



"Waiting," from 3 Days at Edward Air Force Base: The Shuttle Landing. © 1983 Richard Misrach

RICHARD MISRACH IN THE DESERT
PARKER, PURCELL, AND POLAROID
PHOTOGRAPHS AS PROPERTY
SURREALISM AND APPROPRIATION
FRAMPTON, NICOSIA, BROWN, ET AL

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MESSAGES

That language will change is as sure as the synergy of the universe as it rolls relentlessly out to oblivion. That it would change as fast as it has around this magazine and the Houston Center for Photography in the last few weeks was unexpected, on the other hand. Natural phenomena are not always recognized as they occur, but I think this time we are alert to the moment, in which we are engaged in a new collaboration with Lew Thomas. Left, as we were, in the lurch by Lynn McLanahan (now Herbert), our previous and only prior Executive Director, who suddenly moved to Chicago after telling us weekly for more than five months that she intended to do so, we were required to persuade someone else to come do what she did before he or she found out just exactly what needed to be done. Now we have engaged a new Executive Director, Lew Thomas, who has cast his net wide for many years, and presumably will try to pull it in from here.

Lew says things like "If you could get them to lift the screen through which they see the world . . ." He speaks of "strategy," "issues," and "ideas." He speaks with some authority: much of what is already being discussed and practiced in post-modernist photography was nurtured by his ideas, acts, words, and images during the last 12 or 13 years. He has published many books, some with titles like *Photography and Language*, or *Structural(ism) and Photography*. He appears to be well respected among the most thoughtful critics and photographic innovators. There is a short note about him on page 4, in the *NOTES* section of this magazine.

This may be one of those alarming coincidences of person and institution that produces real change. The "Mission Statement" of the Houston Center for Photography contains a reference to our commitment "to provide a forum for critical dialogue and to encourage diverse approaches to photography." Thus this magazine, the HCP's exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and fellowships, not to mention all the wonderful meetings. For Lew, who has already used publishing, photography, curating, teaching, bookselling, and God only knows what else in his endeavors, the HCP is a new basket of tools, some of which he hasn't used before and some of which he is already expert with.

Considering that Foto Fest is right around the corner (again, see page 4) and that hordes of people will arrive from all over the world to participate in America's first real international photographic exposition, and that Lew has it in his head to create a new kind of photo center, the tenor of things will no doubt change around here. What this all means is that by next summer or so, Houston will be the photographic center of the universe, which is fitting for a city named after the first human word spoken from the surface of the moon.

Every now and then you have to say things like that. At least, I do. Since I began editing this magazine eight issues ago, I have said things like that six times. Each time, I have regretted it. They have been fairly stupid, *cute* things, and twice I have made the same person angry saying them. I'm sorry for that.

Moments like this come. In this one, the editor is writing one of those so-long-it's-been-good-to-know-ya-but-gotta-keep-movin'-along diatribes (not intending the second meaning in Webster's *Seventh*). For these two years, I have whenever possible disobeyed Strunk & White's Rule 9: *Do not affect a breezy manner*. This was largely at the urging of the aforementioned Lynn McLanahan (Herbert), who apparently thought it was amusing. So was she. It was like that around here during those ah, *formative* years. There was a great sense of purpose and a great sense of humor. It was fun. It was also dizzying, of course, as everyone who has endured one or more of these high-energy start-ups knows well.

Now it goes into its third or fourth phase, in which the institution seems assured and the questions of meaning and stance predominate. It is a moving vehicle in search of position. Lew Thomas is the driver. He is a madman at this, so it is time around here for seat belts, as he also becomes the editor of this magazine, which shall now be reborn, with new labels.

The magazine had actually entered the post-modernist era in a substantial way thanks to Sam Samore (whose current curatorial effort is reviewed by Paul Hester on page 10), who wrote extensively on his accomplishments in the summer 1985 issue, saying, among other equally outrageous things, that in 1974 the Samore Gallery had "successfully raised the issue of reproductions and originals by appropriating the whole of modernist photography (Szarkowski is the high priest of modernist photography and *Looking at Windows* serves as the apotheosis of his theories), and sealed in the post-modernist era." It was then eleven years before Andy Grundberg announced the crisis of post-modernism (for a short discussion of his position see SPOT, spring 1985, page 5). Now it remains to be seen whether post-modernism also means post-humanism and a bitter end to romance, all of it played out right here on these pages.

The purpose of all these seemingly endless references to this fine magazine is to rivet the reader's attention to the idea that within these pages one has found, and will continue to find, writers and editors devoted to The Great Unscrambling. Thence forward into the age of Lew, who is now on the spot. (He said, as a way of leaving behind yet another of those cute digressions)

Dave Crossley

CERTAIN CHANGES

Little hidden warnings, many glowing dreams

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FOTO FEST 1986:
CLOSE TO REALITY

1986 promises to be a year of endless celebration for Houstonians. It's the Sesquicentennial of Texas (meaning it gained its independence from Mexico 150 years ago) and all cultural organizations in the state have gone completely whacko with hundreds of "Sesquicentennial" exhibitions and performances scheduled. Additionally, of course, the Houston Center for Photography will celebrate its fifth anniversary, and thousands of people, including Robert Frank, Van Deren Coke, Ernst Haas, Andy Grundberg, Bernard Faucon, Susanne Szasz, Jean-Claude Lemagny, Floris Neususs, Pedro Meyer, Daniel Wolf, Sam Wagstaff, Anne Tucker, Andreas Muller-Pohle, Eikoh Hosoe, and so on will be in town for the occasion. Actually, they'll be here for the first Foto Fest, the Month of Photography, which officially runs from February 20 through March 31. And, as the Foto Fest organizers are saying, 1986 is also the 160th anniversary of the earliest surviving photograph, by Joseph Nicéphore Niepce, which happens to survive at the University of Texas.

Amid all this jubilation, the Foto Fest cofounders, photographer/teacher Fred Baldwin and gallery owner Petra Benteler, have some expansive visions. As Baldwin has said, "Our purpose is to make Houston one of the important national, maybe international, centers for photography." Baldwin has expressed the dream of seeing Houston become a hub for people interested in photography all over the world to come together every two years.

So far, 63 photography exhibitions are scheduled for the Fest period. Additionally about 25 lectures, symposia, and workshops will be held by some 45 photographic notables from Europe, Japan, and America. The main lobby of the Warwick Hotel, one of Houston's most prestigious, will be the site of the "Meeting Place," where 100 or more photographers, publishers, critics, and curators will make themselves available to look at work and explore ideas. And just for a little icing, the Association of International Photographic Art Dealers will hold its annual fair at the Warwick on March 6 and 7.

Individuals having exhibitions will include Robert Frank, Suzanne Szasz, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Gohlke, Gay Block, Paul Hester, Enzo Sellerio, Taishi Hirokawa, Nakaji Yasui, Bernard Faucon, Michael Ruetz, Reinhart Wolf, Joel Peter Witkin, Paul Caponigro, Holger Trulzsch, Veruschka Lehdorff, Robert Capa, Alain Clement, Peter Brown, George Krause, Geoff Winningham, Ernst Haas, Ben Shahn, Jerry N. Uelsmann, Valentin Gertzman, Chuck Close, Nic Nicosia, and Russell Lee.

For a tentative schedule of lectures, symposia, and workshops, see the accompanying box. For more information about accommodations or events, call 713-522-9766, or write Foto Fest, 2815-A Colquitt, Houston 77098.

FOTO FEST
LECTURES,
SYMPOSIA,
WORKSHOPS

March	
1	Children's Workshop Robert Frank Lecture
2	French slides & lecture Adam Weinberg lecture
3	Lithuanian slides & lecture British slides & lecture
4	Swedish slides and lecture Floris Neususs lecture
5	Latin American slides & lecture
6	Spanish slides & lecture Ernst Haas lecture
7	Ernst Haas workshop Dutch slides & lecture Meri Del Rubenstein lecture
8	Ernst Haas workshop "On Collecting" symposium
9	Ernst Haas workshop German slides & lecture
10	Japanese slides & lecture
11	Andy Grundberg lecture Belgian slides & lecture
12	Bernard Faucon lecture Hungarian slides & lecture Czechoslovakian slides & lecture
13	Van Deren Coke lecture André Kertész documentary
14	South American slides & lecture

(All lectures and symposia will be at the Museum of Fine Arts, the Houston Center for Photography, the Houston Community College, the Rice Media Center, or the University of Houston)

LEW THOMAS:
NEW HCP DIRECTOR

The new Executive Director of the Houston Center for Photography is Lew Thomas, photographer, curator, and author. Thomas will also become the editor of this magazine beginning with the spring issue, which is published in March.

As a writer-publisher, Thomas founded the NFS press in 1975. His books, published by NFS, include *Structural(ism) and Photography*, *Photography and Language*, and *Still Photography: The Problematic Model*. Most recently, he edited the book *The Restless Decade: John Gutmann's Photographs of the Thirties*, published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in 1984. The Gutman project was launched with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Although known as a conceptual photographer for his continued examination of principles underlying the photographic image, Thomas has also curated important exhibitions, including one on Imogen Cunningham for the San Francisco Art Institute, and a large study of structuralism for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

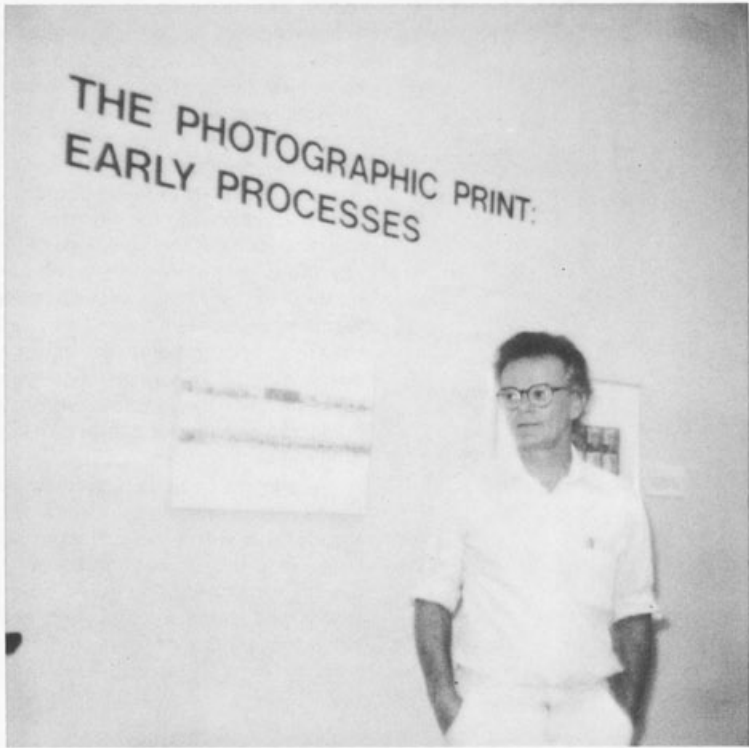
Thomas replaces former Executive Director Lynn McLanahan (Herbert), who resigned to move to Chicago this summer. McLanahan was the Center's first director, who brought to the HCP more than 20 exhibitions and shepherded the organization during its formative years. A Lecture Fund established in her honor has endowed the Center with \$7,500 to date.

Lew Thomas has arrived at the Houston Center for Photography at an important time in its four-year life, noted Herman E. Detering, President of the organization. "We have grown from a small group of people devoted to photography as an art form into a full-scale center, with a range of exhibitions, publications, lectures, workshops, and fellowships," Detering said. "Lew will bring us renewed energy and a broad national outlook."

MEXICAN SHOW
FOR VICTIMS OF
EARTHQUAKE

Five portfolios of photographs by 39 Mexican photographers have been put together by curator Pedro Meyer to benefit victims of the recent Mexican earthquake. The portfolios will be exhibited in five American cities, then sold for \$20,000 each. A major foundation has expressed an interest in buying

Lew Thomas, HCP's new director



all five portfolios. The first of the exhibitions will be at the Houston Center for Photography. It was brought to the Center by board member Jose Kuri, who is president of Continental Airlines Latin American division and a principle in organizing this project. The exhibitions will run from January 10 to February 23, 1986.

VARIOUS NOTES
AND RUMORS

Two important European photographers — André Kertész and Herbert Bayer — died recently. Kertész, who was 91, had enjoyed much celebrity in the last years of his life. Decades ago, he was a successful artist in Europe, then moved to the United States in 1936, where he felt he was being ignored. He is now widely regarded as a true pioneer in documentary photography.

Bayer was a student at the original Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, and taught at the Dessau Bauhaus. He was an associate of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and others. In 1938, he moved to the United States and became a successful graphic designer and architect.

The Art League of Houston and the Jewish Community Center will sponsor major photographic competitions to coincide with Foto Fest in the spring. The Art League competition, juried by George Krause, is open to all Texas photographers, and the Jewish Community Center's, juried by Van Deren Coke, is open to all photographers living in the U.S. Deadline for the Art League is February 3 for shipped work and February 5 for hand-delivered work. These photographs must be matted. For more information, call 713-523-9530.

Deadline for the Jewish Community Center is January 2. Slides or prints may be submitted. For more information, call 729-3200.

The Art League also has a slide registry of Texas artists that will be available for review by arts organizations, consultants, patrons, and the media. The registry is open to all Texas artists. For information, call the above number or write ALVARTA, Art League of Houston, 1953 Montrose Blvd, Houston 77006.

Robert Frank will be in Houston February 28 to introduce his documentary film on the Rolling Stones, in conjunction with a two-day symposium of his works at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The symposium coincides with a major retrospective at the MFA, H, co-curated by Anne Tucker and Phillip A. Brookman.

EXTENDING
PERIMETERS:
(OF THE MARKET)

Extending the Perimeters of Twentieth-Century Photography. Curated by Dorothy Vandersteel. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. August 2 — October 6, 1985.

[The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. As part of the celebration, the Department of Photography, under the direction of Van Deren Coke, has been organizing a number of exhibitions featuring their permanent collection. In addition to a number of smaller shows highlighting "Facets of the Collection," two major exhibitions have been drawn from the museum's holdings, including recent acquisitions and promised gifts. *Signs of the Times: Some Recurring Motifs in Twentieth-Century Photography* was guest-curated by Deborah Irmas and displayed during May and June. The second of these large shows is *Extending the Perimeters of Twentieth-Century Photography*, which was curated by Dorothy (Martinson) Vandersteel, the museum's own Associate Curator of Photography.]

By David Levi Strauss

"The contradictory position in which contemporary art photography now finds itself with respect to both self-definition and the institutional trappings of its newly acquired status is nowhere better illustrated than in the head-scratchings and ramblings of museum curators confronted with the task of constructing some kind of logical framework for the inclusions (and exclusions) of photography in the museum."¹

— Abigail Solomon-Godeau

From its inception, photography has been an interrogative medium. It began by questioning the division of art from science and technology. It questioned perceptual and conceptual assumptions about time and memory, evidence and imagination, accuracy and illusion. It questioned the primacy of painting. In so doing, it attracted staunch advocates and virulent critics, who were called upon to defend art from this pretender, this "industrial process."² Thus began the battle for photography's recognition as art. This was a battle having partly to do with property rights, and this part of the battle was recently won by photography. The victor stormed the marketplace. Another, ultimately more significant, aspect of this struggle has been ideological, and it rages on, now more than ever.

The practice of photography is often an active critique of "the conditions of commodification and fetishization that enfold and inform art production," in Solomon-Godeau's terms.³ It is not surprising that many of the claims currently being made for a postmodern art are balanced squarely on the practice of photography. "The purview of such [postmodern] practices are the realm of discursivity, ideology and representation, cultural and historical specificity, meaning and context, language and signification."⁴ Within these provisions, one could include much of the work in *Extending the Perimeters of Twentieth-Century Photography*.

The curatorial claims for this show, however, (as outlined in Vandersteel's catalog essay, which also appears on a panel in the exhibition) seem to have more to do with property values than with ideological ones.

The writer John Berger has noted that "Our mistake has been to categorize things as art by considering certain phases of the process of creation. But logically, this can make all man-made objects art. It is more useful to categorize art by what has become its social function. It functions as property. Accordingly, photographs are mostly outside the category."⁵

The choice of terms in the show's title is telling; according to The American Heritage Dictionary, "perimeter" has two possible meanings, one mathematical and one military. It is "a closed curve bounding a plane area," or "a fortified strip or boundary protecting a position." Reading Vandersteel's curatorial statement, one reaches the conclusion that the plane or position being protected and defended is that of conventional art photography. "Extending the Perimeters" seems to refer to an act of curatorial appropriation and absorption, rather than to an act of recognition of changes in a rapidly changing field.

It would be useful to question Vandersteel's use of the terms "conventional" and "traditional" as applied to photographic practice:

"A great deal of 20th century photography has been dominated by the aesthetic of the conventional black and white print."⁶

"The photographs in this exhibition, however, are variations on the norm, having little in common with traditional photography."

Conventions do not "dominate." They have to do with agreement and



Georges Hugnet: Initiation Préliminaire aux Arcanes de la Forêt, 1936

convenience — conventional images are images of convenience. Conventions are time-specific. A conventional photograph of one historical period may be extremely unconventional in another period. This relation changes rapidly. Edward Weston did not make "conventional black and white prints."

Tradition is a very different process and alignment. Tradition refers to the "giving over" from one generation to another, "as a coherent body of precedent influencing the present."⁶ The tradition is various and does not depend on agreement or convenience. There can be no real change without tradition.

Vandersteel writes: "The concept of the 'non-traditional' as used in this exhibition, encompasses works which are altered manually or those of a conceptual nature in addition to photograms, sequential works, multiple negative prints, montage and collage, large-scale works and work which incorporates the photographic image with graphic printing processes or uses modern technology such as office copier machines."

This definition of "non-traditional" would include the greater part of the actual history of photography. The Munich art critic Franz Roh (two of whose negative prints are included in *Extending the Perimeters*) described his book, *Mechanism and Expression*, in this way: "our book does not only mean to say 'the world is beautiful,' but also: the world is exciting, cruel and weird, therefore pictures were

included that might shock aesthetes who stand aloof — there are five kinds of applied photography: the reality-photo, the photogram, photomontage, photo with etching or painting, and photos in connection with typography."⁷ Roh's book appeared in 1929.

The actual intention of this show is to extend the perimeters of art photography to include a bit more of the kind of work that has been going on for a very long time, an act similar to that of closing the barn door after the horses have fled.

It is becoming increasingly clear to a number of contemporary photographers (some of whom are in this show) and writers that the constricting perimeters of "art photography" (as recently created and defended by a small number of museum curators, collectors, and critics) are inadequate to contain the actual range and importance of photographic practice in our time.

Vandersteel's curatorial statement illustrates the difficulty of supporting an artificial and reductive art historical view of photography in the face of the actual tradition of photographic practice, which in this case literally surrounds and effectively contradicts her assertions.

Extending the Perimeters is laid out conventionally, with an anteroom or narthex containing "precursors and pioneers" to validate the art historical accuracy of the larger grouping. This room is more or less divided among the formal abstractions of

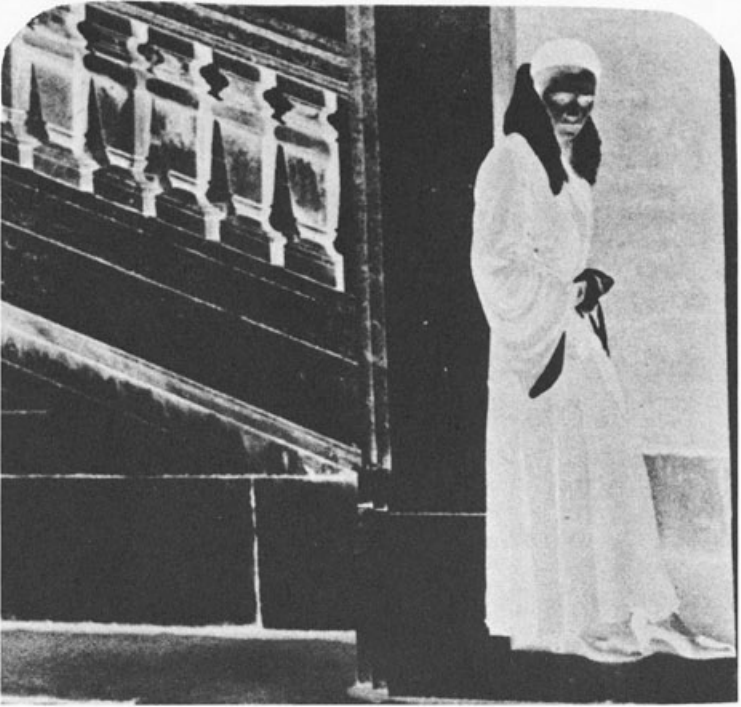
Kepes, Strüwe, Roszak, Man Ray, etc., images that use various photographic techniques to materialize oneiric visions and fantasies (Hugnet, Dora Maar, Pierre Boucher, Roh, Vak Telberg, etc.) and combinations of these two, in Picasso's and Villers' "Diurnes" collotypes and Kepes' intriguing "Landscape III".

The anteroom is dominated by surrealist works, including one of Hans Bellmer's cubo-futurist collages and two remarkable photocollage works by Georges Hugnet, "Initiation préliminaire aux arcanes de la forêt" (Preliminary Initiation to the Secrets of the Forest), 1936, and "Retourner à la Source" (To Return to the Source) 1937.⁸ Hugnet joined the surrealist group in Paris in 1932 and is primarily known as a poet, filmmaker ("La Perle"), and book artist. His many books of poetry were illustrated or embellished by fellow artists such as Duchamp, Dali, Picasso, Arp, Miro, and Bellmer. "Preliminary Initiation to the Secrets of Forest" is an amazing image which predicts a number of recent photographic works seen later in the show. Three black-hooded and robed figures "initiate" (or are initiated by) four identical blonde disrobed women as a huge yellow anemone begins to open behind them. This dark ritual takes place underground, in the belly of an industrial beast. Hugnet's anemone, poised to burst into bloom, is the only spot of color in the otherwise all black and white anteroom.

Leaving the shrine room of images past, we run directly into an enormous Richard Avedon print. "Blue Cloud Wright, slaughterhouse worker, Omaha, Nebraska, 8/10/79" is an advertisement for (among other things) Avedon's new *In the American West* book (Abrams) and major touring exhibition coming to SFMOMA in March. This particular print was part of the museum's "Fund of the 80s Purchase." It is appropriate that a show concerned with "extending the perimeters" should feature Avedon, for Avedon is one of the very few contemporary photographers who have managed to make the practice of art photography a lucrative business. Aside from this, it is difficult to understand how Avedon's images could be construed as being "non-traditional".

The signal image at the entrance to the next room of the North Wing is also appropriate — Andy Warhol, times six ("A Set of Six Self-Portraits, 1967"). The prominent inclusion of Warhol and Rauschenberg in this show recalls their use in John Szarkowski's *Mirrors and Windows* show at The Museum of Modern Art.

Franz Roh: Untitled, ca. 1928



New York, in 1977. Then, they were "foxes in the henhouse."⁹ Now, they are welcomed as familiar, wealthy uncles.

The show is not all so transparent. One small room contains a useful gathering of investigations of *narrative* in serial photography. Barbara Jo Revelle's articulate four-image frame cuts across the narrative functions of her handwritten text. One of Duane Michal's more interesting sequences, "Things Are Queer," 1972, succeeds on its conceptual *clarity*, as does Robert Cumming's mock-evidential "Barrier Explosion," 1973.

Jim Goldberg's pictures make it apparent that the models for much word and image, "personal documentary" work comes not from art photography, but from popular and folk sources, like family albums. The subjects speak for themselves in Goldberg's *San Francisco Hotel* series (1979). Over the image, Mary writes, "We are always Very affectionate Together," and under this her son Wayne writes, "My Mom Looks Pretty I Look Scared." Wayne, in fact, looks remarkably like the blond boy with a hand grenade in Central Park in Diane Arbus' photograph of 1962. I wonder where he will appear next.

Alex Traube's "Letters to My Father" (1976) stands in for the vast majority of work in this vein which is *not* made to hang on museum walls, but to circulate more freely in books and periodicals.

The show does include a number of works which directly question the assumptions of art photography, such as Les Krims' densely hilarious send-up of (among other things) the "directorial mode," " Marxist View; Bark Art; Art Bark (for ART PARK); Irving's Pens; a Chinese Entertainment; and Brooklyn: Another View: 1983," Alex Sweetman's "Photo-Realist Snap Shot, 1975," and Robert Heinecken's "State of the Art/ Computer Image Enhancement and Analysis/Polaroid/ Dec. 9, '76," all subversively funny.

Nancy Burson raises questions about portraiture, authority, and memory in her computer-generated portrait of "Mankind," 1983.

In Lucas Samaras' SX-70 "Photo Transformation II/22/73," only the extended hand is clear, while the human being behind the hand is literally *effaced*. In the same way, there are moments in this show when the face is lost behind the frantic manipulation of the image surface, when the medium *obliterates* the message. Against this tyranny of the "illusion of technique," one finds the inspired use of technique in Betty Hahn's ironic iconic Lone Ranger & Tonto against a blue silkscreen "New Mexico Sky," and Joan Lyons' exquisite crimson offset photo-lithograph from the portfolio, "Presences."

The inclusion of single images by Sonia Landy Sheridan and Keith Smith does not do justice to their respective extensions of the boundaries of photography, Sheridan in her wealth of work over time in machine processes, and Smith in his ninety-six visual books. They remain outside Vandersteel's "perimeters."

In the midst of all this furious technical innovation, Ruth Thorne-Thomson's small silver-toned prints have a perversely intense appeal. Uelsmann's quietly masterful montage seems quaint in this context.

Kenneth Shorr's huge neo-expressionist canvas, "A Life Without Pain" differs from Rauschenberg's earlier investigations in the way that photographic information is foregrounded and *asserted*, rather than merely included as not-yet-meaningful detritus from the image culture.

In some other work in the show it is not at all clear why photography was employed at all, except perhaps as a sort of reverse aesthetic tag: "this is new — it includes photographic imagery" (as opposed to the empty message of some "manipulated" photographs: "this is art — it must be, it has paint on it").

The question of appropriate tech-

nology implies a certain respect for materials. This is evident, for instance, in the work of Joel-Peter Witkin. His images of deformity, depravity, and desire would lose their confrontational power if painted or drawn. They are effective because of their *photographic* relation to representation, and to the unconscious. After the show of Witkin's work at the Fraenkel Gallery in March, two different people told me they objected to the work because it offended the *sanctity of the body after death*.

Extending the Perimeters of Twentieth-Century Photography includes the work of 126 artists. Though it will not necessarily tell you what is going on in contemporary photography, it *will* tell you what the museum is collecting.

The emphasis is on non-reproducibility. One-of-a-kind precious objects are saleable and will increase in value. One of the effects of this accommodation to the demands of art as *property* is to separate photography from common experience, the experience of having a camera and taking one's own pictures. The visual literacy that comes from photography's operation as an "Art *moyen*" (Pierre Bourdieu's term), an art practiced by everyone, is antithetical to the kind of elite consumerism necessary to the art market as is. Anyone who has taken pictures can *participate* in an understanding of what Vandersteel calls "the aesthetic of the conventional black and white print" in a way that they cannot participate in that of many of the works in this show. This separation enhances the property value of the art object. As the perimeters are extended, photography loses some of its unique power to reach or *act on* the world.

Footnotes

- 1. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis & Marcia Tucker (David Godine, 1984)
- 2. Baudelaire's term, in "The Modern Public and Photography," reprinted in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (Leete's Island Books, 1980). More than perhaps anyone else of his time, Baudelaire recognized (to his horror) the real potential of photography to utterly transform the terms of art.
- 3. Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," 84. Ibid.
- 4. Ibid.
- 5. John Berger, "Understanding A Photograph," from *The Look of Things* (Viking, 1974), reprinted in *Classic Essays on Photography*.
- 6. *American Heritage Dictionary*.
- 7. Franz Roh, *Mechanism and Expression* (1929), excerpted in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 1980.
- 8. Eleven more Hugnet images are on their way to SFMOMA in December, in the exhibition *L'Amour fou: Photography & Surrealism*, which originated at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC. [see this page for an essay about that exhibition]. In her catalog essay for this show, Rosalind Krauss writes: "... surrealism was interested in reality transformed in a very particular set of ways. Because it always begins with a piece of the real world, photography can achieve this transformation and did so, at times, with a startling economy that painting or sculpture — among the other visual arts — cannot approach." Krauss also notes: "Surrealist photography has been the consistently unwritten chapter in the history of that medium."
- 9. Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography." "For like the proverbial foxes in the henhouse, the inclusion of these artists — and more specifically, the issues raised by their respective uses of photography — posed an explicit challenge to the brand of modernism enshrined in MOMA's Department of Photography."

SURREALISM:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC
RECONSTRUCTION

L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism. Co-curated by Jane Livingston and Rosalind Krauss. The Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC. Sept. 9- Nov. 17, then travels to San Francisco, Paris, and London.

By Ruth Schilling

"Neither pencil marks made at random, nor recaptured dream-images, nor the imagination's fantasies could be accepted as valid expressions of surrealism."

Pierre Naville, *La Revolution Surrealiste*, April, 1925.

In the article from which this statement is taken, Naville stops short of naming photography as the ideal visual medium for surrealism and opens an argument over the efficacy of painting as a "pure" surrealist activity that was to engender serious ideological splits among the founding fathers of the surrealist movement. That surrealism had its highest "manifestations" in photography¹ is the focus of *L'Amour Fou*. The exhibition is large in scope as well as size (200 photographs). It has as its goal the repositioning of photography within the history of surrealism as well as the re-assessment of the importance of these images both to surrealism and, by implication, to the history of photography. Co-organized by Corcoran associate curator Jane Livingston and art historian Rosalind Krauss, it is accompanied by a film series, a 272-page book, and a symposium.

Instead of isolating photographs that are "surrealist," the curators have reconstructed surrealism via its photographic component. Most instances of photography in surrealism first appeared or were made for the various magazines and books that were the main thrust of its doctrines. The main difficulty in assembling this show according to Livingston was simply the acquiring of these images; never before have we been able to examine so many of these works in such physically close proximity to each other. In fact, Krauss suggests in the brochure accompanying the show that the question is raised "... whether we might not find, within the body of work gathered here, the 'masterpieces' of surrealist art."

To appreciate this assumption that Dali's melting watches might be topped in the pantheon of modernism by a Man Ray nude requires some basic understanding of surrealism as it is now being rewritten. That "the history of surrealism has been a mess"² holds some truth. Surrealism

itself is somewhat messy and the conventional art history response has been to relegate photography to a marginal status. As a movement, it suffers widely from extreme distortion by over-popularization of its own imagery and from its own internal fueling that often used photography as part of the ammunition. I would not lay all the blame at the doorstep of those much maligned "modernist" art historians who are being raked over the coals by nouvelle criticism. It is partly due to the surrealists themselves and in the case of photography its own facility for replication that assured the popularization and perhaps distortion of the "surreal" image.

Surrealism as a movement was born in 1924 with the publication of André Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism." Breton was a poet and it was his interest in language and the ideas of Sigmund Freud among other things that led him to a definition of surreality. Painters and photographers joined Breton and others in the search for methodology and evidence. Their aim, as Anna Balakian pointed out, was not the manufacture of fantastic or absurd imagery, rather it was an exploration of reality. In the pursuit of this exploration they used many media — writing, film, painting, photography, collage, etc. Proponents of surrealism, those who were attracted to its ideas, and those who appropriated some but not all of the doctrine, are many. It never was a cohesive group and members changed sides and fought their ideological battles in the pages of various avant garde magazines. Conventional art history may have overlooked photography, but photo-historians have never examined much of this work or these photographers' relationship to surrealism, since surrealism itself was deemed of little importance to photographic history. It is the aim of this exhibition to change all that.

One of the more successful and striking aspects of the Corcoran exhibition is its installation. Within the marble halls of the museum, designers Alex and Caroline Castro have created a series of rooms that are set on a diagonal orientation. I found the experience maze-like and slightly disorienting. Certainly, it is suitable to photographs taken at extremely

André Breton: Le Serpent, ca. 1936



oblique angles, that look sometimes almost as if hung upside down, the images falling through space. Wall colors and lighting often change quite dramatically from one room to the next. One room is actually a deep and glowing pink. This is not a silver-frames-all-in-a-row photography exhibition. There are large blow-ups of certain key images and many of the prints are framed quite elaborately. Though I generally don't like "museum panels" for their lack of interest as photographic prints, here they have for the most part been well integrated into the show instead of merely tacked on. It is a risky business to include them in the exhibition, since in most photographic exhibitions they would look tacky compared to the craft of the other prints. It is precisely because most surrealist photographs lack the look of an Ansel Adams that the panels are not out of place and are even appropriate to the exploitation of the photograph that is surrealist in nature.

Conceptually, this exhibition is very tightly organized. There is a deliberate pacing that moves the viewer from the facades of the "real" world to the juxtaposed world of the collage, and finally to the fantasy or obsessive world of images that increasingly use manipulated technique. As the rooms unfold, the content moves inward from the light of day to the that dark wellspring of surrealist creativity, the Freudian unconscious. At one point the exhibition literally gets darker and the accompanying imagery deals with what the curators have identified as the "baser" imagery of surrealism — a Jacques Boiffard close-up photograph of a big toe; Man Ray's "Monument to D.A.F. de Sade;" Raoul Ubac's, "The Battle of the Amazons," a solarized image in which the bodies appear to be melting.

The organization recapitulates the evolution of the various stages of surrealism. The early images are much more "documents" that use the camera's ability to record reality at the same time that it can wrench it from that context, thereby transforming it. Thus we see Brassai's photograph of a rolled bus ticket stub that is entitled "Involuntary Sculpture" and his photographs of graffiti. Also, included in this first room are photographs by Jacques Boiffard done as illustrations for André Breton's book, *Nadja*. These are Parisian street scenes and have the odd aspect of being almost Atgets, but without the haunting quality¹. To surrealism, Boiffard is a central figure. To photography, I think he is an interesting example of a missing link, though his work remains strongest when viewed in the context of this show. It is in this sense that the exhibition can be confusing. If for some misguided reason you think you are going to see a "greatest hits" of surrealist photography show, there is much in the exhibition that is there to illustrate the revised text rather than for art canonization.

Photographs often wore many hats within the context of the surrealist publications where they received their greatest exposure. What the collages, photograms (here, rayographs), solarized images, and straight photographs all have in common is a relationship to the process of surrealism. However, some of these images were made or used to illustrate specific texts and others were used as images in their own right. Also, the dedication of some to a rigorous exploration of the medium of photography seems stronger than others.

In the heart of the exhibition are two rooms whose walls are painted shades of pink. In the first room are more famous images of bodies: torsoes by Man Ray, mirror distortions by Kertesz. Though these images are more familiar and more often reproduced than some others in the exhibition, they are rarely seen together and the effect is to impress upon the



Hans Bellmer: La Poupee, 1934

viewer the seemingly endless obsession that these photographers had for the female body. But it wasn't just the subject that was an obsession, it was also the variety of ways that they photographed women. Woman became a foil for their various investigations, being transformed through radical framing, double exposure, solarization, etc., until the reality of a particular woman disappeared altogether, as in the case of a Brassai nude that can be (as the curators point out) viewed both as a truncated female body and as a phallus.

This is also apparent in the photographs of dolls by Hans Bellmer that occupy the second room. These rather large (approximately 20"x24") prints tinted in pink, blue, and yellow are from a series Bellmer made called "Les Poupees." These strange dolls with movable body parts were con-

structed by Bellmer and then photographed in contortive positions. In these images we are often confronted with incomplete anatomy or multiplication of parts such as four legs instead of two. In her essay, "Corpus Delecti," Krauss states that the dolls occupy a dream space and that within this space "... the doll herself is phallus" and that the "doubling" of body parts is akin to what Freud called the "Medusa effect" — where a multiplication of phallic symbols serves as a protection from castration. Citing Barthes, Derrida, and Freud, Krauss concludes that "Surrealism can be said to have explored the possibility of a sexuality that is not grounded in an idea of human nature, or the natural, but instead, woven of fantasy and representation, is fabricated."⁴ As you can see, this is no coffee table art book. Krauss's analysis is complex and she has lived up to her role as a controversial critic (she is the co-editor of the critical journal *October*. Whether you agree or not with Krauss as to her analysis, Bellmer's prints, in particular, are also extremely beautiful objects and, set up as they are in the pink room, worthy of the fetishistic activity that is museum going.

The exhibition is accompanied by a certain amount of wall text that is important to read if you are going to understand the organization of the show. That is not to say it isn't compelling without the text; it is. However, it is the book published concurrently with the exhibition that answers the questions the exhibition poses. Dawn Ades, an English art

historian, provides a very useful essay on the roles of photographs in the various surrealist publications. Jane Livingston's essay concerns the work of Man Ray (who is by far the most-represented photographer in the exhibition) and comes to the conclusion that he is not actually the complete surrealist. It is here that it becomes clear that even the curators are in some slight disagreement over just who played what role in surrealism.⁵

Krauss has written two essays that, though difficult as I mentioned and stubbornly dense with practically impenetrable semiological terminology, are very provocative and provide a basis for linking the photographs to surrealism and also explore the linkage of the surrealist inquiry, the photographic subject, and most importantly the photographic process

Man Ray: Untitled (Torso), 1931



or technique employed. It is this rescue of technique from the realm of quirkiness or experimentation and placing it as integral to the comprehension of the images that does the best service to the field of photography. All in all, I appreciate what Krauss has achieved.

Photography has been too narrowly defined for too long. I think in her reaction to modernism Krauss is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater and has downplayed in some instances the importance of the distinction between a commitment to the photographic process as a method of surrealism and the use of the photograph as a gratuitous illustration. Both Ms. Livingston's and Ms. Ades' essays help to correct that situation. Also, for me a basic problem lies in the reductive nature of some of the Freudian analyses and to disagree is to wrangle over theory that has been wrangled over more astutely elsewhere.

I could go on and on about the symposium and the wonderful characters involved. Suffice it to say that: Anna Balakian was charming and a welcome voice, having been involved with the study of surrealism for years; Jack Spector, a professor of art history at Rutgers University, gave a wonderful talk and let slip that Breton's preferred sexual position was "69" — a term I hadn't heard in public in years; Donald Preziosi, the semiologist for the day, spoke so quickly and obtusely that I had to go home and deconstruct his talk from my notes to find out that, pompous as its delivery was, it was an interesting talk. I suppose I shouldn't be so glib with what are serious inquiries by dedicated individuals, but the nature of symposia is such that ideas come forth with their flesh and blood spokespersons intact and therein lies the surreality of those events.

In conclusion, if you can afford the airfare, go to Paris and see the exhibition there. Not only will it look more at home, but when you are finished, you can explore the city that inspired the work. If your budget won't support that, then buy the book for its compelling text and excellent reproductions.

Footnotes

1. This information and other references that follow are from a phone conversation with Jane Livingston, Oct. 16, 1985.
2. p.114, *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 1985, Rosalind Krauss in an interview by Pepe Karmel.
3. I am not the only one to note this. Dawn Ades in her essay, "Photography and the Surrealist Text" notes that Michel Beaujour also found these photographs "banal" and she notes that it is exactly this "medical observation style" that Breton wanted for his book. p.162, *L'Amour Fou*.
4. "Corpus Delecti" Rosalind Krauss, pp. 86 and 95, *L'Amour Fou*.
5. Both Krauss and Livingston readily admit to this disagreement. Krauss refers to it in a note to her first essay, p. 40 opcit. She finds Man Ray central to the surrealist aesthetic.

PARKER, PURCELL: LIBERATORS OF SPIRITS

Olivia Parker & Rosamond Wolff Purcell. Organized by April Rapier. The Houston Center for Photography. October 25-December 1, 1985.



Rosamond Wolff Purcell: Macaque, 1983

By April Rapier

Rosamond Wolff Purcell and Olivia Parker are often compared for their parallel sensibilities. Similarities undeniably exist, in the form of vital energies, a spiritual understanding (far beyond an endless quoting and imitation) of history, timelessness. Aside from the obvious references, however, exist two artists who draw upon mutually intuitive, universal concerns and the fine art of collecting, but whose differences in methods of working within those similarities are of greater interest.

To the extent that Parker and Purcell synergize visually historical references with a collective consciousness approach to translation, they do so in a fashion that is as painterly as it is photographic. (Both use Polaroid materials.) This allows the viewer the enormous pleasure and luxury of

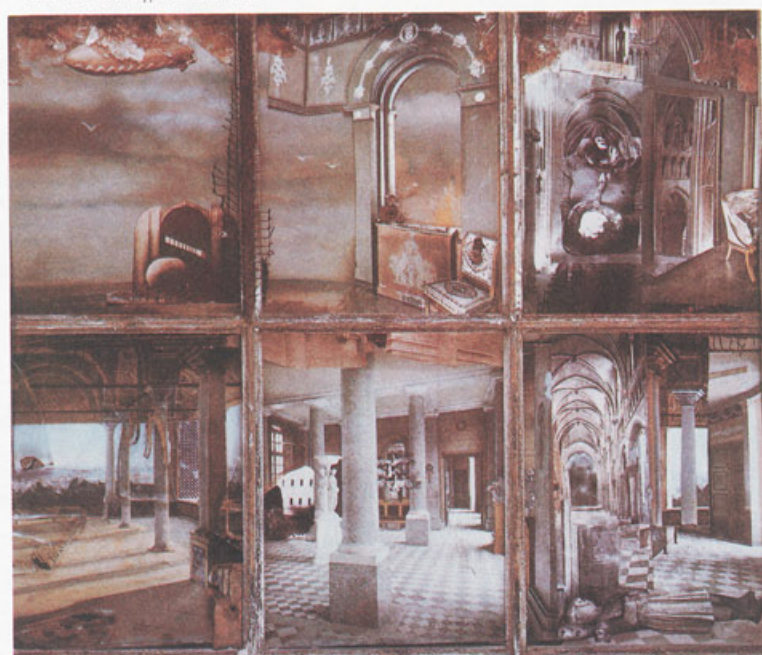
having one's senses guided, emotions orchestrated; because so many references exist, there is more than enough stimulus to draw upon without feeling the claustrophobia of such enclosed (yet infinite) spaces. Rather than having to fight a feeling of being manipulated, the viewer's only potential hazard is sensory overload. The use of found objects (again, a collective spirit is called upon, but a wholly unique process results), rhythmic, musical and sculptural juxtapositionings, and a synthesis of masculine and feminine aspects (the obvious feminine symbols found in flowers or keepsake iconography, the aggressiveness, experimentation, challenges issued underlying the masculine side) constitute a philosophy and resulting methodology, but serve as starting point only. Both Parker and Purcell liberate the spirit contained within the objects that so

inspire them. Although Purcell makes more use of the idea of collage and Parker more the idea of still life, no distant scrutiny with either group of images is possible — each pulls the observer into referential participation, a response initially unobserved but ultimately passionate and engaging. Purcell accomplishes this through a more objective, detached stance, that of an observer, whereas Parker's point of view is more romantic, sensual, impassioned, participatory. Both artists call upon an instructive, moralist overlay, the antique imagery and objects supporting this (including the use of 19th century ambrotypes and other kinds of old photographs), yet do not proselytize. The synthetic nature of these appropriations stands up to an organic operative, the resulting equilibrium rare, indeed. The apparent contradiction is found in Purcell's elevation of the ordinary, the breathing of fire and life into static, representational symbols, and Parker's domesticating, subduing, and finally integrating the unusual or out-of-hand. The intelligence and requisite meticulous craftsmanship immutably and finally places these images into a category that knows no equal.

Parker's markmaking varies from advanced to naive (a fine example of this is found in "After the Barn Door," 1984, where a representational horse, reminiscent of a cave drawing, bounds through flowers, prisms, and unidentifiable motion in the frame, all conspiring to create a dream-like circumstance). Color references depth: the older work (see *Signs of Life*, her first book published by Godine in 1978) was contentedly two-dimensional, using toning for "color"; the newer images, especially the 20x24 inch Polaroids, demonstrate more evidence of depth. Oddly, in this work, less attention is given to the purity and subtlety of color in the background areas, perhaps a mark of acceptance of or concession to the

Polaroid material's limitations. For example, "Taking Turns," 1985, sees true-to-life color and form — roses floating in space alongside antique iron tools, both equally unanchorable. This seems, in a quite different way, to address reality versus illusion. There exists a continuum in the lyrical movement of the inanimate — although once humorous (most memorably, the dancing pea-pods in *Signs of Life*), an evolution toward whimsy now predominates (see, for example, "Four Pears," 1979, in her most recent book, *Under the Looking Glass*, 1983, an image in which glowing red embroidery thread is tied to, but doesn't support, a chorus of sagging pears). There is a brilliant suggestiveness to the use of shocking patches of blue surrounded by otherwise muted colors, the subsequent emergence of details assuming an anarchical status that might otherwise go unremarked. "The High Belfry," 1984, includes examples of this, and uses, among other devices, scale play, illusion, and a bizarre, surreal sense of order that is difficult to question in spite of evidence contrary to realistic expectation or plausibility. In this image, cherries sit next to a drawing of a grand old building, all elements compartmentalized in a frame-like box. There is a formality to the presentation that reminds one of botanical specimens or naturalist studies (the fascination my grandmother's arrowhead and other archaeological collections held comes immediately to mind, the catalytic stimulation of memory a pleasant by-product of examining Parker's pictures). Her vocabulary evokes the syntax of dreams — it attests to and forms a visual text that neither acknowledges nor disavows the recognizableness of the "things" that are so transformed as to defy definition. Two powerful examples of this are "Interrupted Information" and "The Burning Glass," 1985, gorgeous tonal renderings of flowers and shadows, the latter taking on structural as well as referential form (light informing structurally, cascading impossibly). A less ephemeral subject matter is found in some of the black and white work of a few years prior (for example, "Dawn," 1983) — heavier, more recognizable things, including metal chain and tools, are incorporated and explored, yet retain their chimeric ability to float and waver before one's eyes. Close scrutiny is of

Rosamond Wolff Purcell: Eve



little help in unravelling these puzzles.

Purcell creates chaos and disorder from subject matter that is difficult to perceive as subversive. Once neutral, existing imagery, such as architectural renderings and illustrations, become integrated — grounded — after a very painterly fashion, assuming an entirely new character based upon a ruthlessly elusive system of referral and reference. (Exceptions are found in a series of images including dead monkeys' skins.) She carefully studies the relations between objects and icons, the cohesiveness when the two are joined, that stirs memory, executed with a scientist's detachment. The resulting data, a contemporary historical remake, is comprehensive, often at odds, and (one suspects) skewed. The presence of an object or form may be unidentifiable, but it is influential nevertheless, suggesting a compression and layering of time. These mysterious areas in general evoke an emotional response; one rests there, refreshed by the abstraction, then able to wander back into the demanding visionary world within the frame. These scenarios are more pointedly historical, both in terms of physical aspects and intended messages. A windowpane motif is used (often shards of broken glass remain as editorial asides). In many images, there is carryover from frame to frame; others seem fragmented, the interruption on the surface incidental, non-sequitur. One begins to imagine apparitions, spawned from the always-whirling movement of a vortex, around which the image unravels. Any serenity is deceptive, for herein lies a language of intensity, one which pushes the capacities of assimilation to the limit. The collective screams and sighs of the universe are locked up in Purcell's constructions. Torn postcards, marbled papers, skeletons, anatomical illustrations, references to death, old photographs, refracted, suggestive human forms often hovering watchfully, add to the element's dry, powdery appearance, as though disappearance is imminent; the pieces as a whole, however, have solidity and weight, and serve as an authoritative resource. The physical integration of materials never competes with or overpowers the vision — the alliance is remarkable if a bit theatrical. Objects are used more as players, persona, activated by the instinctive



Olivia Parker: Night Rising, 1985

anima of an aggressive idea. Some of Purcell's titles are elusive, even though directly referential or voyeuristic: "Write a Letter to Your Congressman" incorporates faces, both sculptural and photographically rendered, with a larger measure of recognizable imagery than usual. Other titles are more descriptive, without affectation: "Macaque" in no way prepares the viewer for an eviscerated and restitched monkey whose arms reach upward pleadingly as it floats on iridescent flower petals, or "Monkey in a Box," whose gestures of sorrow are contained in tight quarters. The most potent of this series is the least graphic or illustrative — in "Monkey Ear," the body of the animal blends into the background, and the hair on the head is offset by its different coloration. The dessicated feet and ear (highlighted by the orangish hair dramatically swept back) appear to be scattered, or casually fallen as in repose. This series is difficult, sorrowful, terribly evocative (not unlike the moody portraits from her first book, *A Matter of Time*, published by Godine in 1975). Purcell's use of color is hypnotic, lulling the viewer into a false sense of safety. At times monochromatic in spirit ("Eve" uses minimal coloration), this usage calls to mind aging, an assertive antiquity. In wandering through the photographs, one feels the intimacy of bearing witness to a thought process as well as a finished product (evident in, for example, "To be Erected for the State of New Hampshire," or the tableau-like "Angelus," the story of a biplane, cows, and their caretaker, a horse-drawn cart in which cargo is diminished to nonsensical status, and a dog with a gasmask, bespeaking Purcell's interest in World War I). A more still-life treatment is seen in "Trouble at the Bottom of the Old Man's Garden," where nature is misappropriated — seed pods become

eggshells, contents emerged and replaced, newspaper chewed as though in preparation of a nest, layers and folds of cloth, and a startling face in the upper left corner, overseeing clues. Purcell's appreciation of the gesture and grace of something as inelegant as wire or detritus, in association with a profound use of the symbolic content of found imagery, is evident in the aforementioned "Eve." Interiors, in the peace of decline and abandon, move panel to panel, through corridors to striking vistas,

as secrets emerge. And then, one is confronted with a powerful and insightful contradiction — the insertion of a contemporary image showing a woman with hands clasped and bound by a coiled snake. The snake's head points upward, laying flat against the woman's body, faces almost touching. This surrealist vision (found in the first book as well as the second, *Half-Life*, 1980, Godine) is characteristic of the surprises lying in wait for the intrepid observer.

Olivia Parker: A Reasonable Argument, 1980



PLAYING IT AGAIN:
POST-MODERNISM
ON THE MOVE

Playing It Again: Strategies of Appropriation. Diverse Works, Houston. October 26-November 30, 1985. Images by Sarah Charlesworth, Patrick Clancy, Peter d'Agostino, Stephen Frailey, Suzanne Hellmuth, Barbara Kruger, Mike Mandell, Richard Prince, Jock Reynolds, Larry Sultan, Gwen Widmer, and Reese Williams. Curated by Sam Samore, under the sponsorship of the Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe.

By Paul Hester

"Frankly, part of what drew me to the idea of rephotography was the fact that I'd never really liked my work. I'd sold paintings since the early 70s, had solo shows, was successful. But I never liked my work. Ever. Because I did it. Obviously if you don't like your work, a logical alternative is to take someone else's — and call it yours. The activity of taking seemed reasonable. I started to think of the camera as a pair of electronic scissors. The public images I would take didn't really need anything done to them. They didn't need to be silkscreened or painted on or collaged. The photograph that I presented had to resemble, as much as possible, the photograph that had initially attracted me. It was a matter of being as presumptuous as the original picture."

Richard Prince, in *Aperture*.

Confronted by the bewildering appearances of new photographic strategies, the photographic audience needs a new guidebook.

In the mid sixties, the Museum of Modern Art in New York published John Szarkowski's *The Photographer's Eye*, in which he defined his criteria of what made a photograph photographic in terms of form and defended those criteria as if they were inherently photographic. Although supposedly limiting what is photography and what is not, it relied heavily on the existing tenets of modern composition, and became the bible of photography's growth movement in the seventies.

Several publishing ventures since then have attempted to mark out the territory of more recent photographic enterprises, but these have primarily appeared in the form of collected essays; ironically, most have been long on words and short on pictures. Perhaps the cost of photographic reproductions has directed most of these publications toward images considered safe enough for the coffee table. But for whatever reason, much of the writing has been lost to internecine statements between competing camps. Neither of these approaches has been useful to those of us wondering just what the hell is going on in photography.

So it is refreshing to come across the efforts of curator Sam Samore and the Center for Contemporary Arts of Santa Fe in *Playing It Again: Strategies of Appropriation*, a show of appropriated images by twelve contemporary photographers. The best way for someone looking for a way to educate their prejudices after initial rejection of such unfamiliar works is through the exhibition's \$3 tabloid catalogue. By way of introduction, Samore has written a play in one act between Old and New in which all our dumb questions are asked and answered.

NEW: Post-modernism seeks to dismantle the modernist agenda — autonomy, authenticity, originality, self-referentiality. Post-modernism believes in the power of mass-production — with the concomitant loss of the art object's "aura" — as Walter Benjamin so aptly postulated. In fact the modernist hallmark, self-expression, is strongly denied by these artists.

Also included in the catalog are



Sarah Charlesworth: Rider, 1984

reproductions of the work, statements by the artists, and essays by Douglas Crimp, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and James Hugunin. All the ingredients are there for the post-modern movement, including a usual dosage of obfuscation. Not all the artists statements are helpful, but the statement by Barbara Kruger indicates her advanced position among these workers by its clarity: "In the hope of coupling the ingratiating of wishful thinking with the criticality of knowing better, I replicate certain words and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction. I see my work as a series of attempts to ruin certain representations and to welcome a female spectator into the audience of men."

OLD: Didn't Duchamp do this sort of thing already with the Mona Lisa?

NEW: Certainly Duchamp gave us the "ready-made"; but his functional manufactured objects were jabs at the "optical" painters of his time. His intention was to introduce the everyday object into the realm of esthetic discourse . . . [Sherry] Levine attempts to uncover not issues of esthetics but how we have come to know art through reproductions. How photographs themselves simply duplicate reality . . . Hers is a strong denial of originality and authorship. The artist "quotes" from culture's cookbook, assembling pictures in the manner of a magazine editor. The idea of copying, of the multiplicity of reproductions, is a part of the post-modernist agenda.

Kruger is represented in this exhibition by several 11x14 prints, most of which have been seen before in Houston at the show of her work at the Contemporary Arts Museum. Even in their small size and minus her red frames, they draw you up. You recognize a specific position, but are not involved in any closure. The implications of the graphic, bold-faced letters are sufficiently open-ended to allow her challenges to our assumed knowledge to reverberate. You keep thinking about what she means, wondering, reapplying it to your own actions.

Kruger is adamant that she is not a moralist, but her works involve a definite point of view. Whether her position implies judgment depends upon the viewer's reading of the work. Are you defensive about her challenge to the status quo?

The positions of male and female

within Kruger's work are rendered more problematic by her use of the gender-neutral pronoun "you". On the other hand, the other piece in the show which I found to be the most provocative is more specific. Patrick Clancy's "Hawaii nei (Fish Out of Water)" begins or is based on a photograph from a travel brochure depicting the arrival of a luxury cruise ship with a middle-age couple in the foreground being greeted by a young Hawaiian woman in native dress. It is a point of departure. This photographic worker is unconcerned with the making of an original image, but instead has aimed toward deconstruction of an existing image from the world of advertising.

Clancy has pulled apart the travel ad, rephotographing the cast as individuals and as pairs, in a sense framing the competing and overlapping relationships which he sees in the whole. These rephotographed parts are presented in reverse, with the grain of the four-color printing dots contributing to its alteration in size. These fragments form a consistent frieze along the top of the piece, running fifteen feet in length; beneath are white letters reversed out of black in which different size letters differentiate the distinct functions of the text. Uppercase letters just beneath the pictures serve as titles and link photographs together into subgroups. "HOLIDAY DISCOVER EMPLOYEES AND REPLICATES A VARIABLE DOMESTICATION" begins at the left of the work, followed by "FORGOTTEN DREAMS IN PERPETUAL FORMATION ENCOUNTER MATERIAL GENERATION;" the center of the frame is so designated, and EXOTIC INFORMATION is itemized through FANTASY, NATURALIZATION, FOCUS (OBSESSION), TRANSLATION, MOBILITY.

The lowercase text beneath NATURALIZATION reads: "Delighted, she turns to him."

The Photographer has dedicated the cover of the travel brochure to his fantasy. He returns her look.

BIT-uh TSIGH-gen zee meer (Please show me.)

Jerusalem 3pm 60 Partially cloudy.

Layers of photographic technique, dialogue from the actors' structural analysis of the picture, clues to possible readings of the evidence, pronunciation of Hawaiian greetings, excerpts from Captain Cook's diary suggesting other associations of arrival, departure, and the larger issues of colonialism and discovery and exploration, this mix of voices reproduces a sampler of readings available through the image, enlarging the viewer's possibilities of understanding.

It appears not as the photographer's voice, but instead as the chorus of an audience (similar to Samore's play, but with more characters). It is the culture speaking through daily read-outs of time, temperature, and weather from the exotic cities of a would-be traveler's fantasy.

I am reminded of an illustration from *Scientific American* that presented a plotting of one viewer's eye as it tracked back and forth across a simple drawing. Each node represented the

eye's resting place before it proceeded to the next point of information. Rather than the usually implied quick, single glance, this experiment had broken down "a look" into its constituents and revealed the complexity inherent in visual comprehension.

I have written at some length about this one piece because it is a complex work capable of sustaining a great deal more examination, and it is in my mind a careful exegesis of photography in the late 20th century. Clancy has produced a diagram that is representative of the working methods of several photographers engaged in strategies of appropriation. It is both a presentation of a work and the documentation of its theory. It is particularly photographic in its framing and reversal of an existing "reality"; and in the weaving of its sub-texts suggests a narrative of both insight and drama. It is provocative in its attempt to bring together within the work a partial listing of associations and link them with the actualities of place that are also embodiments of fantasy. And he offers hints for the viewer of his starting points within the voices of the characters. "I was investigating the idea of vacation . . . writing copy about certain ideal contemporary fictional models."

All the work within this exhibition is challenging the authority of photography's claim for truth, to insert the subversive suggestion that there is more than one way to see the picture/read the picture. It is a power struggle for the control of meaning.

"Few of us question the source of these images: who is producing them; under what circumstances they are being produced, edited, framed, distributed, collected and installed. The single image, or linear narrative, is the chosen form of most image producers, yet we in the general public must constantly grapple with the myriad of agitated associations and meanings, both random and intended, that these pictures produce when leaving the photographic tributaries and entering the vast mainstream . . . Our work as artists, using photographs, began as a personal effort to examine, and sometimes challenge, visual conventions, mechanisms, and interpretations now commanding the pictorial facade of history;" (Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds).

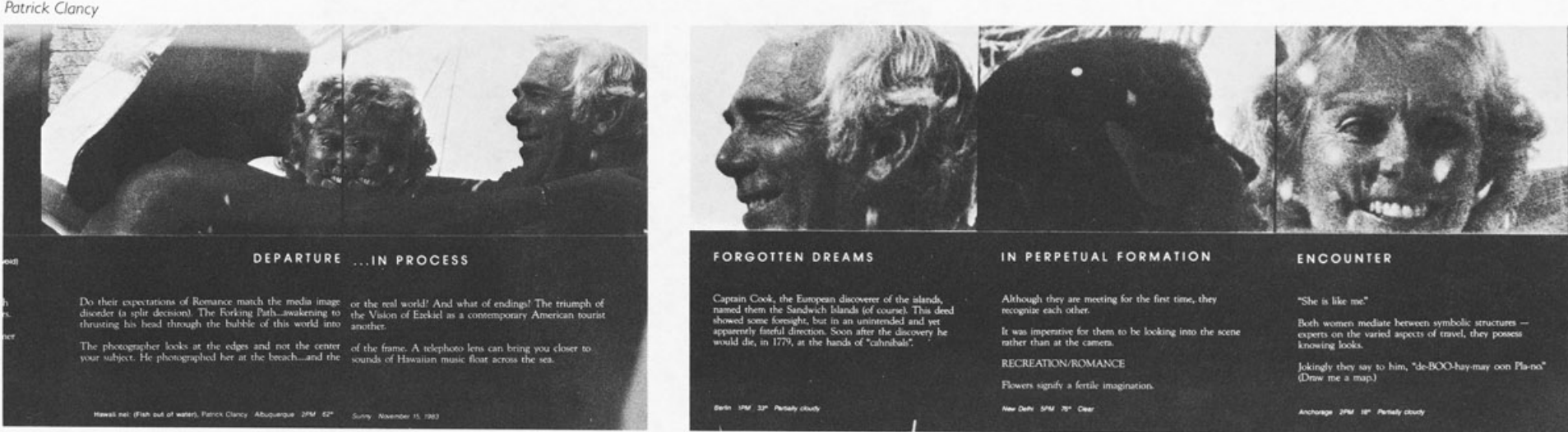
OLD: Clearly, there is something different about these artists. Whether or not it is a distinct break from the past remains to be seen.

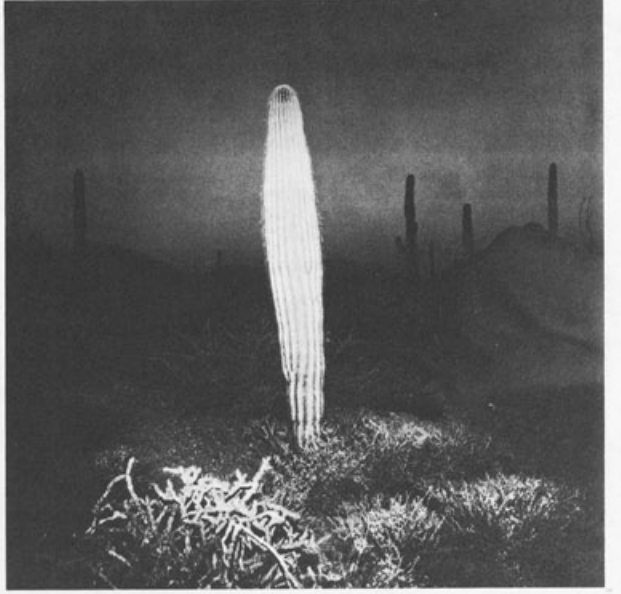
NEW: I think there is a real change taking place. All these artists, who've grown up in the 1950s and 60s and lived in a world filled with images, have learned how to manipulate the syntax, the strategies of mass culture — advertising, film, television in a self-conscious, 'enlightened' manner. At least they haven't blithely succumbed. At least we have a group of individuals whose work is politically active. Either we continue letting someone else — corporations or government — dictate how we conceptualize the world, or we can begin redirecting the images towards a more sophisticated inquiry.

Rather than camouflaging the "real" issues, perhaps we can perceive them clearly for the first time.

OLD: Let's hope so.

END





All Photographs by Richard Misrach

RICHARD MISRACH: DESERT CANTOS

An exhibition of Richard Misrach's desert work, selected from the series which he calls *Desert Cantos*, will open at the Houston Center for Photography on December 6 and will remain there until January 5, 1986. This interview was held in late September.

By Peter Brown

PB: Tell me about your family, your background.

RM: I was born in Los Angeles in 1949 and pretty much lived there until I was 17, when I went to Berkeley to go to college. I have one sister, she's three years older. My father was in the sporting goods business, with my grandfather. I guess you'd say my mother was a conventional housewife.

PB: Any kind of family visual influence?

RM: My father was a kind of photo buff. When he was a kid he had a darkroom. When we were growing up he always had an 8mm movie camera and he used to do the family outings. We had a pretty active family. We'd go skiing and on trips. To film everything the family did, he ended up sticking the movie camera in my hands, so I did a lot of that. When I was a teenager and I'd go on surfing trips with my friends I used to make little films — more like home movies. But I was into it.

PB: Were sports a particular interest?

RM: Well actually, surfing and skiing aren't like team sports. Skiing was always a very meditative sort of sport for me. It wasn't really a sport, it was more of a process . . . It's more like a dance, at least the way I thought, than a sport; you know, rhythm and movement and all that. I just enjoyed being out there. It's very important for me to be in a physical environment that feels good when I'm working. I've been to certain places that were visually interesting, but that I didn't like — too cold or too wet or it just didn't feel right.

PB: Did the desert enter into your consciousness early on?

RM: Yeah, that's important. When I was five or six years old, my father had a friend who talked us into buying three blocks of land in the Mojave Desert, out by Edwards Air Force base, with the idea that base would expand and all these soldiers would need housing. It was a big investment on his part and of course it was a total bust. But he did buy these three blocks and he named the streets after my sister, my mother, and me. I just came back from Nevada last week and as I was driving toward Mojave I had to try to find the place. I turned off a street to start looking and I ran right into Richard Street. That was real strange.

When we used to go skiing in the Sierras and we used to have to drive through the desert, I remember it

being very eerie and not liking the desert at all, particularly at night. I remember we had a flat tire once and I kept thinking bogeymen would jump out of the bushes.

PB: Some of the black and white work in the desert certainly is spooky stuff.

RM: Yeah, in fact, when I first started working there, I didn't like the desert. I thought it was an ugly, barren, empty wasteland — all the stereotypes of the desert. The Carlos Castaneda books about Don Juan came out around the time I started that project. I was interested in a kind of a funky American symbol and also the kind of mysticism that was popular. So I went out there. The first day I just walked around in the late afternoon. The incredible heat, silence, and stillness were very powerful — and positive. I guess it's about the first time I appreciated the beauty of the place.

PB: Why did you decide to go to Berkeley?

RM: It was very good academically, I needed to get away from home, and Berkeley represented an alternative symbol to what I was used to — and I liked the politics. It was the tail end of the Vietnam war, and that was the time of the very heavy politics. I was pretty much involved with that. That was the time I really started taking pictures with a 35mm camera of the riots and the tear

gassing and all that.

PB: Did you take any classes in photography, were there any offered?

RM: They had a couple of classes in the architecture department, but I didn't want to take them. I finally took one when I was already seriously involved in photography and Bill Garnett wanted to flunk me because I wouldn't do the assignments that he wanted. But he and I became friends.

I was getting my degree in psychology, and my senior year I was kind of bored with academia and there was a facility called the ASUC Studio, which was an etching, lithography, ceramics, and photography studio for students and faculty and people related to the university. It wasn't accredited, and there weren't formal classes. The facilities were there, and if you wanted help on a print, you'd bring it out in the light and somebody'd look over your shoulder and say, well it's too dark or too light or you need more contrast. There were good people there. Dave Bohn officially set it up. He set up a real simple structure and he had a protege, Roger Minick, who took over after him. I worked with Roger and saw some of his work there. That was my first exposure to fine art photography. It just blew me out of the water that photographs could be so beautiful. I had the sense that this was something I'd want to do, so I started doing it. After I graduated, in 1971,

they offered me a staff job, kind of a glorified janitorial position, at the Studio. The classic structure at the studio was: nobody would say a word about anything — if you got a grunt, you were making progress. And that was it. So you would just keep working until you got a grunt. I'd go in the darkroom, develop my film and make some prints and bring them out and Roger'd look at them.

I photographed the people getting fucked over by the police and all that, then I did a trip to Europe, and started photographing more fine art sort of stuff. Probably the biggest education I had besides the studio with Roger was the books that were published then on the West Coast — mostly the landscape books, White and Adams and Caponigro. I started making landscapes. I did that for about a year, and then I realized that was kind of a dead end. The next stage was moving towards the documentary work, which resulted in *Telegraph 3 A.M.* in 1974, which was the book of photographs of Berkeley street people.

PB: Were there other younger photographers that you were friends with at that point?

RM: Yeah, there were quite a few. The people who came to the Studio did so because they were highly motivated to make pictures. They weren't doing it for grades or anything like that. It was a fairly intelli-

gent base of people, who maybe didn't go on with photography but who were doing really good work. In fact, in those early years, there was one year when Steve Fitch, Paul Herzoff, and I received NEAs and Roger received a Guggenheim.

None of us was aware of the bigger artworld. We weren't exhibiting yet, we really didn't know about that. We were very naive at that point. We'd heard about an NEA for photography, and we thought, well, we'll apply, but it wasn't like the kind of consciousness there is now about getting grants and having shows. In fact, most of the people hadn't had shows when they applied for grants.

PB: The *Telegraph 3 A.M.* book — how did that get off the ground?

RM: Leonard Sussman, who was a staff member at the time, told me that if you really want to make the medium a language that you can speak with fluently and articulately you have to do it every day. You have to photograph and print on a daily basis. I took it literally. I wanted to get away from the landscapes and I started photographing the street people in Berkeley. After three or four weeks, Roger started looking at the work and said, you've got a book here. So I spent about two years just photographing my brains out and Roger was my guiding light on this all the way along. He helped me edit the work. He sat on the press with me, helped me organize, design the book, and raise the money for it.

I was living on \$3,000 for a year and a half. I didn't have my own darkroom. When the studio would close to the public at 11pm, Steve Fitch and I would print all night. I did that until 1978.

PB: How do you feel about that work now?

RM: It was interesting right after I did the work. I was so intensely involved I just did it, published it. When I looked at it at that point I was embarrassed. I think it was a little bit confused; it was somewhere between art and documentary. It really wasn't that exceptional as either one and it was trying to do both. My original purpose was to make a social statement, ideally to effect social change. I realize that actually it was a coffee table book that most people couldn't afford and when people looked at it they said how beautifully printed, how aesthetically interesting. It didn't do what I thought it was supposed to do. I learned to live with that and moved on. Ten years later, now, all of a sudden the book has valid historical information. I am liking the book now for a totally different reason than when I had made it. I think it has a value now that it didn't have then. The meaning, the information, the period of time I think is well represented. In that sense I do feel good about it.

PB: Then comes a major shift. The desert work is very different.

RM: Photographing people was really draining. After that I went to the desert to isolate myself. I had needed to do that for a long time.



PB: Why did that happen?
RM: The political atmosphere changed at Berkeley, and there was a cultural movement toward Eastern thought: the health food kick, meditation, the introduction of Zen. That clearly had an impact on me and so did the Castaneda books. I was also reading Gurdjieff, Blake, and Yeats, and all that visionary literature that came along with the Castaneda books. I think a combination of that general shift in the cultural winds, and the reading I was doing got me interested in something different.

PB: Why the desert over other places?
RM: Because of my familiarity with the desert from my childhood. Also because of the Castaneda books. I was really intrigued with the desert from the first book and my first experience going into the desert corresponded with that very highly. Out in the desert I would find myself reading each book over and over, trying out certain exercises.

PB: How did you decide on a particular place in the desert?

RM: Then I mentioned to a woman in the ceramic studio at ASUC that I was going down to Arizona, searching for cactus, especially some that looked miraculous. She said there

was a place near Tucson that has incredible stands of cactus. So I figured I would aim for that. I drove all the way to Tucson, but I couldn't locate it. I asked someone at a gas station if he knew where these stands of cactus were. He didn't know what I was talking about. I said, well, forget it. I started driving home and about 20 minutes outside of Tucson, going into the hills, I saw what looked like pointillistic gestures on the mountain. I thought, that's weird. What is that? My intuition said that is the place to go. So I got off the freeway and I started driving and about 15 or 20 minutes later I realized it was these tremendous stands of cactus. Through some back passages I went over the hill and found myself in the Saguaro National Monument, where you find stands of cactuses like you would find forests of redwoods or pines.

PB: Does intuition generally play a role in your work?

RM: I am always relying on instinct and intuition. The best work I have done has been work like that rather than work that is intellectually calculated.

PB: Any examples?

RM: In my most recent work I have had a number of weird encounters with fire. I am very skeptical of the

way we package Eastern ideas and I don't feel comfortable with them, but these encounters are so coincidental that in some ways it can't be coincidental. I am not sure what to do with them. I am skeptical but I get involved with them and I see where they lead me; they lead me to amazing things.

PB: That fire business. I know you had a fire in your Emeryville studio. And then there was a fire at a printing lab where you lost a lot of negatives, then this fire series out at the desert . . .

RM: Well, for instance, the fire at the Emeryville studio was on February 18, 1978, and the fire at Im-agechrome — the lab that had all my negatives — was on February 18, 1982. On February 18, 1983, in the early morning — I didn't even know it was February 18 — I was in the desert. There was a grove of palm trees I wanted to go take a look at and photograph. I went at dawn and walked around and looked at it. The light wasn't right to photograph, so I went back to Palm Springs to the museum and did some work there, and later in the afternoon I decided to drive back out. I was driving out and I saw this huge plume of smoke. So I went over and found this fire

that was so dramatic I couldn't help but photograph. It wasn't until later that night that I realized it was February 18th. That really shook me up. Bizarre. And those three events are only a scratch in the surface.

On February 1, 1984, I went to Hawaii and I wasn't even gonna take my camera. I had been in Hawaii for a week when I flew to the big island. That night, the minute I landed, the volcano went off. We called some friends to see what was happening. Nobody else had even seen it shooting up a 1500-foot fountain of lava. The volcano had been dormant for 100 years. We went and picked up my friends and took them and showed them. I photographed it the next morning at dawn and by late afternoon the eruption had stopped.

When I photographed the space shuttle in 1983, I took one photograph of the shuttle landing. If you are shooting an 8x10 camera you obviously can't stop a space shuttle in motion, but I did want to take one snapshot for my son. I found out three days later that when the shuttle was landing, the interior of the cabin broke into flames, which they put out. I'd love to see if the time of the fire correlates with the time I actually released the shutter. A lot of coincidence.

PB: Good lord. That is really incredible. Back to the early desert work: a book was published without title or text. Why was this?

RM: Actually, Lew Thomas was a big influence and we were good friends at the time. We were having these meetings in my studio about once a month with about 12 people. Nearly everyone there was involved in the photography language or conceptual art at the time. I was about the only one at the time working on "straight photography," very traditional image making. One of the things I felt was the absence of text was in fact the most powerful text you could have. Text that is used in photographic books is usually very superficial and arbitrary and has little to do with the work inside the book. Text titles serve to code the book to influence the reading of the book. I realized I would rather use a photograph as the title, an actual visual image as the title, rather than a word or words. Normally you have a title page or, say, a dedication to mom and dad, that doesn't have anything to do with the work. Normally the text is on the back of the book or the wings of the book — you know, quotes from curators, critics, and writers — and that is hype. None of that has anything to do with the book. So I went page by page starting with the cover and decided what text was really needed. And page by page I would just feel I didn't need anything and the last thing to give up in terms of text was page numbers. My gallery really wanted it to have page numbers. They said, how would collectors be able to order prints? They're all pictures of the desert, and there is no way to distinguish them. The page number would allow the collectors to say they want the image on page number 32 or plate number 46. I realized that doesn't have anything to do with the communication of the book either. At first, I was not going to have anything on the spine, except Lew said you gotta have it or it won't be a book. There are a few things that have to be in a book in order to be a book, and it was a book, not a portfolio of reproductions. Those critical things we put on were the Library of Congress number, the ISBN number, the retail price, the publisher, and a copyright symbol with my name next to it. All on the spine. Everything else was eliminated. That was the reason behind it, part of it was to remove the noise. The stronger rationale was to point up the misuse of language and text and to draw attention to the fact of the use of text.

PB: From this work there is a shift to color and much larger images, and you began to work in a rectangle

other than a square. How did that come about?

RM: I was using a 2¼ camera. When I was in Hawaii working on that project, photographing the jungle vegetation, my camera broke and I didn't know it. It kept vignetting the bottom third of the frame. I got back and most of the images were lopped off at the bottom. I pay a lot of attention to accidents. You can go prepared and the world always provides so much and then you have to rely on chance for probably 90 percent of everything that happens, which is one of the things I like about the photographic process. So, in the case where the bottom of my film was chopped off, I liked what I could do with it. I took it where I could. I printed the work larger and it got me to a rectangular format; it became real interesting.

PB: Do you print your own color work?

RM: I did. Then I stopped. Sometimes I print my own contacts. I don't have the equipment to print the large prints. It is very expensive.

PB: How do you feel about that?

RM: No problem at all. In fact, if anything it has freed me up. Some-





times I wish I were printing. I like printing, and I could probably get a little better results with some of my prints. But I have a wonderful printer who taught me everything I know about printing anyway. Ninety-nine percent of the time she does wonderful work. It just gives me so much more time to shoot, which I think is best. For me in the last three or four years I feel a growth in my work, the evolution of my seeing dramatically speeded up because of the time I have spent shooting.

PB: How do you feel about the "fugitive" qualities of color, the fact that it will fade over time?

RM: It bothers me, but it has recently been improved dramatically. I don't know if you know about the new Ektacolor Plus materials.

PB: You print most of your work on the Ektacolor Plus paper?

RM: Yes, and before the Plus came out, on Ektacolor 78. I did a dye transfer portfolio and I had Cibachromes made from negatives and they were all right but they weren't as beautiful. They didn't have subtlety and beauty. They didn't correspond to what I was trying to do. The Plus paper is better now; it's sup-

posed to last a lot longer. It's discouraging to think all the work you are doing might fade, but I'm not doing it for posterity or to make money at it or all that other stuff.

PB: What do you do with your negatives? Do you keep them refrigerated?

RM: Some I keep frozen. Ones I am working with I have to keep on hand. The ones that are important to me I keep in a safe deposit box in the bank. I have them spread out.

PB: You lost a lot in the fire?

RM: Yes, I lost about 3,000 8x10s and 1,000 2 1/4s. I lost most of my Hawaii work. Most of my Greece work. All my Louisiana. About 3,000 negatives from the *Desert Cantos* project. I did have 8x10 contacts of that project. In fact, some copy prints from the contacts will be in the show at the Houston Center for Photography. I was hoping to do more of that. I'm going to save all those. Maybe five, ten, fifteen years down the road I'll really be able to save them with the new technology.

PB: The fire must have been a devastating experience.

RM: It was bad, but it wasn't as bad as you would think. The thought of it

is unbearable, but the reality You just have to keep working.

PB: In this current desert work, how do you get around, how do you cart your film around, what's your general procedure?

RM: I've got a VW van that I go around in. I have three big picnic ice chests. I don't keep ice in there, but I keep the film in there. Generally, if it's cool during the night, the coolers will stay cool during the day. Once I shoot the film, I'll wait a few days, and when I have 50 to 100 exposures, I'll pack them up and ship them express to L.A. and the lab will develop them.

PB: And do you have a little dark space in the van?

RM: Yeah. I have windows that have black curtains and I unload and reload film every night. Block off everything, pull over and find a relatively dark place, and change film in there. It's a pain in the ass.

I really like the ease of working with 2 1/4 and not dealing with the weight, slowness, changing film, and all that stuff. But I've learned a lot about patience.

PB: Tell me about this new work, *Desert Cantos*.

RM: I've been working on it for about five years. It's the most extended project I've ever been involved with. It keeps expanding in scope, which I really like. The more I work on it, the more layers evolve, and I don't see an end in sight at this point. "Canto" simply means subsections of a long song. In literary history, there is a long tradition of cantos — Dante, Ezra Pound, and so on. With Dante, and particularly with Pound, they were epic projects that took lifetimes. I think Pound worked on his *Cantos* for 35 years, maybe even more. Recently I found an obscure book from about thirty years ago, on his cantos, talking about what the problems were and the epic nature of the work, the kind of criticism that he encountered, the difficulty of looking at the work because the work is very dense; it's very difficult to understand. You almost have to read it as a dream as opposed to any progressive, linear, rational thought. Once you realize that, it changes your whole attitude. It had a big impact on how I designed the structure of this book that's just coming out. And I see it as an epic project for me — there are so many layers to this

thing. I think the ultimate goal here is using the desert both as a place and as a metaphor, dividing the two; one is visually powerful, and it's a real place, loaded with symbols and meaning. At the same time, because of the extreme nature of the desert, the harshness of the desert, it becomes a strong metaphor with association to the Bible and the history of literature, science fiction, the Twilight Zone . . . The desert is always this big metaphor for life and death, and God and the Devil. I

think there's something apocalyptic about the desert. The forces there are powerful.

I also want it to be a contemporary view, I don't want it to be some sort of metaphysical mumbo-jumbo. It's very different from my earlier work, very contemporary and specific, hopefully specific.

It's different than, say, Robert Adams' work, in the sense that I think it's more accepting of the current status of the place. There have been a number of books that have been very influential on my feelings in the work that I've been doing. Probably the main book is the one called *The Desert*, that was written in 1900 by John Van Dyke. He came out here, and spent three years wandering in the desert, writing about the aesthetics of the same desert I'd been working in, which is the Colorado Desert in Southern California. He talked a great deal about the beauty of the place, and he predicted what they'd be doing with the desert to try to cultivate it and all that, but that the desert would take over and reclaim itself, and that there would be "a return to the wasteland." In a very positive sense, in the apocalyptic future — our big scare, the bomb, and all that — the only hope there is, if our worst fears were to come true, is that the earth will sustain itself. Nature in a way will stay intact, and provide hope, even though our own lives will be totally destroyed. That sounds pretty dramatic, but there's something there in the desert that constantly reminds me of that. It makes one aware of a bigger scope of things, not just our own immediate struggle. And the struggle for survival reveals itself everywhere I go in the desert. Whether it's a fire, a flood, or a roadside business just trying to make it, or the landscape torn up by the dune buggies. It's all human folly in a very transient sense, and that shows up in the desert.

PB: Will there be a text with this book?

RM: I'm not sure exactly what it will be, but there definitely will be a text. Originally for each canto, I was going to write a short thing, but that felt too heavy handed. So I think I'm going to let the photographs do the talking for me. The first book will probably be out next year.

PB: So this will be a series of books.

RM: Yes. The second book is about ninety percent done, and it'll be out probably a year to a year and a half after the first one. The first book will be the first four cantos, which is *The Terrain*, *The Event*, *The Flood*, and *The Fire*. The second book will introduce the inhabitants of the land.

PB: Will there be a third or a fourth?

RM: There might be a third book, I'm not sure yet; that remains to be seen. It's still in the early stages, we'll see how that evolves.

PB: And it's all in the Colorado Desert?

RM: Yeah. There are a few photographs that were taken outside the Colorado Desert. At this point my interest is expanding — it's not necessary that the Colorado Desert be the only place I work, but it's been instructive to confine myself to that one relatively small area, probably a hundred mile radius. Everything was there, floods and fires, this incredible landscape — everything was in this one area.

PB: As far as survival goes, are you pretty much self supporting in terms of print sales?

RM: Yeah, pretty much since 1978. It's generally been a combination of print sales and teaching here and there. The last couple of years have been the best.

PB: How do you feel about teaching?

RM: I've thought about that a lot. Making a living has always been month to month and it's always been very tight. I've been in debt several times over this whole project. I taught at UC. Berkeley for a quarter and I

taught at UC. Santa Barbara for a quarter last year and I love teaching but it interferes with my work. It sounds like a luxury, but to do good work I think you have to do it all the time. I should be photographing and working every day. It's what we're all supposed to be doing. As the support system grows, maybe more and more people will be able to do that. But if it gets to the point where I can't sell enough prints or supplement my income in one way or another I'd probably teach.

PB: You have relationships with a number of galleries?

RM: Yes, Light Gallery in New York, Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco. I had Delahunty Gallery in Texas but they've moved away from photography. I've had a number of other galleries but I've pretty much pulled it back to a few.

PB: Relationships have generally been good?

RM: Generally, they've been awful. With the exception of Fraenkel Gallery and Bob Mann at Light Gallery; he's been wonderful. I've several bad relationships with some New York galleries. I have a lawsuit against Dan Fear's Silver Image gallery in Seattle. It's an awful business and photographers are not treated too well; they're really exploited a lot.

PB: What have been the main problems with galleries?

RM: Irresponsible payment, irresponsible follow through. Mainly gallery dealers. The gallery business has very few bright, enlightened gallery directors who really know a lot about photography and love photography. Many of them got into the business for the wrong reasons. Generally, it's very difficult to make it in photography because photographic prices are not that high and it's a lot to pay for the overhead and a lot of these galleries get behind and when they get a payment they pay their own bills and payment to photographers gets behind and they don't let you know that they've sold things and you have trouble getting paid and so on and so forth. There are a lot of problems with that. For awhile there was a boom and everybody jumped on the wagon and there were galleries opening up all over the place and the boom stopped and they got caught with their pants down.

PB: How does your personal life work, living with people — you're married to a photographer?

RM: We're separated now, but for a long time we had a great relationship. She was a photographer, we traveled together, she gave me great feedback for my work. But when we had a child, the financial strain and difficulty, the fact that I travel so much with my work, put a lot of pressure on the relationship. I think when I had my son, it was an awesome sort of transforming experience, it changed my priorities in a very positive way. I came in touch with a lot of things that I never knew before. Fires and children have a way of impacting on one's ideas.

PB: Any other major influences? Film, at all?

RM: It's always been a little bit of this and a little bit of that. *Paris, Texas* was incredible. It relates greatly to what I've been working on. But that happens all along, a film here, a book there. Again, these things seem to really happen at the right time. There's always a timing to how a book will just land in front of my face out of nowhere, a film will come up, or another photographer's work like Frank Gohlke's from the aftermath of the tornado in Wichita Falls. Incredible things like that happen all the time. When I saw Rothko's paintings, that reminded me of something I was doing in the early desert work. I saw that after the fact, but it comes to mind as a body of paintings that was almost identical to some real minimal desert work that I was doing.

I think it was Michael Bishop who said, you take a pinch here, a pinch there, and shake it up, and serve it.

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: COMPLEX MAGIC

Hollis Frampton: Recollections/Recreations. *Laguna Gloria Museum, Austin, August 4-September 29, 1985*

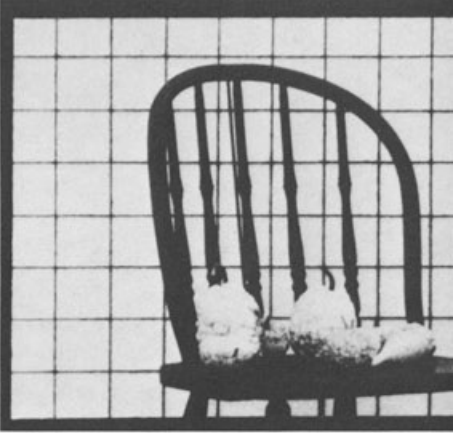
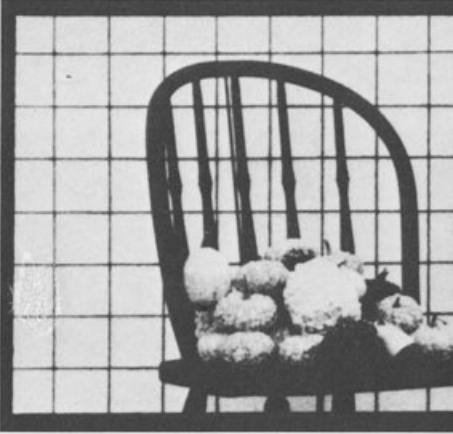
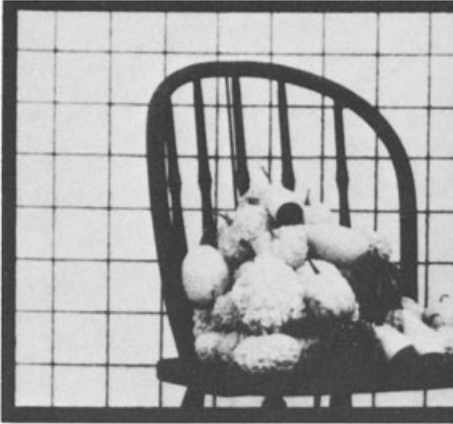
By April Rapier, (with special thanks to Stan Brakhage)

"Style is the adoption of a fixed perceptual distance from the object."
— Hollis Frampton, from *Brakhage Scrapbook* "Stan and Jane Brakhage (and Hollis Frampton) talking"

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, NY assumed the organization of a retrospective exhibition of the films, photographs, essays and mixed media art of Hollis Frampton in the spring of 1982, a massive and difficult undertaking that had begun earlier at the University of New Mexico Art Museum and was subsequently abandoned by that institution. Frampton was actively involved in the project from its inception until his death, at age 48, of cancer. It was completed with the assistance of his long-time companion and collaborator, Marion Faller. Thus the authenticity of importance granted and attention paid to the imagery selected for this exhibition — its inclusion and annotation — is never in question. (Stan Brakhage, a friend and colleague of Frampton, and an extraordinary independent filmmaker, remarked worriedly, "these posthumous attentions to the arts occur in a flurry.") It is clear that much consideration was given to curatorial discretion and restraint, especially with regard to unfinished work. Frampton carried out ideas over lengthy periods of time, with many works-in-progress transposed from one medium to another.

One is tempted, after an initial encounter with Frampton's work, to either devote much time to reading and rereading of the attendant (and voluminous) texts and essays that accumulated over the years, or to dismiss the work altogether. Yet so much is readily available to the involved viewer, most especially a sense of Frampton as complex interdisciplinary, a seeker in constant motion. Laguna Gloria Art Museum is to be commended for mounting as abstract and difficult an exhibit (as well as film retrospective and lecture) as this: one feels compelled to speculate not only on the average, probably conservative, museum-goer's reaction to the work, but as to whether a favorable response without prior, essential knowledge was possible, due to the referential (and appropriational, based on the structuralist movement of the 1960s) nature of the work. On a strictly superficial level, Frampton's art and essays could be construed as unfathomable, however, based on conceptual allusions, cross-referencing, and the ideology central to post-modernist theory — concerns regarding language, illusionism, textuality, and narrative.

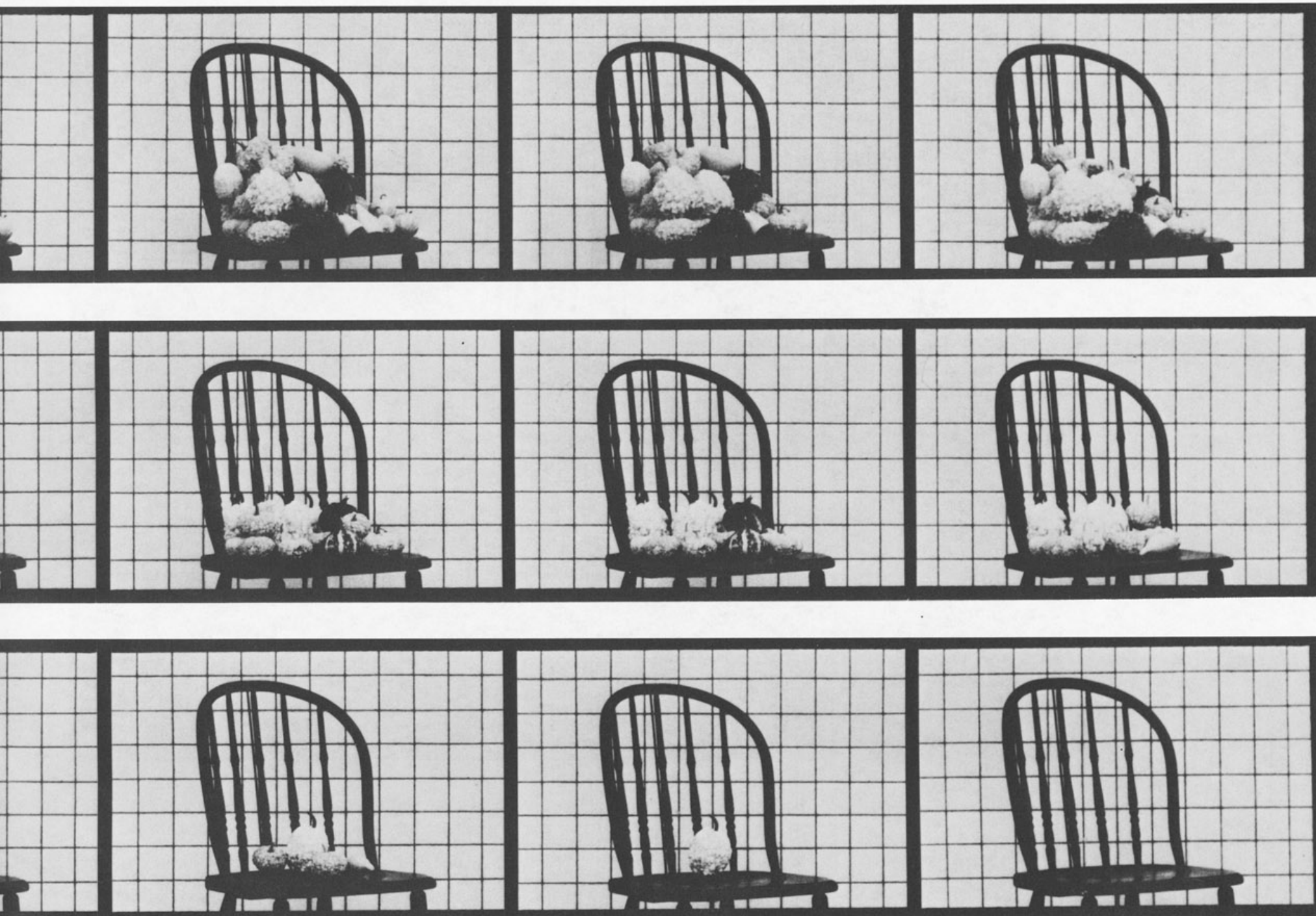
Frampton's genius (being singled out in the late 1930s as a child prodigy led to a precocity that evolved, over time, into a voracious quest not only for information, but an outlet for its assimilation) returned him repeatedly to an endless search — it is improbable that any one medium could have been singularly satisfactory or sustaining. As a youth, his studies ranged from languages (and an ongoing dialogue with Robert Fitzgerald, the translator of Homer) to mathematics and literature; among his classmates at Phillips Academy were Frank Stella and Carl Andre, later his roommates in New York City. He also studied painting and photography during this period. He began corresponding with Ezra Pound in college (1956), and the two formed a strong bond the following year, with many hours spent in conversation on the lawn of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC., where Pound was confined. It was during this period that an interest in poetry and theatre developed. (He considered himself a poet . . . "tentatively" for the time being.) The various references to "secondary" projects and jobs are as astonishing and influential



as the collected works. For example, he translated a seven-volume anthropological study from German into English, because Pound suggested that he do so. Sanskrit, Chinese, Russian, and Greek were among the other languages he studied. Photography was ongoing until 1962, when he began "tentative experiments in film." Photography, from then on, would serve to fill in gaps, answer questions. He had become involved with computers (ideologies more so than generative systems) in the late 1970s, and continued with the integration of video, film, and computer languaging in order that the gulf between art and science be bridged. It was often said of his films, because of their analytical nature, that they were cold. ("Of course I get to be typed as an icicle, frosty the snowman with his cinematic calculus, which mightily annoys me and hurts my feelings," Frampton said in an interview with Scott MacDonald in 1978.) It was a great source of chagrin to him that artists found the sciences cold and unfeeling, whereas scientists perceived the arts as warm and emotional.

Perhaps one of the most resourceful approaches to understanding Frampton's ideas underlying the strange and complex films and photographs exists simply in recognizing the difference in the way he processed thought and translated it. He found thought to be very sensual; he once paraphrased the French poet Gautier to Brakhage: "People might think the way they stroke velvet or a woman's thigh."

Each time Frampton abandoned a form, it was because he had lost interest in it; thus he was in constant search of a medium. He was one of the first to experiment in Xerography. In the film *nostalgia* (1971), in which he uses a hotplate to burn twelve of his photographs, in chronological order, he both haunts the viewer with the



Hollis Frampton, with Marion Faller: Gourds Vanishing [var. "Mixed Ornamental"], from Sixteen Studies from VEGETABLE LOCOMOTION, 1975

concept of memory and plainly evidences that he does not wish to be hung up in his past. (In 1969, John Baldessari burned all his paintings and sealed them in a wall in the Jewish Museum in New York.) Nor is there a more passionate example of revelation than the film *Critical Mass*. This brings up another aspect of the issue of his being unfeeling: there exists a contradiction in the encyclopedic thought that underlies the intricate systems of classification he applied to his vision and the Duchampian humor, the light and puzzling touch that defies the viewer (or reader) to take seriously what is being offered. In the preface to Les Krims' book *Fictcryptokrimsographs*, Frampton depicted, as he did in his essay on Atlantis rediscovered (*Circles of Confusion: Texts 1968-1980*), the power of photography: "... in an age without refrigeration, the photograph was a kind of formaldehyde, superior even to words, serving to immobilize Reality until Culture should inexorably metabolize it into Knowledge." There exist innumerable anomalies in the form of endemic deviations, all the purest representations of thought processes through each of Frampton's periods. (In particular was his departure from the norm when he taught: he created an entire semester's course on the films of Brakhage, for example.) The most potent and revealing clue came by way of anecdote, again from Brakhage: although Frampton had an extremely dry wit (and attitude in general), he was a sloppy wet kisser.

In all likelihood, the visual representations of so prodigious a mind can ultimately only serve as notation of concept, rather than as end in itself; in this case, although sheer output attempts otherwise, the oeuvre, when called upon to stand alone, generally fails to live up to the methodology that preceded it, and the myth that accompanies. Another contradiction exists between the joy

of listening to such a dotty monologue, the running conversation reminiscent of an elderly, charming relative filled with and driven nuts by useless and fascinating information imparted in pedantic delivery, and the depressing futility of such meticulous thought. The ambiguity that characterizes much of the photography is magnified by the master-narrative style of the accompanying texts and titles. (He wrote a great deal for such publications as *October* and *Art Forum*.) Yet the more ambiguous the image, the more powerful and lasting it is. For example, "7, 1963," from the *nostalgia portfolio* is a shot of a window taken from below. One sees a reflection in the shape of a chandelier, an ornate ceiling; not much information beyond cliché is imparted. Then, slowly, one becomes aware of a sentence written on the steamy surface of the glass: I like my new name. It is wondrous that he sees the chandelier, which had been wrapped during the room's renovation, as reminiscent of the tents of caterpillars. It is also this casual sort of observation that begins to overpower the image, dominate the viewer's own formulations and dreams. Or perhaps Frampton saw things that he then denied the viewer access to via verbal smokescreens. It is an intensely compelling process nevertheless. Often, artists assimilate into their imagery what they do not understand; Frampton's definitions were absolute, thorough, influential, and as a result somewhat limiting. His parodies and puns were endless, and executed with regard, taking on such diverse characters as Minor White and Louise Nevelson. His irreverence was stylistic after the fashion of the 1950s and 60s impracticality. "Ways to Purity," 1959, is a series of twelve black and white photographs (most of the work is in series) that chronicle the frequently traveled route between his apartment and Frank Stella's, above the Purity Diner. The

pictures themselves are of found sites — interesting texturally but unmemorable. The series entitled *ADSVMMVS ABSVMMVS: 1982* is based on an analysis of William Henry Fox Talbot's work, and Frampton's concept of "two different sorts of perceptual time": the historic and the ecstatic. The former reflects the more practical aspects of the image, including time; the latter (where the theory most closely connects to Talbot's pursuit of what he called "natural images"), the more metaphysical, in which, "for an ecstatic moment, time is not" (from Frampton's *Circles of Confusion*, the chapter called "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity.") Each image in the series (color), dedicated to Hollis Frampton, Sr., is accompanied by the most engaging of the texts, at times rambling and possibly meaningless, but objective and instructive. The texts contain myth ("the common garter is alleged to hear through its skin"), editorial commentary ("cuttlefish (one of a pair of specimens costing \$1.39 purchased by the author at King Chong Co., Bayard St. Manhattan in November, 1981)"), to scientific or ontological origins. The concept of time runs rampant throughout the work, and takes various forms: "Rites of Passage: 1983-84," with Marion Faller, is a series of twenty black and white photographs of a wedding cake topped with symbolic icons, progressing from birth to death. The series begins and ends with an unadorned cake.

An example of the double-edged parody Frampton was drawn to exists in "The Secret World of Frank Stella, 1958-62." It was conceived as a spoof of *The Secret World of Pablo Picasso*; he photographed Stella intermittently for several years, continuing the joke with the intention of creating a "prize-cliche" (to him a "petrified notion of seeing"). In order that he accomplish this, the photographs had to be "bad." Number 52

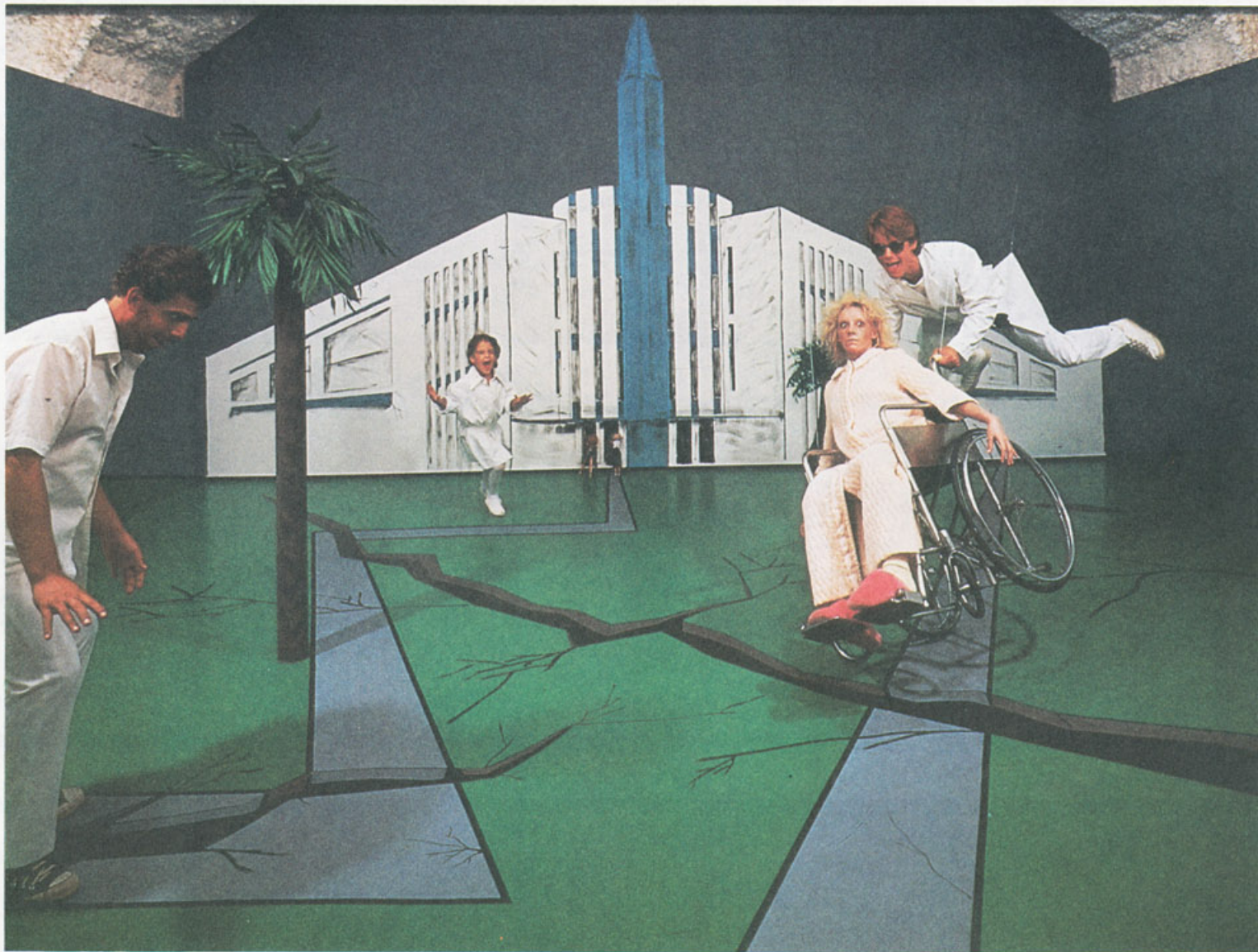
of the series shows Stella in an aluminum washtub facing away from the camera; it is soft, with motion, after Steichen (Frampton did not distance himself from influences). Others from the series portray Stella as movie star in trench coat and dark glasses, or sitting against a wall, terribly forlorn. The power of this series lies in its disparity. There are many portraits of friends, artists, their paintings or studios, which have a cataloging spirit similar to that found in the color Xerox work (of canned goods labels, among other things). One envisions a child enamored — overwhelmed by — a new toy or game, yet the images in their singlemindedness seem off-handed, shaped impulsively. A fair amount of collaborating, borrowing back and forth of imagery, seems to be another undeniable motivational force. For example, James Rosenquist needed a photograph of spaghetti, to be included in a painting; Frampton allowed the remaining plate of pasta to deteriorate, and photographed the progression over the course of several weeks ("Spaghetti, 1964," from *The nostalgia Portfolio*, 1971). The *Reasonable Facsimiles and False Impressions* series (1971, 1979) seem more developed; the former includes Xerox collage, hand-coloring and text, the latter montage and Xerox.

Although much has been written on Frampton (mostly about his films, few if any workable definitions can be extracted. So much was said by him, the intention being to create, not finalize dialogue. Questions were expected to arise from questions, as though this comprised the freedom, in discourse, of thought. The answers he gave, as absolutes or other ideological tracts, were playful, arousing, at times disjointed, in the process of becoming, not existing as givens. At times, it appears as though this core group of filmmakers and painters followed each other around, completely

self-absorbed, marvelling at the freedom they were able to devise; Frampton's work bears traces of this exclusivity. But he had a magical way of being in the world, and the collected works speak well of this. The magic lay in the constructs: he once said that birds have five songs — they say, "good morning," "I found a worm," "fuck me," "get out," "good night." Therein one discovers an eminently sensible, ordered magic, approachable from any discipline or point of view.

NIC NICOSIA: ONE-FRAME MOVIES

Nic Nicosia: "Domestic Dramas" and "Near Modern Disasters." The Houston Center for Photography. September 6-October 20.



Nic Nicosia: Near (Modern) Disaster #5, 1983

By April Rapier

No news is good news: Nic Nicosia is sticking to his original explanations (strict, academic, formal), not throwing any curves to those in pursuit of understanding him. This is very good — it signals a continuance of the work that has progressed in so orderly a fashion, along the same lines — with no abrupt switchbacks to divert either artist or audience from what goes on. As far as what goes on is concerned, I suspect that there is an alter-ego at work/play here (Frankie Paul as Nic, being interviewed by *Life* and *Newsweek* magazines). It has been said of the interiors he creates that they are patently false, modelled after movie sets or cartoons; I find the actors who populate them to be equally implausible. They are, under Nicosia's tutelage, playing out social, personal, and political dramas in a manner fabricated and intended to make the viewer contemplate and react to that which one might ordinarily ignore.

They also guide the drama, altering it beyond his control, which suits him fine. He has an unabashed regard for his influences (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, John Divola, John Pfahl), yet no state of the art, obligatory homage is apparent. (The intelligent child at play is pure Linda Robbenolt in spirit.) The only conclusive parallel he can be persuaded to draw is between his and Bernard Faucon's work.

Inserted in the text of this essay are excerpts from a discussion with Nicosia. My questions were glib; his answers, insightful and sincere, weren't terribly satisfying. Nor do they have to be, as long as the work continues to move. His most recent images, under the series title *The Cast*, are honed down a bit, focusing on an interesting person with tableau as backdrop, rather than an explosive situation. He foresees a possible integration of both. Being, as he puts it, "one-track minded," is perhaps a great blessing.

The extent to which Nicosia's in-

volvement in his work is physical (creating everything but the makeup) dictates his zeal for referential, all-inclusiveness, from sit-coms to coloring books, ideas ranging from those of Christo (who, by hiding something temporarily from the public renews it or adds to its importance) to Eileen Cowan's psychodramas, childhood cartoons to art class. He wholeheartedly wishes the work to be entertaining first, provocative and intelligent second, and ultimately lasting, so that one's perception of the ordinary or mundane is permanently altered. The exaggerated views he portrays enable the humor in a bad situation to come forth; after all, weren't the early Disney cartoons sometimes violent and macabre? When I mentioned that sometimes people didn't "get" what he was trying to do, he said, "I don't get what they're trying to get. It's all right there." Emotional response is the key, not examining topical clues within the sets. (Apparently, the Akron Museum audience "got" it — they thought the work

was funny.) Perhaps one of Nicosia's most revealing aspirations for an image is that it be a movie in one frame. "Near (Modern) Disaster #6," a hotel lobby more closely resembling a ward for loony Californians, seen from inside an open elevator door, illustrates this narrative quality well.

When asked to comment on his meteoric rise in recognition (publication in *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*, inclusion in numerous distinguished exhibits and collections), he touched on timing, publicity, and the support and enthusiasm that Linda Cathcart (director of the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston) has for the photographs, but speaks of himself as indistinguishable from the work. Thus he tries to get people to know him, a pleasant experience because he is absolutely guileless and solicitous about what he does and why.

Although he crosses many media lines in creating a set, the finished piece is photographic. The confusion generated by this has granted him the most success in museums, where emphasis is less on medium than content, with marginal response in either conventional or photography galleries. That there still exists a rabid prejudice against photography as art was demonstrated when *Ultra* magazine called Ms. Cathcart for suggestions as to excellent new artists. As she began describing Nicosia's work, she was interrupted by the writer exclaiming, "But that's photography," as though the two were mutually exclusive.

Nicosia's formal training is in film; in his pictures, any and everything can and does happen, as in the movies, or comics, or pop paintings. He has adopted a perfect balance between being as innocent as he seems and as astute as his work and success would indicate. That he relies so heavily and confidently on fantasy to impart a stronger, more lasting sense of reality seems a contradiction until one examines his own opposing mechanisms, which makes one a believer in the power of an interior, whether defining a physical space, or an interaction/violation between strangers on the street. Opposing forces prevail — he accomplishes what is essentially unstable, unsuitable for close scrutiny.

Nic Nicosia: Near (Modern) Disaster #6, 1983



PETER BROWN:
AMAZING STORIES

Peter Brown: Recent Work, Harris
Gallery, Houston. November 2-23.



Peter Brown: Bowl and Map, 1985

Peter Brown's stories are lovingly imparted, whether verbally or visually, which may be the only uniformly measurable aspect of the work. Gathered over the past two and a half years, the pictures in this exhibition are diverse and subtle, and chronicle the voyages of a person who is endlessly amazed and delighted by what he discovers, one who searches patiently and is extraordinarily lucky to boot. With or without text, this exhibit (like "Seasons of Light", a previous portfolio of work) is a quiet delight with occasional, well-placed bursts of energy that startle and amaze.

The work ranges in tone and content. There are meditative, minimalist interiors (a continuum from earlier work), in which color (browns and blues recur) serves to annotate or extend mood, to fix in memory — as though washed over in color — what is easily felt but difficult to describe. There are also sentimental family portraits, records of reunions and the attendant changes magnified by distance and time. ("Jill Sleeping," 1984, in which a woman reclines, facing away from the camera, in an attic bedroom with flowered wall paper, is a fine example of this.) The emotions are heartfelt and universal, yet transcend the ordinary or obvious. They demand of the viewer a forward perspective or progression of thought — there is no sorrow, no looking back. Some pictures are tongue-in-cheek, and mostly irresistible; others — the rugged, four-wheel drive genre — are of interest because of the struggle and commitment involved in their execution (2-1/4 square or 4x5 format was used to make all the images). The images that generate the least excitement are those that rely on a more formalist, pastoral tradition: an older woman in her yard, enclosed by a white picket fence, or a tree bursting with ripe peaches, for example, are images in which little emotional investment is demonstrated. Other portraits (of strangers) offer little more than a fleeting glimpse. One in particular, however, of a man beside a red truck seems very different, very personal and revealing. Could it be that the success of portrait encounter with a stranger relies on as straightforward a formula as flat light

versus sunshine (the cloudy day images maintaining more of a distance than those bathed in the warmth of the sun)?

These arguments are of little consequence, however, in the face of such dynamic imagery as a grass fire cutting across a field, rendering the back half of the image hazy, Fresson-like, the front retaining its clarity and sharpness. This image, as others, normalizes the strangest of occurrences, making them accessible, familiar. The use of color here speaks clearly, dramatically, as it does in an image of a child swimming through an inky black lake, or a hiker going up a barren black mountain, the path only slightly lighter in tonality than the surrounding terrain. Neither image relies on additional information for its grace and impact.

Another wondrous moment occurs in a photograph taken from a dock: an alligator is swimming toward the camera, while a dog, whose feet and head only show on the side of the frame, bears disjointed witness from a safe vantage point. The dog's partial removal from the frame reinforces his reluctance to get too close.

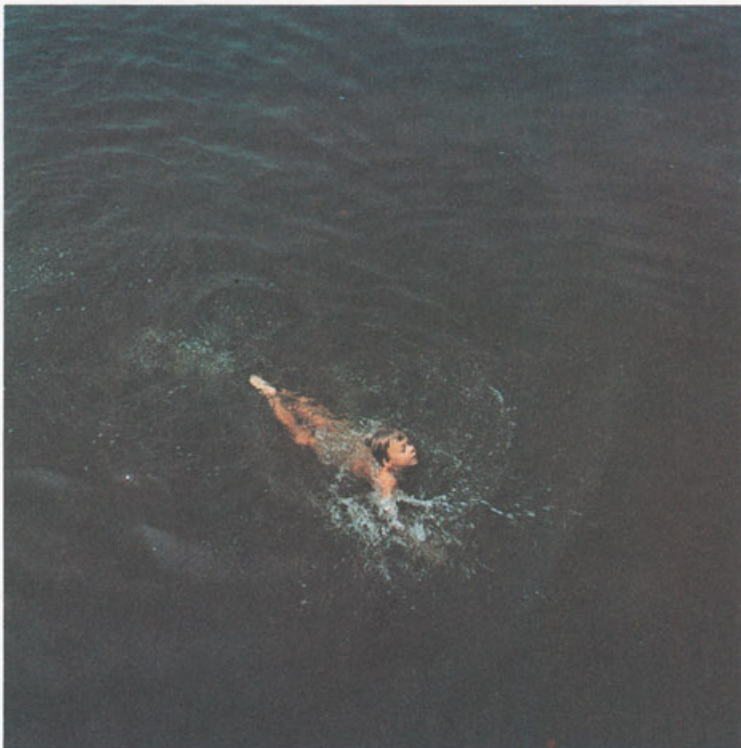
The situation in this image (and in another entitled "Momo on the Move," 1985, in which another dog patrols an icicle wonderland, the probable result of a broken hose or sprinkler, perhaps created on purpose) is not extraordinary except for the dizzying timing which serves to distance them from the reality of reference or possibility. Other moments that are more about travel transport the viewer to places known in memory (collective being the most likely) but not readily placeable: a motel in the West on a cold, clear night, terribly evocative in the recognition of feelings called upon, or the mural that adorns the side of a building in a small town, complete with deer, Hoover ads, and a line about the heart of Texas. The spontaneity of these unconstructed images is their beauty. They represent a race with time, a competition with the perpetual, inevitable changes that people are likely to rail against without the realization of conviction. Often the topographics occur as interiors or still lifes. The most intense representation of this unique genre takes place in a fruit bowl, with a

map of European mountain peaks in the foreground just under the bowl, a reference to muralist imagery. The map is reflected in the bowl, and all objects — books, papers, fruit — are utterly transformed. A similar picture, an exterior still life containing an Ice Capades truck, pickup bed, and fruit tree, has the same quality of light — serenity amid the chaos of average modernity. This occurs in a similar manner in a landscape of snow, with little color pushing through. Four black cows in a row form a dividing line to the right, a cold blue sky comprising the top half of the image. In discussion, Brown has mentioned an interest in pushing the notion of the romantic image to its limit, without digressing into its more blatant evolutions. He has succeeded in doing so.

The timeless quality, perhaps a function of travel as much as anything else, is seen in several different kinds of images, ranging from a portrait of Brown's father after having mowed his fields (time here circles and threatens to land), to a flooded fruit tree orchard (where time extends in a linear manner). The definitive image, one that incorporates all sensibilities and manners of dealing with the chance encounters the road offers is a portrait of the first town to be entirely nuclear-powered. In this image, entitled "Rowdy, Class of '91, and his dogs," 1985, the viewer is presented with an extraordinary vision, using a graffiti-carved mountain (more block numbers than mountain surface) as backdrop. In a yard dominated by an enormous satellite dish, a boy jumps on a trampoline (and is caught in mid-air). This remarkable yard is enclosed by a fence, as though it were somehow keeping the inanimate inhabitants from wandering; two dogs pose on the outside of the fence, beside a small, obligatory stab at a flowerbed (this part of Utah seems terribly dry). The pine trees, fairly majestic in their own right, are dwarfed by the sad, violated mountain and tv antenna, tributes to a dim future. The exhibit offers a special opportunity to visit a world quite different from the one we know, if only due to the condensation of the vaguely familiar nature of the subject matter.

A.R.

Peter Brown: Peter Swimming, Adirondack Park, N.Y., 1984



By April Rapier



Edouard Boubat

BOUBAT, DOISNEAU:
WITNESSES

Edouard Boubat and Robert Doisneau. Benteler Gallery, 2815A Colquitt, Houston. October 23 – December 7.

Experiencing the photographs of Robert Doisneau and Edouard Boubat allows the viewer the purest sort of pleasure, a voyeuristic experience enriched dimensionally by their historical content. Boubat's pictures, some drawn from travels over the world, are those of an invisible voyager who dearly loves what he sees. Encounters are kept to a minimum, and are functional, supporting his capacity as director of an image;

perhaps his patience is infinite and his input on the image and its subjects was minimal. No matter. Few photographers are able to venture outside their realm and maintain such an open-minded, neutral eye. "Jardin des Plantes, Paris," 1980, a picture in which a nude reclines in a zany garden, bears homage to Rousseau. In another, "Parc de St. Cloud," 1981, a couple and a statue of a couple are seen at opposite ends of a park, in

identical poses. These pictures, as others, are graced with a keen sense of humor. Even the more obvious travel-related images that Boubat chose not to pass up are joyous and gentlemanly, and rendered with great care, breaking free from the status quo of cataloguing unfamiliar terrain.

Doisneau is a more demonstrative photographer, his images bearing evidence of having been choreographed. This is not to say that they are, nor is it an indictment of staged imagemaking, no matter the time period. But they feel a bit encumbered by a voyeuristic stodginess, whereas Boubat's influence is quiet, suggestive. One envisions Doisneau as stolid, Boubat as innocent of device or mannerism. Both portfolios are equally important, however, with regard to historical and sociological implications; the context of realism never comes into question. At times, Doisneau's approach seems documentary: one sees a newly wedded couple crossing the street en route to a bar; in a subsequent shot, the couple is inside, he drinking from her glass, surrounded by a barmaid and two watchful onlookers. Another shows a bartender gesturing to a less-than-captive audience, his extemporaneous style lost on the crowd. One wonders how he was able, in a well-known series taken from inside an art dealer's window in France, 1948, to capture the varied reactions to a prominently displayed nude. The responses vary from scandalized to wholehearted approval. "La Mariée Chez Gigène," 1946, is of a bride on a seesaw; she is preoccupied with the playfulness of youth soon to disappear. Her groom is nowhere in sight. It is wondrous to bear witness to

Robert Doisneau



Europe in the 1940s and 50s, albeit second hand; the hysteria and uncertainty of a pre- and post-war time country are sublimated into a grateful, rhythmic dance of normalcy, one aspect in a vast range of work in this exhibit which inaugurates the new home of the Benteler Gallery.

COURAGEOUS
WOMEN:
IMAGES OF
STRUGGLE

Women of Courage, photographs by Judith Sedwick. The Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public Library. September 5 – October 18.

This exhibit of photographs by Judith Sedwick was based on the Black Women Oral History Project of the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, and a series of public programs was held in conjunction with it. (It opened in New York City and has travelled almost a year thus far.) It was widely and generously sponsored, with a good deal of advance promotion accompanying. Upon entering the ornately beautiful hall where the images were displayed, all sense of hoopla and the attendant painstaking work required to assemble a body of images of this nature subsided; one was left to confront calm, dignity, assuredness. Each photograph was lit by a small brass light attached to the frame, giving the room an intimate, warm feeling. Many of the portraits are executive-style — formal, carefully groomed and posed, impersonal; they honor the sitters well, but don't speak clearly to the viewer beyond a carefully constructed public image. Others leave the viewer reeling with the power and magnificence of the sitter. In these images, a lifetime of struggle and hope highlight the beauty born of conviction and courage. Each image was accompanied by an encapsulated biography; through reading and viewing, one is struck by the historical impact (and requisite sacrifice) that these women made upon the world.

The portrait of Lucy Rucker Aiken, a granddaughter of Jefferson Long (the first Black Member of Congress from Georgia), is a doozie! Her posture and expression bespeak a marvelous, resolute soul whose wisdom and kindness could penetrate the narrowest mind. The image tells of a woman who knows exactly why she fought. It incidentally provides the most visually interesting setting — an unexpected and inexplicable mixture of glass block, soda fountain spigots, marble, and flowers, bathed in gorgeous muted lights and colors. Kathleen Adams, who graduated from Atlanta University in 1911 (the difficulty implicit, for a Black woman, in obtaining a degree in the early part of the century, seems in retrospect to be massive and overwhelming, yet many of these women did so, and all went on to be distinguished educators, community leaders, or professionals) was photographed wearing a coat and hat, a touching detail; her entire life is there to see in her glorious face.

Many of the women honored are "firsts" — in banking, schooling, areas in American history associated with shameful exclusion and subsequent pride; a few of the gestures and expressions seem to illustrate the point that perhaps the struggle, no matter what the accomplishments, was less meaningful in the face of the tragedies of injustice that remain. The portrait of Ozeline Pearson Wise, the first Black woman to be employed in the banking department of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, holds her hands in a manner that

seems to bespeak this point. Most portraits are triumphant, however — jubilation sustained by the serenity of having acted in good faith. No one seems to be self-aggrandizing or in need of recognition. In fact, a bemused puzzlement characterizes many of the images. Christina Adair, a Houstonian and longtime community organizer and civic worker (photographed in front of a mural depicting aspects of Black life), gives the impression of eschewing praise for her endeavors, so innocent is her demeanor. No sense of struggle is in evidence; her joy is radiant as she tentatively joins her hands and smiles with the photographer.

Another “first” was Sadie T. M. Alexander, who in 1921 was one of the first three Black women to earn a PhD.

These amazing facts supported by beautifully simple images have great impact. Sedwick deserves enormous credit for not allowing sentimentality to be the guide. (The quiet photograph of Rosa Parks, the courageous woman who tested the practice of Jim Crow in 1955 by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white, triggering a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, has the same kind of escalating momentum.) Perhaps the most poignant example of a private moment between subject and photographer occurs in the photograph of Lena Edwards, a physician who taught at Howard University and worked in a migrant labor camp in Hereford, Texas. Her dress is simple, as is the setting — a wooden house, a stained glass window, blurred greenery in the background — yet a world of compassion shines through, and no words of explanation are necessary.

JERRY UELSMANN:
DIFFERENT
REALITIES

Jerry Uelsmann, Rudolph Lichtsteiner, and Floris M. Neususs. Benteler Gallery, Houston. September 11 - October 19.

Conceptual European photography is at once elusive and deliberately straightforward (sometimes to the point of banality), due to a shaky alliance between the peculiar reuse of overextended ideas and dull or ordinary visuals. The Uelsmann (who, while not European, is closely aligned



Jerry Uelsmann, 1976

with the genre), Lichtsteiner, and Neususs exhibition contained examples of the best and least exciting of this genre, imagery that could be described as mystical, dreamlike, intellectual (this last category constituting perhaps the essence of the work a bit too frequently, at the expense of clarity). In this manner of pursuit of ideas, the thrust of the pictures is

that of control, the manipulation of a situation to the end that the audience ultimately be manipulated as well. Through Uelsmann, the power of the dream can be conveyed in a way that is as effective visually as it is emotionally.

Uelsmann exhibited a retrospective of almost ten years of pictures, the newest (1985) containing a ridiculous duo entitled “Texas Fantasy,” numbers two and three. After weaving intricate spells over the years using multiple printing, these two photographs are obligatory and simple-minded, falling back on facile, trite motifs — the shape of the state, an armadillo, and a cowboy boot — to represent what would be better left unsaid. No amount of technical expertise (and he is a virtuoso) could redeem this short-sighted mockery. There exist other juxtapositionings that fall short: orbs hovering over pagodas, casting shadows within, faces superimposed on sensuously shaped rocks, a person walking on water, birds flying about indoors, other too-obvious devices. This more literal imagery simply cannot transcend technique. In one sense, his movement toward physical simplification (“less is more” being a persuasive precedent in life as in art) gives the viewer more room for interpretation; access to participation within the frame, however, is severely restricted by further trivializing tired abstractions.

At his best, he is the acknowledged master of the transposed dream-world. Icons (faces being used often) spring up in the likeliest of places, never failing to surprise and delight. Mirrors and globes become receptors for the ideal — the spirit or ego that

comes and goes, not at anyone’s will in particular. Upon close examination of any given image, the blending of two or more negatives becomes understood as usable information (although the actual means of execution remain unclear). Yet this disclosure fails to dispel the magic created by combining, say, indoors and outdoors, or appreciably different landscapes. A comfortable yet severely surreal image (“Untitled,” 1976) displays an elegant room, richly appointed with oriental rugs, wainscoting, a fireplace. Central to the space

is a drawing table that holds an open book. A man has begun to walk from the page onto the table. A partly cloudy sky forms the ceiling overhead. The effect, which lingers as viscerally as visually, is unforgettable. That the meanings contained within each image are endless is of little concern to that viewer not in search of a quick formulation or an easy answer.

Uelsmann has remained, in the face of controversy and criticism, obstinately, relentlessly cryptic. All implausible or impossible situations are presented as though nothing is amiss. If water is to appear silvery, it is always a bit more so than seems possible. Even when the symbols become more referential (and thus confusing) than anything else, the overall effect, although frustrating, is still compelling. A clear example of this is found in “Untitled,” 1981, where a knotted rope sits on a table in a cloudy room with picture window views behind. It is the Uelsmann as creator of a different measure of reality that most deserves renewed or continuing interest, for these images are infinite, born of ideas that need not rely on beginnings or endings.

GEORGIA MCINNIS:
PRIVATE MOMENTS

Private Moments; photographs by Georgia McInnis. The Houston Center for Photography. September 6 – October 10.

Georgia McInnis, exhibiting concurrently with Nic Nicosia, disarmed the audience with deceptively descriptive titles, all locales duly noted, interesting points of entry to a group of lovingly rendered Texana treasures. In giving seemingly straightforward, diminutive color photographs deadpan captions, the real became a degree or more surreal — the unremarkable with a twist, small, but most of the time just enough — sufficient to disrupt a passive, bucolic, pictorial rendering.

Some images digress: although an old Plymouth draped with wysteria in bloom is charming enough, the viewer goes through the image in search of that oddity (all taken outdoors, one sees gardens with sinks, floating bicycles, oversized egrets posed on fences, yard charms) which draws McInnis to each site, and is left hanging. In these few, signs of another time do not satisfy. All, however, are graced with an empty ghostliness, a benign decrepitude, and evidence of a personal search that may or may not be best served by the camera, but deserves to continue.





August Sander: Three Farmers on the Way to a Dance, 1914

A NOVEL DRAWN FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

Richard Powers. Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance. William Morrow/Beech Tree Books, 1985. New York. 352 pages. \$17.95.

By Ed Osowski

In August Sander's photograph "Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance," the young, German peasants, boys pretending to be men, dressed nattily in their best black suits and hats, their canes an affectation not without charm, stop. Interrupted by Sander on an early evening in May, 1914, they are on their way to a May Day dance. Standing in a muddy path, they inhabit a landscape that is blurred, abstract, lending credibility to the idea that these three are pilgrims on a passage into the twentieth century. For Richard Powers, whose first novel takes its name from the Sander photograph, they are on a collision course with history. They are heading, not to a gathering where they will flirt with charming Alicia and dance the polka with the other pretty peasant girls, but to the dance of the century, the dance of unrelenting carnage and destruction about to start only several months later with the sounding of the guns of August.

What they face, Powers sets out to demonstrate, and what the war precipitated, was "the passing of the old order," the end of the fixed verities of the Western tradition. In their gazes, Powers decodes an "urgent message, the plea for help." With the "terror of trapped animals" they face an encounter they are barely equipped to understand, but one they cannot avoid, the encounter with "that unmitigated act of violence called the twentieth century."

Powers' novel is nothing if not audacious. An extended meditation on what can be learned from a photograph, it rejects the "exact message" (the who, what, when) of the photograph — the apparatus of objectivity that Sander cultivated in his effort to convey what he called the "truth" — for a more demanding reading. Powers calls the photograph an example of the "intersection" of

events, the seemingly arbitrary and coincidental links that connect characters across broad stretches of time. For Peter Mays, the central figure and narrator of the book, such a moment comes when he learns that he is the grandson of the middle figure in the photograph.

Traveling to Boston by train to begin a job with the computer magazine *Micro Monthly News*, Mays stops at the Detroit Institute of Art to pass time between connections. There he encounters the Sander photograph and senses a "mystery" to be unraveled behind the simple facts of the photograph.

What follows is an intellectual detective chase down the corridors of history told with wit, humor, urgency, and a touch of blackness. Historical personages — Henry Ford, August Sander — share space with fictional creatures. Mays' quest to understand the photograph cannot be accomplished until he has tracked down the mysterious red-headed woman he spied in a Veterans' Day parade. She turns out to be an actress who specializes in playing historical women — Emily Dickinson, Florence

Nightingale, Virginia Woolf. In inventing lives for the three farmers and then having them encounter historical figures, Powers demonstrates an approach that the modern novelist frequently employs — that of deliberately and artfully creating a story, a fabulous structure, finding its source, in this case, from the raw facts that the photograph presents. Sander's photograph may strike the viewer as casual, spontaneous, realistic. But it is far from these three. For Sander has used the same tools that the novelist employs — composition, vision, and decision — to achieve that feeling of spontaneity.

How Mays learns that his grandfather once posed for Sander — and that prints of the same photograph can be found in his mother's attic in Chicago and in the living room of the woman who cleans the offices at *Micro Monthly News* — combines sleuthing and guess-work. When he sees himself, or certainly a person who looks just like himself, in a photograph with Henry Ford, Mays rushes to Chicago to question his mother because he is too young to have ever posed with Ford. The man with Ford's arm around his shoulder, he learns, is his grandfather Peter, the same peasant in the Sander photograph, the only one of the three to have survived the carnage of World War I.

The photograph of the three farmers doesn't really exist until it is interpreted, Powers writes. And to do so means to invent "a fiction behind this documented incident stretching out over the years in both directions, without beginning or end." The tools one brings to this task are, first, a belief that order can be imposed on reality. And second, the willingness to accept that "lies, misrepresentations, involvements, false leads, and ambiguities" will get in the way. One simply endures, Powers adds, by gazing steadily, like a photographer, through the ordering, controlling, and distorting lens.

There is, of course, nothing like "neutral looking." Every act of making a photograph and, by extension, every act of viewing a photograph involve interpretation. Call such an approach to looking at photographs "post-modern," if you will, for it relies on wit, irony, the ability to stand apart while directing and manipulating the action suggested by the photograph. Mays, romantic and naive, is joined in the novel by an alter-ego, called "I" who is serious, a student of the aesthetics of photography, the one who tries to explain history through this one photograph. Their lives run parallel courses, merge finally into one. For Powers nothing is as simple as it looks. Sander's three

peasants record that historically "something irreversible happened to the scale of human events." In Powers' telling, that something is that life itself has become arbitrary and dense, filled with accidents and coincidences, a comic invention in the face of cosmic bleakness.
© 1985 Ed Osowski

BART PARKER: PUZZLING DISCONTINUITIES

A Close Brush With Reality. By Bart Parker. Visual Studies Workshop, 1981.

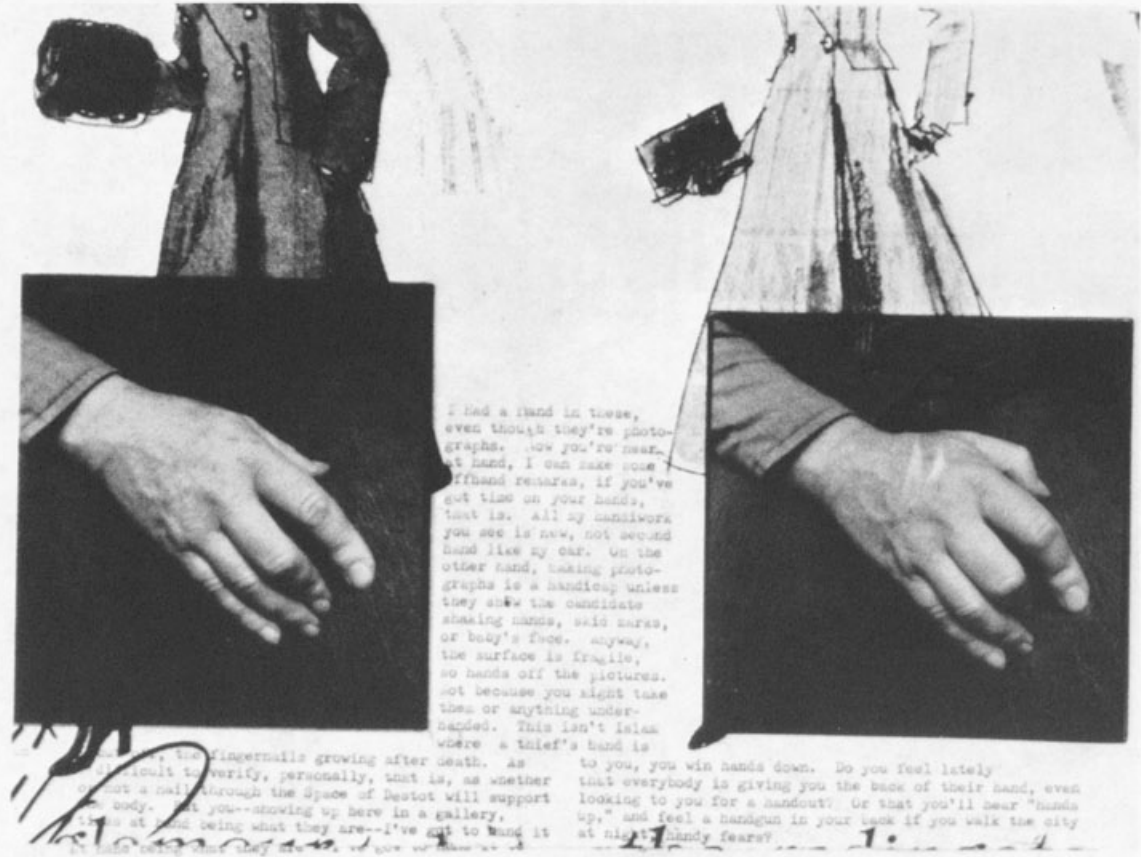
By Patsy Cravens

One should be forewarned of the nature of Bart Parker's book, *A Close Brush with Reality*, by its cover photograph of the same name. In true Parker form it is a visual play on words — but what game he is playing is hard to say. It is a composite photograph/drawing with the title written in script across it. It shows us a close-up of a toothbrush resting on a chair arm in the forefront of a spacious (and spacey) room, full of light and soft colors and Alice in Wonderland perspective. Sizes and spatial relationships are hard to plumb. An oversize mirror resting against the wall leads you in and out of other places; a strange pink light on the wall echoes the pink of large papers on floor and mirror, teasing us. What are we seeing? Where are we? What is the scale of things? It's hard to tell. It's an intriguing puzzle and a rather beautiful one. We float in and out of the room and in and out of Bart Parker's reality.

The artist works with words and photographs together in a variety of relationships. Words play with images, images play with words. He prints words over, under and alongside the visual. Some stories clarify the picture, some befuddle, some simply give a twist, a double or triple entendre. It can be a conundrum, intriguing and fun. It may be of a very different nature, angry and disturbing. Some seem like simple still lifes until, on further examination, you notice something awry, off-center and unexpected, which gives the work a new deeper meaning. This can be strangely disturbing.

One such piece is a composite that includes a peaceful and familiar scene of church, tree, and road — only the

Bart Parker: Handy Fears, 1979



road abruptly drops off into what appears to be an abyss. Off to one side is a picture of three people, backs to us, arms around each other. And these are placed over a photograph of a dark, lightning-filled sky. It's enigmatic and disquieting. Parker shows people only from the back in this book, no faces are seen at all.

Another troubling image is "L.A. Sunday." It is a dark and ominous overlapping of several negatives — disjointed hands, a crucifix, a sinister black dog's head. It's odd and compelling with a dreamlike, almost nightmarish quality.

Bart Parker uses several types of composite photographs. He will cut his negatives into slivers and print several together, in a meld. Or he uses a few or more (in one case fifty one) shots in sequence. Some are like collage. He does these mergers and combinations well, telling elaborate tales and making some beautiful visual effects.

Deciphering the meaning of the pieces is another task and not always easy. He can be very oblique and obscure or he can, figuratively speaking, hit you right over the head with his bluntness. There seems to be a lot of anger, both hidden and expressed, and more wit than humor.

He is well aware of life's ironies. His patched and pieced photographic imagery is a good vehicle for expressing irony. It is subtle, complex and intricate. On the other hand, his words many times seem awkward, heavy, and labored, making you reread passages, hindered by their awkwardness. There's a cynical passage about artists being corrupted by success and the resultant decline in their art and their self assessment. It has a lot of truth but also sounds an awful lot like sour grapes.

Parker gives the impression of being introverted, lonely, ironical, witty and angry, an uncertain man in search of himself and his world through his past and present life, an outsider. "Our mortality may be the best thing about us" he writes gloomily.

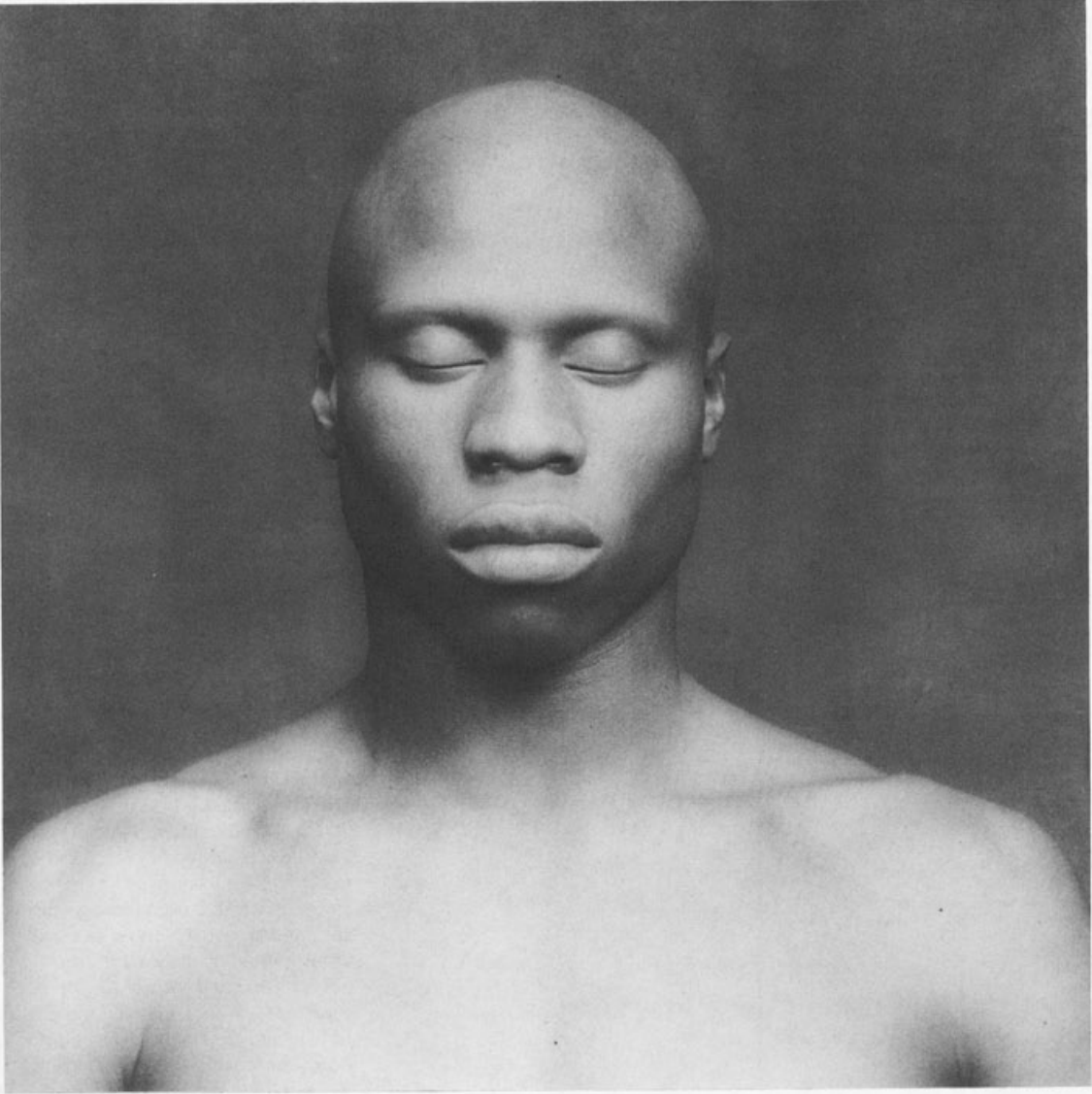
The book is engrossing and certainly worth reading. Its incongruities and contradictions and its expressiveness have a certain intimacy and vulnerability that draw you. These are intriguing puzzles. He writes, "I'm not interested in epiphanies, in illuminations of how thought, word, and deed can match up, like Browning's — 'God's in his heaven, all's right with the world.' I'm after the discontinuities that actually form and infest our lives. The Lord of Misrule was just elected to the city planning board."

MAPPLETHORPE: A COMMITMENT TO BEAUTY

Robert Mapplethorpe. *Certain People: A Book of Portraits.* Twelvetreepress Press, 1985. Pasadena, California. Unpaged.

The urge to read our own desires or prejudices or fears into the photographic portrait is great. After all, the one sure way we have of understanding the other is to recognize in his or her portrait those emotional states we ourselves have experienced. So, we find ourselves saying that a subject, in a certain portrait, looks afraid or bored or tired. Of course, we have no way of really knowing if that is how the subject actually felt at that moment, or if that is a feeling the photographer has attributed to the subject. But we insist on believing in our reaction because when entering the territory of the unknown we first look for that which is familiar.

Robert Mapplethorpe's portraits, taken over the last ten years and collected in this book, make such a reading difficult. His subjects, whether



Robert Mapplethorpe: portrait of Ken Moody, 1983

drawn from the ranks of the "glitterati" (Susan Sontag, Philip Johnson, John Simon, Philip Glass, Mapplethorpe himself) or from the ranks of the unknown do not enter into a conversation of shared emotional states with the viewer. Rather, it is their presence, their physicality, that appeals to us. His subjects engage us by their sensuality and as objects of our desire. Glamour, allure, beauty, grace, charm, mystery, and a tendency to shock, at times, are qualities they all, to a greater or lesser extent, possess. How much we identify with those qualities or how much we want to appropriate them to ourselves thus determines how we read his portraits.

A portrait of Susan Sontag, dated 1984, appears at the book's midpoint. In an essay which opens the book Sontag describes the anxiety she feels whenever she is photographed. This quality is immediately visible in her portrait. But what is also apparent — perhaps ironically — is how Mapplethorpe has transformed Sontag into a vision of ideal beauty. It is next to impossible to read in her portrait Sontag's claim to the title of leading thinker/writer of her generation. This is not a portrait of the writer at work, one that makes us appreciate the mental struggles — the tensions, doubts, etc. — which

a writer like Sontag has endured. For here Sontag looks ever so much like the actress Candice Bergen. Mapplethorpe portrays Sontag much as he does Paloma Picasso or Francesca Thyssen or Barbara Jakobson, all subjects here, as women gifted with great beauty and concerned only with life's most fleeting issues — which blouse to wear, how to comb one's hair, which piece of jewelry to select.

In *Certain People*, one can see the range of styles of Mapplethorpe's portraits. His corporate photographs project the blank neutrality one expects of such works. His pieces that pay homage to the tradition of the Hollywood glamour photograph (Kathleen Turner, Richard Gere) are hot, sexy, flattering. The great majority of these portraits are intense close-ups and contain little or no narrative content. In just a few are there environments. No props, no settings intrude to distract us with their sym-

bolic weight, to direct us toward a particular interpretation. When Mapplethorpe includes a prop it is to confuse us. (His two self-portraits, facing each other across two pages, present two strikingly different versions of the artist. In one, cigarette stuck in his mouth, his hair messed, his leather jacket unzipped, he is the photographer as "tough guy." In its partner, he is the photographer as "androgynous." Lip gloss, eye make-up, soft curls, and an un-muscled body produce a look that suggests that Mapplethorpe is saying, "It is all a mask. It is all artifice.")

Robert Mapplethorpe's fame — perhaps notoriety is a more appropriate word — came early as a photographer of outrageous acts and unmentionable urges. His dramatic male nudes and portraits of street toughs were charged with sexual implications and dared the viewer to recoil in shock. The loving beauty and, at times, humor with which he photographed the exploits of the more extreme representatives of the homoerotic subculture seemed inappropriate if not perverse. Men in leather and chains, whips and hoods their toys, were seen, not with the shock and disgust of Diane Arbus, but with a sense of calm, as iconic figures, with a realization of the beauty informing these subjects. *Certain People* makes Mapplethorpe's commitment to Beauty clearer than ever before.

E.O.

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WOLHAUER: CAPABLE, BUT BORING

Eye of the Storm. *Photographs by Ronald W. Wolhauer.* David R. Godine, 1985. Boston. \$25, softcover; \$35, hardcover.

Ronald Wolhauer's book, *Eye of the Storm*, seems to be wrongly named. As he admits in his foreword, most critics call his photographs

"serene" and he doesn't understand why. To me, they are often serene, indeed sometimes almost lifeless in their serenity — beautiful in subject and in print quality but lacking the drama, tension, and excitement that the words "eye of the storm" imply. I am defining by connotation here; I realize that there is supposed to be calm at the eye of the storm. But Wolhauer's image of himself surrounded by raging madness as he makes his quiet pictures seems unrealistic. He describes himself as "nailing a picture down while all hell may be breaking loose just outside the frame." Most of the images in the book are so devoid of life in the sense of struggle or tension that they leave me with a lovely visual record but a blank emotionally. They are pretty records of seascapes, fields, farms, and streets but empty of content, only pretty.

Wolhauer's negatives (8"x10")

Ronald W. Wolhauer



must be perfect technically. His prints are crisp, clean, and lucid. In the quality of the blacks and whites they are much like Ansel Adams', whose work quickly comes to mind as one glances at the book, and he was in fact a friend and mentor to Wolhauer.

The pictures of nudes, on the other hand, speak strongly of Edward Weston — the sand dunes, peeling paint, downcast eyes, and self-conscious poses are all Weston reminiscent. They are really quite formal. Nothing is revealed of the model herself or of what content the artist strove to express through them. They are curiously empty and distant. He uses such props as masks, mylar distorted reflections and filmy fabrics. All of these are clichés unless they are expertly and freshly used. These aren't fresh. The images end by being magazinish and glib. Even the skin textures and interplay of bodies are not very sensual. They are pleasant but boring.

There is a nice foreword, written by the artist, with notes on the taking of some of the pictures. He tells of his travels in Scotland — where most of the work was done — his adventures and his thoughts during the picture-taking. He writes of trying to eliminate a telephone pole or a vapor trail that ruined his composition. He seems to seek a perfect, unsullied, timeless scene without blemish or confusion or humanity. One welcome exception to this is an image of a complex of pre-historic standing stones in Scotland, with a man sitting precariously atop one amazingly high stone, taking a snapshot. As an image it is startling, human, and wonderfully whimsical.

Very familiar is "Park Bench, Edinburgh," showing two rows of huge trees extending into the distance and towering over a solitary park bench, dwarfed and lonely. Another nice image is called simply "Oak Trees, The Trossacks." It has a sense of mystery, the mystery one feels in the ancient oak forests of England and Scotland on moist days, when the gnarled and mossy limbs drip with wet and the air is heavy with a quiet and foggy presence. Wolhauer captured this well.

Less appealing and less original are images of cracks in dried mud, wooden vegetable crates in an alley, a row boat resting in front of a stone building.

I closed the book appreciating the artist's technical abilities and his sensitive eye but wishing for more whimsy, surprise, excitement, and unique vision.

P. C.

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SNAP JUDGMENTS

In which Joe discusses the photographic possibilities of truly remote travel, while clearly avoiding mention of his own favorite spots.

By Visionary Joe

Angkor Wat is ruined for me, also Lenin's Tomb. Tourists have grooved their footprints into every standard vantage — one must ignore the grandeur for the ground. It is an understandable scandal that not a single novel photo has been taken of a famous place for over twenty years. The only exciting tourist photography is coming from places where no one has ever been.

Many tourists of famous places desire (admirably, pedagogically) to serve their friends at home a slice of life. The friends must hide their disappointment when served stale bread instead of frosted cake. The traveler's landscape reconstructed from mountains of color pics is rising curving cobbled streets, unscented markets, battered cathedrals, and ubiquitous Scottish cliffs (the latter found in at least five continents and Greenland). Tourists will photograph building exteriors famous for the faultily recorded events which passed inside. A plain brick tavern hardly hints of the greasy kitchen where the first signature was forged on a nation's charter, or the bedroom where a general's final night was graced with sugared vice, instead of saccharine sleep. Kodak's infamous inventory alone counts 400 billion foreign sunsets, and an equal number of noble vistas framed by arches and trees. Several thousand tons of tourist pictures exist of boats slashing the edges of blue and curving bays, or colorful dorsal surfaces of departing indians, beneath humongous bulks. Stucco facades total one hundred thousand tons, and this is not counting private production.

Other tourists labor to record the substance of their lives, giving justice however to common moments. The lascivious airport reception of each of twenty doctors, with counterfeit kisses and welcoming leis, is touted for years beyond the day the hula-women retire to raise their roly-poly part-Samoan boys. Lost are memories of weary feet and dully-focused stares (below, above a restaurant table), and hours of cruising shops to choose among shells crudely painted to resemble kittens or bears.

Tourist redundancy arguably has the salutary effect of fixing cultural knowledge in unretentive minds. However a similar effort in fixing their memories to knotted strings (the Inca principle of rosaries) would greatly reduce the criminal tendencies developed in darkroom technicians, who now grow too accustomed to working in conditions of the night.

The visually well-travelled will seldom any longer feign interest for photographs from known locations, even if remote. But for reprehensible, sentimental reasons, one might admire a favorite few. Some will share a Briton's joy, arriving at a lone Victorian mansion in time for tea in the midst of an Arctic gale. Others might recall a close friend, seeing the portrait of the prideful possessor of a grand bumbershoot, made of human bones. The psychologically minded might enjoy the sole existing documentary photos recording deja vu, or the chance encounter among three persons, all the same kind of fool. The picture of a huge concentration of Rod Stewart's ex-girlfriends in customary Zimbabwean dress may give rise to tender emotions. My personal favorite among these travel photos obsolete is of a Dalmatian dentist worshipped among aboriginal peoples as their deity most divine, and handing out Tootsie-pops. To each their own, of course.

Nevertheless the majority of excellent touristic photographs lurk in places where photographers have yet to poke. The reader may not immediately appreciate the difficulties which must be surmounted by this annointed photographic cult. Its practitioners seldom guess what equipment will prove appropriate, and then they find it difficult to hire guides. They will often reach a place

to find themselves preceded by an Australian, a Rockefeller, or a post-modernist painter, earlier seeking something fresh to filch. Or they might find a place only populated by communicable but uncommunicative protozoa. They even occasionally suffer the embarrassment of finding a new religion, factually superior to their own.

Hostile inhabitants of unknown places are countered with proprieties known to the gregarious intrepid as Hemingway's Laws. That is, give them cigars and don't steal their girls. The axioms have only known failure in a single encounter with a tribe of non-smoking cannibalistic homosexuals. This is a combination of propensities after all rare.

Above all, a photographer slogging to places where no one has logged before should limit herself to necessary shots, and add no verbal speculation. Archaeologists offending the latter are remembered posthumously as howling fools, if lucky enough to pre-decease their colleagues' learned studies. Certain places where no one has ever traipsed may turn out, moreover, extraordinarily lusterless and languid. The upper limit of a single photo in places unknown but boring prevents the proliferation of feeble souvenirs.

I lastly note that places where no one has ever been before are recognized mostly by process of elimination. Rambo T-shirts disqualify a place, but reincarnations of Jimi Hendrix will not. Urchins asking precisely for "U.S. tender" should make things clear, or locals calling one's eating habits goyish. Military installations of impossible sophistication do not mean a thing, but candor from military personnel can only mean a pristine location. Waterfalls definitively defying gravity are sufficiently rare, but white rainbows and ochre rivers exist in profusion. A period of residency may be required, but undiscovered places can also be recognized by the existence of everlasting love or personal fortune, also, a currency not subject to inflation. In these cases it is fortuitous to have brought extra film, as these phenomena are significant, more so among inhabitants shaped as toads.

DECEMBER

Through Dec 7 2315 Commerce St Warehouse. "Friends" show, open 7 days all hours.

Through Dec 14 Sewall Gallery Rice University, 6100 S. Main. "Souvenirs": work by Barbara Hanger, Kit Hillery, and Suzanne Mitchell, Mon-Sat 12-5.

Through Dec 14 Midtown Art Center 1914 Holman (521-3097). "Honey I'm Home" and "Particles," Tues-Sat 12-6.

Through Dec 21 Glassell School 5101 Montrose "CORE: Works in Progress," Annual exhibition of works in all media by members of the Glassell School's Core Artists in Residence program.

Through Dec 27 Heights Gallery 1614 Oxford St. "Infinite Combinations": gallery artists; photographs, jewelry, collectibles, Tues-Fri 1-6.

Through Dec 30 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 1001 Bissonnet "Houston Art League," exhibit tracing the history of the Houston Art League, the parent organization of the Museum, Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-6, Thur till 9.

Through January 5, Contemporary Arts Museum 5216 Montrose, "Nancy O'Connor: Milam's Journey" (Perspectives Gallery), Tues-Sat 10-5, Sunday till 6.

Through Jan 5, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 1001 Bissonnet "Moholy-Nagy: Photography and Film in Weimar Germany" Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-6, Thur till 9.

Through Jan 6, Afterimage 2800 Routh, Dallas, photographs by gallery artists. (214) 871-9140.

6 through Jan 5 Houston Center for Photography 1441 W. Alabama, Richard Misrach: "Four Cantos"; also, "The Photographic Print: Color Processes," second of a three-exhibition series created by Maggie Olvey; also, the Center will have a group holiday sale and exhibition.

Through Jan 10, Rice Media Center University Blvd. at Stockton St. (Entrance #7) Exhibition of student work from 1969-1985. Info: 527-4894.

10 through 28 Gallery MacArthur 535 Lovett Blvd, photographs by Barbara Entman.

11 through Feb 1 Benteler 2815 Colquitt, "Coming to Terms," photographs by Wendy Watriss and Fred Baldwin.

21 through March 16 Contemporary Arts Museum 5216 Montrose, "Robert Rauschenberg, Work from Four Series: A Sesquicentennial Exhibition" (Upper Gallery), Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun till 6. Note: the photography portion of this exhibition opens on March 1 and continues through April 18.

JANUARY

Through Jan 5 Contemporary Arts Museum "Nancy O'Connor: Milam's Journey" (see Dec. listing)

Through Jan 5 , Museum of Fine Arts 1001 Bissonnet "Moholy-Nagy: Photography and Film in Weimar Germany" Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-6, Thur till 9.

Through Jan 5 Houston Center for Photography Richard Misrach: "Four Cantos"; also "The Photographic Print: Color Processes" (see Dec listing)

Through Jan 6, Afterimage 2800 Routh, Dallas. Photographs by gallery artists. (214) 871-9140.

Through Feb 1 Benteler Gallery "Coming to Terms" (see Dec listing)

Through March 16 Contemporary Arts Museum "Robert Rauschenberg" (see Dec listing)

Through Feb 4, Watson Gallery "Richard Misrach" Tues-Sat 10-5:30.

7 through Feb 1 Texas Gallery 2012 Peden: group show of gallery artists from Texas, including photographic work of Sally Gall, Nick Nicosia, and Casey Williams. Casey Williams, Tue-Sat 10-5:30.

10 through Feb 23 Houston Center for Photography "39 Mexican Photographers," an exhibition of a portfolio organized by Pedro Meyer to benefit the victims of the recent earthquake in Mexico; also "The Photographic Print: Extending the Boundaries," last of a three-exhibition series exploring the incorporation of photography with other media.

11 through Feb 2 Lawndale Alternative 5600 Hillman "Women: War and Peace," a series of exhibits, performances, and other activities concerning women's creative efforts towards peace and freedom. For more information: Houston Area Women's Center, 528-6798; Lawndale Alternative, 921-4155.

24 through March 1 Diverse Works 214 Travis "Architecture and Culture: A Look at Freedmans Town and Allen Park-

way Village." Exhibit and symposia documenting culture and architecture of the Fourth Ward. Tues-Fri 10-5:30, Sat 10-4.

FEBRUARY

Through Feb 23 Houston Center for Photography "39 Mexican Photographers," an exhibition of a portfolio organized by Pedro Meyer to benefit the victims of the recent earthquake in Mexico; also "The Photographic Print: Extending the Boundaries," last of a three-exhibition series exploring the incorporation of photography with other media.

Through Feb 28 Sewall Gallery (Rice U.) "Dig We Must! Archaeology at Rice" Mon-Sat 12-5.

Through March 1 Diverse Works "Architecture and Culture" see January listing.

Through March 16 Contemporary Arts Museum "Robert Rauschenberg" (see Dec listing).

6 through March 24, Rice Museum, 6100 Main, "The Indelible Image: Photographs of War, 1846 to the Present," info: 527-4064.

10 through 22 Lawndale Alternative 5600 Hillman "National Scholastic Art Awards," award-winning high school student entries in all media Tue-Sat 12 to 6.

14 through Mar 31 Heights Gallery 1614 Oxford St "Around Texas" photographs by Tracy Hart, including the series, "Texas Trucks" Tues-Fri 1-6.

15 through April 27 Museum of Fine Arts "Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia" Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun 1-6, Thur till 9.

17 through March 7 University of Houston, University Park, University Center Gallery color and black and white architectural photographs.

20th through March 31 Gallery MacArthur 535 Lovett Blvd. Photographs by Barbara Entman, all new exhibit.

Beginning Feb 22, Plaza Gallery, 5020 Montrose, Valentin Gertsman: "Houston-Paris: A Juxtaposition of Architecture and Monumental Sculpture," Tue-Fri 10-6, Sat 11-3.

27th through March 22, Graham Gallery 1431 W. Alabama, Alain Clement: "Recent Photographs," Tue-Sat 10-5:30.

27th through April 5 Pembroke Gallery 1639 Bissonnet, Ben Shahn, photographs Tues-Sat 10-6.

Beginning on Feb 28 Lawndale Alternative 5600 Hillman "Integrations." Photography as an adjunct to work in other media. Four international artists.

28 through April 6 Houston Center for Photography 1441 West Alabama "Bernard Faucon," a retrospective of his work; also, "Natural Resources," an exhibition/installation to acquaint visitors with the range of artistic photographic activity in Texas, and an exhibition of work by Houston photographers, curated by Lew Thomas. Wed-Fri, 11-5; Sat-Sun 12-5.

EXHIBITIONS

ELSEWHERE

IN TEXAS

DECEMBER

Through Dec. 7 Afterimage Gallery 2800 Routh Street, Dallas, "Willy Ronis," Mon-Sat 10-5:30.

Through Dec. 13, Southern Light 2200 S. Van Buren, Amarillo, Jagdish Agarwal "Joy of India," Tue-Fri 10-5.

Through Dec. 20, Cultural Activities Center, Temple, "Off the Wall."

Through Dec 31 Artists' League of Texas Photography Gallery 1104 1/2 North 2nd, Abilene, Group show; Tue-Fri 11-2, Sat-Sun 11-4.

6 through Jan 12 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce St, Dallas, "Allen Street Gallery Photographics '85" Wed-Fri 12-5, Sat 10-4, Sun 1-5.

Opens Dec 13 Laguna Gloria Art Museum 3809 W 35th, Austin, "Out of the Forties: A Portrait of Texas from the Standard Oil Collection" 10-5 Tue-Sat, 1-5 Sun, 10-9 Thurs.

14 through Jan 19 Atrium Gallery Moody Hall, St. Edward's University, Austin, "Texas Realism," exhibition of an all-media juried competition; information (512) 453-5312.

JANUARY

Through Jan 12 Allen Street Gallery "Allen Street Gallery Photographics" (see Dec Listing)

Through Jan 19 Atrium Gallery Moody Hall, St Edward's University, Austin, "Texas Realism" (see Dec listing)

17 through Feb 23 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Ray Metzker photographs; also, Associates' Exhibition: Frances Thompson and Walter Nelson.

24 through April 13 Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, "An Enduring Grace: Photographs of Laura Gilpin" - retrospective of one of the foremost photographers of the American West (817) 738-1933.

Through January Artists' League of Texas Photography Gallery 1104 1/2 2nd, Abilene, Michael Nye, photographs Tue-Fri 11-2, Sat-Sun 11-4.

FEBRUARY

Through Feb 23 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Ray Metzker: photographs; also Frances Thompson and Walter Nelson (see Jan listing)

Through February Artists' League of Texas Gallery 1104 1/2 2nd St, Abilene, John Best, photographs Tue-Fri 11-2, Sat-Sun 11-4.

Through April 13 Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth, "An Enduring Grace: Photographs of Laura Gilpin" (see Jan listing)

Feb 28 through April 6 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Associates' exhibition, curated: "Interior Spaces" Wed-Fri 12-5, Sat 10-4, Sun 1-5.

WORKSHOPS/

CLASSES

DECEMBER

7 HCP "Introduction to Cibachrome" Sharon Stewart, instructor, \$40 members, \$50 non-members. Info: 529-7455.

WORKSHOPS/

CLASSES ELSEWHERE

January 19 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Workshop: Ray Metzker.

February 21-22 Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Workshop: Jerry Uelsmann.

February 28 through March 2 Southwest Crafts Center, 300 Augusta, San Antonio, Workshop: "Hand Colored Photography" (Jim McKinnis) \$100 for all three days. Info: (512) 224-1848.

LECTURES/EVENTS

December 6-22 HCP Holiday Photography Sale works by HCP members. Sale is during gallery hours Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat-Sun 12-5. 1441 W. Alabama.

December 9 HCP 1441 W. Alabama: Richard Misrach slide presentation 7:30 PM \$2 admission charge for non-members.

December 13 Lawndale Alternative 5600 Hillman "Enwrapped," a benefit Christmas party and performance platform for the Lawndale Alternative. Information: 921-4155.

LECTURES/EVENTS

ELSEWHERE

January 18, 2 PM Allen Street Gallery 4101 Commerce, Dallas, Lecture: Ray Metzker.

OPPORTUNITIES

Exhibition screening, Houston Center for Photography. Houston photographers are invited to submit slides or prints for consideration for Foto Fest show at HCP. Deadline: February 1. Open to all photo practices including

straight, manipulative, conceptual, post-modernist, etc.

Submit slides & prints, Jewish Community Center, 17th Annual Juried Photography Exhibition. In conjunction with Foto Fest. Juror: Van Deren Coke. Deadline: January 2. Call 729-3200 for information.

CLUBS

American Society of Magazine Photographers (ASMP), meets 2nd Mon. monthly in the Graphic Arts Conference Center, 1324 W. Clay. International association "whose members work in every category of published photography." 6:30pm social; 7:30pm meeting. Visitors welcome. Charge for monthly meetings. 521-2090.

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

Association of Students in Photography, Houston Community College, 1300 Holman. For HCC students. Meets 8pm, 1st Mon. monthly. Randy Spalinger 521-9271.

Baytown Camera Club, meets 7pm 1st and 3rd Mon. monthly at Baytown Community Center, 2407 Market, Baytown. Vernon Hagan 424-5684.

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

The Houston Camera Club, meets 7:30pm 1st and 3rd Tues. monthly at Baylor College of Medicine, DeBakey Bldg, room M-112. Competitions, programs, evaluations. Gwen Kunz 665-0639.

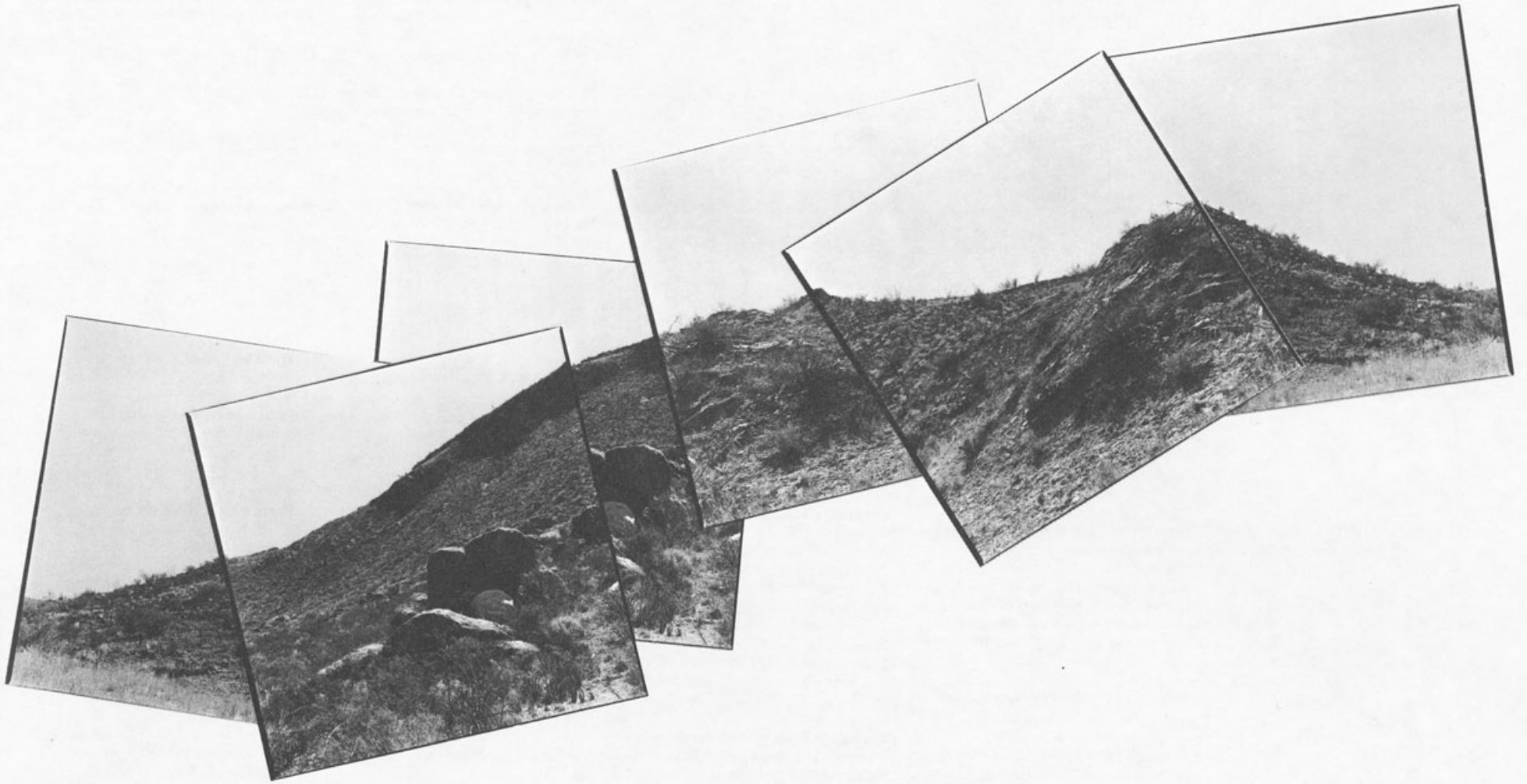
The Houston Photochrome Club, meets 7:30pm 2nd and 4th Thurs monthly at St. Michael's Church, 1801 Sage Rd, room 21. John Patton 453-4167.

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

Photographic Collectors of Houston, meets upstairs at the Color Place (4102 San Felipe) 4th Wed. monthly at 7pm. Steve Granger 498-5589.

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

Society of Photographers in Industry, meets 3rd Thurs monthly, Sonny Look's Restaurant, 9810 S. Main, 6-10pm. Cocktails, dinner, speaker; visitors welcome. Dave Thompson 795-8835.



Mary Margaret Hansen

THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

announces a

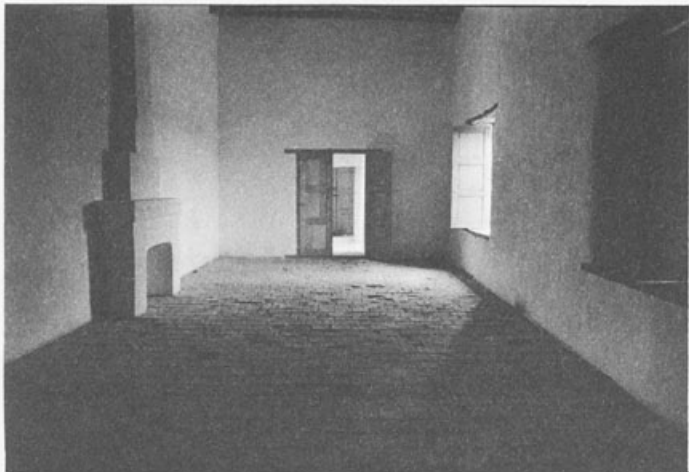
HOLIDAY PRINT SALE

Many well known area photographers participating

December 6 — December 22

Sale will include many areas of interest including

LANDSCAPES	STILL LIFES	PORTRAITS	DOCUMENTARY
1441 West Alabama	Tues-Fri 11am-5pm, Sat-Sun 12-5		529-4755



Maud Lipscomb



Paula Goldman



Jim Caldwell