

Off Land

**1999 Benjamin Menschel Fellowship**

Exhibition



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1999

**Exhibition Dates**

November 15–21, 1999

The Cooper Union

Foundation Building

New York City

on the cover: Rona Chang (detail)

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Exhibition

The Benjamin Menschel Fellowship Program to support creative inquiry was endowed by a grant given to The Cooper Union by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation in 1994 to support work in the fields of art, architecture, design and engineering. This generous grant was intended to provide funding to exceptional students who propose scholarly, independent projects that will in some way provide a culmination to their educational endeavors at The Cooper Union. It is the hope of the Goldsmith Foundation that students designated as Benjamin Menschel Fellows will be encouraged by their awards to complete bodies of artwork, develop scientific protocols, or otherwise further their intellectual investigations in a manner that will provide inspiration and illumination to the community as a whole.

Boshra Al-Saadi, Kerry Carnahan, Rona Chang, and Augusta Wood express their gratitude to the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation for its generous support.

**Cooper Collection**

**Boshra Al-Saadi**

The images in this body of work were taken in Damascus, Syria. The photographs themselves emulate the billboards and signs they depict, advertising a misrecognized society that finds itself repeatedly distorted by the very market culture it appropriates. These images strive for familiarization through the ubiquitous image-language of consumerism, which seems to interrupt the oft-cited "timelessness" of urban Damascus. This combination reflects a larger cultural hybridization, which defies such traditional contrasts as Occident/Orient, East/West, and so on. There is no room for such divisions in the thick of city life, shown here in an effort to alter the understanding of the Middle East in the United States so often mediated by the popular imagery of cinema, television, and newscasts.



**Kerry Carnahan**

On Good Friday, 1964, an earthquake measuring 9.2 on the Richter scale devastated the southern coastal area of Alaska. New topographies and ecosystems were created instantaneously by shifting tectonic plates; high bluffs became beaches and freshwater environments turned to salt (and vice-versa). Houses along the Seward Highway were submerged, a span of the Miles Glacier Bridge over the Copper River collapsed, and the city of Valdez slid into the sea. Over time, the landscape has absorbed these structures, and the photographs in this exhibition represent a visual documentation of these new landscapes created by the Good Friday earthquake.

In the case of the Miles Glacier bridge, the collapse of the span simply boils down to an insufficient bearing length, meaning the top of pier four was not wide enough to support the movements of span four as the ground under the bridge shifted laterally as much as four feet. The very same structural defect recently caused the unnecessary collapse of several highway bridges in California supposedly designed to withstand seismic events. In earthquake-prone areas, rebuilding becomes a Sisyphean task unless engineers are able to examine recorded failures and learn from design mistakes.



**Rona Chang**

I am one of many things that are "Made in Taiwan." The attachment I have to Chinese tradition has turned this body of work toward the water and land I long for every day I am not there. But through the lens of my camera I can make the passage from west to east and back again.

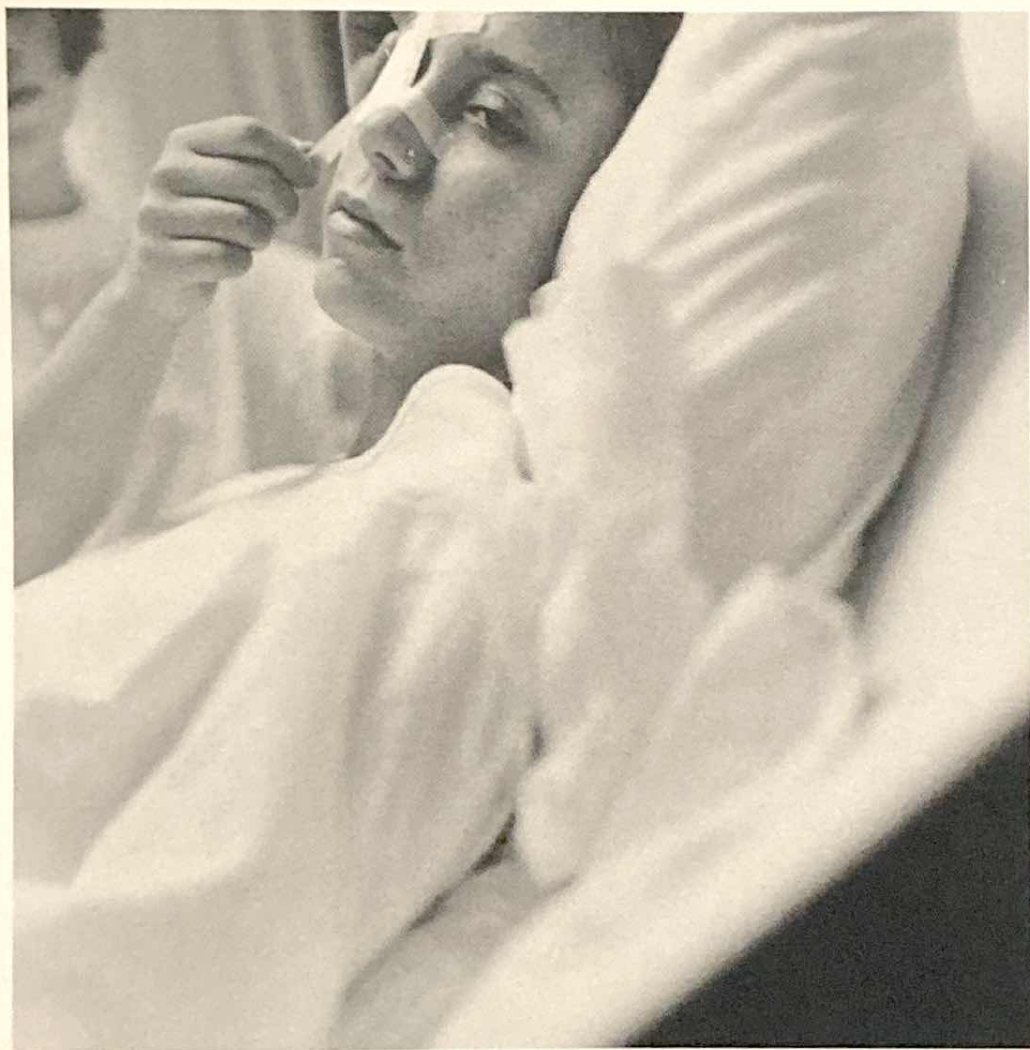
These photographs express my fascination with the diversity of the Taiwanese landscape. The mountainous island is quite industrial and by no means traditional, its principal pastime being "KTV"—karaoke in private rooms. Still, the Taiwan I love remains the Ilha Formosa, "the island of the beautiful," as the Portuguese first described it. But in 1999 the landscapes I have photographed cannot disguise the presence of the industrialized classes that inhabit the island. Factories, networks of wire, and trashbags blowing in the wind awaken me from my romanticized dream of Taiwan. The images here come from parking lots, roadsides, tourist footpaths — not the deep woods of Chinese tradition. The landscapes pictured here are almost as accessible as the Seven-Eleven stores on the corners of the streets. And they make it possible for me to imagine that I am a world away, in my own Formosa.





Augusta Wood

each day a smooth white linen wrapped around again.  
around and flush against a raised landscape around the two new parts,  
drawn together into a seam.  
outside, stiff leaves spread open and blink closed on the moment,  
making memory of ritual.  
the inside out photograph tells of this.  
a metal lace binds the edges where the cloth has parted,  
holds the line, maintains the line, until there is no line  
but for soft pink closure.  
still light must not touch it. for days a tent must cast its cool shadow  
on the new layer.  
it does not wrinkle, but will change form. it is ageless, but tells of history.  
fashioned for it, dressings, moving over the ridge around the swelling,  
wrapping around and  
shifting line and shape and color with the shifting days.  
here today, there tomorrow.  
each day the dressing ritual remains the same, yet the dressing is different,  
for the soft line of history moves.



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