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ARTS & PERFORMANCE

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by Cate McQuaid

**JOHN COPLANS +
AMANDA MEANS: Distilled**
At: Howard Yezerski Gallery,
460 Harrison Ave., through Feb. 3.
617-262-0550
www.howardyezerskigallery.com

Black-and-white world

Photographers Amanda Means and John Coplans became friends more than 20 years ago, but they've never shown together before. Coplans, a generation older than Means, died in 2003. Their work at Howard Yezerski Gallery looks exquisite and shares a fascination with a monumental look at small, ordinary things - a vision that pushes toward abstraction.

Coplans was best known for photographing his aging body up close in black and white; here we have his hands, fingers interlocking. "Interlocking Fingers, No. 17" shows fingers nesting within cupped palms, like baby birds. The tips are plump, the fingernails trimmed to the quick but thick and lined, and the insides of the fingers also deeply lined. All the textures of skin, hair, and nail fascinate on this scale.

Yezerski has paired them with Means's black-and-white water-glass series; it turns out the glasses belonged to Coplans; they had a home in his hands. She photographed them up close with a large format camera, so every chip and scratch stands out, like the scratches on an old film, or the odd folds in Coplans's fingers.

"Water Glass 8" is an essay in tones and textures, light and shadow. Bubbles change from white orbs to black as the back-drop shifts from dark wall to pale table. The narrow focus on the face of the glass causes the sides to blur slightly. A shadow puddles in the glass's base, but light collects on the water's surface. It becomes something other than a glass of water, something larger and more meaningful, a vessel of light.

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