My wife is acceptable. Our relationship is satisfactory.

Edgar E.

Edgar looks splendid here. His poise and strength of character come through. He is a very private person who is not demonstrative of affection, which has never made me unhappy. I accept him as he is.

We are totally devoted to each other.

Regina Goldstone

Dear Jim: I pray you be as lucky in marriage!
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SPOT 2 WINTER 1984

The three-year fund goal is $180,000. To date, $145,000 has been pledged. 529-4755.
From the series: The Poor and Privileged of San Francisco, by Jim Goldberg. More on page 17.

PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS — A SPECIAL SECTION.

Diane Arbus, Anne Noggle, Larry Fink, George Tice, Cindy Sherman, Frederick Sommer, Marion Post Wolcott, British Photography, Health Hazards, Comments on Photography, California, Todd Webb, George Foss, David Hockney, and more.

Social Change and the Struggle Against Art, by Paul Hester. The uses and abuses of photography intended to bring about change.

Jim Goldberg: Rich Folks, Poor Folks, by April Raper. An essay in which both rich and poor seem unable to contain themselves.

O. Winston Link: Strange Visions, by Dave Crossley. An obsession with trains produced a powerful social document.

EXHIBITIONS. Reviews by April Raper.


Gall, Sonnenman, and Williams: Two Up, by Dave Crossley. An essay in which some people and some places are described.

One Down. Sally Gall, Eve Sonnenman, and Casey Williams at the Texas Gallery.

Peter McClean: Injected, by Dave Crossley. A look at some water towers and the inside of McClean's brain. At the Houston Center for Photography.

Boulevard Show: A Little Tired. This stalwart Houston annual exhibition didn't work out quite so well this year.

DELIGHTS

MESSAGES

About Paris and naked women and so forth, by Dave Crossley.

NOTES

News, tidbits, and unsubstantiated rumors.

CALENDAR

Exhibitions, lectures, workshops, competitions, events, clubs.

STAFF

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Contributing Editors: Paul Hester, Lynn McGahan, David Portz
Writers: Gay Block, Dave Crossley, Paula Goldman, Paul Hester, Lynn McGahan, Muffy McGahan, Barry Morrison, Edward J. Osewski, David Portz, April Raper, Debra Rueb, Charles Schorr, Sharon Stewart, Michael Thomas
Production: Karen Sadoff, Long, Michael Thomas, Theresa Ward, Danette Wilson

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MESSAGES

HOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT A MONTH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS IN PARIS MIGHT LEAD TO MADNESS IN HOUSTON AND A TEMPORARY CHANGE OF PRINTERS FOR THIS MAGAZINE.

ROADSHOW -
A PHOTOGRAPHIC CELEBRATION OF THE AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE

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NAKED IN PARIS

Paris is a wonderful place to have a huge photographic extravaganza. When Lynn McLanahan, the executive director of the Houston Center for Photography, and I went there for the Mois de la Photo (month of photography) in November, we found ourselves in a magical city of lights, good food and wine, and lots of breasts.

Our purpose there was to see as many of the 99 photographic exhibitions as possible, and to awaken ourselves to the organizer of the event by taking in about 60 shows in only six days. What we saw was a wild mix of social documentaries, conceptual work, fashion and movie portraits, bug and animal pictures, and lots of breasts. This breast business was a little confusing for us, two innocent Americans from a puritanical city in Texas. It seems that whenever Parisians have anything to communicate, they do it with breasts.

There were an uncommon number of nudes in all these shows, huge billboards on the Champs d’Elysees of a substantial and bare breasted woman advertising a film (which sparked some dry critical discussion on television, conducted in front of a copy of the picture, of course). Breasts popped out from countless magazines, gentlemen in cafes sipping coffee and admiring the big ones. The day in the newspaper, a series of self-portraits by an anorexic nude, and in a giant image at an exhibition a run with the bare breast offered forgiveness and peace.

This presents a problem for us here at SPOT. We went to Paris for two reasons: first to check out the event because we’ll have a piece here in Houston in the spring of 1986, and second to do a special section in the magazine on the work we would bring there. Twice in the past our printer has refused to print the magazine because we were proposing to publish pictures containing nudes. These have been expensive and nerve-wracking experiences. Wandering around Paris made it clear we would have to print the spring issue of SPOT somewhere else.

It also made us wonder what would happen at Houston’s month of photography (which, curiously is being called Foto Fest). Would we be surrounded by pictures of nude women and bugs and animals? What sort of themes would be developed? Oil and Space? Sun, Sand, and Sea? These are worrisome questions that seem to be answered in a way that will keep the thing from tipping toward chaos and boosterism. On the other hand, maybe if the theme is Breasts, everybody in Paris would come here and the town would bust out in a lot of hoop-la-la.

— Dave Crossley

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Although many questions were raised and many issues dealt with at the recent regional Society for Photographic Education conference in Amarillo, the recurring question to me was “Where’s everybody from Houston?” I began to wonder why our city is so poorly represented at regional and national SPE conferences, held annually. At these meetings, resources are shared, ideas tested, networks and friendships established. They are terrific opportunities to see photographs in all stages of development: students display portfolios alongside the work of NEA fellowship recipients.

Among the SPE’s 1500 members are people representing every aspect of photography: there are photo-historians and iconographers, teachers, strictly commercial as well as fine-art-oriented photographers, and students. The dynamics of such a diverse group are exciting and unpredictable. Our regional meeting (South-Central) had as its keynote speaker Barbara Crane, who talked eloquently about a lifetime of work, its attendant joys and difficulties. Another speaker was Joseph Jachna, who had a concurrent exhibition of his work at Amarillo College. Each showed a retrospective of slides. It is one thing to be familiar with the work of a well-known artist, it is quite different and more satisfying to see the work traced through a progressive history by that artist.

At another recent regional conference, in the Northeast, Houston Center for Photography President Gay Block was a program speaker. She is currently in a Boston exhibition entitled Four Photographers: Personal Associations. She began her talk by saying, “I grew up fat and rich,” thereby charming a slightly jaded audience. She treated them to a rather different sort of presentation, one devoid of guilt or pretension. The result was refreshing and revealing.

It is unfortunate that the finer things in life aren’t free, or even cheap — our national membership is forty dollars. But for that you get a subscription to the SPE magazine Exposure, and the opportunity to mix and mingle with our nation’s large photographic community. The conferences involve travel, lodging, and investment of time, but the experience is well worth the effort and expense. For information, write: SPE, Box 6651, FDR Post Office, New York, NY 10025.

— April Rapier
continued strength in grim reality: Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Beirut. There will be a nationwide shortage of resources, names to the lives of migrant workers, words of the state, and the terminally ill: look for a lot less sensitive treatments of these subjects. Depth of field softening toward March.

The promised analysis on a few points. Underwater camera sales are up 40 percent; not so with dive equipment or charters. The intelligent observer concludes either the rise of bathtub baby pics or that a lot of rigs are being dropped overboard by tumble-finned half-bred. The latter sounds right to me, so less live fish. Mergers are clamping down on corpses, and other morbid fascinations are suffering reversals too. So I'll stick my neck out: in early '85 we will neither be surprised, nor shocked. The conservative tide will wash in more nostalgia, a de-emphasis of the big picture and a tendency to view things in black-and-white. As for social consciousness, no one wants it, really. Get the picture!

— Visionary Joe

GOING FOR THE GOLD

The envelope, please. (Gosh, this is exciting.) Ahhnn, and the winners of the $25,000 National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowships for photographers go round: Lee Friedlander and Nathan Lyon. Well, two brother fellows probably couldn’t have been found. And in the $5,000 runner-up category — my gosh, there are 33 of them. Here’s some names everybody will know: Danny Lyon (social documents), Robert Mapplethorpe (anti-social documents), Susan Meiselas (El Salvador/Nicaragua), and Richard Misrach (color magic), not to mention Marilyn Bridges, Walter Chappell, Robert Fichter, Barbara Norfleet, Gilles Peres, Richard Prince, and Don Roder.

Meanwhile, at the $5,000 level, let’s applaud 39 more photographers whose pictures ranged from intimate sketches to dizzying panoramas containing a myriad of details and hundreds of microperspectives.

This brings the total of 117 of Hockney’s finest photographic “paintings”—mostly all of them reproduced in brilliant full color. With a prefatory essay (based on lengthy interviews with the artist) and biographical notes, Wescorcher explores Hockney’s ideas and working methods, and chronicles his relationship with photography.

— Alfred A. Knopf

A spectacular new book of 117 photocollages by David Hockney

CAMERA WORKS

Here—in a large (12 x 12), beautiful book—is a fascinating testament to the creativity of one of the leading artists of our time.

From March 1981 until June 1983, David Hockney spent virtually all his creative time in voracious experimentation with the camera.

He shot thousands of pictures, and in the end produced more than 350 photomontages—photographs created from intimate “sketches” to dizzying panoramas containing a myriad of details and hundreds of microperspectives.

This brings the total of 117 of Hockney’s finest photographic “paintings”—mostly all of them reproduced in brilliant full color.

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— Alfred A. Knopf

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DIANE ARBUS: ALIVE AGAIN

Diane Arbus: Magazine Work. Edited by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel. Published by Aperture, Millerton, New York, 1984. $35.00.


By Edward J. Ossowski

In a period only slightly longer than a decade, from the late 1950s to her death in 1971, Diane Arbus produced a body of work — individual photographs and group essays — that summarize the nervous, alienated, irrational poses we now realize define America at mid-century in the 20th century. That many of her images shocked us then with their directness and severity, with their apocalyptic overtones as one colleague has suggested, is no surprise. What is a surprise, however, is how many of these same photographs continue to demand our attention now, to engage us on two levels — the emotional and the intellectual — and attest to Arbus’ ability to move beyond the poses and restraints of her time.

The 1967 exhibition New Documents at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, included, in a room by themselves, thirty photographs by Arbus. Her biographer, Patricia Bosworth, describes Arbus’ participation in the exhibition as “probably the high point of Diane’s life.” In interviews and critical pieces that year the name Diane Arbus became a media commodity. In 1984, with Diane Arbus: A Biography by Bosworth and Diane Arbus: Magazine Work, a publication by Aperture and an exhibition circulated by Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas (to which Arbus’ Esquire photographs have been donated), Arbus again becomes a figure for study. Bosworth’s book appeared briefly on the “Bestseller List” of the New York Times, certainly not a place where one would expect to find a work dealing with an American artist. More surprisingly, film rights to the book were recently sold. That David Bowie, the rock singer, kept the book by his bed for night reading this summer, as he told an interviewer from Vanity Fair, proves beyond a doubt that Arbus is "in" right now.

What draws us to Arbus now and what was behind her particular vision? What was it that led her to photograph certain thematic groups — "eccentrics" (her term), families, celebrities? One turns to Bosworth’s Diane Arbus hoping that these, and other questions, will be answered. But Bosworth’s work suffers from an excess of information and a failure to organize this information into any coherent pattern.

The reason for this Boswellian documentation may be quite simple. Arbus’ two daughters, Doon and Amy, her ex-husband, Allan, and her close friend, Richard Avedon, all refused to cooperate with Bosworth. Diane Arbus, in fact, insisted that "the work speaks for itself," and denied permission to reprint any of Arbus’ photographs. Bosworth, thus, could not write an insider’s view or a critical study. Bosworth attempted to compensate for these refusals by securing the assistance of a huge group of people, including Arbus’ brother (poet Howard Nemerov), her sister and mother, as well as colleagues and mentors (John Szarkowski and Lisette Model), classmates, baby sisters, neighbors, models, and students. The number of "voices" Bosworth quotes is truly staggering and one can only guess at the work involved in tracking down some of her sources.

Born in 1923 to a wealthy family, Arbus was raised as a "Jewish princess," a friend confided to Bosworth, but romantically and defiantly threw over the comfortable life her parents wanted for her when she married Allan Arbus in 1946. With her husband, she formed a team of fashion photographers who were much sought after in the 1950s by magazines like Seventeen and Glamamour. She grew disillusioned with this fashion work and, as her marriage failed, evolved into a creative artist.

While Diane Arbus: A Biography is filled with all kinds of information, it presents a tone, disguised as "neutral," in which any single detail is no more important than any other. So we learn that Arbus was fascinated by her body smells and menstrual cycles; that, as a student riding to school on the subway, she forced herself to stare at the men who exposed themselves to her; that the apartment she and Allan Arbus shared was almost totally white; that she consumed her last meal (a roast chicken) with friends "ravenously," that, as a teenager, she used to stand on the ledge outside the living room windows of her parents’ apartment and dare fate, enjoying the thrill of knowing how close she was to danger. That Arbus lived constantly on the edge, that "terror" filled her life, and that she was drawn to the "perverse, the alienated, the extreme" precisely because she was this herself, are conclusions Bosworth leads us to but draws back from making herself.

If we grant Bosworth the creative freedom to include any details she wishes, then the neutrality of her tone might be acceptable. Not so neutral, however, is the manner in which Bosworth describes Arbus’ death by suicide in July, 1971. It is Arbus’ death that establishes her as a cultural icon, that makes her a Vincent Van Gogh for our times, that joins her with other famous dead from the 1960s and 1970s — Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton. This is how Bosworth voyeuristically describes the scene of Arbus’ suicide:

He found Diane lying, her wrists slit, lying on her side in the empty bathtub. She was dressed in pants
and shot — her body was already in "mid-movement." On her desk her journal was open to July 26, and as she reached for it she screamed "The last supper."

No other message was written, although the events around the notebook bore the air of several important decisions. There was a sense of conclusion to the series of events. But how did it all happen? What was the last supper? What was the meaning of the message? It was a question that remained unanswered.

Suwan, her hair glowing from the lights of the camera, was out in the studio. The television console is to her left and a sofa, on her right, is covered with a pink blanket. She seems to be in a dreamlike state, her body relaxed and unstrained. It is clear that she is aware of the camera's presence, but she is not engaging with it directly.

On her face there is a faint smile, a hint of a dreamlike quality. Her expression is calm and serene, but there is also a sense of unease, as if she is aware of something beyond the immediate moment. The scene is intimate and private, yet it feels like it is being shared with the viewer.

"And so...it begins..." she whispers softly, her voice barely above a whisper. "This is the last supper."

Suwan is seated at a table, surrounded by a group of people. She is dressed in a simple, elegant dress, and her hair is styled in loose waves. She is holding a small notebook in her hand, and she appears to be deep in thought.

"I have come to tell you something," she says, her voice filled with a sense of determination. "I have come here to make a decision."

She then proceeds to explain the events that have led her to this moment. She tells the group about the last supper and the message that was left behind. She talks about the significance of the events and the need to act quickly.

"We must act now," she says, her voice firm and resolute. "This is our last chance to save ourselves."

The group listens intently, their expressions serious and focused. They understand the gravity of the situation and are prepared to take action.

"We cannot afford to waste time," Suwan says, her voice filled with urgency. "We must act now."

The group nods in agreement, and they all stand up, ready to take the necessary steps to ensure their survival. The last supper has ended, but the story continues, as the group prepares to face the challenges that lie ahead.
LARRY FINK: A QUESTION OF ATTITUDE


By Dave Crosley

Just for a little bit of overstatement, let's say that Larry Fink's photographs are so wonderful it seems almost ridiculous that anybody else should even be trying. In this book, he has combined two series, one the six-year "black tie" project of photographing Washington, D.C., and the other the continuing project of photographing the working-class people of Martins Creek, Pennsylvania, where Fink lives.

Fink started making the black tie pictures with a decidedly bad attitude. "I began to photograph society benefits in New York, fueled by curiosity and my rage against the snobbish, privileged class — its abuses, voluptuous folds, and unfulfilled lives. I wanted to illuminate and lose myself in the dark spectrum of glitter," he writes in the book. He describes a nightmarish routine of forcing himself to go to the parties and affix to see his "political enemies," their surfaces shining with desire: his run-ins with everybody and each in mad genius as he is dragged around the room by his camera and flash. The pictures his camera made him take are so crisp and clear and rich in their tonality that his insistence made them while fueled by drink seems hardly credible. But how else could he have melted into the outrage? All these hooded eyes, the glassy glances, the nearly unconscious drunkenness amid the misplaced cummerbunds and starched shirts.

To see the young women, so beautiful, so poised, and then look at the older ones and know about their sickness and decline and project that future for those sparkling young debuts, well, a little drink is needed.

Not that the people of Martins Creek turn out to be pictures of health and spiritual wellbeing. We have a good deal of fat here, actually bloating flowing out to the edges of the frame. One is tempted to view this group of people the way Fink did, with lots of love and forgiveness and romancing of their simple but well-meaning lives. While he dislikes the rich, he keeps his distance from them. He never seems to know them, yet he admits he despises them. On the other hand, he gets to know these Martins Creek folks very well, learns plenty that is loathsome about them, yet won't get his dander up about them. He describes neighbor John Sabatine's stories as "a combination of hominoid racism and pure fantasy." He says Sabatine will "frighten you, betray you, befriend you, and shake you up however he can." Sounds like a nice guy. Like a rich, corporate monster.

I was surprised at how much I disliked the people in the Martins Creek pictures, and at my ambivalence toward the people in the black tie pictures. Like Fink, I imagine that I dislike the latter in principle (for their smugness) and the former in principle (for their self-sufficiency). But if the truth be known, Fink's affluent enemies, most of them anyway, are more appealing than the beer and spaghetti-stuffed folks of Martins Creek. It is a problem of civilization. I know these Martins Creek people. They're macho and without taste, they know few restraints, and if the older men told the younger men to go kill black people, they'd probably do it, and love it. The game that many of the socialites play is different, one of corporal warriors, attempting always to elevate oneself, particularly at the expense of others, a lesson taken again from the elders, who have discovered this astonishing secret to success. Curiously, among this group, many of the women look more dangerous than the men, who perhaps have simply learned to hide their ambitions behind the blank neutrality of the actor player. Obviously, these are more sweep- ing, ridiculous overstatements.

GEORGE TICE: IS LINCOLN RELEVANT?

Lincoln. Photographs by George Tice. Published by Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey. $37.95.

By Paula Goldman

George Tice has undertaken a great search for the tangible evidence of the memory of Abraham Lincoln across America. Inspired by Carl Sandburg's Abraham Lin- coln, Tice found Lincoln to be "the ideal man, a model for all men, especially Americans." Whether Lincoln's ideal continues to function today becomes the subject of these photographs.

Two-thirds of the beautifully executed 80+ view camera images present Mr. Lincoln's likeness as public commentary. As a suppliant figure in a public place, he is meant to be a reminder to society of great achievements through moral integrity. The statues vary greatly and eloquently in the standard government monument style; others are naive. Some have been copied in memory of dead soldiers or individuals, but most seem to honor the memory of Lincoln himself ("with malice toward none").

The images are carefully and artfully composed. Tice makes conscious juxtapositions between the old elegance of the monuments and, in the urban areas, the present. The statues are often dwarfed by large buildings and demeaned by litter. People are rarely present; the atmosphere is desolate. These statues are anachronistic. Is Lincoln an unsuitable symbol in 1984? Honest Abe may truly be forgotten, superseded by the urban sprawl. In only one situation, in a city park in Chicago, do humans use the statue more than do the birds. Lincoln seems comfortable with a child eating ice cream at his feet.

In Bunker Hill, Illinois, Lincoln is upscaled by a Shell Oil sign that is more recognizable than Lincoln himself. In Boston, he looks ridiculous, enunciating a kneeling slave in between a 5-hour laundry and the House of Pizza. Photographed from behind, a weary, seated Lincoln covered with graffiti in New Jersey, gazes across the street toward a Burger King.

The remaining third of the photos show Lincoln's absorption into popular culture. (Lincoln Cinema, Lincoln Cab, Lincoln-Douglas Savings & Loan, Lincoln Hotel with Abe's Disco). One photo features a Lincoln Continental. In the entertaining foreword, Tice recalls finding a penny at the Lincoln Auto Center in Lincolnwood, Illinois. "Lincoln was everywhere."

Tice is enamored with Lincoln's heroic image and his prevalence in the nation's iconography. He views the homages with affection and irony. But the question remains, does Lincoln's image represent anything to people today? Does Abe's Disco still conjure up the Emancipation Proclamation in people's minds? Or is Lincoln just such a likable hero that America feels comfortable with him in all facets of daily life?

CINDY SHERMAN: DRESSING UP


By Sharon Stewart

Cindy Sherman has come to the artworld a phenomenon unto herself. She has been deemed a photographer and a self-portraitist, labels she rejects although her entire work is her second personality. She is her own muse and her model, her mind’s memories hermessage. It is from a self-awoken curiosity that she has to look in the mirror and not recognize herself. She has played dress-up since she was a young girl. Sometimes, she would dress up in front of the mirror for three hours and then just disassemble the guises, but sometimes she would take her new self to a party. We the readers have been invited to quite a party of 89 persons in this book.

The first presented are her black and white Untitled Film Stills, many of which I first viewed in their mural form at Houston’s Contemporary Arts Museum in 1979. Their hugeness drew me in, making me feel part of the scene. Understandably some of that sensation is lost in the smaller book reproductions, but I still have fun being with her stereotypes—makeup and funky lighting, using gels to cast mood hues. Here she is baring the parentheses of life as well as the current androgyny. Either the characters are happy and mischievous or there is a devastated weariness about them. Cindy Sherman has commented that she has drawn her characters from old European films, fashion photographs, and that ubiquitous baby sitter, the TV. All these are hype media, handing us hyper-reality that is in actuality nonreality. We look at these images daily as a relief from our daily images. There are those who live their lives through these provided images; checking their status vs. the visceral mental images. And yes, we do create our own reality and there are multi-faceted meanings for doing such. Truly living, seeing the balance of the world, demands a rare perception that comes to those who have it not by miracle or magic, but by continuous probing and intense introspection.

Cindy Sherman has spent her twenties looking inside and outside herself and she has led many people along with her. She looks at herself; we look at her. And we have seen ourselves more than once in her over three hundred selves. She has evolved as these selves by spending her time alone, because of the ultimate control it brings. The irony of this state of solitude is that from it a magnificent vision has been created.

FREDERICK SOMMER: CLARITY OF THOUGHT

Sommer: Words and Images. Published by the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Two volumes in one slipcover.

By April Rapier

The set of art and writings by Frederick Sommer is the first book to be published by the Center for Creative Photography, and is the prototype of a concept devoted to "an artist’s integral participation in the content and design" (quoting CCP director James Enoff’s preface). The volume entitled Sommer: Images is a comprehensive retrospective of a lifetime of searching through the nature of creativity in a manner as intellectual as visual. The volume entitled Sommer: Words condenses years of that process, so dear and imperitive to Sommer’s philosophy, of verbalizing images.

He is not unique in this, as discussing one’s art has become an absolute in most circles; it is inexcusable to Sommer, however, to avoid or be unable to honestly and completely under-

spot 10 winter 1984
POST WOLCOTT: NEW INSIGHTS

Marion Post Wolcott: FSA Photographs. Introduction by Sally Stein. Published by The Friends of Photography, Carmel, California. $16

By Gay Block

The Friends of Photography has published the first monograph of important Farm Security Administra-
tion (FSA) photographer, Marion Post Wolcott. It contains 33 black and white prints, a fine introductory essay by Sally Stein, and a chronology of Post Wolcott's life and work.

The Stein essay accomplishes just what such a production should: it deciphers certain of the photo-
graphs, clarifying all the possible symbols to support the premise of Post Wolcott's strength and uniqueness. This makes for ex-
citing, eye-opening reading. Stein shows the ways in which Post Wolcott dealt with the sociologi-
cal and political themes of her time in a very specific way.

She still appears to be an ana-
omalous member of the FSA, one who uses photography not to con-
stitute an unenlightened pro-
cative departure from the domi-
nant themes of FSA photography.
COMMENNTARY
IN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY


By David Portz

Observations is the thirty-fifth among the Untitled series, a group of books published by the Friends of Photography and distributed to its members at the rates of $5 for the first five books. The series has included many monographs and picture-laden commentary, and only rarely volumes that are primarily text, such as this one. Observations is the collection of new essays on the development of American documentary photography, written by noted art historians and critics. While three of these essays deal with theoretical matters, the majority are devoted to observations on photographers who have shaped documentary photography as a tool for social change and as an art. Photographers treated include Eugene Atget, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand, Margaret Bourke-White, Helen Levitt, W. Eugene Smith, Robert Frank and Larry Burrows. The book is an extremely partial survey of documentary photography up to the time of Burrows's death in the Vietnam war.

Beaumont Newhall's essay, placed first in the book, suggests that a photographic aesthetic is distinguished from other photography because it is concerned with the human condition and because it provides commentary, if not in the picture itself, then through accompanying text. Mr. Newhalls attribution of humanistic, interpretive functions to photography is juxtaposed with the second essay, by Bill Jay, Mr. Jay reroutes us from interpreting a photograph to the qualities that interest him personally. The only issue he raises is the possibility that the photographer's intentions are hidden from the viewer. The viewer is left with the role of connoisseur, observer and reader to discover clues to the artist's intentions.

Mr. Strand, while having similar intentions, allowed himself to be distracted from his social message by attention to formal beauty and craftsmanship. Strand used the "beauty of the print, as much if not more than emotional engagement with the subject." To make the viewer acknowledge its importance, Mr. Strand placed Walker Evans, who never strove to be a social protest artist, as the most extreme among the four in giving priority to art over politics.

The formal, or "order, clarity," which characterized Evans's photos, however, gave them "that basic directness and bleakness echoing perfectly the mood of the times that can be achieved only by a documentary photographer.

At another extreme among these documentarians, Mr. Lewis W. Hine, the most photographed of the photographers, was least concerned with the subjects of his photos for magazine viewing. Her agenda for dramatic and commercially viable photographs led her to eliminate competing and contradictory facts from her pictures, creating instead an easily read appeal to her viewers' emotions. Bourke-White also monkeyed with captions and quotes, and hence lost the credibility of the more respected documentarians of the time.

Alan Trachtenberg reexamines the photographs in Walker Evans's book, American Photographs, in order to determine what concept of America is conveyed. Following the book's publication in 1938 -- and according to Mr. Trachtenberg, as far as the present -- observers have considered the photographs an inventory of American reality circa 1935. Mr. Trachtenberg concludes from his examination of the first five photographs of the book that Evans reinvented America with a particular history and culture represented by such emblems as autos, racism, patriotism, and war. Evans consciously showed the craft of documentary photography being used to gather and save the constituent parts of a fictive nation. The most stimulating essays are those, like the next three by Kozloff, Johnson, and Johnstone, which chart careers and discuss the qualities of specific works. Max Kozloff considers Helen Levits's A Way of Seeing to be exemplary in the tradition of street photography. The book contains pictures taken in New York City ethnic neighborhoods during the heat of summer, when people are in the city. The recurrent depiction of people touching enabled Ms. Levits to shape her narrative. Kozloff prays Levitt's use of space in the photograph to "lay an empa- thetic charge" for, example, a picture of children playing communi- cates their total absorption in the game. Though the pictures have a mid-1940s chronology, their "emotional time-zone" is capable of extending even to the present day. Among the achievements of the book as a documentary work, it gathered external gestures that attached human value to an interior life, the psychological and emotional interpersonalities of people. William S. Johnson treats two of the photographs in Outrageous L.A., "Outrageous L.A. Photographs by Robert Landau and John Paulding, published by Chronos Books, San Francisco. 1984. Paperbound, $8.95

Outrageous L.A. Photographs by Robert Landau and John Paulding. Published by Chronos Books, San Francisco. 1984. Paperbound, $12.95


By David Portz

Some books in the bookstore get all the attention they deserve. Chronicle Books of San Francisco seems to make a specialty of these books, that ride the long wave of California jingoism. California Crazy, for example, collects photos of those roadside stands ever since our encounter with the West Coast but now mostly gone: buildings shaped like pumpkins, for instance, or hot dogs, or ice cream cones, coffee pots, or airplanes. Another section of the book gathers photos of the buildings that utilized non-European, traditional motifs, such as the Mayan Theatre or Gramaria's Egyptian. The introduction fails to clearly define the term for the style of these relics, Programmatic Architecture, but succeeded -- relating their history, their disparity among the high art crowd, and their revival under the advocacy of architect Robert Venturi. For California in U.S., architectural history, or perhaps a chapter and its sequel, this book is a worthy glance.

If looking at California Crazy is equivalent to looking at twenty minutes of MTV, then Outrageous L.A. is equivalent to standing in line ten minutes to see a Brooke Shields film. Outrageous asserts that Los Angeles is voluminously odd, and while that may be true, the pictures don't prove it. There is nothing outrageous about palm trees, brightly painted walls, or night shots of neon signs. The presentation relies heavily on hackneyed captions, and the photos provide new ammo to reactionary still grousing over the mindless seduction of color. Better books within the class of Crazy and Outrageous ask you why you aren't a frier more emaciated. "Wouldn't you be less still and more if you hadn't such values like beauty or truth, you felt the human rhythms of the sensational present?" California From The Air asks no such question: only "Why don't you own a pair of glasses?" While photographs show natural coastal features, plus the impact of man: refineries and oil wells, encroaching communities and seaside condos, amusement parks, and surfer havens. Interesting is the "system" the book -- nineteen persons offer coastal captions, including an oceanographer, lighthouse keeper, coastal guard officer, and a photographer for Surfing. There is a love of the land and the sea communicated in a film -- but it is still only book-store viewing. Buy a photographic classic instead.

SPOT

12 WINTER 1984
By April Rapier


The book presents a provocative introduction and presentation, and in the immediacy of this image, the possibility that liberties are being taken. In fact, Webb and O'Keeffe are old friends, and, in Webb's words, the book is a collection of "snapshots of a friend and her surroundings..." that encourages it. This is a provocative way to initiate a voyage into Ms. O'Keeffe's habitat, her sanctuary. What intention prompted such a promising and potentially enormous undertaking? There simply is no indication of a collision in the images, although the bibliography (part of a vast listing, in large typeface, of a selected resume — a pretentiously laid-out addendum) certainly hints at it.

Sadly, the collection has a solemn, after-the-fact feeling to it, in which the images were made after 1969. The gap betrays a homogeny without the intimacy of continuity. It is the Southwest landscape — Vedanta, in the five-color space, color, and simplicity — that dominates the pages. In a recent interview, in the Public Radio, he talked about the years during which he learned to handle the light, so different from that in the East; yet even that critical element is downplayed disadvantageously. The reproductions are not top-notch; that, however, doesn't excuse the overall drabness of the pictures. Their empty dullness seems to portend age and fragility. Ms. O'Keeffe never saw the Southwest as barren — her interpretations were filled with color and life. Although Webb carefully documented her terrain, her haunts, a lifetime's worth of paintings, her perspective is not clearly felt. The ubiquitous skulls and bones, slashes of light, clean lines referred to do not conjure up her strength. It is an artist's rendering. It is through the images of her living and studio spaces that the most precious and valuable information is imparted: those places where she has spent time have absorbed a great deal of her energy and character, and thus have the clearest voice. The details of her life are presented as posed tableau, and this does justice to the care with which she arranges her physical world. She senses the sparseness, but does not translate it as mere. Many of the pictures seem set up for me what I would imagine her own sketchbooks to be filled with. Although she has been obsessively photographed over a lifetime, she remains enigmatic, a bit more spiritual than elaborate. Ms. O'Keeffe's participation strikes me as the occasional, good-natured indulging of an old friend, a distant friend. As she ages, one is tempted to be sentimental, but her stance discourages this, as do her surroundings. As Webb photographs her movement through the desert, the unforgiving terrain seems to acknowledge her passage. Yet, she is always alone, unable to escape from the film plane — she doesn't seem aware of Webb. The insight of communication is omitted. The pictures that approach intimacy seem only passive, or at worst, apolitical. Given the opening statement in her book of paintings entitled George O'Keeffe, "Where I was born and where and how I have lived is important. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest..." the difficulties may not be entirely the photographer's fault. The most powerful image in the book, plate 40, is also the most subtle, and least intentionally dramatic: a glimpse of her admiration for Juan Hamilton's sculpture, expressively touched by a hand that appreciates completely. (It is also Webb's favorite.) She is placed in front of a picture window, and the vista easily transforms into a painting in the viewer's imagination.

It is to Webb's credit that the portraits in no way emulate Stezitz's long study of Ms. O'Keeffe. On a few occasions since that era has she chosen to present herself to the camera. Fleeing passes cannot help but show her magnificence and strength of will. But the feeling that she is determined not to give herself to the photographs results in her reduction to turfistic glimpses; there is a stubbornness to the pictures that is circular and curiously self-fulfilling. There is value in Webb's attempts, and fatigue in Ms. O'Keeffe's patient resistance. The result is representational, neutral. However, any record of her life is of absolute value. Her self-containment compels us, unwillingly, our curiosity is satisfied.

By Debra Rueb

New York/New York is a book of black and white photographs made by George Forss, whom David Douglas Duncan discovered selling prints one day on the sidewalks of Manhattan. Awe-struck by the masterful images he saw of New York City, Duncan spent hours arranging the photographs and writing the text for this book. George Forss is a simple and poor man who taught himself photography with some instruct-ions from his mild-mannered mother, whom he lives with and cares for. Forss prints at night and by day sells his photographs on the side walk for $3 to $4 per dollar prints. Forss' work of New York City is compared by Duncan to Arno and Garry Winogrand's. Forss has attained a mastery of his craft: he has juxtaposed form and content, lines and light to achieve a vision of New York that transcends all others. The photographs show the experience of the city in the buildings, streets, and rivers. Through double exposure he creates a feel of the hustle of the city and the people, though he never focuses on pho- tographing people. He has a true Cinderella story of a modest man's discovery and success in bringing his vision to the eyes of millions.

DAVID HOCKNEY: A CHALLENGE


By Michael Thomas

Thus speaks our subject-author, the artist and born-again photographer. "Today people don't draw that much. They use the camera. My point is, that they're not truly, perhaps, expressing what it was they were looking at...to share the experience, to make it vivid to someone else." (My italics)

It seems an endless, circular argument to make in the way of discussing artistic inspiration by comparing artist to photographer. Yet David Hockney has for that very reason discovered, or should I say, re-discovered, the artistic significance of photography as a valid art form.

Hockney began using photographs as a means to study layouts for paintings in 1972. Since then he has produced over 120 volumes of studies, and recorded countless photographic works. Yet throughout such an intensive and ongoing process Hockney has seemed to uncover more than just a wonderful photographic collection of personal worth. He has in fact brought the photography into the artistic process as an integral consideration. It was impossible for Hockney to merely shoot one photograph of a particular subject. He felt untune to his intentions in that subjects would become less real than his memory to paint them would require. Perspective seemed incorrect and the artistic vision of reality was thus incomplete. Hockney's experiments seemed to point to a list of modern photographic concerns facing both aesthetic and technical issues, one of which is that the time experienced through the lens during conception never equalled the same time within the final print. The more time spent to make the photograph the more time it would express.

Hockney's final works are photographs of different views combined to make one composition that comes as close to the ideas within his paintings as possible. In some instances as many as 187 separate photos are combined to produce one work. The result of such an artistic emotion not only brings the viewer closer to the actual Hockney's mind during composition never equalled the same time within the final print. The more time spent to make the photograph the more time it would express.

Hockney's final plate of the book, #177, reinforces idea by presenting both a drawing and photograph together within one composition. Happily this is a clue to future work. Following the final plate is a full two-page spread of color negatives. In an almost personal way Hockney seems to include these in order to reinforce the idea that his pho- tography is primarily used as a tool. Yet I would highly recommend the examination of each plate along with careful consideration of the text to anyone concerned about the future of modern photography.
briefly noted


Looking at Metzker’s life work is amply proof of his influence. Spending much time with this book (or the retrospective exhibition it accompanies) is bound to reveal how many photographers have worked in the Metzker style. Metzker is a meticulous worker who has done little to taint his own horn. Anne Tucker has done him and the field a great service by organizing and presenting this work of twenty-five years. What Metzker has to say in his “Nineteen” should prove to be an inspiration to many confused photographers. He is a man for whom photography is, not an end but a thing as life.

(A review of this book and the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston will appear in the Spring issue of SPOT.)


There’s a little scope to this book, published in conjunction with Penn’s retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. One flounders around looking for successors to Steiglitz, Steichen, Strand, and Weston, and more often than not the suggestion is made that Penn is one, or might be if Penn were not so reticent. Szarkowski says, “Penn’s private, stubborn, artistic solitude has revised our sense of the world’s content.” His essential work is Spartan in its rigor, in its devotion to the sober elegance of clarity, in the high demands it makes of us regarding pose, grace, costume style, and the definition of our selves.”

In any event, Penn has done it all years, he made many successful images with Eleanor as center piece. It’s interesting that the pictures begin to lose their personality when he includes in them their daughter, Barbara, and that Eleanor herself actually begins to lose her solidity after Barbara appears.


Of the forty photographs in this book, twenty-three are not portraits, which must account for the title. Everything’s in here, heto skelter: “An American Place,” Steiglitz’s pictures from the window, the slob, thirteen pictures of Mr. Norman, one of John Marin, another of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, moonflowers, and so on. There is much mysticism in the introduction. Mark Holborn says of Ms. Norman, “It was Coomaraswamy who introduced her to the concept of the self-perfect, such as the Chinese ‘ji’ the jade disc in the center of which is a pierced circle. When pointed towards the heavens the vision focused through the center drew the view to the point of light, so bringing heaven and earth.” The Norman and Steiglitz images are interspersed without credits (except in a list at the back of the book) as if to say Ms. Normans are as one with Mr. Steiglitz. Holborn says, “The ‘Y’ and ‘you’ of the relationship dissolved until she became his other self and the dual identity found its resolution.” That must have been pretty unsettling.


Nicholas Nixon’s photographs certainly get started the right way: they are so smooth and appealing, one feels required to spend time with them, and is fairly rewarded. Although he enjoys gaining groups of people together, usually on porches, there are no villains among his hundreds of characters, as Robert Adams points out. The photographs are taken with an 8x10 camera, which makes all the more remarkable the wonderful ease with which Nixon’s subjects array themselves. Nixon, like Larry Fink, explores precious views.


This is just terrific stuff, if you like this kind of stuff. Pure information, mind-boggling revelations about how things got done.


Six hundred and seventy-two pages. Thirty-four hundred words. The ICP has come a long way. Everything and everybody from Abbé Ernst to Zworykin, Vladimir Kosma. In an appendix, many contemporary photographers are acknowledged, as are many long deceased other luminaries, such as Lewis Carroll.

Requiem. Photographs by Steven Arnold. Published by Twitweeters Press, Reseda, California, $20 soft cover.


Hard to figure. Urban street scenes, shadows, blurred figures. A sense of mystery attempts to be communicated.

Las Vegas, New Mexico: A Portrait. Photographs by Alex Truax with a text by E.A. Mares. The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Thank God a book of sepia-toned Widelux photographs of Las Vegas, New Mexico, now exists.


So much of our time being recorded in photographs and here is a lot more. There are eighty-five large color illustrations including three-page panoramic foldouts. The introduction relentlessly refers to Robert Frank’s The American Road. He calls this book a shares almost nothing. Still, they’re pretty pictures. The book also incorporates the usual imitating a conventional of putting the captions all together on pages far from the photographs. Why is that?

Landscape Photography: The Art and Techniques of Eight Modern Masters. Amphoto. $27.50.

Boy, these guys have all the filters figured out, and Franco Fontana has everything figured out. Luscious stuff, good enough for a Cokin catalog.

The Evolution of the Japanese Camera. Published by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

There have been a great many Japanese cameras, haven’t there? A lot of them are in here, including what looks like a Coca Cola can. If you need to know about Japanese cameras, this appears to be the book for you.

Alternates. Photographs by Kacumi Kurgomi. Published by Azell, New York, $17.50 soft cover.

Millions of strange, perhaps erotic, pictures taken to fulfill advertising needs. Adventurous fashion photographers should look at this.


Two of many astonishments: to see across 131 years a “Fallen Horse on the Isle de la Cite” and to learn that, while Henry Fox Talbot made his first photograph in 1835 on a sheet of paper, with light appearing as dark and vice versa, it took him until 1840 to make the conceptual leap that the paper “negative” could be used to make a paper “positive.” Thus was born the calotype and photography.


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SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ART

Books referred to in this discussion of photography and social change:


By Paul Heeter

"A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate brainwashing and aesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs stories to fill in the other, smaller amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The camera's ability to create subjective reality and to objectify it, ideally, serves these needs and strengthens them. Cameras define reality in two ways essential to the working of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires the unlimited production and consumption of images."

― Susan Sontag, writing in On Photography

The central problem for photographers actively involved in the necessity of social change is the function of the presentation of images that refuse to support the status quo. This refusal is deemed an act of solidarity with the form of documentation of particular social conditions.

Our social situation, however, is continually interpreted for us by television, newspapers, magazines, and advertising. In order to challenge this dominant interpretation, it becomes necessary to invent new forms of active refusal. Several recent publications thoughtfully explore the possibilities of photography for social change.

A new catalogue from the Milwaukee Art Museum, Photography and Reform: Lewis Hine and the National Child Labor Committee, places photography and social change in an historical perspective. In it, the authors write: "Like most reform organizations of the early twentieth century, the NCCL began its labors with research and publicity in accordance with the well-defined goal of success in reform work depended on the support of public opinion. Reformers thought that the way to bring the people to their particular crusade was to bombard them with facts. Often these facts had social precedents and to educate them about the causes and solutions of the evil.... They knew that only extraordinarily persistent propaganda could wear away public indifference. Moreover, they fully understood that many people had a significant economic stake in perpetuating child labor."

Hine was employed by the NCCL as a full-time investigator from 1908 to 1918. Unlike the way in which we have come to think of his photographs and in contradiction to the manner in which they are most frequently presented, his photographs "were not independent sources of evidence, but supplementary visual documentation.... They were integral parts of his own written history."

This small catalogue-long a key in Hine's photographs with the original textual information which was intended to expand the viewers' understanding of the conditions in which the visualized individuals functioned. Two essays discuss Hine's position within the larger issue of reform movements in the early years of the century and give details of his working methods during his employment by the NCCL.

The general attitude of the catalogue, however useful it might be for publishing these images from the collection of the Milwaukee Art Museum, is apparent in two quotations:

"As they exposed the conditions and consequences of child labor in America, these photographs humanized the laborers. For enlisting the support of the middle class, the primary group at which the NCCL crusade was aimed, this humanization was vital. Hine composed his photographs to allow middle-class viewers to look through unfamiliar and sometimes brutal activities and surroundings to see that the children of the poor were not unlike their own.... In his efforts, Hine revealed something of his own soul in his photographs.... "Hine's position is now secure as a master of photography in America and the creator of compelling images of people at work and the dignity of children in distressed circumstances.... Hine's photographs summarize the cruelty of child labor, its useless toil, and its destruction of human potential. Typical spinners like Mamie may be gone, but the humanity in Hine's child labor images remains with us."

In order to understand the (not so) subtle transformation of social reformer into master of photography that has occurred here (and in the work of numerous other photographers), it is helpful to investigate other recent books. Thinking Photography is a pro- active collection of essays. Of particular interest in relation to Hine is "The Image of Photographic Meaning" in which Allan Sekula analyzes the popular opposition of "art photography in documentary photography" through a photograph by Alfred Stieglitz and one by Lewis Hine. His main thesis is the way in which "the meaning of a photograph, like that of any other entity, is inevitably subject to cultural definition.... In other words, the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the possibility of meaning.... The romantic artist's compulsion to achieve the condition of music is a desire to abandon all contextual reference and to convey meaning by virtue of a metaphysical substitution. In photography this compulsion requires an incredible denial of the image's status as a report.... the invention of the 'photographer of genius' is possible only through a disassociation of the image-maker from the social embeddedness of the images. The invention of the photographic subject as high-art was only possible through its transformation into an abstract entity, into a thing in itself."

Sekula's position is both an analysis of the means by which photography is employed in its aesthetic objects and a critique of the rhetoric of liberal reform. The celebration of abstract humanity becomes, in any given political situation, the celebration of the dignity of the passive victim. This is the final outcome of the appropriation of the photographic image for liberal political ends; the oppressed are granted a bogus subjectivity when such status can be secured only from within, on their own terms.

In another essay entitled "Disdaining Modernism, Reweaving Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Repression)" that appeared in a recent issue of Artforum, Sekula states even more succinctly the problems of traditional approaches to reform photography: "[Fred] London is aware of the fact that many liberal avant-garde artisans have converted violence and suffering into aesthetic objects for a number of intentions, for example, Eugene Smith in Minamata provided more a representation of his compassion for mercury-poisoned Japanese fishermen than one that could resist or change the structural distribution against the corporate polluter. I'll say it again: the subjective aspect of liberal esthetics is compassion..."

Dead Child in Rubble. Spain, 1936, by Robert Capa, who also says in the book The Concerned Photographer, "and the fine hope more often then (sic) not ends like this."

Photography "transforms political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation. It becomes an article of Union." — Walter Benjamin

WHY THIS DOUBLE STANDARD?
One New England Corporation. Owns Colton Mills In Georgia and Massachusetts

In Massachusetts They Employ

In Georgia They Employ

What a Reflection On

Immigrant Children 8 years old and upward

10 Hours a Day.

Native Children 8 years old and upward

11 Hours a Day.

In Massachusetts

In Georgia

Eugene Smith in Minamata

Robert Capa

Spri"
Children rescued from a house destroyed by a 1,000-pound bomb in Managua. They died shortly after. By Susan Meselas

Children rescued from a house destroyed by 1,000-pound bomb near다고。Processed for protection. The next morning, the neighbors started screaming that a rocket had fallen nearby. The shocked, ripped apart the street. It was awful. We spent the whole day just counting the motters. [Image of children]

Neighborhood bomb shelter under coat inniation of Managua. June 1979

Sandwiches on a daily menu in a poor neighborhood.

The Frozen gave no leaflets telling us how to make bomb shelters. We have been children, so any husband would eat all up put down two by two in the living room, to wash them we would all sit. We dig it there—five yards wide and three yards deep. We put wooden boxes and over everything and over the top and used parts of the box. The box itself was a wooden box. We didn’t want to die just because we hadn’t made it right.

At five o’clock the neighbors started screaming that a rocket had fallen nearby. The shocked, ripped apart a door across the street. It was awful. We spent the whole day just counting the motters. [Image of children]

Part of typical page from back of Meselas book.

[Image of children]

rather than collective struggle. Pity, mediated by an appreciation of great art, supplants artistic understanding.

When you look at a book such as The Concerned Photograph (which includes the work of Werner Bischof, Robert Capa, Kertész, Leonard Freed, David Seymour, and Dan Weiner), it is easy to see this process at work. Four of the six photographers had been dead at least ten years by the time of the book’s publication. Images are reproduced one to a page and captions are relegated to the fine print at the back of the book. The captions are limited to “Dead Child in Rubble, Spain, 1936.” But where is the information about the fascists bombarding Germany and Italy that supported Franco’s attack against the democratically elected government of Spain? Either it is assumed that people have the his- torical knowledge or else too much is avoided. The result is to deny any cause and effect; pity replaces political understanding.

Still photographers have tended to believe naïvety in the power and efficacy of the single image. Of course, the monumental handling of photographs encourages this belief, as does the allure of the high-art commodity market. But even photojournalists like to imagine that a good photograph can punch through, overcome its caption and story, on the power of vision alone. The power of the overall commu- nicative system with its characteristic redundancy of words of address, over the fragmentary utterance, is ignored. (Sekula)

In contrast to this reliance on single images, consider the book Nigrovo by Susan Meselas. Although here, too, images have been produced one to a page and captions are again separate from the primary presentation, small black and white reproductions with captions accompany the chronology and text that make up one third of the book. A map places the names in relation to the whole of Central America and quotations from as far back as 1980 indicate the positions him of the People of America, governments, peasants, workers, newspaper editor, hus- bands, President Somoto. Statistics of unemployment, literacy and health are presented alongside poems. Great effort has been made in order that we see the color of these photographs in a social context rather than as front-page headlines or the usual photo- grapher’s monograph. As John Berger has written: “These ex- tradition of photographs take us right inside a revolutionary move- ment and speak on behalf of its participants. Yet unlike most photo- graphs of such material, these refuse all the rhetoric normally associated with such pictures: the rhetoric of victory, revolutionary heroism, and the glorification of misery. Here we have the feeling of real people, members of a real community. And this community has reached as much as any other kind of medium inevitably give way to the sense of a world without a place of signiﬁcant personal political choice. Publicity helps to make and com- pense for all the world underdetermined within society.”

The necessary image is de- scribed as “a volume of work by artists who are concerned with the telling of a dichotomy between public and personal significance, insofar as the meaning of the public image ultimately depends on the context in which it is presented. It is a way of producing a critical analysis and commentary to direct attention and construction, the artists offer readings and re- readings of the realizations of the real events in the public domain.” Among the works is an analysis of a corporate photographic advertisement of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Information Center: “We are persuaded to be con- some makers of technology, Passive, in a theater of activity— the language used in a conveyer of goods there is there is certain objectively, inviting, straitlaced, and the bag. But in such forms, its inflow of the language of the time, we are not looking at the experience of the behavior in the way that the demands of the rhetoric of truth, and attempts to inform us that events or phenomena occurring around us endanger our lives. The tacit accusation that we are cooperating in our own defeat is certain to fathom when read in the armchair or at the kitchen table of our own lives.”

Art and ideology was an exhibition by The New Museum of Contem- porary Art, New York, 1984. Five curators were each asked as two part of the exhibition that includes essays by each of the cura- tors, reproductions of the artists’ work, an essay on the artists, and a catalogue. In the catalogue, growers, Lippard writes, “The theory that is used in the artwork interchange- able with the word ‘political’ to describe the artists’ work. The artists are not, of course, only concerned with the word, but the political and right were so secure in their dominance that they had no need of such things. I’ll use this term as do the artists’ I’ve selected, in its activist sense, though by doing so, I risk prolonging that mood of subtle redacting that also so often accompanies this kind of work. Yet the aesthetic — Bourgeois ideology — that propa- gated, and the complicity of the artists who barely recognize that such is — is made to appear more dangerous in the hands of its creator. The activist definition is fundamentally critical. It analyzes what we looks in what we imagine — what we hides, and how it can be used to our ends.”

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh writes in the same book, “This position which is understood as a problematic and is conducive to ‘de- dam of the matter of the social and political reality’ and it consists in a dialogue of radical critique and tendencies to dismantle the very central- izations within institutions which it is contained, contained, and isolated as a discursive practice...” It will be clear that this work must lack the essential quality that has defined art throughout its history: the experi- ence of disinterested pleasure...”  

The New Museum is a collaboration of contemporary artists who currently receive the attention of the ap- pretentious and the pious. This is a more blatant and profound insight into the current mode of art practice and the pleasure and reactionary power... We recognize, after all, that it is our society that makes possible as they can be fulfilled by contem- porary art production which are the products of a number of elements of dominant ideology like all other structures of social, political and the moral code, religious belief, family structure and the construc- tion of aesthetic and political relations, and the attainment of aesthetic desire and aesthetic pleasure that guarantee the role of the unconscious modes of perceptual and cognitive understanding.

Much of the inspiration for in- dividuals quoted in these books can be found in the work of Benjamin, the German critic and philosopher who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s. The initial essay in Thinking Photography is a translation of an address which he delivered in Paris to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in 1934, “The Author as _Produced_” in which he discusses the difficulties of being a writer within existing social structures and the question of their ability to assimilate revolu- tionary themes without seriously compromising the integrity of their operation. He calls for a rethinking of the nature of the conventions of image and form and forms appropriate to the literary energy of the time. In particular he sees the New Objectivity movement as an advance towards new, poetic and more modern...
I love David. But he is too fragile for a rough father like me.

Jenny J. Denker

Photographs by Jim Goldberg

By April Rapier

Jim Goldberg, whose work was exhibited at HCP from October 19 through November 25 (with C. Winston Lim and Janice Rubin), has been involved in an eight-year (ongoing) project photographing the "poor and privileged of San Francisco." He holds an MFA (1979) from San Francisco Art Institute, studied theology as an undergraduate: he is the recipient of an NEA photographer's fellowship (1980) and the Ruffttenberg Fellowship from the Friends of Photography (1983). Goldberg's exhibition record is impressive, including the OK Harris Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art exhibition Three Americans with Robert Adams and Joel Sternfeld. He currently holds a one-year teaching position at the University of Massachusetts. He is 31.

When asked to discuss the origins of the project and the force behind its continuing virtually uninterrupted for this length of time, it becomes clear that the impetus was political. Goldberg mentions the need to address the stereotypes that accompany these loaded designations. Beginning with the residents of a home for indigents (although he says that as a starting point this is irrelevant, it would have to color somewhat his work with the privileged), Goldberg first photographed the subjects, then returned with proof prints for feedback. (Their formality gives the impression that they are treated less as people than subjects, providing a necessary emotional distance.) When a definitive image was arrived at, he returned again to gather statements of reaction. He then edited the statements and had the subjects write this stolidly composed form in their own hand to be juxtaposed onto the final print. The impact is extremely powerful, the handwriting being quite influential and starting. Goldberg thus intends the viewer to look at cliches and preconceived notions and the way they are challenged. The photographs are revealing with regard to individual conditions; the difficulty lies in ascertaining the photographer's point of view, assumed, at least, to be non-judgmental. They are informative and emotionally weighted, yet Goldberg's neutrality leaves one with an ambivalent point of departure. It is not a question of a motive - compassion courses through these photographs. Could all eight years worth of inventory present such a terrifying image? Both rich and poor seem unable to escape heavy-handed irony; all seem preoccupied with the same issues: money, health and aging, status, motivation, victimization, self-pity. Both sets of people deal with their issues categorically, oblivious to any reality norm.

Stereotypes, after all, exist to reinforce personal opinion. Very few unilateral stereotypes have survived unchallenged, having been over-examined into oblivion. The salient features here - wealth and poverty - become indistinguishable beyond overt symbols. (The use of black and white tames wealth and exaggerates poverty.) These circular conclusions at once confuse and cement the images in our memory. To the extent that they incite and direct such vehement response, it is somewhat difficult to read beyond the initial shock of the image. The only upbeat experience lies in unearthing layer after layer, linking words and elements within the frame. So many questions and possibilities surface. Wealth is as unbecoming as poverty - the poor are obese and dirty, the rich well-kempt, and both are ugly.
O. Winston Link: Strange Visions

The following is a review of the exhibition Ghost Trains: Railroad Photographs of the 1950s, by O. Winston Link. Organized by the Akron Art Museum, this presentation of the exhibition was at the Houston Center for Photography, October 19–December 2.

By Dave Crossley

At first glance, O. Winston Link’s photographs of steam locomotives, taken in the mid to late 1950s, seem to be simple, historic images of a simple, forgotten time. Obviously, they are about trains, but the environment is often more interesting than the locomotive. Many are strange juxtapositions in which trains pass behind curious foregrounds: a young couple snuggle together in a buck convertible at a drive-in movie as the Hot Shot Eastbound comes roaring out from behind the movie screen, which incidentally has a huge image of a Korean War-era jet on it; the same couple sits in the same car at a gas station while an old rural character pumps gas into their tank, and a train flashes by in the background, just yards away from the people, who are utterly oblivious; yet, teenagers lounge, studiously poised, hair perfectly coiffed, at the edge of a municipal swimming pool, with a train and etc.

There are kids in Old Swimming Holes with trains, cows being brought home with train, old folks talking on porch with train, man gathering firewood with train. In this group of pictures, the trains seem almost incidental to the wonderful little vignettes, which Link has invented and usually photographed at night with hundreds of flash bulbs in multiple-bulb units tied together as by as much as three-quarters of a mile of wire, powered by complex battery systems through even more complex electrical circuits, with enough batteries (more than one) and bulbs fired by radio control.

Some of these pictures are very funny. Did O. (for Ogie) Winston Link intend them to be funny? Or did his background as a commercial photographer, with such clients as Tevaco, Alcoa, and The BF Goodrich Company, naturally lead him to complicate his pictures with American Dreams and all the available technology of the time? Is this an artist who photographs a couple from the back standing on a porch watching the last steam passenger train pass in the distance? Or is it a studio photographer who has put flash units all along the tracks (the lights are visible as little black dots in many of the pictures), more near the camera to light up the porch, and yet another one on the ground somewhere in front of the couple to provide a rim light for the woman’s hair? Why are so many of them shot at night! Is it because Link worked the same way one works in the studio, building light from blackness, instead of going out into the day to see what light there is? Curator Carolyn Carr, writing in the catalogue (published by the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia), compares Link’s efforts to those of Carleton E. Watkins who, in an earlier time, hungered huge cameras up mountains to make pictures that could be made no other way. For a picture called “Gooseneck Dam and No. 2,” Link described formidable obstacles to photo-taking: the train running on the far side of a river, with the water cascading off the dam all across the bottom three-fifths of the frame.

It required 6 full days to set up and complete. The terrain on which we worked was exceptionally rough and hazardous at night. To get the flash units across the river we had to cross on a two-wheeled spine, one for your feet and the higher one for your hands. There were no boats or bridges nearby. We had to get our own cable near the dam to carry the circuit and equipment to the west bank. The uphill strata with water rushing between the plates of rock was so confusing at night that we set up guide ropes to get to the light stands and our cameras. We had to build towers in the trees to get to our trolley cable. We were pleased to see the negative of our first exposure which, without any test or Polaroid (which does not exist), was well planned and calculated to it be.

One could dwell for a long time on the technical feats of O. Winston Link. Trying to determine what he was seeing is another task. In his notes and letters, he refers to the surrealism mentioned...
above is absent. He has looked at locomotives as powerful, beautiful forces, always on the go or about to get going. Even when they're being washed, they seem ready to leap out of the top of the frame. When he confined his attention to the train itself, he produced better-than-ordinary images. But his strengths in this project were clearly elsewhere.

It was when he started fooling around with where the train was that his work became extraordinary, valuable to the culture. In the 1950s he photographed America that sometimes was perfectly 1955, but sometimes was 1890, 1910, or 1930. In these latter pictures, the train seems out of its time. Surely the train could not have coexisted with so much bucolic innocence, so much apple pie. It is difficult to believe that the Little House on the Prairie America that Link sometimes portrayed was real in the aftermath of the Korean War and only a couple of years before Spatnik and John F. Kennedy. Mr. Carr points out that, in 1955, the year Link began his train project, Robert Frank began his own photographic survey, which resulted in the book The Americans -- quite a different vision of the same America.

The Frank/Link dichotomy begs worrisome questions about reality. Frank's pictures suggested chaos and that premise was seized upon by many others who also began to communicate it. Link's pictures sug- gested, as Carr says, "community and ordered existence." Not many took up that torch. Today, the nearly unanimous urban view of life is surely Frank's, even the rural view of life "outside" is probably one of chaos and despair. We have just experienced a very strange national adjustment of consciousness in which Ronald Reagan attempted to resurrect the Link dreams and accused Walter Mondale of being Robert Frank. Not much serious discussion went on about this matter, although Time magazine produced a gaudy "I Love America" cover story based on absolutely nothing but Mr. Reagan's insistence that America was "back." What does that mean? What impels editors to head for America's "heartland" in times of great national stress? Is it a wish to be seen as egalitarian, universal? Or is it a sad desire to live in a different America, free of the need to be "sophisticated," "smart," to have simple values and escape global conflict? What if everybody held Link's view? Conversely, of what possible value is Frank's view? We shook our heads in amazement at the stupidity of the self-flagellators we witnessed in Iran in 1979. Yet at the highest academic photographic levels we applauded Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams and anyone else who portrays America as a spoiled, ruined landscape, peopled by fearful, ignorant demi-monsters -- us. We crepted at the idea of Post-Modern Thinking; too righteous, too simplistic. Then in the 1960s and 1970s we learned about Consciousness, and how to raise it, and how its power could change the world. We were working on that, millions of us. Jimmy Carter spoke of the infamous malaise, and we could have said yes, that's true and done something about it. Instead, we elected Ronald Reagan and dismissed the whole issue of changing the world and concentrated instead on filling our pockets, while the President patted us and told us America was Back. And in the midst of these warm messages from Time and the President, what is our sense of consciousness? Do we really believe we are headed for "community and ordered existence"? Or are we back with Frank, worrying about, as Carolyn Carr says, "spiritual desolation and psychic isolation?"

The point is that photographers, like other artists, other communicators, give us visions. For years we have been reacting positively to negative visions, and have used those negative visions to force corrections. But it seems inadequate. Perhaps the Links of the world can never be taken seriously in their own time, and only later, too late, remind us of another view. But it would be encouraging to know that a sense of fullness and love of life and all it offers was being recorded with wit and a somewhat skewed eye today. If not for us, then for others, later.
By April Rapier

The ten photographers in this exhibition (from Spain, France, Germany, Austria, and Great Britain) have in common their age (mid 30s to mid 40s), gender (all male: one wonders about the role of women in contemporary European photography), and extensive exhibition records. With regard to the content or style of the pictures, homage to a European photographic history is predominating. All the artists labor under the banner of conceptual art, the three that is, that is to say to link the images together in spite of their diversity. Physically, however, they bear little resemblance to each other. A persistent view of the idea of one complete moment appears throughout the exhibit, surfacing in a plethora of abstract and private worlds.

With the exception of work by Branko Lenart, Floris Neuuss, and Tom Dahos the fantasy of extraordinary beauty and softness is the key to unraveling the mystery of these images, should the viewer be inclined to seeking answers. As a group they are exceptionably quiet and sensitive, and a collective feeling is so quite by design. Regardless of the viewer’s level of participation, questions are continuously posed by alternating a very exact form with what we know to be devices of technique (and the attendant limitations).

Tony Caraty’s work is achingly pretty and sentimental yet the meticulous, the unexpected, and the delicate are completely unexpected, both emotions and sensations. They seem, even on the surface, ready to explode, but the elements do not intentionally lead in that direction. The backgrounds are intricate and painterly and there is a dominant interaction between foreground and background. The two are often physically linked through a connection to more commercially designed imagery, which adds to their impact. Incredibly, none of the motifs seems gimmicky. To a lesser extent the work of Lenart uses the same dramatic effect to convey the ordinary as mystical; in this manner, isolated cultural symbols assume extraordinary proportions. Parities, all pink bathrooms, bedrooms, kitchens—all bright and very little, not terribly exciting views of people showing the view into a room on an unreal quality, as though seen through a storefront window. The sum is life because it resembles a jungle, many surfaces as a reflective and indoors and out are quickly delineated. A large distance behind a pair of shoes is in the foreground, and this is connected to another one, from knock-knocks to black leather furniture seem simulated, a diorama demonstrating modern life (complete with man’s best friend). Due to the use of both natural and artificial light, the spatial quality is foreshortened, one of many compelling factors. Three of the artists, Olmer Thomann, Rudolf Lichtenstein, and John Goto have been influenced by the Czeck photographer Josef Sukell; in all three portfolios reference to the dream state is highly visible. The notion of entry into a private domain (obviously not of inherent interest unless transcendent or stylized) is drawn upon again and again. One witness (impossibly) another era unfeels as memories stir, like the shift being between waking and sleep. In Lichtenstein’s photographs, however, the inclusion of a disparate object as innocent as a roll of film can bring the overall external quality abruptly to earth. In comparison to the others, this is a deliberate fall from grace. His use of multiple exposure has an air of discovery to it, usually considering the general overview of the routine.

Thomann goes slightly further, combining banal objects with menacing ones; they float and swim through soft lighting, leading the viewer toward a message. The message, though encircled, remains a mystery. Nils Udd’s images are conceptually the most removed from his well-known social series. He manufactured iconography—enormous sites that appear to be found sculpture (nets, flower and vine-covered shapes)—then documented his efforts. The constructions outline the photographs, which seem pretty posthumously, in comparison.

The original Neuss photographs are life-size, but in the exhibit the viewer must settle for smaller reproductions. It is likely that the origins are as daring as the artist’s statement clams, but these versions don’t make much sense without the three techniques that “go beyond that of the pioneers of the photo-gram (Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray) subject (whole human figure), the combination of photography and painting during the development stage, and alteration of color due to non-focusing. None of this is clear, with or without explanation, in the reproductions. Dahos series, “Memories of Egypt” is technically interesting but offers little beyond superficial punning. He plays against antiques in this great-looking, wise little sight gag. One in particular is overbearing in its witness, showing a paper envelope and a stone tablet of hieroglyphics beside side, solely surrounded by darkness. As one waits for more information, it is quickly clear that none is forthcoming.

Andreas Muller-Pohle has created a series of transformations, the journey being ultimately of more importance than the events contained within. The photographs become progressively blurred, and amorphous shapes imitate the human form to create studies of line and shadow. The tones remain much the same as the harshness disappears. It seems not to matter that there isn’t a clear notion of what is being transformed. Each image thoroughly addresses the idea without being limited to a preconception. The luminous light, moody subject matter, and Ulmer’s photographic treatment of perception emerge as light-hearted abstractions of everyday visions. It is not his intention, he states, to “sens ify specific messages, but simply to try to awaken certain emotions in those who observe my images” images which I intentionally im-

The following is a review of the exhibition Contemporary European Photography at Episcopal Galleries, Houston, from September to October 13.

By April Rapier

GALL, SONNEMAN, AND WILLIAMS: TWO UP ONE DOWN

(From October 23 through No-

vember 25) At Episcopal Galleries in Houston exhibited the work of Sally Gall, Eve Sonneman, and Casey Williams. The following is a review of that show.

It is an interesting coincidence that Sally Gall and Casey Wil-

liams, both Houstonians, present photographs made in Big Bend, yet treat such an identical landscape so differently. A general theme of the show seems to be about movement outside one’s normal reality and subsequent responses. Another element that resounds in all the work is that of a very formal, well-intended guiding of those responses. All three are dedicated to the idea that the move-

ments have witnessed their subject matter beyond a first impression, through a more particular vision that isn’t compromised in favor of sentiment. Sonneman comes up short in this group of pictures. Any discussion of Williams’ work must include his explanation that he was trained as a painter, and he is not accounts for the grandeur of his images. He jokingly says that these are studies for Western art, but there is a cer-

tain truth to the notion. He draws heavily on the tradition of the Old West panorama with end-

less skies and mountains, most often imitated in cinematic matte shots. The size (four feet by four feet) and skill with which they are constructed colorized make them as much about painting as photography (other techniques supply this as well). They are one to two reproductions, focus on the landscape, foreground, with no depth of field used to allow for detail in the mid- and background regions. Most of the colors he reproduces are true, but not nearly as much as a magnificent sunset seems artificial and overtasted. He spar-

ingly uses a purplish color making the highlighting all the more effec-

tive. The same colors used in a painting would, of course seem pretentious and stubbornly silly, but in his photographs they recreate perfectly the atmos-

phere of the land. One of Williams’ pictures’ size is a softness of edge, which causes nothing to correspond to echo back into the image. This is supported by the blending of color, the total softness, the term hand-colored in reference to Williams’ photographs, for they truly are more pantyler. They speak of the awe of a first visit. With a luminous hush, casual vis-
tas and geological oddities that initially so spatially confuse. Williams gives a photographic tour about the precise business of constructing an image in honor of it. Williams is a truly precise, and falsely makes sense of the unfamiliar. A precise grasp, the haphazard strips of binding scrub wood together to form a fence, barrel wire and matted thorns on plants, cactus—ghostly signs of migration else-

where). The occasional random inclusion adds force to any necessity of construction. The elements we associate with the hunch that this is on a presence, no matter what their state of decay.

Few human remnants and touches are acknowledged, leaving room for one’s own past. Few are in a dead branch or stalk. When evi-

dence of humanity is included, the mystical heightened pace is by, implying deadly wear, but
how did it get to such a forbidding place? Any reference to television is strikingly out of place. The color and size reinforce a system of order, but the sand and rock and scrub terrain provide a foil for that cleanliness. The notion of integra-
ting found sculptural shapes with their surroundings means so much more here, the clearest possible illustration of the concept. Shadows do not create depth — they are soft, considering the glaring heat and light. Nor do the great purple mountains hovering behind domi-
nate. They remind one of an im-
portant presence, strength and
power implied, blurred but unde-
nable. He softens and protects and neutralizes with larger-than-life
colors and translucent light. It
almost seems as though the images are manipulated — negative blend-
ing, perhaps, because when the plane divides horizontally, the halves or thirds are no longer anchored.
This is further emphasized by un-
colored areas within the print.

All the graves and fences and dead or dying growth seem to gesture in memory of human movement, their mourning postures permanent. There are few other
sentimental signs. Entropy remains
behind, all that is left. The Mexico
series uses a far more directed at-
tention to a starting point. One
is constantly invited to step up to this
edge and peer over or into what is
much hinted toward, never to be
seen. The colors used here are a bit
more demonstrative, yet retain the ability to make absolute sense.
The material itself is more exag-
ggerated, especially in its flatness and
shallow depth of field. One looks
forward with great anticipation and
delight to William's future work.

Sally Gall's exhibit coincides with
the release of a calendar illustrated
with her photographs of Houston, a
very personal and transformative
glimpse of what becomes an over-
awareness of beauty. One is given
access to the private world of land-
scape boulevards, without any
sense of voyeurism. In one image,
an enormous tree bespeaks wealth
and privilege as much as the small
(relative to the tree) mansion in the
corner of the frame. It is necessary
to look hard, for there is no sen-
sationalism (except for print quality,
which is exquisite). For example,
one notes in an image a jogging
path extending to a vanishing point
into the horizon, cutting through
the center of a luxuriously tree-
lined street, at once it occurs that
the path is made of brick set in an
intricate pattern. The extraordinary
is presented quite matter-of-factly.

The city of Houston, an architec-
tural dream, is seen without false-
ness or device. Even the softening,
discussed below, refers to heat
radiating off glass and steel. Its
can be seen and does stand on its
own. It is an extremely intimate
and uncomplicated vision that
carries the familiar environment beyond representation. She has
continued to use the Diana Cam-
era, known to create soft, halated
perimeters and almost sharp cen-
ters, and uses a more traditional
camera as well; many times the
sharper negatives are softened in
the printing process to resemble
Diana images. There is a delighted
homage to Soggetti in two pictures
the reference to a building seen
from below in both indelent and
perfect weather.

In a sense, some photographs
speak of a city substructure — a
vertical plane bisected by a freeway, for example, with buildings on top
and the bayou below. The founda-
tions are neither firm nor filthy.
Her vision is characterized by fair
treatment of all her subject matter.
A deserted tennis court holds
the same whimsical, fictitious or ima-
gined quality found in her earlier
garden series and has the compar-
able credibility of a painting. The
images are all lonely — again more
representative of the relation be-
tween painter and canvas than
photographer as witness/participant.
Gall integrates completely
with her imagery. Another character-
ization of the city, an image which
proves to be transitional to the Big
Bend series, begins the reduction of
man's structural efforts, shrinking
the skyline to an architectural
mock-up. The pictures of Galveston
use the ocean and sky as a meta-
phor for nature's inevitable pre-
dominance over man. Clouds seem
as structurally sound and physically
integral as towering buildings. They
have equivalent mass. In fact, the
sky begins to actively affect and
alter the landscape: the vastness
of ocean and mountains is dwarfed
only by the inclusion of sky, the
one thing of greater magnitude.
The step from city to desert is
great.

The Galveston photographs func-
tion as interim discoveries. Man's
efforts (over-developed peninsulas,
cities on precarious sites) are re-
duced to insignificant stratifications that
band the earth, compressed into
just another geological vein. Man's
attempts at control seem absurd in
these pictures — gods and priests,
extending beyond sensible limits,
risking much to conquer. The
clouds ploddingly bear witness to the
madness of man's relatively incon-
sequential achievements.

There is more abstraction incor-
porated in the Big Bend series, and
at times, one is a bit hard-pressed
to extricate meaning. The darkest
images are the most difficult, not
quite worth the effort. The way
the mountains affect the sky recalls
the initiative quality of nature:
shadows form entire extensions
on the terrain and mountain sides.
Clouds, shadows, mountains switch
places because their forms are so
similar. There are elements of a
classic landscape treatment with
traditional use of planes. This ex-
amination of the relation between
sky and clouds and mountains is
rather like a puzzle, except that
here the parts are interchangeable.
In spite of the preceding work
that fore-shadowings things to come,
Eve Sonneman's photographs seem
here are a radical departure from
the profusious multi-frame images
of the past. These were charac-
terized by her unshakable presence
within the image — she seemed
always to be on the move, relishing
each moment of the search, each
encounter's potential. There is
a hasty quality to the new work,
(2x24 inch Chromolithes, most of
which disregard technique, another
annoying departure). Frederick
Hunter, the gallery's owner, quite
accurately referred to their time-
lessness (the comparison being the
sense of place in, for example, the
older double diphtychs that juxtapos-
ited black and white and color). But they are as didactic as
timessless, blank and arrogant in
their disinterested presentation of in-
formation.

There is one very intricate and
fragile image ("Heart/Torsa — Mer-
ida, Mexico") decorated ornately
in the fashion of where he has ven-
tured. Yet most of the impressions
(and prints) are blunted, no thought through — the confusion
and chaos of the traveler? Another
outside image, "R2 Goveny,
resists falling victim to the garish-
ness of a seductive locale. As
individual images (without the re-
ference of one another and con-
comitant influence), some make
more sense — most especially "San
Cristobal, Mexico, 83," a far more
visceral the trope-designed pic-
ture. Most are notes regarding local
humor and custom — the vantage
point ordinary and uninteresting,
objects unchanged by her expe-
rience of them.
PETER MCCLENAN:
IRRESISTIBLE FUN

(The following is a discussion of Watertowers, a series by Peter McClenan, which was exhibited at the Houston Center for Photography September 7 - October 14.)

By April Rapier

Peter McClenan has re-defined the Houston landscape in his Watertowers series — not the one ordinarily associated with our sparkling, trendy architecture, but the landscape one most often tries to ignore — water towers with power plants and flat, empty stretches as backdrops — parcels of land that city planners would like to hide. That is, of course impossible, due to the monstrous dimensions represented. His new definition consists of recreating water towers in various sizes and approximations and placing them around town so that they interact with the real thing. He also photographs the recreations and his interaction with them and inserts cutouts into subsequent photographs.

This project has been going on for some time, an indication of the seriousness with which it was undertaken. The constructions are so technically competent that it is often hard to separate reality from his version of it. The best pictures rely strongly on fantasy, offering a creative concept, commitment (working with the project beyond its initial momentum), great humor, and a sense of the not-so-subtle surreal. As with any project of that duration however, one inevitably has the disconcerting sense that no matter how long and hard the images are examined, an inside joke critical to fully understanding the piece is missed. Because of the way the artificial elements are imposed on the "real" one tends not to leave anything in the frame unconsidered; even the miscellaneous bucket, broken bottle or handstand seem intrusive and open to misinterpretation. Perhaps it is the infrequent arbitrary gestures (shirt off versus on, for example) that frees them from being glb or self-conscious, the hazard of using artist as model.

Placement of the pictures in relation to one another is an important factor in this exhibit. Depending on the starting point, there is either crescendo or decrescendo to the action within the frame. One of the joyous aspects of the series remains constant throughout: just as one starts to look away, yet another bit of trickery pops forth. And McClenan's body and angelic face are used as cleverly as any of the devices — neutral expression, exaggerated reverence, nose as monument on the horizon, hair as top of tower and body as base. Scale and relationship of elements form foreground to background constitute the most formal design elements; the best example being the picture of a tiny twig in the foreground dwarfing a tower (real, cut-out or papier-mache) a great distance away. It is the addition of this magical realism that draws the viewer in. For example, the recurring dialogue between man and dog, the same patient dog on a long rope tied to nothing — a casual observer of the chaos, McClenan's precarious balancing act on the tower, reminiscent of flying too close or nearly falling (a blurry foot precludes the fall), the solemnity of green shorts matching exactly the looming tower's color; all elicit a complex reaction: funhouse antics combined with sophisticated trompe l'oeil. More and more alterations are made; sometimes the introduction of too many props into an over-saturated area seems last-minute and extraneous. One tower (in spite of size variations) or one cut-out too many can detract from the precision of the pictures, but the overall credibility isn't harmed by these small editing issues. It is easy to forgive irresistible conceptual fun its excesses.

Photographs by Peter McClenan
BOULEVARD SHOW: A LITTLE TIRED

The fourth annual Houston Photographers Show at Houston's Boulevard Gallery (October II-28), curated by Potty Walker, featured the work of James Andrews, Alice Doner, Jim Estes, C. Leigh Forman, Paul Heeter, Sally Harrington, Charlotte Land, Margaret Moone, Dale O'Dell, Debra Rudes, Sharon Stewart, and Jim Tioubot.

By April Rapier

The original intention at this year's Boulevard show was to present portfolios in their entirety for exhibition; for reasons that remain unclear, response to the call for entries was minimal. As the field was narrowed, it became increasingly apparent to Ms. Walker that the selected portfolios themselves needed refining, which she did in the face of some complaint. This is not the only reason the show as a whole is of an indeterminate and noncommittal nature. Most of the work seems to have been motivated by a desire to exhibit rather than the passion that creates good or great art. Most of the images glower in the comfort of the familiar. There is little conceptual outreach to be found.

The artists bring other disciplines to their photography, which could be seen as beneficial; while this normally creates (and does in a few of these images) an expansiveness of thought and vision, here it mostly underscores a feeling of amateurism. The experimenting takes place as a reduction of ideas to their smallest components, a process which diffuses intentions. There is no sense of the equivocal — one must settle for the undecided, tentative, yet over-determined statement in most cases. There is no room for interpretive discourse; this more anything else undermines confidence in the imagery. Stylistically, the work is flat, without effect. An exhibition of this size as a rule has a feeling of unity — if not formally, instinctively. It's not that the portfolios aren't arranged well — Ms. Walker has done a beautiful job with regard to visual continuity. There is a defiance that impels these images to a certain level, beyond which they are, as a group quite triteable.

Once again, Paul Heeter's intense, committed work dominates (see SPOT, Fall '84 for a more complete discussion). Although the pictures are from the same project seen in the last Houston Center for Photography Members' Exhibition, this grouping is considerably different in its demeanor. He has, by way of switching gears a bit, added an element of the theatre of the absurd. The inclusion of less-man- nered concepts (global/anal-analysis, master baton, oblation, faldera) brings one closer to his true feelings, while allowing for an ever-widening interpretation. Every act of debarking is done with consummate skill. This intrepid layering is suggestive, yet his motives are clear; his lethal blows precisely directed. There is honor in being unfail- ing to make an overwhelming statement in art.

Sally Harrington states (in no uncertain terms) in her view that she finds the coastal landscape less than captivating. Its desperacies are another thing altogether, rendered enchanting by the perseverance she brings to the Coastal Prairie Landscape Series. This primer is an affectionate, good-humored document, photographed (and later experienced) with a sense of pe-

donesian shadow puppet theatre: illusion takes hold and carries the moment. The only bit of obtu- sirousness is the male model's perched nipple and earring, violence in an otherwise secure moment.

Margaret Moone's portraits of the elderly, when they get beyond the pretense of pretension, are sad and tender and beautiful. One completely trusts that she is filled with warmth and regard for those she has encountered and documented (a project of extended duration). This enables one to accept at face value the tenderness that is being presented. The most questions, of course, arise from the image of a shadowy, scowling woman behind an overgrown fence. Here's a frown of indifference, one that prevails upon certain limits of credibility. These images would also benefit from an accompanying text of sorts.

Jim Tioubot's "Wild Wind Series" reminds one of the illustrations for a minimalist fairy-tale; they are both chimerical and unrooted to that fully appreciate them one must dissociate with all else. Viewing them becomes an exercise. Upon closer inspection, the hand-coloring becomes indescribable. It extracts from the meditative quality of the pictures, and creates a dichotomy of feelings. The preciousness of the found imagery is invalidated by the somewhat arbitrary although meticulous application of color. One is slow to acknowledge that it is there in the first place: the images are intriguing, enigmatic.

C. Leigh Forman's dog pictures are a charming eccentric dream, unapplying beyond what they are. They are great fun, the best of a genre. No more, no less. Charlotte Land's rooftop image of rows of birds (live) watching a tied-up parakeet (dead) on a dan- gable vantage point to create a marvelous moment.

Elsewhere, one finds that what is being looked for has already been defined, in the manner of a given. Popular design elements, devoid of emotion or point of view recur, often displaying photographic technique to no avail. As such, it is no better or worse than what the oversaturated visual world has to offer, a grave disappointment to the city with so many faces. One feels certain that the future won't be any better change — the more daring, the better.
THE SECOND BIENNIAL PHOTOGRAPH

AUCTION

for the benefit of the Houston Center for Photography.

Saturda

SATURDAY 12.8.84

The Auction will be held on Saturday, December 8, 1984 at Paradise Bar & Grill, 401 McGowan at Brazos. Included will be photographs by nationally known photographers as well as members of the Houston Center for Photography. Table sale begins at 11 a.m., with the auction starting at 1 p.m. Food and drink will be available.

An Exhibit of the photographs for auction will be on view at the Houston Center for Photography from November 28 through December 7. Opening Reception on Wednesday, November 28, 6 to 8 p.m. A catalog will be available. Also on view will be A Tribute to Ansel Adams.

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