

DOUG & MIKE STARN, *Impermanence*
November 5 – December 21, 2005
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Leo Castelli Gallery is pleased to present *Impermanence*, an exhibition of early and recent works by Doug and Mike Starn. These works, exhibited in New York for the first time, consist of three “pipe-clamp” and “photo-collage” pieces from the 80’s and 90’s, and three pieces realized for the occasion. The theme connecting these works is a constant in the Starns’ philosophical explorations: Time transforms the being and the meaning of everything. This is evidenced in how artworks age, change, and survive. The aging and the passage of time alter the meaning of what was created and conceptualized.

For the Starns the reproduction of a relic of art history signifies both timelessness and evanescence. The inevitable imperfections all art must suffer, and the way in which aging becomes part of a work’s meaning is the core. Before Thomas Struth began his ‘Museum Photographs’, the Starns were taking photographs of artworks in the Louvre and the Staatliche and using them for the basis of their works. Although the artists share similar concerns, the realizations of the works are quite different. For the Starns the photographic medium is not a self-evident reproduction of the real world, but a threshold into a nuanced and complex realm of interpretations and metaphor. The Starns layer images and diverse materials to construct works where, as in Rauschenberg’s, every detail is interdependent and contributes to the physicality of the whole.

From 1989 to 1994, many of the photographic works by Doug and Mike Starn incorporated a scaffolding of iron pipes, clamps, Plexiglas and steel bands, elements that have since become iconic. Although these works may appear at rest, they are constantly animated by the tension created by the clamps, a type of perpetual motion analogous to the inevitability of aging and change. By stressing this anti-stasis, the Starns focus attention on a concrete manifestation of time and space.

In the latter part of the nineties, the Starns focused on light and the Sun, creating an elegiac ensemble of self-illuminated mixed-media vitrines. These directions lead the artists to their interrelated and comprehensive bodies of work from *Absorption of Light*. These series have been acclaimed with exhibitions in the US, Asia and Europe, and published worldwide. Currently the Starns are working on two new series in their scientific and humanist body of work. Magnified more than 1000x, imperfect and broken snowflakes become icons of impermanence in new photomicrographs digitally captured in the field during snowfalls by the artists. Simple and complex, they are all the same and all are different, hexagonal crystals branching from the 6-sided molecule of water.

The Buddhist statue is emblematic of much of the philosophy in the Starns’ work, most significantly in this exhibition as *Impermanence* is one of the essential doctrines of Buddhism. As described in this definition of the Sanskrit term *anitya*: “All compounded phenomena (things and experiences) are inconstant, unsteady, and impermanent. Everything is made up of parts, and is dependent on the right conditions for its existence. Everything is in constant flux, and so conditions and the thing itself are constantly changing.”

The statue of the Bodhisattva Guanyin, the Chinese Buddhist deity of compassion and mercy (photographed in Chinese Art gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art early 2005) is printed

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with the 19th Century color carbon printing technique in which strata of cyan, magenta, yellow and black layers are fused together to build the color image.

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