Jessica Damen's Installation Proposal
"A Record of Baby's Days – A Family Narrative"

"Memory is our domestic form of time travel, and the snapshot revolutionalized human consciousness… conveying upon the long faded past a distinct visual immortality … as priceless as religious icons." (Joyce Carol Oates, *Civilization*, March'97)

The "distinct visual immortality" I have created with this installation explores the meaning of loss - the loss of a child - a sister I never knew. Family snapshots of this child, her older sister and parents taken shortly after the end of the Second World War were meant to convey for posterity my family's hope, optimism and achievement. Instead, they were stashed away in basement storage, and forgotten for nearly fifty years, because of their belief that the tragedy associated with them was best buried.

To create an atmosphere of discovery through interior and exterior space and one that blurs the difference between imagination and memory, I have created a room that juxtaposes paintings, drawings and etchings, based on these long lost photographs with real objects. As if walking through an attic or a deserted garden, one finds an empty chair, a ladder precariously balanced, a fallen doll covered by autumn leaves, and a window to peer through to find a sorrowful mother and child gazing back from the other side. The enclosed grief and longing conveyed in this installation is as palapable as the dark cloth with which the walls are draped and, paradoxically, as ethereal as the muted lighting enveloping the space.

The loss of a child was until recently a nearly universal sorrowful event for families. Ironically, as public health and medical care has improved over the last century our arrogance, that we are immune from this grief, has created a particularly lonely place for grieving parents. I saw this concretely during my work as a pediatric nurse specialist. While death and its meaning is a subject Westerners are more willing to talk about due in part to the literature written by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others, the willingness to personalize death's impact, and especially the death of a child, remains I believe, a taboo. It is for this reason that I wish to present my installation in as many venues as possible.

The installation at Dadian Gallery covered approximately 64 feet of wall. I have all materials available for the that footage and I will purchase all material for the additional estimated 6 ft. I will supply all objects of art and found objects pictured in slides, (see attached slide list for inventory of items.) All items are stapled onto the wall with the exception of : the ladder, doors & mirror. The latter items need to be drilled into the wall with standard screws and bracers which I will supply. Each installation becomes distinctive because it assume the unique character of the space in which it is installed. *

The dates I would prefer are after 9/01 through 6/02 and 9/02 through 12/02.

*The columns and the ceiling overhang pictured in my slides are architectural features unique to Dadian Gallery and will not be part of this installation.