



"Triumph of Life," by Lutz Bacher

RICHARD WOLIN ON ROBERT FRANK / ELECTRONIC BOOK / BERNARD FAUCON INTERVIEW / DESIRE OF THE OTHER
PAINTED PHOTOGRAPHY / THE INDELIBLE IMAGE: PHOTOGRAPHS OF WAR / SELF-PORTRAIT: MIRROR OF THE SELF

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MESSAGES

Q. How many semioticians does it take to change a light bulb?
A. Four: One to hold the ladder, one to change the bulb, one to interpret the significance of the action, and one to edit and publish the proceedings. (Art Papers)

Remembrance of The Houston Foto Fest is one of the ends towards which this issue of SPOT is directed. If there is a subtext to the issue, it is the search for desire. Desire seen through the view-finder of the camera, the darkness dispersed in the light of the image, the action caught in the cutting of time, absence erased through the object of a photograph. Desire revealed in delay, in dispersal, in the trace of what is absent—the wish. It is visible in the zones of representation where author and reader look for the signs of agreement.

FRAME: There is the reviewer's desire to explain the objects of her/his discourse—photography displayed during The Houston Foto Fest, the festival of looking. And there are the features: "Angels Are My Only Love," Carol Everingham's interview with the French photographer, Bernard Faucon, whose "delicacy of spirit passes over the impossibility of language"; and the speculation by David Tafler on the text of the electronic book exemplified by Peter D'Agostino's *Double You (and X,Y,Z)*. Is this the advancing technology that promises to alter anew the spatial and temporal categories of the spectator/reader's consciousness? "Desire of the Other" is more speculation, this time on the codes of difference that exist in gender-specific images and images of discourse taken from two exhibitions at HCP: *Houston Photographers* and *Recoding Sexuality*.

The festival of looking was a resounding success producing elation, enhancement of confidence, and the inevitable temporary burnout that follows an intense schedule of exhibitions, lectures, international turnout of people from around the world, and an endless round of parties that would have aroused the envy of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Moreover, this great city, despite its distressed economic condition, continued to play host to a succession of spring festivals after Foto Fest embracing New Music America, The Houston Festival, The Orange Show, ("a unique architectural tribute to the orange, the life's work of Jeff McKissack"), the innuaguration of *The Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden* designed by Isamu Noguchi for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Houston International Film Festival.

LIGHT: Scenes varied from the congregation of more than a million people gathered together in the southwest sector of the city to celebrate the spectacle of Jean Michel Jarre's laser projections of light and sound against the sculptured skyline of downtown Houston to the six or seven dedicated spectators who spent two weekends at Diverse Works viewing a rare screening of Jean-Luc Godard's eighteen hours of video made for French television. There are few artists in the late Twentieth Century who have had greater influence on the semiotics of art (the complex system of signs that order our world) than Godard. Though hardly infallible, the name of Godard encompasses most of the discoveries of the postmodern era, modern era.

ACTION: One of the more remarkable achievements of The Houston Foto Fest was the ambition and desire of the artists' spaces and galleries to mount exhibitions of startling quality such as *Contemporary Women in Documentary Photography* featuring the politicized photographs of Wendy Watriss and Ruth Gordon at The Firehouse Gallery; *Painted Pictures* curated by Andy Grundberg, The Midtown Center; *Interiors*, Rice Media Center; Barbara Riley's hand colored photographs, Hadler/Rodriguez; *Meridel Rubenstein: Lifelines*, Jack Meier Gallery; *Alain Clement: New Photographs*, Graham Gallery; *Black, White & Color: Houston/Los Angeles*, Diverse Works; *Paul Hester: Texas Monuments*, Farish Gallery, Rice University; to name just a few of the exhibits some of which are reviewed in this issue of SPOT.

In addition to these, there are reviews of the larger exhibitions: Richard Wolin's analysis of the retrospective, *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia*; "War" by David Portz addressing the deep latent issues in the *Indelible Image: Photographs of War—1846 to Present*, Rice Museum, Rice University. The review of the Contemporary Arts Museum, *Robert Rauchenberg: Photographs 1949-1983*, is made poignant by the presence of a single photograph—the portrait of the late Joseph Beuys—taken in West Berlin, 1983. The artist is recognizable as he stands in the shadow of an atavistic construction of white stallions wearing the personal emblems seen throughout his controversial career, his hat and overcoat. With his right hand, he makes the sign of greeting, or is it farewell, to the photographer whose vantage point is ours.

EDIT: The symposium, *On Collecting*, held at the Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was especially interesting because of the wit and sophistication of the panel led by Anne Tucker and consisting of Stephen White, Sam Wagstaff, Tom Halstead, Pierre Apraxine, Ann Horton, Robert Persky, and Daniel Wolf. Yet, it was the other symposium, *Representations of the Self: Multiple Perspectives*, organized by Esther de Vecsey, Director of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, that stood out as a stimulating model of miscellaneous discourse.

The format of this symposium, which was held in conjunction with The Blaffer Gallery exhibition, *Self-Portraits in the Age of Photography*, explored "the many levels and stages of self-perception and self-depiction from the aspect of psychology, sociology, philosophy and theology."

The panel was composed of interdisciplinary specialists who were each given 20 minutes to formulate their positions. The audience was allowed to ask questions of clarification after each presentation. Issues of the body, self, memory and authority were joined to the praxis of photography, specifically the genre of self-portraiture. William Simon, Professor of Sociology, University of Houston, challenged the panel and the audience to show him where the self-portraits in the exhibition went beyond the illustration of generic poses found in conventional photography. He equated the camera with its document, the photograph, generalizing the process as an expression of the "democracy of self," a representational system of "shared memory."

The presentation made by Elizabeth Glassman, Cultural Planner and Art Historian, led to a pragmatic discussion of the value of cataloging expression through the art of physiognomy. Advertising was targeted as a source of visual conventions in which pose and gesture are converted into signs constituting, in the words of Glassman, "a language of visual representation."

CUT: As for the physiognomy of desire, it could have been seen on the faces of the photographers as they waited in the lobby of the Warwick Hotel, the "Meeting Place" of Foto Fest, to meet "many of the most creative minds in the field of photography (who) came together from all over the world to make themselves available to the photographic public for the exchange of ideas."

The Co-Founders of The Houston Foto Fest, Petra Benteler and Frederick Baldwin, created a free-flowing context for the photographic arts that went far beyond anyone's expectations and they deserve the necessary support to repeat the festival of looking again. . . .

Lew Thomas



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PHOTOGRAPHY IN MEXICO SUMMER 1986

Rice University will offer during the summer of 1986 a two-week guided excursion through central and southwest Mexico for intermediate and advanced photography students. The dates of the trip are June 29 to July 13, 1986. Guide and instructor for the trip will be Geoff Winningham. Academic credit is available for qualified students. The itinerary will include San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Morelia, Patzcuaro, Playa Azul, Acapulco, Taxco, and Mexico City. There will be a limit of 10 students.

For full details write: Geoff Winningham, Rice University Media Center, P.O. Box 1982, Houston, Texas 77251. Or call (713) 527-4894 or 527-8101, extension 2369 or 3345.

PROBLEMATIC RENAISSANCE IN BRITISH DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

British Contemporary Photography
—Coming of Age was exhibited at the
Wilhelm Gallery, March 8-31.

"The current thinking within American
photographic circles is that contem-
porary British photographers are either
continuing to pursue an extended ver-
sion of the photo essay, or they are
producing dated derivations of the
work of American photographers."
(Martin Parr, 1986, Houston Foto
Fest)

"For the purposes of approximate
truth, it might be said that the photo-
graphic tradition died in England
sometime around 1905. When (Bill)
Brandt returned to London in the
1930s, England had forgotten its rich
photographic past and showed no sign
of seeking a photographic present."
(John Szarkowski, 1972, Looking at
Photographs)

By Wendy Watriss

In search of an answer to the per-
ceived and articulated criticism of
photography in Britain today, Martin
Parr conceived and curated the
show, *British Contemporary Photog-
raphy—Coming of Age*, for Houston
Foto Fest. The six photographers
have known each other for years,
but it was the first time they have
shown together—and for several, it
was the first time they have had a
major exhibition in the U.S.: Paul
Graham, Chris Killip, Graham
Smith, Martin Parr, Brian Griffin,
John Davies.

The title of the show suggests
greater breadth than may be merit-
ed because the focus of the work is
documentary, but its purpose is to
define what these photographers
believe is a new statement in British
photography today. Behind the de-
ceptively familiar format, their work
(individually and collectively) con-
fronts the traditions which have
dominated British and much of docu-
mentary photography in general for
nearly a century.

As a visualization of external
realities, documentary photography
everywhere is struggling against its
own deeply embedded conventions
and a sense of its own irrelevance—
not only to art but, in many cases,
even social reality. The decline of
conventional public forums for this
photography in the mass media, the
demands of the new forums (galler-
ies, museums) and growing scepti-
cism concerning the traditional
'humanism' of documentary expres-
sion have created the need for a
fresh approach, a new language.

Unlike other modern documentary
photographers who seek new lan-
guage by juggling traditional imagery
and themes with montage, multi-
media and text, these six photogra-
phers still work with the image itself.
Rejecting the 'high drama' demands
of postwar photojournalism and the
objectivism of conventional photo
essays, they are seeking subjective
forms of expression that still pay
respect to formal aesthetics while
focusing on external realities.

It is a problematical balancing act
endemic to all documentary photog-
raphy, but particularly in England
where a strong history of late 19th
century and early 20th century social
documentary photography shaped
photographic expectations in Britain
for many years. It did so not only be-
cause of its quality but because of its
wide popularity. Later, in the mid-
1900s and through much of postwar
England, photo magazines like pic-
ture *Post* dominated the photogra-
phy profession. It wasn't until the
early 1970s that the emergence of
galleries, teaching institutions and
special photography publications
began to provide ways for young

photographers to work outside the
editorial and advertising media.

While all of the six photographers
in this show have done journalistic
and commercial work (Brian Griffin
is one of England's most successful
commercial photographers), their
commitment is to a longerterm ex-
ploration of style and subject matter.
As individuals, they show considera-
ble range in style and approach, but
they share a common concern (or
attraction) for formal beauty. All ex-
cept for Chris Killip have formal art
training, and the thin line between
art and documentary provides a con-
scious and continuing tension in their
life and work. "Beauty," said British
film documentarian Paul Rotha in the
1930s "is one of the greatest dangers
of documentation." It is also one of
the most seductive. It is a polemic
openly acknowledged and present in
the work of these photographers—
something that the viewer must also
acknowledge and engage in to un-
derstand this work.

Graham Smith is committed to
documenting the industrialized north
of England which is his birth place.
He rejects the romanticized human-
ism of social documentary tradition
and is proud to proclaim he went to
art school from the Middlesborough
steelworks "by accident." "If photog-
raphy packed it in tomorrow, it
wouldn't bother me. I am less in-
terested in the photographic image
itself than I am photographing. What
interests me is where I go. Of all of
us, I am the least photographic." Yet
Smith pays minute attention to the
quality of his large black and white
images taken with a 5x4 handheld
Linhof which he carries into bars, fac-
tories and houses. The resonance of
'classic beauty' in his prints contrasts
starkly with the dark realities of
working class life in northern England
where unemployment and neglect
not only define the present but the
foreseeable future as well.

A parallel dichotomy is present in
Chris Killip's work which is similar to
Smith's in style and approach. His
photographs of the seacoal camps at
Lynemouth and punk clubs in Sunder-
land deal with even more marginal
lives than the factory workers of
Middlesborough. Killip believes it is
important "for us to stick it out in
northern England because that's
where it's happening"—the decay
and detritus of postindustrial culture.
He never relents in depicting its mar-
ginality, but the brooding perfection
of his large-format prints often bor-
ders on the lingering romanticism he
finds antithetical to his own point of
view: "How do you break the rules
and still express a common language.

* Anne Tucker, "Photographic
Facts and Thirties America," *Observa-
tions*, Friends of Photography, 1984,
p. 42

I want to break the rules. I try to
break myself. The photos I really like
are the ones when I was afraid. Pho-
tographs which scared me shitless
for all sorts of reasons. It's trying to
crawl forward inch by inch."

John Davies' exquisitely detailed,
almost delicate large-format land-
scapes present similar problems for
the viewer. After seven years of pho-
tographing the natural landscape,
exploring the inter-relationship be-
tween sky and land, Davies changed
focus. "In my original landscapes,
there was a physical and spiritual
respect for life. I changed because I
thought these romantic images were
being used as vehicles for escape—
people were buying them to put on
their walls and seeing them as an es-
cape instead of facing their environ-
ment. I feel what we are doing now
is important, getting away from art
for art's sake." Now he has trans-
ferred his earlier style to nuclear
power plants, coal fields, stone quar-
ries and industrial suburbs where
commerce has reshaped the natural
landscape. But while his photographs
avoid the easy moralizing of much
environmental photography, doesn't
their adherence to formal aesthet-
ics result in a 'dangerous' ambiguity
of intent?

Martin Parr's work in this show at-
tempts to deal with these questions
by distancing itself from these tradi-
tions. Calling his earlier black and
white work "too romantic," Parr has
turned to color and uses a mixture
of refinement (large-format camera)
and crudity (blatant flash fill) to ex-
press the chaos and contradictions of
middle class British culture—scenes
from England's famous seaside resort
of Brighton where the seaside disap-
peared in the 1950s and what re-
mains is New Brighton or "The Last
Resort." As would befit images of
people sunbathing and playing by
concrete pilings and bulldozers, the
surface prettiness of the medium is
rendered slightly comical, even ob-
scene by the pastel colors: "I want
to introduce new ideas and options
into pictures—to use the construc-
tion of a picture to say something
new. It's an expanding vision and
that's part of my purpose in using
color and flash fill. I feel angst about
the world, and when I am walking
down a street I see all kinds of things
—the discordant, chaotic things. Pho-
tography can translate this."

Paul Graham also uses large-format
color prints to explore what is one of
the most original ideas in this show—
and one of the most difficult to carry
off successfully. He confronts sub-
jects generally left to the domain of
photojournalists—the war in North-
ern Ireland, the British welfare sys-
tem. Playing off the classic reportage
of Northern Ireland with its empha-
sis on conflict and death, Graham
utilizes the formalism of color land-

scape photography to reveal the
unsuspected omnipresence of the
war—a bit of IRA graffiti on an
empty roadway, a tattered Union
Jack fluttering at treetop on the
horizon of a pastoral country scene.
"In England, we have been very
aware of the expansion of visual
vocabulary as it was practised by
people like Winogrand, Friedlander,
Baltz and even Robert Adams. I am
trying to get away from traditional
photojournalism, but I don't want to
be just a fine art photographer. We
find ourselves frustrated now with
the latest U.S. work which is more
concerned with style than substance.
I want to find ways to put the two
concerns together—art and social
concern."

Brian Griffin goes farther than any
of the others in flaunting photograp-
hic conventions. His famous series on
corporate executives is a portrayal of
power using shapes, objects and
forms of light that seem to emanate
from estraterrestrial life. His response
to the seemingly mundane assign-
ment of photographing 'London By
Night' was to simulate the atmos-
phere of a city on the brink of
nuclear holocaust. Griffin eschews
easy categorization and certainly
doesn't refer to his own work as
documentary, but the same ques-
tions that haunt the others also
haunt him: "A big company in Lon-
don wants me to do a piece on their
building site. I've chosen to do the
workers, to try to photograph them
in a very new way—something that's
never been done before with wor-
kers in photography. The worker has
been photographed so many times,
and people expect a certain kind of
vocabulary from that subject in pho-
tography. It's difficult to think of new
ways to do it because it has married
itself in to certain possibilities. But I
have to try to fight against the body
of tradition in photography."

It's an ongoing struggle, and "Com-
ing of Age" gives us no easy response.
Individually and collectively, the work
of these six photographers raises
more questions than it answers. But
it raises the right questions, seriously
and with integrity. Can art and
documentation be successfully joined
without one diminishing the other?
How does one get beyond the single
'perfect' image to record the incho-
ate nature of our relationships to
each other? Relying on image alone,
these photographers are exploring
photography's ability to come to
grips with these questions. Their
work may not always succeed, but it
is among the most important work
being done in documentary photog-
raphy today.

Martin Parr, from The Last Resort



Paul Graham, Roundabout, 1984



ROBERT FRANK: NEW YORK TO NOVA SCOTIA

The exhibition Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia was organized by Anne Wilkes Tucker for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and was shown there from February 15-April 27, 1986. The exhibition will travel across the country.

By Richard Wolin

"To collect photographs is to collect the world," remarks Susan Sontag in the opening pages of *On Photography*. "Photographs really are experience captured," she continues, "and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood. . . . To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed." Yet these are far from the unambiguous statements they seem to be. Who is doing the photographing and for what ends? Why is the photograph snapped at this moment rather than another? Photography, when it is at its best—as it is in so much of Robert Frank's work—strives to capture the "significant instant"—the "decisive moment" as the great war photographer Robert Capa was fond of calling it.

The apparent claim or self-evidence of photographic verisimilitude must be called into question. For life itself is anything but a chain of pristine "significant instants." On the contrary, monotony and uneventfulness are more often the rule. Moreover, as it is lived, life is a process of constant flux and movement. Photographs "deceive" (if this is the right word) by bringing this process to an unnatural and abrupt halt. The German critic Walter Benjamin had a phrase for this phenomenon; he called it a "dialectic at a standstill": a process of analytically freezing the natural course of events in order to strip them of their familiarity. Yet, this is a process that simultaneously provokes insight: we are compelled to abandon the complacency with which we customarily view our environing world; we are urged to view it with new eyes—the eyes of the

photographer.

In sum, photography's virtue lies precisely in its transcendence of the world as simply lived—that is, the world in its familiar, routinized guise. Photography's goal is to redeem the world from a condition of humdrum sameness, to point out what is meaningful, worthy of note, of significant moment. Were it to aspire toward some phantom objectivity—a bland duplication of the given—photography would forsake its *raison d'être*. Consequently, it is the subjective aspects of a photograph that we are always asked to judge.

Robert Frank is still best known as the genius behind *The Americans*: the brilliant fruit of a two-year auto tour of the United States in 1955-56. The American edition appeared in 1959 with a memorable introduction by Jack Kerouac. The virtue of *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia* is that it features representative examples from other phases of Frank's photographic career—above all a hauntingly beautiful series of photographs pre-dating *The Americans*, taken in Peru, Paris, London, and Wales—while ceding pride of place to *The Americans*, as should be the case.

Its appearance in 1959 was anything but uncontroversial. It drew acclaim to be sure—Walker Evans was an early, vociferous Frank supporter—but also had its share of detractors. Above all, it was the alleged subjective biases of Frank's American panorama that were the source of heated objection. Frank, critics protested, had not presented the glossy, cosmetized, upbeat version of America people were used to seeing on the pages of *Life* magazine. Instead, they felt, he focused unfairly on the nation's fetid underbelly, a

side seldom seen in the annals of official publicity. One critic went so far as to suggest that Frank re-title his work *Some Americans*—a reference to the willful selectivity of his vision. That is, his detractors objected precisely to the aspects of Frank's work that were most original, compelling, fresh, and moving.

Here are the unforgettable opening lines of Kerouac's classically "beat" introduction to *The Americans*:

"That crazy feeling when the sun is hot on the streets and music comes out of a jukebox or from a nearby funeral, that's what Robert Frank has captured in tremendous photographs he has taken as he traveled on the road around practically forty eight states in an old used car (on Guggenheim Fellowship) and with the agility, mystery, genius, sadness and strange secrecy of a shadow photographed scenes that have never been seen before on film. . . . After seeing these pictures you finally end up not knowing any more whether a jukebox is sadder than a coffin. . . . Frank sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world."

In Kerouac's words there echoes a crucial dimension of Frank's vision that remains wholly unappreciated by his myopic critics; the profound affection Frank feels for his subject matter. To be sure, it is an unglamorous portrait of fifties-America that Frank has to offer. But "glamour" is appropriate to Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and "prime time." "Glamour" has been portrayed countless times before. It is not the task of responsible photo-journalism to glamorize themes deserving of more frank treatment. Frank's virtue was to have discovered an "other" America—precisely the "other" America that has been repressed and marginalized by official, "glamorous" America. Yes, Frank has presented us with a "sad poem;" but it is a poem nonetheless, possessed of its own distinctive power and beauty. The miracle of Frank's tragic ballad is that he is able to provide a voice—an image—for a whole series of marginal social types who are otherwise deprived of one by the powers that be: Southern Blacks, urban cowboys, forlorn waitresses, love-lorn elevator girls, motorcycle outlaws, the elderly, "visionary Indian angels who were visionary Indian angels" (Allen Ginsberg)—young lovers with eyes only for each other. Frank's heroism lies in the fact that he refuses to cater to his patrons. Instead, he provides a set of lingering, haunting images and scenes through which ordinary Americans can see themselves. Frank is the bard of 'everyman.' As such, his images are vintage Americana: unabashed, rife with contradictions, sobering. For cheap consolation—as well as 'glamour'—one will have to seek elsewhere.

"Behind the ritualized claims of American photography," writes Susan Sontag, "to be looking around, at random, without preconceptions—lighting on subjects, phlegmatically recording them—is a mournful vision of loss." Indeed, Frank's America is a far cry from the uplifting visions of Walt Whitman. America's "song" has somehow turned into a "dirge." It is precisely this transformation that Frank would have us reflect on. "The implicit intent of Frank and (Diane) Arbus," Sontag remarks, "is to show that America is the grave of the Occident." Yet, here an otherwise astute critic errs severely. The visions of Frank and Arbus are in truth worlds removed from one another. Above all, by conflating Frank and Arbus, Sontag mistakes the profound degree of empathy Frank displays for his subjects. We feel he is on their side. No kindred sentiment is forthcoming from Arbus' work. Instead of empathy, one senses the prurient mockery of unwitting victims; victims of the cruelty and starkness of an unflinching lens, who have been unfairly duped for sensationalist ends. More importantly, there is nothing specifi-

cally American about Arbus' world view. Her images are of oddities; they are not, as in Frank, *representative images*. Hence, one senses that her photographic freak-show is not in the least context-specific. Her repertoire of eccentrics could in principle be found anywhere.

As I have already indicated, one of the major advantages of the Frank show is that it reveals Frank to be more than just the inspirational force behind *The Americans* (one cannot help but wonder all along: would a European alone—Frank is Swiss-born—be capable of viewing the United States with such startling visionary candor?). The photos on exhibition that pre-date *The Americans* show Frank to be a photographer possessed of an acute sensitivity to his subject matter. Among the most moving in this group are his photos taken in Peru and Wales. In both settings, Frank captures the sadness—the "mournful vision of loss"—that he would later extract from an American landscape. The same visages—haunting, empty, forlorn—stare out at us seemingly transposed to another time and place. In both Peru and Wales one sees not only the tragedy of poverty, but also the nobility of the human beings condemned to endure it. In Wales, Frank captures an especially moving image of a coalminer, face blackened with soot, drinking heartily from a shining white coffee mug. The black/white contrast is overpowering. The photo appears as the ultimate subversive caricature of a "Maxwell House" advertisement.

Also on display are photos taken in Paris and London in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In both instances, one feels a very different photographic sensibility at work. The photos of London convey a mood that is quintessentially English. The dominant motif is men in bowler hats walking stiltedly through angular urban settings. Frank's sure feel for the rigidity, dryness, and propriety of British life is effectively communicated. Yet, the predominance of shadows and dark tones in these photos also suggests an unmistakably sombre mood. Absent here is the vitality and earthiness Frank detects in less privileged settings.

It is in Paris alone perhaps that one senses the photographer is truly in his element. Here we see images that are unabashedly robust and enthusiastic. In Paris one feels Frank can temporarily divest himself of his tragic sensibility.

One photo is of a triumphant Veteran's Day parade, with the lead participants proudly clutching floral wreaths in hand. Noteworthy here is the marked absence of the mocking wit that would characterize Frank's rendition of analogous scenes across the Atlantic—the biting satirical portrayal of "City Fathers-Hoboken, New Jersey" or the "Political Rally, Chicago, 1956," where the head of a Stevenson supporter is comically displaced by the wide mouth of the tuba he is playing. In stark contrast, the Parisian scenes are filled with a remarkable sense of serenity. There is a priceless photo of four ragamuffin children in a meadow taunting a horse well past his prime. Another of a young couple on an amusement park ride, expressions of boundless ecstasy radiating from their faces. One is led to believe these were happy times for Frank. The same energy of these photos reappears in those of New York taken in the late 1940s, upon Frank's arrival in the United States.

The exhibit concludes with a group of more intimate photos and photo-montages taken in the last ten years, many at the site of Frank's Nova Scotia retreat. In contrast with his earlier work, the vision here is more idiosyncratic than universal. In these images, one senses photography's role of providing aesthetic consolation and succour under a less favorable set of personal circumstances.



Robert Frank: Hoboken, 1955

Robert Frank: Peru, 1948



DOUBLE YOU
(and X,Y,Z.):
VIDEO'S NEW
INTERACTIVE
FRONTIER

Author, David Tafler, speculates on the meaning of the advancing technology of videodisk art and the electronic book that will alter the spatial-temporal categories of the spectator/reader's consciousness within a mediated environment.

Peter D'Agostino's videodisk installation exhibited at The Houston Center for Photography, May 23-June 29.

By David Tafler

Without the omniscience of an historical distance, it might seem presumptuous to refer to a contemporary installation as a transient frontier between an old order and a new horizon. Nevertheless, the relatively recent technology of the laser-disk and the more recent advances in its use with computers promises a profound change in the relationship between a spectator and a formal visual presentation. Since that relationship has always been a theoretically defined and fluctuating distance, the spatio-temporal frontier between the spectator and the material projected on a video/television screen is perpetually in process. Now, that process is on the verge

disk (30 frames per second x 60 seconds x 30 minutes) simultaneously accessible to the spectator, cinema has finally completed a bridge between the rigid, linear, mechanical, sequential format that characterizes its past, and the flexible, random, electronic, self-regulating, multi-layered access of its present and future.

Peter D'Agostino's project is not simply a celebration of the opening of that new frontier, it is a reflexive examination of the changes in structural convention that mediate the discourse of the medium. In other words, the implicit nomenclature that regulates the discourse between the spectator and the text is also subject to the changing conditions of that exchange. For example, it is be-

experience.

Whereas the experimental film movement often made severe time demands upon its audience, in the interactive text time is self-regulated. Cinema's departure from the temporal demands of a regulated performance event, when released through this new interactive format, is an accommodation to the accelerated movement, increasing temporal requirements, and shrinking time frame that characterizes the social, economic, and cultural environment of the late Twentieth Century. Ironically, in a way, it is also a return to the context of a traditional gallery exhibition of painted canvases where the spectator controls the temporal duration of their experience of these single constructed events. Therefore,

interactive environment represents a radical and perhaps revolutionary departure from commercial programming. Now the television spectator at the touch of a comfortably situated button can rapidly switch among a multiplicity of channels. In other words, "video spectators" increasingly exercise their ability to dislodge video images from their precalculated contexts. Ironically, the traditional critic or scholar who continues to focus on an isolated program may be missing the point by failing to realize the fundamental significance of programming itself as the foundation of a new text.

The open-ended flow of the spectator's own self-regulated movement through the television programming environment marks the erosion of



Peter D'Agostino: Double You (and X,Y,Z.), 1985



of being dramatically altered and perhaps forever diminished by such projects as Peter D'Agostino's interactive laserdisk installation *DOUBLE YOU (and X, Y, Z.)*.

This is not meant to imply that this new interactive environment begins with Peter D'Agostino's work or with the work of other video artists exploring the new technologies. On the contrary, electronic pinball, video games, as well as multi-channel cable or direct satellite television, videocassette recorders, and their respective remotes have given viewers new opportunities to control the pattern and content of their viewing experience. Nevertheless, there is a transcendent aspect to Peter D'Agostino's recent work. Since the interactive video of the 1950's when children drew lines on a piece of plastic placed over their television screen to bridge a series of sequentially presented clues, any viewer interaction with the projected image has been regulated by the formats that exist within those projected texts. An electronic game, for instance, presents limited options. The unlimited programming options available on multi-channel television often follow predictable patterns. Rather than simply allowing the spectator to select the order of narrative exposition, a condition exemplified by most electronic video games, or to quantitatively expand their possible viewing options, through cable, direct satellite and videocassette programming, D'Agostino has helped to pioneer not so much a "new" but more important an open-ended textual experience.

This novel experience can be partially understood by looking at those "events" that transcend the distance between the spectator and the screen. With a limitless number of controls now available to the viewer to manipulate the sequence, duration, repetitions, and velocity of selected images, there is a multiplicity of potential cinematic moments that are not only non-hierarchical, they are susceptible to accidents in the viewer's perception. With the potential for 54,000 individual frames on the side of a thirty minute video-

coming less and less relevant to refer to "shots" and "scenes" as a means of describing a standard cinematographic continuity. Their closure as the distinct building blocks of the text are no longer guaranteed. The new minimal unit more likely exists as an abstraction of spectator experience. For lack of a better term, that experience can be labelled an **event**. Obviously, this new nomenclature lacks the parameters of the "shot" or the order of a "scene." It merely marks a "moment" of spectator experience whose relevance is individually determined by a spectator interacting with a particular text at a particular moment.

Historically, this development has been followed by the work of a number of notable film artists. Peter Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*, a visual continuity of orchestrated alternating sequences of black and white frames, in turn scored by equivalent though varying moments of sound and silence, celebrates the frame, film's smallest common denominator. Though a material unit, the frame is in fact an abstraction that is defined by its specific and regulated projected temporal duration on the screen, a twenty-fourth of a second.

Other temporal factors, such as repetition and recontextualization, were anticipated by filmmakers such as Maya Deren, Alain Resnais, and Hollis Frampton. Maya Deren/Alexander Hamid's *Meshe of the Afternoon*, Alain Resnais's *Je t'aime, Je t'aime*, and *Provence*, as well as many other examples of New Wave films repeat projected events from a number of varying perspectives. Under the partial motivating pretext of dreams, nightmares, and time travel, each choreographed variation of a shot or scene is rendered from a different psychological angle. Meanwhile, Hollis Frampton's film *Remote Control* (1972), the sixth part of his *Hapax Legomena* series, is one of several efforts to represent multi-channel television viewing as a passage through a contemporary landscape of iconically charged events. Every one of the above cited films forces the spectator to recontextualize their relationship to their viewing

the novelty of the interactive text is principally a quantitative measure, the number of available "events" within a single work, rather than a measure of the duration of a single experience. Furthermore, there is also a difference in the measure of control that the spectator has in shaping a unique experience.

In their efforts to develop a conscious, reflexive mode of perception, so-called "experimental" filmmakers in general were nearly always concerned with the relationships between the filmmaker, the film medium, and the audience. As a part of that concern, a fascination with the spectator's perception is certainly not new. What is different, however, is that there is now the beginnings of an expanded sharing of control between the film(video)maker and the spectator. By allowing a recorded sequence to be played forward, backward, accelerated, decelerated, repeated, and selected perhaps at random, the film(video)maker permits the spectator to become involved in a visual form of **writing**.

Unfortunately, the fascination and novelty of this participation may be short-lived. As a textual experience that is historically specific in its relationship to a new technology, growing familiarity may lead to an expanded range of applications where the interaction becomes increasingly programmed, and thus defined. This, of course, is speculative. Nevertheless, this speculation is relevant.

In short, any new cinematic experience will always operate as a part of the historical-cultural environment in which it exists. Whether or not it parodies, disrupts, questions, or examines a prevailing format, any so-called "experimental" cinema must recognize the conventions that operate within a traditional or popular, most often narrative mode. Similarly, video in all of its forms must take into account that it is a part of the prevailing commercial television landscape; its very presence on an electronic screen is inscribed with social meaning.

While the social significance of the television set endures, the new

the classical narrative text's constricting form. At the control of a button, spectator induced **events** often supersede narrative continuity. Not only is narrative causality diminished as a hierarchical format, the narrative's hold on an audience through the manipulation of the viewer's desire is neutralized.

The process of switching, random access to a multiplicity of channels or chapters, inevitably leads to the formation of a new text. In other words, the conditions which govern the relations between the viewer and the screen have changed. Most notably, the units of the system are dislodged from their fixed site within single member compositions and become compositional relations. Adherence to a conventional frame (work) is no longer sufficient as an orienting determinant. The displacements which result from channel or chapter switching are imposed equally on the regulating frame which mediates the spectator's overall experience.

While the ability to randomly access a multitude of chapters is remarkably similar to other self-guiding experiences such as the freedom inherent in scanning a book, interactive television is not quite equivalent. A vital part of conceptualizing the "new frame" is the realization that in the interactive environment the paths shaped by the spectator are nearly as important as the information that is situated within those paths. As a non-sequential index of moments, files, and clues, the interactive process takes on whatever meaning that may exist in its structure from the configuration of the individual spectator's exploration and play. Meaning emerges from the reflexive model of the spectator's activity.

There are other interventions, however, that are just as critical as the actual events that cohere from the diachronic pattern of change that emerges from the individual spectator's play. The totality of potential synchronic displays becomes its own textual system. In other words, the spectator is aware of other channels of structure and information that co-

exist with what might be rendered on the screen at any given moment. This synchronic awareness, however, is not always patterned on a situation presenting a multiplicity of accessible channels or chapters. Something different happens with the laserdisk. There is an extra-textual meaning attached to the presence of the artist in the structuring of channels that are not temporally concurrent but concurrently accessible. This difference is crucial for there are apparently two distinct metatextual relationships available in the new interactive environment.

The manner in which the spectator is affected arises from their manipulative behavior. Moving around a synchronic video environment through channel/chapter switching is a voyage

While their movements may be self-regulated, they are not capable of **writing** an "original" score. The film (video)maker's structure establishes an operational grammar that directs the spectator's activity through the text. In other words, it can be argued that in the megatext the spectator's movement is confined by both the visual vocabulary and the branching that is preconceived and worked into the film(video)maker's score.

Despite the power that the spectator has to randomly gain access to many if not most of the 54,000 recorded images on the side of a thirty minute laserdisk, the pathways through the text are ultimately prewoven by the film(video)maker. It is as if the spectator is locked within an ordered maze; their **writ-**

examines the process of his piece being read/**written**. If a reductive logic may be volunteered for this argument's sake, D'Agostino's theme focuses on birth, infancy, and early childhood in an effort to chart an individual's maiden voyage. An infant who emerges within the preordained world of language and logic initially experiences that world as a precognitive sphere of unordered stimuli and random sensation. Eventually, through repetition, the categorization of experience, and a series of cause-effect encounters, the individual's psyche is shaped and prepared to acquire the signs that lead to knowledge and, in turn, to what may be described as a rational awareness.

Similar to the child, the spectator initially approaches the laserdisk pro-

the spectator is able to encounter the projected world like an infant through the sense of touch. Not only do the subsequent movements have a greater velocity and a greater spontaneity, the touch screen permits the absence of chapter signposts that would otherwise impose a linear order upon the text. The spectator, therefore, has substantially greater freedom to construct their own experience of the film(video)maker's text.

As the spectator progresses, the memories of these sensory experiences are compiled. Eventually, goals and objectives emerge that guide the spectator's self-regulated passage through the text. But the experience itself remains a metacommunication of revolving imagery. In *DOUBLE YOU*

have meaning depending on the context of their specific textual experience. The extratextual experience is affected, in turn, by the knowledge and sensitivity of that spectator, and by the way in which the laserdisk plays in the realm of their television experience. Naturally, as the television experience shifts over time, so does the spectator's play. Therefore, the experience is always historically specific with regard to both culture and technology.

As perpetually observed in children's exploratory behavior, each new generation must flex and stretch the prevailing conventions of an older order. Rapid shifts in contemporary technology, not to mention the dramatic changes in the overall social, economic, and cultural order, by necessity force a bottom-up rediscovery of the environment and the topdown revision of those communication tools that are used to survive within it. When properly equipped, each new and important cultural opportunity operates on the threshold of that new horizon.

With that in mind, the multiple perspectives built into *DOUBLE YOU* (and X, Y, Z.) are particularly significant. As they approach the spatio-temporal frontier separating the spectator from the text, the limitless number of latent events preserve the individual spectator's efforts to articulate **personal events** in a public/cultural sphere inscribed with an artist's and society's meaning. Whatever new formats may evolve from this interactive process, *DOUBLE YOU* (and X, Y, Z.)'s oneiric material will always remain open to reinterpretation. Therefore, it will most likely survive as a novel experience in an environment where most new ideas are exhausted by the time they are consumed.



that is limited by the implicit constraints of perception. A viewer can generally retain something on the order of five to seven unrelated items of information during a single moment in time.¹ In a temporal or cinematic exposition, where the images not only come and go but the eye shifts on the average of four times a second, any effort to construct a lingering experience requires a greater degree of internal (cognitive) storage. In order to build that file, the spectator either generates or relies upon a network of coded abstractions, symbols, and associations that come about from the spectator's past experience and current ongoing sequence of fixations.

The source for this network is twofold. On the one hand, it emerges from the spectator's knowledge of switching options within the projected environment. On the other, the sequence of fixations that compose this environment are determined by the unique combination of potential "events" that are available on the screen. From the map that is developed of the televisual terrain, the spectator generates the expectations that guide their fixations.

Unlike the traditional narrative text where the spectator is principally engaged in **reading** the assigned sequence of events, the interactive environment becomes a **megatext** that exists as a consequence of the spectator's **writing**. This writing is non-hierarchical, loaded with options, and open to a limitless number of accidents. On cable or direct satellite television, the branching possibilities are not only numerous, they are oneiric. A cinema structured on the spectator's potential access to a multiplicity of projected images, is in itself a dreamlike phenomena. The infinite psychological angles that will emerge from this wandering window generate a unique viewing experience each time a spectator's attention is drawn to the screen.

While a spectator's experience may be unique when moving about the synchronic television multiple channel environment, when interacting with a video laserdisk the spectator is qualitatively more constrained.

ing is simply a series of surrogate decisions infinitely rearticulating a large but limited number of controlled inscriptions.

In *DOUBLE YOU* (and X,Y,Z.), the immanent time of the **event** is a phenomenon characterized by an intuitive flow of consciousness between the film(video)maker and the spectator. The **event** exists as only one "moment" in a chain of moments, a "moment" whose significance is determined by its differential relations with preceding and subsequent event-moments in the passage of the spectator's total encounter with the text. With the collapse of an objective spatio-temporal framework, the formation of the spectator's personal orienting frame is a significant factor in his or her experience. In other words, the spectator in an odd sort of way controls the valves that regulate the consciousness of that work. That consciousness, in turn, is determined by the spectator's intention, retention, knowledge, and discovery of the "events" triggered from his or her manipulation. In short, the spectator's action and the work's structure are both an integral part of this operation.

While the inherent limitations inevitably reappear in any ordered work, *DOUBLE YOU* (and X, Y, Z.) achieves a more equitable condition by, first of all, undervaluing the iconicity of its recorded images. While they are concrete, vivid, and in many cases immediately cognizable, the images remain nothing more or less than a visual trace of the inscribed world. No single sequence, shot, or image stands alone as a privileged structure. Each is already a repetition, a manifestation of a previous interpretive process. Similar to what Freud suggests is the manifest content of a dream, D'Agostino's work displays the "gaps" in meaning and/or "lapses" of logic that both represent the unconscious system of the film(video)maker that produced it² and allow the unregulated movement of the spectator who is writing it.

More important, D'Agostino establishes a double reflexive structure that internally and continually re-

gram on the level of play characteristic of a maiden voyage. The viewer selects imagery in the same tentative way that a child experiments with new vocabulary. A number of options are available, each with their own intuitive implications.

DOUBLE YOU (and X, Y, Z.)'s potential computer assisted installation enhances this "child/threshold" experience by allowing direct access to the images on the screen. Rather than limiting the piece by symbolically assigning chapters numerical locations that inevitably imply sequence and order, with a computer controlled link-up the image may be manipulated in certain installations by directly touching the screen. The differences are dramatic. As opposed to the world of regulation implied by the use of a pushbutton remote,

(and X, Y, Z.), that cycle takes several forms. At one point, the spectator travels an outdoor train or wanders through a revolving carousel on the ground. At another stage, the world appears through the window of a helicopter flying over the San Francisco Bay. At yet another interval, a series of tests examine a continuity of images that prefigure a different sort of (grammatical) landscape.

While there are countless references to language and culture, for example: "da da = dada" the image of Campbell soup can = Andy Warhol, the split screen represents cubism, there are no specifically imposed goals or implications. The learned references allow the spectator to move easily around the disk, building **events** that may or may not

DOUBLE YOU (and X,Y,Z.): A Four-Channel Interactive Videodisk Installation

The primary subject of this work is the acquisition of language, but the underlying structure is derived from another source — physics. The four-part structure of the work is based on the four forces now believed to cause all physical interactions in the universe: light, gravity, strong, and weak forces. Through analogy and metaphor, these concepts serve to parallel four stages of early language development. They are:

1. Light/birth
2. Gravity/words
3. Strong force/sentences
4. Weak force/songs

Sound is the motivation for this progression — from cries at birth to first words, sentences, and finally to songs sung at age two.

This last part also reveals the source of the title, *DOUBLE YOU* (and X,Y,Z.) taken from a children's song that concludes with "now I know my ABC's next time won't you sing with me."

The Installation

The non-linear interactive disk provides viewer/participants with an interactive menu to select one of four chapters, a prologue, or an index to enter the work.

Selections can be made by touching an X, Y, or Z directly on the screen; or, by chapter number with the use of a remote control unit. After this initial selection a more complex set of possibilities emerge and the non-linear videodisk can be randomly accessed and even played like a game. The game, however, is not predicated on winning or losing but on making various "discoveries."

The index provides an "electronic book" where most of the 52 chapters (composed of 47,000 frames) are directly accessible. Other forms of interaction incorporated into the design of the disk include: 'surrogate travel' (in part two) which is used to create an analogy between words



Peter D'Agostino

and places. The participatory 'language games' employed in part three are composed of image icons representing words that form sentences. And, part four can be described as a "video jukebox" where songs can be selected from the moving images of a carousel.

A key to *DOUBLE YOU* (and X,Y,Z.) is television operating as a means of cultural transmission. In essence, the work is a document of an individual's birth and acquisition of language which provides a universal "denouement" — unraveling this complex series of events into a basic and elemental message of perception and language.

Peter D'Agostino

ANGELS ARE MY ONLY LOVE

The exhibition Faucon: Fresson Prints was shown at the Houston Center for Photography February 28-April 6. Bernard Faucon gave a lecture at the HCP on March 3.

Carol Everingham, a free-lance art critic, interviewed Mr. Faucon at the Warwick Hotel on March 6, 1986. The interview was conducted in French and translated for SPOT by Ms. Everingham.

By Carol J. Everingham

CE: What is "photography"?

BF: For me, I'm very attracted to the idea that each medium has its own peculiarities—and photography has a peculiarity which is not that of painting—when I went from painting to photography, for me, it was a complete change and I have tried as much as possible to fulfill this—which is not intentionally to do a work which is "photographic." What I mean by "photographic" is a certain way of recording reality which is not that of translating it, of painting it, filming it or any other way—and I think that one cannot cross from one medium to another without hard work in order to know what corresponds with this or that medium.

People often ask me "Why don't you make movies?" If one day I turned to filmmaking, I would be doing something else—there is no continuity—and that seems to me very important to say what one has to say—within one medium by using every inch this medium has to offer.

Photography for me is a kind of abstraction of the real—abstraction in a literal sense—which means to "pull from"—a kind of abstraction from reality which is totally original—a means of capturing, of recording reality which is not that of any other medium.

From that point on, what I have to say concerns my "world"—which is singularly mine—but which is going to be told through photography—and can not be told in any other way.

CE: And your first photograph?

BF: Before doing "performance sets"—I had always done photography and painting together—portraits of children, landscapes, sunsets—and things like that which were very sentimental—but when I began to really get into photography—which happened very, very quickly—with lots of energy and enthusiasm—all of a sudden everything fell into place—the idea of photography, the idea of mannequins, the idea of children, the idea of landscapes—it all happened very, very quickly.

CE: Where did you get the idea to use mannequins?

BF: It was fate—a gratuitous encounter—which means I began to come across mannequins and become intrigued by them, collect them and be surrounded by them without knowing what would happen with all this—then the idea of "the photo" hit.

CE: These are the real old mannequins?

BF: Yes, they are from the store windows of the 1930s, 40s and 50s—I have quite a few—around 200 or so—mostly of children—with lots of clothes.

CE: What is your procedure—from original concept right up to its realization—that is to say the "mise en scene" or "stage set"?

BF: The beginning of the photo is something very abstract—a mixture of emotions, experiences and ideas in relation to the evolution of my work.

A photo shot never appears just like that—as some sort of hallucination—I don't suddenly find "the image"—but rather it begins as some abstract emotional concept which little by little takes form on its own, then solidifies.

What one sees in the photograph is actually the very end of the process—the most tangible, the most concrete—which in the end is the finishing touch—and the least important because I think that with different elements, one could make the same photograph.

CE: What is "reality" for you?

BF: I have a strong sense of reality—and I can say that the photo for me is an experience (or experiment) with reality—moreover, my life is looked at from the angle of an experimentation with reality—in which I am totally incorporated.

CE: And the mannequins with real people?

BF: From the beginning, human beings have been mixed with the mannequins—and the human figures, little by little, exited to where, in my last photograph, there are no more real beings.

But from the start, I always had that desire to mix the living and the mannequins, to play them together—perhaps less for the pleasure of confrontation—but rather to show that the mannequins were much more adapted to the photographic idea than the humans were—that the mannequins "fell into" the photo so completely that there was a kind of appropriateness between the mannequins and photography which gives the energy of these pictures.

CE: Which means that the mannequins are more alive than the real live people?

BF: It's kind of crazy to say that the mannequins are "more alive"—for in all these photographs there is much searching—and in the beginning it was very unconscious and I didn't realize it—but there is the quest for the ideal subject of photography—which means that I don't use photography simply to make a reproduction of a world which interests me or touches me—of course, I am looking how to express a personal universe—to finding a subject which is going to be the most appropriate to photography.

I think that the idea of mannequins—which in the beginning was a fortuitous encounter—but it turned out to be the ideal subject for the photograph—is as much a photograph of the living as a photograph



Carol Gerhardt, Bernard Faucon

color—in this mold which is "the photograph."

Therefore, fire appeared as the mannequins did—but only afterwards did I understand that "fire" is a quite extraordinary photographic subject—because as much as the mannequins were something immobile and without life—fire was as strongly the symbol of life—of destruction, of movement, of dynamics—and to photograph it produced a quite extraordinary effect. To immobilize a fire or an explosion by truly stopping it—is to kill it in its process of escalating—which means depriving fire of its self-destruction—all while keeping that which is the most dynamic in fire without having an indication of its own destruction.

CE: And the explosions came before or after fire?



Bernard Faucon: Les Papiers qui Violent, Fresson print.

which takes away life. It's trite to say that photography kills—but, on the contrary, in a photograph of mannequins—one not only creates a fictional life of images—but a "real" life. For me a photograph of mannequins reveals something about the essence of photography.

The idea of photographing a mannequin—a person already immobile—and to photograph it—translating it into fixed images—is in itself to give life to the mannequin—a life which it doesn't have. That's incredible!

CE: What meaning does "fire" have for you?

BF: Fire—in all my work—is something entirely from within—and often I don't understand what happens until after it has taken place. This work springs from a very important personal experience that goes deep into my childhood—a time experience—of my attachment to youth. Thus there is this set of givens which is very, very strong and the source of my work—there is also an intuition of what is "photography"—or what it would be—and this will to say the most justly and the most appropriately what I have to say—through

BF: There was always fire with the mannequins—but after the mannequins there was a veritable invasion of fire and explosion at the same time.

CE: And after fire?

BF: After the fires died down, there was a total period of transition during the photos of "The Watermelons" and "Eternal Life" where I no longer felt the need to use mannequins—or fire. I just had the desire to let light invade—without knowing what I was going to do with it—the end result being the "chambres d'amour" or "love chambers"—during the two years of hesitation—of wandering—which was, in fact, the time in which the love chambers were in the process of taking form.

CE: What was the first "love chamber"?

BF: It is a room with two bodies in the forefront—two body abstractions—in a little white room with a white curtain and the floor covered with a material that one uses in diapers—a kind of gauze.

CE: And the next?

BF: After that came the exterior—a landscape of broken glass with an unseen explosion completely illumi-

nating the ground floor.

CE: The third?

BF: The third love chamber is a room that has burned—one can only make out traces of a record—a 45 rpm—shrivelled up with burned images—and a blackened floor.

The fourth is an interior very luminous with a multi-colored window and a cherry branch which enters into the room—and a kind of light projection which falls very white on the floor.

The fifth is a little room covered with spider webs, with a figure in the forefront trying to disappear—trying to get out of the space.

The sixth is what I call the "love cage"—a kind of cage made of wooden sticks and white tracing paper, with grass on the inside and some underwear and articles of clothing lying on the grass.

The seventh room is what I call "The Mirror of Milk"—a very white room with its floor covered in milk—three sprigs of lavender floating on the milk—and a profile of a small boy which is roughly drawn on the wall.

The eighth is "The First Time" with this interior looking a bit like a barn with stalks of golden straw—one has the impression that the straw is raised up from underneath—and suspended in a half magical way.

The ninth is a room with its floor covered with hot coals in a somber environment.

The tenth is the one where the floor is covered in feathers—in a blue, white, mauve and pink ambience.

The eleventh is the one with a face projected on the moist tile floor—with cameras sketched all over the walls.

The twelfth one has grass invading the room—this brightly lit room with dew sprinkled grass in the forefront.

The thirteenth room is one of my favorites—it's called "The Stained Glass Window"—a bed, some sheets, with a projection of a stained glass window in the corner—the colors dispersing very softly—the same principle as the stained glass windows of a church.

The fourteenth is called "The Snow Storm"—it's the one I prefer—a little blue room with a palm branch—like what they used to give children in church during Palm Sunday—branches made out of paper or cardboard to which candies were attached—thus here is this palm branch hanging from the ceiling with a kind of wave of snow in the room—with a place where the snow has melted and one can see a few scattered tree leaves.

The fifteenth love chamber is the photograph of the twins who are put together side by side in a very, very white room with a projection of light coming through the window forming a kind of luminous cone.

CE: Then, what is for you the difference between "exterior" and "interior"?

BF: In creating these imaginary worlds—the impact of the interior and the exterior—or the inside and the outside—I like to go back to an experience I had when I was a kid—from age 7 to 12—I repeatedly ex-

(Continued on page 10)

JE N'AIME QUE
LES ANGES

"Faucon: Tirages Fresson"—était une exposition photographique au Centre de la Photographie Houston de du 28 février au 6 avril. Le 3 mars, le photographe Bernard Faucon a donné une conférence au Centre.
Critique d'art et écrivain Carol Everingham interviewé Bernard Faucon le 6 mars à l'Hôtel Warwick. L'interview était en français et traduit en anglais spécialement pour SPOT par Mlle. Everingham.

Par Carol J. Everingham

CE: Qu'est-ce que c'est la photographie?
BF: Moi, je suis très attaché à l'idée que chaque pratique a une spécificité et la photographie a une spécificité qui n'est pas celle de la peinture—c'est à dire, quand je suis passé de la peinture à la photo, pour moi c'était un changement complet et j'ai essayé autant que possible de réaliser—ce n'est pas volontaire—de faire un travail qui soit photographique—ce que j'entends par photographique c'est une certaine manière d'enregistrer la réalité qui n'est pas celle de la traduire, de la peinture, qui n'est pas celle du cinéma ou de celle de n'importe quoi d'autre—et moi je pense que l'on ne peut pas passer d'un genre à l'autre sans un véritable travail pour savoir ce qui correspond à tel ou tel genre.
On me demande souvent "pourquoi ne faites-vous pas du cinéma?" Si un jour je faisais du cinéma je ferais autre chose—il n'y a pas de continuité—il me semble très important que ce qu'on dit—on le dise à l'intérieur d'un moyen et en utilisant tout ce que ce moyen peut offrir.
La photo c'est pour moi un certain type d'abstraction de la réalité—abstraction au sens littéral—c'est-à-dire "tirer de"—une certaine abstraction de la réalité qui est tout à fait originale—une manière de capter, d'enregistrer le réel qui n'est celle d'aucun autre genre.
A partir de là, ce que j'ai à dire c'est un univers qui est singulier—qui est le mien—mais va être dit en photographie—qui ne va pas être dit autrement.
CE: Et ta première photo?
BF: Avant de faire des "mises en scène"—j'ai toujours fait parallèlement à la peinture, des photos—des portraits d'enfants, des paysages, des couchers de soleil—des choses comme ça très affectives—mais quand j'ai commencé réellement la photo—j'ai commencé très très vite—avec beaucoup d'énergie et beaucoup d'enthousiasme—car à un moment donné tout s'est mis en place—l'idée de la photo, l'idée des mannequins, l'idée des enfants, l'idée des paysages—ça a commencé tout de suite et très très vite.
CE: D'où vient l'idée des mannequins?
BF: C'était un hasard, une rencontre fortuite—c'est-à-dire j'ai commencé à trouver les mannequins, à me passionner pour ça, à les collecter, à m'entourer comme ça sans savoir ce que j'en ferais—puis l'idée de la photo s'est imposée.
CE: Ce sont des vieux mannequins?
BF: Oui, ce sont des mannequins des vitrines des années 30-40-50—j'en ai beaucoup—à peu près 200—que des enfants pratiquement—avec leurs vêtements.
CE: Quel est ton procédé—du concept jusqu'à la réalisation—c'est-à-dire "la mise-en-scène"?
BF: Le point de départ de la photo est quelque chose de très abstrait—qui est un mélange de sentiments, d'expérience, d'idées par rapport à l'évolution de mon travail.
Une photo n'apparaît jamais comme ça dans une hallucination—je n'en trouverai pas tout d'un coup une image—c'est quelque chose d'abord très abstrait, d'un ordre émotionnel et qui petit à petit prend forme et se détache et devient concret.
Ce qu'on voit dans une photo c'est vraiment la fin du processus—le plus tangible, le plus concret—qui finalement est le dernier arrivé dans la conception et le moins important parce que je pense qu'avec des éléments différents on pourrait faire la même photo.
CE: Quelle est la réalité pour toi?
BF: J'ai un sentiment très fort du réel—je peux dire que la photo pour moi c'est une expérience du réel—et d'ailleurs dans ma vie j'envisage tout sous l'angle d'une expérimentation du réel—dans lequel je suis incorporé.
CE: Et les mannequins avec les

êtres humains?
BF: Dès le départ les vivants se sont mêlés aux mannequins—les vivants sont sortis petit à petit—dans ma dernière photo de mannequins il n'y a plus de vivants.
Mais depuis le départ j'ai eu cette envie de les mélanger, de jouer—peut-être moins pour le plaisir de les confondre que pour montrer donc que les mannequins étaient beaucoup plus adaptés aux photos que les vivants eux-mêmes—qu'ils étaient de plein pied dans les photos qu'il y avait donc une espèce d'adéquation entre le mannequin et la photo qui fait la force de ces photos.
CE: C'est-à-dire que les mannequins sont plus vivants que les êtres humains?
BF: C'est idiot de dire que les mannequins sont "plus vivants"—dans toutes ces photos il y a la recherche—au début c'était inconscient, maintenant cela est devenu conscient—au début je ne m'en rendais pas compte—mais il y a la recherche du sujet idéal de la photo—c'est-à-dire que je n'utilise pas la photo simplement pour faire une reproduction d'un univers comme ça qui m'intéresse ou qui auquel je suis sensible—je cherche, bien entendu en exprimant un univers personnel—à trouver un sujet qui va être le plus adéquat à la photo.
Je pense que le mannequin—c'était au départ une rencontre fortuite—mais ça s'est avéré être un sujet idéal pour la photo—autant la photo du vivant est une photo qui ôte la vie—c'est une banalité de dire que la photo tue—mais dans une photo de mannequins au contraire—on crée



Carol Gerhardt, Bernard Faucon

sujet photographique assez extraordinaire—parce qu'autant que le mannequin est quelque chose d'arrêté—autant que le feu est le symbole de la vie—de la destruction, du mouvement et de la dynamique—le photographe produit un effet assez extraordinaire—immobiliser un feu ou une explosion c'est vraiment l'arrêter, le tuer dans son processus ascensionnel—c'est-à-dire le feu sans la destruction—c'est aussi de retenir ce qui est le plus dynamique dans le feu sans avoir trace de sa destruction.
CE: Et les explosions sont venues après ou avant le feu?
BF: Il y a toujours eu des feux même avec les mannequins—mais après les mannequins c'était vraiment l'invasion du feu et l'explosion en même temps.
CE: Et après le feu?



Bernard Faucon: Première Communion, Fresson print

une vie de fiction, d'images, mais une vie réelle—mais pour moi la photo de mannequins révèle quelque chose de l'essence de la photo.
Le fait de photographier un mannequin—une personne déjà arrêtée—et de le photographe—de traduire en image fixe—c'est lui donner une vie qu'il n'avait pas—c'est tout à fait étonnant!
CE: Quelle est la signification du feu?
BF: Le feu—dans tout ce travail, c'est quelque chose d'extrêmement intérieurisé—et souvent je ne comprend qu'après coup ce qui s'est passé. Ce travail repose sur une expérience personnelle très très forte qui remonte très loin dans mon enfance—d'une expérience du temps—de l'attachement à l'enfance—donc il y a cette donnée très très forte qui est à la source de mon travail—il y a aussi cette intuition de ce qui est la photographie—ce qu'elle pourrait être—cette volonté de dire le plus justement, le plus adéquatement ce que j'ai à dire—dans la couleur, dans le moule qui est la photo.
Alors le feu est apparu comme les mannequins—mais après coup je me suis rendu compte que le feu est un

BF: Après, le feu s'est éteint; il y a eu toute une période de transition dans laquelle des photos comme Les Pastèques, La Vie Eternelle, où je n'avais plus envie d'utiliser les mannequins, je n'avais plus envie d'utiliser le feu—j'ai eu envie de laisser envahir la lumière etc—mais je ne savais pas encore ce que je voulais faire—l'aboutissement c'était les chambres d'amour—pendant deux ans j'ai hésité un peu—j'ai erré un peu—et en fait c'était les chambres d'amour qui étaient en train de se préparer.
CE: Et quelle est la première chambre d'amour?
BF: La chambre d'amour c'est la chambre avec les deux corps en premier plan—deux corps très abstraits—la petite chambre blanche avec le rideau blanc et le sol recouvert de matière qu'on utilise pour les couches-culottes de bébé—une espèce d'ouate.
CE: Et après?
BF: Après c'était l'extérieur—ce paysage avec les tessons de verre par terre et l'explosion hors du champs qui irradie complètement le sol.
CE: Et la troisième?
BF: La 3ème chambre d'amour c'est une chambre qui a brûlé—on ne voit

plus que les vestiges avec un disque—un 45 tours recroquevillé—des images brûlées—une espèce de sol noirâtre.
La 4ème c'est un intérieur très lumineux avec une fenêtre de toutes les couleurs et puis un rameau de cerisier qui entre dans la pièce—et une espèce de projection de lumière qui tombe très blanche sur le sol.
La 5ème est une petite chambre recouverte de toiles d'araignée, avec un personnage en premier plan en train de disparaître, en train de sortir de l'espace.
La 6ème c'est ce que j'appelle "la cage d'amour"—une espèce de cage en tiges de bois, en papier calque blanche, avec des herbes à l'intérieur, quelques linges et habits posés sur l'herbe.
La 7ème chambre c'est ce que j'appelle "le miroir de lait"—cette pièce tout blanche avec un sol couvert de lait, trois brins de lavande qui flottent sur le lait—et le profil d'un petit garçon qui est dessiné très grossièrement sur le mur.
La 8ème c'est "La Première Fois" avec cet intérieur un peu comme une grange, ces brins de paille dorée—on a l'impression qu'ils sont soulevés par endessous—suspendus d'une manière un peu magique.
La 9ème c'est la chambre avec le sol couvert de ces braises dans une ambiance sombre.
La 10ème c'est celle avec le sol recouvert de plumes dans cette ambiance bleu, blanc, mauve et rosée.
La 11ème c'est celle avec la projection du visage sur le carrelage mouillé, les appareils de photos dessinés tout autour les murs.
La 12ème c'est celle avec les herbes qui envahissent la chambre, cette chambre claire avec au premier plan les herbes couvertes de gouttelettes de rosée.
Et la 13ème c'est une de celle que je préfère qui s'appelle "Le Vitrail"—c'est ce lit, ces traces de draps avec cette projection d'un vitrail sur un coin du mur—avec des couleurs qui se détachent très finement—c'est le même principe qu'un vitrail dans une église.
La 14ème c'est "La Tempête de Neige"—c'est celle que je préfère—c'est une petite chambre bleue avec un rameau—le rameau c'est ce qu'on donnait autrefois aux enfants au moment de la fête des rameaux dans les églises—les rameaux fabriqués en papier, en carton, auxquels étaient accrochés des confiseries, les sucreries—alors il y ce rameau qui est suspendu au plafond avec cette espèce de vague de neige à l'intérieur et il y a un endroit où la neige a fondu et on voit quelques morceaux de feuilles d'arbre.
La 15ème c'est la photo des deux jumeaux qui sont emboîtés dans une pièce très très blanche avec une projection de lumière à travers la fenêtre qui dessine une espèce de cône lumineux.
CE: Et pour toi, quelle est la différence entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur?
BF: En composant le monde imaginaire, le choc de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur—le dehors et le dedans, je préfère—remonte à une expérience que j'ai eue quand j'étais enfant

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perienced this strange event which consisted of seeing myself at first in a closely knit intimate family world—child that I was, surrounded by house and home, of personal things in a warm environment—and on a second scale, I made an effort to identify and realize all that I could conceive of—as exterior—the galaxy, the universe, the stars which moved—things very imaginable—and I tried to represent infinity with concentric circles etc—and when I had grasped these two worlds—all of a sudden I would “short circuit” —which would give me a total dizzying vertigo which would make my entire body tremble with fear—it would last only a few seconds—then disappear—it became the experience of “contingence” or that possibility of something that didn’t have to happen—the absence of necessity—that childhood experience during which one feels the factual reality of his existence in the world—and the factual reality of the non-necessity of existing—which creates a kind of scandalous affair within the mind—which can take many forms. Thus this story of inside and outside is directly rooted in this type of experience—for in most of my photos of the interior there is this threatening, yet fascinating presence of a vibrant exterior—and in the photographs of the exterior—there is often the presence of something quite intimate—whether it be underwear or a photo etc.

CE: For you, what is “sexuality”?
BF: Sexuality? I don’t know what it is. I know about “sensuality”—I know what desire is—I guess I’m touched by what is angelic—that is to say, I really only love that which is angelical—which does not necessarily mean the absence of sexuality—but it does mean always a conflict with sexuality. I would have loved to have been an angel. Angels are my only love.

CE: Then are these love chambers for angels?

BF: Yes, the sensuality of emptiness—a mystical void—after which will come, most certainly, the absence of bodies—like in the photograph of “The First Time”—perhaps that gives an idea of what will come later—although I’m not sure.

CE: To what does the Fresson process do for you?

BF: For me, the process has no importance—a process is a process—all you have to do is see different Fresson prints by different photographers in order to see that the process doesn’t add anything special. But, on the other hand, when one is successful with some prints as one integrates oneself in the process—it’s unsurpassable!

CE: Meaning that with the Fresson process—one is either a total success or a complete failure?

BF: Right!—there is nothing in between—and the Fresson process is either truly marvelous or very painful.

CE: Is there a photographer who is outstanding for his Fresson prints?

B.F. There is a Frenchman named Jean Bateau—and a few Americans—since the Fresson process is more famous in America than in France—it excites more the Americans.

CE: Why?

BF: It’s your love of old techniques.
CE: Have you ever been tempted to work in black and white?

BF: Never, for me, it’s impossible—I see things in color—black and white is an abstraction into which I don’t enter.

CE: What is color for you?

BF: Nothing—color in itself is simply the idea I have of framing it—it is the most subtle format—and the most magical—I don’t see how I could anything else, except in color. I don’t accord a primal importance to color—and I’m not a “colorist”—like some American photographers who are almost obsessed with color—I don’t have that kind of obsession—I think things are colored, that’s all.

It seems more natural—color—rather than in black and white—which is an abstract notion greater than that of color.

CE: And form? What does that mean for you?

BF: What do you mean by “form”?

CE: What intrigues you to put artificial forms in a natural landscape?

BF: I’m not very susceptible to “form.” Sculpture, for example, is something quite foreign to me.

On the other hand, I am very conscious to movement or the halting of movement. I can’t talk about other mediums either—I am taken by the outline of things—a kind of spiritual graphics that one can draw out with objects and things.

moves or hangs out—rather it is a ritual network of everything—of eating, working, sleeping, dreaming, entertaining—thus, an apartment is for putting systems into place—rituals and things like that which one wants to see, or facilitating the movement one wants to make in an apartment—it’s an installation which happens little by little.

Now the place where I live in Apt is a small house which has been expanded by adding rooms to the left and the right—therefore, after a number of years, it has become quite a sight.

CE: How many years have you been at Apt?

BF: I was born in Apt, but the

to day-dream by—which lets the mind flow.

CE: How many galleries do you have?

BF: There’s Agathe Gaillard in Paris and Leo Castelli in New York.

CE: Do you think Americans like your work?

BF: I think so—it has always had some success—but there have often been misunderstandings—often very superficial—of a kind of sexual, religious, political, mythic nature—that’s absurd—you don’t speak about someone’s work like that—because it is too pushed—my photographs are not about surrealism—or filled with heavy symbolism—that is a serious mistake—but, even though, I find

see it as fact.

To tell you the truth, when I was small—I refused to grow up—in fact, when I was five, I went one day to find the family doctor in order to ask him for a prescription or some pills to stop growing.

CE: For you, not to grow was not to get older?

BF: Right. Therein the question of my life. It’s not a narcissistic kind of thing—it’s something else.

CE: For you—photography is way of preserving your youth?

BF: I’m not preserving my youth—I preserving the ideals of youth.

CE: Have you gone through a real emotional or religious experience?

BF: I was inspired by religion when I was a child, a kid.

CE: Catholic?

BF: Yes, but that was a personal choice—not inspired by the family—but more a personal attraction—which lead me, moreover, to pursue philosophy—and to study Jacques Maritain, who is a Christian philosopher and theologian. But today, I’m far away from these preoccupations—although the deep motivation is still within.

CE: Were you shy when you were little?

BF: I was very shy, and I think I still am—one remains shy all one’s life.

CE: Therefore you were obliged to create your own little worlds?

BF: Not necessarily—because my shyness as a kid—I didn’t suffer from it—it wasn’t worrisome because I was very much integrated into my family since I was born—I was a happy little kid—therefore, shyness was simply a fear of the outside world—and I didn’t need to find a solution—shyness is the natural friction with outer forces, with a strange world—but since I was blooming within my family, I had no need to debase myself.

CE: Describe your mother.

BF: Ah, that is a formidable question—she is someone whom I resemble a lot—I suffer from looking like her—it’s not that I don’t like what she is—but I find it is a terrible thing to look like one’s mother.

CE: She is still living?

BF: Oh, yes—she’s an idealist, even a bit Puritan.

CE: And your father?

BF: He’s different—they have a marvellous understanding between them—but they are very different people—my mother is someone who is a bit cold, idealist and moralist—and my father is much more humanist.

CE: What does he do?

BF: My parents work—they run a children’s home—a vacation camp at Apt for six months of the year.

CE: And your brothers?

BF: One of them is still trying to find himself—he’s quite young—and the other is a ceramicist—a whole portion of my mother’s side—my grandfather, my great grandfather were famous reputable earthenware craftsmen at Apt.

CE: That didn’t interest you?

BF: No, they thought at one time that I would be the successor to all this—but I wasn’t—it was my brother.

CE: At age five, what did you think you would grow up to be?

BF: When I was five, I thought—I wanted to be—no, at five, I didn’t envision the future—but later I thought that—either I would die very young or else I would have a mystical or religious vocation—a high priest—or then again—an artist.

SAINT-MARTIAN EN PROVENCE



Photo. B.F.

maison d'enfants à caractère sanitaire

APT

le maison de une mère !

CE: Describe the room where you live in the country and Paris.

BF: The two are quite different—in Paris, I am not the one who furnished or decorated the apartment—so it becomes the taste of the person with whom I live—I only changed it a little bit—by adding things—whereas at Apt—that is a place which I entirely created myself.

I have a way of living which is quite special—which means that I like houses in the state which I find them—I like to add my own things—like layers which come to be added onto other previous layers.

Rather that create “a decor”—I don’t like “decorated” places—rather, I think that decorated rooms are places where one cannot live—one should live in a space that one has created for his own proper comfort—my own personal comfort—for me, an apartment is not a decorated environment where one is situated,

house I live in now has only been for the last dozen years—so its a place that I’ve completely let happen for me—objects and things that arrive—I never really choose them—I just let them happen.

CE: Including books and records?

BF: Not necessarily—I like music—and I particularly like to listen to it on the Walkman—in fact, all my photos have come through the Walkman—I always plan out my photos while moving about with my Walkman—at least since the existence of the Walkman.

CE: What kind of music do you listen to?

BF: Sacred music and sacred songs, Gregorian chants—or else the very lowest form of light music and song—two very contradictory things—either music which is sacred and sublime or, on the other hand, easy listening superficial stuff that lends a kind of steady noise which helps

it often happens.

The biggest insult for me is to hear that my photographs belong to surrealism—even though I do like surrealism and back then I was formed by it and sensitized by it.

CE: Your favorite authors?

BF: For a long time, I read the philosophers—I studied philosophy and read a lot by a philosopher named Jacques Maritain—who moreover taught widely in the United States during the 1950s and is quite well known here—all his books have been translated into English—I really like this man.

More recently, there have been people like Roland Barthes—and outside of that—the more contemporary writers and novelists.

CE: Does it bug you to grow old?

BF: Of course, it’s the biggest insult to life—but I have come to terms with growing old—no, actually I’ve never come to terms with it—but I

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—de l'âge de 7 ans à l'âge de 12 ans —j'ai répété comme ça une expérience étrange qui consistait à me représenter dans un premier temps mon univers intime, familial—moi, le petit enfant que j'étais—entouré de parents, la maison, les choses intimes, l'ambiance chaude—et puis en deuxième temps je faisais un effort pour former, et me faire une représentation de tout ce que je pouvais concevoir comme l'extérieur —l'univers, le monde, les astres qui tournent—des choses très imagées et j'essayais de me représenter à l'infini avec des cercles concentriques etc. Et quand j'avais ces deux représentations—à un moment donné—j'ai court circuité—à ce moment-là j'ai éprouvé un vertige totalement fou qui vraiment me faisait trembler dans tout mon corps—qui durait quelques instants—puis disparaissait. C'était une expérience de la contingence—quelque chose qui n'aurait pas pu arriver—l'absence de nécessité —une expérience d'enfance dans laquelle on éprouve le fait de son existence au monde et le fait de la non-nécessité d'exister—ça crée une sorte de scandale à l'intérieur de soi—ça prend plusieurs formes —alors cette histoire du dedans et du dehors s'enracinait directement à ce genre d'expérience. Dans la plupart de mes photos de l'intérieur il y a cette présence menaçante et fascinante du dehors qui vibre—et dans les photos de l'extérieur il y a souvent la présence de quelque chose d'intime —que ce soit une lingerie, une photo, etc.

CE: Pour toi—qu'est-ce que c'est que la sexualité?
BF: La sexualité? Je ne sais pas. Je connais la sensualité, je connais le désir—je suis atteint d'angélisme si l'on veut—c'est-à-dire que je n'aime que ce qui est angélique. Cela ne veut pas dire l'absence de la sexualité, mais cela veut dire qu'il y a toujours un conflit avec la sexualité —j'aurais aimé être un ange. Je n'aime que les anges.
CE: Alors ce sont des chambres d'amour pour les anges?
BF: Oui, la sensualité de ce vide—ce vide mystique—après ça je ferais certainement l'économie des corps—comme la photo "la première fois" ça donne peut-être une idée de ce qui viendra après—je ne suis pas sûr.
CE: A quoi se prête, pour toi, le procédé Fresson?
BF: Pour moi, le procédé n'a pas d'importance—un procédé c'est un procédé—il n'y a qu'à voir les différents tirages Fresson de différents photographes pour voir que le procédé n'apporte rien. Mais par contre, quand on réussit quelque fois des photos et on s'adapte au procédé, c'est merveilleux. C'est insurpassable.
CE: Et avec Fresson c'est soit une réussite ou un échec?
BF: C'est ça, il n'y a rien entre les deux—et le procédé Fresson est soit merveilleux ou pénible.
CE: Est-ce qu'il y a un photographe qui est superconnu pour ses photos Fresson?
BF: Il y a un français qui s'appelle Jean Bateau - et quelques américains —le procédé Fresson est plus connu en Amérique qu'en France—ça excite plus les américains.
CE: Pourquoi?
BF: C'est le goût des techniques anciennes.
CE: Tu as envie de travailler en noir et blanc?
BF: Jamais, pour moi c'est impossible —je vois des choses en couleur et le noir et blanc est une abstraction dans laquelle je n'entre pas.
CE: Qu'est-ce c'est que la couleur pour toi?
BF: Rien. La couleur en elle-même c'est simplement l'idée que j'ai envie de cadrer—c'est le format le plus subtile, le plus magique—je ne vois pas comment je pourrais faire les choses autrement qu'en couleur. Je n'accorde pas encore une importance première à la couleur—je ne

suis pas un coloriste—comme les photographes américains qui sont presque obsédés par la couleur; je n'ai pas cette obsession là—je pense que les choses sont colorées, c'est tout. Ça me semble plus naturel—la couleur—que le noir et blanc—c'est une abstraction plus grande que la couleur.
CE: Et les formes? Qu'est-ce que ça représente?
BF: Qu'est-ce tu veux dire par "forme?"
CE: Qu'est-ce qui t'intrigue de mettre les formes artificielles dans un paysage naturel?
BF: Je ne suis pas très sensible aux formes. La sculpture, par exemple, m'est quelque chose d'assez étranger.

Plutôt que créer un décor—je n'aime pas les décors—enfin je pense que les décors sont des endroits où on ne peut pas vivre—on vit dans les endroits où on a fabriqué son propre confort—moi, le confort personnel—pour moi un appartement ce n'est pas un décor où on se place, où on se positionne, où on s'installe—c'est un réseau de rituel—de tout genre—de repas, de nourriture, de travail, de repos, de rêverie, de distraction—donc un appartement c'est mettre en place des ordres, des rites, des choses comme ça—qu'on a envie de voir ou qui facilitent les gestes qu'on a envie de faire dans un appartement. C'est une installation qui se fait très progressivement.

CE: Quel sorte de musique?
BF: La musique sacrée, des chants sacrés, grégoriens ou bien une variété de la plus basse catégorie de chansonnettes—deux choses complètement contradictoires—c'est-à-dire la musique sacrée et sublime et l'autre côté, des chansonnettes très faciles et superficielles qui créent une espèce de vibration qui facilite l'invasion de la rêverie—qui laisse couler l'esprit.
CE: Et tu as combien de galeries?
BF: Il y a l'Agathe Gaillard à Paris et Leo Castelli à New York depuis 1979.
CE: Tu penses que les américains aiment tes photos?
BF: Je pense, elles ont eu toujours du succès; mais il y a souvent des

cain —il a fait un succès aux Etats-Unis—j'ai beaucoup aimé ce type là.
Plus récemment il y a des gens comme Roland Barthes—et en dehors de ça des écrivains et des romanciers plus contemporains.
CE: Est-ce que ça t'embête de veillir?
BF: Bien sûr—c'est la plus grosse insulte à la vie—mais j'ai pris mon parti de veillir—non, enfin, je n'ai jamais pris mon parti de veillir mais je constate que c'est un fait.
A vrai dire, quand j'étais petit —je refusais de veillir—et en fait quand j'avais 5 ans, je suis allé trouver un jour le médecin de ma mère pour lui demander des médicaments pour ne pas grandir.
CE: Pour toi, ne pas grandir c'était de ne pas veillir?
BF: Oui. Et donc c'est la question de ma vie. Ce n'est pas une idée narcissique—c'est autre chose.
CE: Pour toi—la photo c'est fixer ta jeunesse?
BF: Je ne fixe pas ma jeunesse—je fixe un idéal de la jeunesse.
CE: Est-ce que tu as éprouvé un événement religieux ou très profond?
BF: J'étais très inspiré par la religion quand j'étais enfant, et adolescent—
CE: Catholique?
BF: Oui, mais c'était un choix personnel pas inspiré par la famille—une attraction personnelle surtout—ce qui m'a conduit d'ailleurs à faire de la philosophie—à étudier Jacques Maritain qui est un philosophe chrétien qui fait de la théologie et tout ça. Mais aujourd'hui je suis assez éloigné de toutes ces préoccupations. Enfin, la motivation profonde demeure toujours.
CE: Tu étais timide quand tu étais petit?
BF: J'étais très timide, et je crois que je le suis encore—on le reste toute sa vie.
CE: Alors ça t'as poussé à créer des mondes propres à toi?
BF: Pas tellement parce que ma timidité quand j'étais enfant—je n'en souffrais pas—ce n'était pas une douleur parce que j'étais très bien intégré dans ma famille pendant l'enfance—j'étais très heureux—et donc la timidité c'était simplement la peur du monde extérieur—donc, je n'avais pas besoin de me trouver un remède—c'était la friction naturelle avec l'extérieur, avec le monde étranger —mais j'étais épanoui en famille donc je n'avais pas besoin de me dégrader.
CE: Décris ta mère.
BF: Ça, c'est une question redoutable —c'est quelqu'un à qui je ressemble beaucoup—et je souffre de lui ressembler—ce n'est pas que je n'aime pas ce qu'elle est; mais je trouve que c'est quelque chose de terrible de ressembler à sa mère.
CE: Elle est toujours vivante?
BF: Oui, oui—c'est quelqu'un très idéaliste, un peu protestante.
CE: Et ton père?
BF: Il est différent—ils s'entendent merveilleusement tous les deux mais ils sont très différents—ma mère est quelqu'un un peu glacial, idéaliste, et morale et mon père est beaucoup plus humaniste.
CE: Qu'est-ce qu'il fait?
BF: Mes parents dirigent une maison d'enfants—une colonie de vacances à Apt pendant la moitié de l'année.
CE: Et tes frères?
BF: Il y en a un qui se cherche—qui est assez jeune et l'autre est faïenciers. Toute une partie de ma famille du côté de ma mère—mon grand-père, mes arrières grand-pères étaient des faïenciers d'Apt très fameux, très réputés.
CE: Cela ne t'a pas intéressé?
BF: Non, on aurait pensé que je serais le successeur de tout ça, mais ce n'était pas moi—c'était mon frère.
CE: A 5 ans tu voulais être quoi dans la vie?
BF: A 5 ans je pensais être... non, à 5 ans je ne voyais pas l'avenir—plus tard je pensais que—ou bien je mourrais très jeune ou bien j'aurais une vocation mystique, religieuse—un grand prêtre. Ou alors, un artiste.

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Je suis par contre sensible au mouvement ou à l'arrêt du mouvement. Je ne pourrais pas dire aux matières non plus—je suis sensible au dessin des choses —une espèce de graphisme de l'esprit qu'on peut dessiner avec des objets et des choses.
CE: Décris-moi la chambre où tu habites en province et à Paris.
BF: Les deux sont assez différentes—à Paris ce n'est pas moi qui a installé ou meublé cet appartement —c'est plutôt le goût de la personne avec qui j'habite donc je n'ai fait que transformer un peu—ajouter des choses—tandis qu'à Apt c'est un endroit que j'ai entièrement fabriqué moi-même.
J'ai une manière d'habiter très particulière c'est-à-dire que j'aime bien les maisons dans l'état où je les trouve —j'aime bien rajouter mes propres choses—comme des couches qui viennent se rajouter aux autres couches qui ont précédé.

Maintenant l'endroit où j'habite à Apt c'est une petite maison qui s'est agrandie de petites pièces à droite et à gauche et donc au bout de quelques années ça ressemble à quelque chose d'assez étonnant.
CE: Tu es à Apt depuis combien d'années?
BF: Je suis né à Apt—mais la maison que j'habite maintenant j'y suis là depuis une douzaine d'années—alors là c'est un endroit que j'ai complètement fondu à moi—des objets, des trucs qui viennent—je ne choisis pas vraiment des choses—je les laisse venir.
CE: Tu as des livres et des disques?
BF: Pas tellement—j'aime la musique et j'aime particulièrement l'écouter dans le Walkman—en fait, toutes mes photos sont passées à travers un Walkman—je réfléchis toujours à mes photos en me promenant avec un Walkman—depuis que le Walkman existe.

malentendus—souvent une compréhension superficielle—du genre symbolisme sexuel, religieux, politique, mythique —c'est une aberration—on ne parle pas de travail comme ça—c'est beaucoup trop tenu—mes photos ne sont pas du surréalisme, chargées de symbolisme grossier—c'est une grave malentendu—mais quand même je le trouve très souvent.
La plus grosse insulte pour moi c'est d'entendre dire que mes photos appartiennent au surréalisme —même si j'aime beaucoup le surréalisme et à l'époque j'avais été formé, sensibilisé par le surréalisme.
CE: Tes auteurs préférés?
BF: Pendant longtemps je lisais les philosophes—je faisais des études de philosophie autrefois et j'ai beaucoup lu un philosophe qui s'appelle Jacques Maritain qui d'ailleurs a beaucoup enseigné aux Etats Unis pendant les années 50 et qui est assez connu ici—tous ses livres sont traduits en améri-

DESIRE OF
THE OTHER:
SEEING HERSELF
SEEING HERSELF



Paula Fridkin: Rupert, 1986



Installation photo by Paul Hester

by Lew Thomas

"Men should perhaps make an attempt to speak from women's subject position, because otherwise we must believe that people are totally determined by their biology, by their history, by their class fix and so on." (Gayatri Spivak)
Art Papers, 1986

We live in a period of violent visual representation where the provenance of aggression is not limited to the commercial media. In photography, distortion of subject matter and manipulation of the photographic print has become the trend and substance of curatorial approval and the expectation of the spectator. The opportunity to organize two exhibitions at HCP (*Houston Photographers*: February 28-April 6 and *Recoding Sexuality*: May 23-June 29) provided a useful context for posing alternative models of photography.

Fundamental to representation is the issue of looking, the configuration of the collective gaze, where that which looks at you forces you to look back at it. The power of the gaze, projected continuously through photography and film, advertising and entertainment, binds us to a system of beliefs that is naturalized in representation.

One part of the *Houston Photographers* exhibiton was based on a structural concept of looking—women photographing men—the reversal of the dominant gaze of representation. The photographs were, for the most part, essentially feminine in the portrayal of women's desire. Softness of focus, passive position of the subject, the non-aggressive distancing of the photographer, tonal luminosity of the print, and the desire to narrate from the problematic postmodern space of subjectivity are some of the formal categories of gender-specific or feminine photography.

The recognition of this kind of photography has found a marginal position in gallery and museum exhibitions. Its critical treatment lies outside the scope of serious discourse assuming the work's lack of creditability. The unspeakable message in the photography of women remains the silent language of the Other. "Not even recent psychoanalytic theory has taken account of the quite different constitution of the female subject—of her radical alienation from the discourses which first construct her body, and then supply her with an interiority (variously known as soul, feelings, consciousness, the unconscious) entirely congruent with that bodily construction."¹ As gender-specific photography, this condition is circumscribed by the 'master narrative'

which supresses contradiction by trivializing the reality of feminine experience.

Paula Fridkin, Sally Gall, Mary Margaret Hansen, Marilyn Lubetkin, April Rapier, Debra Rueb, and Sharon Stewart, the female artists in the *Houston Photographers* exhibition, shared a distinct enthusiasm for making their work appear to the spectator like an invitation to the scene of the photograph. These pictures seem not to impose political opinions or inflect an aggressive attitude towards the viewer. Yet, they are complex in their "difference," Derrida's term for "desire continually delayed."²

In comparison with this approach, the photography comprising *Recoding Sexuality* politicizes the photograph at the site of representation. The results often lead to a passionate critique of the symbolic: "the order of signs into which the individual enters upon acquiring language. Since the language system mediates all experience, the symbolic order structures reality. On leaving the mirror stage determined by Lacan's Imaginary or Kristeva's Semiotic, it is language and the symbolic that specify relationships and difference, thus creating the distinct self."³

The symbolic is encoded in culture through the male-dominant agencies of economics, education, politics, law

and the industries of art and entertainment. By returning the gaze of representation through quotation of media images the cherished codes of the system are exposed, particularly the language of sexuality. Soap operas, "music at the end of the movie," the "couple as copy" in advertising and the narrative climax, the POW! ZIP! or BANG! of the comic book, are just some of the sites of representation accounted for by the artists who are recoding the language of sexuality: Lutz Bacher, Kaucyla Brooke, Minnette Lehmann and Eliza Tonachel.

Less overtly political, the *Houston Photographers* reveals a desire to narrate feminine experience in which the doubling of identification between the photographer and the subject plays an uncanny role in the psychological development of the image. "If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off; thus she must not look, is absorbed on the side of the seen, seeing herself seeing herself, Lacan's femininity. . ."⁴ From their own unknown, thus unspoken language, is created a psychological schism of the phallus. Their silent language of difference is our coded language of the unconscious.

Looking at the work of the *Houston Photographers*, Rueb's *Self Portrait Series: Mirror Me* or Stewart's *Beam*



Photo-Installation by Marilyn Lubetkin. Photo by Paul Hester

of *Eros I-X*, the intentions of the artists are seen in the erotic symbols of fruit or a strobe which create signs comprehensible to even the most impatient spectators.

The portraits by Debra Rueb show an imbalance of the mirroring technique in which the self-assured attitude of the artist posing in front of the camera is comparatively different than that of the male subject whose tentative presence weakens the active masculine code.

Sharon Stewart: Beam of Eros: The Archer, 1986



Mary Margaret Hansen: Mary, Molly and Me, 1986





April Rapier: Ernie Hawkins, 1986



Hester

In Stewart's *Beam of Eros*, the model is given a strobe to interact with the photographer in the co-production of the symbol of Eros in which the photographer and the model are connected to the signifying process of lighting and to the object of the construction—the image of the body formed in the exposure of the camera. The male model is not represented in the pictures as the prey of an exploitative gaze, but is seen, instead, as a partner cons-

ciously displaying his beauty—reversing the code of objectification.

Rupert: *I-XII* by Fridkin reverses the code further in a series of 20" x 16" hand colored photographs depicting the male gaze suspended in a state of innocence and passivity. The subject of the photographs is 'spoken for' from the position of three poses set in two rows of quadrants projecting the subject's aura through the medium of the eye and hand of the artist. "Rupert" is no longer "Rupert"; he has become the decorated symbol of the artist's desire. Painted sundry colors, his images are aligned to the feminine gaze as a figure of masquerade.

The clearest manifestation of gender-specific photography can be seen in the work of Sally Gall. Her pictures blend the chemistry and optics of photography with equivalent images of the human body immersed in a pool of water fusing the wetness of the figure with the illuminated ground of the silver print. These are the *motion-stills* of a pictorial imagination enjoying the repose of capitalist leisure.

Gall's portrait of "LaLo: Botanical Garden," 1982, shows a graceful looking man returning the gaze of the photographer unaware of the fetishizing play of light and shadow on his face as he stands beneath a skylighted ceiling and arching leaves of a

naturalized garden. "LaLo: Lipari," 1983, finds the same man, this time sitting in a boat reading a map illustrated with topographical drawings suggestive of anatomical shapes. These are strangely affective images of the feminine gaze, her *other* seen as though from the distance of a dream.

On the other hand, the dual portraits of men by April Rapier push the genre to the threshold of language. From them one can glean subtle shifts of perspective and minute changes of facial expression providing still another use of doubling—the shared 'imaginary' of the feminine photographers and discourse in general: "Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic Imaginary is the realm of fantasy (as opposed to the symbolic), born in the prelinguistic recognition of one's selfhood... it is the objectified self in which normative social reality is inscribed by repression, socialization, language and ideology; it is therefore the state of misrecognition of psychic reality and real social conditions and is also the shared world of action and communications, i.e., of discourse."⁵

Rapier's portraits depend on naming which is a function of language. Each of the diptychs is given the proper name of the subject as a title. Besides reading the binary portrait for visual clues of identification, the spectator must deal with yet another

set of choices subverting the authenticity of the subject: in whose name are the portraits attributed, the proper name of the subject given as the title, or in the name of the photographer? Is the belief in a stable form of the self threatened by the laconic format signifying a potentially divided personality? Is the doubling of images in the trustworthy genre of the photographic portrait the revenge of the Other? Or is it simply art where questions cease?

It is said of the "family of man" that the pictures of the world are made by men, and that women keep the albums of memory. This narrow ideology was overturned in Marilyn Lubetkin's photo-installation. The gallery space, actuated by the "oldest operating photo-booth in the Southwest," was filled with the humming sound of the exposures and the incessant popping and banging of the mechanical engine processing film strips from which latent images were turned into pictures of identity. Who could resist the attraction to return to the mirror stage of life, the original experience of the self, and for only 25 cents? From all this, people would sign and pin their portrait strips to a six foot by eight foot wall in the gallery. An adjoining wall was turned into a mosaic of faces created by Lubetkin from more than a thousand strips of pictures taken over the

last seven years. This wall highlighted friends, celebrities and society people who had entered the realm of the photo-booth while visiting her home. Even though the person inside the photo-booth looking into the mirror lens of the camera acted as performer and spectator, it was the hospitality of a *femina ex machina* that made this fortunate experience possible—the only dependency on the male principle came from being useful as a part of the subject matter and for periodic servicing of the mechanical apparatus.

In Mary Margaret Hansen's series of photographs, "Mary, Molly and Me," the art of appropriation is raised to the level of a mystery. Working from a glass-plate-negative, the artist made five photographs isolating different aspects from an image of three women whose bathing suit style places them in the distant past. The first photo in the series shows the women holding hands as they walk away from the surf, a wedding ring visible on the left hand of the middle woman. The ring recalls Jane Gallop's theorizing of Roland Barthes' *punctum* where a minor detail can produce a reading of the photograph outside the frame of reference intended by the photographer or, in this case, the appropriator. Furthermore, one can theorize from the original photo that it was taken by

Debra Rueb: Mirror Me Series, 1986



Sally Gall: LaLo, Lipari, 1983





Kaucyila Brooke: Exchange Value, 1986

the husband of the woman wearing the wedding ring. This probability enlarges the purpose of the appropriation to include not only the glass-plate-negative but the sexual identity of the original photographer. Even the ambiguity of the title, "Mary, Molly and Me," identifies the appropriator with the gaze of the woman on the right. Her image is singled out for enlargement in the last two photographs. Since she is looking directly at the photographer, we can assume she is also anticipating the day of cultural appropriation and the displacement of the sexual identity of the original male photographer. Is it possible that the theoretical problems inherent in our consciousness of the Other can be "bridged" by the return of the Other in a declaration of their context? Hansen's desire to explore the image of these three women from the past is a profoundly simple transference by the artist diminishing the psychological distance that separates us from the Other. For the Other is in us all.

"I think it's much more risky for men trying to speak as women. On the other hand, one must not shut that door. In Glas, Derrida made a very interesting suggestion: that for the heterosexual male feminist it might be better to think how it would be to speak as a male homosexual, before the so-called liberation, when homosexuality was still considered a crime. That would somehow bring forth the problems of woman's discourse perhaps better than trying to be a woman because there is a whole history of men wanting to speak for women." (Gayatri Spivak)

In the exhibit *Recoding Sexuality*, Bacher, Brooke, Lehmann, and Tonachel apply photography to the issues of constructed sexuality that trouble the American Dream.

Since the early 70's Lutz Bacher's explorations have led her from the phenomenological examination of the visual object, and the role that language plays in production of representational meaning, to the question of the postmodern copy—the simulacrum.

Appropriating images from advertising that exploit greed and the consumer's fear of rejection, the couple in heterosexual harmony is represented in Bacher's photographs as a semiotic construction—signs referring to signs—"two sides of a whole, mirror images, the copy as double," in other words, the simulacrum." The coded signs are translatable: couple, copy, copulation.

Questions of visual pleasure, fetishism and the problems of "feminine/feminist discourse" presented in Bacher's work summon up and challenge the incantatory industry of media that infects our sexual identity and the formatting of desire. The work documents the cultural suicide of modernism with the breakdown of origin, aura, autonomy, and the author. Oedipus in decline. Oedipus dead. The epic source of desire generated through sons, lovers, husbands, teachers, judges, managers and madmen becomes the disordered terrain of the symbolic.

Bacher's most recent work, *Sex with Strangers* (Obscenity, Misogyny, Desire) is taken from a sexually explicit paperback book (thinly disguised as a scientific treatise. Ripped from its context by the deconstructive power of photography to contradict the meaning of images through quotation/appropriation, the taboo subject of pornography is overshadowed by the overt subject matter of fellatio. The intimate space acceptable for voyeuristic pleasure is abolished by the mural scale of the photographs destroying the privacy of the spectator. This is the battle-zone of representation. The subject matter of this work displayed at the Center would burst assunder the sensitive values co-existing in a members' organization like a blast of dynamite exploding at an art opening. Decoding the images as the exclusive

showing by Bacher represents, in her own words, "the display of gendered subjectivity where sexuality is implied /shown as exchange or oscillation 'between' the terms: masculine/feminine, active/passive, presence/absence." The work not shown at the Center confronts the "colonized territory (of what constitutes the pleasurable in sexually explicit display)." These issues are featured in the tabloid/journals, *Flesh Theory I & II*, organized principally by Bacher and a group of artists who are either teachers or recent graduates of San Francisco State University, one of the few critical and innovative publications dealing with photography in the Bay Area.

"We daily consume a diet of popular culture on a scale that has produced a second collective unconscious of expendable information," says Eliza

offer more satisfaction in terms of a dialogue." Tonachel's frustration is expressed in a grid of 24 photographs which are divided equally between the women and men of day and night 'soaps' individually talking on the telephone. A caption, "It's Like You're Totally Involved," is stencilled on each of the two sections that separate the women from the men commenting ironically on the "emptiness of language" that is the message of broadcast television.

Minnette Lehmann and Kaucyila Brooke explore in separate ways the world of pandemonium found in the comic book—the adolescent introduction to privileged discourse whose text culminates in adulthood with pornography.

Lehmann's color photographs taken from an international sampling of comic book covers reference Freud's ideas of the uncanny: "The sight of the Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact."⁶

Kaucyila Brooke's Cibachromes imitate the format and look of comics scaled up to the size of an installation large enough to cover an entire gallery wall.

The following statement written by Kaucyila Brooke for the exhibition of her work will conclude this text:

These comics are not really comics and yet they are. I am using dialogue balloons, narrative and a sequence of frames linked in a linear grid pattern. Since these comics lack the punchline or climactic buildup, they do not deliver the expected POW! ZIP! or BANG!

In critiques of the classical narrative, literary and film theorists have shown that the structural conflict centers on the borderline of male/female. The displacement of patriarchal positioning provides tension for the narrative climax, and the traditional gender positioning must be reinstated by the end of the story. This binary thinking ("two kinds of people in the world") confirms our cultural insistence that all who are different from the One are the Other. In my narratives, there is no borderline between male and female, there are only differences between individual women. The representation of women's differences extracts us from the position of Other because we are no longer a mass identity that is "sexually different" from men. We are not the same but have individual personalities and names.

If women are the Other, the Lesbians, without legitimizing sexual connection to the male, are completely outside the patriarchal structure. Restricted to marginality and invisibility by the mainstream, we are either represented as fetishized objects in pornography available for the male dominating gaze or as symbols of the cultural paranoid fantasies of "Amazon Takeovers" which must be and will be crushed by the end of the classical narrative. It is through contrast to such usual representation that the women in my

pieces appear "normal" or "just like other people" and refuse to become exotic; but make no mistake, we are not normal.

Although my pieces are representations of a culture of Others, the problems of the dominant culture's value system are evident within our relationships. An economic metaphor permeates the most intimate levels of our lives: "emotional investment," "giving more than I get," "is it worth it?" or "spending time together" are based in capitalistic profit-motive assumptions. These are product rather than process oriented concepts and they deviously evaluate human relations. In our media based culture, we expect the sum of elements in the classical narrative to reward us with "spectacle." Our expectations of relationships are similarly measured on a cost effectiveness scale paying off with the "spectacle of romance."

Conversation in my work is the subject rather than the means for moving the plot along. These narratives are fragments of conversations—uneventful, exploratory and repetitive. These are questioning conversations wherein "nothing is ever resolved." The concept of "resolution" would enable the viewer to simplify, categorize and believe in cause and effect as well as posit the "two kinds of people"—the normal (male, heterosexual, white) and the abnormal. To further prevent a singular reading of my pieces (the idea that these are the "true" stories about lesbian relationships), I have presented simultaneous narratives. Predellas complicate the narrative dialogue by either representing a children's game or a mundane task.

Formally, the pieces relate to the continuous nature of the soap opera as it is served up daily for a female mass audience. However, unlike the women in the soaps, who are sacrificed on the rating altar of audience identification, the women I portray do not offer themselves easily for the viewer's possession. They invite the viewer to consider the questions raised—beyond the frame of this work—within our everyday culture. (Kaucyila Brooke, 1986)

Footnotes

1. Kaja Silverman, "Histoire d'O: The Construction of a Female Subject, p. 320, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Carole S. Vance (Ed.), Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1985
2. "Lexicon: Guide for the Perplexed, II," *Art Papers*, Atlanta, Georgia, Vol. 10, No.1, 1986, p. 7
3. *Ibid.* p. 8
4. Silverman, op. cit., p. 346, quoting Stephen Heath, "Difference," *Screen*, London, Vol. xviii, no. 3, 1979, p. 92
5. "Lexicon," op. cit., p.7
6. Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection, *Screen*, vol. xxvii, no.1, 1986, quoting Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in James Strachey (Ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, London, Hogarth Press, 1964, p.273.



Minnette Lehmann: Cat Mamma's Revenge, 1986

discourse of privileged male sexuality would not displace the rage that would ignite among the factions of aesthetic morality, free speech, common-sense and elitist theory. On the other hand, some of the "bad boys" of photography like J.P. Witkin, Robert Mapplethorpe, Les Krims, and Larry Clark, although not welcomed by everyone, nevertheless would find enough support to get their pictures hung on the walls of galleries and museums because they fit the rubric of received art. Why?

Whereas the work the Center is

Tonachel in a statement on her work. From 35mm color negative film, she enlarges the prints to 16 x 20 inches that are joined together to form various sized grids upon which are stencilled messages addressing the spectator with whom the photographer identifies.

"The consumer's position," she continues, "in relation to the sheer volume of information is essentially passive. . . . The idea of actually responding to media images is akin to screaming into the void and hearing only an echo. A computer would

PAINTED PHOTOGRAPHY: A MATTER OF FACT OR FICTION?

Painted Pictures curated by Andy Grundberg, The Midtown Art Center, Houston, March 7-April 19, and Barbara Riley's Photographs, Hadler/Rodriguez, Houston, March 1-29.

By Jill A. Kyle

"... The aggressiveness with which these works are painted, and the apparent relish with which photographic information is reconstituted or obliterated, suggest an artistic dissatisfaction with photography's inherent Renaissance perspective, its obdurate factuality, its lack of plasticity, and its pervasive "democratic" presence in the world.

One could read the works gathered here as a spirited protest against the omnipresence and persuasiveness of photographic images. . . "

Andy Grundberg

If there has never been a mainstream in photography as there has been in other, older fields of visual arts; and if, as an art form, photography has never advanced consistently on a broad front (so much as it has relied on outstanding exhibits of work by isolated artists), it has nonetheless produced strong currents from time to time. One to mention is painted photography.

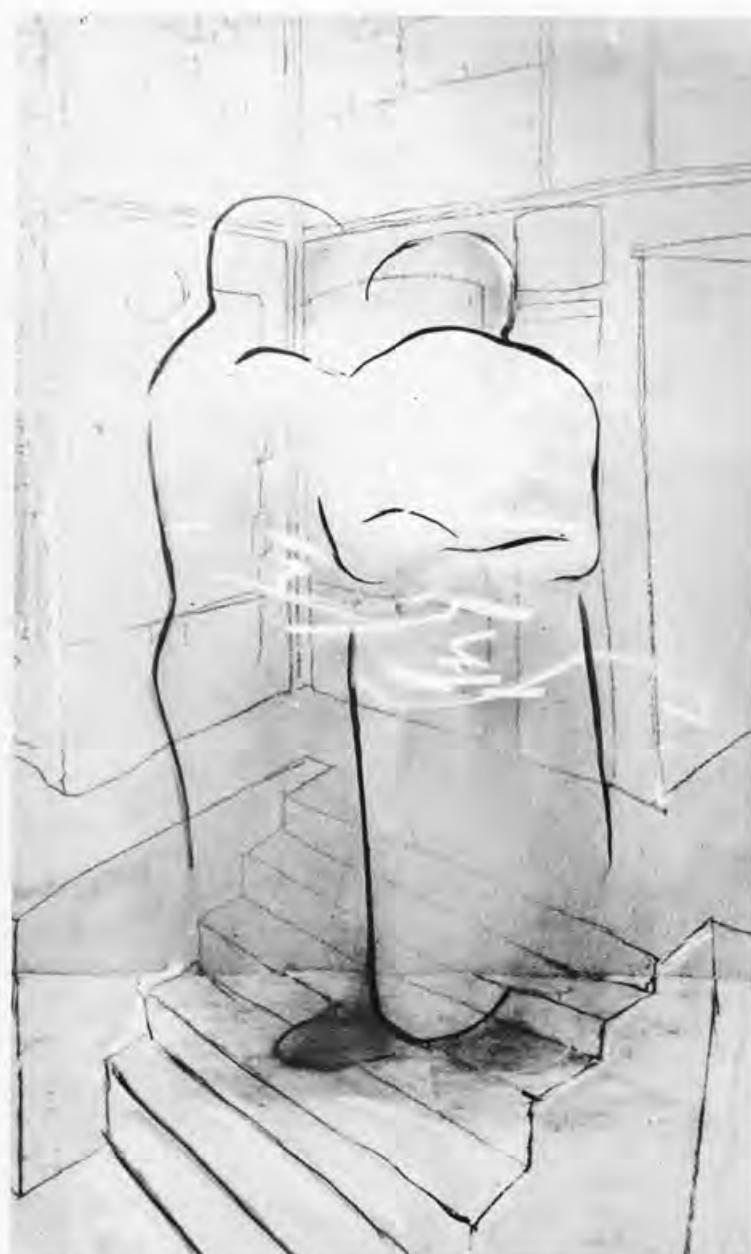
Painting on photographs is not new. From the first artists have wanted to enhance the camera image with the application of paint, at times to add color and at times in the name of art. (An early one was Edward Steichen, whose pigment print portraits of 1901 were highly manipulated by hand retouching.) But the most recent wave of painting over camera-derived images couples an artistic pursuit for forceful effects achieved by mingling photographic objectivity and painterly subjectivity with a very contemporary ambivalence about the function of both mediums in the life and art of today.

This can be seen in the works by seven young artists (6 Americans and 1 Frenchman) in Midtown Art Center's *Painted Pictures* exhibit. Though it cannot properly be called an exhibit of photography, because the applied paint is more important than the photographic image in some works, *Painted Pictures* demonstrates, nevertheless, that the "intermediary" potential of the photographic medium as an artistic tool of broad and diverse application can be exploited to yield stunning results. Albeit not all with the same success, artists in this exhibit, by combining

painterly expressiveness with an understanding of the power of camera images—and the subtle, disconcerting ways to use that power—give their art an intriguing relationship to photography that is far more than the sum of its parts.

In works by Dennis Farber, the question arises, "Is he a photographic innovator, or a painter with photographic sensibilities?" The same could be asked of Robert Rauschenberg, whose art like Farber's, attests that the making of an image accords with the act of combination; but Rauschenberg is not meaning to plunge the viewer into confusion about the problematic existence of the real, and Farber is. A strategy of representation on different levels guides Farber's process of fusion and juxtaposition. The result is an articulate visual idiom that cunningly pits the photographic real against the ideal, abstracted world of painting.

In "Space Heater," a large color photograph of a cluttered urban construction site, Farber resorts to a variety of manipulative devices in order to set up an irrefutable tension between formalist probity of the picture place and spatial depth. Hard-edge, geometric colored areas and abstract surface patterns—the latter created by cutting through painted or pasted layers to unpainted photographic images below—adhere to a certain rigor of placement in shallow planes. As formal elements, they vie for attention with stretches of chain-link grid, in varying degrees of focus, that strongly suggest an illusionistic space. In "Boyhood Meltdown," windows in a cropped facade ("W.T. Grant Building" is barely legible beneath overlapping strokes of translucent paint) are real architectural features, but, cut loose from the slip, they rise to the surface as isolated elements. Not completely free from subject association, yet trying to be, the importance of the windows as abstract, graphic pattern follows the same order of truth as the black newsprint letters in Cubist *papiers collés*. Many of Holly Roberts' oil-painted, gelatin-silver photographs, like primitive art, allude to primal feeling and mystery beyond the reach of our understanding. Beyond our grasp, too, is knowing to what extent the underlying photograph inspires



Bayat Keerl: *Anablep Selene Vomer*, 1984, courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery

her painted imagery. Often she applies color in sophisticated techniques—negative lines through smooth pigment, crusty impastos—that almost obliterate the print surface. Then, by leaving just enough of the possible hidden secrets in the original print, she adds tension to the work.

In some pieces, eerie images, hinged between fantasy and frozen moments of time, materialize

through veils of toned-down, but never dull, pigment: earthy red, pink, ochre, pale yellows, grey blues. And when she gives full leash to the immediacy and impulsiveness of her gestural painterliness, as she does in "Man with T.V.," the photographic touchstone in the work—in this case a man sprawled on a table—becomes foil to the rich, tactile surface in which it is embedded.

What Roberts well understands is that visual information from a tiny portion of photographic image can force us to perceive a painting in new ways. So that docile subjects, like "Bird's Head" become sentient, archetypal images, taking on nuances as emblems of the subjective consciousness. In the profile head, a photo image of frontal human eyes peers from behind a mask of paint, and like a piercing "punctum," it disrupts our sense of the real. By using simple spatial structures—an isolated painted form within a broad, neutralized picture plane—the paradox that something can be so real and at the next moment an illusion becomes more poignant; so does the mystic dimension in Robert's work, which makes us a little anxious about the reality they represent.

The Barthesian assumption that the photographer does not create but merely copies his image appears to be a point of departure for Charles Clough's work. Emphasizing the effects of reproducibility in photography and painting, Clough begins with color shots of art journal illustrations which he enlarges and overpaints in several stages. Ultimately, he completely obscures the photograph, except for a few areas of dot screen. Clough's vehement gestures with a loaded brush—important vehicles of self-reference—create a new artificial-looking surface, an overall image in itself of picture-making processes.

Spatial interaction, a common theme in Bayat Keerl's painted photography, if not its true subject, doubles as the artist's primary means of integrating media. By clever manipulation of photography and paint, Keerl creates images that seem to flow simultaneously in and out of the

Dennis Farber: *Boyhood Meltdown*, 1985, 30" 40," courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York



ambiguous surface between photographic illusion and painted planes. Across two shadowy Giottoesque figures in "Anablep Selene Vomer," Keerl applies impasto sweeps of white paint that establish a visual collaboration between images, in a photographic blur of motion and time, and movement of the brush. For the most part, Keerl uses subdued color tones kept within a close range. Unanchored by dictates of form or plane, the subtly modified color moves fluidly between grounds and creates a spatial continuity that binds painting and photograph together. Without disrupting the spatial flux, but introducing an intellectual counterpoise to it, Keerl's black brushstrokes act as linear elements of stability that define plane and volume. In fact, Keerl's painted marks provide more information about subject and context than does the blown-up photograph—a shift in roles for the media that, in effect, lessens competition for presence between the two.

Ellen Carey's work seems less an attempt to balance or integrate photographic image with painted stroke than to free photographic information from dimensional constraints and distracting realism. The throng of slashing marks over and behind the writhing contortions in "Leaning Figure" feed the action stance. But, devoid of emotional or psychological effects, the image is restricted to design. . .

In a few scenes with people from the "China Series," 1985 (on display at Halder/Rodriguez Gallery) Barbara Riley gives vent to her sense of humor and the decorative. As in "Personal Effects," she amends the photographic print with artificial materials—colored glitter, gold leaf paint, strips of metallic paper—to gain fanciful abstract patterns. But these are exceptions. Most pieces in the series are topographical landscapes done with the traditional technique of oil-tinting. By subject and working method, this is more typical of Riley. In these scenes—"Tian Shan Aqueduct" and "Garden Steps" are two—Riley adds surreal, dreamlike color, attempting to draw the image nearer to her own perception of the real. "Incredible things occur in nature. I try to capture that aspect by adding color that is not quite believable; color that is beyond what you see, but influenced by it." In these environmental scenes, the dimension of Riley's painted vision does not nudge the photographic image from the realm of the descriptive, the unnatural color notwithstanding. The unusual colors do create a mood and at times give an active, almost living quality to the light, but they never alter the realism of Riley's exquisitely structured photographs.

Barbara Riley: Chinese Evolution at the Great Wall, 1985



WAR

The Indelible Image, Photographs of War, Rice Museum, Houston, February 6–March 23, 1986.

By David Portz

A. Indelibility.

Though it's premature to state that this exhibition isolated many unforgettable images of war, I wholeheartedly affirm its success. By organizing *The Indelible Image*, the curators were venturing forth from their fine art orientations to examine a genre of documentary photography. They offered their comments on the task of choosing indelible photographs in essays commencing *The Indelible Image, Photographs of War — 1846 to the Present*¹, the book which parallels the exhibition and contains a large bibliography, biographies of the photographers, descriptions of the represented wars, and excellent reproductions.

Frances Fralin, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, originally conceived of the exhibition and led the curatorial effort. In the book's Preface, Ms. Fralin stated that certain excesses were avoided in selecting indelible images to be exhibited: famous photographers were not given deference, and the subject matter excluded recognizable persons, heroic or romantic portrayals of war, and gory or emotionally assaultive images.

Jane Livingston, the Chief Curator at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and also involved with curatorial duties, writes that foremost among the principles found decisive in choosing indelible images was "the photograph's integrity to both physical and psychological presence. The image must be seen to express the truest essence of its medium—whether glass-plate-negative image or albumen print, or 35 millimeter shot—and thus validate its historical placement in terms of the medium itself. It should also give an immediate recognition of its geopolitical place, as well as the nature of the historical event recorded."²

I note that judgements on the nature of a "geo-political place," preceding by decades the curators' dates of birth, will depend on certain intellectual conclusions of the curators, though not their aesthetic judgements nor the fruits of their knowledge of photographic art history. Their willingness to make such deductions is contrasted with their reticence to draw other conclusions not strictly within their scholarly ambit, as examined further on.

Ms. Livingston suggests that indelible war photographs have the capacity to "expand upon themselves" perhaps more than the great photographs of other genres—"the power to evoke an enormity of associations";³ I suggest that the literal meaning of war photographs often carries more weight than those derived from less consequential events, i.e., standard street photography. War photographs which successfully subvert their literal meanings with alternatives achieve an audacious authority, sometimes perverse. Regardless of this, the ability to communicate multiple meanings is a quality highly valued in works of art, and naturally would appeal as a measure of indelibility, to persons who live within the arts. I speculate that indelible images chosen on the basis of their literal informativeness however, might reintroduce much of the shockiness excluded by Ms. Fralin's parameters as stated in the second paragraph above. The images in the exhibition are indeed exceptional for permitting interpretations concurrent to their documentary sense. Those alternative solicitations of the viewer may even be categorized somewhat.

Some of the images qualify as "beautiful" or "lyrical"⁴—the early landscapes, the sun-dappled campsites and massed materiel of war. Repugnant images are sometimes blunted by strangely classical allusions—a muddy Pakistani corpse in a stone-strewn puddle takes the appearance of a fallen sculpted nude. Pop culture sometimes supplies dimensions of meaning which complicate a document. An SS trooper

floating dead in a prison camp ditch possesses the cranial structure of Frankenstein's beast. The U.S. military brass, seated in ranks of beach chairs to view the first nuclear test, resemble movie-goers in 3-D glasses and lighted by the screen. Religious twists are numerous: G.I.s perform calisthenics, while behind them, their shadows mimic crucifixes in equally ordered rows. A U.S. soldier in Vietnam guides an unseen helicopter, landing to pluck up the wounded. His arms are raised unto the jungle light as if he were pleading for redemption from God. Pictures of victims are sometimes poignant, such as one captioned "Mother and child shortly before being killed." A pensive-looking U.S. soldier stands behind a toothless, stringy Vietnamese mother and her child. His unit had earlier killed her husband in a tunnel and would soon withdraw and call in shelling to level the zone.⁵ The power in a photograph is sometimes boosted when the viewer cannot determine the macabre facts. A Salvadoran soldier is hauled away by other soldiers, his fatigues unspattered but the flesh completely missing from his head. We must speculate about the horrible death of the Russian partisan Tania; the photo reveals a tortured corpse which might have suffered a variety of deaths.

The predominating mechanism which makes the photos resound however, is irony. Sometimes the irony is the photographer's conscious choice. Many of the photos mentioned above are structured to suggest a meaning, directly contrary to its documentary sense.⁶

Some of the irony contained in the exhibition is created or accentuated by the curators. The very modern images are perhaps disabled from participating in these ironies because we viewers have not reached unequivocal decisions on the depicted ongoing wars. Irony depends to a great extent on mutually understood meanings. A large proportion of the photographs representing World War II had served as glib P.R. for the war effort, ironic now in view of that war's generally-recognized destructiveness and massive loss of life. The ironies communicated through the exhibition's Nineteenth Century prints are generally a result of their combination with text. Members of our current generations have no distinctive impressions of the wars more than 70 years distant—ironic reversals are less available to us. But we may be informed that the Civil War soldier who was pronounced cured by a Surgeon General's Surgical Report died shortly after of the same wound. Likewise a caption informs us that the Chinese men strewn about a garrison were killed by their own exploding powder magazine, from

Kimura Kenichi: Hiroshima, 1945 (The patient's skin is burned in a pattern corresponding to the dark portion of a kimono worn at the time of the explosion.)



which they were fleeing toward their British enemies at the moment of their deaths.

A boy, a World War II soldier at home on leave, sits on the door of a convertible and absorbs the gazes of five adoring girls, four smiling girls and one sad one who might be his sweetheart. But this is army publicity, recruiting men to go to the European and Pacific conflicts, far away from convertibles and admiration. Japanese maidens are waving good-bye to kamikaze flyers. The image is ironic because it is produced from sandwiched negatives; the patriotic sentiment was artificially produced. It is more ironic yet by its placement in the exhibition, adjacent a photo of U.S. seamen hosing Kamikaze tatters from the deck of the U.S.S. *Intrepid*. One is conscious of the Emperor's surrender and the consequent senselessness of those deaths (which might have gained value if the Japanese had won). It is ironic that a beer bottle flashed by the Nagasaki blast is the closest approximation among the show's photos of one's mental image of seared flesh. It was exhibited beside the imprint of the kimono pattern on the flesh of a Hiroshima woman's back, the actual effect of an atomic blast. The photographic process places designs on skin with third degree burns, then records them, and then such images are placed on exhibit in various U.S. museums of art.

B. Chronological Matters

In the Nineteenth Century, photographers concentrated on massed munitions, corpses, encampments and ruins, because these were suited to time exposures.⁷ The decorousness of depicting dead men was broached in the coverage of the Opium Wars, and set the framework for the coverage of the U.S. Civil War.⁸ At the time of World War II the U.S. generals in the Pacific were still deciding if the public could stomach the views of face-up warriors slain on Tarawa beach.⁹ The faster films and lenses allowed the World War II photographers to cover the actions of war, rather than just the panoramas. There appear the moments of orders to advance, the moments when charging men are hit by bullets. The chaos shown in war photos has been increasing—the representation of war as pandemonium rather than formal grace. Perhaps the chaos of conflict is best depicted in the exhibition's image of fighters hurling rocks at an approaching armored vehicle in an urban street of Northern Ireland.¹⁰ Yet war photographs which are published generally rely on visual principles of pleasing design, and within the exhibition, it is in those photos apparently never before published that the pandemonium



Edward Clark: Soldiers on Leave, 1941, World War II

may best be observed.

By the Vietnam era, free-lance photographers propelled by any ideology, mission or mystique were permitted to enter that country and expand the coverage.¹¹ It is common understanding that the coverage of that war influenced U.S. policy and finally the decision to withdraw. Photographers have also brought to light realities of the various conflicts in Central America. The presence of the international news media in El Salvador was asserted by the photo of the large group of newsmen and photographers gathered round the coffin of Hans Ter Laag, slain while covering that conflict in 1982. Responding to the newfound power of photographic information in the electronic media and press, the Reagan Administration banned photographers from the invasion of Grenada¹², gaining thereby the freedom to shape the event in an extremely favorable light.

The oldest images of the book reflected the predominating British imperialism—the Crimean War (1854-56), the Opium War (1856-60), the Indian Mutiny (1857-58), the Second Afghan War (1878-80), the Second Boer War (1899-1902), the Boxer Rebellion (1900), and the British adventures in Zululand (1879). In recent times however, with photographers covering nearly all fronts, the U.S. is more than adequately represented among the makers of war. There are reminders of our activities in Korea, our massive expenditure in Vietnam, our training of the Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran army (1982). Our part and profit in the wars of the Middle East and our complicity with the white side of racial violence in Southern Africa are more suppressed, summoned perhaps for only the most informed viewers. Regardless of the attitudes and caution of the curators, the photographs suggest the U.S. aggressivity and militarism, which should come as no surprise. The U.S. has rhetorically appointed itself the protector of freedom and democracy, while substantially protecting a sometimes reprehensible portion of the world's status quo. The U.S. sells more arms than any nation,¹³ has more foreign military bases,¹⁴ prepares the Strategic Defense Initiative despite its extraordinarily destabilizing effect,¹⁵ and maintains a record and policy of military intervention in other nations' political affairs.¹⁶

C. Looking at War is Not Necessarily

Looking at Institutions

Examine this sentence by Frances Fralin, in her Preface: "Yet . . . the wish to make a statement about the absurdity and futility of war was strong (notwithstanding knowledge of the theories of 'just' and 'unjust' wars or 'good' ones.)"¹⁷ It is in the passive voice. Rewrite the sentence: "I wished to state that war is absurd and futile."

Examine this excerpted paragraph from her same essay: "This exhibition asks us to not look at specific problems and to lay blame, but perhaps to glimpse more directly the living reality of institutionalized conflict, to see more clearly what war is for its participants, and to suggest that we perhaps cannot afford to retreat from the consequences in each of us of this confrontation."¹⁸ (italics mine)

Aside from the use of "perhaps" twice in the sentence to blunt her meaning, the phrase "living reality of institutionalized conflict" draws attention away from the systematic disorders that generate war, toward the individual deaths. Even the person who has experienced the contents of the current archives of photographically recorded war cannot bring herself to speculate, in the city of Washington D.C., on war's sources. Such conclusions are not within her discipline, or rather are excluded from it. The Humanities as practiced in Art History, complete with its poli-

tics, almost totally refrain from speculation on the power structures that influence the lives of millions of humans.

The powers that wield the technologies of death are exactly the identities to which we should extrapolate backwards, from photographs of war. Consider our proxy war in Nicaragua, which was not represented in the book. We are not concerned enough with the "spread of communism" to intervene with the lives of North Americans. But we allow our leaders to spend money to finance an effort by smugglers, soldiers of fortune, kidnapped adolescents and Somocistas who commit atrocities upon civilians. We permit our President to carry off a hoax about an "invasion of Honduras" by "as many as 1500 Sandanistas".¹⁹ Our politicians successfully manipulate enough of the population with the ignorant rhetoric of ideologies such as "The Soviets and Sandanistas must not be permitted to crush freedom in Central America and threaten our own security on our own doorstep."²⁰ What are the power relationships behind the surrogate battles of superpowers? How can the assembled materials of this book and exhibition avoid mention of the institutional sources of war, and of the cleverly wielded ideologies which separate mankind? There must be some perception that such enquiry would disturb the incumbents.

"We can perhaps not afford to retreat from the consequences in each of us of this confrontation."²¹ Though the meaning is vague, Ms. Fralin apparently discusses a confrontation of each of us with war's horrors and wastes. I question why such a powerful exhibition has generated only such weak aspirations in its curators. War is horrible, to be prevented. No principle justifies military aggression. War photographs combined with courageous texts could serve as cathartics to action abolishing wars, rather than dribblings over aesthetics. Better that the conclusion to this effort had clearly stated: "Abolish war at its sources."

Footnotes

1. Frances Fralin, *The Indelible Image, Photographs of War - 1846 to the Present*, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1985. (Herein: *Indelible Image*.)
2. Jane Livingston, "Thoughts on War Photography", *Indelible Image*, p.16.
3. *Id.*
4. Frances Fralin, "Preface", *Indelible Image*, p.7.
5. *Indelible Image*, p.206, citing Philip Jones Griffiths, *Vietnam, Inc.*, New York: Collier Books, 1971.
6. The Pakistani corpse opposes classic beauty with sodden death. G.I. calisthenics posits health versus death. The soldier guiding the copter opposes wartime hardship with im-

Pennie Tweedie: Bangladesh, 1971, Indo-Pakistani War



possible divine intervention. The SS trooper, apparently a monster, is only a man. The military chiefs at the nuclear test suggest an attitude of leisure rather than the destructive momentousness of the event.

7. Jane Livingston, "Thoughts on War Photography", *Indelible Image*, p.13. Ms Livingston suggests that the sense of immediacy was missing from war photographs of the wet plate epoch for psychological reasons as well, but does not succeed in identifying them.

8. *Indelible Image*, p.34. Caption identifies Felice Beato's *The Interior of the Secundra Bashi, Lucknow*, photographed in 1858 during the Indian Mutiny, as the earliest known photograph of war dead.

9. Francis Fallin, "Preface", *Indelible Image*, p. 9, quoting William Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness, A Memoir of the Pacific War*, p. 242, Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1979

10. In fact it is not clear that this snatch of pandemonium has been previously published, since the book credits it "Courtesy of the Photographer", Gilles Peress. *The Indelible Image* p.218.

11. Jane Livingston, "Thoughts on War Photography" *Indelible Image*, p.15.

12. Frances Fralin, "Preface", *Indelible Image*, p.9.

13. *World Armaments and Disarmaments*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, p.18, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1985) [Herein, *SIPRI Yearbook*]

14. Compare: Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, pps.126-127, (1986); Department of Defense, *Defense Almanac*, p.51, (September 1985).

15. See: *SIPRI Yearbook*, pps. 2-5. "By 1990, the SDI program (as at present planned) will almost certainly be in contravention of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which does not ban just deployment, but also development and testing of anti-ballistic missile systems." *Id.* at 2.

16. See: Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "The Guns of July", *Foreign Affairs*, (Spring 1986) pps.698-714. The U.S. ventures currently include: assistance to the resistance in Cambodia, aid to the contras against Nicaragua, the attacks upon Libya, funding of Afghani resistance, supply of weapons to guerillas in Angola, and support of the Salvadoran military against their resistance.

17. Frances Fralin, "Preface", *Indelible Image*, p. 7.

18. *Ibid.*, p.11.

19. Statements by Donald Regan White House Chief of Staff, George Schultz, Secretary of State, and White House spokesman Larry Speakes, as reported in the *Houston Chronicle*, Sec.1 p.1, *The Houston Post*, p.A1, and *The New York Times*, pps.1, 6. "Both the resistance and Honduran intelligence sources indicate that reinforcing attacks by up to four Sandanista battalions can be expected within the next 24 hours." [State Department] spokesman Charles Redman said." *The Houston Post*, p.A1, 26 March 1986. On March 25, \$20 million dollars in emergency military aid was granted to Honduras, the best militarily equipped country in Central America, and on March 28, 1986, the Senate approved a bill for \$100 million of aid to the contras. Before the matter dropped entirely from the newspapers, evidence accumulated that the Reagan administration had exaggerated the size of an incursion by the Nicaraguan forces in pursuit of contra attackers, which was similar to many border exchanges of the past, and had also exaggerated the danger it posed to Honduras. See: *The New York Times*, p.4Y, March 29, 1986.

20. President Ronald Reagan, extract from speech delivered on national television on March 16, 1986, exhorting U.S. citizens to call their congressmen in support of military aid to the contras. *The New York Times*, p.8Y, March 17, 1986.

21. See fn.18 and related text.



Robert Heinecken: *Untitled (Newswomen) (Identical Hairstyles)*, 1984, Polaroid prints, 20" x 96"

ARE YOU ENJOYING IT MORE BUT ENJOYING IT LESS?

By Paul Hester

Black, White and Color II: Houston (Artist and the Still Camera)/Los Angeles (Tourism in Perpetuity) was exhibited at Diverse Works, March 7-April 2.

"A text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the Author-God), but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. (Roland Barthes)

What does it mean to title an exhibition, *Black, White and Color II*? Are we correct to assume that this is photography? Is a somehow inherently photographic statement implied by the terms? Is this all the work has in common? Is this the conceptual basis for the selection of the work?

What do we understand from the separation of the work from two cities into two different floors? Are we able to distinguish a sense of place from the geographical structure of the exhibition? Does the work from each city display any unifying principle? Is any value judgment implied by the placing of work from LA above that of Houston within the structure of the gallery? Is it significant that the first work you see on the Houston floor is by newcomer Lew Thomas from San Francisco?

If little importance can be attached to these issues, and if we are unable to attribute qualities of the work derived from the place of their making, what purpose does the title serve? What useful analysis can we make that cross-cuts these deceptive labels?

Is it intentional within the curatorial approach that the Houston work is diffused between the extremes of decorative abstraction and journalistic sensationalism, while the California work is engaged on the whole in the critical questioning of those same traditional modes? Is it an accurate reading that Houston is without any viable challenges to traditional art practices? Are we being subjected to another devaluation of home-grown produce?

Does this deception actually reside in a forced alliance of LA art with trends associated with NY critics? Is

geography a useless distinction when applied to any art produced within a nationally mediated arena? Are the claims of these various critics able to convince you of the transcendence of style? Is style the most accurate term to apply in this situation? What criteria in the past have been used by critics and historians to identify any group of artists as belonging together? Are we repeating an antiquated concept in our search for The Houston School? Does physical proximity matter nearly as much as what art magazines you read?

When artists are using cameras and photographers are using brushes, what is the basis for determining categories of style, or even of media? Has physical appearance lost its primacy as the determining factor of style? Within the Houston work, does some other thread connect these practitioners? For that matter, are there differences between the LA contributors that is concealed by their similar appearances? How do we begin such an investigation?

How many of these works involve words? Are the works that deny words any visible role able to resist the implications of that position? In other words, does the absence of words within the frame conserve the purity of the image's sensuality and physicality? Does this desire for the image's autonomy imply a reactionary position? Is artistic freedom an escape from quarrelsome distractions and disturbing social issues that have no place in art? Is it possible to consider this refusal as an act of classicism? Have I revealed in these questions my own prejudice for a particular style?

Or do those works without words actually suggest words by their absence? Do we supply the unspoken narrative to the situations of Eileen Cowin (moments heavy with an uncomfortable silence in which we wish someone would say something)?

Does that suggest the possibility that those images with words actually shut down our desire to fill in the blanks and supply our own dialogue? Is the text with these works a closure for our imagination? Do the words supplant our personal reading of the visual image? On the other hand, is the relationship of text and image sufficiently ambiguous that we are forced to supply our own meaning? Is the frustration of not being able to know exactly what the artist meant more debilitating in a work with text (which we expect to be legible, specific, communicable) than in an abstract image (which we assume to offer a freedom of interpretation)?

What are we to make of work that combines word and image in such a specific way that we know exactly what it means? Has all the mystery been removed, all the fun taken away? Has the art been expelled? Is communication a worthy goal of art? Is it possible that the artist has provided us with clues that we have assembled in a very precise and unambiguous way, while another audience reassembles those clues in a different configuration? Is accuracy of communication in art desirable? Is it possible? Is it art? Is it reliable? Is it useful?

Is the anti-establishment stance evident in this exhibition shared by all participants? Do they all identify the

same establishment? Are we provided with any evidence of what replacements they offer? Can we identify their stance with any particular tradition of opposition? Is it a legitimate avant-garde intent upon upending middle-class values, or has it already been absorbed by the very culture that it sought to overthrow?

Are we looking at a style that appears to challenge the traditional way of making and thinking about art but fails to differentiate itself from what it pretends to subvert? Do we have a new way of making art, or just another style from the same means of productions?

Is it realistic to put a construction (image, text, picture) on the wall of a gallery and expect it to challenge the misuses of art by that system of distribution? If that is not the case here, what do we assume is the intent of these art producers? Are we being subjected to their subjectivity, their expressions of angst, alienation, repression? Are they attempting to change their conditions, or make and sell art about their condition? Are they displaying their understanding of the prevailing modes of art production? Are we seeing art about art (reproduction)? Does the work challenge the dominate mode or in fact extend it?

Is the work provoked by a particular theory? Is the theory explained, exposed, regurgitated, or repudiated?

If a work appears in a major familiar mode, such as journalism or abstraction, is a questioning of that tradition possible? Is it necessary? Can an artist pose serious questions from within a dominant mode, or is it necessary to perform a radical break?

Are questions possible in any medium that has traditionally been considered one of statements?

Can artistic practice be moved from the arena of personal statements to one of social questioning? Is the work in this exhibit engaged in the style of questioning without any consideration of the implications of those questions? Can a radical practice of art be based on merely a reaction to the institutionalized good taste of an entrenched modernism? Are challenges to propriety sufficient?

Who says a radical practice of art is necessary? Will it sell? Is it true artistic self-expression? Am I comfortable with it? Does it look good on the wall (over the couch)? Does it have universal truth? Is it formally innovative? Is it in the magazines?

What the hell is a radical practice of art? Are we to believe those artists and critics of re-photographic projects and appropriations of existing advertising and art photography that this is new, radical and post-modern?

Wouldn't it be more radical to avoid these trendy new gimmicks and return to the basics? Shouldn't I be true to myself, honor and respect Atget, Evans, Frank, and Winogrand? Didn't they question the prevailing trends of commercialism and artiness? Don't their pictures challenge the notion of what a picture is supposed to look like?

But wait a minute; isn't Frank using words in his pictures now? Wasn't *The Americans* rejected as being too ugly, too one-sided? Weren't those pictures political? And what about Winogrand's pictures of press confer-

ences and demonstrations?

Are the picture in this exhibition at Diverse Works radical? Are Suzanne Paul's very aggressive portraits, activated by paint, radical in their treatment of personality depiction? Are they evidence of a desire to intensify her already confrontational approach to photographing people? Is this desire to change the audience's perception of reality a radical urge? Does her neo-expressionism imply a radical break with convention or a regressive individualism of personal vision and hallucination?

Are Lew Thomas' movie stills with sub-titles radical in their re-contextualizing of our nostalgic approach to old movies? Or is it an elitist posture that borders on authoritarianism in its devaluation of our readings?

Are baggies of dismembered female body parts by Alexandra Sauer radical in their humorous repositioning of woman as object within grocery store packaging? Do they function as a critique of the media presentation of women or do they perpetuate the actual practice they would have censored?

Are Robert Heinecken's *Art Lunches* merely the diary of a traveling photo-lecturer, or do they ridicule the still-life traditions and radically re-digest the possibilities of material manipulation?

Do you read Heinecken's "*Untitled (Newswomen/Identical Hairstyles)*" as a radical critique of the homogenizing influence of television? If so, why did he use female newscasters? Why not male? Is it radical to transform private sexual pleasures into a resistance of depersonalized mass media? Are these images a celebration of these women as faces of authority, or have they been stripped of their (verbal) authority by being rendered speechless? What narrative do you supply for a television without the sound? Is it sexual?

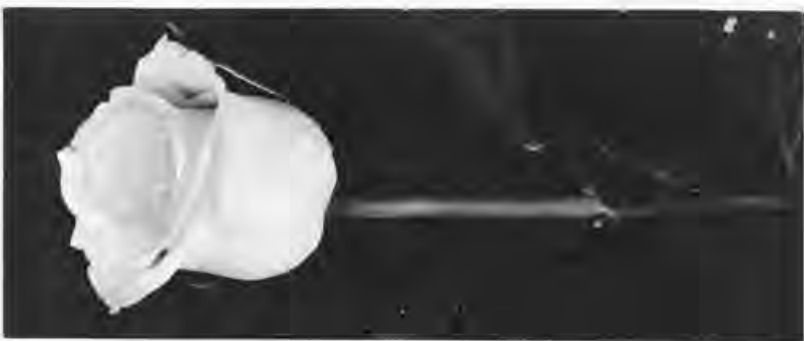
Has Lew Thomas replaced the sound with sub-titles? Is his work an expose of the process by which media determines our perception of the real, or is it another example of manipulation by the translator? Does the sub-title substitute the authority of the Word for evidence of what is seen? By putting the movie still in front of the video camera, generating characters electronically, and photographing the resulting monitor image, does Thomas relinquish his vantage point as artist who makes images from "out there", or does he expand our "nature" to include the TV screen?

Is it intentional that John Divola's cut-out figures in landscapes give the appearance of a movie set? Is it sufficient to interrupt the illusion of a photograph's literal description by placing objects and figures within a landscape and hitting them with colored lights? Would this be enough to be experimental? By including the lights and showing us the means to his hallucinations, is he able to challenge not only the conventions of traditional landscape photography but also the basis of our knowledge about the perceptual world? How much do you really know? How do you know even that?

Do you remember Robert Frank's photograph in the TV studio? Has Divola deconstructed nature photography in the same way that Frank revealed television as a manipulated

R. T. Nassberg: *Mummer*, Philadelphia, 1978





FROM THE DARKNESS THERE AROSE THE POINT. IT LIFTED THEM UP AND THEY NO LONGER WAIVERED

David Bunn: Untitled, 1985, Type C prints, 54" x 66"

image? By comparison, has Heineken refused the alienation of Frank's disillusioned idealism? Or has he accepted the knowledge that TV news is manipulated and returned the power of meaning-making to the audience? Has he progressed beyond Frank's rebellious anti-authoritarianism or just retreated into the authoritarianism of his own cynicism? Does Heineken's work deny politics? Have the issues been obscured by his tongue in her cheek? Does it remain as art only by evading a sense of responsibility, by maintaining its silence?

"...we can still recognize the tragic failure of the original forms of the protest... we see the afterimage of that anarchic and subversive, but ultimately apolitical, radicalism that was doomed to failure, to be appropriated by the very forces that it set out to oppose." (Benjamin H.D. Buchloh)

What about the other two photographers from LA who invoked words? Are these words some badge of defiance, some challenge to the gods of photography? Who erected these gods in the first place? What gives them their power? Why do they generate so much antagonism? Are they really all that powerful?

Is this process of change called progress? Does this changing of the guard imply that the new art will be better than the old gods? How long before the new is god?

Do David Bunn's colored frames and repetitive subject color give narrative continuity to these slick photographic illustrations, or do they negate his attempts to pump up the pictures with the puns of a quasi-Biblical voice of authority? Do they collectively represent new configurations of meaning for what appear as disconnected images, or in fact demonstrate a weak acceptance of an existing mode of representation: (advertising)? Are these mocking the pretensions of advertising proclamations by facetiously suggesting profound references among separate images?

Do you get the feeling in Monique Safford's work that you are leafing through the *I/2 Price Bookstore*, mixing *Italian Vogue* with the comics of *Prince Valiant*, while your unreliable guide through these memories and anticipations has steered you through a muddle of mismatched conversations oh so stylish, but unintelligible to the foreign tongue? What are they saying? Does it matter? Do they seem to perpetuate the idea of art as (divine) revelation rather than open up an art based on discourse?

"Mythologizing the problems allows one to avoid looking at the phenomena

... or to render (it) in such a spurious, distorted, and mystified form that the critique does not generate a confrontation of the problem but a parasitic complacency with the system."

(Georg Lukacs)

At what moment did modern art cease to pose questions and constitute itself as the dominant, institutional art of defensive sentences? When did it forfeit the position of outrageous and provocative and become the official culture of the status quo? Is this the moment it lost its ability to provoke thought?

Are the questions rhetorical? What is behind their approach? Is it to change society or to change art? Where are the art practices that significantly challenge the stereotypes of male=doctor, female=nurse, male=packager, female=package?

Is it enough to encourage these artists in their anti-authority rebellions against the claustrophobia of modern art and mass media? Should we also ask of each artist an awareness "of the sides they would be taking in the process of aesthetic

identification and ideological representation?" (Buchloh).

"Suffering is portrayed as a personal struggle, experienced by the individual in isolation. Alienation becomes a heroic disease, for which there is no social remedy. Irony masks resignation to a situation one cannot alter or control. The human situation is seen as static, with certain external forms varying but the eternal anguish remaining. Every political system is perceived to set some small group into power, so that changing the group will not affect our 'real' (that is, private) lives... Thus simply expressed, the elements of bourgeois ideology have a clear role in maintaining the status quo. Arising out of a system that functions through corporate competition for profits, the ideas of the bourgeoisie imply the ultimate powerlessness of the individual, the futility of public action, and the necessity of despair." (Quoted by Buchloh from Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel, "Modernism and History," *New Literary History* 3, no. 1, (Autumn 1971): 196.

Suzanne Paul: Time-Space-Illusion #1, 1986, mixed media



MIRROR OF THE SELF

The exhibition, *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography*, was displayed at the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, March 2-30.

By Sally Gall

It all started in Lausanne, Switzerland, with an ambitious exhibition of paintings and photographs, *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography*. Erica Billeter, the organizer of the exhibition, set apart the photographic component with the intention of making it a separate, travelling exhibition. However, only a small part of the original show reached Houston and San Antonio, Texas.

Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography (exhibition title remained the same) shown at the Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, left me feeling disappointed and bewildered. One expects from a thematic show of this kind to provide the viewer with a new analysis of the genre or a spectrum for comparing various methodologies. One particularly expects this from an exhibition whose theme is so broad and all encompassing, and which claims as its time period the 150 years of photography's existence. In this exhibition there was neither a thesis nor a range of measurable approaches.

Where are the self-portraits of Lee Friedlander, the auto-polaroids of Lucas Samaras, mise-en-scenes of Cindy Sherman, or the other obvious deletions (past and present) unaccountably absent in an exhibition of this scope. Only when examining the catalog at the end of my visit to the exhibition did I see the missing works, which led me to believe that I had overlooked a room in the gallery. But much of the work reproduced in the catalog (published expressly for the Blaffer Gallery) was not in the exhibition, evidently due to a small staff on the organizing end and to the inability to secure loans for the work to travel. Should we be glad that at least part of the exhibition traveled? It is a difficult question to answer, not only because many strong photographs did not arrive, but because without the missing photographs, the show is very incomplete. There are too many gaps, too many missing links. To be fair to Erica Billeter, this exhibition was intended as part of a much larger display of the genre; however, I am not reviewing that exhibition which was seen only in Lausanne nor am I reviewing the catalog.

The gaps in the exhibition come also from the sections into which it is organized: "The Image," "The Camera, the Photographer's Hallmark," "Portrait in the Group," "Arrangement and Distancing," "Curriculum Vitae," "The Present: Instant Camera—Polaroid," "The Present: Artists Using Their Cameras." What, for instance, does "Arrangement and Distancing" mean? Why are Lee Friedlander and Duane Michals included in that category as opposed to "The Present: Artists Using Their Cameras"? What does that all-encompassing word "Image" mean as a category in the exhibition? Why are Robert Mapplethorpe and Ralph Gibson included in "The Image"? As far as I can tell, "Curriculum Vitae" refers to artists who have made many self-portraits over their lifetimes, whose work is published in the catalog, but not included in the show—so that the category totally loses its meaning in the exhibition. Perhaps the categories lose something in the translation, for they are nonsensical, and create confusion when viewing the exhibition.

What is a self-portrait? What is the impetus for an artist to create something using the self as subject matter? A self-portrait is the way an artist sees him or herself; the way an artist projects his or her being to the world. A self-portrait is a recording of the self, an interpretation of the self, and invention of the self. It is through a self-portrait that the maker faces the 'double bind' of preserving one's image while documenting the mortality of the self.

A question involved in organizing any thematic show is how the parameters of inclusion are set. It



Ilse Bing: Self-Portrait, 1931

seems reasonable to suggest that many artists have at one time or another made a self-portrait, just as many artists have made a landscape, or a still life in their body of work. Are these one-time-only images included, or does the exhibition concentrate on artists who have consciously pursued self-portraiture as a thematic concern? The single self-portrait is often a document; an artist with a multiplicity of self-portraits is usually exploring the genre. It is the latter which I miss in the exhibition. Robert Mapplethorpe is a good example. There is one photograph by Mapplethorpe in the exhibition which shows his upper body cropped lengthwise by the camera frame, his arm outstretched with the hand and finger extended—appearing simultaneously tense and fragile. What subverts the seriousness of this image is Mapplethorpe's grinning face. There is a playful quality to the photograph as well as a projection of the artist's identity and power. What impact has this photograph made in 1975 had on the later Mapplethorpe self-portraits: the androgynous Mapplethorpe, Mapplethorpe with machine gun in hand, or, best of all, Mapplethorpe with an all-knowing grin and devil's ears growing out of his head—and what of the less innocent, more sexually coded self-portraits of recent years? To have had a selection of his work covering ten years would tell us much more about his specific concerns. This leads to a down-grading of conceptual issues when an artist who has consistently explored himself in photography for many years is confined to a single photograph. And, of course, this applies to many other artists in the exhibition.

Metamorphosis and disguise are areas of portraiture interestingly touched on in this exhibition, and there are the Duane Michal's sequences commenting on the mystery of human mortality. But where are the many Man Ray self-portraits made throughout his life in various acts of disguise? Where is Duchamp as Rose Sélavy, his anima and alter ego? Where are the Cindy Sherman photographs which seem to lack a self because of her ability to take on any pose, any identity, thereby losing all sense of a unitary self? These chameleonlike photographs are literally self-portraits that she directs, stages, and acts, taking on the personas of various "types." Her photographs which are ultimately about anonymity call into question the authenticity of self-portraiture and the facility of photography to issue the self in a seemingly endless series of copies. The absence of her work weakens the structural associations useful for understanding the other

contemporary work in the exhibit. I miss Wegman's "family snapshots," photographs made by superimposing negatives of his mother's face and his face, or his father's face and his face, that culminate in a triple negative superimposition of the "family." And what about the most bizarre of all disguise photographs, a late 19th century series by F. Holland Day transforming himself into Christ, complete with crown of thorns, acting out the Lord's last days on earth.

A strong area of the exhibition was the section titled, "The Artist and the Camera." The photographs in this section deal with the camera and/or the lens as a metaphor for the eye, or as a symbol for the act of seeing. The camera lens either becomes the eye, or replaces the eye. These photographs stress that the camera is not between the artist and the self, or between the artist and the world, but is an extension of the eye, and perhaps thus an extension of the artist's self. Ilse Bing's 1931 self-portrait looking through a camera with a mirror at the side, is simultaneously a frontal view and a profile. In the profile view we see one eye, the eye which is not visible looks through the camera. In the frontal view, one eye is visible to the side of the camera and there is an uncanny eerie "eye" (complete with pupil) within the camera lens. This photograph bespeaks the eye's omnipresence and omnipotence; its ability to see in all directions, both out into the world, and at us, the viewers. There is a wonderful photograph by Umbo himself holding a 35mm camera with viewing frame to his face which frames the eye as the camera frames a photograph. And there is a dark Kafkaesque Germain Krull self-portrait in which the camera replaces the eyes and merges with the face. A metamorphosis of instrument transformed into person or person into instrument. To complete both historically and conceptually this section one wants to see the marvelous 1924 El Lissitzky self-portrait of his head, with his hand holding a compass superimposed directly over his eye—a direct reference to the tools of creative power.

Speaking about eyes leads to one of the most arresting photographs in the exhibition, the self-portrait by Michael Seuphor. The subject of the photograph is his eyes, which are hypnotic and all-consuming. Nothing else exists. One eye is in light, the other eye partially recedes into or emerges out of darkness. The viewer looks not into but through the eyes at the same time the artist looks out at the viewer. It is a stare and it is also an exchange.

However, the exhibition is not an exchange, but a stare. As indicated

by the catalog, self-portraiture is an area rich and full of potential for artistic imagination and intelligence, so it seems a paradox that *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography* is so lifeless.

MONUMENTS OF CONTRADICTION

By Ed Osowski

Photographs of Texas Monuments by Paul Hester was exhibited at Rice University's Farish Gallery, February 19-March 19. The exhibition will travel to the Dallas Museum of Art, spring 1987.

The fifty-four photographs by Paul Hester, seen as a part of Foto Fest, were displayed under the title of *Texas Monuments*. Relatively small in format (the images never exceeded 8 by 12 inches) their size indicates an approach to their subject matter that is especially anti-heroic, anti-monumental. There are three contexts, at least, in which the work can be read. The School of Architecture, the sponsor, intended them to provide teaching examples of how public spaces, centered on civic monuments, are organized. The Sesquicentennial celebration of Texas provided the opportunity to catalogue or document these monuments, many of them erected as memorials to the state's struggle for independence

during the Centennial celebration fifty years ago. These two readings, the most obvious, are also less interesting than the third, played down by the exhibition's curator, Drexel Turner. These monuments to the Texas spirit, Hester reminds us, must be seen within the politicized arena of the second term of President Ronald Reagan. Hester's photographs are heavy with economic, social, and sexual contradictions which society itself embodies.

I have known Paul Hester's work for some time. Eight years ago, while employed as Project Director for Houston Public Library, I helped to arrange the first of four photographic surveys of Houston which Hester completed for the Library. I know the pieces in these surveys well and have followed his commercial progress with great interest. But it has been his recent non-commercial work (the two series *Su Voto Es La Diferencia* and *Time Magazine, Jan. 25, 1985* immediately come to mind) that has left me wondering how and when he would find the subject that would bring together the clarity of vision that marks his commercial work with the committed political sensibility one finds in his non-commercial projects. *Photographs of Texas Monuments* ends that wait.

In these works Hester argues for nothing less than a wholesale rejection of the sentimentality and banality that have crept into our understanding of Texas and its history. Armed with irony, wit, distance, and anger, he offers a vision of Texas through its monuments that expresses the failure of public values—as embodied in public art—to shape our values.

One frequently plays a guessing game with these photographs—first, trying to find the monuments and then, once located, trying to figure out why a particular subject was worthy of commemoration. That these monuments have lost their power to inform our spirits, Hester suggests, can be visualized by the difficulty one experiences in finding the monument, itself. In "Milam Square, San Antonio" there is a near-forest of vertical elements—telephone poles, a smoke stack, lamp posts, a church steeple, a victorian column, the statue of Milam himself—which create a pattern of visual rhythms. But as the eye moves from one to the next, it is never certain where to stop, never certain which vertical element is the one intended to be observed. And in "Sam Houston and Pioneer Memorial Obelisk" the vegetation is more pronounced, more threatening and dramatic, than the monuments it blocks. The difficulty in finding the monuments results, at times, in a humorous perverseness, as when he photographs the "Alamo Cenotaph" with a bus blocking its base (and our view) or when he finds, on the grounds of

State Park in Dallas, monuments wrapped Christo-like. Blocked, hidden, obscured, forgotten—the state in which Hester finds these monuments gives certain clues to how society views their messages.

That we, as a society, continue to refrain from integrating fully women and their achievements into the fabric of our social lives is all too true. Hester's on going dialogue with how we perceive women, most graphically handled in the sexual ambiguity of his *Su Voto Es La Diferencia* series lies behind a number of the images in this exhibition. When he finds women in this survey they are usually sentimental stereotypes, images of maternal warmth and comfort. When Hester finds a woman whose achievements ought to permit her to rise above society's stereotyped views, as in the example of Governor "Ma" Ferguson, he finds that efforts have been made to denigrate her. In the rotunda of the Capitol Ferguson's statue is relegated to a spot between two trash receptacles. This is her context, Hester reminds us. And in what may be the two most effective and beautiful photographs in the exhibition, "Joanna Troutman," on the grounds of the State Cemetery in Austin, the photographs form a self-reflecting pair, looking out on an unresponsive landscape, communicating not with the viewer but with themselves, each image doubling back upon itself.

Photographs of Texas Monuments inevitably invites comparisons with Lee Friedlander's ten-year project which culminated in his *American Monument*. Unlike Friedlander's, Hester's range is limited, obviously by the boundaries of geography. His task was to photograph within the state. But both share in a sensibility which sees through the platitudinous statement, which finds hypocrisy in the posturings of a society that has not lived up to the challenges posed by these monuments, and which, finally, enjoys an ironic wit that takes pleasure in recording certain markers from their most deflating angle. In the photograph of "George Washington" on the University of Texas campus eleven figures surround the statue. Posed like statues themselves, the students are indifferent to the figure who overlooks them. One senses that in the case of the blustering, gesticulating, and slightly humorous "John H. Reagan" also on the campus, Hester does not regard the students' indifference as inappropriate. If there is a certain irony that emerges from their indifference in these two examples, one turns to the photograph "Franklin Delano Roosevelt" in which the bust of the president vanishes into the shrubbery around it. Erected as a sign of gratitude and esteem by a Mexican-American political organization in San Antonio in the 1930's, the statue appropriately vanishes in the 1980's as

Paul Hester: Joanna Troutman



the dismantling of the social programs initiated by Roosevelt continues without interruption.

Loss dominates Hester's understanding of how these monuments fit into the cultural landscape. He invites the viewer to consider with him how and whether patriotic values can survive in these pompous, inflated times, whether there is any credibility left at all to the myths of independence, hope, rugged self-definition. In the studio of the sculptor Elizabeth Ney, in Austin, he finds that the statues of Texas heroes look like figures in a warehouse, cold, neglected, haunting yet powerless. No longer do they possess the power to shape our imaginations or motivate our struggles. In "Mustangs," one of the most bravura pieces of sculpture on the University of Texas campus, the roaring horses form the backdrop and comment, ironically, on the mini-drama taking place in front of them as a camera crew and newscaster prepare for a shoot.

When the gap between the message of a monument and its context is too great irony, anger and sympathy enter Hester's vision. A solitary black man sits at the base of the marker in "Confederate Dead Monument" and seems both appropriate but also out of place. And in the second of the four photographs which comprise the "Alamo Cenotaph" group a bag-man leans into a trash receptacle at the monument's base. In the former photograph Hester captures a sense of trespass while in the latter the soaring hope of the monument seems oddly out of place for the homeless and jobless of the 1980's.

The arrangement of the photographs in Farish Gallery was less than hospitable. Certain thematic groups—State Cemetery, State Park, the campus of University Texas, the monument at Gonzales—were not grouped. One wandered from cubicle to cubicle locating photographs that belonged, more fittingly, together. But more distressing was the hesitancy of Turner to include certain textual elements in the exhibition. In a conversation with me, Hester made clear that he intended for a number of the photographs to be displayed with the inscriptions that appear on the monuments so that the sense of loss he had located in these pieces would not be missed. After the exhibition opened without the texts I phoned Turner who assured me that the texts would appear soon. On two subsequent visits, one only three days before the exhibition closed, the words were still not to be seen. Hester has used words intelligently in his photographs before, always to support his images, always to create a dialogue between the image and the word, between fiction and fact. *Photographs of Texas Monuments* would have been a stronger exhibition had his efforts to set words against these images not been shortcircuited.

FROM PSYCHO-POP
TO HUMANIST:
THREE WOMEN
IN DOCUMENTARY
PHOTOGRAPHY

By April Rapier

Author's note: Upon departure from seeing the exhibit reviewed below, I was politely approached by a young man and his friend, who asked (addressing me as "Scuze me, Mam") what was inside the gallery, and did it cost anything to get in. The disquieting reality of the question set in immediately, for I'm sure that, after my assurances in the affirmative and negative, the couple thoroughly enjoyed the show, and that they would have passed it by



Photo by Wendy Watriss

otherwise. I began to ponder the various enticements that might make it easier for people to get to powerful and moving exhibits such as this; "whatever it takes" came to mind again and again as idea after slick idea rolled by.

The Firehouse Gallery/Houston Women's Caucus for Art, *Contemporary Women in Documentary Photography: Liebovitz, Morgan, Watriss, March, 1986.*

This exhibit, organized by Debra Rueb, Diane Sibbison and Paula Dugan in conjunction with the Houston Foto Fest, underlines the wild stylistic diversity falling under documentary photography's aegis (a direction whose origins lie in the upheaval of the late 1960's and the intemperate indulgence of the early 1970's). Although not included, the work of Susan Meiselas, originally a fourth participant (who was unable to get work to Houston in time, due to her coverage of the Philippine election), substantiates the traditional correspondent end of the spectrum, whereas Liebovitz dominates the psycho-pop, cultural exposé domain. Watriss and Morgan stand in between, thoroughly examining (and in the process, understanding), from a resilient, humanist point of view, societal weakness and sorrow. Each voice speaks with passion and conviction, evinced in the excellence of the work. Better yet, the photographs go one step farther: the images are unforgettable on a visceral (if not wholly visual recall) level.

Gallery traffic was automatically drawn to Liebovitz's large, color-saturated Cibachrome pop shots of super stars and the like, in part because of their vibrancy, and due, as well, to a recognition factor. The images are available in her book, *Annie Liebovitz Photographs*; most were culled from the pages of *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*. A master-evocateur of arrogant posturing, Liebovitz's portraits also manage to leave the viewer with warm, familiar impressions of the (virtually) inaccessible. This holds especially true for the *Rolling Stone* years—*Vanity Fair* watered her work down to a comfortable, homogeneous, neat fit. In an era of eroto-phantsmagorical misrepresentations that accompany, as illustration, much of the written word, Liebovitz speaks well, through the playful portraits, of her subjects, and

as a far more important consideration, one feels certain that she speaks accurately. Liebovitz is brilliantly unrelent on device or formula, and has, over the years, created some of the most magical and appropriate pairings: Laurie Anderson in bathing suit and goggles, Mary Decker in shorts in the desert, nude John wrapped fetally around clothed Yoko, Bette Midler swaddled in roses, Lauren Hutton in the mud.

The audiences' staying power, however, was clearly with Watriss and Morgan, whose black and white pictures provided an intense experience that compelled lingering, returning, and a great deal of thought. Watriss hands the viewer, in spite of her convictions, a fairly neutral (journalistically speaking) piece of information, a methodology that assumes an audiences' intelligence, and allows it to draw its own inevitable conclusions. There is enormous power and credibility in this presentation of opinion (and way of being in the world). Therein lies Watriss' extraordinary ability to construct a stance that holds the viewer captive. Clarity of thought, and not just reflexive reactions, layer the pictures, balancing emotional weight with honesty

and fair-mindedness. The images center around the Viet Nam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C., and are an outgrowth of Watriss' work with agent orange victims (synonymous with Viet Nam vets). Symbols and iconology of the Memorial are expressively balanced with emotions and remembrances—from flowers to letters and tears—that arrive in a continuous stream. Watriss gives life to the contradictions of the Memorial and its congregation.

Ruth Morgan spent four years (as both sociologist, her former profession, and photographer) documenting maximum security at San Quentin Prison. The resulting 4 x 4 foot murals detail the claustrophobia, hopelessness and obsession (masquerading as a measure of control in a no-control, out-of-control situation) that constitute prison life. One wonders, faced with the probable artificiality of such a situation, security being an overriding concern, how any degree of communication necessary to and evident in the pictures, occurred. The images are graced with a startling directness, the possible result of four repetitive years; none of the classic subterfuge (resignation, self-pity, gleaming hatred),

the potential for which abounds in said circumstance, is offered or relied upon. Instead, the results of incarceration are examined in a detached manner. The tiny cells hold men pumped up with hatred, guilt, frustration, fear; contained in that same space are the manifestations of those emotions: hyper-organized stacks of supplies, photographs and other allowable decorations (or austere lack of), everything in miniature, the distilled personal and functional effects tainted by an overlay of order, the order of madness and confinement. Outside the cells, evidence of a menacing power structure, a hierarchy of exertion of will, shows up in jerring toughness, the sad affectation of maintaining a delicate and impossible balance of authority and survival in an ultimately powerless situation. One is left with a disturbing question regarding the authenticity of a casual blankness that prevails, for mastery in this arena is survival.

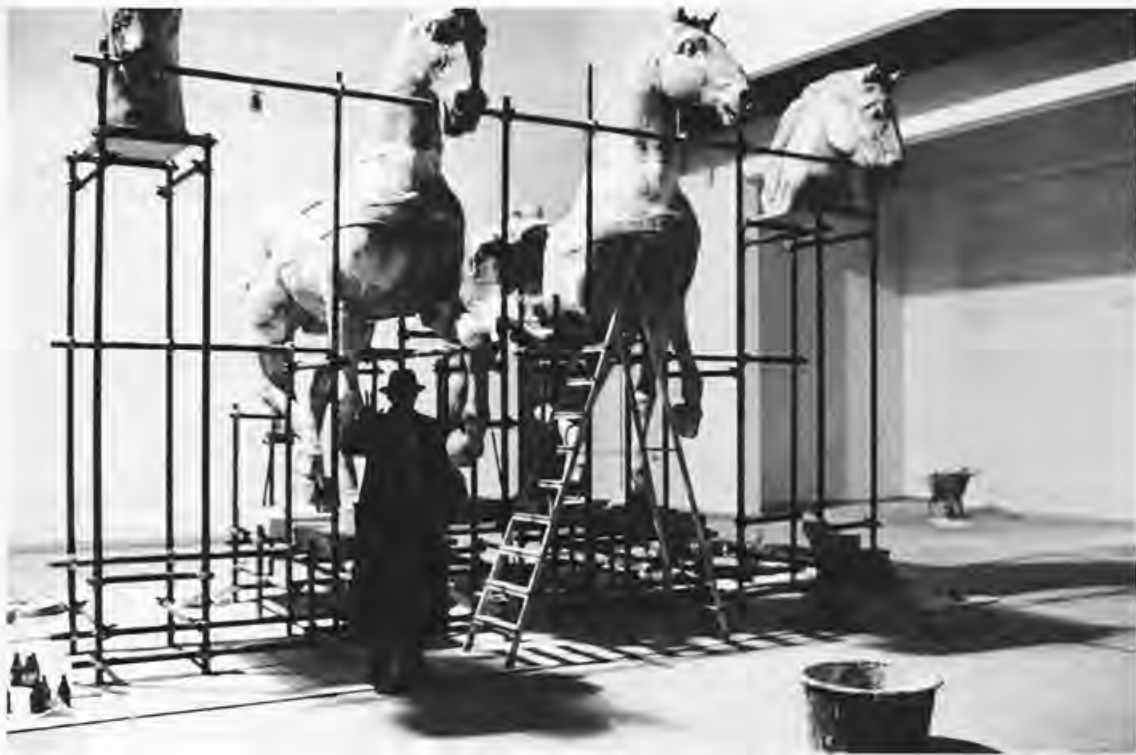
BOUNDARIES AND
LIFELINES

By April Rapier

Photography—New Boundaries: Bach, Blondeau, Haber and Faber The Drawing Room, March, 1986.

The Drawing Room gathered a strange and mostly wonderful group for Foto Fest, with some well-known and fairly obscure work included. Sandy Haber's long and narrow Type C photographs, vibrant with Mediterranean light and color, reminded one as much of painting as anything else, down to the titles ("Haitian Morning," 1983, "Pink Flowers and Claypot," 1980). The pictures were layered, a function of multiple exposure, and quite enchanting. Barbara Blondeau's long, very narrow fractured studies in movement, of landscapes, people, moments in time are by now well-established in photographic history, yet continue to intrigue. Some are solarized, in the case of a nude figure dancing across a black field, with a sweeping gravity that carries the viewer into the motion. Others, from the "Totem Series," are video-imitative; incorporating bands of light in rhythmic pattern, the pulsations create a





Robert Rauschenberg: Joseph Beuys, West Berlin, 1982

"soundtrack" of sorts, nearly audible, operative on a memory level. Lawrence Bach's beautiful black and white constructions, in which things float and hover dangerously near to reality, never allow the viewer to reach a comfort level. This is most obvious in "Grid Study #11," 1979. Meridel Rubenstein, *Lifelines*, Jack Meier Gallery, March, 1986.

Meridel Rubenstein's exhibit included support materials in the form of poems and rambling discourses (by the subjects), a statement of welcome clarity and simplicity, and collage/assemblage, one of which—a geiger counter that detected radioactivity in sand she provided—was unpleasant and frightening. The rest of the grouping, however, was an even, private look at her years in New Mexico, "...maybe meditations on relationships, displacement and change." One felt privy to some rather personal experiences, as though invited to read a journal. Termed "narratives," found objects were assembled before a copy camera and photographed; the 15 1/2 by 18 inch negative was printed using the palladium process. A great deal of soft, subliminal enchantment took place, a combination of the elements assembled, the placement of little ordinary treasures and other "things" laid out on borders, the eccentric obscurity which tied the rather disparate connections together. Some of the juxtapositionings seem an oversimplification—a baby shoe, portion of a skull, some sort of brain or heart wave index, and the title "Fetal Monitor" are obvious to the point of obscuring further interest. Yet, in precisely this open and honest way are relations pointed to, circumscribed, independent of rhetoric or exaggeration.

OMNIVEROUS INCLUSIVITY: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Robert Rauschenberg: Photographs 1949-1983 was shown at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, February 28-April 30.

By Robert Estep and Liz Mengel

After close to 40 years of active artistic achievement, Robert Rauschenberg seems to have reached a plateau similar to that occupied by Francis Bacon or the Rolling Stones: retrospectives abound and lifetime recognition awards tumble in. As with any retrospective conducted during an artist's lifetime a show such as this is necessarily tentative, less of a summing-up than a catching-of-breath in the midst of the continuing work itself. In Rauschenberg's case that work is vigorously prolific, the stuff of near monstrous legend, and yet for all its mass and energy, the oeuvre is only arguably progressive. Most dubious perhaps, in view of the telescoping of four decades which a retrospective allows is the absence of any discernible echoes, either in motifs or recurrent obsessions.

While the earliest photo in the show dates from 1949, during Rauschenberg's time at Black Mountain College, the remainder are predominantly from the early 1980s with a smattering from the '50s and late '70s. For Rauschenberg, pure photography was relegated to fringe status during the '50s through the '70s in favor of the painting and mixed media projects that essentially established his reputation. In 1979, while working with Trisha Brown's dance company, the necessity of producing over 1,000 photographs as part of the *Glacial Decay* wall of moving images, Rauschenberg became "addicted again."

These photographs serve to delineate Rauschenberg's continuing and singleminded concentration on the most pressing problems in art: line, space, composition, and picture plane with little or no regard to either documentation or the question of time. Two striking examples are the study of balcony, sea, tree, and donkey's head from Cozumel (1980), and clouds and building facades from Charleston, S.C. (1981). In somewhat surprising contrast to much of his recent mixed media work Rauschenberg's photographs are straight and unaffected, seen dead-on with 20/20 vision. Nowhere

to be found are his elaborate redefinitions of perspectives and there is only a rare and sparing use of natural distortion (N.Y.C., 1980, Boston, 1980, N.Y.C., 1981).

The two largest and most recent photographs in the exhibit are both in color and make use of a minimally collagist technique and seem to be included primarily as a reminder of a link with Rauschenberg's latest and possibly most ambitious mixed media work. Interestingly enough, both their size and brilliant coloring somehow manage to be overwhelmed by the black and white simplicity of such photographs as "Quiet House, Black Mountain" (1949), or the stunning piers of Atlantic City (1980).

Both Andy Grundberg and Sam Wagstaff, in recent talks at the Contemporary Arts Museum, have chosen to regard the photographs in this exhibit as "sketches" as summary images to be eventually cannibalized and digested into Rauschenberg's ongoing non-photographic work. And while such an argument for these images as essentially fragments of material has more than a passing academic interest for the viewer it is also typical of the sort of disclaimer which even Rauschenberg's most ardent admirers seem obliged to preface their praise. Again, it is to the somewhat curious thesis of "technical perfection as fatal flaw" to which Mr. Wagstaff appears to be referring when he notes that Rauschenberg may be "cursed with possessing perfect taste."

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the exhibit as a whole is its total lack of either an ideological or philosophic slant. To use Mr. Grundberg's marvelous phrase, Rauschenberg's "omniverous inclusivity" of the objects he perceives through his camera lens tends towards an ultimate levelling out in terms of value. Thus, the clear banality of the world of junk nestles side by side with overtly emblematic or totemic images in a seen universe of untroubled sameness. For example, to speculate on the possible irony between two 1981 photographs (one of Mobil Oil's Pegasus, found in New York City, and the other a charmingly awful Egyptian street sign of Anwar Sadat as a crudely bewinged Horus), is to miss the true point of Rauschenberg's interest in these objects as simple objects requiring no symbolic values beyond NYC/Egypt, 1981. Rauschenberg's delight in what the human eye can see, whether museum or back alley, whether exotic or familiar landscapes, goes a long way towards explaining both the technical lightness of his touch and the almost inhumanly perfect distance kept between his eye and his subject. (Three interesting exceptions are the photographs of personal friends Jasper Johns, Jean Tinguely, and the late Joseph Beuys,

which show Rauschenberg's warmth as well as his characteristic wit.)

ALAIN CLEMENT

Alain Clement: New Photographs. Graham Gallery. February 27-March 22. By April Rapier

Alain Clement exhibited during Foto Fest at the Graham Gallery, a space ideally suited to his pictures' aesthetic intellectualism. A great many philosophical, iconographical and ethereal concepts form a complex and often abstruse web that surrounds and cushions the images, sending out signals and clues. Yet, the work is accessible on numerous other levels, should the viewer be disinclined to participate as fully as Clement requests.

A physical description of the photographs' content does the images disservice. The technical level of Clement's work, however, is of interest on several counts. Its basis is sculptural, miniature realities constructed in a straightforward manner (as often as not, little if any attempt is made to hide wires and support structures that suspend pianos and the like, enabling them to float). Thematic issues such as recurring motifs and the use of photograms (which, in conjunction with large format photography, are quite removed from the genre) tangentially create illusion, reforming historical applications of elemental associations.

Subtle gold chloride and selenium toning processes account for the startling beauty and range of tones, from pinks to browns. Shadow,



Alain Clement: Untitled, 1986

gender, appropriation, metaphor exert strong if subliminal influence; the presence of Greek and Roman archaeological elements and found objects seem to refer to meditations on universal truths, working well in these highly referential microcosms. He has disallowed reality its point of departure, removing such elements from any accepted significance or agreed-upon definition. The work is singularly unique and stood out as such, during Foto Fest, amid much celebration of tradition. Clement's visionary alternate realities will endure.

CALENDAR

JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

EXHIBITIONS

Through June 22, Museum of Fine Arts, 1001 Bissonnet, the Sonia and Kaye Marvins Portrait Collection, Tue-Sat 10-5, Sun 12:15-6, Thur. 'till 9, 526-1181.

Through June 29, Houston Center for Photography, 1441 West Alabama, "Recoding Sexuality" and "Peter D'Agostino: Four-Part Interactive Video Installation, Double You (and X, Y, Z.),"Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat-Sun 12-5. 529-4755.

Through June 28, Diverse Works, 214 Travis, "Derek Boshier: Work from 1971-73," mixed media and photography; also,"Works by Steve Brudniak, William Farr, Marc Dennis, Kevin Cunningham, and David Kidd," Tue-Fri 10-5, Sat 12-4. **Through Sept. 7, Museum of Fine Arts,** 1001 Bissonnet, "The Texas Landscape, 1900-1986," photography, painting, and sculpture, Tue-Sat 10-5, Sun 12:15-6, Thur 'till 9. 526-1181.

July 3 through August 3, Houston Center for Photography, 1441 West Alabama, "Grand Illusions: New Large Format Polaroids," and "1985 Fellowship Winners: Dorinth Doherty, Paula Goldman, and Stephen Peterson," Wed-Fri 11-5, Sat-Sun 12-5. 529-4755.

July 12 through July 31, Merideth Long Gallery, 2323 San Felipe, "Introductions '86," work by Paula Fridkin, "Love, Paula," Tue-Sat 10-6. 523-6671.

July 12 through August 9, Graham Gallery, 1431 West Alabama, "Dick Blau: Scenes from Wisconsin Summer," also, "Lew Thomas: VCR Film Still Series," Tue-Sat, 10-5:30, 528-4957.

July 12 through August 9, Toni Jones Gallery, 1131 Berthea, "John Ellis: Color Abstractions," Mon-Sat, 9-5:30. 528-7998.

Through August, Plaza Gallery, 5020 Montrose Blvd, photographs by Valentin Gertsman, Tue-Fri 10-5, Sat 1-5.

WORKSHOPS/ CLASSES

Third Annual Artist Survival Workshop Series:
Sunday, June 8: "Selling Art as an Unaffiliated Artist," Art League of Houston, 1953 Montrose, 3-5 p.m. 523-9350. Fee: \$3.
Thursday, June 12: "Copyright Basics: Are You Protected?" Glassell School, 5105 Montrose, 7:30-9:30 p.m., 529-7659. Fee: \$3.
Thursday, June 19: "Preparing for Posterity: Estate Planning for Artists," Glassell School, 5105 Montrose, 7:30-9:30 p.m. 529-7659. Fee: \$3.
Saturday, June 21: "There's No Success Like Failure and Failure's No Success At All," Diverse Works, 214 Travis, 6-8 p.m., 223-8346. Fee: \$3.

LECTURES

June 3: Roy Flukinger, Curator of the Gernsheim Collection, will present examples of current work in photography by Austin artists. At HCP, 1441 W. Alabama, 7:30 p.m. 529-4755.

TELEVISION

June 23, 10:30pm: "Andre Kertesz: A Poet with a Camera," half-hour special, produced and directed by Houstonian Bela Ugrin, channel 8. Repeated June 28, 1:30pm.
July 16, 9pm: "Something out of Nothing: A Portrait of Six Houston Artists," including Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom (Manual), produced and directed by Paul Yeager, channel 8. Repeated July 20, 6pm.

By Visionary Joe

One currently can take risks in the following photographic genres: lacerated genitalia, non-Anglo Culture psychodramas, and certain extremes of abstract expressionist clutter. Amateurs may still find risks by printing on temperamental papers, placing plastic toys in tableaux and filming video images of President Reagan saying "countless". There are no risks left for anyone in architectural abstractions, text, plagiarism, still-life narrative sequence (there never was) and referentiality to painterly classics. There is still a slight risk in odd-sized frames.

Photographers find it hard to take risks because there is so little of it inherent in the medium. The famous "shooting a gun/shooting a camera" analogy is wrong with respect to risk: squeezing off a picture brings down less woe. Most photographers only risk that they'll run out of batteries. News photographers risk they'll catch a stray bullet, but worry over troubles with their cars. The photographers who feel they are taking the most risk are artists. The artist makes his work the crux of his identity, then scrounges for signs of approval among the blasé. The artist thinks she takes a risk by earning a pittance within a society that respects only personal income. Artists also think there's risks in art politics, and that it's possible to take risks in the actual content of their work.

But consider the paradox of finding a lifetime of risks in the photographic arts. Photography, a pimply adolescent in the gazebo of art, is set on the vast estate of the Humanities, in the fortunate Oligarchy of Academics, away from the troubled collectives of Misfortune and Abuse. In those mean places powerful ignoramus issue the dictates of real life and death, in phrases of fractured syntax. Bullies do not take risks, leviathans, superpowers, do not take many, and those in absolute power, theoretically, risk not one jot. By contrast the arts are nearly empty of risk too, for being inconsequential.

Now street photographers take some risks, the way it is in Houston. If mistaken for a Salvadoran, you could be flying south by morning, and an INS official would be learning how to use your flash. In a run-in with the Houston Cops, the odds are twenty to one, good chance of gunplay, but you're safe if there's only nineteen officers, and they're not certain whether you know the mayor. If you photograph weddings, you risk being attractive to the groom. In copy-work the bulbs blow out, or blow a fuse, and halt your grandmother's respirator. In nature photography you risk offending God, by misrepresenting flowers. Heaven help you if the Greeks had it right, so

that the myths were literal fact, and you are changed to a lightning bug rather than poisoned by dioxins.

In crafting photographic content, the risks are more remote. Risky photographs are those that would prevent you from running for President of the United States, all other things being equal. If you didn't think you had a future, risk would be nothing to you. An uncommitted person is a dangerous person. But say you'll be an artist all your life. You need to be thinking of your retirement.

If you generate something about which no-one knows what to say, and then you are followed by countless imitators, you know you have taken risk. But we want a way of recognizing risk while it is being taken. You can threaten human survival as a species. Poisonous microbes on the picture surface rush toward the viewer as the viewer jumps back, polluted with Thanatos. A visual form of heresy is another good risk, but it's hard to get a show if the work is good. I am certain you have not seen nihilism revealed in a platinum print.

Certain persons perceive a risk in knowing nothing of Walter Benjamin or Roland Barthes, but such persons are, after all, rare. A five-foot-tall friend of mine says that all risk is rooted in the phallus, and the fear of castration. That a five foot tall man would say this is risk.

You didn't see too much risk during Foto Fest. I thought the HCP took risks by mounting bad shows, but I was wrong: they got good reviews. Geoff Winningham took risks by showing bad color. He's the artist who makes his living out of doorways. Manual and Lew take risks by attaching their photography to philosophic concepts too vast to understand. But reaching for things you don't understand is good, compared to communicating things you understand, which is prosaic, or pointing out snippets of beauty, which could take all night. Caldwell's nudes in body stockings risk offending the twenty percent who are open-minded enough to look at nudes, by George Krause's standards, the twenty percent who count.

You are an artist, and the person you have just offended was the most important person to your career. It was the person who saw himself in you, or saw herself in your work, at any rate identified a legacy of influence in you, and praised you to the sky. You made a comment, took a risk, and you got squashed. Your patron's benevolence sheaths a core of insecurities like a rotten candied apple sports a red sugar glaze.

Photography's only decent risk is that of personally offending the overseers of art history's moat. You won't transcend the purgatory of alternative spaces unless you are very good, that is, very discrete. In hell there is no place to set your tripod. But in Houston's photographic art history heaven, such as I can glimpse, Peter Brown has a folding director's chair with his name on it. Gay Block has a couch. And there is the Queen, she is back from Europe. The devil's forces are disorganized, demoralized, and dissolute. Their forked tongues flick relentlessly with nearly imperceptible speech. They hide among the bins at the next print auction. They are slightly sceptical of art.

Photo by Paula Goldman



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