

Elizabeth King
The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye





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Ashley Kistler
Curator
Visual Arts Center
of Richmond



Elizabeth King posing Pupil, 1997

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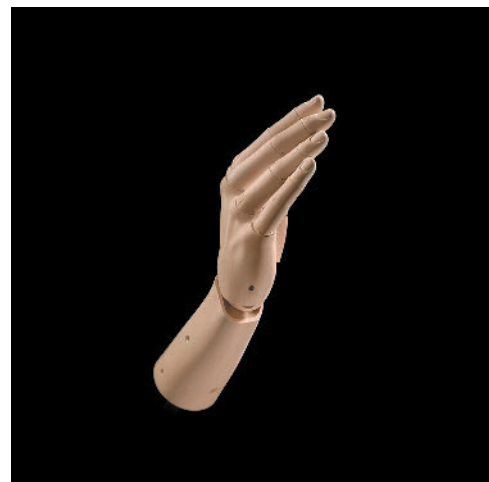
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Celebrating the Creative Journey Jo Kennedy

The Visual Arts Center of Richmond takes great pride in presenting **Elizabeth King: The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye**, the first survey of the work of this remarkable artist. A professor in the Sculpture Department at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of the Fine Arts, and a 2006 recipient of one of five Academy Awards in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, King has exhibited in venues throughout the country. We are pleased she has chosen the Visual Arts Center of Richmond to present this chronicle of her work, culled from a career spanning three decades.

It is both fitting and timely that this extraordinary exhibition inaugurate our new True F. Luck Gallery. The result of years of planning and dreaming, our exciting new gallery space was purposefully designed to showcase the most ambitious and challenging work. King's art clearly fulfills that promise; her

meticulously crafted sculpture christens the new gallery with almost jarring elegance. Speaking to our imaginations, our intellect, our emotions and our intuition, her work pulls us into this space and into her own world.

The True F. Luck Gallery is the very heart of our newly renovated building. Just as this exhibition reflects the creative journey of Elizabeth King, 2007 marks a milestone in the creative journey of the Visual Arts Center of Richmond. In November, we fulfilled a vision we had been shaping over many years—the transformation of our facility, the old Virginia Dairy. For the first time in our history as an organization, we have a permanent home, a truly functional and aesthetic space for experiencing and making art. Most importantly, we have done more than transform a building. We have also transitioned from our grassroots heritage into a regional arts center that serves a broadly diverse community. And while

we've changed in a great many ways as we've grown, we have never lost sight of our essential driving energy—the creative process.

Creative processes that push traditional artistic boundaries have long been at the center of our exhibition program. Exploring the innovations of emerging as well as established artists, from local to global, our program is committed to presenting a wide variety of work that challenges the viewer and the community to think about and experience art differently. King's exhibition reaffirms this commitment. Featuring over sixty sculptures, film animations, installation pieces, drawings, and photographs, the show also includes a fascinating assortment of objects from King's studio—her glass-eye collection, wax studies of facial expressions, plaster life casts. It is impossible to experience her art in tandem with these studio objects without being challenged to consider the astonishingly creative process and bold intent that shaped the finished works.

The Visual Arts Center of Richmond is deeply grateful to Elizabeth King for this unique opportunity to share her artistic journey with audiences in Richmond and beyond, as the exhibition travels nationally to four other venues next year. We are honored to celebrate her remarkable achievements. I am also grateful to our curator, Ashley Kistler, for her commitment to a robust and exemplary exhibition program and, in particular, for her enormous creative focus that brought this challenging exhibition from idea to reality. Finally, the Visual Arts Center is most grateful to our friend and trustee True F. Luck for her generous and visionary spirit in fostering a gallery space that made it possible for us to undertake this project. Her belief in the organization and its mission to engage the community in the creative process opened the doors not only for this show, but also for a future of extraordinary exhibitions for the Richmond community.

Jo Kennedy is President and CEO of the Visual Arts Center of Richmond.

**The artist knows our hovering stay is short.
But the made thing is beauty all itself;
it is here, now, trembling from the ceiling.**

**What is fleeting, what is flown
is its conception. The idea
the creator knows, and lets go.**

From *Transient*
by Elizabeth Seydel Morgan



Lenscraft Amy Hautf

The mark of a great teacher is invisible. Elizabeth King has inspired and excited young sculptors at Virginia Commonwealth University for more than twenty years, none of whom make work like hers, but all of whom (like me, her colleague) have grown as artists through the generosity of her careful, thoughtful, and gorgeous consideration.

I first came to know Elizabeth indirectly, through the way she knew her students' work. Before arriving at VCU, I taught at another art school. Each year, as we prepared for the marathon ritual of reviewing applications to our graduate sculpture program, I would smile to myself in anticipation, knowing that among those daunting stacks of dossiers and towers of slide carousels were missives from Elizabeth in which she deeply divined the aspirations of her VCU students. Her written appreciation of a student's ambitions is a delicious and savory experience for the reader.

Elizabeth is a conjurer of language; she illuminates a student's intentions and, at times, even aspects of their work that they do not yet recognize themselves.

As her colleague in the VCU Sculpture Department, I now have the great pleasure of working with her directly. Here, I have come to learn that the depth of perception she presents in those letters are portals to her eccentric and fascinating bodies of knowledge. These are arenas of information to which Elizabeth will take you by the hand, whether you are her student, her colleague, or her friend. Yesterday, in fact, one of the students called her a "walking Wikipedia." She has a way of opening up little universes about which you had little, if any, prior knowledge but that suddenly feel like something you were on the verge of discovering or inventing yourself. In this way, she manages to summon and make tangible what was previously ineffable.

The daughter of a scientist, Elizabeth wields a specificity of vocabulary that corresponds to her precision of thinking and making. Just as she aims that exactitude at the making of art so, too, does she direct it at the teaching of art. "By using this method," Sculpture Professor Jack Risley notes, "she communicates the importance of the activity of art making to the student. She confounds the art-school slacker mythology by applying a concentrated rigor that forces students to take their endeavors seriously." And as Emeritus Professor Lester Van Winkle observes, "Liz can look into their work and see how much better they can be." To make her students understand this, she will continue to adapt her observations and metaphors until they also appreciate how much more elastic the physicality and content of the work can be.

Elizabeth King is a lens. Sometimes she looks as close as a surgeon's loupe (like the one she uses in her studio to perform the tiniest of tasks); sometimes she resembles a magnifying glass (like the various lenses she uses in her sculpture to amplify aspects of the work itself); and sometimes she is her own outsized eyeglasses that everyday cover her petite and marvelously animated face. She uses these various scales of looking to peer all the way into and through an idea or an object. This is why her observations burn so brightly. This is what makes her such an extraordinary artist and educator.

Amy Hautf is Chair of the Department of Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

With heartfelt thanks to Jack Risley and Lester Van Winkle.

The Physiognomist of Wonder

Nancy Princenthal

As with a deeply compelling novel, from the first glimpse of Elizabeth King's work you know you've entered a world complete, realized in every smallest detail with utter assurance, dazzling in its complexity. And at first you are a little at a loss: for all the power of its coherence and plentitude, it is an unfamiliar place, and you've entered *in media res*. What you see are three-dimensional, partial human figures, rendered with remarkable fidelity in familiar, mostly organic materials. But they all look like they've stepped out of some inter-astral vessel—like they are a distant, superior planet's simulations of humans, idealized in a way we don't have the vocabulary to define. Then, if you are extremely lucky, you meet the artist, a powerfully erudite, warm and generous woman, and realize that they look just like her. This is not the bad punch line to a joke about figurative representation, nor is it meant to malign King's considerable charms. It is merely a partial explanation of what's going on in her sculpture, which is unflinchingly introspective and coolly precise in equal measure, and puts realism to the test on many levels. Though these figures are modeled on the living subject and sometimes evolve with the help of life-cast studies, every final form's outermost layer seems to have been peeled away, and what is revealed beneath polished to a flawlessness not found in nature. The results raise questions about the minimum requirements for believability—and, more provocatively, about whether there are maximum limits as well. The simplest stylistic category for King's work is realism, but her sculptural heads, torsos and hands, and the photographs she makes of them, can also be called surrealistic, in the specific sense of having an uncanny supplemental presence, of being native to a world that is just a little more acute than ours.

Realistic figurative sculpture, not long ago a securely obsolete genre, has many new proponents, their work as varied as Ron Mueck's startlingly convincing silicone portraits; Marc Quinn's conceptualist plays with taboo mediums and subjects (his own frozen blood; deformity and celebrity); and Judy Fox's transhistorical and cross-cultural youths made of painted terra cotta. Of the many things that distinguish King in this growing field, where she has toiled in relative solitude for many years, none is more telling than her engagement with process. Many of the techniques she uses are venerable, from firing porcelain to carving wood. The traditions on which she draws range from tableware to taxidermy; she makes porcelain heads in a way not essentially different from the methods of Meissen, Spode and Sèvres. But her hyper-vigilant involvement with the smallest details of execution would set her apart in any era. A single sculpture can take three years of steady labor to complete; many months are required to carve and assemble a single wooden



hand. In shaping its digits and joints, using jewelers' tools and minuscule brass pins, King wears a surgical magnifying loupe, which suggests not just her standards of precision but also the dangers that threaten the project's parts at each stage. The successive casts, molds and firings of a porcelain head, with sanding, etching, sawing and painting occurring between sessions in the kiln, are fraught each time with fatal risk. This involvement with craft is not meant to be merely reflexive, as in process-oriented Post-Minimalism. King is fascinated by, for instance, the alchemical nature of porcelain, in which base matter (clay) is transformed into a substance so fine and strong that it can be called precious, and not far from animate. In keeping with tradition, she does not use glazes, which add a surface to the final object, but instead China paint, which is an oil-based medium that carries the pigment into the molecules, changing its structure, with luminous results. She refers to beliefs as old as that in mystical beings like the Golem—fashioned, in traditional Hasidic tales, from clay and imbued by Cabbalistic incantation with the spark of life—as coordinates for the historical and conceptual framework of her work.

A considerable perceptual leap is needed to integrate the components of King's figures involving these deeply traditional processes and materials with others decidedly more contemporary: various metals and plastics, fiber optics, digital video. As well as learning how to repair antique wooden mannequins, she apprenticed herself to a manufacturer of false eyes, originally formed in glass and now in dental acrylic. She employs the hardware and mechanics of 17th-century automata, and also the



present millennium's newest electronic technology. In *Bartlett's Hand* (page 13), a virtual hand seen moving naturalistically on a video screen (the result of stop-action animation) is paired with its freestanding wooden mate, the two optically joined by a wooden frame set up at exactly that viewing distance which allows the two hands to seem equivalent in size and, more remarkably, in vivacity. The frame grabs the space of the screen, bringing it forward and making it appear physical, and the filmed hand seems to animate the static one. Similarly, in *Quizzing Glass* (page 36), a small black box houses a roving eye, seen on video through a round aperture cut into the box's rear wall; the moving eye is paired with a static one supported on a metal stand. This fixed eye appears to respond, barely perceptibly, to its mate, an impression—the hint of a dilating pupil, an infinitesimal contraction—that takes shape only in the viewer's brain. Even King's relatively straightforward black-and-white photographs of her sculptures participate in this dance between virtual and physical, since the shininess of those printed on glossy paper brings the viewer's space—and reflected image—into the sculpture's presence.

One way to look at how these perceptual feats are accomplished is to consider how King plays with size and time. All of the sculptures are made at one-half human size, though that is not immediately apparent. Uncertainty results partly from their co-presentation, as a rule, with videos and photographs in which the absence of contextualizing objects inhibits the establishment of determinate scale, and encourages a natural inclination to see the figures as having human dimensions. But the perceived ambiguity of scale is also due to the power of the identification

we feel with the physical sculptures—with their imploring, penetrating eyes and impossibly delicate, incipiently gesticulating hands, an identification that lifts them from the miniature—the doll-like, the imaginary—to the credibly life-size. At the same time, the intensity of King's involvement with detail at nearly microscopic scale brings us in so close that all sense of proportion is swamped. She is fascinated by historical automata, some of them feats of miniaturization, but also by a giant, little-girl marionette that has been put through its terrifyingly innocent Brobdingnagian paces in several European cities over the past few years. Charles Ray's experiments with variable human proportions—his self-portrait in a bottle, giant mannequin, and nuclear family in which baby, child, mother and father are all the same height, seem relevant, too. But King's work slides from monumental to minute with distinctively precipitous speed, making firm apprehension of its actual, palpable size seem a perpetually receding goal. As she observes in her lyrical 1999 book *Attention's Loop*, "the mind constructs things on its own scale."

In the same way that it elides scale, King's work blurs temporal dimensions. Her studio, neat as an operating room, also has the feel of a prop house in which distinctions between storage and display are lost—a condition replicated in some exhibitions of her work. Antique specimen cases of the kind once used in natural history museums, or department stores (of which her studio originally was one), house objects that range from the antiquarian to the futuristic. Samples of precious woods; ranks of false eyes made of glass and acrylic, salvaged from doll hospitals, flea markets and taxidermists; rare old mannequins, dolls, dressmakers'



dummies and artist's models, including a magnificent wooden horse whose flexible neck is the basis for the segmented vertebrae in King's sculptures, are intermingled with various generations of her own work—molds and casts of heads, parts of hands. The mix of obsolete, recent and not-yet-quite-born contributes to an odd temporal skid. Just as we don't know what scale we're in, we can't tell what time it is.

King's interest in historical and contemporary automata is reflected in most observers' responses to her work. It is seen, not unreasonably, to engage some of the same issues that motivate artists concerned with genetic engineering, artificial intelligence and, especially, robotics. Her exposure of her figures' mechanics—as when she leaves open a hole in the back of a head through which eyeballs and illumination are inserted—along with the frankly appealing expressions of the sculptures' faces create a complex representation. It is analogous in some ways to recent experimental robots designed with humanoid features and programmed to elicit, and respond to, human emotional interaction. As is evident in her contribution to a fascinating new anthology of essays¹ tracing the conception of artificial beings from the pneumatic contrivances of antiquity to screaming mandrakes, dancing automata and biofueled nanobots, King is alert to the wealth of thought that has been devoted to the seemingly intractable question of where inanimate matter gives way to living flesh and its vital spirit. (Her own spellbinding chapter is on a mechanical praying monk constructed in the 16th century and still functioning; it walks the perimeter of an imaginary cloister, periodically beating its chest and touching its rosary to its lips.)



Among the several characteristics giving her work a unique place in this lineage, one of the most striking is that so much of it takes the form of self-portraiture. As in the eerily believable chimeras of Rona Pondick's animal-bodied, human-headed self-portraits (but unlike the wry sculptural self-portraits of Ray or Quinn), King's work expresses a sense of dreaminess, even of trance. If portraiture (in any medium) can be called a social exercise, a species of comment or dialogue, self-portraiture is its introverted alter. King's work, though, is so powerfully engaging that it creates a paradoxical experience of displacement, of a subject occupying two positions at once, one hermetically introspective, the other irresistibly gregarious, and both formidably astute. Another distinguishing characteristic of King's project is the most striking element of the heads' physiognomy: their unforgettably vivid, lashless and unblinking eyes. Mercilessly direct and at the same time painfully vulnerable, they skew the otherwise deeply tactile work toward an emphasis on sight and seeing in all its aspects—on vision as perceptual system and as a faculty that can be termed spiritual. Literary critic Philip Fisher has located the particular optical response called wonder at "a border between sensation and thought, between aesthetics and science."² Distinguishing between the sublime, which he says could be called the aestheticization of fear, and wonder, which "involves the aestheticization of delight,"³ he perfectly captures the spirit of King's work.

Nancy Princenthal, a New York-based writer, is a senior editor at *Art in America*. She is co-author of *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (Prestel, 2007).

Notes

- 1 Jessica Riskin, ed., *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
- 2 Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 6.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Elizabeth King's Mutable Theater

Ashley Kistler



With the care and circumspection of a medical student dissecting a cadaver, Elizabeth King completely disassembled an antique wooden mannequin while repairing it in the early 1980s. King's thorough inspection of the mannequin, along with the eight drawings she made of its component parts, gave her an exceptional schooling in wood-on-wood movable joint construction. As a sculptor preoccupied with the mechanics of movement, she was intent on employing this technology in her own work. Although the puppet-like figures she had produced up to that point could move, they were unable to hold a fixed position. Here, finally, was a means of tackling an overriding concern: the fabrication of movable joints that effortlessly maintain subtle, even infinitesimal adjustments to a figure's pose and gesture. King's realization of these expressive elements, achieved by engineering a delicate balance between size, weight, and jointed-ness, has partially dictated even the scale of the one-half life-size figures she has since created.

King's attention to pose and gesture constitutes one of several theatrical conceits animating her work and practice over the past two decades. It has compelled her to regard each of her sculptures as a sensitive instrument, capable of being tuned and adjusted in a multitude of ways, and the pose itself as a kind of musical composition that becomes more nuanced and particularized with every performance. As she describes in her book, *Attention's Loop*, "I put the figure in different positions and stand back to look at them. A few degrees of shift in the axis of the head to the torso can turn an attentive gesture into an introspective one, or signal a trace of suspicion, or resignation. The most minute changes can induce enormous shifts in our interpretation of gestural intent."¹ Always provisional and endlessly variable, the pose plays an indispensable role in addressing a quandary of utmost importance: how convincingly, King asks, can the piece assume a palpable emotional presence?

The articulated wooden sculpture that initially followed her disassembly of the mannequin consisted of a pair of carved arms and hands, each limb supported at its elbow joint by a slender metal stand (page 52). As King originally posed them, these arms stretched gracefully outwards as if reaching up to do something, in a gesture that to this viewer seemed almost imploring. Made in the months after her mother's death, the work partook of a kind of portraiture relating to the term *prosopopeia* (once considered a possible title for the piece), in which something besides the face conjures up a mental image, or the essence, of someone who is absent. Regarding portraits, King notes that her mother became her first subject of intense curiosity, ultimately rendered in wax

(page 53), porcelain (page 9), and bronze. "She compensated for her paralysis from polio," King continues, recalling girlhood memories of her mother confined to a wheelchair, "by being a very animated and charismatic person from the waist up; people were fascinated with her."² This recollection illuminates King's conception of the piece and its particular form, as well as an early source of inspiration for portraying pose and gesture through realistically detailed figurative fragments.

Later, she reconfigured these components in an installation entitled *Compass*, posing the hands in a window-like cabinet, elevated to chest height and viewed from both sides. A magnetic-drive mechanism connected to one arm activates the live movement of the upper hand; existing somewhere between an involuntary tremor and an intentional gesture, the hand's movement is so subtle that it might be missed altogether by the hasty observer. King uses this liminal, barely perceptible motion, which also appears in the real-time animation *Eidolon*, as the temporal equivalent of the types of gestures she seeks to render in the stop-frame animations and still photographs of the sculpture *Pupil*, or in pieces like *Bartlett's Hand*, which pairs another carved, jointed hand with its virtual, hypnotically animated mate. These elusive, unconscious "in-between" gestures, as she describes them, appeal because "they are at once the most difficult thing to comprehend and one of the most interesting aspects about who we are." She finds a visual correlation in the dances of choreographer Merce Cunningham, who captured and transformed a range of pedestrian movements that are otherwise often invisible because they normally occur midway between two stopping points.

Much of King's work, of course, focuses on the human head and face, with extraordinary results. Her concept of the head as both a sculptural form and a metaphorical site began to take shape in an interactive piece entitled *Theater* (1972–73). The most elaborate of her early works, this mechanical sculpture features a hinged wooden box attached to a chair; the two halves of the box close around the seated viewer's head like a pair of enormous ears, revealing a miniature theater inside that contains a window and a real plaster-lathe wall, painstakingly fabricated props and actual lighting, even a musical soundtrack. Once ensconced, the viewer watches as a closet door on a little stage opens to disclose the puppet of an old woman, whose tiny hinged jaw grinds up and down as if in agitation or impatience. A second door behind the puppet—an eye to the outer (or another) world—functions as a threshold between the interior space of the theater and whatever lies beyond.



Experiencing the chair sculpture and its contents, King observes, is like "putting yourself inside a head." As she subsequently discovered, philosophers going back to the 17th-century mathematician René Descartes proposed an analogous model: they envisioned the brain as a miniature theater, occupied by a homunculus, or "little man," who personified consciousness and the self in his task of processing sensory input. As King reiterates, alluding to the Cartesian Theater, "[O]ur ancient habit is still to conceive our head as our private chamber, a room we furnish and whose occupant is us."³ Accorded scrupulous attention, the polished interior surfaces of her porcelain and bronze heads demarcate such a chamber, in which windows and doors are replaced by the carefully sculpted openings of eyes, ears, and nostrils that similarly provide points of congress with the world. ("I am fascinated with the holes in the face," King remarks.⁴) She thinks of herself as occupying this space while making each piece, of "trying to live inside my own skin." Her process proceeds from the inside out, as well as from the outside in, accommodating a zone where empirical observation and representation give way to an imagined internal anatomy. By tunneling into and thus emphasizing the interior, which she eventually equips with fiber optics that illuminate the eyes, King hopes the viewer will accompany her in imagining how we turn sensations into thoughts.

The making of her immaculately sculpted porcelain faces, embellished in one instance by eyebrows composed of the artist's own lashes, demands an unblinking scrutiny that brings to mind Malcolm Gladwell's profile of psychologist Paul Ekman in his article, "The Naked Face." A pioneer in the systematic study of facial expressions and their meanings, Ekman "treated the face as an adventurer would a foreign land, exploring its every crevice and contour."⁵ King operates in a comparable fashion. In the presentation of her heads, whose eyes and sometimes neck joints form the only moving parts, she manages to wrest emotional and psychological nuance with relatively minimal means. She is aided in this effort by her precise adjustment of the lighting conditions under which each piece is seen; and she also relies on the manipulation of certain compositional elements that photography permits. A decade ago, in her first exploration of this medium, King collaborated with photographer Katherine Wetzal to create a magically evocative suite of black-and-white images that captures *Pupil* and a second work (an untitled head, checklist 4) in a sequence of ruminative poses. The sculptures uncannily inhabit each of these photographs, conveying the illusion of a convincingly self-aware human presence, as one viewer observed, "equally able to hold a gaze and to cast one outward."⁶ The perspective of the camera

shifts in angle and distance, sometimes moving in close to intimately inspect the face or a facial feature, as one imagines the artist herself might do, exploding it with dramatic results. Now encompassing two more recent series, the still photographs of King's sculptures, like her film animations, offer singular opportunities for putting these pieces through their paces. How well can they perform?

Only after making *Pupil* did King realize she had created an ideal animation model. A collaboration with director Richard Kizu-Blair, her 35-mm film animation of this sculpture was shot and edited in 1991 at a San Francisco production studio. Stop-action animation, filmed frame by individual frame for replay at 24 frames per second, offers a richly compelling but incredibly slow and tedious technique of assembling a moving image. A solid day of working intently, King estimates, nets only five or six seconds of animated footage. Despite its laboriousness, however, and unlike computer animation, it depends upon the virtues of the physical object and how persuasively that object can function in real time—the cumulative visual effect, in this instance, of thousands of incremental changes in position that the calculated tension of the figure's joints made possible. Uniquely suited to King's material and conceptual concerns, stop-action animation provided her with a perfect, though particularly rigorous, vehicle for testing the efficiency of her instrument and recording its performance. It is an approach she has used most recently, again with mesmerizing results, to animate the sculpture *Bartlett's Hand*.

At times, these gestures are self-reflexive, as when *Pupil* inspects its own wooden hand. Other eye-hand actions seemingly articulate attempts to perform a difficult task, solve a mental puzzle, or make something, recalling the artist's own efforts in the studio as well as an insistent question: can I do this or not? As King mimed gestures for her production team, establishing a template for the animated sequences, she notes a theme gradually emerged: when the mind is in motion, how does the body unconsciously respond? "A tiny shift of attention... What is this shift, in and of itself? I'd like to be watching at the moment of this interruption in someone else's reverie," she muses in *Attention's Loop*, "to see what it looks like from the outside. Maybe the head makes an imperceptible jerk, the eyelids flicker... Or take the return trip: the precise instant when a child ceases paying attention and slips into daydream. All but invisible: the eyes stop seeing the world in front of them. But what has really changed on the face?"⁷



These are moments that surface and then vanish, so to speak, in the blink of an eye. This fugitive, often involuntary response becomes the literal subject of *Quizzing Glass* (page 36), an installation piece titled after the 18th-century term for a monocle that grew out of the challenge King proposed to herself of fabricating a single eye with independently movable, carved wooden lids. She later installed the eye in an adjustable brass bracket and filmed its movement, eventually pairing the sculpture with its animated double. Intent on exploring the tension that develops between these two forms of representation, King has since combined object and animation in several other works. A related area of experimentation, the result of a serendipitous discovery, involves projecting a film animation through a glass lens so that the resulting image—a sort of virtual moving hologram—appears to be hovering in space within the plane of an empty freestanding frame. Coming into focus from only one particular vantage point, this presentation theatricalizes both the image and its relation to the viewer; and it also seems to echo King's early desire "to get rid of these strings and make the puppet stand by itself."⁸ In doing so, she has devised a mutable show in which a single work, changing with each new pose, assumes the potential of playing multiple roles.

By referring to her sculptures as instruments, King affirms another vital aspect: regardless of how lifelike they may appear, their mechanical apparatus is always visibly conspicuous. Her efforts, in other words, purposefully bypass a seamless illusion in favor of a clearly artificial image. In this respect, King's work draws inspiration from Japan's Bunraku puppet theater, in which each character requires three puppeteers, who likewise perform in full view of the audience, manipulating the heads, hands, arms, and legs of the puppets, as well as their wrists, finger joints, and eyelids. Writing on the historical evolution of this esteemed theatrical tradition, the Japanese scholar Donald Keene comments, "Each step in the direction of further realism has generally been accompanied by a simultaneous step in the direction of non-realism, as if those responsible for the fate of Bunraku knew of the dangers of surfeiting the public appetite for verisimilitude."⁹ After all, as King points out, "The contradiction itself fuels our engagement, hypnotizes us." The dilemma of reconciling two equally valid but sometimes mutually exclusive definitions of our human selves—"a thing one minute [made of blood, organs, joints], and a being the next [a personality, with memories, plans]"—engages, she suggests, a similar dynamic.¹⁰

In a collection of essays analyzing various aspects of Japanese culture, the late French philosopher Roland Barthes also emphasizes this essential trait of Bunraku: "It shows the gesture, lets the action be seen, exhibits simultaneously the art and the labor."¹¹ Contrasting the Bunraku puppet to the Western stage actor, Barthes goes on to observe, "It is not the simulation of the body that it seeks but, so to speak, its sensuous abstraction... the little man of Bunraku recuperates and expresses without any deception: fragility, discretion, sumptuousness, unheard-of nuance, the abandonment of triviality, the melodic phrasing of gestures."¹² King's sculptures embody these attributes, too. As she meticulously models the outward appearance of her figures and heads and fine tunes their inner workings, seeking an ideal balance between image and instrument, her exquisite efforts underscore the allure of an age-old obsession: how to distill and represent that which is uniquely human.

Ashley Kistler is Curator of the Visual Arts Center of Richmond.

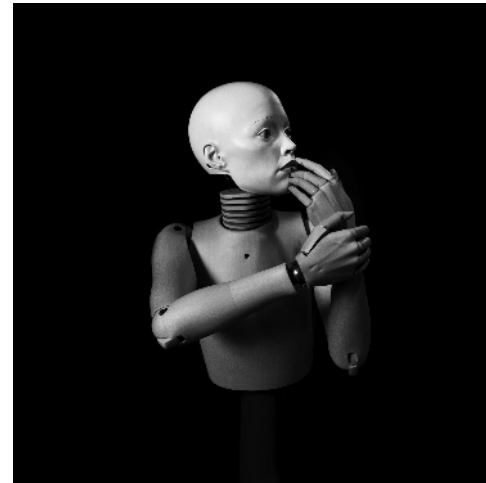
Notes

- 1 *Attention's Loop, A Sculptor's Reverie on the Coexistence of Substance and Spirit* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), p. 50.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations attributed to the artist derive from a conversation with the author on September 16, 2007.
- 3 *Attention's Loop*, p. 21.
- 4 From an unpublished statement by the artist, dated 2/2/03.
- 5 *The New Yorker*, August 5, 2002, p. 40.
- 6 Leah Ollman, "The Ghost in the Machine," *Art in America*, October 2000, p. 159.
- 7 *Attention's Loop*, p. 24.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 9 *Bunraku, The Art of the Japanese Puppet Theatre* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1965), p. 20.
- 10 From an unpublished 2006 project statement by the artist.
- 11 *Empire of Signs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1982), p. 54.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 60.





In Conversation with Elizabeth King



Ashley Kistler: You're about to participate on a panel at the Parrish Art Museum addressing the topic of portraiture. How do you think about this tradition in relation to your own work?

Elizabeth King: When I come upon a portrait of somebody I don't know, by an artist whose work I admire, what I love is the specificity of the face and its particular idiosyncrasies. You don't really have to know who it is. It's always interesting to find out, but the story is all there in the face, and you drink that in. For once, you can stare at a person to your heart's content. Can I make a portrait that is true enough to reward such looking?

AK: With respect to portraiture, your sculpture activates a perceptual oscillation between specificity and an idealized or, as some would say, perfected representation. You manage to evoke both.

EK: Specificity versus perfection: can I say I simply want to be perfectly specific? Certainly there are imperatives having to do with the materials themselves. What qualities of boxwood or porcelain or bronze, for example, allow those materials to be articulated into a sculptural entity? I do worry sometimes that the impulse to perfect the object will sanitize the portrait of some of its essential particulars. The particular is always more interesting to us than the general. It isn't so much about making something perfect as it is about discovering what's there to see, looking from very close up—a point-blank kind of range—and putting in as much as possible. But... that's not entirely true, is it? Someone like Gregory Gillespie comes to mind, a painter who included all the moles and pores—practically a subcutaneous realism—and so does the sculptor Ron Mueck. So I guess I am editing the surface for the form itself.

AK: In an earlier conversation, you described one of your favorite moments when the head comes out of the mold, and the clay is still wet, and you take a tiny piece of silk stocking and press its texture on the lips. This way of dealing with materials—the result of the meticulous attentiveness and scrutiny that characterize your process of looking—seems to me like a kind of perfection.

EK: There are moments of exquisite delight that have to do with finding a way to do something to a material that captures something in the world—in this case, an impossible-to-sculpt set of micro-dimples and puckers. Having said that about the surface of the form, I am also inter-

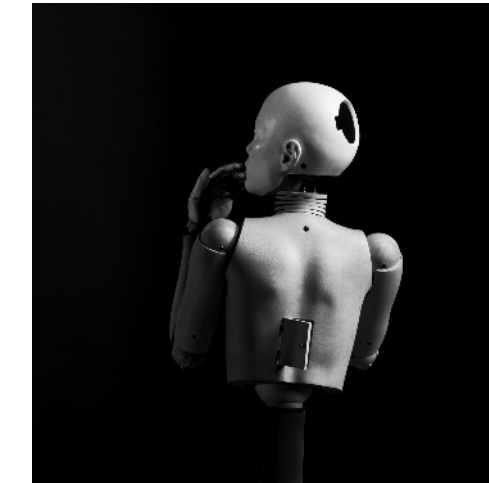
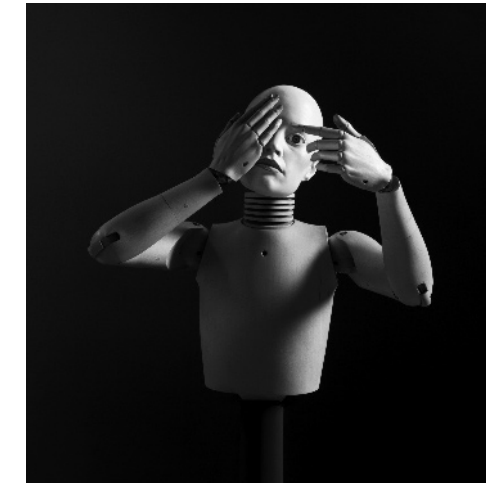
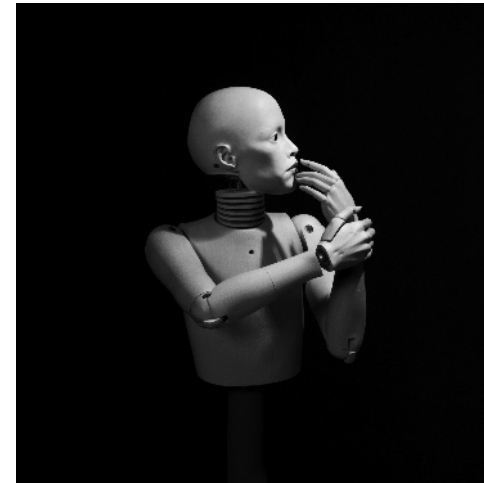
ested in the point where the outside becomes the inside. I leave the backs of the heads open so you think about the inside of the head. The ears, the nostrils—I try and go all the way in. Only in one case did I have the mouth open, but I'd love to do that again. A slightly open mouth seems like such a huge, great thing, dealing with all the problems that would come up. By going in a little farther, I'm hoping to take the viewer with me. That's also true of putting the fiber-optic lights in the eyes. I'm not trying to hide this. You see the wires going into the head, and you know light is going in, so you go in there, too. It becomes a metaphor for our interiority.

I look back on the old chair sculpture (*Theater*, page 15) and realize it's like putting your head inside another head. It even has two ears—the hidden speakers in the walls—and the outer door, a kind of eye. I felt thrilled years later to come upon the term "Cartesian Theater" with its reference to the homunculus, the discredited little projectionist in the brain who turns sensations into thoughts and images. I had the theater, and I had the homunculus, too, I realized, in the form of the little woman in the closet. I spent a lot of time with my head inside that box. It was a world... with sounds, lights and action. You could reach around in front and open a little door and look from the small world out to the big world. All of those things appealed to me then in ways that only later made sense.

My friend Rosie [Purcell] was talking the other day about how you can sometimes find an egg inside an egg. You open the egg, and there's another little egg inside of it. Fantastic. So with the chair sculpture, your head is sort of the small egg inside the larger egg. I ultimately thought of the sculptures of heads in the same way: miniature theaters with lights and curtains, or a chamber that I occupy as I am making the piece. I make the head from the inside out, as well as from the outside in. I hold the head and look in through the back of it with my loupes on, and see the tool in my hand come in through the nostril to refine the inside landscape. And then the eye sockets, which are turned and carved from the inside out.

Part of perfecting the inside of the head is simply a way of doing something: that you would do it well whether it showed or not. I suppose in the back of my mind I thought somebody might see in there at some point—maybe they would be taking it apart—or I would leave it open, or it might be photographed... in any event, that this would somehow be part of the discussion of the work, that it would be an essential part of its character.

In a review Roberta Smith wrote of my show at Kent Gallery in 1999, there was one line that I really loved. Something like: figures that do



nothing so much as look. I want a portrait, not so much of a person, but of a verb. An action taking place or being done.

AK: You've mentioned that movement, in a literal sense, began to take center stage in your work well before you began restoring the antique mannequins in the early 1980s.

EK: In undergraduate school, I remember making a little wax figure of a woman with long hair; she's combing the snarls out and clenching her teeth. I stood her on a stage with a pair of scissors floating above her hair, operated by a little crank. You turned the crank and the scissors would open and close in space over the hair, and that was my sculpture! Then there was *Clocked*, a miniature bike I built; you wound it up with a key, and the rear wheel and pedals turned. Or the sculpture of a small grimacing marionette puppet who in turn holds a string with a hook tied to the end, and you manipulate her to fish through a gutter grate and capture a little shiny ring in the sewer; as you have her lift it out, a hidden machine grabs her strings out of your hands and makes her drop it. And then the chair sculpture, *Theater*, in graduate school. After that, I made a larger figure about 24 inches high—a jointed skeleton that I tried to suspend via strings over a keyboard so you could "play" it. Gordon Hanes bought it years later in North Carolina, and now it is lost. And then a very elaborate free-standing figure with movable joints you could tighten into poses with little wrenches. That one had a whole mess of tiny, hideous, and *desperately* inefficient wedges inside the joints of the hands to get them to hold positions. What was thrilling about working on the antique wooden mannequins and then making sculptures out of wood was a new ability to build a figure that could hold a gesture. Up until then, the joints of my figures were movable, but I couldn't effortlessly put them in a pose and have them just stay there. Wood, lighter in weight, and with a natural wood-on-wood friction in the joints, made it possible. And this became my above-all desire.

AK: That you could make the piece retain its pose?

EK: Yes. I put it in a position, and it stays there. And I move it a little bit, and it stays there. And I adjust it slightly, and it stays there.

AK: And this continues to be one of your central concerns as a sculptor?

EK: Totally. How to put this? I think this is the one thing that's really mine.

AK: When you consider your work in these terms, a single sculpture becomes limitless, with an inexhaustible range of options.

EK: It becomes an instrument. Completely dependant on how it is played, on the narrative of the pose.

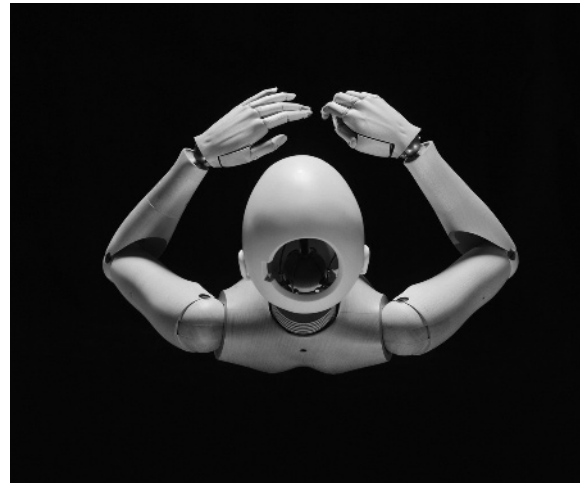
AK: Each time it must tell you something different, and you understand it in a different way, whether it's a three-dimensional rendition or a photograph or a film.

EK: Even before I started making the stop-frame animations, the sculptures would be posed and lit anew in each show. To me, they were very different pieces from one show to the next. The viewer sees a self-evidently movable thing, and sees that it is posed: one pose singled out from many possible poses. So the sculpture has a kind of implied future and past.

And then I'm thinking, too, about the compromise between traditional sculptural form, on the one hand, and a movable model, on the other. If I get carried away with the movability, I only get a robot; but the other way around, it's just a statue. So it's a compromise between two worlds—two worlds that seem mutually exclusive.

If you look at the history of robotics, you discover some magnificently complex machines. At the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab they can make a robot arm, for instance, that will rebound exactly like a live arm does if you push against it. It's a fantastic system of springs and pistons. But realized at the cost of what a human arm looks like. Try and make it look more real and you fall into the "uncanny valley," that interesting term computer scientists use for the close but not-quite-perfect illusion that disrupts interactivity, that breaks the human-robot interface. Cynthia Breazeal compensates for this by making the robot Kismet, and now Leonardo, into pet-like characters that will solicit a genuine involuntary emotional response from us. In the AI world, the idea is that this kind of contact will be the means by which a robot, like an infant, might learn and evolve. But art is after something different, isn't it? It isn't that I want to be thrown into the uncanny valley—although what a delicious briar patch that sounds like—but I think the visual cues we get from robots are still initial and elementary. There is no way yet of interacting with a machine that corresponds, in emotional complexity, to its sheer computer science. The intelligent artifice of the deeper emotions is still the domain of art.

I look at my own work, and I want to think about sculpture getting pushed by the new kinds of knowledge entering our awareness through



AI and neuroscience and biotechnology... while preserving the sense of art's ancient relationship to theater.

AK: Like certain other artists working today, you've discovered a fruitful area of investigation by navigating the boundaries between art and science. Your interest in merging aspects of these two seemingly incompatible worlds seems to parallel another impulse: did the desire to realize both image and object in your work also lead you to pairing the sculpture with its animation, exploring how those two very different languages might work together?

EK: Yes, but I didn't know that right away. After I had worked with film animation, I realized the same kind of dichotomy was in play: the dichotomy between the image and the object, the sculpture and the machine, was being played out this time with the still object and its movement on film, or on video. Could those things be forced together in some way? And that's really what I'm working on now. I haven't made an irreducible package out of those two languages yet.

AK: Doesn't *Bartlett's Hand* come closer to achieving this objective?

EK: In that case, I've made the sculpture and its animation more similar in terms of color, size, and resolution. At the time, I was disappointed because I had planned to project the animation into free space through a lens, and mate it with the physical hand. But I couldn't find or make a big enough lens to keep the projected image from distorting in the transfer, so I backed off and settled for the best electronic image I could get, delivered via a computer with very high RAM. That loop is 4 minutes 14 seconds long; it's made of 6350 tif files, played at 25 images a second. Being able to play the video at a much higher resolution (1440 x 1152 pixels) than just DVD video resolution—actually it is also higher than the current so-called HDTV—does much more justice to the physical object. It was worth losing the lens, and losing its existence as a virtual image in space.

AK: You've made several installation pieces now that combine the actual object with its virtual rendition. When did you first use these two components together?

EK: Right after that first stop-action film animation in 1991 with Richard Kizu-Blair—we animated the sculpture *Pupil*—I had a show at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, which

included the sculpture in a vitrine and the animation on a monitor. And what an uneven match—everyone was looking at the animation. I thought: we're really wired for motion here. How can I damage that so the physical object has half a chance? How can I make them equally as compelling? And how on earth can I get rid of the monitor, that awful box! Whether the animations are shot on film itself, or are shot as stop-action video, or are shot in real time, I still need to present them in video format: VHS tape, later DVD, and now via computer. How I hated that big ugly CRT monitor on a pedestal.

In the summer of 1994—I remember that summer so well!—I was messing around putting lenses in front of the TV monitor. I took my grandmother's beautiful old magnifying glass and made a movable stand for it. The first thing I noticed was that it inverted the video image, so I turned the monitor upside down. I was projecting the image through the lens onto thin pieces of Mylar, a sort of poor man's rearview projector. I built a wood frame to hold the paper, and I set that up on a movable stand, too. One day, as I was changing one piece of Mylar for a thinner piece, I discovered with shock that the image was visible all by itself in the empty frame, with no paper at all. But only if your eye was on the optical axis of monitor-to-lens-to-frame. Otherwise, you would see nothing. Here was a way I could limit the tyranny of the moving image: it would come in and out of visibility depending on where you were standing. If you were standing on the optical axis, it was present in all its richness; but if you moved one step to the right or left, it would eclipse out, leaving an empty frame. I first showed a version of this at VCU's Anderson Gallery in 1995, putting the magnifying glass over a hole in the wall, and hiding the monitor behind the wall. Together with two small sculptures on a platform, I called the installation *The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye* (page 47). Many years ago, I wondered how I could make a puppet—a moving puppet—and only let the viewer see it briefly. So you couldn't have the whole cup; you could only have a sip. How would this change the way you look at a thing? The sculpture wouldn't be there waiting for you. It would appear, then it would be gone, like music.

But at the same time, I do love the notion that you can hang around with it, that it will respond to your closer inspection, and there will be more to see as time goes by. So those are also competing kinds of virtue. It's just that film can do things that sculpture can't, and sculpture can do things that film can't. If they are put together, what effect do they have on each other? I'm not trying to make a hologram-like illusion. I even think that my failure to produce a convincing virtual image is where the art is, where whatever is interesting about the work happens. In some ways, I'm more interested in the tension that develops between these two different languages.

AK: That tension compels the viewer to look more closely at each part and to become more aware of the potential of each. In other words, it seems to open up the possibilities rather than limiting one language or the other.

EK: I love the fact that, as your eye moves in micro-time from the film to the sculpture, you impart to the sculpture, at least briefly, properties that it doesn't have, and vice versa. Can they operate on each other that way? There would be this little momentum of expectation that might take a second, or a half a second, to wind down, that's based on the fact that you look here and see the sculpture, and you look there and see the film. If I can ever find a way to have them occupy the same space at the same time, or intersect, then I'd like to see what would happen.

AK: When you first became aware of the lensed projection existing in space without the Mylar, what was your next step?

EK: The piece from the Anderson Gallery went through some refinements over the next few years. One show included both *Pupil* itself and the animation, so I was able to see them in play that way. Finally, I used a newer sculpture and a live-time animation of it—I filmed the sculpture while moving it very slowly in real time with a hidden rod. This whole sequence of pieces, all of which I called *The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye*, is a classic version of how one project spawns other projects and forks into still others. Just having the animation float in the empty frame as a piece in its own right seemed really thrilling. Although it didn't address the ontology of sculpture versus film, it did other things as a solo piece. It had its own physicality; I suppose it was more openly an illusion. In other iterations, because there is a sculpture, you can see the negotiation between forms.

Then the film or video alone was beautiful on a big scale, projected on an old-fashioned screen, a test of what the sculpture can deliver, in extreme magnification. Each format brings its own potential content. I would still say that the greatest challenge before me in the work would be to put those two languages irreducibly together.

And yet, I have nothing if I don't have the sculpture first. Behind all the other things that I talk to myself about doing, I really want to make a figure that I can pose... that can shrug, or fidget, or pay attention. I dream about perfection as it relates to the operation of the figure as an instrument, one that works beautifully and efficiently.

AK: How do you find the pose?

EK: It's partly a question of what moves me at the moment, the way an improvisational musician might get an idea and try it, run with it, as Bucky Pizzarelli said, "jiggle it." I adjust the arms and stand back to look, and perhaps that makes me think of something it might be doing, and I pursue that. Sometimes the pose enacts a task being attempted; the narrative is one of the figure at work on something, or in the middle of trying, doing something difficult with its hands. Or maybe it is doing almost nothing... just with a little tension along the spine, or in one arm. I'm always knocked out by the enormous difference the tiniest change can make in how we read a pose—you move the head to the right just a millimeter, and suddenly the body language of doubt washes over the whole figure. The position of the eyes vis-à-vis the turn of the head is critical. Even if the piece is just a head on a plinth: where is it looking, where is the light, how is it tilted or turned? Having a sculpture emerge from the challenge and the privilege and the misery of being in the studio, which itself can become an object that enacts that experience in its apparent pose, is something I think about, too. I want to avoid all the obvious pitfalls of making a pose that is too iconographically loaded. And light is everything: I pose the sculpture as much for the light as for any narrative impulse—I'm adjusting the lights, too, as much as the limbs and eyes of the figure, in finding the pose.

AK: How do you know when you've reached a satisfactory point and can walk away from the piece?

EK: Part of it is bearable because I know I can change the pose. I'll get a pose and think, all right, this is it. Then, when it's time to take the show down, I'm heartbroken. I realize I'm never going to find that pose again. On the other hand, I've imagined having a show where I change the pose every day.

September 16, 2007



Untitled (detail), 1994–2004
Checklist 4

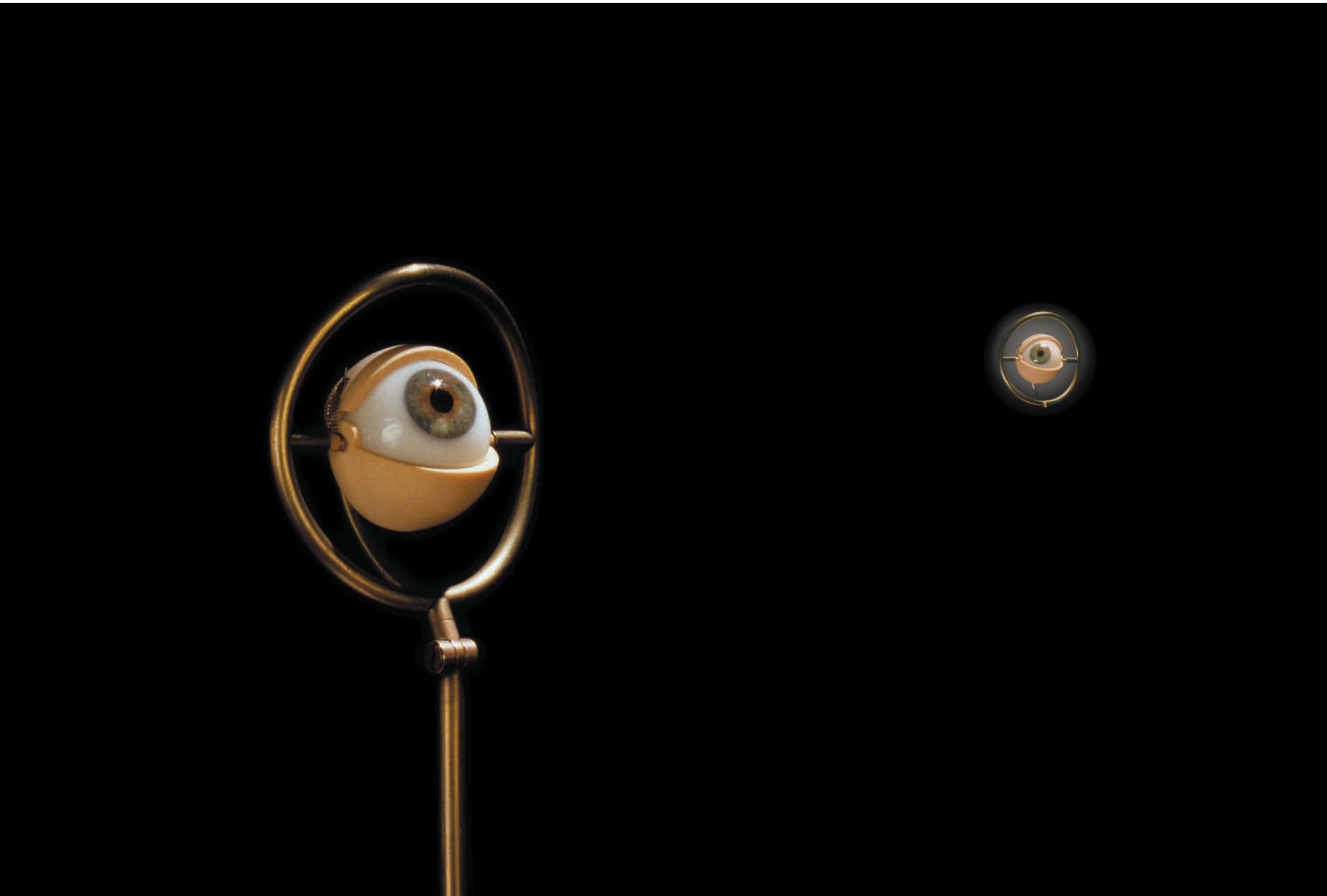














Articulated Figure, 1981–84,
with Dress, 1984
Checklist 18 and 15

Articulated Figure, 1981–84
Checklist 18

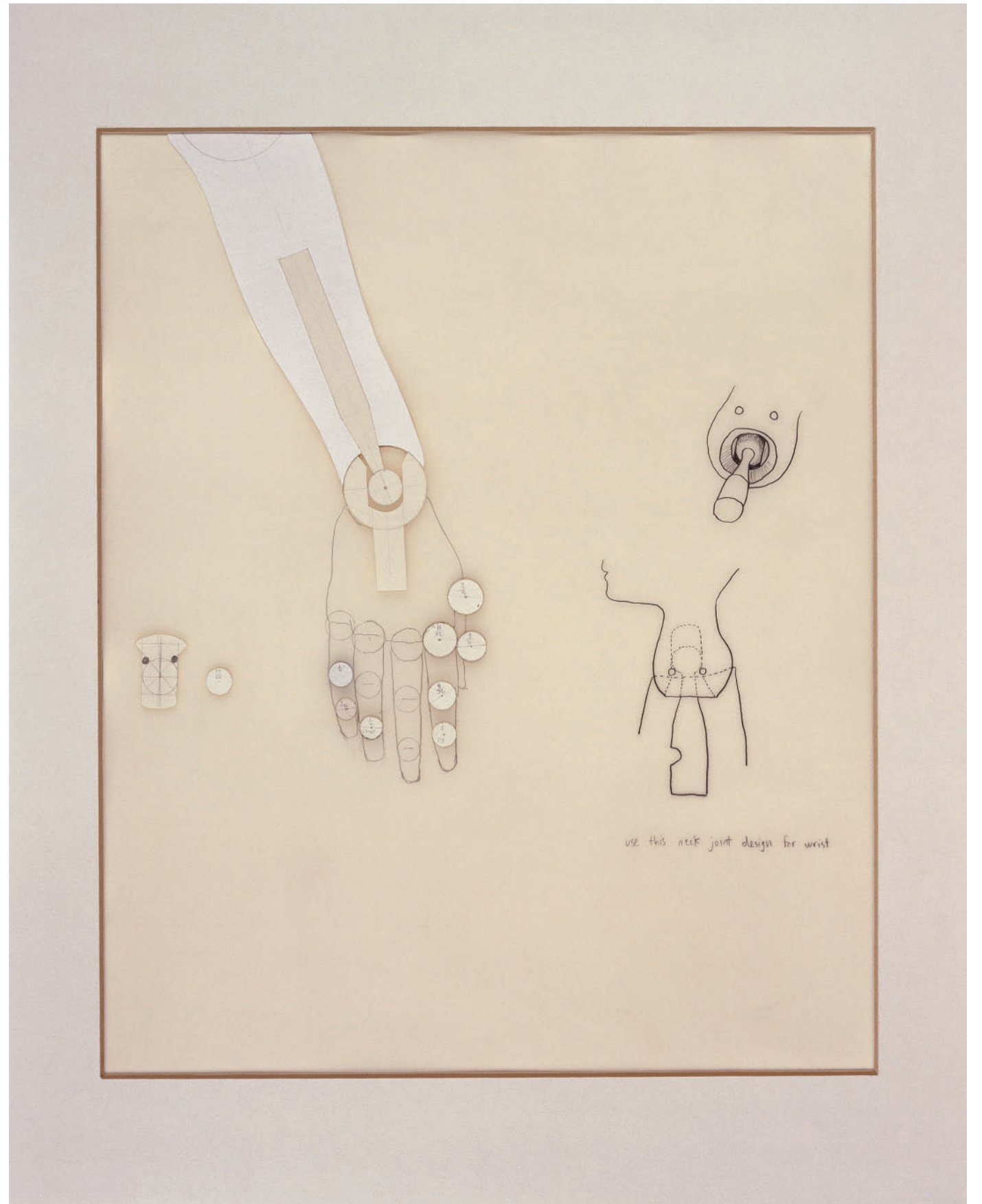




Articulated Figure (details),
1981-84
Checklist 18

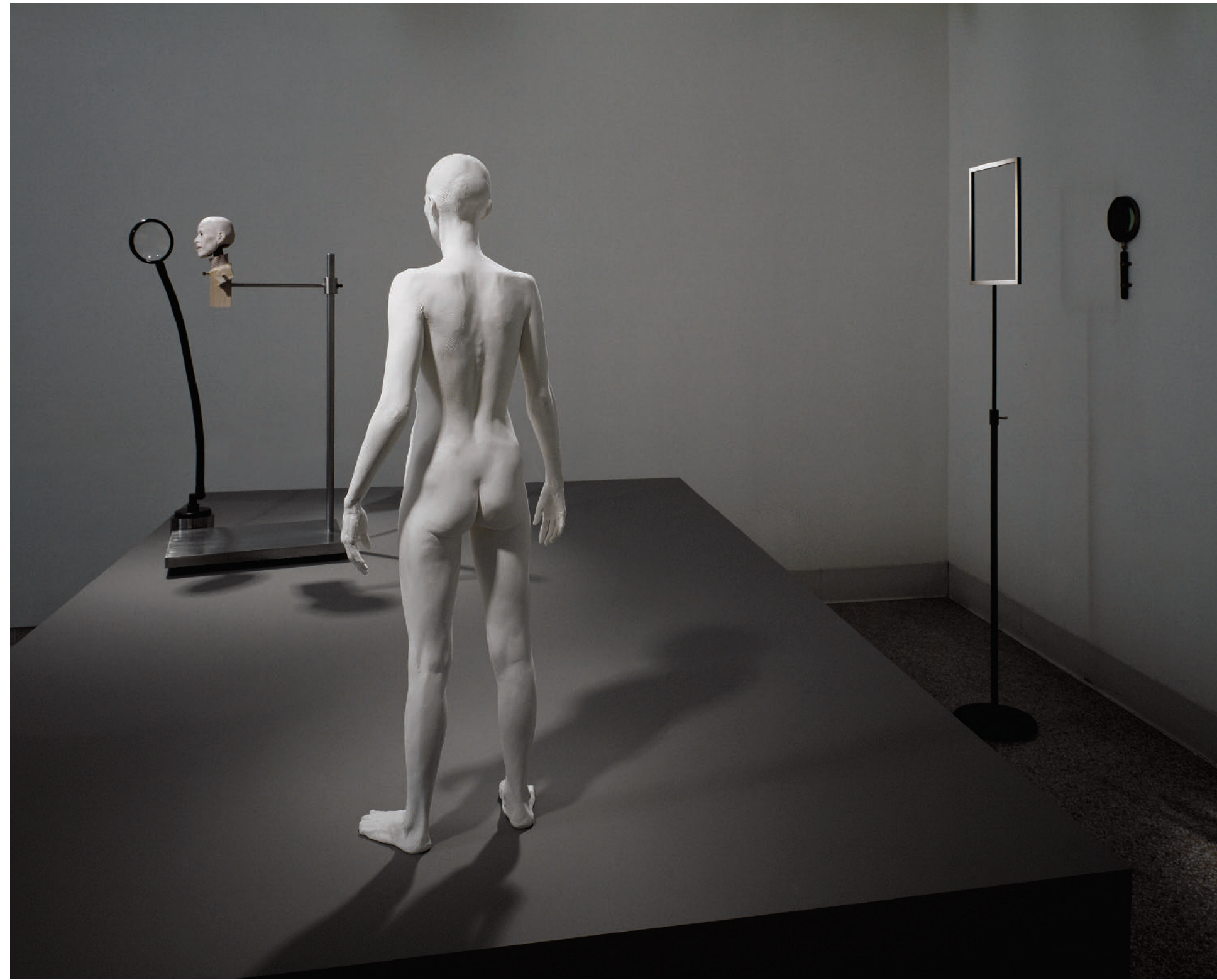








**Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin:
#5 (foreshortened), 1983**
Checklist 33



Installation at Anderson Gallery,
Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, 1995

Exhibition Checklist

Dimensions are given in inches, by height, width, and depth. Some sculptures (checklist 4, 8, 10, 14, 18, 20, and 22) are jointed and movable, with variable dimensions; the dimensions that are listed pertain to a specific pose.

Unless otherwise indicated, works are lent courtesy of the artist.

Sculptures

1. *Untitled*, 2005
Low-fired porcelain
6½ x 7½ x 4¾

2. *By Ear*, 2004
Bronze, glass, and black basalt
5½ x 3½ x 4½
Collection of
Marc and Kathy LeBaron

3. *Some Kinds of Tissue*, 2001
Porcelain, ebony, brass, human hair, silk, and glass
5½ x 2 x 2, hair; 4 x 1 x 1, eye;
4½ x 1 x 1, ear (with stands)

4. *Untitled*, 1994–2004
Porcelain, glass, wood, metal, eye lashes, and fiber optics
21 x 7½ x 5
Collection of Curtis Galleries,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

5. *Cap*, 1993–2005
Sewn kidskin and brass
10 x 3½ x 3½ (with stand)

6. *Untitled*, 1993
Porcelain, glass, and fiber optics
5½ x 3¾ x 4¾
Collection of
John and Dede Brough

7. *Untitled*, 1991–94
Bronze and glass
6 x 3 x 4
Collection of Lindsay
and Leslie Grigsby

8. *Idea for a Mechanical Eye*,
1988–90
Cast acrylic, wood, and brass
10¾ x 2¾ x 2¾ (with stand);
¾ diameter, eyeball

9. *Untitled*, 1988–89
Low-fired Grolleg porcelain
5½ x 3½ x 4½

10. *Pupil*, 1987–90
Porcelain, glass, wood,
brass, and fiber optics
27½ x 7¾ x 10¾
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture
Garden, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, DC, Jerome
L. Greene, Sydney and Frances
Lewis, Robert Lehrman,
and Leonard C. Yaseen Purchase
Fund and Anonymous Gift, 1993



11. *Myself with Other Eyes*, 1987–88
Porcelain and glass
5½ x 3¾ x 3¾
Private collection, courtesy of Allan Stone Gallery, New York

12. *Portrait of Mimi*, 1985–92
Porcelain, wood, and cast acrylic
4 x 2¼ x 3
Collection of Kenneth L. Freed

13. *Untitled*, 1985–2005
Wax
4¾ x 3¾ x 4¾

14. *Articulated Torso*, 1984–86
Bronze
8 x 6 x 4

15. *Dress*, 1984
Silk, suture thread, and brass
24 x 8½ x 3 (with stand)
Collection of Mary Flinn

16. *Portrait of Mimi*, 1984
Low-fired porcelain
4½ x 4 x 3¾

17. *Portrait of M.*, 1983
Low-fired porcelain and glass
5 x 4 x 4
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The John Barton Payne Fund

18. *Articulated Figure*, 1981–84
Porcelain, bronze, llama hair, wood, and cast acrylic
25 x 7 x 4
Private collection, courtesy of Allan Stone Gallery, New York

19. *Portrait of M.*, 1980–94
Porcelain, glass, wood, metal, and fiber optics
5 x 3¾ x 4¾
Collection of Richard Toscan and Sharon Walker

20. *Untitled*, 1978
Rubber latex and mixed media
12 x 10 x 2½
Private collection, courtesy of Allan Stone Gallery, New York

21. *Portrait of a Chair*, 1972
Mixed media
3½ x 3¾ x 2½

Installations

22. *Bartlett's Hand*, 2005
Stop-frame video animation, LCD screen, computer, wood, and brass
72 x 24 x 60, overall dimensions
Collection of Karen and Robert Duncan, Lincoln, Nebraska

23. *Portrait*, 2005
Live-action video animation, plasma screen, glass lens, bellows, and brass and steel frame
81 x 44 x 39, overall dimensions

24. *The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye*, 1991–99 (first version)
Stop-frame film animation, CRT monitor, glass lens, mirror, and wood frame on stand
Dimensions variable

25. *Quizzing Glass*, 1988–2005
Cast acrylic, wood, brass, stop-frame animation, video projector, fiber optics, and lacquered wood cabinet
70 x 44 x 24, overall dimensions

26. *Compass*, 1986–99, revised 2004
Wood, magnetic mechanical drive, fiber optics, and wood cabinet
73½ x 25 x 16, overall dimensions
The Buhl Collection, New York

Works on Paper

27. *Plans for Movable Hands*, 1991
Cut paper
17 x 21 x 2

28. *Plans for Movable Wrist and Elbow Joints*, 1989–91
Cut paper on linen
21 x 17 x 2
Collection of Leo and Diane Slaninko

29. *Plans for Movable Neck and Shoulder Joints*, 1988
Cut paper
24½ x 36½ x 2
Collection of Eleanor Ruffy

30. *Plans and Paper Templates for Movable Wood Arms*, 1986
Graphite and paper on Mylar
16 x 14
Collection of Joseph and Suzanne Seipel

31. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #1 (from front)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28
Collection of Connie Brown

32. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #3 (from back)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28

33. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #5 (foreshortened)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28
Collection of Donna and Lester Van Winkle

34. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #6 (disassembled: head, arm and hand)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28

35. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #7 (disassembled: torso)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28

36. *Study of an Antique Wooden Mannequin, #8 (disassembled: leg and foot)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
38 x 28

37. *Study for a Movable Wood Arm: Two Views*, 1983
Graphite on paper
24 x 18
Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Barbara Forst, M1997.04.03

38. *Study for a Movable Wood Arm (back view)*, 1983
Graphite on paper
24 x 18
Estate of Barbara Forst

Photographs

39. *Bartlett's Hand: 14 Poses*, 2007
Chromogenic prints
17 x 17 each

40. *Studies for Animation: Poses 1–4 and 7*, 1997–2005
Chromogenic prints
24 x 24 each

41. Katherine Wetzel (photographs) and Elizabeth King (sculptures)
Attention's Loop, Pupil: Poses 1–9, Untitled Sculpture: Poses 10–11, 1997–99
Gelatin-silver prints
20 x 16, 16 x 20, or 14 x 11 each
Courtesy of the artists

Videos

42. *Eidolon*, 1998–99
Live-action animation
Running time 14:40

43. *What Happened*, 1996
With Richard Kizu-Blair
Stop-frame animation
Running time 1:44

Studio Objects & Videos

Untitled Figure Study, 1996–2004
Plaster and stainless steel armature
33 x 12 x 5¾

Glass eye collection

Instruments and materials for making artificial eyes

Wax and plaster life casts

Various working drawings

Various other objects, including antique mannequins

Studio Demo, 2005
Adapted from the WCVE series *Virginia Currents*, 4/2/99;
Mason Mills, producer
Video
Running time 12:00

Earle at Work, 1988
Barbara Forst, producer;
Coulter Watt, camera
Video
Running time 28:00



50

Bartlett's Hand in progress, 2005



Study for a Movable Wood Arm (back view), 1983
Checklist 38



51

Wax and plaster life casts
Collection of the artist

Biography

Elizabeth King was born in 1950 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She received her BFA (1972) and MFA (1973) degrees in Sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute. From 1975 to 1985, she taught at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Davis, the City College of San Francisco, and the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. In 1985, she joined the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, where she was appointed School of the Arts Research Professor in the Department of Sculpture + Extended Media in 1999. King has also been a visiting artist and guest speaker at dozens of universities and arts institutions around the country. Most recently, she was invited to spend the spring semester 2008 as an artist-in-residence at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

In addition to numerous private and corporate collections, King's work is held in the permanent collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, and the University of Richmond Museums.

Selected Awards and Grants

2006

Academy Award in Art, American Academy of Arts and Letters

2002

Fellowship, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

1996

Bunting Fellowship in the Visual Arts, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University
Individual Artist Fellowship, Virginia Commission for the Arts

1993

Juror's Choice Award, 12th Annual Black Maria Film and Video Festival

1992

Distinguished Scholar Award, Virginia Commonwealth University

1990

Professional Fellowship, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

1989

Southeast Seven Grant, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

1988

Individual Artist Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts

Solo Exhibitions

2006

Impossible to Freeze the Moment of Regard, Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania
Studio: Things Found, Things Made, Kent Gallery, New York

2005

Two Animations, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno

2004

The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York

1999

Homunculus, Kent Gallery, New York

1997

Attention's Loop, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

1996

Allan Stone Gallery, New York (and 1988)

1993

Illusion of Consciousness, Nancy Drysdale Gallery, Washington, DC

1989

1708 Gallery, Richmond, Virginia

1984

Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, Virginia

1980

Works Gallery, San Jose, California

1978

80 Langton Street, San Francisco, California

1974

Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, California

Selected Group Exhibitions

2007

Close Looking, Kent Gallery, New York
All the More Real: Portrayals of Intimacy and Empathy, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York (catalogue)

2006

Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture; Exhibition of Works by Newly Elected Members and Recipients of Honors and Awards, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York
Beyond Real: Surrealist Photography and Sculpture from Bay Area Collections, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California

2005

Brides of Frankenstein, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California (brochure)
About Faces: Portraits Past and Present, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York
Constructed Image, Kent Gallery, New York

2004

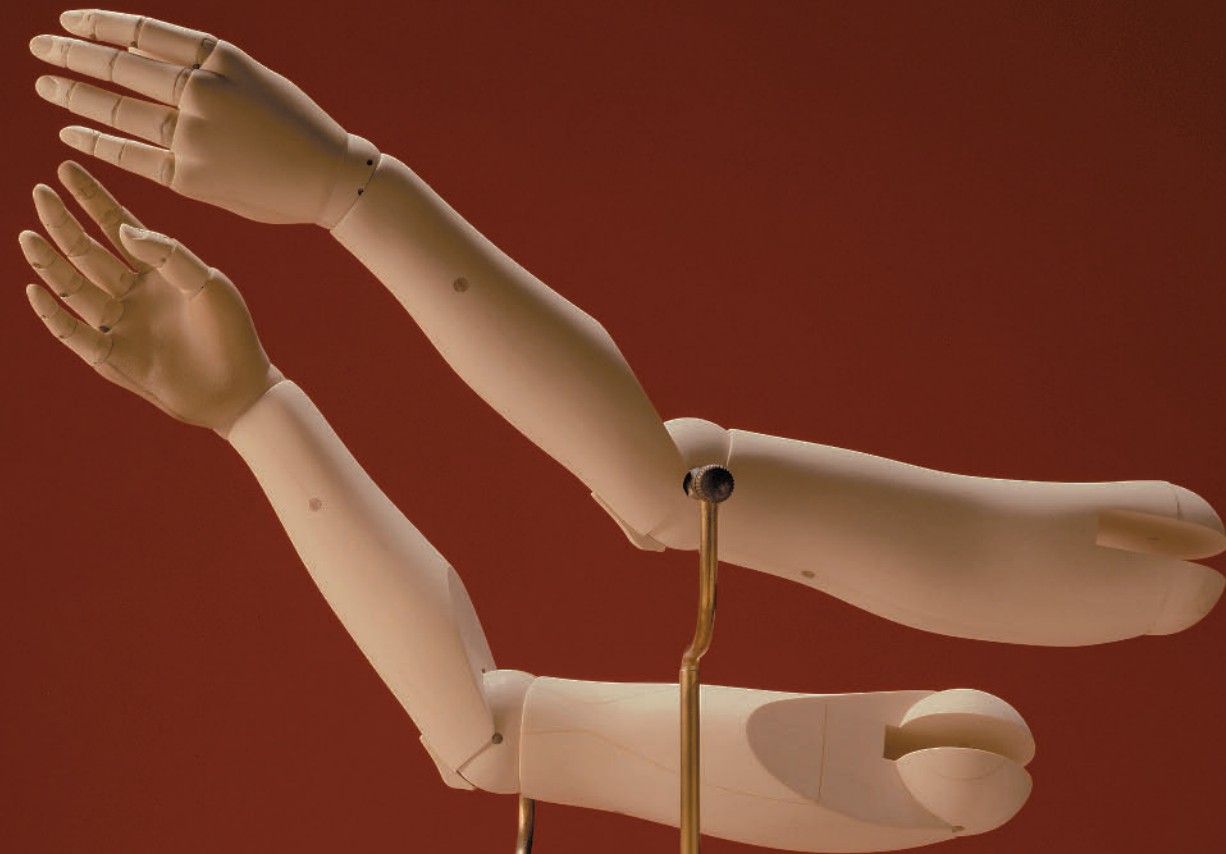
Endless Love, DC Moore Gallery, New York
Robots + Us, Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul; traveled to Columbus Center of Science and Industry, Columbus, Ohio; Liberty Science Center, Jersey City, New Jersey; California Science Center, Los Angeles, California; Ft. Worth Museum of Science and History, Ft. Worth, Texas; Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, Portland; and Museum of Science, Boston, Massachusetts

2002

Faster than the Eye, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, California
Virginia Women Artists: An Inside View, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Figure and Puppet, Berrie Center Art Galleries, Ramapo College, Mahwah, New Jersey
Endless Summer, Kent Gallery, New York
Portrait as Performance, Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia; traveled to Contemporary Art Center of Virginia, Virginia Beach

2001

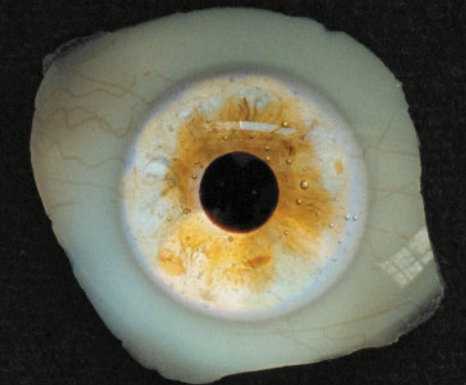
A Shriek from an Invisible Box, Meguro Museum, Tokyo, Japan (catalogue)
Strange Attractor: In the Orbit of the Artist, Photographic Resource Center, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts
Vox, Kent Gallery, New York



Untitled, 1986, carved wood (holly)
12 x 2 x 2 inches, each arm
Now part of *Compass* (checklist 26)



Untitled, 1985–2005
Checklist 13



Fragment of a glass eye,
late 19th century
Collection of the artist

2000

Fortieth Anniversary, Allan Stone Gallery, New York
Forms in Motion, Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater, Great Hall Gallery, Cooper Union, New York
Revealing Bodies, Exploratorium, San Francisco, California

1999

Ghost in the Shell, *Photography and the Human Soul, 1850-2000*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California (catalogue)
Dream Architecture, Kent Gallery, New York
Deus Ex Machina, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, Arizona

1998

Faculty Show, Hudson D. Walker Gallery, Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, Massachusetts

1997

Works on Paper from Virginia Commonwealth University, Galeria ICPNA Miraflores, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, Lima, Peru
Strong Spirits, Fine Arts Center Galleries, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio (catalogue)
General Consensus, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts
The Hirshhorn Collects: Recent Acquisitions 1992-1996, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (catalogue)
Out of Bounds: New Work by Eight Southeast Artists, Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin

1996

Bunting Artists: Elizabeth King and Julia Scher, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Esculturas VCU, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, Lima, Peru
Out of Bounds: New Work by Eight Southeast Artists, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia (catalogue)

1995

Mechanical Advantage, Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont
Off the Mall 2, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

1994

Allan Stone Gallery, New York (also 1992 and 1984)
Reifying the Personality: Three Approaches to Rendering the Invisible, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Too Human, American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (catalogue)

1993

Photography and New Genres '93, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, Virginia
Transformed Reality, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

1992

Contemporary Sculpture from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Collection, Bayly Art Museum, University of Virginia, Charlottesville
Intrastructures: Sculpture by Elizabeth King, Elizabeth Falk, and Genna Watson, American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC (catalogue)

1991

Nancy Drysdale Gallery, Washington, DC

Southeast Seven 13, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina (catalogue)

1990

Un/Common Ground, Virginia Artists 1990, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (catalogue)

1989

Sculpture Now: 10 Virginians, Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, Danville, Virginia (catalogue)

1988

The Art of Richmond; Surrealism Continued, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

1986

Southeast Sculptors: Comments on the Human Condition, SVC Fine Arts Gallery, University of South Florida, Tampa (catalogue)

Process / Image / Portrait, Recent Sculpture by Myron Helfgott, Elizabeth King, and Genna Watson, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (catalogue)

1979

Same Bed, Separate Studio, Falkirk Community Cultural Center, San Rafael, California

1978

Exposures, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
Visiting Faculty Exhibition, Worth Ryder Gallery, University of California at Berkeley

1974

Surrealistic Objects, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California

1971

The Metal Experience, Oakland Art Museum, Oakland, California
California Girls, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California

Video Screenings

2006

Black Maria Film Festival: The Legacy of the Short Film, Museum of Modern Art, New York

2002

The Secrets of Stop-Motion Puppet Animation, Puppeteers of America National Festival, Tampa, Florida

2000

Puppeteers of America Northeast / Mid-Atlantic Regional Festival, Stonehill College, Easton, Massachusetts

1996

The Black Box Film and Video Festival, Art Center South Florida, Miami
Fast Fauxward: ArtParty XIV, Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia

1995

No Strings Attached: Puppets, Dolls and Masks, Pacific Film Archive, University of California at Berkeley

1993

39th Annual Robert Flaherty Seminar for Independent Video and Cinema, Wells College, Aurora, New York

12th Annual Black Maria Film and Video Festival, traveled nationally

Athens International Film and Video Festival, Athens Center for Film and Video, Athens, Ohio

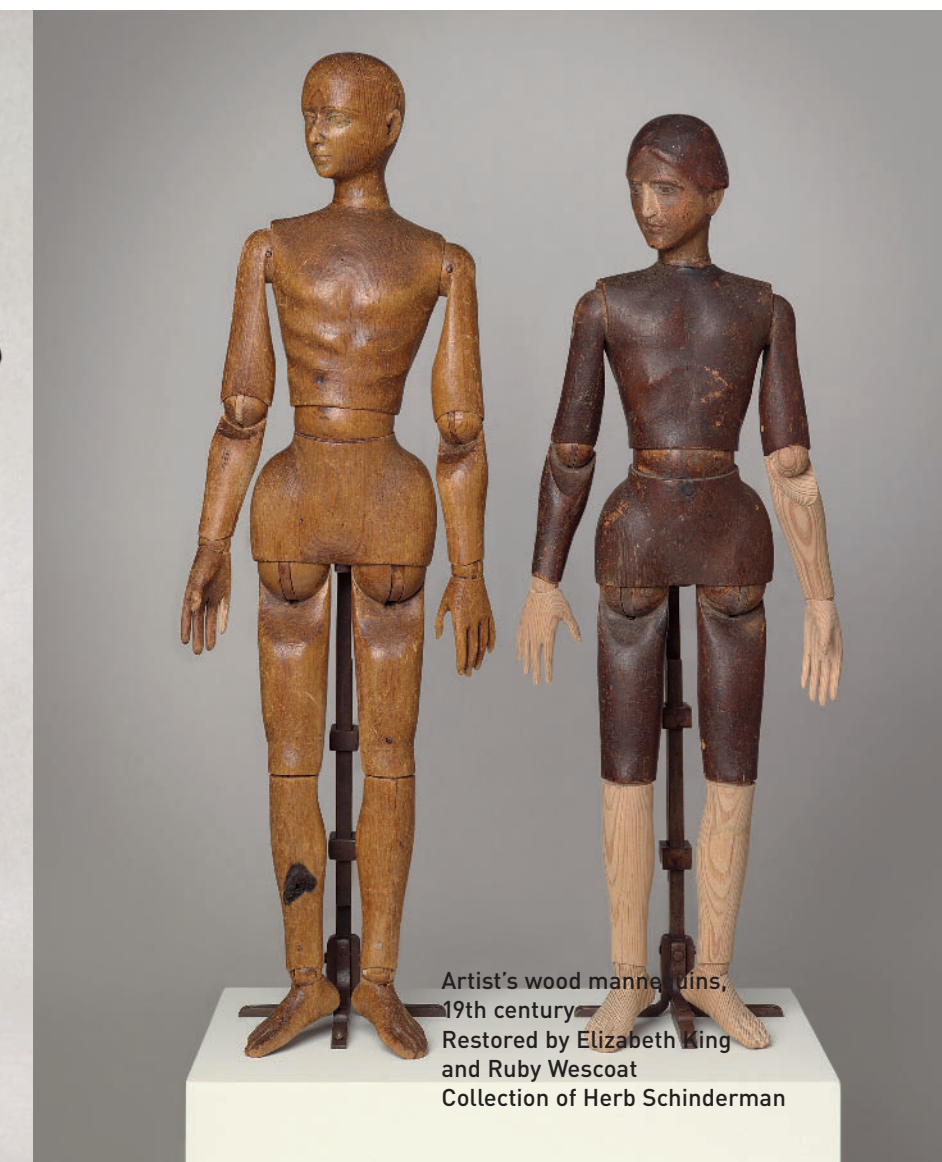
An Animated Evening: Selected Shorts, Nights for New Film and Video, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond



Studio cabinet with mannequins and puppets
Collection of the artist



Wood mannequin of a horse, late 19th century
Collection of the artist



Artist's wood mannequins, 19th century
Restored by Elizabeth King and Ruby Wescoat
Collection of Herb Schinderman

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Fleming, Lee. "Assemblage by Alchemy." *Washington Post*, 3 April 1993, 62.

Gilbert, Chris. "Book Review." *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (November 1999): 65.

Humes, Pete. "Body of Work, King Captures Poetry of the Human Machine." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 28 May 2006, sec. H, 1-2.

Jacobs, Fredrika H. "Postscript." In *The Living Image in Renaissance Art*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 201-203.

Lama, Luis E. "Escultores Norteamericanos." *Caretas*, no. 1426, 8 August 1996, 73.

McDonald, Robert. "Introductions 74." *ArtWeek*, 27 July 1974, 4-5.

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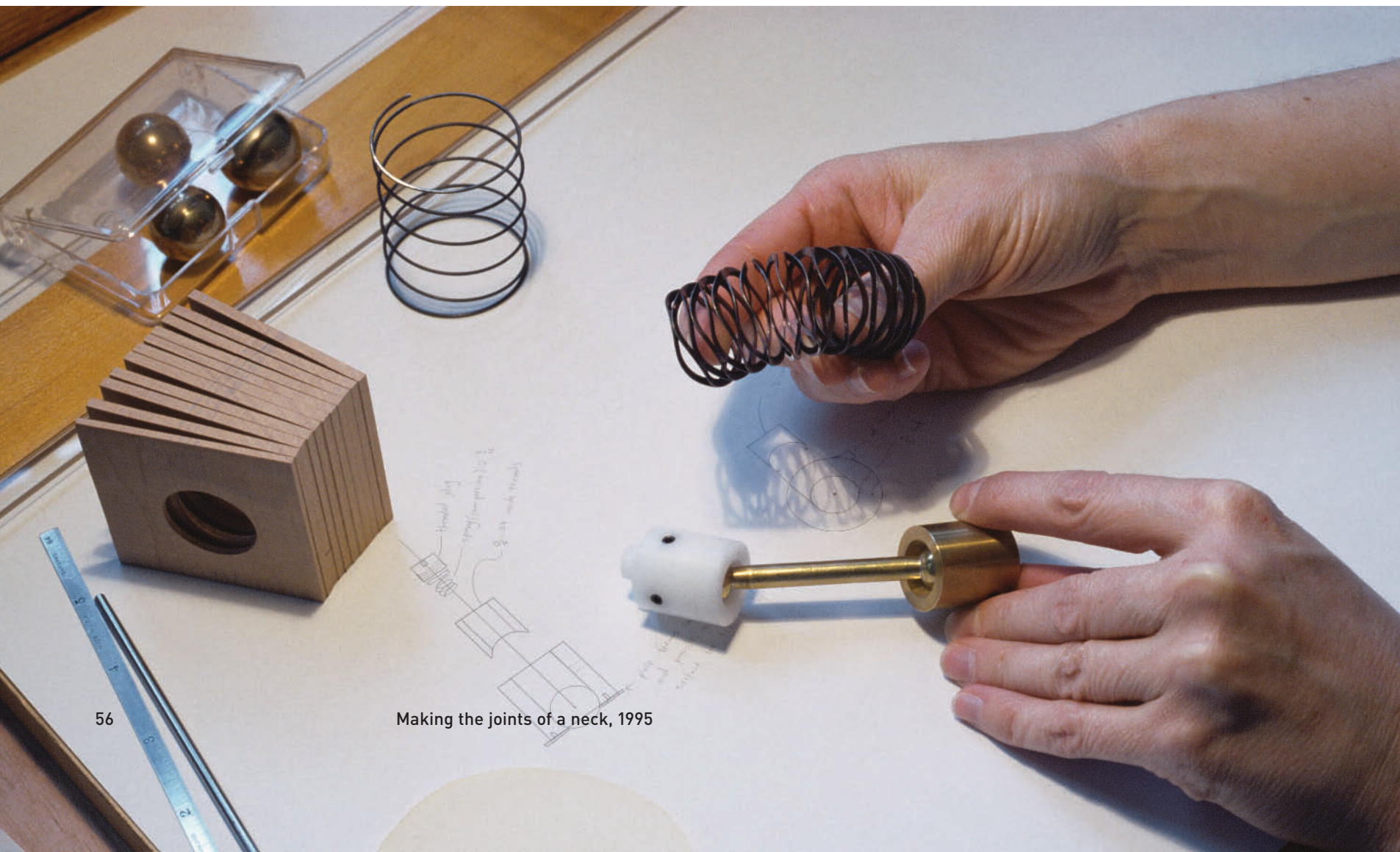
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Acknowledgments

So many individuals have been incredibly generous with their support of Elizabeth King, *The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye*. We are especially grateful to the lenders, recognized on page 4, for their willingness to part with works from their collections for the duration of this exhibition, which otherwise would have been impossible to mount. Also enumerated in full are the sponsors whose assistance has likewise been crucial; their names form a substantial list reflective of the high esteem in which the artist and her work have long been regarded. A source of sustained support for Elizabeth's film and photography projects, the Dean's Office of the VCU School of the Arts has also helped to fund this catalogue in a major way, as have the Virginia Commission for the Arts; Doug Walla, Director of Kent Gallery, who has represented the artist in New York over the past decade; and the ever munificent True Luck, whose contributions to the VACR are beyond measure. To each of you, we extend our heartfelt thanks.

With this, the third book he has designed and produced for the center, designer John Malinoski has created a stunning document of the exhibition. Once again, working with John has been an exhilarating mind and eye-opening experience. We owe him dearly! Susan Higgins personally shepherded this publication with uncommon care at Worth Higgins & Associates, as she has done for the VACR on two previous occasions, while Jennifer Callison provided painstaking assistance with image conversions. We also thank Geraldine Lucid of Laumont Photographics, Lynton and Rebecca Gardiner, and Ed Pollard for their professional photographic services; and Jerry Bates and Matt Charboneau at the VCU School of the Arts Graphics Lab for their pre-production help.

It is a great pleasure to include in this catalogue an essay by critic Nancy Princenthal, who is an enormously gracious person as well as an exceptionally astute viewer and writer. We thank her for so enthusiastically taking on this assignment in the midst of her many other commitments. In addition to the eloquent tributes they have contributed here, VACR President Jo Kennedy and VCU Sculpture Chair Amy Hautf have helped to realize this project in a multitude of invaluable ways.

Shawn Lotze has assisted Elizabeth in her studio for more than two years and has now also installed her work in a variety of situations. He agreed to take on the complex job of overseeing this installation, for which we are most appreciative. As on many previous occasions when I pursued his help, exhibition designer David Noyes very kindly lent his expert consultation; thanks to him, we were able to establish a viable approach early on.

We are so pleased that this exhibition will be extended with a national tour to four other venues. For their ready participation and eagerness to introduce Elizabeth's work to audiences elsewhere in the country, we thank Gerald Auten, Director of the Artist-in-Residence Program at Dartmouth College; Janice Driesback, former Director of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery; Jo-Ann Conklin, Director of the David Winton Bell Gallery at Brown University; and Mark Sloan, Director of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

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Elizabeth herself personifies the word "animate" in all of its shades of meaning that summon those indispensable, life-affirming traits of spirit, vigor, zest, courage, and inspiration. During the months leading up to the opening of this exhibition, she has undertaken an exhausting array of tasks and responsibilities with a passion and perseverance that only she could muster. Words of thanks can't begin to cover her commitment and diligence.

Ashley Kistler



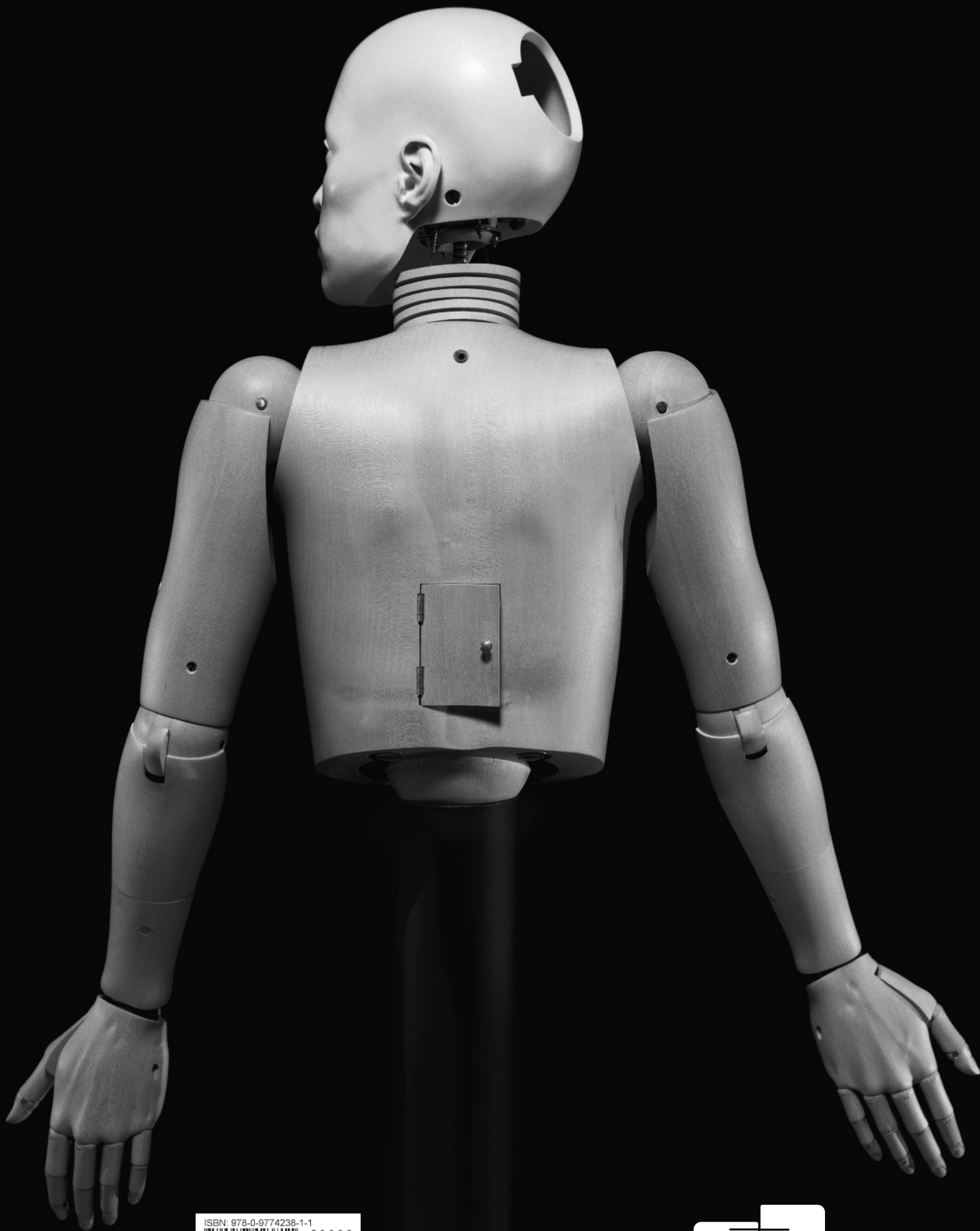
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