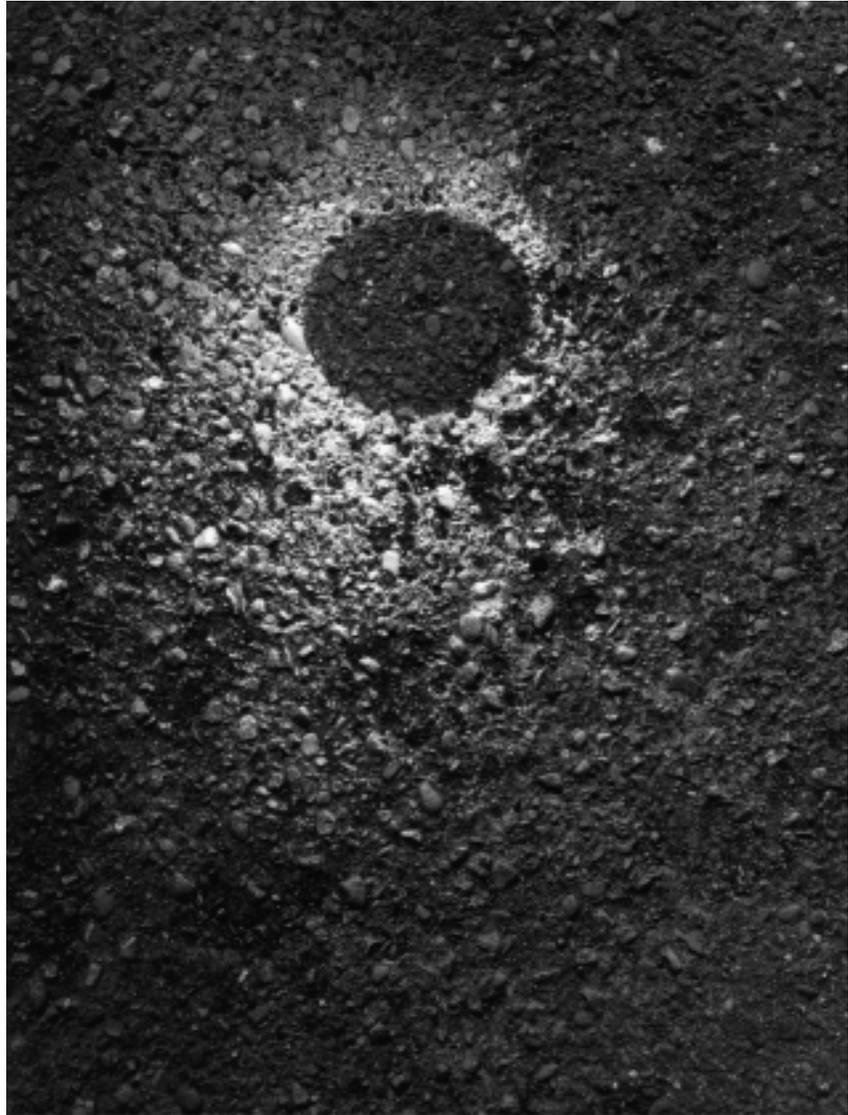


JANUARY 22–  
MARCH 15, 2002



# EVERYDAY CONSTELLATIONS

*Photographs, Photograms and Sunprints by Susannah Hays*

DOREEN B. TOWNSEND CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES  
Geballe Room, 220 Stephens Hall, University of California, Berkeley



# EVERYDAY

The thought of the eternal return came to light because it was no longer possible, under all circumstances, to count on the return of conditions in smaller time frames than eternity provided. The everyday constellations became less everyday. Their return became increasingly more rare and with that the obscure presentiment arose that one would have to content oneself with cosmic constellations.

WALTER BENJAMIN, *THE ARCADES PROJECT*

To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong?

MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE*

For a photographic artist so deeply committed to creating images that reconnect us to the cosmos, it is surprising how often Susannah Hays describes herself as looking down at the ground. Like Icarus whose longing to merge with the heavens was matched only by the hard fact of his inevitable landing, Hays' desire to chart the grand patterns and rhythms of the universe is insistently earth-bound, tied to the ineluctable pull of gravity and the daily path of the sun as it plays across the earth's surface. Unlike the flight of Icarus, however, Hays' journey has not ended badly. Instead, her open-hearted passion for the most overlooked things in the world fuses the domains of the mundane and the infinite. Although the odds against her would seem considerable, Hays uses photography to open up the possibility of returning the cosmic constellations to the everyday.

This exhibition draws from several series within Susannah Hays' work: *The Empty Bottles* replace the lens of the darkroom enlarger with the bottles themselves; the light passing through them illuminates the complex structures of these transparently simple things. The *Leaf Prints* use the decayed, skeletal remains of oak, ivy and eucalyptus leaves in place of photographic negatives, producing positives that uncannily resemble both intricate relief maps and the life systems of the human body. Even when the camera comes into

play, the resulting images are not "fixed" but wondrously various—the sum of a shifting conjunction of likenesses. Look once at Hays' microscopic cross-sections of plant materials and marvel at the miniature vascular network of a buttercup stem. Look again and that same buttercup stem assumes the monumental form of a Gothic rose window.

In the photographs loosely grouped as *Walking in the City*, shadow play obscures distinctions between ground and sky, repairs to cracked asphalt inscribe a serendipitous street calligraphy, and a circle of stones performs the moon's eclipse. Most recently, *Between Cedar & Vine* interweaves Hays' photographic work with another long term project: sifting and sorting through a fifteen-year-plus accumulation of paper ephemera—hastily scribbled notes and want ads, shopping

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Artist SUSANNAH HAYS received her MFA in photography from the San Francisco Art Institute. She is currently represented by Scott Nichols Gallery, and is an artist-in-residence at *landmark*, a program for art making and collaboration at the Sunnyside Conservatory in San Francisco. Hays received the Eisner Prize in Photography at UC Berkeley and is completing her thesis, *Between Cedar & Vine*, in Visual Studies at the College of Environmental Design.

Curator JEANNENE PRZYBLYSKI received her Ph.D. in the History of Art from UC Berkeley, where she held a graduate fellowship at the Townsend Center. She teaches in the graduate programs at San Francisco Art Institute and Mills College, Oakland, and is executive director of the San Francisco Bureau of Urban Secrets, a conceptual art/studio program that develops and promotes art and political interventions in contemporary city life.

# CONSTELLATIONS

*Photographs, Photograms and Sunprints* by Susannah Hays

lists, homework assignments and childish drawings—lost or discarded by other passers-by and found by Hays in the narrow confines of a single Berkeley neighborhood. *Between Cedar & Vine* blends autobiography and topography, linking the routine habits of Hays' daily life with small acts of rescue that seek to mend the isolation of the individual by patiently cataloguing the most vernacular, disposable artifacts of common history and communal memory.

Walter Benjamin wrote a famously forward-looking essay on photography's relentless destruction of aura in the "age of mechanical reproduction." Hays' backward-looking investigation of the medium's prehistory asks us to consider a reverse effect, no less photographic in nature. Her commitment to photography's mutual dependence on light and darkness is matched by her dual investment in the science and art of photography—in all its historic forms. Her refusal to forsake entirely photography's long history of messy chemistry for the clean, digitized optics of bytes and pixels seem to bring us back to an enchanted realm conjoining the celestial patterns of the stars to such forms of embodied mimicry as dance, the richly imitative vocabulary of children's games,

and a host of accidents of perception, both seen and felt—a realm that Benjamin, in his brief essay on mimetic play, described as lost to the numbing forces of a history conceived only in abstract terms of progress. By exposing the unexpected congruence of structural affinity and visual simulation we share with things—both organic and inorganic—that surround us, Susannah Hays resists the fiction that there is no threshold of visibility from "down below," no alternative to the speeded-up temporality of contemporary technological life, no other photographic look than the disciplinary gaze. As much visionary cartographer as visual artist, Hays invites us to think again about photography's power to place us in the world.

JEANNENE PRZYBLYSKI

## WORKS CITED

- Walter Benjamin, *THE ARCADES PROJECT* (Cambridge, 1999).
- Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *ILLUMINATIONS: ESSAYS AND REFLECTIONS* (New York, 1969).
- Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty" in *REFLECTIONS: ESSAYS, APHORISMS, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS* (New York, 1978).
- Michel de Certeau, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE* (Berkeley, 1988).

FEBRUARY 6, 2002

## REPRODUCTION REDUX: THE NATURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*A Panel Discussion  
in Conjunction with  
the Exhibition*

4:00–6:00 p.m.

**Geballe Room  
220 Stephens Hall**

**Doreen B. Townsend  
Center for the Humanities  
University of California  
Berkeley**

## PARTICIPANTS

- Fritjof Capra  
Center for Ecoliteracy, Berkeley
- Sharon Corwin  
Department of the History  
of Art, UC Berkeley
- Robin Grossinger  
San Francisco Estuary Institute
- Susannah Hays  
Visual Studies, College of  
Environmental Design,  
UC Berkeley
- Jeannene Przyblyski  
San Francisco Bureau of Urban  
Secrets
- Richard Walker  
Geography Department,  
UC Berkeley

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. ECLIPSE, *Walking in the City Series*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 16 inches.
2. GRAVITY, *Between Cedar & Vine*, found text, 1985-2002. Epson print, 14 x 11 inches.
3. FALLEN SKY, *Walking in the City Series*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 16 inches.
4. BOTTLE NO. 1, *Empty Bottle Series*, 1998-2000. Gelatin-silver photogram, 20 x 16 inches.
5. BOTTLE NO. 4, *Empty Bottle Series*, 1998-2000. Gelatin-silver photogram, 20 x 16 inches.
6. CROSS SECTION of a buttercup stem, 2000. Gold-toned sunprint, 4 x 5 inches.
7. CROSS SECTION of a leaf embryo, 2000. Gold-toned sunprint, 4 x 5 inches.
8. CROSS SECTIONS of a triangle palm leaf, triptych, 2000. Gold-toned sunprints, 4 x 5 inches.
9. STREET FOREST, *Walking in the City Series*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 16 x 20 inches.
10. SEED LEAF, 2000. Gelatin-silver photogram, 20 x 16 inches.
11. ONE SUN, ONE APPLE, ONE DAY, July 8th, 2001. Vandyke brown, silver-sunprints mounted to Japanese paper, 14 x 69 inches.
12. ONE IS OF THE SPIRIT, *Between Cedar & Vine*, found text, 1985-2002. Epson print, 14 x 11 inches.
13. TREE OUTSIDE MY WINDOW, *Walking the City Series*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 16 inches.
14. LEAF, 1998-2000. Vandyke brown, silver-sunprint on Torinoko Gampi paper, 20 x 16 inches.
15. LEAF (detail), 1998-2000. Vandyke brown, silver-sunprint on Torinoko Gampi paper, 20 x 16 inches.
16. LEAF (detail), 1998-2000. Vandyke brown, silver-sunprint on Torinoko Gampi paper, 20 x 16 inches.
17. LEAF, 1998-2000. Vandyke brown, silver-sunprint on Torinoko Gampi paper, 20 x 16 inches.
18. OAK LEAF, 1998, Cyanotype photogram, on persimmon paper, 11 x 8½ inches.
19. MAP OF CHANGES, *Between Cedar & Vine*, 1995. Gelatin-silver print, 14 x 11 inches.
20. TOPOGRAPHIC, *Between Cedar & Vine*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 14 x 11 inches.
21. HOPE IT'S NOT SERIOUS, *Between Cedar & Vine*, 1996. Gelatin-silver print, 11 x 14 inches.
22. BOTTLE NO. 3, *Empty Bottle Series*, 1998-2000. Gelatin-silver photogram, 20 x 16 inches.
23. BOTTLE NO. 5, *Empty Bottle Series*, 1998-2000. Gelatin-silver photogram, 20 x 16 inches.
24. NIGHT STALKER, *Walking in the City Series*, 2001. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 16 inches.
25. DEAR MOM, *Between Cedar & Vine*, found text, 1985-2002. Epson print, 6 x 6 inches.

*Everyday Constellations: Photographs, Photograms and Sunprints* by Susannah Hays and *Reproduction Redux: The Nature of Photography in the Digital Age* are sponsored by the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities. *Reproduction Redux* is co-sponsored by the Consortium for the Arts at UC Berkeley.

Photographs by Susannah Hays appear courtesy of the artist and Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco

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Catalogue Essay by Jeannene Przyblyski  
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