

For Immediate Release

Frederick Sommer

Choice and chance, structure art and nature

February 24- April 2, 2011

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 24, 6-8 PM



Bruce Silverstein / 20 and Ricco Maresca Gallery are pleased to announce a collaborative exhibition featuring the collages of Frederick Sommer. Containing some fifty examples from his prodigious output, dating from the decade between 1989 and 1999, this survey features many works previously unseen, and is the most extensive exhibition of Sommer collages to date. Included in the show will be a group of related photographs by the artist, as well as a selection of vernacular sculptural objects that set a new imaginative context for Sommer's work.

Since his last major exhibition at MoMA in 1976, Frederick Sommer (1905-1999) has continued to gain recognition as one of America's most influential photographers, and as a restless creative talent in all media. Born in Italy and raised in Brazil, Sommer was trained as a watercolorist and draughtsman before he took up photography in the 1930s. Sommer was an artistic polymath, with deep interests in painting, drawing, sculpture and landscape architecture, and all these interests found their way

into his collages. Many of the collages derive from 19th century medical illustrations, and constitute a radical re-imagining of both biological form and anatomical space. They play often disturbingly on visual ambiguities between categories of animate and inanimate, organic and non-organic, biological and mechanical, and perhaps most important, chance discovery and subconscious choice. He called them "an unbelievable graphic demonstration, of how things come together. The only way they can come together."

Sommer's approach to collage making was consistent with his other artistic endeavors - to engage his world formally, to harvest its chance gifts, decontextualizing and recombining found images and objects according to often shocking visual affinities. This is certainly true with his photographs, which often feature assemblages made from cut paper and found objects. The current exhibition features a selection of these photographs, allowing viewers to see the developmental logic of the collages. The objects in the exhibition, including architectural sculptures, metalwork screens and papier-mache horticulture models, represent a vernacular fantastic, one that subverts conventions in the very act of following them. They put Sommer's formal experiments in a new and broader context, revealing them as the missing link between European psychological art and a home-grown surrealism – unprecedented, excessive and strangely moving. Seeing through his eyes enables us to better appreciate the powerful yet anonymous formal statements that were all around the artist in America.