



# Neely Meisler

INTRODUCTION BY  
CYNTHIA PAMNUCCI

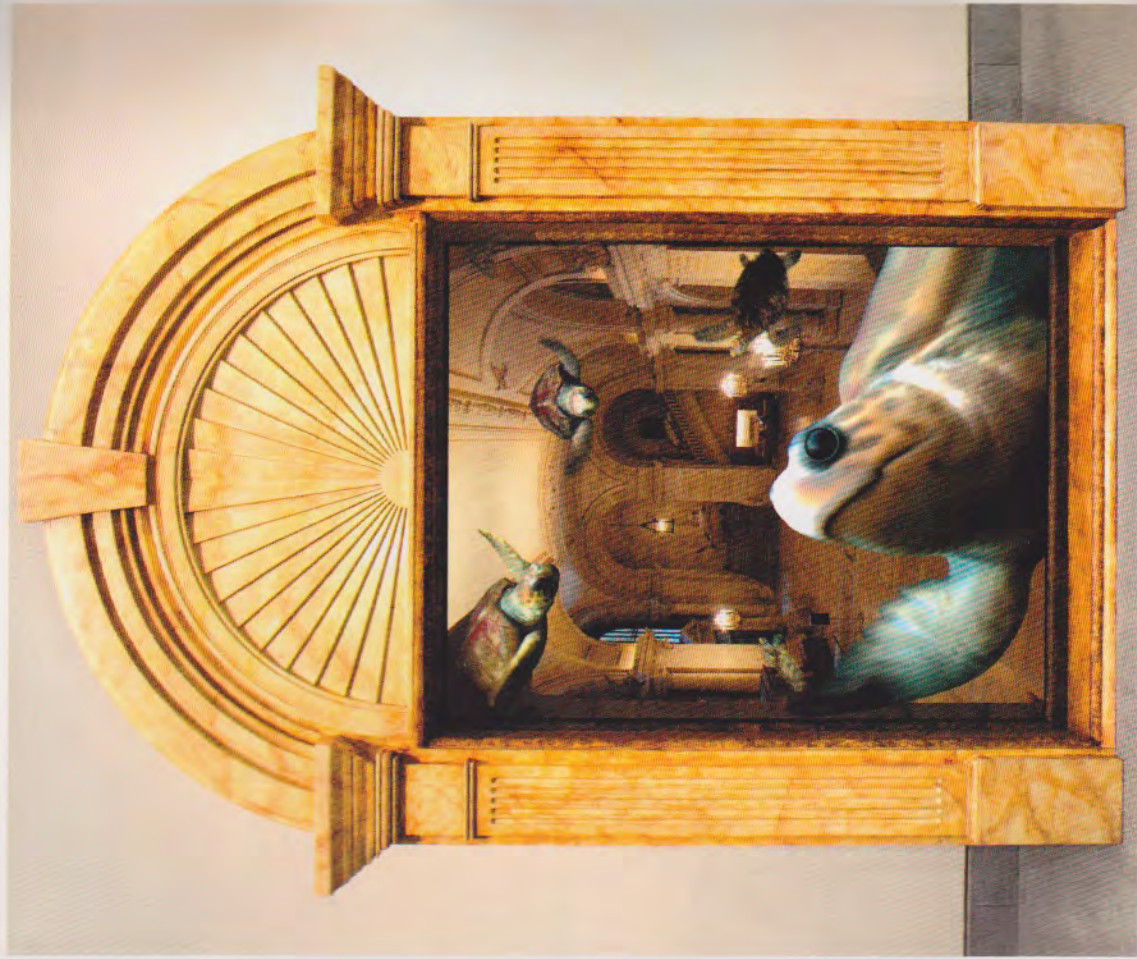
And in fact, there, beneath my eyes, ruined, crumbled and discoloured, by a town with its roofs caved in, its temples gutted away, its arches out of place and its columns lying on the ground, I found in all these fragments one could see the solid foundations of a kind of Tuscan architecture. Further on, the ruins were the remains of a great aqueduct, here by an enormous, crisscrossed mound of some Acropolis, with the floating forms of a Eucharist; there the remains of a dock, as if from some antique port that had once sheltered great fleet ships and triremes; and here, there, all the more, all the more, and further on, long lines of crumbling walls and deserted streets. Captain Schmitt was shouting out an entire Pompeii buried beneath the lava.

# ATLANTIS

# ATLANTIS



100



*Turtles (Never Give Up)*, 2001  
 Installation at the Brooklyn Museum of Art  
 Acrylic paint on Vibrachrome and Cibachrome, wood, Plexiglas and mixed media  
 102 x 75.75 x 14 in. (259 x 192.4 x 35.36 cm)



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*Top, Turtles (Never Give Up)*, 2001 (detail)  
 Cover, *Copper Helmet* (Alas Poor NY I Knew It Well), 1995 (detail)  
 Back Cover, *Copper Helmet* (Alas Poor New York I Knew It Well), 1995  
 Duratran, light, steel, copper, concrete, wood, 73 x 39 x 45 in. (185.4 x 99 x 114.3 cm)

## Introduction

In Meryl Meisler's world anything can happen. Her photo-based digital prints and mixed-media constructions juxtapose architectural icons of New York City with living icons from the sea, creating a world where sea creatures, carefully chosen for their symbolic meaning, inhabit landmarks such as Grand Central Terminal and the New York Public Library.

Meisler's desire to integrate what she sees through her camera lens with what she sees in her mind's eye has roots in her childhood. Her father Jack owned Excel Printing Company in New York City and often brought home samples of simple printed pieces that were made beautiful by artists. Meisler's mother Sunny, passionate about Broadway musicals, took the family as often as she could.

Through drawing, Meisler developed a keen sense of detail. She learned about the subtleties of light and shadow by studying Rembrandt's etchings and drawings, Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, Leonard Baskin's woodcuts, Ben Shahn's ink drawings, and the pencil drawings of David Hockney and Jennifer Bartlett.

As a photographer, Meisler found inspiration in Jacques-Henri Lartigue's depiction of humor in daily life and Diane Arbus' ability to present psychological scenarios. Further down the line, in 1988, Meisler fell in love with scuba diving, awed by the ability to "fly" in an environment of great beauty.



*Turtles (Never Give Up)*, 2001 (detail)



With these kinds of experiences, it's not surprising that Meisler's work consists of bold graphics, repeated patterns, a stage-like setting, with a distinctive use of overhead perspective. Or that her compositional style incorporates the skills of a theatrical impresario responsible for scenic design, casting, choreography and producing. Or that many of the photographs she uses in her work have been taken during dives in the United States, South America and the Caribbean.

Meisler combines both traditional and contemporary imaging tools. Her exhibition record, commissions, awards, and reviews attest to her expertise in photography, illustration, photo-based digital prints and three-dimensional mixed-media work. In the catalogue essay for the WOMENTEK exhibition that I curated for the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News, Virginia in 2000, I referred to her as a "digital chanteuse" because her work "sings" of the benefits of mastering traditional media before tackling the computer as an imaging tool.

Typically, Meisler begins by using one or more of her cameras – medium-format and digital cameras to capture New York City architecture, a 35mm underwater camera to capture the aquatic environment. Next, she uses Photoshop software to fuse the two worlds together, drawing on the digitized photographs, adjusting the light, submerging the architectural spaces, and adding details. The result is a skillful composition, with personified sea creatures dancing

*Voyages Extraordinaires*, 1992  
Cibaprint, 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm)

through an unfamiliar space (to them, however very familiar to us), in a choreography loaded with symbolic meaning.

*Grand Splash* was Meisler's first "submersion" in a public space. It consisted of a series of digital photographic transparencies mounted in thirteen lightboxes in Grand Central Terminal from December 1995 to May 1996. Digital imaging was used to combine the architectural splendor of the terminal with Meisler's scuba-diving photographs. She takes the viewer on a tour of Grand Central Terminal (a symbol of commerce and trade) as if it were underwater. The surreal beauty of the man-made and natural worlds emphasizes the need to nurture and save our resources. Three of the works: *Barracudas (Commuters)*, *Oyster Bar (Patience has Virtue)*, and *Information Around the Clock (Tempus Fugit)* transport the viewer as easily as the work of Henri Rousseau, Hieronymus Bosch, or René Magritte.



After *Grand Splash*, Meisler moved her aesthetic focus down the street to another one of New York's grandest buildings: The New York Public Library (NYPL), a place that has fascinated the artist ever since she visited its rare books and documents collection while researching a book she illustrated in 1975. The building actually has a water connection. It was erected in 1843 on the former site of the Croton Reservoir, which carried the first supply of fresh water from upstate New York through aqueducts into New York City. An observer at the time commented that the water was "full of tadpoles and animalcule."

*Barracudas (Commuters)*, 1995 (detail)

She entitled this next series *Deep Research* because it portrays the library as a treasure chest of printed materials that embodies the information and ideas throughout the ages.

In *Deep Research*, the artist again dove into an environment brimming with splendid visual detail, her medium-format camera serving her well. To look at images like *The Reading Room (Writers Block)*, *Grouper (Get Help)*, *Offline (Paradise and Purgatory)*, and *Mapping (Know Sense of Direction)* we could very well be in the stately rooms of a sunken Titanic—except denizens of the sea have replaced the unfortunate passengers.



Ironically, Meisler received permission to photograph The New York Public Library and Grand Central Terminal just days before the buildings were scheduled to undergo major restoration and renovation. These "straight" photographs are historical documents in themselves, providing records of both architectural landmarks before their alterations.

Meisler continues setting the stage for her aquatic scenarios in *Turtles (Never Give Up)*, but this time she adds the third dimension. Here, her visually synthetic world teases us with a tangible reality, something like Joseph Cornell's little worlds within boxes but on a larger, more human scale. Meisler's box-like structure's façade has a grand arch that mimics the portal to the Library itself, while the digital image inside captures the depth of a vast space

*Offline (Paradise and Purgatory)*, 2001 (detail)

flowing up staircases and through overhead arches. Meisler painted directly on to the photo-image with a sable brush and acrylic paint. Thus, *Turtles* (Never Give Up) combines the disciplines of photography, computer imaging, painting and sculpture. And here new sea creatures – turtles – take center stage.

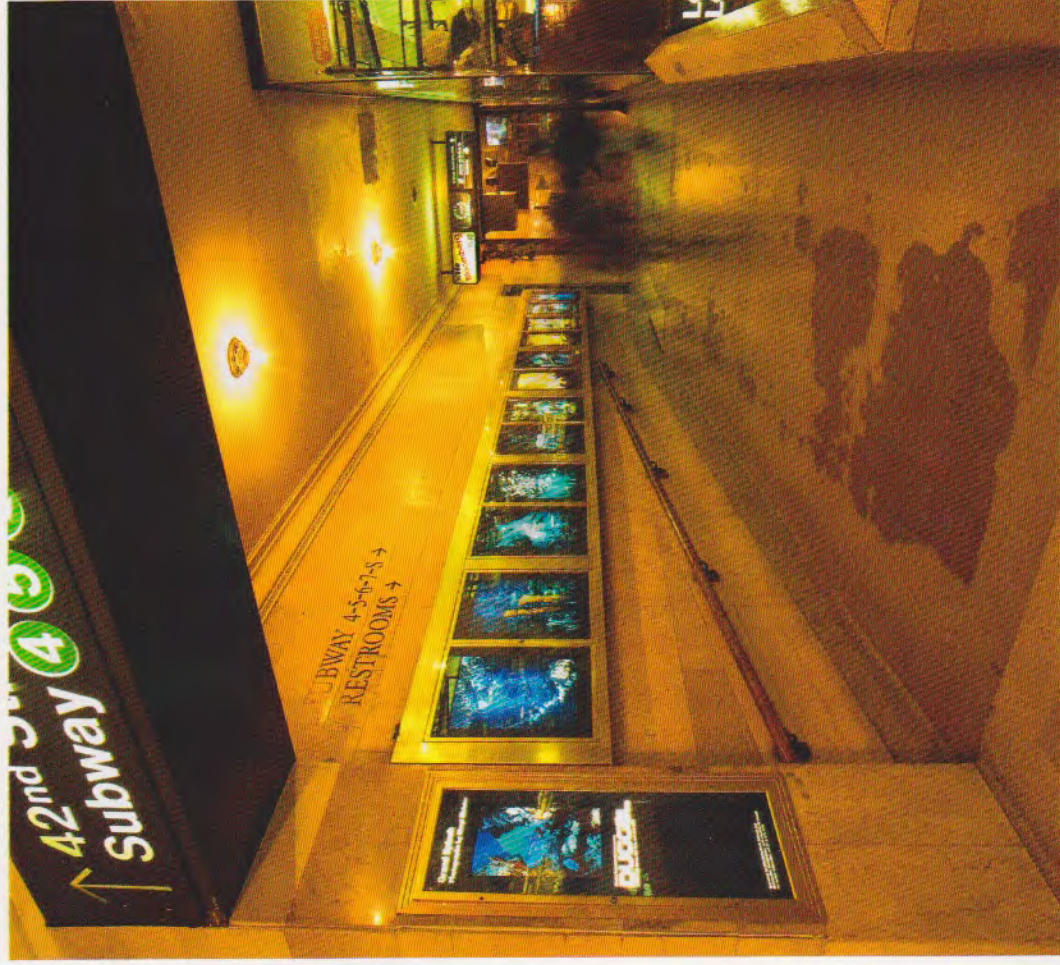
Why turtles? Turtles might be slow, but they're persistent. And sea turtles, shedding the grievous weight of gravity, can swim swiftly in water. Meisler confesses that this work is an "altar," a place to go for the multitude of artists who, like herself, occasionally feel the stress of keeping pace with the fierce competition in the New York art world. This is a tranquil place to replenish one's faith – and then go on at one's pace.

And "go on" she assuredly will, as Meisler's mixed-media digital photographs and constructions continue to explore her inner and outer worlds. Recently, *Submerged*, a work commissioned by the MTA Arts for Transit Poster Program as an edition of 4,000 posters, was seen by millions of people. And though Meisler will undoubtedly continue to captivate us with works of unique vision, beauty and whimsy, her work is also warning us about the state of our planet. Since most of New York City is at sea level and global climatic changes have been acknowledged to be the cause of rising waters, perhaps the urban water-world of Meryl Meisler is not as far-fetched as it seems.

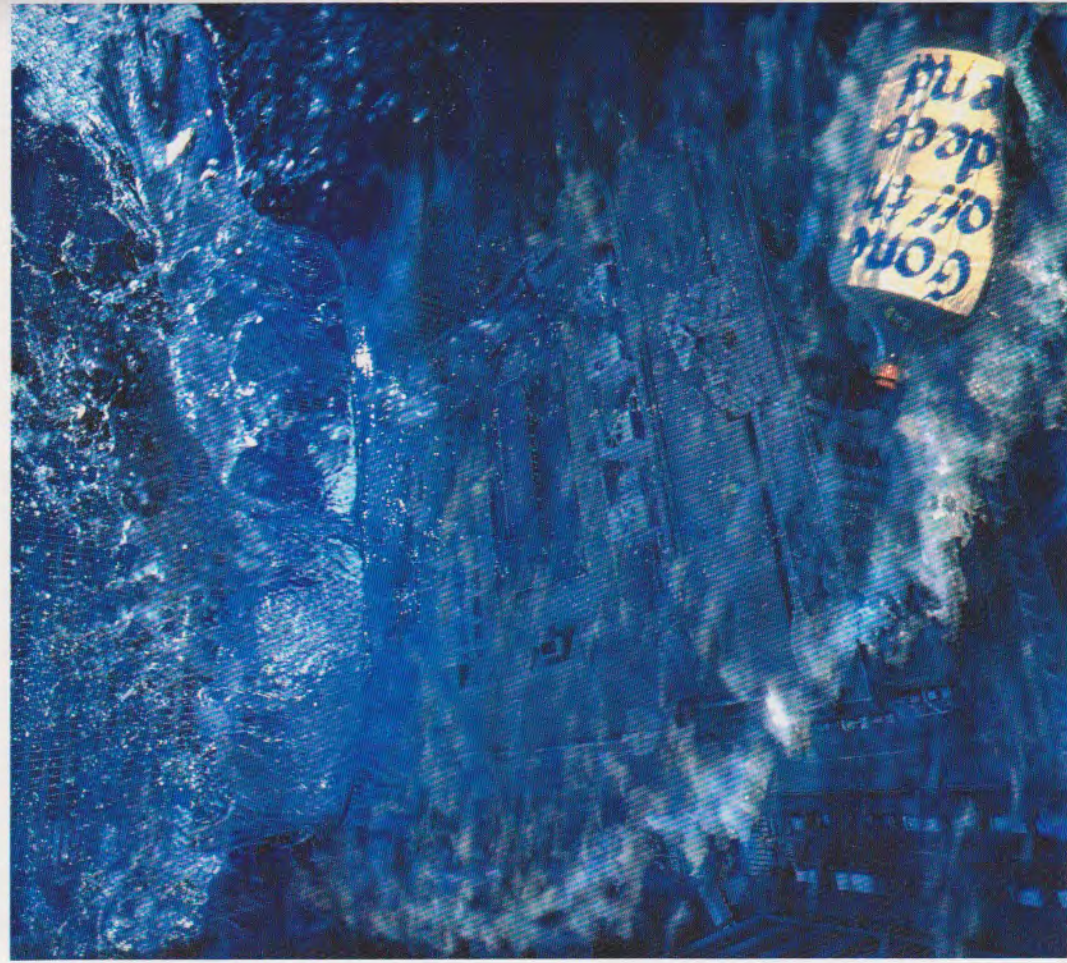
CYNTHIA PANNUCCI

Founder and Director of Art & Science Collaborations, Inc. (ASCI)

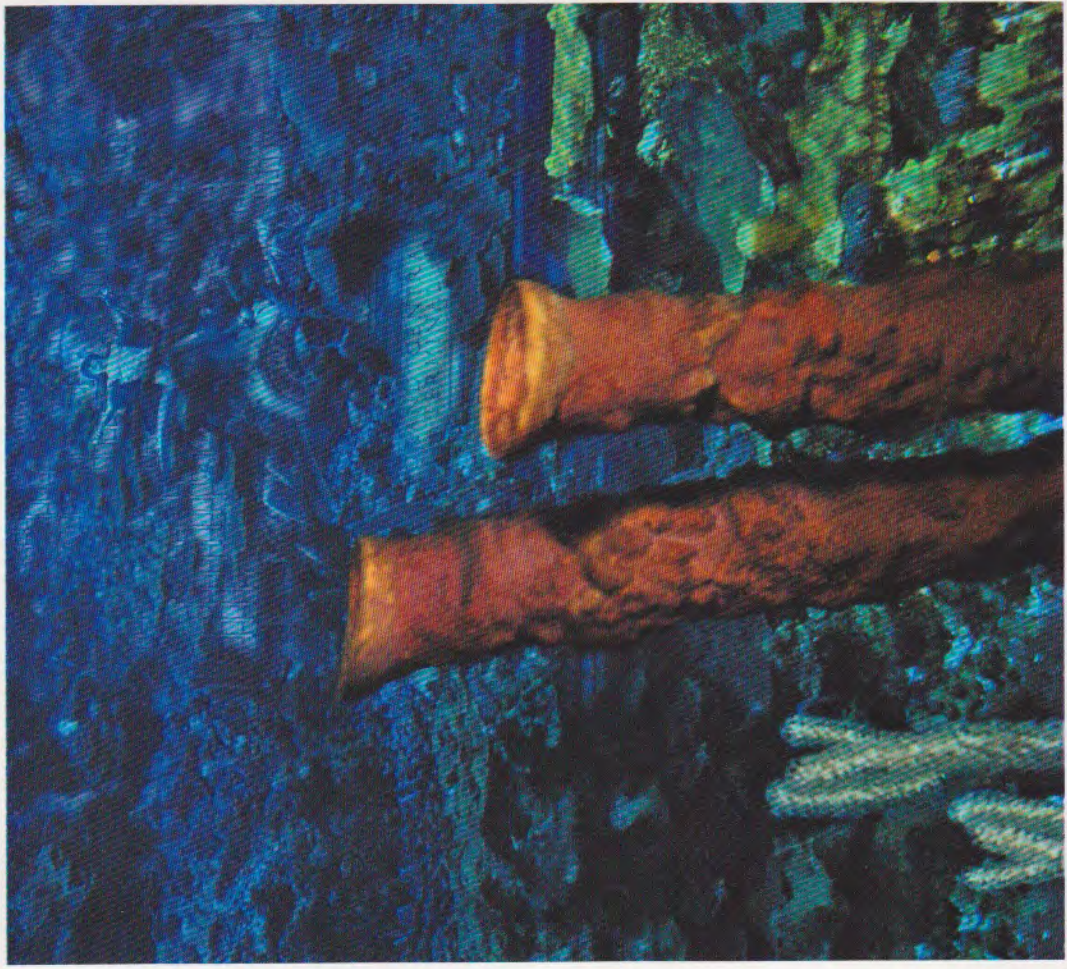
163rd Street Twins, 2002  
Digital photograph



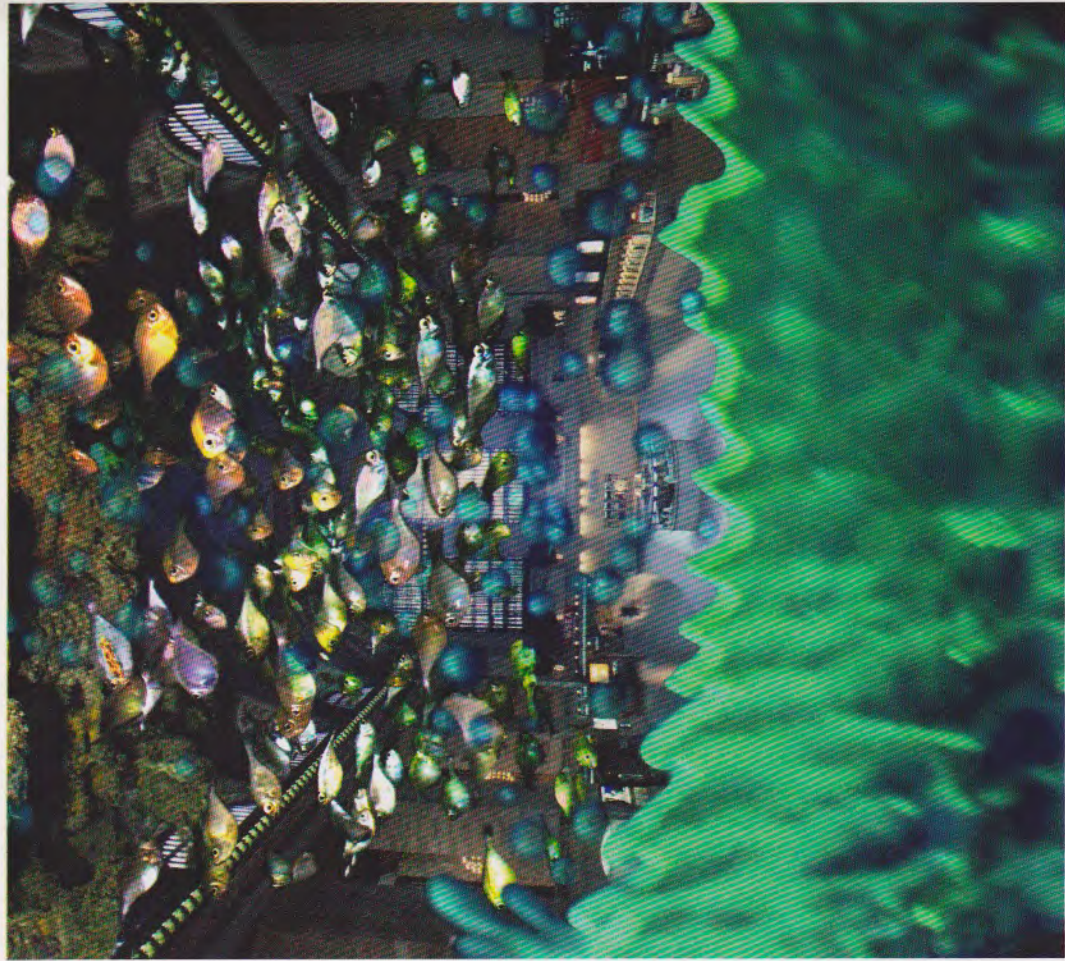
*Grand Splash*, December 1995 - May 1996  
Installation, Grand Central Terminal, NYC  
Duratrans, (12) lightboxes 29.5 x 27 in. (74.9 x 68.6 cm),  
(1) lightbox, 55 x 20 in. (139.7 x 50.8 cm)



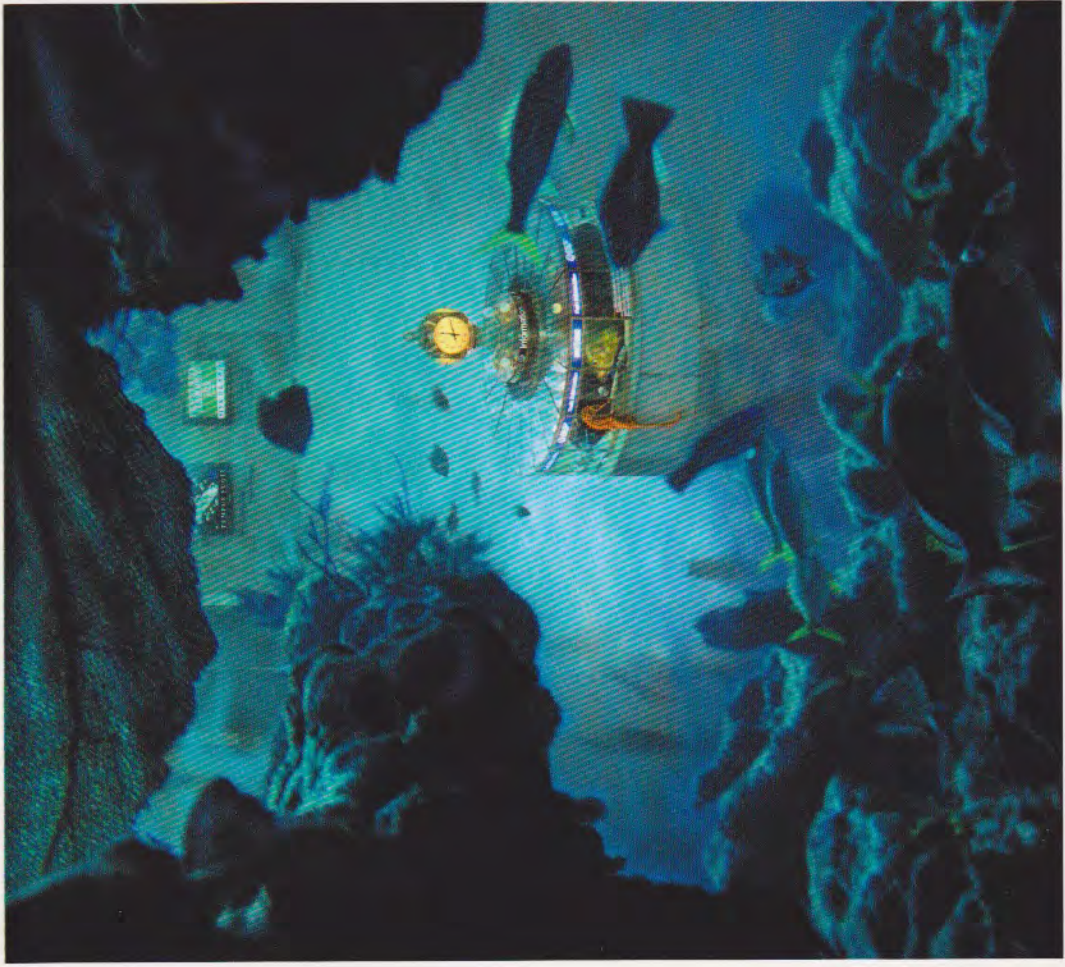
Grand Splash (Gone Off the Deep End)



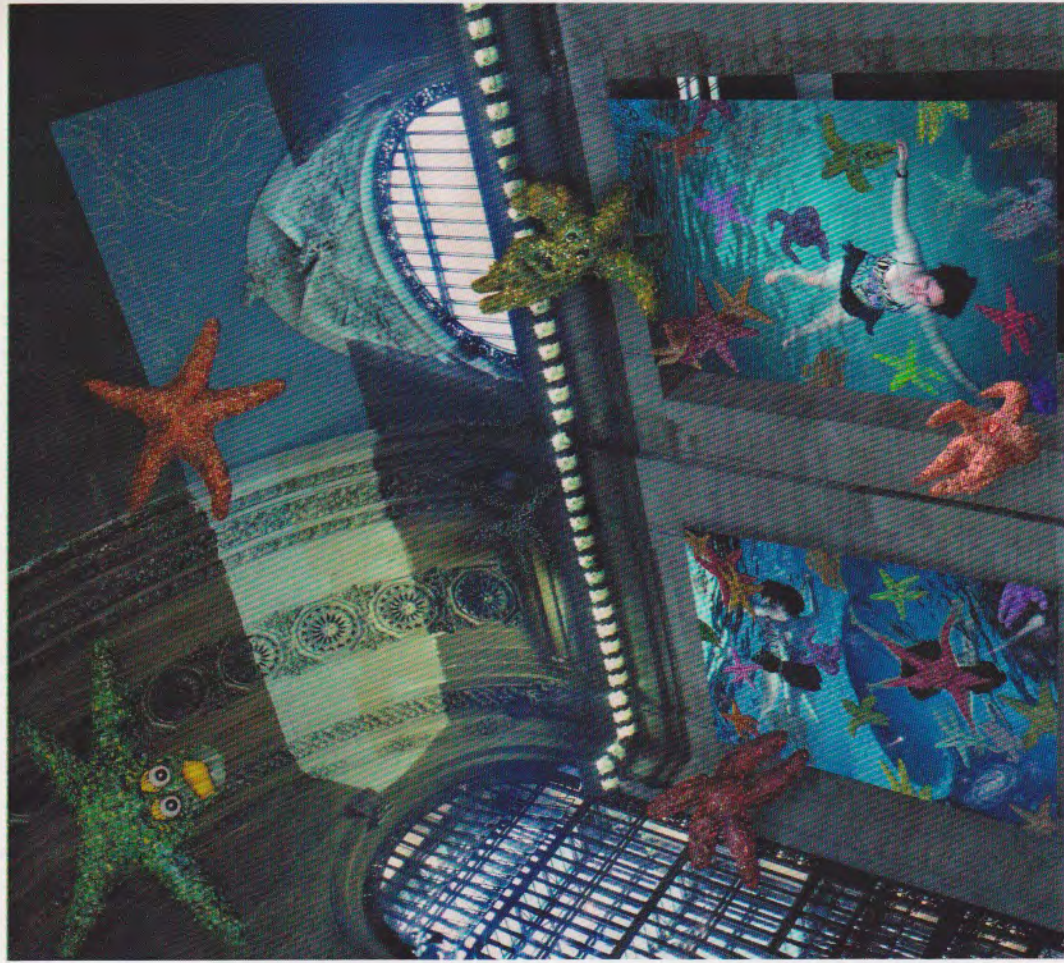
Grand Entrance (Twin Towers)



Grand Basket (Leave Only Bubbles)



Information Around the Clock (Tempus Fugit)



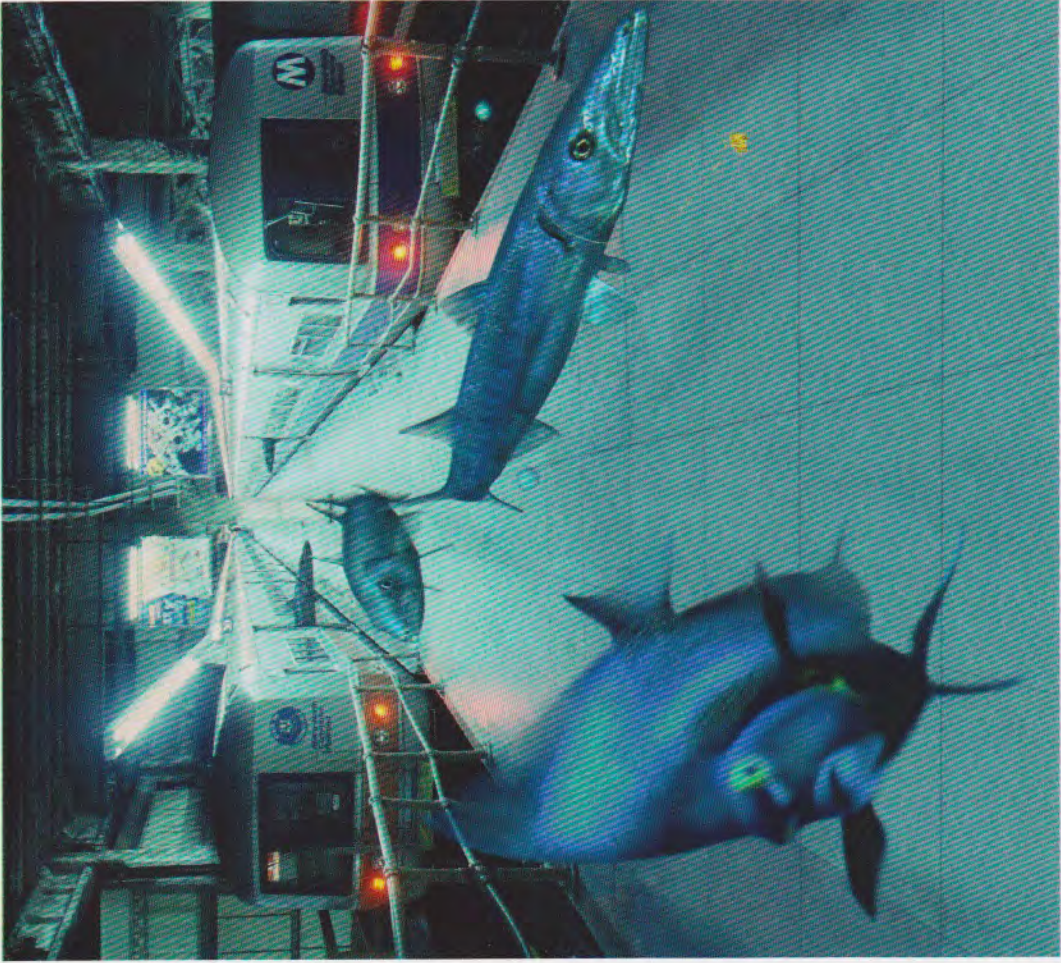
Starfish (for Patricia)



Dolphins (History of Transportation)



Oyster Bar (Patience has Virtue)



Barracudas (Commuters)



Submerged, 2001

Lithography, 45.75 x 29.5 in. (116.2 x 74.9 cm)

Edition of 4000, Commissioned by the MTA Arts for Transit Poster Program



Top: pasting posters  
Right: self-portrait (detail)



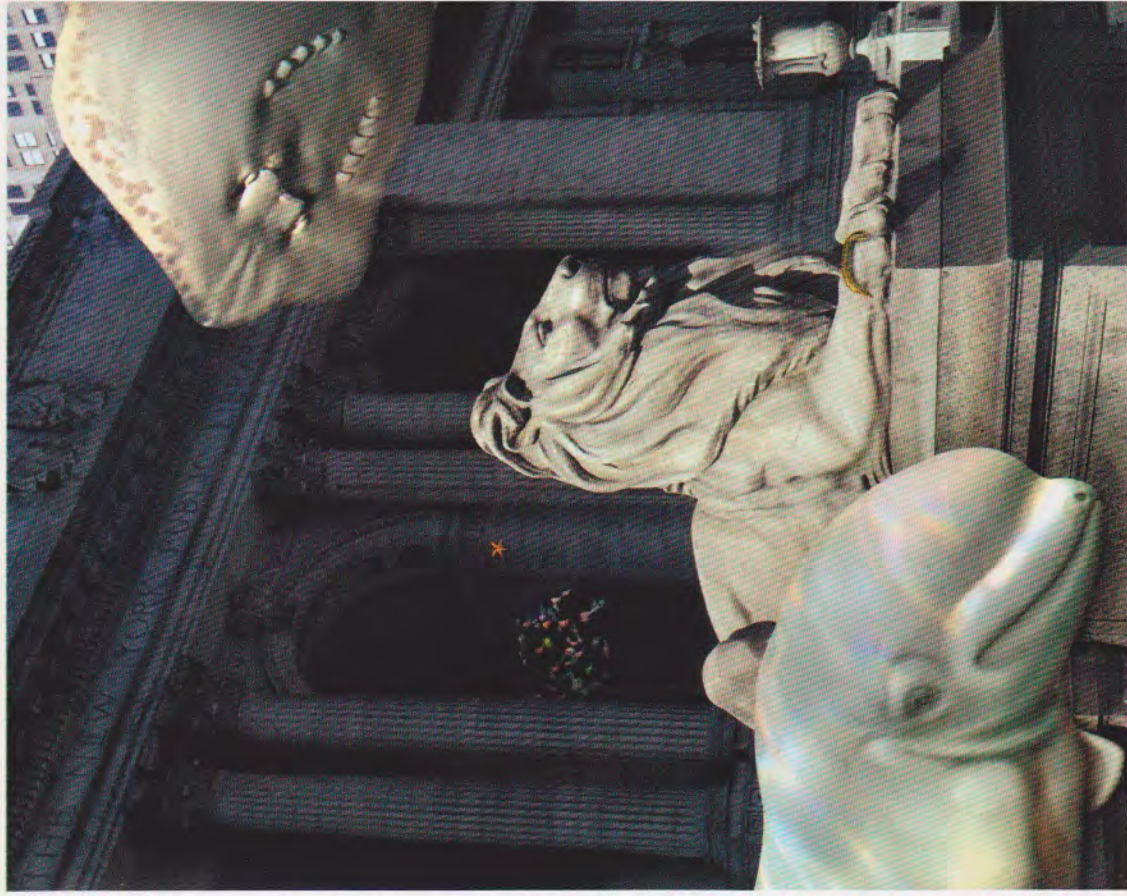
Times Square Station Installation, 2001

Posters installed in over 400 NYC subway stations, from June 2001 - June 2002



Deep Research (Identification Petrification)

Deep Research Series, 1997 - 2002  
12 images, Vibrachrome prints, 62.5 x 50 in. (158.8 x 127 cm) each



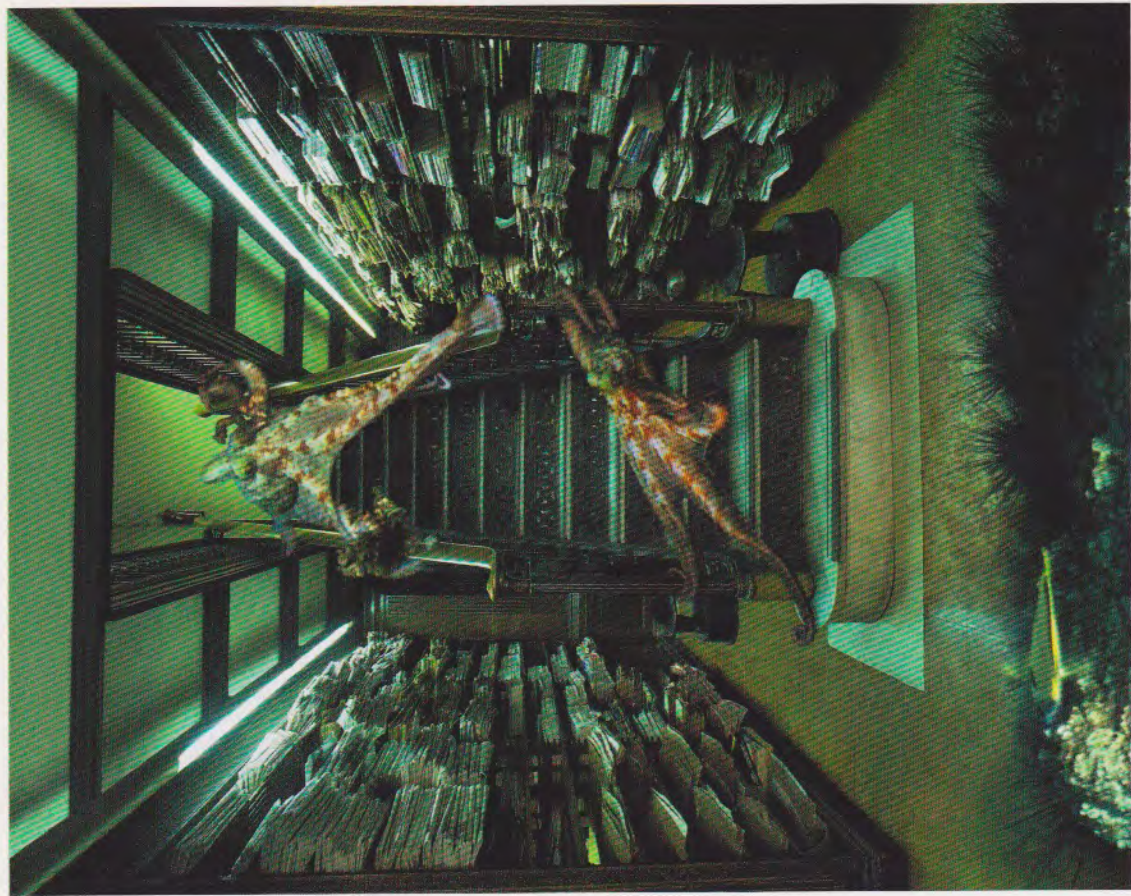
NYPL (Natural History)



Turtles (Never Give Up)



Grouper (Get Help)



Octopus (Careful On The Way Up)



Offline (Paradise and Purgatory)



Reading Room (Writers Block)



Microfish (Read the Fine Print)



Mapping (Know Sense of Direction)



Art for Art's Sake (Best Foot Forward/Commence to Consummate)

Select Awards, Grants and Fellowships

- 2002 China Institute, study/tour of China
- 2001 Japan Society, Educators Forum study/tour of Japan
- New York Foundation for the Arts Catalogue Project Award
- 1999 Artists Space Individual Artists Grant
- 1997 Council for Basic Education/Time Warner Inc., Art Fellowship
- 1992 Walt Disney Company American Teacher Award, Visual Arts
- 1990 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, Photography
- 1979 C.E.T.A. Artists Grant, Photography

Select Bibliography

- 2001 "Eden Revised," Helen A. Harrison, *The New York Times*, 6/16
- 2000 "REPOhistory's Circulation," Paul D. Miller, *Art Byte*, Sept. - Oct.
- 1998 "Creations through Technology," V. Donohue, *Philadelphia Inquirer*
- "Il Fascino Del Contemporaneo," Lisa Parola, *TORINOgette* 48
- "Spray it, don't say it," M. Healey, *TimeOut New York*, 7/23-30
- 1997 "Immersive Tendencies: Meryl Meisler," Diana Linden, *PRINT LVI*
- 1996 "Americans by Americans," Helen Harrison, *New York Times*, 2/2
- "Barracuda," Phil Patton, *WIRED*, 4.05, May
- "News Beat: Barracudas is part of Grand Splash," *Publish*, June
- "Meryl Meisler's digital photos submerge the City," *TimeOut NY*, 1/31
- 1995 "Unmask Thyself," Gay Hiroko Taguchi, *The Times Herald*, 10/4
- 1991 "Restless Photography," Julie Lasky, *PRINT*, vol. 44, #3
- 1989 "Democracy," edited by Brian Wallis, *Bay Press*
- 1990 "Women In Photography," *Zoom*, Vol. 154, USA and France
- 1988 "Working The Gap Between Art & Politics," Roberta Smith, *The New York Times*, 9/25

Select Public Art Installations and solo exhibitions

- 2002 "Submerged," MTA Network Poster, NYC, NY
- 2000 "Corporate Cow in a Bull Market," 55 Broad Street, NYC, NY
- 1999 "Information Immersion," Pace University, NYC, NY
- 1998 "Meryl Meisler," SUNY Westchester Gallery, Peekskill, NY
- 1997 "Grand Splash," Thundergulch, NYC, NY
- 1996 "Grand Splash," Grand Central Terminal, NYC, NY
- 1995 "Environ/mental States," Burke Ladden Gallery, NYC, NY

Select Group Exhibitions

- 2002 "Waterwalks," ISE Cultural Foundation Gallery, NYC, NY
- "Ground Zero," Museum of New Art, Detroit, MI
- "Women of NY," City Hall, NYC, NY
- 2001 "Digital: Printmaking Now" Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
- "Dumbo Double Deuce," Russian American Cultural Ctr, B'klyn, NY
- "In The Style Of," Islip Museum of Art, Islip, NY
- 2000 "WOMENTEK," Peninsula Fine Arts Museum, Newport News, VA
- "REPOHistory Circulation Project," NYC, NY
- "Eden Revisited," Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
- 1999 "Time of Our Lives," New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC, NY
- "The Light Show," Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
- "Meisler/Fretz/Barriffi," Edward Hopper House Art Center, Nyack, NY
- 1998 "WOMENTEK," Lawrence Gallery, Rosemont College, Rosemont, PA
- "The Luminous Image III," Gallery Velan, Torino, Italy
- 1996 "All American Portraits," Naproskovo Museum, Prague and Severoceske Museum, Liberec, North Bohemia
- "alt.youth.media," The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC, NY
- "Nine Sculptors Recent Sightings," Sullivan County Museum, NY
- "Birds, Beasts, Blossoms and Bugs," Brooklyn Botanical Garden, NY

- 1995 "Shoot The Catskills," Sullivan County Museum, Hurleyville, NY
- 1993 "The Final Frontier," New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC, NY
- "Twenty Years Ago Today," Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
- "Exploring The Corners: Box Works," Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
- 1991 "AIDS Timeline," Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, NYC
- 1990 "Surface Appearances," Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
- "Exhibiting Associate: Meryl Meisler," The Center for Photography at Woodstock, NY
- 1990 "Women Photographers; NY/Tokyo - Our Illusions and Realities," Nikon House, NYC, NY and Konica Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1988 "Education and Democracy," Dia Art Foundation, NYC, NY
- "150 Years of Pop Photographica," Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
- 1987 "American/French Art Exchange," Municipalte de Auvers-sur Oise, Salle Polyvalente, France and Chuck Levitan Gallery, NYC, NY
- "Foto Forum USA," Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1978 "Jewish New York: 3 CETA Artists," Macy's Herald Square, NYC, NY
- 1976 "Young Photographers International Exhibition," Arles, France
- "Photography & Language," Camerawork Gallery, SF, CA

#### Select Collections

American Jewish Congress  
Library of Congress  
Islip Art Museum, NY  
Metropolitan Transit Authority of NY  
Reuters Instinet



Art for Art's Sake (Best Foot Forward/Commence to Consummate), 2002 (detail)

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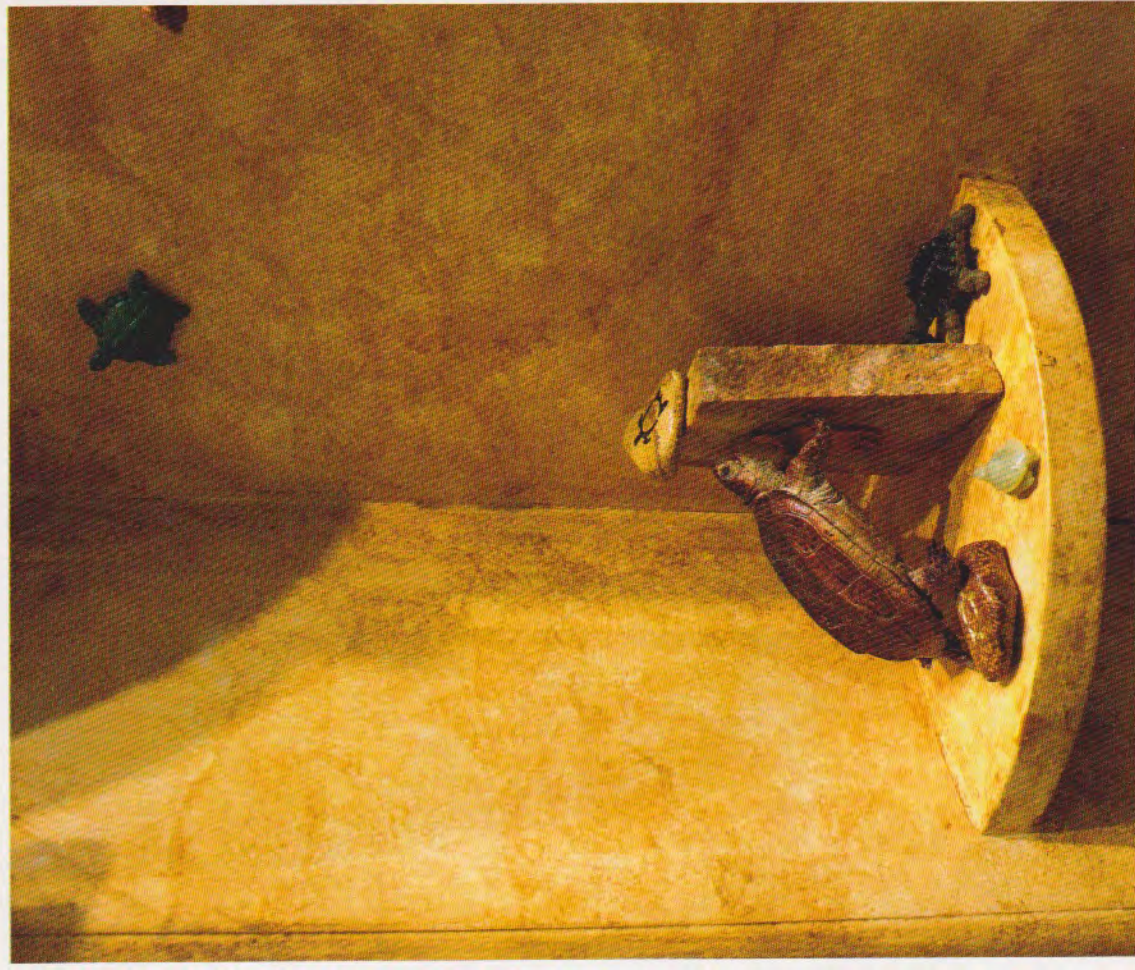
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| Sandra Bloodworth               | Marilyn S. Kushner          |
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| David Brody                     | Laurie Meisler              |
| Jon Callindes, Master Craftsman | Mitchell Meisler            |
| Anne Campbell                   | Barbara Head Millstein      |
| Mona Chen                       | MTA Arts for Transit        |
| Nancy Donner                    | The New York Public Library |
| The Fifth Color, Printer        | Vel Riberto                 |

#### For Further Information

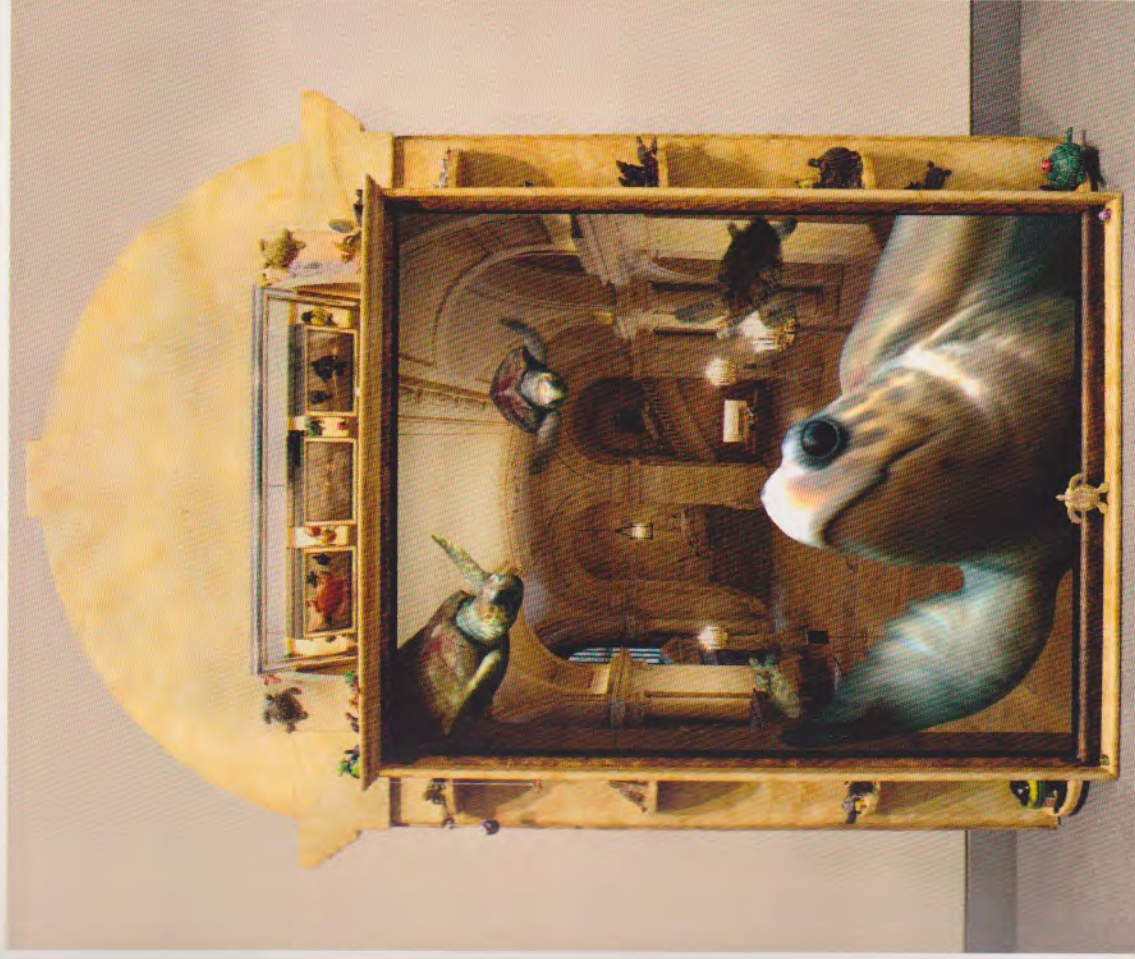
The Image Frontier  
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www.imagefrontier.com  
P.O. Box 129  
Brooklyn, NY 11215



Turtles (Never Give Up), (verso detail)  
Installing work at the Brooklyn Museum of Art



*Turtles (Never Give Up), (verso detail)*



*Turtles (Never Give Up), 2001 (verso)*  
Installation at the Brooklyn Museum of Art  
Acrylic paint on Vibrachrome and Cibaprints, wood, Plexiglas, and mixed media  
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