

When he has done his best work, no one ever notices, and to 39 year old Steven R. Young, "that's the way it should be". Young is an ocularist—one of only a half dozen in the Bay Area. He makes artificial eyes; he delicately fashions and custom-fits to the orbit (eye socket) realistic, plastic eyes for his patients. "The only ones you see are the poorly done ones," Young said.

It's his skill at the fine art work required to make an artificial eye look like the real thing that keeps him busy seven days a week. "I don't like to make patients wait," he said. Young is constantly on the move. He sees patients in his office on Pill Hill in Oakland, during an ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery clinic with Dr. William Stewart at the Pacific Campus of California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC), at a cranial-facial clinic at the California Campus of CPMC, and even as far away as Sacramento at the U.C. Davis Medical Center. Says Young, "seeing children who hide their faces or comb their hair over a mal-formed eye come out of their shell is my motivation."

A patient is fitted with a temporary eye, or "conformer" during the eight-week healing period after enucleation (removal of the eye). Young studies the patient's facial symmetry including the line of eyelashes and takes an impression of the orbit with alginate, a fluffy whipped-cream like material, in a process similar to dentist's impressions. From this impression he creates a wax model that closely fits the orbit. This custom-fit wax model is transformed into plastic and the beginnings of the final plastic eye.

"The process is simple and easy," he says, while holding up his right thumb, "but hard on the hands." And indeed, the skin seems thin and shiny. It's the abrasive grinding and polishing that is required to give the plastic eye its natural like patina that is taking its toll on Young's hands. He adds,

"my fingers get tender sometimes, but each eye is a work of art."

In a painstaking process, he paints the plastic eye to match the patient's companion eye using a red sable brush and medical grade pigment, which is non-poisonous and doesn't fade. Young uses his artistic skills to carefully match the varied browns, blues and greens of the iris and tints and shades of the sclera (the white of the eye). He realistically paints in the tiny blood vessels or freckles that distinguish an individual's eyes.

Recently he was awarded a patent for a device he invented that makes the pupil in a plastic eye appear to dilate. While this is a matter of cosmetics, it is an important improvement in appearance to the wearer of an artificial eye. Young has worked with some of the newer implants which are made of hydroxyapatite, a

Young graduated from Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa in 1974. "I was thinking about being a doctor," but he met Dr. Lee Allan, who started the program in ocular prosthetics, at the University of Iowa Medical Center and decided to wed his hobby, painting, to a career. Young completed the seven-day-a-week program, perhaps the precursor of his current schedule, and was recruited by Bruce Spivey, M.D. to work in the Eye Department. Since that time, Young has established his own practice in Oakland where he lives with his wife, Rene and two daughters, ages 8 and 5. He is hoping to squeeze in a little time to drive his recently restored Excalibur.

Young enjoys a loyal following of patients who keep in touch with him. "People don't generally know what I do until they need me," and that's precisely what Young likes



Left to right: William B. Stewart, M.D., Spencer Koffman, a patient, and Steven R. Young, BCO

material like human bone but without the antigens lessening the risk of rejection. He said the newer implants provide good motility (movement) and less migration. "It's a matter of what works best for the patient."

about his job. "I deal with people at one of the most traumatic times in their lives, they are very appreciative of the work I do. That makes you feel good about yourself."