

hous projects presents **mineral** featuring the work of Francis Baker, Stephen Berkman, Scott Davis, Marion Drew, and Chris McCaw. A reception to celebrate will be held from 6 to 8 pm, Wednesday, February 13, 2008. hous projects would like to thank Scott Davis, Director of Exhibitions & Design at Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, California, whom acted as co-curator of the exhibition.

"How long can men thrive between walls of brick, walking on asphalt pavements, breathing the fumes of coal and of oil, growing, working, dying, with hardly a thought of wind, and sky, and fields of grain, seeing only machine-made beauty, the mineral-like quality of life?" - Charles Lindbergh

"I died a mineral, and became a plant. I died a plant and rose an animal. I died an animal and I was man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?" - Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Persian Poet and Mystic, 1207-1273

Science defines the kingdom mineral as matter other than that of the plant or animal kingdom. Science also tells us the fourth kingdom, man, is 72% water, 21% protein, and 7% minerals; thus, we ebbs and flow across lines when base composition is dissected. Heeding this idea and opening it for interpretation, hous projects will embark on a three part series of exhibitions each based on one of the concepts of mineral, plant, and animal with man reflected in the artist's perspective. The series opens with **mineral**, which abuts photographers working in non-silver procedures such as palladium printing, cyanotype, and platinum printing among others.

The choice to work in these photographic processes, described with syntax that relates to the technology used to produce the image, is a conscious opting to a labor intensive and calculated venture. The cameras used by the photographers are often large format and some self-designed. These are not individuals with 35mm manual or digital cameras slung around their necks pointing and shooting at whim. These are individuals who must heave-ho their camera from place to place and have the patience to wait out the perfect moment to click the image because they do not have the luxury of regular film. They will take a handful or dozen pictures in an outing instead of a handful or dozen rolls; thus, the effect is composition and atmospheres that are poignant, deeply toned images full of body and soul.

Francis Baker's *everyday garden* series takes inspiration from his being somewhat of a neglectful gardener. Baker was cleaning pots of ill-fated plants when his photographic eye caught the notion that the root balls were akin to living sculptures. He took the idea and began placing objects in containers, filling them with resin, and once hardened, he replaced the objects with dirt and a plant whose root structure was dense, such as rosemary or china doll. The end result Baker photographs then outputs as cyanotypes and Van Dyke prints, 19th century methods, or Fuji crystal archive, which is the most stable modern convention available. There is an inherent tension in his work between life and death, the hand that feeds and the hand that smothers, natural and manicured as well as old fashioned and new fangled. Baker's work is a visual fan dance that offers the viewer simultaneous reverie in their beauty and eeriness.

Stephen Berkman's mind unleashes decidedly spooky, strange, magical, surreal portraits. Working with glass plate ambrotypes, he takes the wet-collodian process to places unseen by man of our century or the 19th. Berkman works as an illusionist to make his end product appear in material like a photo in a history book, but with subjects of modern men garbed in period costume standing with aliens or a bird popping out from their top hat to say "cuckoo." Berkman's theatrical fabrications are glorious wonderlands whose fantastical elements bring one back to dark, enigmatic times imagined in youth as well as could be imagined found in the mysticism found in the books of Zohar, for which his studio is named.

The craftsmanship in the photography of Scott Davis is as important an element as his composition or concept. While working, Davis favored an 8x10 camera from which he would take the negative plate and make a transfer to create platinum prints. The quality of light and clarity with any other process fell more than an eyelash short of his objectives; but, when prodded to make larger prints the problem arose of how to do so without incorporating a digital element for enlargement. Being somewhat of a curmudgeon, Davis took the challenge on with vigor and he built himself a 16x20 camera that allows him to work in the method of his choice with the flexibility he previously was denied. His work opens matte, inky, nocturnal vistas of unpopulated streets, parking lots, and valleys, which glow and evoke a sense that the unexpected is always upon us.

Marian Drew's series of works capture the permutable nature of time passing as well as its temporaneous quality. Her work is often constructed and manipulated, which adds a layer to the allusion because it emotes the resemblance of a scene, rather than its strict representation. Her series *Pond Life* especially allows her to capture the fluidity of time via watery vibrations. Bubbles, tadpoles, currents, and plants sweep across the frothy plane in her palladium prints without regard to her watching eye. They are meditative studies that resonate with anyone who has looked through a microscope to view a slide choc full of the microcosms of life unknown to the naked eye.

Chris McCaw delivers velvety 7 x 17 platinum contact prints that capture everyday moments life in a universally nostalgic manner. Shooting with his homemade camera, McCaw's work is infused with light that makes every image seem like it was taken at that magic hour of evening when the world simply glows. His series *The Powerhouse* was accumulated during visits to a 4 bedroom house friends were residing in with 13 other people located next to a power sub station in Portland. The collection of minds and spirits was a rare cocktail and as individuals moved in and out, especially in summer when at one point 27 people shared the space, the mood was open, creative. What sums it up best is McCaw's image of the theater marquee lettering found in one of the rooms that quite simply reads HOPE.