

## CATALOG

### ***Introduction written by Peter Barberie, Curator of Photographs, Philadelphia Museum of Art***

Bruce Katsiff is not Pennsylvania's first artist-academician and museum director with a penchant for bones. That distinction belongs to Charles Willson Peale, the visionary American painter who opened Peale's Museum in Philadelphia in 1786, and who was a leading founder of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1805. Peale exhumed a mastodon skeleton in New York State in 1801 that he displayed at his museum along with other natural history specimens. He even taught himself taxidermy in order to prepare his displays of stuffed birds and animals.

Bruce has not yet learned taxidermy, and fortunately for his wife, Jo, it will not be necessary. He lovingly preserves the bodies and bones of his animal subjects with photography, a nineteenth-century invention whose origins must be traced to the inquisitiveness of Enlightenment figures such as Peale. (Peale was an enthusiastic promoter of the physionotrace, a precursor to photography; more importantly, his legacy of scientific enquiry and artistic ambition was a major factor in Philadelphia's later status as a leading international city for photography in the 1840s and '50s).

Like Peale, who continued painting throughout the years of his other achievements, Bruce persisted in making photographs during decades in which he fostered innovations in education and museums. Beginning in 1969 he was Professor of Fine Art at Bucks County Community College, where he built a nationally recognized photography program, hiring an impressive and dynamic roster of teachers including Emmet Gowin and Larry Fink. Bruce recognized that Bucks County's distinctive artistic traditions should inform the school's offerings. As Chair of the Fine Art Department and later of the Art and Music Division, he led BCCC's fine arts and music departments to national accreditation. He developed a program in fine woodworking to train a new generation of cabinetmakers and furniture designers, building on one of the most important aspects of Bucks County artistry. To this day BCCC is the only community college in the nation to offer such distinguished arts programs.

In 1991 Bruce assumed leadership of the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, and over the next two decades he turned it into a dynamo among regional museums, pairing his now-legendary fundraising acumen with keen knowledge and love for work by Bucks County artists. Today the Michener is an institution known for its great exhibitions but also for the unique sense of place that it contributes to its city and region. Its campus of historic buildings and a sculpture garden house an internationally significant art collection that is rooted in a regional perspective but looks widely abroad.

Bruce's photography, characterized by finely-crafted prints and a wondrous array of studio curiosities, reveals his love for the origins and history of the medium. Like Peale, he embraces art's essential task to show us things in the world as well as its mysterious potential to transport us into imaginative realms. Unlike Peale, his catalogue of specimens is organized not primarily to make sense of this world, but to help us approach that which we do not understand.