

ARTnews

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Doug & Mike Starn

Leo Castelli

"Impermanence," a mini-retrospective of five of the Starns' photo constructions, elegantly conveyed the infinite mutability of the physical world and the transience of beauty.

Gothic Detail (1989) is an assemblage of yellowed, irregularly shaped pieces of photographs printed on paper and film. Details of Renaissance paintings, the images are out of focus and at times unrecognizable. Affixed directly to the wall, fragments of life-size arms, hands, faces, and torsos conveyed a sense of stories barely remembered and garbled by the passage of time. The brownish-yellow photographic elements in *Gothic Disposition* (1990–93) also seem to be decomposing, and the work, shaped like a crude altarpiece, is framed by a construction of splintered wood that might have been dredged up from the bottom of the ocean. Rather than lending a sense of solidity, the armature of steel pipe clamps that supports the filmy layers of *Yellow Concave Assumption* (1993) only underscores their fragility.

In their more recent work, the Starns have experimented with different methods for evoking a sense of material dissolution. *Guanyin* (2005) is a photograph of a Chinese Buddhist statue printed using a 19th-century technique of color separation. The image is divided into nine prints arranged in a grid; their varied tones of greens and pinks give the surface of the statue a corroded, oxidized



Doug & Mike Starn, *Guanyin*, 2005, four-color carbon print on paper, 55" x 55". Leo Castelli.

appearance. *Snow Crystal (Study 1)*, 2005, from a recent series of blow-ups of individual snowflakes, is a four-foot square image of a single ice crystal. Although these photographs of snow lack the physical presence and melancholy of the other works, their scale imparts remarkable weight and substance to one of the most ephemeral structures of all.

—Megan Heuer