

Victor Raphael

This book is printed in conjunction with the exhibition

## Victor Raphael: Space Fields organized by the William D. Cannon Art Gallery

Cultural Arts Office / City of Carlsbad

January 23 through March 18, 2005.

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On the web www.victorraphael.com.

Of the web www.victorraphaei.com

Catalogue design Leah Roschke

Printed by Partner Press

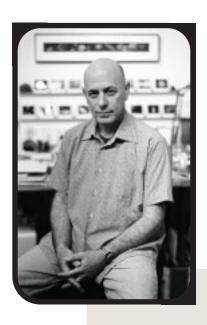
Photo of the artist Alan Raphael Photography Barndoor Studios,

Blue Fier and Susan Einstein

Cover Comet Nebula, 1997

Unique Iris on canvas with metal leaf 29 x 35.5 inches

# Viçtor Raphael



January 23 – March 18, 2005 William D. Cannon Art Gallery

#### foreword

When I was a kid growing up in the L950's I was excited about the prospect of being an astronaut and going out into space...I think that working with these space images was a way for me to put myself out there and create my own fantasy about space.

VICTOR RAPHAEL, A CREATIVE JOURNEY

#### Since the first U.S. manned space flight in 1961,

humans and machines have explored the solar system, reaching out to the Sun, the Moon, the planets and beyond. For many of us, the drama and excitement of space exploration took place in our own living rooms, where we watched NASA broadcasts on television and saw photographs of outer space for the first time. The imagery was breathtaking, and the impact of what had been achieved was enormous. Enthralled and awestruck, we watched as rockets carrying sophisticated instruments thundered across the new frontier. These spectacular achievements fired the imagination of people across the nation and all over the world and opened the minds of many individuals to explore and to dream.

This exhibition, *Victor Raphael: Space Fields*, has much of the same energy as those early NASA programs. Because Raphael was inspired by photo-based images that appeared on televised NASA programs, it seems natural and fitting that he now uses both photography and the television as the conduit for his art. Images on the television screen become both the inspiration and the vehicle by which he begins his work. From exquisite, jewel-like Polaroids to large-scale canvases to Iris prints to a multi-dimensional CD-ROM project, Raphael explores a variety of media and creative techniques. Fifty-eight works of art comprise *Victor Raphael: Space Fields* with processes that include photography, paint, paper, computers, and printmaking. The result is a stunning visual journey into outer space and into the imaginative world of Victor Raphael.

I want to thank the following individuals and organizations that made this exhibition and catalogue possible. First and Foremost, thank you to Teresa M. Cannon and the Carlsbad Arts Associates for their ongoing commitment and support of the programs of the Cultural Arts Office and the William D. Cannon Art Gallery. A special thank you to Barbara Hitchcock, Director of Cultural Affairs for the Polaroid Collections for writing the introduction. Thanks go to Leah Roschke for designing this beautiful catalogue and poster. Funding for the poster, which was developed for the students and teachers participating in the Three-Part-Art outreach program, was provided by a "Museums for America" grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal grant-making agency. Thank you to Michael Zakian at the Weisman Museum, Pepperdine University for agreeing to loan Victor's iconic work, *Planet Field*. I am grateful to the Gallery Committee, the Carlsbad Arts Commission, and all the gallery volunteers for their backing and participation, and to members of the Cultural Arts Office Staff, who continue to do terrific work with energy and passion. Finally, a special thank you to Victor Raphael for his enthusiasm, creativity and the countless hours he devoted to the project. Because of his dedication to arts education, he encouraged me to postpone his original exhibition dates in order to take part in the gallery's exciting Three-Part-Art education program. The Three-Part-Art program includes complete classroom curricula, guided gallery tours, and hands-on art projects for elementary school students for three exhibitions during the year. Over 2,000 students, parents and teachers will participate in the program during Victor Raphael: Space Fields. Victor also generously burned over 90 CD's of his CD-ROM project "A Creative Journey" that were included in the curriculum resource guides.

It is with great pleasure that the William D. Cannon Art Gallery presents this body of work in both exhibition and publication form. We hope you find it inspiring, thought-provoking and extraordinary.

Karen McGuire Curator

# just imagine

It must be autumn • The Ed Sullivan Show lights up TV screens in living rooms where families all over America gathered on Sunday nights. But in a back yard, lying in the fragrant grass, his hands pillowing his head, Victor Raphael stares into the crisp, clear midnight-blue sky. He spies a shooting star flash across the sky, but it extinguishes abruptly. The Milky Way sparkles before his eyes. Finding the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia or the Northern Cross is a piece of cake. He's explored these Heavens from his earth-bound perspective many times before.

Victor Raphael's childhood fascination with the Universe and its mysteries has never waned. Looking at his space field oeuvre, a lifetime in the making, one sees that his curiosity and excitement about the cosmos translates into Polaroid photographs that reflect his sense of wonder, yet reveal specific fragments of reality. Raphael made snapshots of planets, comets and nebula from NASA broadcasts on television. The images quickly appear on film much as the real celestial objects do as the sunset ushers in the night. But these luminous images were just starting points. Raphael transforms bursts of light captured on film with gold leaf and metal paints to give them brilliance, nuanced colors, and dimensionality. Specks of dust and gases take form as spots of gold, orange, magenta and silver paint, spiraling across the blackened firmament. Similarly, metallic hunks of meteorites hurl toward us, backlit by amorphous shapes of light. In these jewel-like photographs, we are able to share Raphael's focused, telescopic view of space.

The physical dimensions and Mylar surface of the Polaroid Spectra print has its merits, but it also has its boundaries, clearly defined by its white borders. To portray planets, moons and stars within a four-inch square demands one's close attention. You must halt in your tracks and really look. The vastness of space then opens before your eyes.

Sometimes, however, the image displayed on the snapshot simply must be interpreted in grand dimensions. And Raphael, interested in new technologies, complies, creating his hand-embellished prints not only as outsized canvases, but also as digital prints on canvas and rag board. Complex explosions of inter-galactic particles scatter across five-foot wide canvases in rich, psychedelic colors and designs. Metal leaf isolates elements of this visual cacophony to help interpret the subject, to keep us grounded as these dramatic, large-scale photographs aim to transport us into uncharted territory.

With Victor Raphael at the helm, our travel into Space Fields is a magnificent adventure. We see close up what were once distant, unknowable constellations, specks of light and floating matter. We could reach out and touch 3-dimensional artifacts, rescued from oblivion, reconstituted with imagination and the stroke of a paintbrush to expand our horizons. Amidst these images, we sense the vastness of space and the power of imagination, nurtured in the darkness of night and the security of the backyard. A boy's dreams are realized and we all are enriched for it.

Barbara Hitchcock

Director, Cultural Affairs The Polaroid Collections Polaroid Corporation

December 14, 2004

### A Conversation with the Artist

KM: When did you
know you wanted to
be an artist?

You have said that the Space Field series, presented in this exhibition, is one of your favorite themes. Why?

You use technology to create a variety of multi-media works. Can you discuss the transition from the Polaroid image to other multiple levels of imagery? VR: For me, it was a gradual realization. In college I started taking some art classes, and after a trip to Europe in 1969 – seeing the art displayed in the museums and galleries there – I fell in love with the world of art. While still in college, I co-directed an art gallery and became a master printer of etchings, printing editions for other artists. This was a valuable experience, as I got to see how several different artists worked. During this same period of time, I was taking acting classes and making independent videos. I worked for a while at the Neuropsychiatric Institute at UCLA making documentary and educational films. Finally, in 1980, I opened my studio in downtown Los Angeles, and began devoting time to my own artwork.

I had been interested in space since I was a kid. As an artist, I feel that these space images are unique to our time. I'm not interested in being scientifically accurate about the images I work with. I am more interested in abstracting the images, and exploring the relationship between the micro and macro worlds.

My process begins by taking Polaroid photographs from the television, often of NASA images sent back from space. After the image is captured, I paint on the surface of the Polaroid with gold and metal leaf, in order to obscure and heighten certain aspects of the imagery. By altering the image in this way, I transform these space images and relate them to abstract and universal traditions. The next phase of my process involves digitally capturing the Polaroid with a 4" x 5" camera with a digital back. This approach allows me to light the Polaroid to accentuate the highlights and shadows created by the applied paint and gold leaf applications. Then, using digital technology again, I expand the scale and scope of the Polaroids – outputting the image onto canvas. This produces a unique piece – but I'm still not done – because then I hand-work the surface again with gold and metal leaf.

Why the changes in scale? What does that achieve for you?

One of the pieces in this exhibition, from your work done at Self-Help Graphics, is an image of the pyramids at Teotihuacan in Mexico. How does this relate to your Space Field series?

What are some of the other "themes" you have focused on in your work?

Viewing the Polaroid is an intimate experience. You have to get up close to take in these highly concentrated images. With the expansion of scale, you physically have a different relationship with the work – it can be read across the room as well as up close. Additionally, the larger versions are not copies of the Polaroids. There is a transformation that occurs with the shift in scale. I am interested in exploring the iterations that are a result of the creative process.

In the late 70's, I did a series of pieces on UFO's, including a photo collage of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan. When Jose Alpuche, the master printer at Self-Help Graphics, saw it at the Weisman Museum show, we talked about making an updated version as a silkscreen. The piece is a musing on the mystery of the unknown origin and fate of the people who built this incredible structure. Hundreds of years after it was abandoned, the Aztecs gave Teotihuacan it's name, meaning "the place where men became gods." In *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*, Erich von Daniken's highly speculative book, argues that the great, unexplained engineering feats of ancient civilizations were technological gifts from alien space travelers. So man's interest in the heavens and space is as old as mankind itself.

I'm interested in the big questions and in the smallest detail that reveals something divine. I did a series at the old Getty villa in Malibu on the building's architectural details, the collection, and the ripples and patterns of water in the peristyle pool. These Getty water studies led to a series of gold and metal leaf paintings of water on canvas. My travels have inspired a series of *Paris Polaroids* and another trip to Japan resulted in an exhibition *Pictures from the Floating World*, which included digital video, altered Polaroids and larger works on canvas hung as scrolls. I also have an ongoing series of abstractions that are kind of a laboratory for new ideas. As an artist, everything I come in contact with can be potential subject matter. I think the artist's role is to open people's perceptions and share another way of looking at things.

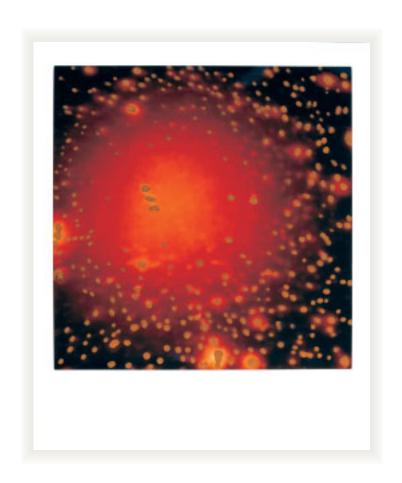
You've mentioned
that your work has
contained art
historical references.
I've read that you
have drawn inspiration
from artists such as
Jackson Pollock and
Man Ray. Can you
talk about how these
artists and any
others have
inflenced you?

Your CD-ROM "Victor Raphael@ZZYZX A Creative Journey" is your first CD-ROM project. Can you tell us about it? I was interested in Pollock's painting technique and the way he dealt with pictorial space. However, it was my resemblance to him that led me to investigate the man behind the artwork. In the mid 80's I did a body of work on Pollock, which included a video, a series of altered Polaroids, and several large Cibachromes. I spent several months going through his archives and made a pilgrimage to his home and studio in Springs, Long Island. Pollock believed that the unconscious was the source of creativity. With respect to Man Ray, I am inspired by the fact that he worked in many different media. As he said, "I paint what I cannot photograph; and I photograph what I cannot paint." His Dada spirit is inspiring and engaging. I have been influenced by many artists: Duchamp, Johns and Rauschenberg were early influences. I was fascinated by Lucas Samaras' Polaroids, Oscar Fischenger, Gustav Klimt, Yves Klein, Richard Long, Joseph Cornell, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Monet, Picasso. The list goes on and on. As Marcel Proust said, "Thanks to Art, instead of seeing a single world, our own, we see it multiply until we have before us as many worlds as there are original artists."

The CD-ROM chronicles my initiation into the digital world, which began in 1995 when I began working with ZZYZX, an innovative digital company founded by Bob Goldstein. I went there initially to create Iris prints from my altered Polaroids, but when we began digitizing the Polaroids, the images were so beautiful on the computer screen that the idea of displaying the work in a CD-ROM presentation became a compelling idea. From the beginning of the project to the pressing of the first edition took about a year and a half. We used state of the art technology to present my artwork to new audiences, in an interactive multi-media format. The technology has allowed me to extend the experience of the work in new ways. Instead of being limited to a two-dimensional presentation, viewers can interactively travel through the artwork. Navigating at various speeds with the mouse allows the viewer to become a participant as well as a collaborator in creating variations in the imagery. As new technologies and software are developed, I'm excited to see where the work might go from here. Among the several museum collections in which it is included, A Creative Journey was the first CD-ROM accepted into the collection of the Bibliotheque national of France in 1998. It was also presented at the international computer conference Siggraph in 1999.



Electromagnetic Planet, 2000 Unique Colorspan on canvas with metal leaf 44 1/2 x 54 1/2 inches



Space Field 1986
Acrylic on 600 Polaroid
4 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches



**Solar Arc** 1992 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Space Field, 1992 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Star Cloud 1996 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Space Field (blue) 1997

Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid

4 x 4 inches





Planet Tribeca II, 1999 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



NYC II<sub>n</sub> 1999 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Vegas Starsı 1999 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Cone Nebula In 2001 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid 4 x 4 inches



Planet in Metal Field  $_{1}$  2001 Metal leaf on Spectra Polaroid  $_{4}$  x 4 inches

# Victor Raphael

#### Education

University of California, Los Angeles, B.A., Magna Cum Laude, 1971-1973 California State University, Northridge, 1968-1970

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2005 William D. Cannon Art Gallery, Space Fields

2002 Cypress College,
 Paris Polaroids: Art In The City Of Lights
 Santa Ana College, Pictures From The Floating World

2000 Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University,

Envisioning Space (20-year survey)

1995 Santa Monica College, The Getty Series

1991 Santa Monica College, Space Fields, Abstractions and Jackson Pollock 1980-1991

1989 Richard Green Gallery, Los Angeles, The Space Field Series

1987 Richard Green Gallery, Los Angeles, Small Paintings

1981 Azurite Exhibitions, Los Angeles,
Paintings, Drawings and Photocollages 1978-1981

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

2005 Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Insatiable Desires

2004 LA Municipal Art Gallery, Bioballistic
Bell Family Gallery, Too Jewish – Not Jewish Enough
Self-Help Graphics, Atelier XLIV

2003 Karpeles Manuscript Library and Museum, Santa Barbara, California, Jean-Pierre Hebert & Victor Raphael:

Illuminated Collaboration

Angels Gate Cultural Center, San Pedro, California,
The Labyrinth and Related Energy Patterns
LA Artcore, International Exchange Show: Crosscurrent
El Camino College, Torrance, California, About Face
U.S. Embassy, Dakar, Senegal, Art in Embassies Program

2002 Photographic Resource Center at Boston University,
 *American Perspectives: Photographs from the Polaroid Collection* Self-Help Graphics, East Los Angeles,
 *About, By, & From: Boyle Heights* 
 BC Space Gallery, Laguna Beach, California,
 *Artist Trade Show* 
 Japanese American Cultural Center, Los Angeles,

Japanese American Cultural Center, Los Angeles,

Lantern of the East

Photo Impact Gallery, Hollywood, LA Nude 8

Orange County Center For Contemporary Art,
Ooparts ||

2001 Museum of Contemporary Art, Sapporo, Japan,
America Perspectives: Photographs from the
Polaroid Collection

John Wayne Airport, Newport Beach, California, Darkroom & Digital

Takamatsu City Museum, Japan,

American Perspectives: Photographs from the

Polaroid Collection

Barnsdall L.A. Municipal Affiliated Show at Gallery 825, Los Angeles,

Romancing The Universe

The College of New Jersey,

Siggraph99 Traveling Art Show

Museum Kyoto, Japan,

American Perspectives: Photographs from the Polaroid Collection

El Camino College Art Gallery, Torrance, California,

Unus Mundus: From Digital to Sublime, Jean-Pierre Hebert and Victor Raphael 2000 Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan, American Perspectives: Photographs from the Polaroid Collection

ACAVA, London, England,
A TransAtlantic Millennium Exchange
Self-Help Graphics, East Los Angeles,
A TransAtlantic Millennium Exchange
(Exhibit will travel to Watts Towers Art Center,
Angels Gate Cultural Center and California State

University Northridge)

1999 El Camino College Art Gallery, Cross Currents
Santa Monica College, SIGGRAPH Traveling Art Show
Finegood Art Gallery, West Hills, California,
Beacon of Light

1998 Skidmore Contemporary Art, Malibu, Gold

SIGGRAPH 99, Los Angeles, Art Gallery: technOasis

Philip and Dorothy Lyon Gallery, Los Angeles,
Thrills and Shpiels
Plains Art Museum, North Dakota, Plein Aire
Northland College, Thief River Falls, Minnesota,
Plein Aire
Museet for Fotokunst, Odense, Denmark, Polaroid 50

Museet for Fotokunst, Odense, Denmark, *Polaroid &* Photo Museum, Zarautz-Guipuzcoa, Spain, *Polaroid 50* 

1997 La Maison Europeenne de la Photographie,
Paris, France, *Polaroid 50*Jewish Museum, San Francisco, *A Kiddush Cup Invitational*Century Gallery, Los Angeles, *Quarks to Quasars*Brandeis-Bardin Institute, Simi Valley, California, *Shelter* 

 Skirball Cultural Center and Museum, Los Angeles, Blessings and Beginnings
 Photokina, Cologne, Germany, Polaroid 50: Art and Technology
 Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, I.A Current 1995 Jewish Museum, San Francisco, Light Interpretations
Transamerica Galleries, Los Angeles,
The Art of Contemplation
FACT Contemporary Exhibitions, Laguna Beach,
Spiritual Connections
Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles,
The California Focus

1994 Sharon Truax Gallery, Venice, California, *Inward Bound*Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, *The Sacred and The Profane*Merging One Gallery, Santa Monica, *What's Next?* 

1993 Platt Gallery, Los Angeles, Artists of the Fine Arts Council

1992 Paul Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles, Small is Beautiful Skirball Museum, Los Angeles, Contemporary Art On View Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, The Day The Earth Stood Still

1991 Turner/Krull Gallery, Los Angeles, Photo Salon

1990 Photo Impact Gallery, Hollywood, Works on Polaroid Photo Impact Gallery, Hollywood, The L.A. Nude II

1989 Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, Alternatives 89

1988 Diane Nelson Gallery, Laguna Beach, Contemporary Masters

1987 ART/LA 87, The 2nd International Contemporary Art Fair

1986 S.P.A.R.C. Gallery, Venice, California, The Spiritual in Contemporary Art

1985 Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, An Exhibition of 12 Artists

1984 Roger Morrison Gallery, Los Angeles, Gallery Inauguration, Group Show II

1983 Old Cabrillo Beach Museum, San Pedro, California, Pacific Regional

1982 Conejo Valley Art Museum, First Annual Photo Show California Museum of Science and Industry, Los Angeles, Union Artists

1981 California Museum of Science and Industry, Los Angeles, *Union Artists* 

#### Selected Collections

Bibliotheque national de France

The Gerald Buck Collections

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles

Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University

Executive Life

Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California

The LeWitt Collection

Monsanto Corporation

Polaroid Collection

Pollock-Krasner Study Center

Self-Help Graphics

Skirball Museum, Los Angeles

Scitex Corporation

Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography

U.S. Trust Company

Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art

William Morris Agency

#### Selected Bibliography

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- Goldstein, Bob, Envisioning Space exhibition catalogue, "A Creative Journey," Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, May 2000.
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- Frank, Peter, *L.A.Weekly*, "Art Picks of the Week," November 25 – December 1, 1994.
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#### Acknowledgments

#### Carlsbad City Council

Mayor Claude A. "Bud" Lewis

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