

WESTERN GALLERY

College of Fine and Performing Arts

Fine Arts Complex

Western Washington University

Bellingham, WA 98225



**SPECIFIC
GRAVITY**

February 27-

March 18, 1989

Jack Chevalier

R. Allen Jensen

Nancy Mee

Susan Seniuk

Ron Glown, Guest Curator

■ WESTERN GALLERY ■ WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ■ BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON 98225 ■

JACK CHEVALIER

Born 1948

Lives in Seattle, Washington

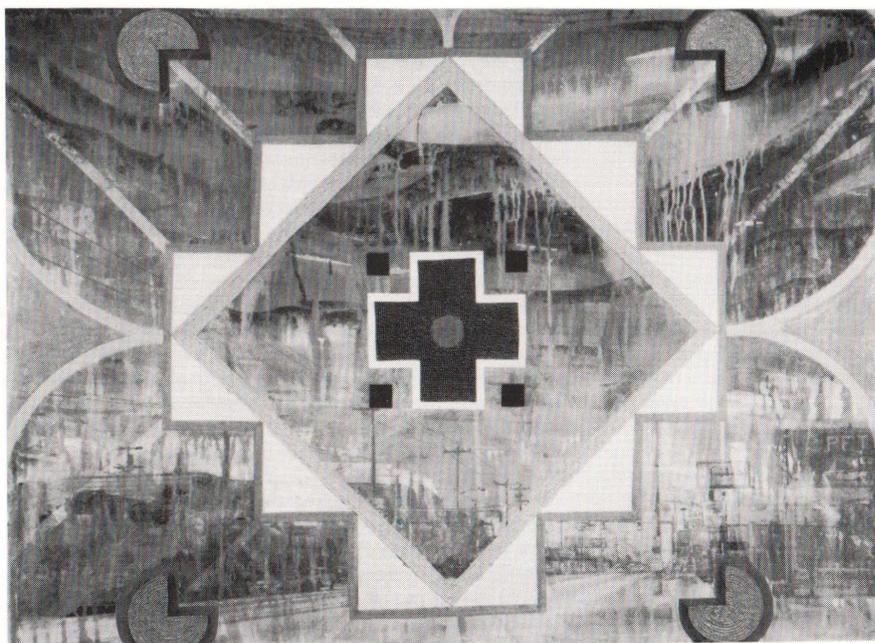
1977 M.F.A., University of Illinois
1975 B.F.A., Cleveland Institute of Art

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1988 Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle
1987 Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati (also 1982, 1981)
1986 Hodges Banks Gallery, Seattle (also 1984, 1983)
The Fountain Gallery, Portland (also 1982)
1985 Pam Adler Gallery, New York (also 1982)
1984 Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham
1982 DBR Gallery, Cleveland
1981 Betsy Rosenfield Gallery, Chicago
1980 Traver Gallery, Seattle (also 1979)

Selected Group Exhibitions

1988 *Specific Gravity*, Cornish College Gallery, Seattle
1987 *Focus: Seattle*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose
1985 *American Art Now! Paintings in the 1980's*,
Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, Columbus
1984 Chicago International Art Exposition (also 1983, 1982)
1983 *Art from the Pacific Northwest*, Brentwood Gallery,
St. Louis
1981 *Abstraction: An American Tradition*, University of
Washington, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle
Assemblages: The Private Icon, University of
Washington, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle
Pertaining to Houses, Getler/Pall Gallery, New York
1980 *Seattle Invitational*, Open Space Gallery, Victoria



Spellbound, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic, wood
32 x 44 inches

systems. Words, camouflage, color-awareness charts and the texture of photographs are each a kind of optical phenomenon or sign used to compare what is visually perceived (the signifier) to the thing it is alleged to represent (the signified). All of these textures are painstakingly transcribed by hand, applied in small patches or daubs which coalesce optically. Thus Seniuk adds another element to the already questioned state of reality and appearance. Is it real camouflage, or illusory (painted) camouflage? Is the dot-screened photo still a photo if it is physically made of paint? Since both the montage effect and the camouflage combine to dissolve figure-ground relationships, it is difficult to discern where the real surface is located. Even the text is subject to a double reading--as separate information, and as a visual element within the montage.

The construction of illusion, and its literal disassembly, is at the core of R. Allen Jensen's drawings of architectural and schematic geometric forms. Large collage constructions using a drawn surface of a grid, against which an isometric three-dimensional schematic of a sectioned cube is laminated with industrial fasteners to the drawing. The cubic form is comprised of industrially patinaed sheet metal, cut into polygonal shapes corresponding to the graphic silhouette of each exposed "surface" for the cube. Jensen literally reinforces the dichotomy between graphic illusion and actual surface with metal fasteners. His material and overly-built channel metal frames are not mandatory for permanence or durability, but are used for both literal and implied industrial-grade heaviness. The drawings of architectural fragments, the ornamentally carved metope segments on a classical building's frieze or entablature, are combined with photocopied collage elements of an arm and hand, seen in series. The hand is shown palm forward, from the back or on its side. The hand seemingly rotates in the series of drawings, creating a paradoxical effect. Do we "see" the hand as being behind the drawing, in front of it or passing through the picture plane? The hand gives the metope drawings an increased suggestion

of three-dimensionality, while its palpable presence as thin as paper subverts that reading, rendering both physically insubstantial.

Nancy Mee's sculptures are concerned with structural analogies for the support of the column and the human spine. The mutability and fragility of the human spine is expressed in the medium of glass--cut, laminated, fused and broken, the columns of glass cannot bear any load and thus must be supported by rigid steel and copper braces. Mee has investigated the spine as a metaphor for beauty and deformity, contrasting the classical elongation and sway of the Venus de Milo to that of a victim of scoliosis, a spinal deformity afflicting women in the prime of their youthful beauty. Photographs of young women's heads with neck and body braces are juxtaposed with those classical ideals of beauty found in the history of western art. Glass--a sensuous, elegant material--befits the concept of the idealized female. But as the structural element, it can only withstand the ideal weight it bears, never the real weight it seems to suggestively carry in the work of art.

For Chevalier and Seniuk, illusion is a perceptual deceit; for Mee it is structural and for Jensen it is both. At work in each case is a tension between the actuality of materials and forms and their assigned usage. The intractable nature of this tension gives the work of Chevalier, Jensen, Mee and Seniuk an extraordinary potency and coherency.

Ron Glown
Guest Curator
January 1989

SPECIFIC GRAVITY EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

JACK CHEVALIER

Phoenix, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
30 by 40 inches
Collection of Linda Hodges

Black Diamonds, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
27 by 38 inches

Spellbound, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
32 by 44 inches

Echo, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
32 by 44 inches

Wheel, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
32 by 44 inches

Red on Cold day, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
30 by 41 inches

Saw Red, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
30 by 36 inches

Autumn Rite, 1988
gouache and pencil on rice paper, acrylic,
wood
30 by 40 inches

All works courtesy of the artist and
the Linda Hodges Gallery

Specific Gravity

R. ALLEN JENSEN

NBBJ Series-87-B, 1987
charcoal on paper, sheet steel
72 by 72 inches

NBBJ Series-87-C, 1987
charcoal on paper, sheet steel
72 by 72 inches

NBBJ Series-87-D, 1987
charcoal on paper, sheet steel
72 by 72 inches

Cross Drawing with Hands, 1987
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
50 by 50 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Metope Series with X-Hands No. 1, 1988
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
24 by 31 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Metope Series with X-Hands No. 2, 1988
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
24 by 31 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Metope Series with X-Hands No. 3, 1988
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
24 by 31 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Metope Series with X-Hands No. 4, 1988
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
24 by 31 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Metope Series with X-Hands No. 5, 1988
charcoal on paper, photocopy collage
24 by 31 inches
Courtesy David Holt, Seattle

Untitled (Mechanical Drawing 21288), 1988
charcoal on paper, paper and metal collage
24 by 30 inches
Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Tafoya, Lynnwood
Works courtesy of the artist unless noted.

NANCY MEE

Seven Beauties, 1987
fused, fractured, laminated and etched glass;
steel, copper, photos
162 by 85 by 18 inches (installed)

Obsession, 1986
glass, steel, photos
85 by 55 by 7 inches

Untitled, 1988
fused glass, steel, photo
75 by 50 by 21 inches (installed)

Untitled, 1988
laminated glass, steel, copper
77 by 23 by 10 inches

Untitled, 1988
laminated glass, steel
81 by 30 by 16 inches

Untitled, 1989
glass, steel, copper, photos
dimensions variable (installed)

Untitled, 1989
glass, steel, copper, photos
dimensions variable (installed)

Body Measure, 1985
steel, glass, etched glass, photo transfer,
encaustic
42 by 48 by 3 inches

De-Form, 1985
steel, glass, etched glass, photo transfer,
encaustic
42 by 48 by 3 inches

Untitled, 1985
steel, glass, etched glass, photo transfer,
encaustic
42 by 48 by 3 inches

All works courtesy of artist and
Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle

SUSAN SENIUK

itself of the rule, 1988
acrylic on unstretched canvas
72 by 60 inches

f-4, 1988
acrylic on unstretched canvas
72 by 60 inches

57/35, 1987
acrylic on unstretched canvas
72 by 60 inches

campaigns are the hearts, 1987
acrylic on rag paper
53 by 108 inches

(rit), 1987
acrylic on unstretched canvas
72 by 52 inches

the shattered ambassador's residence, 1986
acrylic on rag paper
53 by 192 inches

a ā à ä, 1986
acrylic on rag paper
53 by 192 inches

All works courtesy of the artist

Acknowledgements

Located in the south wing of the Fine Arts Complex, the Western Gallery is a center for the discussion and exhibition of issues in contemporary art. Ron Glowen, contributing editor for *Artweek* and author of numerous critical essays for west coast art centers and regional and national art magazines, has organized this exhibition for the new gallery. Acclaimed by *Reflex* magazine, Seattle, as one of the best group exhibitions during the fall of 1988, *Specific Gravity* has been significantly expanded for the spacious Western Gallery. I greatly appreciate Ron's critical eye and intuition and each of the artist's generous cooperation in making this exhibition unique for the Western Gallery.

Sarah Clark-Langager
Director, Western Gallery

Photography Credits

Jake Seniuk for Susan Seniuk's work
Tom Collicott for Nancy Mee's work

Word Processing

Georgia Sentkowski

Design

Madge Gleeson

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Bellingham, Washington 98225
206-676-3963

Essay copyright by Ron Glowen

NANCY MEE

Born 1951

Lives in Seattle, Washington

1974 B.F.A., University of Washington

1973 American Center for Art and Artists, Paris
Atelier 17, Paris

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1986 Allrich Gallery, San Francisco

1985 Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle (also 1982, 1980)

1981 Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma

1979 Kauai Museum, Lihue, Kauai, Hawaii

Selected Group Exhibitions

1989 *Documents Northwest*, Seattle Art Museum

1988 *Specific Gravity*, Cornish College Gallery, Seattle

1987 *Standing Ground: Sculpture by Contemporary American Women*, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati

Northwest 87, Seattle Art Museum

Focus: Seattle, San Jose Museum of Art

1986 *Poetics of Darkness: Nancy Mee and Philip Schwab*, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham

1985 *Governor's Invitational*, State Capitol Museum, Olympia

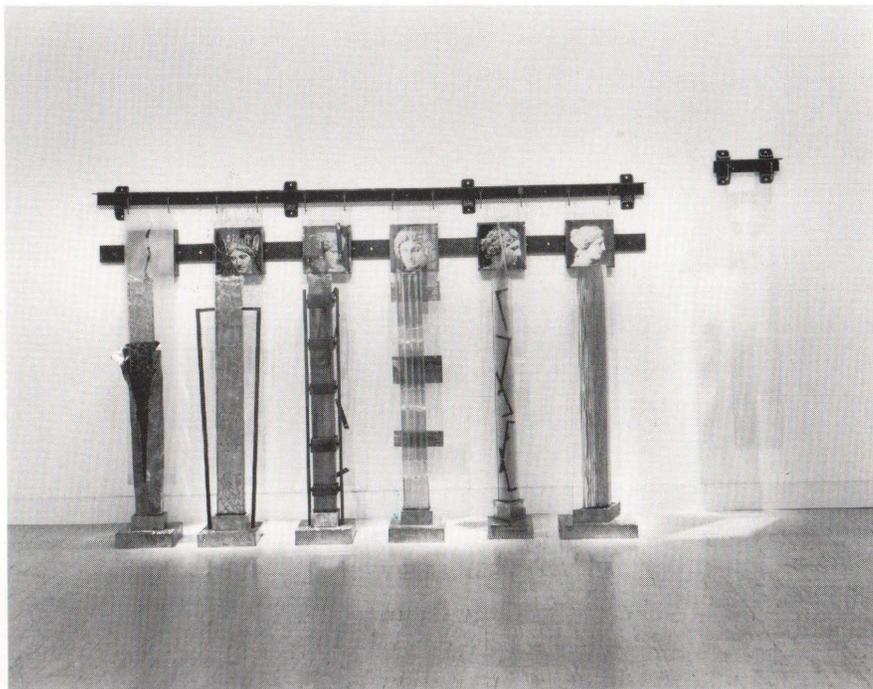
1984 *The Coast Show*, Public Image Gallery, New York

1983 Prichard Gallery, University of Idaho, Moscow
Art from the Pacific Northwest, Brentwood Gallery, St. Louis

X-Change, Karl Bornstein Gallery, Los Angeles

1982 *Raconteur*, University of Washington, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle

Eight Seattle Artists, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art



Seven Beauties, 1987
fused, fractured, laminated and etched glass; steel, copper, photos
162 by 85 by 18 inches

R. ALLEN JENSEN

Born 1935
Lives in Stanwood, Washington

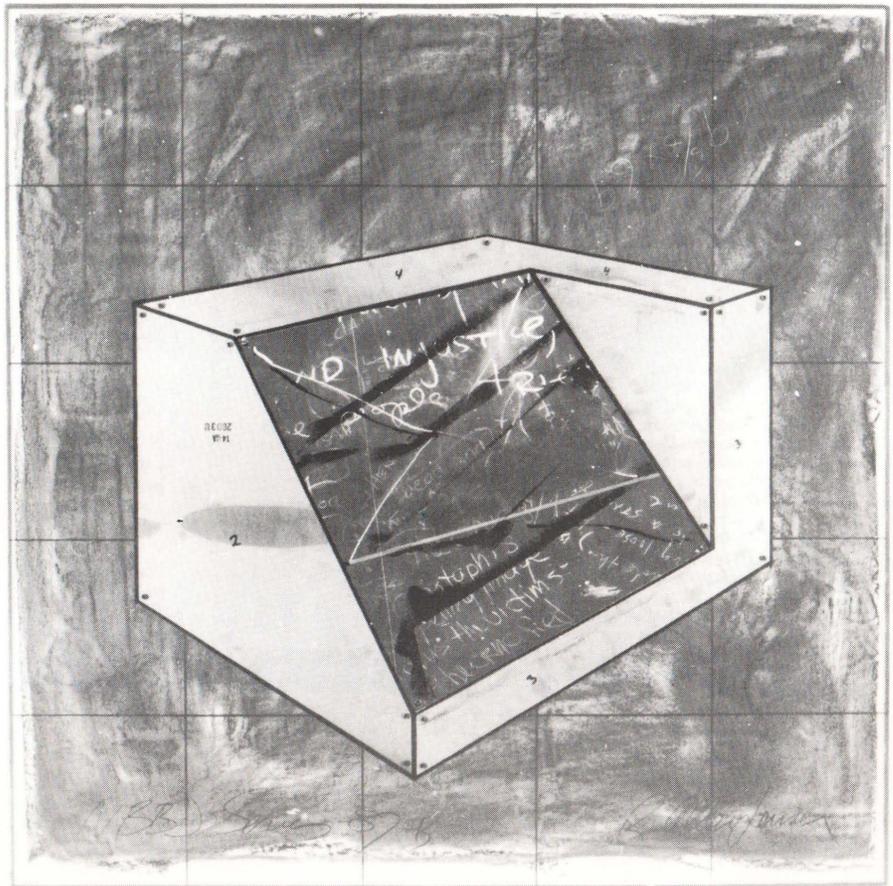
1962 M.F.A., Washington State University
1960 B.A., University of Washington
1956 A.A., Everett Junior College

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1988 Italia Gallery/Mahler Fine Arts, Seattle (also 1986)
Northlight Gallery, Everett Community College,
Everett
1987 The NBBJ Group: Architects, Seattle
1985 The Viking Union Gallery, Western Washington
University, Bellingham
1983 Western Gallery, Western Washington University,
Bellingham (also 1981, 1979)
1979 Olson/Walker Gallery, Seattle (also 1978)
Harris Gallery, Seattle
1976 Rockford Art Center, Rockford, Illinois
1972 Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon
1970 Tacoma Art Museum

Selected Group Exhibitions

1988 *Specific Gravity*, Cornish College Gallery, Seattle
Tremors, Clark Arts Center Gallery, Rockford College,
Rockford, Illinois
1986 *City Sculpture*, Bellingham City Library
Faculty Show, Western Washington University,
Bellingham (also 1984, 1981, 1978)
1985 Mt. Hood Community College, Gresham
1981 Foster/White Gallery, Seattle
Assemblage: The Private Icon, University of Washington,
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle
Raconteur: Private Views, University of Washington,
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle



NBBJ Series-87-B, 1987
charcoal on paper, sheet steel
72 x 72 inches

Perhaps we can regard
illusion as the
"specific gravity" of art,
that baseline medium
of which all artistic
endeavors are
weighted against.

Specific Gravity is not a definable theme or style, or a quality shared by every work of art. The term is used in physics to measure the ratio of mass between one substance (usually water) and another. Specific gravity tells us why wood floats and rocks sink, or why flotation is greater in salt water than in fresh. It is a comparison of relative qualities and/or properties. The term has a metaphorical ring to it: as if to be particularly serious, sedate or solemn; to be sufficiently "weighty" in substance or meaning; or to be attracted to or gravitate towards something.

This digression about a curatorial topic answers some of the questions why, but not what the works in *Specific Gravity* are supposed to "do" in response to each other. What is the sum effect? Is it forced, or does it emerge from some previously unconsidered or overlooked strata within the formal and conceptual construct of each body of work? The much smaller pilot version of *Specific Gravity* was organized for the Cornish College of the Arts Gallery in Seattle to discover if such responses did indeed resonate.

Looking again at the work, the disparities are perhaps more evident. Jack Chevalier combines realistic imagery of landscape and cityscape with elaborate, iconic structures and forms. His materials (wood and parchment) are light, and his images and forms seem to literally float. Susan Seniuk superimposes textures and text-ure; that is, patterns of surface and picture, and patterns of words and letters. The layering becomes denser and denser, the patterns lost in larger patterns. The rugged architectural and industrial vocabulary in R. Allen Jensen's drawings form a kind of structural foundation for both design and meaning. Nancy Mee's armatures of similarly rugged material and finish operate in the figurative absence of structural foundation. Instead, the materials and forms in her work seem imminently collapsed and fragile.

A common feature emerges from the juxtapositions of the four quite distinct esthetic approaches. It is the apparent, seemingly fundamental idea that, for each artist in

the exhibition, the chosen elements of illusion in art are exposed as visual and metaphorical deceptions. Perhaps we can regard illusion as the "specific gravity" of art, that baseline medium of which all artistic endeavors are weighted against. Illusion was once the epitome of art's task--now it is a quality or property to be measured against other qualities and properties of art.

Jack Chevalier's painting constructions literally pierce the question of illusion, presenting it as a veneer with no tangible substance. Pencil and gouache drawings on reinforced rice paper, depicting the low horizon meetings of silhouetted residential cityscapes or distant shorelines taken from late evening photographs, are washed away leaving the streaked pentimento of the illusory drawing. This parchment-like paper is stretched over an elaborate grill-like frame, visible through the translucent parchment and outlined by the washed-away pigments. The frame holds iconic forms such as diamonds or cruciforms which project through, or are separate but level with, the painting's surface. These icons and their supporting frames are decorative and vaguely ritualistic in appearance. The touchstone for illusion in western art--the window analogy--is both reinforced and disrupted. The iconic forms are ambivalent, having no direct correspondence with the image. The two-dimensional silhouette image itself is tensely suspended on a thin plane between the frame beneath and the projecting iconic forms. Chevalier is grafting separate realities--the representational and the abstract--in order to question the veracity of both.

Susan Seniuk's large paintings on paper scrolls and unstretched canvas incorporate the dot-screen patterns of reproduction photographs, military or sportsmen's camouflage patterns, and text either in vertically cropped fragments of newspaper columns or in columns of phonetic alphabets and pronunciation keys. The photo images and text are greatly enlarged against the standard scale camouflage. This web of superimposed imagery shifts in and out, forcing the viewer to discriminate between patterns taken from different pictorial sign

SPECIFIC GRAVITY

By Ron Glowen

WESTERN GALLERY

Sarah Clark-Langager

Director

Western

Washington

University

Bellingham

Group exhibitions of art are often organized around stylistic, thematic or historical relationships--the common grounds for critical consideration and comparison between works of art. Conversely, some group shows avoid commonality at all costs, presenting each work as if entirely individual and bearing no relationship to the other artworks sharing its immediate context. Outside of these polarities is the show based on the organizer's taste or personal judgments--the most difficult rationale to sustain, and usually the weakest.

The four Northwest contemporary artists featured in the exhibition *Specific Gravity* at first appear to have little in common. These recent works by Jack Chevalier, R. Allen Jensen, Nancy Mee and Susan Seniuk do not condense around a theme common to all, nor are they at all similar stylistically. For that matter, even the cultural and historical

references that can be found in each artist's work are by no means consistent. Yet a purpose exists for bringing these artists' works together.

It is my contention that an exhibition of works of art is in many ways analogous to the work of art itself. An exhibition in the making is a fluid concept, subject to revisions, alterations and refinements until reaching stasis at the time of presentation. Each responds to and is changed by a new context, or a new frame of reference. And like the internal relationships between elements in a work of art, a successful exhibition is based on relationships created or established between works of art.

Specific Gravity is predicated on this idea that works of art can illuminate aspects contained in other works of art. As such, the curatorial premise is more intuitive than deliberate.

Specific Gravity