

# SANDY SKOGLUND





# Beyond Real:



*Shimmering Madness*, 1998 Color Photograph © Skoglund

## The Art of Sandy Skoglund

September 9 – November 20, 2005

Curated by Nancy Cohen and Alice Dillon

**New Jersey Center for Visual Arts**  
68 Elm Street, Summit, NJ 07901 [www.njcva.org](http://www.njcva.org)



# Sandy Skoglund, Wonderwoman

I think Sandy Skoglund must have loved Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* because her work is about, among other things, a plague of butterflies. Like cats or squirrels, dogs, even babies, butterflies are living things we are comfortable with as long as there aren't too many of them to control and they keep a comfortable distance. A glimpse of a squirrel leaving a porch is now a little disturbing to me, having seen them out of control, all over the porch and invading the house in Skoglund's *Gathering Paradise*, 1991. It's a matter of quantity. The same goes for the food: fear of falling with jelly beans underfoot; fear of poisoning in a cheese doodle-covered world; fear of death by being coated with hamburger meat. Even benign popcorn can seem potentially smothering if it's everywhere. And it's a matter of timing — a swarm of dragonflies in a snowstorm or naked babies on green-less grass at a leafless park pond or dozens of squirrels foraging for food at an abandoned drive-in movie theater — and appropriateness — snakes in a bathroom, foxes in a restaurant, cheese doodles at a cocktail party. Skoglund's surreality rides a pendulum swinging from wondrous beauty to downright disgusting and back again.

Until *Shimmering Madness* in 1998, one constant in Skoglund's work was its stillness. Nothing moved in the installations and only she saw the live models move into their places in those installations for her to freeze them in photographs. Even then, they were usually seen from the back or with their faces averted, not interacting with each other or with her behind the camera. Closed systems, like all the carefully, often painstakingly hand-wrought parts of Skoglund's complex pieces. The movement is mechanical, controlled by motorized devices beneath or

behind the panels to which the butterflies (*Shimmering Madness*), dragonflies and miniature figures (*Breathing Glass*, 2000), or popcorn-bedecked pipe cleaners (*Raining Popcorn*, 2001), are affixed. With movement that can be experienced only in front of the actual installation, the situation of the photograph has changed a bit — it can't give the viewer all the information needed to understand the piece. Some of the effect has to be imagined unless you actually see these installations.

*Shimmering Madness* was/is a madcap joyful romp in a jelly bean and butterfly-filled, pre-millennium, pre-World Trade Center disaster era. The two installations in this exhibition evoke a very different time. *Breathing Glass* feels millennial — beautiful, futuristic, discombobulating, and frightening. *Raining Popcorn* is not upbeat despite the association one makes between popcorn and entertainment. It was completed before the September 11th tragedy, but its air of stunned silence, woundedness, and forlorn hopelessness was prophetic. So many people carried through the raining ash dressed for work like this woman. Just as Skoglund's artworks are complex to construct, they are equally complex to deconstruct having multiple levels of meaning — formal, personal, psychological, political, religious, sociological, iconographical, and art historical. Her in-depth research can take many months, so the viewer is unlikely to read all the significance out of the work that she has put into it.

Breathing glass is impossible — you would die. And even though glass is everywhere in this installation — on the floor/ceiling and the figures in the form of a blue glass mosaic, on the wall as lamp-worked clear glass dragonflies — none of it is harmfully sharp. The dragonflies flutter beautifully as they have for 300 million years, being one of the loveliest



and most ancient insects on earth. They are without the power to harm anything except the small insects they eat, surviving this long because they readily adapt, but our rapid devastation of their watery breeding sites has begun to endanger them. They flutter amid miniature marshmallows' scattered in clumps like falling snow. The nuclear family standing improbably on their heads on the blue glass mosaic floor are poised as if in mid movement. They are surrounded by tiny moving figures controlled

by the mechanical devices in the floor panels that magnify them to gargantuan size in comparison. In the artist's finalizing photograph, however, with the introduction of two living figures into the space between the man and the woman, figures that seem to be reeling as they try to maintain a balance in this ambiguous, vertiginous world, the mosaic family is seen to be attached to the floor by their heads or to be standing on the wall. The single sure clue one has to the actuality of the live figures' feet being on the mosaic floor is the reflection of their bright skin in the dark blue glass. But no one has ever made the case that truth and art must go together. The installation and the photograph are two independent "sur-realities."

*Shimmering Madness* and *Breathing Glass* were relatively minimal undertakings for Sandy Skoglund compared to *Raining Popcorn*, which is more like other mammoth undertakings such as *Walking on Eggshells*, 1997, with its hundreds of prepared

eggshells, sculpted epoxy resin snakes and rabbits, cast paper bathroom fixtures, and 900 cast paper relief-printed "wall tiles" giving the pictorial history of the rabbit and the snake in mythology and popular thought over the millennia. Of course she lamp-worked all of the hundreds of dragonflies herself, just as she learned how to sculpt with epoxy resin, to make ceramic goldfish and to cast bronze leaves for past installations. Each piece usually starts with a substance she wants to work with. She



Installation, *Breathing Glass*, 2000



has coffee beans in her studio now, but it may be years before she finds a meaningful way to use them. And with every edible or fragile material comes a different set of problems to solve about its maintenance. Popcorn is no exception and each piece applied to a surface (not the piles on the floor) was hand-dipped in epoxy resin. Originally, the popcorn was going to be strung on wires in waves across the floor inspired by “amber waves of grain” in song. The ever-present cornfields around the University of Iowa where she went to graduate school,<sup>2</sup> and the historical cultural resonance of popcorn back to the ancients on this hemisphere were two causes for her liking the idea of using it. Thinking about falling, since the other two movement pieces were about flying, she conceived of the top down motion of the popcorn strung on the red pipe cleaners all over the motorized wall panels as imitating falling rain.



Installation Setup, *Raining Popcorn*, 2001

Photograph, © Skoglund

Usually each sculptural and human element in the final photograph of an installation has its own space, *Cocktail Party*, 1992, being the exception that proves the rule. In *Raining Popcorn*, only the left foreground figure is not overlapped by anything. Thus, neither the overall flatness of the photographed image nor its visual unity is sought here, and the result is very sculptural. The presence of a person with a different skin color, one that contrasts with the overall whiteness of the scene, also disrupts that unity and emphasizes the three dimensionality of the scene and its narrative content. Dressed in white street clothes the three living characters seem to be victims, suddenly homeless, seeking help and warmth. The woman being carried seems to gaze longingly at the fire. What disaster has befallen them? What will they do when the snow snuffs out the fire? Where will they turn? A new filmic quality seems to have invaded this quiet world.

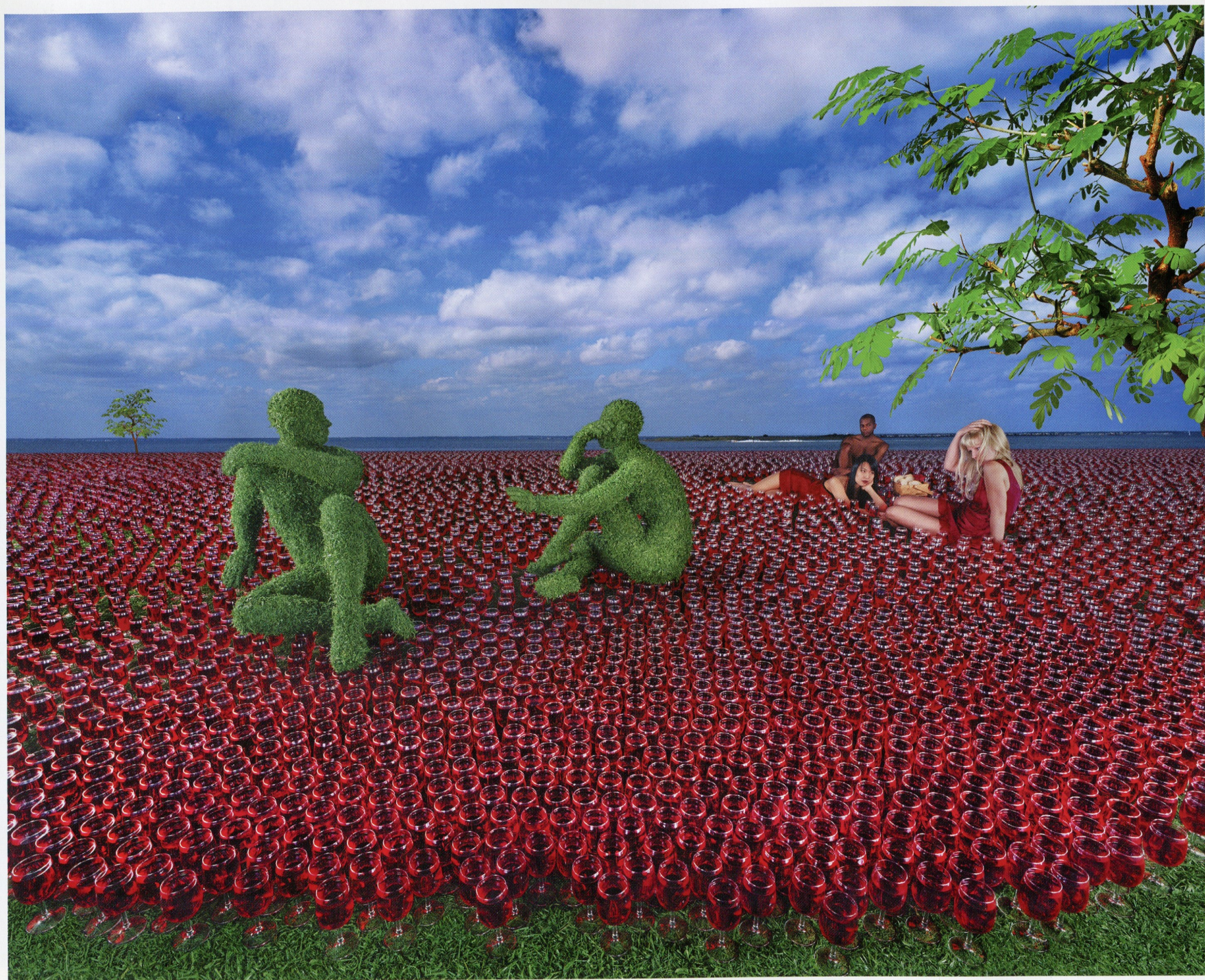
*April Kingsley*

Curator, Kresge Art Museum

<sup>1</sup> The sap of the root of the marsh mallow plant was used in ancient Egypt and since to thicken and flavor a honey-based candy. In the mid-1800s gelatin began being substituted for the marsh grown plant. Dragonflies breed in marshes and when they emerge from their watery pupal stage they usually ascend the stem of a marsh plant to dry out and let their wings emerge so they can fly to their new adult, air-breathing life.

<sup>2</sup> She actually stuffed a sewn sculpture of a starfish with popcorn she had painted pink for a project there decades ago.















# EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

## Installations:

### ***Raining Popcorn*, 2001**

Popcorn, popcorn sealed with resin, sculpted figures,  
tree branches, motorized parts  
Dimensions variable

### ***Breathing Glass*, 2000**

Hand-made glass dragonflies, mini-marshmallows,  
mosaic tile, sculpted figures, motorized parts  
Dimensions variable

## Photographs:

### ***Picnic on Wine*, 2003**

Color photograph  
40 x 52 inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***Raining Popcorn*, 2001**

Color photograph  
39 x 49½ inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***Breathing Glass*, 2000**

Color photograph  
Overall 44½ x 57½ in.  
Courtesy Museum of Art and Design, New York  
Gift of Sandy Skoglund, 2004

### ***Walking on Eggshells*, 1997**

Color photograph  
47¾ x 60 inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***Shimmering Madness*, 1998**

Color photograph  
36 x 46 inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***The Green House*, 1990**

Color photograph  
46¼ x 59¼ inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***Fox Games*, 1989**

Color photograph  
46¼ x 63 inches  
Courtesy the artist

### ***A Breeze at Work*, 1987**

Color photograph  
38 x 54 inches  
Courtesy the artist











# CHRONOLOGY

## 1946

Born in Quincy, Massachusetts.

## 1968

B.A. Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

## 1971

M.A. University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

## 1972

M.F.A. University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

Moves to New York City and sets up studio in Little Italy. Becomes interested in conceptual art.

## 1973-1975

Begins using repetition influenced by minimalism and conceptualism. During this period, does some performance art pieces using food. Makes obsessive line drawings.

## 1976

Begins teaching at Rutgers University, Newark where she is currently a professor.

## 1977

Decides to devote her time to photography. Begins with commercial-looking black and white still-lives of domestic objects.

## 1978

Begins making colored photographs of still-lives of food on patterned backgrounds.

First big break—a summer group show at Castelli Graphics, New York City.

## 1979

Constructs mundane interior spaces filled with domestic objects such as clothes hangers and plastic spoons. Includes human figures before photographing the scene. These are the earliest of Skoglund's staged settings or performances.

## 1980

Makes an installation called *Radioactive Cats*, which has become part of the collective unconscious of many art viewers. Begins sculpting her own objects for her installations. Exhibits both the installation and related photograph which includes real people.

## 1981

Has a one-person show at Castelli Graphics where *Revenge of the Goldfish* is shown as an installation and as a photograph. Photographs of *Revenge of the Goldfish* and *Radioactive Cats* are shown at the Whitney Biennial, solidifying Skoglund's burgeoning reputation.

## 1987

*A Breeze at Work*, installation and photograph is commissioned by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, as part of the exhibition *Sculpture into Photography*.

## 1989

The Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, commissions *Fox Games* for its exhibition on the history of photography called *The Invention of an Art*.

## 1992

Skoglund begins a new aspect of her oeuvre. She installs her sculptures in outdoor settings, photographs them, and prints lithographs of the new images.

## 1997

Skoglund's alma mater, Smith College, commissions *Walking on Eggshells* to accompany her retrospective *Reality Under Siege*. Harry N. Abrams publishes book in conjunction with this traveling retrospective exhibition.

## 1998

*Shimmering Madness*, an installation consisting of jellybean-covered figures and thousands of hand-painted butterflies fluttering against a black background, is commissioned by Rutgers University.

## 2000

Creates and installs *Breathing Glass* commissioned by the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Art and Design), New York City. The installation toured throughout the United States for the next four years.

## 2001

Creates and installs *Raining Popcorn* at the Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, Iowa.

## 2003-present

Becomes a full-time resident of Jersey City, New Jersey. Continues to develop her ideas for installations, print-making and photography.







# SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

## 2005

*Beyond Real: The Art of Sandy Skoglund*

New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, Summit, New Jersey

September 9–November 20

## 2004

*Sandy Skoglund: Enchanting the Real*

Copia: The American Center for

Wine, Food and the Arts

Napa, California

January 30–April 12

## 2002

*Sandy Skoglund: Shimmering Madness*

Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio

(Permanent installation)

*Sandy Skoglund: Raining Popcorn*

Johnson Museum of Art

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

April 6–August 11

## 2001

*Raining Popcorn*, installation

and photograph

Commissioned by Faulconer Gallery of

Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa

June 1–September 16

*Sandy Skoglund:*

*Contemporary Masters Series*

Bergen Hall Gallery

Savannah College of Art and Design,

Savannah, Georgia

January 20–March 17





## SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS (cont.)

### 2001 (cont.)

Smith College Museum of Art, Northhampton, Massachusetts  
Permanent Installation with ceramic tiles and fixtures  
In collaboration with the Kohler Art Center  
and Kohler Company, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

### 2000

*Breathing Glass*, installation and photograph  
Commissioned by the American Craft Museum:  
May 31–September 3. Traveled to Fay Gold Gallery,  
Atlanta, Georgia; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester,  
New York; The Hunter Museum, Chattanooga, Tennessee; The Palm  
Springs Desert Museum, Palm Springs, California

### *Sandy Skoglund*

Installations of *The Cocktail Party*, *Walking on Eggshells*,  
*Shimmering Madness*, and a photographic survey  
Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, Florida  
April 1–June 11

### 1999

*Shimmering Madness* installation  
Rutgers University, Robeson Gallery, Newark, New Jersey  
October 8–November 25

### 1998

*Reality Under Seige*, mid-career retrospective  
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts  
March 12–May 24  
Traveled to the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio: June 27–August  
13, 1998; Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina: October  
12, 1998–January 3, 1999; The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio:  
February 14–May 2, 1999; The Jacksonville Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Jacksonville, Florida: September 10–November 7, 1999

### 1997

*Walking on Eggshells*, installation and photograph  
Commissioned by Smith College

### 1996

*Sandy Skoglund: Teaching Contemporary Art*. ArtsEdNet, The Getty  
Education Institute for the Arts: [www.artsednet.getty.edu/](http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/). On-line  
discussion with the artist, January–May; on-line exhibition  
with archived discussions and curriculum materials

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

### 2001

*Rags to Riches*, traveling exhibition of paper-based art sponsored and  
curated by Dieu Donne Papermill, New York City. Traveled to Kresge Art  
Museum, East Lansing, Michigan: September 4–October 28, 2001;  
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Manhattan, Kansas: April 2–June  
30, 2002; Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York: November  
23, 2002–January 27, 2003; Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee,  
Wisconsin: April 11–June 22, 2003.

*Is Seeing Believing?* North Carolina Museum of Art,  
Raleigh, North Carolina, January 14–April 1

### 2000

*Cast of Characters: Figurative Sculpture* Albuquerque Museum,  
Albuquerque, New Mexico January 23–March 26

### 1999

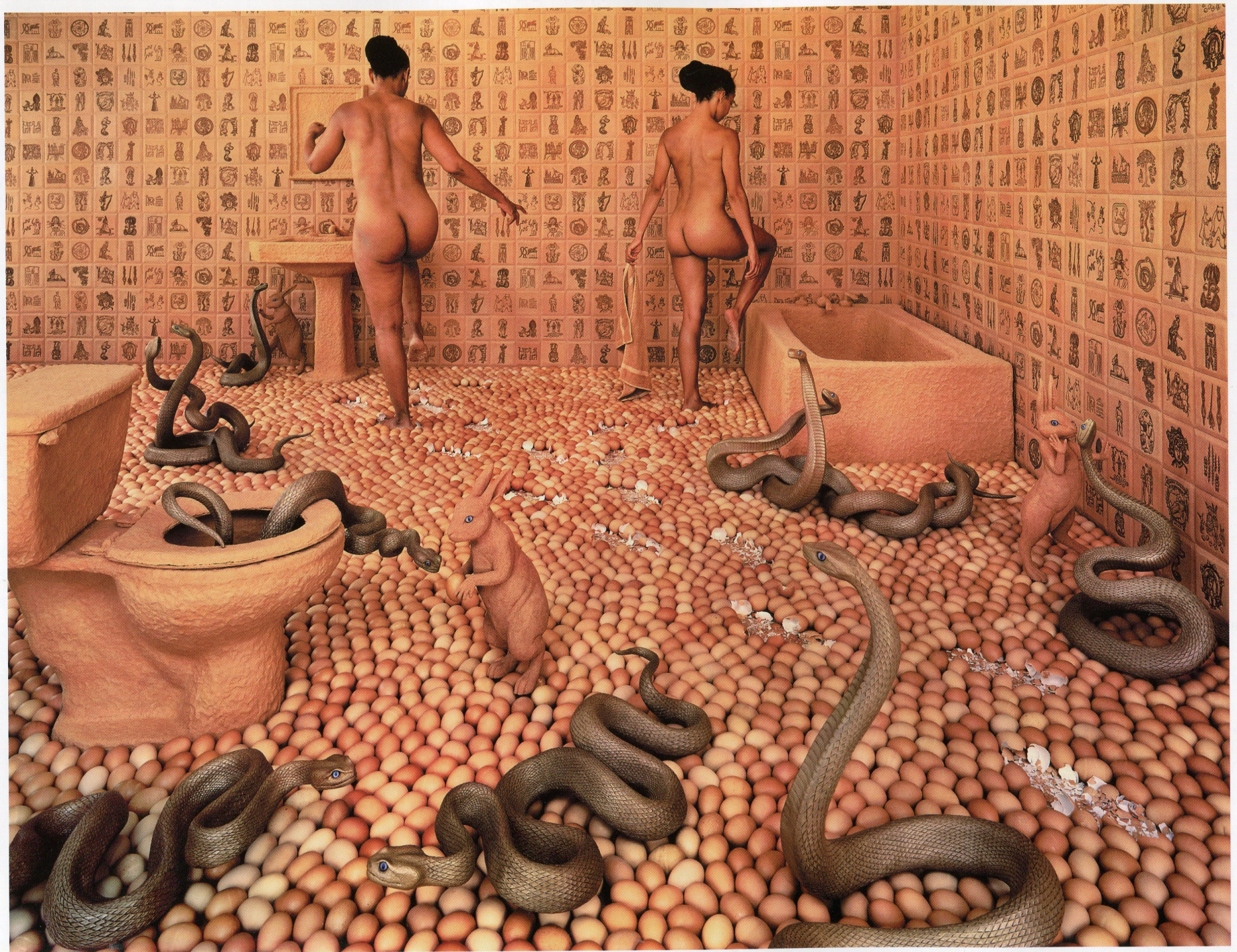
*Food for Thought* New Jersey Center for Visual Arts,  
Summit, New Jersey March 21–May 2

*Almost Warm and Fuzzy: Childhood and Contemporary Art*,  
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa, September 12–November 21.  
Traveled through 2002

### 1997

*Making it Real*, Organized by Independent Curators, Inc.,  
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Ridgefield, Connecticut, January 19–April 20







## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS (cont.)

### 1996

*Telling Stories*, Jacksonville Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Florida, March 14–April 29

*Photography in the 1990s*, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, February 11–March 17

### 1995

*Photography Today*. Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea, March 31–May 31

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 2005

Kingsley, April. "Sandy Skoglund Wonderwoman" in *Beyond Real: The Art of Sandy Skoglund* (exhibition catalogue) Summit, New Jersey: New Jersey Center for Visual Arts.

### 2004

Palmer, Brian. "Our (Wacky) American Life," *Rutgers Magazine*, Fall, 2004, vol. 84, number 2.

Tanguy, Sarah. *Enchanting the Real*, (exhibition catalogue) Napa, California: Copia, The American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts.

### 2001

Van Baron, Dr. Judith. "Sandy Skoglund," in *Contemporary Masters* (exhibition catalogue), Savannah, Georgia: Bergen Hall Gallery, Savannah College of Art and Design.

Heiferman, Marvin. "Serious Thoughts Are Popping Up" in *Raining Popcorn* (exhibition catalogue) Des Moines, Iowa: Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College.

### 2000

Frank, Peter. *Cast of Characters: Figurative Sculpture* (exhibition catalogue) The Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Piguet, Philippe. "Sandy Skoglund, un monde autre," in *Sandy Skoglund* (exhibition catalogue), Geneva, Switzerland: Galerie Gui Bärtschi, Cie S.A.

### 1999

Bischoff, Dan. "A Matter of Taste," *Newark Star Ledger*, Newark, New Jersey, April 4.

### 1998

Rosenblum, Robert, Sandy Skoglund, Linda Muehlig, Ann H. Sievers and Carol Squiers. *Reality Under Seige: A Retrospective* (exhibition catalogue) Smith College Museum of Art. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

### 1993

Schwendenwein, Jude. "Sandy Skoglund: Interview," *Journal of Contemporary Art* 6, no. 1 (summer): pp. 87-93.

### 1992

Cole, Elizabeth. "Fantasy Environments: The Tableau Photography of Sandy Skoglund," *School Arts*, January, pp. 23-27.

### 1991

Richardson, Nan. "Sandy Skoglund: Wild at Heart," *Art News* (April): pp. 114-119.

### 1989

Perreault, John. "Through a Glass Darkly," *Artforum* 27, no. 7 (March): pp. 106-112.

### 1987

Hoy, Anne H. *Fabrications: Staged, Altered, and Appropriated Photographs*. New York: Abbeville Press.



# Acknowledgments

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**Eric Pryor**  
*President, New Jersey Center for Visual Arts*









