

*Merging the KNOWN and the UNKNOWN*

*New Work by*

**FRAN FORMAN**



PUCKER GALLERY • BOSTON



*Canyon in the Night*, 2013  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 17 x 16.25" image  
FF58

# *Merging the KNOWN and the UNKNOWN*

*New Work by FRAN FORMAN*



*Star Gazer*; 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 14 x 21" image  
FF75

*“Many of my recent images explore our complex relationship with those who have come before us, and also with our non-human companions with whom we share—albeit tenuously—this fragile planet.”*

-FRAN FORMAN

Fran Forman’s visual language is a fusion of photography and painting, merging magic realism and surrealism. While honing her incredible craftsmanship as a graphic designer, her imagination was captured by the emotive power of photography. Forman reveals life’s discrepancies between the conventional and the unknown. Her images are mythical narratives of dreams and fables, suffused with colours that transform them to a visionary plane. A latent angst seeps through unearthly calm. Recurring motifs from unknown realms break through the barriers of reality. Primordial symbols are translated into conventional awareness and incongruous juxtapositions. They are submitted to an austere sense of composition, acting as energy transformers and moulders of consciousness.

Forman’s approach is empirical, rooted in her personal experience of motherhood and self-transformation. From her late mother she inherited a trove of family photos which she uses over and over again, combining them with photographs of contemporary children or unknown children from long ago. This is her link between past and present.

Linking is essentially what Forman’s oeuvre is about. She connects the earth with the cosmos. She reaches out to an ultimate composition of all things by means of mathematical formulae which underlie the sciences, astronomy, and physics. In *Star Gazer* (FF75, above) the features of a young girl are enmeshed in a nineteenth-century astronomical map. In *Canyon in the Night* (FF58, page 2) the earth, seen from the perspective of geological

rock formations of Southern Utah, is depicted in relation to a synthesis of the moon and Mars.

Forman connects the ephemeral moment between two states of mind. Human and animal, myth and reality, consciousness and the unconscious, are made manifest in motifs of children and adolescents, archetypes of hope. They exude a life-force that has something to do with magic—and everything to do with all-encompassing love. These enigmatic images are filled with a palpable longing, and manage to remain unfrighting in spite of their uneasy imagery.

Some images resonate with whimsical humour, notably when special motifs relocate to different settings, as in dreams. Henri Rousseau's lion in the 1897 painting *The Sleeping Gypsy* is a fairy tale prototype of the masculine principle. In *Guardian of the Lion* (FF66, page 5), Forman transfers the lion into a clumsy predator on lumbering legs in a synthetic meadow, sandwiched between two pompous wardens. *Avebury Sunset* (FF57, page 5) offers a counterpart to this fabled creature, with the young lioness in the thicket, hugged by a girl. The jungle beast purrs with unabashed delight. In *Moon Lion* (FF71, page 18), the majestic king of predators trumpets his regal roar into the night, which reverberates in the light particles of the moon. The magnificent creature is caught up in the cosmic drama between the earth's magnetism and its satellite.

Fran Forman's surrealism was primarily inspired by René Magritte (1898-1967), who set unrelated objects and human figures against each other in a mood of deathly silence. One of his prominent motifs was an empty bird cage replacing a human torso. This cage is a leitmotif in Forman's iconography. To her, it signifies escape and freedom. In *Deer Isle, Morning Visit* (FF61, back cover), a boy is holding a cage with the bird locked inside, this time for shelter. They are observed by a gentle deer while walking past holiday cottages, but in the thicket a canine creature stares out with a greedy glare. In *Traveler* (FF77, page 19), a boy wearing a French bicorne hat stands with crossed legs in the flowing waters of time; his bird cage contains a childhood photograph of the artist and her brother.

One of Forman's early influences was Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), whose art was also rooted in surrealism. He created glass-fronted "shadow-boxes" containing arranged assemblages of old photographs, childhood bric-a-brac, and birds, which also have a prominent role in Forman's visual narratives. Birds are traditionally metaphors of activation and emblematic of the spiritual and supernatural worlds. However, Fran's birds suggest freedom, escape, and the natural world.

Cornell's boxes are akin to shrines on the threshold between the past and beyond, imbued with a quality of enchantment. Forman intensifies this sense of enchantment with her two-dimensional 'portals' inviting the viewer to enter her mysterious world.

In *Magician's Rabbit* (FF53, front cover), a spell is cast involving a rabbit in a hat. Up in the clouds, near the stars and galaxies, the rabbit goes unnoticed by the female postilion who is navigating over an endless grass plane; in her rickety wheeled carriage is a huge trapped animal to serve as a carrier of instinct. She gazes at a boat on the horizon, sailing away on the grassland.

An artistic theme of introspective enchantment in Forman's work recalls Josephine Sacabo's (b. 1944) photographs. One of her images is the staircase. *Evasive Dream No. 2* (FF63, page 14) depicts a child holding a leash, which winds down the steps reaching into the basement—a metaphor of the unconscious. There, a boy dressed in dated clothing is seated in an armchair. That boy is the artist's father at age four.

As a magic realist, Forman places naturalistic images into surrealistic settings. In the piece *In the Forest* (FF68, page 12), the reassuring pachyderm is approached by a hesitant boy; his butterfly wings stuck closely to his shoulders as he holds an empty bird cage. Despite the elephant's sad eyes and broken tusk, he embodies strength, wisdom, and compassion, while the boy suggests wonder. In *End Paper* (FF62, page 10) a girl in a meadow hurries towards a boy in alpine costume sitting astride an elephant, who endures him with apathy. A sailboat drifts to freedom and a brilliant sunrise fills the scene with radiance.

Adolescents are Forman's most compelling metaphor for awakening life force as youth, by its very nature, embody transformation. Like contact with primordial nature, change and transformation can be frightening. In *A Greeting* (FF54, page 8), a girl meets a bear—a quintessential force of nature. Rising on hind legs to create a level of equality, his kindly eyes greet her. *Wolf in the Parlor* (FF79, page 9) is a terrifying encounter between two raging predators and two teenagers, in an exquisitely furnished golden chamber. The boy and girl shut their eyes and ears to the imagined aggression of the wolves. In *Caravan* (FF59, page 13) a young girl leads a silhouette of five camels in single file across a desert past the glaring disc of the sun. It is a dangerous passage through a fiery dust storm towards the safety of a lighthouse. Her figure wrestling with the hostile elements of nature creates a metaphor of transformation.



*Guardian of the Lion*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 15 x 21" image  
FF66



*Avebury Sunset*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 14 x 21" image  
FF57

To Forman, a house is a setting of psychical events. As a shelter and a repository of custom and wisdom, the house is also an analogy of the human body and of the self. *The Key* (FF76, page 11) offers an imagined narrative of a link with a nebulous past. Seen from behind—characteristic of Forman's figures—is the key holder to a dilapidated mansion beyond a meadow. A lamb, perhaps a symbol of the figure's own childhood, stands in front of the house.

In Carrickfergus, Ireland, women were convicted in 1711 of bewitching a young girl. *Carrickfergus* (FF60, page 11) shows a lonely girl from a previous era standing in a doorway in a row of townhouses, bathed in an eerie light, while her modern counterpart observes the scene. They are aware of each other in the ghostly simultaneity of past and present. A night scene in *Smoke Signals No. 2* (FF74, page 15) reveals a young girl with her birds framed by a brightly lit window. She sends her magic haze into the night garden with its inverted orchard, perhaps to ward off misfortune, or in a lonely, hallucinatory call.

Windows connect the inner and outer spaces of a house, both physically and metaphorically. In *Letting Go* (FF56, page 14), an adolescent stares inside, holding the shell of a broken egg in a ritual gesture. A dove, white as the clouds in the sky above, enters the inner chamber. Adolescent girls inhabit interior chambers, moving between spaces like visible fluctuations of consciousness and longing. In *Melancholic Museum* (FF70, page 7), teens of past and present are depicted in costumes of different eras. Vast interlocking chambers flow into landscapes of different settings. The austere composition holds the enigmatic scene together. We recognize the back view of the warden who has been relocated from his task as the *Guardian of the Lion* (FF66, page 5), staring at a landscapewith ruins. Images of different times, places, and lands are fused into a simultaneity which has a magical effect. In *Grey Abbey* (FF65, page 10), the morning sun, hailed by a teen with raised arms, flows through the ruins forming patterns of the corroded gothic windows. The young girl embodies continuity through her consciousness of transience.

Boats floating away on the sea or on endless grassland, as in *Sailboat* (FF72, page 8), express a yearning to escape and Forman's experiments with aerodynamics embrace the desire to fly. *The Glider Over Lacock* (FF64, page 13) floats over an English country chapel and is greeted by a fearful coyote.

In the art of Fran Forman, the mask is a recurring transformation motif. In *The Super Blood Moon Shepherd* (FF73, page 9), a lone herder stands beside his sheep on a hill. They stand against a glowing evening sky under a moon encircled by a flock

of birds which augur danger. Wearing the meek animal's mask ludicrously fuses his identity with the sheep. A skeletal fence arises out of blue depths, behind which a goat emerges, vital and strong.

Forman's color is beholden to the paintings of Graceann Warn (b.1955) and Mark Rothko (1903-1970), whose colors arise from untold inner depths. Forman is entranced by Rothko's colours, textures, and layers, which she has translated into her technique of digital painting. Hovering between light and dark, primordial terror and ecstasy, anguish and desire, her colors exude a synesthetic power. They resonate, clash, boom, throb, and ripple, in an ever-resonating life force. Emerging from the abysses of the artist's intuitive being, the colors separate earth and sky, fire and air, rearranging them into layers of mythical forces connected by flashes of magnetic fields. Forman's colors in this current exhibition are largely sombre. A suggested pessimism has crept into her work, possibly stemming from a sense of powerlessness over the course of random and unwelcome events in the present world or in her personal life.

In *Anselm's Ladder* (FF55, page 7), a ballerina stands at the end of a passage glancing back at a metal wall. The image of the ladder is part of German artist Anselm Kiefer's (b. 1945) iconography. Forman links herself with Kiefer's mythological anarchy to probe further abysses and intimations of nihilism and despair in the human condition. But ultimately, as in *Highland Light* (FF67, page 12), all sombreness vanishes and the force of fable set her world aglow again. The gentle, towering herbivore of the Savannah carries its rider in the lady's seat with quiet confidence. Crystal-clear waters beneath a glowing sky and variations on former themes by the artist play their vibrant part in this colour-drenched fairy tale.

Fran Forman's art expresses the interconnectedness of humankind, past and present, conscious and subconscious, and in its turn, the connectedness of this world with the numinous. In its affirmation of fear and grief lies the power of comfort. Her art links humankind with its spiritual realms, by means of fantasy and imagination.

— UTE BEN YOSEF

*Ute Ben Yosef has a BA in Librarianship and PhD in History of Art and Fine Arts from the University of Pretoria. In conjunction with her graduate work, she completed studies at the Art Historical Institute of the Free University of Berlin. She was a Senior Lecturer in History of Art at the University of Pretoria, before moving to Switzerland where she worked as an art critic for various Swiss newspapers. After returning to Cape Town she served as Head Librarian of the Jacob Gitlin Library, whilst lecturing and publishing art historical research papers and monographs on contemporary artists.*



*Anselm's Ladder*, 2014  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 15.25 x 20.75" image  
FF55



*Melancholic Museum*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 20 x 16" image  
FF70



*Sailboat*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 21" image  
FF72



*A Greeting*, 2014  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 15.5 x 17" image  
FF54





*The Super Blood Moon Shepherd*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 18" image  
FF73



*Wolf in the Parlor*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 19" image  
FF79



*Grey Abbey*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 21 x 16.25" image  
FF65



*Endpaper*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 12 x 21" image  
FF62



*The Key*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 19 x 16.25" image  
FF76



*Carrickfergus*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 18 x 16" image  
FF60



*Highland Light*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 18" image  
FF67



*In the Forest*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 19.25" image  
FF68



*Glider Over Lacock*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 18.25 x 16.25" image  
FF64



*Caravan*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 18 x 16.25" image  
FF59



*Letting Go*, 2007  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 15.75 x 13.75" image  
FF56



*Evasive Dream No. 2*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 16.25 x 16.25" image  
FF63



*Smoke Signals No. 2*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 20 x 16.25" image  
FF74



*Two Cottages*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 16.5 x 16.25" image  
FF78





*Kearney, 2015*  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 18" image  
FF69



*Moon Lion*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
17 x 22" paper, 16.25 x 16.25" image  
FF71

## *Biography*

### FRAN FORMAN

**F**ran Forman received her BA from Brandeis University in sociology and art, an MSW in psychiatric social work, and then an MFA from Boston University. She has held a succession of positions in the field of graphic design, book cover art, and web design. Between professional life and raising two daughters, Forman continued to create her personal art, combining her illustrative and photographic skills with a passion for surrealism, paradox, illusion, assemblage, the non-human world, and the dislocations of time and place. Forman is a Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis and a recipient of several grants. She teaches digital collage at various colleges and her work has been exhibited widely, both locally and internationally. She has won significant awards including the 2013 Julia Margaret Cameron International First Prize in Fine Art Photography and the 2012 Px3 Prix

de la Photographie (Gold, Silver, and First Prize in three different categories), where her work was on exhibit in Paris. In 2011, she was one of only thirty Americans invited to attend and exhibit at the second Biennial International Photographic Cultural Festival in Lishui, China. Her work appears in journals, magazines, and on book covers, and is included in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; County Down Museum, Belfast, United Kingdom; and the Fox Talbot Museum in Lacock, Wiltshire, United Kingdom. A monograph, *Escape Artist, the Art of Fran Forman*, was published in 2014 from Schiffer Books. Curator and designer Elizabeth Avedon selected it as one of the best photo books of 2014, and it won first prize in an international juried competition selected by 21<sup>st</sup> Editions. She has been represented by Pucker Gallery since 2013.



*Traveler*, 2015  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 16.75 x 16.25" image  
FF77

*Credits:*

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ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON

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**Gallery Hours**

Monday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM

Sunday 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM

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*New Work by FRAN FORMAN*

DATES 4 June through 17 July 2016

OPENING RECEPTION 4 June 2016 • 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM

*The public is invited to attend. The artist will be present.*



*Deer Isle, Morning Visit, 2015*  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
22 x 17" paper, 21 x 16.25" image  
FF61

Cover:  
*Magician's Rabbit, 2013*  
Archival pigment print, edition of 15  
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FF53