

PAUL OUTERBRIDGE
JO ANN CALLIS
TAKING SHAPE
MADE FOR MANUFACTURE

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Jo Ann Callis. *Woman with Blue Bow*, 1977. Chromogenic print. Gift of Gay Block, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © Jo Ann Callis.

THE GETTY MUSEUM OFFERS INTIMATE GLIMPSE INTO THE PROVOCATIVE WORK OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ARTIST JO ANN CALLIS

Jo Ann Callis: Woman Twirling

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center,
March 31–August 9, 2009

LOS ANGELES— *Jo Ann Callis: Woman Twirling*, at the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center, March 31–August 9,

2009, offers an intimate glimpse into the provocative photographic work of Southern California artist Jo Ann Callis. A pioneering photographer, Callis (American, b. Ohio, 1940) established a reputation in the 1980s as one of the first artists to construct sets and create situations specifically for the purpose of being photographed. Fabricated tableaux of the 1980s and 1990s dominate this photographs exhibition selected from the Getty's holdings, including gifts from the photographer Gay Block, and the artist's own archive.

In 1977, Susan Sontag's now-classic collection of serious criticism, *On Photography*, brought photography to center stage. That same year, Callis, an art student at the University of California, Los Angeles, who had learned to draw, paint, and photograph, received her master of fine arts degree. Her mentor, legendary art professor Robert Heinecken, taught that photographs should be made, not found, and Callis has been constructing photographs, as well as paintings and sculpture, in her studio ever since. Over the past 30 years, she has borrowed inspiration from her memories of the Midwest, as well as the best of Los Angeles' traditions in film and design.

Created mainly in the studio from temporary sets and scripted performances, these photographs include black-and-white still life assemblages and early nudes; staged scenes realized in Ektacolor and dye transfer; an installation composed of lush dessert pastries in glossy Cibachrome color; and a recent series of baby portraits, infant children presented digitally against a manipulated background.

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In *Jo Ann Callis: Woman Twirling*, Callis's recurring domestic themes of interiors (particularly bedrooms), still life assembled from household objects, children, and animals will be well represented. In order to illustrate many aspects of the artist's recent career, loans will include small paintings based on photographs that Callis has produced over the past ten years.

One of the photographic gems in the exhibition is *Woman with Blue Bow* (1977), a chromogenic photograph Callis printed herself at the Orange County College photo lab. Callis set up this pose against decorative wallpaper, displaying blue bamboo leaves and swooping yellow lovebirds. The young model, her head tilted back awkwardly, wears a lacy white gown, a kind of debutante's dress, held up with narrow blue satin cord that ties, not behind, but in front after wrapping tightly around her neck. Her face is not visible, another Callis practice. Short curly brown hair is seen at the sides of her neck, emphasizing her youth and the vulnerability of her neck. Rather than being presented as an adult ready for dating, the young woman appears to be offered for sacrifice, with the swarming birds ready for new prey.

"Callis's work has a Hitchcock-like bent," says Judith Keller, who curated the exhibition. "She has a tendency to create a scene subtly loaded with the attractive as well as the troubling."

Her work has been presented in more than twenty one-person shows and numerous group exhibitions, such as the landmark 1991 Museum of Modern Art show "Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort," a powerful exhibition that included the work of 63 American photographers, among them others who invented their own domesticity, like Gregory Crewdson, Nic Nicosia, Laurie Simmons, and Cindy Sherman. Her work also appeared in the earlier MOMA show, "California Photography: Remaking Make-Believe" (1989), and she was one of the artists in the National Museum of American Art survey of 1989, "The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 80s."

More recently, Callis was the subject of a one person show, "Jo Ann Callis: Domestic Setups," at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in 1995, and a monographic show, "Jo Ann Callis: Cake, Hat, Pillow," in fall 2004 at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson. In spring 2007, her work was a prominent component of the show, "Rebels and Revelers," held at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego. As an instructor in photography at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) for more than twenty years, Callis has exerted a strong formative influence on young artists in the Los Angeles area.

Keller adds, "Over the past two decades, Callis has pushed her investigations of domestic drama and decor into new areas, from traditional oil painting on gessoed canvas to the infinite possibilities of digital scanning, layering, and printing."

Jo Ann Callis: Woman Twirling will be shown alongside ***Paul Outerbridge: Command Performance***, an exhibition which presents the work of American artist, Paul Outerbridge, who was considered a visionary for his use of color and his efforts to raise advertising photography to the status of art.

Jo Ann Callis: Woman Twirling is curated by Judith Keller, acting head of the Department of Photographs.

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