VERUSCHKA, NARCISISM, AND BANALITY/HESTER ON MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS/SPACES IN THE HEART OF TEXAS/MCCOMBIE ON HCP’S FELLOWS/PORTZ ON PORTZ/NEIDICH RESHOOTS THE ARCHIVES/LA GRANGE DIALECTICS/ SCHILLING ON DC PHOTOGRAPHY/REVIEWS: MISRAH, FULTON, LIPSCOMB & LIPSCOMB, TPS ANNUAL JURIED EXHIBITION, FAMILY/EXTENSIONS
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WHEN YOU PATRONIZE OUR ADVERTISERS, TELL THEM YOU SAW IT IN SPOT
MESSAGES

Late summer in Houston brings a drenched heat, which settles in like lethargy, retarding its ability to deplete, as a teacher. I look back to last spring semester for inspiration, and ahead to the fall for hope of renewed vigor. Photographic vigor would seem to rely to an extent, upon the resolve of physical well-being, which vaporizes in any extreme. Boredom is yet another counterpoint to resolve. In August, Houston empowers my own work and that of my colleagues, often roughly dependent upon travel for impetus; it is merely the framework of working for a living and the obligatory routine that places us within the vacuum of ritual, which makes it so. My students seek inspiration out of necessity—the necessity of learning, competing, succeeding academically. There is a measure of desperation in this manner, the gathering of externalized phenomena that, ephemerally, yet the results are heartening (see David Reiman’s picture on page ten). Moreover, although student work, almost without exception, is of student caliber, it is far more enervated and alive than the programmed, careful, data-oriented methodology which informates established imagemaking. That the work coming out of the photographic programs is risky, naive, at times incomprehensible and usually exciting is old news. What surprises me is the level of complacency and hesitation surrounding, suffocating the old guard’s conceit of work.

As artist, I must include myself in the second category. As critic, I find such generalizations when they could be applied to me. Ironically, the two must eventually do battle, whether under the guise of self-editing, honest opinions solicited or offered, or when turning a critical eye public (see David Percy, The Othel D. Stagg, page fourteen), it is a concept that most of us deal with definitively: Percy has neither the time nor the patience for such plots. His strategy in his writing as in his art is one of honesty, absurdity, and incisiveness (carefully planned) endeavorment in the form of experimentation. As a 1986 Houston Center for Photography (HCP) Fellowship winner, he created and is currently exhibiting the result of his grant: a series that are formative and impermanent, laid them open to much criticism and dismay, that they are new, plain, rough, difficult to comprehend, and more than the programmed, careful, data-oriented methodology which informates established imagemaking. That the work coming out of the photographic programs is risky, naive, at times incomprehensible and usually exciting is old news. What surprises me is the level of complacency and hesitation surrounding, suffocating the old guard’s conceit of work.

Houston Foto Fest is only two weeks away now, this year concurrent with the Society for Photographic Education’s National Conference and several other important events. Modeled after the Mabi de la Plata in Paris, Foto Fest is a month-long gathering of photographers, city wide exhibitions, curators, collectors, students, educators, dealers, and a diverse photographic audience. From the hometown, one is aware of the excitement, afloat, but even more so, one is impressed by the work that goes into staging a musicale of this magnitude against. Sponsorship and participation are strong, across the board. Last year’s glitches, although minor, have been targeted and directed. It promises to be memorable four weeks, and to encompass several philosophical hybridizations. If it doesn’t kill you, it’ll make a believer of you.

When I look back on my year as president of the Houston Center for Photography (in six months or so), memory will translate the effort, cajoling, bringing together disparate elements, and general, full time nature of things as business as usual. In the absence of an executive director, the membership at large has pitched in, and the result—a collaborative, energetic, and creative effort—although great news, is hardly surprising. These are the players who founded HCP 40 years ago, and while the numbers and points of view have expanded, we remain a membership organization. Many of us are artists and teachers; others are many of the business world. Having never relinquished control aesthetically or functionally, no massive effort was required to coordinate the continuation of an exciting, solid course. Heartfelt thanks are offered, however, to all those who have volunteered an enormous amount of time to the various tasks at hand, including the fire cleanup. Mention the word ‘fire’ in conjonction with art and hearts beat out of control. To put it mildly, we were lucky. Late one Saturday night about a month ago, I received a call from a nonchalant voice on my phone machine saying something about a fire at HCP. A gas leak in the mechanical room had begun a fire hot enough to melt the air conditioning vents in the ceiling, because of an alarm system and a faulty fire department. (These men knew their way around important walls), no one was injured and there was absolutely no damage to any art. The aforementioned heat wave did not make the necessary inventory evacuation, prior to repainting and airing, much fun. Yet this day, as most others, was characterized by the essentials being handled in an orderly and well-attended manner. We remain in competent balance between the day-to-day and the weight of one’s professional responsibilities, energies that founded and sustained the Center as a remarkable phenomenon which, once established, continues to grow even more remarkable.

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FALL 1987
NARCISSISM AT THE STAGE OF MARTYRDOM, OR: “WAS IT FOR THIS THAT I SPENT TWO YEARS STUDYING COLOUR AND COMPOSITION?”

By Cynthia Freeland


In their recent work, Vera Lelhoffer and Holger Braltsch depict the Post-Modernist model of their generation. Veruschka’s work, as she describes herself, is a "pragmatic" and "essential" statement of her own identity. She defies the "masculine" stereotype of the "angry young man" and instead presents a more subtle and introspective approach to her work.

Together, these artists have created a series of images that challenge traditional gender roles and explore the complexities of identity in the modern world. Their work invites viewers to consider the nature of beauty and the role of the artist in shaping society.

SOFT

In conclusion, this essay presents a critical analysis of the work of Vera Lelhoffer and Holger Braltsch, exploring their use of color and composition and their depiction of the Post-Modernist model. By examining their work, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by artists in the modern world and the role that art plays in shaping our perceptions of beauty and identity.

SPEAKERS

FALL 1987
bution; it was the who conceived of and began doing the body painting, and in this book many of the photographs are accompanied by her preparatory sketches. However here, once again, we see the male artist enacting inscriptions on the spectacle of the female body. This appears to be a familiar story; it's Weston and Modotti, Steiglitz and O'Keeffe, Man Ray and Lee Miller. Harry Callahan and Eleanor, all over again. Stanton must sees this, but drops the subject like a hot potato. "For such work, who could imagine a woman invisible behind the camera and a man in front, trying to disappear into the image? Not easily." (p. 93). It's worth trying to think for a moment, who why? why didn't they try painting Trulsock even once? Won his body not too hairy to take on the textures of the paintiputat. Was it fat and ugly? Who's hey about seeing his private parts? Did he lack the requisite physical endurance? Was he temperamentally uninterested in merging into trees and doorways? Why didn't he try her desire to be invisible? Are they commenting on the fact that in patriarchal culture it's typically men who look and women whose body is the encoded visual object of their domination, their objectification, saying since she's doing it herself, "I feel that is not my problem." (p. 149). There's a kind of at his faceless, eyeless creations—images which are "inevitable" in reflecting back the "ego" of the painter (p. 147). Amidst all this weighty theoretical nonsense one has to wonder about the sexual implications of this strenuously physical, male-gendered collaboration. Trulsock's very fears of ego-loss may stem from an enacting of death, a link which has been clarified by Baratelle as follows:

Disillusion—the expression accompanies disillusion. H.C. (His familiar phrase) linked with novelty in the process of disillusion, the male partner has generally an easier task, with the female partner to preserve. The passive female is essentially the new that one is absorbed as a secondary partner. The male partner preserves the illusion of the passive partner means one thing only: it is passing the way for a fusion where both are satisfied, existing at length the same degree of illusion. The whole burden of illusion is to destroy the self of the other partner of which we are in same form. (p. 93)

Sonny sees something poignant and generalizable in these images in the sacrifice of beauty and its merger into vanguardous; hence her description of the image as a "monument" or as "naivetticism at the stage's edge." But a naivistastic manner like this is entirely a martyred in the service of a choice which is genetically self-absorbed, and ultimately sterile.

Footnotes
1 Vera Leidholt's book after discovering rampant commercialization (95). 2 Sept 1977. On Photography. New York: 977, p. 93, p. 359. 3 Jonathan Cott in Cott's book tells how Veurscholke was advised, early on, that one only needed, one real "good idea" to succeed—advice she still seems to be heeding (Artax-
5 Cynthia Freidman is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston. Her most recent book is "A Sensational Separation," appeared in the June 1987 issue of "SPOT."
in this image is the "eclectic crop-
ppling" of the soldi-
ners, each of whom is
represented by a photo-
graph of himself. The
viewer is meant to recog-
nize the individual soldi-
ers by their distinctive
features, and to interpret
the image as a portrait.

Emerson's use of visual
elements to convey
meaning is consistent
throughout his work. In
this case, the use of
photography, the
arrangement of figures,
and the overall compo-
sition all contribute to
the intended message.

The image is presented
in a这种方式 that it can be
read as a narrative,
with each figure playing
a role in the story. The
viewer is invited to
interpret the image as
a whole, rather than as
individual elements.

The use of photography
in this context is
significant, as it allows
Emerson to convey
timeless themes through
the lens of the camera.

In conclusion, Emerson's
work in "The Blind
Nursemaid's" is a
masterful example of
photography as a
literary medium. He
uses visual elements to
convey complex
themes, creating a
world that is both
realistic and
mythical.

Mary Ellen Mark's
"The Blind
Nursemaid's"

Mary Ellen Mark. Ute Child, 1980

The Blind Nursemaid's (1980)

Harry Gruyaert. Mark. Wam, Belgium, 1970

The Blind Nursemaid's (1980)

Alveld Yatsyzad. Wol. Werel, Lebanon, February, 1984

The Blind Nursemaid's (1980)
In reference to Weinberg's theory of seeing "daily life," it is perhaps more difficult to accept seeing real people self-represented as mass-marketed models of "daily life." If there is no art then it is at least artificial.

Representation of reference to past works of art, intended or not, arises in Jean-Marie Simon's "11 yr. Old Girl Lifting a 100 lb. Bag of Coffee." This image in form and context reminds one of the harmony in Millet's "The Gleaners," an ironic feeling in terms of the facts as presented in the title. Simon's other images of young people are usually mediated with a more contemporary stereotypically minor effect. A second exception is "Soldier Dancing with Indian Girl at Independence Day Dance." The girl's formal body language, downcast eyes, and somber face seem to contradict the spirit of "Independence."

Simon Morssar's work merits viewing on the basis of the consistency of strong and persistent message in her work. Her images of Nicargua are not without stereotypes and are not necessarily original in approach; they are loaded and delivered with a masterfully artful touch. Yves Morvan and Alfred Yakhobzadeh are both represented in the exhibit with photographs of the war in Lebanon. Morvan's photographs use fortuitous and romantic lighting and drama (a man carrying a dead baby, lifted in one hand) which mimic film stills. It is the facts of the titles that give credibility to his work. Yakhobzadeh's photographs move closer; several show the photograph taken confronted by a participant. Soldiers posed with their weapons look staged. Again, it is the reality of the textile which enables the work to have an impact on the viewer.

David Burnett's work is coherent and competent in style but unremarkable in content—romantic, sports-related (baseball) imagery. Having a background in war (Vietnam) photography, perhaps this is the idealized "hometown" to which he and other Viet wanted to return.

Gilles Peress' work is more about sensual color and dramatic effects. Only upon reading the photographer's statement does one realize that he is documenting rituals that are disappearing from the lives of Indians in Guatemala. Armed with this knowledge, one searches the beautiful images for content and discovers that two ceremonially garbed figures hovering over a fire are wearing Converse high-tops on their feet.

Several of Rio Bianco's documentary photographs of Brazil also seem to be more about form and pose, much subtler in color. "Woman of Bérés" is holding her head and lying on the bed in such a way as to give no information about herself. It is from the commercial floral bedspread (in focus) in a room with peeling wallpaper out of focus that one gets information about her life. The pages of newspapers and magazines (out of focus) tucked into these otherwise bare walls make one curious about her as a reasoning being.

Alex Webb's photography seems to be of a less documentary, more individual image nature—about dramatic lighting and color. His work in the show is not consistent or coherent.

Jeff Jacobson's work is consistent in vision if not in content. While his subjects are frequently as bizarre as those of Mark, they are not threatening or challenging any preconceived notions of reality. They are glimpses into a peripheral world as well as statements. In some cases, about the lack of reality in our current world.

T.R. Martin is a writer/biographer working in Houston.
By Cynthia Freeland

In her curatorial statement April Rapier remarks that this exhibit, "greatly resembles a family album." It doesn't actually, but it is interesting to think about the differences. Family albums are weak where this show has strengths: in portrait studies or individual narratives, in expressive images conveying the "feel" of spontaneous interactions, or in perceptive reflections on what it's like to be a family member. Often the photographer for the family album is the one person who is missing from its pages. Although we can reconstruct the attitudes, identities, and relationships of the "lost person" from the photographs, the pictures themselves don't effectively reveal that person's own intentions. In this show, perhaps unusually but I think happily, the best emotionally reflective work on family life concerns father/daughter relationships.

The strong work here merits more attention, but first some words about the show's weaknesses. The exhibit seems unevenly edited. As hung, it is crowded-looking. "Family" is admittedly a very loose organizing concept. Here it is limited to focus on contemporary American family life. This makes the inclusion of Giacomelli's scenes of Italian peasants, many shot in the 50's and 60's, so out of place as to seem disruptive because several people are represented by only two images. It is hard to get any sense of what their work is all about. Even in Rick Williams' four images there is confusion about who the children are, how they are related to him and to each other. We need more of a story, more context.

The theme dictates that the best work of this exhibit is intensely personal and interior. This doesn't necessarily mean it must involve the photographer's own family. See below, for example, on Schwartzengberg. Conversely, both family "outsiders" and "insiders" have some work here which is so stiff, posed, and controlling that it blunts sympathetic readings. Are the people seen by Brignoli, Cordell, and Nathan having problems with one another, or is the photographer imposing on them a preconceived notion of their relationship? We just don't have enough to go on for interpretation or evaluation.

Narrative and individual portraiture occupy Rubin, Schwartzengberg, and Chang: Rubin has constructed a partial chronology of her grandmother's life, building from her Polish immigration/passport photo, to 1920 and finishing with a photograph taken on her last day of life in the hospital, in May of this year. Rubin conveys a strong feel for life's memories in a sort of Jewish matriarchy. Although the grandmother is seen with her husband, most images show her with female relations—daughters, granddaughters, sister-in-law, great-grandmothers, during various holiday celebrations—Hanukah, but not, so far. This matriarchal structure also frames the photographer herself. We see her, presumably, as a little girl on grandma's lap in 1957, and then again as posed adult by the elderly woman's side in the 60's. The final image is especially moving because it is Rubin who has brought her "family" to the hospital bedside, in the form of photographs placed around the room. Images replace themselves there. They stand in for life at the scene of death, and tell of death after a widely enjoyed life. Schwartzengberg, more than the others in the show, brings the larger social world into the family context. In telling the life history of Dolores Mahler, a strong woman who struggled in her factory assembly-line job to keep her family going. She has been bent by problems, varying from the death of her husband (from alcoholism) to union pension disputes. Schwartzengberg combines photographs made with bits of text, news clippings, diary entries, and poetry written by Dolores' son William Misher to construct an ambitious, complex, and multi-sided narrative—part of an ongoing project which could well become an exhibition of its own. Chang's pictures show her 16-year-old daughter Allison, who is becoming increasingly aware of ways she is left behind by being handicapped. She speaks in her statement about the need for such children to spend time with their peers. She also describes the more-than-ordinary difficulties of "letting go." Some images depict a happy Alison with friends, as at a Special Olympics' match. There are also lovingly close yet objective portrait studies. These seem both to reach out, almost clutching at, the growing adolescent, and to recognize her need to be seen on her own for who she is. A blurred shot of Allison in the bathtub is an acute rendering of this parental ambivalence.

We see "felt moments" of family interactions in the images of David Reimer (Julie Newton, and Don Youn-ger). Reimer's photographs capture quiet moments on the brink of movement. His use of sharply-angled perspective prods us into family scenes as participants. We become, for the moment, an adult looking down at a boy eagerly waiting outside a screen door, a child gazing up in fascination at the ritual of grandmother's braiding her long hair, or perhaps an older child regarding the baby on mother's lap. Newton's pictures are sad and strained, the most "anti-family" album shots here. She shows a smugly possessive little girl atop her huge pile of dolls and stuffed animals, a tired mother with infant in shot probably too much to breathe. Lange, or a father worried and worn, holding the hand of his sleeping son in the hospital. One fascinating image records a bizarre Christmas scene: with some family members ripping open packages but atomically-unrelated relatives. There is a major discordant element (what Barnes would notice as "punctum"), with a trio on the
couch hugging with what seems to be infinite tragic resignation. What's going on here? Are they whirled out, with holiday blues or is it truly something more serious?

Weinger's "Mercedes Portfolio" is also disturbing. He presents a childhood filled with moments of loss, hurt, boredom, or rage. His pink-toned gristy images create a feel of immediate distance that is periodically reinforced by the out-of-focus closeup. It is as if the gifting is hard to get into this little girl's head but we can't. She lives in another world. And it is not nice. The unexplained aura of loss is powerful, recalling a childhood we might prefer to repress, when we felt confused and out of control.

Three of the most interesting projects here deal with father-son relationships: Uchters' "Family Letters" series superimposes a brief "generic" letter from his father with a host of noir blood, a psychedelic and some cliches to conjure up a lament about the shallowness of the obstacles in this particular male American relationship. As we view the classic "generic" image-the school portrait-a posture less a "heron" seen from below, a drawing of raw sexual anatomy we relive some scenes after a son seeking insight from his father, how to be strong and good, what to be when he grows up, how to deal with love and sexuality like again and again he is brushed off with the postcard message: "Son this is an example of what we talked about Love, Dad." It is as if this longed-for talk never happened, or it happened to Dad's satisfaction but with no chance for questioning and reciprocity. This is a chilling vision of sexual naivete in our culture, compounding in to honest admission of men's needs for real emotional intimacy.

Hexter uses color filmstrip: the images vary from two to eight images per frame, building up the introduction of language into his little son's life. The child is born with a large colored plastic letters at times proudly creating his own word "BIG" being noticeable. At others the long words or juxtapositions (such as "SAVE THE SLAVES") seem to be confusing the child, sometimes we witness the actual letter "handing down" from father to son of the awkwardness of language. Once the son is given wandering freely into a swimming pool where letters float about meaninglessly joyous and erratic return to the words-the impression is enhanced by the side-wise printing used here. In a sequence where the child's mother appears, she watches fondly from the background where she is engaged in a garden project. She sits astride-legged across the back of the images, and Hexter's angle of vision places his son as if newly emerged from her body, about to begin his initiation into the "Law of Father" (with letters ominously spelling out the distinction "MOTHER/CHILD"). Despite the threat in some of these imposed verbal juxtapositions, it is heartening to think that the next generation of young American boys will be gifted with the communicative fathers Uchters is.

It is impossible to doubt that Gelfert's son Carl is also more lucky in having a father who is, albeit malnourished, playfully and curiously so. Gelfert's large color images depicting Carl amidst domestic clutter are so zany and vivid that they dominate the exhibit. Gelfert explains that, as a doctor's husband, he has become his son's primary caretaker. In frustration he turned his camera on his son. Carl, a sort of perfect Gerber baby, responds with consistent wide-eyed wonder as he is covered in dripping chocolate or threatened by cars of Raid, shards of broken glass, even open red-hot ovens. Gelfert puts himself into the situations as co-conspirator or exhausted TV watcher. The colors are hardly bright with a neonblick. TV image counterparts operate in most shots, sometimes as subtly as a hammer blow. This is especially true in one scene: Gelfert sits, in uniform, table with Carl, before them are a mountain of fluidly white rice littered with GI laws and fake blood, with a "TV screen hamee-victim just behind. Carl watches with complete appropriateness puzlement. In one hilarious scene Gelfert ("Super Dad") poses in the kitchen as both builder, via-om-cleaner and weight lifting he-man, while Carl looks on in awe (I confess to being shocked at how much energy my young son is Ecedrial rivalry erupting so soon, or is this just honest toddler parent provocation?) The cleverest conceit of all is a multiple-image print showing Gelfert at work in his darkness, where Carl is being simultaneously "exposed" and "washed" multiple already-finished baby clothes lines on the wall behind. The visual puns on "originals," "reproductions," "exposure," and "creativity" are wild and irresistible.

An afterthought: I was struck by the startling absence of affairs in these pictures. There are hints of adult-sitter rivalry in Matusow's work, or of boyish homeplay with guns in Briscoe's, but no extended series of work shown here concentrates on these crucial family ties. Has the nuclear family shrunk to one central child, or is the real new extended family the extended sibs, half-siblings, half-siblings all and the resultant complications just too much of a challenge for photographers to undertake? I hope not.
HCP 1986
FELLOWSHIP
WINNERS' EXHIBITION

Images by Reel Castillo, Bill Frazier, Frank Isaac, and David Portz exhibited at the Houston Center for Photography from July 3 through August 19, 1987.

By Mal McCamble

Has the passion for text and appropriation taken unsavory sway over photographers? The HCP exhibition of the four 1986 fellowship winners—Reel Castillo, Bill Frazier, Frank Isaac and David Portz—is a public meditation on currently fashionable French and high-theories and art history. The work on view is principally synthetic photography, incorporating appropriation, text, and narrative storytelling as essential complements to the imagery. Although one might deplore the loss of the innocent days of Houston photography—straight, unmanipulated, almost classical in the 1940s—this work signals a new, more international consciousness among the locals. The problem seems to be that although they are learning the public, they are not yet fluent.

David Portz’s work is the farthest from conventional photography. In fact, he himself has taken no pictures here, but has cut advertising photographs from the New York Times Magazine and collaged them onto marbled paper. These collages are then mounted in elaborately tacky gold frames. Portz explains in his artist’s statement that these photos-collages form rebuses that when sounded out illustrate clichéd sayings, and relate his work to semiotics. However, these assemblages are far from a profound gloss on the discipline. Portz states that his pictures are deliberately “all cliche.” The pictures are all banal. “Well, no argument here. The real problem is that they are not replaceable as rebuses. Did someone switch the wall labels around? The only way these rebuses communicate clearly is on the purely visual level through the associ- ative juxtaposition of images. I did enjoy the decontextualization of these banal and advertising images from the Times; the romantically dressed male model primitively posed next to a puerile poster emphasizes the shallow surface qualities of both. (An ancillary question: has his work raised only why only inappropriate from the Times Magazine? Portz does not explain why he limited himself to this one upscale publication.)

This is intellectually ambitious work that makes meaningful visual art. I understand that Portz is a poet and thinker of great power; it would seem, however, that he is so obscenely literate that it impedes his ability to communicate through visual art. I kept wondering who he thought his audience was for these rebuses. I suspect it is only himself.

Frank Isaac’s color portraits of pop-culture are into the genre of narrative portraiture and inject a delightful note of levity into the show. These are straight photographs of well-dressed with short statements by each mounted below the picture. Each psychic has read Isaac’s fortune narratively differently, ranging from the rather Ducrucci man who explained that Isaac was actually from another planet and would be called back by the space fleet at 3:30 in the morning to the sharply turned-out woman who told him to place $5 on the table and make a wish. “No,” she says, “you can’t wish to have your five dollars back.” Although Isaac’s work lacks the intellectual ambitions of Portz's
it is light and funny in the classic tradition of Southern narrative. Oddly, the most technically beautiful images in this series are photographs of the mechanical fortune teller from the Santa Cruz boardwalk amusement center in California. Perhaps Isaac found it easiest to orchestrate color and light with these non-human subjects.

Isaac's work fits somewhere between linguistics and narrative. His pieces consist of a long series of photographs and short texts about his sister Cynthia, who was killed at the age of 18 in a horrible car accident. These pictures are as much expressions of grief and the need for his love as they are documentary. I found them to be affecting on several levels, particularly as the subject was unknown to me before I started looking at the series. Isaac's text is to be read obliquely. Incongruous images, such as Cynthia lying in her cot bed, lifeless, placid, and carefully posed, with a staged photograph of her in her high school cheerleader outfit.

Isaac's texts are both maudlin and moving, with sentiments like "This only happens to others," and "Everything that dies someday comes back." One panel contains a painfully vivid text narrated by the woman who was in the wrecked car along with Cynthia. Each photograph is paired with a poem or an incantation. Isaac's painful memories amply illustrate that "those who love the gods love the young."

Bill Frazier's studio "simulations" of famous Monet paintings are provocative meditations on the identity of art in the age of reproduction and the function of photography itself as a replicator. He states that he has been influenced by the writings of Jean Baudrillard, and that his work draws from the series of Brecht's essay of the same name. These are recreations of studio artifice in which Frazier has constructed tableaux made of paint and paper in his studio that mimic the appearance of some of Monet's most famous paintings, which he then photographs. The tableaux are modified to reflect the serial paintings that Monet made of the same subject, such as Rouen Cathedral and the haystacks.

As Frazier points out, Monet is an especially appropriate artist to reproduce as he was himself compulsively repetitive. I am not convinced as Frazier is that in fact Monet painted little or no art, but rather painted in the studio from other paintings—art historical documentation is unclear on that—but his point that Monet's art about art is well taken. Frazier is extending the metaphor one step further.

Frazier states that he wishes to deconstruct the myth of originality in making his simulacra, but is haunted by his own past: these photographed tableaux are themselves works of art, even if they are art about art about art. Though he is too facile for his stated aim, Frazier's works are nonetheless provocative.

Mel McLure is an art historian and critic living in Austin, Texas.
By David Portz

You, the reader, will immediately recognize that I can gain nothing by writing a review of my own work. Each reader will be constantly alert for any bias that I should exhibit. The good reactions the qualities of my art had already elicited will be thrown into doubt by my articulating them in their full refinement. Indeed, I fear any esteem I have heretofore gathered as a writer and a critic, by this single self-serving lapse of taste.

But the reader will also recognize that I can do the least harm of any critic by attempting an assessment of my own art. In a small art community such as Houston’s, there is always the danger that written criticism will consist of back-brushing and recommendations, or elaboration unmerited praise. In either case the community is deprived, because of unpalatable coincisions and confessions of personality, of a thoroughgoing, objective criticism of an artist’s work. Here to¬day, gone tomorrow, the judgment is apparent—I can hardly see the savor of self-harmony in the greatest space. Nor can I expect myself, grow fond of myself in response to melodious strains. I am constitutionally free of that hunger for current favor so ruinous to taste. I will render a cool appraisal of my work. I will hold to a critical attitude that might make the work’s failings and strengths. I promise.

One conception of the critic’s task is that he should put himself in the place of the artist if he is sitting in his chair and examine what the artist wished to achieve. From this sympathetic viewpoint, the critic may evaluate the work’s strengths and failings. Sharing the thoughts of the artist during the entire period that he was producing his art, I become the unscrupulous expert on its content. This bias, I do not hide. However, upon the exhibition of his work, becomes just one of a number of interpretations. This invisibility occurs because every artist will be blind to certain aspects of his nature, and there is the operation of his unconscious to take into account. There is human foible, which may disable the artist from remembering important details of even his most significant work. One can only hope therefore, that my peculiar qualifications as a critic can recover some of the artist’s insights which are unattainable by his.

The course of the artist’s career, I have observed Portz flitting from one art form to another—photography, and eventually, visual art. The artist has adopted a different style for each of his series: 1) subject, for only a matter of months. His behavior is consistent with the artist’s state of mind is said to imply that he is not as yet matured, as a visual artist. A gradually unfolding aesthetic, a signature style. By contrast, Portz develops—each series from a discrete idea. Exhibits it, then casually abandons it for something else. He has a photographic aesthetic; he leaves no traces. It would be a difficult task to trace a connection between Portz’s methodology and that of the Conceptual artists—by the de-emphasis of hand-crafting, the examination of the media, the elimination of the individual talent. That I feel certain that Portz would deny a connection to a movement already largely abandoned—hold him at a distance in the Sixties. For the same reason, I think he would overly vouchsafe that he has found interesting much Postmodernist—his visual work. An artist should be careful sometimes in his associations.

But in fact, Portz is instinctively distanced from participating in any particular movement, ideology, or creed. He is sensitive, perhaps dis¬posed, about being left behind as an artist working intuitively. In this era of reenacting faith (Evan¬gelism), he is dis¬enchanted. Observa¬tion—rational, that art cannot serve him as a surrogate religion. As such, he can only believe in a project while he is immersed in it. While it is automatic, while he is too involved to fall back and notice its critical lacks. He plans for all the aspects and emotions that are not expressed in an object on which he is working: he loses his momentum if he takes a moment’s thought. Despite his sus¬picions of visual art’s essential vagueness, he is nevertheless sensitive of emotion to express. In each of his series, his effort at meaning and the inconsequence he perceives in that effort, shines forth.

Portz’s current work is not about life so much, as about reading. It is not the revelation of a different culture which this critic considers generally the most stimulating art. It is blind and obsolete: a woefully curious examination of America’s own. He has chosen to restate the refrains of a type of puzzle popular in the earliest part of this century. When perhaps we were less reliant on printed words. The refrains, col¬lages, are arranged to bear syllables which were originally assigned to them by the artist. The pictures from which the collages are con¬structed are entirely from The New York Times Magazines. They are middle-of-the-road, consumer-oriented, class-campaigning, bald images suit¬able for winning away a Sunday after¬noon. There is little reason to get wrapped up in the component pictures of any refrain. They are cut from their original settings so that they only take the direction sup¬plied to them by Portz. One of my primary criticisms of the work is that the original article and articles context have been eliminated from the examination of the viewer. The New York Times Magazine is not decon¬structed for anyone who is not already very familiar with it. I would prefer that the refrains were each accompanied by a little book which showed the pages from which the images were missing. The lack of context puts a strict limitation on the work’s usefulness for writers of critical theory.

Portz assigns each panel of pic¬tures to mean only one thing; each refrain functions as a word equation. Now, many amateurs, when one of their works has been sold, will admit that they had thought it to have a particular meaning—though they’ll con¬tinue to read at their patrons’ different formulations. But Portz would have us believe that his meanings are art and exist explicitly in a work. More than Gaimnerttst the terror of warfare, Portz says that each has only one meaning to give. The viewers find those mean¬ings unsatisfactory—the solutions to the refrains are grim. What’s more, viewers can hardly ever at the intended ‘word equations’ by the use of our intuitions and lan¬guage skills the meanings seem arbitrarily assigned. It is certainly no more arbitrary to say that a group of pictures signify the phrase. ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever’ than it is to say that South Korea is a democracy. It is simply that viewers expect each series of images to mean a thing, to cumulate to a settable thought instead of the dry equation in its title. For this reason the refrains, notwithstanding their definiteness, seem vague. In fact, of all the pictures exhibited in the gallery during this period, those refrains were the most vague. They had the sanctity relation to obvious meanings, to literal, poten¬tial sense. The artist provides no help at all on this matter. He says that some secret meaning hide outside the viewer’s understanding of a picture in order for the picture to be art. One gathers that he considers vagueness a trick of the artist’s profession. The nature of all the other works in the exhibition was that they exhibited a communicative intent: of anecdote, of situation, of material space, or at least, of tex¬ture. Communicativeness, literal¬ness, are contained in the photography, and photographic art like the vagueness is a cornerstone of Portz’s pervasive relation to communica¬tion, in which he gives his viewers only clichés. It is an outrage, or a piece of meagerfulness, or a very odd joke.

The shorter refrains, for example, the candy mound on the voyeur’s shoulder sometimes gave a sensa¬tion of magic, or be he more exact, a sensation of Saw terrorists, many Surr¬reallists, because of their interest in the human subconsciousness, created juxtapositions of objects or images to give their viewers an ap¬prehension of a metaphysical sense, a status of irrational connec¬tions. By contrast, the echoes of metaphysics seem damped out, damped out, of Portz’s larger refrains: no comprehensive mystery is left. There are too many pictures for the viewer to see a connection or find a narrative, though their combination suggests one exists. The refrains works stands in contrast to the aesthetic that, for example, I practice as a writer; I attempted conscious control of all my mean¬ings. The refrains cannot beguile their viewers, they do not offer mul¬tiple meanings so that interpretation is required. They refuse to avoid in misterization, a fundamental tool of the visual artist. Instead, the mean¬ing is left in a heap. As a conse¬quence, the work is a failure in perhaps the most fundamental man¬ner that people relate to art; it does not lead as a metaphor, an en¬capsulation of meaning in there is cer¬tainly no punning of meaning that implies magic or the human spirit. I find them, personally, dry as dust.

The same actual, and I must allow for the possibility, that there is an element of humor in this work. Paul Hacker has made the suggestion that Portz’s photographs generally look
as though he had fun doing them (said at the time that Portz used to take photographs. And similar to much work displayed by Hester. Portz's exhibitions have the appearance of very serious work. Comments needfully delivered by the artist in notably very short.

One must tip one's hat also, as a responsible critic, to the notion that there are "summary of semantics in the work. These names, I believe, were stamped into the term himself. I have a personal distance for semantics. "The theory of the sign." I think it is another idealism, a wish by its practitioners to see more in the language to the max. Portz has suggested that the work reveals a very interesting intersection between the layer of a magazine's picture and the layer of his idiosyncratic speech. As opposed to the linear description of a linguistic system, pre-existing any individual's use of it and paur (the individual's manipulation of that system to produce an utterance) which operate within a single "sign system", i.e., spoken English. "Texas dialect," Portz suggests. He has presented an untraditional interaction between two different systems: a magazine's picture and the English language as it is written and pronounced. I think indeed that this may be interesting, if it is not Portz represents. Yet I also suspect that Portz could be throwing punches in a darkened corner, to see where issues lurk. I do not know him to have become an expert on semantics in preparation for this work. One may question whether the artist is expected to be a scholar, or just to go exploring in likely territory on his own. there are models for both in history. At any rate I am not the critic that Portz hopes for. His hacker and critical theorist, rolled into one, as to the semiotics of his work. There are certain matters, however, that I am willing to take up. That the rebuses are so often made in the configurations of semaphore, or actual writing styles, we may chalk up to the exigencies of standard-sized gilded frames and the artist's wish for a pleasing visual effect. Nevertheless, the rebuses preserve a conventional grammar, reading left to right and when in doubt, downwards. Other structural language hints were available to the artist. But he did not choose to use them. He could have limited his use of composite pictures to polyglotistic words, or he could have put less important words, conjunctions, prepositions, in lower relief. An artificial aspect of the work, which distinguishes it from true language formation, was that Portz used different pictures for words and letters having identical sounds. Thus the pictures are not functioning as idiosyncratic or more abstracted alphabetic systems, but unique and unrelated symbols for individual words.

Another choice made by Portz was certainly noticed by a number of reviewers. Portz said he chooses to use The New York Times Magazine as his "picture-galaxy, because it is a taste-maker"-the magazine has a huge circulation and makes a noticeable, if insubstantial, impact on what America thinks. He likes his bourgeois bread. I guess, and sees in its pictures a panoply of U.S. class aspirations. Portz says he
came to notice that the N.Y. Times Magazine was more popular, more celebrity-oriented, more material-wealth-oriented, much more frivolous. In fact, than the daily N.Y. Times appearing in newssheets. This was an obvious fact to a person who would expect from an ascetic, a visionary...

The magazine is used to form the political hopeful, megabuck artists, renegade artists, terrorism, food and food, as Portz suggests. The magazine's emphasis is on power, upward mobility, security, and the good life. It occurs to me that it would be amusing if Portz chose to do other magazines, like Art in America, or the lowbrow, pornographic magazine.

Such a move is a shame in that no clear distinction is made by Portz, and he would presumably not have the patience for individual Portz will probably proceed to drop this inquiry, having merely sketched a few of his ideas across the pond.

"There is so much out there for the dilettante." Portz is recorded as saying. "If you use the language. I assume, of a hermit, knowing very little pop culture, doesn't watch television, and therefore, when looking at the pages of a magazine, gets a shock. He confesses as grand an amazement at the magazine pictures as would be expected from the Japanese soldier who surrendered yesterday from World War Two, and is standing today in Tokyo. The work was obviously compelling to the artist for a reason, though not so much to his more worldly counterparts. It is not out of line for me to say this, I'd prefer that Portz continue the work. I think it could stand some development. He is willful. However, does not easily take advice, and is particularly sensitive to criticism. So I'll have his thoughts of his own, I imagine.

Footnotes

1 Portz's various series, in the order of their production, can be set forth as follows: documentary photographs of architectural follies in the Houston Heights; color photos of brashly painted dead dogs; odd self-drawing of a nude girl; as to render objects into metaphors; and the current odd rebuse work.

2 Modern mainstream visual art has to be precise. The artist has expressed himself as interested in the optical of the activity of making wall-hangings, to sell in a tiny market oriented toward cerebral inquiry not societal process. But rather toward pleasant and unchallenging symbols of economic status and sophisticated taste.

3 Below, definition. E.g., by things ab. pl. of in. thing —more at Real an extension of representation of a word or phrase by figures, pictures, arrangement of letters, etc., which the intended words or syllables in sound.

4 As was suggested in the interview. It seems likely to me that the reason for the U.S. in sustaining that tradition.

5 The parameters of photography are roughly as follows: (1) One must use photographic elements to arrive at a flat or nearly flat surface (2) that conveys communicative content in its literal sense. Creativity (sometimes, success, in art photography. This critics in the self-defense of these parameters—photographers challenging the use of these processes, breaking up the surface, or thwarting the literal meanings of the latter, paints, prints, painted fish, the artist's earlier work, but also mainly of the materialistic" take tableaux, and mystically suggestive collages."

To borrow Thomas Mann's suggested definition of art.
LIPSCOMB SQUARE

By April Repler

Maud Lipscomb and Sarah Lipscomb Children on Alabama (July 13-September 13)

Although the connection isn't addressed, when one sees the portraits of Maud Lipscomb and Sarah Lipscomb as a whole, the influence of the relation is quickly clear. The cumulative honesty and unembarrassed, straightforward intent is an essential stylistic distinction between this genre of portraiture and, say, the work of Avedon, who, through an erotic transformation, creates a second person set apart from the real—the sitter—by the infusion of drama and psychological manipulation; and, a subsequent third person—the artist—personas as driving force behind the resulting collaborative dynamic. This intrusion of artifice and denial is not evident in the Lipscomb's mother and daughter pictures, much to their credit, for the work is solid and strong without that particular layer of hype.

Maud Lipscomb has created an unassuming and passionate record of friends and loved ones. Even her signature and titles are unpretentious (see Minshull for new levels of art signature extremes). At times, the sparseness cuts to the bone, so unadorned or do her subjects seem the moment the image is made. They are present, moments, to be recalled, which support and renew memory and impression. "Sarah, age 13" is a period piece, and speaks to the difficulties of emotional and personal growth—no, it was impossible not to attach a memory of one's own to the experience of the image, perhaps, to substitute one's own face confronting mother and camera, the two things one can count on to attest permanently.

She usually invasive and personal in a crowd, or, with one, presumes, arranges. The vision captured are magical, but do not rely on that magic—it is there incidentally, as if magic were familiar state of being.

In Maud Lipscomb's world, babies sprawled naked in mother's lap, and men, with sinuous arms and veins that echo the wright lion in a screen door nearby, oversee. In this particular image, adult faces are cut away. The details are rich and referential. "Tamara, age 3" shows a child with her hands stuffed into cut-off shorts pockets, one shoe standing on her other shoe's untied shoelace. Note that the threat is implied, not menacing, leaving tension unbound. She has a bemused, wistful expression—almost all the close-up portraits of children show an eerie adult side, and a yard looms empty behind. Other images such as "Emily age 5" are simply strange and wonderful. One need not come armed to attend attendant meaning, for the pictures offer joy and solace without further qualification or explanation.

Sarah Lipscomb, a recent graduate of the Art Institute of Houston, is more unabashedly commercial in intent (photographs prepared statements, whereas Maud spoke of a random entry into photography initially and a passion sparked, Sarah seemed more involved in self-promotion and acknowledgment.)

There exists a comparable level of magic. In this case the result of waiting patiently for the perfect moment. Both women are taken with the directness and honesty of children, both react in kind, with emotions out in the open. The sitters give Sarah Lipscomb a great gift, by responding to her with a trust and adoration that leave them, at times, seeming painfully vulnerable. Unaware of performance, these children are on best behavior for her. The more compelling image, untitled, of a boy scout in full dress regalia, leaves the area of high-impact undisturbed, to be discovered last—the boy, whose pose and expression are dignified, has teeth rather like the caricature of a bunny rabbit. Although that feature is ultimately hard to miss, it is certainly the least important aspect of the picture. This, and other of her images, rely on a pre-established closeness, one which evolved through compassion, not image making. The pictures are taken on an already special date. Another untitled image shows a third world mother nursing a baby, and it seems as though she is in a crowd, waiting or walking. The facial expressions of mother and son address the role (and irony) of the boy-child in cultures elsewhere—no matter that the timing is inappropriate, he will be nurtured, and he will not have to wait. Sarah Lipscomb's forte might very well be in the style of a photojournalistic passage through the familiar.
Americans, having come to grief with 1776, are discussing the real past. Central philosophy plays out, and philosophy all the same. The medallion, a replica of the great international reconstruction (Pennsyl vania silver only after a test has been tamperingly translated use it and impress iously decreted.)

The meeting: "Dumbot Eco"

Modern man at the brink of the 21st century no longer needs words but reacts to hierarchies: shared cultural visual resonances being our current rationality with graphic engines. It is only natural the the truth in such a relationship to his past will change. History becomes an ever-evolving visual archive. Whether looking at the seven o’clock news or Life magazine, we are confronted by a digitai virtual societal mnemonic to be memorized for future negotiation.

The photographic archive in this country dates back to the early 1840s, and its march forward is marked by constantly revised technologies shifting its order to glimpse an ever "true" sense of reality. We know that certain processes took one-half to five minutes exposure time. Time constraints created compositional necessity. Portraiture required subject immobility. Thus, people of this time seem still and stern. City streets were haunted by ghosts and nature swung its beguiling hoists in harmonious symphonies. Viewing the photo object at this time with a late 20th century mindset brings a skewed sense of people, place and time Roland Barthes. In Camera Lucida, states

Photography transformed subject into object, and even, once might say, into a subject: his/her/its task is to make the subject part of the sentence. This is a time to consider the use of this sentence. This is a time to ask: What is the sentence? the truth. It is the sentence: "The truth is that we do not know it."

Photographs included in this series entitled Photographie and American History, are structured to show the world in which the photographic archive is real. The images were taken at various historical restorations in the United States: Williamsburg, Virginia; Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts; Plymouth, Massachusetts; Old Salem, North Carolina; historic Bayside, New York, and Calico, California. Some of these restorations were carefully maintained in museum quality by others. There is a visible attempt by many of these museums to preserve their antiques. The utmost care has been taken by the curatorial staff in their rendering. Clothes, artifacts, processes such as weaving and tool making have been researched and instituted in remarkable fashion. Even the language of the pilgrims has been preserved at Plymouth. Like a pray from another era. I crept through the past in order to expose its flaws, to peer through its cracks at a more real light, many times the flow was already there writing to be found. Other times objects from our own time were placed in the perspective of light in order to subvert more clearly the "wholeness" past. These, photographed by permitting albumen coated paper with veil salts, create a photo relic, an object in its own right. Intended for the first time the image subverts our 20th century pigeon hole. They appear as old photographs. But something makes us uneasy. Something is just not right. Slowly the eye moves around the picture to find the "timeless illusion." Sometimes it is the anachronistic object, sometimes the movement of the individual or sometimes the angle of the image. The relationship of the reader and the image becomes mnemonic for the relationship of the photographer and the historical restoration. Once the flow of the photograph has been uncovered, we begin to question other aspects of the thing that is looking very much antique? Are the objects true to that period? The whole photograph and its validity as true document is thrown into question. For what are the objects themselves? A bottle floating in a sea of time? What do they say about the difference between the present and 150 years ago? The signs for "No Smoking," "LIFTING" "This is Not An Entrance" talk about how language has become more and more dominant in directing our lives. Coming in orders, they are acting to control what we do and in this context, how we experience history. Obviously the directors are subversive to the myth. The curatorial staff would not want us to stand on an unyielding lift or the changing rooms. The keepers in the Williamsburg photos take on center stage reminding us that the 20th century life is one in which people are monitored with electrical authority. The cul de sac in the background look and empty themselves, taking advantage of what they have. The dollar bill in the image of industrial bayadère suburbs at the edge of the photo and lies an empty box waiting to be the cent of that image. The money economy drives on relating figures of history to give it greater validity. Each object, familiar enough here, at the end of the 20th century, becomes something else in the historical context of these photos. The power of the object in the political sense is being re-appreciated by political philosophers such as Derrida in "The Specter." The transformation of the visual archive to include Throcky from theussian revolution is a case in point as to how photo images can be manipulated to alter history and truth. Because we believe photographs are real, we do not believe they are not. We have all taken photographs. There is no experience that reassures our sense of reality more than taking a photograph. Instantly, we have a reaction and a face of censorship. The sign says photo evolves out of a desire to enter the photo discourse and push its dialogue towards the question of what a photo is and what it is not. Photographs today, fed on Wheaties and Cheerios, are too ready to adapt their TV mentality to art in order to transform themselves from photographers to photo-artists. In attempting to ride the side of new Marxism, they claim all Coca-Cola, drunk by all people is equal. In sublimating distinctions, they breed lazy thinking and, worse, mediocrity. We cannot be allowed to think of our decisions on what constitutes a mass aesthetic. We must be taken to the cell of beauty perfection and truth.

Warren Noblick

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Photographer: Noblick

Photo: Noblick

Editorial: Noblick

Noblick: Noblick

Face of censorship. The sign says photo evolves out of a desire to enter the photo discourse and push its dialogue towards the question of what a photo is and what it is not. Photographs today, fed on Wheaties and Cheerios, are too ready to adapt their TV mentality to art in order to transform themselves from photographers to photo-artists. In attempting to ride the side of new Marxism, they claim all Coca-Cola, drunk by all people is equal. In sublimating distinctions, they breed lazy thinking and, worse, mediocrity. We cannot be allowed to think of our decisions on what constitutes a mass aesthetic. We must be taken to the cell of beauty perfection and truth.
"This is La Grange," said Caponigro, checking the map one last time before trying to fold it.

"Great Let’s go look at the Chick-fil-A!" I said.

"We can’t," I said. "They moved it up to the Metropolit." (Note: I used to work there.)

"No," said Coleman. "They moved it from there. It’s somewhere in Houston."

"You’re both wrong," Caponigro added. "They tore it down. It’s pieces."

"Yeah, just like Postmodernism," remarked Berger.

That set them off again. I decided to circle the country courthouse to see if any of them succumbed to the inevitable call of a remnantless, nature Caponigro sighed, that sight he got the wrong crosses again, and began unfolding the map once more. I took the northwest corner of the square on two wheels while Coleman removed the attack from the back seat.

"There can be no undisciplined classifications. Photography is an incredibly complex medium. It cannot be easily compartmentalized and compacted: just like highways, maps... mutated Caponigro, adding another unintentional curse.

"Then how do we evaluate anything?" asked Berger.

"If we can’t create a frame of reference how can we gain both historical and critical perspectives? Is the entire 110 years of the medium more than an unlabeled prehistory?"

"No, Abigail has already picked the lock of that necklace!"

"How about encomiads based upon sociocultural origins rather than arbitrary aesthetic parameters?" I asked, while taking out a half dozen parking meters in the interim.

"It can’t be done," said Berger.

"You create the social event as an offshoot of historical drives. The spirit of art in photography must evolve from the individual, the student, the teacher, the school. The format itself must be changed."

"Right," said Caponigro, "and the Burger was just a bunch of drunkin’ German design students who were too lazy to learn either basic technique or traditional pictorialism. Sansom won out over map folding.

"Well, I don’t know about the drunkin part..." added Coleman.

"Speaking of drinking..." said Berger.

"Let’s stop somewhere. I gotta take a leak and grab some lunch. It was the call I had been waiting for. I pretended the sign was at the corner and floored it two blocks towards the rotary I knew about. We were fifty feet away when Berger dropped the bomb. "Anyway, none of this amateur diatribe can explain away the demise of Postmodernism."

"What?" I yelled.

"What?" Coleman yelled, "Shut up!" Caponigro yelled. "I took out a bench and a foot of concrete, but we didn’t hit the canteen. We all turned to stare at Berger and Coleman summed it up quite nicely: "What is this she about Anti-Postmodernism?"

 Berger smiled ironically while he unbuckled his seat belt. "You mean you missed it? But it was a major flowering of symmetrical expression which flowered until its recent staggering demise on or about July 1 of 1983. Sorry, I can’t be more precise."

"Name! Place! School! Images! I spit out the words.

"Any number of major American artists, Krueger’s missing series, Le’s Italian work, Duane Michals’ first series, Antrhut; Ralph Gibson did in 1972. Everything Krueger has done since he started photography. George has championed an entire movement and has never known it. Then there’s the entire RISO graduating class of 1983. Even Caponigro here contributed a tad with some of his photos of dark rocks." He opened his door. "Cheeseburger-all around? My treat."

"Damn right it is," said Coleman, leaning out of his door. "And you better have a good definition for this movement before we get to the counter!"

We watched them head for the front door. Caponigro put his head in his hands. "Just great," he muttered. "I’m part of a movement and I don’t even learn about it until it is all over with." I noticed the crushed and open map lying on the floorboard under his seat.

Ten minutes later we were stopped at the last light on the way out of town. Questions and intersections were spread out around the Malibu, along with the cheeseburgers and onion rings.

"It makes no sense," said Caponigro.
In Washington, we have the same troubles you have anywhere. It's just that here, as I learned when I arrived two years ago, you have an added dimension that can be summed up bluntly: DC, the local nightly news is the national news. The arts scene is intimidated, as many cities are, by the Goliath, New York. It is also threatened by the flood of such news as Transism (what we need is a good Camacour); our Mayor Barry has his blues with increasing frequency. And you thought Houston had troubles. All this leaves the photography scene hard put to compete with such compelling, happening right here and now, events it certainly makes photography not important. Witness the hordes who waited patiently at Olivier Norris's feet every day, their various long lenses aimed at his every facial shift. It's just that the usual audience for such a major figure in the art world is so dispersed that it is more than somewhat difficult to capture this other business. Many of them would have liked to be in the gallery, but they didn't know it, or at least didn't attend. The audience, the bureaucracy. It was (apparently) said to me that there are only two and a half collectors in DC and not maybe that not many. That may be true, but in a gallery that is only in its second year, in the two years I've been here, I get the sense that maybe it is not there and possibly they are changing.

What are the good things about being a photographer in the nation's capital? You are near some of the more interesting embassies and museums. Many travelling exhibitions of note will stop here or originate here and not be able to travel in this country. This is also more impressive to Houstonians, as museums there are often rare, but it is remarkable to find one on the East Coast. Since none of the National museums charge admission, the other major collections in town are forced not to do so, either. (Though, like the MFA, they have started to change small amounts for special exhibitions.) For photographers the Corcoran Gallery of Art has a strong tradition of support for contemporary photography. And it houses an art school whose photography programs have had a major and direct influence in insuring a source of young photographers. I could point out here that for this article I am talking about "art" photography and Washington. There are only a few truly influential photographers in DC and it is an important aspect of the art scene there. There is quite a bit of commercial work here. This is not just from associations, newspapers, agencies, government, and other types of PR that generate endless "grip and grins." There is also a growing advertising and fashion market.

Indeed there is rapid growth in the whole Washington area. Like Houston with its oil industry, DC is dominated by one major employer, the federal government. There is much talk that this is changing, thereby creating a more diverse and vibrant economy. Though the government workers who here are there are constraints caused by reliance on the federal government. In probably hashardt the art scene that bureaucrats don't adequately understand the resources or the inclination to be collectors. So there are only two and one-half of them. The government does have needs, though, that translate (10 jobs) for photographers and these resources of revenue can then help to support their art habits.

One point that people say about the lack of collectors. Washington, ironically, does have a number of galleries that show photography exclusively, and others that show it regularly. The scarcity of these galleries, Kathleen Ewing, has been in existence since 1971. More recently, others who have been active in local photography opened galleries: Jeffrey Tiber, Martin Gallery, which now shares space with Ewing; Tiber Gallery; Sandra Berber, a dealer who has added gallery space to her house. Compared to other cities, the lack of a "community" of gallery-goers devoted to photography, it is also remarkable that all of these galleries show major contemporary American photography in particular has a strong and long-standing commitment to local photographers. They are already clustered in an area around Dupont Circle. In the attempt to build an audience, they have held past openings recently re-entice for their attention by showing off covering five historical areas of photography: "Great Visual Moments in Photography." Each gallery examined a period in photo-
RICHARD MISRACH: DESERT CANTOS


By Ed Groswold

In an interview he conducted with Richard Misrach in September, 1985, Peter Brown asked Misrach to dis- cuss his then-current project, Desert Cantos, selections from which were shown at the Houston Center for Photography in 1985 and early 1986. Misrach had described how the metaphoric qual- ity of the land possessed a great attraction for him and that it was the land as metaphor, as image, as repository of certain ideas, that he tried to convey in this project.

I thought the ultimate goal here is using the desert both as a place and as a metaphor, distilling the land into something that’s visually powerful, and it’s a real place, loaded with symbols and meaning. At the same time, because of the extreme nature of the desert, the hardship of the desert, that becomes a strong metaphor with associations to the Bible and the history of literature, science fiction, the “Last Frontier,” the American West, the huge metaphor for life, death and God and the Devil. I think there’s something almost archaic about the desert. The forces here are powerful.

But now that Misrach has collect- ed approximately sixty of these photographs into a handsome publi- cation, a shift has occurred in how he views his work. He tried to pull back from the reading he offered to Brown. In the “After- word,” to Desert Cantos he makes a claim for the environmental con- cerns of his photographs and writes, The desert may serve better as the backdrop for the problematic relations- hip between man and his environment. In the same After- word he identifies and terms inadequate two other approaches to landscape photography. In the first of these approaches, which Misrach dates from the seventeenth century examples could easily be found at least four centuries earlier; however, the world is viewed as the setting for catastrophic events, for the turmoil and terror of the “last days,” as a visual representation of the final struggle of the soul with the forces of good and evil. Quite simply such a view is apocalyptic. The second view which Misrach rejects could be shorthanded to read “Nature as God.”

That water would never pose a threat again is the promise that con- cludes the flood account in the "Book of Genesis." Rather, it would be the "righteous visitation" in a phrase borrowed and made famous by James Baldwin that would signal the consummation of the waters. The Bible account of the flood followed the burning of Hiroshima and Nagasaki preparatory ones for Misrach’s last section, his vision of the Holocaust.

In flames and smoke sweep across the land, the sun stands a red, glowing ball in the following clouds of orange and yellow. The bloodstained remains of trees and other vegetation stand transformed, yet strangely beautiful, in this last section. In what may be the most disturbing image in the book, "Desert Fire," two men stand in a sea of dry grass. One man, smirking, looks at the photographer and at us. His partner, perhaps twenty feet from him, bends over him, as if to absorb heat. Small flames appear in the lower right corner. Misrach has captured a moment of particularly disturbing emotional dislocation. Is this scene "orchestrated." Are the men joking? Does the man smiling at us know that there is a weapon point- ed at him? Does he know that he is in danger? Or does he smile because he is looking forward, in some manner of his own death, his deliverance? Certainly, as a metaphor, this is a great photo- graph. The image can be engendered by flames echoing the dis- harmony which has brought these two men to this point, great because it so easily a quick- imagination.

Certainly Misrach is not a "relig- ious" photographer and my read- ing of his canto is not intended to suggest this. But Misrach, who received his art instruction in psychology, knows that the land, that all is out there and apart from us, is often the only window we pos- sess to what is inside us. And cer- tain religious (dis-) of chaos, that the world is the only reality of the end- can just as easily be called psycho- logical: as they can be called spiritu- al.

The photographs in Desert Cantos show Misrach to be a master of color, light, and atmosphere. He photographs his world with a vision of beauty and energy, and a sense of the implications of light that sug- gests the nineteenth-century Amer- ican painters called the "Luminists." And he can do so. In "Salton Sea (Ripples)," create a vision of absolute stillness and calm. But while Misrach’s photographs are strong indicators of how we have abused and mismanaged the fragile deserts of the Southwest (his environmental concerns are quite apparent), calling him a photogra- pher committed to the "conserva- tion" of the land seems limiting. For what Misrach provides is a compel- ling manner are glimpses into a world that is specific, concrete, real, that is frequently without people. What is beautiful in the haunting way that destroyed things can be beauti- ful. Where destruction has found a permanent place, where fire and death are at home and all else seems alien.

C. PART Ed Groswold

Ed Groswold is a librarian with the Houston Public Library System. He is a frequent contributor to SPOT and occasionally reviews books for the HOUSTON POST.
The road toward great photography is mined with clichéd pitfalls of variant form, but, is the conclusion, therefore, that celebrity juror Helen Mat Semshen was not more aware of these pitfalls when he judged the 1987 Photographic Society’s 1987 Annual Exhibition. Has it occurred to you that the timed aspects of cuticle animal pictures, bland color, landscape scenes, and ubiquitous “arty” shots of mirrored glass buildings reflecting the sky? Evidently not, for works such as these abound in the show. Of course, Gerschmen had to choose from the material available and not from an unlimited spectrum; yet there are enough exceptional works in the show to suggest that some judicious editing might have been profitably applied to create a smaller but finer exhibition.

Discussing the good news first, the show contains a body of works by artists whose images emphasize abstract composition. Jeff Cameron’s Clichemane image of the jucture of a yellow and a white wall with a triangle of oddly blue sky above is a dynamic postmodern image, slightly antiformal, jazzed and rendered in jazzy-pared color. Carol Cohen Burhen’s photograph, an open and closed consensus stand, looks like one of Robert Motherwell’s “Open” paintings rendered in the cliche of the high-yellower perfection of Clichemane. Nancy Scariano’s similar architectonic works are more rigorously composed, contrasting color, texture and disembodied architectural members. Jeff Frings also shocks in the architectural vocabulary: isolating and framing architectural members in a form of visual synecdoche, his partial members signify the larger whole, yet work alone as purely abstract compositional elements. Randy Eckels’ Untitled #3: an intense close-up study of a blue and black patterned surface is also matterially abstract and the best of his pieces in this show.

Several of the standout photographs are black and white, oddly, the work in black and white seems more empathetically poetic and subject-oriented than the color work that dominates the show. Tracy Reisinger’s contact print, “Portrait for an Emptiness,” is an enigmatic image of a multiple layer of portraits; she photographs herself reflected in a store window in which is displayed a framed portrait of a young girl from Reisinger’s work seen in the last year. She is a young photographer who seems ready to capture from the world without sentimentality. Michael Short’s “Conundrums for the Feast of Saint Lawrence” is a gorgeously composed image of Mexican women preparing food. Distinctive by the picturesque disposition of detail, textures and tonal contrasts across the field. The sliding image in the show belongs to Rick Williams, whose 1971 photograph of a “Bird and a Bird” is a clever confection of sculpture and evocative subjects. A bird skeleton lies on a wood floor surrounded by sharp shards of glass; the image is somehow tragic yet its clarity and color make their subtle gradations make it seductive exquisitely.

The bad news can be summed up with a few egregious examples. In the color category, the winner is Tracy Gordon’s photograph of a squirrel hanging from a bird feeder with three birds perched on it. Keith Gordon’s “In the Garden” (eyes the head of one of those P oggins’ Loopy Birds) is in the bald landscape category: Brenda Day Ladd’s “Big Sky” is vivid with Karen Leler’s “A Fresh Look.” Texas: the “boy have we seen it and we know better” is due. The Hallmark Card award goes to Suzanne Hubbell’s close-up of a pair of dandelion puffballs (honest) with the “ire” to it. Allan Adams’ wall is “A Room in Rancho de Box.” Mary Sofer’s photograph of the American flag and cowboy bandanna in July 4th is just too sentimental to take seriously.

The final category of architecutural photographs is headed by James McNicholas’ shots of mirrored glass buildings making odd reflections of their surroundings. Mark Navar’s tri-linear contrast of a painted brick wall and mirrored windows, and Sherry Branyan’s shot looking up the freight wall of an Austin office building are seen as much as fun as it is to call and car. TVP can be a proud of the handful of truly excellent work in the show. Clearly the juror’s preferences allowed some painfully cliched work in the door, but it serves to point out the quality of the best pieces. After all, how many good artists exist at any one time anyway?

In her curatorial statement, Mori Heuchten-Kitchins notes that Women’s & Their Work asked her to curate this exhibition because of her interest in the women in ways women use photography to explore the concerns of their hearts. She invited nine Central Texas photographers to join her in interpreting the exhibition’s theme because of “the ways they have consistently used photography to communicate about the human condition.”

Heuchten-Kitchen’s remarks refer to the literal and metaphorical meanings of both ‘space’ and ‘heart.’ The interpretations vary from wholly emotional to strictly cerebral. Limited to six images, not every body of work is able to fulfill the artist’s intentions. Heuchten-Kitchen’s statement accompanying the photographs of her son Aaron bear more moving than the images as edited. While several of the images are evidence of how she as mother-photographer sees the suffering of her son and his isolation—she (all short of her eloquently stated goal. Also working on an emotional interpretation were Bono and Barbara. Bono’s work depicts two images of Bono as he rides his motorcycle, and two of his family not their own. Bono also seems embarrassed by the limit of his six photographs. Three of her images are portraits of children; each shot is without background or perceptual information. Two other images are evidence of family relationships and loving feelings. The remaining image is of an empty room where the children in the portraits might be. While the photographs are lovely and well done, one wishes that in which there was more to be had.

Newtton’s photograph is meant to be illustrative of special relationships. A father leads a daughter down the aisle of a church, sunlight streams in the door behind them. A small girl watches her great-grandmother dance a guitar. These images are nice to behold and have wonderful detail, but once again, they do not convey all that the photographer has implied in her statement. Possessions are rites of the heart and always lead to change. No relationship can really ever stay the same.

Kathy Vargas deals with relationships in an abstract way. From her statement we infer that a relationship has ended—that Vargas intends to explore the experience of loss and the subsequent release by “burning” presumably meaningful letters. In her five photographs are layered images of handw writing with flowers, feathers, and red umbrellas. The images are so similar that the progression and the alliances to any ritual are unclear. Vargas has said in her statement that she is trying to express what she cannot verbalize—the feeling in the resulting imagery is definitively ephemeral. Carol Cohen Burhen’s small color trip reports personal memory attached to things. Burhen’s ambitions fit and succeed within the limitations of the show: The photographs are arranged vertically, three to a mat, outlined and formatted with black and color photographs of the family album. The family album feeling does not extend to a snapshot. Feelers like the images that are definitely personal references. Light metal chairs, black and white hats, and a glass of red juice (J. J. A)’s sitting on shaped boxes may serve as mnemonic devices for more than one Central Texas child.

Syll Villar’s color photographs were made, she said, after she began to feel at home in the hill country. No clue is forthcoming in the photographer’s statement as to the relationship between images. Villar expresses regional history, the future site of her home, and a hidden and dislocated subculture of Middle Eastern students at the University of Texas. While there is no conscious thought process evident in the unrelated images, there is a pervasive sense of consistency in Miller’s work.

Also consistent in feeling are Amy Klaukhuar’s water-related color images. Klaukhuar did not explain that her name meant “spring water” one might have missed the connection between bathing holidays and reflected clouds and abandoned beach chairs. Like Klaukhuar’s Phyllis Liedeker also took an approach which seems to blend literal and metaphorical intent. Her mostly desert landscape views do not reflect the elements as they are described in her statement—evaporating water wind, sand, and salt. Infalling signs, abandoned areas, and subtle visions are more indicative of literature, sometimes poetry spaces. Nancy Scariano worked from a totally literal perspective. Her images are taken in the ‘hearts’ of Texas. Scariano prefers to be dealing with abstract spatial qualities. While the color images are momentarily visually arresting, the objects are not photographed in such a way as to dissolve into a disintegrated form.

Mary Lee Edwards’ documentary approach produced visual and literal portraits of homeless women. She writes in her statement, “For some it seems, there is no place in the heart, home, or the family, or the heart is filled because they are told in the first person and are written in too consistent a style. A sporadic vernacular intersections interrupt this otherwise highly readable style. As grammatical references they are meant to lend authenticity to the speaker, but rather serve to question the text’s credibility. The spokesperson sounds the same in each, and as a result, the stories do not transmit individual personalities which might have lent authenticity to the speaker’s voice. The idea of the project, however, does make one want to see more.”
COMMERCIAL SYMPOSIUM AT HCP

A symposium titled "Artistic Freedom in the Commercial Arena" will be held at HCP on Tuesday, September 22 at 7:30, in conjunction with the exhibition, The Art of Commercial Photography. The panel, moderated by Paul Hester, will include photographers Dave Crolisky and Ron Scott, and designers Jerry Herrera and Lowell Williams. The symposium will explore such issues as how commercial photographers work with their clients; how award-winning photographs are created, and how to innovate despite the constraints of conservative clients. The public is invited to attend.

MEYEROWITZ TO LECTURE

A practical discussion is scheduled with Robert M. Rosenthal, the magazine editor of the New York Times. R. M. is currently in the midst of a shoot for a major fashion campaign, and he will share his experiences in the field with his audience. The symposium will cover the photography of the New York Times, the history of the magazine, and the evolution of the fashion industry. The event will be held on Tuesday, September 22 at 7:30, and is open to the public.

FELLOWSHIP WINNERS

The Houston Center for Photography invites you to attend its annual awards ceremony on Tuesday, September 22 at 7:30 at the Center. Each year, fellowships are awarded to artists who incorporate photography into their work. This year, the Center is proud to announce the following fellowship winners:

1. The Houston Center for Photography awards three fellowships to Houston area artists who incorporate photographic media into their work. The recipients are selected based on a portfolio competition and are awarded the money to support their work in progress. Judges for this year's competition were Janie Riddle, curator of the Hall of Fame Collection, and Carol van Zanten, curator of the Contemporary Collection. The winners are:
   - Louise M. Redfield, artist
   - David W. Barlow, photographer
   - Jennifer S. Mann, sculptor

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   - David W. Barlow, photographer
   - Jennifer S. Mann, sculptor

SPAGNA ON CAPTURED SLEEP

On Thursday, November 12 at 7:30, the Houston Center for Photography is sponsoring a lecture by award-winning photographer Ted Spagna. Spagna has been experimenting with sleep photography—which he considers the ultimate portrait—since 1975. His successful and unorthodox photographic methods have been found to have great scientific relevance in our understanding of the sleep process. He has collaborated on the landmark exhibition, Dreamscape, a multimedia presentation, which has toured internationally. The talk is sponsored by the Texas Photographic Society, and admission is $2 for HCP members, $3 for nonmembers.
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