

F R A G M E N T S

Over the past 25 years, Jenny Okun has been creating kaleidoscopic images of boats, landscapes, and buildings, looking at things in the round the way the cubist painters did. Her brush is a Hasselblad, and she achieves her effects, like the earliest moviemakers, within the camera. She composes an image in her head, imagining juxtapositions of key details, then takes a sequence of six overlapping images, by winding the film forward a third of a frame at a time. "It may take me a whole day to do 12 strips," she says, "and I often spend three days walking around a building, shooting whatever seems interesting. Then I take the transparencies, scan them into a computer, and move them about until I've got a single strip or a triptych that I want to print up."

These expansive, often colorful images dazzle the eye and offer a fresh take on familiar sights. The lamps that outline Harrods department store in London become, through Okun's lens, a thousand points of light that glimmer in the darkness. Casinos on the Las Vegas Strip yield pyrotechnic

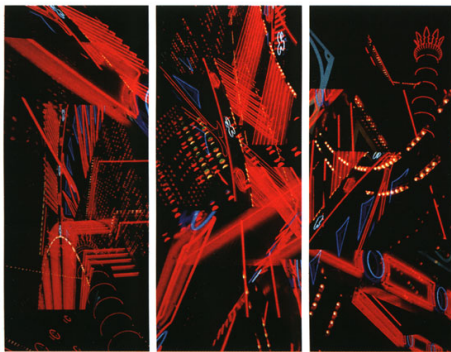


displays of sizzling neon reds vibrating on the black velvet of the night sky. The fanned Gothic vaults of Exeter Cathedral, a triumph of medieval building technology, ripple and coruscate in a golden light. The Albert Bridge across the Thames in Chelsea is a characteristically Victorian mix of cast-iron classical columns and functional metal strips—much like the stone arches and steel cables of the Brooklyn Bridge. She fuses its artistry and technology, printing the image in black and white to dramatize the structural daring.

Okun was born in New York, studied art, photography, and film in London, and now commutes back and forth from her English studio to her parents' home in Beverly Hills. She's at ease in both countries, embracing architecture that speaks in the language of today, but also finding inspiration in ancient monuments. The Getty commissioned her to create a poster of its new museum, and she dances around and through its pavilions, imagining how

the steel panels will play off the stone, and how the curved canopies of the entrance will compose. "If I know what to expect, I charge right in," she explains, "but here there are so many things I can play with. If the play of light is really exciting I go for it, but even then I'm thinking of the crucial details, the things that don't change. At the Getty, I'm shooting as many shapes as I can, taking them back to the studio, and thinking about them before I do the final images."

In an age when artists can be maddeningly obtuse about their work, Okun is refreshingly down to earth. She cannot remember what lens she brought to the Getty but



Above: "Albert Bridge," J. Okun © 1997

Below: "Las Vegas Steamboat," J. Okun © 1997

T H E A R T O F