

LIMITED EDITIONS OF
**HAND PRINTED
ETCHINGS**



BY LES LEVINE

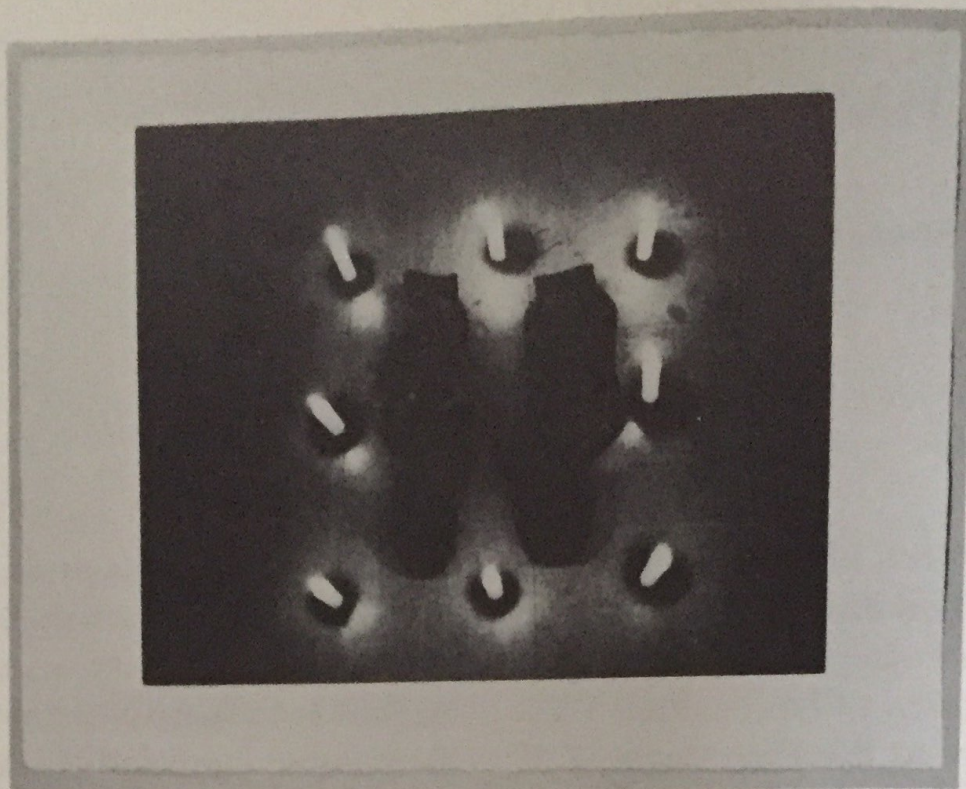
BODY ATTACHMENTS

by Carla Stellweg

The eleven photo-intaglio etchings titled **Body Attachments** are the only remaining physical materialization of Les Levine's 1975 installation, **At the First Moment of Your Death: Remember**. In this work, Les Levine addressed himself directly to the crucial issue of man's condition. The viewer could rehearse the dying experience, assuming he would allow himself to learn and open up in order to receive consciousness.

Discussing these prints requires connecting them with the installation out of which they were created. **At the First Moment of Your Death: Remember** consisted of several parts. Thirteen triangular shaped boxes made of copper were placed on the gallery floor. In the center of each box was a photograph of a piece of clothing. The four triangular corners of each box were filled with colored sand and topped with four colored, lit candles. On one wall, the thirteen





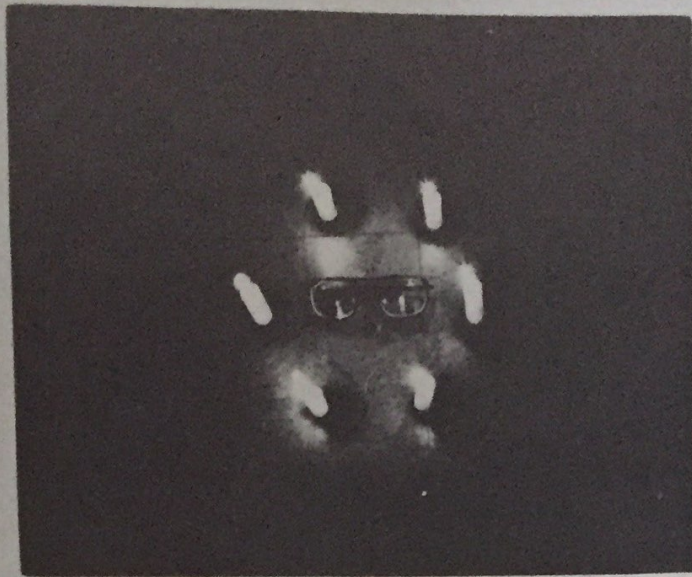
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photographs of clothing appeared again, hanging in a row and printed in red. On another wall, real clothing, dripping wet, was hung on a line. The accompanying text, read by William Burroughs, faded out and stopped at the end as if in synchrony with the mind and soul departing. Sound, the word, is gone with the body to which it is attached. During the reading of the text, a carousel projected images of a man and a woman in sexual communion. The images flew past like visions or hallucinations.

At the First Moment of Your Death: Remember is an altar for the dead, a shrine where a reconciliation of opposite directions shapes a dialectical awareness of subject and object, of personal and social groping for a visualization of consciousness. The work fuses Eastern philosophy

with Christianity. The mind is leaving the body and the search for a new body is beginning.

All the attributes are clearly present: water, fire, air and earth. There is food to accompany the spirit on its journey, energy or heat and a male/female coupling to insure germination and fertility. There are also certain numerical combinations (3, 5, 8 and 13) and the basic shapes which indicate transformation from square to triangle to circle. The work generates a complete view on all levels of perception and it also supplies the necessary and identifiable intellectual elements, i.e., the *Kabbala*, *Kaddish*, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Intellectual knowledge provides the script, and the images provide the perceptual experience which makes



us conscious of our condition.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead talks about the soul after death and before rebirth as a being detached from its body, possessing a powerful desire to return and inhabit the body, to reenter the womb and be reborn as a physical being, negating the state of non-being. To such a

spirit in limbo, a shirt or a pair of shoes become the most sacred of items, the objects closest to the remembrance of the body. Only sexual images, which are also spoken of as visions before entrance into the womb, contain such strong body association.

The clothing Les Levine has chosen for his imagery in the prints suggests the closeness, the second skin which enhances, protects, warms and covers the body. Rather than concentrate on the cosmetics involved in shaping the outline and contours of the body, the clothing focuses on the body as a whole, as a vessel we own which houses the mind and the spirit.

The items of clothing are arranged in a manner suggestive of ritual objects. Lying on the floor surrounded by a circle of lit candles,



shoes, jacket, shirt, glasses appear to have been emptied of the body very recently. It is as if the supporting body has abandoned them casually and might return at any moment. They are intensely evocative of the relationship between oneself and the clothes of a recently departed person who has been close to us. They are charged with a lingering aura of life and suggestive of the personal way in which each of us expires and energy/life drains from the body. In addition to personal associations, the **Body Attachment** prints also contain a broader cultural commentary; a T-shirt, a belt, a scarf become sacred items not only to the dead individual who wore them but also to the dead society which used them.

Les Levine is one of the few persons I have met who is so deeply concerned with the issue of consciousness and who confronts it directly in his art. I feel I can say this on the basis of my own relationship with religious aspects of the life/death experience. I have vivid recollections of the Buddhist Balinese concept actualized in a 49-day ritual ceremony to accompany the mind's departure from the body and follow its path toward rebirth. I am also reminded of the incredibly complex Pre-Columbian philosophical approaches to this experience which are still present today in Mexico.

In **Body Attachments**, Les Levine offers us the experience of preparing

to leave the body. The dualistic nature of our existence is questioned in terms of leaving or staying. The items of clothing represent all the material fabrications which fill our time and space, and they are also precisely the attachments which we must leave behind to make death the most intense celebration of life. In **Body Attachments**, Les Levine gives up ego, creating a ritual space with votive offerings, opening up multiple channels to acquire perception of our being so that we may become conscious of our non-being.

Carla Stellweg is an Art Critic, Art Historian and Curator who lives in New York City and Mexico City. She is the founder and Editor of *Artes Visuales* and recently co-curated a Rufino Tamayo retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum.

Body Attachments

Suite of 11 handmade photo-intaglio etchings. Etched on zinc; printed in black ink on buff German etching paper. Each 22" x 30"; editions of 100.

- 1 Shoes
- 2 Watch (*not shown*)
- 3 BVD's
- 4 Socks
- 5 Scarf (*not shown*)
- 6 Pants (*not shown*)
- 7 T-shirt (*not shown*)
- 8 Jacket (*not shown*)
- 9 Glasses
- 10 Sweater (*shown on cover*)
- 11 Belt (*not shown*)

Each **Body Attachment** print is composed of an item of clothing (same as titles above) lying on the floor and surrounded by a square, rectangle or circle of lit candles.