

Sheila Pinkel, 1987

A NEW GODDESS OF MEMORY, BY TERRY GIPS

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY: EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE REVIEWS

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY (AGAIN) IN RECENT AREA SHOWS

EXHIBITIONS: CARILLO/VISIONS OF TEXANS/NAGATANI & TRACEY/WITKIN/WAGNER

BOOKS: DATER, GOHLKE, SHEELER, VOGUE BEAUTY, & THE *DITLO* PHENOMENON

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Editor: Cynthia Freeland

Design: Jim Tiebout

Contributing Editor: Jean Caslin

Advertising Sales: Stephen Peterson

Writers: Johannes Birringer, Roberto Cofresi, Bill Frazier, Cynthia Freeland, Terry Gips, Katherine Guild, Robert Hobbs, James Houlihan, John Jacob, David Lazar, Joanne Lukitsh, Martin McGovern, Stanley Moore, Ed Osowski, Joan Seeman Robinson, Wendy Sterba

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Narratives are constructions of meaning. In a lecture this November at Rice University, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard described Modernism's narrative of rational progress. Lyotard argued that new technology and information processing systems are attempts to continue Modernism's grand mythological narrative; but the real subject of progress is an alien new god. Inhabiting a vast information network, it possesses super-human knowledge, a "non-terrestrial" body, and ominous power. Lyotard, the theorist of "the postmodern condition," criticized the hegemony of the technoscientific narrative and its inhuman subject. He called for free narratives--"free conversations, free reflexive judgements and meditations, free associations, poetry and the literary arts, music and the visual arts...." These are narratives of imagination, not control: "No prejudice, no security."

In this issue of *SPOT*, three writers critically reflect upon new narratives of meaning for visual representations using digital technology. Mixed-media and computer artist Terry Gips constructs a technological narrative linking the computer to prior stages of an exponentially exploding process of aiding human memory. But in her art Gips constructs a second narrative--an imaginary one, if you will. Her photographs picture the computer itself in terms of earlier images--architectural images (of rooms, windows, stairs), which humans have used to picture their own mental powers. Like Lyotard, Gips recognizes the superhuman "spaces" of the computer; but she fantasizes it as "a new goddess of memory," a new Mnemosyne--one of the beneficent (if temperamental) Greek sister Muses.

Next, James Houlihan and Joanne Lukitsh discuss (respectively) the exhibition and catalogue, *Digital Photography: Captured Images/Volatile Memory/New Montage*. Houlihan notes the irony in the fact that the "digital" ("fingered") has become the non-manual. The artists in *Digital Photography* use the computer reflexively to question diverse narratives about art history, American politics, the news media, or nature/culture relationships. Lukitsh's essay emphasizes the need for complexity in discussing the meaning of "digital photography." She argues that in their catalogue essays for the exhibit, Jim Pomeroy and Timothy Druckrey oversimplify and overschematize their subject: Pomeroy creates a weighted narrative of steady progress to claim that digital representation is the direct heir of photography; Druckrey artificially dichotomizes culture and technology.

Gips writes in her article, "Not only does the computer dissolve boundaries between picture fragments, it also dissolves boundaries between traditional media....The computer simulates drawing, painting, photography, film, and in some ways, sculpture." Digital representations enter into territory already subject to boundary disputes. Aspects of these debates, as manifested at the site of several important recent regional exhibits, are addressed in my article "Art & Photography (Again)". Beyond this, Johannes Birringer meditates in "Intersections" about erratic confluences, non-readable narratives linking "art" and "non-art": the contemporary art museum and the traffic intersection, or the human with the inhuman (techno-designed) body.

The computer users I know develop narratives in which their computers are agents with conscious presence and even bodies: "It won't let me do that"; "It's trying to figure out what I just told it to do"; "It's slow because it's hot." (And of course, God forbid that it should get a virus.) The computer can be seen as a goddess, metaphor for memory, or as an alien inhuman god. Two brief narratives, one unanswered question: does the computer-god possess a gender? In a recent insidious development, "Mac-playmate," the computer screen displays an image of a woman who seems to inhabit the machine, and who intimately inquires whether the viewer wishes to undress or otherwise fondle her. All this manipulation is done with a "mouse," of course (remember what Freud said about mice?). Our Macintosh II at HCP speaks with a deep male voice, in what can only be described as an extraterrestrial accent. Surely my most memorable interaction with it (him) in assembling this issue of *SPOT* was when "he" read back the text "he" was scanning of Joan Robinson's article on Joel-Peter Witkin. "Mac" droned on, indifferent when reciting that Goya's war images concerned "rapine, dismemberment, and violent death." But when it came to Robinson's remark that Witkin "is an iconoclast with a hard-on," "Mac" definitely disapproved.

--Cynthia Freeland

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A NEW GODDESS OF MEMORY

By Terry Gips

Since about 1980, I have used photography in combination with a variety of other media including the computer to grapple with issues of information, experience, and memory: how we accumulate and sort the bits of data from our experience; how we process those bits; how we store them; and how we retrieve them from memory in order to construct new ideas. More specifically, this work has been about images of memory which have architectural connotations. We talk about allocating and structuring "space" in memory, we put things "into" memory, and search and recall "from" memory. It is as if memory were some physical space, an enclosure with dimensions, corners and recesses, surfaces and openings. Sometimes we imagine memory as a series of connected spaces or rooms or residences, each with a unique address.

These associations between architecture and memory are not new. Architecture as metaphor and mnemonic device goes back many centuries, but such roles for architecture are even more poignant when seen today in the light of computing technology. Like the human mind, electronic processing has an elusive and immaterial nature. However, many of the same concepts based on the concreteness and systemic quality of architecture are employed to understand the uncanny power of both human memory and computer memory.

As these parallels presented themselves in my own work, I began to try to unravel the larger implications of bringing the camera and the computer together for purposes of making art. Although there are a number of distinct issues, memory impinges in one way or another on most of them. In looking at the digital/photographic works which are beginning to make important appearances in exhibitions and in critical discussions throughout the U.S. (and wherever the technology has achieved a sufficient level of availability), one doesn't find much explicit use of architecture as metaphor for memory. However, concern for the shape, structure, and process of memory—the sorting, recalling and reusing of past information—is pervasive.

As I began this writing, I intentionally borrowed technical vocabulary from computing, not just because I was going to talk about using the computer, but because it seems important to note the dialectic which is going on between electronic technology and our conceptions of the world in general, and of memory in particular. Within this dialectic there are two levels of mutual interaction. First, the words themselves: the terminology of computing has parallels in the current language used in a wide range of contexts, from intellectual and philosophical discourse to the everyday exchanges in social, political, and even personal arenas. Although this may



Terry Gips, *Media Memories*, 1988.

be due in large part to the fact that the computer has become a useful tool in nearly every field, and that practitioners need the vocabulary to interact with each other around issues of technology, it is also due to the fact that we live and work in an information-dominated culture.

Thus, on a second level of dialectic, the language shapes our ways of conceptualizing, thinking, experiencing, acting, and also of being creative. In the other direction, new concepts, thoughts, experiences, actions and creations modify our speaking. One of the phenomena subject to this process is memory: personal memory, collective memory and what might be called a tangible public memory/record. The way we understand, experience and talk about memory is changing radically. This computer-generated revolution can be compared with those revolutions which came, respectively, from the development of photo-mechanical reproduction about 100 years ago and the movable-type printing press in the 15th century. Most would agree, however, that the repercussions from the computer will greatly overshadow those from the earlier two.

The remarkable power of the camera to "remember"—to record and save vast amounts of visual data—serves as an informative backdrop to the work of most photographers. Likewise, negative files are an efficient memory bank from which visual fragments can be selected at will to refresh memories, reconstruct the past and create the meaning of life present. The computer is, however, a memory tool of an even higher order. Artists who come to recognize computing as a potential extension of photographing combine these two technologies in a variety of ways to expand the concerns of memory. In order to examine this specific focus, it is helpful to summarize the general ways photographers are approaching the computer. There are four that result in static, single-frame images which most would identify as photographs and which could be held in the hand, displayed as prints on the wall, or distributed in printed materi-

als. While there are related ways to use the computer for video works and interactive installations, the static images are the concern of this article.

The approach which most clearly parallels traditional photographic practice uses the computer to "process" camera images taken from reality. The artist starts in the standard position of the photographer, behind the camera, and "takes" a picture from the world. In this case, a camera which records light electronically is necessary: a video camera or a still-video camera, the generic name for a new line of frame-by-frame cameras which use digital disks rather than film chemistry to encode light transmitted through a lens. The image is either transferred directly to the computer from the video camera, or as a recorded image from a tape or disk to the screen of the computer. Here, manipulation, similar to that undertaken in the darkroom, is applied to the image. It can be lightened or darkened—overall or selectively; inverted from positive to negative; and edited not only by cropping but also by "electronic retouching," a process that is easier and less detectable than the hand retouching of negatives and prints practiced since the inception of photography itself.

In addition to such subtle modifications used primarily to heighten certain aspects or "correct" imperfections in a realistic view of any given subject matter, "enhanced image processing" is used to give a visual interpretation of information that does not directly correspond to human vision. For example, the computer can mathematically sample values across an image and then assign colors or textures to particular values which have nothing to do with the actual color or texture of the original object which we perceive with our eyes. While the first approach seeks to retain traditional "straight" photographic qualities, this second recodes the visual image for special format effects.

A third approach is to use the computer reflexively—that is, to use it to underscore its inherent nature as a data pro-

cessing and information management tool, and to disclose its impact on art and society. The computer continues and expands the postmodernist critique of images, and brings such issues as original and copy, authenticity and simulation, individual and multiple authorship into even sharper focus.

The fourth approach (which most directly corresponds to my work) revolves around the characteristics of computer imaging that facilitate collage, montage, and the simultaneous presentation, perception, and transmission of multiple images. As is fairly obvious, these four approaches are far from mutually exclusive. This last one employs some electronic processing to undertake "cut and paste" editing, and other operations to merge distinct images and filter one image through another. In addition, it has some reflexive aspects. Montage and collage are almost by definition formats which disrupt the linear flow of information in visual and verbal narration, causing the artwork to circle back upon itself. These techniques of constructing images from disparate elements were originally developed by avant-garde artists of the teens and twenties in their efforts to rattle aesthetic conventions and to deliver social and political commentary. Computer-aided collage and montage continues this disruptive practice and goes one step further by making the collage appear seamless. There are no cut or torn edges, and the artist's intervention leaves no visual trace.

Not only does the computer dissolve boundaries between picture fragments, it also dissolves boundaries between traditional media. Often described as a meta-tool, the computer simulates drawing, painting, photography, film, and in some ways, sculpture. In addition, it undercuts art criticism and art practice invested in art as unique artifact or object. A recent article by Joachim Schmid, "*Es kommt der elektronische Fotograf*" ("Here Comes the Electronic Photographer"), plays off the 1929 book by Werner Graff, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*

(*Here Comes the New Photographer*).¹ Graff's central point was that the time had come when photographers would establish photography as an independent art free from the "antiquated laws of painting" and from nature and its replication. The primary purpose of photography, he said, was not to produce life-like pictures but to explore new ways of seeing.

Although Schmid does not refute this perspective, his assessment of electronic photography is more far-reaching. In his view, digital technology is causing "fundamental changes in all areas of production, distribution and reception" of photography.² In addition, he addresses shifts in the relationship between memory and photography by pointing out that there will eventually be vast files of photographs stored electronically and easily accessed and montaged with the computer. The operator of the digital machine will have enormous power to arbitrarily reassemble these photographs into new pictures which will present themselves as original photographs, showing no evidence of having been constructed from unrelated parts. The issue here is not that the artist will "invent" pictures—because we have always had the ability to frame selectively, dodge and burn, etc.—but that the ease of doing this is so dramatically increased.

Among photographers working with computers today, many are continuing to investigate issues they had addressed previously with other means. For those concerned with issues of information construction and memory, turning to the computer is a natural move. A hand-constructed piece of mine titled "Photoconstruction as Bricolage" referred to Lévi-Strauss' idea suggesting that one works in the spirit of the "bricoleur," building on the leftovers, the fragments of raw materials which may be on hand. In a large free-standing installation piece titled "No Hard Evidence," I used sections cut from photographs of houses to build a labyrinth of spaces. This visually constructed environment stood as a metaphor for the complex information environment in which we find ourselves twisting and turning to gain a readable view of the barrage of fragments.

I was, in a sense, building pseudo-houses for my ideas. It was a way of organizing ideas and giving them "residences," particular locations or addresses to which I could return at another time. When I continued this process with the computer, the historical models and practices linking memory and architecture (to which I alluded at the start) made even more sense. It would be a lengthy exercise to describe all of these, but a brief mention of a few concepts will be useful.

A recent example appears in the writing of contemporary architectural historian, Joseph Rykwert: "Of all the faculties, memory has most to do with architecture."³ He is reiterating the stance of the nineteenth century art historian, John Ruskin, who said that "We cannot remember without architecture."⁴ As one of Ruskin's "seven lamps of architecture," memory referred to the memorializing function of buildings, their role as the pri-

mary carriers of historical meaning, passing information from one generation to the next. For him, the past resided even more in the stones of architecture than in the pages of literature.

Saint Augustine's poetic image of the "spatial palaces of memory" is a more abstract concept; memory is envisioned as a grand space furnished with images where human intellect dwells. He, like many other literary persons through the centuries, has borrowed from the ancient traditions of *ars memoria* which were used to memorize--mentally store--material in the days before printed books, photographs, and computers. The images of actual buildings with their particular rooms, structural elements and decorative details were committed to memory as spaces in which less concrete words and ideas could be hung like pictures. Because the human mind remembers visual information most readily, and because memory seems to be inherently modeled as an interior space, architecture worked well as this supporting device. Once the words or ideas were assigned precise locations in the building, the person could mentally "walk through" the space to retrieve the material for oration or other "processing."

Although I have not been interested in mimicking any particular practice of using architecture to represent or enhance memory, images of buildings have served as metaphors for information environments and memory environments. With the computer, I have digitized photographs of whole buildings, as well as isolated architectural elements, and then rearranged them, changing orientation and position, modifying scale and color, and editing or repeating sections. I have layered my own photographs with those appropriated from various print media, merging architecture--particularly doors, windows, passageways, stairs, and colonnades--with faces and figures. Software functions which give images a degree of transparency, so that one can be read through another, have been especially useful.

A Janus-like spirit inhabits these pictures. Like photography which can be a means to carry the past forward, as well as the basis for looking backward from the present,* the architectural openings I have incorporated look simultaneously backward and forward in time. Figures float on steps, in doorways and across arches, occupying these metaphorical hous-

es. Sometimes it seems that the figures are all at once in front of, behind, and in the same place as the buildings. Body and house are equated as they mutually inhabit one another. In other montages, eyes, ears, and lips seem to be the human psyche pulling itself backward and forward, tracing its dreams and memories across the translucent surfaces of walls, vaulted ceilings, and ornate details of Victorian facades.

Although these images, along with the work of many other computer artists, are not particularly invested in a "high-tech" look, few who use electronic machines would choose to ignore their unprecedented technical powers--even if they could. As a nod to the computer's extraordinary memory attributes, we might designate this machine a twentieth century Mne-mosyne, a digital goddess of memory who floats over personal work stations and throughout global networking systems. Perhaps, too, the hard and soft structures of computing can be seen as palaces of memory for the electronic age.

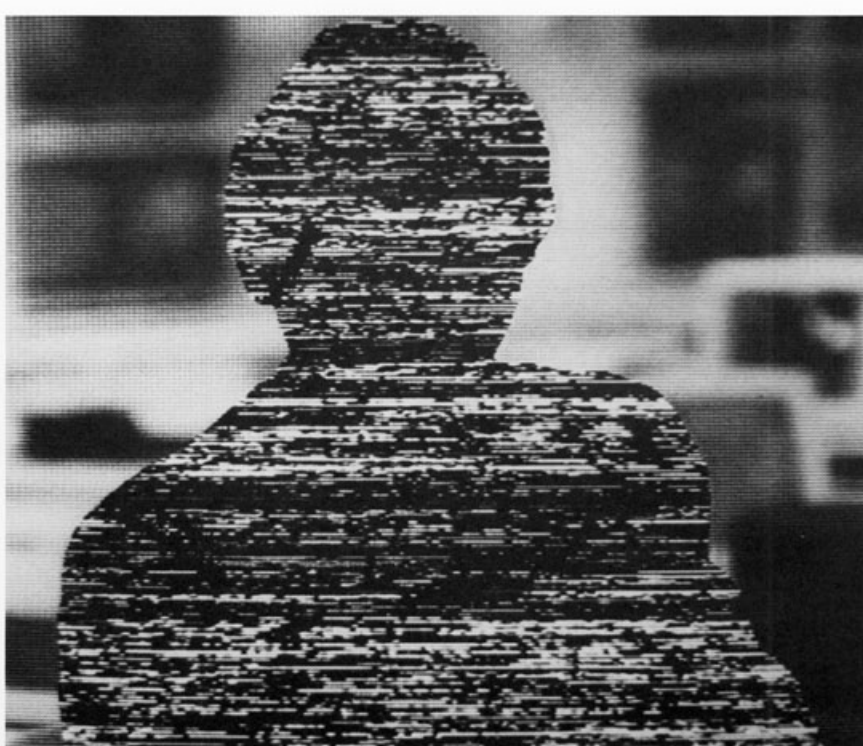
Footnotes

1. Joachim Schmid, "Es kommt der elektronische Fotograf," in *European Photography* 22, April-May-June 1988; Werner Graff, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf* (Berlin: Herman Reckendorf Verlag: 1929).
2. Schmid, p. 5.
3. Joseph Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982).
4. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1971; originally published 1849), p. 169.
5. Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.
6. St. Augustine, quoted in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 31.
7. See Yates for a general discussion of *ars memoria*; and Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
8. Shelly Rice, "Souvenirs," *Art in America*, September 1988, pp. 157-71.

Terry Gips is a photographer and mixed-media artist who teaches at the University of Maryland. Her recent work using the computer has been exhibited in Atlanta, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Canada, and her writing about art and photography has appeared in various journals, including Views.

Bloom and Ed Hill), Esther Parada, Sheila Pinkel, Alan Rath, and Ed Tannenbaum. (Ed Tannenbaum's work was not part of the traveling exhibition.)

What a joy there is in etymology! The realm of the hand, *manus*, and the handmade, *manu-factum*, used to describe the artwork and its aura of irreplaceability, as Walter Benjamin saw, looking back at the equally irreplaceable preindustrial age. With mass production and infinite reproducibility, the aura vanishes, and we lose the meaning of "manufacture," which seems to refer, nowadays, to the assembly line, excluding the human



George Legrady, from the series *Figures of Authority*, 1987. ink jet color prints, 24 x 30" each, four panels. From *Digital Photography*.

touch.

And by another grafting from this ancient Latin root, the infinitely reproducible artwork has now become infinitely manipulatable. "Manipulate" from "maniple," ultimately from *manus* and *pleo* (to fill.)

The manual has become digital. The hand is too big, or the metaphor too worn, for the sophisticated keyboards where the digits are rulers. And fingers provide the symbol for the bipolar computer, even though a hand with only two fingers would more exactly represent how computers really function. But language itself can be a tool of manipulation, and it serves the interests of a few that the many remain mystified by the very technology that can free as much as it can enslave.

Now the ethical question can only be addressed by examining the purpose--or values--for which artists or advertisers manipulate images. Retouching images, the commercial aspect of digital manipulation, may at first seem harmless, and most of us may be glad that "glamor" photography eliminates the "warts and all." But when in February 1982, *National Geographic* manipulated a cover shot of the pyramids for a more dramatic angle and did not acknowledge the altering of the image, we may begin to wonder. And what of images of snowmobiles whose detrimental tracks are erased from the video images used to sell the machines and discredit environmentalists? I could go on into science fiction scenarios: a presidential candidate who exists only in the pixels of digitally manipulated video images.

The artists exhibiting in *Digital Photography* all raise the crucial question not just of the ethics of manipulation but also of the epistemology of the artwork: how do we know if the image corresponds to reality, how do we know that we know? We think there is a clear distinction between the obviously manipulated images (recolored, reshaped, recombined) and the "untouched" images, but there

is no reason to assume the "straight" images are any less manipulated than the faces turned into mosaics or static lines.

In this exhibit, however, the point of manipulation is artistic pleasure, yet it is often a pleasure not far from the pain of discovering how much of our world is becoming unknowable. How can we control what we don't understand?

George Legrady's images instantly address the problem of knowing by deflating figures of authority--figurations, shadows of reality. The strategy here partakes of the avant-garde tradition of exposing the mode of production and thereby demystifying the artwork. To interrupt the illusion of realism, in a Godard film or a Barth novel, is to remind the spectator-reader of the etymology of "artifact," and culture is nothing but the sum of human artifacts.

Legrady's piece, "Figures of Authority," shows the ghostly outline of Ted Koppel made up of nothing but fluctuating visual static: obfuscation not illumination. This image reminds us that the figures we unthinkingly empower are themselves manufactured, one-dimensional, and subject to change. The relationship of the news commentator to the truth is like that of the outline mask to the full person. And the 20-second outline is, of course, the format in which news programs deny historical complexity.

Unlike Legrady's images which provide a stable point of reference (since we know immediately that the artist is engaged in a media critique even if we don't know why), the work of MANUAL (Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill) is not so easy to place. All their pieces use a layering of images which are, as it were, rubber-stamped by a word or phrase such as "Utopia," "Redemption," "Good Life," (but with the "the" missing, we sense something lacking). Each word relates, respectively, to the political, religious, and so-

cial aspirations of Western culture, and their presence creates an unsettling relationship with the beautifully manipulated images.

If, for instance, the only image under the word/title "Redemption" had been the bar of Zest soap, the meaning would have been clearly satiric, but, in fact, with the quotation of Ingres, itself a quotation of a Greek water nymph, the relationship between text and image becomes risky--risky for both artists and spectator.

The artists risk being misunderstood, and there are those who think redemption lies in consumerism--or in collecting French masters. But the artists prefer to believe in the intelligence of the spectator, and encourage interpretation which only exists in surplus of the text. MANUAL emphasizes the artistic experience over the reifying of the collecting; their art is transitory, and is, like much of what is called postmodern, subversive of the boundaries between "low" and "high," transitory and eternal, irreplaceable and reproducible. They remind us that there is no nature which is not already culture, even if it is just our way of seeing the natural. The pleasure of interpreting their many-layeredness is the pleasure of refocusing on what it means to create images from nature in a way which fosters self-understanding. Before these works, we are a bit like Socrates who, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, ironically draws pleasure from Nature which he claims to have no feelings for, saying he is interested only in the human psyche.

The risk of irony (as in MANUAL's work) and the social critique of the media (as in Legrady's) are combined in Esther Parada's "The Monroe Doctrine." The piece is ambitious: large and perhaps overburdened by text, for text forces meaning on the spectator, delimits interpretive freedom. The images of the U.S. Marines, in positive and negative, speak reams by themselves, and would still, even if

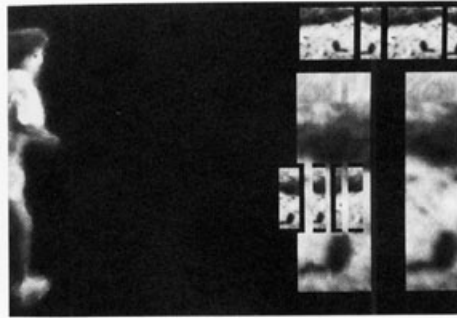
THE ETHICS OF MANIPULATION

By James W. Houlihan

Digital Photography: Captured Images/Volatile Memory/New Montage was an exhibition curated by Marnie Gillett and Jim Pomeroy which originated at San Francisco Camera-work. It was shown at HCP from October 14 - November 13, 1988. Artists whose work was included in Digital Photography were Paul Berger, Michael Brodsky, Christopher Burnett, Carol Flax, George Legrady, MANUAL (Suzanne



Carol Flax, *Triptych 1: Shana's Run*, 1987. Ink jet color prints, 21 x 90" framed. From *Digital Photography*.



the only text were the title.

The very density of the texture troubles any simple reading, while reflecting, perhaps, the oppressive density of U.S. control of Central America--of which the larger South America is, in this work, a shadowy likeness. Because the economies of the other Americas are in a state of "neodependency," capitalism south of the border does not suggest the system most congruent to human freedom and dignity; it suggests, rather, "a brutal oligarchy-military complex that has been supported by U.S. policies--and armies."¹

Although Parada sends us to the historians (and rightly so, since her piece obviously sketches an historical pattern), there are also here mysteries of interpretation. The word "vacant" is stamped over what would be Georgia, Mexico City (the least vacant!), Guatemala, and Colombia; and there is a fascinating interpenetrating relationship between, on the one hand, the positive soldiers in the north and their negative images in the south (not to mention their boot-size clone hordes) and, on the other hand, the solid map of the United States and Central America (background or foreground?) and the "negative" topological map of South America. In this interplay, the texts move in and out of focus, like the comments of authorial figures or like revelations of the repressed.

Moving from the fugal density of Parada to the austere mystery of Carol Flax is like moving from Bartok to Cage. Flax's "Triptych 1: Shana's Run" is an allegory of interpretation. Here manipulation is an outright mystery, but one which is untroubling, beautifully calm, as a single line of a violin echoing across the desert air. There is a narrative thrust from the symmetrical left panel, where the runner's calf bridges the obverse images, and in its blurring suggests the

propulsion of every "in the beginning."

The black of the central panel surrounds the runner now haloed in her own mosaic. Is this loneliness? Or endorphin ecstasy? Or human existence, where ex- means between and *sisto* means standing; hence, standing between two nothings, or two congruencies with (a) god?

The calf-propelled image bridges, finally, the central and right panel. In this trajectory, the runner, not haloed but blurred by motion itself, looks straight into the blackness ahead and, perhaps, at the mysterious end-term of this race: the race as journey, as story, as transformation, as an image of pure manipulation.

And the end-term itself, fragmented yet teleologically awaiting us all, is it desert or sand dunes by an impossibly distant sea? What dark cylinder shape casts the shadow? Artistic creation is finally self-manipulation, self-creation through creating images. And like MANUAL's work, Flax's images involve the spectator in the creation of meaning, in turning nature (the desert) into culture (running as ritual) and culture back into nature, as when Coleridge says that Shakespeare's plays are like the expression of nature itself. Here the value of manipulation is its own valuation.

So when we manipulate--to return to our etymological beginning--what are our hands (*manus*) full (*pleni*) of? Such stuff as flickered between Prospero's hands? Or what the tubercular hands of John Keats intimated, stretching out, in his last great poem, beyond anything imagined in his age?²

Footnotes

1. The words of the judicious diplomatic historian, Walter LaFeber, in his *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 14. Cf. pgs.

16-18 for a discussion of neodependency.

2. I would like to thank Ed Hill for spending an afternoon discussing MANUAL's work and the *état d'ame* of digital photography.

James Houlihan teaches in *Classics and Honors at the University of Houston*. He has published translations of Spanish and Portuguese poetry. Previously he taught in the film program at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

FROM DAGUERREO-TYPE TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY?

By Joanne Lukitsh

"The people who are interested in categories are waiting for another one," says [Willis] Hartshorn [director of exhibitions at the International Center of Photography, New York City]. "What will happen when photography is no longer prints on paper, when the image exists only as electronic data that can be called up on a video monitor? In a couple of years that technology will become very inexpensive and accessible and then--boom! That will change everything--about the way photography is treated in museums."

--It's art, but is it Photography? *The New York Times Magazine*, October 9, 1988.

The catalogue to the exhibition *Digital Photography: Captured Images, Volatile Memory*, *New Montage* features three essays which will be examined in this review. I've chosen the essays as my subject in order to explore a question unresolved by the exhibition itself: why should "digital photography" be distinguished from digital visual representation in general? The recent availability of powerful, low-cost computer imaging equipment has provoked sections of the art photography community to take stock of this technology, but it is only one aspect of the major transformation in the representation and communication of knowledge currently under development in our post-modern culture.¹ While the concept of "digital photography" would meet the expectations of the photographic institutions which have produced and displayed the exhibition, there are problems with applying expectations of photographic representation to digital visual representation which are resolved to varying degrees of success in the catalogue essays.

The *Digital Photography* exhibition catalogue features an in-

roduction by Jim Pomeroy, exhibition co-curator, an essay "L'amour faux," by Timothy Druckrey, a New York City based photographic educator, and an essay by Martha Rosler, artist and writer and head of photography/video/media studies at Rutgers University, "Image Simulations, Computer Manipulations: Some Ethical Considerations." Also published in the catalogue are artists' statements, biographies, and reproductions of works, and a bibliography. The bibliographic citations from art, photography, and communications journals and popular magazines typically date from 1985, with a few citations as recent as the spring of this year (the exhibition opened in San Francisco in June). Although several participating artists have been working with the computer technologies for some years, 1986 is the date of the oldest image in the exhibit, and the majority were produced in 1987-88.

Thus the exhibition/catalogue, with its current subject, up-to-date information, and reproduction of very recent work, is itself a product of the technologies of rapid information accumulation, processing, and transmission inseparable from the development of computer information processing. Curator Marnie Gillet and Pomeroy, rather than waiting years to construct a magisterial, definitive survey, have produced what I appreciate as an informative and necessarily provisional account of some current developments. I think their approach is commendable, consistent with the rapidly changing discourse of computer information processing.² A direction I found problematic, however, was their effort to identify "digital photography" as a particular practice of computer-based visual representation, assigned a specific aesthetic category: montage.

Curators Pomeroy and Gillet approached the complex of issues generated by computer representations by focusing on one concerning the application and reception of this imagery: the use of sophisticated computer technologies to seamlessly manipulate photographic representations in advertising, television and other photographic media. With this issue in mind the curators selected a range of American work which used digitizing technologies at some stage of its production and pertained, to different ends, to mass media photographic representations. As Pomeroy explains in his introductory essay:

Our intention is to show a variety of ideas through different forms of exposition, distribution, and engagement. In opposition to the oblique strate-

gies of concealment employed by the media industry, most of these artists handle their ideas, transparently and aggressively, as montage.³

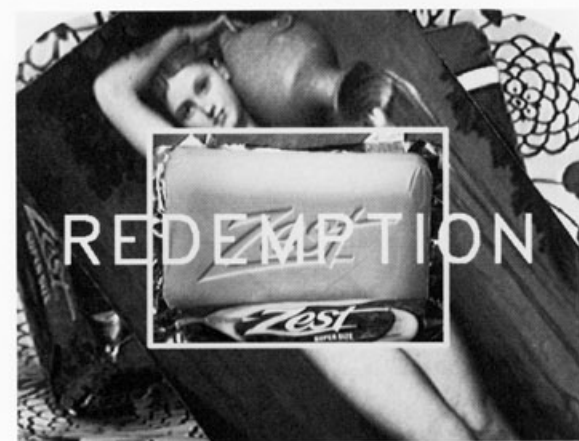
In this passage Pomeroy poses an artistic opposition to the media industry based upon a self-reflexive presentation of devices--artistic transparency versus mass media concealment. While this particular artistic approach is significant, it is insufficient in itself to counter the influence of "the media industry," implying neither goals of, nor audiences for, this opposition.

To the extent that curatorial interest in mass media photographic manipulation invited the exhibition of socially critical work during a politically conservative time and encouraged the exhibition audience to connect the lone artist at his or her terminal with other applications of computer imaging processes, I commend the curators. Unfortunately Pomeroy's use of the term "montage" to describe the majority of work in the exhibition enables him to make an analogy between some established practices of photography and some work in digital representations. This analogy, in turn, enables Pomeroy to evaluate digital representations according to categories of development and practice conventional to art photographic activities.

Of the three essays, only Rosler's analyzes at any length the value of photographic objectivity threatened by digital manipulation of mass media images. She begins her essay with a paradox: computer manipulation poses a threat to the objectivity of photographic representation which has itself been critically challenged for several decades. Why then should this manipulation be considered as a threat? Rosler works with this paradox, historicizing the expectation that the analogue photograph is objective and explaining how photographic manipulation and re-touching have long served the interests of journalism, politics, advertising and entertainment. The point is not that digital technologies are the latest example of such uses, but that photographic objectivity is a social construction, not essential to the photographic process:

As always, social meanings and their perceptions are not fully determined by the technologies used in their production but rather are circumscribed both by wider hegemonic ideological practice and by the practices and traditions of those who oppose them. If material conditions need to be redescribed, more painstakingly and in novel forms, in order to be reinvested with "believability," then we

MANUAL (Bloom/Hill), *Redemption*, 1987. From *Digital Photography*.



can surely develop the forms... and the means of dissemination to do so.

As Rosler notes, discussion of effects of computerization commonly split the subject into two: the first dealing with the production and reception of computerized imagery, the second with the impact of computerization on the production and experience of labor. This separation facilitates discussions of this imagery as distinct from the social relations in which it functions. Effective criticism of the manipulation of mass media imagery is accomplished not by protesting digitizing itself, but by addressing specific applications of this technology in the production of social meaning. Rosler's essay itself is an example of this effective criticism, as she carefully distinguishes between different applications of digital imagery in print and broadcast journalism, and the dissolution of distinctions between advertisements and information in the marketing of entertainment.

Rosler's essay does not refer to any of the work exhibited in *Digital Photography* and is more self-sufficient than the others published in the catalogue. Her essay is consistent with the didactic purpose of the show, even as her attention to the importance of commenting upon image manipulation in "particular, concrete situations and events" is inconsistent with an exhibition which groups work under the general category of "digital photography." The essays by Pomeroy and Druckrey struggle unsuccessfully with this inconsistency. Although their approaches and intentions differ, both emphasize, to quote Rosler, technology as "the determinant of social meanings and their perceptions" at the expense of a socially inflected interpretation of photographic representation.

In his essay Jim Pomeroy joins digital photography to a narrative of continuous photographic technological development (from daguerreotype to disk camera), in which he identifies one of photography's "strongest attributes" as "its constant relationship to invention, change and improvement." With this technological emphasis Pomeroy gives a 1980s version of the modernist art photographic procedure of securing artistic legitimacy for contemporary work by invoking nineteenth century photographic precedents. Implicit in Pomeroy's narrative is the photographer's unceasing ability to meet the challenge of photography's progressive development; digital photography represents an expansion in complexity, but not a change in kind.

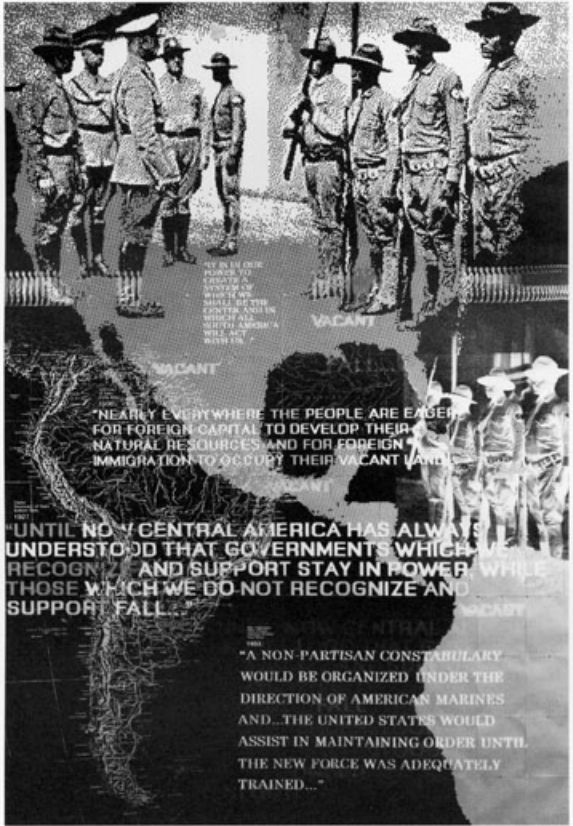
Pomeroy's essay combines an appreciation of the complex social implications of computer technology ("Computers are not altogether utopian solutions, however... Their assembly exploits cheap labor abroad, contributing greatly to flight of domestic jobs, tax revenue and the trade deficit") with the delight of a tech rep promising better pictures ("If prices drop and the technology continues to improve, still video is the next likely area for a lot of exciting new pictures"). By devising a category of computer photography which can be assimilated into a standard model of photographic technological

progress, Pomeroy gives little sense of the changes in practice which will occur with the changing status of information in a computer communications culture. His category may offer reassurance, but offers limited applications for practices.

Timothy Druckrey's essay is a polemic, intended to inform his audience of the threats to cultural values posed by widespread media use of digitized photographs. Although I am in sympathy with his aim, Druckrey undermines the value of his appeal by describing computer technology as a monolithic force dominating a gullible populace, which passively consumes any photographic representation as truthful. While Druckrey's appreciative discussion of the varied intentions and forms of the different work in *Digital Photography* is a welcome alternative to his technological determinism, its effectiveness

already has established the photograph as dubious form of authentic history, but this digitization process redoubles the problem by further destabilizing the bond the image has with time, memory or history.⁶

Contradictions within the paragraph (can an analogy have an intractable relation to anything? are there creditable forms of authentic history? authentic for whom?) make it difficult for me to identify Druckrey's point exactly, but I disagree with his premise that there are essential characteristics of photography (the image's bond with time, memory and history) exclusive of social use. Druckrey admittedly raises these conventional ideas with extensive qualifications, but I think their mention provokes a certain nostalgia for a less "destabilized" era which doesn't encourage the question, stabilized for whom?



Esther Parada, *The Monroe Doctrine, Theme and Variations*, 1987. laser prints, 12" x 8", 168 documents. From *Digital Photography*.

is impaired by a rhetoric of confrontation and mastery which reinforces his conception of the issue as an implacable opposition between technology and audience.

Unlike Pomeroy, Druckrey does not explain digital photography as the latest stage of specifically photographic development. While Druckrey accounts for digital photography as an irrevocable rupture with previous expectations of photography, he delineates this break with an uncomplicated characterization of the legitimacy of pre-digital photographic representation:

Its [photography's] credibility as representation may be subject to scrutiny, but its intractable relation to time is not. Digital imagery, however, ruptures this analogy of temporal continuity and introduces a recording regime which is discrete and infinitely transmutable. The question about the veracity of the image

Druckrey's nostalgia for pre-digital photography is recapitulated in his conceptualization of technology as separate from the culture in which it was developed. As he explains in his discussion of the issue of new montage in digital imagery:

Suffice to say that the photomonteurs of the 1920's and the electromonteurs of the 1980s reveal that culture and technology are always at odds.⁶

In addition to collapsing differences between montage practices of the 1980s and 1920s, Druckrey uses the precedent of the 1920s to give spurious authority to his opposition (technology isn't a cultural production?) between culture and technology. Druckrey himself abandons this opposition in his discussion of the work exhibited in *Digital Photography*, but its use elsewhere in his essay is consistent with a belief that there is value--almost an organic goodness--residing out-

side of technology. This belief encourages the political passivity I noted earlier, maintained at the cost of the program of political intervention raised by Rosler.

Of the three essays, only Druckrey's discusses the work exhibited in *Digital Photography* and his analysis is informative and generally lacking the determinism which mars the first half of his essay. Having established technology as a monolithic force, however, he maintains the credibility of artistic interventions in this technology by attributing great power to the challenges made by this work. My quarrel with Druckrey is based less upon differences in our recognition of the value of the work, than on the rhetoric he uses to describe it. As Druckrey explains:

Much of this new work in fact "captures" extant data. To seize images by force, to capture them, has curiously duplicitous meanings. If culture presents its products, its images, its ideologies, its materials, to us without constraint, then their expropriation both perpetuates them as a system of meaning and ruptures the system by refunctioning them as critical... From personal memory to media and political memory, the works here may capture, but do not kidnap, may be volatile, but explode only presumption, may be new but only as they integrate current culture and technology as viable elements in history.⁷

I have less confidence than Druckrey that a system can be simultaneously perpetuated and ruptured, and that opposition to a system can be accomplished on what Druckrey describes as its own terms--aggression and destruction. Druckrey uses many of these terms to describe the presumed impact of some of the individual pieces on the viewer: Esther Parada's *The Monroe Doctrine: Theme and Variations* "...reopens the wound so vehemently suppressed by our current administration"; George Legrady's *Figures of Authority* "...erode the confidence normally yielded to the television as a material device"; each panel of Sheila Pinkel's *Thermonuclear Garden* "jolts with contradictions, money, childbirth, the military...in a form which is linked with childhood memory, the grotesque character of the political economy and the moral bankruptcy of the nuclear age"; in the work of MANU-AL "traditions of art, their use by advertising, the codes of television...these currencies are assailed in these works." Assaults, reopened wounds, explosions, capture, jolts, overwhelm the possibilities for integration and the discussions of play and empowerment which Druckrey raises in his account of some of the work in the exhibition.

It is possible that many photographers would characterize, with Willis Hartshorn, the proliferation of digital imaging technologies in terms of an explosive--boom!--change threatening extant categories of activity. The curators of *Digital Photography* endeavored to present the subject in a different way, emphasizing its implications for artistic activity in relation to social concerns with the communication and representation of information. This

aim was well-intentioned, and I repeat my praise for the curators, but the specificity of issues and forms engaged in such critical work is incompatible with the organizing category of "digital photography," and I think that the result was a vaguely "political" exhibition context which mitigated the effectiveness of individual pieces. The catalogue essays recapitulate this problem, with Rosler's essay providing suggestions for future examinations of the issues.

Footnotes

1. See the recent article by Robert Bowen, "After the Revolution," in *Afterimage* 16 (September, 1988): for reporting on conferences on digital imaging technologies conducted earlier this year at Ohio State University, Columbus, and New York University, New York City, and citations in the exhibition catalogue bibliography.
2. Perhaps I'm being idealistic about the appeal of a "provisional" exploration of a subject to curators, grant sources and arts institutions. Pomeroy writes, "...Our primary concern in *Digital Photography* is to present rigorous, mature work by contemporary artist/photographers imaginatively utilizing accessible systems" (p. 2). Given the relative novelty of this utilization, describing it as "mature" seems slightly defensive.
3. Jim Pomeroy, "Captured Images/Volatile Memory/New Montage," in *Digital Photography: Captured Images/Volatile Memory/New Montage* (San Francisco: San Francisco Cameraclub, 1988), p. 2.
4. Martha Rosler, "Image Simulations/Computer Manipulations: Some Ethical Considerations," in *Digital Photography*, p. 33.
5. Timothy Druckrey, "L'amour faux," in *Digital Photography*, p. 4.
6. Druckrey, "L'amour faux," p. 9.
7. Druckrey, "L'amour faux," p. 7.

Joanne Lukitsch is a Visiting Mellon Instructor in the Department of Art and Art History, Rice University.

THE SILENT CLASSROOMS OF CATHERINE WAGNER

By David Lazar

American Classroom, photographs by Catherine Wagner, were exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from September 10 - November 27.

Ironically, Alexander Pope's "A little Learning is a dangerous Thing" is often misconstrued through the absence of the following line: "Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring" ("An Essay on Criticism"). Those who forget or do not know the couplet's second line confirm the first. While looking at the portentous introduction to Catherine Wagner's show, *American Classroom*, at the Museum of Fine Arts, and the photographs themselves, I was struck with how dangerous a thing a little theory is.

Someone should undertake (or have they? I fear my own ignorance on this) to study the "study guides" that accompany museum exhibits, that hang on the walls with the pictures and paintings, declaiming the importance of theory and directed interpretation for the supposedly unwashed masses who, presumably, have very little learning indeed.

The introductory mini-essay on Wagner's photographs reads like a primer on deconstruction theory, "Deconstruction for Toddlers." It tells us that "Wagner's goal is to transform classrooms in the public eye . . . Familiar teaching tools are juxtaposed with the unexpected,"



Catherine Wagner, *Moss Landing Elementary, Seventh and Eighth Grade Science Room, Moss Landing, CA*, from *American Classroom* series, 1984. Target Collection of American Photography purchase with funds provided by Target Stores. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

that while the photographer "concisely describes how a place looks, Wagner does not impose how it feels to be there. She withholds overt expression of her own response to provoke discussion, remembrance and discovery in her audience. A picture fails for Wagner if all viewers derive from it the same feeling or message." Clearly derived from Barthes and company (writers produce "presumptions of meaning, forms, as it were, and it is the world which fills them"; Barthes, *Essays critiques*, p. 9) this is, for one thing, writing on an abysmal level. How, I wonder, does one "concisely describe how a place looks" without imposing some sense of how it feels to be there? What is the role of "conciseness" in graphic art? Is the use of the language of the temporal meaningful?

Note the earnest high seriousness of the tone with its dusty pedagogical edge, the fussy romanticized "remembrance" instead of "memory." I'm sure some other visitors thought me a bit demented when I started giggling at the unintended pun: "A picture fails for Wagner . . .", as though photographs were students in her class on successful productions of art. "If they [the viewers] stretch," we are told, "what they get is their own response." This is vacuous exhortation and deflection of potential criticism. It is the myth of pure formalism. If the word "School" were written on a blackboard, displayed in one of our city's cultural institutions, we would certainly be confronted with memory and association, discussion and the possibilities of discovery. However, we would also be responding to the language and context of the presentation. How is it written, scrawl or fine calligraphy? How big the board? Green or black? Capital

or small letters? Is it in a room draped tastefully with black crape, or beside Tennessee classrooms of Walker Evans in the permanent collection?

Wagner, we are told wants "to transform classrooms in the public eye" through the juxtaposition of the "familiar" and the "unexpected." Wagner "does not impose . . . She withholds." Wagner would like us "to re-see" and to remember. I understand the desire to shake one's audience from the still catacombs of static memory. But I cannot appreciate the desire to transform a public institution into, well, something else. It is an obscure object of desire.

That said, Wagner's photographs are compositionally balanced, sometimes to the point of fastidiousness; in a sequence, the definition and symmetry of the photographs seems airless, even when the classrooms are somewhat disarrayed. Theory notwithstanding, this suggests a pedagogical critique. The dominant motif, old classrooms with wooden movable desks, are contrasted with disconcertingly pristine vocational settings, and some still lifes: frogs in a dissecting pond, a collection of toy animals and people.

The last is a lovely piece, taken at the New Mexico School for the Deaf. Soldiers, wind-up toys, a dragon, a pincushion, all in a box of moist sand, it is full of tactile suggestion and the intriguing role of touch in the narrative creations of deaf children. Unfortunately, the photograph is marred by the too self-consciously exposed corner of the box at the upper left hand of the shot.

On St. Patrick's Day at Calistoga Elementary School, Wagner again delivers a little essay in texture. A left-over lunch of baked potato, beans, indeter-

minate condiments, is ravaged but sensual, an index of the departed diner's hunger, the artifact of his or her directed energy. Next to the plate is a disconsolate, flat cloverleaf, smudged, left behind, of little significance: an artifact of the failure to engage the imagination.

At Moss Landing Elementary School, birds of different feathers, seemingly long past the taxidermist's handiwork, are impaled above the blackboard, which is covered with diagrams of a bird's optical system. In the dusky landscape of the classroom, the birds are martyrs to education, pathetically, yet by virtue of fecundity, almost amusingly crucified. It might be subtitled "Because We Are Too Many" or "On Extended Wings." It is lovely and disturbing, flat and wry, critical and slightly juvenile in its facile juxtaposition.

The Don Bosco Technical High School, in Boston, shows Wagner at her most benign, predictable. An icon of Mary stands between the window and a flaccid American flag; a couple of fifties posters on how to study hover above to the right. Lurking outside the window is a vague street, Anystreet. The juxtaposition makes the flag, Mary, as banal by implication as the imprecations to good study habits, de-ritualized by the levelled presentations of a religious school in a secular society. The image does not shock; it does not disorient. We have seen meaning drained, meaning trivialized in this form in every photograph of every billboard for the last thirty years or more. It would be vaguely amusing if it were not such a worn-out form. It could be moving or demanding if there were a locus of power, spiritual or other, in any of the images. But it is merely some-

what arch.

And this is the problem of too many of Wagner's classroom photographs. Too nostalgic to be critical, too post-modern to indulge in delight, what is left is the alienated image. All the photographs are de-populated (metaphorically dehumanized), a strategy designed for disconsolation considering the fact that these are, for good or ill, arenas of interaction. As a student of humankind's structures and forms, its architecture and artifacts, Wagner surely knows that any setting whose active agents of process are removed will seem somewhat stagnant as a result. Wagner takes these settings, all conventional classrooms, and informs us that the occupants have just left. Perhaps she nods to social science and does not want her variables contaminated by rearranging, by cleaning up. Perhaps she feels the aura of the students and their teachers still inhabit the rooms (In one shot there is a skeletal shadow on the wall). A post-modern cosmic social scientist might have a great deal to say, would have more than the limited, if refined, vocabulary of this work, these timid soft-focused ironies in crisp gelatin.

David Lazar is a doctoral candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Houston.

IMAGES OF IMAGES

By Roberto Cofresi

On *Fantasizing*, an exhibition of Polaroid photographs by Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey, was on view at HCP from September 9 to October 9, 1988.

We surround ourselves with images: written images, advertising images, television, photographs, paintings (do I see trees outside my window or just another image?). Images communicate and record what is in another space, another time, somewhere else, not here, but there, in the past, in the future. One thing has as much presence as another. "The model is always here before the event. Simulation brings an end to the opposition between truth and falsehood". Can action take place under these conditions?

Physical presence—being in a moment, taking part in the qualities that make the moment special. Like me writing this now; like you reading it. The moment is related to a specific space and time, has it ever been only one space and one time? With the increase in media communication a moment is more and more occupied by other moments past and future, there, and somewhere else. This article becomes part of our moments, mine as writer, yours as reader, Nagatani's and Tracey's as subjects. From different places (times and spaces) we exchange moments.

A woman in rollers and a robe has calmly interrupted her breakfast to look out the window. She sees a crack in the surface of the earth expanding, menacingly growing towards her. The refrigerator door has been flung open and its contents have begun to topple out. Everything else around the room is also being flung around. A cat in a freakish reaction is looking for protection underneath a table, but the table itself is being flung. The woman holds a newspaper in her hand; the headline reads: "L. A. Earthquake Unlikely". The piece by Nagatani and Tracey is titled "Unlikely Earthquake."

Left out of this description of "Unlikely Earthquake" are important details: the window is a painting by Tracey; strings from above hold the objects in place; the cat is not alive. The piece is made out of two 20" x 24" Polaroid photographs of a construction, an installation by Nagatani and Tracey. In their installations paintings of landscapes, interiors, and window views provide a backdrop for furniture, objects, and people (represented both by cutouts and models). The people are engaged in various everyday activities (picnics, breakfast, restaurants) while in the midst of phenomenal events (nuclear explosions, earthquakes) and other more fantastic experiences (flying fish, snicker bar clouds). In all the installations the people maintain the same casual attitude as the woman in "Unlikely Earthquake," with a show of occasional interest, never more than mild surprise.

In the Nagatani and Tracey



Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey, *Snicker Snicker*, 1984. Color polaroid photograph, 20 x 24".

installations the process of construction is exposed, not hidden. Tension is created. These installations, on one hand, like newspapers and television, document another moment (an earthquake, a nuclear explosion, etc.); on the other hand, as opposed to newspapers and television, they expose their own appropriation of that moment. Nagatani and Tracey have made events such as nuclear explosions, and earthquakes their own, creations of their own actions; they have presented them now for my own appropriation. My actions towards the photographs and then towards the events that the photographs bring to mind are being questioned.

In the piece "Trinity Suite" the lower part is crossed from side to side with a negative strip of photos of a nuclear explosion, while on the upper part there is a small stage where two miniature dolls paint pictures of a nuclear explosion that is happening somewhere outside of the stage. I look at photos of a nuclear explosion, the miniature painters look at a nuclear explosion. Can I make a nuclear explosion a part of my moment more than they can? Their reaction is to paint it. What is my reaction? What is your reaction as you read about it? Is reading an article or looking at an artwork about nuclear explosions different from seeing a news report or a documentary about it?

When something is about to affect our moment we take action. We can look at photos of past moments without feeling that we need to do anything about them, but we take action

towards the nostalgia, longing, etc. which they bring, which takes place in our moment. Looking at the Nagatani and Tracey photographs, surrounded by a world of images, do we take part of the moment or do we remain in another? Do we take action towards realizing ourselves, or do we become another image?

In the photo "Snicker Snicker" two very overweight people are watching a television that shows a slender woman in a bathing suit holding a can of TAB diet soda. A large number of crumpled Snicker bar wrappers lie on the tables next to the pair, and many unopened bars are floating (suspended by strings) inside the room. Two newspaper headlines can be read: "Candy bar binge kills teenager" and "The Ultimate Cure for Fat, eat as much as you want and still lose weight."

The overweight couple sits inert; they don't decide whom to believe, which image to follow, whom to relate to. They watch television; the television has the moment: it is constantly providing new images, maybe the next one will be the one. For the viewer the couple watching television becomes just another repeated surface, like the Snicker bars, or the houses that expand towards the painted horizon in the background. The couple sits inert, watching the television; we also watch. Maybe the next one will be the one.

People in the Nagatani and Tracey photographs have been desensitized by the removal of the moment—or the excessive occupation of it. They have lost their physical presence—or gained too much. They live

in a world of images, where everything is a representation of another, where the only decisive action is to construct another image.

Nagatani and Tracey show us a leveled world. Earthquakes, nuclear explosions, obesity, fantastic happenings are all seen under the same light (regardless of the effect they have on people that are actually experiencing such events, for whom the events are not images, but occupy their moment); natural, social, physical and psychological experiences are all leveled as images. Even the artists themselves become images, desensitized subjects in several of their own installations. The leveling is by choice, as in Baudrillard's "active indifference."

Could there be an option? Options become images, imagined. Nagatani and Tracey fantasize a world of images, flatness; we could also fantasize a world of difference, depth, where we imagine that some things are more important than others. Physical presence must be assumed.

Footnotes

1. Jean Baudrillard, speaking in an open forum at the University of Houston in April, 1987 (from edited notes by Cynthia Freeland, in "Scenes from a Simulated Seduction: Jean Baudrillard Visits Houston," *SPOT*, Summer 1987, pp. 7-8).
2. Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983; the

masses' passivity towards the media is a decisive step, a strategy. They aim at becoming objects, and therefore give up responsibility as subjects.

Roberto Cofresi is a Houston photographer who is Operations Assistant in the Film Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Johannes Birringer, *Body Builders* by Paul Kiftelson, 1988. Foam rubber, steel, approx. 120". Installation *Mindless Competition* for First Texas Triennial, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1988.

INTERSECTIONS

By Johannes Birringer

Five headless figures, body monsters, lined up along a metal wall. The metallic wall, with its razor-sharp edges, shields an exhibition of "contemporary art."

On the other side of the traffic intersection, across from the rush of cars which is a permanent condition of the contemporary city and its systems of transit and transportation, stands another museum, its walls protecting the "fine arts," portraits of the old masters, memories of cultural history.

The museums and the intersection are oblivious of each other; they belong to different models of circulation. However, the five headless bodies which guard the entrance to the Contemporary Arts Museum inhabit the same space in which the traffic and the buildings function as screens of consumption, mobility, money and desire in a society of the mass market and multinational capital, of mass media, information and technological reproduction.

In this space of consumption, the body and representations of it are inseparable from the multiple economies of the city. At this intersection, perhaps, the bodies of the headless figures create a spectacular scene ("these towering black hunks glisten seductively in the hot Texas sun...at night their distorted forms rise from their pedestals like dense black smoke from an oil well explosion or apocalyptic nuclear mushrooms," writes a reviewer in the *Public News*).

But how can one review such figures? What do they stand for? What metaphor: seduction? explosion? apocalypse?

On the one hand, they are hardly seductive because the scene is too familiar and too transparent: our culture is saturated with images of the panic body. Fashion and commodity industries produce every imaginable and unimagined version of the total body or of the perfection of body parts.

Bodybuilding is only a symptom, albeit an especially absurd one, of the general panic anxiety within a society driven by excess and high-intensity competition. The terror of ruined and contaminated sur-

faces increases with every media image that exploits the pornographic violence to which the body can be exposed as the target of crime, abuse, addiction, and disease. Medical and military images intersect with the rhetoric of technology, fashion and sports to produce a trajectory of "planned obsolescence" which explains the current obsession with the fate of the body as precisely a sign of its redundancy and disintegration.

The pose of the bodybuilder accurately reflects the cultural pathology of excess and accumulation: at the end of its modern history, the body has become grotesque. Or, within the logic of late capitalism, it has become the model for cynical consumption ("Discover how beautiful you can be," promises world champion body builder Rachel McLeish in her new "Perfect Parts" guide).

On the other hand, if the headless bodyguards in front of the CAM were viewed not only as an image of disfigurement but as a reminder of the public function of the museum, as a kind of "writing on the wall," then they presumably pose a more complex relationship to the *Texas Triennial* Exhibition inside. There is nothing unusual about the show itself: the work (abstract, figurative, conceptual) of 24 artists is hung on walls, and one of the curators attempts to shuttle the art into our social consciousness when he describes it as a "mirror" of contemporary realities ("the full spectrum of emotional and intellectual response...to death, plague, repression and racism, and the effects of these elements on the body").

Whether or not "these elements" and their effects can be perceived in and through the art (how is art consumed in the museum?) is a question that is perhaps more subtly and provocatively framed by the configuration of the display. As you enter the CAM, you face another wall and a roofless building constructed as a scaled-down replica of the Alamo. Its cool white facade is a postmodern abstraction, a purely rhetorical reference to history or to the founding myth of Texas independence.

As Marilyn Zeitlin has written elsewhere, the ruined mission was the location of a cru-

cial loss in the war. Today the Alamo is not only an icon, but a major tourist attraction, "a monument to the romanticization of violence," a memorial to heroicism, death, honor, glory. Remember the Alamo?

Our contemporary social experience, however, is far removed from such missions, from heroicism and romanticism.

History and mythology as postmodern facade in the museum will be remembered, if at all, as posings, as free-floating signs, or as a parody of the loss of memory.

The art on the other side of the facade hangs in a vacuum; it does not reconstruct any cultural memory, nor does it transport any reality other than that of the familiar aesthetic practices (abstract, figurative, conceptual) sanctioned by art institutions and the art market. None of the works deals with or questions the historical and material conditions of its consumability.

If the museum can cynically affirm that the condition of art is the loss of its critical function once it enters into the circulation of pure surfaces, then the headless figures of the body builder do not stand "outside" (as a critical commentary on our culture), but are both totally visible as bodies-in-ruins and immediately irrelevant.

These bodies, like the museum itself, or like other scenarios for the promotion of images (Olympic games, presidential debates, corporate advertising), are caught up in the logic of the suicidal parody.

The perfection of this logic will be reached once it is possible to design a completely impersonal, abstract and disembodied body without history and social relationships. An exhibition of this body will be an exhibition where there is nothing more to see.

Sources: Gregorio Salazar, *Public News*, Sept. 28, 1988; David Ross, juror's statement, exhibition catalogue of *Texas Triennial 1988*; Marilyn Zeitlin, "Honor Roll," exhibition catalogue for *Francesca Torres installation* Belchite/South Bronx, *Queens Museum 1988*.

Johannes Birringer is a theater director and writer. He has completed a video, *Inter-Sections of the Body*, which he will show in Houston later this winter.

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY (AGAIN)

By Cynthia Freeland

The First Texas Triennial 1988 was held at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, from September 24 - November 13, 1988. Curated by Marge Goldwater, David Ross, and Marilyn Zeitlin, the exhibit included works by 24 Texas artists; it will travel to various Texas sites until January, 1990. The 1988 Houston Area Exhibition was held at the Sarah D. Blaffer Gallery of the University of Houston from September 9 - October 23, 1988. The jurors, Alison de Lima Greene, Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, and Richard Koshalek, selected 96 works by 64 Houston artists for inclusion in the exhibition. The show *Rejected: A Salon de Refusés* was held at Diverse Works from October 15 - November 19, 1988. According to *Diverse Works*, of the 1000 artists whose works were rejected by the two other area shows, and who were eligible for the *Rejected* show, 213 artists participated, exhibiting one work each.

...But Is It Photography?

This fall two major juried exhibitions in Houston highlighted regional art. In addition (and in response) to the Contemporary Arts Museum's *First Texas Triennial* and the Blaffer Gallery's *1988 Houston Area Exhibition*, *Diverse Works* hosted a large *Rejected: A Salon de Refusés* show. The representation of photography in all three exhibits reflects issues raised in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, "It's Art, but is it Photography?" (*New York Times*, Section 6, October 9, 1988).

In this article, Richard B. Woodward surveyed work by such artists as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and the Starn Twins, who reject the label "photographer." He emphasized the gulf between "art photography" and "artists who use photography," speaking of the Starn Twins as representative of a younger generation of photographers "impatient with the tradition of 8-by-10 black-and-white images intended for a print room or a book" (p. 30). Woodward also commented that "...It isn't clear anymore how photography should be valued or looked at, where within our museums it should be exhibited—even what is or is not a photograph" (p. 42).

This comment is directly relevant to classifications in the two regional shows. For example, counting strictly, in the Blaffer Show perhaps three artists were "photographers"—i.e., did "straight" photography: relatively small-sized, finely-printed, formally beautiful work made with a 35 mm or view camera. Counting a bit more broadly, several other people were also "photographers"—artists working mainly in the photographic medium, perhaps via digitizing, collaging, huge blow-ups with paint, the incorporation of graffiti and texts, etc. Counting even more broadly, I could find seven more "photographer/

artists"—artists working with an incorporation of photographic materials into drawings or paintings, sculptural-photographic (billboard) installations, video sculpture, and so on. And even this last count does not include the variety of artists working with photographically-derived imagery.

Again, in the CAM's smaller, more focused (and statewide) exhibition, only Wendy Watriss among the photographers did "straight" photography (the show included some of her series done at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington). In the *Texas Triennial* we could also see Regina Vater's space-landscape photograph installed with wildcat and rabbit fur, Celia Alvarez Muñoz's mixed-media Cibachrome religious ritual pieces, Casey Williams' huge (72" x 83") monotone photos overlaid with metallic paints, and Frank Martin's chemically manipulated "selonium prints." Here too, this initial list of artists using photographic media does not extend more broadly to include the photographically-derived imagery found in Rachel Hecker's paintings, Randy Twaddle's charcoals, or Rick Lowe's installation/environmental structure concerning racism and the KKK.

A natural preliminary conclusion is that to be "art" by the currently operative museum standards, photography does indeed have to be "more than photography." (And might the converse follow—if it's art it's not photography? It's tempting to think so, at least on the basis of Frank Martin's by now notorious exclusion from the FotoFest "official list" last March.) My attempt to use these exhibits to inquire about "the state of photography" thus begins from a contradiction: to examine the way "photography" is represented in these important regional exhibitions is already to separate and categorize what is in practice fused. Nevertheless, bearing this in mind, I pursued my inquiry in conversations with Alison Greene (a juror of the *Houston Area Exhibit*, and Associate Curator of 20th Century Art at the Houston MFA), Marti Mayo (Blaffer Gallery Director), Anne Tucker (Curator of Photography at the Houston MFA), and Marilyn Zeitlin (Curator and Acting Co-Director of the CAM, and a juror of the *Texas Triennial*).

Technique and medium

Greene pointed out that even quite recently photography has not been included in juried area exhibitions. But both Mayo and Zeitlin emphasized that there was no hesitation about including photography in their institution's exhibits. Zeitlin remarked, "The *Triennial* was open to all the fine arts—not crafts. We were looking for work with quality, work that could hold its own with the rest of the work in the show. Other 'straight photography' was considered and got studio visits."

However, all the people I interviewed agreed that the artwork selected *did* reflect the jurors' preferences and the fact that none of the jurors involved were "photography people." Greene noted, "Often when there isn't a photography expert serving as a juror,

'painterly effects' appeal enormously." On the other hand, Tucker thought that a "photography specialist" might actually have ruled out some of the color formalist "straight photography" included in the Blaffer show as dull and derivative.

Again, most of the people I spoke with viewed photography as simply one among a variety of media for artistic exploration. Zeitlin said, "It's a technique, a medium, not an end in itself. As far as technique is concerned, all three of us [Triennial jurors] have a preference for well-crafted work. We weren't looking for technically-driven work, *tour de force* work. I don't think our choices imply that art photography must be "more than photography"—rather, that photography has arrived, and now it can relax."

Mayo's view was similar: "I'm not of the school that believes art has anything to do with technical perfection. What I think is central is the idea or content—not the subject matter or iconography, but what can't be written or spoken. I'm not the least bit interested in the media or how it's accomplished. I think the show reflects the fact that young people today are coming to terms with ideas of the early 1980's, 'the new photography.' It takes time for ideas to filter down, get used, and get thrown out. Appropriation, manipulation, blurring of media have become part of the vocabulary of artists."

Tucker also commented generally on the topic of "art photography today": "The 1970's courtship between painting and photography has definitely cooled. What remains is a much more selective embracing. We see it in photographs that are conceptual in origin, large in scale, and rooted in general art history, rather than photographic art history. The aesthetic can be quite different—as in works by Nick Nicosia and Casey Williams, for instance. The traditional black and white photograph may be passé; but I don't care what the painting world thinks—I won't stop collecting them."

Regionalism

Regionalism turns out to be an extremely touchy issue. In their catalogue statement for the 1988 *Houston Area Exhibition* the jurors confidently pronounced that they had found...

...a strong and healthy regional style evident. This style is informed by many elements including the often-mentioned and most obvious reflection of the city's proximity to Mexico, its brilliant light and the ever-present, uninterrupted horizon.

By comparison, jurors for the *Triennial* seemed concerned to dissociate themselves from the discovery of any regional aesthetic. David Ross, Director of the Boston ICA, probably went furthest in this direction:

And what about the Texas angle? Quite frankly, in the opinion of this juror, there isn't one. Texas is a large state, affected by various economic and social conditions, that is home to many artists. Period. (CAM First Texas Triennial Catalogue, p. 11.)

Zeitlin's view was more qualified: "It's a very strange question because it always has a chip on its shoulder. There's nothing wrong with regionalism. The question of regionalism misses one thing: is the work personal? People work from their environment; to the degree they absorb that, they reflect a region, a locale—geographic, political, and so on. What exactly would define regionalism? When I was at the Virginia Museum there was a show called *Painting in the South*. What does this mean—cliches about the south—hoop skirts and lynchings? Or just painting by a 'southerner'? But how many generations back do you have to go to count as a 'southerner'? In the Texas *Triennial* we defined regionalism as 'You live here and make your work here.' To be a Texan, you have to have a ZIP code in Texas. And that's it, as far as I'm concerned. Three people in the show were born outside the U.S., and of the people in the show, few—only 5 of 24—are natives, and few were educated in Texas. Mobility is ubiquitous today.

"You run into trouble anyway if you try to define Texas imagery. Is it cowboy art? Hispanic imagery? Well, that's part of it—to try to define where we are in relation to Mexico—I wish we'd had more of that. We have all been seduced to some extent by 'the Texas aesthetic'—Texas expressionistic figurative work (as in John Alexander or Derek Boshier). But regionalism is really a critical convenience; and we were trying to avoid this critical convenience. Any format that creates a venue for work should be pursued. It helps artists get their work to a public."

Mayo complained, "The issue of regionalism is a tired old issue we've been beating to death—interminably flaying this tired old horse. It's virtually impossible to operate today without an awareness of the art world. Younger people are more aware of young German art than I am—and they should be. On the other hand, it's almost impossible to write, sculpt or make music without some awareness of your environment. You paint differently in Houston than in Raleigh, North Carolina. Certain kinds of images, a certain physical presence, may be more sympathetically received in some regions."

Greene's position was more critical: "Regionalism lies in the eye of the beholder, more than in the artist. There's a tendency here only to look at the work in the context of other Texas art. So some people are over-esteemed and look unique here." Greene emphasized that, though both were in a sense "regional," there were important differences in the approach of the CAM and Blaffer shows. "The Blaffer show represents a fast take by four experts within a selective group of objects. The CAM *Triennial* involved long-term reconsideration, so it resulted in a more consistent and polished exhibition. Also, there were two artists serving as jurors for the Blaffer exhibition, and they [artists] do have a distinctly different approach."

Tucker's reply was brief and to-the-point: "Is there a regional aesthetic? Naaah—people have come from too many

places and studied with varied people."

Installation and Display

An obvious difference between the CAM and Blaffer shows concerned methods of installing the work. In the Texas *Triennial*, most photographic work was exhibited together in one small space, while at the Blaffer Gallery, photography was interspersed with a variety of other media. (In fact at the Blaffer show, works by one artist were sometimes separated and exhibited in different parts of the gallery.) Mayo's comment on this was simply, "I tend not to separate media when I hang exhibitions. Otherwise, drawing and photography can be typed, seen as some sort of adjunct." Both she and Greene acknowledged that the jurors had argued about this issue; in fact they initially tried out a plan which would separate all the photography and put it together; but in Mayo's words, "It was awful! We tried for the visually exciting."

At least one photographer complained to me privately about the categorizing of work that occurred in the CAM exhibition. More tactfully, Tucker and Greene also offered criticisms. Greene said, "I can imagine certain cross-cuts from both exhibits of people whose work in different media would be related and look well together—for instance, Robert Ziebell and Rachel Hecker."

Tucker said, "There were probably ways to hang the work that were more interestingly provocative. For instance, you could put together works with political sensitivity—Wendy Watriss' Vietnam series and Rick Lowe's KKK piece. Or you could combine Frank Martin's photographs with Regina Vater's spiderwebby sculptures—they're both sort of 'swampy' works. This might have taught you more about what the artist was doing—or made you think about why they were hung together. In the old days, Nathan [Lyons] and John [Szarkowski] had to tell people how not to hang photographs—not to hang works with one subject matter together, for instance. When you simplify associations too much, you don't make people question why they were put together."

In defense of the CAM's installation, Zeitlin argued that grouping is in part an issue of scale, and that texture differences are also important. "I don't like to hang a work behind glass next to a painting. We tried to group the photography and the photography-derived painting—work by Randy Twaddle and Rachel Hecker—together. And we also placed Celia Muñoz's photographic work near Wendy Watriss' because of the shared sense of ritual in the two pieces." She also commented it would have been impractical to juxtapose Martin's photograph with Vater's work because the latter artist wanted her work to be shown in a low-light situation and in a corner.

Another important issue about the hanging of a large juried exhibit concerns decontextualization. Ben DeSoto's striking and aggressive series on Houston's homeless in downtown shelters, for instance, was sequestered only to

an extent by its placement on a separate free-standing wall in the Blaffer's second-floor gallery. It stood out from the surrounding works, dripping blood-red painted graffiti. Both Mayo and Greene seemed slightly defensive when I asked whether this work was nevertheless neutralized by its inclusion in a general survey "art" show. They responded that this was by the artist's (DeSoto's) own choice. (Tucker similarly commented, "That's something he had to know"). Greene argued that DeSoto's work would at least be stronger in this setting than in the too-abundant realm of the newspaper photo (DeSoto is a *Houston Chronicle* staff photographer). She said, "Every artist's work would benefit from more context; but an exhibit like this can create a new context, with 'answer back' from other art work in the show—there's an 'answer back,' for instance, between Ben's work in this show and that of Rick Lowe."

Marilyn Zeitlin was more willing to confront this issue head-on: "You're touching on a real problem. Political art in any medium runs this risk. Rick Lowe solved this problem, to some extent, by creating a little precinct of his own (in the *Triennial*). But everybody's work gets neutralized by being in a group show, a smorgasbord. What would I change about the show, then, if I could? *Not put it in a museum at all*. The neutralization you're talking about has more to do with its presence in a museum than in an 'art exhibit.'"

Future Directions

As the name indicates, the CAM's *First Texas Triennial* is the first in an anticipated series of future statewide shows. Zeitlin says that at present CAM staff members are mulling over the best future format—about whether to include more established artists, as this show did not, and whether to whittle the list down even more, so as to display more works by each artist. Mayo has plans for the Blaffer Gallery to repeat its *Houston Area Exhibition*, but at irregular intervals, perhaps every two or three years or "as needed." Zeitlin is convinced that the juxtaposition of the two shows has been very stimulating for the local art community. She also thinks, after viewing *Diverse Works' Rejected* exhibit, that not much good art escaped the search process for the two shows combined.

My own impression of the photography in the *Diverse Works* show was that it included a number of examples of the Ansel Adams aesthetic—exquisitely printed but rather clichéd nature imagery that neither juried show would grant the rubric of "art." It's hard to look at work in a show entitled *Rejected* without focusing on why the work got rejected (one photographer who exhibited in the show referred to it bluntly as "just another dog 'n pony show"). I saw some pretentiously overmatted and glitzy pieces, and some rather precious "avant-garde" work. One surprise was the elegantly composed and clever color formalist "Triptych #1" by James Paster, which I would have thought certainly at least the equal of similar pieces by Stephen Peterson and Ellen

Warren that were included in the Blaffer show. Two intriguing works that displayed a particularly "photographic" inventiveness were the anamorphic pinhole camera photo by Jeff Fletcher, "Union Pacific/Myself," and Helen Sweetman's beautiful "Untitled 1988" gum bichromate image. And of course the casual gallery-goer might also wonder at the reason for the absence of a number of Texas photographers from all three shows (names like Linda Aguilar, Gay Block, Peter Brown, Alain Clement, Rick Dingus, George Krause, Nick Nicosia, Kathy Vargas, and Geoff Winningham come to mind.)

Tucker commented in summation, "The juried show is a funny beast. There are probably no artists in them whose work you wouldn't have seen before if you are religious about going to all the galleries and alternative spaces. Still, this offers them the imprimatur of a museum show. Their work is seen by outside curators, so there's always a chance they'll keep track of the artists and put them in future shows. It's hard to evaluate what juried shows do for the community down the road. I want to applaud both shows—they're useful."

Tucker went on to muse about whether anyone has done something similar for photography. Both she and Zeitlin thought it would be a great idea for HCP, for example, to undertake plans for a statewide juried competition. Zeitlin suggested getting Tucker herself involved—along with two other people with a really different aesthetic ("Get someone with an off-the-wall point of view, and have them really fight it out"). Would Anne Tucker agree to participate? "Well, it would be curious to see what's going on across the state..."

In recent years, HCP has sponsored two widely different sorts of area competitions: the broad, democratically selected Members Show, and the narrow, highly selective Fellows Show, juried by a panel of "experts." A statewide juried show might offer a stimulating addition to these offerings by bringing in a wide range of new work.

All juried shows have recognizable limits: they reflect jurors' personal taste, decontextualize artists' works, and provide institutional support for particular views of "art." An HCP-sponsored statewide competition might attempt to build in structures to reveal these limits in the exhibition itself. To demystify the selection process, the jury's debates might be incorporated into the show. Organizers could also seek non-traditional modes of display: artists not shown might be invited to add comments (verbal or visual) about why their work was not selected (or why they did not participate). In addition, an HCP juried show should begin by adopting a conscious approach to the split between "art photography" and "artists who use photography," so as to encourage submissions from a wider range of participants.

Cynthia Freeland, SPOT Editor, is also Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston.



Wendy Watriss



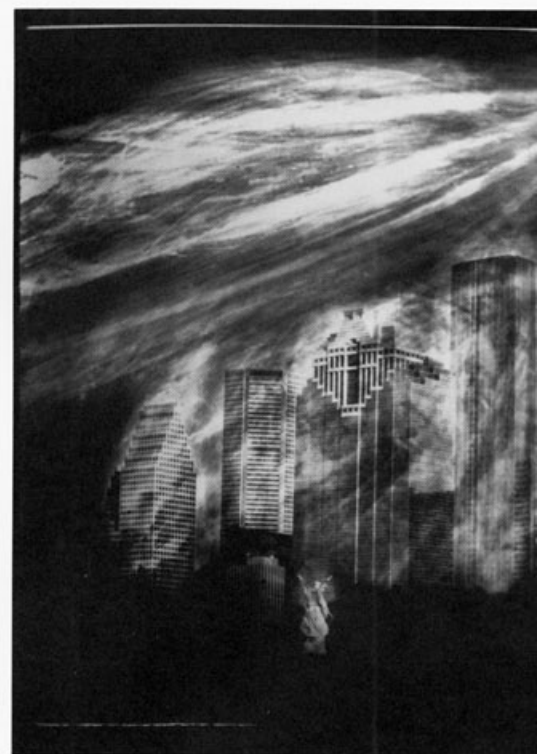
Casey Williams



Celia Alvarez Muñoz



Jeff Fletcher



From *First Texas Triennial*,
Contemporary Arts Museum:
Hockor, *Standard Hero*, 1988. Acrylic on
canvas, 72" x 120".
Muñoz, *Mobi*, 1988. Cibachrome, mixed
media, 24 x 20".
Watriss, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*,
Washington, D.C. Gelatin silver print, 16 x
20".
Williams, *Untitled #CW 353*, 1988. Black
and white photo with metallic paint, 36 x
72".

From 1988 Houston Area
Blaffer Gallery:
Blakemore, *Child*, 1988.
print, 191/2 x 19".
DeSoto, *WIC Saves Lives*,
dia on Ektacolor.
Robert Ziebell, *Wheel of*
Photographic assemblage



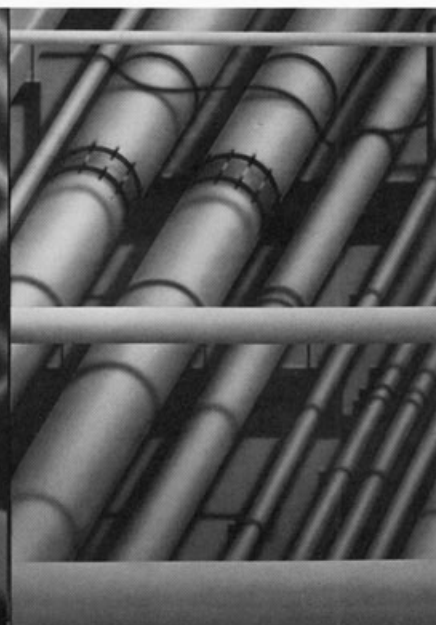
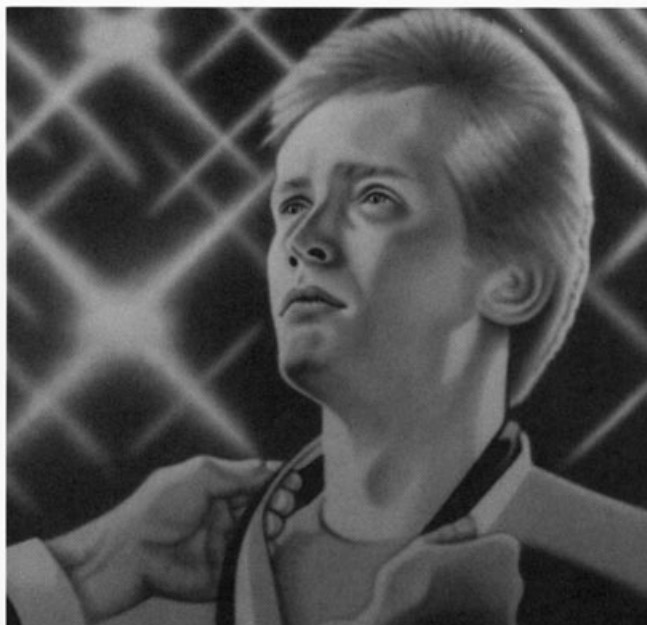
Robert Ziebell



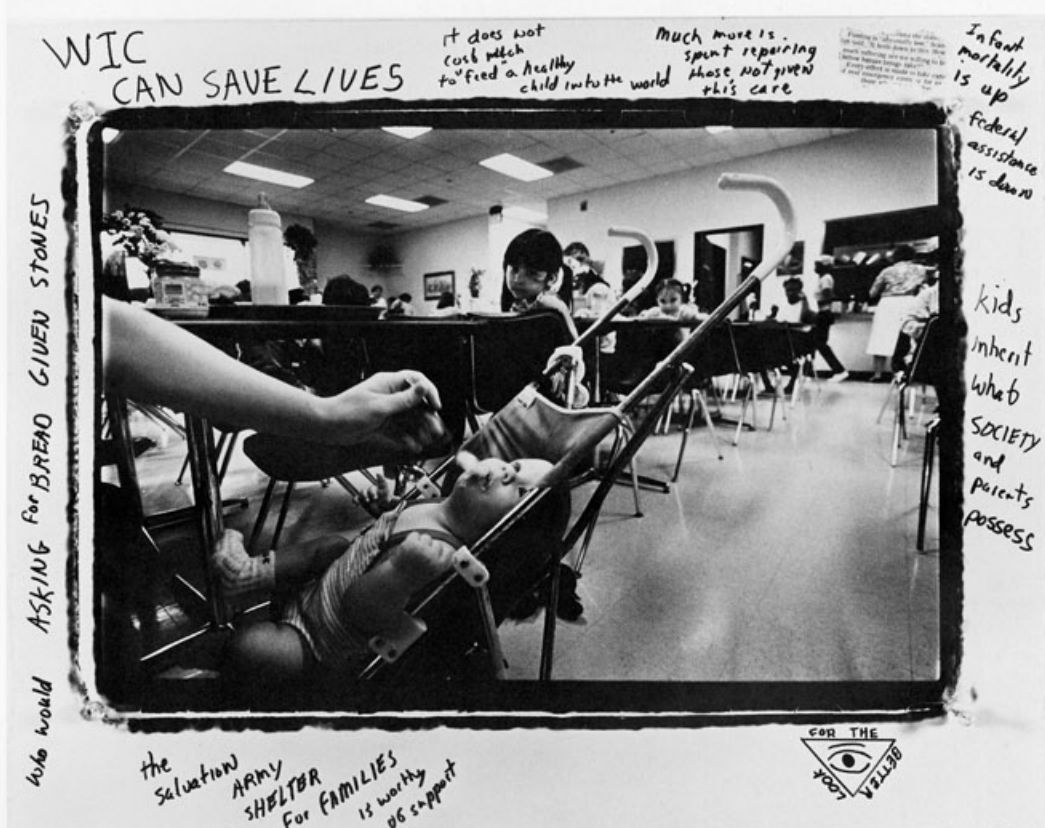
Frank Martin

From *Rejected: A Salon de Refusés, Diverse Works*:
Jeff Fletcher, Union Pacific/Myself.
Anamorphic pinhole camera photo.

From the "Unofficial" FotoFest Exhibit at
OnVaugh, 1988:
Martin, Celebration 1988. Solenium print.



Rachel Hecker (photo credit Rob Ziebell)



Ben DeSoto



Amy Blakemore

PROFILE: AMY BLAKEMORE

Amy Blakemore's large black and white photographs of children were selected by jurors from among entries by 64 local artists as third prize winners in the Blaffer Gallery's 1988 Houston Area Exhibition.

These photographs look at first (and even second) glance unremarkable, fuzzy and haphazard in their technique and sentimental in their content. Yet juror Alison Greene praises the work for its "perfect balance between technique and image." And like Greene, MFA Photography Curator Anne Tucker comments that Blakemore's images represent a very personal response to the recent FotoFest Diane Arbus exhibit, prompting her to move beyond the more standard photojournalistic format of her earlier photographs.

Blakemore's previous work, done for her 1985 M.F.A. project at the University of Texas in Austin, was a photojournalistic study of "poor people" in Austin and San Antonio. In these medium-format color photographs, Blakemore used a straight-on confrontational style, often adding long descriptive handwritten titles. She showed various small businessmen and -women being pushed out of their San Antonio shops by development, as well as Austinites displaced into welfare hotels by "Boom



Amy Blakemore, *untitled*

from being cute."

Despite criticisms from "gear-head photographers," Blakemore seems intrigued by the Diana-type camera's own aesthetic challenges: the cameras are slow and can't be used in any dim light situations. Also, they tend to leak light unless properly taped both inside and out (Blakemore got only two or three pictures out of 20 rolls shot recently due to problems with fogging). Each camera has a different optimal focal length that must be learned by trial and error; she carries

continues now as Instructor in Photography.

Blakemore sees her new Diana street series as an advance over the M.F.A. photojournalism project in which she worried about exploiting her subjects. But in concentrating on the elderly and on children--the "less intimidating"--Blakemore could still be accused of exploiting the powerless. She seems to be more comfortable with her new work because of how the photographs *feel*. The moodiness she selects for through her choice of style and presentation of subjects can be read as evoking the subjects' own intensely private presence in an alien and mysterious world--but is it theirs or hers? In any case, Blakemore does not pretend to offer any summary "truths" about these people, but instead provides mere glimpses--of the concentration of a child stretching arrow against bow, or of an elderly woman preparing to launch herself into an empty eerie-looking street.

After completing the Diana series, Blakemore plans to return to more standard cameras and formats; she would like to develop more journalistic investigative skills so as to pursue projects concerning the mentally ill and Houston minority groups. It is impossible to predict how her intuitive by-the-guts approach will serve in these more complex and ambitious projects, particularly to resolve important problems about context and exploitation--when she will, presumably, want to convey more "truths" about oppressed groups. For now, at any rate, Blakemore resists theoretical puzzling or in-



Amy Blakemore, *untitled*

City" changes.

Blakemore found that doing portraits of people she didn't know was stressful, and she began experimenting with a Diana-style plastic camera "as a way to relax" from pressures of her MFA project. Her portraits of children in the Blaffer show are part of an ongoing series of work using this cheap (\$5) plastic camera. All are street shots of people, mainly done in New York. Blakemore finds that shooting strangers on the streets is also hard, but says that children are "less intimidating." She is quick to disassociate herself from a "street photographer" like Gary Winogrand: "I went on a rampage when I first saw his book *Women are Beautiful*." She also rejects the label of "child photographer." Blakemore looks for a "scary quality" in these pictures to "keep them

around three at a time so as to choose the best one for each shot. She has also found, to her surprise, that not all Diana-style cameras are alike (the Dorie is actually better than the Banner).

About the recent Arbus exhibit, Blakemore says astonishingly, "That show made me really happy." She explained that her unusual reaction was probably due in part to the fact that she had worked after college as a counselor in a psychiatric hospital. "I saw it all--I mean, I didn't see rapes and murders, but I saw every kind of human misery." With an undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology, Blakemore admits feeling at first "like an impostor" teaching at an art school. She says she has learned much from her colleagues at the Glassell School, where she was a Core Fellow from 1985-7 and

tellectualizing about her work: "My pictures are ahead of where my head is."

--C.F.

VISIONS OF TEXANS

By John P. Jacob

Visions of Texans, an exhibit featuring the work of 25 Texas documentary photographers, curated by Roy Flukinger and Rick Williams, opened September 9, 1988 at the Instituto Cultural Mexicano in the San Antonio Hemisfair Plaza. The exhibition will travel to various cultural centers in Mexico.

Visions of Texans is the first in a series of international photographic exchanges initiated by the Austin-based Texas Photographic Society. Devoted exclusively to documentary photography, *Visions* will, following the exhibition in San Antonio, travel to cultural centers in Mexico. A similar exhibition of works by Mexican documentary photographers is currently being assembled to travel within Texas. As stated by Project Director and co-curator Rick Williams in the exhibition catalog, "the *Visions of Texans* project was developed ... to stimulate cross-cultural communication and understanding between the people of Texas and the people of Mexico."

Why is such cross-cultural communication necessary? Because, writes co-curator Roy Flukinger, "a significant percentage of the population within each culture still views those on the opposite side of the border with distrust, disdain, or fear." Without a common language, communication between Texas and Mexico has been, at best, challenging. In *Visions of Texans*, photography is conceptualized as a borderless, universal language, capable of recording the details of everyday human experience and of communicating the essential qualities of everyday life. "In the hands of effective documentary photographers," Flukinger continues, "cameras can do much more than reveal these details; they can also give us a practical, realistic experience of what life can be like and feels like within another culture."

The romanticism of its underlying concept does not in any way diminish the fine work included in this exhibition. *Visions of Texans* contains an appropriate selection of the sort of photographs that an outsider might expect to see in a document of Texas, such as Luther Smith's (Fort Worth) young adults, most of whom appear to be growing up to be cowpokes,

April Rapier, Susan and Phoebe, 1987. From *Visions of Texans*.





Bill Wright, Leo Garcia before grave of his great-grandfather, who was an Indian Scout, 1988. From *Visions of Texans*.

and Ashton Thornhill's (Lubbock) stark, expansive landscapes of the Northwest Texas plains. Also included in the exhibition are the works of Meri Houtchens-Kitchens (Austin), Mary Lee Edwards (Austin), and Diane Brubaker (Houston), whose visions of Texans are decidedly unconventional. Brubaker's photographs of her two daughters, representing moments she recalled from her own childhood, are distinctly reminiscent of the work of Cindy Sherman. Edwards, who describes herself as "a good housewife 'gone bad,'" accompanies her photographs with brief, poetic texts which, though not as strong as her images, help the viewer to understand her perspective.

Of particular importance are the works of several artists whose visions dramatically expand the traditional vision of Texas culture. Among others, Ave Bonar (Austin), Bill Wright (Abilene), and Fred Baldwin and Wendy Watriss (Houston) work to document the diversity of cultures in Texas. Baldwin and Watriss have been collaborating for several years on a photographic and oral history of the experiences of Black, Hispanic, and Central European Texans. Bill Wright's photographs document the cultural transition of the Tigua Indians, who live in far West Texas. Ave Bonar's photographs from the lower Rio Grande Valley, where the traditions of Mexico meet with those of Anglo Texas, are especially pertinent to the concerns of *Visions of Texans*.

The studio portraits of April Rapier, mostly printed as diptychs so that more than one image of the subject is presented, are perhaps the only photographs in the exhibition which extend stylistically beyond the traditional "people-in-their-own-settings" conceit of documentary photography. Rapier's photographs are portraits struggling to break free of the lifelessness of much studio portraiture by embracing the documentary aesthetic. For their effort to transcend the rigidly specific categories of photographic practice (i.e. portraiture, landscape, documentary, etc.), Rapier's are among the most interesting photographs in the exhibition.

Documentary photography is historically rooted in liberal political activism. The heyday of the documentary practice occurred in the 1930's when the Farm Security Administration (FSA), in an effort to promote Roosevelt's New Deal, hired artists like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, among others, to document the cultural transition then taking place in

the United States. Many of the photographers included in *Visions of Texans* adhere to the documentary style practiced by the FSA photographers. What is missing from much of their work, however, is the progressive political commitment that many of the FSA photographers shared.

The relationship between Texas and Mexico, and by extension the United States and Mexico, is a profoundly political one. Our differences are the result of a history of complex uses and misuses, rendered only somewhat more complicated by our lack of a common language. "Visions of Texans" excellently fulfills its goal of visually recording the diverse aspects of Texas culture. Nevertheless, its intention of stimulating cross-cultural understanding is an impossibly idealistic goal. Such understanding will be effected, if ever, only through works which deal directly with the many troubling issues that divide us. *Visions of Texans* fails to address these issues. Without such an effort, *Visions of Texans* satisfies only the liberal appetite for images of strangers and their customs that people of all cultures share.

John P. Jacob is a writer, photographer and curator who lives in Austin.

THE HUMAN AND GEOMETRIC WOUND

By Martin McGovern

Works by Manuel Carrillo were on exhibit at the Benteler-Morgan Gallery from November 10 - December 3.

In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes describes the difference between *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is an "average affect," the "general enthusiastic commitment" to a work, a photograph. It's by *studium* that one is interested in many photographs, whether one perceives them to be political testimony or enjoys them as historical scenes--"the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions." *Punctum*, on the other hand, denotes that "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (p. 26). I was mulling over these elements recently as I viewed the photographs of Manuel Carrillo at the Benteler-Morgan Galleries. Born in Mexico in 1906, Carrillo first achieved international recognition in 1966 when he won first prize in a photography contest held by *Saturday Review*, his winning photograph entitled "Dog on Master's Grave."

What are these photographs "about"? Mark M. Johnson, Director of the Muscarelle Museum of Art in Virginia, claims in that museum's catalogue of a recent show that "Carrillo has sensitively recorded the nobility of the common man," and Carrillo's titles reflect that preoccupation with people, the people, his people--"Boy on Sidewalk," "Mother and Child in Crowd," "Workers in Line," and the wonderfully Hitchcockian "Man on the Ledge." Carrillo's people are the first images one is taken with or, *chez* Barthes, generally committed to, their faces and gestures and actions. Many of the faces are, of course, striking: the broad, flat Indian; the broad Mexican faces; the children's black, bottomless eyes; the crones' ravine-like skin. The photographs risk sentimentality, risk becoming mere instruments for provoking a surge of emotion for its own sake.

A good two thirds of the photographs avoid that danger. And what helps Carrillo avoid sentimentality in those is geometry.

In "Woman Walking and Shadow" a hunched-over woman walks in an alleyway between two buildings and another building at the end of the alley from which she came. The woman, both visually and verbally--in the title--is primary, and in her carriage and age evokes sympathy, almost pity. Yet a shadow draws the eyes away from her. It slices down from the top of the photograph in a dramatic triangle, while Carrillo offsets this triangle with a smaller one, a triangle of light protruding from a building and overlapping the lower portion of the woman's body. Carrillo subjects even her body to geometry, covered as she is with a black shawl which divides her body into two almost perfect triangles.

Geometry also derails the evocation of emotion for its own sake in "Boy on Sidewalk." In it, the boy, stretching on a cor-



Manuel Carrillo, *Rebozo Largo*. Courtesy of the Frank B. Christopher Collection.

ner in the very early morning light, tugs at our sympathy. Yet Carrillo catches him as the crux of geometric patterns, of the human, the vertical, intersecting with the world: the sharply accentuated parallel lines of the street and the top of a building, the rectangle of light the building makes, the semi-circle of light which the sidewalk shapes as it juts into the street.

Geometry, it seemed to me, had become the *punctum*--the surprise, the prick, the wound--which jostles one out of first impressions, the general but perhaps complacent commitment to the photograph. In fact, though, the geometric element is so strong in Carrillo's work, I began to lose sight of the people. They almost become extraneous. Instead, perhaps, Carrillo underscores that we are elements of the world's geometry. In our most daily and nightly actions we are perpendicular lines, parallel lines, vertical and horizontal ones, all of course tempered to the chipped, imperfect lines of the earth.

I thought back to Barthes; the geometric had become a second *studium* really, the first first, the human, having receded into it. (I thought briefly of Paul Ricœur's "*deuxième naïveté*," a second naïveté, at least an edified one, with which we return to a problem or thought or perception.) In thinking back on Barthes, I recalled that for him the *punctum* arose out of a detail, and I realized that Carrillo's geometry had grown too large a subject. I returned to the photographs with that in mind, and it's true that while the larger human and geometric forms vied for predominance, the small detail proved its mettle. In "Woman Walking and Shadow," that detail is an uncovered light above a door, an "eye" watching the woman from a distance; in "Boy on Sidewalk," it's the intricate ironwork of a street lamp and the boy's small arm stretched in the air. In two photographs playing off the tug-of-war between the *absent* human and the geometric, details which at first seem extra-

neous indeed become the *punctum*. In "Cross and Shadow" a cross without the figure mounted on it, makes an arch shadow against a cemetery wall; yet while the eye moves back and forth between the empty cross the shadow, what really pierces one's perception are the weeds growing out of the top of the wall. In "Dog on Master's Grave" one's eyes move between the absent--dead--master (the master's grave) and the geometric patterns of crosses and graves and the diagonal slash of the dog across the grave, but one is caught instead by the dog's apparently sudden glance off to its left. Why is he looking there?

"Rebozo Largo" exemplifies what I'm talking about. This almost sentimental depiction of the mother and children looking at us pulls us in, but it doesn't surprise us, stun us. The photograph's geometry--the pyramidal slope of the blanket leading to the woman's face and the vertical, cactus-like part of the blanket on the right edge--pulls us in as well, but it does not "bruise" us. What does is the little girl behind the boy, and not just that she's there, but that she's looking away, behind them. At what? The sea, a plain? Someone approaching? She's looking at that scene as we look at hers.

Martin McGovern's poetry and essays have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, and *The Antioch*, Chicago, Kenyon, and Sewanee Reviews. He teaches for the Honors Program at the University of Houston and is a lecturer for the University of Houston Creative Writing Program.

THE INFERNAL WORLD OF JOEL-PETER WITKIN

By Joan Seeman Robinson

Selected images by Joel-Peter Witkin were on display at the Butler Gallery from October 14 - November 12, 1988.

There is no doubt in our eyes that Joel-Peter Witkin's theater of the macabre is real. He is the impresario of the obscene, the procurer for the porn-prone, the stage manager of S & M scenarios, whose invisible presence permeates his photographic tableaux. When Goya, in his equally appalling prints of the *Disasters of War*,¹ added the captions, "One cannot bear to see this," "This is worse," "I saw it myself," he was documenting his horror at actual rapine, dismemberment and violent death. But Witkin conceives his subtle barbarities himself in sketches and notations, and then directs their production with flesh and blood models.

The moral imperative which drove Goya to record his personal outrage seems absent in these scenes. In its place is a cunning connoisseurship, a savage delectation, a coveting of transgressions on the human body itself, and on the classical ideal of the human form as we know it perfected in the history of art. Witkin gives us low life in the guise of high art and bores from within with diabolical intent. He is an iconoclast with a hard-on.

The Butler Gallery showed four of his works this fall in a mini-encore of its large exhibition of fifteen works, shown in 1986. Throughout them all, the *dramatis personae* are physical freaks or anatomically gross-transsexuals, hermaphrodites, amputees, dwarfs and the malformed. He masks, wraps, straps, crimps and bars them, and in the final treatment of the print they are hybridized, decapitated, warped, stretched, and eaten away by manipulative studio strategies—collage, photomontage, camera movement and photochemical staining. The models themselves are compliant performers, complicitous in their co-mingling, and satanic in their contexts. What we finally see is shocking, forbidden or incredible.

And yet irrefutably real. These are photographs in which the models are exhibitionistic, not embarrassed. Like flashers in the shopping malls, they and the artist set up shocking confrontations. These produce polarized reactions: some dig it and some don't. Witkin's subjects are not just clinically interesting sports of nature but queerness incarnate, geeks in a sideshow, deviants by chance and by choice engaged in mocking revels. And there is a market for such tastes, on this level alone.

There is also a serious history for such imaginings. One in which the mysteries of nature are regarded as essences and not aberrations—the androgyne as the first human, for example. Witkin plumbs this dark region and exploits its rancid depths, alert to its power to alarm and offend. Usually cited for the classically serene art

historical sources he aggrandizes—elegant Christs and limpid Venuses—he more greedily plunders an alternative history based on the vitality and the viciousness of the grosser appetites.

This pictorial tradition is both moralistic and insidiously seductive. It is rooted in Judeo-Christian doctrine and culture,² from the enumerations of martyrdoms (gouged-out eyes, organs extracted, bodies flayed of skin), to medieval

are not susceptible to assimilation amidst the attributes surrounding them. This is the source of the critical tension which animates Witkin's work, which makes it alluring, objectionable and unnerving.

Witkin is all for the sleep of reason. He is determined to disarm us, first with the bodies and then with the scrim he lays over them. His protagonists can't really threaten us because they are social outcasts, marginal to society.

scale for this tiny world of fragments.

The image is menacing, despite its almost didactic rigidity. The horse is cut in two, the plaster face is destroyed, and both are claimed by the grip of the sexless dwarf-masked and clad mysteriously in female undergarments. He wields a chain-festooned riding crop, its black shaft aimed at a metal ring linking the animal's two sections, and echoing the black line of a strap around the head

man" still obscures the range and richness of Witkin's labor and goals, and finally, of his works. As perhaps it is meant to.

Isn't that the central aspect of their power? They simulate conditions of pleasure and pain most of us will never know and many of us can hardly imagine. They transgress on our need for security, and on the limits we set and on which we insist; those we fight for, arm for, and would kill for. Witkin titillates but repels us, but we recognize somehow everything he proposes, what his tradition in art and iconography has refused to ignore. The late Joseph Campbell once said that acceptance of evil didn't mean approval, it meant acknowledgement. The unimaginable is always possible and really occurs. Witkin is like a celebrant at the Witches' Sabbath, a high priest at a millennial Black Mass, a moralist enthralled with immorality. The lies to his truths are harmony, equilibrium and classical restraint.

Two relatively simple images were also in the gallery but were not exhibited, one the back of a seated nude in which the camera was moved slowly to the right, stretching the form like a viscous material. The breadth of the body recalls Courbet's hefty models; more especially, Ingres' flaccid bathers. It flows through, as well, Lartigue's work, and that of Kertész and Brandt, but sweeps back at the bottom to an optically warped skull, a *memento mori*, with a perfectly shaped pomegranate placed next to its cheek.

And there's a hooded little girl, reclining on a *fauteuil*, that eighteenth century French chair with the flowing contours, whose upholstered and plumped surfaces were the first ever conceived to fit the shape of the human body. The hood is a mask, like that of the executioner or Goya's ass-headed monsters, making the child satanic, a diabolica in the *bordeño*. So unlike the modesty wrapping over the eyes of Eakins' studio nudes, or the black Mardi Gras taunts of Belloc's Storyville prostitutes. This quieter dimension of Witkin's work deserves attention, as well as his studies, in contrast to the engorged extravagance of his more notorious and popular tableaux.

Footnotes

1. Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* opened at the Menil Collection, Houston, October 21, 1988.

2. Witkin's father was Jewish, his mother Roman Catholic.

3. De Sade, quoted in Constance Sullivan, Ed., *Nude Photographs 1850-1980* (New York: Harper and Row), p. 170 (uncredited translation); from Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* (n.d.).

4. Joel-Peter Witkin, *Centro de Arte Reina Sofia*, Madrid, April-June, 1988. The influence of Spanish art on Witkin's imagery is very important and needs to be investigated in an English language publication.

5. Witkin was trained as a sculptor and is a skilled draughtsman. He also was a combat photographer in the army in the early 60's.

Joan Seeman Robinson is a Visiting Scholar at the Menil Collection.



Joel-Peter Witkin, *Portrait of a Dwarf*. Photo courtesy of Butler Gallery.

bestiaries similar in their inventions to elaborate depictions of the Monstrous Races (heathens); renderings of fabulous Wild Men and of the scrofulous, the leprous and the victims of the Black Death; graphic delineations of the tortures of the damned and wondrous explications of the Temptations of Saint Anthony. This entire iconography was necessitated by the denial of the senses and a fear for the spirit, by a lust after forbidden fruit and terror at the weighing of souls. Proscriptions were brought to life by painters of miniatures and sculptors on cathedrals, in personifications of the virtues and vices—the latter more stimulating and sensuously familiar.

The naked body, as an object of desire, an emblem of excess, and a reminder of mortality, is central to Witkin's work—expressively, symbolically and structurally. The physical attributes of his models and the features he adds to them in costume or re-workings testify to insatiable appetites, lustful practices, the pleasures of punishment, and the penalty of death. De Sade put it this way: "There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image."³ Their poses are rhetorical: they mime past performances in art history and theater. Like morality plays they are arranged on shallow stages—set-pieces congested with symbolic props, antiquarian detail and weird esoterica.

The effect however, in a photograph, is to sharpen our awareness of the bodies because of the artificiality of their settings: their abnormalities are heightened; their currency as freaks, oddballs for hire, thrust at us in the trappings of mythological prototypes. They

They never seem to move and they don't look at us; their glances are oblique, self-absorbed, or deflected with masks. They are distanced by quaint arching borders, oval apertures or snapshot-clip corners. The print surfaces are washed, scumbled and scratched, suggesting generations of handling as if whatever we see happened back in the past. And his compositions often have a classical resolve which muffles the surcharge of these wicked engagements.

In "Venus and Cupid," 1987, a voluptuous nude lies in a dark, cave-like bower, encircled by a black border recalling the peephole view of Duchamp's "Etant Donée," a crotch-angled view of a woman lying in a landscape. The concentric circles are female symbols, but they veer to the left eccentrically, where the woman lies. At her parted legs hangs a penis.

In a painting this androgyny might suggest a supreme gratification, male and female undivided and wholly embodied. In the photograph such harmony is thwarted; intercourse on any level is blocked, the cave cannot be entered. It is either the onanistic sublime or a genetic nightmare. Its antecedents are in the bacchanal, early erotic photography, and twentieth century Surrealism, reined in by a strict formal order, a foil to the flagrant display of the dangling organ.

Witkin places a fat lace-clad dwarf between a severed pony and a smashed portrait bust, in "Portrait of a Dwarf," 1987. They are lined up on a ledge, surrounded by the border of a satin panel which sets them off, like a theatrical curtain or a shop window display. At the right the tall legs of a mannequin establish a normal

of the sculpture. He is a guardian figure, a terrible child, a ringmaster conducting games of destruction which have ended or, worse yet, are about to begin. These are not broken toys but remnants of a ritual from an underworld cult. Here Witkin explores cubist fragmentation and reconstruction as the explosive dynamics they really were in the evolution of modern painting and sculpture.

"Portrait of a Dwarf" was shown with its preliminary studies in an exhibition in Madrid this year.⁴ The distillation of the photograph from the sources leading to it is fascinating. Following academic practice,⁵ Witkin began with excerpts from paintings of a corseted woman and of a child on a hobby horse—a nineteenth century American work in which the boy's clothing resembled a girl's, its skirt and pantaloon completely obscuring the animal's mid-section, "eliminating" it. Witkin scribbled on it a mask and the notation, "MAD DWARF-BRIDE RIDING A HORSE," and next to it sketched a male bust with its eyes blindfolded.

The evolution of the image—from clippings and sketches to the selection of models and props, the arrangement of the tableau, and the final reworking of the print—is a process full of chance and deliberation, each phase having different requirements, as he moves from one medium to another. But the notoriety of an artist who uses body parts from the morgue (like Leonardo, Rembrandt, Gericault, Francis Bacon and others), who has a waiting list of walk-ons who come through referrals, and who is described in the press as a "fabulously self-centered

By Ed Osowski

Martin Harrison, *Beauty Photography in Vogue*. New York: Stewart Tabori and Chang, 1987. 184 pages. \$30.00.

It has not always been true that looking at one's reflection in a mirror simply provided the opportunity to examine how one "looked." Perhaps even as late as 1758, when Francois Boucher painted "Madame de Pompadour," the presence of a mirror triggered other responses, as well. The viewer knew that a mirror in a portrait signified that the portrait could be traced back, in its iconographic details, to certain medieval images of the saints. Such portraits, combining the themes of *vanitas* and *memento mori*, found their fullest expression in the numerous paintings of the Magdalen. In his "Penitent Magdalen" Georges de la Tour places the saint before a mirror in which a candle is reflected. In her lap she holds a human skull. The message is quite clear: Magdalen's great beauty will last as briefly as will the candle. But the opportunity to contemplate her reflection in the mirror will bring with it the knowledge that this world passes and another (the spiritual) remains.

De la Tour's saint turns herself away from the viewer and inward to these realizations. Boucher's sitter, on the other hand, faces us squarely, confidently. Her mirror triggers in our minds the *vanitas* theme. But for her it is there only to guide her as she applies her cosmetics and jewels. As she attends to her toilette, preparing herself to meet her lover, Louis XV, she prepares us also for the photographs of women we will find in Martin Harrison's *Beauty Photography in Vogue*.

A 1938 photograph by Edward Steichen (p.56) epitomizes the contents of Harrison's book. In the Steichen photograph, a young female model in evening clothes applies perfume to herself from a large crystal atomizer. She smiles with the confidence that comes from good looks and expensive clothes. And she enjoys the attention she pays to herself—as well as the attention paid her by the camera—as she completes her preparations to meet some later-day Louis XV. The photograph emphasizes youth, beauty, elegance and wealth—exactly what one would expect to find emphasized in a photograph in *Vogue*. But this is only the obvious "content" of the photograph.

Steichen's photograph, it seems, can also be read as a variation on the portrait of Madame de Pompadour, or more accurately, as a subversion of the message of the *vanitas* portrait. The props which surround the model bear iconographic reading. An arrangement of flowers is placed above her right shoulder, and more flowers crown the back of her head and cascade across her shawl. We know that their blooms will soon fade. The flask she carries brings with it echoes of the flasks Magdalen carried with her to the tomb of Christ. Most importantly, Steichen's model turns her back to the mirror (an opportunity for



Sarah Moon, 1974. From *Vogue Beauty*.

the photographer to show the back of the gown). But the turning away also tells us something about how the meaning of the portrait of a beautiful woman has been transformed in the pages of *Vogue*. If the message of the Magdalen is one of liberation, at least from the tyranny of the flesh, then Steichen and the other photographers represented in Harrison's book offer a full-scale capitulation to the controlling power of the search for youth and beauty. In Steichen's photograph, "Remember death" has been replaced by the advice, as fleeting as the model's perfume, to "Seize the day."

To distinguish it from fashion photography, with which it overlaps, Harrison defines "beauty photography" this way: "A beauty photograph signifies a concentration on the appearance of the woman herself, as opposed to what she might be wearing (p. 7)." He goes on to say, "Beauty photography is primarily concerned with a woman's bodily well-being." Such a definition is, at best, disingenuous. For the fashion photographs in *Vogue*, collected in Harrison's book, have functioned first as adjuncts to the advertising pages in the magazine. These are photographs which suggest that certain cosmetics or treatments or hairstyles (the list goes on) will give a woman "beauty." Their concern has been not with the "well-being" of the viewer but with her pocketbook (specifically, how to extract money from that pocketbook). Secondly, these photographs aim to support the cultural notion that women are commodities, that their personhood is open to the highest bidder. Irving Penn's 1965 photograph (p.81) of seven tubes of lipstick replaces the beautiful models with beautiful things.

These photographs suggest that something as elusive as "beauty" can be obtained by painting one's nails or cutting one's hair. But what must be remembered is that the women in the photographs are "beautiful" because they are *Vogue* models. Their "beauty," in a

sense, is a given. The tyranny of these photographs is that they foster discontent; they tell the viewer that beauty is hers if she will only follow certain directions.

What are the directions, according to *Vogue*, that will bring beauty? In a 1968 photograph by Helmut Newton (pp 62-63), beauty involves being strapped, wired, and bound into a device that looks vaguely sci-fi-like, certainly threatening, possibly sadistic. As the models are irradiated, they achieve that inner glow of beauty, one assumes. That Newton is using irony is fairly

course, never ends because those with the power to set the standards constantly change them. Cecil Beaton, quoted in Harrison's book, expressed it this way: "How imperceptibly, but quickly, our views on beauty fluctuate! Even in two years the ideal can undergo complete change!" To achieve that unachievable ideal one is urged, as Irving Penn does in a 1983 photograph (p.93), to transform the eye into a target or pinwheel, black and white circles surrounded by slashes of blue, pink, and green. Or, one is offered a 1972 photograph (p.172) by Horst in which paint



Edward Steichen, 1938. From *Vogue Beauty*.

certain. But the endless toiling and primping these photographs advocate can only be supported when the viewer herself has been trained to feel discontent towards her own body.

And if a woman has been made to feel ill at ease with her own flesh, then she paints, plucks, and powders it, inflicts pain, if necessary, upon it, and tries to force it into some closer approximation of what, at that particular moment, society calls beautiful. The quest, of

and lipstick are applied to the face to create a mask-like effect. That these colors mimic the shapes and tones of bruises is obvious, but deserves to be mentioned.

Beauty Photography in Vogue draws upon the past fifty years of American, Italian, French, and British editions of the magazine and contains over 180 photographs.

(From the text it is impossible to tell in which edition a photograph first appeared.) Of the more than fifty photographers represented in this book, just six are women. Two whose work was published in the forties and fifties, Toni Frissell and Frances McLaughlin-Gill, bring a freshness, directness, and narrative quality to their images. But whether their models laugh, move, or sit pensively, they do so with a double awareness: they are aware of their beauty, but they

also know that their beauty depends on a male audience to confirm it. In the work of the later four women—Sharon Moon, Joyce Tenneson, Sheila Metzner, and, especially, Deborah Turbeville—it is possible to detect an aesthetic different from that which motivates the male photographers. One finds here another world, dream-like, soft and vague. Coated with white powder or hidden behind gauzy fabrics, their models come to resemble statues or corpses. At other times they almost seem to vanish, as if these four were urging women to vanish to another place where they will not be used and discarded.

Harrison's concern, in his text and photographs, is with beauty with a lower case "b," not the principle which Robert Adams in *Beauty in Photography* (1981) says is "a synonym for the coherence and structure underlying life." And what escapes him is the content of the works he has chosen and how they relate to the culture of which they are a part. Harrison is good at describing how technical advances in cameras and film were reflected in changes in the images printed in *Vogue*. But he fails to show how the works relate to the anti-feminist (anti-female?) culture of which they are a part. A Helmut Newton photograph (p.118), homoerotic and masochistic in content, is termed "amusing". Harrison's photographers "exploit" (his word) techniques, never their models, to achieve effects.

At the center of the photographs Harrison has drawn from *Vogue*, then, rests a very disturbing theme. These photographs aim at creating dissatisfaction. But it is not the political status quo that they challenge. They are too firmly grounded in the culture of commerce ever to do that. The dissatisfaction they create is personal, not political, and it poses no threat to the patriarchal ruling class. They succeed in channeling the unease with the self, with one's body, with one's appearance, into a drive for new and different products and styles to shape and alter the body. In the political content of these photographs rests the belief that the female body itself is just another thing to be shaped, consumed, manipulated, cut apart, and pieced back together (p.178 as Tom Palumbo in 1961 and (p.179) Serge Lutens in 1980 do photographically), in a never-ending effort to distract women from those things which truly demand to be changed.

Ed Osowski manages the Montrose Branch Library. A frequent contributor to SPOT, he occasionally reviews books for the Houston Post.

A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

By Stanley Moore

Frank Gohlke, *Landscapes from the Middle of the World*. Photographs 1972-1987; Introduction by Ben Lifson. Untitled 46. Friends of Photography, San Francisco and the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.

The first impression the viewer gets on leafing through Gohlke's *Landscapes from the Middle of the World* is one of stasis; a flagrant disregard for the Golden Mean/Rule of Thirds school of innumerable texts on composition. The pictures have for the most part (with two exceptions, both panoramas), aspect ratios of 1:1.25 or 1:1, that is, an 8 x 10 or square format. The feeling of static sterility is intensified by Gohlke's use of midpoint horizons and by his frequent placement of major picture elements directly at the center of the frame (see Plates 6 and 23). Contributing to the overall effect of blandness is a hard-to-read essay by Ben Lifson which dampens initial enthusiasm. Add to all this the book's mostly banal and boring subject matter, and the reader may simply want to close the book and watch television instead.

This, however, would be a grave mistake. By discarding the outworn shibboleths of the composition texts and actually looking at the pictures, we can obtain a filling repast that nourishes the soul along with the eye. First and best of all, many of the photographs depict Texas. It is not the Texas of tourist brochures but a deeply emotional and idiosyncratic view of Texas as it is, or should be, for anyone with a love of the state. Second, all the photographs convey a sense of presence, a feeling of place. Third, both rural and urban landscapes show a keen sense of atmosphere—light and sky seem almost tangible in these images. But before exploring these landscapes, we need to clear away some of the brush.

The book begins with a one-page essay by Gohlke. It is fully in character with the photographs, being spare in tone, and raising questions rather than putting them to rest. He explores the problem of the connection between the image and reality:

In the case of landscape photographs, the paradox is sharpened because the world represented must have existed for the picture to be made, and yet the existence of the photograph attests undeniably to that world's disappearance.¹

In keeping with this sense of paradox, Gohlke ends his essay with a series of queries that are essentially unanswerable, commenting "at that point wisdom would suggest silence."

Following these words we find ten photographs (Plates 1-5) arranged two to a page, one above the other. All appear to be highly personal pictures of Gohlke's childhood home and environs, and while "ordinary" they show a love of Texas—of a past Texas that seems no



Frank Gohlke, 1306 N. 8th Street, Wichita Falls, Texas, 1982.

longer to exist. However, just as we seem well underway we come upon Ben Lifson's introduction, "A Figure and a Landscape." Immediately we are bogged down in a rather turgid disquisition on Gohlke's work, the most engaging portions of which are the personal details related by Lifson, a close friend of Gohlke's. Of considerably less interest is an involved and contrived discussion of five categories (and one reject) proposed to organize the pictures in the book: *The Horizon, Singular Object, Tapestry, Spectacle, Ruins, and Darkness into Light*. These categories can certainly be applied to the photographs, but the exegesis of them seems to be so much filler, since the idea of grouping by category was discarded in favor of presenting the work as an organic whole. But this notion is marred by the odd inclusion of four color photographs—which seem poorly reproduced in extremely garish colors—sprinkled willy-nilly among the black and white photos that make up the bulk of the work. The color pictures (with the exceptions of the cover shot) are somewhat different in style, tone, and mood from the others. There is also an unfortunate remnant of Lifson's categorical scheme in Plates 6-10, which are meant to exemplify each of his groupings. These are square-format pictures inexplicably reproduced on gray screened pages, whereas everything else in the book is printed on plain white pages. The gray background is distracting; it makes the otherwise excellent reproduction look dingy and foggy. Since the only apparent point of this choice is to model Lifson's categories, it is a shame that such strong images are dulled to no real organizational or visual purpose. The transition from Plate 10 on gray paper to Plate 11 on white paper is so disconcerting that this reviewer thought at first that some bookmaker's error had occurred.

Having cleared away a bit of undergrowth, we can now examine the terrain of the book in more detail. By subject matter the photographs can be grouped as "personal," "storm documentary," "grain elevators," "houses, fields, etc.," and "Mount St. Helens." But beyond these classifications, the works could be tied together by the broad label of the "emotional." These pictures strike such a resonance that they bring back long-buried memories and feelings in the viewer, with astonishing force and clarity.

Plate 23, "View down two

streets, Wichita Falls, Texas, 1978" looks static, with a midpoint horizon line, and the main subject centered in the frame. This subject is a pair of houses at the confluence of two streets that intersect at an acute angle. The houses face a tiny triangle of grass made by a very short cross street. They are built in the style of the 1940's, of brick and wood, and are solidly middle class, conventionally bland. It appears to be winter, as the sky is cloudless, the grass dead, and some trees bare. There is a school nearby and a few cars on the streets. The pavement, which takes up almost as much picture area as the sky (i.e. half), is very clean and deserted. This is a small town far from the turmoil of the city; in fact it is resolutely facing away from modernity and rush represented by the high-rise apartment in the far background and the auto coming up from behind. Instead of stasis, however, the scene is evocative of a Sunday afternoon; an interlude of rest and a haven from the world. There is a sense of home, warmth, and love.

In contrast to this middle class serenity, Plate 13, "1306 N. 8th Street, Wichita Falls, Texas, 1982" shows a considerably more modest house. The simple frame building covered with asbestos siding surrounded by large trees has an ill-kept yard with unraked leaves and a pile of dead brush. It is centered within the frame, and although the window shades are down and the door is closed, it still exudes the feeling of four-square solidity and the welcome of home. It is the kind of home that "when you have to go there they have to take you in."² Gohlke has taken dwelling places in these two photographs and invested them with the deep emotions we all long to experience: a sense of belonging, a solid anchor in the storms of life.

The more literal storms of life are dealt with in a series of six photographs (Plates 32-34) titled "Aftermath: The Wichita Falls, Texas, Tornado." The series consists of prints labelled "A" and "B." The "A"s were made within a few days of the disastrous storm of April 10, 1979, that killed forty-six people, injured 3000, and destroyed 2600 homes. The "B"s were made one year later, in June of 1980. These photographs show the continual play of man and nature on our planet, first one ahead, then the other. More than a resurrection after a storm, they de-

pict the essential impermanence of humanity and all its works. Visually, the clean bright light lends an atmosphere of unreality to the storm.

Echoing this theme on a grander and more awesome scale are the last photos in the book, Plates 35-44, showing Mount St. Helens in the years after its eruption. Two of these are panoramas. Plate 35 is dark, forbidding, very desolate and dead. Plate 44 is more upbeat, showing a mudflow and felled trees bordering a completely untouched area that is alive and well—as if to say that even the earth herself cannot vanquish life. The pictures in between these two show the volcano and its environs, together with logging operations. Two of these are worth special note. Plate 37, "Area clear-cut before the 1980 eruption surrounded by downed trees, Clearwater Creek Valley, 9 miles E of Mount St. Helens, Washington, 1981," is a gray print (presumably from the volcanic ash covering everything.) Thousands of dead trees are played out in all directions like jackstraws on a hillside. In the center of the picture is a roughly oval area clear-cut by loggers, within which is a rune-like triangular shape delineated by logging roads. We see devastation by both man and earth, in a kind of grim one-upmanship between the two that seems a metaphor for the battle between good and evil—with considerable doubt as to which is which. The complete absence of wood in the clear cut area as opposed to the merely downed trees might remind the more fanciful viewer of the Biblical injunction to "...fear not them which kill the body ... but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." In contrast, Plate 43, "Inside Mount St. Helens crater, base of lava domebase of lava dome on the left, 1983" has a long tonal range, and, while totally barren of life, still contains the presence of the photographer. The fore and middle grounds consist of many volcanic stones embedded in volcanic ash. There is no horizon, and the sense is of a sharply limited environment. The scene is backlit, and lens flare produces a beam of light that comes from above and outside to point to a small flat white stone in the exact center of the frame. While the religious might again see divine lessons, the overall effect is of simple presence. We are present in the bowels of the earth, and the utter desolation seems nevertheless filled with light and activity. But the activity is not one of motion but of suspension—an effect heightened by the ardent fumaroles on the background slopes. These stones and ash were once deep below us and may be replaced at any moment by stones deeper still. The mood that Gohlke evokes more than justifies the great personal risk he took to make the photograph.

The more conventional landscapes also proclaim a presence. Plate 7, "Grain elevators, Minneapolis, 1974," and plate 26, "Landscape—cornfield and approaching thunderstorm near Plainview, Texas, 1975," are both about men and nature. Both are square-format photographs with a stable balance. Plate 7 shows four grain elevators in the middle dis-

tance, while the center foreground contains a stanchion aiming to the center and light poles gridding the area. The snow-covered ground obscures bier-like concrete objects whose use is unclear. Crisscrossing the snow are footprints, implying an activity belied by the still scene. The elevators are imposing but seem warm and inviting despite the still, cold air, as they hold the fruits of the earth safe and dry. Most of Gohlke's grain elevator photographs are monumental in nature, but these are not forbidding monuments, but comfortable, commonplace human objects. Plate 26 is divided at the mid-point by the horizon. Rows of immature corn stretch to the ends of the earth. The foreground shows a weedy border separated from the corn rows by a muddy band apparently churned up by a recently passing vehicle. The presence of man is clearly implied by the track and orderly rows; but humans have fled, and from the left side of the frame a thunderstorm impends. This storm seems not to threaten but rather to bless the earth with rain. There is a tension between these two photos: after the joyful growth of food comes the serene storage of it. Atmospheric effects are quite visible in both pictures. The warm rain and frosty air as seen by Gohlke are translated beautifully to the print.

Gohlke's skill with the camera gives his viewers a very real sense of place, a feeling of being there and of seeing which we often ignore when we peruse the world around us. In his "Thoughts on Landscape" he expresses the prime motive behind his photography: "... being there made my pulse speed up, and the making of a picture seemed the only appropriate response." Authenticity of intent is plainly visible in his photographs, and the emotional response he feels and shares with us makes his work among the "finest"—at least if we apply the criterion stated by Gohlke himself:

... The making of a photograph presupposes distance, which accounts, I think for the elegaic tone, the note of longing that suffuses so many of the finest landscape photographs.⁴

Landscape photography is difficult, as an artist must walk the line between sentimentality and literalness. The whole point of landscape is to force the viewer to see in new ways the surroundings we take for granted. Gohlke has, by conveying emotion without cheap sentiment, given us his very personal window on the world.

Footnotes

1. Frank Gohlke, "Thoughts on Landscape," *Landscapes from the Middle of the World*, Friends of Photography 1988, p. 5.
2. Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man," *A Treasury of the Familiar*, Ralph L. Woods, ed. Macmillan, 1942.
3. St. Matthew, Chapter 10, Verse 28, King James Version.
4. Frank Gohlke, p. 5.

Stanley L. Moore is a Houston chemist and photographer.

CHARLES SHEELER'S AMERICA

By Robert Hobbs

Charles Sheeler: The Photographs, by Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., and Norman Keyes, Jr. Boston: A New York Graphic Society Book; Little, Brown and Company. 162 + x pages; \$45.00

It took the modern artist Charles Sheeler and a camera to create a convincing image of America's past. In 1917 Sheeler made a group of twelve photographs of the rented Bucks County farmhouse which he shared with fellow artist Morton Shenberg. His images are intimate views of this Doylestown house, built in 1768 by the Quaker, Jonathan Worthington. Each image in this series abstracts an aspect of the building; the group includes "Old Kitchen," "Stairway with Chair," "Open Door," and "The Stove." Disarmingly simple, these semi-abstract images look inevitable. Perhaps their seeming inevitability now stems from the fact that they have served as models for a number of important works dealing with the ambivalence of nostalgia in America—and also as points of departure for many more mindless spinoffs that simply revel in the good old days. And perhaps their inevitability develops out of Sheeler's special way of abstracting aspects of American culture.



Charles Sheeler, Doylestown House, The Stove, 1917.

Abstraction has recently been under attack by critics, Marxists, postmodernists, and others, who regard its liberties with nature as arbitrary, its ties to French modernism restrictive and superficially orthodox, and its dependence on the inherent processes of its chosen medium a materialistic bias that glories in techniques, machines, and materials over human concerns. Yet abstraction has been of enormous value to those few artists who have been persuaded to eschew unessentials in order to emphasize feeling. Like many other artists of his generation, Sheeler did not find abstraction an easy route to the reality of his own feelings. His exercises in abstraction in the second decade of this century reveal many of the limitations of this way of radicalizing and restricting the world. In his paintings he made pastiches of Cézanne, Demuth, Maurer, Bluemner, and Picasso. His imitations are competent enough in technique, but they do not prepare viewers for the

new understanding of abstraction that appeared in his work in 1917, when he turned to the vernacular architecture of Bucks County. During this crucial year, when the United States declared war on Germany, and soon thereafter sent troops to fight in France, Sheeler turned to American subjects, invoking his country's endurance and strength. He regarded the photographs of his Bucks County farmhouse as "drawings," and he supplemented them with a few tempera studies and conté drawings of vernacular architecture that recall the formal devices of Synthetic Cubism, particularly its reliance on plane and radical juxtaposition.

It is impossible to know whether the photographs preceded the works in tempera and conté; both were created during the same year. The new interest in America as subject matter, however, had been well prepared by Sheeler's familiarity with Bucks County, and by his deep appreciation of American folk art. He shared this appreciation with the eminent collectors of modern art, Louise and Walter Arensberg, who had searched, as had Sheeler, for an American equivalent to the African sculpture embraced by the School of Paris artists. Although America's more formal eighteenth-century decorative arts had been revived in Philadelphia at the 1876 Centennial, and had been important to Thomas Eakins, who painted people in period Chipendale and Windsor chairs, the rural charm of American folk traditions was not appreciated until the teens of this century, when a few discerning individuals, such as Sheeler and the Arensbergs, began to discover and collect it. American folk art began to achieve wider recognition in the 1920's: it was the subject of an important exhibition at the Whitney Studio Club in 1924. A number of American artists, including Sheeler, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Peggy Bacon, and Charles Demuth, lent objects to this exhibition. In the 1930's folk art began to achieve wide popularity when Holger Cahill of the Museum of Modern Art (and later the Federal Arts Project) embraced it. Cahill's embrace of folk art was part of a broad program aimed at giving ordinary people in the United States a positive historical account of themselves as industrious and resilient folk who had managed to make humorous and charming work in the face of adversity. His exhibition, *American Folk Art/The Art of the Common Man in America 1750-1900* (MoMA, 1932), was a landmark in the appreciation and acceptance of folk art in the United States.

Sheeler's turn to the American tradition in the photographs of his rented Doylestown house is a fortuitous mixture of personal interests and public need. His subject is predicated on his own appreciation for the American vernacular tradition, as well as on his intuitive grasp of its potential significance at the time the United States entered World War I—a time when this country needed to be reminded of the power of its own traditions. Sheeler may or may not have considered the irony of taking a Quaker homestead as an image of America's past, since it represented, among

other things, a time-honored tradition of pacifism. But perhaps, since he had lived in the house for seven years before photographing it, he meant deliberately to invoke elements of pacifism and religious tolerance within an old homestead, arranged to look as if it were only marginally occupied. These elements may have been important to a symbolic representation of the United States the year it entered World War I; if so, then Sheeler was sympathetic with the isolationist factions then bemoaning the United States' entry into European politics.

Since we have all been subjected in the past few decades to the waves of country kitsch that have appeared in furniture, fashions, recipes, restaurants, and even hobbies (for those people who equip themselves as frontiersmen or soldiers in order to fight Revolutionary or Civil War battles), it is worth reflecting on Sheeler's photographs, to see exactly how they characterize the American past. The image of the stove in the Doylestown house provides a key to the series. Although Sheeler could have presented the stove as a genre element similar to those occurring in the works of the nineteenth-century painter William Sidney Mount, he chose instead to transform it into an evocative silhouette that mysteriously shields the light which he placed behind it. The convention of a hidden light source goes back to the seventeenth century Dutch painters Honthorst and Rembrandt, who used it to dramatize the living theater of daily life. Sheeler's adoption of this convention for a room which is empty except for a stove and a glass bowl helps to dramatize the ideas of absence and the irretrievable past. His stove is neither friendly nor familiar—instead it resembles a dream image: a once familiar object that haunts us because it has taken on new meaning. The marks and textures of life are emphasized in this photograph, which carefully reflects the sheen of polished worn floorboards, the chalkiness of peeling paint, and the paint around a door latch which is worn from generations of use. These traces of life make the emptiness of the room particularly poignant. And the few enigmatic props that Sheeler has placed in these photographs—the transparent glass bowl barely discernible on the edge of the mantle in this image, an empty mirror in "Stairway, Open Door," the same mirror combined with one leg of a straight chair in "Stairway with Chair," or a blooming glorioxa plant in "Open Window"—make these scenes both intriguing and haunting, because they indicate life and its absence. Sheeler's dreams were later to affect the entire country, when they were picked up by Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth, who are also concerned with absence and nostalgia. The art of these three people ultimately becomes a spectrally quiet nightmare dramatizing America's insecurity regarding its own past.

In these photographs Sheeler does not regard the American tradition as endearing, charming, and familiar; instead he makes it strange, alien, dreamlike—and also disturbingly familiar. Unlike Grant Wood,



Charles Sheeler, New York, Towards the Woolworth Building, 1920

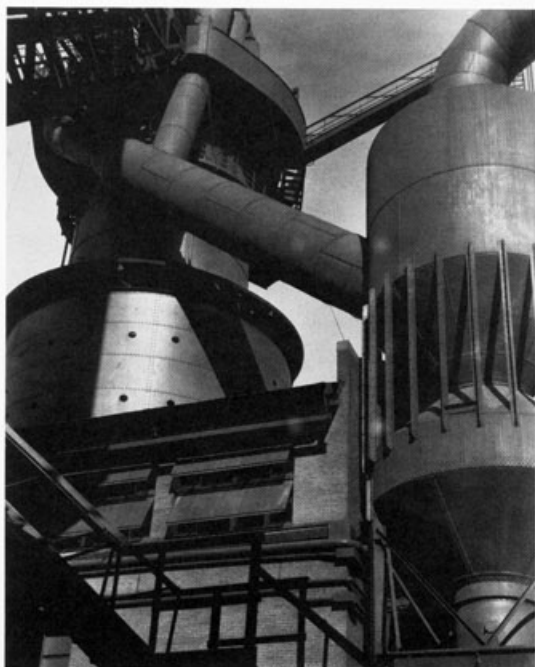
whom he probably influenced through his later paintings, Sheeler does not view the past as a cozy storybook realm, a fanciful never-never land conceived in marzipan hills, toy houses, and manicured trees. Instead of streamlining reality, Sheeler maximizes its felt surfaces, as explained earlier, so that viewers can visually caress the different textures in these photographs. His spectral light and strange juxtapositions make these spaces uneasy and foreboding, as if we can't quite figure out, in one image, why a door is left open, and in another, why we are studying a stairway so intently. And the prominent shadows in these photographs increase their mystery: shadows become important protagonists which peer from behind doors, loom out of windows, and multiply such objects as the scythe that leans uneasily against a fireplace.

Sheeler's photographs are both modern and anti-modern at the same time. And this ambivalence gives them enormous power, because such traditional codes of modernism as cropped images and underlying abstract, geometric grids look as if they were the rightful properties of the house, and not a manifestation of a twentieth century method which sometimes reduces objects to predetermined essences. In this way, the photographs convince us of their reality, in much the same way that Brady's collection of Civil War images or Atget's early morning scenes of Paris convey, respectively, the tragedy of war and the isolation of the modern city.

It is a pleasure to find this important series of photographs thoughtfully reproduced, along with a number of other important works, in the lavish *Charles Sheeler: The Photographs*, by Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., and Norman Keyes, Jr. This book serves as one of two volumes of the catalogue for the Sheeler retrospective, organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and first shown there, before travelling to the Whitney Museum of

American Art and the Dallas Museum of Art. In the volume on photographs, Sheeler's vintage prints are beautifully reproduced in a subtle range of duotones that approximate the warmth of the earlier prints and the slightly cooler tones of the later work. The volume has been lovingly conceived as a testament to Sheeler and his collector friends Bill and Sandra Lane, who have lent eighty-nine of the ninety prints for the exhibition (and who will, it is hoped, place the entire collection on public trust with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, at some future date). The text, a straightforward catalogue of Sheeler's works, has attempted to set records straight regarding proper dates and sources, as well as to chronicle the critical reception of Sheeler's photographs, which almost from the beginning were regarded as works of art. The great attention to the photographs represented by this book corrects a common misunderstanding of the role photography played in Sheeler's work. Unfortunately, in their efforts to provide a balanced text, the authors have failed to recognize the significant contribution Sheeler's photographs have made in creating an enduring myth of America's unobtainable past.

After his remarkable series chronicling his Doylestown house, Sheeler in 1920 made an equally noteworthy group of photographs of the New York skyline that paralleled his film *Manhatta*. Unlike the modernist painter Joseph Stella, who glorified the power, energy, and dynamic force of New York in his *Brooklyn Bridge* series, Sheeler makes the city's skyline memorable by making it highly suspect. Instead of looking up at skyscrapers and delighting in their way of commanding the heavens, Sheeler looks down at the rooftops of some skyscrapers, and across at the congested slum of others that block vistas and fill the city below with smoke and darkness. These photographs proved to be of inestimable importance to Edward Hopper, who used them as a basis for



Charles Sheeler, *Blast Furnace and Dust Catcher, Ford Plant, 1927*

his watercolors and paintings of New York rooftops that appeared later in the twenties.

Sheeler unfortunately did not always adhere to the critical rigor evidenced in the Bucks County farmhouse and New York skyline series. In the 1920's, many of his photographs became increasingly commercial. In 1926 he joined the staff of Condé Nast, where he worked for three years, contributing sixty photographs to *Vanity Fair*, and more than ninety to *Vogue*. Although he described his job as a "daily trip to jail," he entered fully into the spirit of the Condé Nast publication and began to glorify the glamour and power of the modern world. Significantly, few of these images are reproduced in the Stebbing/Keyes text, which mentions the need at the time to produce glamorous photographs of celebrities, and the requirement on occasion to stoop to such features as "Ann Pennington Struts a New Step--A Dance Up from the Levee--The Black Bottom." Sheeler's Condé Nast connection can be explained in terms of a need for regular work and pay, even if the results cannot be lauded.

The commission in 1927 to advertise Edsel Ford's River Rouge plant near Dearborn, Michigan, however, can less easily be categorized as commercial work. In most of his photographs of the Ford plant, Sheeler maintains a critical distance. Some of his images in this series, in fact, are among his greatest. They appear to extol industrial power and at the same time present its dark side. The most successful scenes are restricted to huge machines in action. These spectral figures--great leering dinosaurs of the industrial age--heave, sigh, and spew steam, in what appears to be a lumbering synchronized manner. They are spectral and monstrous robots of automation. Certainly not friendly and also not entirely subdued, they represent the industrial power of the modern age.

Compared to these great icons that testify to the mixed blessing of industrialization and mass production, Sheeler's 1929 interiors of his South Salem house seem trivial and

anecdotal, while his scenes of the Mount Lebanon Shaker Village (1934) and Williamsburg interiors in the following year are pale reflections of the early series devoted to his Doylestown house. Only in 1939 when he undertook the Fortune commission to create a group of paintings commemorating power did he achieve some of the intensity of his old manner, maintaining his remarkable ability to celebrate and question aspects of American culture in the same work of art. The photograph "View of Boulder Dam," for example, commands respect for this man-made wonder at the same time that it underscores the dam's role in influencing natural water courses. The view of "Boulder Dam, Water Intake Towers" is science fictional in its spectral calm, and the ferocious harnessed power of "Wheels" demands respect for these then ubiquitous mechanized monsters of the modern world.

By comparison, Sheeler's paintings lack the conviction and force of his photographs, perhaps because painted images do not impress on viewers the level of reality that can be conveyed by the photographs. As is evident from Sheeler's work, a photograph is a selected image of reality, a special and privileged view that might differ radically from the way a scene or an object might appear to casual observers. Still, in his photographs Sheeler plays with this medium's ability to maintain an apparently direct relationship with the perceivable world. His success can be gauged by the fact that his photographs are frequently more evocative than his paintings. Although superbly crafted, the paintings often appear prosaic when placed next to photographs. His photographs transform reality while affirming it; they present carefully selected segments of the world that look like accurate records of external reality, while exhibiting the strange familiarity of dream images.

Robert Hobbs is Associate Professor of Art History at Florida State University. His most recent book is *Edward Hopper* (Abrams).

THE DITLO EFFECT: AN ARMCHAIR GUIDE TO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

By Bill Frazier

In 1982 there emerged a new format for photojournalism which has since grown into a large publishing industry. The series of *A Day in the Life of...* (DITLO) books has become, by the publisher's own statement, "the most successful photography series in American publishing history." These volumes, which have so far been devoted to Australia (1982), Hawaii (1984), Canada (1985), Japan (1985), America (1986), the Soviet Union (1987), Spain (1988), and California (1988), have been produced at a rate of about one volume a year and have, on occasion, made the *New York Times* Best Seller List. Each volume reproduces an open letter to the participating photographers which urges them to "make extraordinary photographs of ordinary, everyday events." Given the rate of production, it would seem that this directive is easily achieved.

The format of each volume is identical, regardless of the country or culture pictured. Each book is a collection of images made within a single 24-hour period which commences after the photographers have received their assignments and are in place. While the list of photographers changes from project to project, there seems to be a core group of people who are hired frequently. This group is then supplemented with selections from a larger international list of photojournalists and photographers from the host country.

Typically, the volumes begin with images of sunrise and morning activities, e.g. exercises and breakfast. Daybreak is followed by photographs of daily activities--work, school, factories, financial districts, farmers mothers, soldiers, and vistas of cities and landscapes. Each picture is accompanied by a small schematized map which indicates the approximate location where the image was made and a credit line with the photographer's name. At dusk our attention is directed to pictures of sunsets and nightlife. Allowing for various customs, fashions, and the sprinkling of ethnic minorities indigenous to various locales, the photos in these photo books are nearly identical. For instance, the U.S.S.R., which probably has larger and more varied ethnic sub-groups than any other country encapsulated by this process thus far, is shown simply as another melting pot--just like America. The DITLO formula obliterates difference.

The DITLO process involves a considerable act of faith by the photographers, editors, publishers, and consumers who purchase the books. All of these persons seem to believe that something will be revealed as a result of the DITLO process. A collective portrait, perhaps even some sort of universal truth about



Cristina García Rodero, cover photo for *A Day in the Life of Spain, 1988*.

the human animal or its society will inevitably emerge from studying the collection. This belief in the truth value of photography--its ability to convey a human essence--parallels the views of some influential antecedents.

In the United States, *LIFE* magazine, which was modeled after earlier prototypes from Germany and France, began publishing in 1936. Its popularity continued to grow until the 1960's when its audience and advertisers were gradually pulled away by television. During its nearly 40 years of success, *LIFE* developed the formula that is used in DITLO. In both publications, photographs are accompanied by three or four brief sentences which relate, in a rather innocuous way, some slight information about the subject, or perhaps the photographer's experiences while making the image. Like their counterparts in *LIFE*, these bland captions have the role of a text for the



Erza Stoller. Installation view from the exhibition *The Family of Man*. January 24, 1955 through May 8, 1955. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photograph courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

publication. The DITLO editors mimic the *LIFE* magazine formula by telling us about specific people in everyday situations. We are encouraged to see these people as typical.

In the 1940's and 1950's, the Museum of Modern Art Department of Photography, under the direction of Edward Steichen, assembled and presented a series of exhibitions which reflected, in their installation design and curatorial methods, an approach remarkably similar to that exercised by these publishers. In a number of exhibits, such as *Road to Victory* (1942) and *Power in the Pacific* (1945), Steichen used images that had been culled from many sources to present vast, elaborate installations which ultimately gave patriotism the blessings of institutionalized high culture. In 1955, Steichen mounted what was and remains the most popular photographic exhibit of all time, *The Family of Man*. While these exhibits did little

to advance the public identification of photography as an artistic medium, their populist appeal was a marked departure from earlier MOMA efforts.

For these shows, the museum used an installation design by Herbert Bayer that had been adapted from El Lissitzky's Russian constructivist exhibit plans. These plans, which had been further refined in the Bauhaus, yielded an installation which was reassuringly familiar to an audience acquainted with *LIFE* magazine. The overall look of the galleries was remarkably similar to a double page spread from *LIFE*. Images were juxtaposed in ways which suited Steichen's purpose.

In *The Family of Man*, Steichen placed images of people from various cultures side by side. When gallery visitors entered a given room, they were confronted by a photo mixture of differing scale, subjects, and cultures. Steichen's placement and selection of imagery suited his propagandistic aims, which ultimately were to present America as the social and political leader of the post war world. As Christopher Phillips has observed, Steichen's curatorial choices of scale and juxtapositioning established "new narrative chains (which were) consistent with a pre-determined thesis." While the DITLO project directors are not as overtly political, they are engaged in a more subtle process which is very similar in its aims and effects.

Like Steichen's *Family of Man*, the DITLO books are directed primarily to the American consumer, and only secondarily to the global audience.

If the eight-volume series is considered as a single entity, it has a remarkable similarity to an earlier nineteenth century practice--the illustrated book of the Grand Tour. These volumes, which incorporated photographs of most important historical and archeological sites in distant

lands, had an enthusiastic audience in England and France. They simulated the travel journal which was popular among the upper classes, who bought them as souvenirs of their travels. Those nineteenth century publications were essentially symbols of a cultural colonialism being practiced at the time by France and England, and replicated now by the United States. The DITLO volumes make all cultures knowable, and to that extent possessible. When the series is expanded, as is currently planned, to include some third world countries (where the average \$40.00 cost of these volumes exceeds the monthly income in many households), our photo-colonial impulses will become even more apparent.

The gender roles which are seen in the DITLO photographs generally support traditional stereotypes. Women are frequently seen in activities or portrayed in manners which are associated with societal views of femininity. They

are pictured as mothers, teachers, nurturing children, cleaning house, sitting idly, or relating to men in a way which establishes the male as the person who is in charge of the situation. When women face the camera, they often are laughing nervously or gleefully. They are only rarely shown involved in serious purposeful work which challenges stereotypes. There are many pictures of young beauties.

When men are pictured, a distinct difference in editorial choice is evident. They work hard, and their involvement in their task is a serious matter. They are nearly always shown in positions of responsibility and authority. Men are frequently pictured in instructional roles—with other men or women; or they are involved in serious discussions (minus the hilarity which punctuates pictures of gatherings of women).

Here, there is yet another similarity with Steichen's world view. Phillips accurately observed that *The Family of Man* presented "the global patriarchal family...as utopia." Here the participating photographers and editors have done the same thing thirty years later. The gender roles in these books are also congruent with images recycled from another more contemporary source, advertising. In commercials and magazines women are usually represented as frivolous and dependent, while men are serious and independent. These representational formulas have long histories.*

There are still many people who cling to the old ideas about photography's pre-theoretical innocence. Editors and curators within our photo culture invest considerable faith in the notion of photographic truth. This belief in the truth potential of the image is a myth that has been operative since the invention of photography 150 years ago, despite the fact that many photographer-writers have critically challenged it. Gisèle Freund, for example, has written of the photograph's dependence upon the written word.¹ As an example, she cites the various captions assigned to images of rebellion against Soviet domination in Hungary in 1956. The truth value—or information value of images depends entirely upon their captions and contexts.

More recently, photography has also entered another dialogue which also ascribes to the image a curious and problematic independence. Formalist criticism assigns to a given object, such as a painting or a photograph, a mysterious completeness, apart from any artistic, theoretical or social concerns. Ideas about photographic truth may now be seen as stemming in part from these formalist attitudes. About this issue, Allan Sekula has written, for example:

*Implicit in this argument is the quasi-formalist notion that the photograph derives its semantic properties from conditions that reside within the image itself. But if we accept the fundamental premise that information is the outcome of a culturally determined relationship then we can no longer ascribe an intrinsic or universal meaning to the photographic image.**

Since nationality is ostensibly

the subject of the *DITLO* books, we might consider the nationality of the publisher. Collins Publishers, an American concern, seems to be exercising proprietary rights similar to those claimed by our government and our citizenry. We are, after all, the self-appointed leaders of the free world. The "culturally determined relationship" of the *DITLO* volumes bespeaks our colonialist patronizing attitudes toward the world population in general.

As these books function in our society, they offer us an image of the benefits of privilege and wealth that few outside the western world can ever hope to enjoy. The pictures document the myth of the bourgeoisie, proposing this class as the model for global society in general. The proletariat is shown striving eagerly for association with the moneyed class. The work ethic is firmly in place. This bourgeois view is problematic, however, because it depicts a mythological state. Since the western democracies comprise about 15% of the world population and control about 80% of the world's wealth, we are presented with a model that is improbable. These *DITLO*'s promote, to borrow from Roland Barthes, the myth of "a perfectible mobile world, [which] produces an inverted image of an unchanging humanity, characterized by an indefinite repetition of its identity."² We as Americans, holders of great wealth and bourgeois privilege, have nothing to lose by perpetuating these myths. The *DITLO* books codify our position in the world and give our status an air of respectable attainability.

Footnotes

1. *A Day in the Life of California* (San Francisco: Collins Publishers, 1988), p. 230. 2. This phrase appears in the letter to the participating photographers which is reproduced at the beginning of each volume in the *DITLO* series.
3. Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat of Photography," *October* 22 (Fall 1982), p. 46.
4. Phillips, p. 46.
5. Phillips, p. 46.
6. For an informative illustrated discussion of how images of women and men are used to reinforce stereotypes, see Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, Introduction by Vivian Gornick (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); see also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books and BBC, 1972), which links contemporary imagery in art and advertising with earlier sources from western art.
7. Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980; first published in France in 1974 by Editions du Seuil), p. 163.
8. Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," *Artforum* Vol. 13, no. 5, 1975, p. 37.
9. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), p. 142.

Bill Frazier is a Houston artist and photographer.

FALLS THE SHADOW

By Wendy Sterba

Body and Soul: Ten American Women, Text by Carolyn Coman, Photographs by Judy Dater, Design by Lance Hidy. Boston: Hill & Company, 1988. 136 pages, 200 black and white photographs. Cloth \$27.50, paper \$14.95.

One important aspect of artistry is making judgement calls, including ones about what to leave out. Good artists know when to let go of their original intent in favor of a better inspiration, and most of all they know how to reformulate their feelings and ideas. *Body and Soul: Ten American Women*, by Carolyn Coman and Judy Dater¹, is full of inspiration, but it suffers from the lack of adequate reformulation. Intent and result are at cross purposes in a work that combines the abilities and efforts of three talented individuals who seem to have been unable to unify their purpose and presentation.

Taken on its own, without explanatory preface, *Body and Soul* is surprisingly impressive. Ostensibly it is an unrelated collection of self-reflective essays by women—the kind of book that might be picked up out of idle curiosity, and then read through with increasing interest. It is a compelling text which explores the nature of women's perceptions and experiences in a male-dominated world. As Carolyn Coman explains in the Introduction, "Isn't diversity, after all, a giant relief, a gift that in the giving makes room enough for us all?" (pp. 7-8). There is a quiet feminism here—a celebration of the silent beauty in these women's struggles to be out of the ordinary. This is a book about strength through adversity, telling stories about some women not typically included in a feminist pantheon.

Unfortunately, the three-person creative team was not content to leave it at that. Instead of allowing the work to speak for itself, they attempt to explain their actions, and the result is an underscoring of the book's less visible weaknesses. The Introduction maintains that, "Ordinary daily life ultimately made the sensational story understandable and human. And it was the drama within the seemingly ordinary life that inevitably floored us" (p. 9). There is nothing ordinary about the lives of any of the women included in *Body and Soul*. The implication is that, if explored, any woman's life involves some sort of sensational story. Yet this is belied by the very process Coman and Dater used to seek out the interviewees. They initially talked to ten interesting people who then suggested other subjects. It is repeatedly stressed that only one of the original ten ended up in the book. It would have been a different book, but an intriguing one, if Coman and Dater had accepted the challenge of detailing ten "ordinary" women in all their ordinariness.

Originally, as conceived by publisher Tim Hill, the book was to be a collection of essays on women doing traditionally male jobs. Hill envisioned a joint effort between a writer and a photographer, and he



Judy Dater, Celia Alvarez, in *Body and Soul*.

brought Coman and Dater together for the project, suggesting poster artist Lance Hidy as designer. Coman and Dater went out for the interviews, but began to realize that they did not want to define these women purely by their profession, that they "couldn't isolate work without dragging in everything else" (p. 8). Tentatively, they changed their premise to "Survivors," or "What Women Want." After more work they decided that they did not need a unifying theme; instead they would choose a variety of issues and highlight women-related topics. They wanted to interview "a woman who breaks all the rules and gets away with it" or "a woman who has worked at a repetitious job for years" (p. 9). This idea changed again, as they adopted the new goal of showing "different things from different lives, contrast and connection" (p. 8). The final work ends up being a hodge-podge of all of these things, unable to focus or carry the impact that any one of the individual projects might have yielded.

A further goal, as expressed by Dater, was to combine text and image so completely that neither was subordinated to the other, to achieve a dynamic fusion "in which words and pictures carried equal weight" (p. 12). Here again the artists met with failure, for the written text carries far more weight than the images.

Coman did a superior job of editing the interviews, presenting their results as a sort of monologue delivered by each subject. The subjects are always interesting and characteristically revealing. The visual aspect of the portraits, however, leaves much to be desired. The most overwhelming problem concerns design and choice of materials. No doubt financial considerations limited the quality of image reproduction, but there is really no excusing the substandard printing in *Body and Soul*. Prints are overly dark and often lacking in white tones. The overall mood is one of hectic photojournalism rather than pensive examination.

As if this weren't bad enough, designer Lance Hidy compounds the problem by cutting out low-contrast subjects and laying these against stark white backgrounds, further emphasizing the grayness of the prints. The layout in general is annoying. Frequently frames are laid in strips end to end, proof-sheet style, in an effort to capture the subject's animation. Unfortunately, the effect is tiresome. After a couple of instances, one no longer wants to bother looking closely at such small images. It almost suggests that the photog-

rapher or editor did not find any of the prints impressive enough to stand on its own. Many of the photographs are close-ups trying to get at the "essence" of the personality, yet this in combination with Hidy's design creates an image claustrophobia. Even photographs which are given an entire page of their own seem to suffer from a lack of space.

In many instances the shots themselves don't seem to be well thought out. A boy standing before a wall wears an antler made by the design of the mortar between bricks behind him. A shoe factory worker floats in her frame because her dark trousers merge with the background. Iditarod winner Susan Butcher becomes a hairless wonder, for the same reason. This is not the quality one expects from the experienced hand of Judy Dater. It would have been far more impressive to have chosen only two or three strong images of each woman, well-printed and spaced, rather than to subject readers to this relentless barrage of mediocrity.

Some of the images actually do succeed. Especially expressive are the images of Maggie Ross, a free-spirited Episcopalian nun who calls herself "a speculative theologian." In one shot she is seen standing outside in her over-large homemade habit, exuding *joie de vivre*, arms upwardly outstretched, with beneficent smile. An openness beams forth, evoking her comment on her lifestyle, "I just wander with God, a kind of availability" (p. 131). This openness to life and balance between humor and contemplation is also clearly visible in some pictures taken of her in a treehouse. Laid out nine to the page, with bad printing, they still have much to offer in variety of expression and emotional play. If only there were less treehouse and more nun, fewer images, and breathing space between the frames!

The most beautiful portrait in the book is also quite traditional. It depicts Celia Alvarez, who describes herself as "a working-class Puerto Rican woman." In the close-up image of her with eyes closed, hand to cheek, we seem to see pensiveness and humor, a woman reconciled to the uphill struggle of her life. Texture detail is beautifully rendered, with reflected light illuminating her curly dark hair and an engraving in her ornate bracelet. Oval shapes are repeated in her face, hand, and in a string of beads which dips to the bottom of the picture. Celia's images and story fit in well with the project as it was initially conceived, and the photographs and text achieve a symbiosis in this section moreso than in any other.

Another nice, less traditional portrait is a close-cropped image of an S&M mistress, showing only her crossed hands on crossed legs. Patterns made by her curled pudgy fingers in gaudy ring and by her studded bracelet are laid against a background of leather and sinuous arms and legs. It is an unfetishized view of a highly fetishized profession, emphasizing work aspects of this romanticized occupation.

Unfortunately, the most interesting women in *Body and Soul* are shown in some of the least interesting portraits. Pic-



Judy Dater, Vickie Singer, from *Body and Soul*, 1988.

tures of actress Geraldine Fitzgerald sitting in a chair do not begin to reveal the power and energy shown in her interview. Although there are some good shots of Susan Butcher, the dog-sled racer and two-time Iditarod winner, they are mostly too contrasty and badly lit. They do not measure up to the fascinating depiction of her life in her interview.

In the same way, the portraits of Vickie Singer, one of the loyal wives of notorious renegade polygamist John Singer, while they demonstrate her lifestyle, do not seem really to convey the conviction and rage which were soon to surface in the police siege at her family's house in Marion, Utah. Dater described Singer in the *San Francisco Examiner* as a "very bitter woman bent on revenge." Yet the best shots of her emphasize her family life, showing a smiling Vickie and two daughters looking out a window, or a proud Vickie standing in front of her husband's hand-made American flag. The interview stressed her strength and struggles of conscience, her trouble in dealing with her husband's taking a second wife, and the importance that love and belief played in her life. As is frequently the case in *Body and Soul*, the written text here has more depth and complexity than the photographs, which seem to have been chosen for purely pictorial/formal reasons.

Body and Soul is a mixed bag. It cannot be recommended for its images. It is, however, well worth the reading. A quietly feminist book, it teaches through example rather than rhetoric or theory. The book suffers from being a group effort without a clear goal or unified theme, but it still offers considerable raw material for rumination, without either sentimentality or demagoguery.

Footnotes

1. *Body and Soul: Ten American Women*; Text by Carolyn Coman, Photographs by Judy Dater (Boston: Hill & Company, 1988). All subsequent quotations in the text are from this book.

Wendy Sterba is Assistant Professor of German at the College of St. Benedict, in Minnesota. She teaches and publishes in the areas of film, gender studies, and critical theory.

LETTERS

Priority in the SPOT letters column is given to letters concerning recent SPOT articles. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

Heinecken on Sekula

November 9, 1988
To the Editor:

I am writing to clarify two potentially misunderstood points in "Sekula replies to Kozloff" (*SPOT*, Letters, Fall 1988).

Near the end of his letter is a sentence that reads: "But I do get cranky about my historical research being used to legitimate work for which I have little respect."

Unfortunately, in our language, the word "legitimate" can be used as an adjective or as a transitive verb, and therefore is completely dependent on its grammatical and/or syntactical context to insure accurate meaning. If "legitimate" is understood to be an adjective and is prefaced by the words "used to" one might interpret his statement to mean: "But I do get cranky when my historical research is accustomed to being considered as valid work for which I have little respect." At best this reading produces confusion, and at worst reverses his intention. I think Sekula means to say: "But I do get cranky about my historical research being utilized to justify work for which I have little respect."

Because his writing (and position) is otherwise precise I feel that we should make certain that those subscribers who have followed Sekula's sequence of exchanges in *SPOT* consider the following: A determination of context is crucial to an understanding of intended meaning.

The second (2nd) incident occurs in the third line of Sekula's piece and is most certainly a typographic error (typo). We all know the general maxim which states: "It doesn't matter what they write about you, as long as they spell your name right." If this epigram is true, I must point out that the correct spelling of my given name is "Robert," not "Rober" as was printed. "Rober," when pronounced ("Robber"), induces an overtone of criminality. I am certain that Alla would not wish to allow this negative connotation to stand.

Respectfully,
Robert Heinecken
Los Angeles

On Japanese Video

November 3, 1988
Dear SPOT/Wendy Sterba:

Regarding your review of *WAVEFORMS: Video/Japan*, entitled, "Boundaries of the Wave: Japanese Avant-Garde Video," I'd like to make the following corrections and clarifications:

WAVEFORMS: Video/Japan was organized by Carl, not Carol, Loeffler and Beau Takahara.

WAVEFORMS is designed to be a survey to present viewers with a broad perspective of video art activity in Japan. The two programs are not arranged in chronological order, but in contextual order, with each program comprising a totality on its own as well. The central motif of the entire program is the persistence of tradition and the embracing of new technology in Japanese culture.

Regarding technically primitive: How much American experimental video art is of equivalent technical sophistication to Hollywood or MTV?

WAVEFORMS includes works employing both low end and high end technology. Such works as Ko Nakajima's Mt. Fuji, Runosuke Kato's What!, and the pieces by Radical TV are state-of-the-art by American and European standards, even today! Kiri Miyagaki's

Chasing the Rainbow received a standing ovation at SIGGRAPH for its technical sophistication.

Terminology: Please note, these are video tapes, NOT film.

Cultural alienation: Yes, Japan is a different culture than ours, as this video program indicates. And "difference that opens up possibilities of meaning" cannot be adequately judged by the standards of a culture which have not informed it.

The program: Alley of Alley may be seen differently by Americans and Japanese, but stands up on both fronts. It is a subjective record of the artist's boyhood impressions (the camera view is held waist high by the artist to capture his perspective as a child). Objectively, Alley of Alley exposes a Japanese slum.

In GI Joe, Radical TV holds a mirror to Americans of what they see of us; what we've directly exported. Seeing the "Lilliputian toy serviceman doing a jerky dance number" also provides a provocative commentary of U.S. military stance.

Koto Buki is not a music video, but documentation of a ritualized performance. The artist comes from a fishing village, hence his "poetic inspiration" of seeing the blue sea water reflected in his parents' faces. The music recalls seabirds; the artist's costume is based on Japanese symbols; red for the soul, white for purity.

Narrative: Even in the U.S., narrative is not an imperative for video art. However, *WAVEFORMS* includes both narrative and non-narrative works.

Innocent? Tentative? Look a little deeper. By inquiring into the technology utilized, and Japan's cultural roots, it IS possible for the difference of Japanese culture to have insight and meaning as it complements our own.

Sincerely,
Carl Loeffler
Director, ART COM
San Francisco

Wendy Sterba replies:

Thank you for your concern with the review of *WAVEFORMS*. It

seems we both have in mind the same goal: the dissemination of new insight via the experience of another cultural perspective. You have expressed my views precisely in your explanation of "G.I. Joe" by Radical TV, and I hope it is very clear that I certainly had no intention of judging Japan by American cultural standards. My review was aimed more at an American cultural bias and at the ways in which acquaintance with Japanese video might speak to a group unfamiliar with Japanese culture. As a long-time student of Japanese language and culture, I was very interested in your analyses of the individual works, and can only say that I regret no additional material was available to the less informed American audience. I spoke with several Japanese friends about "Koto Buki" and they were as confused about the color symbolism as I. It would be helpful to American audiences if there were some written explanation of the persisting traditional roots to which these videos refer, or if a short description explaining subject and order choices were to be made available. My hope is that such programs will continue to be made available to American audiences, with sufficient secondary material to allow them to step beyond the limits of their narrow cultural perimeters. I however also reserve the right as critic to comment on aspects of art which I find pleasing as well as those which are displeasing. With regard to *WAVEFORMS*, I believe I have succeeded at elucidating both.

Sincerely,
Wendy Sterba

CLUBS

The Houston Camera Club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonet. Contact Jane Ashley, President, at 984-2125 (h) or 622-2330 (o).

The Houston Photographic Club meets at 7:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at The Camera Doctor, 3211 Edloe. Contact Ed Borgman, President, at 777-7255.

NEWS

Conferences

Women in Photojournalism

A two day conference entitled "Another Point of View--Women in Photojournalism" will be held in Austin on February 25-26, 1989. A faculty of ten women, all leaders in their respective fields, will headline this conference designed for working photojournalists, editors, news directors, graphic designers, and media students. The speakers will include internationally known photographer Susan Meiselas, Los Angeles Times columnist and author Kay Mills, and Houston photojournalist Wendy Watriss. Hosted by the Region 8 Women's Committee of the National Press Photographer's Association, the conference will address important issues that affect women, as well as men, in the field of photojournalism. For more information about the conference, please contact: Michelle Bridwell, 1402 Galveston, Laredo, TX 78040, (512) 727-7487 (H), (512) 723-2901 (O), or Joyce Marshall, 1700 Sunset Terrace #6, Ft. Worth, TX 76102, (817) 336-4309 (H), (817) 390-7650 (W).

SPE National Meetings

The Society for Photographic Education will convene its 26th annual conference in Rochester, NY, March 16-19, 1989. With a theme of "Media and Society," the event will examine the many ways that photographically derived media have come to affect human experience in cultural, economic, and political terms. Programming for this year's conference has been selected by a ten-member national jury representing the field's diversity--in racial, sexual, occupational, and geographical terms.

For further information, contact: 1989 SPE National Conference, P.O. Box BBB, Albuquerque, NM 87196, or call (505) 268-4073.

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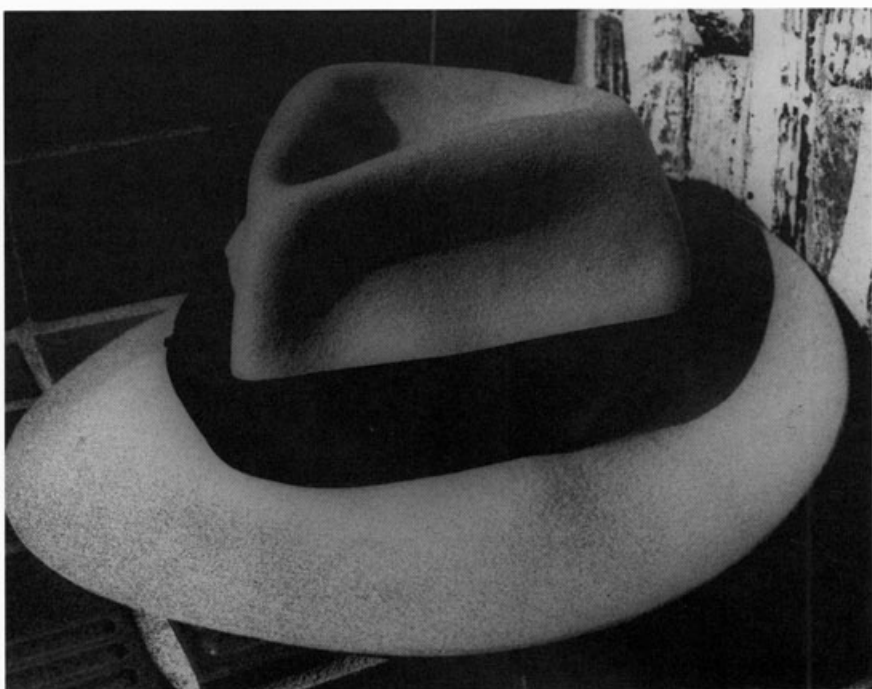
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Empathy: Contemporary Japanese Photography was exhibited in the 1600 Smith lobby gallery from September 22 to November 17, 1988. The exhibition, conceived and assembled by Akira Matsumura, was accompanied by a newspaper-format catalogue published by the Visual Studies Workshop.

From Akira Matsumura's catalogue statement:

Japanese people are often quick to poeticize their emotions and render them into literature or art.... Unlike Western photographers who favor predetermined conceptual formats, Japanese imagemakers are more likely to approach their subjects intuitively. Thus, Japanese photographers express themselves through their subjects--by a process that can best be described as "empathy." The final result may be a forward plunge into the depths of joy or despair, a rhythmical sense of playfulness, or a recreation of the senses. But in the end, the pictures leave one with an impact that is raw and powerful.

Katherine Guild responds here to two images from this exhibition in the spirit of Empathy. Guild is Senior Editor at Houston Metropolitan Magazine.



From "Light and Shadow" (1981) by Daido Moriyama

As we are weightless ants journeying up and down the surface of this city, Moriyama's hat is a landscape. I will swim to the beach of its brim and find my way to its recessed center--the perfect spot to lie hidden from view and look up at the sky. From this perspective, I come to know the hat as a lover, with the skin of my belly, eyes inches away, moved, suddenly, to press my cheek against... And then I step back, away.



From "Kakunodate" by Ryoji Akiyama

Unbeknownst to the priest, he carries the self-condemnation of hopelessness over his head. All the utterances of despair dispersed on anonymous individual white rectangles of paper for the new year. My newly lightened inner life a paper parasol, along with, I am sure, the prayer from a woman I do not know and will never meet who cannot conceive and the many prayers for all the only sons.

I am disinclined to share with anybody the relief I feel, indeed devotion, to the happy priest, who will always be here, bright with purpose, celebrating, unknowingly, shame's hideous toenails, everyone's dry croaking pleas for prosperity, death wishes.

Faithfully, excitedly, he bears these paper slips, encoded stars and invisible boulders all, to a place where there is no word for permission, where mothers don't live in their cars, where men don't shoot their wives, where the boss doesn't spy on you, where the medicine chest isn't filled with prescriptions, where your friends are happy, where, in fact, your lover sucks your tit.



Lee Friedlander, Canyon de Chelly, 1983

HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY 1989 PRINT AUCTION

The Houston Center for Photography announces its fifth print auction to take place on Sunday, March 12, 1989. An illustrated auction catalogue will be available in early February 1989 for \$7.00. This auction will feature photographs by approximately 150 regionally, nationally and internationally known contemporary photographers. Mail and phone bids are encouraged. To order a catalogue, send your name, address and check or MC/VISA card number to:

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