

The Weeks Gallery at Jamestown Community College will present an ArtHappening –exhibition, gallery talk, Scharmamm Theatre concert, and artists’ reception–on September 29, 2012.

The event begins at 6 p.m. with a viewing of Robert Hirsch’s *The Sixties Cubed: Signs, Symbols, and Celebrities*. Visit <http://www.lightresearch.net/> for details, images, and video. At 6:30, Hirsch will present a brief Weeks Gallery talk to illuminate his installations that include cubed photomontages, a monolithic *Peace Sign*, *Spinning Mobile*, *Timeline*, *Button Women*, and the notorious, hypnotic *Dream Machine*.

At 7 p.m., Oliver Burdo, an Infinity Visual and Performing Arts student, will open the Scharmamm Theatre concert with his rendition of Bob Dylan’s *The Times They Are a-Changin’*. At 7:15, Mercury Rising, featuring Nelson Starr and members of Stinger (a Sixties/classic rock band), will present songs by the Beatles, Country Joe and the Fish, Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, Moody Blues, Steppenwolf, and others.

The reception, which begins at 8:30 in the Scharmamm lobby and Weeks Reception Hall, includes hors d’oeuvres and wine and beer tasting. Family Function and the Sitar Jams will enliven the festivities with their East-West fusion that melds Indian classical and folk roots with funk, jazz, and rock. Their instrumentation is reminiscent of Ravi Shankar, a visionary sitar player who gained world attention in the ‘50s and ‘60s and influenced The Byrds, The Beatles, and others.

Tickets for the all-inclusive ArtHappening (exhibition, talk, concert, and reception) are available through JCC’s FSA bookstore box office, 716.338.1187 or at the door. We sold-out twice last year, so order early!

Prices are: General admission, \$20; JCC/FSA members \$15; area students \$10. The bookstore is open Monday to Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Fridays, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Why stage an ArtHappening? For many historians, the ‘60s spirit arose in 1962, so 2012 marks the golden anniversary. “No decade in recent U.S. history has reverberated and been mythologized more than the ‘60s,” wrote Hirsch. Many events, movements, and personalities from this unique and controversial era are rooted in our culture: Haight Ashbury, Woodstock, and hippies; Vietnam War, the draft, and demonstrations; The Beatles, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Aretha Franklin; Andy Warhol, Louise Nevelson, and Allen Ginsberg; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, sit-ins, marches, and riots; Billie Jean King, Mohammed Ali, and Johnny Unitas; Presidents Nixon, Kennedy, and Johnson; and the Women’s Movement, Betty Friedan, Shirley Chisholm, and Gloria Steinem.

This event is made possible by JCC, JCC Faculty Student Association, JCC Foundation, Katharine Jackson Carnahan Endowment for the Humanities, Sarita Hopkins Weeks Concert Fund/ Chautauqua Region Community Foundation, Arthur R. Gren Company, and Southern Tier Brewing Company.

To add to the fun and to make this a “real happening,” students, faculty, administration, and friends are invited to search their wardrobes or visit a vintage store to dress Sixties style or to wear a few accessories.

The Sixties Cubed: Signs, Symbols, and Celebrities is a sculptural anthology based on reinterpretations of historic and personal photographs. The camera re-envisions the competing social landscapes that shaped the American zeitgeist. Thousands of resulting images are presented in 4 x 4 x 4-inch transparent boxes that echo the Kodak Instamatic photo cube.

Why the 1960s?

No decade in recent U.S. history has reverberated and been mythologized more than the 1960s. This venture explores how visual media interacts with the exceptional as well as daily life. It offers a complex pattern of pictures depicting an epoch I lived through and recorded as a budding photographer in the New York City area. Additionally, it juxtaposes how the demographics of the Baby Boomers, those born approximately between 1946 and 1960, challenged the traditional values of the “Silent Majority.” My purpose is not one of historical archivist or nostalgia, but rather to visually connect the past and the present to ponder the future. In this sense, this venture offers a visual representation of our collective societal memory of that era. Its open, pictographic storytelling format encourages viewers to ponder how this decade affects who we are today.

Defining the 1960s

Regardless of your political persuasion, the ‘60s was an age of extreme polarity. On one hand there was John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier with its sense of idealistic public service including the Peace Corps, the physical fitness program, and the challenge to place a man on the moon. During this decade the Civil Rights Movement culminated with the March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech. Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society implemented the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the War on Poverty as well as environmental and consumer protections. It was a period of middle class, economic expansion, accompanied by an outburst of consciousness expanding energy of “The Harvard Psychedelic Club” of Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith, and Andrew Weil that purged the 1950s and led to experimentation in the arts, culture, and politics. Woodstock became synonymous with the peaceful good times of sex, drugs,

and rock-and-roll. Women and minorities confronted societal standards to build a more humane and open nation with expanded personal freedoms. Although its legacy is hotly debated, one overarching theme that defined this turbulent decade was an intense drive by a minority counter-culture to generate alternatives to conventional institutions and social customs. At its best, the 1960s was a chapter of new possibilities.

Conversely, the assassinations of John Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy and the murders of African-Americans and civil rights workers, cast a very dark shadow, as did the Vietnam War. President Johnson’s escalation of the war led to the drafting of hundreds of thousands of young men into service and an estimated 2,500,000 civilian and military casualties. Inner city riots and antiwar protests took place along with hedonistic and nihilistic extremes, as exemplified by the Rolling Stones concert in Altamont and the Charles Manson murders. The era also gave us Thalidomide babies, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and above-ground testing of nuclear weapons, all of which took the world to the edge of “Mutual Assured Destruction” (MAD). Finally, the ‘60s marked the beginning of a long, downhill spiral of faltering public confidence in the ability of Big Government (a.k.a. liberal Democrats) to make things work correctly and honestly. For countless Americans, it was a chaotic and uncertain period of rising anxiety and disenchantment during which their familiar societal values came under siege.

Image Treatment

The project’s inventory of 40,000 images was brought together over three years of collecting in the public realm, gleaned from such publications as *Avant Garde*, *Ebony*, *Life*, *Look*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Playboy*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Popular Science*, *Ramparts*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Time*, and *Vogue*. Additional sources encompass yearbooks, the Internet, and photographs I made during that era. The themes are comprised of the arts, politics, popular culture, science, and daily life, as exemplified by ads for beauty aids, cars, clothes, cigarettes, food, and liquor that during a period of rising consumerism encouraged people to buy into the American Dream.

The Cubes

The massing of cubes into three-dimensional forms emulates the popular graphic representation of the pixels in a digital image. Each discrete, moveable frame is a picture block that when joined with others fashion a multifaceted yet mutable representation based on separate modules. The fluidity of this arrangement reverberates with the practice of street photography, in which accidental factors and a prepared mind deliver unforeseen results.

Apart from the ever-changeable forms assumed by most of the cubes, the large, three-dimensional figures, such as Lenny Bruce, Jackie and Jack Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are composites that take an approach akin to the photorealism of Chuck Close’s larger-than-life grid portraits to topographically build a picture. In each of these works, 72 cubes are precisely placed within a grid that allows viewers to visually assemble the separate image units into a cubist style, multifaceted, all-at-once view of each subject.

Images and History

My photographic involvement revolves around iconophilia, an appetite and fascination for visual culture. I do this by opening my eyes wide and absorbing as much as possible. The incorporation of thousands of cubed images pushes the medium’s indexicality to the edge of legibility by isolating pictures amid the endless stream of image production.

Secondly, the sheer number of image cubes makes excess an essential project ingredient. Overwhelming the eye and the brain generates a conflict as to whether one should read individual images or the overall gestalt, thereby resisting easy comprehension and challenging viewers to both perceive and create simultaneously. The sheer, ungraspable, multiplicity of pictures acknowledges the folly of presenting the un-presentable by embracing the doctrine of skepticism. By addressing the authenticity of something claiming to be factual, I call into question the cherry-

picked, nostalgic fairy tales that often surround our cultural myths and ask viewers to reflect and create an expanded reality. This metropolis of nonlinear, stream-of-consciousness images generates an interconnected dialogue of quotes, references, and appropriations — all with a tip of my hat to their sources — while recognizing the foolishness of reducing an illogical world to a set of rational concepts. These are not Twitter moments, but rather an elaborate mosaic of image fragments, crammed with information, which demands time and concentration for consideration. In the end, this physical manifestation of larger-than-life characters and worlds-in-conflict asks one to suspend disbelief, to look deeply, and to merge images that play off the tension among reality, fantasy, drama, humor, and a sense of mystery, all in order to rethink the past.

Conventional histories look for beginnings and endings that impose structured progressions on the diversity and randomness of life. Certain facts are put forward while others are ignored. Such pattern making has recently been evident in the media coverage of the civil unrest (i.e Arab Spring) that has rocked the Arab World. But real life is not like that.

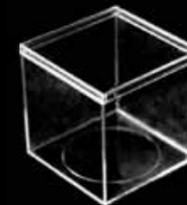
Through their unsystematic placement, the cubes scramble any sequential model, allowing images to flow forward and backward in time while remaining connected to the present. Audiences do not merely consume the images, but, like a Rorschach test, build and rebuild them. This re-seeing process underscores how meaning is personal, flexible, and in flux. It also reminds us how the mechanical eye of the camera can see more than the human one, capturing, organizing, and expressing time for later examination and explanation. Its non-analytic nature conveys a never-ending and unknowable tale about humanity that exists outside chronological time.

– ROBERT HIRSCH

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ROBERT HIRSCH

THE SIXTIES CUBED: Signs, Symbols, and Celebrities



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