

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

naming game

Initiated by Cindy Neuschwander for

1708 Gallery, Richmond, Virginia

And made possible in part with funding

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for the Visual Arts.

Exhibition schedule

October 7 – 29, 2005

1708 Gallery

319 West Broad Street

Richmond, Virginia 23241

www.1708gallery.org

November 8 – December 16, 2005

Westby Gallery, Rowan University

201 Mullica Hill Road

Glassboro, New Jersey 08028

www.rowan.edu/westbygallery

June 15 – July 30, 2006

September 5 – 30, 2006

Main Gallery

Fine Arts Center Galleries

University of Rhode Island

Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

www.URI.edu/artgalleries

Jill Moser
naming game

the rules of the game

In the fall of 2002, Jill Moser invited several of her friends (critics, poets, writers, curators and artists involved in the relationship between language and image) to participate in a collaborative project. We had already established a dialogue with Jill and it signified that each of us was familiar with her work and she with ours. This familiarity functioned as the first delimitation, the first rule of a game that she wanted us to play, a game that had resulted from conversations between Jill, Laurie Sheck, a poet and former Princeton colleague and artist Barry LeVa. Jill, unlike some visual artists, is comfortable with language, indeed, delights in it, and is profoundly curious about the ambiguous, ambivalent relationship between image and text. In an exploration of that ambiguity and ambivalence—of the slippage that occurs between the visual and the verbal—she wanted us to suggest word pairs that might become titles for works she had not yet made, a reversal of the more usual procedure. As part of her directive, she wanted us to juxtapose words that had a sense of play, that could be expansive, double-edged, waggish, even scrappy. These word pairs should somehow surprise in their couplings and, in some instances, single words might do double-duty as noun and verb, object and action. Above all, the project was to be structured around the complicated, conspiratorial interplay of word pair and what would be image pair. It was also important in this game that the initial impetus would be extrinsic to the artist, functioning as an outside source, a catalyst, irritant, shake-up or shake-down. Jill thought of these words as the “voices of friends in the studio.”

Thus, the Naming Game was invented, played with nine gamesters (Roger Boyce, David Humphrey, Carolyn Lanchner, Catherine Lee, Nancy Princenthal, Laurie Sheck, Deborah E. Smith and Christine Montross and Lilly Wei*) plus the artist. It ultimately yielded 85 pairs of words, of which 37 so far have been used. A series of paintings, drawings and photocollages of various dimensions have been completed and all are diptychs. The diptychs, sometimes double squares, are most often joined horizontally but occasionally stacked. The diptych format recalled an “open book” and underlined the dialectical nature of the panels’ imagery, both formally and expressively. It also reiterated the internal dynamics of the word pairs and image pairs, how each defined, redefined, intercepted and changed the other. In focusing on the process of naming, it showed us how the object became subject, how, as Emily Dickinson observed, “subjects hinder thoughts,” and how fluid perception is.

For instance, there is “Bloom Shadow,” a word pair conceived by Deborah E. Smith and Christine Montross. The painting it is matched with is softly luminous, threaded with a few ghostly grey loops and lines that in one or two areas are massed together, rubbed and blurred. On the right panel, a

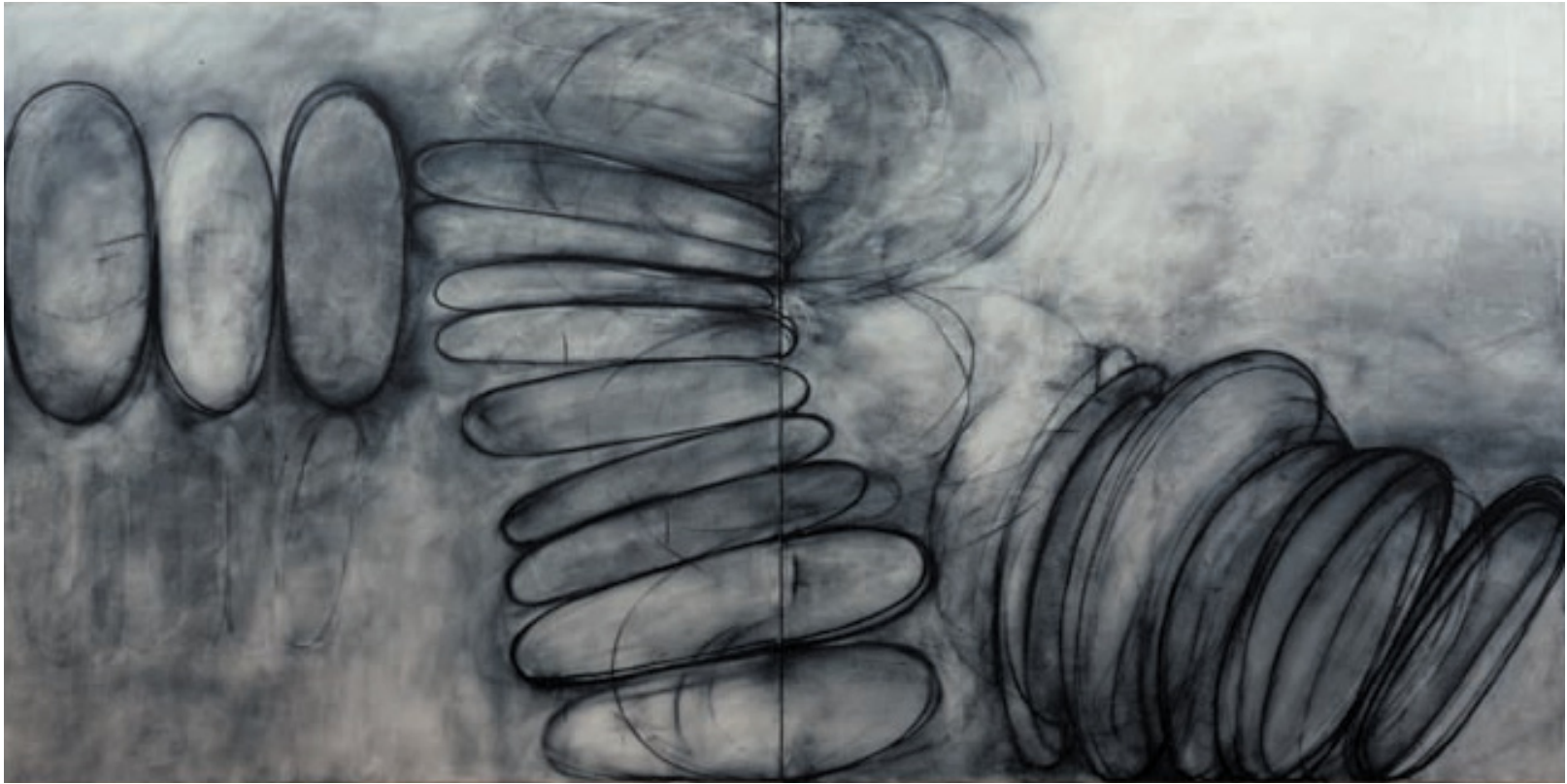
quintet of open red ovals, drawn over similar shapes in grey as if shadowed, seem to hover in the foremost plane while four smaller red links slip gleefully into the left panel. “Bloom Shadow” might be read as an imperative, a shadow play, a feat of magic, or simply as two nouns, a description. “First Hand,” a pairing by Nancy Princenthal, might also be admonitory, an injunction to experience something first hand as primary sensation or knowledge, or to be dealt a first hand. It might also be taken apart, the easy phrase “first hand” separated into “first” and “hand” to produce a different reading that could refer to the painting process and the supremacy of the hand-made. “First Hand” could also push the painting into eschatological territory, with its urgent drawing and stormy ground, its burst of light, its piled and toppled circles that suggest cosmic landscapes, planets in collisions, the universe in its shudder of birth and death. Then there is Tender Ransom, from Laurie Sheck, and its crowd of delicately gilded coils, its hint of romance, its hint of payment—and more; all the alliances are open-ended.

In the Naming Game, deceit always lurks and no absolutes are promised, just implications and reverberations. Even the placement of the panels is not necessarily definitive. Instead, there is an ongoing search, “a puzzling out” and “desire to turn the paintings on their heads,” as Jill says, a stubborn insistence on keeping things loose, discursive, to acknowledge both flux and a temporary stoppage. The Naming Game is a felicitous combination of the open and the closed, of chance, a system of chance, volition and the constantly renewable.

The viewer is requested to play.

Lilly Wei

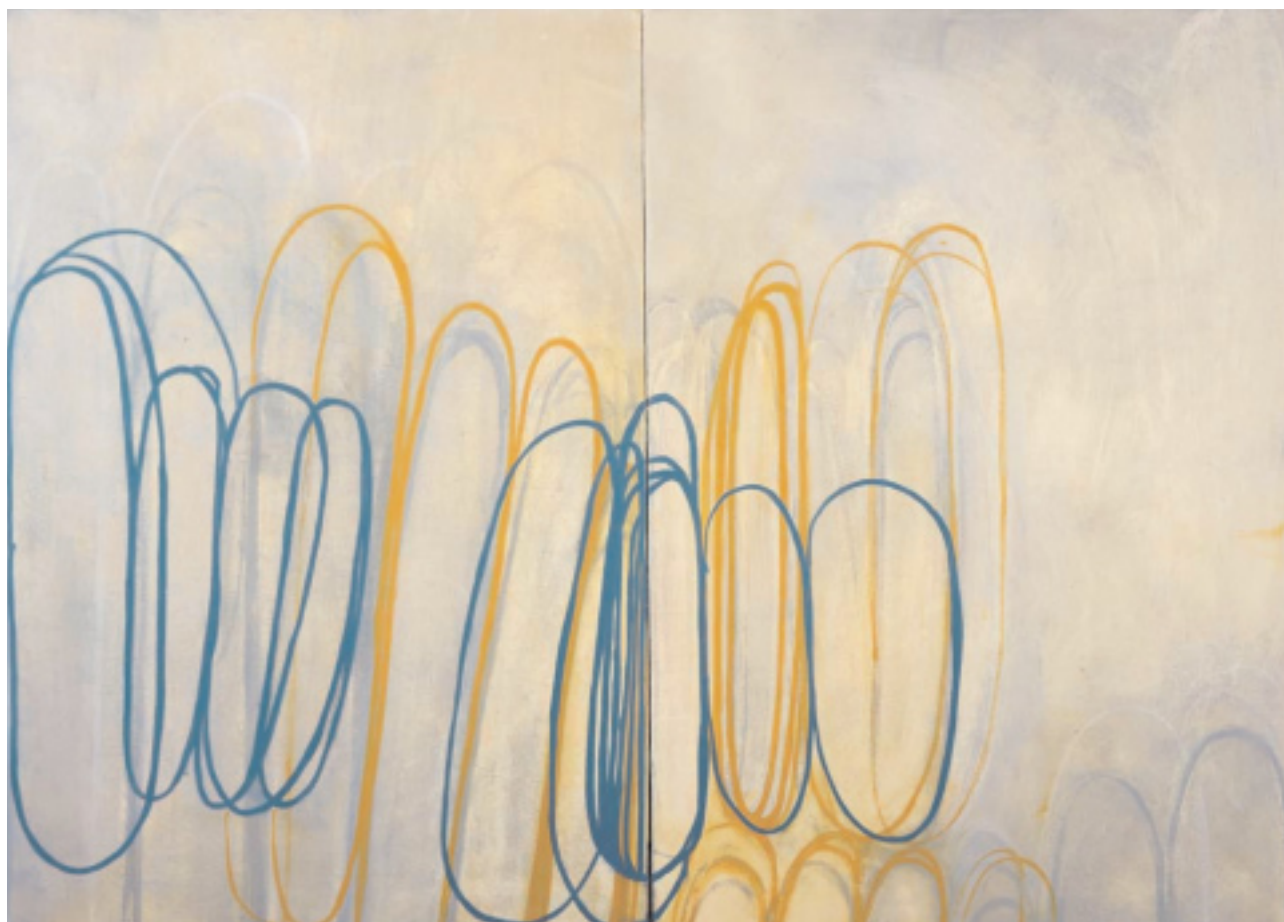
*Getting into the gaming spirit, I wanted to invent my own temporary rules and devise a parallel game. Chance was part of the Naming Game, so chance would be part of my contribution but system was also involved and I wanted to include both, to make a system of chance, as did the Surrealists and the Minimalists and artists such as John Cage, Barry LeVa or Sophie Calle. Several days later, still mulling over the project, I came up with my game plan as I regarded the ever growing, half-ignored, half-read jumble of books by my bed. Closing my eyes, I selected one. It turned out to be Nabokov’s *Speak Memory*. I then counted the number of books in the pile; there were 20. I opened *Speak Memory* at random and from that page and the facing one—which corresponded to Jill’s diptych format—selected two words from each, counting 20 words down the page and up, then making a choice, to come up with my word pair. I did this 20 times for a total of 20 word pairs. It was an arbitrary system but it had intriguing results and was a constellation of words, like numbers in a lottery, that would not likely be repeated in any foreseeable future.



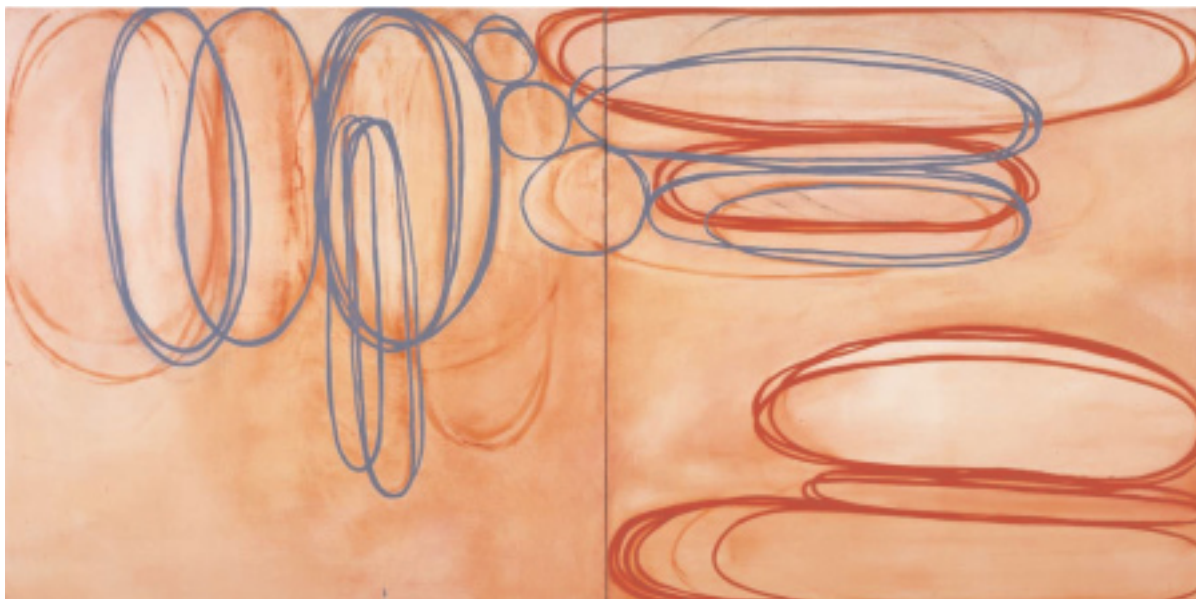
First Hand, 2003
oil on canvas, 68 x 136 inches



Tender Ransom, 2003
oil on canvas, 63 x 170 inches



Westward Swoon, 2003
oil on canvas, 38½ x 54 inches



Blushing Blue, 2003
oil on canvas, 30 x 60 inches



Deborah E. Smith &

Christine Montross



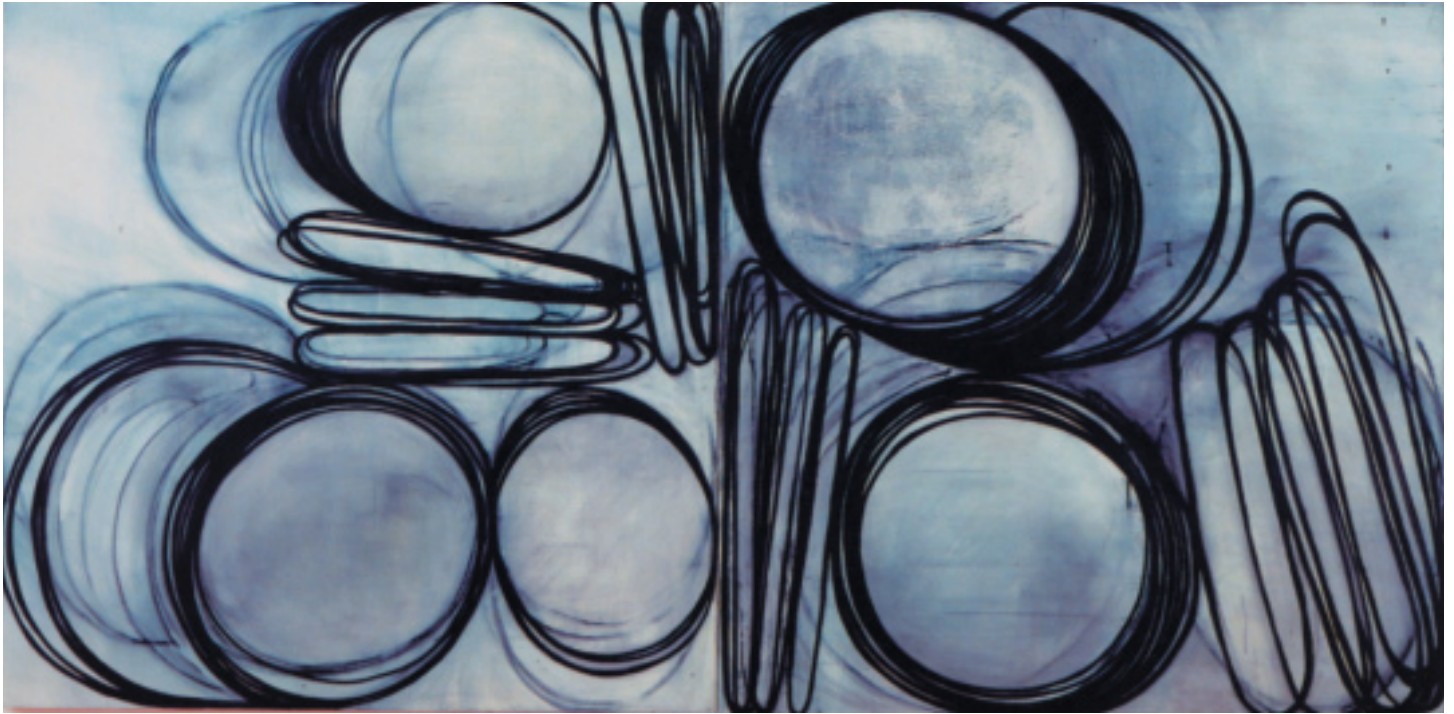
Bloom Shadow, 2003
oil on canvas, 40 x 80 inches



Stone Split, 2002
oil on canvas, 12 x 24 inches

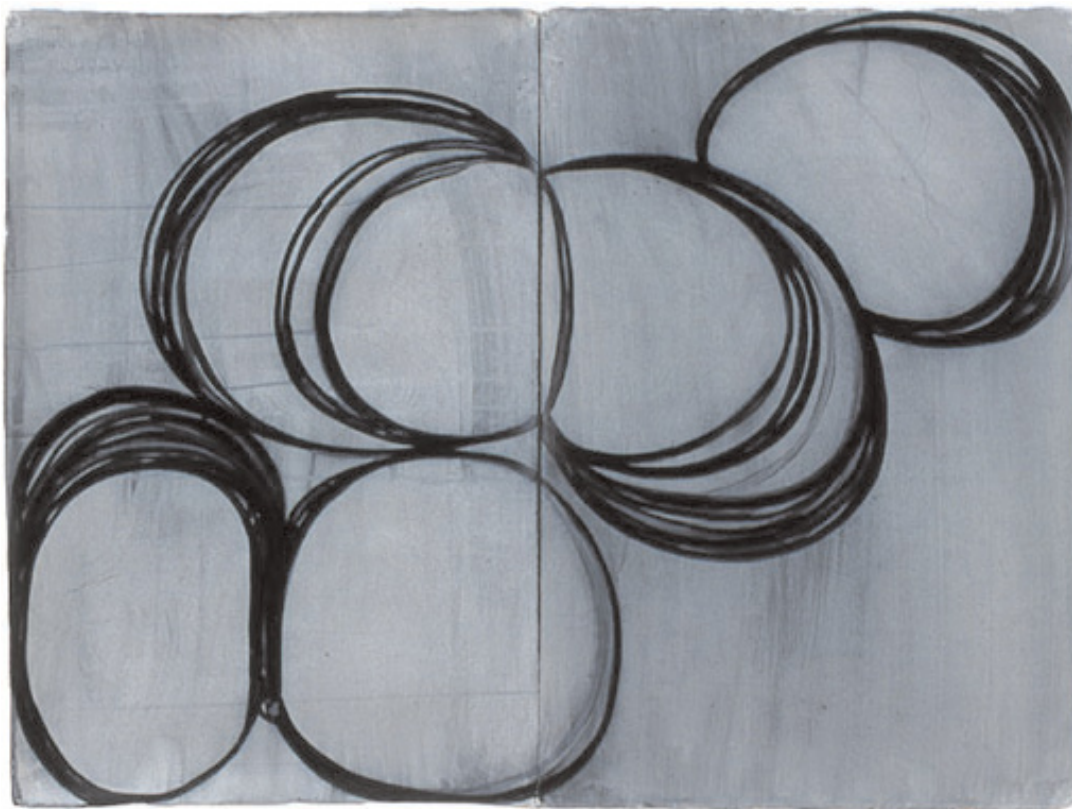


Catherine Lee

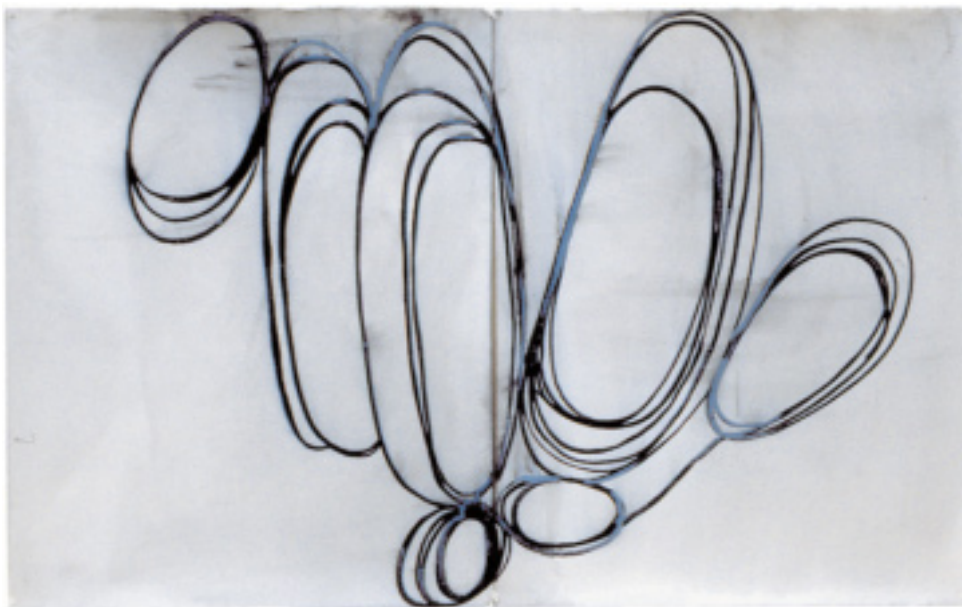


Freeze Frieze, 2002
oil on canvas, 40 x 80 inches
collection of Leslie Chang & Andrew Bahn, NYC





Full Before, 2002
ink on paper 22 x 30 inches



Agile Zipzag, 2002
ink on paper 22 x 30 inches
collection of Richard & Linda Cravey, Atlanta, GA

THE COYOTE

Veering down the track like a girl veering down a cobbled street
in the meat-packing district,
high heels from the night before, black shawl of black-tipped hairs,

steering clear of that fluorescent ring
spray-painted on an even stretch of blacktop
like a ring in which we might once have played keepsies,

veering down the track without the slightest acknowledgement from Angus,
the dog lying in a heap on our porch
like a heap of clothes lying beside a bed,

Angus who had himself been found wandering by the highway
somewhere on the far side of Lake Champlain,
slubber-furred, slammerkin, backbone showing through,

and, though we didn't know it when we brought him home,
blind in one eye, the right one,
the one between him and the coyote,

the cloudy, flaw-fleckered marble of that eye
now turning on you and me,
taking in the spray-painted ring where you and I knuckle down.

Paul Muldoon



Coyote, 2002
photo collage 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
collection of Barry LeVa

With great thanks to all of the players:

Judith Tolnick Champa is Director of the Fine Arts Center Galleries at The University of Rhode Island. She has been an active curator for over twenty years, since her graduate work at Brown University.

Lisa Hatchidoorian is the Director of the Westby Gallery, Rowan University. She is an independent curator and writer who has organized numerous solo and group exhibitions dealing with painterly abstraction and line.

David Humphrey is an artist living in New York City who curates and writes. He is represented by Brent Sikkema Gallery, NYC.

Carolyn Lanchner, Curator emeritus in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, NYC, has organized major retrospectives including Paul Klee, Joan Miro, Fernand Leger as well as Sophie Tauber Arp and Hannah Hoch.

Catherine Lee is a sculptor who lives and works in New York City and rural Texas. A retrospective of her work is currently on view at the Irish Museum of Art, Dublin

Paul Muldoon, Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University, is the author of eleven major collections of poetry including *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002) for which he won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize.

Cindy Neuschwander is a painter living in Richmond, Virginia and curator of *Naming Game* at 1708 Gallery

Nancy Princenthal, a critic based in New York, is a Contributing Editor for *Art in America* and a frequent contributor to several other publications. Her most recent essays include two for *Charta* monographs, on the work of Alfredo Jaar and Catherine Lee.

Laurie Sheck is the author of four books of poems including *Black Series*, Knopf 2001. She was a 2004–2005 Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard.

Deborah E Smith & Christine Montross live together in Providence, Rhode Island. Deborah is a playwright who has just completed a Fulbright at the Abbey Theater in Dublin, Ireland. Christine is studying medicine. Her book on dissecting a cadaver will be published by Penguin Press, Spring 2006.

Lilly Wei, a New York-based art critic and independent curator, writes frequently for *Art in America* and other publications. She is also a contributing editor at ARTnews and Art Asia Pacific.

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Becket Logan

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