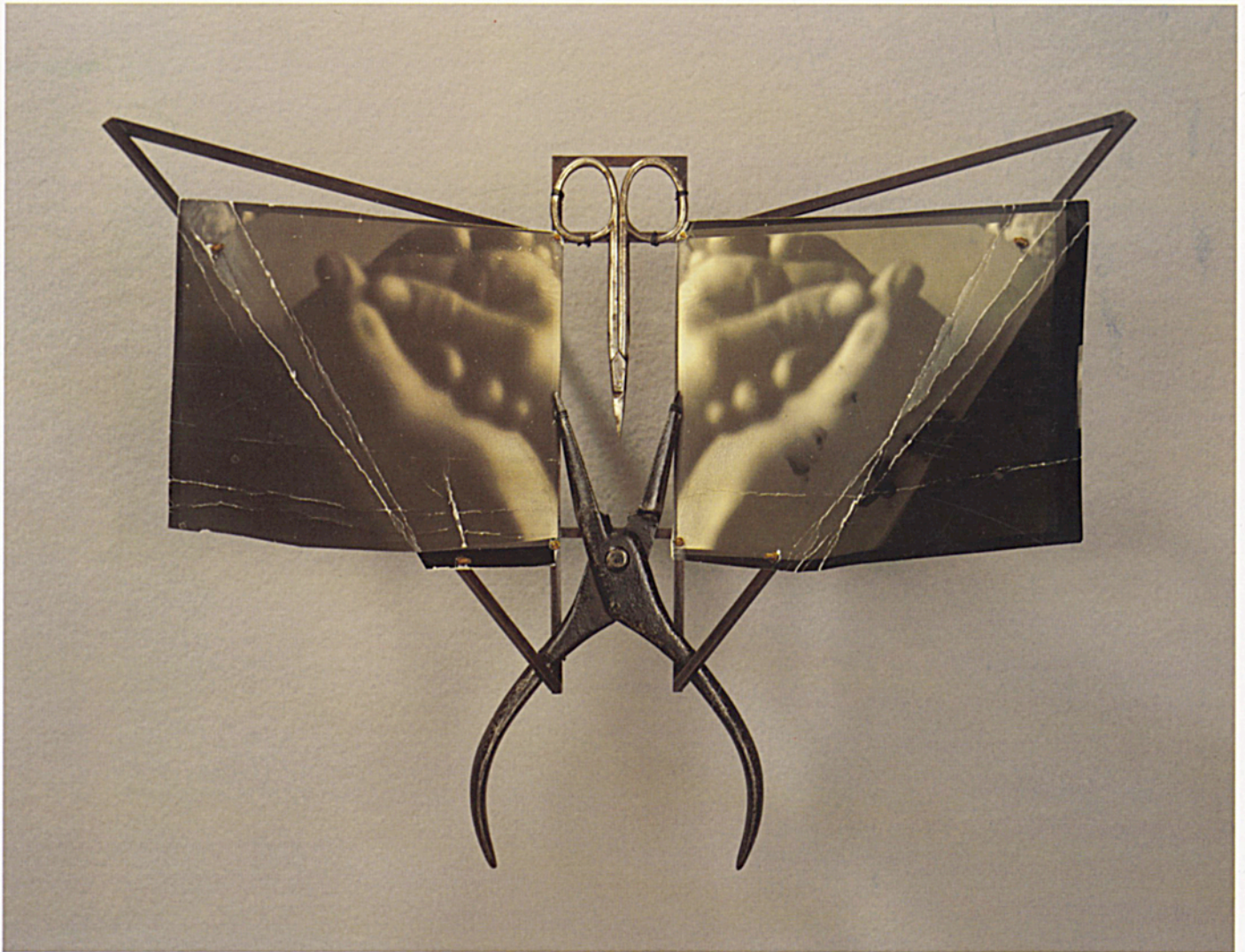


# ELLEN GARVENS

*fontanel*

April 6 - May 19, 2001



*Moth*  
1999  
mixed medium on brass

## INTRODUCTION

Humboldt State University's First Street Gallery introduces the North Coast to the intriguing hybrid sculpture of Ellen Garvens. Her art combines elements of photography, metal armatures, and tools to create evocative arrangements. The works read as poetic constructions with a strong narrative quality, folding and opening like the pages of a well-worn visual journal. Intimate moments are stilled with the lens of her camera and re-assembled into complex assemblages.

Garvens' work reveals sensitivity toward exposing inner structures. *Fontanel*, the title of Garvens' exhibit, refers to the pulsating soft spot in a newborn baby's skull. It suggests the vulnerability and exposure that the viewer senses in her art when looking into the fragile inner structures of her pieces. The title also alludes to the theme of the progress and evolution of life. With her art she proposes that we are all witnesses to the cycle of life into which we are progressively incorporating our technology. Garvens' art can also be thought of as relics, time-honored objects that connect our past and our present to modern technology. Her sculptural forms reference an aged quality, the human body as an object and an artifact, merging with the modernity of our technology.

Garvens' own eclectic past has been a professional voyage blending both technical aptitude and artistic vision. After spending time on a kibbutz in Israel as a beekeeper, Garvens attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison and worked for the entomology department as an electron microscope operator. Using a microscopic camera, she photographed insect specimens from the department's collection. After receiving her MFA from the University of New Mexico, Garvens moved to New York City where she secured a position at the Museum of Natural History working as a scientific illustrator. Garvens' next appointment was as Assistant Professor of Art at Oberlin College in Ohio followed by her latest move to Seattle, Washington where she is currently Professor of Art at the University of Washington.

The works in this exhibition are connected by several recurring themes. Complex surfaces, cell division, duplication, tears, divisions, and penetrations all reference Garvens' dedication to dualities. Many of Garvens' pieces include duplicate, mirror photographic images severed by a tool, blurring the line between image and object. Within her

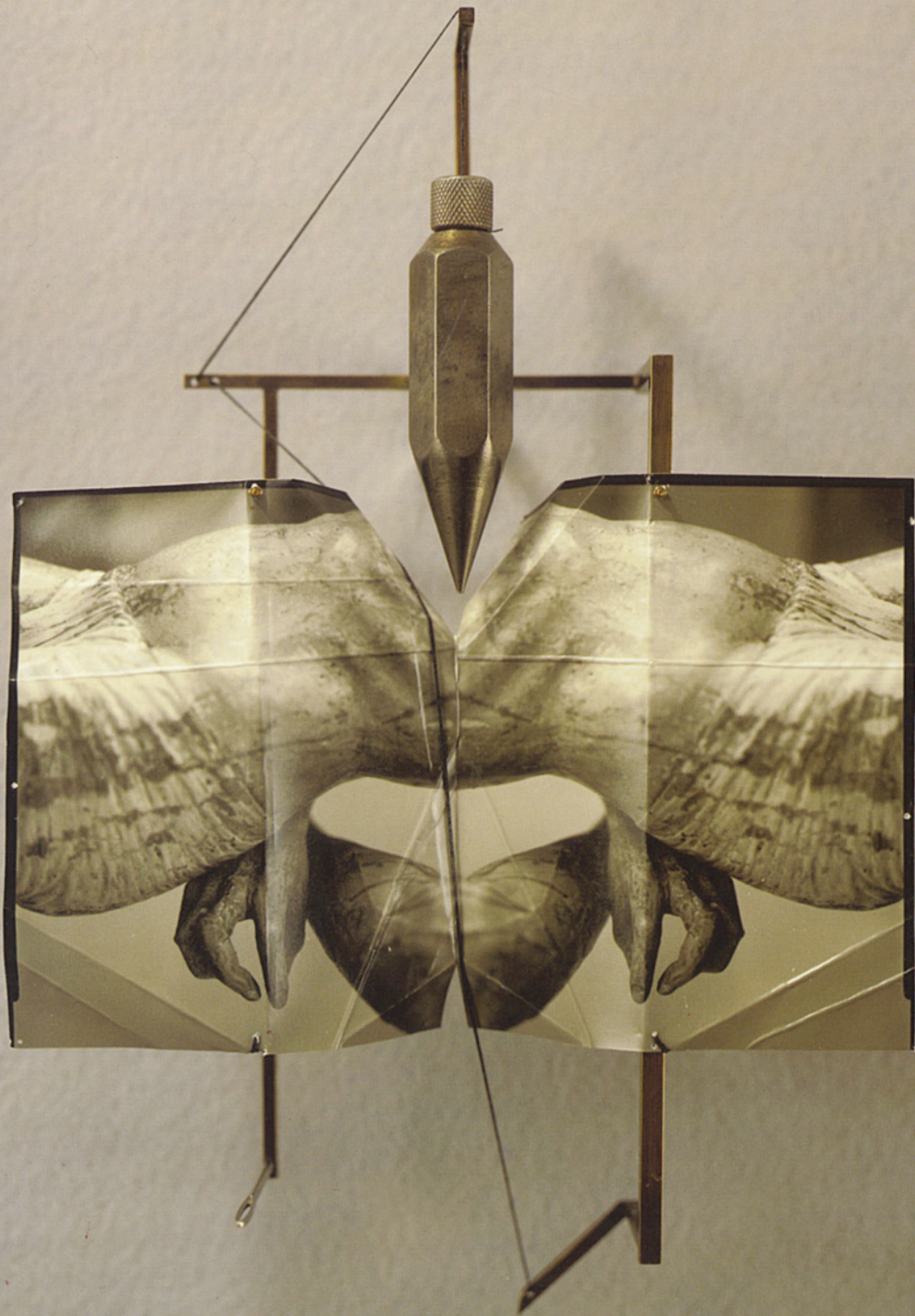
bent, crumpled, aged collages, one cannot help but notice her ability to translate minute detail into landscapes of texture and movement.

Garvens' guidance and presence during the installation process emphasizes her role not only as studio artist but also as a creator of atmosphere. The sculptures must be strategically placed so that the shadows cast, the negative space, and the pieces themselves work together to create a complete composition. The works hover off of the wall creating a dynamic that makes the space between pieces as important as the individual forms. Ellen Garvens' work invites the viewer to look beneath the surface of everyday reality and view change and growth as part of a larger, evolving cycle.

Christie Cook Erin Hamilton  
Jocelyn Moriarty Linnea Tobias



*Studio view*



*Hemlock*  
2000  
mixed medium on brass

## FONTANEL

In his book, *The Fourth Discontinuity*, historian Bruce Mazlish argues that humankind has entered into a new stage in its co-evolutionary relationship with technology. He asserts that earlier in history, Copernicus, Darwin and Freud created new scientific and cultural paradigms by shattering three closely held fallacies; the delusions that mankind was separate and discontinuous from the heavens, the animal kingdom, and the unconscious mind. Similarly, he argues we are presently in a stage of history which will inevitably lead to the overturn of a fourth delusion or discontinuity—that humankind is separate from its technology.

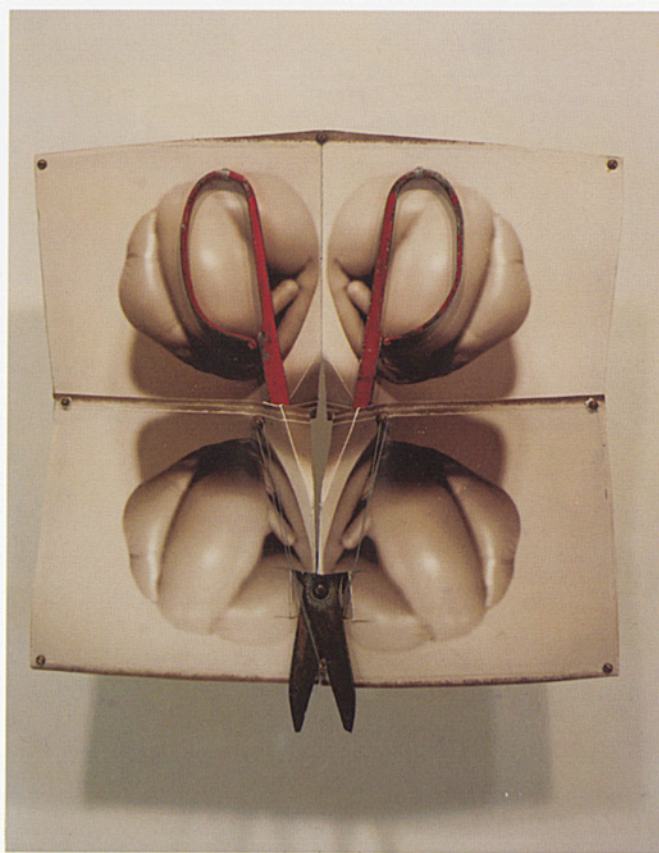
In making his argument for the ending of the fourth discontinuity, he calls for the recognition that we are on an evolutionary continuum with the machines that we have created; a continuum which is very different from that which connects us with the animal kingdom. He argues that human biological evolution, as understood in cultural terms, will lead us to recognize that our technology is part and parcel of our evolving human nature. He posits that the future will see further blending and merging of our species with our technology. Machines will have human-like traits and humans will adopt machine-like traits. There will be super-thinking machines and perhaps machines with what we call emotions or feelings. We, in turn, may incorporate machines into our physical being in order to live longer lives or to more fully integrate with our technology.

The art of Ellen Garvens seems to intuit such a future. Her fragile constructions impart the sense of a new life evolving from old. She wants her art to blur the boundaries between the organic and inorganic, between image and object, between 2-D and 3-D, and between human and non-human. She often designs her pieces to visually reference the bisymmetrical nature of living things. At first glance, her constructions are reminiscent of organic forms found in nature. In fact, these forms also contain disconcerting passages incorporating technology and tools. In this manner, Garvens' work addresses humanity's adaptation to and melding with its own technology. She depicts the uneasy interdependence of human life and technology.

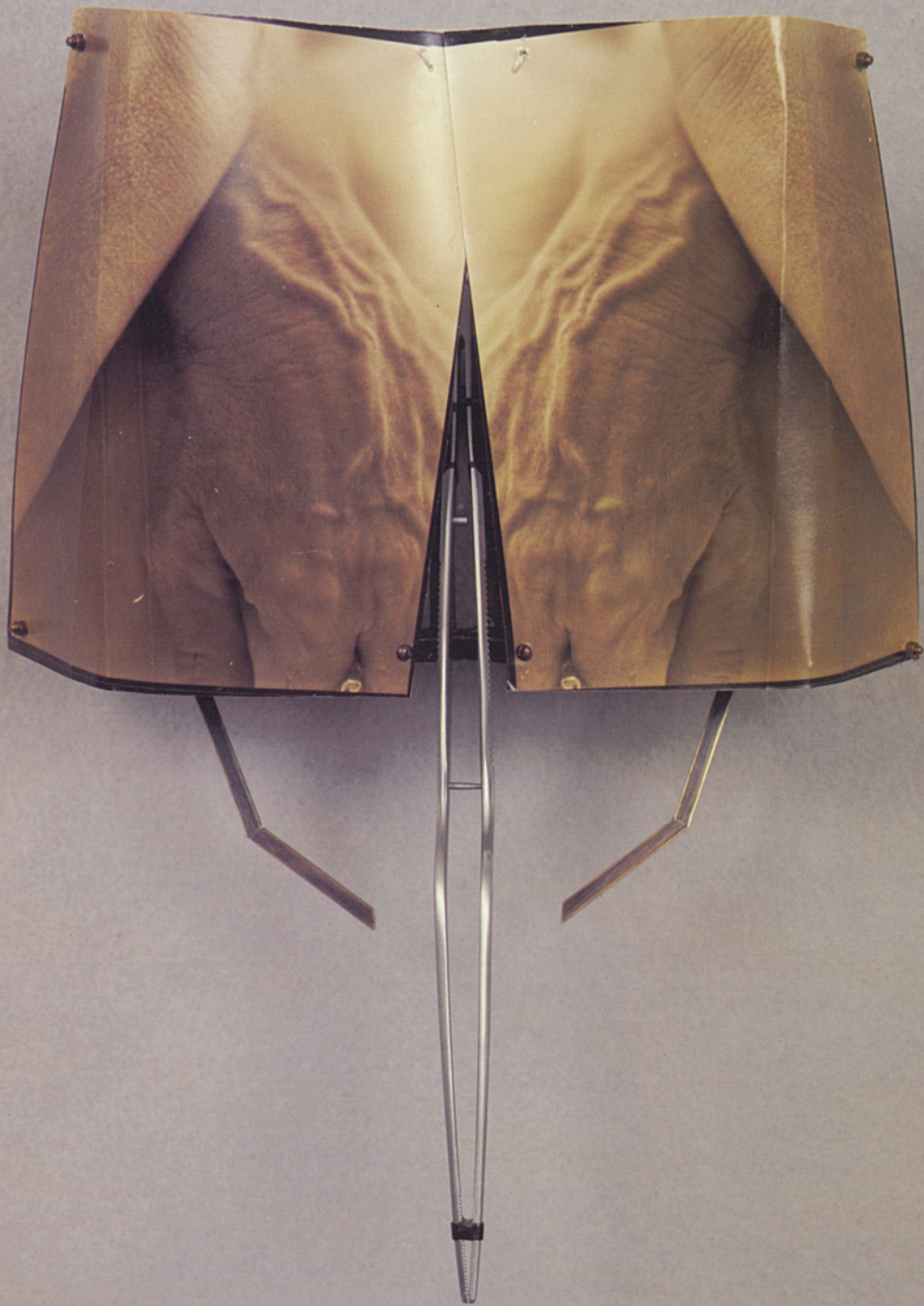
Her pieces often reference the human body as a time worn object, an artifact merged with the precision and modernity of our tools.

Ellen Garvens' work is pinned to the gallery walls in groupings so as to mimic the conventions of scientific specimen displays. The gallery is transformed into the artist's personal natural history collection; a collection that scrutinizes the artifacts of life co-existing, evolving and merging with our machines.

Jack Bentley, Curator



*Red Scissors*  
1998  
mixed medium on steel



*Prayer*  
1999  
mixed medium on brass

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The production of this exhibition was a joint effort of Ellen Garvens, First Street Gallery student assistants Jocelyn Moriarty, Linnea Tobias and Heather Roberts; interns Christie Cook, Erin Hamilton and Jennifer Keller; volunteer Katrina Hollowell and curator for the exhibition, Jack Bentley, Director at Humboldt State University First Street Gallery. We are especially grateful to the artist Jim Phalen who has given this exhibition and the work Ellen Garvens special support. Additional program support has been provided by the Art Department and University Advancement at Humboldt State University. Special thanks are given to Elizabeth Hans, James Crawford, Martin Morgan, Maris Benson, JoAnne Berke and Betsy Boone.

It was through this cooperation that we are able to present *Fontanel* by Ellen Garvens. The works have come to us from Ellen Garvens' collection. Funding for this exhibition comes in part from an anonymous benefactor to whom we are deeply indebted. Additional funding has been made available by the Humboldt State University Foundation.

Jack Bentley, Director, First Street Gallery

## *Fontanel:*

MIXED MEDIA SCULPTURE,  
PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS

by Ellen Garvens.

April 6 through May 19, 2001

Humboldt State University

**First Street Gallery**

422 First Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

(707) 443-6363

Hours: 12-5:00. Tuesday through Saturday

Exhibitions are free to all.

Design: Jack Bentley and Bug Press

Photography: Ellen Garvens

Printing: Bug Press, Arcata, California

Typeface: Myriad, Minion, and Bernhard Tango

Photographs contained herein,

©2000, Ellen Garvens, all rights reserved.

Publication ©2001, First Street Gallery

Humboldt State University

Arcata, California 95521

## The Artist Thanks...

Cole Phalen, Mason Phalen, Jim Phalen and Jack Bentley.

First Street Gallery