



**Robbin Lockett Gallery**  
**703 North Wells Street Chicago, Illinois 60610**  
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***Mediate Knot***

**February 8 -March 4, 1989**

**Curated by: Gaylen Gerber, Robbin Lockett**

Artists: Ellen Brooks, Clegg & Guttmann, Fischli & Weiss, John L. Grahm, Pamela Golden, Julian Opie, Hirsch Perlman, Stephen Prina, Thomas Ruff, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Christopher Williams

Within the context of a histrionic image-choked age wherein the ego is privileged by multiple complex manufacturing of representations of itself and social intercourse is a constant deflection of blunt expression to mediated innuendo, a tactic of art-making has evolved which assumes a benign stance of simple reflection, a defacement of personality, and a poverty of meaning. Through a series of rejections – of the heroic, the overtly emotional, the unique – some of these artists have accepted methods of representation which allow an exposition of possibilities of discourse without either abandonment or hope.

Emotionally cool, bland, evasive, impenetrable, the work seems to affect a swaggering pose of competent closure in the modesty of its enterprise. The images are neutral representations of banalities presented as such, calmly honoring the traditions of legitimation of the photographic., textual and sculptural as approximate recordings of mediated experience. They seem to be just what they are.

Initial reaction to this emotionless, non-assertive stance is mimicry: the viewer may pose aloof in facile comprehension of the art's tactics. Clinched systems of art making-nature and architectural photography, portraiture, material fabrication – appear to be adopted

simply and openly, without sentiment or anticipation. Any presumed interest in composition, color, scale, or subject matter is immediately subverted into a self-fulfilling determinism – they gave just enough to satisfy the prerequisites of the systems employed. The hierarchies of form, content and ideology are levelled in the mundanity of the work's actual which offers no specific meaning and no latent subtext.

By rotely following the rules of the systematic, the artists expose the inherent flaws in these systems when extrapolated to reality. The work seems to rest on Minimalism's failure to rid art of the undeniable faith in style, aesthetic taste, emotive expression, and referential content. In a beneficent acceptance of the effort to depersonalize the systematic aligned with a modernist tendency, the artists present the impossibility of that endeavor. By trying to remain mute, the art begs the question of muteness and discloses a rift between the systematic and he series of mediations set up by experience of the work.

This rift is opened by the work's apparent acceptance of its status as art object and an acceptance of the ubiquity of mediation. Acknowledgement of these failures of closure shifts the work from initial speechlessness to offering the possibility of exchange. Also, the selection of images represented-people, buildings, furniture, flowers-offers an entry into the work by their overwhelming familiarity and their bland transformation into art. By placing these representations into an art context, the viewer can't help but try to find some meaning for the work's existence. By admitting failure in systems and representations that are available to everyone, the work seems to exist in democratic equivalence with the viewer. Both work and viewer seem to be searching for possibilities of communication.

However, in the process of the search through layers of mediation, the work steadfastly refuses to reveal a correct interpretation. The rift becomes a void, a hermeneutical chasm, which absorbs every possible reading as equivalent. What at first may appear to be a simple mutual interchange of post-modern self-pity, can just as readily become potent emotional mediation on self-determination. By constantly evading and denying any set meaning, the artists seem to disappear, in a subtle manipulation which reflects back on to the viewer his/her desire for meaning. Because of the works' constant shifting, the only stability that can be assigned to it necessarily emerges from the

viewer's systems of interpretation, the work exposes the aesthetic, ethical, physical, and political processes which make up the act of interpretation. The viewer becomes aware. The work seems to empower the viewer to create meaning through engagement, not only with the object, but with him/herself's own systems of exposition.

By allowing the viewer to assign meaning, the artist appears to have secured deniability for the work as well as for the artist, as it shifts the responsibility for interpretation to the viewer. Removal of the artist's intention seems a defensive strategy aimed at precluding inevitable charges of hypocrisy.

Through employment of the tactics of negation, what seems to be apparent, a blank surface representation becomes a reflection in which discourse may occur. Non-didactic and non-assertive, the artwork, emptied of any manifest artistic intentions, maneuvers the viewer into a position of awareness and the responsibility this brings, from the work to the viewer, without preference for its acceptance.

Kathryn Hixson