

THE ART OF JUDY DATER AND HER PHOTOGRAPHIC *MEMOIR*

By Donna Stein

Judy Dater's emergence as a photographer coincided with the blossoming of the Feminist movement in the late 1960s. At first she focused her large format Deardorff camera on women, keenly aware of stylistic precedents in the portrait photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, Edward Steichen, August Sander, Edward Weston, Richard Avedon, and her mentor Imogen Cunningham, as well as the modernist photographic techniques of the San Francisco photography Group f/64.¹ As a founding member of the San Francisco-based Visual Dialogue Foundation, she became known for her careful attention to print quality. Dater has never associated her work with that of Diane Arbus, even though early critics noted some similarities. She admires and relates to the work of painters Lucien Freud and Alice Neel, both of whom made portraits and depictions of the body.

Born in Hollywood, California, in 1941, Dater studied photography and earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees from San Francisco State University. She is best known for her intensely seen portraits and self-portraits in luminous black and white—most notably, her photograph of Imogen Cunningham encountering Twinka Thiebaud in a primeval redwood forest (1974; front cover).²

Through the years, Dater has experimented with landscapes, still life, computer-manipulated images, composite images, and photo collage and has worked in a variety of media, including printmaking, installation, video, and performance. She regularly keeps a diary, travelogues, and a notebook of her dreams, bits and pieces of which have been used in her work since the early 1980s. The breadth of her oeuvre is surprising, given the relative lack of critical response since the late 1980s, and she has never settled into a comfortable pact with the market or with the position the art photography establishment reserved for her.

From 1964 to 1967, Dater lived on Haight Street, in the heart of Haight Ashbury, where she photographed the “flower child” generation of young professionals and artists—friends or acquaintances close to her age that mirrored her life and what was going on around her. She saw in them a reflection of her own personality: women who stood out from the crowd—confident and daring about their sexuality. “They are distinctly marked by urban sophistication,” Anne Tucker wrote about these images in 1972, “as Dorothea Lange’s women were by simple country ways.”³ Like Edgar Degas in his photographs and monotypes, Dater went beyond the formal, public pose to



Fig. 1. Judy Dater, *Joyce Goldstein* (1969), gelatin silver print, 14" x 11".

discover women as they are to themselves.⁴ Positioning her subjects clothed and naked in everyday surroundings, Dater's portraits from the late 1960s and 1970s are character studies—personal, provocative, and often humorous. Like Cameron's portraits, they have a startling sense of presence and psychological connection with the viewer. They explore the new freedom of contemporary women.

Among her “nontraditional women” subjects was the prominent San Francisco chef Joyce Goldstein, whom Dater met when Goldstein was a docent at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Dater was invited to a reception at the chef's home in honor of the photographer Bruce Davidson. Dater photographed Goldstein (1969; Fig. 1) seated in her white tiled kitchen with the tools of her trade above her head. She recently recalled, “I was



Fig. 2. Judy Dater, *Cherie* (1972), gelatin silver print, 16" x 20".

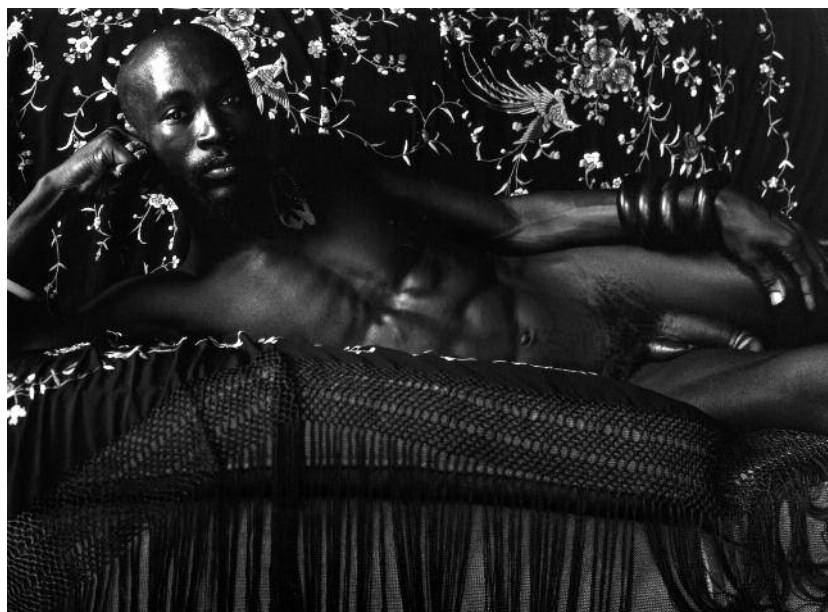


Fig. 3. Judy Dater, *Nehemiah* (1975), gelatin silver print, 16" x 20".

fully aware of the kitchen utensils hanging behind her and their threatening medieval torture-like nature. I was questioning the role of the woman ... I wasn't interested in having children or being a "housewife" in traditional terms."⁵

Another free-spirited woman with a life of her own was the painter Maggie Wells, photographed by Dater in 1970. Shown nude from the hips up, she is seated in her garden in a rattan chair, casually smoking a cigarette and looking askance toward the camera. Dater's portraits, observed Tucker, "are important documents of young San Francisco women and they preserve that time and place as Brassai preserved people of the Parisian night."⁶

Also among Dater's subjects was Cherie Hiser, who in the late 1960s founded Aspen's legendary Center of the Eye

summer photography workshops. *Cherie* (1972; Fig. 2), is pictured in her living room as a frontal standing nude; she holds a vintage photograph of about one hundred World War I soldiers that normally hung over her fireplace, suggesting a provocative story in a single image. "Cherie and her soldiers," Dater explained, "was made with the idea that she was bragging about her conquests. I was keenly aware of the implications and was presenting a woman unafraid of her sexuality, and making what I considered a parody of a *Playboy* image, that is, a man and his conquests. Here the woman is nude, unafraid to show herself. A man would be bragging with his clothes on."⁷ This pictorial approach ultimately led Dater to incorporate words into some of her pictures as a way of elaborating on the embedded narrative.⁸

Like Imogen Cunningham's 1915 nude portraits of her husband, considered scandalous, Dater's portraits of men more than half a century later are both bold and intimate, reversing the usual gender-defined roles of (male) photographer and (female) model. She turned the male gaze with its objectification of the body and historical eroticizing of the nude on its head. In *Nehemiah* (1975; Fig. 3), a frontal nude portrait of a dancer and musician she met at a party in San Francisco, the subject confronts the viewer with a disconcerting directness that simultaneously reveals his physical presence, psychological strength, and vulnerability. Dater also photographed him from the back, emphasizing his musculature as light bounces across the dark surface of his skin.

The men Dater photographs are frequently friends, colleagues, and students, so they are relaxed and at ease with her, such as in the nude portrait of photographer Walter Chappell (1977).⁹ Similar in approach to her portrayal of Joyce Goldstein, *Sandy* (1975) shows the man Dater hired to trim the redwoods on her San Anselmo property with the tools of his trade, set against a towering redwood. Lit from the right, the subtlety of the photographic grey scale is featured in this concentrated composition.¹⁰

Despite an age difference of nearly sixty years, Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) was Dater's mentor and became a close friend. Following her death, Dater honored the legendary photographer by publishing a very personal memoir *Imogen Cunningham: A Portrait*.¹¹ Through interviewing family members, friends, other artists, historians and critics who had known her, Dater illuminates Cunningham's work, her long life (she died at 93), and her unique personality. She brought her camera to their meetings and created compelling portraits of the individuals which add a lively dimension to this beautiful volume. Dater then selected sixty photographs from Cunningham's rich archive, half of them never before reproduced, to illustrate the span of her photographic career.

Although Dater has photographed acquaintances, friends,

and strangers encountered at home and abroad, from her earliest days as a photographer she was her own best model,¹² constantly probing and ultimately self-revelatory. Feeling especially isolated after a move to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with photographer Sam Samore in late summer 1980, she also felt liberated and made her time there productive artistically.¹³ Over the course of some ten trips into the national parks during 1980–83 she used her 4" x 5" camera, and most often a 90mm wide-angle lens, to make a Landscape series, actually a group of self-portraits. Each shot was methodically rehearsed; she had only 10 seconds after pressing the shutter release until the shutter snapped. She came equipped with props but didn't necessarily use them. The resulting photographs reside at the intersection of portraits and landscapes.¹⁴ They present a deeper understanding of herself as a woman. Metaphorically the terrain of self-revelation and self-discovery, the Southwestern landscape is where Dater confronted "the burden of establishment-dominated (i.e., male) artistic conventions and sensibility."¹⁵

A recurring theme in works such as *Self-portrait with Sparkler* (1980) or *Self-portrait Craters of the Moon* (1981) is the placement of a small human figure against a vast natural landscape.¹⁶ Her compositional choices often tested her nerve and put her in jeopardy—standing on the edge of a geyser hole of boiling water in Yellowstone, walking across jagged volcanic rocks in her bare feet, walking through tall grasses where rattlesnakes reside, or being discovered nude.¹⁷ Nevertheless, these forays made her feel more self-reliant and allowed her to freely associate autobiographical themes as she looked for sites to photograph.

In the only photograph in the series actually made in New Mexico, *Self-portrait with Petroglyph* (1981; Fig. 4), the snakelike imagery in the rock engraving suggests Dater's own symbolic meanderings—an umbilical cord, as if she is giving birth.¹⁸ By 1983, in *Self-portrait with white rock* and other photographs from that time, Dater was using her body more actively in the compositions, acknowledging her own growing sense of physical and mental strength. As the photographic historian and curator Michiko Kasahara noted, "She bears her loneliness and unease and allows herself no compromise as she struggles to answer unanswerable questions. In doing so, she leads us to places women have not ventured before."¹⁹ A West-Coaster, Dater always felt herself an outsider beside the overtly political feminist East Coast-based artists she admires like Ana Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann, who also made ritualistic earth performances.

Between trips to the national parks, Dater worked in or near her home in Santa Fe. Continuing the autobiographical themes she had begun to explore in the landscape, she constructed a shallow stage set with satin curtains in which she enacted some of the mundane activities of her daily routine—eating, cleaning, trying to stay in shape. Stunning color self-portraits like *Ms. Clingfree* (1982) are economically presented with typecast outfits and props, merciless in their portrayal of her own body and lacking any of the seductiveness or glamour for which her earlier portraits generally were known. By poking fun at popular stereotypes of women's roles and at herself,

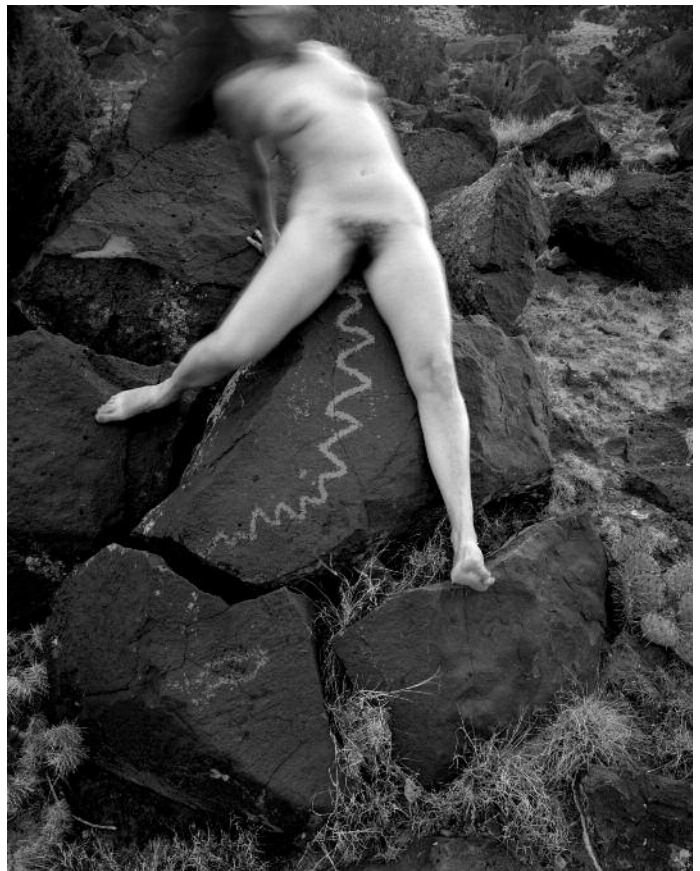


Fig. 4. Judy Dater, *Self-Portrait with Petroglyph* (1981), gelatin silver print, 20" x 16".



Fig. 5. Judy Dater, *Teenage Diary* (1982), installation view of 12 chromogenic prints, each 20" x 16" (original in color). Grapestake Gallery, San Francisco.

Dater was able to confront the dilemmas of the modern woman at the same time she was critically clarifying her own identity. James Enyeart was the first to recognize that the artist turned her emotional experiences into works of art that were internal self-portraits.²⁰

As Dater was moving away from iconic black and white portraiture, she began to experiment with color photography and sequences of images. She photographed the abandoned



Fig. 6. Judy Dater, James Mason, at 13 He Was All She Ever Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted (1990), ink jet print, 11" x 8 1/2".

five-year diary she had kept as a young girl and created a suite of twelve simple, unpretentious chromogenic prints entitled *Teenage Diary* (1982; Fig. 5). Written in a determined schoolgirl hand, the excruciatingly ordinary adolescent autobiography unfolds: "I am finally a teenager... I am deeply in love with a man who is my social studies teacher... Perhaps I will go to college in Israel."²¹ Pre-Photoshop, Dater devised a way of photographing the imitation crocodile leather-bound diary so that it appears to be floating on the shimmering aquamarine surface of her parent's swimming pool. For gallery installations, the prints have been displayed next to the original diary resting on a satin pillow and placed in a Plexiglas box atop a white pedestal.²²

Dater continued to explore her memories, dreams and reflections in the *Love Letters* series (1984), her homage to Carl Jung. Using a Hasselblad camera, Dater arranged three groups of four prints: one image presents excerpts from an unsent letter describing a dream, another shows the actual letter burning in a ceremonial bowl, and the other two picture enactments or interpretations of the content. *Love Letters* #3 (Pl. 1) incorporates a list Dater wrote while talking on the phone to a friend about suffering caused by impossible love. The visual pairings in these four-image grids suggest a surreal atmosphere.

Invited to Aspen for a residency at Anderson Ranch in 1984, Dater created the overtly political *Fourth of July, State #4*, an ironic feminist statement in lithography that references George Orwell's book *1984*, and the idea that the future is now. Her image contrasts four views of a nude holding a bomb, with a

nude mother and child in the center of the sheet; "Mom Bomb" is written diagonally across the entire composition. Dater was drawn to the muscular body of the woman depicted, a potter who was on the ranch staff. She photographed her hoisting an empty torpedo shell found on the ranch—front, back and side views—as well as cuddling her child. Like a stage set with curtains at the edges of the frame (a subtle allusion to her earlier color self-portraits), the composition references a Greek cross, adding a religious dimension to the contextual reading of the imagery. Here, the woman, a symbol of hearth and home, is in control of the bomb but not using it for its destructive powers.

Dater moved to New York City in January 1987, and during that year she changed apartments eight times and made frequent trips home to San Anselmo to work in her darkroom. Adjusting to this chaotic lifestyle made her more internal and she began to write *Confessions of a Practical Hedonist*, a highly personal memoir, which included drawings of naked men she had known based on her original photographs. By then, she had thought a lot about narrating a life and began by pairing drawings with her own writings.

Dater was already making large black-and-white, combined-image tableaux (her response to her fractured existence) when she was invited to work with the large format Polaroid camera. She took advantage of the color potential of this unique camera by making still life collages that combined color materials from various sources. Using source material almost exclusively from the Museum of Natural History in New York City, she created *Cycles*, a nine-panel color work, and the multi-image black-and-white *End of Innocence* (both 1989), both chronicling the evolution of culture, starting with ancient civilizations.

After Dater was invited to participate in the workshop at which Adobe introduced Photoshop 1.0, she became interested in experimenting with this new software. She began to develop a modus operandi for a planned memoir project by scanning various materials, including pages with text, and manipulating them in Photoshop. The best of these studies was *James Mason, At 13 He Was All She Ever Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted Wanted* (1990; Fig. 6).²³ Dater continued her internal projections about her life in other computer-manipulated photographs such as *New York Window*, about her life and old age, and *I Didn't Want to But I Did* (both 1991), revealing a psychological conflict about beginning an affair with a married man. These prints illustrate two distinct visual directions by adding words to help tell a story, juxtaposing the real with the voyeuristic. Dater later would revisit these and other subjects in *Memoir* (completed 2012).

Dater returned to California in 1991, and eventually started a project focusing on the variety of Asian people in her home state. She had been thinking about a different way of photographing people, and began these succinct portraits with men and women from her Tai Chi class, including the mysterious and beautiful *Chinese Woman* (1997), in which the light catches individual strands of the subject's white hair. Before completing her Asian portrait project, Dater left for two months in 1998 to be a visiting artist at the American Academy

in Rome, where she photographed archetypal Roman faces like *Jacopo* (1998) that suggest figures in Renaissance paintings.

After returning home, she divorced her third husband and in 1999 moved to Berkeley, where she built a custom studio designed to maximize the available light for her portraits, which had morphed into a series about the diversity of people in California. *Russ Ellis* (2003; Fig. 7) is among her favorite images from this group and clearly articulates her stylistic preferences: a light source coming from the right so that the left side of the face is in shadow and the right side is brightly lit. A rich black backdrop accentuates the intensity of facial expressions. Dater is the first to acknowledge that Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits of the late 1860s, such as those of John Herschel, Thomas Carlyle, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and others, where just a head and face emerge from the black setting, are the direct line of inspiration for these expressive portraits.

Dater's *Memoir*, begun in 2009 and completed in 2012, became the realization of her decades-long interest in combining words and photographs to more fully tell her stories.²⁴ Dater compares the urgency to take stock at age forty, which led her to create theatrical personas in color and the extended series of black and white self-portraits in the western landscape, to her desire at age seventy to reflect back on her life in *Memoir*. Going through all the possessions in her parents' home in order to sell it after their deaths, Dater unearthed boxes that turned out to be buried treasures. She uncovered long-forgotten photographs and souvenirs that helped her remember her past and visualize her story.²⁵

Once decided, one of the greatest obstacles Dater faced was the discovery that the silver-coated paper she had used for some thirty years to print her sumptuous black and white photographs had been discontinued.²⁶ Unable to find an acceptable replacement, she was forced to transition to digital photography—a hard adjustment for Dater, who had perfected her craft over forty years with gelatin silver printing. Digital imaging felt like starting from scratch, like learning a new language. It took about two years until she felt comfortable with the new technology and could move ahead with her project.

Memoirs reveal personal experiences and record events by someone who has intimate knowledge of them. As writer and memoirist Susanna Sonnenberg recently explained, "Memoir requires a rugged honesty of the self ... it forces us to think about 'truth'—each person has a different one—and about how the use of the self is a creative act."²⁷ In this way, personal meaning can distort the way we remember things, and memories can be partial, self-serving, or faulty. The necessity of telling a good story often requires the blurring of truth, fiction, and reality itself. The photographic memoir is an attempt to describe important life-passages using a combination of pictures and word captions. Such "autobiographical albums are like messages in a bottle ... as narratives they are easy to follow with dates and places often helpfully inscribed."²⁸

Dater's *Memoir* takes the form of scrapbook pages, for which she created a colorful trompe l'oeil effect using digitally collaged photographs, some old and some new, combined with sketches, newspaper clippings and other printed materials as

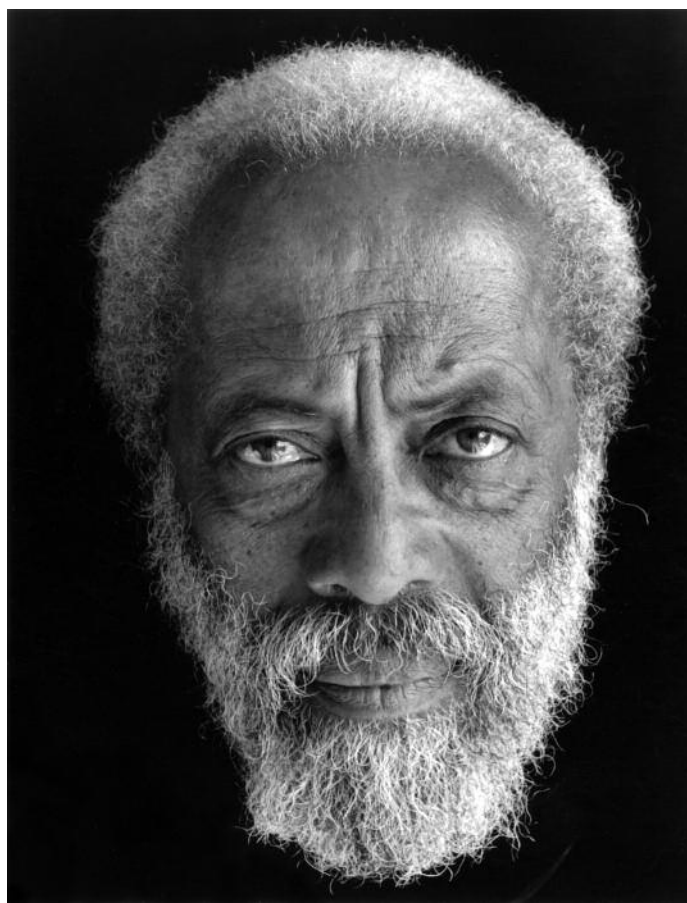


Fig. 7. Judy Dater, *Russ Ellis* (2003), gelatin silver print, 24" x 20".

well as snippets from the diaries she kept during her adult life. She captures interesting times photographically and sequences them into an anecdotal account that is intended for the future. Every print both summarizes and amplifies nearly five decades of her life and career as an innovative portrait photographer. The oversize scale of the scrapbook format (41" x 52") moves the portfolio beyond the realm of private personal object, which adds to the irony of the overall statement.

While photographs or objects inspired some of the pages, memories stimulated others. In the latter case, Dater would look for appropriate pictures in her image bank or would take new photographs. "Sometimes I had the concept or story and no pictures; occasionally, I had the pictures that suggested the page. Pictures jogged my memory and I could easily develop a narrative to pair with them."²⁹ In the portfolio, words get to the kernel of a situation while pictures illustrate the narrative. The scrapbook pages emulate a cinematic storyboard, recontextualizing existing materials and linking visual and textual clues to her life and passion for the movies as they influenced her creative approach and photographic production.

Memoir includes references to the past, present, and future. Biographical highlights intersect with transformational cultural changes (e.g., wars, politics and assassinations, feminism, abortion reform) to reveal how Dater has been shaped by the world. Beginning with 1941, her birth year, *Memoir's* thirty-six pages cover a full century, which immediately alerts the viewer

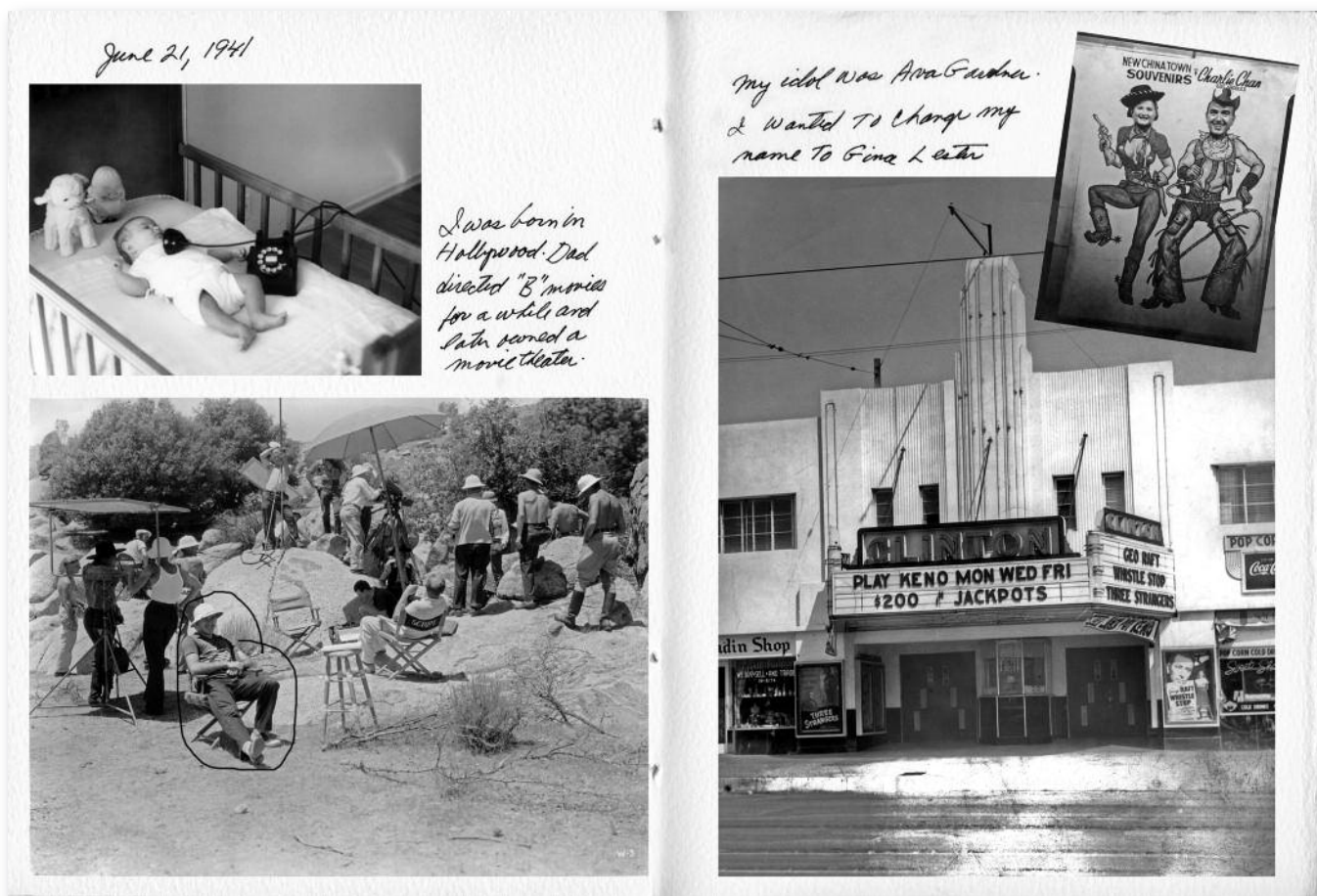


Fig. 8. Judy Dater, *Born in Hollywood* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

that the chronological scope of this artwork, at the very least, blends fact and fiction. As Dater is quick to acknowledge, "The work is not about truth. It's about memory... it's based on the truth and my desire to be entertaining." Its appeal transcends gender, age, and race, because the experiences she presents are universal as they encompass a lifetime.

Before settling on the final portfolio box presentation, Dater tried several different covers, from a sober nineteenth-century-style leather binding embossed with gold lettering, to a risqué photographic image combining a favorite teddy bear and a lace thong. Likewise, she experimented with many ways of printing the text before deciding on the informality of hand writing the captions. The carefully calibrated colors and tones visually balance the two sides of the scrapbook pages; repetition is used to underscore ideas and for humorous effect; and many of the titles rhyme with the dates.

The portfolio opens to a composite photograph (2012; Pl. 2)—the nude from "Self-Portrait Sequence, No. 2, Yellowstone" (1980) and the swimming pool from "Teenage Diary" (1982)—which repeats the cover as a positive and sets the stage for the scrapbook pages that follow. The standing nude on a rocky outcropping is shown from behind, gazing into water, a reference to the unknown—the mystery of the past and its changeability. The expanse of water captures a subtle sense of movement, reticulation, not unlike a hologram. For Dater, this imaginary self-portrait signifies her personal experience of

memory. This project brought the realization that sometimes what she thought wasn't necessarily what was true: "Perception of memory changes over time. What you remember is what you remember and that is your story."

Dated June 21, 1941, the first scrapbook page (Fig. 8) begins with a photo of Judy as a baby in her crib talking on a telephone and the hand-written words, "I was born in Hollywood. Dad worked in 'B' movies for a while and later owned a movie theatre. My idol was Ava Gardner. I wanted to change my name to Gina Lester." In a few words and four snapshots, Dater provides historical context. She includes a carnival photo-op from Los Angeles's New Chinatown, where you stick your head through a hole in a painted board, here depicting a voluptuous cowgirl (Judy) and sexy cowboy (Dad). With this favorite family snapshot, she claims her western heritage. The other two images reference Hollywood and the derivation of her interest in the movies: her father on a film set and an old photo of the classic Art Deco Clinton Theater, which her father owned. Dater's mention of Ava Gardner references how, when she was a young girl, the actress was the ideal, the epitome of what a woman should be—sexy, beautiful and "hot."

"Uncle Julius Goes to War," the first of many pages with political themes—a way of inserting herself into memorable events—is dated April 1, 1944. Dater is pictured as a curly-haired, smiling three-year-old sitting in a wagon among war-related photos of her uncle. The caption reads, "Uncle Julius



Fig. 11. Judy Dater, *Women's Movement* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

came to visit us. He wore his army uniform. Three days later he shipped out to the Pacific front." The page dated November 22, 1963, "President Slain" (Fig. 9) shows the front page of the San Francisco evening *News Call Bulletin* announcing the assassination of President John F. Kennedy paired with an early self-portrait in which Dater's hair completely obscures her face. Like everyone of a certain age, she remembered the moment: "I was at Marina Junior High, student teaching, when I heard the news. I went home to my tiny apartment and cried all weekend." A page titled "Deb-u-Teen" (Fig. 10) dated December 6, 1958, recalls a friend's abortion, communicating pregnancy fears associated with coat hanger abortions and trips to Tijuana, Mexico, for illegal procedures before *Roe vs. Wade*. The page also represents Dater's call for action regarding the contested nature of this political issue today. A page titled "Women's Movement" (Fig. 11), dated 1971, features a compendium of Dater's portraits of women, including Libby Butterfield, Anna Savoca, and Laura Mae Dunlap, with Dater's understated caption: "I was in the right place at the right time." On a page of her male portraits, many of which show frontal nudity, titled "Size Matters" (Fig. 12) and dated 1978, she states, "I started photographing men in 1964. Fourteen years later I got a Guggenheim, even so no one would publish the male nudes."

To understand how Dater constructed the pages of *Memoir*, "Date Shake" (Pl. 3), dated February 5, 1951, is instructive. With references to older pictures, she has created new

photographs to highlight private stories so that they reach beyond the purely personal. On the left side is a Chi Chi menu kept from a visit to Palm Springs that year. The naked woman on the cover had fascinated her, just as a reproduction of Thomas Hart Benton's painting *Persephone* (found in a book her parents owned)³⁰ had appealed to her and eventually was a source for *Imogen and Twinka*. On the right side of the page are three photographs taken during a 2011 visit to Palm Springs: the sky with a flying saucer-like cloud, a 1950s Cadillac, and a roadrunner. Her text, "All I wanted was a date milkshake" is carefully placed opposite the sexy, uninhibited woman, cleverly comparing "milkshake" with her bare breasts. The pages are filled with biographical insights, but also inform our knowledge of the culture as experienced by Dater.

The "James Mason" page (Fig. 13), dated February 13, 1952, reveals her crush on that actor using some of the "research" kept since childhood in a folder of photographs and newspaper clippings about her idol. Like Ava Gardner represented ideal womanhood to a six-year-old, Mason epitomized her male ideal at age thirteen. He was exotic; she loved his cultured English accent. However, it is the "killer charm" of the professor he portrayed in the film *Lolita* that is characterized in the newspaper clipping she reproduces, with his personality traits (excerpted from the clipping) listed on a green post-it note: "irresistible sadist, bewitching fiend, misogyny was once considered romantic, a man who detested women appeared to be desirable."



Fig. 12. Judy Dater, *Size Matters* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

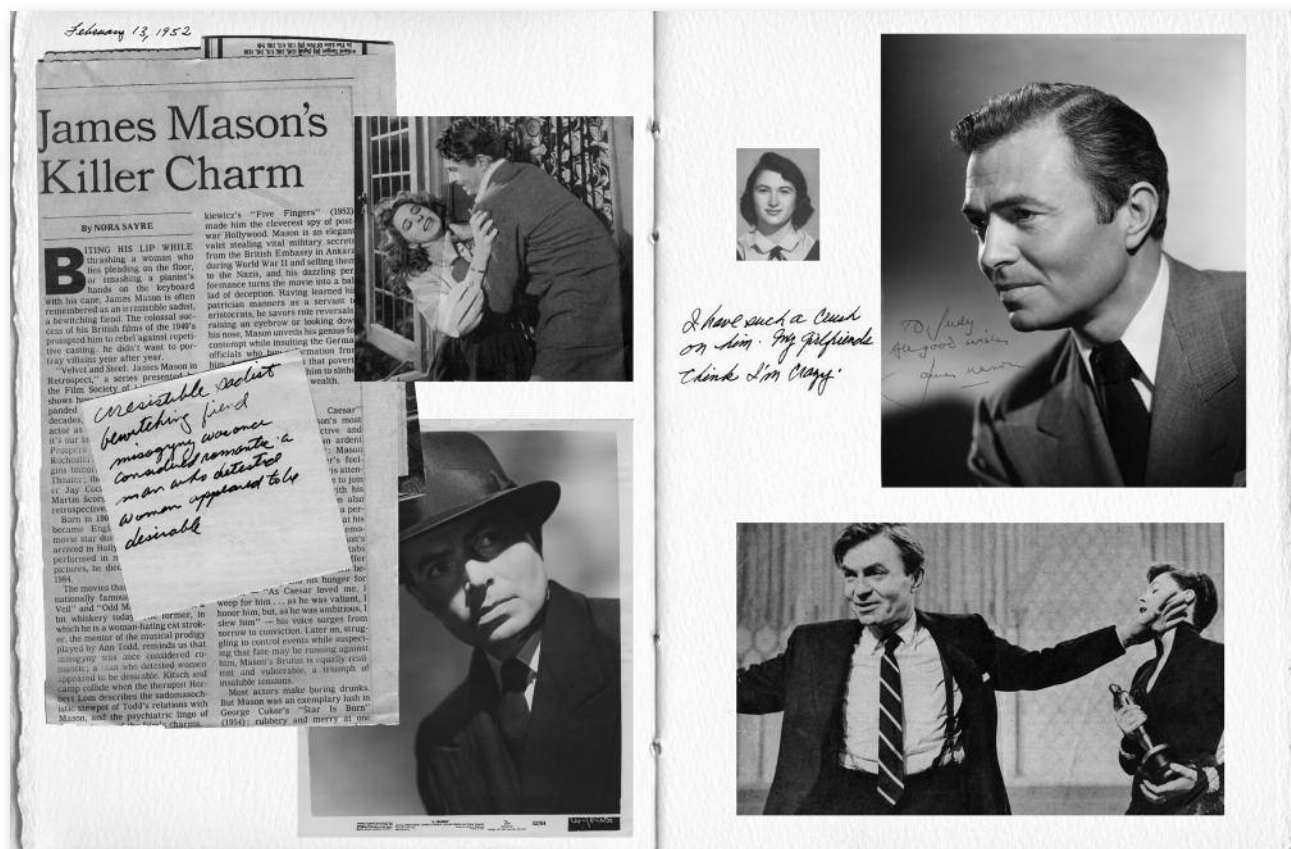


Fig. 13. Judy Dater, *James Mason* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

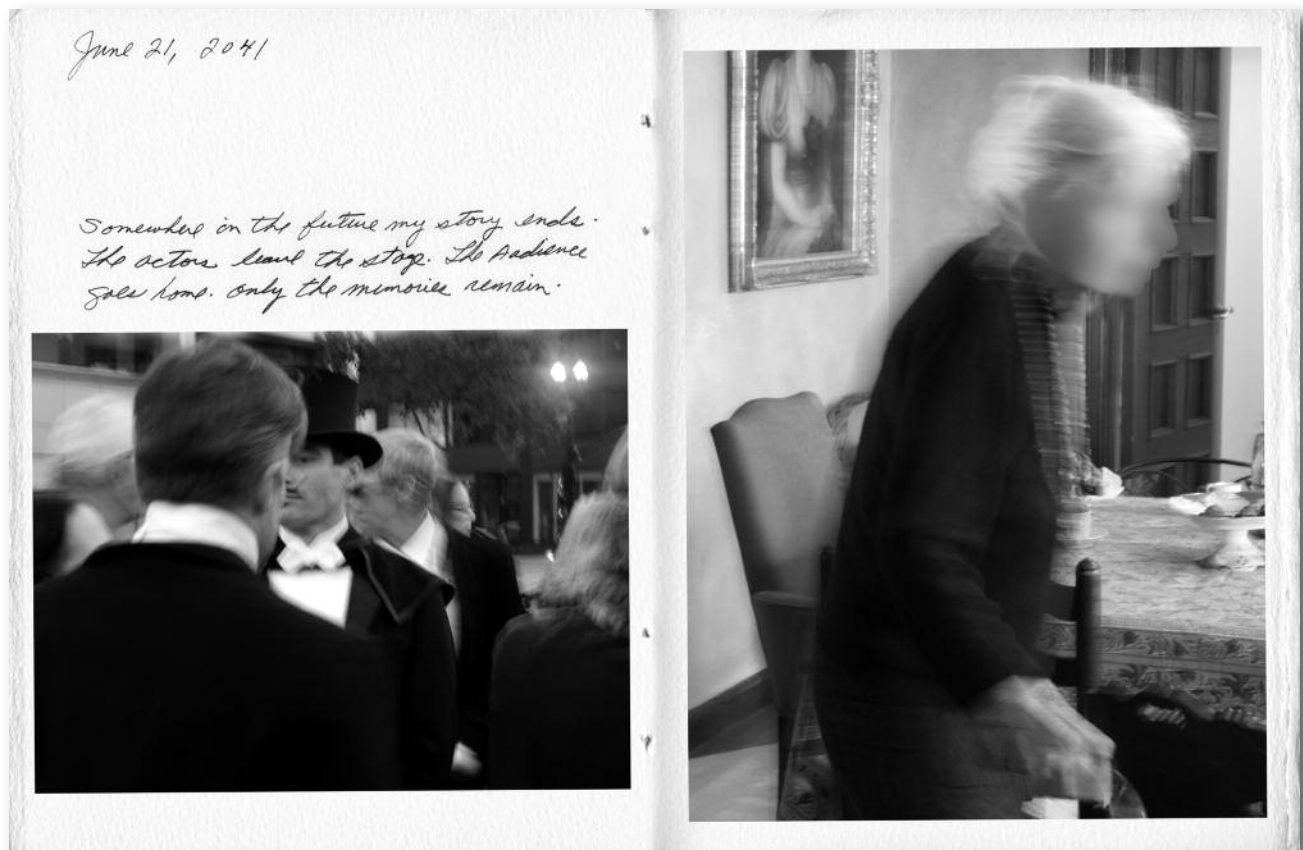


Fig. 14. Judy Dater, *Memories* (from *Memoir*) (2012), archival pigment print, 41" x 52" (original in color).

With hindsight, Dater finds many of her sexual exploits humorous. Using innuendo and an element of surprise, she describes clichéd human behavior, her male partners, loss of virginity, affairs, being caught-in-the-act, and a ménage-a-trois. Dater's style of black humor appears in "Just Act Natural" (Pl. 4), dated August 23, 1977, where, beside a photo on the left showing Dater in conversation with a man whose face is erased, the text says, "He whispered, 'my wife and daughters are here. Just act natural.'" On the right, next to a photo of Judy speaking with two women, the wife counters with, "Where did you get that dress? she asked. It's exactly like the one he brought home for the girls." Dater's response, beside a close-up of a martini is, "I needed a real drink." The ever hopeful Dater never gave up trying to find her life partner, and "The Fourth Wedding" page, dated February 17, 2007, captures the changes in style and officiates over time, from her first to her fourth ceremony—from traditional (Rabbi) to flower child (Judge), to casual (Justice of the Peace), and at last to her true happiness and glamour (Universal Life Church Ministers = friends).

The most romantic page in *Memoir* is "Moroccan Moonlight," dated July 27, 1980, which starts with the text, "We could hear the goatherd singing somewhere in the darkness, and the sound of the bells on the goats as they moved along the hillside beneath our window." Photographs of historical monuments and a self-portrait in a hotel room in Morocco combine with recent snapshots of goats she photographed in Mexico and a bedroom in Southern France.

The last three scrapbook pages are about aging. We see

Dater struggling to keep youthful and fit in "Burgers and Fries" (October 10, 2009). She keeps her sense of humor as she shows the aging of her body and deals directly with her sexuality. Similar to the color self-portraits, here she is seen laughing at herself. On the page dated May 5, 2011, she asks, what is life about anyway? "There are times when I just want to say 'fuck it.' Spend my days in the garden, my nights in the kitchen and my weekends at the movies." On *Memoir*'s last page, titled "Memories" (Fig. 14) and dated June 21, 2041—one hundred years after her birth—Dater's text reads: "Somewhere in the future my story ends. The actors leave the stage. The audience goes home. Only the memories remain."

Memoir recalls Dater's journals, her dreams and experiences of more than six decades, reimagining and reimagining her past. It is a powerful and amusing internal dialogue about age and womanhood. It is intensely personal, yet ironically feminist and universal. As Claire Sykes recently wrote, "All of Dater's photographs are self-portraits." Dater would agree:

Portraits I've done in the past I've always thought were a reflection of me. With *Memoir*, now it's just me looking at me, not at somebody else. The work certainly goes along with my other self-portraits. Like the black and white ones, it's introspective and serious; and like the color, it's also playful and satirical. And I think it also goes from the naïve to the knowing, to more of an acceptance of who I am and the reality of life in the moment.³¹

For Dater, *Memoir* is about female experience. From the beginning of her career, she focused on women, and her work has a narrative, whether within one picture or a combination of images. She's quick to say, "Everything I've done is Feminist"; though because of the freedom she expresses about sexuality and her sexual being, it is "post-feminist feminism." While trying not to offend, she wants to wake people up, saying, "I've consciously tried to be provocative and disturbing."³² As a result, Dater has been a part of the gestalt of her time, a product of her generation. The story of a free soul who never wanted to have anyone stick a label on her, the pages of *Memoir* document a life well lived. ●

Donna Stein, an art historian, curator and essayist, is Associate Director of the Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War in Culver City, California.

Notes

My thanks to Judy Dater for providing all photographs for this article.

1. The group shared a common photographic style characterized by sharp-focused and carefully framed images seen through a particularly Western (U.S.) viewpoint and included seven photographers: Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonia Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke and Edward Weston. See Judy Dater and Jack Welpott, *Women and Other Visions*, (Dobbs Ferry, New York, Morgan & Morgan Publishers, 1975).
2. In 1974, Cunningham and Dater were teaching a workshop together in Yosemite on the nude in the landscape. Twinka (painter Wayne Thiebaud's daughter) was one of the models. Among the first of many references to this iconic work is Douglas Davis, "The Ten 'Toughest' Photographs of 1975," *Esquire* (Feb. 1976), 108–10.
3. Anne Tucker, "Judy Dater: Sexual Women and Fearsome Landscapes," *Afterimage* (Oct. 1972), 6.
4. Joan Murray, "Portraits of Women," *Artweek*, 4:23 (June 23, 1973): 11.
5. Judy Dater, e-mail to the author, June 19, 2013. This same questioning spirit is shown in some of the color self-portraits, including *Ms. Clingfree* (1982).
6. Tucker, "Judy Dater: Sexual Women and Fearsome Landscapes," 6.
7. Dater, e-mail to the author, June 19, 2013.
8. The earliest example of Dater's incorporation of words to expand the meaning of a photograph occurred in *Prayer* (1971), a tabletop still life photograph that includes a ceramic book open to the Lord's Prayer.
9. Shelly Rice, "Portfolio," *Ms.* 6:12 (June, 1978) 42–43.
10. This is the same redwood tree and virtually the spot where Dater captured the intense image of *Twinka Thiebaud, Actress, Model* (1970) that became the cover image of Anne Tucker's *The Woman's Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1973).
11. Judy Dater, *Imogen Cunningham: A Portrait* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1979).
12. Note the self-portrait from 1963 in *Memoir* on the right half of the diptych "President Slain," which has never before been reproduced.
13. Dater, email to author, Sept. 3, 2013.
14. Kate Bonansinga, ed. *Passing Through, Settling In: Contemporary Photographs of the Desert* (El Paso: Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, Univ. of Texas at El Paso, 2006), 50.
15. Janice Grover, "Shifts of Focus," *The Women's Review of Books*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1986), 11–12.
16. Donna Stein, "Between Light and Dark: an Interview with Judy Dater," in *Cycles: Judy Dater* (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd., 1992), 223.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Michiko Kasahara, "Dissonance," in *Cycles: Judy Dater* (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd., 1992), 234.

20. James L. Enyeart, *Judy Dater, Twenty Years* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1986), xxiv. He refers to *Somewhere Over the Rainbow Blues*, an installation of sixteen 20" x 24" color prints (total 80" x 96") that Dater created in 1985 as a diary of her five weeks as a guest artist at the Kansas City Art Institute. Alternating captured video images and computer texts, Dater describes the experience living in two less than attractive dorm rooms with a shared bathroom down the hall, and muses about previous occupants. Only when she visited the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and encountered a compelling life-size, painted sculpture of Kuan-Yin, the god of mercy and compassion, was Dater able to achieve a sense of spiritual comfort and enjoy her time in the Midwest. An excerpt from one panel of the installation reads: *Her serene sensuous face and self-contained presence had me spellbound. She was magnificent, elegant, awesome, yet warm and human. I felt she could and would speak to me, comfort me, sustain me while I remained here.*

21. Donna Lee Phillips, "Personas of Women," *Artweek* (March 31, 1984) 15–16.

22. This work was shown at the GrapeStake Gallery, San Francisco in 1984 and at the Thomas Paul Gallery, Los Angeles in 2012.

23. Other early studies from 1990 include: *Socks, He Got Dressed in the Dark and When She Got Up a Few Hours Later She Discovered that in His Frenzy to Get Out of There he Had Put on One of her Socks by Mistake, Mistake, Mistake; It Occurred to Her That She Had Photographed All of the Men She Had Known Intimately in the Nude*; and *Clip-Art-John, "That was so great," he said. "I wish we could do that for a week." "Ha, a Week!" "Well, a Year," he said.*

24. *Memoir* is a limited edition portfolio of 38 individual scrapbook pages, digitally printed on 17" x 22" Hahnemühle Fine Art Photo Rag Duo paper. Each box contains a separate composite photograph of two pictures from 1982, which is a positive rendition of the negative image on the portfolio cover. The cover material, and the photograph were made especially for this portfolio and printed at Magnolia Editions in Oakland, CA. John DeMerritt Bookbinder in Emeryville, CA, created the portfolio box. Dater has also printed some of these pages as large-scale archival pigment prints (41" x 52"). In addition, she produced a 23-minute animated video of the portfolio pages in collaboration with filmmaker Eli Noyes in which she reads the text with deadpan innocence that emphasizes the humor.

25. Among the items that she included in the *Memoir* portfolio are a photo album from high school, her high school prom program, family photos including some from her first wedding, and the calendar girls from her father's old office.

26. Ilford Gallery Graded paper, 20" x 24".

27. Quoted in Jasmine Elist, "Her BFFs and Playmates," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 4, 2013), D10.

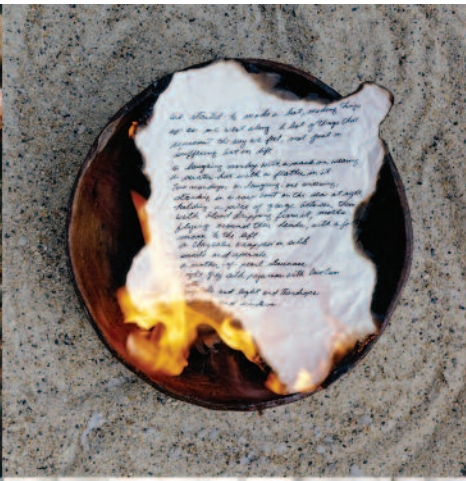
28. Martha Langford, "Telling Pictures and Showing Stories: Photographic Albums in the Collection of the McCord Museum of Canadian History" (online text), 2005, p. 8, see <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/>

29. Interview with the artist, July 24, 2012, Berkeley, CA. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from this interview.

30. A poster of this painting has long been a fixture in Dater's darkroom.

31. Claire Sykes, "Judy Dater: Seeing and Being Seen," *Photographer's Forum* (Fall 2012) 10–20.

32. Stein, "Between Light and Dark," 217.



Pl. 1. Judy Dater, *Love Letters #3* (1984),
4 chromogenic prints, each 15" x 15".



Pl. 2. Judy Dater, *Positive composite photograph* (from *Memoir*) (2012),
archival pigment print, 20" x 24".



