

# STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Casemore, (415) 433-6879, [julie@wirtzgallery.com](mailto:julie@wirtzgallery.com)

CATHERINE WAGNER

*A Narrative History of the Light Bulb*

Exhibition dates: March 28 – April 28, 2007

Opening reception for the artist, Thursday, April 5, 2007, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Stephen Wirtz Gallery presents *A Narrative History of the Light Bulb*, a new series of photographs by Catherine Wagner.

While in residence at the Baltimore Museum of Industry during the last two years, Catherine Wagner was given access to their 50,000+ collection of historic light bulbs, one of the premier collections of vintage and antique light bulbs in the United States, with lights dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The resulting series of photographs titled *A Narrative History of the Light Bulb* embodies both sculptural installation and photography. Wagner creates arrangements of bulbs that she then photographs with an 8 by 10 view camera in order to record the glass enclosures and the delicate filaments in stunning detail. Wagner's work has long been noted for its investigation of the dissemination of knowledge and the construction of culture and these new works follow in her trajectory of providing access to the close scrutiny of scientific objects.

These works are records of historical light bulb classification as well as narrative landscapes of metaphor rich objects that borrow from the history of the still life. With a keen eye toward Morandi, Wagner utilizes similar strategies of grouping familiar objects in beautiful, compelling installations. Some are based on scientific indexes, such as *Early Tungsten* or *Carbon Filaments 1900- 1910*; others are constructed more lyrically, with sensitivity to the implied stories in the groupings of bulbs. Wagner employs an intuitive approach, cataloging them by color, form, or aesthetic with examples that include an installation of varying blue bulbs entitled, *Homage to Yves Klein*, and the architecturally based collection entitled *Utopia*, which invokes ideal cityscapes. *Green Energy* involves a double entendre: the topical need for our technology to become more sustainable, and also a metaphor our landscape.

Wagner focus on the invention and history of the light bulb and its place as a cultural indicator follows from her long-term interest in the phenomenon of light as evidenced by past projects such as *Cross Sections*, *Pomegranate Wall* (*San Jose Museum of Art, 2001*.) the installation of *Home and Other Stories* (a constructed light and photographic installation at LACMA, 1993,) as well as her over thirty year career in photography, a medium inherently dependant on light.

Wagner was named one of *Time* magazine's Fine Arts Innovators of the Year for 2001. Her work is represented in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; among others. Monographs include *Cross Sections* (2002), *Art & Science: Investigating Matter* (1996), *Home and Other Stories* (1993), and *American Classroom* (1988).

Stephen Wirtz Gallery is located at 49 Geary St., 3<sup>rd</sup> Fl., San Francisco, CA 94108, (415) 433-6879, Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-5:30, Saturday 10:30-5:30.