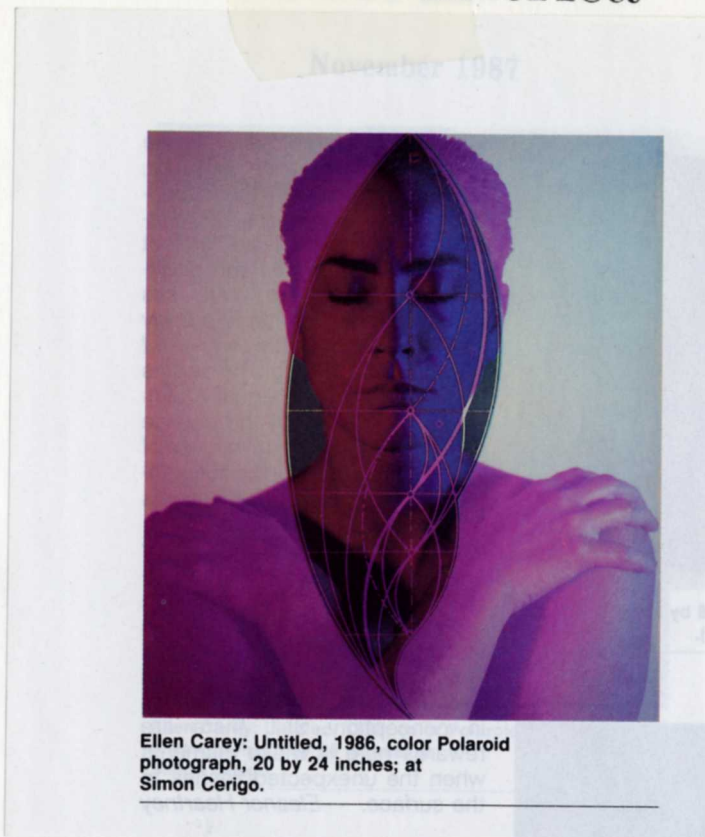


**Ellen Carey
at ICP and
Simon Cerigo**

Ellen Carey's photographic portraits and figure studies have been associated with Neo-Expressionism, Neo-Geo and appropriation art, among other labeled movements and trends. They also may incorporate touches of the surreal. The 10-year survey of her work at the International Center of Photography and an accompanying show of recent photographs and prints at Cerigo underscored Carey's relationship to prevailing "schools" and her ultimate independence from them. Part of a generation that has elevated photography (and, specifically, manipulated photographs) into the high-art mainstream, Carey is, in this writer's opinion, a vastly underrated artist.

Carey's work proposes a merging of the human form with metaphysical energies made visible. In her earlier black-and-white images, she directly applied storms and swirls of black and white paint to the photographs. By the time she moved to color photography, in 1984, Carey's use of acrylic and ink was subtle enough to appear to be part of the photomechanical process itself. That same year she began to work with large-format color Polaroids with patterned acetate covering the lens. This technique creates an effect something like that of a projector throwing a pattern onto the figure, but without the telltale shadow appearing behind the illuminated subject.

Carey's imagery has oscillated between all sorts of self-portraits and a more outward-looking, group-oriented art. The earliest pieces that were included in the ICP show are mostly head and hand shots of Carey in poses evoking a dancer's self-consciousness. There is also a kind of fantastic melancholy operating in the work. Her face and hands are isolated by a blur of marks that seem to describe her emotional weather as she is caught in states of pain, vulnerability, erotic slyness and self-assurance. It should be noted that, though



Ellen Carey: Untitled, 1986, color Polaroid photograph, 20 by 24 inches; at Simon Cerigo.

Carey is, well, *awesomely* photogenic, it's a little mean-spirited to accuse her—as some have done—of anything more than the usual amount of narcissism in doing these self-portraits. Not only is she a conveniently close-at-hand model, she is fully in tune with the moods she's after.

The raw light and rougher surfaces of this early work also recall the stark, fluorescent-lit club and performance scene that was experiencing a resurgence at the time. In fact, Carey's photographs drew upon aspects of performance art as did much of the emerging photography of the period—including the far better known self-depictions of Cindy Sherman. In 1980, Carey began positioning full nude figures, often in pairs, in strangely angled spaces. Silhouetted and illuminated by dramatic lighting, they moved about in poses drawn from dance. There's often a drastic diminishing of scale in these works between foreground and background figures, which creates a relational vortex heightened by Carey's swirls of acrylic and ink which threaten to dissolve the figures altogether.

The sexual identity of the figures in these pictures doesn't seem as crucial as in the earlier self-portraits. The later self-portraits, with their expanded use of color, also seem less gender spe-

cific and autobiographical, Carey's own image acting more as a stand-in for the human spirit. In the striking *Luna*, for example, Carey's face is held and caressed by three pairs of hands (one her own, the others painted in) converging from all directions—a spiritual laying-on of hands. *Luna* and other images such as *Tattoo Ocean*—where Carey's head and shoulders turn ecstatically in a field of exploding streaks of color—engage the theme of transcendence without the cool irony that slinks into her recent and more technically accomplished prints, a selection of which was mounted at Cerigo.

Still committed to images of human transcendence, Carey has grown more conscious of the seductiveness inherent in the media techniques she is mastering. The large-format Polaroids are alluring, with the soft-edged brilliance that seems the property of Polaroid alone. The models (of whom Carey is only one) are presented as beautiful and androgynous, the overlaid geometric designs appropriated from mass-produced pattern books. Though the transition from figure to pattern and back is now virtually seamless, the images have forgone the organic sense of development previously apparent in her work. That's okay. The *American Gigolo* sleekness of the

new work addresses a loss of innocence, not a loss of faith. These are illusions all right, but they are still directed toward the necessary imaging of human beauty in the light of an advancing technological culture. Within that potentially oppressive ideal, the germ of transcendence still exists.

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Tangible Consciousness" exhibition at Rutgers). "Making use of intellect is an intuitive process," she stated in 1979, a principle that continues to lend her work its uncommon stamina.

—Carl Little

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Michael Kessler: *Indians's Dream*, 1987, oil on canvas, 66¾ by 50 inches; at Jack Tilton.



Claire Moore: *A Good Investment Bound to Go Up*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 60 by 48 inches; at June Kelly.

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Peter Nagy at International With Monument

Since he first showed in the early '80s, this young artist seems consistently to have taken his membership in the age of mechanical reproduction seriously—indeed, literally. His recent work has included images of machine shapes Xeroxed over and over until they smear into abstraction, and of monochromatic blowups of cancer cells painted on canvas. Such images were visually compelling and, as illustrations of how something could become dangerous through self-reproduction (the cells) and how a potentially dangerous image could be hidden through replication (Xeroxing), symbolically complex.

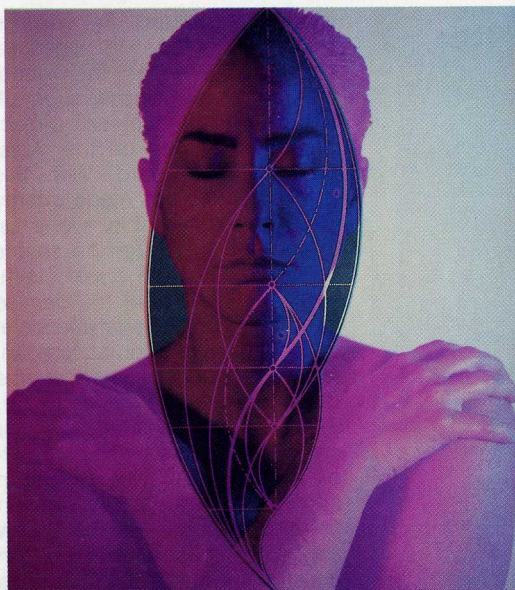
Nagy's recent sandblasted aluminum wall reliefs and photo-etchings comprise a species of serially conceived, postindustrial still life: pristinely distanced in

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