

A PUBLICATION OF THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

FALL 1984



The Origin of Drawing

Dianne Blell

DIANNE BLELL: MODERN ROMANCE
RAY METZKER: PHOTOGRAPHY AS LIFE
BARBARA NORFLEET: INSIDE THE CIRCLE
ROBERT ADAMS: THINGS AS THEY ARE
GEOFF WINNINGHAM: IN THE BEGINNING

COVER

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Messages

By way of explaining about the spot on the cover, and searching for a network.

WHY NOT SPOT?

View, Insight, Critical Dialogue, Perceptivity, and so forth?

Then on a sunny summer afternoon during a lull in the Small Art Press Symposium going on here at Diverse Works, Ed Hill and I began talking about the name over a pitcher of beer. Ed, who is half of the dynamic photographic duo known to the world as MANUAL, remembered a similar problem in something he'd once been involved with and they wound up calling the thing Spot. I thought that was pretty funny.

The idea didn't necessarily go down very well around the Houston Center for Photography, which publishes the magazine. But every subsequent emergency name meeting before the very last one produced worse and worse names. At the last meeting, when SPOT had become a near certainty, one more name came up, but that turned out to be the name of a new magazine from Dallas that was sitting in a stack on the table right in front of us.

It was SPOT in a landslide.

With the speed of light, Michael Thomas and Peter Boyle went to work on the new logo. Peter came up with a beautiful Bauer Bodini one with the o a perfect, solid, black circle. I showed it to Charles Schorre, who is to my knowledge the most accomplished designer associated with the HCP (having said that, I hope it's true; we have over 500 members now, after all). He went berserk. He hated the name, and he didn't understand what all those letters were doing on either side of that terrific spot. He started sketching and then we pulled the s,p, and t off the board, and voila! The spot. Nice.

But a magazine without a name? What about librarians? What if people call it DOT? Or BLOB? As the panic grew, Schorre, who is not only imaginative, but very persuasive, led us through the Logic of The Spot like a masseuse smoothing errant muscles. As we were capitulating, we asked if we could have the word spot in little teeny letters way down at the bottom. For librarians. Sure, why not, he said. And at that moment the design of the whole magazine was born. Lots of little teeny letters.

Actually, the design wasn't quite that simple. Thanks are due to Leah Hoffmitz, who guided us through the bewildering job of choosing a new typeface for the general text. And special thanks are due to Michael Thomas, who stayed with the project all the way through and insisted on simplicity and elegance, and finally helped produce the cover design on this new, improved *Image*, now SPOT.

— Dave Crossley

SHARING RESOURCES

When strong forces in the art world slip into town virtually unnoticed, it seems a terrible waste not to share them in some way with the photographic community. Bart Parker and Rita DeWitt were in Houston briefly in June. The duration of their stay allowed only for necessities: including showing work to galleries, where interest in viewing any portfolios ranged from chilly to enthusiastic (to my horror, some galleries aren't even looking at new work).

Their visit raises the issue of being able to generate honoraria and short-notice gatherings. Parker and DeWitt are articulate and eloquent spokespersons for their work, and this ability to communicate the way the mind sees carries over into talk about the work of others. I benefitted enormously from the few hours spent talking, examining, perceiving beyond topical commentary. The lesson is simple: some resources are too valuable to ignore. Provisions for spontaneous events need to be established in every city, perhaps via a pre-arranged network of geometrically progressive phoning. If at all possible, a plan should be devised before the wealth of another visit, preceded by little advance notice, is wasted.

— April Rapier

Or "Why not *Image*," the former name of this magazine? What happened to *Image*? Well, how were we to know, when we were naming the magazine a couple of years ago, that it would develop that an obscure Northeastern institution — George Eastman House — had been using the name on its magazine for decades. The idea that they'd had it long enough, and now it was our turn, didn't wash. We had to change the name.

But what to? AfterImage? Nice, but it's in use by Nathan Lyons on his magazine (which he started when he left the aforementioned *Image*). AfterAfterImage? PostAfterImage? Images? With an s? Totally different name, right? Or should it be something completely different? Like X, or P. On the other hand, what about

We welcome comments and arguments about everything. Write, if you are so moved. SPOT, 1441 West Alabama, Houston 77006.

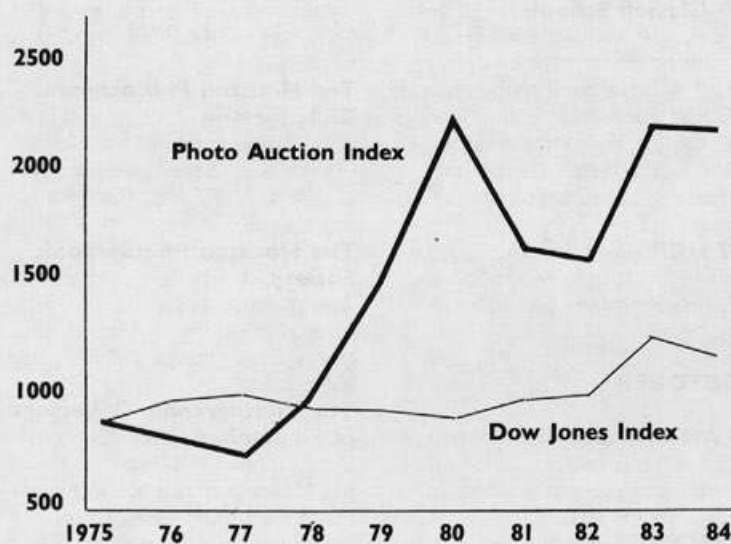
STABLE MARKET FOR PHOTOGRAPHS AT AUCTION

People who invested in stocks and collected some photographs in 1982 may be finding that their photographs are worth a lot more now than the stocks. According to the Photograph Collectors Comparative Auction Index, photographs brought five percent less at auction this spring than last, but the prices seem to have settled after the big drop between the wild spring of 1980 and the subsequent crash that ended in the spring of 1983.

The index was designed to be compared to the Dow Jones Industrial Average and is issued semiannually. It uses a "market basket" of twenty-five auction print prices to track the strength of the photography market. Included are works by Ansel Adams, Atget, Stieglitz, Edward S. Curtis, Irving Penn, and Berenice Abbott. A key item in the index is Ansel Adams' *Moonrise*, which fetched \$3,000 more at Christie's this spring than it did last fall.

A rare daguerrotype of Abraham Lincoln sold by Winter Associates, of Plainville, Connecticut, sold for \$16,000. It was not included in the index, but if that sale had taken place at Sotheby's or Christie's, which are included in the survey, the index would have surpassed the 1980 high. However, said Robert S. Persky, publisher of *The Photograph Collector*, "The market has vigor, but is not so euphoric as to be compared with that of the 1979-1980 sales."

What will happen in the fall is anybody's guess, now that the J. Paul Getty Museum, of Malibu, California, has announced that it recently acquired nine major collections, including those of Sam Wagstaff and Arnold Crane. The total price of all the prints in the initial Getty buy is believed to be between \$20 million and \$30 million. The acquisitions budget of the Getty is the largest in the world, and Persky believes its entry into the collecting of fine art photography may be the catalyst that the market needs to carry it to new highs.



The Photograph Collectors Cumulative Auction Index

CLOUDS WITH DEPTH

Frank Davis is one of your basic artist/scientist/musicians prone to alarming insights and inspiration that often result in work almost too complex to be realized. A Houstonian, Davis recently became associated with The Anthony Foundation of Houston, a sort of research organization that tries to bring art and science together. For Davis, it's been a nearly perfect marriage and has resulted in a set of photographs



Guests at Frank Davis's cloud viewing.

Dave Crossley

the likes of which he claims the world has never seen before.

It occurred to Davis some time ago that people had never seen clouds in three dimensions. "No human being can see distant clouds, or any distant object for that matter, in depth," he says. The average two-and-one-half inch spacing between a human being's eyes limits the parallax effect, by which we can perceive depth, to a relatively short distance, no more than a hundred yards or so. Much greater parallax is required to see far objects in depth."

So Davis took cameras, gear, and helpers — including photographer/architect John Lee Simon and Anthony Foundation President Patricia Robinson — to the Eastern Coast of the Yucatan to photograph clouds in serious 3-D. Ektachrome transparencies were exposed in two Hasselblad cameras placed approximately one mile apart. Synchronization of the two cameras required radio communication and was executed on voice command after the cameras had been focused and framed by sight description, compass heading, and the common horizon.

"The two pieces of film must be exposed simultaneously to capture sharp images of moving objects," Davis says. "Clouds are particularly difficult because of their constant fluctuation." All the images were shot between five and six in the morning to take advantage of dramatic backlighting and the early morning build-up of clouds common during the rainy season in the Caribbean.

The resulting pictures are most effectively seen as projections, viewed through polarized glasses, although they can be viewed in the old stereopticon way as well. It is an astonishing experience to see clouds in 3-D for the first time. The closer one draws to the screen, the more the clouds seem to hang out in the middle of the room.

The Anthony Foundation held a showing of the pictures in late summer and invited TV weathermen and local scientists concerned with weather to see for the first time just how clouds work. None came.

THE RIGHT WAY TO DO PHOTOGRAPHY

Tired of being hopelessly confused about the various rules and regulations of Contemporary Fine Art Photography, the members of the Houston Center for Photography will hold a day-long symposium, *Out of Sight vs. Out of Mind*, to clear up once and for all the correct approach to the

medium.

Pushed on one side by The New Documentarians' view that what you see is what there is and pulled on the other by The Symbolists whose baffling dreams come from the deepest recesses of the gene pool, it's no wonder today's photographer suffers from nervous exhaustion. On the assumption that much more work could be done if everybody followed the same rules, the Houston School, which will be born that day, will issue a manifesto called "The Houston Manifesto About How to Do Photography Just Right."

Speakers will present 15-minute papers and the floor will discuss matters and surge toward unanimity, although minority reports will be welcomed. Persons interested in speaking should contact Lynn McLanahan at the center (713-529-4755). Non-Houstonians are also urged to attend and to cooperate, but no arrangements for honoraria, travel, or per diem expense will be made, although possibly shelter in private homes can be managed.

The discussion will begin at 10am, Saturday, October 13. Bring sack lunch and soapbox.

HCP: AUCTION II

The Houston Center for Photography will hold its second biennial photography auction on December 8 at the Paradise Bar & Grill. The first auction, which netted the HCP \$19,000, was also held at the Paradise.

No list of photographs was available at this time, but it is known there will be at least one Ansel Adams print. George Krause has donated two prints and is working hard on photographers all over America to get their cooperation. At the last auction, well over one hundred photographers sent work, including Krause, Adams, Ralph Steiner, William Christenberry, Neal Slavin, Lee Friedlander, Jerry Uelsmann, Aaron Siskind, George Tice, Richard Misrach, Ray Metzker, Kipton Kumler, and many others. The auction will be preceded by an exhibition of the work at the HCP and *A Tribute to Ansel Adams*, both opening on Wednesday, November 28, from 6-8pm. The auction will begin at 1am, with a table sale beginning earlier, at 11am.

VARIOUS NOTES

Carole Kismaric has left Aperture after many years there as the person who actually had to oversee the editing and production of all those books. At one point last summer she was juggling seven-

teen new books at the same time, so her doctor suggested she cool off for a while to get rid of a chronic case of Sturm und Drang. Rumor has it that Aperture Guru Michael Hoffman is not the easiest person in the world to work for. Kismaric told friends she had no plans except to rest and recuperate.

The last issue of this magazine contained a story about the making of a dye transfer and platinum series of portfolios of The Best of NASA, which caught somebody's eye at Light Gallery in New York. Negotiations are under way for Light to represent the work, which is being produced by 801 Editions in Houston.

Art & Mammon: Houston's Foto Fest, a month of photography in the spring of 1986, continues to gather momentum. The Fest's founders, Petra Bentler and Fred Baldwin went to Paris this summer and made some arrangements toward cooperation with the organization that puts on the Paris month of photography. Baldwin says "New York" (not necessarily New York City) was trying to get the franchise, but the Paris group opted for Houston. And Fuji is considering doing a Biggest Photograph in the World at both extravaganzas: a Houston skyline for Paris and a Paris skyline for Houston.

David Portz has suspended work on his *Hand Painted Fish* series to plunge into the Guatemalan jungle in search of trouble and Temples of Doom. While he sketches glyphs, he's also planning to keep an eye out for the last few World Weary Hippies in hopes of documenting their perilous existence.

Stephen Scheer will teach at Rice University's Media Center this fall with Geoff Winningham and Peter Brown. A former NEA Fellow, Scheer has taught at Yale, Cooper Union, and Pratt, and shown at various places including Kiva Gallery and Daniel Wolf. He was published not long ago in the book *New Work, New Color*.

Texas Gallery will show work by Casey Williams, Sally Gall, and Eve Sonneman, beginning October 23 and continuing until November 10.

Diverse Works' opening show *Six San Antonio Artists*, will include work by photographer Steve Sellers. The show runs from August 25 (opening at 7pm) to September 30. Diverse Works is at 214 Travis.

Ned Bosnick will have an exhibition titled *Bosnick's Paris Show* at the Alliance Francaise, 427 Lovett, in Houston. The show opens on October 4 at 7pm and runs through October 26.

Ned Bosnick



CALENDAR

EXHIBITIONS

SEPTEMBER

7 - Oct 14, HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, "Dianne Blell - Work from 'Various Fabulous Monsters' and 'Charmed Heads and Urban Cupids'" and "Peter McClennan: Watertowers," Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat & Sun 12-5.

8 - Oct 13, Benteler Galleries, 2409 Rice Blvd., "Contemporary European Photography Multiple Exhibition," Tue-Sat 11-5.

13 - 20, Kauffman Galleries, 2702 W. Alabama, "Tom Zetterstrom: Faces of China," Mon-Sat, 10-6.

15 - Nov 4 Contemporary Arts Museum, "The Heroic Figure," mostly non-photography, but including work by Cindy Sherman, Robert Mapplethorpe, Ellen Carey, and Richard Prince. Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun Noon-6.

21 - Oct 26, Heights Gallery, 1613 Oxford, "Tracy Hart: 'American Music - You Shoulda Heard, Just What I Seen . . .,'" Sun-Thurs 1-6.

29 - Dec 2, Contemporary Arts Museum, "Video: Heroes/Anti-heroes," with work by Max Almy, Eleanor Antin, Michelle Auder, Dara Birnbaum, Doug Hall, and Ann Magnuson. Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun Noon-6.

OCTOBER

Through Oct 14 HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, "Dianne Blell - Work from 'Various Fabulous Monsters' and 'Charmed Heads and Urban Cupids,'" and "Peter McClennan: Watertowers," Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat & Sun 12-5.

Through Oct 13 Benteler Galleries, 2409 Rice Blvd, "Contemporary European Photography Multiple Exhibition," Tue-Sat 11-5.

Through Oct 26 Heights

Gallery, 1613 Oxford, "Tracy Hart: 'American Music - You Shoulda Heard, Just What I Seen . . .,'" Sun-Thurs 1-6.

11 - 28, Boulevard Gallery, 1526 Heights Blvd, "4th Annual Houston Photographer's Show," Tue-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-5.

14 - Nov 25, HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, "O. Winston Link: Ghost Trains," "Jim Goldberg: The Poor and Privileged of San Francisco," and "Janice Rubin: Images from Asia," Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat & Sun 12-5.

19 - Nov 27, Benteler Galleries, 2409 Rice Blvd., "Jacques-Henri Lartigue" in honor of his 90th birthday, Tue-Sat 11-5.

23 - Nov 10, Texas Gallery, 2012 Peden, "Sally Gall, Eve Sonneman, Casey Williams," Mon-Sat 10-5.

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Through Nov 10 Texas Gallery, 2012 Peden, "Sally Gall, Eve Sonneman, Casey Williams," Mon-Sat 10-5.

9 - 28, Harris Gallery, 1100 Bissonnet, "Kevin Clark: The Red Couch - An American Epic," Tue-Fri 10-6, Sat 11-5. (Lecture Oct 14, 7:30 at HCP).

13 - Dec 15, Moody Gallery, 2015-J W. Gray, "Roy Fridge: Vision, Myth, and Ritual," Tue-Sat 10-5.

17 - Jan 27, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1001 Bissonnet, "Unknown Territory: Photography by Ray K. Metzker 1957-1983," Tue-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-6, Thursdays open 'til 9pm.

28 - Dec 8, HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, "Ansel Adams: A Tribute," and "Photographs at Auction," an exhibition of photos to be auctioned Dec. 8, at the Paradise Bar & Grill, Brazos at McGowen. HCP hours Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat & Sun 12-5.

DECEMBER

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1 - Jan 15, Benteler Galleries, 2409 Rice Blvd., "Contemporary European Photography Multiple Exhibition," Tue-Sat 11-5.

EXHIBITIONS ELSEWHERE IN TEXAS

SEPTEMBER

Through September 15, Custom Camera, 416 W. Main, Tomball, photographs of the New York Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center, by Yoichi R. Okamoto.

Through September 16, The Art Center, 1300 College Drive,

Waco. "Skeet McAuley: Photographs." Large-format color landscapes.

4 - Oct 27, Afterimage, 2800 Routh, Dallas, "Christopher Jaymes: Hand Colored Photographs," Mon-Sat 10-5:30.

8 - Oct 14, Allen Street Gallery, 4101 Commerce, Dallas, "Robert Rauschenberg," "Susan Kae Grant & Celia Munoz: Hand-Made Books," Wed-Fri 12-5, Sat 10-4, Sun 1-5.

Through Sept 23, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, "New York, New York: Prints and Photographs, 1900-1940."

27 - Nov 8, San Antonio Art Institute, 6000 North New Braunfels, "Word Images."

OCTOBER

19 - Nov 25, Allen Street Gallery, 4101 Commerce, Dallas, "Arnold Newman," Wed-Fri 12-5, Sat 10-4, Sun 1-5.

30 - Dec 8, Afterimage, 2800 Routh, Dallas, "John Sexton," Mon-Sat 10-5:30.

NOVEMBER

9 - Jan 6, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, "Edward Weston: Mexican Photographs 1923-1926."

15 - Dec 21, San Antonio Art Institute, 6000 North New Braunfels, "Video Installations."

LECTURES/EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

5 HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, 7:30pm, Dianne Blell, New York artist will discuss her romantic and provocative photographs in conjunction with her HCP exhibition.

8[9] Photographic Collectors of Houston Camera Show. Fleamarket of equipment and images. 10-5 both days at the Radisson Inn, 7000 Southwest Freeway. Admission \$3 (\$2.50 with ad elsewhere in this magazine). For more info, call 868-9606.

OCTOBER

13 HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, 10am-?, "Out of Sight vs. Out of Mind," are you excited, confused, repulsed, bored or angry about the rules and regulations of contemporary photography? This event will feature speakers in support of the 2 conflicting approaches to photography. Manifestos from the floor and caucussing during lunch encouraged. End result: "The Houston Manifesto About How to do Photography Just Right." Bring sack lunch and soapbox.

NOVEMBER

11 HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, 4pm, "Jim Goldberg," San Francisco artist will discuss his work, in particular his series on the rich and poor which combines telling portraits with penetrating handwritten statements by the sitters. In conjunction with his exhibition at HCP.

14 HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, 7:30pm, "Kevin Clark," New York artist will discuss his recently completed series of portraits which range from astronauts in space to Hugh Hefner in his bunned backyard, all seated in Clark's peripatetic red couch.

DECEMBER

3 Museum of Fine Arts, Brown Auditorium, 1001 Bis-

sonnet, 7pm, "Ray Metzker," a guiding light to many photographers through the years, Metzker will discuss his thoughts and approaches to photography and life. Co-sponsored by MFA, H and HCP and in conjunction with Metzker's 25 yr. retrospective exhibition at the MFA, H.

8 HCP Photograph Auction, at the Paradise Bar & Grill, Brazos at McGowen, time to be announced. Photographs from all over the country will be auctioned. Work on exhibit at the HCP Nov 28-Dec 8. Catalogs available at HCP. Call 529-4755 for details.

ELSEWHERE IN TEXAS

SEPTEMBER

13 Allen Street Gallery, 4101 Commerce, Dallas, 7:30pm, "Susan Kae Grant: Bookmaking," in conjunction with her exhibition at ASG of artists' books.

OCTOBER

18-21, Society for Photographic Education (SPE) Regional Conference, Amarillo, a 4 day event with featured national speakers, panels, and the opportunity to meet other photographers from the region, see new work, and trade. Call 529-4755 for details.

COMPETITIONS

Submit portfolios of 8-10 pieces for Boulevard Gallery's 4th Annual Houston Photographer's Show, bring work Sept 7-8 to gallery, 1526 Heights Blvd, \$10 fee, exhibition dates: Oct 11-28, call 869-8733 for details.

Submit slides for HCP Annual Juried Exhibition, 5 slides, due Oct 27, \$5 fee, exhibition dates: Jan 4-Feb 10, \$500 in prizes, jurors to be announced, send slides to HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, Houston, Tx, 77006, call 529-4755 for details.

WORKSHOPS/CLASSES

SEPTEMBER

10 Glassell School, fall semester begins, photo classes include Beginning Photography, Intermediate & Advanced Photography, Portrait Photography, and Seminar in 20th Century Photo/History, Sally Gall and Rob Ziebell, instructors, call 529- 7659 for details.

22 HCP "Basic Lighting," Jim Le-moine, instructor, \$40 members, \$50 nonmembers Call 529-4755 for details.

OCTOBER

1 Art Institute of Houston, classes begin on Oct. 1, full range of day and evening sessions, call 523-2564 for details.

6 HCP "Toning, The Final Touch," Bill Adams, instructor, \$24 members, \$30 nonmembers, call 529-4755 for details.

11 HCP "Developing Your Style," Gary Faye, instructor, meets monthly on Thursday evenings thru March, \$120 members, \$150 nonmembers, Call 529-4755 for details.

20 HCP "Introduction to Cibachrome," Sharon Stewart, instructor, \$32 members, \$40 nonmembers Call 529-4755 for details.

25 HCP "Words and Photographs," Peter Brown, instructor, meets once every 3 wks

Thursday evenings thru Dec 6, \$65 members, \$80 nonmembers Call 529- 4755 for details.

NOVEMBER

27, 29, Dec 1 HCP "Underlying Questions," Ray Metzker, instructor, co-sponsored by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in conjunction with Metzker's 25 yr retrospective exhibition at the MFA, an intensive thought-provoking workshop to discuss some of the fundamental issues confronting photographers such as: What's important? What's the value of what anyone is doing? How should one go about doing it? \$80 HCP & MFA, H members, \$100 nonmembers Call 529-4755 for details.

30, Dec 1 & 2 HCP "Large Format Photography," Michael A. Smith, instructor, \$80 members, \$100 nonmembers Call 529- 4755 for details.

CLUBS

American Society of Magazine Photographers, (ASMP). Meets 6:30pm 1st Monday of each month in the Graphic Arts Conference Center, 1324 West Clay. An international association whose "members work in every category of published photography." Visitors welcome. Charge for monthly meetings. 521-2090.

Houston Chapter of Association for Multimage, meets 3rd Thurs. monthly. Stever Sandifer 667-9417.

Association of Students in Photography, Houston Community College, 1300 Holman, for HCC students, meets 8pm, 1st Mon of each month, call 521-9271, Randy Spalinger, for details.

Baytown Camera Club, meets 7pm 1st and 3rd Mon monthly at Baytown Community Center, 2407 Market, Baytown, call 424-56, Vernon Hagen for details.

Brazoria County Camera Club, meets 7:30pm 2nd Tues monthly at Continental Savings & Loan Asso., Lake Jackson, Tx., call (409) 265-4569 Don Benton

The Houston Camera Club, meetings 7:30 pm 1st and 3rd Tues monthly at Baylor College of Medicine, Debakey Bldg. Room M- 112, Texas Medical Center, competitions, programs, evaluations, call 665-0639 Gwen Kunz for details.

The Houston Photochrome Club, meetings 7:30pm 2nd and 4th Thurs monthly at St. Michael's Church, 1801 Sage Road, Room 21, call 453-4167 John Patton for more details.

The Houston Photographic Society, meets 8pm 2nd and 4th Tues monthly at the Bering Church, Mulberry at Harold, programs and critiques, call 827- 1159 for details.

The Photographic Collectors of Houston, meets 7-10pm 4th Wed monthly in the basement of the Museum of Science in Hermann Park, public welcome, "meetings feature auctions, buy-sell-trade, show and tell, and lectures," call 795-7455 Leonard Hart for details.

1960 Photographic Society, meets 7:30pm 1st and 3rd Tues monthly at Cypress Creek Christian Community Center, 6823 Cypress Wood Drive & Stuebner Airline, call 522-1861 or 353-9604 Dave Mahavier for details.

Society of Photographers in Industry, meets 3rd Thurs monthly, Sonny Looks Restaurant, 9810 S. Main, 6-10pm, cocktails, dinner, speaker, visitors welcome, call 795-8835 Dave Thompson for details.

By Ray K. Metzker

The following article is taken from notes kept by Ray K. Metzker and excerpted in Anne Wilkes Tucker's book *Unknown Territory: Photographs by Ray K. Metzker*, which will be published this fall in conjunction with the November 16 opening of the exhibition of the same name at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

RAY METZKER: PHOTOGRAPHY AS LIFE

People are seen today as wandering (if not lost) solitary figures, subject to a labyrinth of fantasies, laboring under the imaginary quest for utopian freedom, afraid of their singularity (individualness), dependent on the now, and apprehensive of the future, stripped of charity, lamenting war but unable to live in peace.

I recognize the desire, the need to affirm. This requires reverence and a belief that there is purpose and meaning to our being. To make work and life meaningful is a struggle. Were we not to try, life would be sad and empty. From the magnitude and intensity of the struggle comes the greatness we hope for.

I approach photography in the context of art, as a key to understanding.

The need to make photographic images goes so deep that it is difficult to imagine doing anything else. Photography serves as the alter-ego, the "other" of my private dialogue. There is something in that light-formed, silver-fixed image that causes me to respond with excitement.

Photography provides the means for speculation about meaning; I am not an objective reporter. I prefer to go further, to the unstated things of our existence. What I can't understand and grasp seems to lead me.

Art is man's action on commonplace material. To state something more than the material or the act, something must occur to make the object special. Just what that is and how it enters the work is always cause for wonder and endless speculation. Strong work startles us. We recognize the ingredients but we can hardly believe the result. Something jumps, glows, flutters. It has tactility, flavor — so convincingly we say it is real.

Art must affirm. This is our treasure: our capacity to affirm human intelligence, sensibility, inventiveness. Art is not a luxury; it is the clue for man's hope.

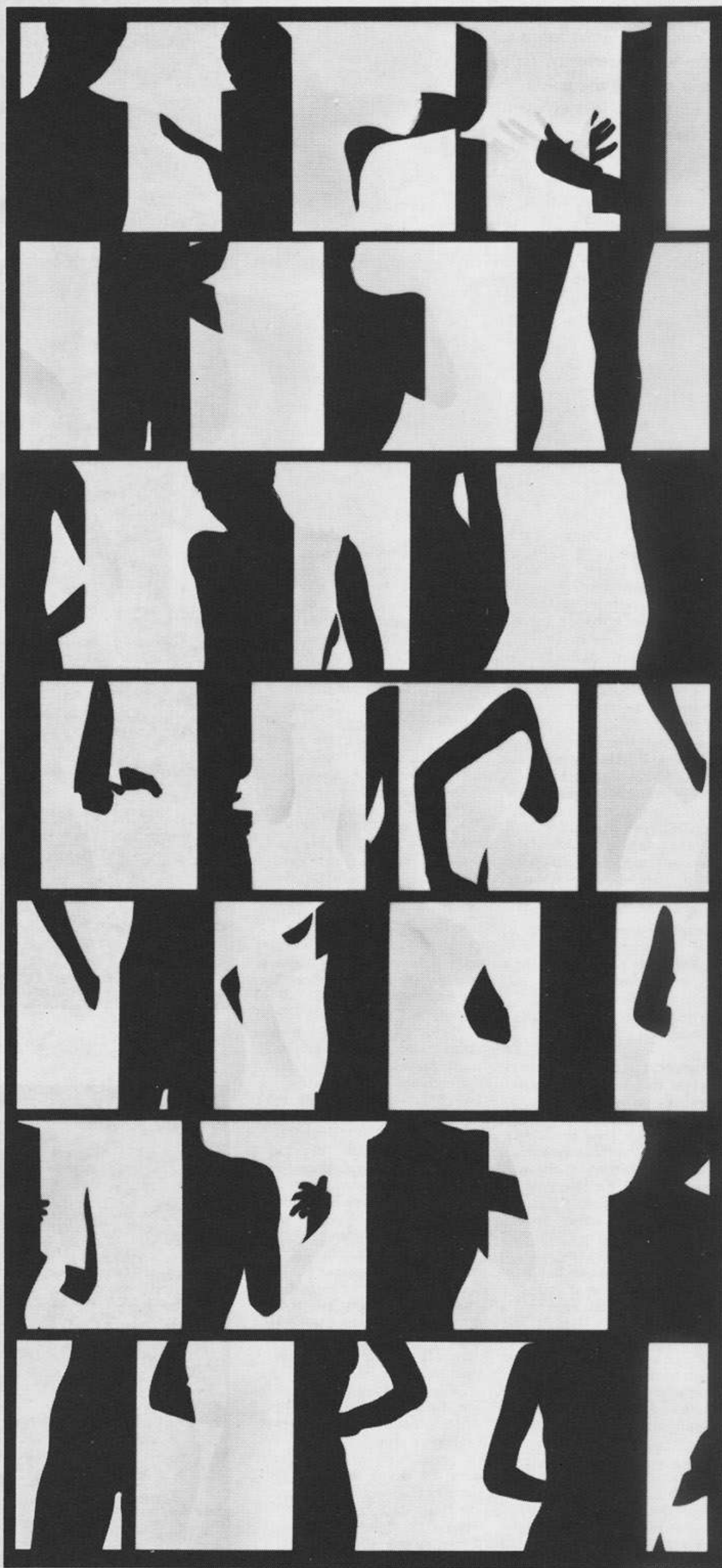
Somewhere in development the artist comes to a juncture with one path emphasizing self-importance and the other leading to passionate concern for ideas. To follow the latter path calls for a divestiture of self, an effacement, a drawing away from egocentricity. That makes the going slower, more challenging. It becomes necessary to acknowledge the importance of honesty and forthrightness.

It is not a question of what one chooses to do, but how one does it; not whether it is intellectual or emotional, but whether it is inventive, enriching, or caring. Does it touch central issues or play on peripheral issues?

Isn't art the need to hold, to make visible, what we believe or wish to believe? The elusive search, the frustration of incompleteness or inadequacy, the failed attempt at seeing, catching, recognizing, knowing something that points to and reveals the nature or essence of our being — this attempt is an act by the artist: art is the message of that act.

Rage is about the world not being what it could be. The euphemism for this is passion. In the artist, it has to be more than anger; it has to be rage. The fire has to burn strong. What saves the artist is that working caps the rage and channels it into something constructive.

If you have any intelligence, you realize that rage will destroy you, so you have to discover sweetness, to seek balance. Some things I point to but know not



From the series "Composites"

Photos by Ray K. Metzker

"Art must affirm. This is our treasure: our capacity to affirm human intelligence, sensibility, inventiveness. Art is not a luxury; it is the clue for man's hope."

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to dwell on them, for to dwell would be to sink and invite the viewer down. That is no solution and shows no sense of invention. Menacing and yet playful. I am always conscious of those features.

The artist does not need to follow an event. Instead, he takes

what is workable in his system of values and determines his own event, injecting and incorporating visual devices (confusing the space, eliminating detail, introducing ambiguity). The artist looks on objects and sensations as providing the raw material, and imposes a scheme upon it.

The artist digs holes to trip the viewer; climbing out is the act of participation. Slick work does not have the means to hold the viewer.

Photographic life alternates between periods of reflection and work. The questioning that goes on during reflection is — as it

"The elusive is what we seek, be it of the heart or the mind. The artist learns to live with uncertainty, for it is in meeting the unknown that spirit is exposed and tested."

should be — unsettling. Working is the attempt to step off into space. The heat of intensity melts the bands of restraint.

Most significant work is the result of concentration, which implies a shedding of the non-essential. In the end, the mix of what remains gives character and meaning to the work.

There are a number of strong examples: Aaron Siskind's rocks and divers, Bill Brandt's nudes, Richard Misrach's cactuses, Arthur Sinsabaugh's elongated landscapes, Marsha Burns' and Robert Mapplethorpe's portraits. In each of these artists' series, look for the constants. Often you will see that they are obvious and simple. Then look for the way these constants have been worked, combined, added, and subtracted. Finally, consider the different meanings that result. Along the way we discover how some small decision, a different attitude, maybe even an intrusion, adds a whole new dimension.

The more you are willing to invest in your work, the greater the clarity you will get in return.

Because daily living requires being positive, the tentativeness you have to maintain in working is formidable. For the sake of sanity we need certainty. To a great extent we fabricate and manipulate our lives to create new illusions of certainty. But working takes us into an area where we face uncertainty. Sometimes it's very frightening. Either courage or obsession brings us through. The toughest thing is to know when to be decisive and controlling and when to roll with the work and let it take over.

Often, as I am working, the developments inform me and that influences the next step. Sometimes I want the work to do one thing but it proves unwilling and tells me to do something else.

As a creature in this world, I have to reach out and touch. That is a very deep motivation; to interact, to touch; to examine as a means of survival. Photography can take me out of the ordinary world.

Once I start touching, I start shifting. I begin to push, trying to transform meanings.

Manipulation leads to discoveries. That which we retain is what we call our reality. That's what appears in the pictures.

Without transformation, work would be a dull activity. Being

cognizant of transformation, one senses the mystery and the joy of existence. All of our world has potential as material for our re-making. Excitement comes with seeing something in a new meaning that we previously either took for granted or overlooked.

Imagination delights in leaps, change is cherished. Changing something into something else...something happens...we detect a spirit, elusive and fluttering, beyond the pale of knowing.

The elusive is what we seek, be it of the heart or the mind. The artist learns to live with uncertainty, for it is in meeting the unknown that spirit is exposed and tested. The certainty of knowing is fool's gold.

What is alive is in the midst of becoming. Acts in the light of meaning can be construed only as tentative. Action is of the now; meaning exists in past action. The act anticipates future. To live is to project. Our lives are balanced to the future; today is the preparation for tomorrow. Experience constantly instructs that the next will be better than the last — unless of course, one is committed to nostalgia.

I experiment with forms and probe for experience. Form cannot live without experience nor can experience communicate without form. There is the magic of forms and the mystery of our lives. Where they come together is where I have a photograph that is vital.

Design is overemphasized by others as a deliberate concern of mine. For me, design is more innate, operating subconsciously or automatically. If anything, I have tried to restrain it.

Design is part of the total package. It is the vehicle for the idea, which is the attempt to integrate experience. The design elements can serve as signals to attract and direct the viewer, and to suggest something. They can create an effect at a distance or at first viewing, but there has to be something else as the viewer comes closer to the work.

Formalism implies gamesmanship — how you move from A to B, how you capture the queen; it is separate from and only a container for the encoded life experience. What is contained is not always obvious — but that's part of the gamble.

Ultimately, the concern has to be for images with symbolic content. Frequently, encoded experience is the stuff for speculation.

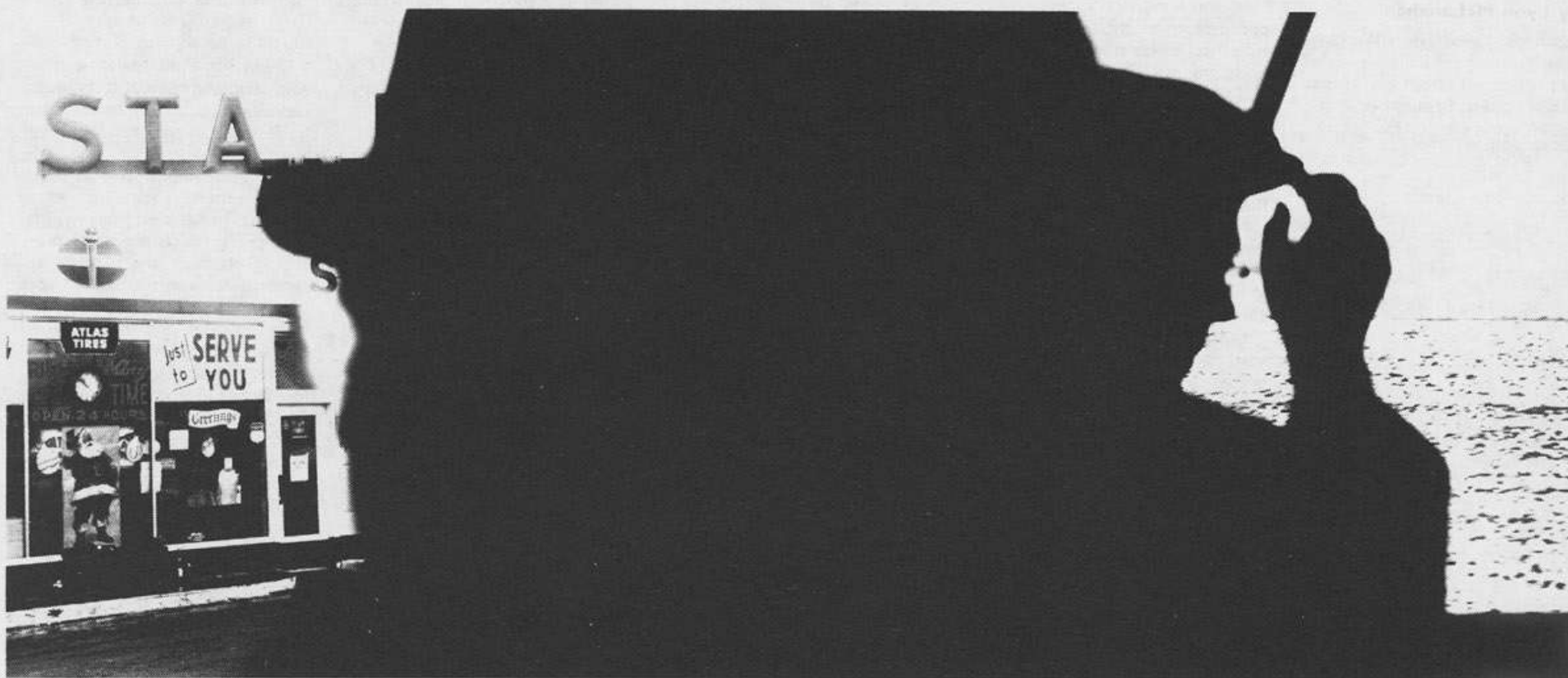


From the series "New Mexico"

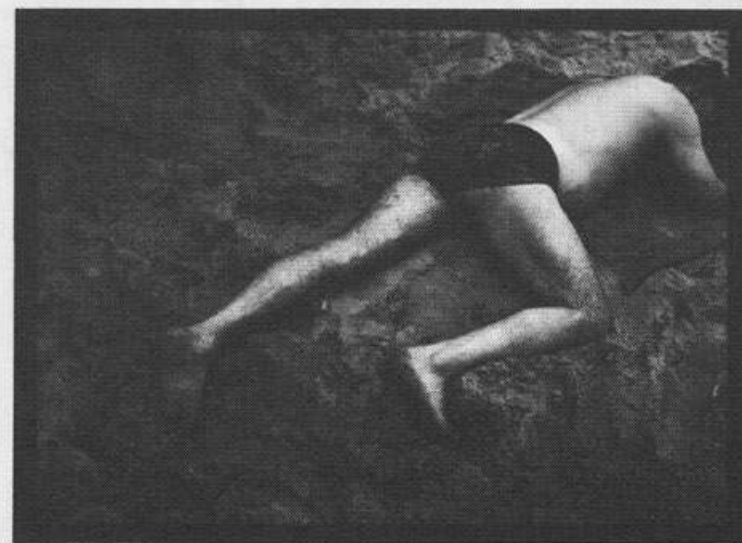


From the series "City Whispers"

"The artist digs holes to trip the viewer; climbing out is the act of participation. Slick work does not have the means to hold the viewer."



From the series "Double Frame"



From the series "Sand Creatures"

That images can affect us we cannot deny, but how and why?

Eventually, one has to meet the notion of responsibility which is the point of all meaningful work. It is not enough, not fulfilling, to live the now as an isolated moment for the pleasure of self. Meaning grows when one begins to think of the future and the welfare of the collective.

The order of my working process: observation, questions, seeing the problem, concentration, obsessive examination.

The first part of the process is open ended, when I am scanning or simply looking. When I realize there are certain stimuli that I keep responding to, that reoccur in my perceptual field, then I can begin to identify a pattern. What is really curious is how the clues appear in other areas such as what I am reading or discussing or noticing on the street.

The second part of the process then begins: structuring. I start to rid myself of other elements, close the door around what I have. Then I begin to beat through to the inventive process, where playfulness becomes important. Invention and play work together. When it is finally time to invent, I am soaring.

A photograph seems to come to us on the wings of angels. It harks of magic. The uninitiated assert that photographs appear without antecedents; background and preparation which are the feet of serious work are overlooked.

Many artists and viewers are inclined to attribute to the artist powers of mastery which may exceed the fact. One of the fictions commonly cherished about photography is that images are made in a flash, a significant or great picture delivered with lightning speed. I like to refer to this as the Immaculate Conception Theory.

It's easy to get lost if an aesthetic goes no further than technique or composition. It is something else to examine the work for the maker's concerns or values to see how personal sensibilities are manifested. The self needs to be tested and new doors opened on the way to discovering the terms of personal aesthetic.

Many of those working in the medium are not taking the photograph beyond some kind of

factual notation. Often, accompanying verbal description is far more exhaustive and animated than the photograph, which is an unconvincing visual experience. This kind of picture operates as a sign.

Art has other concerns. It must fight its way above the flood of overwhelming detail. It strives for larger meanings. It would peel away the husk from the seed. It is an embodiment of essences.

Time and again I reject the lifelessness that I find in so many photographs. It is mere exercise to execute theories and follow prescribed methods, working each detail to the maximum, only to end up with a dead body. That the work will ultimately have a life of its own is the undeniable challenge of working.

Excitement is to be found in the suggested, in what the minimum of articulation can lead us to see. It is one thing to enhance the obvious; it is quite another to catch the elusive. Unnecessary detail is the death of a lot of photographs. The viewer can see and get involved with every pebble, but the experience is only inventory taking. No work is left for the imagination.

We are experiencing excessive traffic of the obvious: combination and recombination of knowns, adorning and embellishing knowns.

Today's snapshot genre of exploratory photography suffers from lack of imagination. The best that can be attributed to it is spontaneity. Conceptually it is old hat, something to which we are now thoroughly conditioned.

The snapshot genre is weak because it is obvious. The image is determined by little more than the presence of the photographer. More is revealed of the objects photographed than about the photographer, regardless of the skill of the rendering.

Many of those photographers walking the streets, shooting from the hip, are interested in obtaining souvenirs. Their results indicate only change of time and place. The viewer is presented with signs, but nothing symbolic. As it occurs today, the snapshot is not pushing any frontiers; it holds little power within the medium.

The key term is waste. Wasted time, wasted material, wasted effort, wasted people. Nothing depresses me more than human effort which results in nothing. I

want to go in the other direction. Substance is my obsession.

Tragedy is failure in the face of possibility, the inability to communicate. For all the show of communication, the fact remains that one person does not fully understand any other.

Tragedy is unwanted change, loss, or destruction accompanied by the belief that somehow it could have been prevented.

Other kinds of tragedy include:

- so much to give, but rejected
- preparing to do, but doing nothing
- aspiring to do good, but doing wrong
- the attainable, unattained

Man-made barriers: duty, family, country, revolution, or abandonment to hedonistic pleasure.

Antidote: nakedness/truth.

Work is of a constructive nature and requires on-going attention. To be involved is a constant struggle to define and orchestrate a complex organism. It can be no other than an integrated activity.

Thoughts and decisions can take you deeper into quality. There is the dream of wanting to do something better and more meaningful with one's life and giving that dream form and a sense of order. When I look back, I see I was willing to gamble on the possibility of something better, that I could get just a little more nourishment if I made a decision.

The explanation of why we work is not simple. Some say: "I like beautiful things" or "I want to express myself."

I know this about myself: I have to lay hands on, to seize and to build, to beat the stuff until it resonates.

I doubt if any work can really be called fun. Fun is just that: carefree and irresponsible, a light moment, a respite from our endeavors. However, there is joy, full of body, which one encounters only from intense endeavor.

You stand out there with nothing on, with so much at risk. It is amazing that one proceeds, but one does.

If you are committed to working, you don't measure your successes by the rate or degree of acceptance. You make the work and people start looking and responding. In time, someone comes along who wants it. That is the natural process.

By Lynn McLanahan

Dianne Blell's exhibition *Works from "Various Fabulous Monsters" and "Charmed Heads and Urban Cupids"* opens September 7 at the Houston Center for Photography.

As someone who looks at photographs all the time, it's refreshing to be stunned by a photograph. I was first exposed to Dianne Blell's work in an article in *Newsweek* that included a reproduction of her "Love Fleeing Slavery." Quite simply, I was dazzled. The image is, to use Blell's own word, "loaded."

My next exposure to Dianne Blell was via the telephone to ask if I could see more of her work. When I hung up, I found myself stunned again. We had talked about Jupiter, makeup artists, warring gods, painted rocks, giants, caryatids and the kind of noses they need to have, and on and on. I was exhausted yet inspired by Blell's energy and enthusiasm. The world depicted in Blell's large Cibachrome prints is a world of dreams, ancient myths, modern angst, and whimsy. By recreating legends and photographing them, Blell's viewers are faced with the dilemma of reality vs. unreality. They are photographs, and what we see was actually there when she photographed the scene. Yet, as you step back and look again, her work looks less like what we have come to expect from photographs and more like what we have come to expect from paintings (old paintings), both in subject and presentation. Noticeable blur and dust and scratch marks quickly curtail one's flight into fancy back into the reality of the fabricated photograph, but not without some fun on the way. A methodical progression has led to these elaborate, splashy, and enticingly romantic works.

Born in Los Angeles, Blell received her B.F.A. and M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute. Her artistic endeavors included theatrical gallery installations, slide projections, video pieces and billboards, all of which fall into her conceptual scheme of "performance photography." Her work began to focus more and more on fashion. Blell loves fashion, has a background in it and had done some modelling and worked in the industry in retail outlets. She was drawn to incorporate fashion into her work because of the "tremendous impact" she feels it has on women. Borrowing clothes from fashion designers such as Oscar de la Renta, Mary McFadden, Nipon, and Fortuny, Blell set off on a series which she was to entitle *Charmed Heads and Urban Cupids*.

Blell herself served as the model in carefully staged fashion dramas that, in their poses and settings, contain art historical references. Hair and makeup specialists as well as fashion photographers were used, and all participants are credited when the work is exhibited or reproduced. The first picture in "Young Woman Overtaken by Storm," a series of three photographs, shows Blell, jewelled and gowned by Mary McFadden, standing next to a supportive tree, arms raised a la 19th century romantic painter Burne-Jones. Both Blell and tree are ravaged by nature as a roaring storm carries the eye to the final image where we find that the tree fared much better than Blell, her hair, her makeup, or her gown. Fleeting fashion is again alluded to in "Future Perfect" as Blell, guised as a cupid in a Le Gaspi maillot, gets her toes wet in the river surrounding Three Mile Island.

This series of socio-political fashion narratives led to Blell's most recent series of works, which she calls *Various Fabulous Monsters*. She maintained her interest in the presence of the female form to evoke various responses (social, erotic, graphic), but decided to remove herself as the model. "I just didn't want to be in front of the camera any more; it was emotionally wrenching and I was tired of it. I was also continuously surprised by the photographs. Every time, no matter how much control I exerted in installing the colors, the styles, and the shapes, when I looked at the photograph, I would be dumbfounded, which was fair in a way." She began to learn more about the camera and decided that she wanted to be the one holding it, "becoming very greedy about the camera itself."

She rented a papier mache stage prop — an urn — which she had stumbled upon and it became her first "model" in a new series. "I practiced on the urns first of all and they represented uninvolved for me. They were cool, they were objects, they didn't complain, they didn't move, I could do them myself, and I just took this one thing and did it a lot: underexposed it, overexposed it, splashed it with color, and gels, and whatever; it was my guinea pig. But it was like a very loaded vessel for me, sort of mythological and religious, sort of like human life in a way: it had corrosion, wear, and age, and it was also fabri-

cated as a theatrical prop to look like something it really wasn't. It really was a false front almost, and it represented the trick of photography that can give things a numinous essence, a very incredible power and attraction that maybe in person they might not have."

Blell then took her interest in fashion a step further and began to explore how people through the ages have presented themselves in social and economic ways pictorially, both in paintings commissioned by kings and noblemen as well as genre works which depicted the common man. "Holy cards were my first real introduction to pictorial manifestations of things and I think they had a great influence on me even though I'm dealing with it in a more pagan nature."

The coffee table in Blell's lower Manhattan loft is buried under books on mythology and art history (the only exception being a small dish of licorice) and it is "the whimsy of legends" that has monopolized her artistic energies recently. Inspired by classical interpretations of the more obscure and eccentric myths in paintings, Blell "re-presents" the myth in her own unique and capricious manner.

A certain myth may brew in Blell's mind for years before it is actually realized as a photograph. This may seem an inordinate amount of time, but in Blell's case, she has to first create the legend before she can re-present it. Building the set takes anywhere from a few months to a year. Blell and her assistant, Gretchen Zimmer, build the rocks, walls, columns, furniture, and while they may call in Blell's youthful street graffiti gang to help paint rocks and walls, Blell and Zimmer attend to the details such as designs in the friezes and the faces of the cupids.

Next come the models and one only has to look through Blell's enormous file of applicants for the role of the male in "The Origin of Drawing" (cover) and the Polaroid "sketches" of each one in the setting to see what. Blell has to go through to find someone who "looks" the part. Once she has the models, she moves on to arranging a composition, altering the set if necessary, making costumes, and researching period hairdos. The stacks and stacks of Polaroids attest to the painstaking process of subtle changes in arrangement, lighting, makeup, color, gesture,

camera position, flame height, starry backgrounds, drapery, cupid's flying altitude, and so on.

Unlike some photographers who shun commercial techniques, Blell reads up on any tricks of the trade that can help her stage her legend.

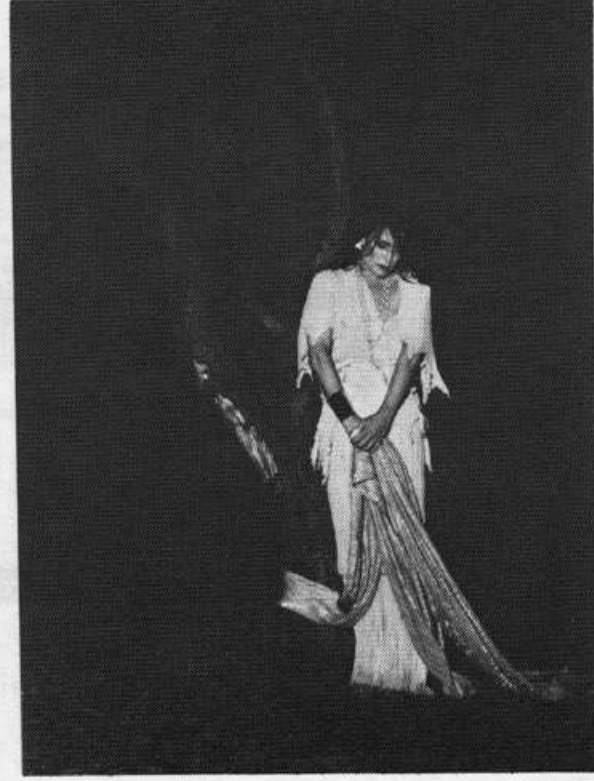
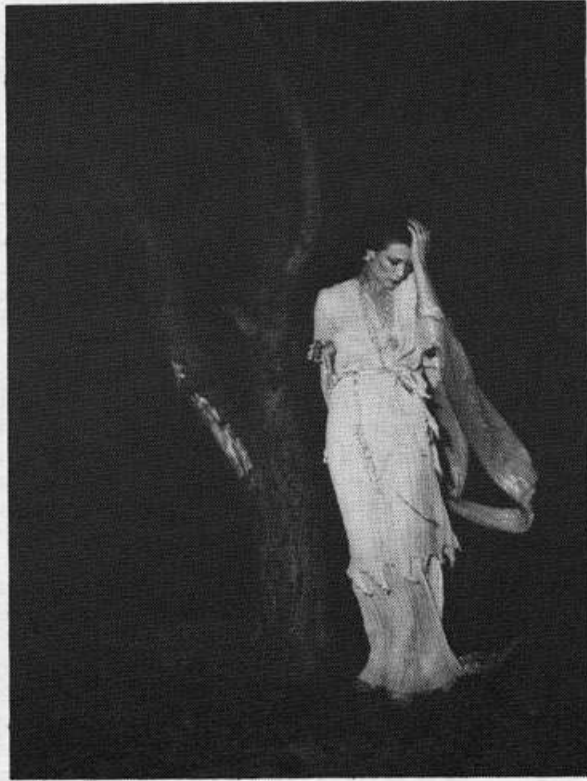
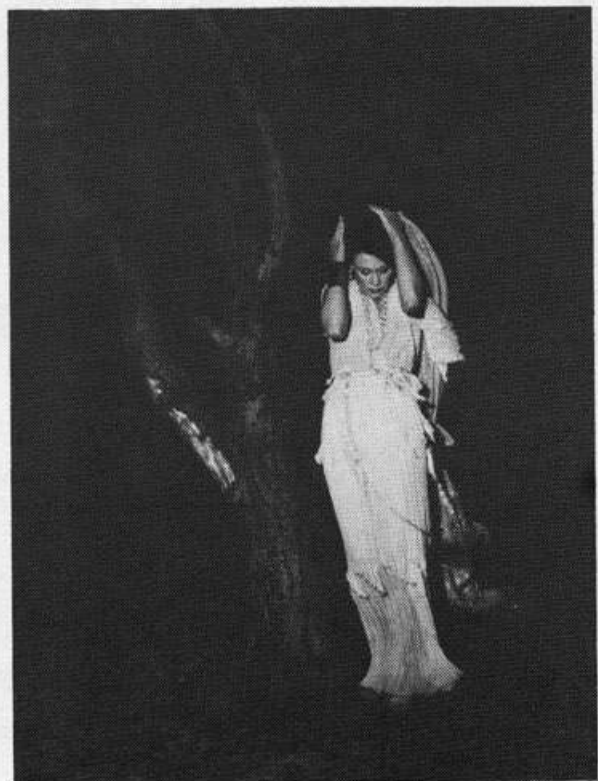
The actual shoot takes all day with the models, stand-ins, her assistant, makeup and hair stylists, and special effects specialists present when necessary, all trying to synchronize their efforts and work together despite the slow large format process and the element of chance introduced by certain of the special effects such as fog, fire, and front screen projection. Blell has her oversized Cibachromes (color prints made from transparencies) printed and she mounts them on Masonite. Then, in this age when the Museum of Modern Art is throwing out the clunky baroque frames that have always adorned many of their paintings, Blell is putting hers on. The smaller pieces have gilt frames dripping with ornament while the larger pieces have rough-sanded wood frames in gold, silver, and, as critic Brook Adams pointed out in *Art in America*, "the color of a barbecued potato chip."

"Hollywood or art?" you may ask. Recreating a myth or legend and photographing it is not new to the history of photography. OG. Rejlander was draping his models in classical garb in the 1850s in England, challenging notions about the relationship between painting and the limitations of the new kid on the block, photography. Just as Rejlander chose to make his tour de force "The Two Ways of Life" an unusually large print for 1857 (31"x16"), Blell's Cibachromes are enormous, even by 1984 standards (up to 53"x63"). "It has to do with trying to get the photograph to look more like a painting; I'm very interested in altering the perception of the large photographic image with textures, and there is the curiosity of making something and having it look like something else." Blell's photographs do look "more like painting" because she is taking existing paintings that illustrate the legends she is drawn to, and recreating them in her loft with sets, props, and models. As for altering the texture of the photograph, Blell is currently investigating the possibility of embossing and adding gilt to the surface. So why doesn't she just paint?

**DIANNE BLELL:
MODERN ROMANCE**

"Why doesn't she just paint? Because, Blell's work is about photography. We still tend to want to believe that what we see in photographs is real."

Young Woman Overtaken by Storm





Future Perfect



It Lay Crouched on the Top of a Rock and Arrested All Travelers Who Came That Way

Because Blell's work is about photography. Despite the fact that we are bombarded with set-up photographic images every day, particularly in advertising, we still tend to want to believe that what we see in photographs is real. And, with photography, Blell can bring her zany world to life. "The photograph can provide a reality that doesn't exist at all; how else could I make cupids fly

in the air? The legend is recreated, it's really happening. It's different from painting. Painting removes it: painting comes directly from the mind onto the canvas and therefore it's still fictitious, it's liquid."

The Polaroid 20"x24" camera and Polaroid's program of bringing prominent contemporary photographers into their studios to use their instantaneous and luscious

process has brought studio set-up photography back into the limelight in the past decade. Yet, in these times when the photographic pendulum seems to be swinging away from the set-up and the decorative back to the more socio-politically relevant, Blell's work comes as a blast of fresh air. For the moment, her feet are firmly planted in the studio and she is restricting her

subject matter to that dream world we all like to escape to once in a while.

How deep can one delve into her work for content? There are allusions to feminist issues, but to be safe, one shouldn't try to go too deep in that direction; rather, plunge into her unabashedly fabricated fantasies and relish her ability to infuse each one with "romance, wit, and poetry."

Love Fleeing Slavery



By Wendy Watriss

The growth of contemporary photography in Houston parallels, in many ways, the career of one of Houston's best known photographers, Geoff Winningham. Winningham came from Tennessee to Houston as a Rice undergraduate in the early 1960s. He became involved in photography by what he calls a "process of elimination," discarding one academic field after another. Although there was very little photographic activity in Houston then, Winningham credits three people at Rice with fostering his decision to turn to photography as a career: Charles Schorre, who introduced him to a wide range of photographic work; Larry McMurtry, who showed him Cartier-Bresson's *The Decisive Moment*; and Gerald O'Grady, a Rice English teacher who helped convince him that photography was a legitimate and important medium of expression.

After Rice, he received a Master of Science degree from Chicago's Institute of Design, where his interest in documentary photography was subjected to the more abstract and experimental approach of Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. He returned to Houston to teach at the University of St. Thomas. He then became a seminal figure in the development of one of Houston's first photography programs, the Rice Media Center.

GEOFF WINNINGHAM: IN THE BEGINNING

"In that first academic year we had a very rich program. We had a lecture series that included John Szarkowski, Nathan Lyons, Peter Bunnell, Robert Frank, Jerry Uelsmann, Frederick Sommer. I was not only getting to hear but to meet and deal with those people."

WW: How did you come to make your photography career in Houston?

GW: When I got out of graduate school after two full years there, the question was whether to stay in Chicago or to go somewhere else. I remember people telling me if I were to leave Chicago and go back to Houston where there were no quote unquote serious photographers, I'd dry up. Well, I preferred the notion of drying up to that of being absorbed in a large group of photographers. But the final decision was based on two things: I got a job offer here at the University of St. Thomas, which was starting the Media Center. The other thing was that I found in my visits back to Houston things were economically possible here that were not possible in Chicago. In Houston, there was the attitude "If you've got a good idea we'll help you do it." In Chicago, you couldn't walk into a bank and say I want to start a photography gallery, and I want to borrow some money. But in Houston I did it. There was a fundamental difference in attitudes in Chicago and Houston. What really brought me to Houston and kept me here was the fact that, in Houston, I could try things.

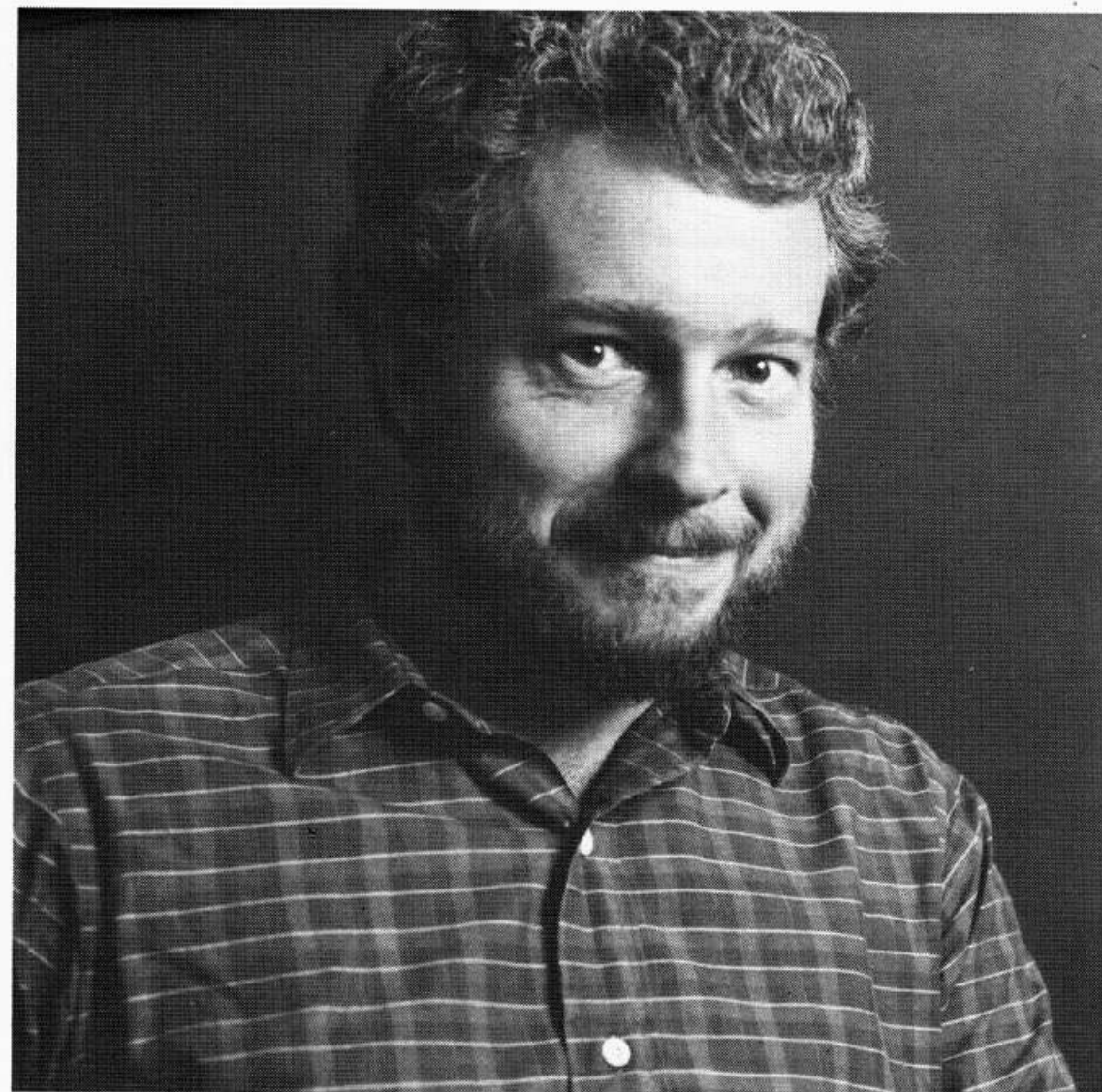
WW: How would you describe the photography community in Houston when you came?

GW: There were all these pictures that hadn't been made: in the streets, in the houses, everywhere. That's how I remember it. There were a lot of people who thought they might be interested in photography, and very few had ever had a course anywhere. Photography had begun to be recognized by a few institutions as a medium to be collected and exhibited, but nobody had started doing it here. In the late 1960s there wasn't a photography collection anywhere in Houston. There was no institution exhibiting photography.

WW: How did the Media Center develop?

GW: Well, first it was at the University of St. Thomas. A critical thing that happened was that Gerald O'Grady, who had encouraged me in photography, developed an interest in film. He got to know Jean and Dominique de Menil and convinced them that part of the art history program they were developing at St. Thomas needed to be related to filmmaking. In the summer of 1968 the de Menils made the decision and commitment to start the Media Center. My perception was that it was an initiative of O'Grady to do it. He hired Stan Vanderbeek, then James Blue, to teach filmmaking, and me to teach photography. We converted a couple of old houses that were then in the middle of the St. Thomas campus to classrooms and lab facilities. Things happened very quickly. I remember going in one weekend, sketching how this house should be transformed into a teaching facility, and the next week it was done.

We started off our courses in the summer of 1968. There was a wonderful spirit about the whole thing. I remember I had a doctor, a couple of interesting housewives, a lawyer, and a lot of St. Thomas students. The classes were about the same size as they are now — fifteen to twenty students. My own approach to photography, particularly then, was very panchromatic. I held on to my own tendencies of what



Janice Rubin

might be called documentary picture taking, but at the same time I was just coming away from Chicago and Aaron Siskind, Arthur Siegel, Wynn Bullock. I had an appreciation and some instinct for the very manipulated, very pictorial work. I think I was a more sympathetic teacher to all strains of photography than I ever was later. I encouraged people to do highly manipulative things, very experimental things technically, and would also have assignments in documentary photography. And I could show and talk about photographers in a very wide range.

WW: Was anyone else teaching photography seriously in Houston?

GW: No. There was the Houston Photo Club in Rice Village, but there were no other courses at all. No university courses. The Museum of Fine Arts hadn't shown photography since the 1940s. In that first academic year we had a very, very rich program: in the fall of 1968 and spring of 1969 we had a lecture series that included John Szarkowski, Nathan Lyons, Peter Bunnell, Robert Frank, Jerry Uelsmann, Frederick Sommer. I was not only getting to hear but to meet and deal with those people.

WW: Did the lectures bring in a lot of people who weren't in your class?

GW: No, not a lot. The average audience would be 55-75 people. The idea that Robert Frank was speaking here, and probably wasn't speaking anywhere else that year, was sort of lost on most people. I remember when Frank was here he was trying very hard to sell prints, and I bought ten from him, from *The Americans* series. He had a guy back in New York printing them and then he'd sign them. He was taking orders, trying to sell them at \$25 apiece.

WW: Did you have any exhibitions?

GW: Yes, we had an astonishing exhibition, a selection from the Museum of Modern Art, a collection of about 60 prints chosen as a cross-section of the museum's collection. Everyone from Cartier-Bresson to Ansel Adams, Richard Avedon to Robert Frank.

WW: What brought those people down to a new institution, and why would MOMA do such a show?

GW: First of all, there weren't many people offering honoraria for lectures in photography. Second, if you could assemble such a distinguished group of people, once you got a few, other people seemed to follow. Also, Jean de Menil was on the board of the Museum of Modern Art, and was on the photography committee. I don't remember much response to the exhibition. I remember the opening. We had a good crowd, but the papers didn't review it. There were no reviews of shows. We had a series of photography shows at St. Thomas. When Jerry Uelsmann came to speak, we had a Jerry Uelsmann show. He went in the darkroom with my students and made the prints. It was an amazing demonstration.

WW: After a year the Media Center went to Rice. Why?

GW: It came about as a result of the frustrations the de Menils had with St. Thomas as a place to grow because of the limitations of the St. Thomas administration. Amazingly, the decision to move came very quickly, like January or February, 1969. By March, the decision was made and ground was broken for the Rice Museum. By summer it was in place, and by fall it was rolling.

O'Grady was not hired at Rice. His contract had not been renewed at Rice after his first three years there, and that's when he came to the art department at St. Thomas. He didn't go back to Rice, but I was hired and James Blue was hired.

WW: Who actually ran it those

first years?

GW: James Blue ran the film section and I ran the photography section. The two didn't have much overlap except in our individual work. It was James's operation and my operation, with Rice kind of permitting it all to happen.

WW: Did you design your own curriculum?

GW: Yes. It wasn't anything revolutionary. For years there were just two photography courses, beginning and advanced. I began as I still do with a view camera, partly because people don't ever have a chance to use a view camera again. The other reason is that it slows people down, causes them to take things one step at a time. I've always begun with a series of very static, contemplative assignments to make people take pictures slowly and learn the craft, and then introduce roll film to loosen them up.

The essential thing — then and now — is that I've tried to integrate three aspects of teaching into one course: to teach the technical aspects of photography, the craft, while introducing some sense of the history of photography and its traditions, monuments, and the famous figures and their work, and finally to criticize the work in process, trying to get people accustomed to talking about and being critical of their own and their classmates' work. In the advanced course, I let people pursue independent projects. I wouldn't presume to suggest to people after a year of photography what they should photograph. That's a problem at least equal to the problem of how you photograph: What do you photograph? How do you do it? A marvelous story is told about Diane Arbus, by Lisette Model. She said Arbus came to her after class one day at the New School and said, "Well, what should I photograph?" Model said, "That's your problem, darling." If after two full



"It angered me that art was somehow taking tragic human experience and stylizing it. I didn't want to be associated with art. I wanted to look for my pictures wherever art didn't live."

semesters of photography, someone cannot pick a subject with some passion, I think they should drop it, if not permanently, at least for the time being.

WW: What was your philosophy about what you wanted the photography program to be and how has that changed?

GW: I don't think it has changed. My primary idea, partly dictated by the circumstances, was that we were not offering a photography degree — this would not be a place you would come to become a professional photographer. Rather, we would have a course offering open to undergraduate students and others where they could learn photography in the context of other subjects. Undergraduates that we teach are very seldom art majors. And I enjoy teaching people of different ages. If there's been any big shift, it's been in the past five to six years as the Media Center has really developed its continuing education program. It's not unusual to have someone age 40, 50, or 60 come in and say, "I really want to learn to photograph because I really want to do this or that." And I can really get excited about that. I would not want to be part of an art factory. The world of art is a lot less interesting to me than the other worlds around it.

WW: Was there a difference between your and Blue's commitment to community involvement?

GW: I'm sure there was, but I'm not sure I can verbalize it well. First of all, James was more mature and had gone through a lot as an artist. I was twenty-five years old when I began teaching at St. Thomas and had come out of graduate school with a strong sense that I couldn't let my own career drag and wanted to get on with it very intensely. James had gone through a period of Hollywood photography, a period of doing documentary films for the USIA, and had all that experience behind him. And he was at a mid-life time when he was examining that experience and what he really wanted to do with all that knowledge and background. So that's very different. Secondly, I think James was a person with very keen sensitivity to social issues, and I've never really been like that. So we were very different in that respect. But the interesting thing was that four or five years after we began, we found we had a tremendous amount in common: primarily that we both loved straight photography or filmmaking, if you will, and neither of us wanted to establish an art school, either in film or photography. We wanted to draw upon the public: James because of the social issues that came with those people. For me, because it brought new in-

fluences, ideas and backgrounds into my photography classes. Both of us saw style, aesthetics, as something that should be felt but not seen in the work — that it should be contained within the work in an almost invisible way. The term that I often use is that style should be transparent. James admired Walker Evans. When we had a little show of Walker Evans from the Farm Security Administration files, James walked through it and understood immediately why I would love those photographs.

WW: Let's go back chronologically.

GW: During the first five years, the photography program was largely supported by the de Menils. After five years, the university took on the commitment of supporting the Media Center. Things scaled back a bit. The character of the place changed after the first two to three years at Rice. There was that burst of expansion at St. Thomas and at first at Rice. The first year at Rice we had a major exhibition, *Photography into Sculpture*, from the Museum of Modern Art, and that occupied the whole building. It was photography that had become three dimensional, and had been put on three dimensional objects. Peter Bunnell was the curator for that show.

Then we started having major photography shows at the Rice Museum. I think photography at the Media Center very clearly influenced the Rice Museum, which is to say, Dominique de Menil. I think to some degree her eyes were opened by some of the things we had. I remember the look in her eyes when she walked around an Aaron Siskind show we had. With her interest in the abstract expressionists, I remember her walking through the Media Center, through that little mezzanine gallery and seeing Siskind's pictures for the first time and looking at the dates on them and just kind of being amazed.

There were exhibitions at the Rice Museum in which there were a few photographs back in 1971 or 1972. I remember they had an exhibition on the theme of the highway, and there were certain photographs in that show, Robert Frank's photograph of the highway and so on. There were a few scattered photographs in their exhibitions in the early 1970s. I think Mrs. de Menil and the people who worked for her really became aware of photography because of the shows we had at The Media Center. The first I can recall of a big show, and an amazing one, was the exhibition of Cartier-Bresson photographs in about 1974. That was the full set of photographs he gave to the Menil Foundation, 385 photographs, his selection of his own work. It was exhibited very quietly in the summer. I remember

telling John Szarkowski about it and his saying, "What?" He was not even aware that Cartier-Bresson had done this. And here we were next door with a really definitive set of his pictures.

Then we began a period of very slow growth which we have had since then, very slow. We got Lee Friedlander for one semester. Then we got a commitment from the university to fill a permanent part-time position and Peter Brown was hired. Now that has been increased to a full-time position. With the exhibition program, the budget was cut quite drastically from what we had in the early days. All we can do is paint the walls, cover the pictures with glass, and shift them to and fro. But we can put something on the wall.

WW: What was it like being a photographer in a place like Houston then?

GW: I loved it. There seems to be something in me that makes me want to do the thing you are not supposed to do. Coming here to Houston was going against the grain in a way. The advice of most people in Chicago was "Stay around here. Here people know what you are doing." But in Houston I wasn't really bothered by the notion that people didn't know what I was doing. Now it's different, now I'm older and I do want people to know what I'm doing, partly because you only have so much time to reach people with what you're doing and you want them to see it.

I think at that point in my development I was nourished and spurred on not so much by people who were doing what I was doing, but by others from other fields. There was an exhibition at the Rice Museum called *Some American History*, organized in conjunction with Larry Rivers. It had work by a number of New York artists, commissioned to do something about the history of the black man in this country. I remember going into the show, and there were all these big paintings of things like Aunt Jemima with a machine gun, very white women in erotic stances with black men. Then there was a Larry Rivers piece that was a construction, with a white woman lying prone, cut out of plywood and painted. Hanging above her by four nooses were four black men who had been lynched. They were in very graphic hanging poses. Just startling. I remember looking at it and thinking, somehow that's very familiar; but somehow it is obnoxious. There was so much style to it, cut out plywood, painted on. It angered me that art was somehow taking human experience — really tragic human experience — and stylizing it. I couldn't figure out where I had seen these images before. Then I remembered a book published in the 1960s called *The*

Movement. Danny Lyon was a big contributor. It had a photograph by an anonymous photographer in Kansas, about 1936, of a lynching. All you have to do is look in *The Movement* and there it is. But the photograph contains much more. The four guys were hanging in the same posture with the same expressions, but all around them was this crowd of gawkers. A man with this kind of funny look in his eye, pointing. A woman with a baby walking by. When I looked at that photograph, I was somehow really angered. This is what art wants to be, but it can't do it.

The consequence of that was, I didn't want to be associated with art. So that kind of caused me to pull back from people in the art world, whether they were painters, photographers, or others. Photography has so much leverage, so much natural power over art. That experience really energized me. I think the realization made me know I wanted to look for my pictures wherever art didn't live.

WW: What about your gallery? How did it begin?

GW: I really wanted to have a place where people would come and look at photographs. We started in the fall of 1970. It was called "Latent Image," at 1122 Bissonnet. I wasn't under the illusion that I was going to make any money at it, but I thought it might break even. Eventually I took in a partner, Jack Wetmore, who is in the printing business and interested in photography.

There were all these terrific photographers who were willing to exhibit just to have a show. Paul Caponigro had a show here. Ansel Adams had a show. There was a group show when we opened of Aaron Siskind, Arthur Siegel, Harry Callahan, Ray Metzker, and Charles Swedlund. These were people I had known in graduate school at the Institute for Design. One could just write and say I would like to have a show of your work, and would you send me some work on consignment? The answer would be yes. When we showed Ansel Adams, a 16x20 print was \$150. A few people bought them, not many. We sold several Caponigro pictures. We had a show of Eikoh Hosoe, the Japanese photographer, and that didn't sell any work. A daguerrotype show. An Arthur Siegel color show. A Les Krims show. A Frederick Sommer show. We had a large number of people at openings and a trickle in between. A few, very few, actually bought.

What I had in the gallery was 90 percent consignment work. I could write Siskind and he would send me ten photographs on consignment. Callahan would send ten photographs. Then I had a certain number of photographs like the ten Robert Franks I had



Paul Hester

bought. I bought ten Edward Weston prints for \$25 a piece, printed by Cole Weston. They were for sale at \$50 a piece.

Some Museum of Fine Arts people would visit us, look around. One photograph was actually bought by them. It was very interesting what that one photograph was: a big print — 32x40 — of that magnificent picture from Apollo 15; I think it's Buzz Aldrin standing on the moon, slightly crooked, on the landscape. A big print. I bet that was the first photograph bought by the Museum of Fine Arts. I think it cost like \$100-150. That was the only sale we made to a museum or institution.

When we closed in May, 1971, eight months after we opened, we had to have an auction of all the prints that I owned because my note had to be repaid. I had reduced it only very little. I had Siskind prints — you know when Aaron was teaching and I was there, you could buy a 16x20 print from him for whatever you had in your pocket, \$5 or \$10. It bought him lunch, and you went away with a picture. It was a deal for both of us. That was before Light Gallery carried his work. Well, I probably had six or eight Siskind pictures and they probably auctioned for \$5 or \$10. E.A. Carmean, who was one of the curators at the Museum of Fine Arts and is now at the National Gallery, sat in the front row and just bought them up. I don't have the records but he must have

bought 12, 15, 30 pictures in that auction — Frank, Siskind, Callahan. The price range was \$10-\$20. Bear in mind that they weren't selling for a whole lot more than that at the gallery. The Westons were marked at \$50, maybe \$100 by then. And they probably auctioned for \$35. Frank's I think we marked at \$50, and they may have gone for \$25. Lots of pictures, I'm sure, sold for \$10-\$15. About twenty or thirty people came to the auction.

WW: Did the papers review the shows?

GW: John Scarborough at the *Chronicle* was alive and had developed an interest in photography and he reviewed a couple of the shows. No formal training, just a real bright guy.

WW: From the standpoint of your own career, has Houston been a beneficial place?

GW: I think my career, my development as a photographer has happened largely because I am in Houston. I can't imagine having developed anywhere else, partly because at every point that I wanted to do something, it was possible to consider doing it because of attitudes and opportunities that exist here. In those early years, there was the opportunity to bring in people. That was very helpful to me, that's the way I met Garry Winogrand and other people who were very im-

portant to me. Now if I had been stuck somewhere where there was nobody at all, that could have been disastrous.

WW: What about today for a developing photographer?

GW: I think it is an exciting, productive place. You have institutions exhibiting photography regularly, good work and big shows. There's a lot of work to be seen. There are a number of photographers you can draw on and learn from. And it's growing here in Houston. I don't know what is happening in New York or Chicago or Los Angeles, but my feeling is that we've got it as good as anybody, maybe better.

WW: For a developing photographer, what is the best advice on how to show work?

GW: I don't think there is any one way. My inclination is to say first of all, try not to push too fast. I think a lot of people feel that if they can't produce pictures that are salable to museums or collectible or publishable within two or three years, there's something wrong. The main thing is to try to develop a life style, find a job or series of jobs in which you can exist and your growth can take place. Plan a longterm career and don't expect things to happen too fast.

It seems to me that photographers who develop in the most interesting ways are people who

don't worry too much or get too preoccupied about getting the work published or getting it purchased or getting it shown. They just go about their work and they commit themselves to it. They let things fall in place. I have students who have been or are tremendously skilled, but that doesn't mean they can make a living at it or anything like that. It's not logical to assume that they are going to produce work that will be collected by museums or published by fine art magazines or exhibited in galleries in a few years. Even if that happens, it won't support them. So my suggestion is learn the skills you can support yourself with and then let your career develop in a slow, organic, natural way.

WW: For a developing photographer who wants to show you a portfolio, what impresses you?

GW: One is the development of style, even if it is closely related to some other major photographer's work. That is part of getting past just wanting to be a beginner — you begin to know what you want your photographs to look like. Not that they won't change, but you're beginning to get a sense of that. The other thing is the ability to locate subjects that are very interesting. You know, that's just critical. If someone comes to me and shows me pictures of something that I never thought to photograph, I'm impressed. That's a good mind.

"When Aaron Siskind was teaching, you could buy a 16x20 print from him for whatever you had in your pocket, \$5 or \$10. It bought him lunch, and you went away with a picture. It was a deal for both of us."

Winningham (far right with glasses) in Charles Schorre's class at Rice. Schorre is at left as priest. Photo by Winningham.



By April Rapier

Note: Jeffrey Silverthorne joins the faculty at the University of Houston this fall for a year. The following is a discussion of impressions derived from examining Mr. Silverthorne's work, and excerpts from conversations conducted by telephone. All words and phrases in quotes are his.

JEFF SILVERTHORNE: IN THE THROES OF DECAY

"There is great serenity in the staging of these guileless dramas. The beauty of the imagery is that it is non-judgmental. With the inexorable as a premise, the burden of the image as instructive is lifted."

"Since 1971 I have worked primarily with the nude figure. While photographing dead animals, female impersonators, wrestlers, prostitutes, and landscapes, I began a new project in 1971 to which I devoted most of my time for the next two years: photographing in a state morgue."

"Trivial — the enormous importance of trivial . . ."
— Jeffrey Silverthorne

I did not begin exploring Mr. Silverthorne's work under the influence of these, or any other prefaces. Nor was I surprised at the tone (peaceful, centered, in command of the origins of the work) he used when I questioned him at length. Yet I remain somewhat at a loss to reconcile the macabre aura of violation with the overall feeling of placid resolve in these dense, rich, autobiographical illustrations. I return, time after time, to the themes of death and futility, which range in expression from barbarous utterances to the loveliest of subtle spirituality. The pictures acknowledge but do not embrace the darker side of life/death, so that the aging of a body, the decrepitude of age, the "scream, howl, kiss" can be overriden, translated from the literal to a more palatable metaphor. The classical elements (the photographer's directorial posture, the model's pose of disinterest, fruit and pedestals, romance, an indirect acknowledgement of sensuality, a reference to "horniness," monologue versus dialogue, pedagogic intent versus observer participation) distance and editorialize the sensationalism that moves through these images.

Shakespeare or the theatre of the absurd (Beckett) come to mind in the *Silent Fires* series: the viewer is often confronted by a narrator in the foreground, gesturing frantically to expect the worst. Yet one goes away unconvinced, because the characters' anguish is anonymous, ambiguous, the relationships between principals layered and ambivalent. That all the surprises are up front is a relief, because the images stay put in the mind, taking on new forms and attitudes, ultimately leading toward the anticipation, the religion of success. Silverthorne cites the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as the origin of *Silent Fires*. When asked about other influences, Silverthorne mentions Steichen, Callahan, Rembrandt, Mozart, and Rickie Lee Jones, among others. Certainly, the cast of characters in *Silent Fires* is reminiscent of sculpture in the throes of decay. The quality of movement from life to death neutralizes the sexuality of youth. Silverthorne dusts the backdrops and models with powder to create a stony, aged pallor, but his concerns are practical as well — the whiteness of the powder also "increases contrast in the negative." There is great serenity in the staging of these guileless dramas, except for the ethereal lighting — blankets of distraction that conjure up the presence of the Gods (that so punished Orpheus by giving him a second chance) — that illuminates heavenly, sacred spots singled out in the set. The beauty of the imagery is that it is non-judgmental. He returns often to the phrase "no way out" in reference

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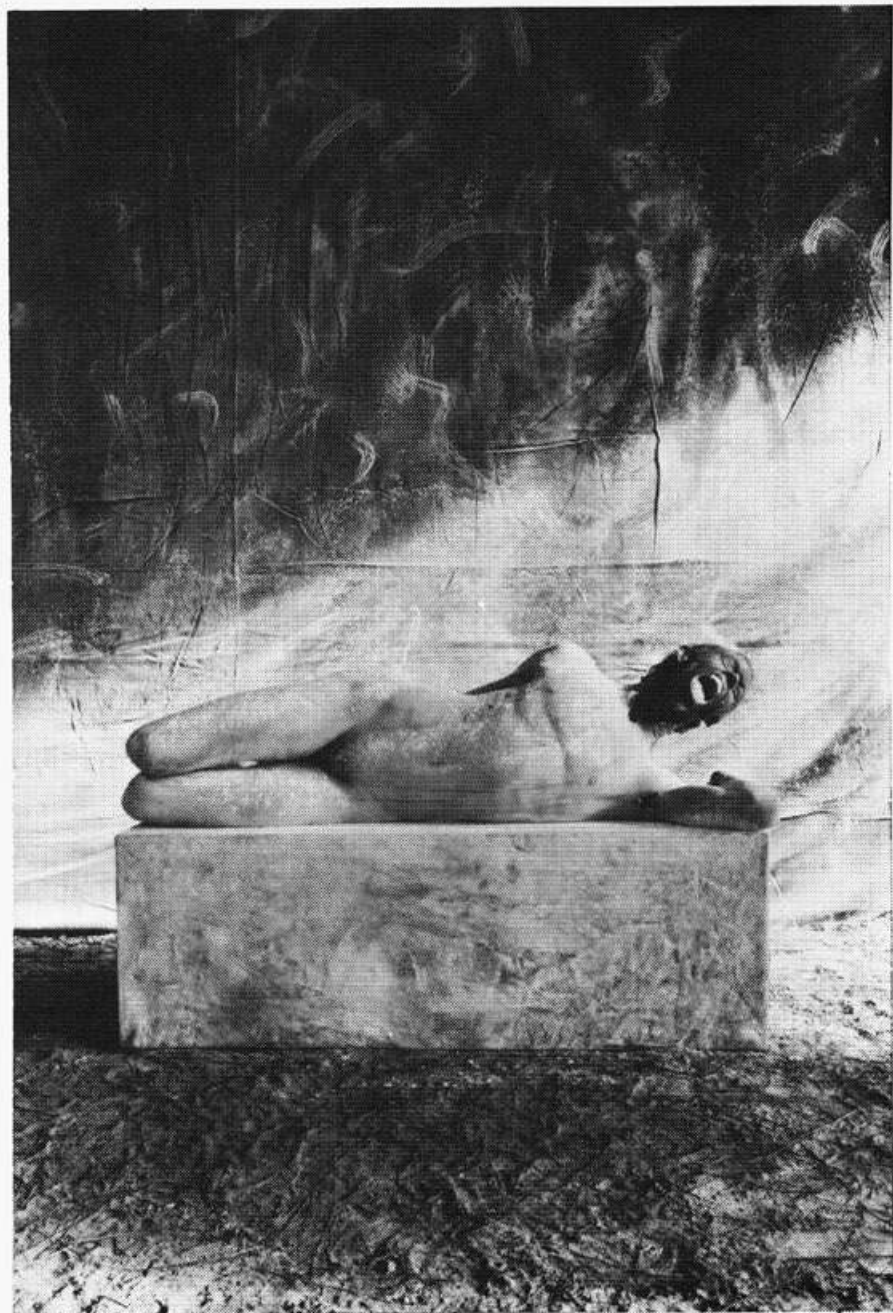
and paradoxes are difficult to acknowledge. Bounds are easily broken, but they are devised nevertheless. In one image from *Silent Fires*, a woman is held motionless within a cage, a captive angel. Only an angel would stay still. The pedestal on which the models perch isn't made of marble at all — it is shaky, old, made of wood. The pears (ubiquitous throughout *Silent Fires*) inhabit a far more secure and comfortable place where they rest. All activity is perfunctory; the end has been written. The same feeling is found in the *Waiting Room* series, precursors to *Silent Fires*, although more documentation and less dramatic devices find their way in. Interspersed throughout the years of imagemaking are photographs of enormous calm and simplicity, necessary intervals to the maintenance of such an intense constitutional pace.

After weaving quite a spell over the pictures we discussed, Mr. Silverthorne brought up the formalistic theme of hope, the wish for all things to right themselves. His denouements turn out happily in the long run, despite the odds. The many years and pictures that are the result of an intelligent quest cannot readily be condensed in an article of ideas. Yet after spending time with Silverthorne's photographs, it is easy to feel the power and beauty of his determination, and the understanding of a grander design is a natural conclusion of the experience of them. I join the Houston community in wishing Mr. Silverthorne a warm welcome, and a most successful year.

to *Silent Fires*; with the inexorable as a premise, the burden of the image as instructive is lifted.

Some of the sexual ambiguity has an emasculation edginess to it, the whimsical Gods interfering and intervening beyond the play's stage directions. This potential loss of control empowers the madness of futility. Equal time is given to male and female nudity. Questions are incessantly posed: the morgue pictures present a peacefulness in death, whereas the living elsewhere seem anguished. The benefit of aging, the body falling into disarray, is that the soul grows more serene and elegant. Yet the contradictions

Photos by Jeff Silverthorne



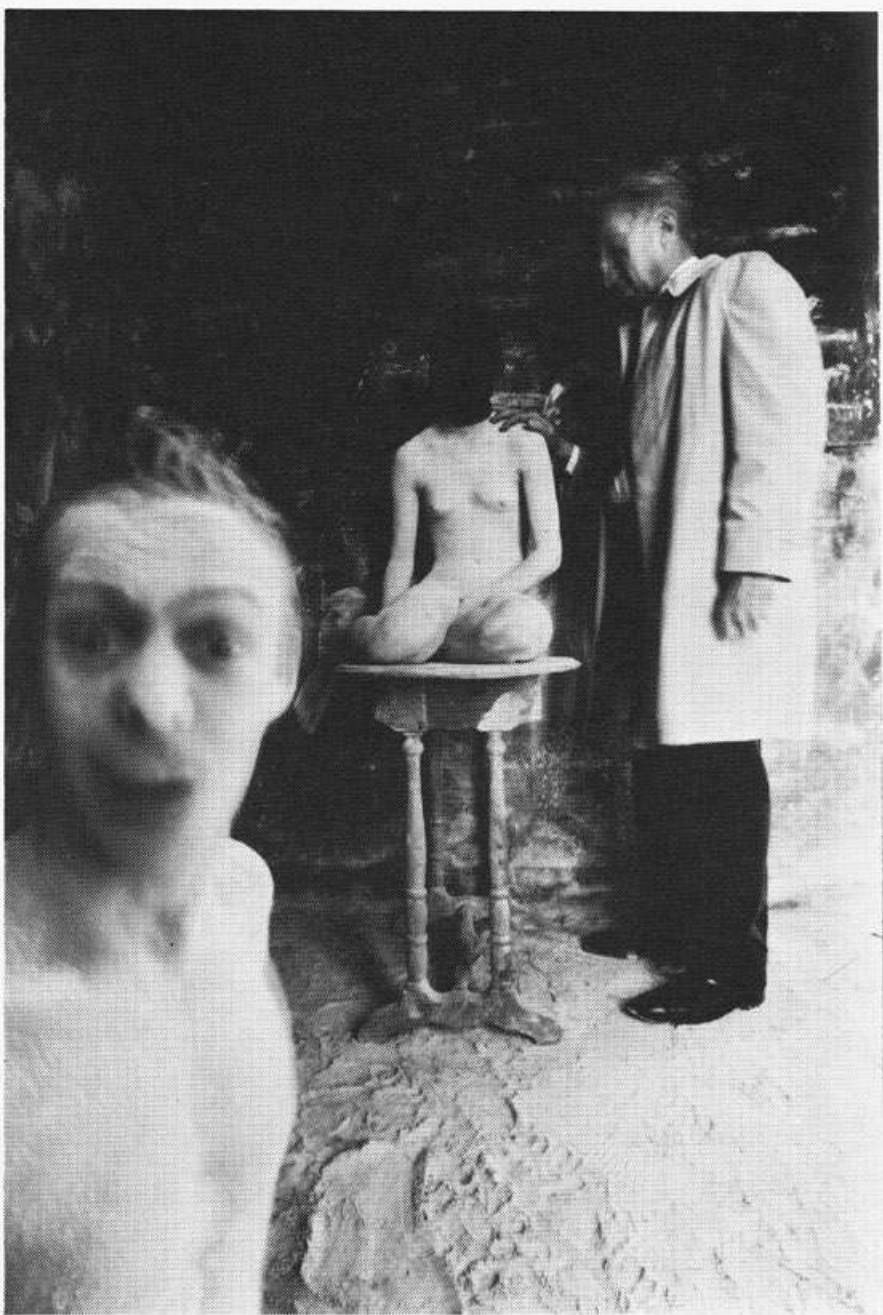
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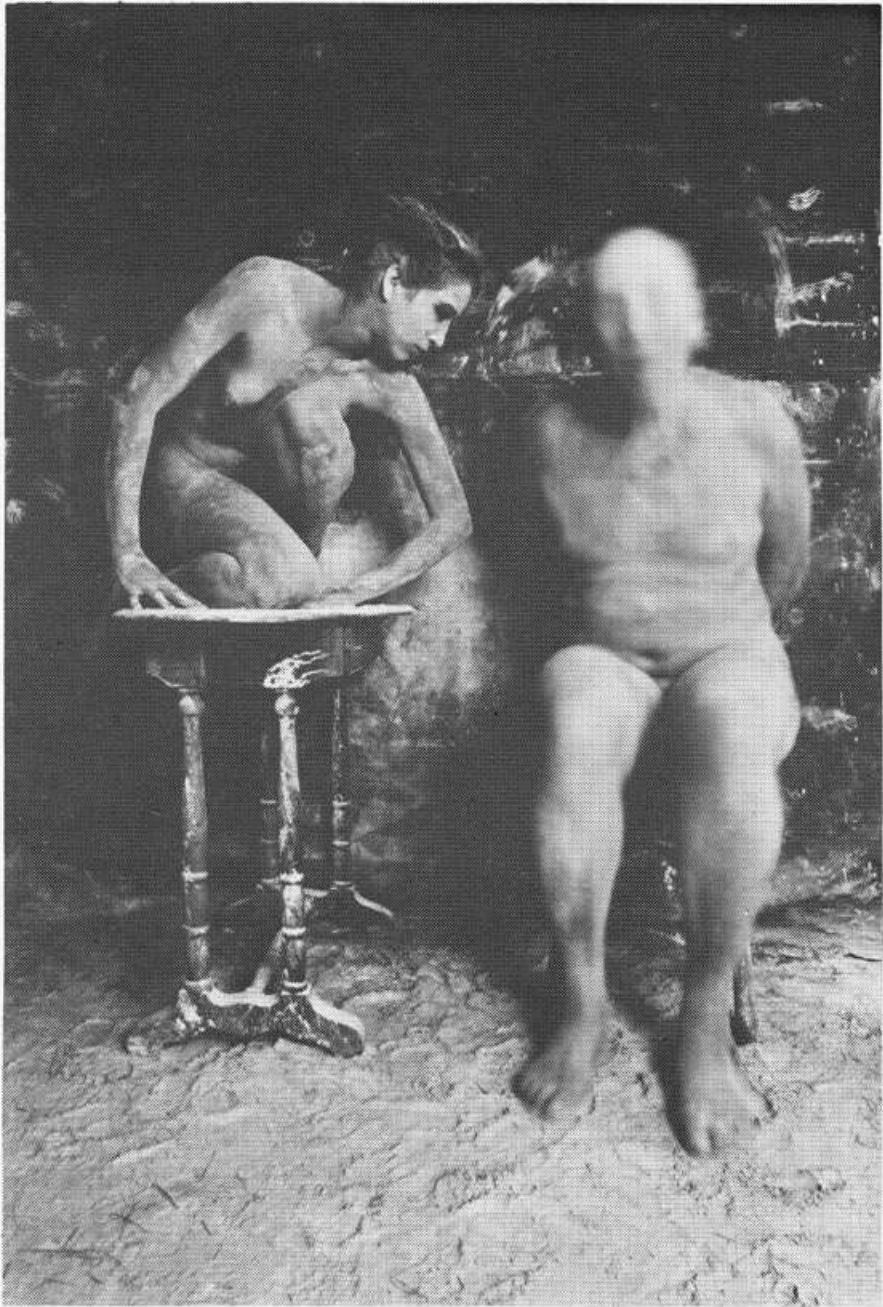
The Oracle Consults Eurydice



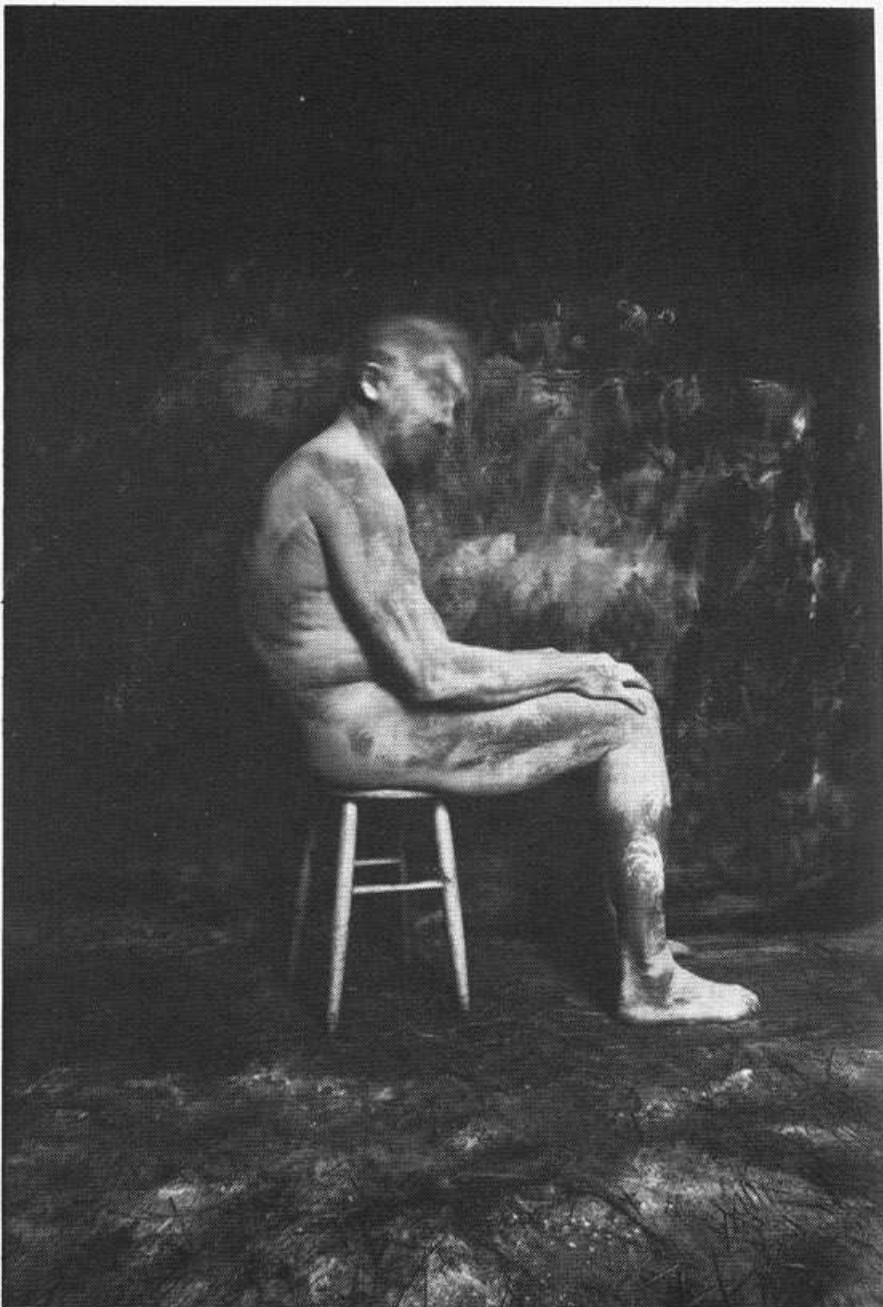
From the series "Silent Fires"



The Offer



From the series "Silent Fires"



Orpheus

By Gay Block

(The following is a discussion of the recent work of Barbara Norfleet, whose photographs were shown at the Houston Center for Photography during July.)

BARBARA NORFLEET SOULS OF THE RICH

"The group of photographs proves that human beings in every strata have their own sets of problems and celebrations, that having great wealth may be costly, that everything has its trade-offs and great wealth is no exception."

Have you ever wondered what life would be like if you had more leisure time and money than you knew how to spend? We all know that there exists a class of people who are so fortunate. In a way, they must be terrified of the outside world, afraid of envy, or that other people will take from them what they have. So they insulate themselves at their private clubs or at gatherings at each others' estates. With great persistence, Barbara Norfleet has gained entry into some of their social functions and photographed with precision and insight what she calls "The Hidden Upper Class in America."

When I look at these pictures I am overwhelmed by their clarity and depth. I see at once the many dichotomies in the subjects: they are arrogant and brazen at the same time that they are afraid and vulnerable. Their lives as depicted are at once exciting and dull, the people are both good and bad, happy and sad, having fun and enduring routine, habitual social rituals. Their homes are beautifully furnished, full of people but cold and uncomfortable. They are isolated from the large world, but connected to one another, albeit superficially; we can't detect real emotional connections between them. The details of these pictures — the gestures, facial expressions, and body postures of the people and their environment — are the clues to Norfleet's passionate interest in her subjects, and it is her passion for content in art which makes the pictures the exciting documents that they are.

During the month of July, 25 of these photographs of America's aristocratic and entitled graced the walls of HCP. The pictures are grab-shots, akin to street photography, almost all done with flash. They are not related to studio or formal photographs. "I think of all photographs as social documents," says Norfleet. We have seen many photographic essays of the very poor in America, many of the middle class and some of the upper middle class. But this is only the second one of which I am aware — the first being Mary Lloyd Estrin's collection, *Of The Manor Born* — of the lives of the elite aristocracy. They are usually quite protected and hidden behind the walls and doors of their homes. In this essay, not only does Norfleet enter these walls, but she reaches the souls of the people. She shows us in one photo a dowager walking in her very formal, manicured gardens and in another, young boys in formal riding attire sitting smugly with two elegant older women in an antique buggy. In the photographs

of lawn parties, the people are elegantly dressed, the men always have on ties, the children are quite properly dressed up. We can see the rules which govern their lives; Norfleet has circumvented the rules and found a way to reach the human beings. It is her ability to expose human qualities in these snapshot candid of social events that evokes my strong response to these photographs.

There is one photograph, "Private House," New Providence Island, The Bahamas, of a black maid whom Norfleet said she encountered in the act of cleaning the bathroom. A wet young man in a brief bathing suit smiles at her through the glass door. She laughs, embarrassed. A subsequent photo shows the maid sitting on the young man's lap, this time he's dressed in white slacks and knit shirt. Norfleet explains, "I saw the bathroom scene and grabbed it fast. Then the young man asked, 'Oh — you want a picture of me and Rosie?' and he came inside, got dressed, sat down and posed Rosie on his lap." Only a man who had been raised by black women servants, perhaps by that black woman servant, would have been able to enact that drama with comfort and even a kind of love and respect. And Rosie understands his gestures, or at least tolerates them; she laughs in both photographs and everything seems very natural and comfortable.

There is one curiously ambiguous photograph, "Wedding Reception, Lincoln, MA. 1982", of a beautiful white woman in maid's uniform serving at a wedding reception. She could easily be one of the guests, judging from her appearance, but she is clearly the maid on this occasion. She is so extraordinarily beautiful that I resist thinking of her as a servant. I wonder what kind of people would have servants who look like that.

In some of the faces, we see cockiness and self assurance, mostly in the young men, as in "3 Brothers: Cambridge Boat Club," and "Arriving at the Ritz-Carlton for the Windsor School Prom." In some we see depth and intensity as in "Chilton Club, Boston, MA." A young woman stands in front of a huge antique tapestry, by a large floral arrangement. It appears to be in an entrance hall and Norfleet has photographed it from about knee level, looking up. The woman is posed, staring directly into the camera, but seems a bit nervous as she picks on the fingers of one hand and holds a glass of champagne in the other. Her hair is casually tousled, but she is dressed formally in her velvet jacket. This is a strong portrait of a complex woman,

"The people are elegantly dressed, the men always have on ties, the children are quite properly dressed. We can see the rules which govern their lives; Norfleet has circumvented the rules and found a way to reach the human beings."

one who may be both comfortable and ill at ease in this society. Norfleet told me that the woman likes this photograph very much, and I can understand why. She is one of the few people who seem to have maintained a sense of personhood, of strength and frailty, of real personal depth in this sometimes frightening society. By contrast, the man in "Eating Club, Princeton Reunion" who stands in suede Tyrolean short pants and a pointed hat, holding his drink and staring blankly at the camera, seems lost forever. He has become a pawn of the events and rituals which make up his life; all vitality and knowing connections to his real self seem gone.

At the other end of the spectrum in terms of age but not in terms of vacancy is "A Plantation, Mississippi 1984", of two young girls in a formally appointed library. They are wearing shorts and sit casually talking, their blond hair still wet after swimming. Are they aware that everyone doesn't live like this? Are they so well cared for that the life energy that most children use to make themselves happy and comfortable becomes dull and dormant? I can see all these things in this photographs because Norfleet has given us clues in the environment, clothes, and gestures.

And then there are the dowagers. They have created this world, they own it, and the young people pay their respects. Norfleet has let us see that. They stare blankly or are engaged in conversations. They are heavily wrinkled but well cared for. I can see the fear which may have originated with them, the fear of the outside world and the need to make their world secure and insulated.

Now just how much of what I have said is true? Here is where we get into trouble putting words to photographs. I have some connections to a monied society, albeit a fraction of the amount of money possessed by these people, so my observations certainly

reflect my own experience. That is why I asked Norfleet for her words and here are some of her random reflections: "These people are as complex as any ethnic group, and they are like an ethnic group in the way they stay together. They are happiest at home when surrounded by other entitled people. These are the people who are accepted not for what they do with their lives but for who they are. They're very mild mannered unless something goes wrong."

Norfleet has just been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to finish this series. She wants to photograph more servants, more dowagers surrounded by their servants. She hasn't yet been allowed to photograph a debutante ball, but wants to very badly. The wealthy children take dance classes as a group and she wants to photograph them. She wants more yacht clubs and sailing events, though the series already contains some of these plus some at fox hunts and riding clubs and horse-drawn buggy events.

Norfleet writes to individuals asking to be allowed to photograph at a party, usually sending her book, *The Champion Pig*, to show she's interested in pictures of people. She very generously gives people prints of the photos she takes after working. Recently, on a plantation in Mississippi, she sent them a book of 30 photographs. Still, she only has a one percent acceptance rate from her requests. So it isn't easy.

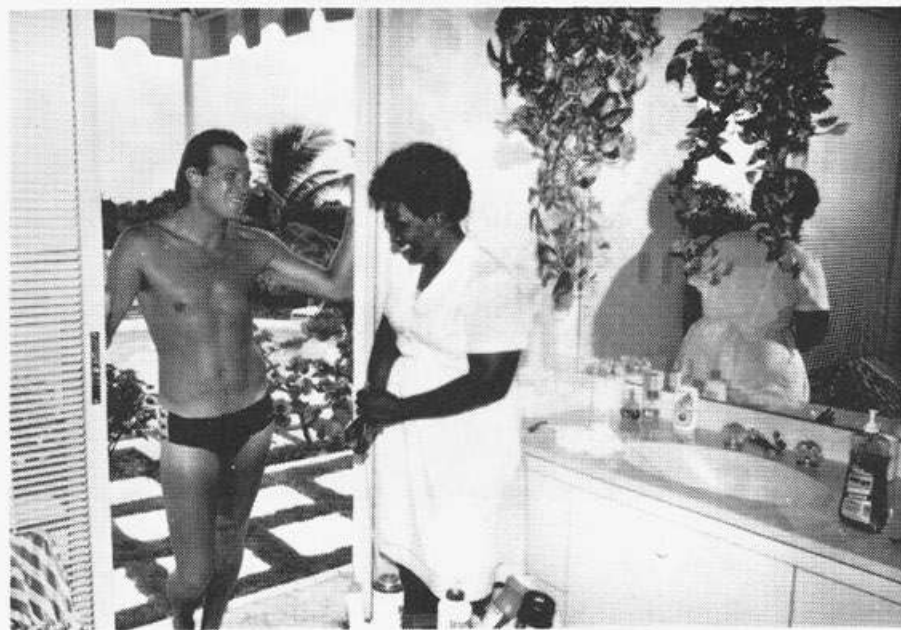
Nor are the photographs easy to make. "These people are very hard to photograph," said Norfleet in a recent interview in *Vanity Fair*. "It is not cafe society. There's no outrageous behavior or fabulous clothes, and they're very private, very family oriented. That's one thing I really like — all the generations are included in everything."

We see evidence of the generations in lawn party pictures where ponies provide rides for children and balloons keep it festive. "Is the family orientation motivated by a desire for in-breeding, so the children will marry friends' children?" I ask. She hesitates, hedges, and says, "Probably. They're very afraid of the outside world."

In spite of their need for privacy and protection, these people seem glad to be photographed just as most of us would be. After all, as Diane Arbus said, we all want attention, and "that's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid."

To understand even more fully Norfleet's orientation, we must know that she has a Ph.D in Social Relations (Psychology), teaches anthropological field work

Private House, New Providence Island, The Bahamas, 1982



Mt. Vernon Benefit: Copley Plaza, Boston, MA 1983





Flying Horse Farm, Hamilton, MA 1981

and photography in the Visual and Environment Studies Department at Harvard University. For twelve years she has been curator of photography at the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard; she founded and now directs the Photographic Collection there. She has curated many exhibits and authored important publications while there. She is a

wife, and the mother of three grown children. In her curatorial work as well as in her own photographs, she is fascinated by the possibilities of what we can learn from photographs of people. Whether they are posed studio portraits or informal candid, she knows that photographs are visual communication to be read with as much depth and understanding

of human construction as the best Henry James novel. And she seems to me to have a deep understanding of human beings, their lives, and the visual clues which promote understanding. "The Hidden Upper Class in America" proves to us that human beings in every strata have their own sets of problems and celebrations, that having great

wealth may be costly (no pun intended), that everything has its trade-offs and great wealth is no exception. Can aristocrats remain vitally engaged in life, performing the kind of tasks which make us feel proud of ourselves even if they aren't required to be productive? Does a life of indulgence devoid of almost all personal yearnings preclude intense feelings

and therefore cause life to be somewhat flat and meaningless? I believe Norfleet has posed these questions and made important discoveries. The photographs do not make us envious; we are not asked to criticize or judge her subjects. They are true reflections of the universality of the human condition in yet another unexpected arena.

Chilton Club, Boston, MA 1983



Paul Hester is a three-time NEA Fellow who lives and works in Houston. The following is a discussion of his most recent work, which was included in the HCP's 1984 Members' Exhibition.

By April Rapier

The politics of 1984, of sex and sexuality, of repression, imposition of will, and death as a power play, of racism and hatred — in short, the persuasion of volition against conscience and desire — lead ultimately to an ineffectual end, a cry for help that has no voice. There is intelligence and concern in Paul Hester's sequence of images, "We Are Seduced By ... / Su Voto Es la Diferencia." The nine categories he structures the pictures around seem neutral enough at first, yet are loaded politically and emotionally. One gradually begins to sense his outrage — a conceptual mayhem born of the absurdity of hopelessness. How can anyone be fooled by all of this — be seduced by the repellent — we wonder, as the question echoes over and over. Hester's premise, if it can be condensed so readily, is that once aware of the seduction, one is empowered to act against it. The vote is the symbol of power, even though that, too, necessitates a compromise. The pictures tell of a now-predictable pattern of horror from which wisdom must be extracted; otherwise, civilization's atrocities will be condemned to being forgotten.

To do business with world politics on a symbolic rather than documentary level is no less effective when the horror acted out is dreamlike, recognizable. The metaphor for seduction/repression can be drawn from many arenas but most often from the dynamic between people. The use of male and female nudes, calling again and again upon the tension that nudity creates, can be seen in two ways: nudity as vulnerability, or the release from taboo, the strength that comes when a concept is no longer a red flag. This intensity draws attention to every detail within the frame — we question props, veins bulging, scratches on the floor, light directed toward genitals, as well as the principals themselves, with the same objective scrutiny that is traditionally followed by an embarrassed laugh. Physical evidence within the pictures can be found in mirrors and reflections, Reagan masks, surprise and distraction, sleeping bag cocoons, entrapment, bondage and blindfolds (the tools of the interrogator and executioner), and showmanship — devices that make us question our assumptions. In spite of a certain absurdity to the gestures, poses, masks, and wrappings, we are engrossed in the absolute se-

riousness of the message. The images are terribly complex and powerful; many interpretations are available and encouraged by the interplay between the myth of a collective history of political horror, and the reality of what seems all too familiar yet remains unintelligible.

Paul Hester and his work are virtually inseparable. He is an anomaly in Houston, a city of noise and confusion; he maintains a quiet profile, yet has an activist's sensibility. The political overtones of his pictures, once rather raw and cruel, have grown refined and sophisticated. The intent remains clear. Once a photoeducator, attention is naturally drawn to him as a resource, someone with a solution, not an excuse. His commercial work is primarily architectural; he has bridged the gap between his commercial and fine art photography, in that neither suffers in excuse of the other. One senses his regard for the historical aspect of photography: he once organized a display of city archive pictures, and often uses a panorama camera, a relic of great beauty from the more cumbersome days of pack mules and glass plates and portable studios. All aspects of his photography are labors of love. He has achieved and continues to maintain a fine reputation in the art world, and is published and exhibited regularly (he was recently included in an exhibition entitled *Exposed and Developed: Photography Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts*, at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art). He was awarded the Thomas Watson grant, and is a three time NEA Fellowship recipient. Yet the focus of his interest and output is local, his sense of community strong.

For many years, his work was experimental and more personal, a private statement open to interpretation. He recently made a more definitive political declaration in the form of an exhibition he coordinated at the Houston Center for Photography regarding nuclear disarmament. His work in that show evoked enormous internal controversy at the HCP. His was a courageous move, one that further politicized his stance. One hopes that there is no turning back. The force of a goal thus became crystallized in this most recent portfolio: whereas many rally behind causes with footwork and words, pictures backed by ideas prove to be powerful in the allegiance of belief and action.

PAUL HESTER:
BELIEF AND ACTION

"To do business with world politics on a symbolic rather than documentary level is no less effective when the horror acted out is dreamlike, recognizable."

WE ARE SEDUCED BY



THE INEVITABLE

SU VOTO ES LA DIFERENCIA

WE ARE SEDUCED BY



MYTH

SU VOTO ES LA DIFERENCIA

Photos by Paul Hester

"The pictures tell of a now-predictable pattern of horror from which wisdom must be extracted; otherwise, civilization's atrocities will be condemned to being forgotten."

WE ARE SEDUCED BY



PERFORMANCE

SU VOTO ES LA DIFFERENCIA

The following is a review of the 1984 Annual Members' Exhibition at the Houston Center for Photography. Portfolios included in the exhibition were by David Cornue, Laura Derrick, Jim Elmore, Gary Faye, Bill Frazier, Paula Goldman, Paul Hester, Muffy McLanahan, Julia Milazzo, Don Rice, Becky Ross, and Beth Schlanger.*

HCP MEMBERS' SHOW: NOT UP TO SNUFF

"There are many underexamined and overexecuted ideas, as well as the forcing of an undeveloped vision into premature conclusion. This show is not without its marvelous images, but several unpleasant trends seem to be emerging."

A review of the 1984 HCP Members' Exhibition is, in a manner of speaking, incestuous; the exhibitors are acquaintances and friends, associates in the alliance that makes HCP an astounding success in its third year. It is an uneasy task under the best of circumstances, and it gives me no pleasure to admit, after much consideration and discussion, that the overall tone of the show is to be found lacking.

The exhibition is dominated by student-caliber work. There are many underexamined and over-executed ideas, as well as the forcing of an undeveloped vision into premature conclusion. This show is not without its marvelous images, but several unpleasant trends seem to be emerging that require note. There is a lot of travelog imagery, de rigueur picture-taking that feels forced, the result of a determination to take advantage of each and every photo-opportunity. There is no enigma to it. Some of these documents are simply treated too well, given too much importance. They are born of a motivation that is difficult to take seriously. One has the sense that homage to well-tested ideas is being paid without proper credit.

The other disturbing trend that I noticed was that the intention of some sequential images was mystifying, their statements inconclusive. A discussion with the artist with regard to origins might be fascinating and enlightening, but the images mustn't depend on an explanation for clarity. Pictures should be able to stand alone. I would also like to note the difficulty in referring to pictures without titles or enumeration.

Although the show was generally uninspired, some of the work merits critical scrutiny. The most thought-provoking and accomplished portfolio was that of Paul Hester. That work is discussed in a separate article elsewhere in this magazine. Becky Ross has created a sense of wonder with her lovely heirloom-like pictures. This portfolio has the feel of old Brownie snapshots — sharp centers with halated, fuzzy edges, thus highlighting the mainstay of the image. The effect is that of paring down notions and conclusions, settling in on the idea that the act of being photographed is a very serious event, resulting in treasures to be discovered and re-discovered years later.

These pictures stem from the uncommon sensibility that images aren't haphazard, brief moments in passing. There is reverence, referential to both past and future. It is the curious omission of the present that most intrigues. Ross has also attained a coveted state of anonymity; because any trace of her presence is wholly absent from the images, we have the rare treat of watching the subject posing, as if in front of a mirror, enjoying the fantasy before the photographer actually arrives. No mugging for the camera here, caused by its intimidating status: there is sheer pleasure to be found, a seductive feeling of warmth, with happy endings in mind.

Muffy McLanahan, in devising a playful approach to scale and dimension, has created some excellent assemblages from lifeless relics, most notably "Steps at the Achilleion," "Achilles Wounded by Herte," and "Greek Graffiti." Classic subject matter tends to overpower classic treatment, yet McLanahan personalizes the images in a way that frees the subjects from the burden of their pasts. Beth Schlanger's *Puye Cliff Dwelling* series is based on a suc-



Cowett Hill, Maine

David Cornue

cessful concept, yet suffers greatly from an oppressive printing technique. These dwellings, beautifully limned by a credible sensibility, have been obscured by heavy-handedness.

Paula Goldman's "Waiting for Cancer" portrait series is the work I find most enigmatic. The pictures simultaneously attract and repel. Her aims elude the viewer. I detect an evasiveness in the series as a whole, yet find some individual pictures to be enchanting. Perhaps it is the title, which plays on profound emotions, that leads us to expect more impact than is delivered. The awkwardness is that nothing gels — the anxieties drawn upon continue to float around the imagery, so that the relationship between title and posture is inconclusive. The most haunting pic-

tures contain people surrounded by neutral, seemingly disparate objects and props. These are elements of security and familiarity. We wonder how they will transform, and if that, too, is inevitable (assuming that cancer is). This series requires considerable contemplation.

Although David Cornue's subject matter is noble and lovely, I take issue with the relatively small (4x5-inch) image size he has chosen: it is difficult to justify forcing the vastness of these landscapes into such confined quarters. So much of the delicate light and tonality is obscured. These pictures demand more surface space for the photographer's intention to be fully appreciated.

Jim Elmore's pictures taken at the English seaside are of a documentary nature, and it is clear

that he is least at home and most successful when he indulges in the risk of participation. As he closes in on the things being photographed, his stance is more clearly stated, his vision defined. Reliance on the wide angle, quick swing-through leaves us with a random, empty impression. This circular gesture doesn't have the triumph of the images that surround him. His social commentary is far more acerbic as well: when not distanced, we really feel what some people might be willing to put up with for a little sun. His economizing of spatial plane (less is far more here) gives us a better sense of the crowding he seems to be so interested in.

Jim Tiebout's single, hand-tinted image is so frail and enticing and quite frustrating to see alone. It is

From the series "Waiting for Cancer"

Paula Goldman



* Also in the show were miscellaneous prints by Martha Armstrong, Leslie Baldwin, Julie Edwards, Ellen Goldberg, Phillip Holland, Charlotte Land, Sam McCulloch, Margaret Moore, Debra Rueb, Charles Sage, Barth Schorre, Jim Tiebout, Marcos Urdaneta, and Danette Wilson.



Dick, January 1983

Rebecca Ross



Beth Schlanger

part of a series; we would doubtless benefit from its exhibition in entirety.

Beth Israel Goldberg's picture entitled "Simla Indian Himalayas" is a refreshingly simple and unpretentious bit of secret smuggling. It imparts the feeling of seeing sacred things not meant for any but the holiest eyes. Therein lies the difference between tourist and traveler. Similarly, Barth Schorre's "Cemetery Sequence #10" is the definitive picture in a rash of cemetery invasions. His is not an overly reverent grave robbery; he points up the eccentricities with which people decorate the graves of their loved ones. He doesn't pass judgement, and this gives one the tender chuckle of recognition.

Phillip Holland's painterly, evocative "Frenchies Three" (it is unfortunate that he chose such a glib, distracting title) is a wonderful image with an understated punchline. The colors are rich; we are in no danger of doubting its veracity. The sum of elements in this image confirms our confidence in the integrity of the photograph. We take with us an impression of this mysterious image composed of mundane elements, quite satisfied.

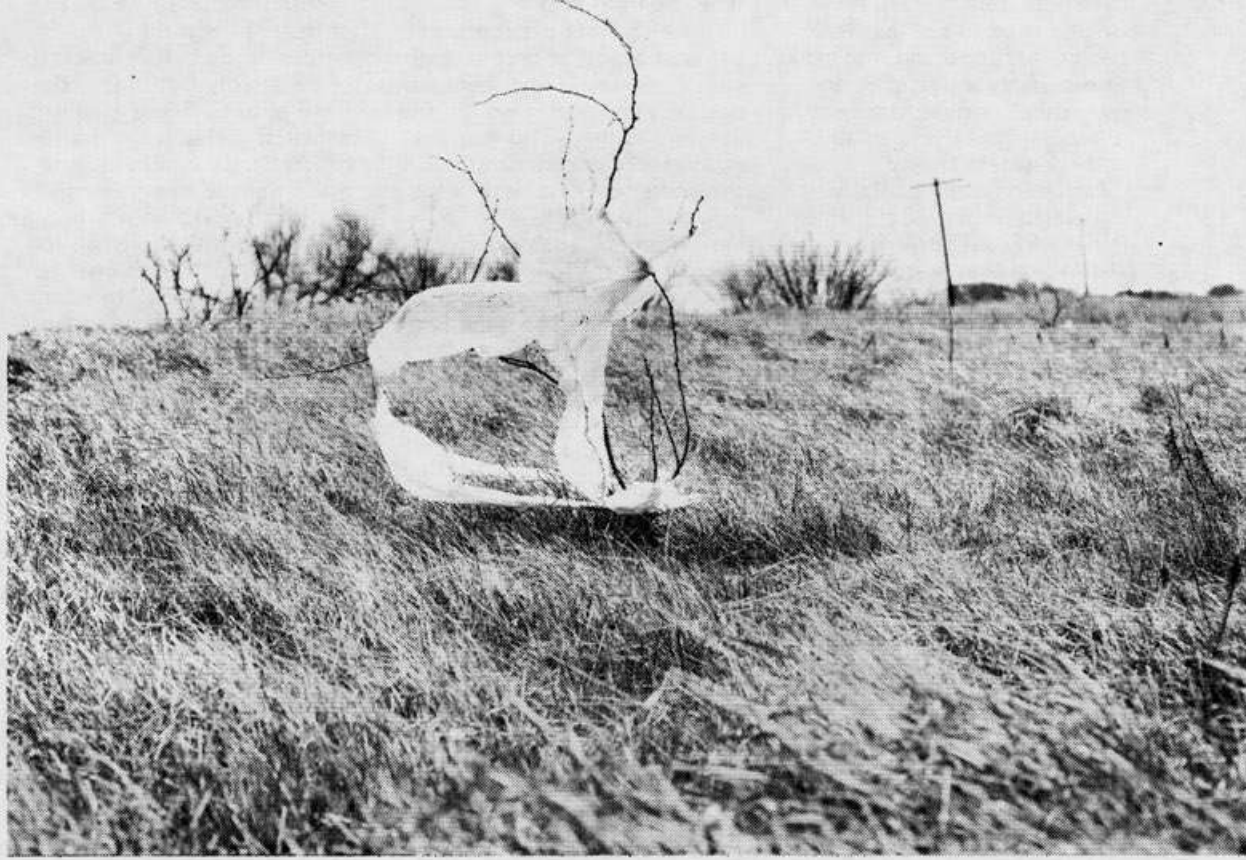


Greek Graffiti

Muffy McLanahan

Jim Tiebout

The consensus seems to be that the members' exhibition is a sacred concept, and I agree for the most part. There are a number of theories as to why participation was low this year, but the most significant one is the coinciding of fellowship award appointments — deadlines were nearly simultaneous. That the fellowship review received more portfolios than the members' exhibition is sad commentary indeed. If lack of interest continues to weaken the concept, amendments or incentives need to be initiated in order to encourage a more general participation and enthusiasm, without which a dangerous precedent is perpetuated. The selection process itself is a democratic one, with members voting to rate the top portfolios and single images. Members may vote whether or not they submit pictures; the number of members who voted was very low as well. Perhaps if members really want this to be a serious exhibition some consideration should be given to another method of choosing the work.



By Paul Hester

Our Lives and Our Children; Photographs Taken Near The Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant. By Robert Adams. Published by Aperture, Millerton, NY 1983. Paperback, \$12.50

ROBERT ADAMS: A NEED TO ELABORATE

"They are members of every race and nation of the earth. They are of all ages, of all temperaments, of all classes, of almost every imaginable occupation. Each is incorporated in such an intense and various concentration of human beings as the world has never known before. Each, also, is an individual existence, as matchless as a thumbprint or a snowflake. Each wears garments which of themselves are exquisitely subtle uniforms and badges of their being. Each carries in the posture of his body, in his hands, in his face, in the eyes, the signatures of a time and place in the world upon a creature for whom the name immortal soul is one mild and vulgar metaphor."

-James Agee, introduction to *Many are Called*

Photography is burdened by an expectation of unblemished views of the world. Portrait, advertising, architectural, and landscape photographers all labor under the demand for perfection. This obsession with the ideal is responsible for the lingering remains of the picturesque in photography and a fastidious concern for The Fine Print.

Concurrent with this urge to create a better make-believe world within the picture is another hope that photography can contribute to change beyond the frame. Activists from Lewis Hine to Danny Lyon to Fred Lonidier have expressed the conviction that social conditions exposed by photography could be reformed.

These impulses have formed a troubling mixture in the work of Robert Adams. He loves the land, both mountains and prairies; he admits to having an Ansel Adams print on his wall. But his concern for accuracy and typicality has led him over the past twenty years to make pictures not of national parks but of land that is being used and developed.

Robert Adams' work first achieved prominence in 1974 with the publication of *The New West*. Subdivided into "Prairie," "Tracts and Mobile Homes," "The City," and "Foothills and Mountains," the pictures point out all the things we usually try to escape when we travel or photograph. The unsettling aspect, however, is the careful attention paid to all these blemishes. A thoughtful equilibrium informs each picture; his simple, balanced compositions always seem to include the ubiquitous mountains at the edge of perception. As he wrote in the foreword, "Paradoxically, however, we also need to see the whole geography, natural and man-made, to experience a peace; all land, no matter what has happened to it, has over it a grace, an absolutely persistent beauty."

Each of his other books has elaborated on this initial theme. *Denver; A Photographic Survey of The Metropolitan Area*, published in 1977, included this statement: "...a photographer wants Form, an unarguably right relationship of shapes, a visual stability in which all components are equally important. The photographer hopes, in brief, to discover a tension so exact that it is peace."

Prairie was published by the Denver Art Museum in 1978. Adams wrote in the foreword, "There are times, of course, when the only possible reaction to life on the prairie is to be still.... Prairie buildings...are emblems of our hope and its vulnerability.... Mystery in this landscape is certainty, an eloquent one. There is everywhere silence."

In 1980, Aperture published *From The Missouri West*, in which

Adams "...decided to try to rediscover some of the land forms that had impressed our forebears. Was there remaining in the geography a strength that might help sustain us as it had them? I set one ground rule — to include in the photographs the evidence of man; it was a precaution in favor of truth that was easy to follow since our violence against the earth has extended even to anonymous arroyos and undifferentiated stands of scrub brush."

I have quoted Adams to this extent because rarely does a photographer try so hard to help us understand his position. His achievement in these landscapes is the union of both the conditions for his despair and the sources of his awe. The almost religious intensity with which he has concentrated on this uneasy marriage is evidenced in the progressive tautness of his images and the growing subtlety of his vision.

The didactic nature of Adams' work has generally been overshadowed by his classical concern for austere, restrained objectivity. But *Our Lives and our Children* appears to mark the end of his desire for objective detachment. It is a collection of candid portraits made in parking lots, crosswalks and airports, many of young children and babies. Cars are everywhere; people are almost always moving, walking — some alone, but mostly in groups — talking, holding hands, touching. There is rarely any contact with the photographer. The people are not unusual in any obvious way. They are white, middle-class, and not engaged in any particular activity such as a parade or demonstration. They are ordinary people engaged in the ordinary details of everyday life.

Four-fifths of the way through the book an image of a woman holding a young girl is repeated, cropped into a narrow, horizontal band. The final dozen pictures maintain this format and present faces of anxious concern and gradually increasing imprecision and blurriness.

Two pages of text give a history of the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant, then Adams concludes,

"In summary, the plutonium triggers built at risk to Denver become part of a worldwide system so open to error and malfunction that it is reasonable to believe many of us will, at a scarcely imaginable but exact time, die from them."

"If we confront this conclusion we want almost at once to give up, to be free of what seems impossible hope. When we can find in ourselves the will to keep asking questions of politicians, it is, I think, after we have noticed the individuals with whom we live. How mysteriously absolute each is. How many achieve, in moments of reflection or joy or concern, a kind of heroism. Each refutes the idea of acceptable losses." The final page states that, "All royalties from the sale of this book will go to the American Friends Service Committee Freeze Education Fund, 1600 Lafayette Street, Denver, Colorado 80218."

I went back to Adams' earlier pictures looking for clues that might relate to this new book. Among the stark images of tract homes spread out below the mountains, I came across more people than I had remembered. While not present in significant numbers, they are consistent in their solitude, contemplation, and

"Adams has admitted the weakness of objectivity. He is confronted with a danger that cannot be seen, that he cannot photograph."

stillness. More surprising was the number of times these people happened to be children. "A child with nothing to do; the back of a shopping center" (page 92, *Denver*); a woman pushing a baby in a grocery cart past rows of bottled water (page 95, *Denver*); a young boy on a motorbike, poised on an overlook toward distant mountains (page 102, *The New West*); a father and child holding hands and walking away from the camera across a vacant lot toward the back of a shopping center (page 84, *Denver*).

The greatest help in my reading of Adams' new work was Walker Evans' 1966 book, *Many are Called*, of photographs that Evans took in the 1930s on New York subways. Evans hid a camera under his coat, ran a cable release down his sleeve, and rode the subway, surreptitiously photographing those seated across from him. People, isolated in the noise of the subway, read or act out small dramas with their companions. They all appear about the same size against the dark background of the subway and this format forces you to concentrate on them as individuals.

In the differences between the two books are certain clues. Evans' pictures have for us now a nostalgia for old clothes and hats, even old-style faces. Adams is stuck with contemporary T-shirts and running shoes, without the softening effects of time. His is a public arena limited to the distance between car and shopping mall, not the forced intimacy of a subway car. Because of our associations with this environment, it's difficult to see the enduring, persistent beauty of which Adams has convinced us in his other work. He has, however, revealed (or bestowed) a powerful authority residing in each body; the casualness with which I dismiss others every day has evaporated.

Adams' pictures have an air of haste, an element of stolen glances. It is, I believe, a source of the anxiety that one senses in these pictures. There is nothing dishonest in this, but it is a reminder that the pictures were made without asking. Perhaps the effort to explain why he was taking them was too great, too impossible. How does one say, "Because I love you," to a total stranger? Adams seems to feel a great burden, and marvels that others manage to carry on in spite of their difficulties.

Evans' pictures, also taken without permission, don't show this strain or tension. Only occasionally does someone peer suspiciously toward the lens hidden in the folds of his coat, and we fear for a moment we're about to be caught. The images are more formal; people are practically sitting for their portraits, lost in themselves, in the noise and anonymity of the subway.

Both photographers vary the size and proportions of their pictures, cropping and enlarging to emphasize the individual. Adams

kept his camera low to place the figures against the sky, which increases their heroic stature and gives his camera the eye level of a child.

The absolute equilibrium which he demanded from his earlier pictures has been relaxed, and he offers in its place the precision of his observations about gesture and posture. Without fanfare or acrobatics, he records the quiet tenderness of our fragility.

It is this voyeurism, however, that is finally frustrating. All the interaction is within the frame; we watch touching, caring, loving people, but never make eye contact or become intimate. We are removed, the all-seeing eye, taking in facts, but making no commitments. I realize this distance is part of his respect for the subject, and that it contributes to the solitude which we see in the subjects, but it is this neutrality, this pretense of objectivity, that is so paralyzing. This style of photography presents its point of view as the ultimate window on the world, as though its cool, clinical detachment were the only reality.

The crack in this window gives this book its potential. Adams has apparently sensed the need to elaborate in order to give new meaning to the looks and gestures of the book. He has cropped and sequenced the last pictures to give no other option. He is demanding that we see in the nuclear context the concern on the boy's face in the window and the man carrying his son and the woman biting her nails and the woman with her eyes shut. The cold, brilliant light of *The New West* has become a hot, blinding explosion.

Adams has, it seems to me, admitted the weakness of objectivity. He is confronted with a danger that cannot be seen, that he cannot photograph. He must make pictures to awaken us to what will be lost, and to persuade us of the immediacy of the danger. Some recent films, like *Atomic Cafe*, have mocked nuclear defense preparations; others like *The Day After* used makeup and special effects to suggest the horrors of nuclear war. An exhibition called *The War Room* documented the effects of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with photographs of the cities and the survivors.

All efforts to alter our passive acceptance are worthwhile; they are necessary in order to change our minds about what is possible. But neutral photographs that put their faith in objectivity run the risk of supporting the status quo. To see ourselves as passive victims hastens our acceptance of the inevitable. We need photographs that challenge our acquiescence to Star Wars policies and mindless militarism. Classically composed photographs cannot convey the urgency, as Robert Adams admits with these last images.

The book as a whole encompasses the balance of his earlier pictures. Looking at the cover photograph, a woman in distress holds a child and crowds in on us from the left edge of the frame, while down the sidewalk a bit, another woman, holding a child by the hand, looks towards the first woman. She doesn't perceive the danger and is unaware of the ominous shape over her and the line that slices through her head. Again I see the ambiguous message of ecological disaster and possible survival, the contrast between objects of despair and love. It is an equation of the sacred and the profane, the perfect and the imperfect.



Robert Adams

There would still remain the never-resting mind,
So that one would want to escape, come back
To what had been so long composed.
The imperfect is our paradise.
Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds."

Wallace Stevens, *The Poems of Our Climate*

The questioning of things as they are is the beginning of our understanding. Robert Adams has questioned our beliefs about what is worth photographing, or to put it another way, what is worth caring about. He questions us clearly on that account, and in

large measure by his ability and willingness to relate these loving observations to the threat of nuclear war. I admire and applaud his strength on all levels. My reservation is one I am trying to answer for myself: How do we photographically place these questions in the political arena?

"Less than ever does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory, let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore something has actually to be constructed, something artificial, something set up."

Bertold Brecht

"Perhaps the effort to explain why he was taking [these pictures] was too great, too impossible. How does one say, 'Because I love you,' to a total stranger?"



Gilles Peress

By Peter Yenne

Telex Iran/In The Name of Revolution. By Gilles Peress. Published by Aperture, Millerton, N.Y. \$20 paperback.

GILLES PERESS: CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

"The country that emerges from these photographs is bleak and mysterious, an agitated, contradictory place, filled with high emotions and sadness, where few things are what they seem."

Depressing as the world situation is today, it still inspires wonderful photography. The last few years have brought us Susan Meiselas' powerful book on Nicaragua, followed by an even better group effort on El Salvador (recently shown at the Rice Media Center). In a parallel development, three current films feature photographers as central characters — *Under Fire*, *Circle of Deceit*, and *The Year of Living Dangerously*. The "committed" photographer, something of an endangered species during the 1970s, is obviously making a comeback. Gilles Peress, a French photographer working for Magnum, may not look like Nick Nolte or Mel Gibson, but he is clearly a successor to the likes of Robert Capa and Don McCullin. Like them, Peress shoots in black and white, but the world he lives in, as Nolte and Gibson quickly discovered, is getting grayer and grayer.

Telex Iran/In the Name of Revolution is the amazing record of five weeks Peress spent in Iran in 1979/80 during the seizure of the American Embassy in Teheran. It is a big book, filled with images as intricate as the rugs that were Iran's second most famous export. Fittingly, for a Magnum member, Peress' style is indebted to Cartier-Bresson and Josef Koudelka, with more than a casual nod to William Klein and the late Garry Winogrand. This is a wide-angle view of Iran, tilted, fragmented by the piercing rays of the low winter sun, energized by a people in revolt. Peress is an artist as well as a journalist, and the book shows it. He is interested in pictures for their own sakes, and the photographs are full of visual puns, bursting with information, and strong in contrasts of lighting and scale. The impressive range of visual strategies in *Telex Iran* reveals a quick,

resourceful and inventive eye. Peress likes to break up the picture frame, reducing mass movements to individuals. Often, people are seen through screens and windows, or from passing cars and trains, reinforcing the feeling that Iran is still "out there", impenetrably foreign and remote. Yet Peress manages to break through his alienation and get close to his subjects — with stunning results.

The country that emerges from these photographs is bleak and mysterious, an agitated, contradictory place, filled with high emotions and sadness, where few things are what they seem. Turning to the essay at the end of the book, for example, we learn that the women wailing in the cemeteries may well have been paid professional mourners, and that the "revolutionary martyrs" they grieve for could just as easily have died in a car wreck. Ayatollahs are everywhere: on mirrors, posters, cassettes, television, even at the bottom of soup bowls, reminding us that this holy war was also a war of images, a modern struggle of Good and Evil for prime time. It is not a clear, simple, or uplifting story. Brief captions, in small print, are placed at the end of the book, leaving the photographs to stand on their own, reflecting the tumult and ambiguity of the situation that produced them.

Peress has come a long way from the classic photojournalism of Eugene Smith. He belongs to a more complex and self-conscious time in which the media are so powerful and all-encompassing that they create events as much as they cover them. The hostage crisis is a perfect example of this trend, and the example of this trend, and the Iranians made maximum use of the intense media coverage it generated.

Seeing is no longer believing, which puts the photojournalist in a rather difficult position.

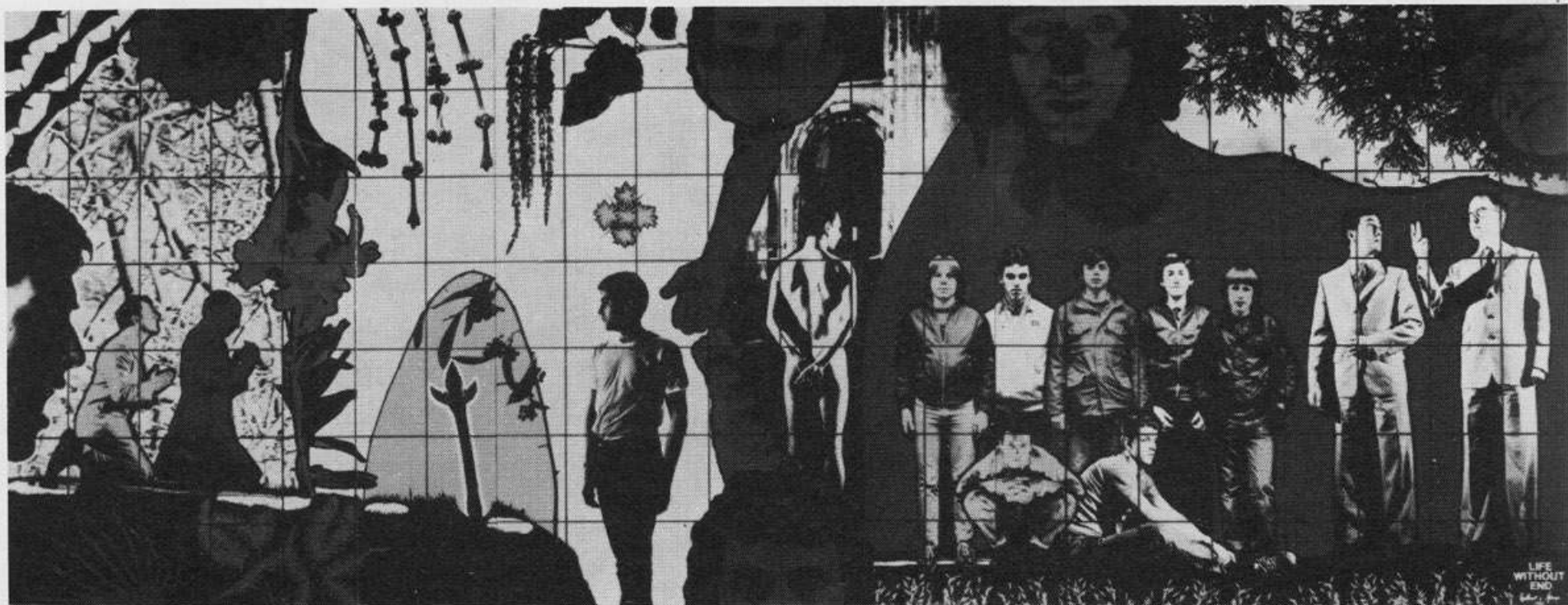
Telex Iran addresses this problem in an interesting way. Sprinkled throughout the book are the terse, puzzling telexes that were Peress' primary link to the outside world. They give us an unusual glimpse into the everyday life of a "troubleshooter." Like his glamorous cinematic counterparts, Peress is a kind of spy, and thus the telexes are probably deliberately cryptic. They tell of contacts and couriers, missed deadlines

and opportunities. They talk of money (he is in it, after all, for *something*) and send their love. The telexes are candid, too (one of them describes his latest take as "not very smashing"), contributing to the sense of a real, yet curiously pared-down and "existential" personality behind the camera. Peress comes across as a politically committed journalist who tries to remain objective, concerned that his pictures be correctly captioned and not misused by the by the right-wing press. Inevitably, captions are confused, meanings are lost and blurred.

Peress is at the mercy of events and the fickle interests of the reading public. From the telexes we learn that he would like to go home, but can't — there is a rumor that the hostages will be released. When he finally has a hot story, no one is interested — all eyes are on Afghanistan, could he please go there instead? A lingering sense of futility hangs over these marvelous pictures. Ironically, we learn more about the actual political situation in Iran from Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi's two-page essay than we ever could from the photographs, and Peress knows that even if he should capture a crucial image it will probably be used to sell apple pie or compact cars. Still, what else can he do? Peress is driven to make sense of a situation, to interrogate the visual world. Like Winogrand, he knows his pictures are only circumstantial evidence, but they are the only evidence he has.

Perhaps the filmmakers were right after all — in a twisted and very contemporary way, Peress is a kind of romantic hero. From his pictures we cannot tell exactly what happened in Iran, but we can say, with conviction, "This is what history looked like."

"Peress is driven to make sense of a situation, to interrogate the visual world. Like Winogrand, he knows his pictures are only circumstantial evidence, but they are the only evidence he has."



Life without End

Gilbert & George

By Sharon Stewart

The exhibition Gilbert & George was organized by The Baltimore Museum of Art and was shown at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston this summer. It will tour to the Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach; The Milwaukee Art Museum; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Art does not imitate life, nor life art with Gilbert & George, two fellows whose creative worlds have come to live as one. To them, life is art. And this life began in 1967 when they were students at St. Martin's School of Art in London. They chose to be a living sculpture and have remained so as subject center in their mail art, films, poetry, paintings, drawings, bookworks and photo-pieces. Sixty seven of the latter are presented in, Gilbert & George, their first American retrospective, shown this summer at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, and organized by Brenda Richardson of the Baltimore Museum.

These photo-pieces are each comprised of a network of 24x20 black framed photo segments making a whole image/allegory with a semblance to stained glass cathedral windows. I say allegory because initially their photo-pieces were groupings of individual photographs compounding a story told. Through an evolution involving color and theme has the allegory returned. But that is jumping a bit ahead and one must have an overview of the life art of Gilbert & George.

Their life (for they never talk about their art) is delved from intense introspection and transposed through sexuality, militarism, religion, alcoholism, mental mania, social strappings, floral omnipresence, and youth — don't forget the youth lest it leave.

In this exhibition we initially find Gilbert & George introverted to their home world during 1974-1977. "Dusty Corners" and "Dead Boards" abound in black and white tales. Comes worry, comes red color slathings to "Bad Thoughts," "Bloody Life," "Mental," and "Red Morning Death."

Turning out of the immediate mind and home in the late 1970s to the "Mad" street scum's scratchings provided graffiti piece motifs in "Queer," "Bent," and "Prostitute Poof." And it is again red, the color connotation of Commie, rage and blood that rejoins "Are You Angry Or Are You Boring?" and "Communism."

Enter the Eighties intellectual yellow yell. Gilbert & George propose themselves to be quite high beings and will wax so while we remain willing recipients. They are now "Waiting," arms afront clenched and crossed across twin tweed stares. All about their titles abounds anguish in '80. Trapped, Dying Youth and a Hellish Misery Fighter, Living in Madness, are Exhausted in Intellectual Depression. Be it the "Power and Glory" of Brixton

blue collar boy "Angels" and a half-yellow war "Hero" to bring back a transmogrified yellow Gilbert and red George like the red "Rose Hole" gaping above us but below them. Finally life art fills. "Four Feelings" for "Four Knights" bring on four colors. And with these colors come photogram template masks of "Coloured Faith," "Lions," "Monsters," "Coloured Black," "Rude," and "Speaking Youth" in decade dawning primitive poses.

And in 1982 it's "Deatho Knocko" a Dies Irae so bring out the living colors of magenta, violet, turquoise, orange, green, of course yellow, blue, and red and we might as well have some

gold leaf since art being has bid us so well. Let's watch the boys yell and scream and tumble thrust through crotch crosses and Icarus' disgraced descent. All blooms in the flower shower skies of "Coloured Loves" and "Winter Flowers." Through stamen stares come "Naked Beauty," "Naked Love," and "Youth Faith." We'll lick our "Lickers" to that faith in "Seven Heroes" so young and peaked. Why, we'll wait and watch the wall of them finish their "Urine" floating face tree pee. We're ready with faint "Forgiveness," though forgetting not "Fruit Fear God" for we rightly remember that this remains art religion. "Life Without End." Amen. Amen.

What do you think we should do today, Gilbert?

Go for another round, George? That sounds splendid.

How about two more on the art world?

They may want women this time, but I do not believe I can oblige.

And I'm sure to get depressed and bloody sotted again and again. And I rather like screaming and yelling and dancing with you so we must just as well continue living our life's life.

We'll write and prepare for presentation another film and continue, too, not to talk about our art.

GILBERT & GEORGE: POMPOUS PANDERING

"Their life is delved from intense introspection and transposed through sexuality, militarism, religion, alcoholism, mental mania, social strappings, floral omnipresence, and youth — don't forget the youth lest it leave."

By April Rapier

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, recently hosted an exhibition entitled A Century of Black Photography: 1840-1960, curated by Valencia Hollins Coar. It coincided with African-American Photographers of the Southwest: 1850-1984 at Texas Southern University, an exhibition and series of special events.

BLACK PHOTOGRAPHERS

"The time span was enormous, the historical period complex, and the accompanying range of emotions spoke of an aesthetic comparable to any other place or time."

Blacks have been in the mainstream of photography from its beginnings. It is hypothesized that Jules Lion (French), working in New Orleans, might have brought the daguerreotype to the U.S. prior to the publication of Louis Daguerre's book in 1939. No aspect of life, no technique was omitted, although opportunity for study was minimal. The accomplishments are stunning.

These exhibitions are glorious and long overdue celebrations of photographers whose merit was overlooked because of the color of their skin. It is a tragedy that so many of the negatives, and miscellaneous data, all of vast historical importance, seem to be permanently lost.

In the case of the exhibition at the MFA, H, organized by the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, the country was combed in an exhaustive effort to seek out artists of local, national, and international reknown. Yet the task is a difficult and ongoing one. It is a broad historical overview, and does not pretend to be in any way complete. In fact, included in the catalogue is an index (by state) of photographers not exhibited, about which precious little is known. It is stated that the subject, its characters and any remaining records are in desperate need of further research. (Curiosity prompts the mention of a lack of female photographers.) The time span was enormous, the historical period complex, and the accompanying range of emotions spoke of an aesthetic comparable to any other place or time.

Many issues emerged in the course of putting together the ex-

hibition and catalogue. Attention was drawn (by the curator as well as Angela Davis and Michael Winston, among others) to the perpetuation of race labeling. Yet the very thing that caused this work to be so long overlooked by museums has now earned it a place in American history and art (a fact of little comfort to those photographers, scholars, and archivists who, for years, have been proponents of research and conservation efforts). It is also assumed that this limited number of artists is representative of a century of work that spanned geographical, financial, cultural, and educational diversities; that there is a unifying aesthetic to be extracted seems to be an impossible assumption. Practical considerations dominated the photography of the period, leaving behind far more studio and documentary-style examples than, say, photojournalistic or "fine art" experimentation. Yet the uniqueness lies in the subjectivity of the vantage point, the lack of sterile conformity. We learned so much more thanks to the artists' interjection of visual commentary. Perhaps this has to do with the high cross-over between painting and photography.

It is distressing that the exhibition travelled to only seven museums around the country. A body of work on the order of this beauty and importance should be fully accessible, most especially since its application is so varied, and offers so much to learn from. I was told that the catalogue is out of print, which further limits seeing a first hand viewpoint of history in clear and poignant terms.



George Krause

The second biennial photograph auction for the benefit of
HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

will be held on

Saturday December 8, 1984

at

Paradise Bar & Grill

401 McGowen at Brazos

Table sale begins at 11 am — Auction begins at 1 pm

Food and drink available from 11 am on

*Photographs by nationally known photographers
 as well as members of the Houston Center for Photography*

*Photographs for auction will
 be on exhibit at*

**HOUSTON CENTER FOR
 PHOTOGRAPHY**

as will

A Tribute to Ansel Adams

November 28-December 7

Opening: Wednesday, Nov. 28, 6-8 pm

*Please contact the Center (713-529-4755) if
 you wish to donate work to the auction.
 The auctioneer is Howard Zar, formerly of
 Sotheby Park Bernet, New York. A catalog
 will be printed and will be available at the
 Center. To have your work included in the
 catalog, we must receive it no later than
 October 14, 1984. Please mat prints.*

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