate base, bronze  
22 x 26 x 19 3/4 inches ↑

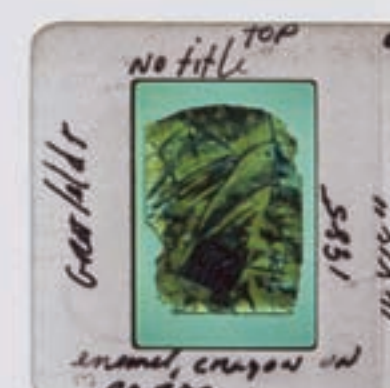
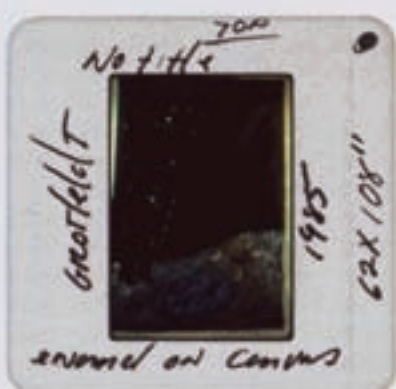
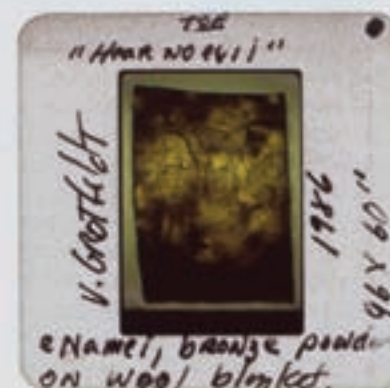




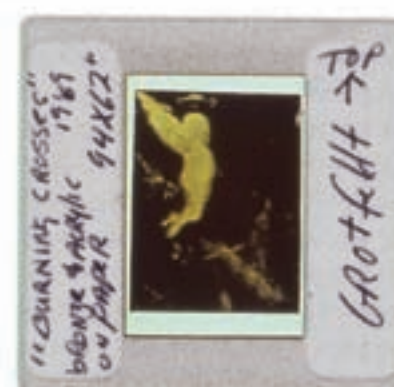
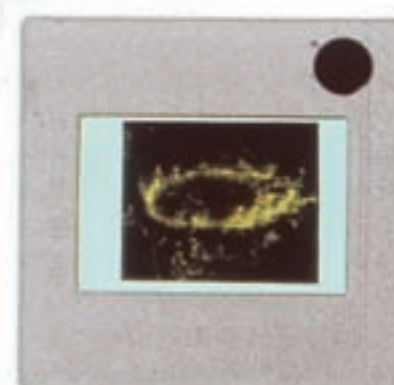
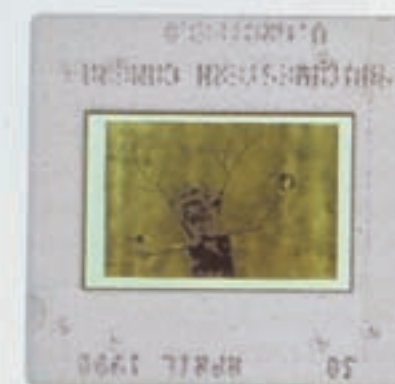
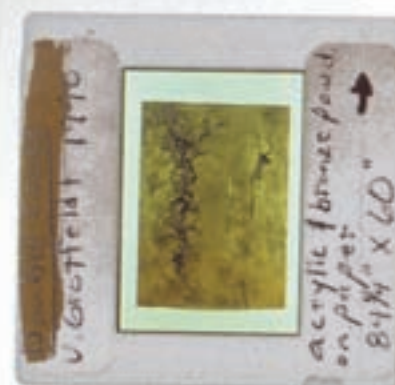




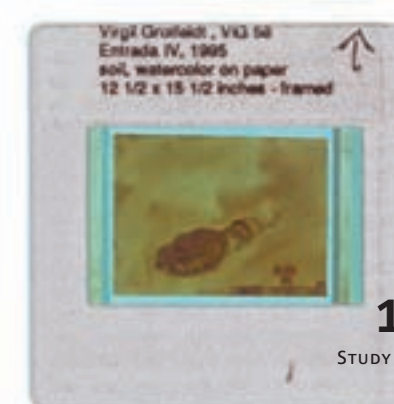
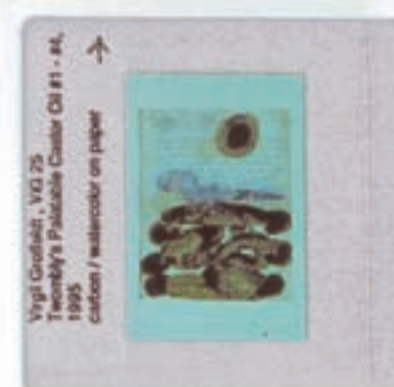
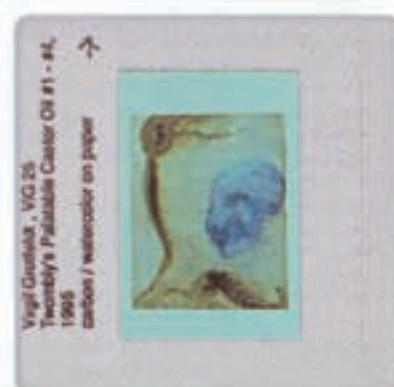




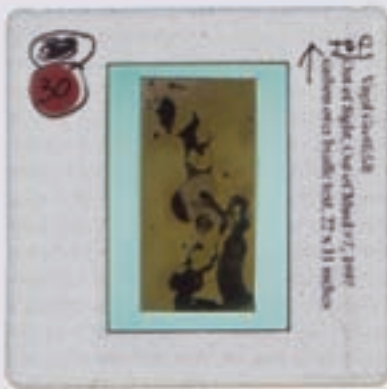




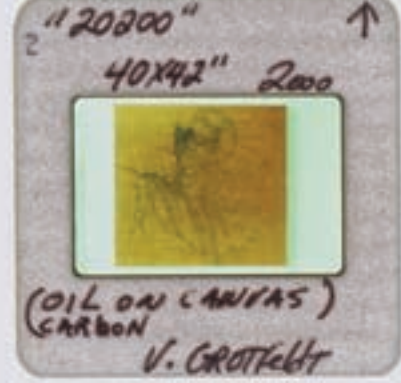
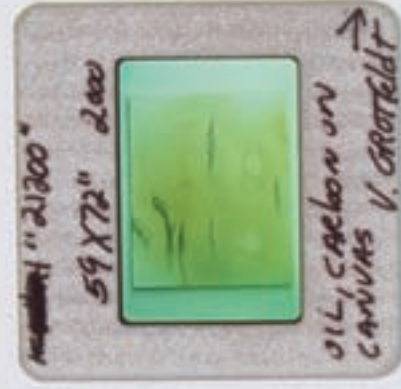




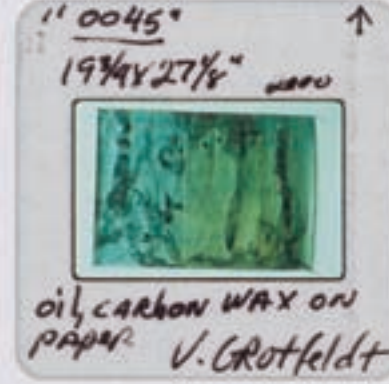
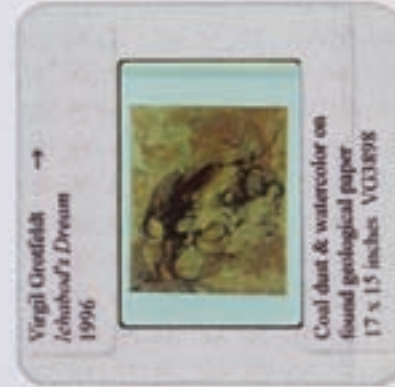
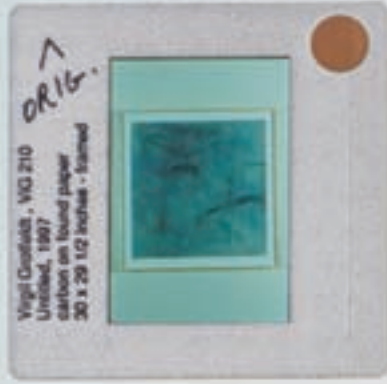












## FIUWAC DATA Virgil Grotfeldt/06\_2003

number	title	material	size / metric	location	page
014 - 1999	Dollar green	Coal dust and acrylic on canvas	91,6 x 101,6 cm	Zeist/NL	95
015 - 1999	untitled	Canvas with light blue universe and floating plants/vegetation (1999)	157 x 128 cm	Zeist/NL	94
016 - 1999	untitled	Work on paper (1999)	108 x 118 cm	Zeist/NL	131
017 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on stained paper (1997)	152 x 106,5 cm	Zeist/NL	66
018 - 1999	untitled	Canvas (above sea level, 1998)	93 x 77 cm	Zeist/NL	41
019 - 1999	untitled	Canvas (1998)	46 x 46 cm	Zeist/NL	–
020 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on paper (1991)	31 x 46,8 cm	Zeist/NL	45
021 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and river clay on map (1998)	23,5 x 26,5 cm	Zeist/NL	86
022 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on braille paper (1997)	57,2 x 28 cm	Zeist/NL	69
023 - 1999	untitled	Silverpowder and coal dust on paper (1991)	15,2 x 10 cm	Zeist/NL	101
024 - 1999	healing plants series	Coal dust on ledgerpage (1997)	31,5 x 20 cm	Zeist/NL	199
025 - 1999	untitled	Watercolour and coal dust on architect. drawing paper (1999)	61 x 30 cm	Zeist/NL	91
026 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on ledgerpage (1997)	19,8 x 16,7 cm	Zeist/NL	101
027 - 1999	untitled	Stain and crayon on paper (1993)	29,1 x 24,2 cm	Zeist/NL	100
028 - 1999	untitled	Aluminium and oilpaint on sandpaper (1987)	30,5 x 25,5 cm	Zeist/NL	25
029 - 1999	Brushstrokes	Coal dust and watercolour on paper (1998)	30 x 22,4 cm	Zeist/NL	79
030 - 1999	untitled	Watercolour and soil on paper (1996)	24,8 x 15,8 cm	Zeist/NL	65
031 - 1999	study for black	Coal dust and aluminiumpowder (1992)	15,2 x 10,2 cm	Zeist/NL	100
032 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on ledgerpage (1999)	17 x 10,4 cm	Zeist/NL	41
033 - 1999	untitled	Watercolour and river clay on ledgerpage (1998)	24,3 x 15 cm	Zeist/NL	87
034 - 1999	untitled	Watercolour and coal dust on ledgerpage (1997)	19,8 x 15 cm	Zeist/NL	101
035 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on paper (1995)	17 x 10,4 cm	Zeist/NL	100
036 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on paper (1998)	20,4 x16 cm	Zeist/NL	89

number	title	material	size / metric	location	page
037 - 1999	Belladonna	Coal dust on paper (1995)	16,4 x 20,4 cm	Zeist/NL	60
038 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on paper (1998)	19,8 x 17,8 cm	Zeist/NL	101
039 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on ledgerpage (1998)	24,5 x 20,8 cm	Zeist/NL	86
040 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on ledgerpage (1998)	24,5 x 20,8 cm	Zeist/NL	121
041 - 1999	untitled	Mexican soil (Oxaca) on paper (1995)	28,2 x 19,1 cm	Zeist/NL	60
042 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on ledgerpage (1994)	21 x 16 cm	Zeist/NL	53
043 - 1999	untitled	River clay and watercolour on ledgerpage (1998)	24,2 x 15,2 cm	Zeist/NL	101
044 - 1999	untitled	River clay and watercolour on ledgerpage (1998)	19,2 x 15,5 cm	Zeist/NL	83
045 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust on ledgerpage (1994)	21 x 16 cm	Zeist/NL	52
046 - 1999	untitled	Bronze powder and acrylic on paper (1990)	32,5 x 25,3 cm	Zeist/NL	34
047 - 1999	healing plants series	Coal dust on ledgerpage (1997)	31,3 x 20 cm	Zeist/NL	67
048 - 1999	Baboon	Tea-stain and watercolour on paper (1993)	36 x 28 cm	Zeist/NL	126
049 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on ledgerpage (1999)	42,2 x 35,1 cm	Zeist/NL	93
050 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on paper (1998)	40,2 x 35,3 cm	Zeist/NL	92
051 - 1999	untitled	Bronze powder and acrylic on paper (1995)	39,4 x 34 cm	Zeist/NL	61
052 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and watercolour on paper (1995)	51,2 x 49,6 cm	Zeist/NL	–
053 - 1999	untitled	Coal dust and shellac on paper (1998)	68,2 x 60 cm	Zeist/NL	100
054 - 1999	untitled	River clay on carbonpaper (1999)	82 x 56 cm	Zeist/NL	100
055 - 1999	Buddha Grid	Coal dust, river clay and watercolour on canvas (1998)	40,5 x 50,8 cm	Zeist/NL	84
056 - 1999	Just Inside the Turn	Coal dust, river clay and watercolour on canvas (1998)	40,5 x 50,8 cm	Zeist/NL	85
227 - 2001	Man of sorrows	Linocut (1975)	20 x 23,2 cm	Zeist/NL	11
228 - 2001	E. D. Rudd	Colour litho (1972)	52 x 64 cm	Zeist/NL	15
229 - 2001	Peterbilt II	Black/white litho (1972)	38,2 x 37 cm	Zeist/NL	14
260 - 2001	untitled	Acrylic and coal dust on countertop (2000)	50,1 x 58,3 cm	Bruxelles/B	96/ 97
421 - 2003	untitled	Coal dust on invitationcard (1995)	12,5 x 17 cm	Zeist/NL	–



Note: The numbers of the collaborations refer to their listing in the Waldo Bien Archive

# Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien collaborations

**1994-019** *p. 106/107*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 1  
Amsterdam  
6 double canvases: 30 x 40 cm each (plus frame); Oil on canvas  
Artists' collection

**1995-089** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 21 x 58 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1995-090** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 33,5 x 73 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1995-091** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 41 x 58 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1995-092** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 33,5 x 73 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Private collection

**1995-093** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 41 x 58 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Private collection

**1995-094** *p. 109*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 2  
Houston, Texas  
Double canvas: 41 x 58 cm including frame; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-002** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 82 x 35,5 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-003** *p. 112/113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 85 x 53 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-004** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 83 x 35 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-005** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 83 x 35 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-006** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 83 x 55 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-007** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 83 x 55 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-008** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 103,5 x 45 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-009** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 103,5 x 45cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-010** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 81,5 x 35 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-012** *p. 113*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 3  
Amsterdam  
Double canvas: 102 x 45 cm; Double canvas and carved wood panel, coal dust and river clay on canvas  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-019** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
85 x 33 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-020** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
94 x 66 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-021** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
53 x 85 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Private collection

**1996-22** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
51 x 129 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-023** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
Size not specified; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1996-024** *p. 115*  
Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt Meeting 4  
Mexico/Houston, Texas  
116 x 72 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas, aluminium frame  
Private collection

**1997-111** *p. 128*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 6  
Houston, Texas: Strata  
Size not specified; Mixed media on canvas and wood  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-114** *p. 129*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 6  
Houston, Texas: Artchitecture  
Size not specified; River clay, coal dust and bronze powder on ledger paper  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-115** *p. 129*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 6  
Houston, Texas: Artchitecture  
Size not specified; River clay, coal dust and bronze powder on ledger paper  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-116** *p. 129*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 6  
Houston, Texas: Artchitecture  
Size not specified; River clay, coal dust and bronze powder on ledger paper  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-117** *p. 128*  
No title (Grotfeldt, Bien & Kloppenburg)  
Meeting 6 (Houston, Texas)  
Size not specified; Bien: river clay and staples on wooden drawing board;  
Kloppenburg: pencil and ink on wooden drawing board;  
Grotfeldt: coal dust on river clay on drawing board  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt/Kloppenburg

**1997-121** *p.117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
47,5 x 88,5 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolour on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-122** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
47,5 x 78,5 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolour on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-123** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
47,5 x 105 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolor on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-124** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
55 x 98 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolor on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-125** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
62,5 x 41,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-126** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
87,5 x 47,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-127** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
68 x 97,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-128** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
99 x 67 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-129** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
88 x 36 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolor on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-130** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
47,5 x 68 cm; Coal dust, river clay and watercolor on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-131** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
88,5 x 56,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-132** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
83 x 129,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1997-133** *p. 117*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 5  
Houston, Texas  
46,5 x 68,5 cm; Coal dust and river clay on canvas; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1998-001** *p. 132*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 7  
Amsterdam/Houston, Texas, telephone size not specified; Coal dust and bronze powder on paper, styrofoam packing  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1998-004** *p. 134*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 8  
Houston, Texas  
Size not specified; Coal dust and river clay (Rio Grande) on canvas and maple frame  
Private collection

**1999-018** *p. 137*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 9  
Amsterdam: Donor Work  
100 x 150 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas over skeleton  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1999-019** *p. 136*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 9  
Amsterdam: Donor Work  
108,7 x 204,5 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas over skeleton; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1999-020** *p. 136/137*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 9  
Amsterdam  
100 x 200 cm; Coal dust on river clay on canvas over skeleton; Frame: beech wood (Tasmania)  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1999-053** *p. 141*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 10  
New York: Gay Parade  
247 x 122 cm; Paint on carbon paper  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**1999-056** *p. 141*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 10  
New York: Artchitecture  
141,8 x 70 cm; Coal dust and river clay on braille paper and ledger paper  
Collection FIUWAC

**1999-061/109** *p. 142, 144/145*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 11  
Normandy: The End of Sorrow  
Title page by Bien/Grotfeldt: 39,7 x 39,7 cm; Enamel on X-ray  
Waldo Bien Archive

Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 12  
see page 149 for specifications

**2001-xxx** *p. 155*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 13  
Houston, Texas: Flowers for Charlotte Corday  
total size: dynamic; Coal dust, pigments and river clay on canvas; variable group of 19  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt

**2003-xxx** *p. 187*  
Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 14,  
Paris, St. Agnan S.Erre  
*Zero Zone: "Rose"*  
Coal dust on aluminated fabric  
207 x 191 cm  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt  
(Series in progress, August 2003)



**Waldo Bien**

Born 1949  
The Hague, NL.  
1970–1976  
Staatliche Hochschule für  
Bildende Kunst, Düsseldorf,  
Germany, Raum 20 (Prof. J.  
Beuys), Meisterschüler.  
1976–1980  
Book & art dealer in  
Düsseldorf. Sharing studio  
with Michael Rutkowski,  
Lankerstraße.  
1980–1983  
Interdisciplinary research  
(anthropology and pheno-  
menology).  
1984–2000  
Over one hundred and fifty  
exhibitions, solo and group  
shows. Full bibliography  
and details published in  
Waldo Bien (ed. Ferdinand  
Ulrich, Hans-Jürgen  
Schwalm), text Patrick  
Healy, Kunstaussstellung der  
Ruhrfestspiele  
Recklinghausen, Wienand,  
Köln, 2000.

Founding director of the  
Free International  
University World Art  
Collection, since 1999,  
development of the collec-  
tion and publications.  
Krasner Pollock Foundation  
Award for outstanding  
achievement, 2000.  
Trustee and representative  
for the Artchive for the  
Future.  
Professor FIU, Amsterdam,  
Director of the FIU Summer  
School, Normandy.





Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien Meeting 14,  
Paris, St. Agnan S.Erre, July/August 2003  
*Zero Zone: "Rose"*  
Coal dust on aluminated fabric  
207 x 191 cm  
Collection Bien/Grotfeldt  
(Series in progress, August 2003)





# FIUWAC

an introduction by Waldo Bien.

Reproduction of original statement  
of FIUWAC launch at the  
Triodos Bank, Zeist, NL, 1 Oct. 1999







## THE FIUWAC AND THE TRIODOS BANK



FOUNDING STONE  
001-1997

THE MENIL COLLECTION 1511 BRANARD HOUSTON TEXAS 77006

June 25, 1999

I am writing to support with my highest recommendation the creation of the Free International University World Art Collection. The purpose of this initiative, undertaken by Waldo Bien and other members of the Free International University Amsterdam, is to establish an ongoing art collection which represents cultural unity and the notion that cultural expression is mankind's most common and fertile ground. It is designed to unveil the secret energies which are hidden in cultural expression.

In this century, western-dominated art history has divided creative expression into hierarchical levels. The Free International University World Art Collection is designed to break down these artificial cultural barriers and build worldwide consensus which, to date, politics and governments have failed to achieve. The first step in restoring bilateral relations among divided nations has always been the establishing of cultural relations/exchanges.

The Collection is analogous with the planting of a tree in which shade mankind can meet and pay respect to a common past and a common future interest. In this regard, it is especially propitious that the Dutch Triodos Bank, known for its ethical approach toward banking and investments, is lending their auspices and assistance that together, we might set a new trend for the future.

The fact that this collection will be the declared property of the world's population as the only benefactor probably makes it the first real "modern" art collection in the world. The moment of introduction is unique: On the eve of a new millennium, an open future space.

It is my privilege to serve as a member of the Advisory Board of the Free International University World Art Collection. As such, I urgently request that all artists, individuals, multi-nationals, institutions, and governments support this initiative and contribute to its realization. The global content of this united population collection should ultimately be placed under the protection of the United Nations. Future generations will be thankful to us for giving such a tool into their hands.

Sincerely,

Walter Hopps  
Founding Director & Senior Curator

WWH/dg

## SEEKING THE IDEA

About thirty years ago there was a strong desire in my generation to turn the idealism of the late 60's and 70's into practice. We didn't just want to talk about things but really change our society for the better.

In Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, London, indeed all over Europe I knew there were students of economics, of sociology, and artists who had started seriously to explore what we called an 'alternative' life style. There were even those who started to tackle the vision of having a different conception of the money economy <sup>IMF</sup> creating transparency, democratic openness and ethical standards in their day to day dealings.

We believed that in the different conception of banking the idea that creativity equals capital would become a real driving force and principle. Many people at the time, I remember, were politely sceptical. But as a practising artist I was fascinated by the vision, and wondered how it would be possible to find the best means to achieve it.

I exhibited a sculpture in the early 80's called Universal Bank in the IMF building in Washington trying to tease out my appreciation of what I felt was happening.

Today with the opening of the new headquarters of Triodos Bank in Zeist there is for me the personal satisfaction of seeing the idea of the Free International University World Art Collection (FIUWAC) being shown for the first time in public.

## WHAT IS THIS NEW IDEA?

What lies behind the idea of such a public collection and its presentation in Zeist under the auspices of the Triodos Bank?

The idea of a new and modern collection can be formulated in terms of what Joseph Beuys, the well known German artist, has called 'social sculpture'. I believe in the need to take full responsibility for the future and recognise that all our actions and activities have a direct influence on the way the world will be tomorrow. How things look, depends on form, and form is also a matter of shaping. I would say it is a serious question of how things are sculpted. Every society has a specific form and we can learn to look at it as a sculpture.

As individual members of society we become shapers and makers, free creative beings. How the world is, how it will be, depends on our actions now, on what we do today.

Beuys had reduced his highly complex thinking into a simple and essential proposition:

*'Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler'*  
(Every human being is an artist)

*The future is the sculpture we all work on together.*

The Free International University (F.I.U.) was created in the early 1970's in Germany to create a world wide platform, like a permanent conference, where creative spirits and minds could unfold and be active without the restrictions of a specialist conception of knowledge boundaries, or of institutional stasis. It was to be a domain where people could meet, and work together, with freedom and creativity.

Beuys had cogently observed:

*'Economics is not only a money making principle. It can be a way of production to fulfil the demands of people all over the world. Capital is humankind's ability in work, not just money. True economics equals the creativity of people. Capital equals creativity.'*



265-2001  
Joseph Beuys: *Everyone Is An Artist*,  
undated

**FIUWAC**  
Free International  
University World  
Art Collection



**INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

Interdisciplinary research allows us to establish an understanding which cherishes assimilation and the common sense of different views. It is a method for the future. The false unity of globalisation suggests a smaller and smaller world, more fractured and divided into first, second and third grades, based on national products and social status. Even in the domain where the creative capability of humankind becomes most visible, in our arts and cultural expression, we see things divided into the West and the rest. The common sense we seek in the interdisciplinary research and the creation of the social sculpture is a deepening of our human potential and an elimination of old imperial, and other politics and ideologies, which seek to harness the cultural and creative in the service of domination, and a conception of the market, as an abstract play of forces with no regard to ethical consequences.

The Free International University (Amsterdam) in which several first and second generation members participate, is a platform for a multinational exchange of ideas and research, dialogue between science, economy and creativity with individuals from all over the world.

In 1997 active members of F.I.U. (Amsterdam) Patrick Healy, Michael Rutkowsky, Babeth Mondini-van Loo, Gijs Frieling, Virgil Grotfeldt, Hilarius Hofstede, Jacobus Kloppenburg, inter al, discussed the need for a world-wide and multicultural art collection which would be owned by the entire world population, and which would enable us to overcome the barriers we have created through specialisation, and open up an understanding of what is common to our humanity as brotherhood, sisterhood, our human-kindness, our capacity to create.

We all agreed on the need for such a collection, but, as is so often the case, there was no finance to help realise the conception. Someone then suggested that the way to get this going was to ask artists for credit for this idea and to request donations.

**SOMETHING UNEXPECTED**

Something unexpected happened. Two of my children were playing on the ground, not far from where the discussion was taking place. It didn't occur to us that they were listening to this conversation, when suddenly they called out 'can we give something?' We were surprised and charmed at the same time. Such an offer would dissolve the problem of the 'founding stone' in the collection, in the sense of significance and symbolic value. We were being offered the future generation, not a name from the famous past, and to our astonishment, the children began to make a sculpture from things lying around the studio, which consisted of tree elements. This was followed by donations from our other members, and in a matter of minutes, you might say, the collection had been formed.

**TRIODOS BANK**

Then on a certain day in the Spring of 1998 there was a meeting with Triodos Bank. I had known of the existence of the bank and its principles, and it seemed they knew about us and our activities. I remember it as a pleasant and remarkable meeting. Remarkable, because they had come all the way from Zeist to my studio in Amsterdam, but could not really say why they had come. For some hours I discussed the work of the last twenty five years in which I had been engaged, and the activities of F.I.U. Several months later we had a second meeting. We discussed the F.I.U. collection and the possibilities of a new conception for the future. It was at that second meeting that the dormant F.I.U. collection came to life. Specifically the idea was a freeing of the idea of a 'collection' from possessive individualism, or art work as a status symbol for the leisure class. I sensed their interest and they asked me to work it out in more detail, and in terms of practical consequences. There followed several sketches in which we tried to shape the idea, and exhibit the demands for its working, structure and organisation. I was thinking how such a tree could be planted, which at the same time could generate its own economy, and ideally its own autonomy.

It was agreed there would be no depots or stock.

All the art works collected should have a place under the wings of caretakers and hosts who participated in the conception. The home of the collection is the world itself and those who take care to support it, be its keepers for a time, be it banks, companies, governments, or, individuals. Public access could be mediated through the electronic network, where each development in the collection would be transparent and available for consideration.

It was agreed to build a parallel 'savings account' in the form of 'F.I.U.tures', which could be realised on the market in 25 years. With the sale of 'F.I.U.tures' the FIUWAC and so the collection could continue to generate further works, and exist in a continuing open and public sphere of creative enhancement. That was the tree which I had in mind to plant. On behalf of F.I.U. Amsterdam we would like to thank everyone who has helped with the care and protection of this idea and enabled us to make it visible.

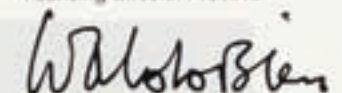
Amsterdam, 1 october, 1999

Patrick Healy  
Board member



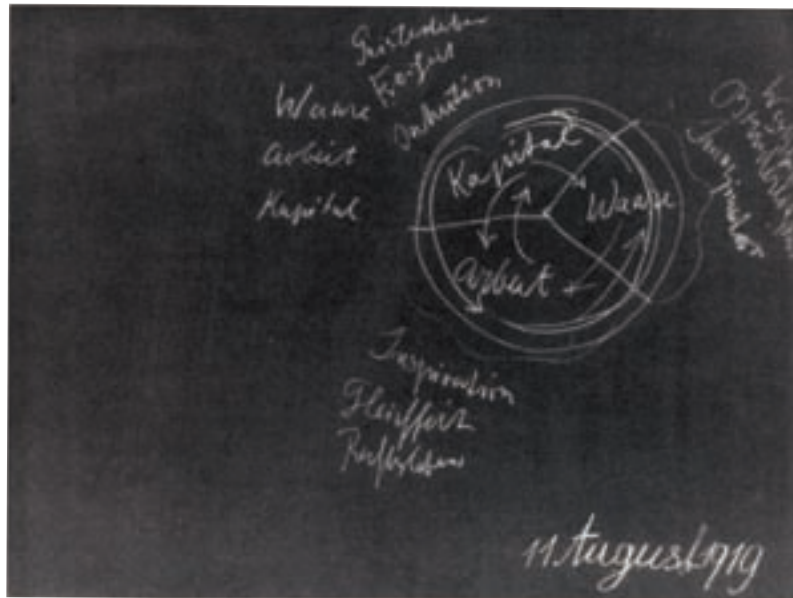
FIUWAC  
Launergracht 123  
1016 RK Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
Tel/fax +31 20 6 260 320  
www.fiuwac.org  
(in the new millennium)

Waldo Bien  
Founding-Director FIUWAC




**FIUWAC**

202435



Rudolf Steiner  
blackboard drawing, 11 August 1919  
On loan to FIUWAC from:  
Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, Dornach

## TRIODOS BANK

Where more than money counts.

Triodos Bank is a social bank lending only to organisations and businesses with social and environmental objectives. Triodos Bank is well known for its innovative and transparent approach to banking. Depositors at Triodos Bank know where their money works.

Triodos Bank NV was founded in 1980 in the Netherlands and is a fully-licensed independent bank, owned by public shareholders. Today, Triodos Bank has offices in Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Triodos Bank is a founding member of INAISE (the International Association of Investors in the Social Economy) and of the Social Venture Network Europe (SVNE).

## POSITIVE CHANGE

Depositors and shareholders play a vital role in making Triodos Bank an instrument for positive change in society. When money is deposited with Triodos Bank, innovative enterprises can develop, community projects can be helped and environmental initiatives can be funded.

Triodos Bank finances exclusively the development of renewable energy sources (solar and wind), organic agriculture, art and culture, protection of the environment and conservation of nature. Triodos Bank also plays an active role in development cooperation.

Triodos Bank NV

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P.O. Box 55

3700 AB Zeist

The Netherlands

Telephone +31 30 6 936 500

Fax +31 30 6 936 555



47

W. S. Sutton & Co.

1938

1939

April	29 by cheque	10 3 8	April 1	11 9 5	
May	31	10 18 11	May 7	16 9 8	
June	2	13 18 2	June 1	6 19 7	
July	27		July 1	10 10	
Oct	3 by cheque		Oct 1	14 16 1	
Nov	29		Nov 1	12 14 0	
Dec	28		Dec 1	10 1	
Jan 1939			Jan 1	14 7 9	
Feb			Feb 1	45 2 6	
March			March 1	45 2 6	
Total Balance		45 2 6	Total Balance		45 2 6

April 5 by cheque

April	5 by cheque	14 10 1	April 1	2 8 5
May	12	14 7 9	May 3	13 18 10
June	5	16 4 8	June 15	11 10 9
July	11	12 8 8	July 1	12 18 9
Aug	22	11 10 1	Aug 1	11 18 4
Sept	10	11 14 0	Sept 1	11 18 4
Oct	11		Oct 1	
Nov	14		Nov 1	
Dec	14		Dec 1	
Jan 1940			Jan 1	



# ECOLOGY

Wer will guten Kuchen backen, der muß haben sieben Sachen: (old German children's rhyme) (Who wants to bake a good cake...must have seven ingredients to make)

5

Waldo Bien/ K (Jacobus Kloppenburg)  
Design for the boardrooms of the future, here for



Lothar Baumgarten



7

Filling corners with positive energy and consciousness

One corner of the Conference Room should function as a refreshing well during meetings and breaks. In the Triodos Bank Zeist NL a block of Grotfeldt works was installed (see page 199)



K  
Colour reference:  
Haemoglobine  
Chlorophyl



3



THE FIUWAC AND THE TRIODOS BANK

B. and K  
a permanent seat for plants and  
animals on conference tables:  
flora=green (Chlorophyl)  
fauna= red (Haemoglobine)

ECONOMY



2



K (Kloppenburg)  
marrowbone spectacles

Steering the future

Waldo Bien/K (Kloppenburg),  
with Lothar Baumgarten and  
Rudolf Steiner 1919/2003

Tools needed for board conference  
tables, to ensure social and envi-  
ronmental economic decisions.

4



B.  
plantportrayal (photonegative)

6



B.  
Topos Earth  
Rock sample with topographic  
specifications

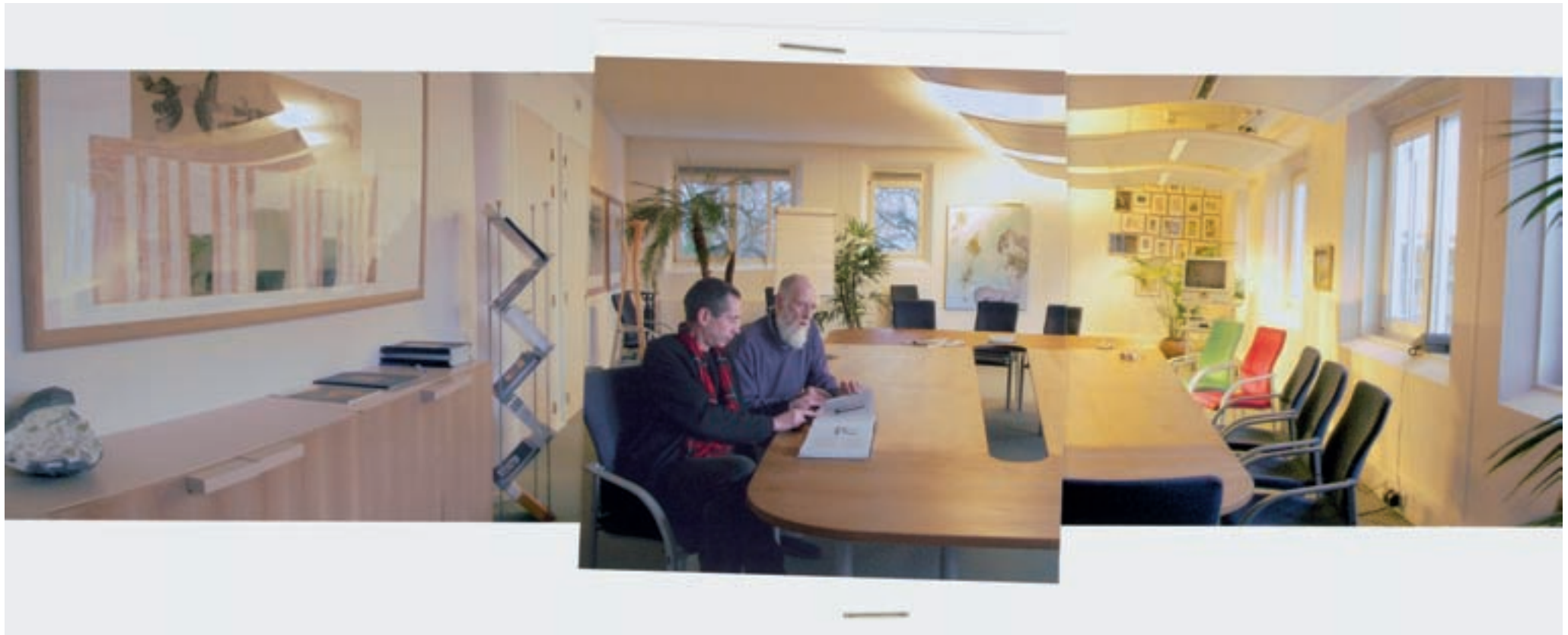


Rudolf Steiner  
Blackboard drawing  
(Nat.Econ.course)

1

# TRIODOS BANK

where flora and fauna are boardmembers



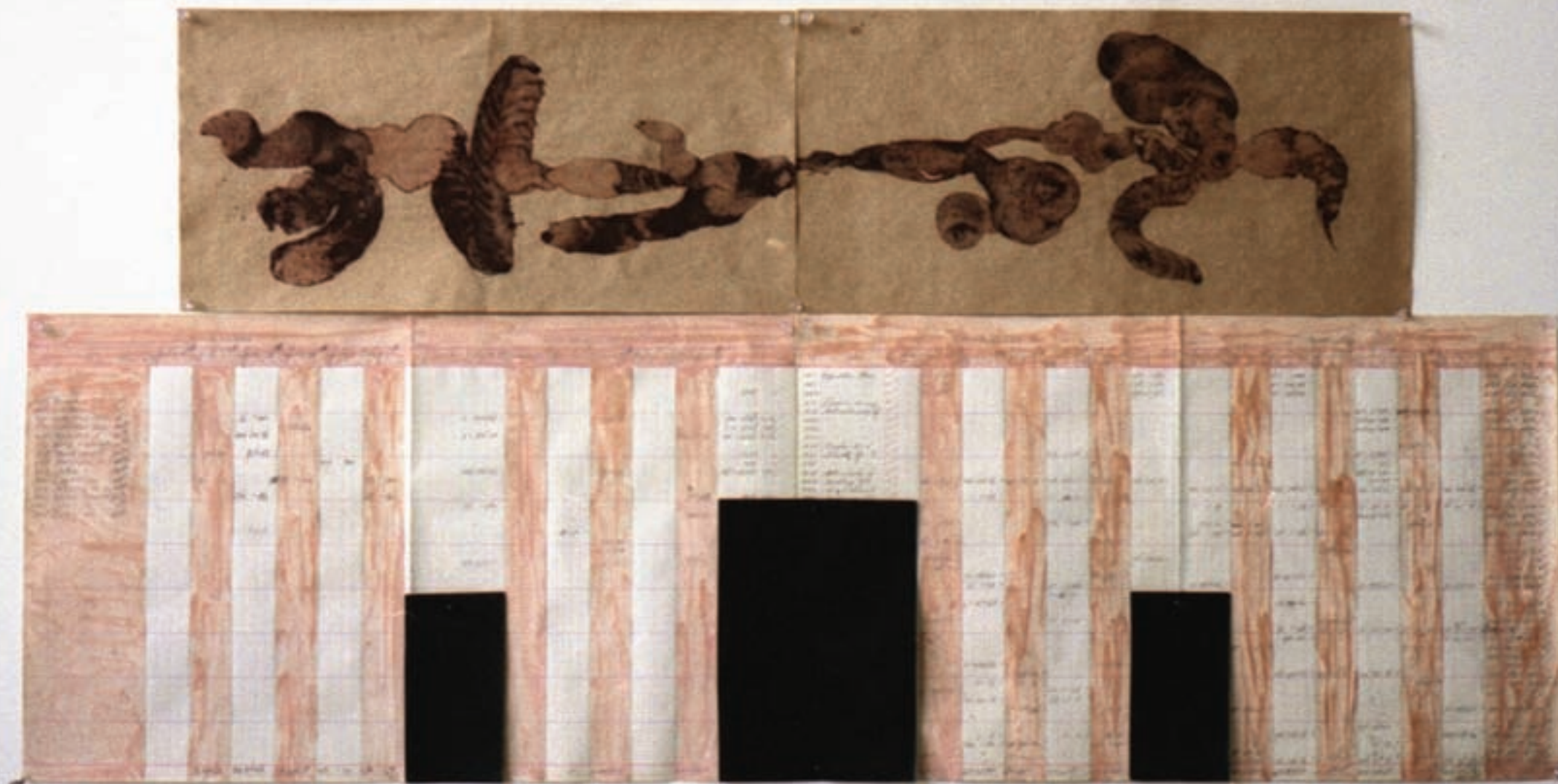
Triodos Bank headquarters, Zeist, NL

**The realisation of an ideal.**  
Conference Room with creative resources and a permanent seat for plants and animals.





Grotfeldt works in/as Study Corner



078-1999  
 Waldo Bien-Virgil Grotfeldt  
 Virgil Grotfeldt-Waldo Bien  
 Showing the supportive relationship between economy and art, 1999, New York  
 Coal dust on Braille paper, river clay on ledger with X-rays





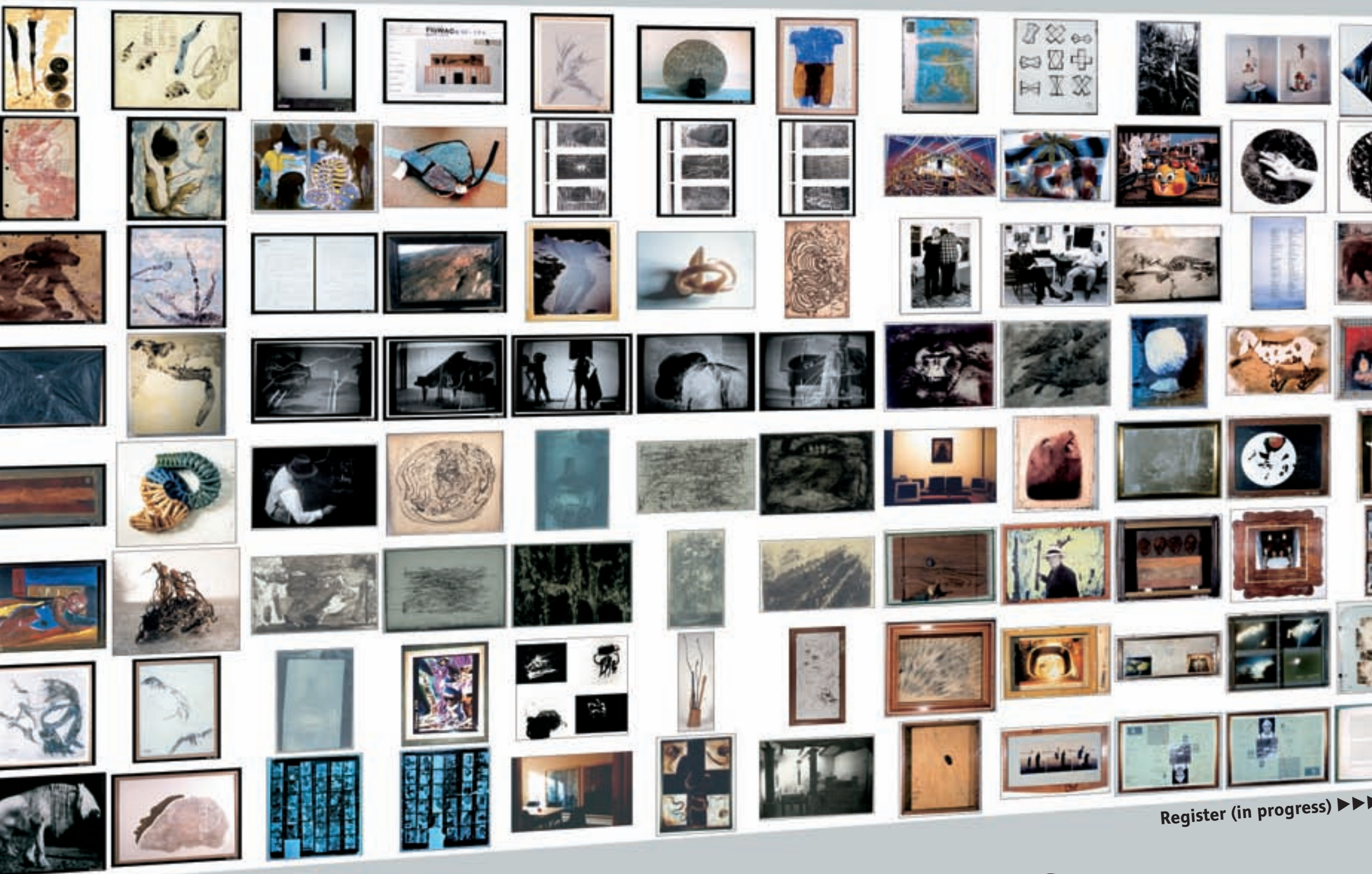
left: Hilarius Hofstede, Virgil Grotfeldt, Patrick Healy, Jacobus Kloppenburg (from left)  
right: Triodos Gen. Dir. Peter Blom in conversation with Jacobus Kloppenburg during the opening of FIUWAC at Triodos Bank Zeist, Oct. 1, 1999

next pages: .....  
all this is in progress and  
will be published in the near  
future.







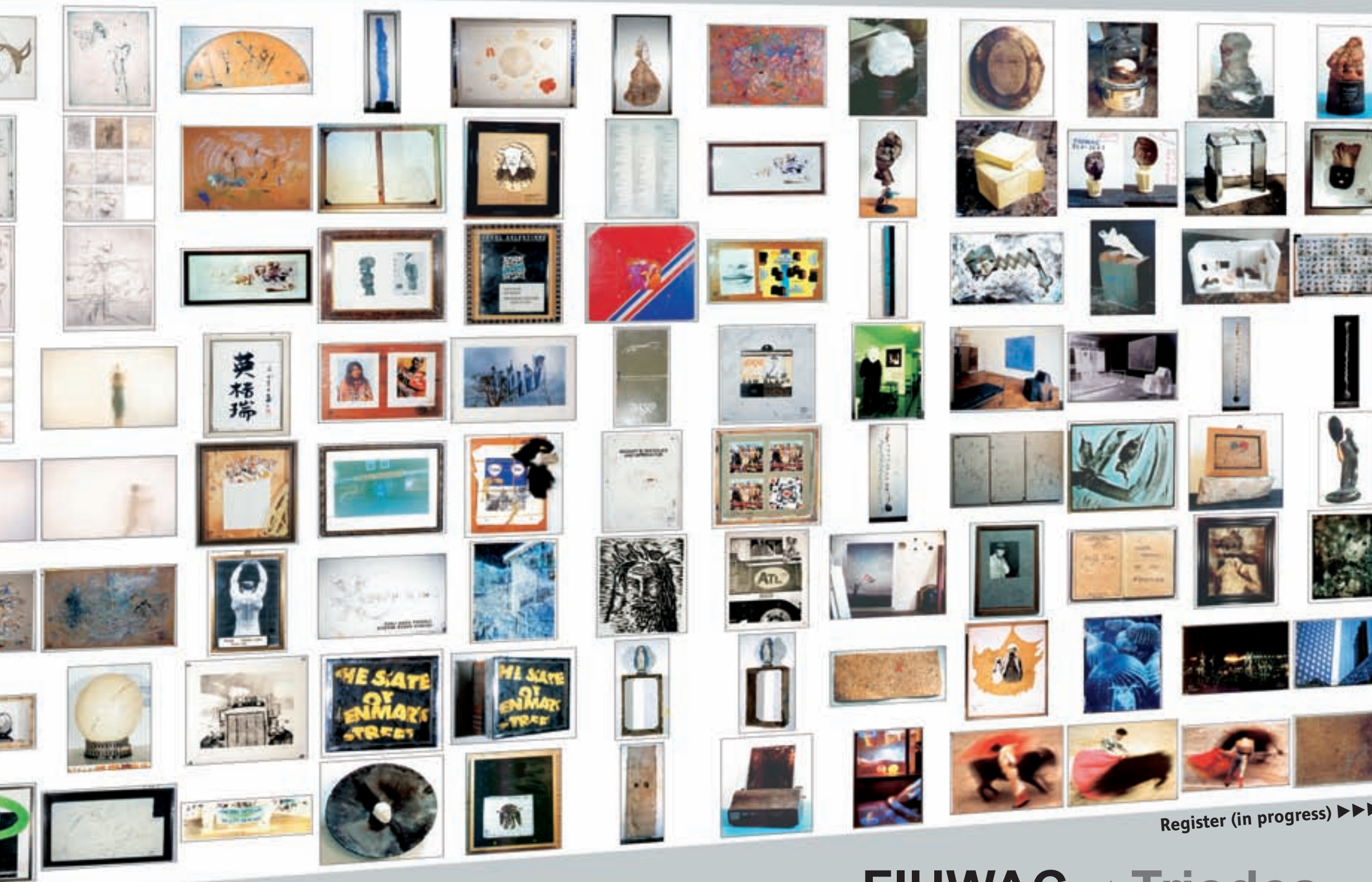


Register (in progress) ►►►









Register (in progress) ▶▶▶

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Virgil Grotfeldt

Texts

Patrick Healy

Waldo Bien

Walter Hopps

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Above and Below (Dollar Green), 1999

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# Triodos Bank F.I.U.-tures

...it was agreed to build a parallel 'Savings Account' in the form of 'F.I.U.tures,' which could be realised on the market in 25 years. With the sale of F.I.U.tures, the FIUWAC could continue to generate further works, and exist in a continuing open sphere of creative enhancement...

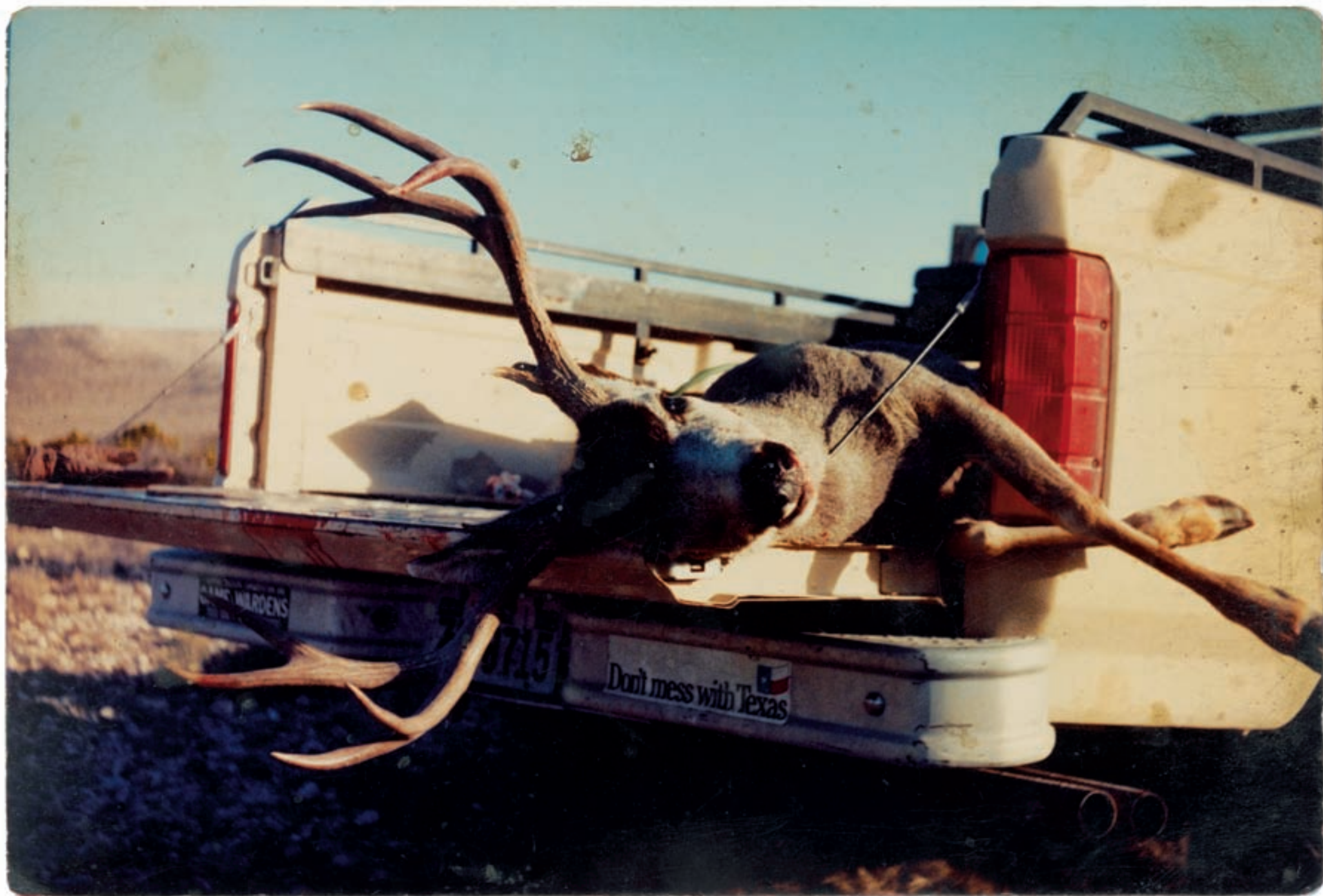
There are 500 F.I.U.tures in Zeist

all this will be published in the Future.

In progress...











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