



# City of Cambridge

32.

Amended Order  
IN CITY COUNCIL

April 27, 1998

COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU  
COUNCILLOR BORN  
COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
MAYOR DUEHAY  
VICE MAYOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR REEVES  
COUNCILLOR RUSSELL  
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN  
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

WHEREAS: Elsa Dorfman, internationally renowned Cambridge photographer, will have her work entitled Self Portraits 1974-1997 displayed at Gallery NAGA, 67 Newbury Street, Boston through April 25<sup>th</sup>; and

WHEREAS: Elsa's work is a celebration of life and a joyous visual homage to humanity with all our quirks, our uniqueness and our enduring connections; and

WHEREAS: Elsa's self portraits are a vivid and beautiful rendering of the honesty, openness and sensitivity that make her such an outstanding artist; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That this City Council go on record extending its best wishes to Elsa Dorfman on the gallery showing of her photographs and on her recent article in the Boston Globe lauding her photographic talents; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Elsa Dorfman on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council April 27, 1998.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

*D. Margaret Drury*

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk



# City of Cambridge

32.

Original Order  
IN CITY COUNCIL

April 27, 1998

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~~600215~~

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Original Order

April 27, 1998

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*internationally renowned*

① WHEREAS: Elsa Dorfman, Cambridge Photographer, will have her work entitled Self Portraits 1974-1997 displayed at Gallery NAGA, 67 Newbury Street, Boston through April 25<sup>th</sup>; ~~now therefore be it~~ and

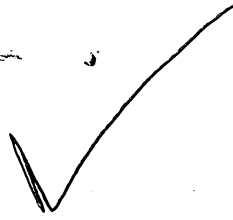
④ RESOLVED: That this City Council go on record extending its best wishes to Elsa Dorfman on the gallery showing of her photographs and on her recent article in the Boston Globe lauding her photographic talents; and be it further

⑤ RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Elsa Dorfman on behalf of the entire City Council.

② *Whereas: Elsa's work is a celebration of life and ~~human~~ and a joyous visual homage to humanity with all its quirks, our uniqueness and our enduring connections; and*

③ *Whereas: Elsa's self portraits are a vivid and beautiful rendering of the honesty, ~~efficiency~~ openness and sensitivity that make her such an outstanding artist; now therefore be it*

Councillor Triantafellow



X38

Whereas

Elsa Klonfman, Cambridge Photographer,  
will have her worked display ~~at~~  
entitled Self Portraits 1974 - 1997 at Gallery  
NAGA, 67 Newbury Street, Boston, through  
April 25th; now therefore be it

Resolved

That This City Council go on record  
extending its best wishes ~~for her~~  
to Elsa Klonfman on her gallery showing  
of her ~~past~~ photographs and on  
her recent article in the Boston Globe;  
and do it further

Resolved

SEC to Elsa Klonfman

# Real people, real things

Show of works by popular Boston area artists Ken Beck & Elsa Dorfman at NAGA

by Shawn Hill

**'Ken Beck: HITS' and 'Elsa Dorfman: Self-Portraits 1974-1997' at Gallery NAGA, 67 Newbury St., Boston through April 25**

Elsa Dorfman, the celebrated Cambridge photographer, is best known for her insightful, affirmative and charming portrait Polaroids. Her portrait work is not about dressing up the figure, or covering up flaws.

In many ways, she has ties with the naturalistic tendency that has guided photography since the '60s. Warts-and-all verisimilitude showing things "as they really are" is prized over theatricality, over costume and performance. But Dorfman's work remains positive, as she seems to celebrate the real, including real lines of age, real thoughts, real feelings, and real things that people value in their lives. She does like props, but they're things the subjects bring themselves, character-defining treasures shared with her and with her audience.

The absence of that sunny, social sheen is what surprises in these self-portraits from over 20 years of Dorfman's life. Starting in the '70s with moody black-and-whites, moving through her life to show the artist in the context of friends, loves and family, these images are often raw, confessional and honest in their exposure of moments of strife and emotional pain. Dorfman obviously owes a debt to Diane Arbus, a similarly honest and probing photographer unafraid to show the unpleasant truths. There's also an echo of painter Alice Neal here, in the psychological charge that imbues these images. Like Neal, Dorfman occasionally puts the focus not on others, but on herself, with the same unflinching insight.

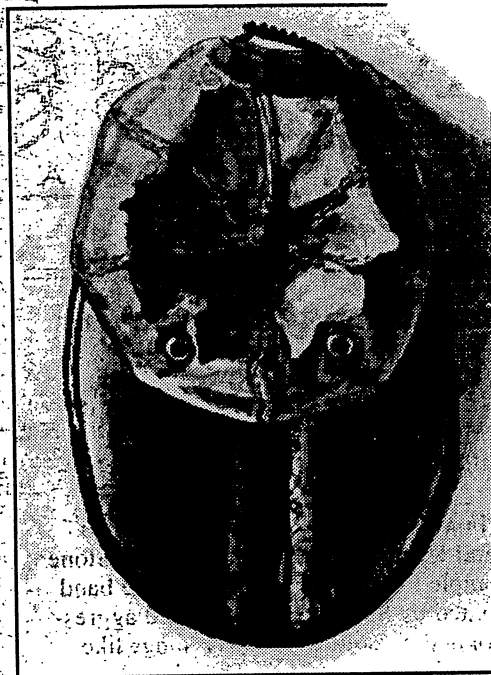
The way accident plays into her imagery is poignant, hinting at fleeting opportunity, and the passage of time. Dorfman says in an accompanying statement that she began photographing herself so she could better empathize with her subjects. Seeing the young artist sitting primly on a couch, or examining her breasts in a mirror, or happily (gratefully) watching her husband and child asleep in hotel room, you're right there with her,

feeling the pulse and breath of life as it happens. She looks proud standing beside her own giant camera, and sturdy as she sits on her mother's chairs, holding a phone that she had to take away from her mother (whose illness late in life led her to make hourly calls).

Such poignant confessions are touching, undeniable in their truth. If anything thematic unites this work, it's a sense of mourning. "I'm 59. Yesterday I was 40," reads one caption. Or, more starkly "I'm sixty. Allen is dead, April 26, 1997," yet another homage by an artist to the ever-influential and important poet Allen Ginsberg, and his passing. One recurrent visual theme is a bouquet of black balloons, an ironic birthday present given one year to Dorfman by her husband, to make her laugh at her own moroseness. She holds them aloft, or hides behind them, or uses a few as a symbol amidst other items. Folly and pain, love and regret are united in this show, inextricably joined.

## Coherent shape

Ken Beck's winkingly-titled "HITS" has a lighter charge. These 24 watercolor-and-ink drawings are the work of a master painter looking back through his past and trying to make some coherent shape out of what has gone before. Encompassing fifteen years, Beck has made new versions of old paintings, in order eventually to create a print portfolio of ten of the images (the ten "greatest hits"). Smaller and more delicate than his rich oils, these images are like cartoon versions of his major themes, light-hearted looks back at what he was once doing. They fit together more as a history lesson than as a singular vision. And, yet, of course, they

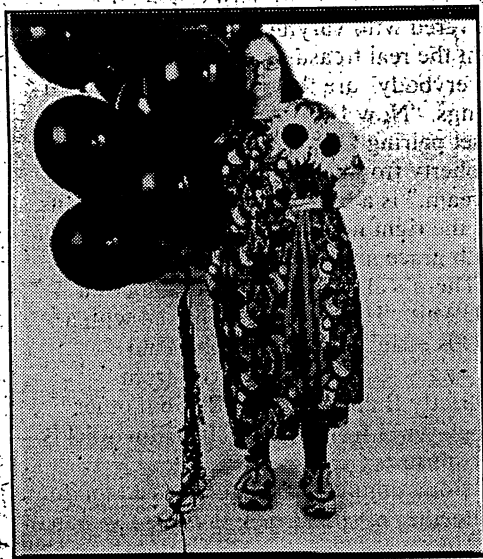


Ken Beck's 'Duckbill Hat,' 1997

are united, for Beck has been a very focused painter. He takes still-life objects, and enlarges them, and anthropomorphizes them, so that a fireplug is not just a fireplug, and a hat is not just a hat. What's human in Beck's work, watercolor or oil, is the gesture of touch. His brush revisits the surface countless times, layering color in luxurious profusion. Early images of studio objects and kitchen objects (cake pans, cookie sheets, oil cans) show metallic surfaces mottled with dents and encrusted with paint. Beck does paintings about his creative process, and yet he does it through a language of recognizable items.

In the late '80s teddy bears became theme, and each one of these creatures personality and a humanity more corportraiture. "CEO" is a big, golden Works based on his "Cylinders" ser-

continued on



Elsa Dorfman's 'I'm sixty. Allen is dead,' 1998

April 27, 1998

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Consent Order #32

R-493

Councillor Triantafillou re: best  
wishes to Elsa Dorfman on her gallery  
showing of her photographs.

In City Council April 27, 1998

**ORDER ADOPTED**

*as amended*