

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

KEITH COTTINGHAM

For immediate release: February 9, 1999

FEBRUARY 27 – APRIL 3

The Disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact – Maurice Blanchot

Keith Cottingham will exhibit digitally constructed photographic images in his first one-person exhibition at the Feldman Gallery. Relating to historical photography and contemporary image-making, the images are seemingly examples of traditional genres. Improbable details, however, call into question their authenticity. Identifying his work as imaginary or fictitious spaces, Cottingham creates the illusion of a material world – a constructed realism – in order to explore issues of perception and identity that relate to the objectivity of representation and the authenticity of subject. Using an amalgam of advanced computer technology and traditional art-making techniques, Cottingham characterizes his work as a collage of reality, rather than the collage of an image.

In his current series, initiated in 1993, Cottingham creates a pictorial survey of a fictional existence, set in a period fused from the past, present, and imaginary. Albumen prints - portraits, architectural details, and animal and botanical still lifes - simulate a collection of nineteenth century ethnographic studies; yet anachronisms and other inconsistencies are subtly revealed. These are documents of no place, of no time, and of no body. Architectural and anatomical models and drawings created by the artist, combined with photographs of hair, skin, eyes, and other features taken from numerous individuals, and documentary source material of various subjects, become images that erase established boundaries.

Referring to this series, Hubertus von Amelnunx, Professor of Cultural Studies at Kiel Art Academy, Germany, has written: *Keith Cottingham offers a critical approach to the notions of image and space in the digital era, knowing that representation, the historical archive and the human archive (memory with its elementary contiguity) are destined to be subjected to an as yet inconceivable revision. He is among the few conceptual artists who take up the challenge of history facing the time-codes of the twenty-first century.*

Fictitious Portraits, 1993, consists of three large C-prints that suggest multiple portraits of prepubescent youths. These imaginary images question the conventions of portraiture and definitions of selfhood.

Though cloaked in photographic reality, Keith Cottingham's "Fictitious Portraits" in fact have no actual models. These are "beings" who have no basis beyond the two-dimensional, yet their very real appearance in photographs convinces us to believe they exist in the real world as we do...Cottingham makes no effort to disguise his artifice. The closer the viewer scrutinizes the fictive figures the more they begin to visually deconstruct...Their power rests in their uncanny ability to simultaneously mimic and contradict the veracity of photographic reality...Ron Platt, MIT List Visual Arts Center

Keith Cottingham, a San Francisco-based artist, will be included in *Tomorrow Forever – Photography as a Ruin*, Kunsthalle Krems, Austria, March 20 to May 16. He has exhibited in numerous group exhibitions including *Photography After Photography*, a traveling exhibition organized by Siemens Kultur Programm, Germany, and *The Ghost in the Machine*, the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge.

There will be an opening reception, Saturday, February 27, from 6 – 8. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 – 6. Monday by appointment. For information, contact Breck Hostetter (212)226-3232 or breck@feldmangallery.com.