



GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL

BRUCE NAUMAN

Soft Ground Etchings and Infrared Outtakes

September 6 – October 20, 2007

One of the most versatile and influential contemporary artists, Bruce Nauman moves effortlessly between sculpture, video, film, sound installation, drawing and printmaking. Since the 1960's, he has experimented with emerging technology, including video, holography, neon, infrared film, as well as a wide range of printmaking techniques. His two recent series published by the Los Angeles-based artists workshop, Gemini G.E.L., *Soft Ground Etchings* and *Infrared Outtakes*, find their source in early photographs taken on infrared film. Gemini's first series of digital photographs, *Infrared Outtakes*, and a related series, Nauman's first-ever soft ground etchings aptly and simply titled, *Soft Ground Etchings*, will be on view from September 6 – October 20, 2007 at **Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Moisant Weyl** at 980 Madison, 5th Floor New York, New York.

In the mid-60s while a student at University of California, Davis, Nauman's work began to focus primarily on his own body in performances pieces, films, sculpture, and drawing. He made a list titled "Codification" that provides insight as to his concerns at that point in his career. The first two items on the list are 1.) Personal appearance and skin and 2.) Gestures. He made a pen and wash drawing in 1967 titled *Both Lips Turned Out / Mouth Open / Upper Lip Pushed...* As was often the case at that time, his drawing was a pre-cursor to another project. Nauman approached photographer and friend, Jack Fulton, and asked him to document a session of himself "making faces" that were similar to those in the drawing. Always eager to explore non-traditional art-making materials, Nauman wanted these photographs taken on infrared film with a yellow filter, which lent his skin an eerie yellowish quality. These photographs became the source images for Nauman's iconic series, *Studies for Holograms* (1970), published by Castelli Gallery.

Other images from this session were underexposed and sat dormant in his studio for almost 40 years, unable to be processed until digital technology was developed. In preparation for the exhibition, *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960's*, curator Constance M. Lewallen unearthed some of these underexposed images and Nauman worked with the original photographer, Jack Fulton, to breathe new life into them digitally. Nauman approached Gemini to publish the series *Infrared Outtakes* as part of the workshop's 40th Anniversary program, and it is these four inkjet prints that are the seminal images for this exhibition.

Inspired by these images and a return to the Gemini workshop in Los Angeles, where he had been making prints since the early 70's, Nauman began his work on the series of six *Soft Ground Etchings*. Soft ground is an etching technique for drawing a softer, more textured line similar to charcoal, crayon and pencil. The soft ground process allows the artist to draw directly on paper offering a more familiar feel than drawing on a polished copper surface. For this reason, these prints rival the sensuality and fluidity of his drawing. Initially, drawing from the *Infrared Outtakes*, he resolved the etchings related to *Neck Pull*, *Hands Only*, and *Cockeye Lips*. He returned to the workshop armed with images from *Studies for Holograms*—(*Pinched Lips*, *Pulled Cheeks* and *Squeezed Lips*) to create 3 more editions for this series. Originally conceived to be black and white, as the project progressed Nauman decided that each image needed a colored background and an aquatint was applied to achieve the effect.



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Nauman is an artist's-artist – greatly admired and closely observed by his contemporaries as well as younger generations of artists. These two projects in the exhibition – with their visual, technical and conceptual range – make it clear to see why.

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BRUCE NAUMAN at GEMINI

Infrared Outtakes and Soft Ground Etchings

Bruce Nauman's two new print series, *Infrared Outtakes* and *Soft Ground Etchings* find their common source in photographs he made nearly forty years ago, in 1968. Nauman, who had then just received his MA from the University of California, Davis, was living and working in a former grocery store in San Francisco's Mission District and experimenting with new materials and media, as he had done as a graduate student. Although he had entered the graduate art program at Davis in 1964 as a painter, he quickly abandoned painting in favor of sculpture (primarily cast fiberglass and resin), films and live performance. And he continued to draw; it was his natural facility for drawing that steered him toward art in the first place. His interest in photography, then not much practiced by artists who did not consider themselves photographers, was piqued after seeing a large exhibition of the versatile Dada artist Man Ray's work at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1966. Around that time, Nauman says, he had been "interested in doing something representational" but didn't know how to proceed, since he didn't have a "style." Learning that Man Ray worked in a multitude of styles and media, including photography, gave Nauman confidence to embark on a series of photographs with photographer Jack Fulton for which he pulled and pushed at his facial features. A short time before, he had made a pen-and-wash drawing of five lip manipulations. He played out versions of two of them in these photographs—one he describes on the page as "both lips squeezed together from/the side by the thumb/and forefinger right hand" and the other as "upper lip pushed up by right/thumb and lower lip pulled/down by right forefinger." He adapted them again for *Soft Ground Etchings*.

As part of a group of artists who came of age in the 1960s who sought alternatives to the conventions of painting and sculpture, Nauman was among the first to explore his own body as an expressive material. At Davis he had already created a series of sculptural tableaux, assuming a series of twenty-eight positions in relationship to the floor and wall in a 1965 unrecorded live performance (later reenacted in his 1968 video *Wall-Floor Positions*). The strong reaction that performance elicited from several of those who saw it encouraged him to continue in that direction. The facial and body manipulations that he realized in drawing, photography, and film are at once macabre and humorous in a Samuel Beckett sort of way (Nauman found inspiration in Beckett for other works as well).

At the same time, he and Fulton were interested in seeing what they could do with infrared film. Nauman himself has always been drawn to new, non-art techniques and materials; infrared film, which produces images that are not possible with conventional film, is often employed for scientific or military purposes. (Doctors use it as a diagnostic tool since it can penetrate the skin; the military uses it for aerial surveillance and reconnaissance; and it's indispensable to astronomers, physicists and other scientists.) When used with color film and filters (Fulton used a yellow filter), it records wavelengths of the spectrum of natural light unseen by the human eye, as we the viewers can see in *Infrared Outtakes*, where the artist's skin has an eerie metallic yellow or orange cast.

Nauman was also set to try out the new technique of holography, and he decided that these particular images would be best expressed in holograms precisely because they were powerful enough "to dominate the technical aspect of the medium." Nauman's second print edition (the first was *Eleven Color Photographs*, also made with Fulton), *Studies for Holograms (A-E)*, 1970, consists of duotone pale yellow-green and gray screen-printed reproductions of five of the original infrared photographs.



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Around the time I was preparing the 2007 exhibition, *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960s*, for the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Fulton found in his files several outtakes from the 1968 infrared series that had been underexposed and, therefore, at the time, virtually unusable. Through digital technology, Fulton was now able to adjust the exposure and improve the overall quality. When he showed ten of these corrected images to me, I immediately sent them to Nauman to see if he liked any of them well enough to allow their use in the exhibition and catalogue. Nauman selected four for my use and also suggested to Gemini G.E.L., where he has worked on prints consistently since 1973, that they publish the suite. Printed by Fulton, *Infrared Outtakes* is Gemini's first digital inkjet print project.

It is not unusual for Nauman to develop an idea through various media or to go back into earlier works and find something in them that is relevant to his current concerns. For example, Nauman again found a purpose for infrared photography in his 2001 multi-screen digital video projection *Mapping the Studio (Fat Chance, John Cage)*, in which he recorded several areas in his New Mexico studio at night in hour-long segments over a period of several months. Cats and mice occasionally scurry across the floor, coyotes howl, dogs bark, a train passes nearby, and a screen door bangs, while the viewer looks at the artist's studio, with its evocative evidence of work-in-progress or tools of the trade, in the unnerving greenish color of the infrared light.

In the case of the two prints series under discussion, what was suggested by a 1965 performance was extended in a 1967 drawing, then further expanded in a series of photographs, which led to both *First Hologram Series; Making Faces (A-K)*, 1968, and to Nauman's first screenprints of 1970, eventually to find new life in the *Infrared Outtakes*, and finally, in *Soft Ground Etchings*.

The six prints that comprise *Soft Ground Etchings* are hand-drawn versions of three of the *Infrared Outtakes* (*Neck Pull*, *Hands Only* and *Cockeye Lips*) and three of the *Studies for Holograms* (*Pinched Lips*, *Pulled Cheeks* and *Squeezed Lips*). These are Nauman's first works in soft ground, an etching process in which the artist draws on paper laid over a soft wax coating that the printer has applied to the metal plate. Nauman drew with litho crayons of varying thickness and with smudge sticks, which yielded soft, fluid lines resembling those one would achieve with charcoal. He was interested in the range—from the relatively descriptive *Neck Pull*, one of several in the set in which he emphasizes the stubble of his beard, to the quasi-abstract *Pinched Lips*.

The sensitivity of the ground also picks up every slight impression, purposeful or accidental, and with no allowance for correction, and this was also something that interested Nauman—the indirectness of printmaking, the fact that “you really don't know what you're going to get until it is printed.” Marking through the paper overlay in soft ground separates the process from drawing yet one step further.

At first Nauman intended the images to be black on white, but as he got into the process, he decided to add a light aquatint background behind each image: blue for *Hands Only* (the only image on a vertical rectangular page); yellow for *Cockeye Lips*; lavender for *Pinched Lips*; rose for *Pulled Cheeks*; green for *Neck Pull*; and coral for *Squeezed Lips*. The supple line quality and pastel color give these images a gentleness that sets them apart from the edgy *Infrared Outtakes* or even the ghostly *Studies for Holograms*. Nauman has made figurative prints on occasion, most recently in *All Thumbs* and *Verso Rectos* of 1998, but *Soft Ground Etchings* are the only works in his print oeuvre that approach the sensuality of his drawings.

Constance Lewallen, 2007

First published June 2007 in *Bruce Nauman at Gemini: Infrared Outtakes Soft Ground Etchings*, part of Gemini G.E.L.'s 40th anniversary celebration



GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL

BRUCE NAUMAN

Soft Ground Etchings

PRODUCTION NOTES

Before Bruce arrived at Gemini to begin working on this project, we spoke by telephone about what he hoped to create when he came to the workshop. He wanted to reference images from the *Infrared Outtakes*, a series of photographs taken of Bruce by Jack Fulton and being published by Gemini. He told me he wanted to work with soft ground etching, a technique for drawing a softer, more textured line similar to charcoal, crayon and pencil. He explained that he had not used this process before and was interested in further exploring these images using this technique.

The soft ground process allows the artist to draw directly on paper, offering a more familiar feel than drawing on a polished copper surface. Drawing paper is laid on top of a copper plate that has been coated with a soft, tacky wax layer. As the drawing tool presses against the paper, the paper is then pressed against this waxy "ground" on the plate. The ground is then lifted from the surface of the plate as it sticks to the paper. The remaining ground on the plate acts as a resist to the acid. Now the drawing, revealing the copper, is exposed to the acid and etched into the surface of the plate. Once the drawing is etched, the ground is washed off and the plate is ready for inking.

Upon arriving at Gemini, Bruce drew using the *Infrared Outtakes* photographs as reference. He used an assortment of drawing utensils: pencils, litho crayons, paper stumps; anything that touched the paper made a mark, so even his hands were used for shading. After reviewing the first proof pulled, he decided the images needed color backgrounds. For this we applied an aquatint to a separate plate; it was inked in the color he desired and ran through the press first, then the drawing plate would be run through directly on top of this color field. After the first visit to the workshop, Bruce finished three drawings referencing the *Infrared Outakes* series. A few months later he was able to return and he brought more images; these were from his 1970 *Study for Holograms* series (*Pinched Lips*, *Pulled Cheeks*, *Squeezed Lips* and *Pulled Lower Lip*). We were able to produce three of the four images from this series in the same manner as before. In all instances, the paper used was Somerset Satin white.

Although I've had considerable experience working at other printshops, this was the first collaboration in which I was in charge at Gemini. I'd like to thank Bruce Nauman, Sidney Felsen, Jim Reid, Xavier Fumat and the whole staff for all their help in making this project successful; Bruce and I where both covering new ground, and due to their help it all went smoothly. Working directly on the project with me was Master Printer Xavier Fumat; we had invaluable assistance from printers Jonathan Cross and Erik Beehn. Thank you all.

Case Hudson

Master Printer

First published June 2007 in *Bruce Nauman at Gemini: Infrared Outtakes Soft Ground Etchings*, part of Gemini G.E.L.'s 40th anniversary celebration