



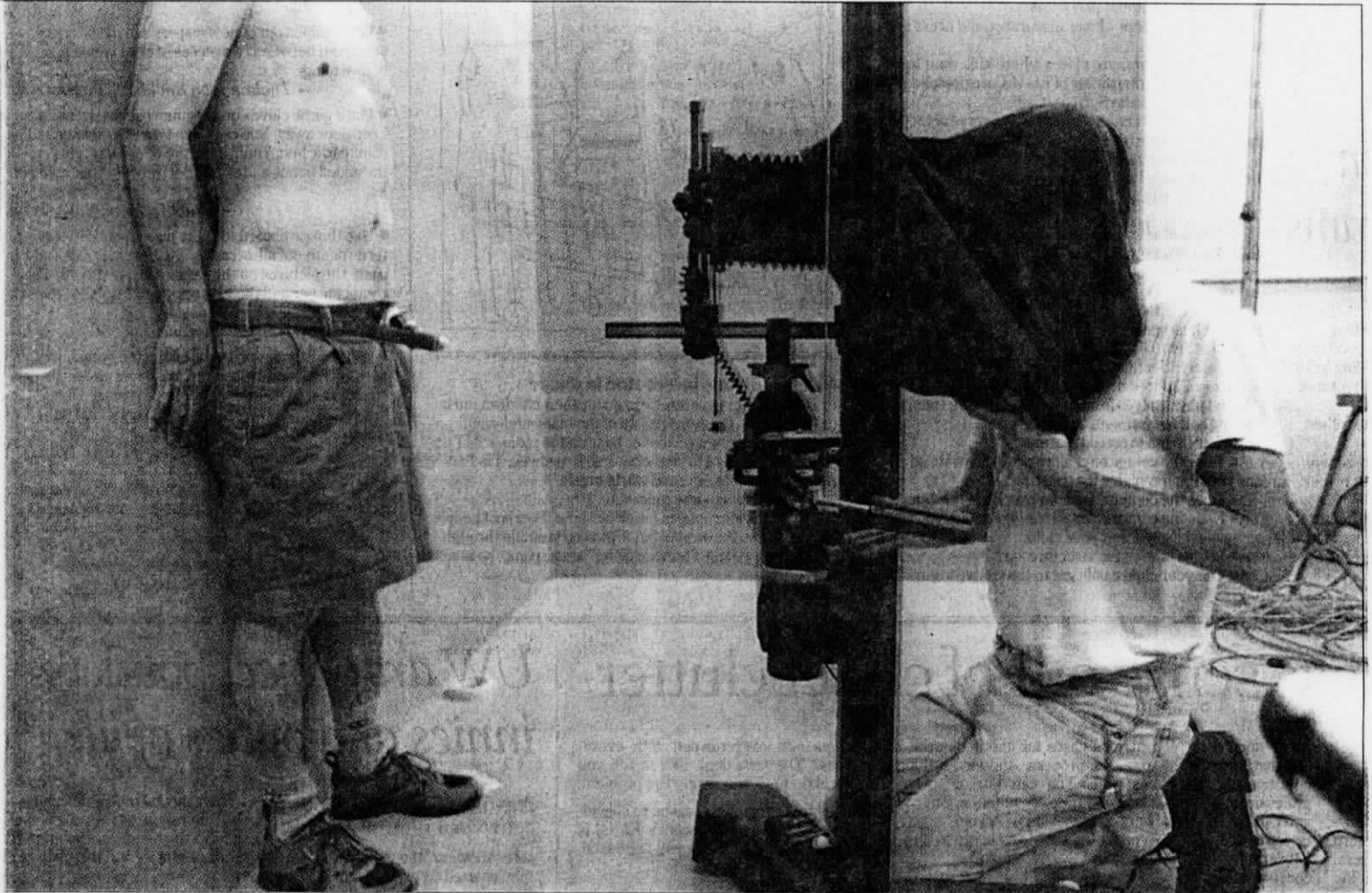
Real Life
What to look for in evaluating a day-care center.
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SCENE

Activity passes yield barg
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THE SEATTLE TIMES SECTION F TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1996

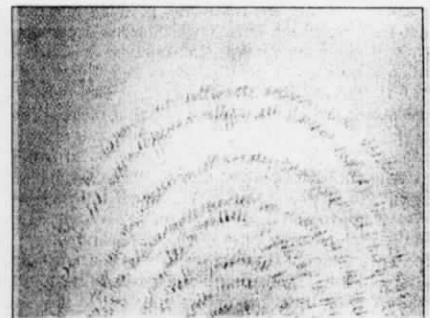


ALAN BERNER / SEATTLE TIMES

Up close and personal, photographer Robert Plogman records a detailed study of a volunteer's navel at the University of Washington.

Navel gazing

At the University of Washington, an unusual public-art project ponders the innies and outies of life



BY JANET I-CHIN TU
 Seattle Times staff reporter

Contemplate the belly. Its roundness, its firmness (or lack thereof). Now ponder the navel.

At the University of Washington, an unusual public-art project ponders the innies and outies of life



ALAN BERNER / SEATTLE TIMES

Artist Yong Soon Min creates panels that superimpose a person's handwritten life story over a photo of their navel.

BY JANET I-CHIN TU
Seattle Times staff reporter

Contemplate the belly. Its roundness, its firmness (or lack thereof). Now ponder the navel.

Is it an innie? An outie? A symbol of birth? Of life?

Never thought much about the midsection?

Artist Yong Soon Min has.

Min, 43, a professional artist living in Los Angeles, was in Seattle recently to do some serious navel gazing.

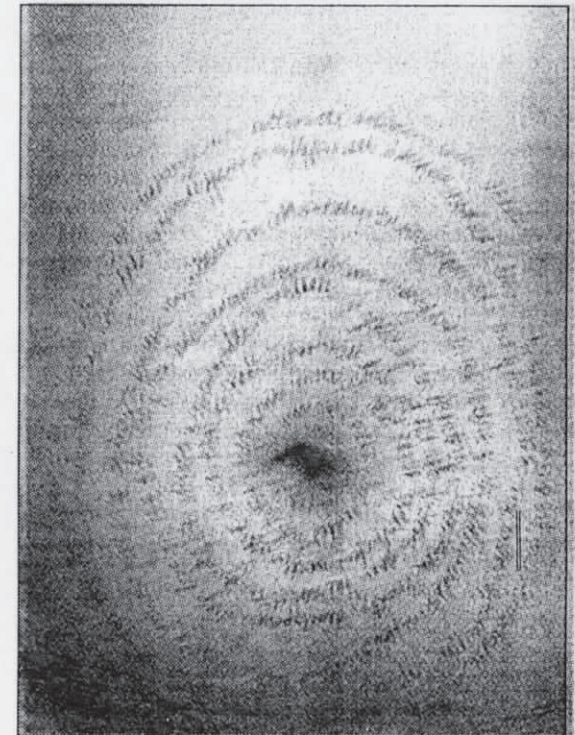
Five male bellies, six female bellies. Working with photographer Robert Plogman, Min will create mural-sized full-color photographs of these volunteers' bellies in which their navels serve as the center of their handwritten, spiral-shaped life stories. Titled "BellyTalk," the public art project was commissioned by the Washington State Arts Commission and the University of Washington. It will be displayed at the UW in spring.

"The belly is such a central part of our body but it's not the part that people think about," Min said during a belly-photographing session in a UW studio. "I'm de-marginalizing the belly."

At first, it seemed, more women had the guts to show their bellies than men.

Min posted ads for volunteers in July. Of the 12 responses, all were female.

"When I first started this project, I thought more men would do it," Min said. "I thought they would be more comfort-



ALAN BERNER / SEATTLE TIMES

"**BellyTalk**" is the project's title. Spiral writing tells of the subject's life. Says artist Min: "There are a lot of associations between the spiral and life force. Such as fingerprints."

PLEASE SEE *Navel* ON F 2

1996



play means the stereo, but if you can stumble through "Frenesi" or "The Toreador Song" at the piano, so much the better.

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set clutter

elves now overcrowded with every- books? The pros don't like to tell you should do until you define the problem.

the most compelling reason to consid- in a professional, concedes Kloss, is you pay someone to get you organized, immediately motivated to do it.

organized need not be expensive (an long used to keep me from doing it). ling cabinets from secondhand stores, bins or shelves from discount stores. according to your life, not something a book. Consider a file for each kid, for taxes, for each pet, for the different your or your spouse's business, for ormation. Then only keep the things eed. If there's a paper with a phone want, take a minute to put the phone your address book, then throw the

e's nothing wrong with brick and board en just a new set of shelves can make nized a manageable task.

orch leaves my house after her two- y morning visit, I am inspired and I WILL clean out the extra closet and hat junk. I WILL go through our four make new folders that have some our lives now, and move the cabinets y cleaned closet so our extra bedroom rowded. I WILL go through my kids' them and get rid of the toys they 's ago.

usband comes home from his soccer on's friend arrives to play and my ggles into the kitchen, finally ready to . It's Sunday, the last day of the e sun is shining.

s to sit on the floor and go through old

to your life

ndated photos that you're hoping to ut in albums some day, consider a hort-term solution. Use inexpen- ive cardboard shoe boxes to catego- ze the pictures by year or subject.

UW art project ponders innies and outies of life

Navel

CONTINUED FROM F 1

able showing their bellies since they're used to going around shirt- less."

She had to recruit friends in order to get some male volunteers.

"I wanted to get a diverse range of stories as well as physical form," Min said.

"No one's ever asked to photo- graph my belly before," said one male volunteer that day, a friend of a friend of Min's. "At least, I didn't have to audition for it."

Polaroids of the volunteers' bel- lies lined a nearby table. The photo- graphs don't show the contours of the waist or hips, just the abdomen itself in close-up, almost abstract form. The bellies have become terrains — landscapes of swells and concaves, light and shadow.

Some of the bellies in the photo- graphs were hairy, some hairless, some shaved. There was a pregnant belly, a fit belly, a child's belly.

Afterward, on a sheet of paper the volunteers wrote about defining moments in their lives, using, if they chose, a spiral template drawn by Min.

The belly serves as a symbol of birth, of origin. And "there are a lot of associations between the spiral and life force," Min said. "Such as fingerprints."

Volunteer Mayumi Tsutakawa found fascinating the "direct rela- tion between your life — expressed through the words, and the physical body — expressed through the navel. In Japanese culture, at least, the stomach is considered the cen- ter of the being, not the head or heart," she said.

The handwritten spirals will lat- er be superimposed over the photo- graphs of the bellies, the centers of the spirals placed right over the navel.

These murals will then be placed in eight lightboxes on two UW bus shelters — one by the art building, the other by Meany Hall.

Min wants the project to be as personal as possible.

That's why she had the volun- teers write whatever they wanted, in their own handwriting, to be superimposed on pictures of their own bellies. Each mural will be a personal history of sorts.

Her impetus was a photo series she created in 1992 called "Defin- ing Moments," in response to the L.A. riots.

"That work made me think of defining moments, of getting peo- ple to think about what's important — what were the defining moments — in their lives," Min said.

Min also cites the influence of the feminist and Asian-American movements in her work. The phi- losophy that the personal is politi- cal. And the realization that many marginalized people have not had their histories told.

While "BellyTalk" is not overtly feminist or Asian American, Min's activist consciousness pervades it: She allows her subjects to speak; she places the personal histories in a larger context.

"I think of personal events in my life, and I think of them in the context of the larger life," Min said. "So that when we think of history, we don't think it's autonomous, but that we have some impact on histo- ry, and that we are a part of history."