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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Body Parts—A Self-Portrait by John Coplans

October 7 – December 31, 2004

Reception: Thursday, October 7, 5:30–7:30PM

A List of Public Programs is attached.

For weeks [after 9/11], when the wind blew in my direction, I could smell fumes in my studio and in my bedroom. The fumes constantly seeped in; the smell reminded me of the burning of a body at a Hindu funeral pyre. A vast number of bodies were being roasted in the heart of the burning debris. Without consciously connecting the disaster to what I was photographing, I had started making images of my arms and legs and then collaging a pair of them together to make one image. After I had made four such images, I realized the connection when it was announced in the news that workmen were digging up debris and constantly finding human body parts.

– John Coplans, from *Body Parts—A Self-Portrait*

I found myself quite intuitively making some photos that I recognized with considerable excitement as reflecting the grotesque. However, no sooner had I made four of them than, to my consternation, I suffered a severe attack of macular degeneration in my one good eye and could no longer see properly. Perhaps with the aid of a magnifying glass, I could see any Polaroids we could shoot and I could continue the series, which is what happened, and I was able to continue working.... Of course, we do not see with our eyes, but with our minds.

– John Coplans, on developing his final body of work

CAMBRIDGE, MA — September 8, 2004. The MIT List Visual Arts Center (LVAC) is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Body Parts—A Self-Portrait by John Coplans*, which will be on view from October 7 through December 31, 2004. The exhibition, organized by Charles Stainback, former director of the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, and Jane Farver, Director of the LVAC, consists of powerful black-and-white images taken by John Coplans of his own aging body. This exhibition showcases the final series of 26 large photographs completed before the artist's death in August 2003. The opening reception will be on Thursday, October 7 from 5:30 to 7:30PM.

An accompanying catalogue, *Body Parts—A Self-Portrait by John Coplans*, includes "Prologue" by John Coplans, "A Conversation" between Jean-François Chévrier, professor, Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris and Coplans, and black-and-white photographs in the exhibition. Published by Powerhouse Books, the catalogue is available at the LVAC for \$25.

A noted art critic and curator for most of his career, Coplans abandoned his criticism and curatorial work in 1980 to become, at age 60, a much-exhibited and almost immediately successful photographer. Intent on an unusual process of self-investigation and cultural reflection, he told *Art Journal* in a 1990 interview that "the principal thing is the question of how our culture views age: that old is ugly."

Coplans's work reveals the relentless tectonics of physical aging: the wrinkles and sags, hairlessness, and varicose veins. But the result is an eerily beautiful, touching, and monumental landscape made up of calves, arms, torso, hips, and hands, dramatically lit and emotionally larger than life. "I don't really deal with old age per se," Coplans said. "It's only a condition I'm in that I have to make use of the best I can."

About the artist

Born in London, England, in 1920, John Coplans grew up in South Africa and lived an adventurous life. As Mussolini and Hitler rose to power in Europe, Coplans dropped out of high school and spent eight years in the military. He trained as a Royal Air Force fighter pilot in 1938, then joined the British army for service in Kenya, Burma, and Ethiopia, where he learned Swahili and saw combat. After the war, as a painter and admirer of American abstract expressionist and abstract styles, he migrated to the United States, traded some paintings for a used car, and drove cross-country to San Francisco. There he co-founded *Artforum* in 1962, and during the mid-sixties, organized exhibitions at the University of California, Irvine, and the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum), where he showed work by artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and others on the outer edges of new art. During a late 1970's stint at the Akron Art Museum, he started the art magazine *Dialogue*. He authored books on Cézanne's watercolors, the New York photographer Weegee, and American artists Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol.

When he returned to making art in 1980, Coplans settled in New York and developed a career not in painting but in photography, making what one critic called "mercilessly beautiful photographs of his self-effaced self." He had his first solo show within a year, followed by solo exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Musée de la Ville Charite, Marseille; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and the PS 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York.

Outspoken and possessed of a colorful personality, Coplans was "fired from more than one job," noted *Art in America*. "John Coplans never made the art world an easier place, but in the end, he made it a better one."

Body Parts—A Self-Portrait by John Coplans was organized in collaboration with the artist, by Charles Stainback, director of SITE Santa Fe, and Jane Farver, director of the List Visual Arts Center at MIT. This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Council for Arts at MIT, British Consulate General, Boston, and the Hotel@MIT.



Directions:

The List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, and walk one block to the cross walk. The List Visual Arts Center, housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway) during business hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

Gallery Hours:

Tuesday–Thursday: 12–6PM; Friday: 12–8PM; Saturday and Sunday: 12–6PM
Closed Mondays; Nov. 25; Dec. 24 and 25. Closing at 4PM on Dec. 31

Information:

617.253.4680 or <http://web.mit.edu/lvac>

All exhibitions at the List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible. Accommodations are provided by request. Please call Hiroko Kikuchi at 617.452.3586 for inquiries.

Public Programs

Lecture, Bartos Theatre, MIT E15

Tuesday, October 26 at 6PM

Peter Plagens, Newsweek art critic and painter

Special Gallery Tours, LVAC Galleries

Friday, October 29 at 6PM

Deborah Martin Kao, Richard L. Menschel Curator of Photography at the Harvard University Art Museums

Friday, November 12 at 6PM

Howard Yezerski, of the Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston

Gallery Talks, LVAC Galleries

Wednesday, November 10 at 12PM and Friday, December 17 at 6PM

Bill Arning

Wednesday, November 17 at 12PM

Jane Farver

Sundays: October 17 and 31, November 14, and December 12 at 2PM

Hiroko Kikuchi