SPOT

HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY · WINTER 1990 · $2

Skeet McAuley

LANDSCAPE AT RISK

Landscape vs. Environment: or, thirteen ways of coping with Nature by Ed Hill & Suzanne Bloom

4 Years Against an Urban Environment by Kirk Condyles

On John Pfahl's Poisonous Beauty by Hans Staartjes

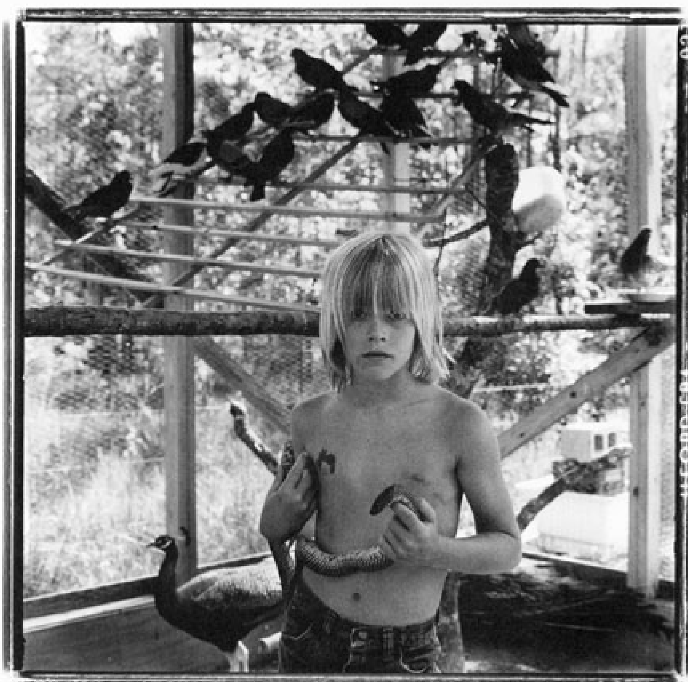
Sharon Stewart's *Toxic Tour of Texas* — Profile by Julie Lee

Also In This Issue

Reviews of • Man Ray • Czech Modernism • Vernon Fisher
Three Hungarians • Dick Arentz • Jocks and Nerds • Laura Mulvey

RICE UNIVERSITY PRESS

New Books For FotoFest



THE BLUE MAN

Photographs by Keith Carter
Text by Anne Tucker and Keith Carter
144 pp 72 Duotones
$34.95

DETERING BOOK GALLERY
2311 Bissonnet 713-526-6974
Book Signing February 15 6:00 to 8:00 PM

MCMURTREY GALLERY
3508 Lake 713-523-8238
February 10 - March 10

Reception February 17 6:00 to 8:00 PM

THE EARLY YEARS OF RHYTHM & BLUES

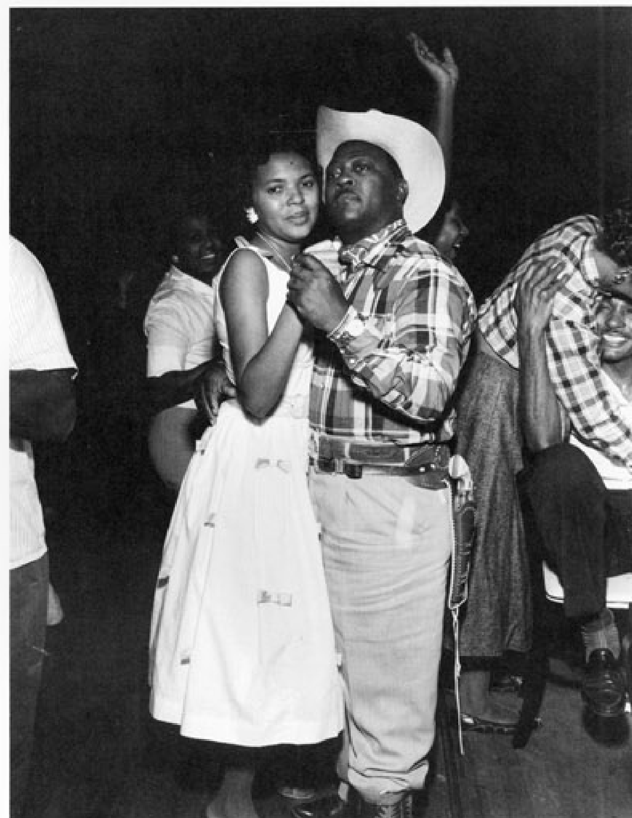
Photographs by Benny Joseph
Introduction by Alan Govenar
96 pp 60 B &W Photos
$24.95

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MUSEUM
2101 Crawford, Suite 111 A
713-759-0044

February 10 - March 10

Reception and Book Signing
February 10 6:00 to 8:00 PM

Funded in part a by grant from
the Cultural Arts Council of Houston



SEASONS OF LIGHT **Photographs by Peter Brown**
142 pp 29 Color Plates $24.95
Brown's recent work will be displayed during FotoFest
at Farish Gallery, Rice University

PO Box 1892 Houston, Texas 77251 713-527-6035

CONTENTS

COVER
Skeet McAuley, Fallout shelter directions near Goulding, Utah, 1984

FEATURES

LANDSCAPE AT RISK

5 Landscape vs. Environment, or, thirteen ways of coping with Nature, by Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom
HCP's *Landscape at Risk* exhibition makes clear that landscape as a particular artistic tradition has limits in style and in substance.

8 Four Years Against an Urban Environment, by Kirk Condyles
Condyles, who has done work for Greenpeace and the Environmental Defense Fund, says, "If I am to be known only as a photographer of dead rats and trash, then so it must be."

13 Poisonous Beauty, by Hans Staartjes
In *Arcadia Revisited*, John Pfahl pursues a nineteenth century experience of the awe and sublimity of Niagara Falls.

PROFILE

10 More Than the Landscape at Risk: Sharon Stewart's *Toxic Tour of Texas*, by Julie Lee
Houston photographer Sharon Stewart shifts from lyrical infrared Greek landscapes to participating in and documenting grass-roots environmental activism at various Texas sites.

EXHIBITIONS

15 Blind Visionary, by Margo Reece
Man Ray balanced on a tightrope over a precipice of contradictions.

18 1930–Something, by Louis Dobay
The MFA's huge exhibition *Czech Modernism* tried to tidy up troubled times.

20 Private Eye, by Anne Roberts
The MFA's Exhibition culled from area collections contained familiar old friends and intriguing new works.

21 Hungarians, by Béla Ugrin
Work by three Hungarians shown in Gallery X at HCP surprise, showing the avant-garde's precarious existence within socialist restraints.

23 Interrupted Visual Stories, by Johannes Birringer
Vernon Fisher's narratives in the CAM retrospective resist interpretation and closure.

24 Something Old, Something New, by Lynn M. Herbert
Arentz is poised between masterful landscapes in his platinum-palladium prints and new suggestions of surrealist metaphors.

BOOKS

25 Moving On, by Joan Seeman Robinson
Janice Rogovin listens to where Vietnam War veterans have been.

26 Jocks and Nerds, by Ed Osowski
A new book on men's fashion helps fill in some gaps but is not without its own limitations.

27 Sphinx and Spectacle, by Cynthia Freeland
Laura Mulvey's *Visual and Other Pleasures* gets stuck in theory, particularly psychoanalysis.

DEPARTMENTS

3 Letters

SPOT is a publication of the Houston Center for Photography, a non-profit organization that serves the photographic community as a resource for educational exchange through exhibitions, publications, lectures, workshops, and fellowships.

SPOT is sponsored in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

Cynthia Freeland, editor of SPOT, will be a visiting faculty member in the philosophy department at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia during the Spring semester. In her absence, Lynn M. Herbert has agreed to guest edit the next two issues.

SPOT

WINTER 1990
VOLUME IX
NUMBER 1

STAFF

EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
Jeff DeBevec

EDITOR
Cynthia Freeland

DESIGN
Jim Tiebout

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Jean Caslin
Elizabeth Claud

ADVERTISING SALES
Michael G. DeVoll

WRITERS
Johannes Birringer
Suzanne Bloom
Kirk Condyles
Louis Dobay
Cynthia Freeland
Lynn M. Herbert
Ed Hill
Julie Lee
Ed Osowski
Margo Reece
Anne Roberts
Joan Seeman Robinson
Hans Staartjes
Béla Ugrin

COPY PHOTOGRAPHS
Deborah A. Garza

HALFTONES
A's Colour

PRINTING
Drake Printing

For details about membership contact the HCP at 1441 West Alabama Houston, TX, 77006 Telephone (713) 529-4755

Subscriptions to ***SPOT*** are $12 per year in the UnitedStates. The magazine is published three times a year in January, May and September.

Advertising
For information please contact the HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY (713) 529-4755.

Copyright 1989. All rights reserved. No portion of ***SPOT*** may be reproduced without the permission of the Houston Center for Photography

HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
1441 W Alabama
Houston,Tx 77006

JEAN CASLIN
Executive Director

MICHAEL G. DEVOLL
Admin. Director

DEBORAH GARZA
Admin. Assistant

ELIZABETH CLAUD
Curatorial Assistant

LETTERS

The Man in the Street

November 7, 1989

The Fall 1989 issue of SPOT carried a review by Wendy Sterba of my book, *The Man in the Street*, recently published by E.P. Dutton. I wish to thank Ms. Sterba for many of the positive comments she expressed toward my image-making and my skills.

I do feel that both readers and reviewers should understand that in the reality of today's publishing world (maybe this is how it always was!) the photographer/author has little to do with how the book is laid out, where it is printed, etc., etc. Yes, the editor usually does talk to you and make you feel that you are included in the design process, and you do get to see some steps along the way, BUT the final decision is in the hands of the publisher, and they are concerned with questions of money, production costs, piqueing a viewer's interest (so they will buy one of the 10,000 books they are paying you for), *along* with design standards. To me it was crucial to have done wonderfully strong, contrasty and clean prints to hand in as final prints. They then get laid out by the art department and then sent on to Spain–where someone else is in charge of what happens next. I don't think the art director from New York even gets to go there and watch the presses. I did volunteer to go to Spain to "help" and they said, "The last thing anyone wants is the photographer driving everyone crazy." So, ultimately it is out of your control. Since I am a rather compulsive person about my work, this was hard for me. But in the real world we cannot have total control AND have exposure too! And to agree with Ms. Sterba, I have ALWAYS hated double-page spreads of photographs; they look fine on a flat mechanical on the art director's table, but not in a book with a spine.

For now, I hope that the book I am currently working on, for Doubleday, called *Artists and their Gardens*, will be a more harmonious union between my vision and the publishers'!

Sincerely,
Ann Chwatsky
Rockville Centre, N.Y.

Seasons of Light

September 19, 1989

Dear Editor:

I am gratified to see that my review of Peter Brown's *Seasons of Light* has sparked so much fiery commentary. As a critic, I have only one point of view, one spotlight, so to speak, with which to attempt to illuminate an entire manuscript. And as a book-reviewer, I am responsible for considering the work as a whole, including what some might consider unnecessary appendages. Of course if I hadn't found Brown's work beautiful, as I said in the review, I wouldn't have bothered writing about it. And if I hadn't thought him a good enough artist and writer to take the heat, I wouldn't have evaluated the work by considering it in relation to the superstars. But as a *responsible* critic and reviewer, I'm relieved that my writing is being taken as a platform for further enlightenment rather than as received wisdom.

Elizabeth McBride
Houston

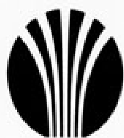
BENTELER-MORGAN GALLERIES

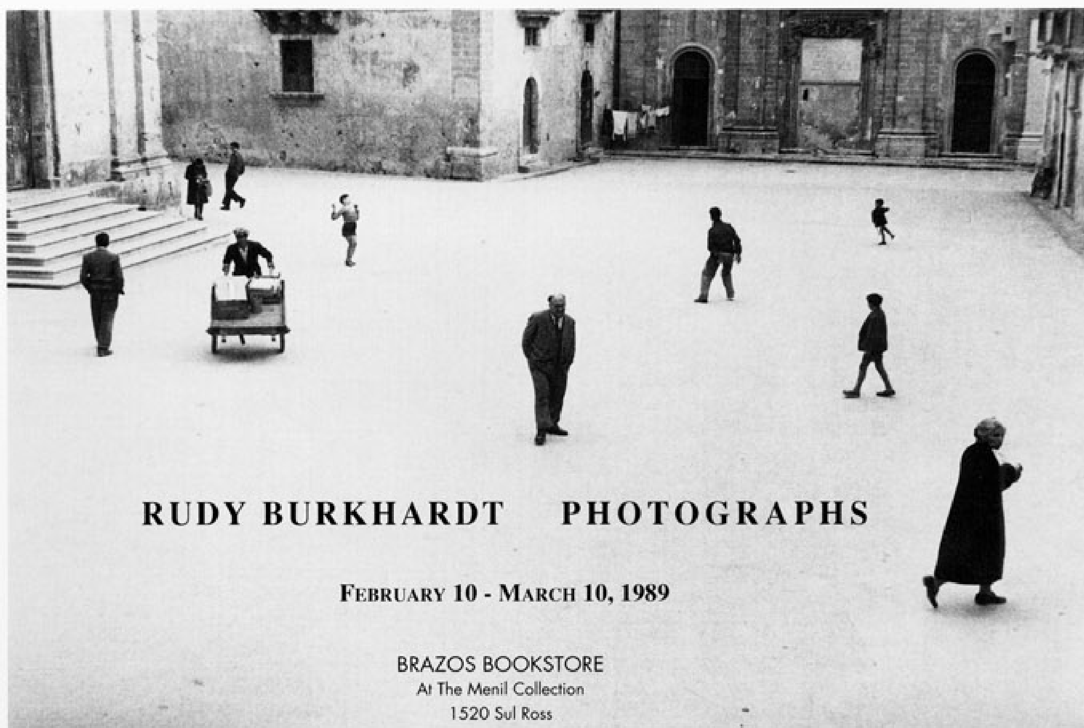
Fine Art Photography and Custom Framing

DEBBIE FLEMING CAFFERY

4100 Montrose Blvd., Suite D
Houston,TX 77006 713-522-8228

CONTINENTAL AIRLINES





We Do Things In The Dark
You'd Never Dream Of Doing Yourself.

It's time we shed some light on what Houston Photolab can do for the average shutterbug and professional alike. Things like:

- 2-hour continuous E-6 runs
- Computerized push/pull available
- Slide imprinting
- Duplicate transparencies
- Fuji Super Gloss prints from slides or negatives
- Mounting and laminating

In fact, we have the equipment and expertise to handle anything from the simplest snapshot to the most complex photographic display.

Because a photographer shouldn't be in the dark about where to go for custom lab work.

HOUSTON PHOTOLAB

5250 Gulfton at Royalton
Building 3, Suite 3
(713) 666-0282

12145 North
Freeway
(713) 876-2186

2621 South Shephard
#160
(713) 522-5400

Mary Peck, from the *Everglades Series, 1988*

LANDSCAPE VS ENVIRONMENT;
or, thirteen ways of coping with Nature

By Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom

1.

A group of distinguished Greek philosophers has announced the discovery of the fifth element, ***Detritus****, or "***Trash****," which will be added to the traditional four elements of Nature:* ***Earth****,* ***Air****,* ***Fire****, and* ***Water****. In his press statement the group's spokesman, Empedocles, said, "What led us to the discovery were the rusty cab of an ancient pickup truck, several rotted mattresses, and the charred remains of a TV console found recently in the woods outside of Athens." He also acknowledged that his group would be examining the possibility that this new element might be the* ***First Principle*** *of our post-industrial age.*

2.

The environment is now a *hot* topic. It probably has never before received more media attention–especially since the Exxon debacle in Alaska. Over the last six months, for example, several major magazines have published cover stories on pollution ("Dirty Air," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 12, 1989; "Cleaning Up Our Mess," *Newsweek*, July 24, 1989), on rain forests ("Torching the Amazon," *Time*, September 18, 1989), on the destruction of species ("The Ivory Trail," *Time*, October 16, 1989), and on the whole enchilada ("Managing Planet Earth," *Scientific American*, September, 1989). The electronic media have been very much in the picture as well. Perhaps the most remarkable new item on network schedules is ABC's "American Agenda," which has allocated four minutes and thirty seconds for socially and environmentally relevant issues Monday through Thursday evenings on *Nightly News* with Peter Jennings. Even affiliate stations have begun to produce their own "special reports" that deal with problems specific to their regions, such as serious ozone pollution along the petrochemical Gulf Coast.

3.

All this attention focused on the environment – Is it warranted or might it be merely alarmist journalism? For us the latter is a moot question. More to the point, "Has it come too late?" The natural environment exists under evidence of severe stress; or, to phrase it differently: the health of the entire planet appears to be in absolute d-a-n-g-e-r. Added to what we can see for ourselves, various watchdog organizations inform and warn us daily about deteriorating conditions in the atmosphere, water, and forests. Virtually every habitat on earth is threatened to some degree. The threats are of many kinds, but the relevant fact is that we, humans, are the principal agents of influence and effect on the natural world. We are simultaneously *world-builders* and exterminating angels.

4.

So far the visual arts have found only limited and largely problematic means of expressing ecological "concern." Yes, problematic – even contradictory. First, because the materials we use as artists are so often damaging if not toxic to the earth at some stage in their manufacture or as they are used in the production of artworks; and second, because our artistic "statements" tend to operate in the realm of aesthetic ambiguity where mixed messages are generated, i.e., what is received by a viewer may not at all reflect our intentions. These two problematic conditions are generally true but seem especially poignant when the artwork is attempting to address environmental issues.

The question of hazardous materials (to both worker and environment) has not been ignored in the past two decades, but needs to be treated more extensively – given the wide range of materials used – and researched in greater depth so as to trace more fully the actual chain of environmental effects. Photography certainly must bear its share of responsibility for contaminating the biosphere. The great yellow giant, Kodak, has been charged with pollution through seepage and release of methenol chloride into the soil and air of the environment surrounding its manufacturing facility in the densely populated area of Rochester.[1] Over the course of history the gods have committed their own acts of pollution, so why should we expect better from corporate titans? Besides, we can't rage against large-scale polluters without examining our own studio/darkroom practices or our cash support for these fouling industries.

5.

There is a problem in resolving environmental awareness with the *genre* of landscape; at the heart of this difficulty we find what might be termed the "aesthetic fallacy." Because of his commitment to conservation, Ansel Adams is paradigmatic in this regard: his camerawork – informed by a 19th century artistic tradition and modulated by a conservative modernism – promotes the simple but noble idea that the grandeur and beauty of the landscape can be evoked by a grand and beautiful photograph, that the *value* of nature can be conveyed through the rich, controlled display of tonal values in black and white photography. The silent effect of this ideology, however, is that Adams' mastery of the (landscape) photograph translates into man's mastery (domination) over the natural world.

That the aesthetic perfection of a photograph (i.e., of the artist's vision) can inspire in us deeper reverence for its object (nature) is a notion hard to resist. Yet photographers in the last twenty years not only have tired of Adams' aesthetic, they have come to believe it just plain isn't an effective strategy with which to raise environmental awareness. Images of perfect and beautiful landscapes too easily become our preferred version of the world, fostering an illusion of well-being. In fact, they become aesthetic signs that seduce our vision, substituting for and blinding us to the dreaded truth: nature is in a state of biological, chemical disrepair.

Only one photographer in HCP's major fall exhibition, *The Landscape at Risk* (curated by Jean Caslin and Elizabeth Claud; supported by funding from the Wray Trust), took up this traditionalist approach. In Mary Peck's panoramic scenes of the Everglades all the advantages accrue to the photo-as-object and not to the photo-as-intentional message. The alternative strategy (which the majority of photographers in the exhibition followed) is to document the wounds and scars, the visible signs of damaged and disregarded nature. To put forward the verso of the pristine landscape would appear to be the logical choice, to present, contra-Adams, visual evidence that the "naturalized" landscape is in jeopardy. The aesthetic fallacy, however, is terribly resilient. It conceals itself in the same conjugal bed where lies the false belief that photographs speak for themselves, only in this case it is the aesthetically pleasing or

Detlef Henrichs, *Oil spill on rocks, Alaska,* 1989 (original in color)

well-formed photograph (image) that is taken to speak for itself. David Hanson's aerial photographs of coal strip mining, and to a lesser degree Robert Dawson's images dealing with the diversion of water resources in the West, got caught in this particular trap of aesthetic distancing. Their environmental statements, although appropriately focused on ecological manipulation, are nevertheless highly mediated by the formal priorities of photography derived from the artistic conventions of landscape.

Robert Dawson, *Polluted New River, Calexico, CA*, from the *California Toxics Project*, 1989

6.

The word "landscape" speaks to culture not nature. Or, when it does, it speaks to nature about form (topography). Basically it refers to a classic genre or motif of art which invariably carries considerable aesthetic baggage. "Environment" is a word with an entirely different life. To begin with it derives from the transitive verb, *environ*, *en* (in) + *viron* (circle): to encircle, turn around, or surround. The environment is our living envelope. It "contains" the conditions and forces that influence, indeed, ultimately determine the form and survival of the biosphere. "Landscape" is about the construction and control of pictorial space, about domesticating nature and giving it form pleasing to the eye and mind; whereas, "environment" abolishes the horizon line, the fixed point-of-view and the delineation of rational space. The latter term attempts to draw us away from our anthropocentric illusions while the former constantly reproduces them.

7.

In light of this, the title *Landscape at Risk* reveals a second meaning – the risk or threat of displacement that environmental concern itself represents to the autonomous domain of art. Landscape and environment, two expressions so often used interchangeably, at bottom, stand for conflicting interests. This fact seems to have been grasped intuitively by Alison de Lima Greene, curator of *The New American Landscape* shown during the same time period at the Glassell School of Art. Drawn from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the works exhibited were American, but they were decidedly not contextually *new*. (The "new" American landscape is one that is being radically altered -- contaminated, deforested, and eroded.) The conceit of this thematic exhibition by all appearances was to bolster the aging metaphysic of modernism which uses Nature to "naturalize" the creative activity of art, transferring to the artist all of Nature's power and authority.

Just because an artwork represents, alludes to, or derives from natural forms does not of and in itself signify an ecological consciousness bourne on the wings of these forms. For that to be the case, the configuration of signs peculiar to the work must in some manner transgress, invert, or disrupt the conventional pictorial language of "landscape," and in a way that exceeds the merely formal. The one work included in *The New American Landscape* that was unmistakably environmentalist was Neil Jenny's "Threat & Sanctuary." The principal elements of the painting are an indeterminate body of water, a small, empty lifeboat, and the tentacles of an octopus. Jenny manipulates meaning through a double reading of title and picture which hinges on what we designate as threat and what as sanctuary. From a man-centered view we identify the lifeboat as a place of relative safety from the dangers lurking in the deep, dark waters of the sea. On the other hand, Nature is the sanctuary being threatened by the invasion of uncontrolled technology represented by the inflatable lifeboat as technological artefact (adrift from some offshore oil rig?). We are responsible for the present threats to the (our) sanctuary, Nature; and so, it is we who must intervene and rescue "her" from destruction – if that possibility is yet open to us. Greene grasped the fact that irony is at work here but she missed the inverted message. Her wall text described the painting as "an absurdist melodrama." Indeed ... tell that to Greenpeace.

8.

The fire in the water,

the air in the earth,

The water in the air,

and the earth in the sea.

(–Antonin Artaud)

And the Trash.

9.

Intervention, then, is a tactic of the environmentalist, and irony is one device of intervention for the artist. Text is another. In *The Landscape at Risk* two photographers combined text instrumentally with their images. Detlef Henrichs' color photographs are flashing images that occur abruptly where the thin, incidental lines of various individual lives intersected the broad black path of the Exxon-Valdez oil spill. The texts are not supplements to the photographs, but instead, voices that amplify a close encounter with a great American tragedy. In the most restrained manner Henrichs encourages us to consider the deadly outcome of permitting petro-corporations to colonize the wilderness and turn waterways into traffic lanes of exploitation.

Deborah Bright's eco-archaeological project, "How the West was Won: Caution – Do Not Dig," used the implements of historicity (textual and visual documentation) to exhume the irradiated truth from a ragged, overgrown thicket outside Chicago. The West has won (over Nature) through an aggressive assault on Nature's secrets. Bright's choice of site, the abandoned location of the first nuclear reactor, is both emblematic and symptomatic of a crucial moment in this long-standing Western policy of might over the rights of Nature.

10.

The most familiar coupling of text and image occurs, of course, in advertising. We are all well aware of the invocation of Nature as a venerable tradition that has proven to work for advertisers: the landscape as *natural* setting for the product. But now there is an increasing list of major corporations or corporate groups that are shifting from pure landscape to "environment" in an effort to convince the public through print and electronic media of their ecological consciousness – or, at the very least, of their abiding concern for all God's creatures. If it is not already an acquired response, we need always meet these ads with extreme cynicism.

The recent issue of *Scientific American* (referred to above, section 2) provided advertisers an ideal occasion to inform the public of their corporation's right-mindedness on environmental issues; an ideal occasion because the magazine created a tone not unsympathetic to its advertisers by titling this special issue, "Managing Planet Earth." Every plant manager on earth can feel at home with that phrase. One example will do. The American Forest Council, an association of fifteen "forest products companies," asked rhetorically in their two-page spread: "Are America's Forests Out of the Woods?" The photograph above the text provided the answer without needing to bother with the other fourteen lines of small type. Not only does the cloud forest they chose look healthy and unscarred, it appears to be rich in species *and* completely unlike the hybrid monoculture forests that are managed by these producers of lumber and paper products. Everything is under control. There will be no disruption in the production and distribution of these essential materials. And Mother Nature is doing just fine, thank you.

11.

Skeet McAuley's contribution to *Landscape at Risk* provided a more complex and troublesome view of the inevitably romanticized man-Mother Nature construct. The works exhibited were selections from his extensive ethno-photographic book project, *Sign Language: Contemporary Southwest Native America* (Aperture Press, 1989). In the immense spaces of Navajoland small, ironic signs of modernity have cropped up, e.g., a gasoline pump, playing field scoreboard, and posted directions to a fallout shelter stand out of kilter near the shadow of the red "Rocks Pointing Upward" (Tsenideezhazhaii).

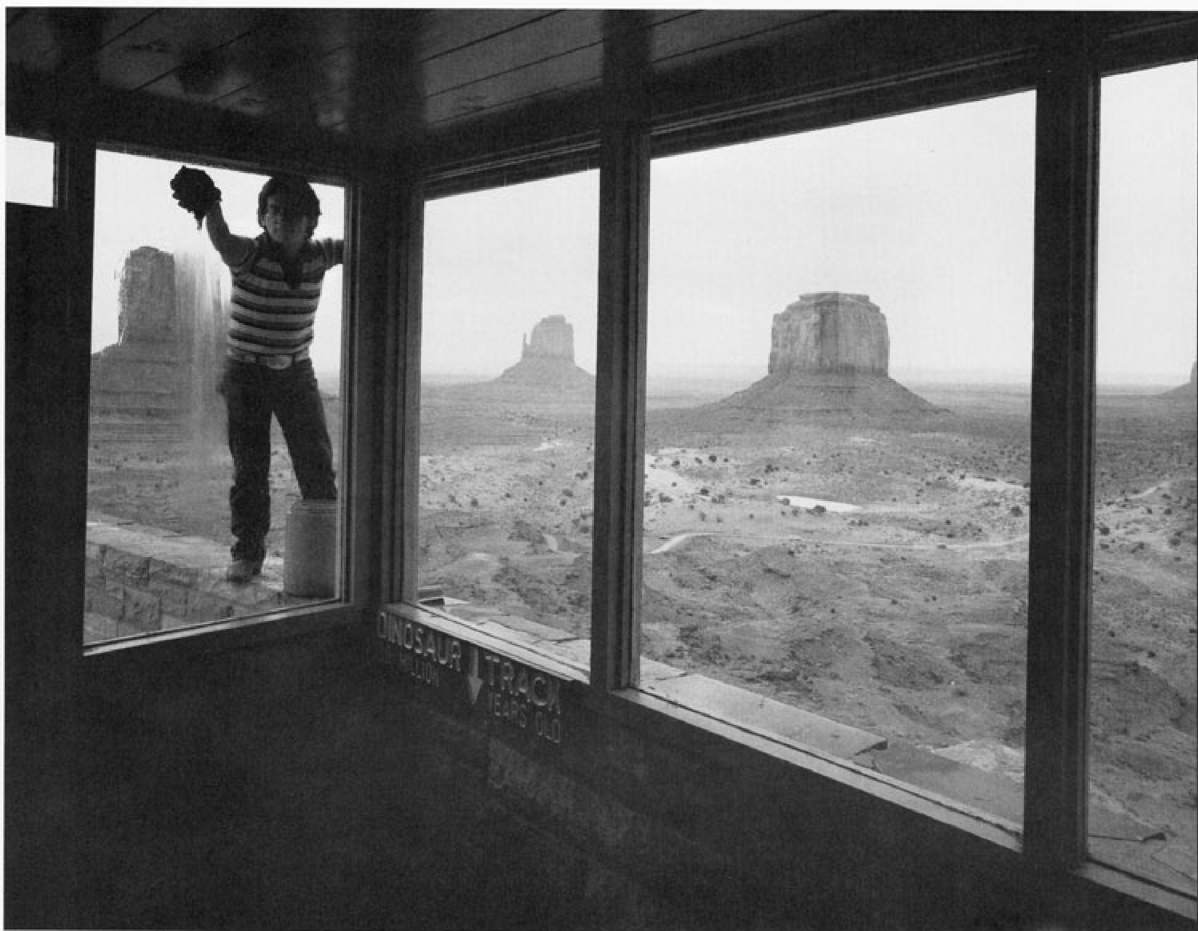
But although Whites may think American techno-culture now squats where earthen hogans used to sit, Navajo medicine-person Mike Mitchell sees no contradiction. His "innocent" interpretive responses to some of McAuley's photographs serve as a strong reminder that photographs are socially constructed by the photographer and re-constructed by the viewer. In order to resolve the conflict between Navajo economic progress (western style) and ceremonial tradition, Mitchell sees a continuous sacred line between Mother Earth, which "was made in harmony with living things," and "Earthly Five-Fingered People" who must "somehow be able to make a living." Whatever "livelihood" comes from earth's surface, and whatever is taken from inside her body was put there by the Holy People for the Navajos use. Present tribal consumption of her bounties, from agriculture to coal, natural gas, and uranium, even if ultimately destructive, further affirms human's respectful, loving relationship with Mother Earth.[2] Apparently the sacred path between nature and spiritual man can still be reduced to that of a supply rail leading from fecund source to pragmatic need.

12.

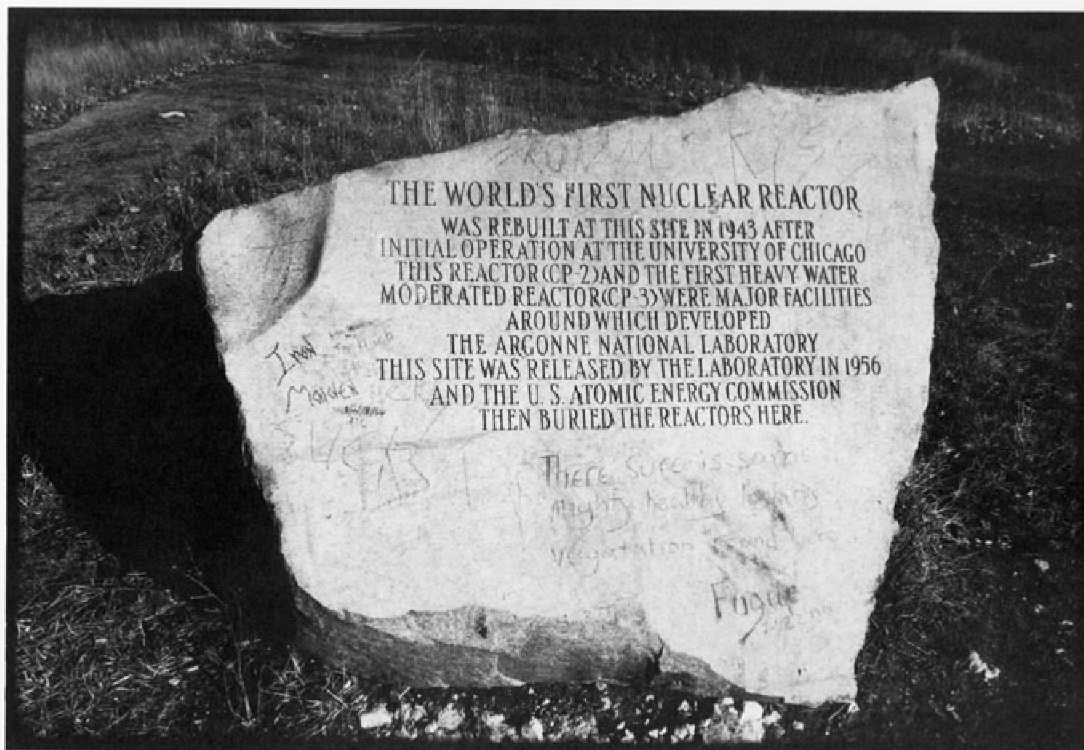
"She" is mute in "His" world....

The metaphoric archetype exists: Nature has been and is considered, virtually universally, to be female, to have feminine properties, to be the Eternal Mother. The planet Earth, Gaia, is Mother Earth, the primal Goddess (who gave immaculate birth to Heaven, Ouranos), the Oracle at Delphi, and the Oldest of Divinities. But what are the implications and consequences of this reductive personification of nature as female and mother?

Pre-patriarchal societies viewed earth as a *living mother*, originary matter (*mater*), which, as Carl Jung points out, was able to encompass symbolically the "profound emotional meaning of Mother Earth" and to carry considerable psychic significance for humankind's collective identity with natural phenomena.[3] Such a force, the Great Mother, who served to maintain the human connection with nature, stands in contrast to the modern view of earth as simply material resource. In the one case the earth is seen as fertile and life giving, generation creating; and, in the other, as a passive instrument of production brought to fruition by and for man. Both cases are supported by an essentializing view of the feminine nature of Nature as evident in certain characteristics, i.e., fertility and passivity.



Skeet McAuley, *Navajo Window Washer, Monument Valley, AZ* (original in color)



Deborah Bright, detail from *How the West Was Won*, 1985

Reverent views of Nature ("She is our living mother.") were and continue to be healthier attitudes toward Earth than those that would deny an intimate relation between man and Nature and allow for excessive exploitation and despoliation (rape) of the biosphere. In those American Indian societies of the 19th century that retained the idea of the Earth Goddess there was clear distress at the way Caucasians were treating their land:

They kill the trees, they treat the trees unjustly, and the trees cry. They tear out the entrails of the earth, they hurt the earth, and the earth cries. They poison the water of our clear rivers, the fish die, and the fish and rivers cry, the earth cries, the herbs of the meadows cry - indeed, the Whites make all of nature cry.[4]

Regardless of the degree of reverence or irreverence of a society's position toward nature, if the guiding ethos is dependent upon an essentializing view that sets up a hierarchial relation between man and Nature it is basically problematic. If Earth is Mother Earth, then we are her children who are dependent on her for nourishment and sustenance. But there is also in psychoanalytic terms a good deal of ambivalence in the relation between child and parent: man (i.e., specifically, the masculine gender) tends to deny his origin, the ties that bind him to the mother. In this relational web of son and mother, his assertion of autonomy manifests itself as mastery over her; thus Nature is reduced to a sign of dependency overcome or conquered, or at least controlled.

Another, quite different view of the earth as an organism that retains strong psychic connection to humankind but is completely non hierarchial was introduced in 1974 by ecologist James Lovelock:

The Gaia hypothesis sees the evolution of the species of living organisms so closely coupled with the evolution of their physical and chemical environment that together they constitute a single and indivisible evolutionary process.[5]

There is no terrarium-like Garden of Eden represented here, no innocent beings, no children or mother, but rather the ongoing cybernetic processes of a living ecosystem. One fundamental observation within the Gaia Hypothesis is that when the system is at its optimum state of health we find there is also the greatest diversity of organisms. This diversity, an essential condition for the maintenance of Gaia's health, has been encountering the surging force of human economic progress and development – and diversity is in steep decline. Implicit in Lovelock's hypothesis is the radical recognition that human beings are merely one species in a nonhierarchical whole. Global acceptance of this fact is likely to be the final barrier to the survival of the planet.

13.

Lest we find ourselves over-confident about the future of the environment, keep in mind the attitude voiced by the character "TOOB" in Bill Griffiths' comic strip, *ZIPPY*: "A good car chase is worth a thousand episodes of *Nature*...."

Footnotes

1. See Laura Marks, "Kodak's Latent Toxic Spills in the Company Town" Ten-8, #34,pp. 10-19.
2. Excerpted from a traditional Navajo story by medicine-person Mike Mitchell in response to one of Skeet McCauley's photographs in his book *Sign Language; Contemporary Southwest Native America* (New York: Aperture Press, 1989), p. 52.
3. Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 85.
4. Quoted in Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols & Sacred Objects* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), pp. 339-40.
5. James Lovelock, "Man and Gaia," in *The Earth Report; The Essential Guide to Global Ecological Issues*, eds Edward Goldsmith and Nicholas Hildyard (London: Price Stern Sloan, Inc. 1988), p.57.

Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom are, respectively, Professor and Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Houston. They work together as the artists MANUAL *and frequently write articles and reviews for* SPOT, Artforum, *and other journals.*

By Kirk Condyles

FOUR YEARS AGAINST AN

I have lived most of my life near the sea. Except for a short period in the Rocky Mountains, I have lived on one coast or the other, and also on islands of the Pacific and the Caribbean. Though I have always felt close to the natural world, I have no desire to be a nature photographer. My interest is in people. My photographic work has reflected this and has always involved social issues. I have struggled in particular with ideas about how to become involved with environmental problems.

In the summer of 1988 the major media focused attention on the medical waste appearing on the beaches in New York and New Jersey. I decided to have a look. Like a lot of New Yorkers, I rely on public transportation. One of the easiest beaches to get to is South Beach on Staten Island. That August South Beach, like most other beaches in the area, was closed due to medical waste. The beach was so trashed it seemed to me that it might be difficult to find any particular type of trash distinct from any other. I learned from lifeguards that the fecal count was also too high for safe bathing. On the tideline were a number of dead rats, and dead birds were all over the shore.

I approached a seagull squatting in the rubble. The bird made no effort to fly, but sat dull-eyed staring at me. The beach was trashed beyond anything I had imagined. The dying seabird on the heap was a hellish revelation. "This is the war," I thought.

On the following Sunday (August 7, 1988) *The New York Times* ran an article on the state of our beaches . They used one of the photos I had made at South Beach, an overall shot of the beach with a fat dead rat in the foreground. The picture was over a quarter page and had an insert of syringes found on the beach.

I have returned to South Beach many times and in all seasons. It is always the same–a dumping ground. This past summer the beach had new caution signs hanging from the lifeguard chairs. The signs warned, in both Spanish and English, that the water was polluted, this time due to infectious fecal waste. Despite the signs, people played on the beach and swam in the ocean. The lifeguard I spoke to said he had been told not to interfere with the swimmers.

I walked the tideline collecting syringes. Stopping to talk with a family that had been bathing, I showed them the syringes I had collected. They responded by saying they believed the needles had been left behind by drug users. The major media were not there; it was a season for turning a blind eye. *The New York Times* ran a follow-up article about the beach problems almost one year to date after the original piece. Happily, they used a photo of mine. Unhappily, they cropped the photo severely, showing only the warning signs. It was placed on a back page in the lower corner at the fold. The picture size was two by four inches: The beach is no longer very important news at the *Times*.

I was happy to see my photos used in *The New York Times* (though it is unfortunate that the *Times* does not recycle its papers). Because of the original "rat picture" made on that first trip to South Beach, I have been contacted by several more concerned publishers. *Discover Magazine* contacted me and ran a color photo I had made later at South Beach. The "rat shot" was seen by an environmental architect at the University of California, Michael Southworth, who phoned me to let me know of a book he was editing called *Wasting Away*, to be published in 1990 by the Sierra Club. Southworth has selected several of my photos, most involving the garbage problem, for his book.

I have done as much as possible to trace medical waste from its origins and through the sanitation system. In the middle of August, 1988, my wife and I had a daughter. I took advantage of my access to the hospital during my wife's early labor to photograph the ways in which waste was handled in the hospital. After photographing throughout the hospital, I returned to my wife's side. In a short time security guards showed up asking questions. I gave them my press card and they went away.

My journey on the "trash path" took me to the Fresh Kills Landfill, also on Staten Island. Fresh Kills is the largest landfill in the world. It is also the highest point on the east coast outside of Maine–a mountain of garbage in a low-lying wetland that was pure enough for recreational use at the turn of the century. I stood in the stench knee-deep in trash, photographing. Trucks dump thousands of fully packed black garbage bags. Tractors push through and grade the heaps of waste. Seagulls by the thousands squawk and clamor about. It *smells*. In the most bizarre way, the garbage took on a life of its own–a kind of death of its own, a carnage. I was ill the following day.

The photos I made during this period have been used in several publications, most notably by various environmental groups. The contact with these various groups has provided me with some access to places I might have had some difficulty getting to or just into otherwise. Also, I get ideas for projects, having learned the groups' photographic needs. A lot of the groups network with one another all around the country. Naturally, it is encouraging to see the photos used (and I appreciate the monetary help).

Several years ago I tried contacting Greenpeace, asking if I could stop by their offices in Washington, D.C. to show my portfolio. I was told that it would be all right to do so, but that there was no pay and they didn't need any photographers. It was three years later before I made a connection with Greenpeace. I was watching the local evening news when it switched to a live broadcast showing Greenpeace activists hanging from the Triborough Bridge on the East River. Since I live near the Bridge, I ran to the scene. They were protesting the dumping of sewage in the ocean, and were about to descend on a sewage barge as it made its way down the river.

Kirk Condyles, *Long Beach, New York, October 1989*

Kirk Condyles, *Dying Gull, Midland Beach, Staten Island, New York*, July 24, 1989

Kirk Condyles, *Greenpeace protest, New York City as a nuclear harbor, during naval parade, New York harbor*, April 1989

URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Kirk Condyles, ***Midland Beach, Staten Island, New York,*** **July 24, 1989**

Kirk Condyles, ***Coney Island, New York,*** **July 1989**

Kirk Condyles, ***Fresh Kills Landfill, New York City,*** **October 1989**

Later on, I made further efforts to contact Greenpeace and eventually was put on a press list. I went out on one invitation they made to the press for a photo-op in the harbor. The organization provided a cabin cruiser for the press, but it was my choice to photograph from a Zodiac, one of the small rubber power boats Greenpeace uses. I like being more mobile and closer to the water (though it's a problem keeping cameras dry). On this particular outing, protesting nuclear ships in the New York Harbor, I met Jay Townsend, who heads photography for Greenpeace. He has hired me twice more since then. I like working for Greenpeace simply because I enjoy the water under all sorts of conditions and it is always challenging. (The people are very nice, to boot). I have never seen any uses of the photographs I did for Greenpeace, though I understand that murals for offices and postcards have been made from the assignments.

There is little room for subjectivity in environmental chaos. However, I find the sociality connected with the sea intriguing. The universal appeal provides for different people's various needs. The different ethnic and economic groups of the New York area demonstrate this very clearly. In Coney Island you will find people from India, Pakistan, Southeast Asia and Latin America who fish, swim, and sunbathe. They swim only a little, and often do so in their clothes or underclothes. Farther out on Long Island you will find young men in wetsuits who surf in almost any kind of weather, including near-blizzard conditions.

More recently I have begun to explore the lower Hudson River and the New Jersey wetlands. I have walked beside streams there that are malodorous enough to make me retch. People do fishing and crabbing there; they cook and eat their catch at the very site where the stream enters the river. I have had mothers ask me if I thought it was safe for their children to eat the fish from such a place, and I let them know that the area is heavily contaminated with chromium.

The more I do, the more I understand and see what to do. I want to go to the Everglades and the rainforest. I want to photograph the people of Love Canal and their children. I want to see the fight of rural New Yorkers against the machine that has selected their homes as nuclear waste sites. My thoughts for the future are not terribly positive. Governments act slowly and seem unable to think abstractly. Businesses do not take responsiblity. The belief that we are separate from nature and that it is something to be controlled has brought us a hole in the ozone. Is it too late? What other surprises await us?

I have walked for miles in abandoned industrial areas. I've been picked up for trespassing several times, attacked by people, dogs, and mosquitoes. I have heard cheers from the shore while racing by in a Greenpeace vessel. It is tough on the cameras; the dust in some places and the saltwater in others is destructive. But I like it in a way. Usually off alone I appreciate the vast open spaces after being in the city. It is rare that I would want to swim in the places I visit to photograph. I would rather be able to take a swim and know that my daughter's world is safe. .

I am pleased that my photographs are used and seen. My work in the environmental arena has been largely to identify problems and bring attention to soloutions. I have a sense of making a contribution when, for example, working with the Environmental Defense Fund I can provide for posters, slide shows, and their annual report. I have, however, to express my doubts about any overall positive effects generated through my work.

W. Eugene Smith described the click of his shutter as a cannon firing against injustice. More often I feel as though the shutter opening and closing is like the sound of a toy gun. I become cynical at times, enough to hang it all up. We are the senses of the earth we were born out of. We participated in the landscape as hunter-gatherers and then as farmers. Now it is only through recreation that most of us are able to participate in the landscape.

I was taken as a child to a showing of Winslow Homer seascapes. When I returned home that day I began to paint. Using only my Testor model airplane paints, I tried to imitate Homer's work, painting on shirt cardboard. Eventually I went down to the sea and painted in oils on large canvases. I believed I was an artist. I sold most of my paintings, both sea- and landscapes.

I became fascinated by Pieter Brueghel. His landscapes are not only individual in their style, but also uncomplicated. He conveys mood, but he reports objectively. Few works could be more surrealistic than "The Beekeepers." It was drawn about 1568 and was one of his last. In Brueghel's last years landscapes became secondary to how they are participated in. Man and his experience be come his exclusive subject.

I have been a photographer for only a short time. As I progress, I consistently seek to simplify my images. My mentor, Mel Rosenthal, has influenced me in this way. His ability to demystify photography has helped me to find my own way and style and provided me with professional standards.

Becoming environmentally active, I have had to let go of any pretension of art. Just as the war in Southeast Asia was shown, so must the battle for the environment. If I am known only as a photographer of rats and trash, so it must be.

My work is only beginning. I am no Pieter Breughel, drawing with a camera. I want to achieve a sense of space and distance. In rendering the environment, you begin to see how everything is transitory. In photographing I wish I were exorcising.

Kirk Condyles is a freelance photographer living in New York with his wife and daughter.

PROFILE

MORE THAN THE LANDSCAPE AT RISK

1.

2.

Sharon Stewart's *Toxic Tour of Texas*

3.

4.

5.

1. Lailie Szuponik, member of Panna Maria Concerned Citizens, and her daughter, Katie. Lailie's family of ten does not drink, but does bathe and wash in, their well water, determined radioactive by the Texas Department of Health. Recent tests indicate the levels of radioactivity continue to rise.

2. 160-acre unlined mill tailings pond operated by Chevron in Panna Maria, Karnes County, Texas. An estimated six million tons of radioactive waste is dumped here, although the site has been operating without a license since 1980.

3. Remains of a radioactive pipeline the Department of Energy used to remove radioactive waste on private ranchland in Karnes County. 24.8 acres of ranchland are contaminated from the federal government's uranium mill tailings pond that once operated in the area.

4. The Sink Hole Inn, a Texas honky tonk, commemorates the historic collapse that occurred in the middle of the highway one Saturday night in 1986. Three pickup trucks disappeared into the geological fault, though the drivers were able to swim to safety. Such instabilities are commonplace in the Boling Salt Dome area, prompting residents to object to the establishment of hazardous waste injection wells in the Dome.

5. This flood control ditch installed by the Army Corps of Engineers in Texas City uses hay to filter toxic effluents released by area petrochemical refineries. The Texas Water Commission considers this a "state of the art" system for filtering waste before it is discharged into Galveston Bay.

All photographs by Sharon Stewart, from *The Toxic Tour of Texas, 1989.*

By Julie Lee

On September 30th, 1989, Houston photographer Sharon Stewart spoke at a symposium organized by the Houston Center for Photography and presented at the Glassell School of Art of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The symposium was designed to complement the HCP exhibition, *The Landscape at Risk*. Stewart's presentation on her most recent work, the *Toxic Tour of Texas*, was enlightening to the audience, most of whom live and work in the greater Houston area. The *Toxic Tour of Texas* is a self-initiated and self-financed collaboration between photographer Sharon Stewart and writer Steven Fenberg. Begun in February 1989, it focuses on the efforts of individuals to prevent or rid their communities of hazardous waste disposal sites, injection wells, or incinerators.

Many of us were uncomfortable with seeing and hearing Sharon's presentation. We had difficulty comprehending the nature and scope of the problem. Denial, after all, is a way of life. We often don't want to think about problems we can't solve or illnesses we can't cure or dangers we can't see. In a state where "first" is equated with "best," we didn't want to hear that Texas ranks "first" among the states in our nation in the production of chemical waste. But it made good sense when we were reminded that we have the "largest" concentration of oil refineries and chemical plants in the nation. Nor did we want to know that Texas "leads the nation" in the number of hazardous waste disposal sites. And we certainly didn't want to know that a good seventy percent of those sites leak, threatening our groundwater.

However, there are people who are addressing these issues in their own communities primarily because the health and well-being of their families are directly affected. This is often a difficult situation because the economic welfare of a community may be sustained by the industry that is responsible for groundwater, soil and/or air contamination. The strength of Stewart's project is that it reaffirms the power of the individual to make a difference. Says Stewart, "Through this study, we present the situation and offer solutions, thereby empowering the viewers to take personal action to effect changes in their own lifestyles and in their own communities."

Stewart is a very positive, energetic person, and she clearly feels that she is contributing, in her own way, something toward the solution of these problems. As a result, the project has a clear sense of optimism for the future, built on the premise of working together– rather than against one another–to find solutions. She notes that industry is acknowledging its responsibility toward finding solutions to environmental contamination.

Stewart's own story is fascinating. She learned firsthand early in her career (1981) that the darkroom environment can be dangerous: She contracted strep throat after working with Cibachrome for long hours. Later she learned she had problems with her kidneys and liver. She began to research the literature concerning the potential hazards of darkroom chemicals and to tell other photographers how to protect themselves. As she continued to work with Cibachrome and other chemicals, she improved the ventilation in her darkroom, and wore gloves and protective clothing. She also taught a course for HCP called "Risky Living in the Darkroom" in 1987, and Anne Feltus and Mark McFarlane interviewed her for their article "Danger in the Darkroom" in the June, 1989 issue of *Photo District News*.

A self-taught photographer, Stewart had gone to college and graduate school preparing for a career in business. She says, "Business was the first thing I'd ever quit, and I really did it because I listened to my heart." Ironically, the profession she chose for her mental and spiritual health became a threat to her physical health. Although she no longer works with Cibachrome, she still photographs and works in the darkroom. She continues to work with selenium toner, and protects herself by using tongs, wearing gloves and a mask respirator with chemical cartridges.

Growing up in Edinburg, Texas, Stewart turned to photography in her teens because she was in the 4-H Club and "didn't have a cow." In 1980, upon deciding to become a photographer, she moved from Austin to Houston because she was attracted to its active and compelling visual arts scene.

Stewart arrived in Houston just in time for the founding of the Houston Center for Photography in 1981. She served as Vice-President of HCP in its formative years and has remained active in various capacities, except for the time she has traveled abroad. After hearing Houston commercial photographer Joe Baraban mention in his talk at HCP that his stock files needed attention, she began working part-time for him. Before long she was his assistant, and worked with him for several years before venturing out of her own.

Stewart works hard and shifts gears with relative ease. She may work several days a week on assignment and spend the rest of the time on her personal work. She has a natural sense of formal composition and a passion for beauty as it is created momentarily between form and light.

Between 1979-84, Stewart worked on the *High Light* series, a portfolio of color photographs of the urban landscape. She photographed at dusk and dawn for this series, "splicing" natural and artificial light. In shooting this series, she focused on the sacred symbology – the pyramids, the columns, the spheres – that endures even in the urban environment.

In the *Beam of Eros*, begun in 1983, she continued her interest in light and spirituality. Stewart initiated a collaborative project with both male and female friends, photographing them nude, in total darkness, with only a single strobe for illumination. The darkness freed them to express themselves without inhibition, as they chose their own poses and the moment of the exposure. These intimate, small scale, black-and-white photographs are landscapes of the body exploring the idea of spiritual sexuality.

In her landscape series, *The Magic Valley*, Stewart returned to her childhood home and portrayed the expansive beauty, abundance and calm that is pervasive in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. By using black-and-white infrared film, Stewart utilized its special qualities to underscore a surrealistic sense of time and place.

Stewart continued these themes in her landscapes of sanctuaries and temples in *Time Shadows of Ancient Greece* that she began in 1985. Her strong tie to spirituality is intimated by her cool-toned, delicate renderings of classical sites. What interested Stewart in this series was exploring the beauty and balance of classical Greece in the face of the contemporary chaos of rubbled marble, weeds and restraining fences. The series is an elegant portrayal of a time seemingly lost.

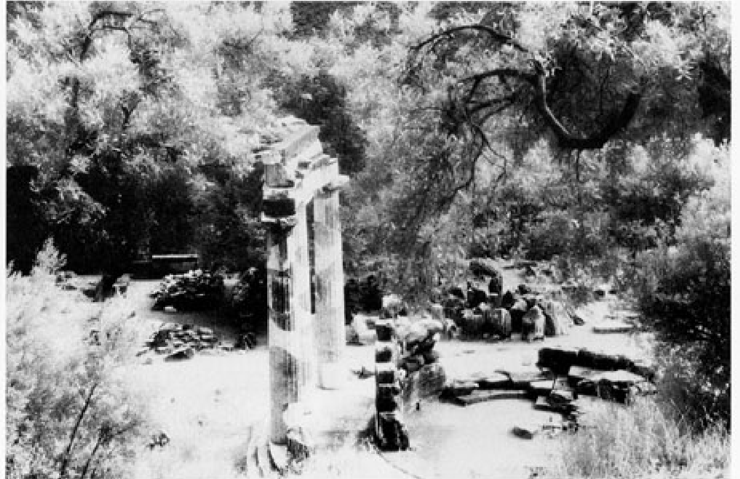
Stewart's continued exploration of layers of meaning is again seen in her series the *Toxic Tour of Texas*. Although her new role as an activist photographer seems markedly different from her previous work, it was a natural evolution out of her previous experience, and is an accurate reflection of her belief system. "When I was travelling and doing a lot of personal insight," Stewart said, "there was something that was calling out to me to do more than just make beautiful images. I thought – what can I give back – what can I contribute? I realized that the gift of vision is exactly that – it's how I can make a contribution. It comes back to the notion of personal responsibility – the balance of nature is precious and we have a tremendous responsibility to assure its continuation."

In this regard, Stewart maintains, "we can alter our personal habits within the home and workplace by: choosing to use recyclable containers; boycotting products of companies that are blatantly adding to environmental contamination; recycling glass, paper and plastics. People can also actively participate in the political process and help select leaders who will be responsive to these issues."

Stewart maintains that there is a strong grass-roots movement forming in this country bringing together activists from the civil rights, peace, women's, and original environmental movements. These citizens are learning how to collectively organize and influence decisions made by government and industry. She sees this as a positive trend for the 1990s as society moves away from its preoccupation with the individual.

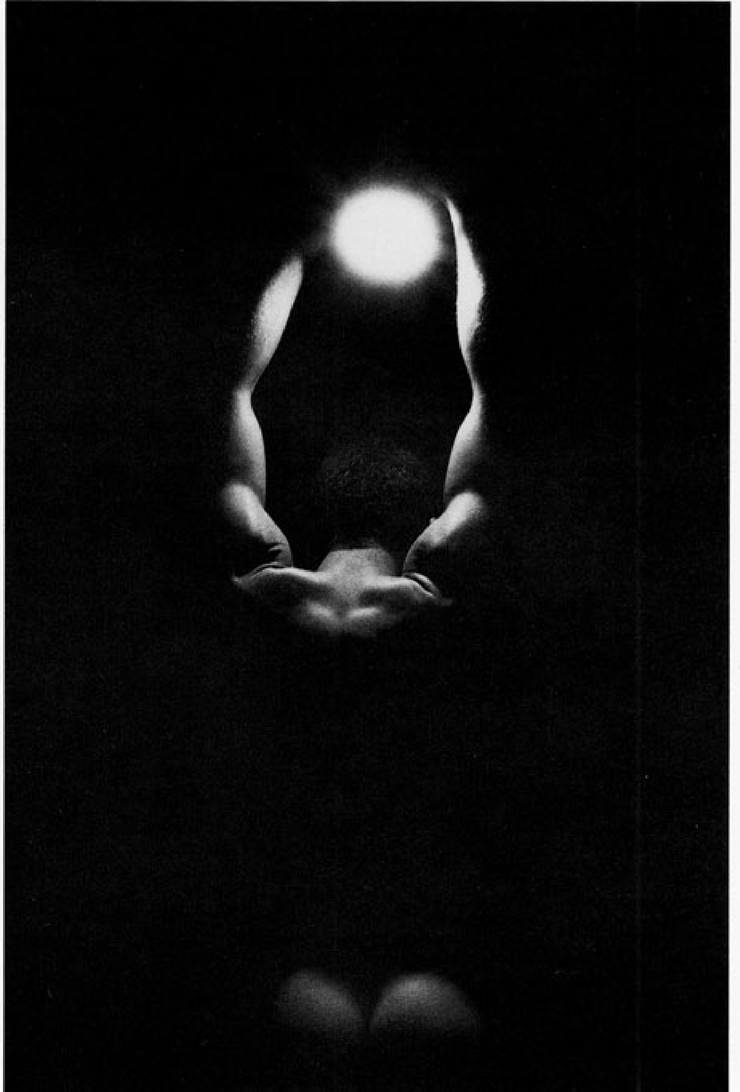
Julie Lee is a frequent contributor to SPOT.

Magic Valley, Rio Grande River VII



The Shadows Of Ancient Greece IX

***Beam of Eros* Series XXXXV**



The Color Place

Quality Photographic Processing

Professional Results. On Time.

- 2 Hour Film Processing
- Color & B&W Printing
- Complete Slide Services
- Computer Graphics
- Canon Laser Copies

Main Lab
667 – 6777
10377 STELLA LINK

Galleria Counter
622 – 1606

Greenspoint Counter
447 – 0777

Photographers agree ...

It's the **Silver House** for the Freshest Chinese Cuisine. No MSG, 100% Vegetable Oil.

Szechuan Seafood Specialties. Best Buffet Lunch in Chinatown. Recommended by the Houston Chronicle and Houston Business Journal.

1107 Chartres (Opposite Convention Center)
(713) 224-8091

THE LANCASTER
G • R • I • L • L • E

The Lancaster Grille, in the heart of Houston's Theater District. Specialties include grilled Lamb Chops, Texas Venison Pate, and White Chocolate Mousse.

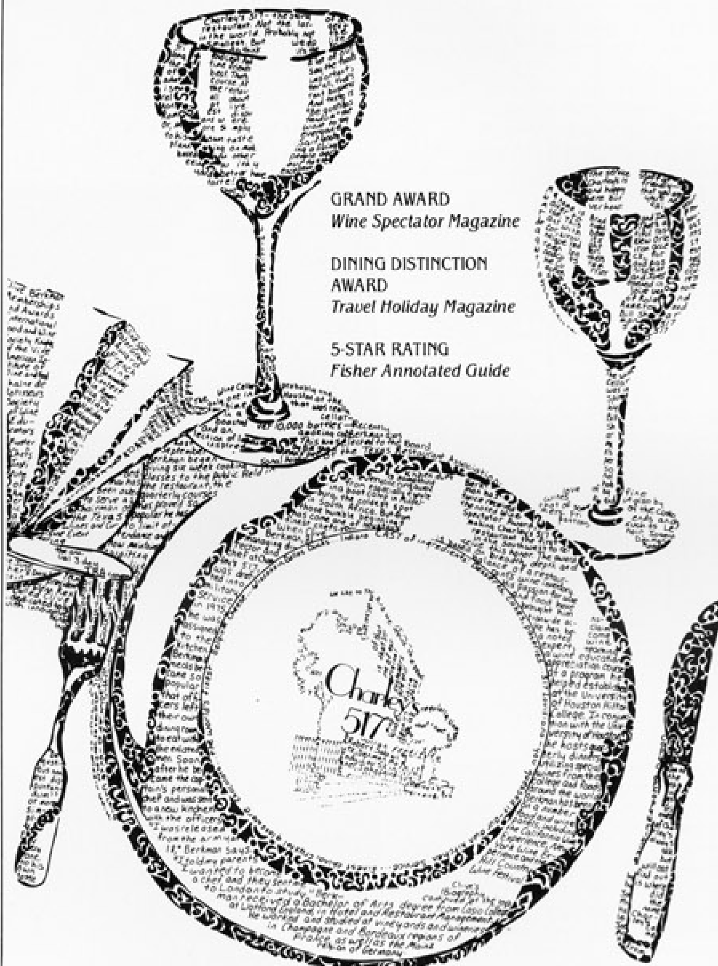
THE LANCASTER
HOUSTON

"...the dishes are innovative, exciting, well-executed and fairly priced."
—Houston Chronicle, 1989

"Hotel dining rarely gets better than this."
—Houston Chronicle, 1989

"...ideal for an oh-so-cosmopolitan pre-theater or after-symphony supper."
—Orange County, 1988

For Reservations: (713) 228-9502
701 Texas Avenue at Louisiana
In Houston's Theater District



Houston's oldest downtown restaurant... award-winning cuisine, one of the world's most acclaimed wine lists. In the Houston Theater District...*the* choice for business lunch, relaxing dinner before or after the show. *Free valet parking.*

Charley's 517
REGIONAL AMERICAN CUISINE
517 Louisiana Houston, Texas (713) 224-4438

1936-1989
53 YEARS OF SERVICE

SHOP WITH THE PROFESSIONALS

ILFORD CIBACHROME
WE INVITE COMPARISON.

KODAK
Professional Stockhouse
Equipment and Supplies

Leica

Nikon
We take the world's greatest pictures.

HASSELBLAD

PHOTOGRAPHIC PAPER-B&W
ORIENTAL

FUJI FILM

500 N. SHEPHERD
880-2505

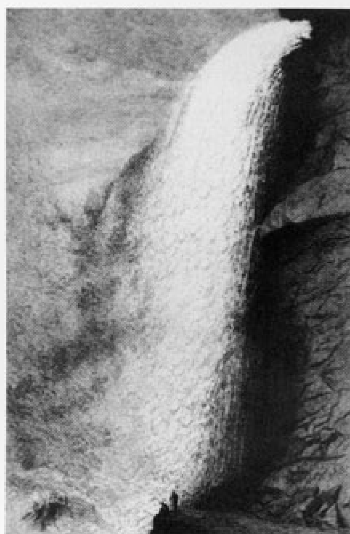
2403 POST OAK
960-9904

Southwestern Camera Co.

POISONOUS BEAUTY

John Pfahl, *Horseshoe Falls from Below, September 1985,* from *Arcadia Revisited* (original in color)

Arcadia Revisited, Niagara River & Falls from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, *by John Pfahl. Essays by Estelle Jussim and Anthony Bannon. Published by the University of New Mexico Press for the Buscaglia- Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, 1988, 143 pages.*



Amos Sangster, *Entrance to Cave of the Winds, Niagara Falls, American Side, 1887* (etching with black ink), from *Arcadia Revisited*

John Pfahl, Triangle, Bermuda, 1975 (original in color)

John Pfahl, *Willows and Spring Ice, April 1985,* from *Arcadia Revisited* (original in color)

By Hans Staartjes

A recent article in *U.S. News and World Report* described the reaction of a typical visitor to Niagara Falls a hundred years ago:

Nineteenth century tourists visited places with a more conscious religious sense than tourists of today. They felt inadequate before the grandeur of Niagara Falls or Yosemite, and then after an emotional struggle, they experienced the object's beauty and felt elated. The pattern was close to the conversion experience characteristic of nineteenth-century evangelical religion.[1]

The question I asked myself after reading John Pfahl's new book, *Arcadia Revisited*, was whether it was an attempt to revive this feeling.

The intention of this book is to "revitalize community pride and national interest" in the Niagara River by reexamining the etchings of Amos W. Sangster.[2] Sangster was the only nineteenth century artist who "undertook the enormous task of documenting the entire course of the river," according to Sandra H. Olsen, Director of the Buscaglia-Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, which organized the publication of this book.[3] Several of Sangster's beautiful black or color ink etchings are reproduced in the beginning of this book; all were shown in an exhibition at Niagara University celebrating the centenary of their 1886 publication.

Pfahl was commissioned to retrace Sangster's steps and to find out, photographically this time, "exactly what it was that he and other nineteenth-century artists were experiencing."[4] In this there is no doubt that Pfahl succeeded. Several of Sangster's etchings are shown adjacent to Pfahl's photos, inviting us to compare; it seems uncanny how Pfahl managed to find the exact location where Sangster was standing one hundred years ago and to take a photograph that has little to tell it apart from the nineteenth century illustration. This is especially true when we compare Figure 7, Sangster's "Two Miles Below the Falls-American Side" and Pfahl's photo plate 5 with same title. Or, place a finger on the small human shape in Figure 8, Sangster's "Entrance to Cave of the Winds, Niagara Falls, American side," and you will have an almost exact copy of plate 6, Pfahl's photograph "Horseshoe Falls from Below."

One particularly striking color painting by Frederick E. Church, also reproduced in this book (Figure 4, is most representative of the idyllic nineteenth century image of the Falls. It shows huge cascading mists, a "glorious rainbow" and beautifully clear bright green water. This painting is probably the most obvious example of the feeling that Pfahl was commissioned to recreate. In fact, most of Pfahl's photographs in this book succeed in impressing us with Nature's beauty in just the way Church's painting is meant to.

Beautiful color landscapes are not new to Pfahl, as his previous works show: *Altered Landscapes* (published in 1981 by The Friends of Photography), *Picture Windows* (published in 1987 by Little, Brown and Company) and *Power Places* (exhibited in 1984, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). However, the photographs in books such as *Altered Landscapes*, though beautiful in following the aesthetic tradition of landscape art, also aim at overthrowing the idea of the landscape photograph's sole function of eliciting the illusion of "being there." Pfahl says about this work, "It had to be more than simply a new illusion–the illusion has never been the main point."[5] Elements such as foil wrapped around trees in *Altered Landscapes* ("Slanting Forest," Lewiston, New York 1975), bagels on the sand in the foreground against old tires on a canvas-covered pile in the background ("Bagel Pile," South Buffalo, New York, 1976), or a photograph entitled "Moonrise over Pie Pan," Capitol Reef, National Park Utah 1977, are a clear indication that Pfahl is trying to debunk the myth of the traditional landscape photograph. Pfahl's landscapes in *Altered Landscapes* are manipulated in a way impossible to any media other than photography and rely often on optical illusion, for example lines that appear drawn on the photographic print are in fact drawn on the subject in false perspective. This is a conscious art that, according to Peter C. Bunnell, "fully recognizes our need to see a picture and not recreate an experience. The picture is the experience."[6]

Power Places, though less obviously manipulative of the natural environment than *Altered Landscapes*, is still a series that aims to evoke more than the illusion of "being there." The power plants and dams photographed in a traditionally beautiful way–in glorious sunset for instance–belie a more sinister meaning of potential human destruction of the environment and the folly of human attempts at enslaving nature's energy. *Picture Windows* is also a polemical work, where the nature of photography as a framing and selecting device is under discussion, with photographs of urban and rural scenes taken through windows in mostly dark interiors.

In light of these past works I found it difficult to place *Arcadia Revisited*. I imagined that an artist producing works such as the above couldn't help but introduce his environmentalist and philosophical attitudes in this work. However, I could see little evidence of this. Clearly the intention of this book was *not* to horrify us. Pfahl himself admits in his artist's statement,

...There is an almost unbearable irony to the act of recording an achingly romantic meeting of shadowy forest and luminous water while suffering the stench of untreated sewage dripping nearby." (page 54)

Certain photos like plate 22, "Electric Plant from Beaver Island," with its overall yellow tones and a puff of white smoke in the distance, plate 23 "Navy Island and Chemical Plants," with clumps of floating snow drifting through a dark smooth river and little green mercury vapor lights highlighting the plant in the background, and plate 25, "Willows and Spring Ice," with its cool winter tones and small and soft delineation of the smokestacks, have the Pfahl signature of what I would describe as "poisonous beauty." They reveal the perverse way in which noxious industry can be beautiful in the late afternoon light. But other photographs in *Arcadia Revisited*, such as plate 40, "Path to the Whirl- pool," are more reminiscent of Eliot Porter.

In reference to Pfahl's previous work, then, *Arcadia Revisited* seems slightly out of character. Pfahl admits there will be "disquieting thoughts" revealed through some of these photos, but feels that these "devastating issues" of pollution "are peripheral to the thrust of this body of work and can best be confronted in other venues" (p. 54). One is left with a sense of incredulity, in view of Pfahl's earlier more critical work, that he would not want to do more than merely copy the nineteenth century "picturesque" view of the Niagara River and the Falls, leaving a critical view to "other venues." As it stands, the photographs in *Arcadia Revisited* will probably attract people to Buffalo and the Falls, making them want to sail in Lake Erie or perhaps even swim in the water.

Most eerie to me was the thought that remained after reading in this book one of Pfahl's own remarks that,

...the joy of seeing a thirty-pound salmon leaping clear out of the mirroring pool of Cripp's Eddy [is]...effectively tempered by the knowledge that its flesh is suffused with errant polychlorinated biphenyls (p. 54).

In the Foreword to *Arcadia Revisited* we are told that Sangster was capturing...

...the aesthetic of the sublime ... the magnitude, grandeur, and awesome power of the rapids and falls so that the viewers might share the incomparable experience of confronting God in nature (p. 12).

Although the Niagara River and Falls still possess the awe-inspiring beauty of the nineteenth century, and some of the tourist and industrial excesses are long gone, it still remains a smelly river. But you can't smell it in this book.

Footnotes

1. "Conversation with Alvin P. Sanoff" (author of *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*), *U.S. News and World Report*, August 14, 1989, p. 52.

2. Sandra H. Olsen, Foreword, *Arcadia Revisited: Niagara River and Falls from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,1988), p. 11.

3. Olsen, p. 11.

4. John Pfahl, "Artist's Statement," in *Arcadia Revisited*, p. 52.

5. John Pfahl, interview with Peter C. Bunnel, Introduction to *Altered Landscapes* (Friends of Photography, 1981), p. 15.

6. Bunnel, p. 15.

Hans Staartjes is a freelance photographer of Dutch nationality residing in Houston .

EUDORA WELTY
PHOTOGRAPHS

FEBRUARY 10 - MARCH 10, 1990

BRAZOS BOOKSTORE
2314 BISSONNET

JOBAR'S
CAMERA CENTER

"Your One Stop Camera Store"
Equipment and Supplies for the Professional

Plus Much More!
7:30 AM - 6:00 PM Mon.- Fri.
8:30 AM - 5:00 PM Sat.

4909 Bissonnet 668-5773

CAPITOL FLAG CO.

Custom Flags and Banners for All Occasions.
Flags of All Nations, too.
Family Owned and Operated Since 1954

Lucille Parrish, Proprietor

4822 Fannin
(713) 522-7760
Houston, Texas 77004

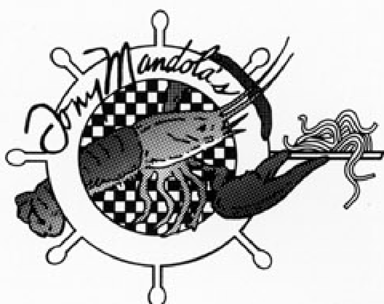
JOHN CLEARY PHOTOGRAPHS

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY
BY APPOINTMENT

PHOTOGRAPHY
✦
BOOKS
✦
APPRAISALS

6913 SUGAR HILL
HOUSTON, TX 77057
(713) 977- 1105



Creole & Cajun Cooking With Mama's Touch

Gumbo, Etouffe, Catfish, Crabs, Oysters
and Mama's Shrimp & Crabmeat Spaghetti

1962 West Gray in River Oaks Shopping Center
(713)528-FISH

JOIN
HOUSTON CENTER • FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Membership Categories

Silver Memberships	Platinum Memberships*
__$35 Member	__$100 Donor
__$50 Household	__$200 Contributor
__$75 Friend	__$300 Sponsor

Name ______
Street Address ______
City, State, Zip ______
Telephone: Home ______ Work ______

1441 West Alabama Houston, TX 77006

(713) 529-4755

Call for information on special membership benefits *
and the Collectors' Print Program.

BLIND VISIONARY

By Margo Reece

Man Ray, *Portrait of Lee Miller*, c. 1930

Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray, *a traveling exhibit organized by Merry Foresta, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, was on view at the Menil Collection, Houston, June 28-September 17, 1989. A catalog accompanies the exhibition:* Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray *(New York: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Abbeville Press, 1988.*

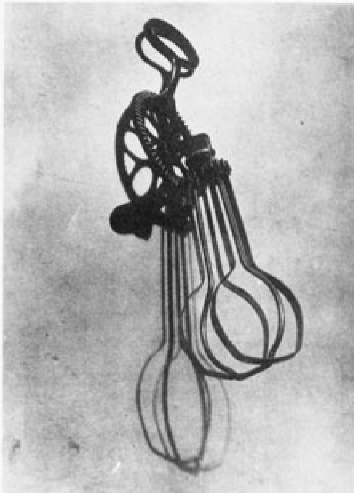
...the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation.[1]
–T. S. Eliot, "Baudelaire," 1929 (in reference to Baudelaire's appeal to America's talented, disenchanted of the 1920's).

Man Ray's career was a balancing act–he was an ambidextrous tight-rope-walker (a figurative reference featured in certain early works) navigating on a precipice of contradictions. He was an artist who never really had a proper dealer or gallery to represent him and who supported himself as a commercial photographer (two careers considered widely incompatible). In an impressive sleight of hand, he fed himself with portrait and fashion photography that serviced the well-known and wealthy, while the other hand bit the hand that fed him with images that were critical of and parodied such ventures. An example of the latter is his photographic portrait of Mina Loy (1920) framed in a traditiomal oval format and sporting a large thermometer as an earring.[2] He was a somewhat dandified loner who revelled in his role and yet turned it to his advantage enhancing his celebrity; by never aligning himself with anyone too closely, he was accessible to everyone. "He moved unrestrained among nationalities, social classes, artistic genres, and rival schools never quite belonging.[3]"

An American by birth (1890), Man Ray was European by association. With the help of his first wife, Aldon Lacroix, a Belgian writer and intellectual, and colleagues such as Marcel Duchamp, he learned French and acquired a background in art history, philosophy and vanguard French literature. Works by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautremont, Mallarmé, Appollinaire, and others were important literary precedents to Dada and Surrealism and laid the foundations for his thinking. Eventually he matriculated to Paris in a general wave of expatriation from America. Political, but nonpartisan (other than his affliation with Dada and Surrealism), the only real endorsements he ever made were the signings of two surrealist manifestos: one in support of Chaplin's divorce and sexual freedom in general (*Hands Off Love*), the other in condemnation of Stalinism (*When the Surrealists were Right*).[4] A rebel, he seemed naive about the controversy surrounding his work and the public's reaction to it. Very few in America were interested in him or his talent and even less so in his ideas. "I didn't realize at the time that the public, the people, even those who are intelligent above all things, hate ideas" (Man Ray in reference to the 1919 showing of his "Self Portrait," 1916, oil on canvas with attached objects, bells and push button).[5] His attempts to extend the message of Dada in the U.S. had been in vain. In the summer of 1921 when he left New York sailing for the continent, the "possibility of damnation" was no longer a relief. He departed on a sour note, "Dada cannot live in New York"[6] he wrote in a letter to Tristan Tzara, and in quest of acceptance, recognition and salvation elsewhere.

Man Ray's early work, the period 1908-1921, is full of restless movement, questioning the traditional notions of art and seeking alternatives to accepted practices. It reads like a condensed, yet authoritative, assimilation of western art up through Duchamp. Man Ray's early formal concern with painting's inherent two-dimensionality was influenced by his exposure to European avant-garde artists such as Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Picabia, and Duchamp, whose work he had seen at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291 and at the 1913 Armory Show. For the most part the paintings from this early period deal with the process of seeing as mobile and changing (from no fixed point of view), with the elimination of nearly all clues to illusory depth and with the reduction of forms to flat patterning in conjunction with tactile surfaces. His work evolved further through an exposure to collage at the Picasso/Braque exhibition at 291 in 1914. The two-dimensionality of the works and their sparsity of detail appealed to him. The culmination of this thinking can probably best be observed in "The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her Shadow," (1916) a painting inspired by collage methods, the residue of cutouts and chance discovery. Probably as a result of his move to the urban environment of New York city (1915) and further influenced by his new association with Duchamp and by Picabia's depictions of machines, Man Ray's themes began to involve "pseudo-mechanistic"[7] forms that circumvented both logic and science. *The Revolving Doors*, another series of collages made from cutouts, combines elements that simultaneously refer to two and three dimensions in a "geometric-anthropomorphic fantasy".[8] In a later development (1919) of the *Revolving Doors* series, the collages were installed by hinging onto a rotating support so they could be spun around. The attachment of two and three dimensional objects to the canvas, as he did in "Self Portrait" (1916), was just one more step in his experimentation with the physical properties of his art. Simultaneously he began experimenting with the air brush, an illustrator's tool that liberated him from conventional ways of painting. Accused of destroying art with mechanical means, his reaction was the opposite: "It was wonderful to paint a picture without touching the canvas; this was pure cerebral activity"[9] (probably a reference to Duchamp's dictum to put painting "again at the service of the mind"[10]). By 1917 he had assimilated the formal innovations of cubism, futurism, abstraction, collage and machine art. At this point ideas came to the fore; the problem became not so much how to paint as what to paint: "I wasn't as interested in painting itself as in the development of ideas".[11] Like Duchamp before him, who had "given up" painting in 1915, after 1917 Man Ray resorted to paintingonly when another medium was not more appropriate. He stopped referring to himself as a painter.

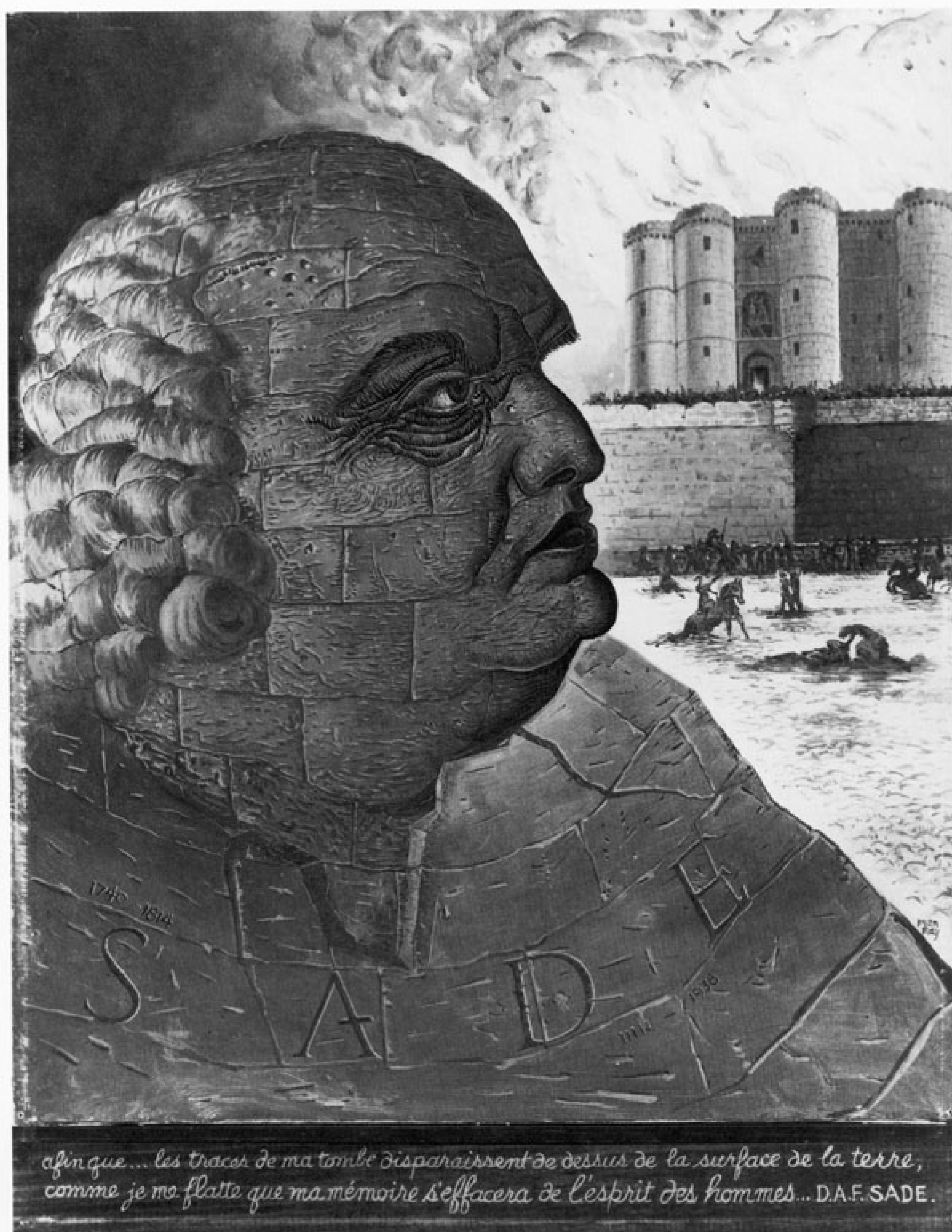
Man Ray, *Man*, 1918



Because he was dedicated to the creative idea rather than any particular style or medium, the variety of Man Ray's work is complex and resists easy categorization. The medium he worked in changed constantly. He was variously a painter, a maker of objects, a photographer, and a filmmaker, or he might work in two mediums simultaneously. From 1917 on objects and photographs feature prominently in his work, though there is a constant collapsing of the various mediums into one another; his paintings become objects, his objects become photographs, his photographs become objects. Man Ray's choice of the object as a vehicle for his art was revolutionary but not without its antecedents; as early as 1913 there was Duchamp's gesture of the readymade, and Boccioni in the furturist manifesto had urged artists not to confine themselves to "noble materials" but to use all materials. Likewise Cubist collage methods included an elevation of the trivial as espoused by Appollonaire. Man Ray's use of objects also corresponds with the introduction of "extra-artistic" materials into art as championed by the Dadaists, especially the use of cast-offs, refuse, and trash, and with their anti-mimetic concept of realism, which preferred material literalism (the objects themselves) over metaphoric constructions (their representations). The deluge of mass-produced, printed and photographic materials that emerged in the early 20th century became the material for a new art. Both Duchamp and the Dadaists were seeking ways of radically short-circuitimg the means by which art objects acquire financial, social and spiritual values. By utilizing already existing forms (objects culled from the cultural environment) and/or mechanical means (photography), a maximum of effect could be achieved through a minimum of effort--a reversal of the bourgeois preference for labor-intensive, time-consuming, ritualistic art (i.e. paint on canvas). Unwilling to let go completely of any kind of artisanal fiddling, Man Ray's utilization of existing forms was less radical than Duchamp's "readymades," in which an ordinary object, fabricated by machine, available everywhere, and choosen on the basis of visual indifference was appropriated, titled and displayed out of context. Man Ray's treatment of the object was more about transforming the original through an inspired play with materials. Revelation took precedence over specified aims. He often manipulated the object by combining it with other objects or through the use of photography. His choice of objects had less to do with indifference and more to do with the particulars aroused by said object, as did his titling of objects. In one piece, "The Riddle of Isidore Ducasse" (1920), Man Ray pays teasing homage to the French author, whose pseudonym was Comte de Lautreamont, and teases the viewer as well. His photograph is an illustration, with a twist, of the author's oft-quoted remark "Lovely as the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." The twist is that there is no way for the viewer to verify that the unidentified objects, assembled to be photographed, are what the title implies, because the objects are covered, wrapped in the folds of a thick carpet, tied with a rope and ensconced in a photograph, forever out of our reach. The act of concealment suggests a hidden meaning and the title reinforces this. The act functions as a trigger to desire–the spectator's desire to see, to know–a desire continually frustrated–a desire that can only manifest itself in interpretation.

What is crucial here is that Man Ray invites interpretation, viewerparticipation, as to the meaning. Meaning is not fixed. Titling is not an act of closure but tempts the viewer to a clearing or clearings. It was important to Man Ray that the objects be read first and foremost for what they are, with further associations supplied by the evocative titles.[12] In another example, angled strips of wood and a C-clamp make up one piece that doesn't seem particularly significant until one reads the title, "New York" (1917), at which point the piece is transformed into a playful comment on the jazzy dynamics of the modernist skyscraper so glorified by the futurists during that period.

Indeed no subject seems exempt from Man Ray's playful, witty,sometimes almost juvenile sarcasm. The bastions of high art seem particularly vulnerable to his assaults of mockery etched with envy. As early as 1915 he had dedicated the "Gazooks" cover drawing of twocopulating insects to a typographically puerile "PicASSo"[13]. Sometimes a photograph of an object served his ideas better



Man Ray, *Portrait imaginaire de D.A.F. de Sade*, 1939 (oil on canvas)

Man Ray, photograph of bound woman in William Seabrook's

than the object itself, as in his photograph of a common eggbeater, "Man" (1918). The controlled lighting and use of shadows not only render the anthropormorphic reading sugested by the title possible, but the image can be viewed as well as a swipe at the photographic purists', in particular Paul Strand's elegant close-ups of machine parts.[14] Likewise "Cadeau" (1921), the infamous flatiron spiked with tacks, besides embodying his uneasiness towards New York, puns one of the citadels of pictorialist and purist photography the Flatiron building in New York City.[15]. "Le Violon d' Ingres" (1924), Man Ray's famous photograph depicting a back view of his mistress Kiki's torso in a perfect hourglass shape, sets off a labyrinthian series of associations "combining mystery, humor, and the erotic in a multiple visual-aural pun that rhymes violin shape with the female torso, with the French expression for hobby, with a famous composition by Ingres"[16] (Kiki's pose is similar to that of Ingres' *Baigneuse de Valpincon*). Man Ray was exploring the possibility of opening up, through the punning character of the title(the interplay of linguistic and phonetic elements), the referential possibilities of a piece. Ingres was known for playing the violin as well as painting, but the extreme erotic refinement of his paintings suggests that his real pastime may, instead, have been women.[17] The expression "violon d' Ingres" is now used to refer to "a hobby exercised with passion."[18] By the addition of sound holes (a graphic element) to the female form Man Ray's depiction can also be viewed as an irreverent pun on Picasso's and Braque's recurrent themes of the violin or guitar.[19] The comparison of the female form with a violin puns the classic tradition of the nude as a form on which many great (male) artists have played.

Early on Man Ray set for himself a goal of doing what he was not supposed to do.[20] His overriding penchant for flaunting societal mores can be understood as a kind of twentieth century version of nineteenth century romantic outlawry–romantic, that is, in its aspirations away from the bourgeois society it loathed. Bolstered by a disdain for the law-abiding citizen, the romantics' contempt for societymanifested itself in a need to combat and destroy mediocrity. The law-abiding citizen was seen as moral in a small, dull way, so the thing to do was to flout his petty morality with amorality on a grand scale. Wallowing in irresponsible pleasure-seeking was a form of rebellion, a deliberate onslaught on the propriety of the bourgeois. All ecstasies and excesses were justified in the search for sensation, beauty and freedom (both personal and artistic). By choosing debauchery the artist at least partially asserted his freedom. "Rebuking cultural limitations was essential not only to the free and creative behavior of individuals but to the very possibility of human individuation."[21] Man Ray proclaimed that throughout his life he had only two goals: the pursuit of freedom and pleasure (his way of warding off the banal). The nude had been a respected tradition. Although it is not suprising that Man Ray would treat it with irreverence,in conjunction with a more acerbic use of language, his iconoclasm reached new heights, a kind of gay blasphemy, in "La Prière" ("The Prayer") 1930, this time with Sadean overtones (Sade was one of Man Ray's heroes). The depiction of nude female buttocks with hands clasped behind implies, a kind of perverse reverence for sodomy (flaunting sexual mores) while simultameously punning the tenets of Westonian abstraction "governed by taste and a feeling for form".[22] Man Ray's photo borders on the tasteless by virtue of the somewhat lewd pose and heightened halo like studio lighting, designed to offend. A second jolt is delivered by the title which hammers home somewhat diabolically its anticlericalism. A similiar theme is explored in Man Ray's "Monument à D.A.F. de Sade" (1933) in which the rigidly ruled outline of an inverted cross is shockingly juxtaposed against the soft folds of a woman's buttocks.

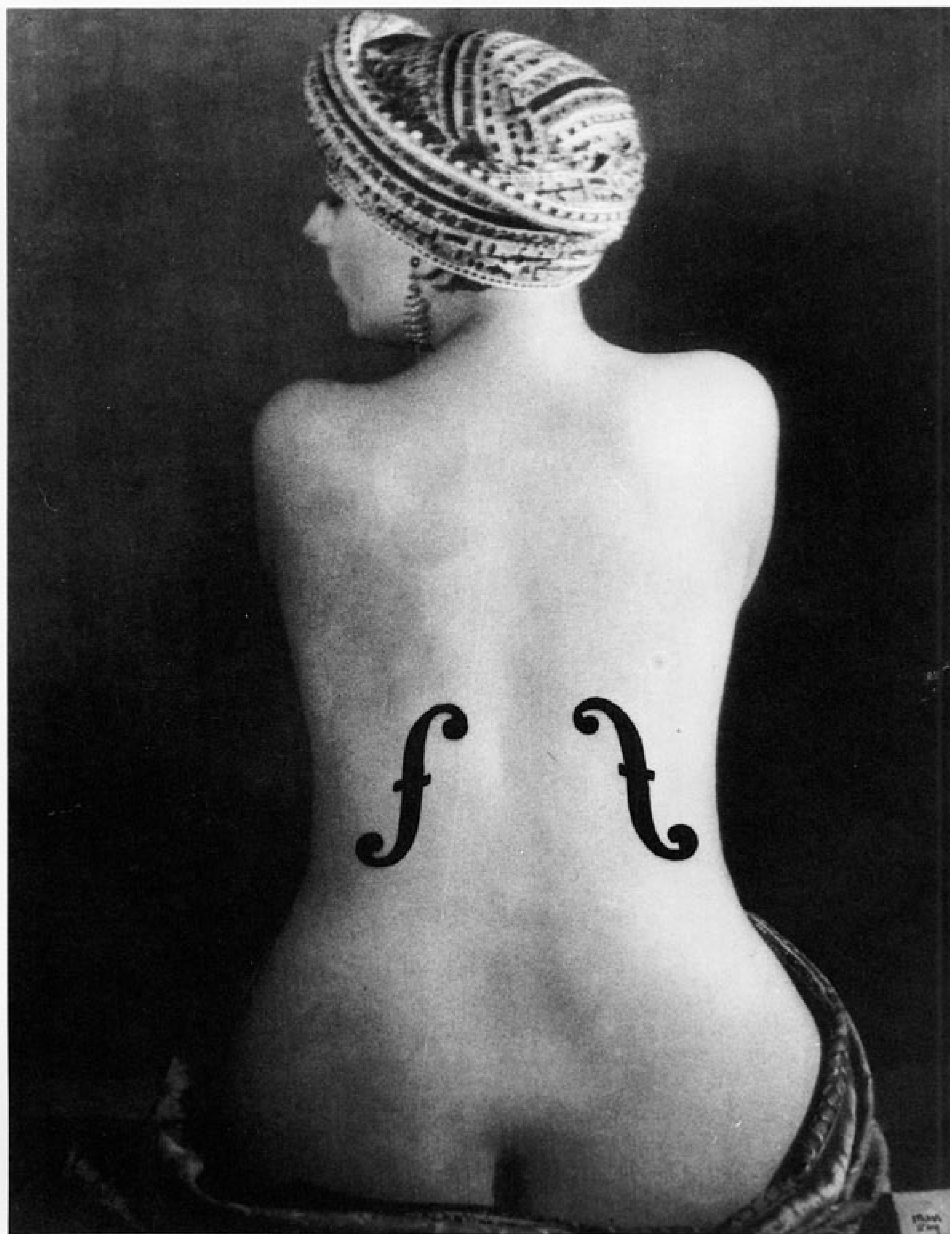
Man Ray shared with the Dada-ists and Surrealists a concern for "liberating objects from their stereotypical place or obsolesence in culture"[23], a concern that unfortunately did not translate over intotheir depictions of women. While many of Man Ray's images are fiercely critical of societal mores, restrictions, or taboos, they often depend, at least representationally, on the subjection of women to accomplish their goal. This dependence on the subjugation of the other (the female) to traverse boundaries exposes the ideological limits of surrealism and renders their concepts of freedom and pleasure problematic. It seems that while they were liberating objects they were objectifying women. In their zeal to expose the hypocrisy of middle-class Christian morality, "freedom" all too often simply translated into a willful transgression of sexual codes (permissivity) and male desire (men doing what they want to).

The idea of unrestricted access to an absolutely available female population to which one could do anything, has gripped the male imagination, especially on the Left, and has been translated into the euphemistic demand for 'free sex, free women.'[24]

For women "freedom" means only that they are free to be used. The confusion of left-leaning ideology with sexual transgression partly accounts for Man Ray's troubling obsession with Sade. Sade was (and still is) mythologized by the left as an avatar of freedom, unjustly punished (imprisoned) by a repressive society for daring to express radical sexual values.[25] Sade, a member of the aristocracy, and for a time, an officer in the military, seems the very antithesis of leftist sentiments. However convoluted their thinking, for Man Ray and the Surrealists he became "the great ideal of freedom."[26] "Sade represented complete and absolute liberty" –"Sade showed what you could do if you had power"[27] (Man Ray in a letter to Author Miller). What Sade showed was that you could batter, rape, torture, and murder women (particularly women of a lesser class) if you had power and could get away with it.

Needless to say, with such contradictions inherent in Man Ray's thinking, in his work the female form (unlike his objects) did not transmute into a "fresh, expressive entity."[28] The transposition of the female form into a violin is just one example of a disturbing recurring theme in Man Ray's work, that is the subjugation of women to men's pleasure that manifests itself in patently offensive objectifications of women. "The Prayer," shocking then for its pose, is now appalling for its politics. The ambiguity is discomforting; is this a landscape of pleasure or a human sacrifice? The pleading hands and vunerably submissive posture indicate the latter. The anatomically disturbing form is reminiscent of dismemberment. Images sugestive of female dismemberment are common in Man Ray's ouvre. "Venus restaurée", 1936, depicts a plaster cast of a woman's torso without head or limbs bound with ropes. "Hommage a D. A. F. de Sade", ca. 1929, shows a blindfolded severed female head trapped in a bell jar. The same subject is dealt with again in a later work, "Aline et Valcour," 1950, (oil on canvas), named after "Sade's novel of the systematic repression of everything except male pleasure"[29] which critic Roger Shattuck politely refers to, in his essay "Candor and Perversion in No-Man's Land" (see the catalog that accompanies the exhibition), as a "faint decapitation motif." [30] There are other images with cannibalistic Sadean overtones where a peach mimics the female body "luscious and edible."[31] An apple with a screw in place of a stem feeds male fantasies of sexual

suite, ca. 1930



Man Ray, *Le Violin d'Ingres*, 1924

All photographs from *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* at the Menil Collection, Houston

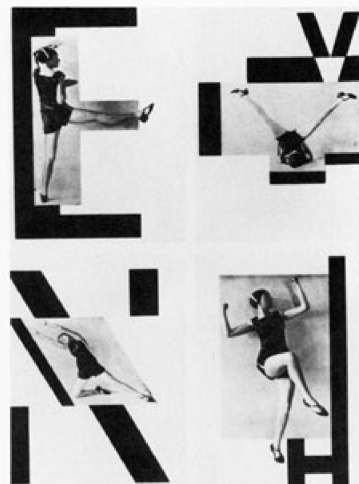
violation by suggesting the painful introduction of foreign objects into the female body. In the catalog only Sandra Phillips, in her essay "Themes and Variations: Man Ray's Photography in the Twenties and Thirties," seems uncomfortable with Man Ray's obsession with Sade and with the questionable nature of Man Ray's depictions of women. Phillips points out the obvious discrepancy in Man Ray's portraits: men are portrayed as physically and mentally active full of "the light hearted *esprit* of newly found comrades," while women are objectified as "exotic creatures" (bejeweled, bedecked) or anima- like, needing to be restrained by ropes or painful collars (see "Lee Miller Wearing Collar with Seabrook", 1928-29 and "Untitled," ca. 1928-29). It is distressing to read in Phillip's essay that Man Ray "helped explorer William Seabrook fashion a necklace that would be deliberately painful to Seabrook's wife" and "more than once proudly commented on violently abusing women."[32] The flip side of the "exotic creature" is the woman as dummy, mechanical toy, manipulatable as in"dadaphoto," 1921, empty headed as in "Untitled," 1923, a rayograph in which a paper doily frames a void with a floating firecracker (denoting a woman's head), or dangerous, devouring, trap-like, as in "Untitled," ca. 1929, a photograph in which a spider web, enticing yet menacing, fans out from a woman's pubic hair. The woman is treated as a thing, primarily a sexual body, an ambivalent object of desire/danger, or as an abstraction, fragmented and disembodied with no identity beyond that of the recognizable female anatomical parts. Man Ray's depictions of women run the gamut from classical ideal to modernist abstraction to girlie magazine–always the general, never the particular. True to the traditions of European art, in Man Ray's photographs men act, women appear.

In recent criticism there has been an attempt by Rosalind Krauss, in connection with her project "L' amour fou" (an exhibition of Surrealist photography), to account for the sheer numbers of fixated images of female nudes in Surrealist photography (Man Ray's work included) and to refute "the frequent characterizations of surrealism as antifeminist"[33] by connecting these images to contemporary theory and practice as a critique of representation, and by ascribing to them an acute perception in their representations of women, "since its manipulations of the woman are so overt as to suggest she is more social construct than natural essence."[34] Hal Foster, in his article "L'amour faux", a critique of Krauss' project, questions whether the "new" fate of woman as a social construct is any more self determined than her "old" destiny as a biological essence. "Quite possibly, women are subjected to control far more as "artifice" than they ever were "as nature"; certainly today they are manipulated primarily via an induced fetishism of signs of the feminine."[35] While one can appreciate, art-historically speaking, the nuances of meaning that the comparison of the female form with a violin points to, in drawing attention to the way in which women have been represented over time, pointing up something is not, in and of itself, a critique of that usage or of representation (does not necessarily subvert). While it is possible to read into surrealist images precursors of postmodern concerns (such as the blurring of aesthetic boundaries, etc.) and to credit them with a critical awareness of certain representational conventions, "overt manipulations" aside, as they concern women, such assertions remain doubtful. The quotation of Ingres and the addition of sound holes to Kiki's torso was aesthetically radical in that it called into question with radical new means (i.e. photography and all that that implied in terms of reproduction processes and its ramifications for painting) a cherished practice, the painted nude, but it was not liberating, at least not for women. The act was more about disrupting the politics of painting (the hierarchy of media) then sexual politics. Man Ray's quotation of Ingres and his graphic intervention is cunning, a usurping of the masterpiece's privileges through the pun (appropriating tradition, not so much undermining its prestige as laying claim to it–the new bad boy "photographer" on the block, mocking his antiquated predecessors [painters], demands his rightful place alongside them). Man Ray's revolt is strictly artistic and falls neatly within accepted modernist canons of avant-garde male dominated art (not to mention male dominated culture). As it concerns the female he does not set out to disrupt convention; he hangs his hat on it. After inviting questioning, "Le Violin d' Ingres" affirms the status quo, reinforcing our culturally conditioned expectations of the image as an object of the masculine gaze, putting her (the female), again soundly (pun) in her place as a thing of pleasure. Krauss' attempt to accord privileged status to surrealist photography through a revisionist reading based on present insights and to redeem it from feminist inquiry seems premature. Conventions were a prime target of the Dadaists/Surrealists, deplored because they allowed no questions to be asked. In the interest of deconstuction (exposing hidden agendas) and a return of the repressed only a cacophony of voices will tell whether surrealist practices, in terms of it' treatment of the feminine and its relation to representation and power, represent insight, vested interests or innocence–a blind spot.

Footnotes

1. Frederick J. Hoffman, *The 20's* (New York: The Free Press, 1949) p.53.
2. *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (New York: National Museum of American Art Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C., Abbeville Press 1988, subsequently cited as "cat."), p. 17.
3. cat. p.322.
4. cat. p.187.
5. cat. p.72.
6. cat. p.137.
7. cat. p.66.
8. cat. p.314.
9. cat. p.74.
10. Harold Rosenberg, "Duchamp: Private and Public", *Art on the Edge* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p.18.
11. cat. p.75.
12. cat. p.79.
13. cat. p.14.
14. cat. p.178.
15. cat. p.142.
16. cat. p.318.
17. Jean-Hubert Martin, *Man Ray Photographs* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1982), p.7.
18. Martin p.10, ftn.#9.
19. Martin p.7.
20. Martin, Interview with Man Ray, p.36.
21. cat. p.240.
22. Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p.188.
23. cat. p.245.
24. Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography Men Possessing Women*, (New York: Putnam's, 1981), p.98.
25. Dworkin p.70, 88, 89.
26. cat. p.215.
27. cat. p.326.
28. cat. p.245.
29. cat. p.327.
30. cat. p.327.
31. cat. p.217.
32. cat. p.212-213.
33. Hal Foster, "*L' Amour faux*", *Art In America*, Jan. 1986, p.126.
34. Foster, p.122.
35. Foster, p.126.

Margo Reece teaches photography and printmaking at the Art Institute of Houston.



Karel Teige and Karel Paspa, *The Alphabet: Choreographic Compositions by Milca Majerova,* 1926 (Private Collection, Prague)

1930–SOMETHING

By Louis Dobay

Czech Modernism 1900-1945, *a multi-media exhibition, was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and exhibited there from October 8, 1989 – January 7, 1990. The exhibition will travel to New York, Akron, Cleveland, and Berkeley, through the Fall of 1990. A catalog documenting the exhibition was in preparation at* **SPOT** *press time.*

[Editor's Note: Due to typographical limitations, Czech names appear without their proper accent marks.]

If it is now true that modernism is dead, then looking back to the early days of this century, perhaps it is the childhood of modernism we see in the MFA's exhibit *Czech Modernism–1900 to 1945*. The art of the modernist avant-garde in Prague 1900–1945 is naive, tentative, and somehow freer than one might expect it to be. It is also familiar, like snapshots from the youth of modernity–Here's modernity playing with impressionism, there's modernity inventing photography, and there, that's modernity with pimples–Surrealism. But behind the consistently pure images of superficial cultural and artistic continuity and stability lies a Freudian maze of repressed events. In this exhibit Czech modernism is represented as Prufrock, etherized upon a table, and we are dilettantes and nit wits who view pleasantly, asking only, "Is that all there is?"

If this exhibit attempts to establish a broad and sometimes leveling view of Czech art of the period 1900-1945, it does so at the expense of the less tidy elements of that time. The purpose seems to be to create an identity for Czech artists of the period 1900-1945 in the minds of a western audience which has little or no general knowledge about this region. We are presented, unfortunately, with a neat, I suspect cleaned-up view that perhaps was unavoidable, but that nonetheless takes politically sensitive, not to mention historically monumental elements out of the frame. Whether this was the fault of the curators, or whether it was some inherent limitation placed on them by a now vanquished Czech governmental regime, it is nonetheless far less interesting to view Czech art of this period from a strict and narrowly defined art-historical vantage (or revisionist political one), when the historical story of the region during that period is of far more cultural, artistic and human consequence.

There is obviously some consciousness of this "missing time" in Czech art, as evident in the opening line of the introduction by Jirí Kotalík, the Director of the National Gallery in Prague, "The present exhibition does not claim to present Czech art of the twentieth century in its historical entirety..."[1] That statement is code for, "We who are about to revise salute you." He continues:

Instead, the selection of works concentrates on the most typical trends and leading personalities that determined the course of creative evolution from 1900 to the mid-1940's, that decisive stage of modern art in the context of European development.

Most significant, it seems, is what he doesn't say, what we don't get to see.

Are we to be told that since there are no direct references to WWI, the creation of the Czechoslovakian republic, the rise of National Socialism and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Hitler, WWII or communism, all of which exist in "that decisive stage of modern art in the context of European development;" that these artists had nothing to say about any of it? It is a particularly puerile distinction between "art" and "history" being offered by this exhibit; that artists could be so divorced from their time that while a thousand year dynasty crumbles in central Europex in 1908, and thus liberates the Czechs and the Slovaks from imperial suppression, that Prague artists were content to hide behind Surrealism on the one hand, and that even photographers were content to study their models nude in their dark but picturesque studios and not even go outside–on the other. Must we ask, after viewing the exhibit, if it was possible that while the nation of Czechoslovakia was created, invaded and ended, and recreated virtually all within the time frame of this exhibit, that the artists of Prague didn't notice?

In the catalog, Antonin Dufek, in "Imaginary Photography," discusses the photographer Jaromir Funke: "A number of important photographers in Czechoslovakia devoted themselves to the discovery of the fantastic in everyday reality," and Jindrich Styrsky, whose "[m]ost interesting photographs are those images of the urban environment dominated by cultural products... (Brassai also began to document graffiti in the early 1930's)." Graffiti is not shown in the exhibit. Try as he might to use codified or subtle references to realities of the time, such as graffiti protesting political unrest, Dufek is ultimately unable to discuss the political nature of this period with any directness or substance, especially for those who do not already know what took place.

Jaromir Funke, *Staircase of Old Prague,* 1924, Prague (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

Dufek continues, "The photographs of this prominent Surrealist [Styrsky] can also be seen as fascinating documents of a civilization now extinct, similar to the photographs of Walker Evans." Exactly what was destroyed in the period of this exhibit, and why, we are shown little of. Dufek continues, "Furthermore, from the viewpoint of post-World War II art, Styrsky can be considered on of the important forerunners of Pop Art." There is a considerable gap calmly elided between Styrsky and Pop Art; namely, abstract expressionism–which was officially banned after 1945 by the postwar communist government. Abstract expressionism, to a communist government, is the artform of existentialists, nihilists, and anarchists; the antithesis of socialist realist art, and as such represents an intolerable opposition. To imply, as Dufek does here, that some unhindered parallel artistic development took place or was set up in this period before 1945 along the lines of the New York School after WWII is absurd. Such an implication is easy to accept in the West, given the realities of postwar art, but coming from a Czech art historian, the statement omits if not actively misrepresents the reality of the Czech social situation before and after the Second World War.

Karel Teige, *Travel Postcard,* 1923 (Gallery of the City of Prague)

Dufek alludes to the omission later, when discussing Vilem Reichmann, "Although Reichmann started out fascinated by civilization's objects, he reacted to the new social situation with new visual metaphors." It is the political content of this "new social situation" that is entirely missing from the catalog or the exhibit. Dufek continues, approaching confession,

Although outside the framework of war documentary and photojournalism, the shots of damaged buildings and objects in postwar Brno are as effective as battlefield shots in expressing war's destructive forces.

It is lamentable that these images are left out of this exhibit. While a total of six thematically important works of Reichman are mentioned in the catalog, as "(for example, "The Meshes [Osidla, 1940]," many of the images convey anguish and absurdity in a uniquely existentialist way."–only two photographs, "In the Studio of Adolf Loos" and "Abandoned One" are exhibited. One of those is a shot of the interior of a studio, the other, a surreal, indirect, ambiguous image of vines growing up the legs of a mannequin torso. If the photographs of the war taken by these photographers exist, then why aren't they in this exhibit?

Strictly within the realm of what art is offered us, some defining characteristics emerge. There seems to be an interesting lack of the kind of Abstraction that modern art developed in New York after WWII. Though Cubism is formally presented as a full-fledged style of painting being practiced between the wars, there is ample evidence of a more lyrical, heartfelt counter-current within modern art of Prague, that of the mythical, cosmological and symbolic realm–as in Frantisek Kupka's "the First Step," and in Vojtech Preissigs' 1936 "Birth of the World." Kupka and Preissig seem most characteristic of Prague modernists in that they capture the bittersweet faith and the naively romantic

qualities that form the basis of a contemplative modernism.

What shows through the haze of academic pleasantries in the first half of the exhibit is an intense underlying idealism and hopefulness. In Kupka's "First Step," and Preissigs' "Birth of the World," there is evidence of a belief in a structure, a spiritual premise of grand cosmic circular forms, and of an evolving, animate universe. And, though Edward Munch is the primary influence on these artists (see Dufek's essay), theirs is a less horrific expressionism. And Alfons Mucha's interiors do not seem existentially empty, but rather, lack the separation, alienation, not to mention the horror, found in Munch.

Photographic comparisons come in the "Pictorialism" of Alfons Mucha and Frantisek Drtikol from roughly 1900-1930. The dark interiors study shadow and form, and are primarily architectural, or human nudes. Preissig's photo of large stone classical heads laying in storage offer the only witty or ironical moment in this period. They are not, however, bleak. Dufek says in "Imaginative Photography" (from the catalog),

World War I and the establishment of the Czechoslovakc Republic created a definite drift…It was no longer necessary to manifest "soulfulness" and to defend artistic stylization…

Along these lines, the exhibit is laid out as a progression from Kupka's cosmological/philosophical art through Cubist disintegration, until we reach the large central hall that houses the "Functionalist" art. Ahead is a great tableau of commercial artforms that could be made from the new modern aesthetic: book covers, collage and surreal imagery, portraiture, and advertisements/textual combinations. This bland, mechanical photographic period, occupies the central room in a way that suggests that perhaps "Functionalist" utility and commercial art are the highest forms reached by these moderns. This part of the exhibit conveys a 20's art deco urbanity. But to present this as the condition of artists and art in the twenties and thirties in Prague is like presenting the American film *Topper* in order to demonstrate that the Depression was chic.

It is not until the small hallway near the end of the exhibit, which contains photographs from the late years of WWII that the second substantial thematic element of this exhibit comes into view. Disappointment, disillusion, and the notion of cultural failure creep into the photography in the late 30's into WWII. The photographers who met and regrouped after the onset of the war, the "*Skupina Ra,*" used absurd images to convey loss and disappointment, as Miroslav Hak's fixated views of water on metal seem to be the view of one who is shell-shocked, in "A Rainy Day". Reichman's "Abandoned One," 1941, is a torso with vines growing on it; the torso of Czechoslovak national independance crushed by Hitler. Finally, and perhaps in conscious reference to the uniquely Czech "Poetism", is Jaroslav Puchmertl's "Poetry at a Loss," 1940; and "Such an End," in 1944. These artists give us a glimpse of potential depth of insight these artists had about the anguish of the European collapse during the war, robbed as we are of actual evidence that these artists witnessed it. To look at it, one simply learns that *Skupina Ra* were a bunch of photographers who liked Surrealism, who were interrupted by WWII.

Jan Lukas, *Before the Transport*, 1942 (Lent by Debbie Friedman)

Karel Teige, *Collage*, 1942 (National Museum of Literature, Prague)

Aside from the technical capabilities evidenced in this exhibit (from Cubists just like the Parisians, to budding inventors of Pepsi ads, to paint by the number Surrealists) there surely should be a more substantial message; for those artists must have been motivated as much by a perception of their moment in history as by some inferiority complex that drove them to look outside Prague for styles to emulate in order to validate their work "in the context of Europe." It is a context that did not exist at the time, that has been defined after the fact; and it is a context that does nothing to bring forth the realities of either Europe of this period, or Czechoslovakia.

To the artists of Prague, judging by this exhibit, modernism only meant technology, commerce and media. If this is true, then modernism here is only an aesthetic, one that is comprehended, rather than felt or experienced. It is a calm, unencumbered development that proceeds with rational clarity. While it is far too complex a task to expect the relationship between the avant-garde in Prague and the historical situation of Europe between the wars, for example, to emerge, to ignore, even repress, mention of those wars, the reality of the decline of the *ancien regime*, the supplanting of the Czech republic by fascism, and the suppression of modern art, is as absurd as any surrealist image in the exhibit, for without such a historical context, how can the difficulties of establishing a modern aesthetic, and the radical nature of even the simplest "functionalist" art be seen? This exhibit leaves the uninitiated viewer with a pleasant view of a violent and tortuous period. And it reinforces the pleasant but untrue idea that bourgeois culture somehow supported the developing modern culture; that somehow they were compatible, and that change was without conflict or trauma. It poses an avant-garde in terms that lack meaning–the implication being made that they didn't stand for anything, or that there was nothing they actively opposed through their art.

The view in art history that separates the individual artist from his or her cultural context and poses their creativity in terms of some entirely subjective, interior, and unrelated aesthetic scholasticism is inadequate, for it does not provide a basis from which we can understand their art as a reaction to the historical events of the day. Those artists had to have been deeply and profoundly moved by events around them, and our failure to comprehend, much less learn from, their experience is unfortunate for our own detached and immortal-minded generation–given the scale and speed with which change comes at the end of this century. One exhibit may not be able to address all of these issues, but, in the name of archaeology if not art–Will somebody please take the plaster out of the bullet holes?

Frantisek Drtikol, *Worker (Portrait of Jaroslav Rosler)*, 1924 (Sonia and Kaye Marvins Portrait Collection)

Footnotes

1. Page references are omitted from quotations from the catalog because the catalog has not yet been printed, and the pages have not yet been numbered.

Louis Dobay has written for Artspace, Artscene, *and* Public News. *Raised in Texas, he visited Hungary extensively as a child. His father left Hungary during the uprising in 1956.*

All photographs from *Czech Modernism* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

EXHIBITIONS

PRIVATE EYES

By Anne Roberts

The Private Eye: Selected Works from Collections of Friends of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts from June 11 – August 13, 1989.

The large photography section of this summer's Museum of Fine Arts exhibition, *The Private Eye*, organized from private collections in Houston, was extensive and diverse (as well as a reservoir of possible gifts to the museum). The exhibition coincided with the 150th anniversary of photography, with *TIME*'s publication of their photojournalism "Collector's Edition," and with *Popular Photography*'s article, "Are These the 15 Greatest Pictures Ever Made?", among others. Many of the well-recognized photographs included in these publications could be seen in *The Private Eye*–but no matter how many times you see certain images, there's always pleasure, a smile of connection. The self-satisfied boy in Cartier-Bresson's "Rue Mouffetard, Paris," the stylish hats on the middle-aged society women of Lisette Model's "Fashion Show, Hotel Pierre," the through-the-shopwindow look at "La Dame Indignée," by Robert Doisneau, and the private but stagy moment of "Lovers, Place d'Italie," by Brassai, were only a few of these important pictures. No mass-production technique can compare with seeing the original prints.

The exhibition, like other shows curated by Anne Tucker, allowed viewers to note both connections and contrasts. The exhibition began with the credits and with Eliott Erwitt's dramatic, revealing portrait of the famous characters gathered from the cast of the movie *Misfits* in 1961; it continued with a large grouping of older images, including some wonderful, early cased ferrotype, daguerreotype, and ambrotype portraits collected by photographers Sonia and Kaye Marvins; it next moved from contemporary work to the very new, with all works placed for interesting relationships. One of the earliest prints was "Untitled," (Bridge in Landscape), 1852, by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, an albumen or albuminized salted print from a calotype negative. What interested me in addition to its amazing clarity, the light falling on the foreground shore and individual stones on the streambank and in the bridge, was its artistic break from purely documentary landscape photography. The bridge, with its strong geometric form and circular opening resembles an eye in shape, and so the photograph thus becomes a statement about seeing.

Frederick Sommer, *Beato Salvador Alegre*, 1947 (Anonymous Loan)

Harry Callahan, Provincetown, RI, 1975 (Morris Weiner Collection)

Moving on to famous photography from the turn of the century, two landscape pieces by Alfred Stieglitz stood out: "Early Morn, or Harvesting, Black Forest, Germany," 1904?, and "Landscape, Lake George," 1920. "Harvesting" shows painterly influences from the mid-19th century, with each wheat stalk glittering in the heat, the toiling figures partially shadowed, rounded forms against angular buildings. The mood changes in "Lake George," where the brown, shadowy tones of the moon, fragments of the road, trees and house paint a moment of quiet in a country vacation. Adding to the Stieglitz study was a cased group of various materials: copies of *Camera Work*, including the first reproduction of "The Steerage," and *An American Place* publications and invitations, all collected by John Cleary. It's important to mention here this informative "who collects what, and why," element of the show. Some prominent collectors focus on paintings, sculpture, or decorative objects, making it interesting to see what photographs they have acquired. Others, like Cleary or Gay Block, are photographers themselves; this means we could see photographs that have perhaps influenced them. Finally, HCP's current President, Clint Willour, proved to be one of those valuable collectors whom the Museum may call upon to purchase photographs they would like to have.

Certainly two influential pictures by Edward Steichen fall into the "must have" category. "Brooklyn Bridge at Night," 1903, with its misty, looming overhead diagonals spiked with faint lights could be a still from some space-age battle station; while "Portrait of J. P. Morgan," 1904, is structured to draw your attention first to the stern face, down through the watchchain to the hand grasping a chair arm lighted to resemble a knife. Here is a psychologically intense and revealing portrait of a powerful and dangerous man. Equally influential is the platinum print cityscape of Paul Strand's, "Untitled, 1918," in which roofs and buildings stripe down to make beautiful abstract angles. Repeated abstract roof shapes also fill the image area of Bill Brandt's "Windswept Roofs," 1930's; while Andre Kertesz' "Carrefour, Bois," 1930 combines people and vehicles in the brick street into an almost choreographed pattern of perfection.

In the area of landscape photography, certainly a major force has been Ansel Adams and his zone system, represented here by the stunningly printed "Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite," 1944, in which plateaus and bluffs emerge from the mist and fog, each leaf distinct in the foreground aspens. More architectural in feeling are the romantic, mysterious, weed-overgrown Doric columns against a lacy, cloudy sky in Clarence John Laughlin's 1941 "Enigma." Mood also plays a key part in Aaron Siskind's "Utah 21," 1976; the dark edges of cliffs are almost like faces in a shadowed crowd. Possibly all these pathfinders have affected "Cordon #1, Baja," 1976, by Richard Misrach, who breaks with the natural light tradition, using flash to illuminate a single tall cactus forming a strong vertical line against a moon low on the horizon. Misrach's use of flash has the additional effect of washing out foreground color, making the resulting night scenes resemble old brown platinum prints.

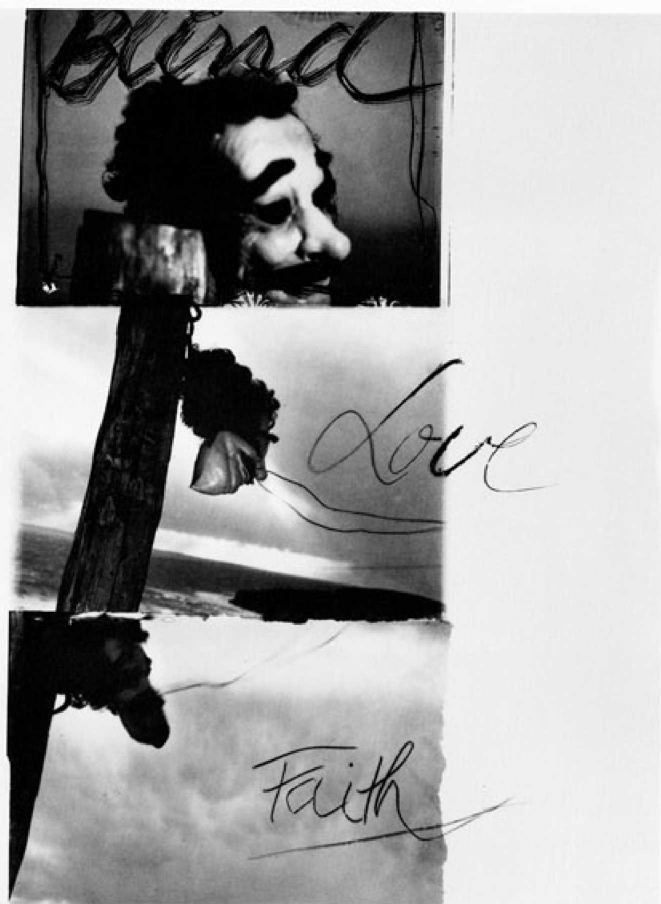
Important photojournalism was also well-represented in *The Private Eye*. Dorothea Lange's "Ditched, Stalled, and Stranded, San Joaquin Valley, California," 1935, is a good example of her groundbreaking work, signalling a new prominence for American women in photography. Continuing this sort of work, Helen Levitt added color in her representation of three generations of women in "New York, N.Y.," 1970. The characters in this one picture - a woman with an enigmatic frown, one rather proud, almost defiant, a baby in ruffled white christening dress, two older women in curlers, seeming just to wait in front of a graffiti-covered wall – tell a complex story of life in this area, with its mixture of racial and ethnic minorities.

In contrast to photojournalistic efforts at realism, stagy unreality animates two large, almost naked men who contrast with a third wearing a suit, gesturing away, in Geoff Winningham's "Tag Team Action, Wrestling, Houston," 1971. These characters, one with a grimace of pain, the other looking sneakily away, are placed on a horizontal line; a spotlight centered above emphasizes the oddness of their activity. This same sense of the unreality of the real characterizes "Untitled, Welsh Miners Series," 1965, by Bruce Davidson. In this eerie photograph a serious little boy walks his doll and teddy bear in a pram in front of a gritty, smelt-spewing plant of some sort. How difficult it must be to keep his shirt so white.

In contrast to these images, it is ordinary reality that becomes important in a portrait of a room that functions like a still life, Walker Evans' "Bedroom, Shrimp Fisherman's House, Biloxi, Mississippi," 1945. Here the machine-turned bedposts, chenille patterned bedspread, sheer lacy curtain, and religious wall decorations quietly describe a man's lifestyle and belief. Examples of new approaches to still life are shown in the technically amazing, toned silver print, "Flowering Kale #3, by Carol Mariono, in which the image area is like a blow-up, with each tiny bubble and glass pattern important. Another large close-up, this one in a color coupler print, Jan Groover's "Untitled," 1978, emphasizes the beauty of nature and the ordinary, with its red caladiums contrasting with and reflecting the hard edges of a silver plate and knife. The quietness of these two pictures is also a main attraction in what may have been my favorite image in the show, "The Last Rose, Cycle from the Window of My Atelier," 1944, by Josef Sudek. Its intimate mood is achieved somehow mysteriously through the careful framing of a shell and three roses, one dark and two light, in a glass against a condensation-fogged window. These romantic details seem to encapsulate an artist's life.

An early example of serial presentation is Ruth Orkin's wonderful "The Cardplayers," 1955, composed of six images, like a short move, and the marvelous good/bad fairy story "Bishop by the Sea," by Diane Arbus, where the fairy's flowing white dress and hair seem to indicate she has just arrived from the beyond.

This vast exhibition also says something about the educational work of not only the Museum of Fine Arts, but also farsighted photography galleries like Cronin and Mancini (which unfortunately are no longer open) and Benteler-Morgan (which is). The exhibition included too many examples of new, breakthrough, sometimes trendy works to do more than just mention them here; presumably some of these works will be shown again as part of individual exhibitions. Among very recent work, some standouts were Michael Van Horn's "Future Fossils," 1986, which places a still life in collage-like dimension against the background; Gary Brotmeyer's "Fotographia Misteriosa," 1986, which adds a small ape head with scraggly grey hair to an old studio portrait; and the huge, almost life-size, triptych, "Composition Musical," 1982, by Christian Boltanski, which is composed of cutout geometric paper shapes, forming puppet-like forms in front of a dark background; it seems to make a statement about



Robert Frank, *Blind, Love Faith, Mabou,* 1981 (Joan and Stanford Alexander Collection)

Paul Strand, *Gaston Lachaise, Georgetown, ME,* 1927-8 (Gay Block Collection)

the fragility of life and all endeavor.

A final, important piece which was actually shown around the corner, in the large entry room along with paintings, was Ed Keinholtz's "Car Door," 1971, a mixed-media with photo construction piece combining a real car door with a dark night photograph of some frightening Ku-Klux-Klan-like activity. Clear plastic glue drops ran down the open car window.

The photography component of *The Private Eye* exhibition attracted justified interest, and we can hope that it will also create some *new* photography collectors. We can hope that future shows like this one can be as rich and varied.

Anne Roberts is a photographer, writer, and editor living in Houston.

Zsuzsi Ujj, *1989 Augusztus/August 1989*

EXHIBITIONS

Independent Visions

By Béla Ugrin

Three Hungarian Photographers *was an exhibition shown in HCP's Gallery X from September 15 to October 29, 1989. The exhibition was organized by John P. Jacob.*

Photographed under a single spotlight and printed in high-contrast fall-out technique, the three black-and-white photographs of female torsos with missing extremities commanded my attention as I entered the innermost exhibition room at the Houston Center for Photography. The three 20x24 prints were part of a group exhibition entitled *Three Hungarian Photographers* that hung at the Center for six weeks this fall during the first leg of its tour in the United States.

At first glance the three torsos against black background looked like ancient, classic statues where time became the second artist. But on closer view, the straight lines of the "broken" limbs, the graphic outlines of pubic hair and upturned nipples on drooped breasts gave them away for what they were: staged nude photographs posed with slight variations. The head, arms and legs were neatly coverd and blocked off by pieces of black cloth. A single label displayed the title both in Hungarian and English: "1989 Augusztus/August 1989," by Zsuzsi Ujj. I wondered whether she created and printed this impressive panel for her American debut? The surprise came when I learned that these were self-portraits! What a unique idea! I had never met Ujj before, nor had I heard about her during my recent visits to my former homeland, Hungary.

The images were visually striking in their enhanced graphic quality. They weren't sexy by a long shot, nor were they masterpieces of photographic composition, but they looked very different, thought-provoking and had an aura about them that lit up the room. But then, again, they looked tragic and forboding, especially the one in the middle. Here, the spotlight illuminated the body from a lower angle, whereby the large black holes under the breasts and the stomach lent the torso a tortured look.

I couldn't get rid of the thought that via these self-portraits, Ujj may have entertained the idea to symbolize the European Woman whose agony became perpetuated in this century through two World Wars, the Holocaust, the Cold War along with its Iron Curtain, and the commencement of the Nuclear Age.

Later, on the opening night of this exhibition and the morning after at a workshop, I met Zsuzsi Ujj and her fellow artists from Hungary, Istvan Halas and Tibor Varnagy. Our time together proved rather short. We spoke in Hungarian and too many topics kept popping up that weren't related to analytical inquiries about their works on display. Besides, at that time I had no idea that soon after they left Houston I would be asked to write this review.

When asked whether she was a serious student of applied photography, Ujj simply told me that she was not a photographer and that she uses this medium only when the realization of a particular idea calls for the photo camera. As it turned out, she is a writer, a singer and a filmmaker in Budapest. But this makes things the more puzzling. To create nude images with the camera always presents unsuspected difficulties. Yet Ujj seems to have mastered the complexities of the task rather well.

All three of them seemed familiar with the works of their late compatriots: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Martin Munkacsi, Andre Kertesz, Robert Capa and Brassai (alias Gyula Halasz), but claimed no affinity with the style or the school of thoughts of any of these masters. However, each spoke with affection about Kertesz, probably because he was the master of unique personal statements that he so subtly encoded in his images.

Halas spoke enough English to get by. Varnagy's vocabulary was very

limited and Ujj spoke no English. Whenever needed, the curator, PR-person and organizer of this travelling exhibition, John P. Jacob, was on hand. He is a writer and expert on Central European art photography (what we call Eastern Europe is geographically and culturally known as Central Europe.) Jacob, an American who lives in Austin, had gotten acquainted during his frequent visits to Hungary with these three artists at Budapest's LIGET GALERIA, where he saw their works. However, the real benefector behind the scene is George Soros, a Hungarian-American. Soros is a 1956 emigree who was successful in New York and now wants to share his good furtune with the less fortunate in his old country. Jacob knew of him and applied to the Soros Foundation for a grant on behalf of Halas, Varnagy and Ujj; the rest, as they say, is history.

When I received the invitation to the opening of *Three Hungarian Photographers*, my first thought was whether I should go and see photographs shot by "straightshooters of government-sponsored Socialist Realism." But, instead, I encountered a new breed of freelance, avant-garde art photographers of sophisticated and independent visions.

In the past, in Socialist countries like Hungary, a freelance artist would simply be "set free," in a Rousseauist sense, by the state and could starve, because only the state-owned firms and corporations were able to support or buy art. What made things worse was that neither the public at large nor the officials of the Ministry of Culture were trained or educated to be qualified critics of experimental art in the realms of the visual media.

According to Varnagy, even today, heads of large, state-owned corporations who can commission art work and finance exhibitions in Hungary or abroad, simply can't comprehend the public relations or advertisment values that could follow such proactive support of the arts. Thus, the official motto for artistic continuity remains standstill and reactionary attitude toward the traditional.

Artists who dare to cross the line toward freelance status have to have a hybrid professional background. Only by wearing many hats can they survive and succeed. In this way, some "legitimate" jobs garner the paychecks, while part-time experimentation provides the spiritual nourishment and a hope for the future.

Of the three Hungarian artists, only Halas makes his living exclusively with the photo camera. He shoots advertisments. His clientèle include firms and fellow artists working in various components of advertisment departments that are integral parts of large corporations.

And now, with these multi-image photographic abstracts, via this travelling exhibition in the United States, he has entered the international arena of renowned heavyweights of the past and present. Yet, Halas seems confident. He thinks that the medium's experimental potentials remain infinite, especially in the realm of manipulated images. Here at the Center, his main piece was the "Answer" 1988–a 40x55 mural composed of nine photographs fitted tightly together in three rows. The images include segments of typed pages from an inventory of photo supplies in Hungarian, a pile that looks like lecturing material and parts of a lengthy questionnaire in English he received in Budapest in 1988 from Jacob.

Next came five 20x24 panels each carrying four frames that reveal Halas as master of visual poetry. Entitled "Five Sonnets" of 1988, the black-and-white compositions include what looks like multi-layered arrangements of glass plates with pasted newspaper articles, clips of logos and slogans in different languages. Often, the reflection of some glass plates bring houshold objects and bric-a-brac into the field of view. Halas' technique is so subtle or clever that sometimes it's hard to tell when he employs multiple exposures and when he shoots straight through the maze of partially overlapping glass plates arranged in various angles, or does both.

Istvan Halas, from *Five Sonnets*, 1988, courtesy of the Allen Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio

In the second frame of the first "sonnet" is a printed announcement of his very first photo exhibition at the Budapest University of the Arts. The moody sequence ends with a reflected portrait of Robert Frank, whose face was destined to be squeezed into the extreme lower right corner of the parting shot. Halas' show strikes me as a fragmanted diary; a visual trip back on Memory Lane.

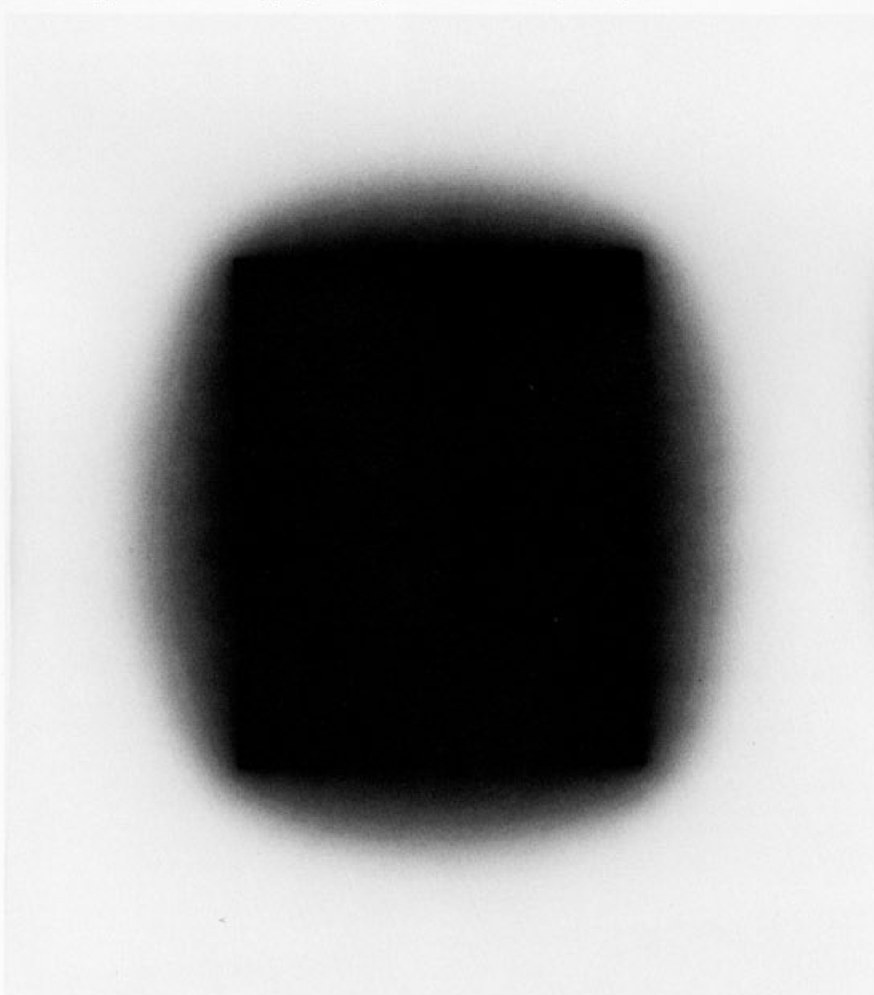
It took a multi-media professional such as Varnagy, who is a painter, graphic artist, art theoretician and director of the LIGET GALERIA, to contemplate a purist approach in creating photograms for his photographic debut in America. "Photograms are the key to photography," said Moholy-Nagy in his book *Vision in Motion*. And it seems that Varnagy went one step further when he made his photograms without laying any object on the photo paper. As far as we know, he may not even used a lens in the enlarger. He, probably, aided himself only with the blades of the easel and the light source of the enlarger to create his black rectangles.

However, he introduced a visual twist to finish his prints. All four of Varnagy's nearly identica12x16 prints were done with double exposures. The first ones became the bases of the photograms: four 71/2 x 91/2 upright, solid black rectangles, while the much shorter second exposures without easel blades and no film carrier in the enlarger resulted in partial eclipses of the rectangles by the created dark coronas measuring about 11 inches in diameter.

The Hungarian artists were eager to talk about the great changes in Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union, but remaind tongue-tied about the particulars of their highly personal style and the mode of their creative processes. They seemed to prefer to leave all that to the interpretation of the beholder. Regarding the unique creative intent, form, style and communicative substance, there is a great deal of originality and artistic courage in Varnagy's work that are refreshing even here in the United States. And that goes for Ujj's torsos and Halas' abstract sequences, too.

Béla Ugrin is a Houston-based photojournalist and producer-director of educational television. His TV documentary entitled André Kertész: A Poet with the Camera *premiered on PBS in 1986.*

Tibor Varnagy, from Untitled Series, (n.d.), courtesy of the Allen Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio



INTERRUPTED VISUAL STORIES

By Johannes Birringer

Vernon Fisher, an exhibition, was held at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, from September 9 - November 5, 1989. The exhibition was curated by Hugh M. Davies and Madeleine Grynsztejn. It was first presented at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, before traveling to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; CAM, Houston; and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (February 11 - April 8, 1990).

Vernon Fisher, *Show and Tell*, 1981

As I try to remember what I remember more concretely in Vernon Fisher's work, the narrative texts or the visual images, I recall a statement the artist made for the *Directions 1981* exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.):

Any coherency that we experience in the world we bring to it. Unity is not inherent in nature, but is a net–like a grid we cast over nature when there is something we want.[1]

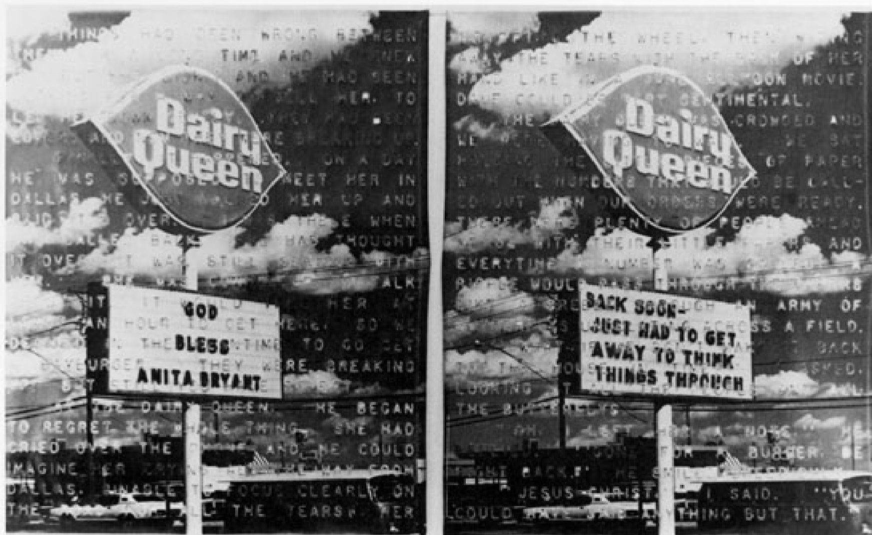
What Fisher's art wants, it seems, is to pursue the uncertainties and contradictions in the incoherent, polymorphic and impure experiences that are the ground for the figure of order. That figure, like the net with which one tries to organize one's perceptions, sticks in my mind. The exhibition *Vernon Fisher* at the Contemporary Arts Museum of Houston is a major mid-career survey that chronicles Fisher's narrative art from the mid-seventies to the late eighties. The striking syntheses of mediums (text, painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, found objects) and the overpowering dimensions of some of the installations still betray a child-like, yet diabolical, sense of irony which creates havoc with the idea that our perceptions and systems of perceiving (optical, linguistic, conceptual, scientific, etc.) could actually cast order or coherency upon reality.

With the help of the "Children's Guide to Seeing," thoughtfully provided by the CAM, I find my way past a wall of text and neon light ("Basutoland, 1986," repainted directly onto the entrance wall) to the back of the museum, and to Fisher's "Show and Tell" triptych of 1981. On the left, a photograph on laminated paper shows two fishermen proudly displaying their catch. The text (quoted below) is stenciled directly through the entire surface. In the middle, a blackboard is sprinkled with white paint spots. Barely visible, the word "snow" is written across its surface with the clumsy hand of a child. On the right is the small cut-out figure of Aunt Fritzi, a character from the comic strip "Nancy."

One little girl never brought anything to sharing time. Other children might bring an authentic Indian headdress acquired on a vacation in Arizona, or a Civil War sword handed down from Great Granddad, but whenever the teacher asked, "Dori, do you have anything to share with us today?" she only stared at the top of her desk and shook her head firmly from side to side.

Then one day, long after her turn had mercifully disappeared, Dori abruptly left her seat and walked to the front of the class. With everyone's startled attention she began :"Today on the way to school I found something that I want to share.." She held her arm stiffly out in front of her and began slowly dropping tiny pieces of shredded Kleenex. "See" she said. "Snow."

To ask for the unity of this triptych is to bring several levels of communication ("show and tell") into collision, and both the visual and the verbal clues, like Aunt Fritzi's bland smile, begin to create a disturbing syntactical sequence (left to right, right to left) that makes the familiar cultural connotations (fishing, vacation, classroom, comic strip) slide into surreal, inconclusive and precarious constellations. The image of the fishermen cannot be "read' at the same time as the text is being deciphered.



Vernon Fisher, *Dairy Queen*, 1977

The story refuses to give context to the image, even as the blackboard and the figure of Aunt Fritzi promise (and deny) such a context. But neither the comic strip figure nor the blackboard–and they are recurring leitmotifs or "figures" in the exhibition—can be caught in the net of the child's fantasy of snow or her persistent refusal to share the fantasy; the words of the cryptic story remain afloat on top of the image of fishermen. This montage of superimpositions and juxtapositions speaks to us about the relations between its constitutent parts and their failure to add up to a coherent whole, even though their simultaneity strongly suggests and reinscribes the meanings of sharing, showing, and telling through a suspended narrative which questions the process of "reading"/"viewing" itself. This questioning of the perceptual constitution of realities–and of the art object, of course–is exacerbated by the combinational play of contexts: the fusions of image and text in fact generate illusory fantasies of meaning that remind us uncomfortably of our need, our desire, to connect words or stories to the pictures and/or the world we see.

Vernon Fisher, an exhibition presented matter-of-factly, without descriptive title, takes us deep into a placeless and unmistakably American universe of signs that make reference to the geography (desert, sea, freeways) and topology (mass culture, science, art) of an adolescent country which has already, and perhaps irretrievably, lost the innocence of the dream on which it–and its pursuit of the freedom to discover, name, and conquer–was founded. Fisher's work traces a course of failed originality, moving from the earlier painterly and narrative allusions to modernism and American abstract expressionism (in "Looking for Judd," 1976, "Desert Malevich," 1978, or "Pollock," 1981) and pop-cultural art (in "Parachute," 1976, and "Dairy Queen," 1977–obvious glosses on Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol), to the more recent multi-panel installations such as "Rushing into Darkness," 1984, "Spider," 1986, or "Complementary Pairs," 1987. Although there are practically no overt iconic references to his home environment of Fort Worth, Texas, his suspended narratives betray a sense of anxiety, alienation, and insecurity about the American West and the artist's identity vis-à-vis his country and the art created elsewhere. And this sense of insecurity is powerful and productive, at the same time, because it substitutes for all heroic and mythic pretensions an irony in the compositional structure that I find more challenging, since more existentially honest, than some of the facile postmodern self-reflections on the language of images or the writing of culture (in the photo-texts of Barbara Kruger, the language paintings of Kosuth, Ruscha, and Baldessari, or the tomb-engravings of Jenny Holzer).

Fisher's literal manipulation of the surface, the puncturing of painted or photographic images, the re-inscriptions of texts and found/sculptural objects onto a flat surface, or the erasure and smudges on the blackboard (faint allusions to Joseph Beuys' pedagogy on "social sculpture"?) create a complex semiological exploration of how signs and icons operate on the surface, and how the accuracy of vision is constantly deferred by the arbitrary arrangement of disparate elements. The most interesting aspect of this exploration is not the apparent formal coherency of Fisher's "objects in a field" (*cf.* the insertion of photogrpahic images or repainted photographs into the pictorial field of the canvas or the blackboard), but the contradictory effect of the suturing of image and text on the position of the spectator in relation to them. Unlike the common operation of narrative cinema, Fisher's montages don't bind the spectator in place or define the position or terms of identification, but rather provoke the collapse of such a place and, implicitly, the psychological loss of control over objective reality.

This resistance to closure (or refusal to share) is emblematically depicted in Fisher's ironic use of eye-charts and cartographic grids. The scientific instruments through which perception and perspective are ordered float in space like the cartoon images of social behavior (Nancy and Aunt Fritzi), and the viewer loses track of the scenes and stories that lead nowhere (*cf.* "Rushing into Darkness"). The same discontinuity is built into the reading process: one cannot actually see the image and read the text at the same time in the same place, even though they are present together, superimposed or fused. To decipher the words one must be close up, and in order to re-member the image one needs to move backwards, towards a point where the letters blur or fade out. This disappearance of the text seems conceptually related to the interruptions of the stories themselves. For this viewer, at least, the interruptions of the stories, and the sense of terror, displacement and amnesia they suggest, are more fascinating and thought-provoking than the images Fisher paints or appropriates. The weakness of his appropriations is particularly obvious in the images he chooses for "Basutoland": umbrella, neon light, extension cables. The dictionary entry on "bats," with its pseudo-scientific elaborations on the nature of their existence, is considerably more interesting than the inverted umbrella.

Fisher ultimately remains concerned with the ironies of the interrupted mediation between narrative and cultural icon, and between narrative/visual forms and our frustrated desire to complete an elliptical story that seems to have a deeper meaning we cannot see and recuperate. *Vernon Fisher* is an exhibition about the *aporias* of narrative fiction, in that sense. Its writing invokes the end of painting or the death of the painter–as a poststructuralist critic might infer from my inability to remember the substance, the color, tone, light, texture, and composition of the painted images.

Footnotes

1. Vernon Fisher, quoted in Miranda McClintic, *Directions 1981* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1981), p. 44.

Johannes Birringer is a theater director and video artist. He was director of Invisible Cities, *a multi-media performance work at Lawndale in November.*

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

By Lynn M. Herbert

Dick Arentz: Platinum and Palladium Photographs *was an exhibition shown in Gallery X at the Houston Center for Photography, November 11 - December 31, 1989.*

Dick Arentz has been on the road the past two years traveling in Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia and Arkansas. He uses a large format (12" x 20") Schwing & Folmer banquet camera and then contact prints the negatives to make platinum and palladium prints; Arentz isn't the type to buy film at the airport or go on a trip without some notion of what he's looking for. Walking through his exhibition at the Houston Center for Photography, one could see that Arentz was still seeking out traditional landscapes with awe-inspiring potential when put through his masterful printing process. Yet, upon closer examination, one could also see that Arentz's eye had done a bit of straying into new territory.

Technique is very important to Arentz as it would have to be for anyone with the patience to pursue his painstaking process. His more traditional landscapes have a romance and poetry about them that is reminiscent of 19th century photography. In "Dogwoods #1, Bernheim, KY," thousands of sparkling white flowers dance against a background of dark trunks showing off platinum's expansive tonal range. In "Bog III, Thomas, WV", a forest cloaked in fog becomes so otherworldly and omnipotent that even Stephen King would be hard pressed to create an inhabitant for it. And "Cumberland Falls, KY," becomes picturesque with its smooth velvety water and seemingly endless detail of trees and rock formations. Even ardent cynics could find poetry in nature in these prints.

Arentz is best known for his "pure" landscapes, but in recent years, he has also made note of the numerous ways in which man is inflicting himself on nature. He can be subtle as with the lone white fence quietly crossing the fields in "Pleasant Hill, KY," or with the "Tim-N-Diane" and "Susie + Stephen" type graffiti scribbled on the roadside cliff in "Route 77, KY." He can also be less than subtle as in "Mozelle, KY" where a house not only has a satellite dish square in the front yard, but that satellite dish has a large Jesus painted in it with the message, "He is praying for you. Cast all your cares on him." Other nature invaders include a basketball court pushing a forest back and a miniature golf course of poured concrete in the middle of a wood. Lest we lose all hope, nature can also be seen fighting back as in "Wall, Pocohontas, VA," in which a tireless vine has climbed story after story over the years to cover much of the Coca Cola advertisement painted on the side of a brick building.

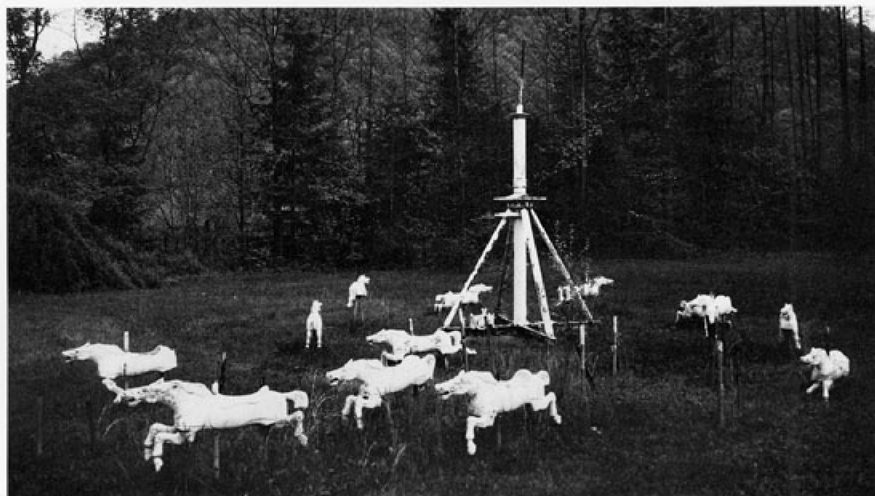
These photographs of nature-at-her-most-glorious and man-doing-battle-with-nature comprise most of the exhibition, but a few additional images suggest that Arentz may be headed in a new direction. In these images he seems to be more free-wheeling and less of a slave to his large format camera and printing technique. The results are images that combine nature and that which is man-made, but in a new surreal way. In "Gabbard Farm, AR," hundreds of glowing white turkeys are swarming about in the crowded confines of their commercial pen. It is a startling and puzzling image. And, at first glance, "Olive Branch #2, IL" looks like another Arentz landscape: more trees along another waterfront. Yet a closer look reveals two pumpkin-headed ghosts swinging from the branches and a lone mask tucked in the gnarls of a trunk. All kinds of questions arise in the viewer's mind as is so often the case with surrealism. These two images are more intriguing than the more predictably surreal "Starland Drive-In, WV" with its abandoned carrousel horses scattered in a field. Yet, "Starland" serves as a logical transition from the more conventionally Arentz man-doing-battle-with-nature images into the world of the surreal.

It is encouraging to see Arentz going in this new direction. His technique is so burdensome that it all too often seems to stagnate artists, leading them to comfortably repeat themselves endlessly. In his new, more surreal work, Arentz's content is no longer reliant on his technique. Unlike the so-so landscapes that he transforms into glorious landscapes with his large format camera and platinum and palladium printing, the imagery in these surreal works is powerful enough to survive any of the quicker and easier ways to make photographs. How exciting it is to see Arentz finding a new powerful subject matter, and bringing his technical mastery with him.

Lynn M. Herbert is a photo historian living in Houston.

Dick Arentz, *Gabbard Farm, AR, 1988*

Dick Arentz, *Dogwoods, #1, Bernheim, KY, 1989*



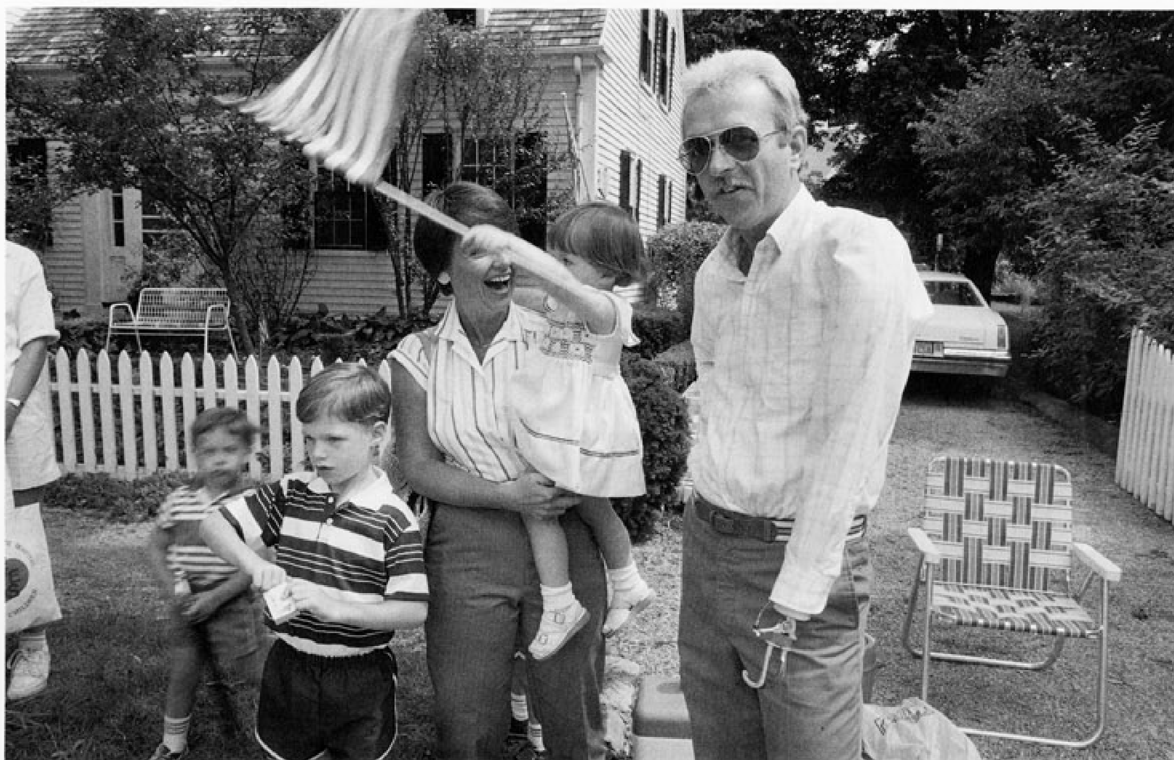
Dick Arentz, *Starland Drive-in*, WV, 1989

Dick Arentz, *Wall, Pocohontas, VA*, 1989

MOVING ON

By Joan Seeman Robinson

Janice Rogovin, Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: Photographs and Interviews with Seven Vietnam Veterans, *1988. Available through the Stonybrook Press, 26 Clive Street, Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, $8.95.*



Janice Rogovin, *James Kilroy, Hingham, MA, Fourth of July,* 1986

There's a saying about the look in the eyes of men who've burned out in combat. They have the "1000 yard stare." It's an utterly expressionless condition; wide-open eyes which look empty as though they're fixed on something indeterminate which is neither ahead nor behind them. David Douglas Duncan captured it in photographs of G.I.'s in the Korean War. The writer James Jones used Tom Lea's famous painting to illustrate it when he published his account of World War II. The "1000 yard stare" isn't about looking forward; it's about trauma that won't recede. In familiar jargon it's evidence of battle fatigue. In its persistent form it's an aspect of post-traumatic stress syndrome, stemming from combat experiences which are so harrowing, so unacceptable, and so irradiated in recollection that they halt time and evaporate distance. Past and present collapse as distinctions in this interiorized condition–sometimes intermittently and, all too often, fundamentally.

Fortunately most veterans survive the extreme psychic injuries of war and accommodate themselves in various ways to the inevitable return and the necessary adaptation to civilian life. There is no way that Janice Rogovin could have photographed the memories of the seven Vietnam veterans she interviewed for her small photo essay, *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: Photographs and Interviews with Seven Vietnam Veterans.* But she could record their past and their present objectively by interviewing and photographing them. Prompted by the frequent and well-publicized reports of the many returnees who have problems readapting, she visited a Veterans' Center in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, and spent time talking to the those who gather there. This is what vet centers are for–camaraderie, of course, but also to provide opportunities for communication about obstacles to effective reentry into and accommodation with civilian life. In Rogovin's publication, which she undertook unilaterally and markets herself,[1] the veterans' own narratives accompany each individual set of her photographs and typify what was most memorable and, it turns out, most perturbing about their service in Vietnam. Not all the recollections are of traumatic experiences, but that's not the basis for this account. For the most part, it's the pervasive and still indelible sense of disillusionment, handicap and loss these older veterans carry with them from tours of duty twenty years ago which have molded and still motivate them. Rogovin's photoessay should be interpreted in the context of these recountings, and the relationship they have to the images of the veterans as they look today.

The subjects are an infantryman who is now a detective in the Boston Police Department, an army nurse earning her doctorate in Human Services, a veteran from Puerto Rico who became a high school teacher, another who has since died of Agent Orange-related cancer, an ex-Marine with a degree in psychology who now organizes protests against U.S. intervention in Central America, another who returned to Vietnam to make the nationally acclaimed film, *A Separate Peace*, and a former machine gunner on an armored personnel carrier who has since become an amputee, again because of Agent Orange-related cancer.

The space between their stories and the photographs, both literally and temporally, is almost unbridgeable for the imagination. In most instances the two mediums are

Janice Rogovin, *Mantle, Ernest Washington's Mother's House,* February 1982

assigned to facing pages, which seems conceptually and expressively most effective because it affirms distance, setting up a tension between the invisible which is memory and the present which has superseded it. In others the format is altered and the two are integrated, diminishing, I feel, the separate strengths of the two histories. Each medium loses its impact and concentration in an effort perhaps to vary the visual character of the publication, or to illustrate that memory survives and sometimes dominates daily life obtrusively. Maybe I'm niggling: either set-up works for different reasons because what both the tesimonials and the images seek to invoke is of course intangible–the passage of real time and the durability of real pain. That's what Rogovin and we both attempt to reconstruct–and it is what the veterans themselves are clearly working to resolve.

In almost all the photographs the subjects are smiling and relaxing with spouses and children, and are at work or engaged in constructive community projects–helping young people, sponsoring a memorial service for a fellow veteran, organizing an anti-war demonstration. The images are black and white, crisp in definition, and photographed in clear daylight or well-illuminated interiors. Their horizontal formats allow for the full display of back yards, parks, offices and living rooms. In most cases, the subjects face the camera in attitudes of conviviality, confirming their comfort with the photographer, the supportive nature of her project, and their own positive commitment to getting on with their lives.

Knowing that they are Vietnam veterans affects our preception of these scenes, so that we seek the telling details. The detective wears a pistol over his floral sportshirt, and wears a walkie-talkie on his job, while standing next to posters of "wanted" criminals. The army nurse, secure in her backyard with her family (she was raped while on duty in Vietnam), is also photographed in her living room sitting next to a replica of a memorial to Vietnam nurses. A Puerto Rican veteran is surrounded by squads of little leaguers, or by ethnic minority high-schoolers the same age as draftees in the 60's. An Agent Orange victim lies on a hospital bed; another armless one on a family outing wears his prosthetic hook while his little girl waves an American flag. It's the apparent ordinariness of these lives with their slight vestiges of the military which persuades us. The cynicism, the rambling outrage, and the bitterness of their accompanying recollections work contrapuntally against the pristine lucidity of these photographs. This is a good will tour of the tracks of regeneration, tracks which sometimes seem tenuous but not darkly disturbing. These are the next-door neighbors who refrain from inflicting their war stories on us. Whatever their nightmares there's no evidence in this project of the random, compulsive shootings, sleepless nights, suicide attempts which haunt the nights and dark days of other less well-integrated survivors of the war, for whom the irrepressible character of traumatic experiences provokes daily battles like clockwork.[2]

Let Me Tell You Where I've Been seems effectively to assure us of the sometimes exceptional ability of some combat veterans to turn destructive and demoralizing experiences in socially beneficial directions. These subjects don't act like super-patriots, apologists or advocates for war, or emotional cripples deprived of psychic resources. This is an upbeat view of a basically downbeat history, a palatable presentation of volatile material. It reassures us that the world goes on, while attempting modestly to provoke us into imagining what we don't know and haven't experienced, and hopefully never will have to go through ourselves.

Footnotes

1. Janice Rogovin. *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been; Photographs and interviews with Seven Vietnam Veterans*, 1988 (available through the Stonybrook Press, 26 Clive Street, Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, $8.95).
2. See *Vietnam; The Battle Comes Home; a Photographic Record of post-Traumatic Stress with Selected Essays*. Photographs by Gordon Bear. Edited by Nancy Howell-Koehler. (Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 145 Palisade Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York. 1984).

Joan Seeman Robinson is a Visiting Scholar at the Menil Collection. She is writing a book on the effect of the Vietnam War on the visual arts in the United States from 1963-75.

BOOKS

JOCKS AND NERDS

By Ed Osowski

Richard Martin and Harold Koda, Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century. *New York: Rizzoli, 1989, 224 pages.*

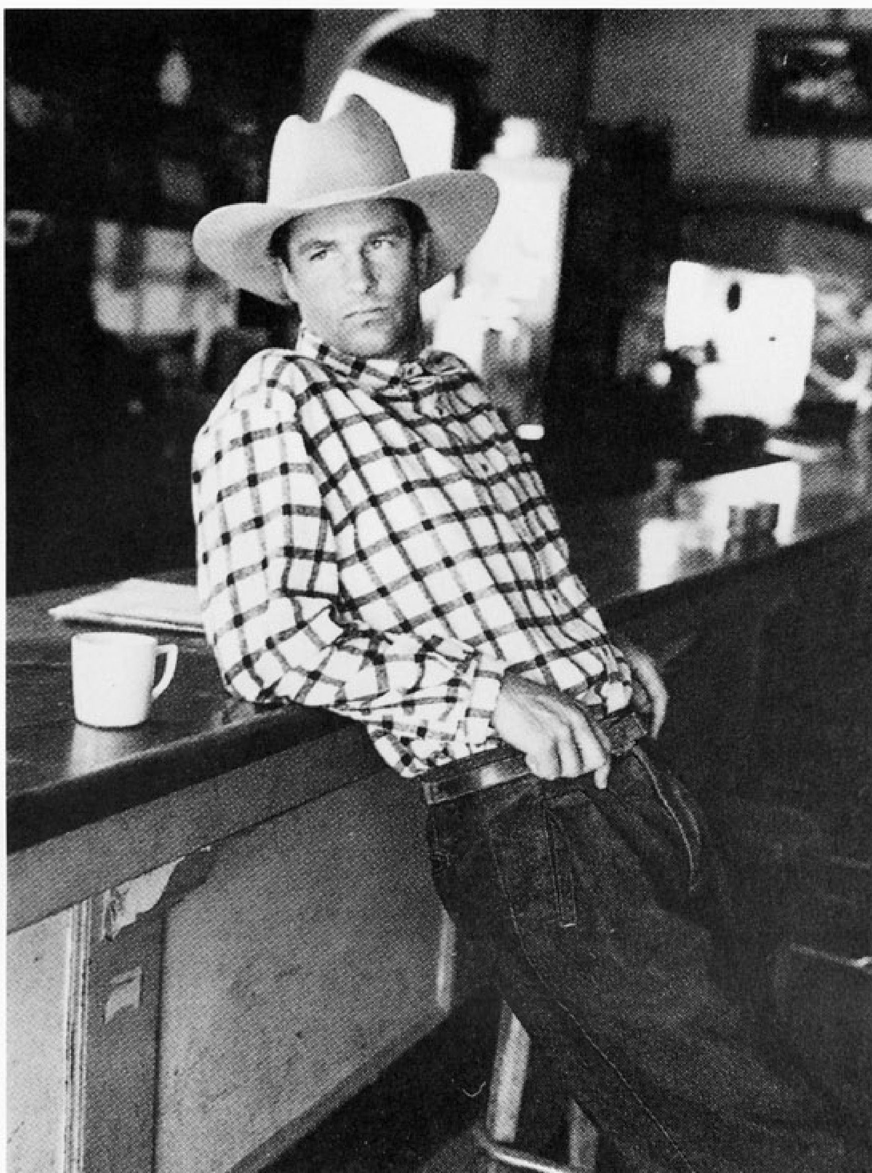
The concern for the specific "look" of pieces of fabric–woven, then designed, shaped, and sewn into wearing apparel–is a distinctly Western phenomenon, and also representative of certain middle-class priorities and aspirations.[1] It requires the luxury of time and money, in other words, the freedom from the controlling concerns of food and shelter, to allow one to care about fashions and about the clothes that cover one's body.

For men, the concern has traditionally taken on sexual meanings as well. For, with the exception of Hollywood personalities, whose ability to maintain their positions as public icons depends on their frequent appearances in the press in clothing that enhances their appeal to society's appetite for the romantic or the adventurous, taking a keen interest in clothes has been a task better left to one's wife (whether she was choosing items for herself or for her partner). Or, the concern was a sign that one was homosexual and, in the stereotyped language of the heterosexual majority, was free of the restraints imposed by wife and family, and possessed the time and money to buy those pieces of apparel that would most enhance one's image as a desirable sexual object. To quote Anne Hollander, what mattered less was the covering than the powerful images and metaphors connected with the style of that covering. Clothes, she writes, "are objects made of fabric that convey messages beyond the power of the cloth itself to convey."[2] They are "the potential elements of created fiction, conveying sophistication, sexual allure, power, and austerity,"[3] all dependent on the role (the fiction) the wearer chooses to project.

Richard Martin and Harold Koda's *Jocks and Nerds* is the catalogue of an exhibition, organized at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, where they both teach, that traces the development of male fashion in the twentieth century. Its illustrations are drawn principally from advertising sources, magazine pages, Hollywood publicity stills, and formal portraits. But its subtext is greater than the above summary. For their book substantiates Hollander's claims. The two authors write:

Conventional wisdom has it that men dress to be conventional, but those with insight into male dress might hold that men dress to realize dreams, to be themselves through being someone other than themselves.[4]

Martin and Koda divide their discussion among twelve types, the two named in the title, and ten others: the worker, rebel, cowboy, military man, hunter, sportsman, Joe College, businessman, man about town, and dandy. There is considerable overlap (and confusion) in their effort to maintain these distinctions. They call these twelve types "identities," suggesting that there is some authentic psychological truth behind each type (and style) and the man who chooses that look. One is passionate or holds his emotions in tightly, is a team player or possesses an ego that thrives on a sense of being unique, is concerned with power and prestige or is free from such restraints. But, in truth, each style is a fiction, a creation. Each is a willed and deliberate choice of a look that betrays how antithetical to the notion of psychological "identities" these looks actually are.



Lance Staedler, *image for advertisement for The Gap Workforce clothing,* 1987

How inauthentic style is becomes clearest in the chapter titled "The Worker." From a 1987 series of advertising photographs prepared for The Gap clothing store chain by Lance Staedler, they select three examples (pp. 54-5). Men, all handsome, young, and innocent, pose in blue jeans, denim shirts, and Stetson hats. The principal photograph featues a male and female couple, two mythic creatures who, in their youth and innocence, seem to exist in a world before corruption and echo connections with the first couple, Adam and Eve. Behind them the land vanishes into endless possibilities. That this couple has never "worked" at anything more difficult than posing for the photographer is apparent. His shirt is freshly creased, his hat new. And she, despite the leather work glove on her left hand, with which she tentatively touches the man (and demonstrates who in this couple possesses the power and makes the decisions), has knotted a silk scarf around her neck.

Dorothea Lange, *Cafe near Pinole, California,* 1956

The Gap series is especially interesting because it actually used a classic Dorothea Lange photograph ("Cafe near Pinhole, California, 1956," p. 54) to introduce it and, ostensibly, to set its tone. The Gap photographs are romantic images that try to suggest that the wearer of these products will assume the freedom, purity, and determination that we associate with the outdoor worker.

In Lange's image her subject wears clothes similar to those worn by Staedler's models: a man, in jeans, work shirt, and black cowboy hat, sits at a bar. But, if his clothing could be called props, his context belies any connection between Lange's work and Staedler's. A juke-box, coin-operated wall telephone, and cigarette machine fill three-fourths of the space and capture sharply the most visible light in the the photograph. Advertising slogans hang from the walls behind him. Lange has photographed in a dark, inky light; in fact, at the photograph's center is a large rectangle of blackness. Lange's subject waits–for the telephone to ring, for the juke-box to play, for something or some person to enter and interrupt his isolation. Her photograph is heavy with silence and loneliness. In Staedler's photograph that most closely resembles Lange's, the model is turned to us. He also waits, alone, at a bar, a coffee cup to his right. But his languid pose and pensive demeanor are not the signs one reads in Lange's photograph, whose worker wonders if he will have a job tomorrow, who, like the antecedents in Lange's WPA photographs, faces the loss of his farm. The greatest risk Staedler's models face is losing the crease in their clothes. Only the most naive reader of Staedler's work will fail to see that the models and the clothes are all pose, all style, all fiction.

From the same chapter comes Michael Disfarmer's "Three Working Men, 1940" (p. 48). Martin and Koda describe it this way:

Michael Disfarmer's photographic chronicle of the men in the small Southern town of Haber Springs, Arkansas, during the Second World War is an essay in style. On this occasion, although the men are not at work, they are dressed for it. The figure at left wears true work clothing, but the others are literally "white collar" workers. Their clothes equalize the effect, however, in the informality of their rolled cuffs, open collars, and unpressed style.[6]

Juxtaposed with Disfarmer's photograph is Herb Ritts' "Body Shop: Fred, 1984" (p. 49). Fred appears to be a worker in a car repair shop. But he is, it is clear, no worker in the ordinary sense of the word; he certainly is not employed at the shops where our automobiles are repaired. Rather, chains draped across his bared enormous and well-muscled back, leather bands tightened on his wrists, his coverall unbuttoned, his leather apron hanging loosely (and uselessly) behind him,[7] Fred is employed in the "body shop" of homosexual longing and fantasy. His pinkie ring is, perhaps, the tell-tale clue that Fred's work consists of developing his body into an object that can fuel homoerotic fantasies. Disfarmer's three workers face us squarely, each man conveying his own level of ease at baring his soul to us. Ritts' Fred, his face turned from us, leaves reality behind for the dwelling place of fantasy.[8]

Just how removed Ritts' photograph is from any real effort to convey authentically the look of a "worker" is made clear by considering Lewis Hine's 1921 "Mechanic and Steam Pump" in the recent exhibition, *Experimental Photography: The Machine Age* at

Herb Ritts, *Body Shop: Fred*, 1984

the Getty Museum. Hine's subject is dressed appropriately for his work. And, while his body is well developed, he does not show any more of it than "correctly" wearing his clothes will allow. Bent at a ninety degree angle, he holds a massive wrench in his hands and fastens a bolt on a large circular device behind him. Hine is not beyond using the mechanical shape behind the man to function metaphorically: the large metal circle acts like a halo, elevating this worker to the level of a saint and conveying something of Hines' own belief in the dignity and sanctity of work. Ritts' metaphors are of a completely different sort.

Jocks and Nerds is especially exasperating because it contains no index to the photographers whose works are represented. So, while the list of well-respected practitioners of the art of fashion photography is long–Richard Avedon, Cecil Beaton, Amy Arbus, Bruce Weber, Irving Penn, Horst B. Horst, among others–there is no way to locate their work in this book. Frequently, an image that is discussed does not appear until several pages have passed. The authors' quotes are not footnoted and, at times, the source does not appear in the bibliography. And, in a work that features a large number of well-dressed personalities, a subject index would have been helpful as well.

As the recent exhibition, *The Art of Persuasion*, at the University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery demonstrated, to convince the buyer in a capitalist economy that she or he needs a new product, that a new shirt or perfume will transform the buyer's life, is one of the goals of advertising photography. Advertising and editorial photographs from sources like *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *Vogue Hommes*, *Esquire*, and M form the bulk of Martin and Koda's images. But they also rely heavily upon Hollywood publicity stills, many by unknown photographers, from the Kobal Collection. Apparently a very rich source for fashion images, the Kobal Collection is nowhere identified by the authors.

To be fair to Martin and Koda, *Jocks and Nerds* is not a history of the male fashion photograph. And expecting it to be such is to judge the book unfairly. As I wrote in my opening paragraphs, a hint of homosexual urges clings to any interest in the male fashion photograph. But it seems unmistakable that a photograph like "Joe Colby in Laurel Canyon" (p. 106), in which the subject has been photographed as if seen through a peephole camera, participates in some understated homosexual flavor that manages to survive in a book noteworthy for the images that it does *not* include. Discounting any editorial or copyright reasons that may have prevented the authors from using Bruce Weber's famous series for Calvin Klein underwear, for example, the book seems tame.

Unlike the history of female fashion photography, which is well-documented, the history of its male counterpart remains to be published. A surprising discovery *Jocks and Nerds* makes is that images never intended to illustrate fashions–portraits of Montgomery Clift (p. 117), J. Pierpont Morgan (p. 148), Winston Churchill (p. 150), Henry Luce (p. 151), and Jean Cocteau (pp. 170-171), to cite several examples–are among the sharpest in their documentary and metaphoric qualities in the book.

What Martin and Koda have compiled is a fascinating, if at times wrong-headed, collection of photographs, linked by a text that is, at times, obvious and elementary. Vanity, of course, lies behind the notion of adorning the body. And it is the original source of that word, from the Latin "*vanitas*," which remains to be fully explored. In the secularization of culture which marks this century, buying goods has essentially replaced efforts to achieve grace. And, like their use by the ancient Egyptians, acquiring goods has also become a way to deny the onslaught of age and, ultimately, to deny death. The fashion photograph, in service to the world of advertising, can only afford to confront indirectly the corruptibility of the flesh. Other messages–its encoding of "values" like strength, sexual desirability and power, heroism, violence – form a subtle web around the male fashion image. Clothing is rhetorical and, to quote Hollander one last time, speaks a "poetic language" in which shapes are "unfunctional but symbolic."[9] The strength and appeal of fashion photography lie in its language of metaphor and meaning, in its ability to reveal persuasively the spirit of its times, the personality of its subject, and, most difficult to assess, the desires of its viewers.

Footnotes

1. Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968/1978), p. 90.
2. Hollander, p. 2.
3. Hollander, p. 5.
4. Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Jocks and Nerds* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 9.
5. Martin and Koda, p. 7.
6. Martin and Koda, p. 48.
7. Hollander calls such decorative use of clothing, removed from its ordinary purpose, "unfunctional but symbolic and decorative" (p. 17), with "no logical genesis" (p. 72). The apron, no longer used to protect the body, becomes drapery that adds "the flavor of luxury" to what should be an austere representation (p. 37).
8. In Ritts' matching photograph of Fred, "Fred with Tires" (not illustrated in Jocks and Nerds), Fred has turned to the camera. The chains replaced by a large medallion that hangs on his chest, his arms bulge as he holds a tire in each hand. His hair, we can now see, has been artfully "disarranged." His torso is turned in a baroque and revealing twist. He averts his eyes from the viewer because to confront us directly would break the magic spell of his sexual allure, an issue Disfarmer's three men do not face. Martin and Koda's reading of the Ritts photograph is almost humorous in its effort to sanitize the obvious content of the image. They write, "In this case a standing figure, his body bare from the waist up, achieves mythic presence through his physical energy and his pose, as well as through his clothing–his leather apron, coveralls, and heavy boots–which establish a continuity with the world of work" (p. 46). Ritts has now been employed by The Gap to produce a series, featuring "real" people (New York writers, actors, designers, editors) who, while wearing the relatively inexpensive clothes The Gap sells, nevertheless are clothed with coolness, romance, and some intellectual élan.
9. Hollander, p. 29.

Ed Osowski is employed by the Houston Public Library system. A frequent writer in ***SPOT***, *he also occasionally reviews books for the* Houston Post.

BOOKS

SPHINX AND SPECTACLE

By Cynthia Freeland

Laura Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures. *Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. 201 + xvi pp., 13 b&w plates. $12.50 (paper).*

Laura Mulvey is an activist British feminist, avant-garde filmmaker, theorist, and critic whose 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has been described as "the founding document of psychoanalytic feminist film theory."[1] Renowned for its analysis of the pleasure of the *gaze* (ascribed primarily to the male viewer) and of the nature of *spectacle* (it is primarily woman who serves as visual object and fetish–as "bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning"), "VP & NC" has been much discussed and reprinted and has had a profound effect on feminist art criticism. Mulvey's analysis, which is set out primarily via a description of fetishism in Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*, has also been frequently challenged–for being too dualistic and simplistic, for neglecting to describe particularly *female* pleasures in looking, for inaccurate use of Freud's descriptions of voyeurism and fetishism, or for failing to understand Hitchcock's use of the actor and the camera.[2] Hence it is useful to have the original essay "VP & NC" reprinted in this book in the context of the author's other essays of the time, together with some significantly distinct "Afterthoughts" from 1981.

Visual and Other Pleasures includes 15 essays originally written between 1971 and 1986. (Of these, three were co-authored.) In addition to "VP & NC" and the "Afterthoughts" on it, the book includes two other more recent theoretical articles, along with various critical pieces on film and photography. In these Mulvey discusses such themes as melodrama and the avant-garde in film, and such artists as Douglas Sirk, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Jean-Luc Godard, Mary Kelly, Victor Burgin, and Barbara Kruger. These review essays, though they contain some interesting observations, are for the most part relatively short occasional pieces prompted by a particular film or exhibition; they tend not to be very ambitious or to take on major critical dimensions. By far the best, most interesting of the critical pieces is a catalog essay co-written with Peter Wollen (also Mulvey's collaborator in filmmaking) for a 1983 exhibition of works by Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti.[3] My own remarks will focus on "Afterthoughts" and on Mulvey's more recent theoretical pieces.

In her "Afterthoughts" on "VP & NC" Mulvey attempts to shift attention from her earlier focus on the male spectator and to take up consideration of the pleasure of a female spectator of film. However, she limits her discussion to the narrow category of Hollywood melodramas depicting an active female protagonist who must choose between her own

Thomas
PHOTOLAB

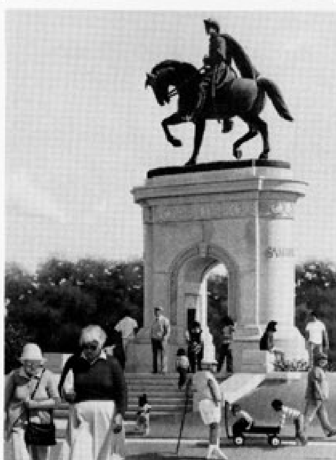
A PROFESSIONAL, FRIENDLY FULL SERVICE PHOTO LAB
952-0315

3939 Hillcroft Suite 115
Hours: M-F 8:30-5:00 PM
SAT 9:00-1:00 PM

Butera's For Lunch.

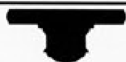
Saluting FotoFest '90 & Photography

West Alabama at South Shepherd (713) 528-1500



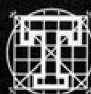
The Greening of Houston

For the past 14 years a private nonprofit corporation has worked to preserve and improve green space in Houston. The Houston Parks Board believes a strong parks system means a high quality of life and a strong plus for Houston's economic development. This year, the Parks Board is joining the National Celebration of the Outdoors in commemorating the 20th anniversary of Earth Day by pledging to create a world-class parks system in Houston before the year 2000. Please join this celebration and pledge your help. Call 845-1036 for information about how you can be a part of the "Greening of Houston."



MAC
MAC
MAC

Ready for Desktop Publishing?
Classes, workshops, and private lessons on the fabled Macintosh computer.
Crossley&Pogue
523-5757



Typografiks, Inc.

Typographical and Prepress Services
4701 Nett Houston, Texas 77007 (713) 861-2290

Photo by Larry Gatz. All imaging and special effects were accomplished using specialized computer graphics hardware and software. Processing was performed by a Linotype Raster Image Processor and a single high resolution negative was output via a Linotype L-300. No manual stripping was required.

autonomy and sexual freedom and the norms of prescribed femininity. Mulvey sees parallels between such a protagonist and the female viewer, who vacillates in her own pleasure in the movie between "active/male" and "passive/female" roles (p. 30). This essay (like "VP & NC") is heavily weighted with Freudian theory; the female spectator who revels in identification with an active female protagonist is said to have a "masculine identification, in its phallic aspect ...[which] reactivates for her a fantasy of 'action' that correct femininity demands should be repressed" (p. 37).

"Afterthoughts" is a relatively short essay which makes brief and somewhat scattered reference to *Duel in the Sun* and *Stella Dallas*. This essay is frustratingly inadequate as a reply to critics of "VP & NC." It is disappointing that Mulvey does not directly respond to a variety of published criticisms of her original essay. For example, Marian Keane has very persuasively described *Vertigo* as a *critique* of the male hero, the Jimmy Stewart character, and as a representation of his passivity and inability to recognize his own desires.[4] Or, Stanley Cavell has independently developed a quite complex theory of the presence of actors in film that emphasizes the passivity of certain specific actors–notably Cary Grant or Gary Cooper–within 30's and 40's comedies of remarriage; Cavell argues that this passivity represents the hero's desires for and openness to both female film characters and viewers; he seems to provide an alternative and plausible account of pleasures of female spectatorship of such films.[5]

By focusing on 50's melodrama Mulvey leaves us guessing about what she would say about the female spectator's enjoyment of the new genre of mainstream, successful Hollywood films with active (and even sexually or economically exploitative) female protagonists (*Gorillas in the Mist*, *Working Girl*, *Bull Durham*...). It is also frustrating that Mulvey never registers awareness of a variety of socialist/feminist critiques of psychoanalysis as a theory devised to describe European–white, bourgeois–society.[6] This theory seems to presuppose a nuclear family structure which is now far from standard, and to recognize a filmic world with only one kind of oppression–sexism. Hence neither "VP & NC" nor "Afterthoughts" provide theoretical assistance in approaching and analyzing conventionally narrative films with pretensions towards socio-political commentary, the representation of minorities, or of other forms of oppression (e.g. Spike Lee's movies)–or even patriotic jingoistic movies of the *Indiana Jones/Rambo* variety.

Melodrama is a genre particularly associated with the kind of vacillating female pleasure Mulvey has in mind, and in Chapter 8, "Melodrama Inside and Outside the Home," she traces links between Hollywood filmed melodrama and earlier vaudeville and nineteenth-century melodrama. This essay (published in 1986) provides useful historical information, but it presents an account of television's threat to cinema which seems to date from the 1950's. We are left to generate our own conclusions about the quite complex relations which exist between television and Hollywood now in the age of cable TV and the VCR. This essay closes with some extremely broad generalizations about the teenager's new spending power as a threat to the housewife/mother's power of commodity consumption (p. 76).

The theme of the sphinx, curiosity, and the feminine first appears in Mulvey's Introduction (p. x) and prevails in later writings in the book. Mulvey attempts to move beyond the dualism of her earlier work–which made simplistic link-ups between male/ active/looker and female/passive/spectacle–not so much because she regards these polarities as wrong as because they were stultifying: "There is a sense in which this argument [from "VP & NC"] ... hinders the possibility of change and remains caught ultimately within its own dualistic terms." (p. 162). To attempt to provide a more complex account of women which will allow for their being active, Mulvey plays with a traditional view of women as simultaneously curious and riddles–both active seekers/inquirers and strange, unfathomable enigmas. She proposes that *curiosity* may stand as a fundamental feminine drive in parallel to fetishism as a male drive. It is "a source of danger and pleasure and knowledge" (p. x).

Mulvey has been fascinated by the sphinx at least since her 1976-7 film *Riddles of the Sphinx*. The sphinx serves as core symbolization for Mulvey's new picture of woman for several reasons–because of her position as powerful riddler as well as her links to the Oedipal tale. Mulvey discusses both Oedipus and sphinx in detail in the book's final chapter "The Oedipus Myth: Beyond the Riddles of the Sphinx" (1986/7). She describes this tale as a paradigm narrative of patriarchy: it tells the story of a young man's desires and conflicts, of his own increasing awareness of them; and it leads eventually to a resolution involving the formation of an orderly society with clear structures of inheritance (so she interprets Sophocles' sequel to *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*). In solving his riddles Oedipus must resolve his own feelings: "Curiosity and the riddling spirit of the sphinx activate questions that open up the closures of repression" (p. 200).

The sphinx belongs to the little-known prehistory of the Oedipal tale, which Mulvey would like us to take as a model of contemporary men's own pre-Oedipal phase and as a kind of western cultural pre-history as well. Oedipus' real father, Laius, was punished by the great mother goddess Hera for his abuse of a host's hospitality (actually he abducted and raped his host's son); in retribution, Hera sent the sphinx to ravage Thebes. Mulvey thus regards the Oedipus story as paradigmatic in another way because it builds upon repressed homosexual desires for, and violence against, the original father[7] (she even links Oedipus in this sense to the young male protagonist of *Blue Velvet*, with his fascination/repulsion for the father figure played by Dennis Hopper in the film).

Now, one might suppose that since Mulvey regards narrative as a culturally prescribed form which tells of the conflicts and resolution appropriate to a male hero,

Sphinx from Olympia

she would reject it altogether. But instead she champions experimentation with narrative. She argues that feminist filmmakers cannot pursue one potential avant-garde path of eschewing narrative altogether: "Feminism is bound to its politics; experimentation cannot exclude work on content" (p. 124). Noting that the basic structure of any narrative is tripartite–it moves from opening stasis to some disruptive action and then back into stasis as it reaches closure–Mulvey hopes that this will allow feminists some room to move beyond simple dualisms.[8] She now sees some of her own techniques in her earlier films as too limited by their inscription in a dualistic/oppositional stance. They used various methods to counter the traditional expectations of filmed narrative.

> *These strategies, however, depend on acknowledging the dominant codes in the very act of negation itself; it could only be through an audience's knowledge of the dominant that the avant-garde could acquire meaning and significance.* (p. 164)

Instead, Mulvey now emphasizes the middle stage of narrative in which there is mystery, disruption, pursuit of knowledge, and the absence of closure. She refers to this as the stage of the Sphinx, of riddles and "liminality" (existing outside boundaries of ordinary experience). She compares an individual's occupation of this phase to that of a culture by talking about the role of carnivals, prescribed periods permitting eruption beyond usual norms and laws. According to Mulvey, when an individual or culture is liminal it can win self-knowledge and change– and thus it resembles someone seeking self-knowledge through psychoanalytic practice, which also emphasizes open narratives (p. 195). In general, she writes, it has been a goal of feminism "to inflect the way in which our society narrativises itself" (p. 199).

As theoretical constructs the notions of riddling, liminality, and unclosed narratives serve Mulvey effectively in her own criticism. For example, in her 1983 essay "Dialogue with

Tina Modotti, *Pregnant Mother and Child*, Oaxaca, c. 1929

Spectatorship" reviewing work by Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin (Ch. 11) she emphasizes these artists' ability to bring the pleasure of active interpretation–of mystery and unsolved narratives–to their works. Both artists refuse simplistic male/female dualisms by revealing masculinity as itself a type of masquerade, one with cracks and vulnerabilities.

In part what I admire about the catalog essay on Kahlo and Modotti is the authors' efforts to locate both artists within the time period and culture in which they practiced. The authors discuss the importance of the Mexican setting in terms of the Revolution, the "Mexican Renaissance" and its reclamation of Mayan heritage, and folk art traditions. They refuse to succumb to overly neat and simplistic contrasts between Kahlo and Modotti's very different sorts of "feminist aesthetics" (one supposedly emphasizing the "private," one the "public"). They argue that both women's art has a female specificity of one sort because it is based in their bodies. For Kahlo this involved the parallels she painted between martyrdom and emblematic art and her own acute physical suffering, or between female masquerade and nature seen as a construct of signs. For Modotti it involved a continuing effort to reverse the *look* directed at her (not least by Edward Weston, her photographic mentor) because of her beauty. Mulvey and Wollen describe her as using, but ultimately failing to move beyond, the formalist aesthetic she adopted from Weston to record the politically laden messages she wished to transmit

concerning the oppression of women and peasants.

Still, there is a real question whether this or similar critical essays require the theoretical burden of Mulvey's later pieces. These combine an unquestioning reliance on psychoanalytic theory with its bold generalizations (and jargon) with a strange tentativeness about actual social implications:

Patriarchy is founded on rites and rights of inheritance and exchange of women that neutralise a neurotic, violent father/son rivalry and establish the basis for a symbolic order. But perhaps this symbolic depends shakily on the repression of the primal, pre-Oedipal father so that culture continues to be tinged with violence and institutions that claim to be guardians of the law and defence against chaos are maintained by the violence that lies behind patriarchal authority... Perhaps even this lack of cultural recognition is significant, returning rather in symptomatic social and sexual anxieties that afflict our society (p. 199).

Is it really plausible to think that hysteria over the flag or the crucifix displayed in a bottle of urine stem from repressed homophobic desire for, and rage against, a primal father? I am dubious about whether patriarchy's more recent and visible forms of repression (new threats to abortion rights, free expression, etc.) can best be illuminated by a psychoanalytic approach or combated by a kind of feminist art using alternative narratives which emphasize curiosity and refusal of closure.

Though Mulvey considers herself a materialist (and she uses, for example, relatively unknown materialist analyses by Soviet folklorist Victor Propp to study Oedipal narratives),[9] the real base of all her filmmaking, criticism, and theory remains psychoanalysis. In this book the reader will find no discussions of how psychoanalysis helps illuminate or provide a basis for concrete reactions to the disasters Thatcherism has created for British art schools and universities, increased censorship and threats to artistic freedom in both Britain or America, commodification and the "Saatchi factor" in the art market, or the new management policy of firing curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Explaining in her Introduction why she has now chosen to publish a variety of articles on diverse subjects, including some originally published anonymously and some she herself "perceived as ephemeral" (p. vii), Mulvey writes that perhaps they can be seen as documents of aspects of the women's movement. She seems to feel a curious and ambivalent nostalgia for this movement which by the early 1980's "no longer existed as an organisation" (p. 159). She alludes to the "utopian" dimensions of previous feminist theory and to its inability to reconcile theory and practice (p. xiv). Though her activism extended to such practices as intervening in the "Miss World" beauty pageant (see Essay 1, "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970"), Mulvey may now consider that she herself was too preoccupied with theory. In a particularly telling confession she observes, "Looking back from the late 1980's, it seems as though deeply important changes were engulfing society while I was looking elsewhere, at the cinema or at the unconscious" (p. xii).

Scene from film melodrama *Rebecca*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940 (Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive)

The problem of the value of truth came before us–or was it we who came before the problem? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks.

–*Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil[10]

Footnotes

1. Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York: Methuen Press, 1988).

2. See, for an example, Marian Keene's article "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and *Vertigo*," in *The Hitchcock Reader*, Ed. Marshall Dentelbaum and Leland Poaque (Iowa State University Press, 1986), pp. 231-148.

3. The exhibition was titled simply *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti*; it originated at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1983 and subsequently traveled to other sites in Europe, America, and Mexico.

4. Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1981). See also Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, revised and enlarged edition, 1979).

5. See Marian Keane (note 2 above).

6. My own view is that Mulvey and other psychoanalytically oriented feminist film (or art) critics should inform themselves about, and address, a variety of critiques of psychoanalysis (including Lacanian psychoanysis) published in recent years by, among others, analytic philosophers of science (Adolf Grünbaum, *The Philosophical Foundations of Psychoanalysis*); theorists of a deconstructive bent (Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," *Yale French Studies* 1975), radical psychiatrists (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*), socialist feminists (Ann Ferguson, *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance*), and feminist philosophers (see my own essay criticizing Lacan, "Woman: Revealed or Reveiled?" in *Hypatia, the Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 1986). Film theorists continue to assert that "psychoanalysis has shown... x, y, or z," revealing a naive and unfounded faith in the unanimity of "psychoanalysis"–an institution troubled in its short history by a remarkable series of expulsions, excommunications, and other denounced heterodoxies.

7. See, for another interest ing example, pp. 59-70 of Bernard Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*, Tr. by Arthur Goldhammer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986; originally published in France under the title *L'Homosexualité dans la mythologie grecque)*. Unlike Mulvey, who attempts to generate certain universal, cross-cultural truths from the Oedipal story, based on psychoanlysis, which purports to be a general theory of human nature, Sergent contextualizes Greek myths to the time period in which they were active and effective, a time period in which particular practices of pederasty–restricted to certain members of the upper-class–were deemed to be the norm. Sergent argues, on the basis of a comprehensive study of *all* major ancient Greek myths, that homosexuality plays a particular role in conjunction with pedagogy of a certain type. Thus, like Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, he would locate the significance of Greek homosexuality within a specific culture that does not even really have the same concept we have of homosexuality as a mode of orientation alternative to heterosexuality. It strikes me that a materialist analysis should take this route of relating myths and folktales to the social systems and ideologies of the culture that generated them, rather than to begin from some purportedly timeless and essentialist conception of human nature, its "drives," etc.

8. For a quite different feminist account of stasis as the unstable failure to move beyond simplistic dualisms–leading into hierarchies of value, see the intriguing account in Page duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982, Ch. VI.

9. Actually, materialism seems to have had no significant effect on Prapp's construal of narratives like Oedipus' (at least as Mulvey represents it). One can find a quite similar analysis in recent critical studies of Greek mythology and folklore that have no materialist underpinnings (e.g., the work of Vernant or that of Sergent; see n. 7 above).

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part One, Section 1, translated by Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1968), p. 199.

Cynthia Freeland, SPOT *Editor, is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston. She has recently completed an article for the collection* Critical Feminist Essays on the History of Western Philosophy *(SUNY Press, 1990, Bat-Ami Bar On, Ed.).*

One Works

Houston's only complete desktop publishing and pre-press service.

At One Works everything between design and printing happens under one roof: desktop publishing; typesetting; color separation; black and white scanning; slide production. Our hardware/software capabilities are the most extensive in our field, and we offer installation, service, training and support, plus radio dispatched pickup and delivery with 24–hour production.

If you want to know how One Works works, just make one call. We'll do the rest.

2501A Central Parkway Phone: 683-6666
Fax: 681-6501

DALI COSTUMES, PARIS, 1939. COURTESY OF JANE CORKIN GALLERY, TORONTO

One Fashion Legend Salutes Another.

In conjunction with FotoFest '90, the Galleria is pleased to present the first American retrospective of the life works of famed fashion photographer Horst P. Horst.

HORST AT THE GALLERIA

FEBRUARY 10 TO MARCH 10

Galleria II, level 3 south

Neiman Marcus, Lord & Taylor, Marshall Field's, Macy's and more than 300 legendary shops. Westheimer at Post Oak. 713/621-1907.

RESPONDING TO THE MOST DEMANDING PHOTOGRAPHER
NPL
THE COMPLETE RESOURCE
IN PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY
1926 WEST GRAY . HOUSTON . 713-527-9300
© Jeff DeBevec