

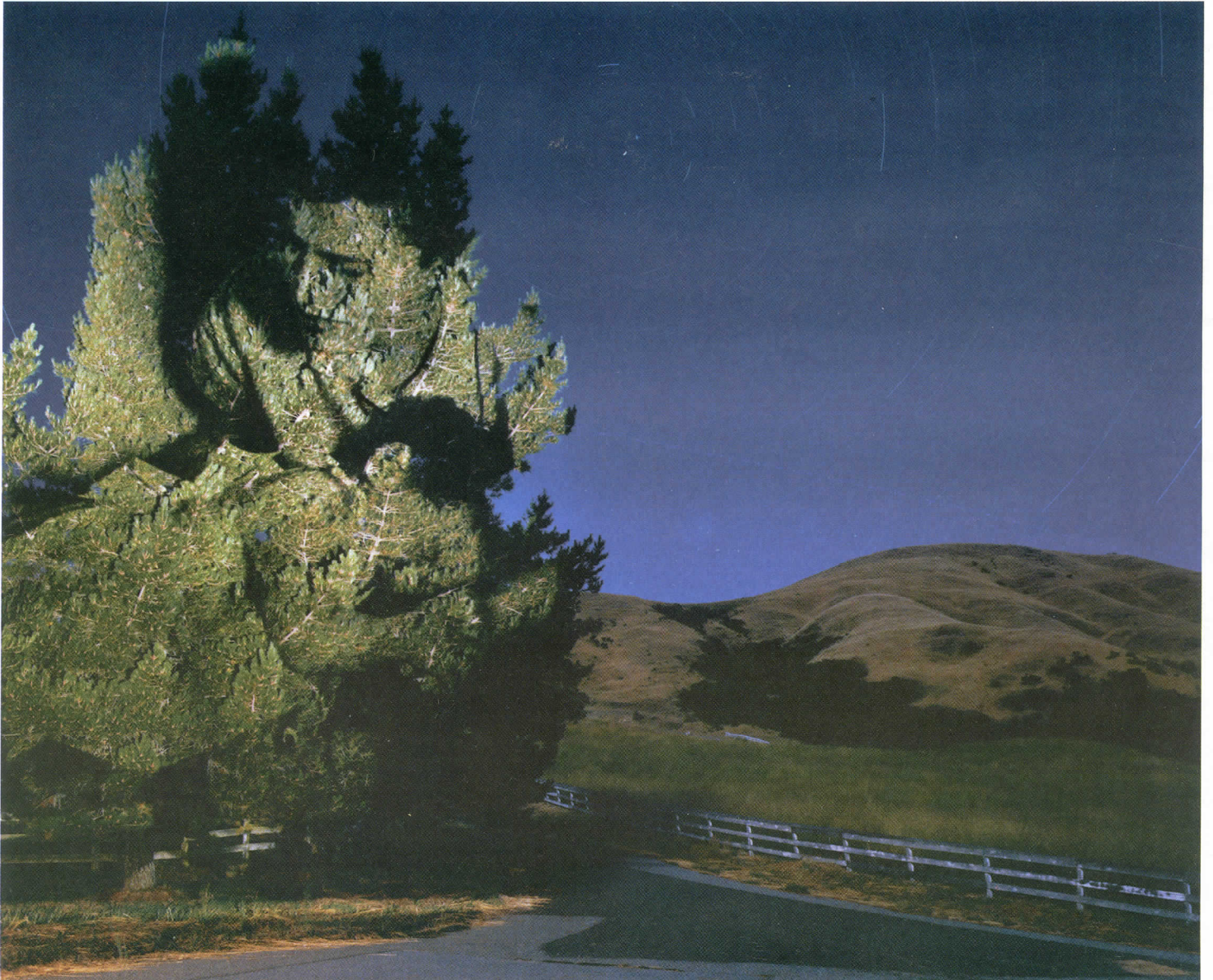
I met Lorie Novak in Boston in the late 1970s, when she was teaching photography at the University of Massachusetts and I was teaching photography at Tufts University. She was a friend of my upstairs neighbor, whose apartment she was using as the “set” for some of her photographs. Since my apartment looked pretty much the same, it was strange to see how Novak transformed what felt like my personal space into her own. Working at night, she would project slides of landscapes and abstract patterns across a darkened room, allowing its walls and

furnishings to dismantle the images in interesting ways, then photograph the interior. Her pictures gave a funky South Boston rowhouse apartment the feeling of an expansive landscape—a landscape of the imagination.

It was around that time that Novak, working on a photograph in her own apartment, projected an old family slide of herself against a wall. “There I was as a child, looming like a ghost,” she recalls. “The floating image had a dream/nightmare quality, and I felt as if I were making a memory materialize.” Novak began to create and photograph scenes

FOR NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S LORIE NOVAK, PARTICIPATION IS THE HEART OF ART—AND TEACHING. BY RUSSELL HART

COLLABORATIVE VISION



in which she projected slides of existing family snapshots. "This was a turning point in my work," she says.

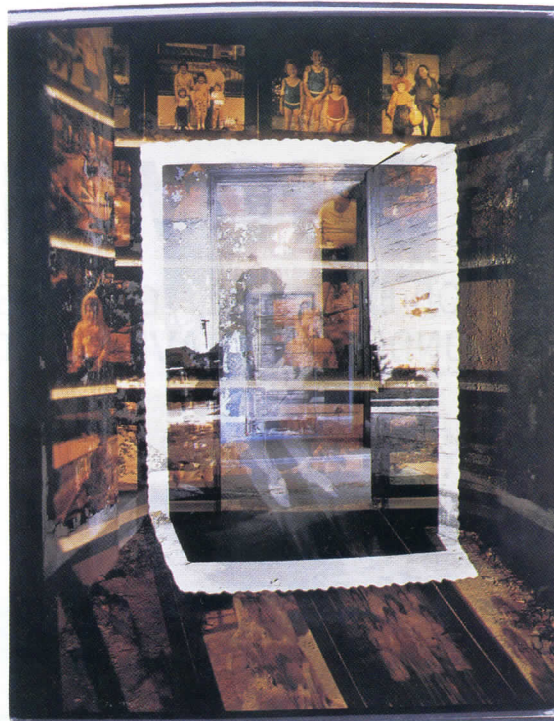
Now chair of the photography and imaging department at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Novak has spent the last two decades exploring the relationship between photographs and memory. That exploration has branched off into installation art and the World Wide Web, both natural directions given the way Novak works. "Collected Visions," Novak's recent installation at New York's International Center of Photography, uses images drawn both from her own family archive and from thousands of contributions, using specially developed streaming-media software to fade them in and out on adjoining walls against a soundtrack of music and the spoken reminiscences of contributors. The installation, along with 30 of Novak's photographs, is now on display at Tucson's Center for Creative Photography.

Novak's source for many of the installation's images is a unique Website, also called Collected Visions (cvisions.cat.nyu.edu), that she created with colleagues from NYU's Center for Advanced Technology in 1996. Visitors to the site can upload their own family pictures, as well as thoughts and remembrances, and their contributions are kept in a permanent online archive that can be browsed, and commented on, by any other visitor. Collected Visions is an ongoing work of art (though that phrase diminishes its scope) that draws its strength from its own audience's participation—defying Western art's egocentric, monomaniacal tradition.

Participation is at the heart not just of Novak's art but of her teaching strategy. Since she started teaching full-time at NYU ten years ago, she has played a big part in developing two highly successful programs that involve students in the community. In one, called Community Collaborations, students pair up to teach workshops at nearby New York City high schools that have no photo program of their own. Students conduct classes twice a week and meet with Novak once a week to plan the curriculum and discuss their progress. The end product is a photographic book or exhibition.

The other community-based teaching program, called Urban Ensemble, which Novak co-directs with an NYU drama professor, places Tisch students in a ten-week internship at various local sites. Jessica Ingram, a 1999 NYU grad, taught at an East Harlem community center. She found the experience so compelling that she continued working at the center throughout her college career, often with the help of NYU community action grants. For Ingram, whose Urban Ensemble students ranged in age from seven to 23, the experience was transforming. "Before I worked with Lorie, it never occurred to me that teaching photography could be meaningful or creative," says Ingram. "But it ended up having a profound effect on my own work." Indeed, Ingram ended up doing most of her college photography in the East Harlem neighborhood surrounding the community center—a neighborhood she got to know when she and her students would roam its streets taking pictures.

But Ingram's experience wasn't just a matter of access to the community. "It gave me a sense of photography's power of communication," she says. "And working with Lorie gave me a sense of my power as an artist." ■



Opposite: "Night Sky," 1990, by Lorie Novak. This page, from top: Novak's "Altar (Ellis Island)," 1988; Novak herself; and the "Collected Visions" installation, 2000.

“ I THINK IT'S CRUCIAL TO MY TEACHING THAT I REMAIN AN ACTIVE ARTIST. ”



Assignment: In one of Lorie Novak's favorite assignments, she asks her students to bring in a photographic image from a newspaper, magazine, or book, making enough copies for everyone in the class. Students trade copies so that everyone leaves class with the same packet of images. From this raw material, students must create a "book." Images can be altered or repeated, text and other images can be added, but no image can be left out. "I tell the students to think hard about the way the images are sequenced to make meaning and create rhythm," says Novak.



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