

New Work by

Unnatural Selection

Charlie Cho

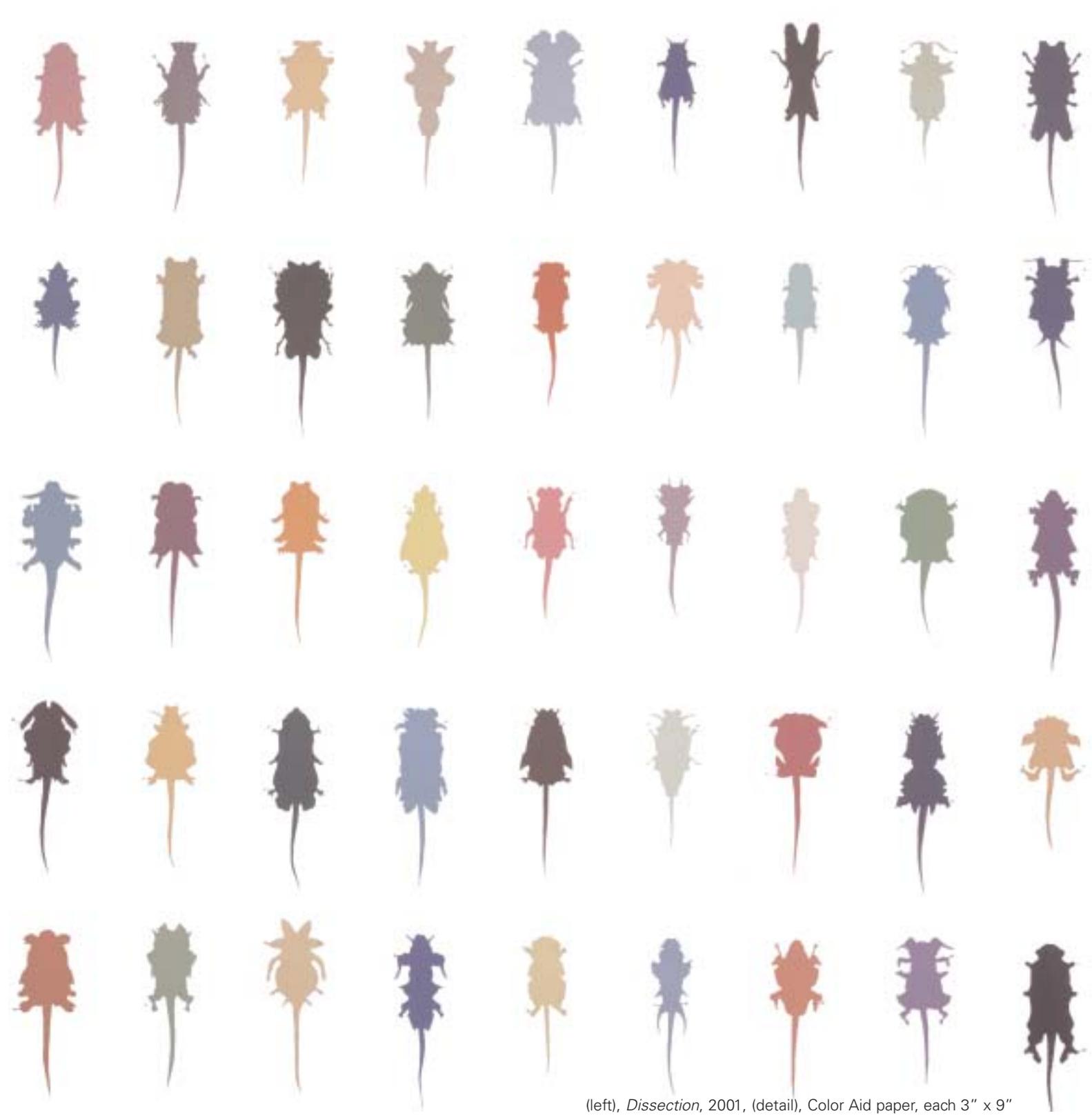
Thursday, Sept. 27 to Saturday, Nov. 3, 2001

Gahlberg Gallery
McAninch Arts Center



College of DuPage





(left), *Dissection*, 2001, (detail), Color Aid paper, each 3" x 9"

Trial Studies

The split between religious faith and scientific reason has been a defining component of modernity since Descartes. Charlie Cho is among the ranks of artists, authors and philosophers scratching around in this contentious, perhaps irreconcilable terrain. Today this dichotomy raises volatile political questions. Do we support stem cell research? Should we interfere with nature's course? Are we destined to clone ourselves? Can art add relevance to the discussion?

Contemporary art boasts many practitioners asking probing questions in this arena. Alexis Rockman's paintings, part phantasm, part biotech invention and wholly romantic, are a prime example of an artist's pictorial rumination within the evolution debate. Xu Bing's tattooed pigs, braided wire sheep pens with texts, and interactions with livestock attempt to define a human connection to our animal (evolutionary) heritage. Mark Dion's installations pose questions regarding the extinction of species, the order in which natural histories are presented to the public, and the symptoms of humanity's quest to control nature. Within the clutch of contemporary practitioners

facing these moral and ecological dilemmas, Cho focuses on a scripted set of narratives promoted in Hollywood films and scientific texts that illustrate the polarizing ethical discord between creator and creation.

Cho's large-scale multipanel acrylic and ink on paper drawings present a two-dimensional fiction similar in sequence to a scripted storyboard or animated book. These wall-size compositions borrow visual components from cinematic science fiction, de Stijl form and refinement, 19th century color theory and 20th century painterly abstraction. The results give a nod to Hans Hoffman's rigid yet lyrical paintings, Mondrian's highly organized and pared down abstractions, Mimmo Rotella's torn movie posters and the illustrational line work of George Herriman.

Cho renders, in solid black line over gestural passages of monochrome fields, narratives based on stills from key moments in a sci-fi film's unfolding story. Using classic productions such as *The Fly*, *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner*, Cho deliberately embraces and illustrates a creator versus creation

conflict. These pre-existing scenarios conceptualize a simplified horror that in turn solicits an attraction/repulsion experience from its audience. Consider for a moment a general reaction to some deformed on-screen characters like the insect/man in *The Fly* and the crudely constructed man/monster Frankenstein. These are freakish byproducts of human intervention into nature. Yet, in Cho's hands, the represented sequences are formal, structurally colorist languages fed into the prearranged cinematic narrative. His titles such as *What Have I Done?* and *It's Not Easy Meeting Your Creator!* remind viewers that this formally arresting production continues to embrace considerations of creationism and evolutionism.

In a grouping of Cho's most recent wall works, 940 (or more) flat shapes, created by cutting out biological forms from sheets of Color Aid paper, resembling hybrid animal forms both rodent and reptile-like, revisit his considerable attention to formal structure and color orchestration. These cutout drawings/schematics, inspired by experimental grafting procedures in textbooks, delicately formalize via a gridded regiment the horrific probing involved in grafting various animal parts between species. A gallery wall filled with these flat, colorful, paper-thin reliefs illustrates for his audience the endless possibilities in the arena of scientific and artistic experimentation. We are reminded not only of the Warholian influence upon banal representation and serial images but also the possibility of the horrific multiplication of rodent breeding gone amuck.



Vomit, 1999, Cast and poured urethane, 96" diameter x 3"

Cho's sculptures also take root in combining "origin" narratives with a spare and selective use of refined materials and abstract forms. Works such as *Vomit*, a low pool of poured urethane substance with small rodent, snake and tapeworm-like forms wading in its puddled fluid, is a floor-mounted bas-relief. The creatures, before casting, are created from bits and pieces of toy store critters about the size of a hamster or rat. Bisecting, dissecting and graphing these figures, Cho reassembles small laboratory-like oddities and casts their form in translucent, yellowing, monochromatic, pliable polyurethane. The results are formal and illustrative, compelling and repulsive. Just as the title suggests, we're asked to consider a puddle of evolutionary vomit or the aftermath of a scientific experiment possibly gone awry. Here Cho directs us toward questions regarding the ethics of research and the motive of the scientist. Is the scientist mad or benevolent? Is that researcher seeking humanitarian advances or personal rewards?

Cho has decided to confidently wade hip deep into the politically murky territory of creation and evolution, faith and reason, religion and science. This territory is both historical and contemporary, positioning him in the company of theologians, philosophers, writers, politicians and artists. What sets Cho apart from the pack is his formal emphasis preceding these heavily debated scenarios. He's not performing as a pseudo scientist like Dion, a mythological Dr. Dolittle like Bing, nor a painter of romanticized degeneration like Rockman. He is a formalist with a penchant for cinematic flair that is balanced gracefully by a sparse language of color and form; allowing his work to move beyond Hollywood, the White House and academia toward a new synthesis of visual language and political content.

Brad Killam, an artist and writer, teaches at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Gahlberg Gallery
McAninch Arts Center
at College of DuPage

Gallery Hours
Monday through Thursday,
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.;
Thursday, 6 to 8 p.m.;
Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Also open during Mainstage
events and by appointment.
Call (630) 942-2321
for more information.

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency and by The National Endowment for the Arts.



Yellow Jacket Wasp Trap, 2001
Cast and poured urethane inside wasp trap,
6"x 5"x 5"

Charlie Cho

Education

- 1994 M.F.A. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
1992 B.F.A. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Solo Exhibitions

- 2001 *Unnatural Selection*, Gahlberg Gallery, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL
2000 *Another Account of Creation*, Klemens Gasser Tanja Grunert Gallery, NY
1999 Chicago Project Room, Chicago, IL
1997 *On Exhibit*, Klemens Gasser and Tanja Grunert Gallery, Cologne
Chicago Project Room, Chicago, IL
1996 Klemens Gasser Gallery, Cologne

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2000 *Ego-Berry*, Nagoya University, Japan
1999 *On Paper*, Stalk Gallery, Copenhagen
Loyola Arts Research Center, Loyola University, Chicago, IL
1998 *Raw Hide*, Zolla Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL
Not Renoir, Lake Forest College Art Gallery, IL
Apocalypse Now and Then, DePaul University Art Gallery, Chicago, IL
1997 *Just Watch*, Shedhalle Museum, Zurich
1996 *Inclusion/Exclusion*, Reininghaus and Kunstlerhaus Museum, Graz
Found Footage, Klemens Gasser and Tanja Grunert Gallery, Cologne
1995 *XYZPDQ*, Coburn Gallery (Ashland University), Ashland, OH
Undertow, N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, IL
Art as Dramatic Comedy, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, IL
Youth Culture, Thomas Blackman Associates, Chicago, IL

Selected Bibliography

- Johnson, Ken. "Art In Review." *The New York Times* (March 31, 2000)
Barandarian, Maria Jose. "Liz Arnold and Charlie Cho." *New Art Examiner* (July/August 1999), pp. 46-47
Barandarian, Maria Jose. "Raw Hide." *New Art Examiner* (November 1998), p. 48
Theil, Wolf-Gunther. "Charlie Cho." *Flash Art* no. 190 (October 1996), pp. 116-117
Wilk, Deborah. "Youth Culture." *Flash Art* no. 183 (summer 1995), p. 76



(back), *Origin of Species*, 2001, (detail)