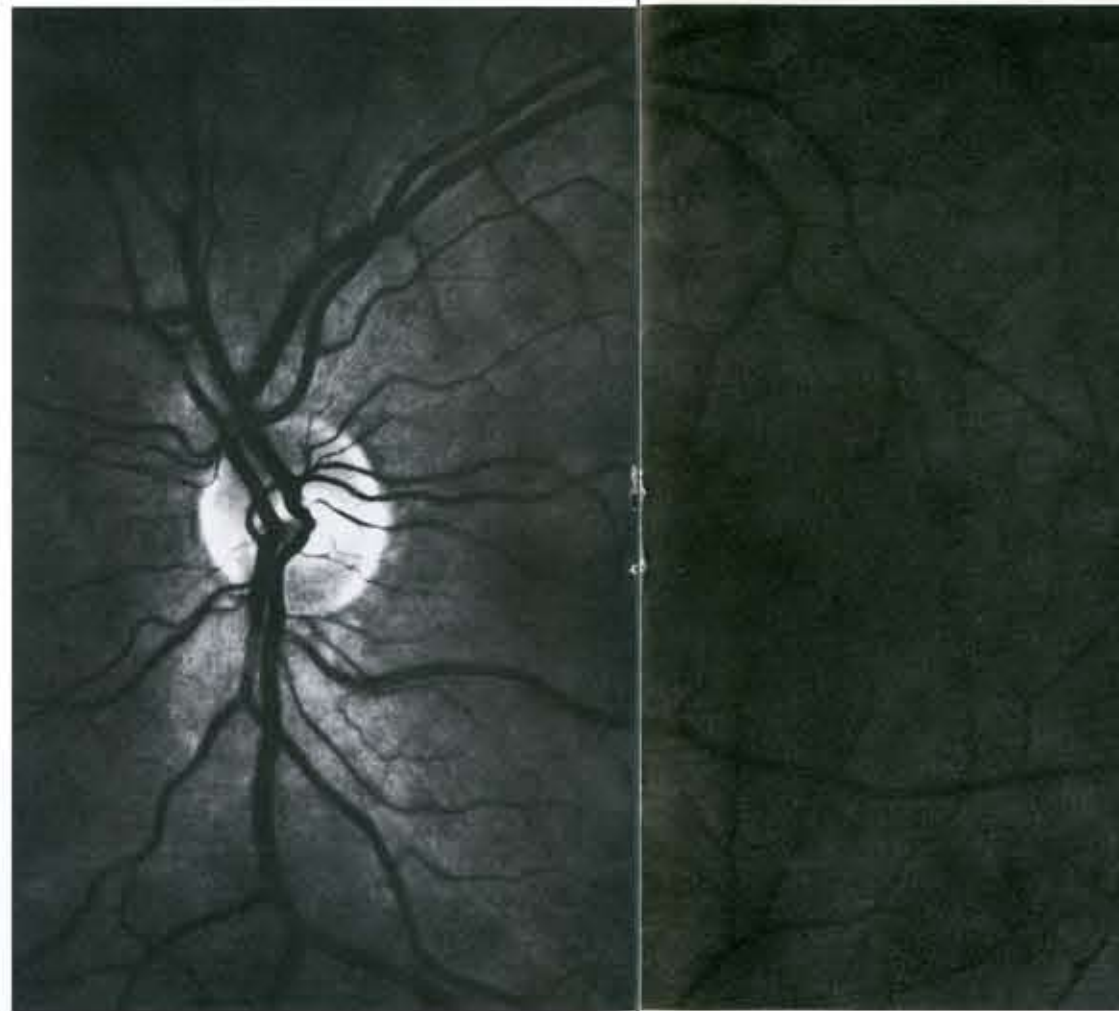


Gary Schneider, *Genetic Self-portrait Retinas, Right*, 1998



Gary Schneider, *Genetic Self-portrait Retinas, Left*, 1998



Gary Schneider, *Genetic Self-portrait Hands, Right*, 1997



Gary Schneider, *Genetic Self-portrait Hands, Left*, 1997

GARY SCHNEIDER GENETIC SELF-PORTRAIT

JILL WATERMAN

In 1966 the sci-fi thriller *Fantastic Voyage* engaged audiences in an uncharted adventure inside the human body. In 1996 contemporary artist Gary Schneider was invited on his own fantastic voyage, when he was asked to make photographs inspired by research on the Human Genome Project. The body of work resulting from this photographic exploration is now exhibited and published as *Gary Schneider: Genetic Self-Portrait*.

With previous work addressing identity through conceptual portraiture and a professional background as a master printer, Schneider was well suited to the task of visually interpreting the realms of biological samples and genetic research. Over the course of this project

he collaborated with nine different scientists to gather the raw materials used in image-making. A wide variety of scientific instruments, from a basic X-ray to a transmission electron microscope were used in the image capture. Schneider's notes to accompany the finished pieces include commentary about the scientific processes. He also describes personal associations used to make decisions about the forms taken in his work. In a noteworthy example, an artistic reference transforms the culture from a cheek scraping into an expansive grid-work inspired by a heroic Chinese landscape.

Schneider's self-portrait treats the complete spectrum from microcosm to macrocosm including such classic pieces of forensic iconography as a dental X-ray and handprints. These elements are incorporated as an emotional response to the Human Genome Project. In his catalog notes the artist states: "I wanted the portrait to be an act of faith inside my anxiety of stepping into the unknown of future biology. So from the most clinical representation (DNA sequence) to the most intimate of images (Hands) lies the full range of this multi-layered self-portrait."

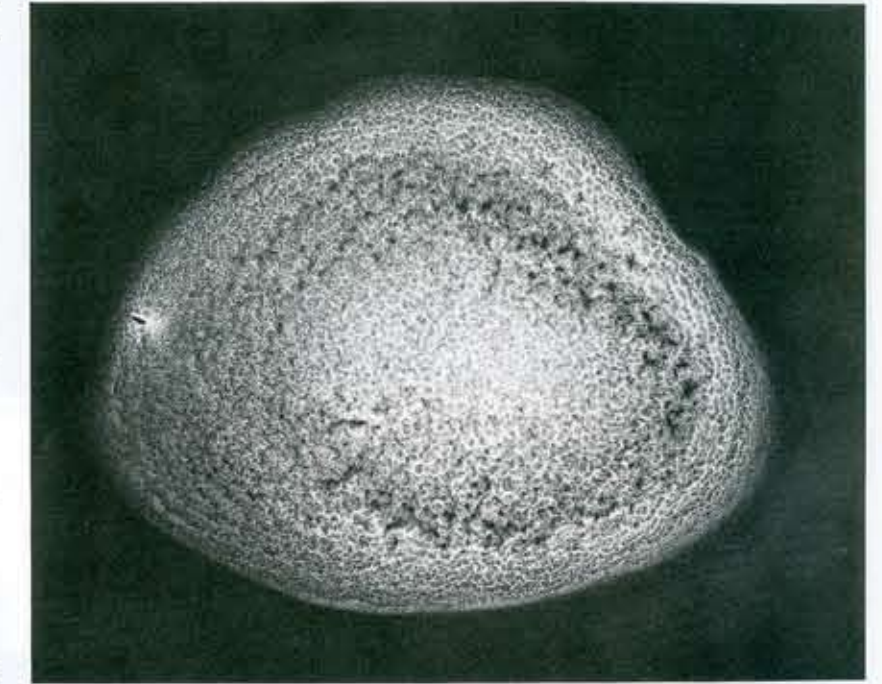
In 1993, long before starting his *Genetic Self-Portrait*, Schneider began to use handprints as a theme for portraiture. In the handprint series, a moist palm is placed straight onto photographic emulsion, then printed as an enlarged photograph. This image-making technique, termed an autothermohydrogram by conservators at the National Gallery of Canada, is also employed in photograms of the artists' ears and in face prints such as *Mask*. The direct physicality of this work presents a strong connection to 19th century photography, an important influence on Schneider's overall vision.

Details of highlight and shadow are abstracted and reversed in the photogram body-prints. This renders points of contact as a spectral highlight and gives open shadow areas a milky glow. When viewed in exhibition, ear lobes suggest the domain of distant constellations and palm prints hover, as if emerging from the smoke of a magic lamp. In a similar spirit, the scientific images resonate with new associations. Chromosomes printed in the negative resemble fuzzy totems aligned along the gallery wall. A DNA sequence becomes a coarsely woven tapestry of human code. Such richness is achieved through a combination of astute, aesthetic decision-making and broad leaps of scale. In *Genetic Self-Portrait*, Gary Schneider brings new meaning to the words of *Fantastic Voyage* adventurer Raquel Welch "We're going to see things no one has ever seen before. Not just something under a microscope."

Gary Schneider's *Genetic Self-Portrait* was published as a hard-bound monograph in Spring 2000 by Lightwork, Syracuse, NY. This publication is available for purchase in museums, fine-art bookstores as well as through amazon.com. His photographs were recently featured in two installments as part of the major group exhibition *Unnatural Science* at Mass MOCA in North Adams, MA (June 3, 2000–March 15, 2001). Work from *Genetic Self-Portrait* was presented from June–early Autumn and work from the series *Specimen Drawings* from Autumn 2000–March 15, 2001. The photograph from *Genetic Self-Portrait* titled *Retinas* was recently acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Originally from South Africa, Gary Schneider currently lives in New York City. ●

JILL WATERMAN IS A FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHER LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY. SHE WORKS AS A PHOTO EDITOR FOR THE STOCK PHOTO AGENCY, FPG INTERNATIONAL.



Gary Schneider, *Genetic Self-portrait Dried Blood*, 1998