



Cristina García Rodero

FOTOFEST 1990



If a picture is worth 1,000 words—then here are 10,000 reasons for you to call us.

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GETTING FOCUSED

At a recent retreat of the Houston Center for Photography, board members were asked to list what they thought were the three most important objectives for the long-term vitality of the Center. In addition to exhibitions and membership, SPOT grabbed a share at the top with a heartwarming round of votes.

As unique a publication as SPOT is, it is good news to know HCP will continue to dedicate resources to SPOT. It is reassuring for those who have labored over the years to produce such a fine publication.

SPOT will undergo inevitable changes, some already begun, but through it all will surely retain its national reputation as a respected and beloved forum of imagery and analysis.

The current edition of SPOT focuses on FotoFest '90, originally scheduled for publication last summer. Chasing the heels of cultural evolution in eastern Europe, FotoFest '90 truly lived up to its name as the international month of photography. Lynn Herbert, the first executive director of HCP, has generously provided her expertise to edit the issue. We hope you enjoy it.

Jeff Debevec

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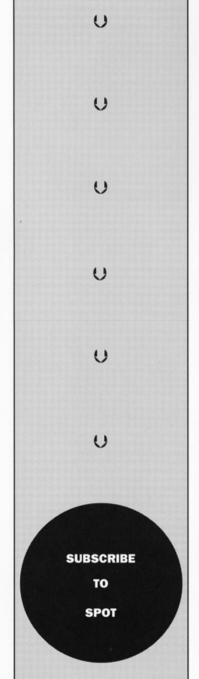
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STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

By Dave Crossley

There he was with his camera over his shoulder as usual, bathing in the atmosphere of the Benteler-Morgan Gallery opening several days into FotoFest.

of the Benteler-Morgan Gallery opening several days into FotoFest.

"Hey," he said, "Seen enough pictures yet?"
Enough pictures? What could that mean?
"No," I answered, "How could I see enough pictures?"

"Man, I have. My brain is just throbbing!"
"But isn't that what it's supposed to do? Or are you looking for zero wave action in there?"

Why do people always talk about too many photographs? How can there be too many photographs? What does that mean?

Okay, maybe there were too many photographs at FotoFest '90 in the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston in February. Maybe 2,500 or 3,000 or 17,000 prints on 280 32-foot long white walls in one gigantic room is a few too many for your average gallery-goer. I haven't looked at the records yet, but maybe 1.67 miles of photographs is the wrong way to measure these things. But what do you expect from Fred Baldwin, FotoFest's co-founder and full-time volunteer visionary? Everything with him is always the World's Biggest Longest Widest Fastest Firstest Weirdest FotoFestest and that's just the way he is. There wouldn't be any FotoFest if he wasn't that way. How many granting agencies, national governments, world-class curators and critics are going to jump into A Mid-size Mediocre Not Bad Little Picture Show? But FotoFest, ah, well, it had 263 curators, critics, collectors, and other big-names from all over the world right in the middle of it, bowled over by it, singing its praises and sometimes cursing its weirdness. Fred Baldwin at play on the world stage, a big guy with a long reach and, you guessed it, an excess of Vision. Too many images indeed.

Here is the biggest photography event in the



Installation view of FotoFest at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Photo © Houston Chronicle

history of time, 28 exhibitions in a new convention center, another 75 or so exhibitions in galleries and museums around the city, dozens of lectures, workshops, performances, and guided tours, as well as a fair and a publishing conference, all held in collaboration with AIPAD, Women in Journalism, and the Professional Photographers Guild of Houston. And at the heart of it, The Meeting Place, physically a big open sunny space on the second floor of the George R. Brown Convention Center, spiritually a dream come true for dozens of eager photographers who have a chance to show their work to as many of those 263 meeting place reviewers from all the dream places on earth that they can stand in two weeks. Guys like Bruce Gilden, who came to FotoFest two years ago and wound up with a string of exhibitions and sold a bunch of prints right on the spot. Back again in 1990, now a Meeting Place pro who's learned the ropes, beat the system, even won the Book Award at the Publishing Conference. Hey, you could base an entire career on contacts and deals made at FotoFest every two years. You could have more shows in more exotic places than you ever imagined. You could be an international star, rich and famous, with

catalogs raisonnee and lifetime retrospectives and a Place in History. You could do it! Just go to the Meeting Place every couple of years, pay your fifty bucks, and talk to Helmut Gernsheim, Arthur Ollman, Jean-Luc Monterosso, and Colin Ford and let them light that candle. You could do it!

A lot of people do, and now George Krause, who did some reviewing, thinks maybe it's gotten too professional. People have learned how to beat the system, they push each other out of line, they make it rough on the a teurs, the lovers, the young and timid; it's horrible, all these sweating pros jockeying for position and fame and riches. The pros complain a lot, too, not happy about anything. They don't like the crassness of it all, they don't like the way the exhibitions downstairs are laid out, they don't like the choices of exhibitions, they don't like the signage, they don't like the lack of labels, they don't like the Styrofoam walls, they don't like the huge ring of Styrofoam monoliths-Foamhenge-that defines the center of the whole thing, they don't like the generous people who have par-ties for visitors every night, hell, they don't like Houston, they don't like Fred, what do these people want? Did they complain before there was a FotoFest? Had they always known about it in their fevered professional brains? Was it always supposed to be perfect? It's an incredible opportunity, an incredible display of talent, an exhausting, overwhelming, mind-boggling, all that kind of stuff, experience. It makes you crazy

Well. I had to know about that excess for myself, so I started at the beginning, right next to the birthing tunnel, the Sea of Sperm that squirts you out from the street into Foamhenge, the center of all the exhibitions. My son, Austin, and I started walking at a good clip, determined to walk through the whole thing in one grand swoop, without stopping, and we looked at every single pic-ture and didn't stop walking until we'd seen them all, a marathon walk through FotoFest, through 3,000 photographs, no, more becau so many people put large numbers of pho-tographs in their Works of Art now, so many complicated messages, stories, godawful som times terrifying nightmares so many of our promising young artists are having, as well as a lot of bad food apparently. The Czechs and Hungarians and so on aren't that enamored of dead animals and humans and miscellaneous body parts, but one lady had great servings of raw cow tongues and uvulas and pellets of fat and so on, very nice, very personal. Unfortunately, we couldn't stay and travel down the ruminary canals and into various intestinal treatments because of our commit ment to Our Walk which propelled us pell-mell through the thousands of images, around

hundreds of people milling and studying away as we tore down our private Autobahn at breakneck speed, clapping each other on the shoulder, holding to our integrity, never failing, never allowing ourselves to skip one single image, laying our eyes specifically and purposefully one each on every one, we had to see them all.

Far into it if you went to the left, clockwise from the Uterus (what the hell is it, the tunnel the sperm swim up, we were lost for the duration, couldn't remember the name of the damn thing all afternoon, Austin thought it was the Uterus, and I kept thinking Fallopian Tube, and one advisor thought it w eustachian tube, but we were stuck in the visual world, images glowering at us on all sides, thousands of dead and dying, maimed, homeless souls spread across the face of the earth like so many postage stamps, completely overwhelming the favored with their riches and shiny white hospitals and intentional facial surgery, almost nowhere to be seen. It was all the halt, the lame, the tame, huddled masses under the heel of the Powerful that Fred inflicted on us one and all. Oh sure there was a lot of constructed stuff, intellectu-al stuff, smart stuff, stuff without roots, soulless aestheticism, the stuff of having too much stuff. The stuff of altogether too many images that everybody was talking about, those brutal millions of images, and not a dictionary or any encyclopedia anywhere for a boy and his dad to look up the physiology of the Sperm Marathon, the Lemmings of Life. What the hell is that thing?)

So one hour into it, we shot out the end of one of the corridors and took a break on the far side in a strange dark corner where the Hot Dog People have their establishment. Not everybody knows about the Hot Dog You have to go deep into the center of the Polaroid World to find them, with their stainless steel equipment, the eternally rolling Hot Dog Cooker, their darkness, their white eyes and hair, their keen hearing and shrill shrieking ear-splitting high frequency calls, the smell of their streets, of chili and cheese, ancient smoking hot dogs sizzling in their dark musty corner of Hell far from the Seeing World, their glistening bodies writhing in HooDoo rhythm, barrel house kings, with feet unstable, sagged and reeled and pounded on the table, pounded on the table with the handle of a broom, hard as they were able, boom, boom, BOOM! Fortunately Austin wasn't having any of that, just a chili and cheese hot dog, a bag of Ruffles potato chips and a coke. I didn't go for the chili and the cheese, or the Ruffles

When we got out of there, I was trying to get far from the Uterus to the Polaroid World, but that's out of sequence, not in keeping with the spirit of this Grand Walk my First Born Son and I are experiencing, so if we start thirty seconds after the Hot Dog People, as they recede into their gloaming, we up part II of the Walk, which actually, now that I sit and think very carefully for fifteen minutes staring at the blinking cursor in the lower right corner of this computer screen was actually was the gleaming velvet heart of the Polaroid World. On another occasion, I aw a grown man, one of the top commercial photographers in Texas, come roaring out of one of these myriad Polaroid tunnels with his pants on fire and a new-found religious need for his own Polaroid 20-by-24 camera. His life changed back in there in the grainless landscape of Polaroid, so close to the Hot Dog people and their pounding rhythms. He had to have one of these damn things and now. This was a wild man, a convert, it's the kind of thing that can only happen to an Innocent, one long sheltered from the Northern Art World and its lock on the 20by-24 Polaroid cameras.

Phwew, wow, that's enough of that. This is starting to sound like one of those crazed suicide notes put together from letters cut out of newspapers and magazines. The kind of weirdness you write just before you go take a potshot at the president.

Speaking of which, there's not a single

Speaking of which, there's not a single American President in this show. Is that right? I think it is. There are famous people, and I'll tell you who's the most famous, after maybe Oppenheimer, is Allen Ginsberg down there in the home stretch if you're on the clockwise marathon instead of the counter-clockwise one. Ginsberg's not only the most famous, he's the most often, and the most penis, and the most Polaroid even, standing as he is at the crossroads of the document and the constructed art piece and the outrage of the Instant Two Foot Polaroid, him and Orlovsky and Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso and William Burroughs and the incred-

Fred Baldwin, President and Co-Founder of FotoFest with Police Chief Elizabeth Watson and a participant in the Police Activities League program. Photograph provided by FotoFest



ible Neal Casady, boy what a rich texture of photographs that is, right in the end there in between Dan Weiner with everybody in America working and Eikoh Hosoe with everybody in Japan ululating, writhing in their soot-and-chalk Oriental Dead Mystic Society. Ginsberg, there's the guy, the central figure of the whole thing, dozens and dozens of 8x10s of all the beats, the best group of pictures I've ever seen of all those people of the fifties who certainly changed my life, not to mention John Lennon's and so forth. And here they all are with big white borders with lots of writing around the edges. more richness of history which unfortunately the committed Marathon Speed Walker can't really even get a sense of here in the last gasp of FotoFest, something only Speed Art iewers realize, which is that the Post Modernist language aberration slowed every-thing down too much for us visual junkies who don't want to have to move our lips when we look at images, slurpin' 'em up, you can drown if words get in the way. We're just cruising now, near the end, we can see the back side of the Sea of Sperm in the Ovulary Tributary there, just yards away, while serious students 350 degrees away still stand before the first pictures taking deep notes, way back there in Czechoslovakia, amidst The People. All this time Son Austin's hanging in nearly

All this time Son Austin's hanging in nearly brain dead, now saying "What is this? What's with this guy? Why are there so many pictures of his penis?" This is Allen Ginsberg he's talking about, way before his time, when City Light...never mind. Why is he naked so often? Good grief, there he is naked with Peter Orlovsky and there with some other guy, and there and then twenty years later there again in these big sleek Polaroids, still naked after all these years. I don't know, son, it's...natural, it's...his way.

And then you move past Ginsberg and into the black Hell of Eikoh Hosoe and you realize how perfect it is that you didn't go counter-clockwise, don't do it, don't go counterclockwise into that good night. What is this man thinking about? Way beyond thought, totally hopelessly adrift in imagery, a visual bath, a swirling round of screaming terror and soft flashy beauty, and finally Hosoe's private Simmon, a kind of lame ending for this whole thing, but who cares, there's Fred and Harla Kaplan,the director, at the opening of the Primordial Passageway and we have done it, in one hour and forty minutes—not counting the Hot Dog People—seen it all, the whole thing, every last living one, and Austin gives me a high five, and it's six o'clock sharp on the last day. FotoFest is over. Clean it up and pack it away.

Well, my God, that's excessive in excess. Of course it wasn't exactly over at exactly that minute, that's just me and Austin craving high drama and fiery endings, split-second timing. But outside the warm spring sun was setting and this gigantic red white and blue George R. Brown Convention Center was glowing in it as it disgorged FotoFest for the last time, not to mention the Houston Gift and Jewelry Show in Bay II. Austin and I ran around back, using a special skip-walk he



Horst P. Horst and Carolyn Farb at the opening of the Horst P. Horst exhibition at the Galleria.

worked out to bring our feet back to life, and went right into Henry's Silverhouse and wolfed down a bunch of spring rolls and Singapore noodles and a huge plate of salt-and-pepper crabs and I had a cold China beer and I could see that it was good, but we never talked about photographs again, for the rest of our days, The End thank God, we're free at least.

Free of Fred? Well, no, now it's necessary to go talk to Fred. To ask him what's going on here. Were there too many photographs or

Remembering dozens of conversations with Fred in the past, intimate explanations of what was going on, of his frustrations, a tenminute raging once as he walked me to the parking lot and vented his anger at certain institutions whose leaders failed to have Vision, I went off with him and turned on my tape recorder and this is what happened, wildly condensed, of course, and often way out of context, and speeded up a lot to suit my purposes, but this was Analytical Fred for the Record:

Going into Brown was a quantum leap. It was a huge gamble on our part but it paid off in terms of delivering a major professional festival. I'd say 90 percent of it went exactly as we wanted it. I like the convention atmosphere. It's a miracle that we were able to put in 28 exhibitions, a performing arts area, and Foamhenge, and the Berlin Wall in seven days. Where else could we have done that? Brown was tamed by volunteers and talent, particularly that of Jim Kanan and Steve Polk who came up with a wonderful system and usable display area. And of course it was wonderful that the Meeting Place had a lot of natural light for viewing portfolios.

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We attracted about 25,000 people to George R. Brown. I would say a total of about 75,000 saw the whole FotoFest. Towards the end we were doing little informal interviews with people and found that we were getting people who had never set foot in a museum before. That was a

result of the publicity and word of mouth. A lot of those people returned. We had large numbers of people coming that are a new group for us and for cultural events. During the first weekend, I knew a lot of people in the audience. During the last couple of weekends, almost everybody there was a face I didn't recognize, Hispanics, blacks, whites, lots of them with children. I made videos all the time, and when you look at them you can see that these people were really looking at the photographs. So I think there was an interesting phenomenon.

In some ways, I think you can say that 1990 was the first FotoFest. It's the first event that's understandable and located in one place.

The things we didn't do terribly well–I would have liked to have seen the interior of Foamhenge be some kind of high-quality cafe where people could come at lunchtime and just have a nice time. We were locked into the very low-quality food Brown offers, sort of baseball game stuff. I don't know what we can do about it. You can't even bring your own brown bag in there. That worked very much against us.

Our signage was horrible. It was hard to deter-

Our signage was horrible. It was hard to determine where you were in the exhibition because of bad signs and labeling. We'll correct that. Some of the exhibitions were too long, and we can fix that

Our public relations was very good, but our marketing was miserable. We needed to encour age major corporations to sponsor evenings at FotoFest. We also should have plastered downtoun with posters and flyers telling people to come to lunch and hear a lecture.

We had no tourist packages coming in from other cities and countries. Tourist organizations from England and France and Japan complained that they would have brought tours in if they'd known about it. We need to work tighter with the visitors and conventions people and the Texas Tourism and Development board. We thought we were working closely with them, but nothing much happened. The city and state lost a lot of revenue as a result, and FotoFest lost a lot of revenue. We learned that a group of British travel

agents was in Texas during FotoFest and the tourism board told me they had scheduled them for a ranch somewhere and they didn't have time to see FotoFest. Well, coming to FotoFest would have set them all up to send tours to Houston next time, and that didn't happen. That kind of stupidity is something the state cannot afford. It cost everybody a lot of potential possibilities for the future.

Anyway, we need a staff marketing person who is as effective as Mary Margaret Hansen and her volunteers were with public relations. We'll start immediately on that.

In 1988 we had some very large numbers that the visitors and convention bureau through some formula said we had attracted. Those numbers did not materialize and come to the Brown Convention Center, so obviously that formula was wrong. Even so, it was very encouraging for event. I think we'll double the num bers in 1992, but still not probably enough to pay for the Convention Center. The chief drawback of the Convention Center is that it's enormously expensive. The total tab on that thing is astronomical compared to what happens in other nomical compared to what happens in other cities. Apparently, there's nothing anybody can do about it, because it's set in some kind of administrative concrete. But San Diego for example, gets a permanent space in Balboa Park donated to the museum of photography there, and they pay a dollar a year for that. In addition they get \$140,000 from the city and another \$25,000 from the county every year, because it's felt that it's a major attraction for the city. We get \$17,000 from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston, which we're very grateful for, and the city was helpful in putting our signs up, but Houston is not organized currently to really put much money into the arts if we're an example. There doesn't seem to be any civic relief for the kinds of costs that we experienced going into the George Brown. That's just a fact of life with trying to put on a thing of this nature in Houston. On the other hand, the city can put in large amounts of effort and money trying to attract things like the Democratic Convention or the Economic Summit which I think are both very attractive for the city and could be beneficial, but whether it will be worth \$12 million or have any long-term economic benefit is another thing. We are in place, producing FotoFest every two years. It is an expandable tourist possibility, it is going to be a revenue generator for the city, and it costs practically nothing compared to what it does for the city. We get two-thirds of our budget from out of state. We have attempted to raise \$300,000 a year here to take care of our admin-istrative costs but have been unable to do that. We get good support from some of the founda-tions, but not enough. We get a fair amount of in-kind contributions from corporations, but very little cash. We think this is going to change because of the immense public relations benefit. Houston is written about extensively all over the world during FotoFest. The word is out from Tokyo to Moscow that this is the major photography event of the world. As that sinks in, we'll get more and more help. I would think that as an arts group we've drawn more publicity in than any other group.

We've been able to do all this on a shoe string We've been ane to as as uns on the because we have very very good volunteer sup-port. We have a well organized volunteer system have about 700 volunteers who worked this time around. And we've gotten very surprising support from small businesses, like Spencer Plants that loaned us eight 20-foot Ficus trees to for a month, for Foamhenge. A lot of contributions were small-scale, but there were so many of them that it became large scale and was a major help. There's a kind of spirit of generosity that permeated FotoFest. This reflected to some extent the feeling that FotoFest is dedicated to giving photographers a chance and to encouraging cultur interaction and international exchange, and we work hard at that. That spirit has been caught up by the volunteers and has gotten out to a large segment of the community and they work their tails off to help us. Europeans are amazed that we can operate a multi-million dollar operation with only five staff people that would normally take 20 people to run. We have about five more people who work full time as volunteers. I'm a volunteer myself. The disadvantage of that is that we have the reputation for being able to pull it off every time on a shoestring. But you cant' do that permanently. At some point people burn out. You can't expect people to work for nothing forever. To have this organization stabilize, you have to have a larger staff. You can't expect volunteers to carry the whole thing on their backs.

For about \$500,000 more than we spend right now, to cover administration, we can deliver to Houston a multi-million dollar tourist and public relations draw. It's relatively easy to raise the rest of the money. This festival cost \$1.3 million for everything. We probably need a total of 2 million, and that covers two years. With that we can hire a curatorial person, a marketing person,

Participants at the Meeting Place



and so on to become a professional organization. We're so swamped now that we can't even evaluate ourselves correctly. Relative to the cost of other organizations that bring in publicity and tourism for Houston, we can do more at a fraction of the cost.

And so forth. Good solid information, much of it true, maybe all of it, but, you know, boring. I know that's a terrible thing to say, I get furious every couple of years when the political writers start telling us the election of the moment is boring boring boring and then the day after the election the newspapers chastise us all for not voting in this wonderful event. What they mean by boring, and I think what I mean by boring, is that Fred wasn't giving me any dirt, none of the raging in the parking lot. What did I expect? Sure, Dave, let's just sit down here and I'll babble on for half an hour and completely destroy FotoFest for you, would that be okay? Okay, I didn't really want that, but I wanted some fire from the soul, I wanted...vision, yes. And just as I was beginning to despair of getting anything other than this elaborate wrapup, I got it, I think. The Center of Fred.

But we can't just jump right into that, gotta set the stage, change the venue. Well, who cares about these projects? Why are we living our lives from one bright idea to the next, stressed to sickness, crazed at all times, unhapy and frustrated-and for what?

Think about Fred four months before FotoFest is supposed to begin, when every-body else goes home at night to rest, and he carries off the knowledge that the money just isn't there and the city won't help and every-where he goes people commiserate, but where's the dough? Half a million dollars to build the Global Village in the convention center and the money just isn't there. Fine, okay, forget it, do something else. So Fred can recover and cuts costs and go on, but boy he looked terrible for a few months there in the early fall; you had to worry about him. A lot of people say, well, it's his ego, this FotoFest is his monument, his big claim to fame. He has to succeed. Sometimes when he's on for a tape recorder or a new mark, you hear him talk about how Houston can benefit from all the tourism FotoFest can generate, all the

of Houston here, Europe here, and Japan here, with Houston right in the middle, the obvious place to focus all international activity of every sort. Other lines drifted off to Latin America, Asia, the Soviet Union...

It was a vision as grand as they get, people meeting people, transcending ideologies and making deals, all through Houston, the First Word Spoken from the Moon, the Energy Capital of the World. All right there on napkins and the backs of envelopes. The first couple of FotoFests were heavy on Japan and Europe. And now it's 1990, the year FotoFest focused on Eastern Europe and brought it out of the Soviet prison, when Fred was to offer the public relations provess

of FotoFest to Vaclav Havel, the new President of Czechoslovakia, when the huge mural of the Berlin wall (which had been the planned centerpiece of the '90 FotoFest for a year) suddenly took on new meaning as the real wall was smashed to bits, and here came this flood of Czech, Bulgarian, and Russian photographers to FotoFest, and all this amazement. One World! It was working!

FotoFest works on all levels, Fred says. People make friendships here, and we're visiting in Eastern Europe and Japan and God knows where as the result of contacts that were made here. Even on a commercial basis, we made an arrangement for an exchange program between TASS and the Houston Post. We had the senior picture editor for TASS here and we took her down to the Post and we made a deal with them to exchange photographers. All those kinds of formal and informal exchanges are something to tie the world a little closer to Houston.

If you look at the fact sheet, you see how many



Fred Baldwin; Mike Matzkin, National Manager of Public Relations, Photography Products Division, Canon USA, Inc.; Mayor Kathy Whitmire; and the Honorable Peter Maier-Oswald, Consul General, Federal Repbulic of Germany (Lto R).

United States and she's talked to Carole Kismaric about a show at the Museum of Modern Art.

"Now this kind of connection puts you on the world map. FotoFest is so effective in terms of making these connections for photographers that now, if you've exhibited at FotoFest, you're on the world photography map.

How, if you be candidated to be soon to be world photography map.

People come here and find book projects, museum projects, and they sell work here. I've talked to at least ten people who sold work to Helmut Gernsheim while they were here. In fact, there was one guy from New York who was here working on the Canon Color Copier in our Creative Center and pulled a couple of experiments out of that, put them in his portfolio and Gernsheim loved them and bought three of them on the spot. What a strange thing, the guy that bought the first photograph ever made and gave it to the University of Texas comes along and buys the latest one ever made, just minutes old. In that one act, you have a reference point to the earliest photograph that was ever made, to one of the earliest and greatest collectors of all time, and the

latest possible thing that is happening in FotoFest with electronic imaging.

The other thing we're up to is, we're committed to educa tion. We're using photography as a tool to combat literacy problems in the school system and it's a very successful program and we've already started to have discussions with other organizations who are similarly involved. We're interested in getting together with the Texas Institute, for example. They doing similar things with the other arts, but they're not using otography. It's a little different, but what they want as an end product is the same as what we want, which is better educated kids. So education is our major thrust for the future, but that is

still a puzzle administratively, whether we establish a separate foun-

The Creative Center is another major project. That involves enormously expensive equipment and space and new administrative costs. Depending on how excited we can get Apple and Sony and Canon, if we can get enough money from corporations of that size to set up an experimental place in Houston, that would be something we'd want to do. That week of experimentation during FotoFest was highly successful. Canon is very interested in it right now. They brought a lot of equipment in. We'll do it again next time, even if we don't get into it full time. It was very interesting to the public and they lined up to watch and to play with it.

In 1992, we'll have two main thrusts, the Americas, and Latin America, because of Columbus coming here 500 years ago. We'll concentrate on Latin America, a celebration of the truth about the influence of the migration from Europe to the Americas. Not a celebration of the event, but a celebration of the truth.

The other part of PotoFest will be devoted to the twelve Common Market countries, because in that year all the barriers come down in Europe. We may do a very large Soviet exhibition curated by Wendy and myself. We plan to go to the Soviet Union very soon to start on that. That arose out of typical FotoFest circumstances. Wendy and I are doing a workshop in Czechoslovakia, we will then go to Bulgaria, where we've been invited, and we will go on a tour of the Soviet Union with the editor of the Bulgarian photographic magazine, who's a close friend that we've brought over here and who speaks fluent Russian and knows all the Soviet photographers...

Right, and Japan's over here, and Africa's down here, and Houston's right in the middle, and so is Fred. Still crazy after all these years, and why not?

All photographs courtesy of FotoFest



Dave Crossley, above, is a veteran of FotoFests I, II and III, and an artist living in Houston.



An anonymous viewer at George R. Brown Convention Center

international publicity and so on, but in spite of the fact that that long pitch is his major theme, it's the other thing that drives him, the old stuff, The Movement.

the old stuff, The Movement.

Here's a guy who has loads of photographs he made of Martin Luther King in the early days. He was there. His long residency in Grimes County with co-conspirator Wendy Watriss, photographing the lives of black people there, at nobody's request, and all their other involvement in Good Things, years and years of it. Fred Baldwin, this Savannah aristocrat who looks like a Southern senator and moves like one too, but he's a man who sees through New Southern eyes, and what he sees through them, clearly, is One World.

In the beginning, when Fred and Wendy and gallery owner Petra Benteler were forming FotoFest, Fred would draw little pictures of the foreign exhibitions are going to travel to other places in America. On a personal level, Wendy and I were able to arrange for one Bulgarian and one Czech to get Fulbright scholarships, and they're traveling around the country lecturing and making contacts. One of them went to the University of Missouri and one to the University of Texas. Ivo Hadjimishev, who is the picture editor of a major Bulgarian picture magazine, is anxious to start a journalism school in Sofia. So we arranged to have him look over the programs at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Missouri. We're actually concocting a three-pronged program which will be FotoFest, Kodak, and the University of Missouri, doing workshops on this subject to figure out how to help them get their journalism school going.

school going.
There's a Swedish photographer who, through
FotoFest, now has five museum shows in the

When people come together for professional conferences, it gives them a chance to meet with colleagues and share ideas. SPOT invited a number of people participating in different aspects of FotoFest to jot down some ideas they had about the medium of photography after spending a few days immersed in

Maybe the dimly lit, black styrofoam hall-way with its carved sperm motifs made me squirm because I just finished curating an AIDS exhibition project. Maybe the point of the Stonehenge rotunda-sparsely populated with tired, hot-dogeating people-went right over my head. I don't know.

What I do know is:
- that exhibitions from Italy, Chile and Spain were, for me, the most interesting -that I was glad to participate in a pub-

lications conference that was useful for its attendees

-that I was glad to see friends and colleagues and azaleas in bloom

at I was sad to leave, picture-junkie that I am, feeling that I had seen too many photographs that were disengaged from issues that make photography, communication, and our lives so thorny and interesting.

Marvin Heiferman Curator, New York City



"Vaclay Havel: First Civic Forum Meeting, Prague, November, 1989"

I saw work by more foreign people than last time. I ate crayfish for the first time (not the heads). I met an excited Polish man whose superimposed pictures made Nancy Burson's and mine look like kindergarten stuff. I didn't have time (my fault) to see any exhibitions. I saw e remarkable color photographs (by Patricia Schwarz) of corpulent middle age women posing (for the most part, nude) in classic styles. It was the first absolutely fresh idea I've seen in some time. All in all, it was worth the visit. I almost went to the wrong airport.

Robert Heinecken Artist, Chicago/Los Angeles

Fred Baldwin; Mike Matzkin, National Manager of Public Relations, Photography Products Division, Canon USA, Inc.; Mayor Kathy Whitmire; and the Honorable Peter Maier-Oswald, Consul General, Federal Republic of Germany (Left to Right). Photograph provided by FotoFest



haunted by a cry that echoed throughout the Meeting Place. "I didn't come here to have my work critiqued." Does that mean they came to the Meeting Place only to have their work praised, pur-chased and published? Is there nothing more to be gained or learned? This attitude may be attributed to FotoFest's greatest success - the Meeting Place. In an attempt to encourage and support, we may have sacrificed growth, direction and the learning experience. The number of photographers and teachers as reviewers was limited to allow a greater percentage of curators, collectors, critics and publishers. We exchanged the opportunity of self-discovery for the business of being discovered. What is needed to complement this direction is a second space, less structured, more informal. A place where work and ideas are eagerly and generously shared by all. FotoFest is still in its infancy. We are learning from our mistakes and building on our successes. I can't wait for FotoFest '92.

Now that FotoFest '90 is gone, I'm

George Krause Artist, Houston

The overwhelming variety of exhibitions demonstrated that anything goes in photography today. I find this healthy. The lack of rules about what is and what is not photography means that each group of pictures must stand on its own. For me FotoFest was one of the nicest of times. I saw collections of photographs that I had not seen before. I was espe-cially impressed with the work of Cristina Garcia Rodero and Keith Carter. I had a chance to get to know other curators of photography whom I had long admired-curators like Anne Tucker and Colin Westerbeck. I also saw old friends like Buzz Hartshorn and Francis Fralin.

Barbara Norfleet Artist, Senior Lecturer and Curator, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

I was quite surprised by the book dum-mies and projects that I saw- surprised by the level of commitment to the various projects, by the elaborate and very well done presentation of proposals, and by the amount of time and thought that people had put into their projects.

Photography publishing is thriving because there is so much talent and good material to publis - -but it is still surprisingly difficult to publish photography books profitably. Thank goodness for nonprofit organizations.

Dana Asbury Editor of art and photography books at the University of New Mexico Press

After a full immersion in the ocean of photographic exhibitions, lectures and portfolios at FotoFest, I am taken by the insistant homogenization of this growing subset of the art world. All of us, Portu guese, British, French, Bulgarian, German, Japanese, Austrian, Australian, Canadian, Dane, Swede, Finn, Italian,



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Volunteers working at FotoFence chili cook-off.

Greek and even Texan are now capable of producing images identically, antiseptically, and homogenously presentedsans accent-of the world looking poetically gritty and "real"-or we can all offer the same large, montaged, cut and stained "art speak." It is as though the doors of opportunity are open to only a couple of classifications of material. I

The Meeting Place. Photo by Dave Wilson

leave-foot and eye sore-wondering how one begins to emerge from the over-wrought, over ambitious, overtly hungry mass of photographers. Yet, once again, out of the chaos, one or two are remembered-come through like a clear sound and distinguish themselves with an economy of elegance . . . a few images embossed on my memory - images more wise than clever, images that are "some-thing," rather than images "about" something. These rewards, celestial thanks, this time, I feel, were earned.

Director, Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, CA

This concerns only the George R. Brown Convention Center / FotoFest '90:
Overexposure . . . too much . . . I don't see how it ever happens . . . it might be the biggest . . . so why not try next time for the process unique. for the most unique . . . the very best ever . . . editing could cause more complaints, but perhaps more could be gained, learned, studied, etc . . . When I found myself looking instead of seeing I had to leave.

I can remember having seen and wanting to see again . . . the Czech work (Zdenek Lhotak's "Spartakiada '85"), Philip Jones Griffiths, several Raymond Moore pieces, Cristina Garcia Rodero . and always Walker Evans and Eugene Smith for history.

I congratulate the courage and work of those who made all this happen I just think it needs to be leaner, needs more clarification, and needs unique exhibits and work.

Charles Schorre Artist. Houston

One evening a young woman drove several of us to a party where a Houston couple opened their doors to over one hundred strangers. She had been driving participants from around the country and world to parties for nearly a month, and she was but one of everal hundred volunteers. Later that night I returned in a different car with three somewhat besotten photographiles from three different countries. We compared, at some length, how our languages render the sound a rooster makes. In Houston there was a palpable sense of communities forming and pulling together toward common objectives. This makes FotoFest unique in photography, and a rare phenomenon most anywhere in our hyper-real realms. Witnessing this spirit close up was even more exciting than seeing the acres of photographs that were our common focus.

David L. Jacobs Formerly Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts. The University of Texas at Arlington Currently Chairperson of the University of Houston Art Department.

Cock-a-doodle-doo.

"Photo-inflation" as a contemporary

described the situation in Germany in 1929. That's what's going on today. And I'm uneasy about it. Maybe it's good for the field overall, but . . . any substance behind the hype?'

> Nancy Barret Curator of Pho Curator of Photographs, New Orleans Museum of Art

FOTOFEST '90 The surface benefits of events such as

FotoFest—the opportunity to see very large num bers of photographs in a compressed period of

time, and the chance to make or renew contacts in the field—are obvious. But other, more intense interchanges give greater insight into the complex of personalities and attitudes that make up photography today. As a panelist at the Publishing Symposium who served as one of the final judges for the FotoFest Book Award, it was intriguing to see how five completely disparate points of view about what a book should be could arrive at a consensus opinion. It was a difficult and thoroughly discussed decision, but in the process we all learned more about the concepts that constitute our medi-

David Featherstone Former Director of Publications The Friends of Photography

The 1990 FotoFest shows the high level of maturity and sophisitcation the festi-val has reached. I was very impressed by the scope and varied character of the exhibitions. There is no other place where it is possible to be exposed to this level of international work.

Elizabeth Glassman Formerly of Glassman & Associates, Houston Currently President, The Georgia O'Keeffe

A post-mortem of FotoFest is of uncertain value, like detailing the neuroses and excesses of a past marriage Nonetheless, without question what FotoFest is very good at is bringing pho-to-people together, sometimes even to look at and discuss photographs. As a social event it clearly has its serious cultural side - it educates and facilitates. But concerning the logistics of the exhibitions and the surfeit of pictures, it's back to the drawing board for 1992.

And - styrofoam should be banished from the planet, immediately, lest the Druid priestesses set a curse upon us.

Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom are professors of art at the University of Houston. They work as artists under the name MANUAL and frequently write articles and reviews for SPOT and Artforum.

A couple of FotoFest incidents come to mind: the first had to do with looking at portfolios. I was reviewing a Belgian photographer's work (Michel Papeliers) and had some difficulty understanding what he was saying about it. It was a group of portraits of factory workers - generally third world and southern Europeans, some nice stuff, but I had no idea what he w saving because his Belgian English and my American French were of about the same quality. We couldn't communicate at all. He looked behind him kind of wildly and grabbed this Guatamalan photographer who for some reason spoke both French and English fluently. And he translated for us. It was a genuinely nice family of man international moment.

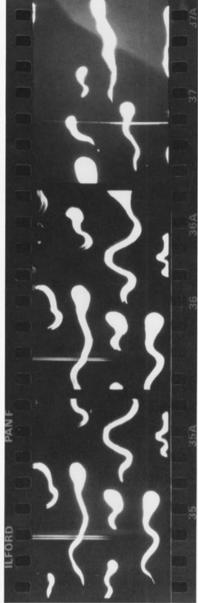
FotoFest seems to be comprised of hundreds of such moments - people talking about and around photographs any way they can.

The best thing about it for me as a teacher is the incredible resource it brings to classes. Seeing actual prints is much more tangible for students than slides or reproductions Students get the idea that they could actually make that themselves. I usually notice the effects of FotoFest the following fall. Kids have had a chance to think about what they've seen over the summer and often come up with some sort of off-shoot that they want to talk about. It's also helpful to me. It's a major evaluation of my work. and a lot of talking and a lot of looking at new work that often sparks new

It's also a time to review old favorites. I've always been very moved by Josef Koudelka's work, but had never seen more than a few images in a show. Again, books are one thing as a show is another. Seeing those photographs and the way he's printed them pushes me to take out a 35mm camera and black & white film for the first time in quite a while.

And all my Rice students had a great time looking at and talking about George Krause's show.

Peter Brown Artist, Assistant Professor, Rice University, Houston



Deborah Garza, Entrance to FotoFest '90 (sperm wall)

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PERSPECTIVES, REAL & IMAGINARY: CZECHOSLOVAKIAN PHOTOGRAPHY AT FOTOFEST 1990

By John P. Jacob

Perspectives, Real and Imaginary. Nineteen Contemporary Czechoslovak Photographers, curated by Fred Baldwin and Wendy Watriss. FotoFest 1990, George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston, Tx., Feb. 10 - March 10, 1990.

Where political activity is severely restricted, cultural endeavor takes its place. Vaclav Havel, 1990.

The presentation of Czechoslovak photography at FotoFest in the exhibition "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary," was a significant accomplishment. Selected by FotoFest Directors Fred Baldwin and Wendy Watriss, with a color catalogue printed in Prague by the Czechoslovak import/export agency Art Centrum, the exhibition was installed in Houston by the artists and was accompanied by a statement of encouragement from Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel. Given the recent changes in Central Europe, during the course of which artists have, in certain instances, risen from banishment to leadership, the exhibition must surely be seen by all who participated in its development as an event worthy of celebration.

The scale and immediacy of the events that resulted in the toppling of the structures of cultural repression in Central Europe at the close of the 1980's distinguished this exhibition from others at FotoFest. Such distinction is heightened by the dramatic shift in perception that is required of viewers, aware, per-

haps for the first time since 1968, of the currency of Czechoslovak imagery. The grim circumstances of the last twenty years, during which these images were made, all but disappeared behind the present historical moment. This erasure of the past is exacerbated by the location of the FotoFest in the massive George R. Brown Convention Center. Still, in the presence of liberation, and in the midst of celebration, one is hesitant to call the ghosts of history back to life. To recall the past is to dig for the meaning of these images in the "cultural cemetery" from which they have emerged. 1 To imagine how differently we might have received these images had they come to us in the pre-"velvet revolution" period during which they were both made and selected, but from which their presentation here separates them, is to question the intentions of the exhibitions' organizers from the outset of their negotiations, several years ago.

Negotiations for "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" began in less pleasant times for Central European culture. It was a time when cultural ministries controlled culture, and administrators, not art historians, decided who and what could be exhibited where. Visas for artists to travel to exhibitions in the West could be obtained only with daily payments of hard currency, or through the committeent of a Western institution to purchase "X" number of the artist's works for "Y" number of dollars. Only two years ago the Czechoslovak born art historian Meda Madak wrette.

In accordance with official policy, only Czechoslovak institutions - rather than anyone from abroad - have the authority to determine which artists qualify for art shows abroad. There is no institution, however, willing to provide an interested foreigner with objective information. Since 1969, there has ben no single art review dealing with contemporary art. There is not one independent art gallery; museums are expected to buy only from officially approved artists. Only occa sionally do they manage to include into the bargain art works by other, genuinely creative artists. These art works, if passed by the official committee, have never decorated the walls of Czechoslovak museums. They are exhibited only with the yearly acquisitions and then put into storage... From time to time an artist may succeed in installing an exhibition of his work on a modest scale in small, remote towns, or in the halls or courtvards of some scientific institution in

Exhibitions which came to the United States from the nations of the Soviet Bloc between the 1960's and the 1980's were presented as emerging from limitation and repression, and as controlled by Soviet cultural direction. Such rare Western media coverage of cultural phenomena as the fanfare surrounding the "Manezh event," (Moscow, 1962) when Krushchev denounced an exhibition of works by a group of experimental artists, and the "Bulldozer Show," (1974) when an open-air exhibition in Moscow was bulldozed and burned, presented artists working in the Soviet Bloc as fundamentally motivated by political concerns, and as divided by their struggle to either promote or resist the state. 3 The cultural identities of nations vanished behind the political identity of the Bloc.

By the 1970's, Soviet and Eastern European cultural activity had come to be understood in the rigidly simplified terms of "official" versus "unofficial" artists. Throughout the 1970's,

exhibitions of private collections of contemporary artworks from the Soviet Union and the nations of the Bloc perpetuated this simplification, presenting artists unified in their struggle against the restrictions of the socialist state and against the repression of When all else failed. Western institutions could always be assured of getting the attention of their audiences by offering amusing or anecdotal, self denigrat ing representations of cialist backwardnes Such highly charged representations of culture within socialism, while often based in truth, had the additional benefit of reassuring view ers of the superiority of the liberal policies of American cultural institutions.

Most viewers of
"Perspectives, Real and
Imaginary" have been subject to the sort of media
manipulation that has, for
the last twenty years, publicly promoted dissident art
from the Soviet Bloc as part
an institutional effort to
undermine the morale of
"official" artists. In
"Perspectives, Real and

Imaginary," as in such media manipulations of Soviet and Central European experience, viewers were provided with scant information on the basis of which to form meanings. Wall labels, indicating which photographs belonged to which artists, were conspicuously absent during the important first week of FotoFest. The exhibition's wall text and the brief essay in the catalogue that accompanies it refer to artistic movements of the past and to Czechoslovak film and literature of the last "several decades," yet the concrete social and political context in which this work is grounded is not mentioned. The selection of specific works by this particular group of artists, over numerous others, is not explained. Without such information, the photographs presented are interpreted as aesthetic signs marking the triumph of culture (democracy) over anti-culture (communism), an "a priori division of art," as Havel noted in 1984, that is "rather dangerous." 4 Although it is true that many artists suffered under the control of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, and that resistance to the cultural hegemony was forbidden in the visual

arts, it is neither the liberation of creative expression in these photographs nor the phys-ical circumstances of their making that is of issue here. This distinction is critical to comprehension of the revisionist interpretation of Czechoslovak cultural history presented in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary." It is not ontent of the photographs in the exhibition, but the process of purification through hardship, of which they are but momentoes, that is significant. It is not, as the promotional material for the exhibition proclaims, the armaterian to the extinition proctains, the resonant "Czech-ness" of these photographs that is represented in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary." Rather, "Perspectives" is a reaffirmation of the Modernist spirit through reappropriation of Central European culture. Presented as the salvaged legacy of realist, symbolist, and surrealist traditions, contemporary Czechoslovak photography is returned to the privileged place in Western European from which it had been hijacked.

Within the schema of cultural salvage the influence of the Communist Party upon Czechoslovak culture is effectively buried in this exhibition; it is as if communism were some sort of deep freeze from which the photographic ideals of pre-war Europe have emerged unscathed after a long slumber. The immediate past in which they were made, the powerful political orientation that informs many of these photographs, is subverted by their presentation. Historical context is denied, with the result that artists and audience come together at the moment of salvage and transition, at the "still point of the turning world" where, as T.S. Eliot has written, "time past and time future allow but a little consciousness." The past is unknown, the future unknowable.

An especially poignant example of the obfuscation of context is the presentation of the work of Pavel Stecha. Mr. Stecha's



Pavel Stecha, Cottage Owners, 1970-85

"Cottage Owners, 1970-1985," is an amusing series of before and after dyptichs made over long periods of time. The first photograph in each pair depicts a plan or idea for future development; a tree being planted or a cottage designed on paper. The second photograph, often made many years later, reveals the accomplishment of the goals of the first; the tree full grown or the completed cottage. Of this series Mr. Stecha has said, "I once did a show of pictures of weekend houses. Now that doesn't sound political, but it was, because they were built at a time when you couldn't even stay at a hotel in this country." 6

"Cottage Owners" shows the value of nurturing a beloved ideal over a period of time when such values are threatened, using the growth of trees and the construction of houses as metaphors for Czechoslovakian culture. Yet in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary." photographs from the series are presented as single instead of paired images. The dyptichs have been broken down, and from them single images have been selected for their "decisive moment" qualities. Thus, not only has the relationship of the project to real time

Top: Zdenek Lhotak, *Spartakiada (series), 1985* Below: Viktor Kolar, *Ostrava, 1974*

(specific events) in Czechoslovak history been subverted, but also any possible connec-tion of the audience to that relationship and consequently to those events. What we receive from the presentation of "Cottage Owners" is not an understanding of the artist or his circumstances, but the pleasant feeling of recognition through emphasis of style over meaning.

artists and their "decisive moments" in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" is espe ironic. In Czechoslovakia, as in other Central European nations, groups of artists continue to form "schools" based on aesthet-ic, philosophical, and political ideals. "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" is dominated by advocates of "social documentary" photography. Yet discussion of the important historical connection of this contemporary group work" to the movements with which the curators seek to tie these artists (surrealism, constructivism, cubism) is missing.7 It is therefore no surprise that "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" also fails to recognize the anti-Bresson trend in Czechoslovak social documentary photography, as expressed in Vladimir Birgus' manifesto "The Undecisive Moment" (1978) and the work of such groups as Dokument (Document; also the name of an inexpensive, light weight photographic paper often used in book making) and Oci (Eyes). The anti-Bresson stance of the social documentarians revealed an implicit rejection of the "excessive aesthetism" of Western photographic practices, as exemplified in the c cept of "decisive moments." 8 Composed largely of professional photographers and photographic instructors at FAMU, the Prague Film Academy, the social documen-tarians were powerfully influential. The style of photography that they advocated was, as Dr. Antonin Dufek has written, the strongest "creative stream" in Czechoslovakian photog-

directions, using photography as a single ele-The curatorial emphasis on individual ment within larger, conceptual projects.

The photographic work of the group of artists represented in Houston is distinctly Czechoslovakian; it may be understood only in terms of the circumstances in which it was created. That these photographs are familiar formally, that they are rectangular black and white documentary style images, guarantees that viewers will appreciate distinct elements in their construction. Deprived of information concerning the social and political cir-cumstances of their making, however, as we are in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary," it is impossible for viewers to distinguish the relationship of familiar signs to others distinctly foreign. It is impossible, consequent-ly, to distinguish the points at which Ćzechoslovak photography departs from Western and from socialist aesthetic traditions to ally itself with specifically

Czechoslovakian concerns. The blending together of distinct cultures, ort of equalizing through photography, is reflected throughout FotoFest, and is a direct result of the overall design of the event. Attempting to come up with a creative solu-tion to the oppressive, mall-sized convention center in which the FotoFest was housed, the designers devised a system of tunnels constructed of styrofoam. One enters FotoFest through such a tunnel. Its walls were painted black. Light penetrated the darkness of the tunnel through cut out sperm shapes swimming towards the center. At the end of this

of artists that developed within and around

FAMU supported cultural activities where the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture was

incapable of providing support. As a direct

Toth, have been able to branch out in nev

of this nurturing, artists like Miro Svolik and Peter Zupnik, as well as others not represented here like Ivan Kafka and Dzieter

long, active, male space, one entered the "nucleus" of the FotoFest, a circular resting place with circular tables and walls reminiscent of Stonehenge. From this mystical egg sac numerous long halls shoot out in every direction, apparently symbolizing the creative burst that occurs when the masculine and feminine energies of pho-

tography converge.

It was clearly the goal of the designers of FotoFest to bring the numerous exhibitions housed together in a single space as a cultural event rather than an art fair. Yet FotoFest is indeed an art fair, spon ored by Kodak and bracketed at either end by the meeting of AIPAD (Association of International Photography Art Dealers) and the FotoFest Book Fair and International Publishing Conference. Its design, focusing crassly upon the mystical/sexual activities of picture making and viewing, implied that those activities are more pure than promoting and selling. The purity of vision, whether the pho-

tographer's or the audience's, was paramount. Context was abandoned. In long, parallel lines against white walls, thousands of uniformly matted prints blended together unanimously to form the event of FotoFest. The prestige of participation in the group was obtained through complete subversion of individual intention, or meaning.

The histories and the intentions of the artists whose photographs are presented in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" are left untold. The question "Why?", for example why "although ranking among the best contemporary photojournalists, [Viktor Korar] has not been given the opportunity to publish in magazines"is never posed.10 Why is there a photograph of a Communist Party congress placed at the center of Zdnek Lhotka's series of photographs of mud covered soccer players? It is not clear whether this is an accident of installation, or an overt political statement. What is the meaning of Jiri Polacek's series of night photographs of streets and sidewalks devoid of people? Has the artist chosen to work at night, or was his decision forced upon him? Why is the infa-



Pavel Stecha, Cottage Owners, 1970-85

mous nightlife of Prague absent from his pic-

Jaroslav Barta's photographs reveal architectural decay: layers of bricks still standing while decorative plaster deteriorates. Are these photographs simply abstracts, or do they represent Prague as an elaborate urban stag constructed for Western tourism, as one Czechoslovak artist described it to me, behind which the drama of Czech history is hidden? Dusan Palka's street photographs repeatedly show blind walkers shown making embarrassing trouble for sighted pedestrians. Are Palka's photographs just bad jokes, or are they metaphors for the blind determination o artists and opposition? How, after all, did the "conceptual" work of Miro Svolik and Peter Zupnik emerge from the school of social documentary photography with which it is pre-sented here? Without contextual information viewers are incapable of asking such questions, and without such questions we are incapable of forming anything but aesthetic responses to these photographs.

Finally, it is important to question the degree to which the formula of this exhibition has served the Gernsheim Collection at the University of Texas in their bid to purchase these works. Negotiations with Czechoslovak cultural authorities took place at a time of severe stress in the Czechoslovakian economy, when the value of the dollar towered over that of the Czech Korun. Thus, even contemporary "classics" of Czechoslovakian photography, like the photographs of Jindrich Streit, may be had by collectors for "reasonable" prices. The subse quent exhibition and national tour of these photographs in "Perspectives, Real and Imaginary" has significantly increased the value of the Gernsheim Collection's invest ment. The gloss of the Modernist legacy that accompanies the exhibition, minus the political context from which these photographs have come to us, nullifies the stigma attached to acquiring work by communists that has prevented the Gernsheim Collection and collections like it from recognizing the work of such Western groups as the Photo League.

In the context of its presentation at FotoFest, Czechoslovak photography is not represented as a independent movement of aesthetic resistance emerging from within socialism, but as the prodigal son of Western tendencies. Had this exhibition come to us prior to the "Velvet Revolution" this representation might have satisfied; any discussion of the circumstances of the last twenty years

would have appeared a political gesture, insulting to the Czechoslovak cultural authorities and dangerous for the artists involved. The failure of "Perceptions, Real and Imaginary" is that these photographs have come to us from a free Czechoslovakia. Today, for the first time, we may know the truth about these artists and their pictures We may speak of "the special role that culture plays in [Czechoslovakia]," of artists who ulated the will of the people" there.11

The Directors of FotoFest have brought nineteen of Czechoslovakia's finest contemporary photographers to Houston. After finish celebrating, however, we will find that the life behind their pictures remains

Footnotes

1. Heinrich Boll, Dagens Nyhter, Stockholm,

2. Meda Mladek, "Speakeasy," New Art Examiner, Chicago, p. 14.

3. John Berger discusses the Manege event in Art and Revolution, New York, p. 81. A thorough discussion of cultural life in the USSR, including discussion of the Manege event and the Bulldozer Show may be found in Igor Golomshtok's text "Artistic Life in the Soviet Union," in Soviet Emigre Artists: Life and Work in the USSR and the United States (New York, 1985)

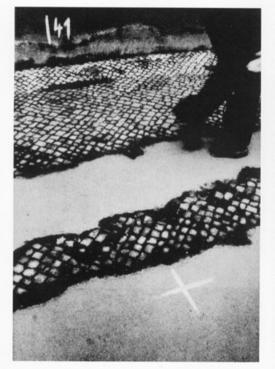
Vaclav Havel, "Six Asides About Culture," in A Besieged Culture: Czechoslovakia Ten Years After Helsinki (Stockholm & Vienna:The Charta 77 Foundation and The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights Inc., 1985) p. 139. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (New York: S. Ellot, Foir Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971) p. 16.
 Barbara Karkabi, "The 'Velvet' Revolution," The Houston Chronicle, 2/10/90, p. 11.
 See Valerie Smith's Metaphysical Visions, Middle Europe (New York: Artists Space, 1989) for discussion of contemporary artists' groups working in Central Europe. 8. Dr. Antonin Dufek, "Creative Photography in Czechoslovakia," Contemporary Czechoslovakian Photographers (London: Photographer's Gallery, 1985) p. 6.

 Dufek, p. 6.
 Fred Baldwin and Wendy Watriss, Choice: Nineteen Contemporary Czechoslovak Photographers (Prague: Art Centrum, 1990) n.p.

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Jaroslav Barta, Streets, 1979

raphy from the early 1970's until the mid-80's. 9

Emerging from within the official mainstream (the film academy) in a time of severe restriction, Czechoslovak social documentary photography represents simultaneously a rejection of Western photographic trends and a brilliant reworking of the tenets of Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism proposed that reasisin. Socialist Realism proposed that artists should strive for a practice capable of putting art back in touch with life, of reflecting the "truth" of socialist reality. In reflecting that truth, however, Czechoslovak social documentarians quickly transcended the bureaucratic limits of state defined culture. Thus, social documentarians like Pavel Stecha formed a movement of resistance working from within FAMU, the seat of photographic culture

As a result of the consolidation of its practitioners, the strength of contemporary Czechoslovak photography is distinguished less by any stylistic unity than by the ideological cohesion of an emergent avant garde. Like their peers in the Jazz Section of the Union of Czechoslovak Musicians, the group











NEXT PLANE TO SPAIN, PLEASE!

By Hans Staartjes

Espana Oculta: Photographs by Cristina Garcia Rodero, George R. Brown Convention Center, Feb. 10 -March 10, 1990.

Photographs, like powerful experiences, can leave an indelible mark in one's consciousness. It was impossible not to be affected in such a way by Cristina García Rodero's images of Spain. Though we know Spain as a great culture with what many consider somewhat barbaric traditions such as bullfighting, few people other than Spaniards themselves could know other peculiarly Spanish rituals and customs. There were more than a few open mouths among those viewing this work.

The show began with images of

men and women in strange hoods and robes parading ceremonially through rural roads and small towns, often bearing a crucifix or a candle. These images had a dour medieval quality about them that was beautifully enhanced by the dark gritty character of the prints. Many of these images were taken in the southern province of Andalusia, a largely poor region (unlike the tourist ridden coast) historically wrenched by Christian and Muslim faith. Profoundly Catholic, the Andalusians are also known for their revelry. Some of García Rodero's most poignant images reveal the juxtaposition of strong religious devotion and drunken abandon. Such an image is one of two robed men, one wearing a pointed hood with a pigeon haplessly perched upon it, and the other holding a bottle and glass, clearly well inebriated. In the background stands a man dressed in what looks like a Roman soldier's outfit holding a spear and smoking a cigarette. This photograph, almost surreal in the absurdity of its situation, is a wonderful encapsulation of a rural Spanish festival.

In her opening statement
García Rodero tells us: "I have
focused my photographic interests
on producing a social document
about life in Spain through her
local festivals rituals and beliefs,
researching our way of being and
reality. I chose the festival because
of its wealth of symbols and varied
content. It represents a duality at
several levels: religion, paganism,
life-death, natural-supernatural.
When celebrating their festivals,
people forget their inhibitions, and
all the emotions of the human condition converge, tragedies and
banalities, laughter and grief, hope,
dignity, love of life. I have tried to
photograph the mysterious, real and
magical soul of popular Spain with
passion, love, humor, tenderness,
anger, pain and truth. I have tried
to capture the most intense, most
expressive moments of certain characters with all the original inner
strength. These are simple people
who are quite irresistible, and I
have devoted myself wholeheartedly to this personal challenge which
has given me energy and inspired
my understanding."

The festival is an indispensable
feature in any culture and reveals in

The festival is an indispensable feature in any culture and reveals in the most intimate and yet public manner the core beliefs and customs of a particular group of people. Not only does the festival represent a release from the humdrum reality of day to day life, it is rooted in a most ancient way to a people's set of beliefs. Participating in the festival gives a feeling of belonging and well being, and a a reassurance of a certain order in the world. The annual reaffirmation of the festival reflects the cyclical nature of the world and its seasons. Festivals are celebrations of hope for a produc-

tive agricultural season, and a healthy regeneration of life, but they are also reminders of death. Unwittingly perhaps, the photograph of the jocular man holding a large curved piece of wood around his crotch, is, in its simplest form, symbolic of the fertility everyone celebrates and hopes for in this fes-tival. Another image of a man jumping over a bed with five babies on it, seems a curious and comical ritual of good fortune and health. But some of García Rodero's most moving images are probably the images of Death. Sometimes there are ironic reminders of death, such as the photograph of a soldier mock- executing an old peasant who is being held by a jovial man in an outlandish costume. Death, as epitomized in the death of Christ, is a critical aspect of the religious fes tival, and most of García Rodero's images are reminders of it; for example the image of an old lady holding a little girl up to kiss the feet of Christ on the crucifix, the picture of a little boy sitting behind a large black casket, or the image of a little dead boy in an open cas-ket on the side of the road with his parents standing beside him. But an unforgettable image was that of a dead boy's face in a glass case behind a statue of the dead virgin.Death is written on the faces of the of the elderly, and strangely, frequently on the faces of the chil-dren as well. But life and rebirth, as epitomized in the resurrection of Christ, is simultaneously reaffirmed in these pictures, just like the children's faces squeezing through the furrowed adult expressions with their playful beaming smiles. García Rodero has the knack of

revealing life's complexity with almost deadpan simplicity. Her photographs are not merely anthro-pological studies of rituals and customs. They reveal human issues that are tied with politics and religion. The image of a bored priest in an open confessional, situated in front of a cemetery, listening to a pleading and penitent old lady, had a cynical quality that seemed a ghostly reminder of the Inquisition, and the dominating grip of the Catholic church. Against this grip, is a stubborn attachment to certain heathen rituals and customs that predate Christianity itself, and sur-vive today, probably to the chagrin

of the Catholic church. The photographs in this show are full of different layers of mean-ing that is not immediately apparent. The shock value of seeing something that seems bizarre and strange, appeals to the voyeuristic in almost all lovers of photography. Obviously García Rodero is aware of the popularity of her work due to this. It is possible to construe this as a weakness in the subject chosen,

P. 12 top to bottom, left to right Cristina García Rodero, El Dependiente, Zamora, 1978 (The Dependent)

Cristina García Rodero, Las Potencias del Alma, Puente Genil, 1976 (Potency of the Soul)

Cristina García Rodero, El Desfile, Alcoy, 1976

Cristina García Rodero, La Confesión, Saavedra, 1980

Cristina García Rodero, Los Angelitos, Morella, 1987 (The Little Angels)

P. 13 Top to bottom Cristina García Rodero, ¡Camarero! Un Chocolate con Churros, Cartagena, 1981 (Waiter! A Chocolate Pastry)

Cristina García Rodero, El Cascaborras, Orce, 1987



but in this case the work shows a deeper integrity. This work as photographed in different regions of the country and on different dates and it probably would have been helpful to have titles and dates under the images. But apart from this, the Ministerio de Cultura of Spain would be happy to have piqued the curiosity of many visitors to this show, and (who knows?) to have attracted some more tourists to Spain.

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BANK SHOTS

By Joseph McGrath

Money Matters: A Critical Look at Bank Architecture, an exhibition of architectural photographs by 11 photographers, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Parnassus Foundation, Feb. 4 - April 15, 1990; and the accompanying catalogue with an introduction by Brendan Gill, and essays by Robert Nisbet, Susan Wagg and Anne Wilkes Tucker (McGraw Hill, 1990).

At the heart of Money Matters: A Critical Look At Bank Architecture lies a contradiction which Anne Wilkes Tucker, the show's cura-tor, reveals in her essay, "Where One Stands And When One Stands There." First, there is the idea that photography is capable of capturing an "essence" of architecture in that architectural photographs not only picture a building and its circumstances, but also com-municate the cultural values which it embodies. Tucker writes, "Compared to less stationary subjects, architecture offers both advantages and disadvantages to the photographer. Time dependent factors of patination and use-- such as light, weather, neglect and ordinary habitation--cause striking changes in appearance, but the architectural presence of each building remains available for contemplation and interpretive efforts to capture its essence."1 Through the mediative efforts of the photographer, Tucker suggests, an essence which transcends the building's actual cir-cumstances may be revealed. This points directly to the second assumption and explicit point of her essay and the show as a whole. Although the architectural photographer must frequently manage technical considerations such as light, people and obstacles in the building's environment as well as respond to the desires of publications and clients, he remains fully capable of bringing an original and insightful interpretation to his subject. Thus, she writes, "The photographers in this project had to explore their feelings and assumptions about banks, in general, and specifically about the banks which were assigned to them."2 Yet she also notes that, "Architectural photographers seek to commu-nicate a sense of each institution's cultural significance, as well as its function and the structural relevance of its materials and methods."3 A succinct resolution is shaped by her suggestion that "the most talented (architectural) photographers" attempt to balance these contradictory demands in their work

There is no doubt that the work in this show, as Tucker notes, falls far short of obsequiousness. However, the fact that each photographer's vision is mitigated by the intentions of the show itself is overlooked. It is also worth noting that Tucker's insistence on the personal expressiveness of the work only blurs the distinction between interpretations which have been built around the work and the photographer's own expression. For example, in juxtaposing the Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank with the Second Bank of the United States does James Iska's photograph suggest "the commercial value of having one's own place on Banker's Row" and, "the additional value of distinctive appearance,"?4 Or has a skillful response to a photogenic subject been set to substantiate a particular history of bank architecture?

togenic subject been set to substantiate a particular history of bank architecture?

In his 1979 book, Architecture and Its Interpretation, Juan Pablo Bonta characterizes the variable nature of meaning ascribed to architectural form. Bonta suggests that a building's meaning is contingent on the "expressive system" within which it is set by a particular interpretation. Bonta writes, "Interpreters are free to subscribe to one system or another, and even to shift allegiances from time to time. But each expressive system is selective and restrictive. Each system imposes a certain view of architectural reality, enhancing the identification of certain forms and meanings, and precluding or at least obscuring others."5 Moreover, alternate interpretations may mark buildings with diametrically opposite meanings.

metrically opposite meanings.

For instance, David Duchow's photographs of Arthur Erickson's 1971 addition to the 1938 Bank of Canada in Ottawa are accompanied by this descriptive note: "The Vancouver architect Arthur Erickson designed a modern addition that preserved the integrity of the original building by embracing it with a massive glass structure. The light

filled interior at the rear is a welcoming public space that contains a year round garden."6(italics mine) The same bank was also the subject of photographer Allan Sekula's early 1987 exhibition, Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes. In accompanying text published in 1988 in the journal Assemblage, Sekula variously describes the building as a "turd in a vitrine," "embedded . . . in a glass box, rather as if a brick had been frozen into a block of ice," and "pharaonically entombed." Sekula goes on to advance a more radical reading of the facade by suggesting, "Another reading is possible. This reading detects a more cynical subtext. A style associated with commerce, but primarily with the state, is

excluded from David Duchow's work as they certainly would be in almost any commissioned work of the building.

More interesting perhaps, is the fact that both exhibitions use a virtually identical photograph of the building (a medium range shot which centers the original bank's north facade in the middle of the print with the surrounding addition extending symetrically towards left and right) in support of their widely departed interpretations. Admittedly, the fact that Sekula's photograph was taken at the height of a Canadian winter and Duchow's during the summer may be no small difference. Nevertheless, the philosopher Arthur Danto makes much of this kind of coincidence in his book, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. Through the use of imaginative examples, Danto suggests that even though objects (in this case, photographs) may even appear indistinguishable, this in no way marks them as the same work of art. They are in fact defined and differentiated as works of art by interpretations supplied to them by the artist or viewer. Given the central importance of interpretation in Danto's thesis, his characterization of Art as

ficing dignity or beauty,"10 one might suggest that Susan Wagg, the exhibition's historian sets urbanity at the building's essence.

To the degree that they are works of art in their own right, buildings stand under the architect's own creative interpretation. photograph of such an artwork provides an additional interpretation of the "once-inter preted" object. It might be suggested that the essence of the building is, in fact, the archi-tect's interpretation embodied by the building and evoked by the skilled and perceptive architectural photographer. The transparent role of the photographer in directing our attention to the explicitly "architectural" apects of the building such as architectural details, the play of light and shadow, or the building's relationship to others around it may not limit the work's artfulness. Yet, contrary to Tucker, the expressiveness of such work can only by limited. For, in letting the building "speak for iteself," the photographer is obliged to suspend his or her own judge-ments. Len Jenshel, for instance, combines an objective, documentary eye with a refined aesthetic attitude in capturing the historic Bank of Columbus, Georgia in the even light



James Iska, Chestnut Street Facade, Second Bank of the United States, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1819-24. Architect William Strickland.

allowed to front for—while being swallowed up by—a style associated almost exclusively with commerce. It's as if a large corporate headquarters building had taken on the original Bank of Canada as a facade."7 For Sekula, the complex embodies a kind of Canadian economic myth which is "whispered" to the "Canadian bourgoisies." On the one hand, the building recalls a nationalistic tale of natural resources as the source of Canadian wealth (evidenced by the garden environment of the addition's public lobby). On the other, the building promotes Canada's membership in the invisible, but powerful, global network of international trade. The "welcoming public space" of the garden lobby is welcoming in Sekula's view strictly within the confines set by the bank's security system. The lobby is thoroughly duplicitous in its distraction of the user from the effectual operations of the bank.

In discussing the shaping of "expressive systems" by various interpreters, Bonta notes the discriminating selection of photographs to illustrate their own observations and delimit others.8 Sekula's caustic work attempts to destroy the aura of the lobby with photographs which include bags of fertilizer and capture workmen descending through hidden access hatches in the lobby floor suggesting the actual artificiality of this "natural" environment. Such occurences are, of course,

being fundametally rhetorical is not surprising. Danto writes, "But it is not at all difficult to find rhetorical aspects in the most exalted art, and it may just be one of the main offices of Art less to represent the world than to represent it in such a way as to cause us to view it with a certain attitude and with a special vision."9 Thus, under the aegis of an interpretation, advanced by whatever rhetorical skills the work's interpreter can bring to bear, a bank, much less a photograph of a bank, can come to mean different things.

At the risk of having overstated the case, the work of writers such as Bonta and Danto as well as the tenuous discussion of photographs that are not even in the show has been submitted to help raise issues which are not without significance for this exhibit. In contrast to Tucker's suggestion that, "... each building remains available for contemplation and interpretive effort to capture its essence." is the notion that a building contains no singular essence which is captured by an interpretation. Rather, a building's "essence" is situated by the interpretation itself. For Sekula, the essence of the Bank of Canada at Ottawa is duplicity-a quality placed there by his reading of the building. "... a refreshing, sophisticated wit to Canadian Bank Architecture, without sacri-

of early morning. The building is placed judiciously as the focus of the composition with intersecting streets vanishing away from it in two-point perspective. The morning hour provides the warm, photogenic light frequently used by architectural photographers and insures wide, quiet streets which remind the viewer of the bank's small town location. Other than depicting the bank in the most flattering and informative way possible, the photograph suggests little about Jenshel's attitude about the bank, Such an approach is certainly not limited to Jenshel's work. In repeated examples, such as the photographs of Robert Boudrea and James Iska, the work is limited to the limpid and picturesque presentation of the buildings and their ornamental details.

However, the show is not without some notable exceptions. Although her photographs of various banks lack the full force of her own study of classrooms exhibited at the Museum a few years ago, Catherine Wagner's distinctive style clearly stands out. Wagner has a singular ability (combined with no small amount of wit) to photograph buildings in such a way that one is struck by them simply as objects. In a sense, it's as if the photograph is not "of a building" at all as she tests the limits of the visual signals which tell us that a photograph is "architectural."

Wagner's photograph of Minoru Yamasaki's Rainer Bank Tower in Seattle captures the entirely alien quality of the building as it looms over the city. Likewise, her "View the Roof Garden" of the Bank of California in San Francisco transforms the bank into an over-scaled, decorated pedestal on which the garden sits, cleverly underscoring the impenetrable mass of the bank.

One of the most interesting aspects of the show is the fact that the photographers were asked to include written remarks about their subjects with their work. Although selections have been included in Tucker's essay, they were unfortunately excluded from the mor accessible installation of the work itself. She notes, for instance, that David Miller's comments, "reflect a certain dislike for banks" appearances and what he regards as authori-tarian practices." She writes, "It therefore wasn't surprising that his photograph of the manager's office in the Bank of British Columbia has the aura of a school principal's office."11 Miller's photograph is noteworthy because it uses the building in shaping an expression of the photographer's experience of it. Depicting the building or its spaces is secondary to seeing it, as Danto suggests, "with a special vision." It is affective because it presents a bank as its subject rather than merely the building in which it is located.

It is easy to overlook Edward Burtynsky's witty testament to this distinction in his photographs of the Canadian Bank of Commer Burtynsky's photograph of the banking hall ceiling serves as the colorful commanding image on the exhibition poster and catalog cover. It is telling perhaps to imagine replac-ing it with a second photograph from the same building of the broker's loan office in which a bank functionary peers out at the viewer from his cage-like office. In seeing these photographs side by side, Burtynsky seems struck by the permeable boundary where the dignified may become the stolid and the composed, the intractable.

Nevertheless, a decidedly conventional

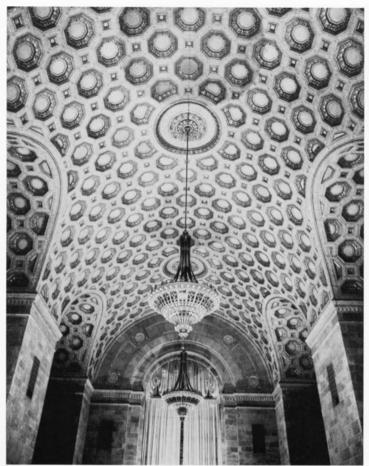
air pervades the show not only because of the predominance of photographs made through well-established approaches for shooting architecture. It's also provided by the task to which the photographs have been set within the exhibit. The photographs serve to illustrate a historical narrative which combines formal and stylistic descriptions with analysis of the changing features of banking institutions. As the bank's social role changes, the bank building's architecture changes. The architect works to project his client's image of that role by using architecture as a kind of expressive language. Thus, in describing the use of the Greek temple form, the exhibition notes state, "In order to succeed, American bankers had to convince the public that these unfamiliar and widely distrusted institutions were sound. To that end, they had their architects design impressive buildings that suggested stability."12

The fact that such a conception of architecture has both specific historical origins and critical ramifications for architecture is over-looked in the exhibition and catalog. Emerging during the French Revolution in the experimental work of architects such as LeDoux and Boullee, an architecture parlante advanced the expressiveness of architecture through the formulation of a linguistic rela-tionship between form and function. In one design for a wheelwright's shop, LeDoux prodesign for a wheelwright's shop, Let-Doux pro-posed a rudimentary wheel-shaped facade. Although LeDoux's forms are highly abstract-ed and more radical, the understanding that architectural form represents a building's func-tion still underlies the rhetorical transposition of the ancient Greek temple form to house an eighteenth century American bank. In taking this understanding for granted, Wagg fails to place her narrative within a larger context which might have illuminated the way in which American architecture distinctly exemplifies fundamental changes in the nature of architecture since the Enlightenment. Among others, the Italian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri has written about "the crisis of the architectural object" born of the divestment of cultural values (perceived as permanent) from architec-tural form. The emergence of architecture parlante reflects this crisis by replacing the symbolic, even organic, relationship between architecture and values with a linguistic relationship of signifier and signified. Simply put, prior to the Enlightenment a palace did not express the authority of the monarchy,

but literally embodied it.

For Tafuri, the eclecticism of 19th century architecture thus exemplifies a notable devaluation:

. what (had) allowed romantic eclecticism to make itself the interpreter of the mer-



Edward Burtynsky, Ceiling, Banking Hall, Canadian Bank of Commerce, Head Office, Toronto. Ontario, 1929-31 (now Canadian Imper York & Sawyer, Consulting Architects. erial Bank of Commerce). Architects Darling & Pearson;

ciless commercialization of the human environment (was) by immersing in it particles of completely worn-out values, presented in all their contorted muteness and falsity, as if to demonstrate that no subjective effort can regain an authenticity lost forever.
Nineteenth century ambiguity consists wholly in the unrestrained exhibition of a false conscience, which attempts an ethical redemption by displaying its own lack of authenticity."13

The contrast between Tafuri's general cri-tique and Wagg's observations on the eclecticism of Burnham & Root's Society for Savings Building in Cleveland is stunning.

Wagg writes: The detailing is eclectic in the manner of the day. Several periods of Gothic as well as Romanesque and Renaissance forms furnished Root with motifs, producing an agreeable—to contemporaries—visual variety. At times the ornament is pure delight . . . This giant red tower projected the image of a protective fortress, but it was a decidedly friendly fortress Like Richardson and Sullivan, Root sought ways of investing America's new large-scale commercial architecture with the dignity and meaning which had once been reserved for palaces and churches

While Tafuri's criticism might be dis-

Catherine Wagner, View South from Pike Tower Roof, Rainier Bank Tower, Seattle, Washington, 1974-77 (now Security Pacific Tower). Architects Minoru Yamasaki; Naramore, Bain, Brady &



missed as polemical, it is hardly necessary to accept his provacative arguments to appreciate his critical awareness of the thoroughly artificial nature of 19th century architecture. In accepting Root's 19th century attempt to create an image for a bank from buildings realized centuries earlier. Wagg serves the central point of her history. From their inception up through the present day the design of banks has changed just as much (if not more) because of the desire to revise the bank's image than because of the need to facilitate changes in its function. To suggest that such "image-making" is inauthentic would be to raise critical questions about her concluding assertion that banks rely on their buildings to "project, if not physical safety, then the other qualities that play an enduring role in their institutions' existence and survival: stability, security and sound judgement.15 Rather than analyzing architecture's role as projection and its relationship to the increasing institutional power of banks, Wagg accepts this role and characterizes the way in which various buildings have come to play it. Opinions like Sekula's or Tafuri's are

important with regards to "Money Matters" because they raise critical issues either excluded from or presumed by an exhibition which is especially resistant to criticism. The controlled relationship between the narrative and the photographs which make it plain, as well as the air of completeness created by the project's comprehensive scope admit few of the insights offered by contentious interpreta-tions. What is at stake here is perhaps best summarized by John Berger in the conclusion to his 1978 essay, "Uses of Photography":

"There is never a single approach to something remembered. The remembered is not like a terminus at the end of a line. Numerous approaches or stimuli converge upon it and lead to it. Words, comparisons and signs need to create a context for a printed photograph in a comparable way; that is to say, they must mark and leave open diverse approaches. A radial system has to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultane-ously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic."16

In his essay, Berger argues for the creation of public contexts in which photographs might serve as artifacts of social memory Central to his argument is the idea that photographs must be held within such contexts in the same way individuals hold memories: at the center of a nexus of countless associations. If only more critical exploration had been made of these contexts, "Money Matters" might have played this role which is more comprehensive

- Footnotes
 1. Anne Wilkes Tucker, "Where One Stands and When One Stands There, Money Matters: A Critical Look At Bank Architecture, (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.),
- p. 293. 2. Tucker, p. 288.

- 3. Tucker, p. 269.

 4. Tucker, p. 291.

 5. Juan Pablo Bonta, Architecture and its interpretation (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd.), p. 121.

 6. exhibition porce.
- 6. exhibition notes
- 7. Allan Sekula, "Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes," Assemblage 6 (June 1988), p. 45. 8. Bo
- 9. Arthur C. Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), p. 167. 10. Susan Wagg, Money Matters: A Critical
- Look At Bank Architecture (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.), p. 173.
- 11. Tucker, p. 289. 12. exhibition notes
- Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development, translated by Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press), p. 43.

- 14. Wagg, p. 87.
 15. Wagg, p. 199.
 16. John Berger, "Uses of Photography," in About Looking (New York: Pantheon Books), p. 62-63.

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CONCEPTUAL ART SURVIVES FOTOFEST, BARON UNITED WITH GERMANS

By David Portz

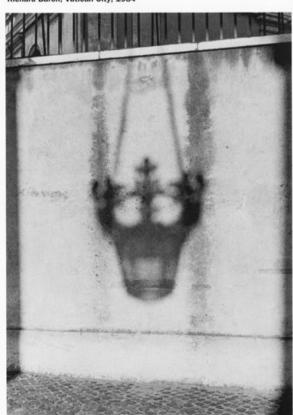
Richard Baron, DiverseWorks, Feb. 10 - March 10, 1990.

Germany: Photography Has The Right To Make You Think, George R. Brown Convention Center, Feb. 10 - March 4, 1990.

Photography within the conceptual art tradition was not much in evidence at FotoFest, perhaps because such photography suggests photography's misgivings about itself—its anxieties, its self-doubt. Documentary photography, self-assured and self-sufficient, was most prevalent in the extravaganza, performing in the center of the medi-um's perceived strength, the power to inform. Also prevalent w photographs with traditional art intention - the snaps of captured or fabricated instants - fanciful, amusing, loaded with implications, depending heavily on their forthright relation to literal, visual truth. The conceptual photography which attended FotoFest, by contrast, was neither amusing nor informative, but ironic, subversive, self-conscious, unpolished, and minimal. Moreover, it seemed dated, a decade, two decades distant a phenomenon of the past. Is all self-consciousness and subversiveness similarly dated?

Richard Baron's photographs at DiverseWorks recalled the quintessential conceptual art of the sixties and seventies. Conceptual art privileged the artwork's idea over its execution. The conceptual artist carried the craft of artmaking only so far as needed to make clear the originating idea - handwork was de-emphasized. The concept of the work was thus kept as the work's essence; the concept ruled the art. Additionally, conceptual art concerned itself with the medium in which it worked - conceptual art revealed as cursorily as possible the conyentional nature of art-making, and the operation of art upon the viewer. Conceptual art aspired to







Martin Kippenberger, Wo sind die Photographinnen, die den Kerker der Moralitat leeren, 1986

reveal to the complacent viewer his or her own expectations, often enough, by chiding or upsetting them. The very absence of hand-crafting thwarted the art viewer's expectations, to which disturbance was added epate le bourgeois banality.

The vitality of El Paso photographer Richard Baron's work lies in how well it can still offend, by ris-ing to no one's expectations. The series "Corporate Headquarters and Other N.Y. Landmarks," (1977-79) depicts the almost featureless street-level marble and metal surfaces of the titan architectural landmarks built by U.S. institutional giants (for example, Union Carbide, AT&T, MOMA), ignoring the PR value of those landmarks for their truer nature - conformity and anonymity - implicitly imputed to their occupants. A similar series depicts businessmen striding to work past such building surfaces ("Men in Suits" 1980), but focuses on the surfaces instead of the executives, who appear slightly blurred. This series was, as the wall text explained, "photographed while Richard Baron was on his way to the unemployment office." Nothing extraordinary arouses the viewer in any of the individual series either.

Denied other stimulation, the viewer is left with only the concept: that the artist chose a point of view communicating dismissal of the traditional photographic subject. Baron's concern with surface, interchangeability and inscrutability is consistent throughout his several series. "Border Portraits" (1982-86) portrays faces of persons pho-

tographed at El Paso's US-Mexico tographed at El Paso's OS-Mexico border, squinting under sunlight, the faces cropped so that all indicia of social class or economic status are unavailable. The series is an undoing of the documentary impulse, similar to the non-pho-tographs of buildings and executives mentioned before. "Whorehouse Self-portraits" (1986) is a series of enlargements from Polaroids by Juarez street photographers, each one of Baron, at table, with beer and arm around a different Mexican prostitute. His setting, position and sullen glower are invariable, so that the photographs of the series would be interchangeable if not for the women, who are modulated by the alacrity of their smiles, and daringness of their decolletage. The repeti-tion of the documents undoes their function of recording these routine visits - it makes them a hoax instead. "Dream Girls" (1987-88) are rephotographs from crumpled pages of pornographic magazines. Light from the various planes of the crumpled surface disrupt the closeups of the straining women's faces. In such manner Baron diminishes even the minimal achievements of rephotography, giving less, and reliably communicating almost noth-

Another exhibition of photographs that was subversive of photographs tradition was "Photography Has the Right to Make You Think" - selections from F.C. Gundlach's collection of German photographers' works. One may put aside the exhibition's preposterous name, except to note that it signified the collector's disposition to ponder the nature of photography, vis-a-vis its own technology and the other visual arts. Gundlach pursued his enquiry by purchasing works on the "boundaries" of photography, including several photographers whose work could be considered conceptual art: Martin Kippenberger, Walter Dahn, and the collaborative efforts of Peter Fischli and David Weiss.

 Martin Kippenberger was represented by several pieces. Among the very few sculptural works appearing in FotoFest,
Kippenberger's "Das Medium de
Photographie..." (1989) consisted of
plastic film canisters sloppily taped together into an amorphous, tentacled construction, upon the pedestal of a manual of photograph-ic technique. Examining the construction to determine whether it. represented a particular object (a headless torso for example), the viewer would determine that no, the object indeed was amorphous In a Kippenberger photograph, a man on a balcony atop an ocean-side highrise sticks out his tongue. Dotted lines rise into the sky on his line of sight, then plunge to indicate certain antlike figures on a crowded beach. At the top of the photo was a question in German, which, translated at slight variance from the wall label, said, "9. Where are the women photographers who empty the dungeon of morality?"
At the bottom of the photograph was another caption, translatable as '10. Where are the photographs which extinguish the grain-eleva-tors of monotony?" In another

Kippenberger photograph the face of a man confronts the viewer, his face shaded with blocks of color: a blue shape over one eye and a red spiral from the other.

Superimposed text states: "We don't have problems with the Guggenheim because we are not invited."

These works with mock seriousness ask questions of art politics, rhetorical questions. The short texts take photography so seriously that expectations of it are equivalent to expectations of religious salvation. In the dungeon of morality, who is waiting to be saved? All persons whom any society has castigated? If so, can women photographers be expected to save them? And is it realistic to expect photography to alleviate whole silos-full of tedium? Referring to the sculpture, is the medium of photography capable of isolation and definition, or is it rather an amorphous existence, not subject to description?

not subject to description?
Walter Dahn remystifies the
African cult masks and tribal religious objects incarcerated behind
glass museum showcases. Phantom
reflections of carved skulls and
shrunken heads reanimate the space
behind the glass barriers—an effect,
a resurrection, owing its life to photography. Dahn answers
Kippenberger, at least with respect
to the magical expectations of
defunct tribes—his photography
spoofs the accomplishment of the
miraculous. The photography, such
as "Sculpture" (1983) and "Mask"
(1984/85) presented the utmost of
sloshed chemicals on the print surface, seemingly swabbed with blood,
showing a casual regard for technique while alluding to mystic pro-

The collaborations of Peter Fischli and David Weiss are photographed assemblages of objects, parts of a series titled "Quiet Afternoon" (1984/85). In "Die Masturbine," a title which may per-haps be translated as "masturbation machine," five high heeled-shoes link together heel in mouth to form a circle, with these words identify-ing the respective shoes: Flirt, Love, Passion, Hate, and Division. In the same series, "The Danger of the Night" (1984/85) links objects in an arc above a cement warehouse floor: a metal pail (labeled "fulfill-ment"), a stretched cloth rag ("tactic"), a wooden cylinder ("strategy"), two rubber gloves stretched to reach in opposite directions ("yearning, curiosity"), and an old horseshoe ("melancholy"). Together with roots in Dada, these constructions suggest a bleak abstract use of metaphor, and other affinities with conceptual art. constructions are staged in dingy interiors, and formal qualities and fine finish are avoided in the pho-tographs; they are ironic, minimal, and self-consciously constructed. The equilibrium of the suspended objects is improbable, and the identification of the words with the objects is improbable. Yet, neither can be dismissed outright. When the clutter is swept away, or wiped off with rag and pail, the concept remains, understated, critical,

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WORKING WITH KEN AND BARBIE

By William Howze

"America Worked: The 1950's Photographs of Dan Weiner," and "Love Scenes, 1988" by Andy Wiener, in the exhibition "Camera Art in Scotland Now," George R. Broum Convention Center, Houston, February 10 - March 9, 1990.

Dan Weiner's black & white photographs of the 1950's reveal so many disturbing tensions beneath familiar surfaces that one is prompted to ask if photographs like them are being made today. FotoFest provided an unlikely but provocative comparison in the work of the Scottish photographer Andy Wiener, whose staged color photographs feature the most durable survivors of the '50's, Ken and Barbie.

Many of Dan Weiner's photographs depict conservatively dressed business executives engaged in activities such as discussing the design of everything from laundry detergent boxes and automobiles to Lincoln Center. Other photographs show such scenes as suburban housewives in pedalpushers exercising in front of a television, families shopping for furniture in a department store, and a home sales "Hostess Party." One's first impression is that we have seen these pictures before in old copies of LIFE magazine. Weiner, who died in 1959, was in fact a leading magazine photographer of the period. On the other hand, Andy

On the other hand, Andy Wiener's large (approximately 24 x 30") pictures appear to have been made in the rooms of a playhouse occupied by Ken and Barbie dolls and furnished with a portable television and simple forms of furniture. The colors range from pastel pinks, yellows, and blues to deeper shades. Though there are actual dolls in the photographs, the scenes are dominated by adults who wear Ken and Barbie masks.

Captions or titles influence one's interpretation of both bodies of work. Dan Weiner's photographs are accompanied not only by descriptive captions, but also by excerpts from books and magazine articles of the period. For example, a photograph of three business men regarding half a dozen detergent boxes displayed on a table is accompanied by the caption "Packaging decisions by Benton and Bowles agency executives for Procter and Gamble products, New York City, 1956," and this excerpt from Fortune magazine: "Procter and Gamble wages psychological warfare on many fronts." Although the obvious interpretation is that these men conduct the war, Weiner's composition suggests that the men themselves are actually embattled by the boxes.

This ironic use of captions and ambivalent view of consumer values links the work of these two photographers. Andy Wiener, who was born the year Dan Weiner died, gave his entire series the title "Love Scenes, 1988," and captioned each photograph. The photographs were hung in three groups: Fertilization-Implantation-Gestation-Birth; Love-Marriage-Separation-Divorce; and Domination-Desperation-Analysis-Conclusion. "Fertilization" depicts a woman sitting before a television in the playhouse-like setting. Significantly, the woman is a brunette, while the image that appears on the television screen is that of blonde Barbie. In the course of the next three pictures, the woman acquires a Barbielike mask and, apparently through the medium of television, a man with a Ken mask materializes.

Dan Weiner captured a young man apparently in the throes of just such a metamorphosis in a photo-



Dan Wiener, Packaging decisions by Benton and Bowles Agency executives for Procter and Gamble products, New York City, 1956

graph captioned "Potential trainee awaits interview at Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1957." The young man stands in the middle of an office waiting area. A sign in the background reads "Part-Time & Summer Student Employment." He is dressed like a junior executive in an open top coat with a plaid scarf over a white shirt and tie, but his expression and posture belie his business-like suit. His forehead is wrinkled and his head is tilted down so that his eyes peer out from under his brows. His gaze is directed out of the picture to his left as if he is about to leave. He is turned away from a poster that asks, "Are you ready for your Interview." A

Dan Weiner's observations thirty years earlier is irresistable. One's perception of the subtlety and complexity of the work of both photographers is enriched by repeated comparisons. Andy Wiener's staged metamorphoses prepare one to discover potential transformations in many of Dan Weiner's pictures. For example, Andy Wiener's use of doll-like face masks to represent social conformity informs the way we see Dan Weiner's picture captioned "A perfume saleswoman with customers in a department store, Washington, D.C., 1953." Not only can one see the faces of all four women in this picture as masks, one can also see the back of



Dan Wiener, A Procter and Gamble salesman visits a food store in New York City, 1956

cartoon-like drawing of a young man who straightens his bow tie with a confident gesture illustrates the poster. The young man, whose hands are jammed in his pockets, appears to be having second thoughts about his readiness for the interview. It seems the image has defeated him instead of preparing him for the changes he must face.

In Andy Wiener's pictures, images defeat other images. In the Separation-Divorce-Love sequence, the character with the Barbie mask rejects the character with the smiling Ken mask and turns her attention to the television image of a scowling Thor-like character. Soon a character with a Thor mask materializes who, in "Domination," reduces the Barbie-faced character back into a doll, his plaything.

The temptation to see Andy Wiener's compositions of 1988 as extensions and confirmations of the heart-shaped mirror as a blank face awaiting its own metamorphosis. Similarly, Dan Weiner's photographs of real people in real situations heighten our curiosity about the real people behind the masks in Andy Wiener's compositions. The fact that a Scottish photographer chose to use such quintessentially American icons as Ken and Barbie can be taken as an indication of just how successfully those men at Procter and Gamble, and others like them, waged their psychological warfare.

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Dan Wiener, Exercise class, Park Forest, 1953



THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

By Lynn M. Herbert

Drum: Photographs from the South African Magazine Drum during the 1950's, Barnes-Blackman Gallery, February 17 - March 11, 1990.

Sometimes photographs can be so powerful-and this is one of those times. Drum is a South African magazine that was founded in 1951. Soon thereafter the magazine began to focus on the concerns of the growing black urban population. Anthony Sampson was the editor from 1951-1954 and helped organize this exhibit. In an opening statement, he explains: "The township life of the 'fifties which these photographs portray, displayed a kind of innocent optimism which was soon to be disillusioned by the events which followed It was the good fortune of *Drum* in the 'fifties, of its writers, photographers and editors, to be able to record and reflect this vibrating world before it was overshadowed by a much harsher confrontation."
"Vibrating" is an understatement.

In this thoughtfully laid out exhibit, you began in a room that gave you an overwhelming sense of the prominent role that music played in the lives of black South Africans. Celebrity singers and successful professional musicians performing, informal groups gathered around a piano, church service—a variety of ways in which music entered into everyday life were illustrated. Each photograph was accompanied by its original caption at the time of publication to further enrich the viewer's understanding.

Heading into the next room on that upbeat note, you were greeted by a photograph of a happy bride and groom sipping drinks through straws out of soda bottle. It was easy to share in their happiness until you read the title and caption: "Prohibition—They're drinking anyway.... They haven't got a license to drink, so they hide their brandy in cooldrink bortles." This photograph was followed by a portrait of gold miners taking a smoke break, the forced removal of residents of Sophiatown which was to be torn down and replaced by a white suburb, and a subsequent protest march. Sprinkled in were images of unusual events, such as a yogi burying himself for 45 minutes, and portraits of people involved with Drum such as "Bob Gosani, Exceptional Photographer."

Photographer."

The next room focussed on boxing and included Bob Gosani's now famous image of a young Nelson Mandela shadow-sparring with Gerry Moloi, a boxing champ.

Other champions were portrayed as was Benny Singh, an Indian boxing promoter dubbed "The Father of Black Boxing in South Africa."

Portraits of political leaders at work included Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Josias Madzunya and Helen Joseph. Amidst these portraits were photographs of paddywagons driving through the streets documenting December 5, 1956, the day the South African police picked up 156 political leaders throughout the country and

charged them with high treason. So often in this exhibit, the captions made already powerful photographs wrenching. Ranjith Kally's photograph "Bantu Court - Zululand, May 1956" shows a white magistrate sitting behind a table, a black prisoner in front of him, and a crowd of black men sitting to the side on the floor. The caption reads: "The magistrate raises his eyes above the documents and plunges them like daggers into hearts of all who watch him. His blue eyes are keen; the hearts pound like the bass of a boogie woogie."

Bob Gosani's "Watching the Dead - Newcastle, May 1958" shows a young woman and her child



Bob Gosani, Nelson Mandela sparing with Molol

seated outside next to an open coffin. The caption reads: "There was urine pools and stool all over the courtyard. The walls told the murky story of degenerate backyard lives. Giant-sized cockroaches glided merrily up and down the coffin as if nothing had happened. There was nothing else, except death."

Issues concerning women were addressed by photographs in the last men, the home life. And because of new jobs the Modern Miss has her red-painted talons onto more money than she has seen before. At first this made her gaudy and brash She now talks about those unheard of things: aborttion, feminine rights and mere males."

Like LIFE magazine in the United States, *Drum* portrayed the changing life of the 1950's to its



Jurgen Schadeberg, Racial Classification and Reclassification

rooms. The caption under Bob Gosani's portrait of Regina Brooks, a white woman living with a Zulu, Richard Kumalo, concludes: "Regina's attorney Mr. Harry Bloom claimed that she had 'gone native' and could no longer be considered white." And Jurgen Schadeberg's portrait of a beautiful woman posing while combing her hair is captioned thus: "Johannesburg, March 1958—The modern Africa Miss. She's city slick and sophisticated. She's smart. She's delicate and unself-conscious in the way she handles

readers including the good, the bad, the humorous, and the sad. The images that have been coming out of South Africa in recent decades have necessarily been focussed on only certain aspects of life there. This exhibition was a poignant reminder of who the people we see in those pictures really are.

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Peter Magubane, Watching the Dead





Michiko Kon, Eat, 1987

QUIET DEFIANCE

By Maggie Olvey

Three Japanese Contemporaries: Michiko Kon, Ryuji Miyamoto, and Toshio Shibata, Curated by Koko Yamagishi, George R. Brown Convention Center. 10 Feb.. 10 - March 4,1990.

To the Western eve the three young Japanese artists in this installation are apparently tilling familiar photographic soil. Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup and René Magritte's Kiss seem to be reincarnated delectably in the work of Michiko Kon; Ryuji Miyamoto and Toshio Shibata seem to be exploring the same philosophical ground as Robert Adams and other New Topographics photographers. But this simplified view ignores the profound and unshakable regard that the Japanese culture places upon tradition and order. The food one eats, the shelter over one's head, and the land upon which one walks are treated with a sacred reverence not to be trifled with. Likewise, photography in Japan has been circumscribed by traditions that stress journalistic methods and promote unmanipulated, "straight" imagery. Only recently have young Japanese photographers diverged from these paths to focus on individualism, internal dialogue and social consciousness.1 Therefore it is within the context of adherence to and defiance of lapanese traditions that the photographs in this installation should be viewed.

In a country where land is at a great premium, signs of human encroachment are pervasive and inevitable. At once reverential toward nature and mindful of the needs of progress, Shibata's large-scale black-and-white photographs communicate an uneasy tension between the landscape and retaining walls that invade and seek to control it. In compositions that confound our sense of scale, he describes how humankind operates upon the earth leaving sutures and bandages of concrete and stone to repair its acts of violation.

When Miyamoto descended into the Nine Dragon Castle district of Hong Kong he found 50,000 people living on seven acres of pandemic disorder. Myriad webs of water hoses and electrical wiring, rivers of open sewage, and mazes of alleyways attested to an intense desire to survive above all else. Suffocating, replete with detritus and decay, his series of gelatin silver photographs is both an indictment of the present and a warning for the future.

Food, traditionally a taboo subject for Japanese art, "is both the stuff of which we are made and also the

sacred thing that keeps us alive, [and] our parents find it necessary to reprimand us for treating such vital lifestuff as a plaything. Kon's black-and-white still lifes are bites from just such forbidden fruit. She constructs her unique world of animated objects from ordinary vegetable and animal materials placed into everyday situations. The resulting photographs are enormously tactile, and though contrived, the images are imaginative. sensual and deliciously humorous.

Footnotes

- 1. Koko Yamagishi, introduction to
- the exhibition installation.

 2. Shuji Shimamoto, Michiko Kon: Eat (Tokyo: Artworks Books, nd).

Texas Sand, a "thotofilm" by Ned Bosnick with music composed by Paul English, B.S. Restaurant Building, Houston, Feb. 8 - March 10, 1990.

DESERT SOUND-

By Johannes Birringer

SHAPES

Staged simultaneously with, but independently from, the 1990 Houston FotoFest, Ned Bosnick's Texas Sand exhibition created a somewhat anomalous and very provocative occasion to view pho-tography in a theatrical setting that invited comparisons to film and filmic narrative. Although photog raphy and film have had a long and entangled history since the beginnings of the kineto-phonograph and the motion picture in the 1890's (Lumiere) or, earlier still, the cinematographic studies of the human body-in-motion in Muybridge's sequential pho-tographs, Bosnick's exhibition claims the status of "the world's first photo-film." Despite this claim, and Bosnick's mundane comments on the distinction he wants to explore between film ("the director presents a rapid series of individual still photographs to a seated audi-ence") and his own work ("Texas Sand presents a series of still photographs to a moving audience"), the exhibition remains a traditional show that could be viewed like any

other show that is hung on walls.

The challenge lies in the mode of display which effectively directs our viewing through its theatrical design (lighting) and the musical

images over time. The play of enframing, via light focus, picture-framing and collaging devices, and musical texture and rhythm, generates the truly inspiring quality of the work: the viewing of Texas Sand turns into an imaginary journey, a complex symphonic experience of a time-landscape that is both abstract and full of figurative and realist connotations. The illusion of hav-ing watched a film is entirely created through the interplay of light and sound: since all the images are similar (taken from a desert in West Texas), the cumulative process of viewing them in sequence becomes a particular kind of film production. Although the structure and dramaturgy of this production are inscribed, the identification of meanings remains subjective and, ultimately, depends on how the sand shapes, as narrative images, read by a female/male viewer.

score that enframes and con-

structs a narrative experience of the

I will briefly describe my jour-ney past the 116 black and white photographs that are hung (some are placed at floor level) on the walls and partitions of the gallery, creating a meandering movement that starts in the dark and ends in the last of several black-outs, There are 54 lighting instruments variously spotlighting the particular frame I am meant to see. Paul English's original score gently develops an ephemeral, wind-like sound-landscape that is gradually altered into more dynamic, percus-sive textures and rhythmic colors (including two jazz-oriented sec-tions; English's synthesizer and piano composition incorporates voices by Isabelle Ganz, cello by Max Dyer, and bass clarinet by Richard Nunemaker). The journey is an intimate one, since Bosnick only allows small groups of 4 to 5 to embark on it at a time.

Throughout the 25 minutes of the staging, I am viscerally conscious of my fellow viewers, of our relation-ship in space and towards the images. Perhaps it is this physical awareness of my body which makes me begin to project a kinetic and sculptural dimension into the contours of the desert.

All the desert landscapes Bosnick has photographed are pris-tine, monotonously undulating spaces, one gently sloping sand dune after another, with no interruption in the eternal and abstract surface except an occasional dot of brushwood or some craggy driftwood. But Bosnick presents them in increasingly complex variations, some of them cropped, altered in size or scale, pasted together in mir-roring configurations, tilted upright or set afloat. A seismic shifting of lines and curves, the "scenes" from the desert begin to become anthro-pomorphized. I see voluptuous forms, outlines of a woman's body, breasts, thighs, vulva, pores of the skin. This projection of the eroti-cized "figure" of the landscape is accentuated at one point by the soft female voice we hear over a throbbing cello line on the soundtrack. But this beckoning voice, part of English's musical composition which in itself creates a spatial atmosphere of romantic expanse and unfulfilled yearning, cannot be reconciled with the metaphoric archetypes (Desert/Nature/Female Body) that are set in motion during this journey which ends in front of a frame with an empty, white sheet of paper. Although the personification of Nature as female and as a sexualized body is tempting, the cliche of the fetishistic icon of female Nature is ironically contradicted by other cultural meanings evoked by Bosnick's cropped and altered desert shapes. The sense of a masculinized, austere, barren and sublime landscape is equally pre-sent, informed by the ideology of the Western movie and a masculine metaphysics that projects its narratives of heroism, silence, and death into the vast blankness of the

My journey is inconclusive. Since Bosnick's desert shapes are not silent and yet remain undefined by English's fluid, poetic music, I experience a constant desire for interpretation, for control over the erotic and spiritual image associations produced by the unconscious. At the same time, I am growing aware of the "movement" of the exhibition; my relationship to Texas Sand is wholly imaginary, and the sand dunes are as indifferent to my fantasies as the white sheet of paper at the end which mocks the transcendental or material values, the hidden plot of this film narrative, that one would want to write into these deserted images which reflect nothing except, perhaps, the unfulfillable nature of human desire

Johannes Birringer is a theater director and video artist. His documentary film, Memories of a Revolution, premiered at the Rice Media Center in March.

WAKE UP AND **SMELL THE COFFEE**

By Lynn Herbert

Testimonies: Photography and Social Issues, curated by A.D. Coleman, George R. Brown Convention Center, Feb. 10 - March 10, 1990.

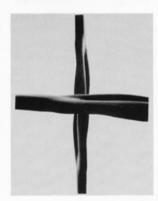
By bringing together six "issue oriented" photography projects for this exhibition, A.D. Coleman draws attention to the variety of issues currently engaging photographers, as well as the variety of ways they have chosen to convey their ssages about their subjects. Linda Troeller's TB-AIDS

DIARY deals with contagious dis-eases and the stigmas attched to them. Her diaristic collages com-bining photographs with personal items, such as letters, began by focussing on tuberculosis, drawing on her own family's battle with it. Seeing many parallel problems with AIDS, Troeller continued her diary, drawing inspiration from a mother who was willing to share the experi-ence of her son dying from AIDS. Troeller's rich collage technique takes these issues out of the clinical arena and allows us to sit with them awhile on a personal level.

Herman Emmet's Fruit Tramps is a wrenching reminder of the plight of fruit and vegetable pickers in the United States, a plight we had hoped ended with The Grapes of Wrath and the documentary work of Dorothea Lange. Emmet's harsh black & white photographs take us deep into the world of the Tindal family, deep enough to see that they are people like you and me, and deep enough to see that the agricultural system is not treating

them fairly. In Granddaughters of Corn. Marilyn Anderson and Ionathan Garlock have found a way to per manently stamp in our minds the "disappeared" of Guatemala. Anderson provided formal portraits of Guatemalan women and girls that portray serenity, dignity, and calm. These portraits were taken when she was working on an earlier project about weaving in Guatemala. In Granddaughters of Corn, these regal portraits are com-bined with Garlock's handwritten text that reveals the horrific statistics confronting such women in Guatemala (rape, pillage, torture and murder), and lists names of women who have "disappeared." It is the contrast between these two elements, the photographs and the frightening words, that cannot help but make a permanent impression on any viewer's mind.

Top to bottom below: Ned Bosnick, "still" from the "photofilm" Texas Sand, 1990. Toshio Shibata, Honkawane Town, Shizuoka Prefecture Ryuji Miyamoto, Kowloon Walled City







In such company, Julio Mitchel's A Conversation which deals with a variety of ills, seemed a bit diluted. And in Fran Antmann's project, she combines her recent photographs documenting the conditions in the Peruvian mining town of Morococha with those of Sebastian Rodriguez taken earlier in the century. Despite her intent, one can't help but compare the work and choose to spend more time with Rodriguez's charming portraits made with a large format camera and glass-plate negatives.

Lonny Shavelson's project, I'm Not Crazy, I Just Lost My Glasses, an engrossing project combining portraits and oral histories of people who have been in mental institution, has been discussed at length in these pages (see SPOT, Spring 1988), so I will close by thanking the curator for bringing together a diverse group of heartfelt projects, for offering ample explanatory text in a venue that frequently offered none, and for showing viewers that there are many ways to skin a cat.

PURE PARIS

By Gerald Moorhead

A Paris Album, photographs by Frank Welch, Rice Media Center, Feb. 15 - March 30, 1990.

The calm subtlety of photographs by architect Frank Welch reveals an alert, perceptive eye trained in painting and architecture.

Born in Paris (Texas, of course) and raised in nearby Sherman, Welch studied drawing and painting as a youngster at Austin College. He admits the influence of realist illustrators, like Norman Rockwell and his uncle Jack, who also drew for Saturday Evening Post. Welch entered Texas A&M in liberal arts for a year, and returned after 20 months in the army to study architecture.

Welch first visited Paris in 1953 on a Fulbright Scholarship to study architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Finding empty studios at the "moribund" Ecole, he received permission to study the city with a camera instead. Having had no previous experience with photography, the change was naively bold: plans to publish a book were even developed. He bought a Leica at the army PX, someone showed him how to use it, and he spent six months randomly wandering the city; not in search of preconceived images, but creatively open to whatever he might encounter.

Henri Cartier-Bresson's book

The Decisive Moment had just been published and it gave Welch his first exposure to photographic issues. Similar backgrounds in painting (see the two-part article on Cartier-Bresson in The New Yorker, October 23 & 30, 1989) produce parallels in the photography of Cartier-Bresson and Welch, most notably the emphasis on composition. The premise of visualising and capturing a picture at just the right moment for the confluence of form, action, and meaning inspired Welch and gave direction to his peregrinations.

A return trip to Paris 25 years later in 1978 produced photos nearly indistinguishable from those taken earlier, continuing the exploration of similar themes and portraying a city apparently unchanged.

Several themes emerge from the work shown at Rice. With few exceptions, architecture is used as a frame or backdrop to the composition. Only a couple of shots are of architectural still lifes, inevitably recalling Atget (in Old Paris, what else). Facades, doorways, windows, cafes, and street vistas define space and order the picture plane. The subjects, however, are people, isolated figures or tightly composed groups.

Within the compositional space of architecture, the second theme is the figure, detached from other people and seemingly alone in a neutral urban environment. The figure may be the focus of the frame, with parallel or complimentary organizing lines/objects in the architectural surroundings. Or the figure may be a mere shadow, a scale device to measure the space in which it moves.

The evenness of character in the work exhibited may be traced to the preferences of the curator, Geoff Winningham. Photos of a more architectural content commenting on the clash of modern development in the old city were not chosen to be shown.

In marked contrast to much photojournalism or "street photography," the photographs of Frank Welch imply no moral judgement or socio-political agenda. The images of people amidst places are also not the nostalgic or romantic illusions of an American in Paris. Welch's photos achieve their beauty (yes, beauty) from the strengths and subtleties of graphic composition, not emotional pleading. There is no symbolism or hidden meaning requiring explication.

Recording life in the city, Welch captures his visions with an instinctive sense of order which, however, does not burden the frame with excessive structure. Welch approaches his subjects frontally, never from a distorting angle. It is a painterly viewpoint of thoughtful framing and an architect's construction of forms and surfaces that are solid and still.

Without an emotional burden or an artificial "artistic" abstraction, these photos come as close as possible to the ideal of objectivity possible with photography, which clearly "sees" without the intervening presence of the photographer. Welch's images reflect the soul of Paris

Gerald Moorhead is an architect and photographer living in Houston.



Ferne Koch, Left Behind, 1950
Below: Benny Joseph, Couple Dancing, Eldorado Ballroom

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

By Lynn M. Herbert

It was interesting to see that during FotoFest 1990, seven unrelated galleries exhibited photographs that depict life in the South. The subject has always been inviting and we've all seen our share of shallow looks into Southern life. Fortunately, each of the 10 artists exhibiting work on this subject at FotoFest chose to dig deep into their subject. In their photographs, they have captured a sense of people, place and time peculiar to the South.

The large glossy multiple color portraits of elderly cowboys in Nancy O'Connor's "Echoes" serie (Moody Gallery) may at first lead you to think that this is a superficial look at the subject. But when you sit down in front of one of her pieces, you hear the recorded voice of the man portrayed, talking informally about being a cowboy. Her subjects are telling you about how hard they worked, about how modern cowboys are different, about how they could talk to cows and how cows understood them, and about the dreams they have at night. As you listen, you realize that you are being given a glimpse of a dving way of life, and you notice the meticulous craftsmanship framing the photographs and housing the tape recorders. As you experience each work, it takes on the solemnity of a shrine.

Words also play a role in Patsy Cravens' (Detering Book Gallery) portraits of some of the inhabitants of Colorado County in Central Texas. While O'Connor grew up with her subjects, Cravens has made a point to meet new neighbors. Her black & white portraits of people in and around their homes are accompanied by short texts that Cravens has composed about her relationship with these people. Once again, words make a memorable contribution to the whole. Cravens' photographs have always had an otherworldly and introspective sort of calm to them, whether they be images of a cow, a dog, a foot, or a windowsill. With this series of direct portraits and the eloquent texts that read almost like a private journal, Cravens allows viewers to share in her not-alwayseasy task of making new friends,getting to know them, gaining their confidence, and photographing

Native Houstonian Ferne Koch found herself in Daleville, Alabama when her husband was stationed there during the Korean War. Her photographs of the inhabitants of Daleville (Jack Meier Gallery) from that time reveal the daily rhythm of an era past. Her portrayals of children are particularly memorable. In her "Free Read" series, we learn that children were invited to pharmacies on Saturdays to read comic books. Seeing how engrossed they are in their reading, Koch eloquently tells us how important the Free Read and the fantasy world of the comics were to themduring those

Earlie Hudnall Jr. and Debbie Fleming Caffery were aptly paired (Benteler-Morgan Galleries) as they both photograph people in a way that transcends the individual. In Hudnall's photographs of people, it's the details that tell us so much about the world he's documenting: the bold stripes of an elderly man's

shirt contrasting with the gentle wrinkles on his hands; the broad back of a mother holding her sleeping child; or the simple yet noble profile of a young boy. Caffery, on the other hand, offers us no details. Her photographs of the sugar cane industry in Louisiana are dark and dominated by a smoky atmosphere. The people in them become imposing silhouettes in a mysterious world, and her images invite viewers to use their imaginations.

Keith Carter is also interested in the mysterious aspect of the South, but he confronts it more directly. Carter's photographs of







Top to bottom above: Herman Leroy Emmet, from Fruit Tramps, 1989 Linda Troeller, from TB-AIDS Diary, 1988 Frank Welch, Untitled



East Texas (McMurtrey Gallery) bring you face to face with an unusual world of killer frogs, pigs frolicking against a backfrop of angels, someone dressed as a rabbit standing in the woods, a girl in her underwear holding a dead bird, a man standing on stilts in front of a wild array of whirligigs, and tomato plants growing in gas cans. Even the more mundane subjects take on an air of mystery in Carter's richly toned photographs.

Back in the city, Benny Joseph's photographs of life in Houston from the 1950's onwards (African America Heritage Museum) tell of a vibrant black community: B.B. King, the DJs at KCOH Radio and their mobile studio dashing around town, Mahalia Jackson, parades in downtown Houston, Martin Luther King Jr., teen sock hops, NAACP meetings, Thurgood Marshall, Joseph's home covered in snow, a kindergarten graduation, a car wreck, a debutante ball, and a deceased baby lying peacefully in his coffin. Joseph's broad portrait of a community is uncontrived and refreshing in its direct appreciation of the events depicted.

Clint Willour curated a group exhibition (University of Houston-Clear Lake) titled Three Generations of Photographers: The South, 1930-1990. The work ranged from the more emotionally charged photographs of Marion Post Wolcott (who photographed the rural depression of the South in the 30's and 40's) and Fred Baldwin (who followed the civil rights movement in the 60's) to the more subtle investigations into a Southern state of mind by Koch, Caffery and Carter (mentioned previously) and Birney Imes. Imes has dedicated himself to documenting life in the Mississippi delta and in his photographs you feel like you're getting such an open and honest view into people's lives that it's hard to imagine that there was a man with a camera standing in front of them.

The South is unusual, exotic rich, mysterious, gentle . . . the list

could go on and on. Each of these photographers seems to have found his or her own particular way to tap into that energy.

TAKE 5

By Lynn M. Herbert

3x5: Three Dimensional Installations by Five Artists, with work by Gillian Brown, Robert Flynt, David Joyce, Susan Kirchman, W. Snyder MacNeil, Houston Center for Photography, Feb 16 - April 1, 1990.

Installation work offers an artist the chance to really envelop a viewer both physically and mentally in a way that a two-dimensional work hanging on a wall cannot. The five artists in this exhibit each went about it in a different way.

Visitors to the gallery were first greeted by David Joyce's "flying figures" (cut-out photographs of ordinary people suspended as if in flight) swooping down against a sky-blue backdrop displayed in the front windows. Joyce is better known for his earthbound cut-out figures, such as the life-size fat man reading the paper, who was placed in the back of the gallery and startled viewers even though he's printed in black & white. Finding that he frequently dreamed of flying, Joyce let his models "take flight" and has permanently installed 156 of them in "Flight Patterns," a 235 foot mural at the Eugene, Oregon Airport. At HCP, one tended to want to see the figures flying more freely, rather than isolated against the front windows with very little depth in which to maneuver.

Robert Flynt's installation was more cerebral and two-dimensional even though his images and objects were carefully scattered all over the walls allotted him. His piece included underwater photographs of men swimming, anatomical drawings, maps, Greek sculpture, wrapping paper, and bits of plexiglass

and mirror all which combined to subtly explore eroticism and the concept of boundaries.

Susan Kirchman's "Fears and Phobias" was anything but subtle. Kirchman placed the viewer on a street surrounded by chaotic computer printout skyscrapers everywhere you looked. Plexiglass "silhouette" figures stood around you looking up to the sky in horror making you feel like you were in one of those Japanese horror films

As a physical and mental challenge, W. Snyder MacNeil's "Nuclear Portrait" was the most successful. Viewer's entered a dark room lit-only by two video monitors, one facing a bed, the other facing a sofa. The monitors offered enough light to enable you to take a seat, and off you went into the world of MacNeil's 6 1/2 minute tape confronting you with rhythms: an actual childbirth, a frog swimming in a bath tub, telephones ring-



where the giant monster comes down out of the sky to get you, trapped in metropolis. In case you still had any hope, a glance into one corner revealed "you" behind bars on a video screen. It was pointed out to me that some of the buildings were from the San Francisco skyline, thus the earthquake reference, but hey, I was already scared.

On a sweeter note, Gillian Brown recreated for us a homey but cunning scene of kids in their PJs sitting on the staircase, teddy bears in hand. On the side table in front of the staircase was a small photo album offering clues in the form of two snapshots: one being the image of the kids (one of them, Gillian as a child) on the staircase, and the other of Gillian today dressed up to look like "Mom" back then coming out of the kitchen. While pondering the interrelationships presented in the album, one could step back and admire how adroitly Brown recreated the black & white snapshot of kids on the staircase onto an actual staircase. By projecting the image and making a photorealistic black & white painting on the 3-D staircase very painstakingly, Brown enables the viewer to "see" that black & white snapshot come alive if they stand in the exact spot she used as her point of reference.

ing, someone snoring, a baby breastfeeding, a child playing with Daddy, rain coming down on trees in the darkness as a car drives away, alarm clocks going off, a child fin-gerpainting with bold red paint, a pregnant stomach looking like a sunrise . . . At this point your eyes have adjusted to the darkness and you see a 40"x60" image of Mars suspended in the corner of the room in front of you looking very much like that pregnant stomach you just saw. The tape with all of its allusions to the rhythms of our lives comes back on. You begin to question why you sat on the sofa instead of the bed, or vice versa. And once you've taken it all in, you stand to leave this seductive world, and are confronted by a mirror reflecting you and Mars, cleverly reminding you that you're a part of this world MacNeil is present-

Installation work allows artists the chance to step outside their work a bit and tackle challenging new parameters. We don't see it as often as we would like because, quite frankly, it's costly in terms of time and money for artists and galleries alike. Thanks should go to all parties involved with 3x5 for making it happen and for offering viewers a wealth of things to ponder.

Top: Nancy O'Connor, J. Y. Lott, 1989 Center: Gillian Brown, Photoinstallation Left: Patsy Cravens, Untitled Right: David Joyce, Sitting Man. Photoinstallation

LOOKING BACK

By Ed Osowski

Like a One-Eyed Cat: Photographs 1956-1987 is an exhibition of photographs by Lee Friedlander organized by the Seattle Art Museum that was at the Dallas Museum of Art, December 1989-January 1990. The accompanying catalogue was published by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1989.

To paraphrase Harold Bloom, influence works in a number of ways. I It can be a tyrannical force, exerting a power so strong that the artist who struggles to learn from it never escapes its influence. Or, when an artist with gréat creativity and independence confronts the influence of a predecessor, the successor learns, uses the influence of the past to sharpen and focus a new way of seeing, and deliberately casts the power of the old into new shapes and new directions.

"Like a One-Eyed Cat," a retro-

"Like a One-Eyed Cat," a retrospective look at the career of Lee Friedlander, gathers 154 photographs that survey his work from 1956 to 1987. In his short, but insightful essay, "Lee Friedlander: A Precise Search for the Elusive," the Seattle Art Museum's curator of photography, Rod Slemmons, who organized the exhibition, lists those photographers from whom Friedlander learned: Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Harry Callahan. But, as with all true artists, Friedlander took certain cues from them, understood and appropriated their angles of vision, and created his own distinct, humane approach to photographing the social landscape. What emerges, as Slemmons puts it, is Friedlander's "surprising ways of seeing." 2

In 1956, Friedlander moved from Los Angeles, where he had studied briefly after high school in Washington, to New York City where he quickly began to earn a living as a free-lance photographer. His commercial work included assignments for the magazines Sports Illustrated, Esquire, and Holiday. Marvin Israel, the influential art director of Harper's Bazaar, knew Friedlander's work and encouraged him to continue his interest in photographing jazz musicians. Columbia, RCA, and Atlantic Records, for which Israel worked, regularly purchased Friedlander's photographs to use as album covers.

Critical attention rapidly followed for Friedlander. In 1963, he was first exhibited at George Eastman House. Then John Szarkowski, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, showed him in 1964 (in the influential "New Documents" exhibition which included Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus) and again in 1967. One-man exhibitions followed at MOMA in 1972 and 1974. To date, eleven books devoted solely to his photographs have been published.

Jazz is another influence Slemmons locates in Friedlander's body of work. (The exhibition and





Lee Friedlander, Hillcrest, New York, 1970

book's title comes from Ioe Turner's 1954 "Shake, Rattle, and Roll.") Slemmons writes, "The devices of scale shift, reflection-reversal, distortion, repetition, counterpoint, and formal association by shading and contrast are all familiar to jazz musicians. Friedlander used these devices in his work to suggest openended alternatives to normal seeing."3 His aim is to allow coherence to emerge from the seeming chaos he photographs, "to see clearly but not obviously."4

The key phrase in Slemmons description of how Friedlander's work resembles jazz is "open-end-ed." When one thinks of Robert Frank of Garry Winogrand, whose work could also be described by Slemmons' passage quoted above, and then one thinks of Friedlander's photographs, Friedlander's work seems to be free of the ideological edge that defines the other two. Friedlander seems freer, looser. It is not surprising that he dedicates Like a One-Eyed Cat to "the memory of my parents who came to America," a dedication that seems to carry with it affection, love, and optimism, an unstated belief in the possibilities of the American dream. If Frank, Winogrand, and Arbus are jagged, assaulting, and troubling, Friedlander is softer, gentler. His works do not grab for attention, do not jump out and engage one in a frenzied argument, but, rather, invite the viewer in for a dialogue, a conversation that demands slow and patient looking and reading, meditation almost. If Frank and Winogrand and Arbus could be called "hot," then Friedlander is

In the photograph "Woodmen, Wisconsin, 1974" (Slemmons points out that Friedlander is deliberately reluctant to provide titles for his works beyond location and date because to offer more "information" would limit the viewer's freedom to address the photograph openly and to "establish context nd meaning from internal evidence"5) Friedlander's unique vision becomes apparent. It is a wonderful photograph, possessing the feel of a snap-shot (a look Friedlander favors) yet rich in its reliance on metaphor and tradition. It recalls the feel of paintings by Botticelli or the English Pre-Raphaelites. In it a girl stands on a garden swing. Her pose lacks all traces of sophistication, guile, or fear. A towel in her right hand waves gently and repeats the move-ment of her hair and of another towel waving from the photograph's right edge. What could be a disturbing element, a disembodied arm that holds on to the rope beneath her left hand, carries with it no hint of threat or danger. That disembodied arm is an element one finds again, in other forms, in Friedlander's work. An amateur photographer would have corrected the photograph, would have includ-ed the person standing to the girl's left. But Friedlander finds these 'mistakes" a way to stop us, to slow us down, to get us to reconsider precisely what makes a photograph "correct." The disembodied arm is related imagistically to Friedlander's

shadows which appear in one photograph after another in Like a One-Eyed Cat. These shadow images of the self remind us that we are looking at a work that is the vision of one person, that the photographer's role is crucial to what is seen and photographed. The arm, these shadows, are, in a sense, artifice, clues for the viewer that the photograph is one step removed from the

ily album in which warmth and

arms, folded over her head and

defense, but rather of ease and

cally, not an easy task. The anti-

feminist impulses which dominate

our culture can emerge in subtle

thinks of Garry Winogrand whose photographs of women reveal a great amount about how we as a

male-dominated culture, manipu-

how anxious women make men. By

contrast, Friedlander's images of

women (for example, four party

scenes, plates 84-87, which func

tion as a critique of Winogrand's

147-152) approach their subjects with subtlety, care, and integrity.

Friedlander's personal pho-

sess a clarity and calm that, initially, sets them apart from his

works that document the social

landscape. In the latter works, all

tographs, of family and friends, pos-

vision, and a series of nudes, plates

late and control women, how uneasy we are in their presence,

and not-too-subtle ways. One

acceptance.

love dominate. In a photograph of his wife asleep (number 79), her

across her face, suggest not a pose of

Photographing women is, politi-

Lee Friedlander, Woodman, Wisconsin, 1974

reality it represents. "Woodmen. Wisconsin, 1974" is a photograph of youth, beauty, calm, and loveliness. That such qualities may be elusive, at best, qualities we find only too rarely, does nothing to undercut the photograph's appeal to our imagination and our senti-

Friedlander played an important role in selecting the photographs in Like a One-Eyed Cat and a number of them force the viewer to consider where sentiment ends and sentimentality begins. In a photograph of his two young children dancing, "Anna and Erik Friedlander, New City, New York, 1964," W. Eugene Smith's photograph of two young children emerging from a forest (in the exhibition and book The Family of Man) comes immediately to mind. What also comes to mind from this photograph and others of his wife, Maria, and his son and daughter is how apparent his love for his family is. If the camera can be used to pry, to strip bare, to expose, Friedlander uses his for another purpose. The snap-shotlike photographs of his family (plates 76-83) are pages from a famthings are a jumble of conflicting signs and messages, a maze of objects, visions and views reflected, fractured, all competing for attention. In "Hillcrest, New York, 1970" the sideview mirror of an automobile divides the photograph, prevents us from seeing completely the subject before us, and reflects back to us an image of the photog-rapher himself. Friedlander returns to the framing and dividing device of a car mirror (plates 38-40) to interrupt our vision and to depict the fragments and competing images from which meaning must be taken. Store-front windows, bars, tree limbs, machinery, fences all are devices that reappear in one photograph after another. They block how we see, what we see, and by so doing, as the photograph records, present something "new ee as well as a photographic analysis of the act of seeing.

The physical arrangement of Like a One-Eyed Cat at the Dallas Museum of Art presented the view er with certain problems. (Its stop in Dallas was not on the exhibition's original itinerary and one applauds the museum's last-minute

success in finding funding for the exhibition to include a venue in Texas.) Half the works were hung along the walls of the ramp that slices the museum and will be familiar to anyone who has visited the facility. Because the ramp is the principal axis through the museum (along which museum-goers move from one exhibition space to another and off which other services, for example, the gift shop, radiate), it did not allow the photographs to be shown to their best advantage. But the photographs hung along the busy ramp were principally exam-ples of Friedlander's "public" pho-tographs - of urban scenes, of monuments. In a smaller gallery one found the remaining works. This space was also not without its problems, however. A partition at the rear of the room gave no indication that there were several works displayed behind it. The small gallery did offer the chance to eflect, free from the busy comme tion of the ramp, upon Friedlander's Japanese landscapes (plates 138-144) and his commissioned series of computer workers in Boston and

consistency of Friedlander's vision became clear. For, while the content of the photographs in the small gallery replaced the content of the photographs on the ramp - urban and industrial scenes replaced by views of the natural world, nudes, and individual workers in the workplace - the photographs depended on the same webbing of light and dark, a network of obstacles to our clear vision, patterns reflecting upon patterns (of trees and leaves reflected in water, of fish seen through water, of a kimono shot through a window, of hands entwined in endless yards of computer cable) to force us to realize that Friedlander is not a photogra-

Wisconsin. In the small gallery the

pher that one "gets" quickly. Only by intense and intent looking (what the computer workin a project commissioned by MIT in 1985-86, plates 122-131 express) do the elements in a Friedlander photograph cohere. When that cohering occurs, when fragments come together to produce a new whole, when separate elements come together to create something new, then Friedlander's ongoing commitment to finding unity in fluidity becomes apparent. His aim, as Slemmons concludes in his essay, is to help "us to understand better the relationship between seeing and knowing."

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- 3. Friedlander, p.114.
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Ed Osowski is a librarian with the Houston Public Library System. A frequent contributor to SPOT, he also writes for the Houston Post.

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Video Verisimilitude of Peter Harvey

By Michael G. DeVoll and Jean Caslin

Hey, hey...hey, wait...wait, this'll just take ong second - just one second. I know you're r...you're in a hurry, you're probably late, you're on your way -- but look -- just one second. Ok. I...l appreciate your look ing in -- on me -- ok -- cause that's... I mean... I'm sure that it's just, you know, cariosity -- ok, so -- just a minute. Ok...one minute. Um, the thing is, that while you're looking in here, other people out there are looking at you looking in here. So when you turn around, you know, the expression on your face, is gonna say something about what it is that you're looking at, in here -- ok -- so just remember that -- ok. Thanks.... There'll be more if you stay tuned.

We see a head shot of an athletic, clean cut white male with a crew cut. He has smooth features, brown hair and eyes, and is wearing a conservative shirt with a button-down collar, a wedding ring and a watch He makes eye contact with us, and confronts us with his lively, direct gestures that emphasize the tight space in which he is framed. He is in front of an expressionistic backdrop drawn with green and red magic marker. This is how we are introduced to the mind of Peter in his eight minute video, "Test Tube" (1989). The opening monologue cited above sums up his major artistic concerns, and sets the stage for the three videos that he presented at FotoFest.

In first person narrative, Peter establishes a connection to the viewers. He cajoles us to pay attention and listen to him. By raising his hands and pushing his palms out toward us, he signals for us to stop. He points directly at us, emphasizing his efforts to involve us as active participants in the interaction. He entreats us to be aware of our facial expressions that reveal our innermost thoughts -- about him. We feel an obligation to him to be self-conscious about our reactions, because they will influence other people's reactions.

He quickly establishes the duality between the "in here" and the "out there" and makes us think about what is "real" and what is "illusion." He approaches us, goes out of focus, moves out of the frame to the right, and lowering his voice, whispers in our ear: "I've got the secret to success. Don't spread it around."

A parallel narrative takes place at the Success Labs, where a scientist stands in front of a blackboard holding a clipboard. He wears a white labcoat, white shirt, black tie and black-framed glasses. In solemn tones reminding us of a 1950s train-





Peter Harvey, Verism, video still

ing film, he discusses the "success potential test." The test involves observing participants engaging in a ring toss game, and the results indicate levels of competitiveness and their potential success in the business world. The test, developed by "a Harvard professor," has an air of authenticity, and we are encouraged to trust the accuracy of its scientific results. The scientist uses pseudo-scientific jargon, whereas the first character speaks casually and colloquially.

The two narratives are skillfully woven together as the first speaker gives us the accumulated benefit of his wisdom: "You're busy doing something every day. That's what's important. Sssssssst ssssssst. Concentrate. ... It's not what you do, but how you do it, your attitude. ... Be aware of what's going on about you, or you'll get caught with your pants down -- again. ... Scrutinize. Look for that weak spot...They're always watching."

In his four minute video, "Verism," (1989), Peter Harvey also presents two personas, each shown standing before a backdrop of crumpled brown paper, but this time, the character goes through a physical, and by extension psychological, transformation. The character begins,

"I tell you, I got this new book --one of those self-help books" that
gives basic tips about self-motivation and self-image. "One of the
things it says to do right off the bat
is to get a haircut. I couldn't
believe that. Get a haircut! I figured I'd do it. What the heck. It's
got to have some kind of effect. It's
in the Book, right?... People will
perceive you differently," and then
"you will actually behave differently."

So, Peter gets a short crew cut. Sometimes I tell them the Book told me to. ... Other times I try to say it was my idea -- it was thing I thought of. If I tell them it was the book, then I get embar-. I think that changing rassed. . one's self image is good if you have the time." The character with the new self-image wears black-framed glasses, and is similar to the Success Potential Test" scientist. The character has believed in the authority of "the Book" and has followed its instructions. Our perceptions of the character do indeed shift, as we begin to question his psychological stability. We are led to question it after the character says, "I feel that lights keep dimming and going brighter. I'm kind of confused after all of this." We see close-ups of his eyes, and we

wonder whether he's taking the Book's tenets too literally. The character sserts that he will soon read the second chapter, and "by the end (of the Book), I think I'll be a pretty neat person. The accessibility of the narrative, its sense of humor and ironic question-ing of a "truthfu" authority, continue to be the hallmarks of Harvey's style.

In "Veridical," a three and onehalf minute video (1989), a silhouetted "eyewitness" speaks to us on the condition of anonymity about a story he

heard on the news. He relates a series of highway incidents in which an "insane man" drove around menacing other drivers by pointing a brightly painted orange gun out of his car. Giving the effect of a TV news report, the video cuts between the narrator and footage of highway traffic. Using a series of technical effects in this reenactment, including split screen, delayed repetition, altered speeds, and second generation footage, the viewer senses the disorientation and fear that the witnesses claim to have felt. The narrator then questions the truth of the reported events by saying: "It is not a regular occurrence. It may be the same person. In fact, it may not be true In all cases, the person has killed no one, and there were no accidents. It happens about this time each year.

The inability of the viewer to verify by visual evidence the events described above speaks to the power of the medium to control our per-ceptions. In "Verify," a two minute video, Peter Harvey shares a secret of the medium with us. "OK, well just pay attention to this. One thing I'm going to share with you." And soon he says "Nobody sees what's outside the picture. I'll demonstrate so that you'll know. Watch this." With a series of fast cuts between the narrator in the video, to second generation footage of the video showing parts of the narrator's head and shoulders isolated and altered through strange perspectives, and out of focus images. he demonstrates the "enormous benefits" of the video medium and its restricted/limited view. "You can put in or take out whatever you want -- what suits your fancy -however you want to edit some-thing. The power is in your hands whenever you have the camera." While speaking, he is performing some task offscreen to soon demon-strate his statement about "what's outside the picture." He demon-strates this video "truth" by holding up the visual evidence -- his under-wear -- while saying "All right. Now what d'ya think?

We think we like this guy. All three videos presented at FotoFest, "Verism," "Veridical" and "Verify," share etymological roots in "truth." As a photographic medium, his videos speak to critical issues in the medium with a sense of humor and irony, and involve the active participation of us as viewers. His approach to video personalizes and humanizes the medium.

Michael G. DeVoll is the Administrative Director and Jean Caslin is the Executive Director of the Houston Center for Photography.

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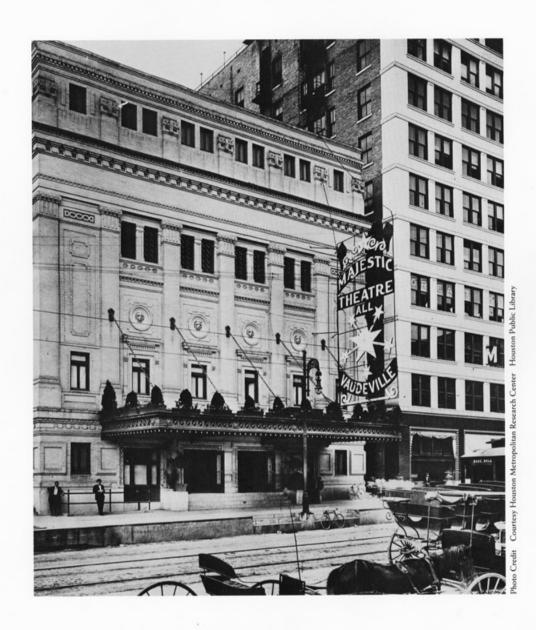
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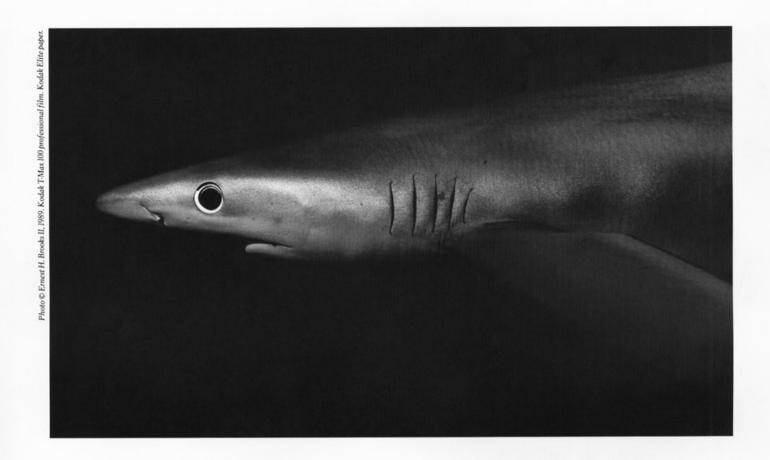


at Majestic Metro Theatre
911 Preston, Houston
on Wednesday, March 20
Live Auction
7:00 to 9:00PM

Hors d'oeuvres and music

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\$10.00 Admission Fee \$5.00 to HCP Members and students



A X I O M N O 2

Never compromise your ideals.

