

**TRIP**

WIRE

# TRIPWIRE

February 29 to  
March 30, 1996

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C u r a t e d b y  
Carmine Iannaccone

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L A C E  
L o s A n g e l e s  
C o n t e m p o r a r y  
E x h i b i t i o n s  
6522 Hollywood Blvd.  
Los Angeles 90028

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Perhaps you've had this experience. You're taking a snapshot of a friend and look forward to seeing the print. When it's developed, you discover (to your dismay) that some annoying intrusion has ruined the composition. A garbage can in the background seems to be growing out of your friend's shoulder, or a telephone pole seems to have lanced him or her in the head. Is it fair to say that, at the time you took the photo, those objects were, temporarily - invisible? After all, had you noticed them at the outset, you wouldn't have let them ruin your photograph. You would have rearranged the picture to exclude them.

It's similar to the experience of losing your keys or your wallet or your watch, and needing them urgently. You search madly everywhere, only to finally discover the lost possession right before your eyes, somewhere you *know* you looked a second ago.

## Watch Your Step

The art object also intensifies vision. But what may be surprising is that intensified vision, as with the case of the lost keys, can actually make things less visible rather than more. Intensity of vision can, in fact, make some things completely invisible. It can hide the most obvious things from view.

**Invisibility** is hardly the preternatural condition it's cracked up to be. The only thing about it that's at all extraordinary is just how mundane and commonplace it is. Invisibility is something we encounter every day, whether as an annoyance, like when we can't find our keys, or on broader sociological planes such as those first pointed out by Ralph Ellison over 40 years ago in his novel Invisible Man. In that book Ellison exposed the way our society willfully excludes certain members of the population from representations of itself. "I am a man of substance," says the narrator,

of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me... That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.

Ellison's narrator is referring to his exclusion as a black man from white society. Today's cultural debates have gone on to locate the exact perimeter of that zone of exclusion and have drawn attention to the other communities that we keep out: the Latino and Asian characters rarely included in mainstream television drama, the women we hardly ever see in headline news stories, the Indian, Asian and African scholars we never read about in our classical humanities curricula.

What these well justified complaints about invisibility all have in common is the way they depend upon a specific medium of communication. Anyone systematically excluded from that medium becomes, for its viewers, readers, or listeners, invisible. The ultimate port into which all these channels finally download their biased points of view is human consciousness. Anyone excluded from



that consciousness also becomes, for the duration, invisible. This doesn't mean they don't exist, just that they can't be seen. As Ellison points out, however, that's just as bad - if not worse.

But this line of reasoning quickly hits its limits. Just how much is our consciousness actually formed by these various inputs? That's a question which cannot be answered because it brings up an issue which *cannot be measured*. And what these arguments about the misrepresentation of society all depend upon is the power to quantify reality with which our Opinion Polled, Nielson Rated and Dow Jones Industrial Averaged culture is so enamored.

Of course, the limitations to an argument in no way disprove or diminish the issue it seeks to address, but they do point out how the artists in this show (while not shying away from the substance of these matters) address them in qualitatively different terms.

If there's one thing these six artists do *not* do, it's quantify their subject matter. That which escapes our view, the invisible affairs of daily life, is of interest to them for everything about it which *cannot* be grasped, which *evades* definition, and which *resists* being named or numbered. Their work is not simply about information that doesn't get transmitted. They are concerned with that which slips from the clutch of consciousness *despite* our best efforts to be informed, intelligent citizens of the Republic. For them, invisibility requires an eye that wants to see, but can't. The argument is no longer about exclusion or denial. We go beyond squabbles over equal air time, equal access and equal representation to the question of what is really knowable in the first place.

**Any** prospect across which you might cast your glance right now has aspects about which you know much more than you can see. *Almost* all of what you know about the world, in fact, cannot be verified by vision or eyesight. You might be aware that the wall in front of you contains a series of wooden or aluminum studs, though you can't see them; or that a piece of jewelry you're wearing once belonged to your grandmother and that she wore it on her wedding day, though there's no visual evidence of that. You know that there's a heart beating in your chest, an intestine coiled in your abdomen, a brain cradled in your skull, though you've never seen any of these things and hopefully never will. You know that the tea in your cup is Earl Grey and not English Breakfast even though they both look exactly the same.

It's obvious that perception depends upon far more information than what the eye alone can provide. But in spite of this, the odds are *good* that we'd be quite willing to judge as "accurate" or even "true," a reproduction (like a photograph) that excludes most of that information. We *have* to, otherwise we invite a kind of infinite regression that would be terrifying and impossible to control. A portrait of you, for example, would require that the tag on the teabag hanging from your cup be fully exposed and legible. An image of your heart, brain and intestines would have to be included. We'd need an arrow pointing from that piece of jewelry to a portrait of your grandmother in her wedding gown on the wall behind you (with a cutaway to show the internal studs, of course); and all this would be only the beginning...

All art (like all argumentation), has to set up limits. But that creates an oily space between what we can (or cannot) see and what we do (or do not) know. This is where standards of measure fail and reality resists quantification. Far from being defeated by this condition, though, the six artists in *Tripwire* make it work to their advantage. Their concerns range from matters of social and political


import to questions about memory and psychology and corporeality, but they address these issues with an eye to the instability, ambiguity, and evasion that is their natural condition. They forgo the illusion that any of these topics are completely knowable just as they embrace the fact that none of them are completely seeable. Where they do not allow themselves the security of absolute, quantifiable data, they adopt tactics of contingency, stratagem and, yes, old fashioned artistic conceit.

This necessarily puts their audience on shifting ground as well. The neutral, unobtrusive setting of the gallery becomes a dynamic, operative space rather than a passive backdrop. Give these art works a white wall and, like chameleons, they'll actively blend in and disappear, or else silently infiltrate its entire geography - or escape the walls all together. Like a forgotten name on the tip of your tongue which you struggle to recall (tantalizing, stubborn), this art acknowledges the gallery as the theatre of amnesia which it really is, institutionally resistant to any permanent trace from the art that passes through it. So in some cases, the first thing that the work demands is to be actually *found* or located. In all cases, it demands not just to be seen or studied, but to be *discerned*, to be separated from the background either inside or outside the frame, and to be resolved either in the field of vision, or in the field of thought at the other end of the optic nerve.

In a word, this art toys with you. It taunts. It dares you to spend time with it. In fact, with its tactics of disguise, camouflage, and deception, it works very much like a snare. To discover it, to understand it, to experience it, is to be caught by it. So watch your step; the tripwire that springs any trap is always hidden from view.

Carmine Iannaccone  
*January, 1996*



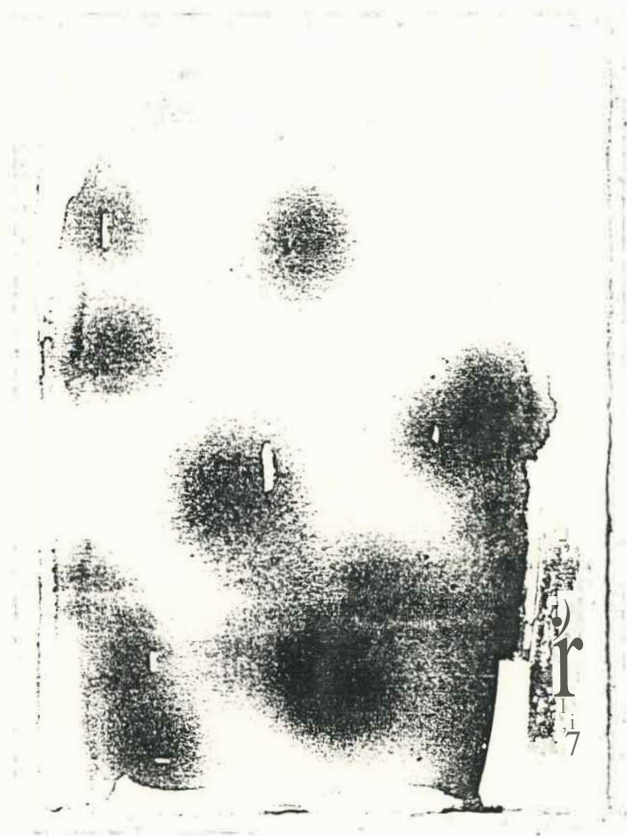


# Artists in the Exhibition

Annotations by the curator

From heliograms to semaphore to Morse Code:  
does it all return, finally, to secret handshakes,  
decoder rings, the thrill of hide and go seek -  
invisible ink? Whether it's the encrypted directives  
of generals at war or the steamy contents  
of a teenager's locked diary, secrecy is a constant  
in human affairs. A whole history of civilization  
could be traced through the technologies (from lemon  
juice to lasers) that we've invented to sustain it.  
A whole study of human nature could be conducted  
through the characters (snitches, tattle tales, traitors  
and spies) that have betrayed it.

**Masaharu Hoshino. *Shizophysiology*. 1996.**  
**Paper, citrus juice, flame. 5.5" X 4".**





**Janet Jenkins.** Sightings: Wilshire Boulevard. **1994**  
Production stills.

We name and categorize them in order to assuage our collective conscience; in order to allot a place in the social order that will make sense of them, explain and locate them, so that we can then safely ignore them.

At the outermost circumference of society, after all, on the periphery of vision, what harm can they do?

Steet person. Homeless. Runaway. Addict. Panhandler. Hustler. Bum.

These are the titles we give anonymity in the numb and faceless economies of despair. These are the dramas that will never get an audience because they're too ubiquitous to be moving, too concrete to be astonishing, too real to be digestible, too present to be real. Weave yourself too tightly into the fabric of daily life and even the Lears and Hamlets, the Elektras and Antigones among you become only pattern and background, scenic elements on a stage cluttered with detritus and noise.



A light caress runs across exposed flesh that quivers at the touch. But which end of it are you on? In love's most intimate scandals, who's got the upper hand: the one giving pleasure or the one receiving? Seducer or seduced?

The Geisha (an artist) is an expert at making such distinctions disappear. She presents herself with an esoteric courtliness that is severe and extreme. She becomes pure aesthetic principle, dematerializing before our very eyes in a pale haze of white makeup and talc, already just one step away from a painting—a figure in your imagination, a tender modulation of zinc pigments, titanium, and chalk.

Yishai Jusidman. *Geisha Uncovered*. 1992.  
Oil and tempera on wood. 72" X 72" (Detail).



If you've ever been duped by a salesman you have no one to blame but yourself. Everyone knows that their job is to deceive, to *conceal* as well as reveal, but it's deception refined to such a high degree that we celebrate it rather than castigate it. The good salesman can make you miraculously feel a need you didn't know was there before, a need which only his product can satisfy. He or she is an entry level worker in the sophisticated culture of the scam.

Diversified operations:  
the con-game,  
the cover-up,  
the conspiracy.

## "A BMW was my goal. And, I'm driving it today"

— Norman Thomas

"The program was exciting to go through because I felt like I was embarking on a new chapter in my life. That sounds sort of momentous, but when I look at it, the effect it has had really has been that big.

When I first subscribed to it, I was a typical young, early-20's guy. I spent a little bit more than I made all the time, and was having a great old time. But it

started to occur to me that I can't keep living like this. I need to look at how I'm earning, how I'm spending my money, what I'm doing.

I was driving a junky little Japanese car at the time and I had a lot of debts. I dearly would have loved to have gotten rid of the car, but I just didn't think I could do it. I was making huge interest payments on my credit cards and the like.



With the *Successful Investing & Money Management* course, I was able to come up with the plan to get myself out of debt, and then to set up a fund whereby I could buy a BMW, which was my goal. And, I'm driving it today."

Michael McCurry. *Get Rich Slowly*. 1995. Color Xerox. 10" X 12".

Everything has to fit into certain molds which we call the *known*. Molds constructed by experience. This is how we become the architects of our own reality. This is how we write the blueprints by which things are measured, processed, and *recognized*. This is how we become fixed in our ways; this is how we become characters. Sanity demands it of us: imagine waking each day to a totally new and unknown world, imagine having to deal every day with the raw sensory stimulation that befuddles the newborn.

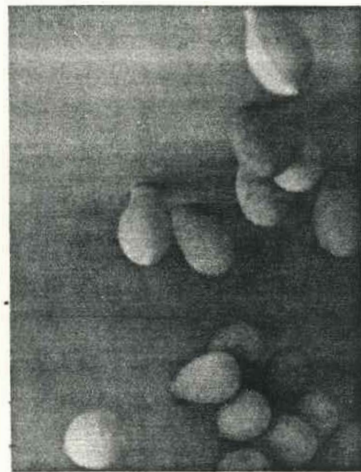
But after we've overlaid new data against the template of what is known, after we've found the needed correspondences, what happens to everything that doesn't fit the mold? Staying sane also means learning to cultivate a selective blindness. If it doesn't line up with what has come before ... erase it.



Vally Mestroni. *Generate*. 1995.  
Pencil on sketch paper,  
steel wire, metal hardware.  
Dimensions variable.

Jeanne Patterson. *Colony*. 1993.  
Sculpty, latex, nails.  
Dimensions variable.

-Just as you're about to turn out the light, you see  
the enormous spider on the ceiling directly over your head.  
-Only after the guests have arrived do you notice the film  
of dust all over the furniture they're leaning against.  
-Right when the weather cools, you find that insects have  
been chewing into all the woolens in your closet...  
There's always something lurking, something you don't  
notice, something you consistently overlook in the  
self-content somnolence of domestic routine. A  
virus in the cocoon. It migrates to the dark corners  
and out of the way crannies from which awareness  
is excluded, into which consciousness doesn't reach. It  
propagates silently in the moldering darkness while  
you're absorbed with other things, until, one day, you  
open that cupboard door...







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