

**Bruce Conner, "The Dennis Hopper One Man Show, Volume II"**  
Susan Inglett, through Sat 1  
(see Soho).

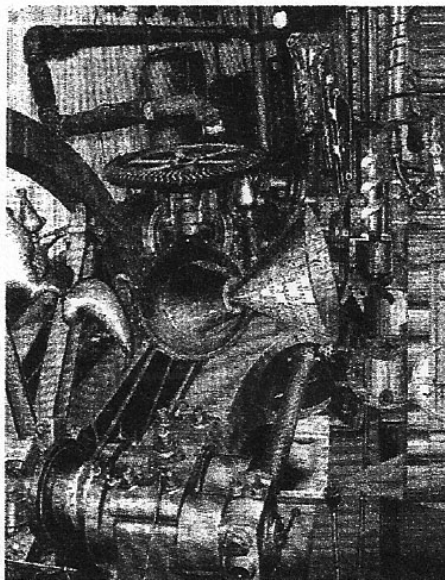
**T**he Dennis Hopper One Man Show, Volume II" is a real mind-boggler. The show presents prints made after collages that were originally made from prints. The ten etchings on view are miniature marvels chock-full of dreamy subjects: Machine parts and bits of furniture interact with seashells and wings, all stacked sky-high like discarded items at the county dump. In spite of the exhibit's title, however, these works are not Dennis Hopper's; instead, they belong to his friend and fellow artist Bruce Conner. The reason for this misattribution is what makes the show so fascinating.

In the late '50s, Conner established his reputation as a mixed-media artist and experimental filmmaker. His drawings, paintings and sculptures were exhibited in New York and San Francisco, where he was closely aligned with Beat Generation artists Wallace Berman, George Herms and Ed Kienholz. In 1958, he secretly began making collages from wood engravings culled from old books and magazines that were similar in style to those of the Surrealist Max Ernst—a fact Conner fully understood.

Conner's intent was to credit these works to a fictional artist, and he originally conceived of three possibilities: a contemporary of Ernst; a predecessor of Ernst; or a contemporary with himself who continued Ernst's style. In 1962 Conner met Dennis Hopper, then an aspiring actor, photographer and collector. A few years later, Hopper showed him some of his artworks

that suggested Conner's own influence. As Conner recently explained in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "If Dennis can perform me in his work, as maybe I tried to perform Ernst in [mine], I would take advantage of his being an actor, and cast him in the role of the artist who made these collages."

Conner's plan for the exhibit's opening was to bring an unsuspecting Hopper, whom everyone would congratulate as the author; but dealer Nicolas Wilder balked. The 26 collages were eventually exhibited as "The Dennis Hopper One Man Show" at another venue. In the early '70s, they were returned to their engraved origins when Crown Point Press published three bound volumes of the etchings, a selection of which are on display here. With Bruce Conner, it's never a short story.—Paul Laster



**Bruce Conner, *The Dennis Hopper One Man Show, Volume II*, image 5, 1972.**