

Aliyah (detail), 1996

In Hebrew, **Aliyah** means a blessing, inspiring a movement from darkness into light. At this point in the exhibition we start to see the light of a blue sky in the distance. Perhaps redemption is possible. A male figure covered in dirt labours in a darkness punctuated by light. He carries a body, pulls at the earth, rescues a woman from the water, tends to a dog and then looks downwards as if reflecting on himself. The final image in the series has the redemptive calm of two bodies cleansed by water. A bruise glistens on the woman's leg which serves to heighten the sense that redemption was necessary. For what is redemption if you have not fallen or suffered?

to redeem: to get or win back; to free from distress or harms; to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental; to change for the better; to make good.

syn- see rescue

- Webster's Dictionary

Considered as a whole, Eldon Garnet's exhibition **The Fallen Body** lyrically explores the nature of our physical circumstances and the struggle for regeneration.



No (detail), 1997

Photos - Courtesy: CMCP/NGC

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Eldon Garnet

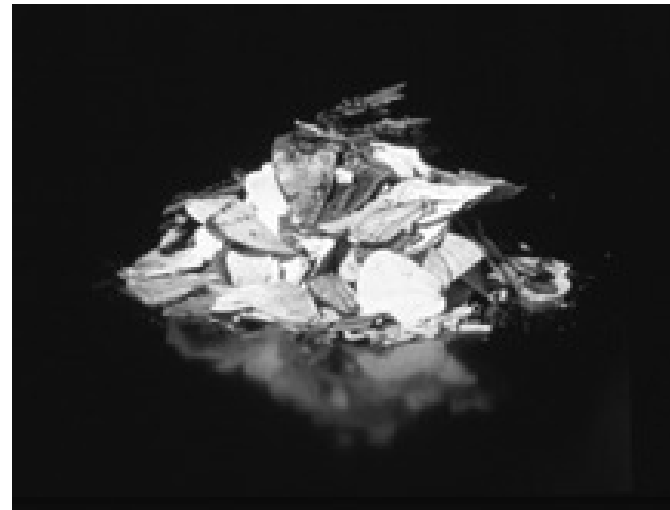
The **Fallen** Body

A self-guided tour



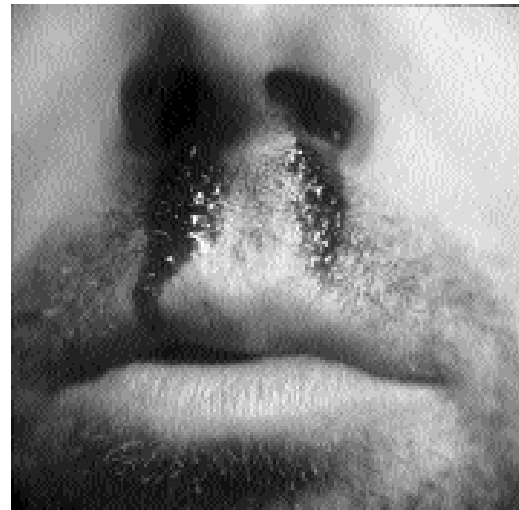
Pleasure and poetry are key words in appreciating Eldon Garnet's exhibition of photographs *The Fallen Body*. Although the subject of each picture may not be strictly pleasurable, his titles and images guide us with a poetic sensuality. Through this sensuality, Garnet's photographs touch on the profoundly personal thoughts we all have about desire, loss, redemption and death.

Perhaps the best way to look at the photographs of Eldon Garnet is to take pleasure in them as one would a piece of music. We become involved with a piece of music through the sensory pleasure of its lyricism rather than a literal reading of its parts. With Garnet's photographs we can look at how certain images and titles play off each other, though their impact remains in their poetic sensibility.



When? (detail), 1993

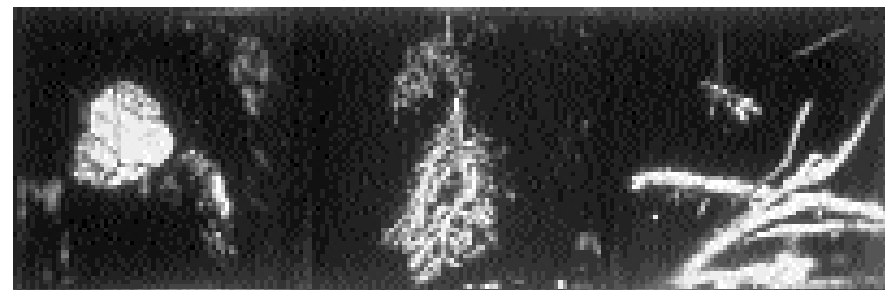
In each of the seven series, Eldon Garnet gives us one word titles which act as frames or doorways into the images. The title *When?* introduces the element of time into the series. This theme is echoed by the photographs of piles whose mysterious lack of purpose draws us into their sensual richness. With the butterfly wings there is a vivid frailty. In life, these exquisite wings carry butterflies over vast distances, but now their beauty is quickly turning to dust. There is a sense of the duration of life and its fragility. In the next photograph we see the hard glistening teeth that last long after our own lives have ceased. Some life spans seem infinitesimally small, others are longer. *When?* plays with the knowledge that time is fleeting. No one chooses when.



Trembling (detail), 1990

If we speak of "trembling" we may be referring to states of intense pleasure or of pain. We can tremble with excitement and desire or we can tremble with injury and exhaustion. Inanimate objects can also tremble from elements such as the breeze or the heat of a flame. In Garnet's series *Trembling* we see all these possibilities. *Trembling* brings together images of acute tenderness with images of injury, labour and loss. There is a capacity for both a poignant sensitivity and a passionate strength. Perhaps the line between creation and destruction or between loving and loss also wavers.

The title *Vanitas* refers to seventeenth-century still life paintings which traditionally depicted death. The word *vanitas* is Latin for vanity and the tradition may have evolved from moralistic representations of the seven deadly sins. By insistently reminding us of mortality, these paintings drew attention to the human vanity in thinking we were above the laws of nature. Eldon Garnet is making reference to a specific kind of *vanitas*, where wild game were strung up amongst other objects typically found in *vanitas* scenes, such as burning candles, skulls or biblical texts.



Vanitas (detail), 1992

Unlike these traditional paintings, dead objects in Garnet's *Vanitas* hang in what looks to be their natural surroundings. By moving these objects out of the dark interiors of the seventeenth-century paintings, Garnet's images become more mysterious. We are free to wonder who has suspended these objects and why. Unlike the moral and religious overtones in the *vanitas* tradition, here there seems to be a more mechanistic or scientific curiosity. In this series Garnet has reinvented the *vanitas* in a contemporary way.



Promise (detail), 1994

The series *Promise* shows us two different realities. In the warm russet toned photographs we see twigs and branches veiling human figures. In the other photographs we see bodies blackened by ashes. Eldon Garnet refers to the warm scenes of the branches as holding the promise of the body's regeneration through fertility and growth, a hopefulness for the future. Perhaps the branches obscuring the figures also act as a barrier to that reality. There is a sense it is unreachable. A promise is grounds for expectation, but expectations aren't always met. The blackened bodies which meet and embrace out of the ashes may not hold the same promise for the future, yet they are more accessible. The final image in the series is poignantly ambiguous. Berries hang drying on a branch in what appears to be dusk light.