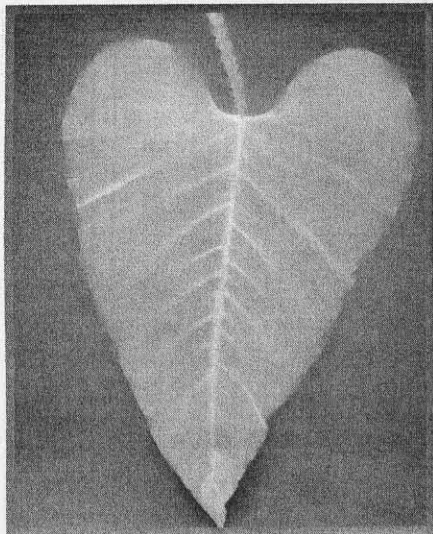


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The hues range from peachy-pinks to sienna and even vibrant orange and are striking for their playful compositions. Burchfield has arranged the leaves, stems and flowers in myriad patterns, which to me represents some of the challenge here. After hundreds of prints, monotony and formula are often the greatest dangers, but the artist has deftly created each image to slightly distinguish it from the others. Since not all of the leaves lay flat, edges are sometimes hazy and out of focus and in direct contrast to the areas that are sharp, adding to the sense that there are both spiritual and physical qualities captured here. It is hard to not see some of them as even ghostly. I also love the fact that each print is totally

### Jerry Burchfield at the California Museum of Photography

**F**or the past few years, Jerry Burchfield has been traveling to the rainforest of the Amazon and making photograms—or as he calls them, lumen prints—of native plants. Though this sounds pretty simple and might suggest a scientific quest to catalog the ever-shrinking flora of the endangered forest, he has instead composed a body of work that transcends such utilitarian concerns to explore a mysterious creative arena where chance and skill collaborate. From the earliest photographic experiments with light sensitive materials to modernist fascination with the subconscious to current conceptual practice, Burchfield's lumen prints suggest the gamut of the history of photography.

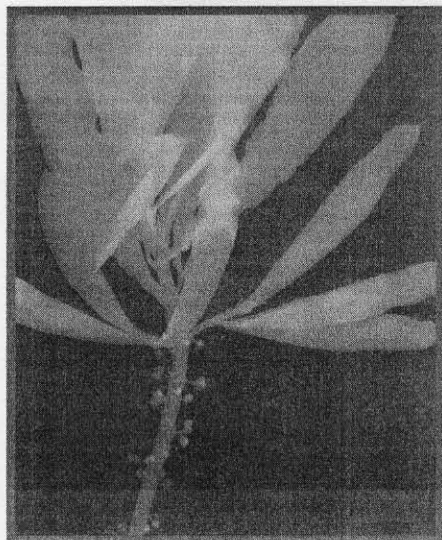
His process seems pretty simple: just lay plants upon photographic paper and expose them to the sun, as has been done since the invention of photography. However, Burchfield's results are anything but simple. Delicate pastel hues ebb and flow around the plant forms and variations of lightness and dark emerge and recede. The technique apparently involves no chemical developer and so the rich coloration is achieved by a combination of out-of-date paper and sunlight and made stable through conventional fixing. The results are quite beautiful and mysterious.

unique, a one-of-a-kind image that is slowly deteriorating, endangered even. The deterioration of these gentle, beautiful prints combined with the knowledge of the disappearing rainforest make them poignant and even urgent to comprehend. The photographs go way beyond any scientific purpose and suggest mortality on its most basic level.

It is slightly ironic that as an environmentalist who obviously cares for the natural world, Burchfield must cut an endangered plant, and therefore kill the leaf, to make a print. The exhibition also has a weakness in that the installation of so many small prints, clustered together, diminishes the power of each photograph; from a distance, everything looks the same. I think the soon-to-be released book will be the ultimate vehicle for this work.

In the center of the gallery entrance

Jerry Burchfield, (above) *Philodendron melinonii*, 2002, lumen print; (below) *Ficus Mathewsii*, 2002, lumen print, at the California Museum of Photography, UC Riverside.



the artist has created a tribute, *Exotics*, to his lumen printing process. A very large round platform is covered in various plants and specimens. On top of the plants, some crawling with bugs, is a thick piece of glass pressing them against photographic paper. For the duration of the exhibition the light from the gallery will slowly create a lumen print of native plants from Riverside County.

Burchfield is a fixture of the Southern California photography scene and known as an artist, teacher, curator and environmentalist. This work makes it clear that his reputation is well-earned and deserves to grow.

—Thomas McGovern

Jerry Burchfield: *Primal Images* closes January 11, 2004, at the California Museum of Photography, UC Riverside, 3824 Main St, Riverside.

Thomas McGovern is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.