The Transformed Image
Works by Holly Roberts
January 20–March 13, 1991

Notes Toward an Understanding of Holly Roberts’ Paintings

Her art hovers in regions simultaneously fueled by the mundane and the fantastic. Roberts strips, distills and reorders events drawn from the objective world — she reveals glimpses of realities which lie beneath those routines and surfaces of daily existence. The world of her imagination seems inhabited by apparitions projected upon the screen of slumber where consciousness lingers between the unknown of deepest sleep and the tangibility of total wakefulness.

While looking at Roberts’ paintings, a statement by the great Norwegian Symbolist, Edvard Munch, comes to mind: Nature is the unique great realm upon which art feeds. Nature is not only what is visible to the eye — it also shows the inner images of the soul — the images on the back side of the eyes.

Roberts has described herself as a filter, “and what comes through me is not just what I am but what’s around me.” The “who I am” has been profoundly shaped by Roberts’ sense of place. Although she has spent important periods of her life in California, Ecuador and Mexico, it is the American Southwest that has remained Roberts’ home. She is drawn to and nourished by the sublime extremes of the region’s geography and its rich mix of Native American, Mexican and Anglo cultures.

Her present home is in the northwest region of New Mexico, in the village of Black Rock on the Zuni Indian Reservation, approximately forty miles south of the city of Gallup. Roberts’ studio is in a trailer located on the Zuni pueblos. She maintains a complex relationship with the culture surrounding her.

Even as an observer, I am distant to it. Still, it’s wonderful to have it as part of the environment. I may be driving down to my studio and past a muckload of Mudheads, or there will be a figure going door to door — a boogy man — who goes around and scares people, telling them to clean up their act.

For all the richness of her geographic location, it has isolated her from museums and galleries. Through the doors of catalogs and books that line the walls of her home, Roberts has diminished that sense of distance. Her tastes run wide: Mary Cassatt, Diane Arbus, Richard Diebenkorn, Francisco Clemente, Georgio O’Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Frances Bacon, Ralph Eugene Meatyard. Both on and above the bookshelves, Roberts keeps her collection of kachinas, folk art figures and masks. Formerly a curator, Roberts has made her home into a museum — one with a collection of objects drawn together by the demands of her art.

Interviewer: Do you find a common thread between Egyptian art, kachinas, Mexican masks and rock art?

Holly Roberts: Yes. There’s this absolute simplicity and rightness. In and of themselves, they are fantastically powerful works. I remember going to the Met and seeing a little room, a gallery of Egyptian figures and I thought, God, I wish I had that in my house! It has too much power to it. Who knows what you’d be bringing in? It could be death, destruction, whatever.

Working from and over photographs, Roberts finds, builds and shapes asence. Her effacement of the photograph underlying the final image is not the gesture of a polemicist nor it is the celebration of oil over silver. For Roberts, the photograph is essential: it is the final image’s physical foundation and its original source of inspiration. In the end, however, she defines herself as a painter. Roberts feels a confidence in her handling of the paint that she does not feel with photography.

With its combination of media, richly worked surfaces, dark psychological narratives, wide-ranging cultural sources and transformation of the physical into the visionary, Roberts’ paintings are born of an aesthetic ultimately grounded in Romanticism. Work created within this tradition is rarely, never, closed in meaning. Other than the titles, Roberts provides no verbal explanation of her work. She leaves it to us to ponder the signs and symbols she has created.

Dr. Edward A. Aiken
Director, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery
Chautauqua Program in Museum Studies

1. Edvard Munch, written 1907 or 1908; in Theories of Modern Art, ed. Hertel Chipp (Berkeley: University of California, 1969) 114.
EDUCATION
1981 M.F.A. Arizona State University, Tempe
1973 B.A. (Special Distinction) University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
1971-72 University of New Mexico at Quito, Ecuador
1971 Bellas Artes de Mexico, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

SELECTED INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS
1990 Benitez-Morgan Galleries, Houston
Photographic Resource Center, Boston
Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco
Eberton Gallery, Tucson
Friends of Photography, San Francisco (Catalogue by David Friedman)
1989-90 Jayne H. Baum Gallery, New York
Light Factory, Durham, North Carolina
Elmers Caulli Gallery, Chicago
Gimmy Williams/Photographs, Inc., Denver
Linda Durham Gallery, Santa Fe
1988 Holly Roberts, Animals, Film in the Cities, St. Paul
Eberton Gallery, Tucson
Works by Holly Roberts, Gimmy Williams/Photographs, Inc., Denver
Holly Roberts at Linda Durham, Linda Durham Gallery, Santa Fe
Northlight Gallery, Arizona State University, Tempe
Images of the Southwest, Marcuse Piefer Gallery, New York
1985 Holby Roberts: New Work, Eberton Gallery, Tucson
The Painting Photograph Issue, Jon cement, Studio, Minneapolis
1984 Holly Roberts: Paintings, ASMU Exhibit Gallery
Northern Montana State University, Bozeman
New Work on Paper, Sette Publishing, Tempe
1983-84 Paintings by Holly Roberts, Arizona Commission on the Arts Traveling Exhibition Program
1983 Holly Roberts-Paintings, Eberton Gallery, Tucson
Holly Roberts: Paintings and Painted Photographs, Wildlune Gallery, Albuquerque

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1990 Photography in Siquirra, Graham Modern, New York
Feminist Strategies: Actuality and Originality in Consumatory Photography, The Squibb Gallery, Princeton Newmark's South, Farnsworth Frick, Palm Springs
Desert Museum, Palm Springs, California
Nature and Culture: Conflict and Reconciliation in Recent Photography, The Friends of Photography, San Francisco
Bordeline: Photography in the 150th Year, Amerspace, New Haven, Connecticut

Asking for Money, 1986
Holly Roberts, Michael Berman, Blue Sky Gallery, Portland
Jeffrey Silvester and Holly Roberts, Edna Carlen Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
New Rooms: Holly Roberts, Fahey/Klein Gallery, Los Angeles
Photography on the Edge, The Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee
Photography: Judith Gold and Holly Roberts, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago
Explorations: Extending the Boundaries of Contemporary Photography, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago
Contemporary Photography Since 1940, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (Book)
Contemporary 2: Recent Additions to the Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
Empowered Printmakers, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe
Painted Pictures, Midtown Art Center, Houston, Curator: Andrew Grundberg
The Painted Photograph, Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco
Construct Realities, Baker Gallery, Kansas City
The Colored Image: Applied Color in Photography, The Friends of Photography, Carmel, California
Southwest 85, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe
On the Wall Off the Wall, Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe
1984 The One and Only: Unique Photography Since the Daguerreotype, Lawrence Miller Gallery, New York
Painted Photographs, Marcuse Piefer Gallery, New York
Works on Photography, Santa Fe Center for Photography, Santa Fe
Gender Constructions, Ichaba Collage, Ichala
Contemporary Work in Texas, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix
The Home Show, Robert Freidka Gallery, New York
Northlight Southwest, Northlight Gallery, Arizona State University, Tempe

SELECTED AWARDS
1988 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
1986 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
1984 The One and Only: Unique Photography Since the Daguerreotype, Lawrence Miller Gallery, New York
Painted Photographs, Marcuse Piefer Gallery, New York
Works on Photography, Santa Fe Center for Photography, Santa Fe
Gender Constructions, Ichaba Collage, Ichala
Contemporary Work in Texas, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix

SELECTED PUBLIC & CORPORATE COLLECTIONS
Center for Creative Photography, Tucson
Citicorp Bank, Albuquerque
Dayton Hudson Corporation, Minneapolis
Greenbelt Center for the Graphic Arts, University of California
Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe
Phoenix Museum of Art, Phoenix
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
National Endowment for the Arts, California
Phoenix Art Museum, San Diego
Prudential Insurance, Newark
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
Triadica Collection, College of Fine Arts, Ohio University
Tulsa City-County Collection, Tulsa
University of Arizona, Museum of Art, Tucson
University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
University of Houston, Print Study Collection, Houston
Valley National Bank, Phoenix
CHECKLIST

Dimensions are in inches, height before width, and refer to the size of the image, not the sheet. Unless otherwise noted, all works in this exhibition belong to the artists.

Syracuse University Art Galleries

Two Dogs Running in Their Backyard 1985-86
Oil on silver print
14 1/4 x 19
Lent by the Joyce Baum Gallery

Asking for Money 1985
Oil on silver print
18 3/8 x 22 7/8

Couple in Love 1986
Oil on silver print
18 3/8 x 22 7/8

Man Looking at His Hands 1986
Oil on silver print
22 1/2 x 18 3/8

Man with Deer Mask on a Stick 1986
Oil on silver print
18 3/8 x 22 7/8

Man with Fire 1986
Oil on silver print
14 1/2 x 18 7/8

Three Women 1986
Oil on silver print
22 1/2 x 18 3/8

Two Angels 1986
Oil and silver print on canvas
25 x 21

Woman with Tree 1986
Oil on silver print
19 x 14 1/2

Being Alone in the Cemetery c. 1987
Oil and silver print on canvas
26 x 23

Child Being Held 1987
Oil on silver print
36 1/4 x 24 1/2

Target 1987
Oil on silver print
28 3/8 x 23 1/2

Child with Wolf 1988
Oil on silver print
22 1/2 x 18 3/8

Dad 1988
Oil on silver print
10 3/8 x 13 1/4

Man Saying No 1988
Oil on silver print
10 1/2 x 13 3/8

Rabbit at Night 1988
Oil and silver print on canvas
23 x 27 1/2

Slower 1988
Oil on silver print
33 1/2 x 23 1/4

Woman with Pink Legs 1988
Oil on silver print
18 3/8 x 22 1/2

Bird with Man Sleeping 1989
Oil on silver print
26 1/2 x 10

Couple Getting Married 1989
Oil on canvas
40 x 30

Man Being Packed 1989
Oil on paper
31 1/2 x 29

Man Looking at His Arms 1989
Oil on silver print on canvas
20 x 18 1/2

Man Losing His Temper 1989
Oil on silver print
40 x 24

Man Sleepwalking 1989
Oil on silver print
45 1/2 x 31 1/2

Man Trying Not to Fall 1989
Oil on silver print on canvas
20 x 18 1/2

Man with Heart Attack 1989
Oil on silver print
28 x 25

Man with Three Black Cacti 1989
Oil on silver print
28 3/8 x 23 1/4

Two Men Fighting 1989
Oil on silver print
30 x 25

Woman Being Confused 1989
Oil on silver print
13 5/8 x 10 5/8

Woman Being Turned Suddenly Subways 1989
Oil and silver print on linen rag
9 1/2 x 12 1/4

Woman with Burning House 1989
Oil on silver print
22 1/2 x 13

Woman with Long Arms 1989
Oil on silver print
21 1/2 x 50

Cry Head 1990
Gouache on silver print
9 1/2 x 7 1/2

Couple with Dog’s Head 1990
Oil and silver print on canvas
40 3/8 x 25 7/8

Dog with Man Falling 1990
Oil on silver print
7 1/2 x 19

Leaving Paradise 1990
Oil on silver print
22 1/2 x 18 1/2

Man and Women Together 1990
Gouache on silver print
9 1/2 x 15

Man Cutting 1990
Oil on silver print
33 1/4 x 26 1/4

Man Scratching 1990
Oil on silver print
33 1/4 x 25 1/4

Woman with Pink Legs 1990
Oil on silver print
38 1/4 x 28 1/4

Man with a Dress 1990
Oil on silver print
36 3/8 x 23 1/2

Man with Red Hands 1990
Oil on silver print
23 3/8 x 27

Two Men in Black 1990
Gouache on paper
22 x 13

Woman Being Hungry 1990
Oil and silver print on canvas
39 7/8 x 25 7/8

Woman Standing with Bike 1990
Gouache on silver print
22 1/2 x 9 1/2

We are grateful to Holly Roberts and the staff of the Joyce Baum Gallery, New York, for helping us arrange the loans for this exhibition. In the early stages of planning, the Elders Caudill Gallery, Chicago, provided valuable assistance. The exhibition would not have become a reality without the enthusiastic interest of the Department of Art Media Studies and the aid of the Robert Menschel Endowment.

The students of the Graduate Program in Museum Studies and the staff of the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery have been instrumental in bringing this exhibition to fruition. We would like to acknowledge Professor Donald M. LaMorte, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and Professor Rodger Mack, Director of the School of Art, for their constant support.

E.A.A.