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5 FotoFest Revised
It was a big hit, a Houston original. Many have their own opinions of how successful FotoFest was this year. Were the exhibits up to par? Is FotoFest fulfilling its mission? What's to come in '94? Some of those most involved in this celebration of photography share their views.

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Cover: Flor Garduño, Sinti, Bolivia 1990
Fotofest ’92
Latin America and Europe

The following is an excerpt from the introduction in Fotofest ’92 catalog written by Fotofest Curator Wendy Watriss and Principal Frederick Baldwin.

Curiously, and coincidentally, one of the greatest movements of people in human history occurred during the first hundred years of photography. From 1840 through the 1940s, more than forty million people left Europe for the Americas. This movement has mod cons of a kind, as it is the classic example of a travelogue that provides information, disseminates culture, sets trends, and is a model for the new wave of tourism in the twenty-first century. It is also the case that the majority of this traveloguing was not the result of poor decisions, but was instead the product of a well-guided, well-planned, and well-financed project. As such, it is an example of a successful cultural exchange that could be adapted to other times and places.

The history of this movement is well documented, and the organizers of Fotofest ’92 recognize the significance of this phenomenon. They have attempted to recreate it by organizing a series of exhibitions and events that reflect the spirit and style of the original. The goal is to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and cultures, and to promote understanding and cooperation between different peoples. The organizers have also attempted to make the event accessible to a wide audience by providing free admission to the exhibitions and events.

The organizers of Fotofest ’92 have also attempted to involve the local community in the event. They have worked with local organizations and artists to create a series of workshops and events that reflect the diversity of the community. The organizers have also attempted to make the event accessible to a wide audience by providing free admission to the exhibitions and events.

Fotofest ’94

Fotofest ’94 was a major event that took place from April 1 to April 11, 1994, in Houston, Texas. The event was organized by Fotofest and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (HMFA) and included a series of exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and seminars. Fotofest ’94 was one of the largest photography events in the world, with over 100,000 visitors attending the event.

The event featured over 50 exhibitions from around the world, including works by well-known photographers such as Steve McCurry, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Yoko Ono. The event also included a series of workshops and seminars, with speakers such as Martin Parr, David Hockney, and Leon Trotsky. The event was also a platform for the exchange of ideas and cultures, and to promote understanding and cooperation between different peoples. The organizers have also attempted to make the event accessible to a wide audience by providing free admission to the exhibitions and events.

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Marie Miller

Marie Miller has been a Houston institution with the quality of photography and the level of visibility around the world increas-
Florencio Garduño, Canasta de Luz, Guatemala 1989

Whether the photographers know it or not, this formula of depiction is a legacy from the traveling nineteenth-century European artists who toured the Western Hemisphere making visual reports for European eyes. Some of these artists were trained academically in the neo-classical or romantic schools of Europe. In the process of depicting the New World, their academic schemes suffered the modifications suggested by Fuentes’ model so their work often becomes a mixture of bias, fantasy, and visual record. Moreover, the depiction of what is locally commonplace as extravagant is deeply entrenched in the Latin American mind because, in a sense, that mind is both native and alien to the land. In order to become less alien to their own land, and therefore to themselves, Latin American artists—like Garduño—often look for the characters of their own ethnic life in the scenarios of the native cultures around them. In this quest, there is a sense of urgency derived from a realization that those cultures may soon vanish—taking away part of what the artists themselves are. Their imperiled survival makes it seem as if the very personal art of Garduño was fundamentally an anthropological document. Nevertheless, it is erroneous to classify her photography as documentary or direct as opposed to artistic, creative, or expressive. As suggested, there is a history of art in Latin America that dissolves that dichotomy. The subject matter of the George O. Jackson show, “The Essence of Mexico,” at the Museum of Natural Science, Houston, overlaps with that of Garduño. And yet, Jackson’s images are primarily reportage, whereas Garduño’s are not. Although many photographers are—like their unused film—pretty unexposed, it is not the case that any photographer is tabula rasa—a blank tablet with no cultural inscriptions on it. Garduño evidences a plethora of cultural and iconographic influences universal as well as local. Whether she likes it or not, her Canasta de Luz (Basket of Light) pays homage to Diego Rivera’s 1925 painting Forever Days. Rivera’s painting is rooted in the work of those traveling artists allied to above and concurs with the reevaluation by the 1920s Latin American avant-garde of the Indian as so-called “primitive” cultures of the Americas, but, whereas the nineteenth-century European artist was probably motivated by the picturesqueness of an Indian woman carrying exotic flowers, Rivera may have been inspired by the weight of the symbol of planter-gentry fertility over his generic Indian women. By medium or by
to be secularizing the rituals by showing us the people behind the costume, the effigy or the mask. (Albeit somewhat materialistically, that would be interesting enough.) At other times, however, she appears to be doing just the opposite; that is, animating people and nature with mystical or even divine powers. The tornado over Lake Titicaca, which the regard as a gift, is an unlikely appearance that moves one to take seriously the ballowness of that body of water where many civilizations were born. And what of that masked character, deceptively named "Iruvide, demanding from miners either hard liquor offerings or blood? He is one with his mask almost as if no one were behind the mask or that the mask were not a mask at all. The arcane power of the shaman is never secularized by Garduno; rather, she seems to be married to it. It is in this respect that the technique and utmost sensibility that she faces the Tarahumara governor and the Bolivian shaman of El Abasto del Tiempo, in the process, even ordinary objects surrounding these characters, like a plain blanket and the iron pick, undergo a strange transformation.

How, if at all, does this new direction in Garduno's work relate to that of her Mexican peers? One thing she does not do is that some of her colleagues do, is focus on the impact of politics, technology, and social change on these ethnic groups. Her art is not the concern for the material welfare of the people-the photographs on about the face of their cultural beliefs in the modern world. Although other photographers have shared her themes—her individual images must be interpreted in a way consistent with their respective portfolios. Take for instance, Pedro Meyer's Iguala (1990), a photo essay that brings forth the Instagrams of Cuernavaca, Guanajuato, and the Iruvide's Noche en el Jardín (1979). One feels inclined to find something shocking in Meyer's portrayal of an old Iguala (Iguala woman); instead, it is the erotic made digestible. Iruvide, using an angle that tends to exalt, follows folk religion in its sacralization of popular idols. Her Iguala is a matter, not particularly attractive woman wearing a halo of Igualas. In a sense, Iruvide is following a very current artistic exploration of popular culture in its route to becoming dominant. Garduno's Igualas is represented in a way that is classical both in its approach and its penchant for beauty. The black background is no longer a backdrop but a container; a dark celestial sphere where shines the angelic face of a young woman in the constellations of the Iguala. It is an image born of popular culture, but so long as a social phenomenon but as a symbol of something more enduring than particular social circumstances or anthropological peculiarities.

Flor Garduno, Agua, Mexico 1983

so small and so foreign; and ironic too when one learns that "Santiago" was the signal for Piraro's cohorts to capture the Isla Azuaylou. Perhaps it is an absurdity akin to Surrealism. Indeed, it is hard to keep Surrealism out of one's mind while looking at Garduno's masked riders of the giant turtles—no matter how much explanation one gets about the ritual of fertility involved.

Although two of Garduno's mentors, Manuel Alvarez Bravo and Kari Horn, had associations with Surrealism, she resists the label precisely because it is used as a label. Garduno's resistance is better understood in relation to the powerful influence Horn carried on her. A self-professed Surrealist, Horn became the center of the Mexican Surrealist group in the 1940s. Yet, Horn's relation to the Mexican mythical world was external in the sense that the artist had no roots in that culture (Horn is Spanish-Hungarian). Inspiring as she was, Garduno seeks to distance herself from the intellectual or psychologization of Horn's surrealistic vision so unlike her own. The container or cloister-like space in many of her images of interiors expose how very Catholic and Mediterranean Garduno's vision is. The image of a small wooden coffin surrounded by candles in a dark room is constructed with an unbarque simplicity, which recurs throughout the show. Also of Catholic/Indian descent are many of her still lifes put together like reliquaries. In those compositions loaded with amulets and symbolic objects, her frontal approach suggests the presence of an altar. When she does depart from that frontal

Flor Garduno, Tres Veas, Guatemala 1989

not with much dexterity, many avant-garde Latin American artists and writers in the 1920s turned their gaze to the native cultures of their respective countries as a source of inspiration for an art that was to be congruent with their times and national character. Some of them looked beyond their national borders and theorized about a Pan-American cultural continuum as the muse of a future, beaver art. Flor Garduno's photographic pilgrimage—starting in her native Mexico and going as far as the Bolivian highlands—has fulfilled the promise of those who merely sketched a desirable program. Her subject matter extends to all those national American cultures where myth and its representation in rituals still survive. Although very much in the mainstream of photography, her style bears very personal markings and remains consistent with Mexican and European iconographic traditions. She follows two phenomena: one pulling her to the dark confines of a cloister or cave where unspoken secrets are kept; the other brings her out into bright open spaces, where trees grow and people dance, bathe, etc., deep, and keep unspoken secrets.

The book Witness of Time, with texts by Carlos Fuentes, will be published this year by Jean Grasset, Luzern, Switzerland. Contact the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, for more information.

Fernando Castro is a Peruvian photography researcher, critic, and curator currently living in Houston.

NOTES
1. Born Antonio Francisco Libia in 1738, Alejandro ("Little Cripple") was the son of a black slave and a Portuguese father. He lost the use of his hands at thirty and yet continued to work as a sculptor to an old age. Fuentes showed his sculptures of prophets at the Sanctuary of home Jesus de Matazinos, Minas Gerais, Brazil.
2. "Metalas" in the Webster dictionary means "a person of mixed European and American Indian ancestry;" but its range must be understood to include cultural as well as racial mixture. As such, it is one of the key notions in understanding Latin American culture.

Flor Garduno, Tres Veas, Guatemala 1989

powerful than the King's soldiers. In the meantime, manuals illustrating the use of the musket circulated in Europe and found their way to America where local painters used them—adding to them the attire of an eighteenth-century European gentleman and the wings of divine troops. Thus, though the materials are European, and the pictorial decorations are hybrid, the logic is native. In other icons, the setting is native, the pictorial conventions European, and although the character portrayed is officially Christian, he clandestinely refers to an Indian pagan divinity. Houstonians may be able to see paintings of those angels in the show of Colonial Latin American art "After the Arrival" at the Transco Gallery East and West.

3. I am referring to artists like Delvise, Rugendas, and Alexander von Humboldt. Their occasional fits of fantasy arise from their European mind, which tended to see the natives and their land through the myths available to it—biblical, literate, philosophical, etc.

4. There seems to be a resurgence of this type of artistic quest. Marta Palau, another Mexican artist, presented at the XIX Biennale in Sao Paulo an installation called "Recor de Chamanes" (Enclosure of Shamans). In the 1990 issue of Smithsonian magazine, she says, "Art begins as ritual magic" and is paraphrased as stating that even civilized people carry the memory of magic in their genes. The work of Guatemalan photographe Sergio Gonzalez Palma and the Italian photographer Mario Cravo Neto (both featured at Fotobus), although following less anthropological strategies than Garduno, also touch upon popular myths.

5. Diego Rivera's paintings of women with flowers recur for over twenty years: Flower Seller (1926), The Flower Carrier (1930), Profile of an Indian Woman with Calla Lilies (1938), Nude with Calla Lilies (1944), Flower Vender (1949), etc.

6. In some of Garduno's images of interiors (and some outdoors as well) there is an intimate, cloister-like space that echoes the work of another Mexican-Spanish Surrealist painter, Remedios Varo. Of course there is also the possibility that said space has a common root in the proximity of both artists to Catholic convenats and churches.
The Force of Grief

Nupcíss de Soledad, Luis González Palma stands exhibited at the George H. Brown Convention Center in Houston during Fotofest '92.

Maria Cristina Orive

In each work, in every exhibit, Guatemalan photographer Luis González Palma speaks of grief. Like a pounding force that echoes through time, pain seems to spy in ambush at every movement, like a stigma. Every title of his exhibits: "Nupcíss de Soledad" (Nuptials of Solitude), or better still, "Nupcias in Solitude" (Fotofest '92); "El Sueño Tiene Los Ojos Abiertos" (Sleep with Open Eyes), Buenos Aires and Paris, 1990; "La Felicidad del Dolor" (The Faithfulness of Pain), Mexico 1991.

Despite González Palma's relative youth (born in 1957) and his short photographic career of only six years, his work is surprisingly powerful and original, and possesses a defined and personal style clearly rooted in photography.

In Child's Portrait (1991) and Chronica (1992), the photographic image becomes the evidence of life, of existence, a testimony against death, time, disappearance or oblivion. Like an artisan of memory, he reconstructs the portraits piece by piece; some pieces are darker than others—traces of time or suffering?—glued along with ledger paper, another proof of existence, official in this case! The emotional impact grows through the expression in the eyes, the frequent use of religious symbols—crown of thorns (martyrdom) —as well as in the coarse way in which he paints the prints with ink, scratches on the surfaces, and uses nails to hold the images on the flaking backgrounds—the wall of his hometown! The manipulative misattribution of his works is yet another symbol of the constant suffering of the being—the everlasting crucifixion.

The richness of his aesthetic language seems to find root in his quest to determine the profundity of the grief. Through the use of images on Kodachromes superimposed upon others printed on paper—such as in the beautiful Intimate Memoires—González Palma reinterprets the intimacy of their sorrow; the memory of a loved one, the probable disappearance of a whole family or a village, and so on.

Through the repetitive use of the same image in The Silence of a Look or A Place without Repose and even in The Secret, he evokes the intensity of pain on the emotive memory.

Death is ever present in González Palma's work. It is the epicenter of his grief, but the poet in him replaces blood with a red-colored ribbon and death itself with a pair of winged feet in Await Me in Heaven.

Imbued with decorum, González Palma's work never falls in the category of "arte povera" or "miserabilism." On the contrary, pain is expressed through beauty, both formally and conceptually. It is shown through the beauty of his characters. They are austere Indios, for the most part: common people full of serenity and dignity with an impassive force that evokes an ancestral wisdom, an ancestral resistance to all evils—evils imposed by others, by destiny, or by oneself.

Luis González Palma, The Moon, 1989, courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston America. The King. The Moon are handsome examples. The artist exalts these canons of Latin American beauty with photographic excellence and studied sub-eroticism. Using masks, small wings, crowns of flowers, fish, and other recognizable cultural icons, González Palma not only accentuates their Latin American-ness butreinterpret reality. He has transported them into a timeless, universal plane. As it always happens when confronted with a "new" image, the viewer might feel a certain confusion at first, but emotion has its own language of comprehension.

If in the beginning González Palma was influenced by Joel-Peter Witkin, later influences from the Dougs and Mike Starn or the German Anselm Kiefer have surpassed it. But these influences represent only aesthetic horizonsthat open up to his continued experimentation. As he sums it up: "To make it important, I have to portray our own experiences, but with a contemporary language."

Edison's Note: This review was originally written in Spanish and then translated by the author.

Maria Cristina Orive, born in Guatemala, is co-founder and director of La Azotea Publishing Company, which is devoted solely to Latin American photography. La Azotea will publish a book on Luis González Palma by the end of this year. For more information about the forthcoming book, contact Orive at La Azotea, Paraguay 1480 P.B. "B," (1061) Buenos Aires, Argentina, (54-141) 0531/812-0562, or FAX (54-131) 827-7720.
Beholding War


"The archive from which this exhibition is drawn—800,000 negatives documenting the past twelve years—was prepared by Salvadorans in procure and protect an accurate record of their lives," wrote curator Kitty Klee in the FotoFest catalog..."Some contributing photographers are journalists, filmmakers, artists, and survivors who acquired these photographic educations through experience. Most are Salvadoran; the war is presented anonymously to safeguard their lives and the lives of their relatives...." The following reviews of "In the Eye of the Beholder...are by two women who have been islanded by war first-hand in their lives; both are current undergraduate students at the University of Houston. Jacqueline A. Taylor is studying art history and Pamela Dean is studying interior design.

Remembering El Salvador

Jacqueline A. Taylor

This is not the El Salvador I remember, but I was only a child then, and children see the world in different ways. I remember the sampas—big bags of the size of your thumb—that crawled around in the garden. My brothers and I would sit and watch them for hours. I was only three, but I remember thatch, palm leaf cabanos and the black volcanic sand. My mother says I was too young to remember all this, but I'll never forget the smell of the tropical fruits as we picked them off the branches and brought them home to eat, the juice dripping and the sweet, sticky residue left on my face. As this same child, I don't remember the political and social upheaval that was just beginning in the larger, immediate world around me, but a child's world is dominated by the things that give her pleasure and it is a mother's job to protect her young from the things that brings pain. My mother had said that Dad would be away for awhile and that is why we were at my grandparent's house in San Salvador. I would later learn that my father was an American in the Marine Corps, fighting a war in Vietnam thousands of miles away. All I remember is that Daddy wasn't with us. Who could forecast that a decade later El Salvador would become the battlefield, mirroring all the previous bloodshed that comes when men decide in all rights to kill one another. See the pain in the photographs of El Salvador. But as I see something more—strangers between two groups that think they each know what is best for their country. To put it a bit simply, it is the elite ruling few who own the land and would like to keep things the way they are versus the opposition of the composition led by an educated few. El Salvador has the highest illiteracy rate of all Central American countries, but one does not have to know how to read to feel the pain of social and political injustices. These photographs show the cruelty by the government toward its own people and the people fighting back to preserve their existence. History has shown us that civil wars are some of the bloodiest ever fought. It is said only that a country should have to take up arms against its own, but we know what has happened and can happen.

Robert Capa once said, "I would have preferred to be an unemployed war photographer." But, the bitter truth of war can be painfully felt in his photograph, Death of a Libyan Soldier (1956). Made during the Spanish Civil War, Capa's work is revealing and poignant. It does not glorify; it documents. Capa died in his efforts to bring photographs of struggle to the public because he felt that "If the picture wasn't good enough, you weren't close enough." The anonymous photographers of "In the Eye of the Beholder...have to get "too close" in order for us to see the struggle for catching photographs. But the one photograph that affected me the most was the one of the assassinated Irma Elena Centurias, juxtaposed with a cross lying next to her murdered body. To think that these are just a few photos among thousands is an overwhelming statement in itself. But as I think of this, I recall the last image of the exhibit. It is of a young child running down a dirt trail lined with trees toward an unknown destination, and as I read the peace agreement on the wall, I hoped for the future of this child and all others like him. Maybe they can share in my memories of the sampas and the black volcanic sand beaches.

National University, San Salvador, 1980

Remembering the Truth

Pamela Dean

I remember hearing my father curse for the first time. It was late one night and he'd just returned home from a "meeting," an event he never talked about. But that night he was talking, rapidly and angrily in Farsi. The subject of his ire! A picture, or rather a series of photographs, extracted from a Russian newspaper. "Look at this trash...you'd think that those Russian dogs were heroes...of course, they'll never show any of the dolls." The "dolls" were exploding toys left behind by the Russian soldiers for the Afghan children, many of whom had become amputees in short order. But the photographer had made his decision the Russian populace back home would be fed a strict diet of images that portrayed the dignified valor and bravery of their fighting men abroad. The atrocities would remain out of sight and, if those in power had their way, out of mind.

My mother, who sat on the front page of many American papers, was a different image: one of hardship and carnage and the countless other brutalities that accompanied an invasion.

As a young Afghan girl living in Afghanistan at the time, my first taste of propaganda was not an easy one to swallow. My mom was not only a victim of suffering of my people. I was the beholder, and what I beheld was their situation—a terribly unjust and ugly one. If my eyes had been the only ones to see the photographic form, then naturally they would have focused on the misery common to my own people. Never for a moment would my sensibilities be informed by the concepts of Russian courage, valor, and duty.

So it is with the exhibit at the Brown Convention Center, ambiguously titled "In the Eye of the Beholder..." Immediately, the cliché "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" comes to mind, which is ironic because the photos depict anything but beauty. Pain and misery, sure; violence and hate, yes; repression and death, OK, but beauty? Only a hardcore sadist would find beauty here. This is perfectly understandable given the relationship between photographer and subject. The photographers, whose work is on view, are from among the people who are variously labelled as "tehris," "freedom-fighters," "insurrectionists," "terrorists," "guerrillas," or whatever politically-charged moniker you happen to choose. This is relevant because you will not see portrayed any grand traditions of the rich, land-owning El Salvadorans. No glory deb balls, or lacy first communion gowns, or forced military reviews, or visits from foreign dignitaries; no glamorous cocktail parties, or sophisticated settees; and certainly no "travels of the rich" stuff, such as bombed Mercedes or devastated swimming pools, are pictured here. But if the vocabulary is different and darker by necessity, it is not completely devoid of light. Occasionally, we are treated to glories of ordinary life. Often it is reflected in the children's eyes. Most notably, however, it is contained in a not-so-grand finale photograph that captures the playful child, coming toward us along a set of railroad tracks. It may be a whisper, but the message is clear: this generation of Salvadorans hasuffered the heft of political and social reform so that tomorrow's generation might benefit. Accordingly, the trees on each side of the tracks would stand as a symbol of change, standing equally tall and reverent, in placid observance of that which is now new life.
Photographs
Of the Day Before

The Urban Landscape: Argentina and Uruguay, featuring Juan Traurik, Oscar Pizarro, Eduardo Gil, Mario Murin, and Juan Angel Urruzola, was exhibited at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston during FotoFest '92 and was curated by FotoFest.

Diana Mines

FotoFest '92 proposed a global interpretation of today's photography in Latin America. Be it totally or partially correct, it was the first serious attempt to analyze what is being produced in our countries.

According to that interpretation, the photographers in the countries facing Rio de la Plata—Argentina and Uruguay—are focusing their attention on the oppressive solitude of the urban environments. With the variety of styles that characterize each individual, our photographers are acting like veterans, or perhaps survivors, of some terrible catastrophe that killed most of the inhabitants, but left the scenery intact—the photographers of the Day After.

At most, a few men who escaped death wander around without direction, homeless, lost, and hopeless.

This tendency to the melancholic, critical, and even tragic view of society can be traced back to the very beginning of our music and our literature. Without a doubt, this attitude toward life among our people and our artists was consolidated by the military dictatorships that both countries suffered almost simultaneously from the mid-70s to mid-80s. The particular brutality of the repression had tragic effects, both for Argentina—in spite of its authoritarian tradition—and for Uruguay—contrarily, a country with a strong democratic tradition. The feelings that rose during that period were rebelliousness, fear, and impotence, but there was also a sense of loss.

Our countries threw themselves into the hands of multinational capitalism and that action was followed by the destruction of our traditional architecture and many forms of popular communication. Photography played an important role in raising political awareness and in restoring the links with the real world. So much so that many people who had worked in other arts took up the camera to speak in the visual language, a more appropriate one to elude censorship.

The case of Juan Angel Urruzola (one of the photographers featured in The Urban Landscape: FotoFest) is in part representative and in part different from this situation. Urruzola was 20 years old at the time of the military coup in Uruguay, and was arrested for his political activity. A few months later, he was set free but told to leave the country. As many thousands of Uruguayans did, he waited twelve years before he could return. During that time, he lived in Paris, where he studied art photography. He showed his work both in Mexico and Colombia, and worked as a photographer for Latin American filmmakers living in Europe.

In 1985, once the new democratic government was installed, he visited Buenos Aires and came to Montevideo, Uruguay, where he stayed a few hours. In his brother's company, he walked the nearly empty streets of the past while taking photographs. He printed them in Paris and brought them for an exhibition in Montevideo one year later. He returned to Uruguay in 1987 and has lived here since, although he travels to Paris regularly to visit his daughter.

In Montevideo, he has worked as a graphic designer and an advertising photographer. He took part in several group exhibits, where he showed the Cibachrome prints that he had done in Paris.

In 1990, a large exhibition was put together by the City Council of Montevideo that celebrated the anniversary of photography in Uruguay. It was called "150 Years Later." There, Urruzola showed photographs that were part of a series called "Granja Pepita," which he completed and exhibited one year later at the Gallery of the Alianza Cultural Uruguay—USA. That series was a moving homage to a beautiful old mansion built at the turn of the century for the Mendezahab—a traditional Montevidean family. The building would soon be torn down to make room for a shopping center. Most of the photographs in the series were taken from a lower angle and showed the shadowy areas, giving them the mood of Eugene Atget's photographs of the Parisian parks.

During his exhibition at the Gallery of the Alianza Cultural Uruguay—USA, Urruzola showed a video that he made on the same subject. There again, the camera was placed at a low level and traveled continuously around the old house, whose walls had been literally devoured by wild vegetation. The tender, detailed representation of Granja Pepita resembled a farewell tour. At some moments, it looked as though the camera would enter the tall rooms still inhabited, but it preferred to stay outdoors, unable, as it were, to spare away death.

Juan Angel Urruzola's photographs don't cry over the debris of the past. They rather stick to what is still up but soon to be gone: the photographs of the Day Before.

Diana Mines is a photography critic for BRECHA, an independent weekly in Montevideo, Uruguay; a teacher at the Catholic University of Uruguay; and a curator. Mines was curator of "150 Years Later." This was the first time in Uruguay that a photography critic was asked to put a photography exhibit together, according to Mines.

Juan Angel Urruzola, "Granja Pepita" series, 1990

Juan Angel Urruzola, "Granja Pepita" series, 1990
Linda Benedict-Jones and Chris Johnson

Dear Chris,

I'm sitting at a gate of Houston Hobby Airport waiting for the plane to carry me home. Since we just started our discussion about the photographs from the "Inside Out: Black British Photographers" exhibition, I thought I'd continue it in a letter—the fast-disappearing form of communication.

I thought the show was really quite rich in its offerings. Two of the photographers—Jared Pollard and David A. Bailey—are more familiar to me from their work reproduced in the book, British Photography: Toward a Bigger Picture (see her review in SPOT: Spring 1992).虽然Pollard is said to have the same resonance for me that I felt when I first saw it. It was gratifying, of course, to see the whole series of Portraits Interludes. The prints are beautiful with their rich hand-colored tones, but their primary strength is that they engage me. I have asked myself many times what is so compelling about this work. The answer, I fear, is simple: we don't see images of black people in lush countryside settings. We may or may not, depending on where we live, see black people in the countryside, but part of the force in her work is that she is offering images of black women. I find them startling, and it及时了 me that I am startled! Pollard seems aware, of course, of the effect her images will have and the text that she uses to accompany these pictures furthers this notion of displacement... "...it's as if the black experience is only lived within an urban environment... A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unevenness, of emptiness..."

I suspect, as does Derek Briston, the editor of TEN magazine, that helped organize this show, that elements in this series will be long-lasting. There is a new voice at work here. Pollard has succinctly captured the notion of ambivalence, sometimes bordering on alienation—shared by a growing population of people of color in the United Kingdom—against the oftentimes hazy and inscrutable world of English heritage and traditions. Her single images may become icons for this expression, and I would not be surprised to see some of them appear again and again in the yet-to-be-written histories of photography.

Incidentally, did you know that TEN is the British expression for 8x10? Many Americans miss that reference, I think. Briston did an admirable job of helping to pull this show together. His ambitious magazine will, I believe, be getting wider and wider recognition in the States within the near future.

In the show, David A. Bailey had one large series of images about his native Barbados, which I truly admired. As a northerner, I must confess to frequent dreams of golden sand and translucent warm waters (especially in February), but his pictures remind us that these Caribbean climes are not only for sun-seeking snowbirds. Real people live there; I, of course, know that. The travel pictures that saturate London, however, would have us forget. His pictures are a gentle reminder, not angry, yet determined. I felt that to be the case with most of his work, in fact.

As well as being an articulate spokesperson for the group of photographers in the show, Bailey is smart. In his lecture, he demonstrated his knowledge of the currents of rhetoric surrounding image-making in the late twentieth century. Wisely he saves this for lectures. His pictures are not so steeped in the rhetoric; to their advantage, and ours, I believe. Do you recall his piece Absent Presence—where the profile of a black man moves gradually out of focus through a series of four pictures? In reverse order, gradually coming into focus, is a headline in one of the London papers, The Sun, boldly stating "Foxy Over Lazy Blacks." I think Bailey has effectively used this sequence of images, including the newspaper, this channel of human communication, to offer evidence of racist notions in the press. The opposition of person and headline is a good one. Headlines we all experience daily; our various interpretations of them are usually kept to ourselves.

Claudette Holmes' work was the nicest discovery for me in this show. I was especially drawn to the personal and intimate nature of her work—with the hand-applied colors and the hand-written messages. These pictures felt strangely familiar, though I've never seen them before. They suggested memories to me, they offered glimpses into my dreams and different states of mind. Below one image she noted, "I can be quite practical and realistic or offer thoughts let me down..." and that was like a gentle song. I like the careful, yet free, spirit in her work.

While I appreciated the work of both Pollard and Holmes, I had to say it was for dissimilar reasons, even though they both use hand-applied techniques and they both employ the use of words in concert with the pictures for establishing a context. They are both black women, but I think it was the "blackness" of Pollard that reached out for my attention, and the "womaness" of Holmes that did. In other words, I appreciated Pollard and identified with Holmes. Is Holmes' reach only effective for women? I'm eager to know your thoughts.

One thing that these three photographers have in common with each other and with contemporary British trends is their attraction to the combination of pictures and words. We've seen a lot of compelling work of this nature in the States in the last decade, too, of course. I remember, though, that people like Victor Burgin, Jo Spence, and others were challenging us with integrated combinations in Great Britain already by the mid-1970s.

By far the most challenging—and perhaps approachable—pictures for me in the show were those by Rotimi Fani-Kayode. I understand that some of his work was created with Alex Hint, a white artist with whom he lived for several years before...}

Claudette Holmes, Carol (original in color)

Rotimi Fani-Kayode's recent death.

There are a couple of things I'll mention that seem quite obvious. First, whenever I hear that a young person has died of AIDS, I die a little, too. Learning this about him understandably made me feel more receptive to his message, more willing to hear his cry.

Secondly, the pictures on display were technically and formally exquisite. They reminded me of the virtuosity of Robert Mapelthorpe, complete with the best of professional studio lighting and the highest standard of printing. (Though Kayode is a native of Nigeria, he grew up in the United Kingdom, but then studied in the United States at Pratt before eventually returning to the United Kingdom. Perhaps he even studied with Mapelthorpe? Surely he was influenced by him.) From a formal point of view, his pictures were a feast for the eyes. However, in spite of my desire to listen to these images, I'm afraid that the formality of them hindered that very process. I felt distracted, unable to appreciate them except at that superficial level of technical expertise. Most of the message, I'm afraid, was lost on me, though I'm not sure at all.
Dear Linda,

Thank you for your letter, and for taking the time to respond to the show in such detail. It gives me an opportunity to air my own thoughts on a complex, mixed feeling issue I have, not just about the work in this show, but about being as a black artist in this remarkable phase of our cultural history.

This is a season charged, time, when all of our assumptions are subject to critique and must be seen in relation to what had emerged as fascinating questions. What role do we play in the over-arching problem of creating a civil society? What is a civil society, and how can it best sustain and nurture human potential? Between the positive developments in South Africa and the disturbing events here and in Europe, we see trends moving powerfully in opposite directions, leaving the rest of us in a dynamic void with few models to guide us. Here's a good example: I casually used the expression "black artist" just now, well aware that even those seemingly obvious words are in fact loaded with coded meanings that could influence painful debate. Am I in fact a "black" artist? Yes, of course, but just as definitely, I'm not. And it isn't just the question of appropriate labels. I respect the concerns of those who petition to call African Americans but I frankly don't consider myself to be African in any significant way. For me, the term "black" will carry the political weight of the 60s when being "black" meant embracing a healthier social identity.

So, ironically, I find myself much more comfortable with being "black" than I am with being defined as a "black artist," especially when the term suggests that my ethnicity necessarily shapes the core of my creative practice. In simplistically obvious ways it does of course, but it doesn't mean much to claim that my life and work are informed by my background. With that said, you very quickly have to ask, "What else do you have to say about the content and meaning of your work?" This explains why some of us tend to avoid being cast in this "black" box.

Doing so risks reinforcing the audience's misconceptions of what "black art" should say and the role it should play. But there is a more important, both personally and professionally, to upset those assumptions by demonstrating the universality of the human condition. More on this later.

As you can see, I am living a heavy load to the act of seeing a show like this one. With this in mind, you won't be surprised if what follows is full of conflicting opinions and attitudes. It's fair to say that, at times like these, I'm much more likely to trust in honestly confused person to someone one who projects confident, well-researched positions. In general, I mistrust ideology in favor of the blur of undifferentiated human response. Someone has said, "I find it much more difficult to say the truth when what's said contains its opposite." That's how I feel.

I find it impossible to look at work like this without considering the question of who the work intends to speak to, about what. Clearly didactic artwork intends both to "speak from" and "speak for." By this I mean that it represents both an immediately-felt personal, emotional, social, political, or spiritual position, but it also in some way represents the position of committed activists of color to the mainstream audience. This raises other interesting questions: Are there codes that indicate whether or not the work is directed inward, back to the home community, or outward to the "other"? If the direction is outward, then what do these codes suggest about what the artist assumes the intended audience is to know or feel? Are you as the reader of the work, comfortable with having those assumptions projected onto you? For example, much didactic work assumes bias and insensitivity; or conversely, that all-Black-skinned people have the same experience. Also, does the work try to celebrate or persuade? Here's where it becomes problematic for me. Celebrate what? that "speak from" are unchallengable. It's the artist's inherent right.

We as the audience gain insight and are close to seeing into and sharing another's soul. If the work seems both inspiring to the "other" and didactic, then assumptions and messages must be critiqued. My typical reaction is one somewhat like this: "What are you trying to say and why?" Are you trying to say, "I'm beautiful, proud, worthy, outraged, empowered, etc., etc., etc.? To my ear, this harkens back to the "Say it loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" days of twenty years ago. It's a message I try to give to and get from children; but otherwise, I'm sympathetic but frankly, I'm also somewhat bored and tired of this. "Blackness" and "worthiness" are assumed, now tell me what you have learned about and can add to the great questions that confront all of us.

Another way of putting it would be: "OK, I hear you, and I accept you. Now help me to know you. I can only know you to the extent that what you say reflects things I've experienced." This brings us back to the desire to hear broader, more universal human expressions. Speak "for" you. Speak "from" your heart. I have a heart too, and I want to better understand us both.

I may finally be ready to comment about the work in the show itself.

Ingrid Pollard clearly anticipates what you describe as the dissonance of "black" people in "human expressions." My reaction to her work is similar to yours. Although I find the images themselves a bit redundant and simplistic, she is clearly expressing deeply felt sentiments, and I'm looking forward to seeing more of what she has to offer. This is an issue as well as the fact that you were disturbed by your own response to the work: the slight guilt of being "starched." Help me to know you. I can only know you to the extent that what you say reflects things I've experienced.

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A Glimpse into the Past

The War of the Triple Alliance, 1865-1870: Esteban García, from the collections at the National Library of Uruguay in Montevideo. Photograph by the Baudouin Foundation of Modern Aesthetics, 1919-1933, curated by Jeanne Fiedler, from the collection at the Bauhaus Archiv in Berlin. The Illegal Camera: The Netherlands, 1940-1945, curated by Hal Buol and Veronica Heldring; Art, Industry, and the State: USSR in Construction, 1930-1936, curated by Ross Hansen, Macindow Center, Gothenburg, Sweden. All these were exhibited at the George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston, during FotoFest '92.

Maggie Olvey

For the first time in its six-year history, FotoFest arranged to have a number of historic exhibitions hung in its George R. Brown Convention Center galleries. In itself, this is remarkable because it reveals a commitment to the room of much of today’s most innovative work and a commitment to spending time and money to properly take care of ephemeral photographic archives lent to FotoFest. Two of these exhibitions, those highlighting Charles Marville and John Thomson’s photographs, are reviewed elsewhere in this issue (court—those European and one Uruguayan with a distinctly European look to it—are addressed here.

The first is an installation that traveled extensively throughout Europe before coming to Houston for its only American stop: “Photography at the Bauhaus: The Formation of a Modern Aesthetics, 1919-1933.” Accompanied by a significant and generously illustrated catalog, the show was culled from the collection of the Bauhaus Archiv in Berlin (the repository for much of the original artwork created by the students and masters of the Bauhaus school), but represents only a portion of that collection—and only a fraction of the original traveling exhibition. In spite of this smaller scope, the viewer cannot escape the sense of joie de vivre that emanates from these images. As editor Jeanne Fiedler aptly states in her introduction, “To observe the Bauhäuslers in the group portraits reveals the collective spirit that reigned at the school. Everyday life, not least in the school’s workshops, was filled with Oscar Schlemmer costumes to advertising material, nothing was too plebian, too ordinary, to place before the camera lens of either Boberg or Moholy-Nagy, not even light bulbs, friends, theatrical productions, and Bauhaus buildings were among the myriad subjects for both masters, such as Moholy-Nagy’s students.”

It has been often stated that there is no Bauhaus “style” per se. The independence of artistic pursuits fostered by the teaching atmosphere precluded such an academic outcome. Students were encouraged to experiment quite literally with every available medium—from photography to the newly-introduced plants. Nevertheless, the spirit that pervades these images provides us with a singularly unified aspect of school life at the Bauhaus. The exhibition reveals, with great poignancy, the artistic experimentation, the camaraderie between the Bauhäuslers, and the quotidian accounts of life in avant-garde Germany of the 20s and early 30s.

Installed next to the Bauhaus show, “The Illegal Camera: The Netherlands, 1940-45” exhibition windowed you away from the high-minded ideals of Bauhaus philosophy into the harsh realities of Nazi-occupied territories during World War II. The hand-held camera—introduced into use only just over a decade before—becomes a formidable weapon in the hands of amateurs and professionals alike as it peeps around corners, into hiding places, and out onto the occupied streets. During this time, cameras were an unwelcome sight instead of the ubiquitous machines every Bauhäusler held in his hands for at least a short time. Photographs in this exhibition, whether staged after the fact or taken “live,” have never been exhibited outside the Netherlands before, and, to some, are still used painful to view at all fifty years later. Abound most certainly in the Bauhaus joie de vivre.

Then there is the utopian Constructivist-influenced assemblage of the periodical USSR in Construction, an illustrated magazine published from 1930 to 1936 with artistic contributions from noted artists Nikolai Fyodorin, El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko, and his wife Varvara Stepanova. USSR na Strelice, as it was known in Russian, was an illustrated magazine of the type popular elsewhere in Europe during the 20s and 30s and made ubiquitous by the introduction of Life magazine in 1936 in the States. Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ) published in Germany and Czechoslovakia between 1924 and 1938 is now one of the most well-known of these. But there is a significant difference between the Soviet publication and AIZ, where the German magazine used John Heartfield’s photomontages printed straightforwardly to point effect, the idealist and ideological messages purveyed by the Soviet publica-


From “The War of the Triple Alliance, 1865-1870: Esteban García”

photographs taken and printed at the time. Other installations of Latin American historical photographs in FotoFest relied on modern prints of original negatives and/or copy prints. While interesting as documents of their time and evidence of their makers’ photographic predilections, the modern prints lacked the aura of the weathered Paraguayan views and thus some of their charm and immediacy. After all, the Garcia images arose from a conflict that began when the Civil War in the United States had just ended, and more parallels and contrasts could be drawn from that fact.

In all, these four historically-oriented installations provided a welcomed insight into the lives, communities, and political circumstances of their own times. How much they helped to convey the general theme of FotoFest ‘92—the relationship between Europe and Latin America—was problematic. While the organizers of the festival should be congratulated for their programmatic approach as structure, the extent to which that message was received and/or understood should be assessed prior to the inception of FotoFest ‘94.

Maggie Olvey is co-editor of SPOT.
The nineteenth-century photographs of Scottish photographer John Thomson and Frenchman Charles Marville are familiar to all who have studied the history of photography. Less familiar, for many, is the opportunity to gaze upon original prints by these two European masters. This year's Fotofest offered visitors just that opportunity, and it was a rare treat.

"The Modern City—Reconstruction of Paris, 1865–1880," includes thirty original collodion prints by Marville in pristine condition, though one of them revealed what happens when there is considerable cracking of the collodion emulsion on the original glass plate. The prints belong to the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, which was kind enough to loan them for this occasion.

When the negatives were made, it was a time of enormous change for Paris, the largest city in continental Europe. As with their neighbors across the English Channel, industrialization was changing the way people lived and worked. Napoleon III, hoping to be remembered as a modern ruler, wanted to make Paris the model of urban existence, with emphasis on the grand power of the state. With Prefect of the Seine Baron Hausmann, the architect of the vast rebuilding of Paris, he succeeded in transforming much of the layout of the city, demolishing existing alleys and impasses to create wide, new avenues, and annexing adjacent villages to increase the size of the city itself. A second aim of this gentrification was to displace the poorer quarters, often the centers of popular revolt. For those that remained, the grand boulevards offered an easy means of access and control to Parisian police forces.

One of the unsettling realizations in viewing this exhibition, as noted by curator Marie de Thezy in her gallery tour, is that much of what is represented in these photographs no longer exists. Fortunately, about 1865, the municipal government of the city of Paris commissioned Charles Marville to photographically document the condemned neighborhoods prior to their being demolished. It is because of this that a remarkable collection of some 400 photographs of urban landscape documentation was created. Some prints depict the then recently completed Boulevard Hausmann, wide and regal and lined with impressive, stately buildings. Some preserve the more humble symbols of the time, such as the râvetières or streetlamps, which Marville photographed systematically.

Marville was not the only photographer working under commission in the midnineteenth-century. In the 1850s, Edouard-Denis Baldus documented the building of the new L'Estaque and the floodings of the Rhône. And in that same decade, other recognized photographers—such as Henri Le Secq, Gustave Le Gray, and Charles Nègre—along with Marville, photographed France's mediaeval architecture at the invitation of the Commission des Monuments Historiques. It was a unique active period for photographic documentation in France in spite of the fact that it was the mere beginning of the new medium of photography.

The commission also purchased photographs in the first decades of the twentieth century from the man who so totally devoted himself to his photography that he lived on bread and milk and sugar for twenty years: Eugène Atget. More recently, since 1979, phenomenal architectural changes have again changed the complexion of Paris—the Centre Beaubourg, the new LM. Pfi entrance to the Louvre, the reconstruction of Les Halles, to name a few. We can only hope that this venerable commission is continuing to extend its support to documentary photographers in France.

"Street Life in London" by John Thomson was also created during the late nineteenth-century, when England was the greatest industrial power in the world. The city streets, however, did not necessarily reveal this prosperity. Instead, they were home to women and children who had no permanent shelter, the unemployed, the poor from the countryside, and others who didn't share in the affluence of the period.

John Thomson, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, is best known for his four-volume work, Illustrated London, published in London in 1873. This enormous work, complete with 200 images of scenery, peasants, and architectural studies, attempted to make life in the Far East less exotic and more comprehensible to a British audience at home.

After returning from his four-year stay in China, Thomson trained his camera similarly on the street people of London: market vendors, public disinterment workers, street doctors, and others. According to Mark Haworth-Booth, curator of photographs at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, Thomson was always careful to say these pictures were made with the permission of the people depicted. Haworth-Booth also mentioned that Thomson, in his ample writings, noted how it was "social skills" that were of primary importance in photography, rather than technical skills.

Preferring the book medium, Thomson published these images in twelve monthly episodes. Though each photograph originally served to illustrate a story written by Adolphe Heilingly, who was exploiting the living conditions of the urban poor, this exhibition is comprised of twenty-four photographic images only. Compared to present day photojournalistic studies of poverty, this work is tame. In its day, however, it was persuasive enough to provoke the embankment on the Thames River to prevent occasional flooding in the dwellings of London's poor people.

As with the Marville display, the lighting was necessarily low for viewing "Street Life in London." Nineteenth-century processes, such as albumen and collodion prints, are vulnerable to fading under normal levels of illumination. At the request of Haworth-Booth, however, it was simplified somewhat for the Thomson show because his Woodburytype originals are actually richly pigmented prints, made from mechanical printing presses, which are considered to be more stable than many nineteenth-century processes. The Thomson pictures were more difficult to discern than the Marville images, largely due to size. Each of these was roughly 4 x 5 inches, whereas the Marville prints were approximately 8 x 10 inches, and sometimes larger.

These pictures are important to us today because they offer an evidence of early sustained efforts of social documentary photography. Thomson was not alone in this pursuit in the United Kingdom. A fellow Scottish photographer, Thomas Annan, was commissioned in 1868 and again in 1877 to record old and interesting land-

Linda Benedict-Jones is curator of the Polroid Collection in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

From Charles Marville's "The Modern City—Reconstruction of Paris, 1865–1880."

From Charles Marville's "The Modern City—Reconstruction of Paris, 1865–1880."
Discovering Teige
Surrealism/Czechoslovakia: Karel Teige, 1935–1951 was exhibited at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston during FotoFest '92, curated by FotoFest and Dr. Raimunda Dacera, director of The National Museum of Literature, Prague.

Alison de Lima Greene

While virtually unknown outside of Czechoslovakia, Karel Teige (1900–1951) was one of the truly innovative proponents of the avant-garde in the laboratory era between world wars. A founder of the Duvetral movement in Prague in 1920, he was also a passionate champion of film and photography, a prolific theorist, and an artist, an inventive typographer and witty collaborator.

A year after André Breton published the “First Surrealist Manifesto,” Karel Teige issued his Duvetral Manifesto, featuring Painting and Poetry. Seeking to reconcile the iconoclasm of the Dada movement with Functionalist idealism, he proposed a new praxis for collage. “We, face a logical consequence of the fusion of modern painting with modern poetry. You will see ... the VISUAL POEMS which represent a solution of the problems shared by painting and poetry. Sooner or later this fusion will probably eliminate the traditional methods of painting and poetry, not instantly but gradually. The visual poems abounds absolutely conform to present needs.”

Teige produced an enormous body of photograms throughout his career (approximately 75,000 have been published in Czech museums). His early Duvetral collages of 1923 originated at travel souvenirs, combining maps, nautical and astrological imagery, fragments of text, and postcards. Teige regarded the montage technique as a new artistic language, “Those hints should be sufficient to evoke an impression and represent reality in a way that is inaccessible to words.” In 1926 he collaborated with Karel Pupa and Vitezslav Nezval to publish in book form the wonderfully ephemeral Abrakadabra, which combines bold Constructivist typography with photographs of the dancer Milica Majerovi interpreting each letter of the alphabet. A 1930 visit to the Bauhaus inspired a tribute made up of reproductions of other Bauhaus photograms, and it is possible to recognize fragments of T. E. H. Fentinger and Edmund Collett in Teige’s photograms.

Several of these early works are reproduced as an introduction to the remarkable exhibition “Surrealism/Czechoslovakia: Karel Teige, 1935–1951,” presented by FotoFest 92. The exhibition was organized by Dr. Raimunda Dacera and presents forty-six photograms, a selection from the long-supplied Teige archives now in the National Museum of Literature in Prague. The Prague Surrealist Group was established in 1934 with André Breton’s blessing, and the first issue of the Bulletin International du surrealisme was published in Prague the following year. Teige was a reluctant convert to Surrealism and only joined the Prague Surrealist Group in 1935; however, the poetics of Duvetral translated with ease into the aesthetics of Surrealism. Teige’s photograms from 1935 until his death in 1951 were conceived as a private chronicle by the artist; richly evocative, they are an invention of the themes and motifs that dominated the Surrealist movement.

Teige drew inspiration from his fellow Surrealists and in several decades of photograms, he developed his aesthetic and poetic vision. One of his most haunting images is a large 1951 composition of a truncated, folded figure floating over a landscape surrounded by the ghost of Max Ray’s 1934 Haunted House of the Observatory. The Levers.

Most of these works were produced during the traumatic years of World War II. Czechoslovakia was one of the first victims of Nazi invasion, invaded by Germany in March 1939 and for six years almost all public activity ceased in the arts. Direct references to combat are rare in Teige’s work—more typical of his disquieting wartime compositions is the forbidding copulating of a truncated torso in a baby carriage with shell cases. The historical events of the 1989 exhibition has been devoted to these fascinating objects. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, introduced Teige in the Czech Modernism: 1900–1950 exhibition of 1989 and FotoFest is to be thanked for giving us this unique chance to study this artist in greater detail. However, the presentation is seriously compromised by the lack of a catalogue. While financial restraints, as well as Central European red tape, may have made it a scholarly or comprehensive publication unfeasible at this time, some form of documentation should have been attempted. Teige’s achievements have been removed from the public realm for far too long, and these photograms deserve to be recognized as a unique contribution to the history of Surrealism.

Alison de Lima Greene is associate curator of twentieth-century art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She was co-curator of the 1989 exhibition "Czech Modernism 1900–1945.

FOOTNOTES
1. Established in 1920 by Teige to promote what he termed “poetic naziism,” the Develbral movement defies any simple definition. The membership was varied over the years and included painters, photographers, graphic designers, architects, writers, and poets. Several artists broke with the Symbolist, Expressionist, and Cubist conventions that dominated the pre-war avant-garde, advocating instead a visionary modernism that embraced both the tenets of Dada and Futurism, as well as the aesthetic qualities of Constructivism and Functionalism. The association formally disband in 1931.
4. A selection of these works, as well as later Surrealist photographs were featured in the exhibition "Czech Modernism: 1900–1945," Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1989.
5. For exceptional examples of Surrealist activities in Prague, see Andrzej Smejkal, “From Lyrical metaphors to Symbols of Fate: Czech Surrealism of the 1930s,” and Antonin Dufek, "Imaginative Photography." Czech Modernism: 1900–1945, pp. 164–83, and 122–133.

Karel Teige

of the Surrealists. The cadaverous expans is evoked by his hybrid figures; René Magritte’s disquieting bourgeois interiors are echoed by a number of Teige’s compositions and Max Ernst is missed for a variety of disquieting allusions. However, the example of Max Ray provided Teige with some of his most haunting images. A large 1951 composition of a truncated, folded figure floating over a landscape summons the ghost of Max Ray’s 1934 Haunted House of the Observatory. The Levers.

Karel Teige

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SPOT/SUMMER 1992
A Challenging Par Three

Lynn M. Herbert

Seen altogether, these three exhibitions offered a variety of approaches to dealing with contemporary landscape issues. Skeet McAuley’s amazing large-scale panoramas of golf courses somehow manages to both seduce and repulse. Twilight on those lush greens surrounded by generous landscaping makes you want to sit back with a cool drink and watch the sunset. As your eye begins to take it all in, you see what lies just beyond the boundary of the course—in one case desert and cactus. Suddenly, you’d rather know just what the water bill must be to keep such an anomaly verdant. The exhibition included five such slick and alluring courses. How tragic that something so dramatically beautiful is also so environmentally incorrect.

MANUAL, Woodmaker, 1992 (original in color)

Equally engaging is McAuley’s “Portage Glacier, Alaska,” which offers untouched nature at its most powerful. A small boy looks out an enormous picture window at a glacier from the comfort of a climate-controlled lookout point. Despite the architectural structure, the unbridled power of the glacier makes you feel for the boy’s safety.

MANUAL’s work reflected their continuing investigation into the divergent needs of mankind and forests. There were some familiar motifs, including stereo images, historical lumber mill photographs, computer chips and diptych formats. Yet, as one would expect from MANUAL, there were many new associations. Enter Kamist Malevich and El Lissitzky. Enter three-dimensional objects including the handcrafted crafted “Maple/ICR.” And, enter Worldsadder, which deploys a computer-generated ball hovering in a forest clearing. Its inviting and playful colors would suggest “Toys R Us,” but it seems to have blurred a path of destruction through the forest. This is no ordinary beach ball. It’s hovering, and if Nintendo doesn’t already have a forest-clearing game, this ball could score quite a few points in the Amazon.

William Christenberry’s “Southern Views” brought us back to a more romantic and traditional approach to landscape. With photographs and mixed media works from 1975 to the present, Christenberry captures the indigenous south with stereos, country signs, tombstones, red clay and lots of vernacular architecture. As presented by Christenberry, Tusculum swelling up an old house in Tusculum County, Alabama, has more charm than menace. It just seems to belong.

ages of the war from videotapes presented on television. Rovner produces results that are timeless and universal images of man confronting man. Her soldiers don’t wear a particular country’s uniform or have any recognizable ethnic facial features. All such particulars are lost. As Rovner has pointed out, these photographs are not about specifics or about who’s right or wrong. They are about the general theme that she felt to her own existence. Looking at her blurry images, it is frightening to realize how commonplace their gauges are in our visual vocabulary. Though it gives us very little in the way of specific information—a shadowy figure with his arms raised, or a blurry group of figures running across the landscape carrying objects with cornered edges—these images powerfully resonate war and hostility. The clumsy forms in the background could just as easily be tanks as the outline of a mountain range. And the crocheted lines inevitably mean that the landscape below is now in target range and in danger.

It is interesting to see how Rovner can achieve the same power without the highly charged imagery of a recent war. Her series of photographs of a lone hut in the Negev Desert, taken over a period of years, reminds one of Mori’s obsession with haystacks seen in different light conditions and at different times of year. Rovner’s hut sits along in the landscape in much the same way, and is presented in the same straightforward yet impressionistic manner. Such a simple structure, alone in a vast desert, it has not survived. Its vulnerability and mortality become our own.

From CNN to Bigger Unavoidable Truths
Michael Rovner: Decay—Works from the Gulf War was exhibited at New Gallery in Houston, March 7—April 5, 1992.

Michael Rovner watched the Gulf War on television just as the rest of us did. But she was watching from her loft in New York, knowing that her family’s home in Tel Aviv was under a scud attack and being destroyed. The photographs in this exhibition represent her way of dealing with this nightmarish situation. Photographing im-

From “Skeet McAuley: Recent Works”

Photogram, Photograms, Photogram
Floris M. Neusius: Photograms was exhibited at Benton–Morgan Galleries in Houston, March 3–April 6, 1992.

Never assume that Floris Neusius has done all there is to be done with the photogram technique. Never. Look at a number of the works that were included in this exhibition. A recent series of works entitled “Nachtbilder” were made outdoors at night with perhaps the help of flashlights and maybe a bit of the moonlight. They are predominantly abstract compositions with an occasional recognizable object such as a fern leaf. The unusual paper used to make these prints offers up an intriguing blend of positive, negative and polarized imagery.

The exhibition also included several of his elegant LIO’s, or unidentifiable flying objects. The simple forms and curves of his flying objects are very lyrical against their stark black or white backgrounds. They also speak to one another from a diptych format as in one where two shoes seemed to dance back and forth between positive and negative space.

Neusius’ series of "roppongi" reflect the work of one who knows his photogram history. The recurring object in them is the roppongi, a wire nesting basket that, turns lottery balls, similar to those used in bingos. It is the kind of object one could comfortably have found in a Man Ray or László Moholy–Nagy photogram. An object associated with chance, Neusius has taken the idea a step further, placing inside it torn pieces of photographs. With any Neusius exhibition, there will always be more to learn about the possibilities of the photogram.

Lynn M. Herbert is associate curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston.

Floris M. Neusius, Vice-Versa, photogram 1985

HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
Switching Places

TAFOS: Talleres de Fotografía was exhibited at INNOVA Design Center, February 1–March 30, 1992.

Fernando Castro

TAFOS is the acronym for Talleres de Fotografía Social, which means "workshops of social photography." The idea is new; photography as a means to effect social awareness and, hopefully, improvements in society. What is somewhat novel is that the people empowered with image-making machinery are those who, up until recently, were only the subjects of photography, not the agents. Photographic glimpses of the Andean world and its people occur in the work of Peru, Salgado, Chambi, Garduno, etc., but as is only natural, outsiders see different things than do insiders—albeit not always less or worse. Still, what Andean people themselves find interesting in their own world is something that the TAFOS project—at least in principle—promises to reveal. And yet TAFOS is conceived so that the main recipients of these revelations are their communities and not necessarily the international public.

Although last year TAFOS had a show at Photographers' Gallery in London and this year at INNOVA Design Center, exhibits of this work usually take place in the mining centers, peasant communities and shanty towns of Peru. TAFOS's photographers are elected by their communities to be their representative image-makers and visual record keepers. Paintings as visual records in Peru date back to pre-Columbian times, although none survived the religious real and ethniccenitic vision of the European invaders. At every TAFOS exhibition, true community facemakers install with another distant community with which the former may not otherwise have any reason to interact. A sense of belonging to a larger community (nationality) begins to emerge as viewers realize they share similar problems or learn visually how other communities deal with the problems of drought, education, commerce, terrorism or repression. Thus, photography becomes both a socially cohesive force and a means of educating.

If some of the images of TAFOS have that militant look, which has almost become a Latin American cliché, it is because its members live in a politically risky environment. In the eyes of TAFOS, the need to quickly define your position, and you have chosen theirs. Mind you, the project was not conceived by well-intending activity leaders eager to turn the photographic into a weapon of the political avant-garde. In fact, its beginning was rather serendipitous. Some eight years ago, its founder, Gerardo photographer Thomas Müller, was traveling in the Andean highlands when one of the townpeople asked him to teach him photography. This began a chain of events that only later shaped the ideological contours of the project. Many writers covering the Latin American Photo Show have shown that political upheaval has failed to notice how timely the TAFOS show is perhaps because they ignored or failed to recognize the Peruvian political situation. The war in Peru is going on now and the political situation is so unclear that it is hard to say which team one really wishes to win—although it is clear who the winners will be. Some, like those in TAFOS who are trying to build rather than destroy, usually end up in the crossfire of the incompetent military forces, the government and of the Maoist terrorists of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). Sections of the American and European overseas cognoscenti onto the wagon of radical chicans, have uncritically endorsed the sinister Senderistas, maybe because they sound like Sandinistas and/or because they have bought their propaganda. "Only power is real" is Sendero's motto. The phrase not only describes their ontology but also their no-concessions program on the way to absolute power. That they will stop at nothing in pursuit of that goal is clearly shown by the recent assassination of shantytown organizer Maria Elena Moyano. (El Diario, the official medium of Sendero, voiced Sendero's claim to her killing accusing her of being a spy.) And yet, so far to the left was Moyano that some suspected her of being a Senderista herself. Her real crime was to organize neighborhood soup-kitchens to curb the starvation of Lima's poor, and probably, not to have followed Sendero's dictates.

During the period of 1985–1990, only the Apuqista party, which governed Peru, invaded Sendero in destroying the country's economic infrastructure. The economic damage caused by their sabotage and destruction equaled the Peruvian foreign debt and the number of victims of terrorism went—like hyperinflation—to five digits. Every successful project to improve production and/or the lives of people—whether by foreign sponsors or by indigenous ones—has been targeted by Sendero in one of the TAFOS images, one sees how the Quisimo cooperative, one of the most successful cooperatives created by the radical Agrarian Reform of the 1970s, was destroyed by Sendero. From their actions, one easily infers that Sendero's design is to create such an acute crisis in Peru that nothing will be left standing except their organization.

Always hidden and under lock and key in order to protect those who appear in the images, TAFOS archives preserve clues to the daily life of most of Peru's citizens. Although they occasionally fall prey to the merely emotive or picturesque, TAFOS photographers also record compelling scenes of daily life, ranging from situations of struggle and despair to those of work and celebration. They can hardly run the risk of recording too many things for people on both sides of an invisible trench would rather not be remembered. It is not clear whether gruesome images of torture victims or mutilated bodies have been obliterated from TAFOS shows in an effort to de-legitimize the level of violence in Peru. That the latter has always been a top priority in their agenda is a moral lesson more should heed.

Photographers and curators who saw the TAFOS exhibit were impressed by the outstanding quality of the prints. TAFOS has a team of local technicians that develop hundreds of rolls of film monthly, and then edit and prints the work. The process of editing is indeed one that cana shadow in their otherwise democratic process. I am far from believing that democracy is a panacea or that there are unviolated sites, but how would a TAFOS show look if the editing was done by the photographers themselves? The photographically adept technical team of TAFOS may simply have a different set of biases about the importance of certain images than the photographers and/or the other members of the communities to which they belong. May we one day see the latter's biases? Last year's show at Photographers' Gallery was democratically and optimistically conceived to outrage the European public by bringing to it a barrage of objects of "chicha" culture. It was meant as an anti-celebration of the Quinquennial of Columbus' arrival in this continent. But frankly, three quarters of a century after Dachau's arrival and the latest pissed-on-deity, the international art world and its public have become virtually shock-proof (although shock does not necessarily have to be). To its credit, except for being framed and marred, the photographs at Fotofest more closely resembled a eulogized form of nostalgia. TAFOS holds in its own territory that the high-schools London installation. With all the photos photographers turned on bums (the way they are usually held in Peru) would have been specially appreciated by those who attended Fotofest's Colloquium on Research of Latin American Photography. How a TAFOS show looks when its target audience is miners, peasants, and the urban proletariat is certainly of interest to those working in that field. As to the photographic gravity of the images themselves, a clever curator could probably put together a superb show from the TAFOS archive. But as I have already suggested—and it is of the editing issue—that is not the point of the TAFOS project. It does not exist to turn out Magnum photographers. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that the TAFOS postcards credit individual photographers with copyrights. With those cards and the rather elegant (but-chicha like) catalog from the Photographers' Gallery show titled "Viva el Peru. Carajo!" one can identify the work of individual photographers as being consistently solid. The work of Serapio Verduzco, Sebastian Turpo, Severo Salazar, Mequaides Ramos, Sabino Quijano, and Gabriel Quintero seems to me to be more than just statistically correct. It will be interesting to see what the future will hold for the project and its photographers in terms of a semiotic system that may be used to code communal and individual objectives. Finally, it is worth thinking about what kind of photography by outsiders is rendered superfluous by the presence of this project.

Fernando Castro is a Peruvian photography researcher, critic, and curator currently living in Houston.

NOTES

1. Recent political developments in Peru came about as I was editing this critique. President Fujimori dissolved the congress with the support of the armed forces; thus became a dictator. It remains to be seen that this move enjoys 70 percent of popular support. Peruvians now call him "Choncholet," a mix of "Hitler" and "Fujimori." (Fujimori is obviously a failure.) Although I was against Fujimori during the 1990 elections, the situation in Peru has worsened to the point that the government with emergency powers—speciality in the light of the widespread theft and corruption in the legislative and judicial branches of government. The question is whether Fujimori is that strong will still use the power wisely.

2. Attributable to "chicha" is a vague word for a pre-Colombian corn beer, the term is also used today to denote the syncretic popular culture in Peru.

3. I find it curious that TAFOS chose to use this phrase for its catalog because it was a phrase used by the guerrilla political party led by the former dictator Juan Velasco Alvarado, whose leftism seemed to wane when he was in power that they are now. The title, whose levity was obviously impermeable to the English reader, may be roughly translated as "Long live Peru, Fucking All!"
The Benetton Photographs: Selling Social Change?

Advertising and Social Issues. United Colors of Benetton was a lecture given by Oliviero Toscana at the George K. Brown Convention Center during Fotofest '92

Marlee Miller

If you had a $100 million to place images in magazines and newspapers, on billboards, posters and the sides of buses around the world, accompanied only by a company logo, what would you choose to show? Would you celebrate the beauty that the world has to offer, or would you reveal its injustices? Would you commission works of art or choose to sell a product?

Oliviero Toscana, a fashion photographer born in Italy and living both in Paris and New York, got such a chance eight years ago as the creative director for Benetton Group SPA, an international clothing chain. With the support of company founder and Managing Director Luciano Benetton, Toscana says he is using his advertising budget as a "vehicle for social change." He believes he can focus attention on social issues through the photographs in his ads, raise people's awareness, and eventually affect change. The question is: Can he ever get away from the fact that advertising's most basic function is to sell products?

Patrons of Fotofest '92 were given the opportunity to debate the many issues provoked by the Benetton ad campaigns in a one-hour discussion with Toscana. His presentation was the last in a series of 26 wide-ranging lectures offered during the month by Fotofest. The debate was heated at times during Toscana's presentation, but it seemed none of the attendees missed his point: advertising is powerful. Their reactions were also the calculated result of his manipulation of that power.

Benetton has more than 7,000 shops in 100 countries around the world. In the early '80s, it charged Toscana with creating an image for "a global company known for its use of color" in its United Colors of Benetton campaigns. He began by creating photographs filled with young people of different races, yet rarely showing the Benetton clothes—the "product." The company currently uses a combination catalog and magazine of "world events"—as one Benetton ship salper described it—called Colors to display the clothing.

"Most companies say in their advertising, 'We have the best product in the world. The cheapest—go buy it,'" Toscana said to the capacity crowd. "Benetton doesn't do that. It says, 'Diversity is interesting, take a look.'"

In 1985, when he produced a photograph of a young man dressed in Arab clothing hiding a young man dressed as a Jew, Toscana got a lesson on the impact of advertising. The image was censored by the Jewish community in France, according to Toscana.

"It made me think that even through the advertising media, which is normally used to sell clothes, you can reach and touch a different problem," he said. "You can disturb some people because they have prejudices."

In his lecture, the photographer discussed these prejudices and how the responses to them vary from country to country. His photographs of three children of different races stealing out their tongues was censored in Saudi Arabia because in that country the display of internal organs is prohibited. The Japanese simply laughed at Toscana's image of a priest being kissed, but it caused an uproar in Italy. His favorite photograph, that of a newborn baby still attached by an umbilical cord, is the most censored photograph in the world, according to Toscana.

It's not necessary to show the clothes, he said, because it is the impact of the image that lasts in the consumers' minds, therefore, they remember the company.

"When we look at an advertised product, we don't just drop the magazine and go out to buy that product; we think about the image and what it's trying to tell us," he said.

"With all the money and all the power that advertising has, it could do something more interesting than sell products. We will go on consuming and buying products but we can make it more interesting."

The crowd took issue with his motives and expressed its views when the lecture turned to discussion. One member of the Fotofest audience claimed that Benetton was really no different than Calvin Klein or Marlboro in its advertising approach: "If I buy these clothes because I bought the Benetton image—that people who wear these clothes care about the world—how is it different than Calvin Klein saying that if I buy this image, I will get young tonight?"

Another member of the crowd said the ads "prostitute" the issues—such as with the photograph of AIDS victim David Kirby—to shock the public into remembering the company. The photographs of Kirby on his deathbed surrounded by his family was originally published in black and white in Life magazine. Toscana "colorized" it and has been accused of altering the photograph to make Kirby resemble Jesus Christ. Toscana has denied such charges and has brought issue with the fact that people accepted the image when it was printed in Life but now it is much more controversial as part of the company's seven-part "disaster" series.

In the April issue of Interview magazine, Toscana spoke of the controversy further: "At Benetton, we are trying to create an awareness of issues. AIDS is one of today's major problems in the world, so I think we have to show something about it. That's my work; to report something that exists. We can't be like ostriches who put their heads in the sand... Communication is the responsibility of a company as much as it is, it says, the responsibility of the media. I don't believe we're using human tragedy to sell clothes."

In his lecture, Toscana said that he cannot claim all the credit, but Benetton's profits have gone up during the recent good and black is evil. A portrait of a black woman nursing a white baby was also dis- liked by many because they said it reminded them of the role of black women as slaves and wet nurses for whites. No words explain these images: the viewer has to listen to his or her own reactions. Toscana said he did not present a white woman with a black baby because he simply wants to show cultural realities. He displays the stereotypes, draws attention to them, gets negative reactions, and makes people focus on them. The crowd danced to Toscana's tune.

"Today, we started with an advertising campaign and ended up discussing AIDS, racism, overpopulat- ion, and pictures that we don't want to see," Toscana said. "We've been dis- cussing different issues coming from an advertising communication. I think that is a lot to do. I'm not saying this is the right way, but this is probably the way to get out of the plastic world that is advertising."

"Now, could you do that with $100 million—and still sell clothes?"

Marlee Miller is co-editor of SPOT.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

The Houston Center for Photography periodically reviews copies of new books from publishers around the country. They are available to visitors of the center’s regular gallery hours.


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Compiled by Neil P. Hightong
Suggestibility
Is the Secret


Adèle Horne

When a feeling reaches its highest pitch we remain still, because no words are adequate. Even autumn syllables may be too many.

To any event Japanese artists were not influenced by the way of Zen and to use the finest words or strokes of brush to express their feelings. When they are too fully expressed, no room for suggestion is possible, and suggestibility is the secret of the Japanese art.

David L. Jacobs, essayist for the book Ralph Eugene Meatyard: An American Visionary, notes that this passage was heavily marked in Meatyard's copy of Suzuki's Zen Buddhism. Underscored three times were the words "suggestibility is the secret." Meatyard's photographs are masterpieces in the suggesting capability. The children sit on their laps wearing grotesque masks. They confront us with the simultaneous reality of youth and old age, growth and decay. The photographs, Romance (N.) of Andoire Berry 83, is something not so much because of the ghoulish masks, but because it is impossible to assign a clear meaning to this powerful image. The ambiguity of much of Meatyard's imagery may be part of the reason his work has not received the critical attention it deserves. He was mentioned in Beaumont Newhall's 1964 edition of History of Photography, nor in the 1982 revision of that book. In the twenty years since Meatyard's death, there have been only two publications of his work, and certainly nothing as scholarly and comprehensive as this 1991 book, Ralph Eugene Meatyard: An American Visionary. The book is published in conjunction with a touring exhibition of the same title, organized by the Akron Art Museum, and co-curated by Barbara Tannenbaum and Jacobs. The exhibition is currently at the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and will conclude in April 1992.

Although Meatyard has not always been recognized by photographic historians, his work has intrigued both photographers and scholars. His work is especially relevant to today's contemporary art and its interest in ambiguous and multi-layered narrative. Cindy Sherman, a widely exhibited artist known for her photographs of constructed tableaux, counts Meatyard as one of her primary photographic influences.

This book is a long-overdue feast for information-starved Meatyard fans. Best known for his figurative work with blurred images, masks, and the masks he invented, Meatyard worked in several distinct styles throughout his life—sixteen according to one critic. In this publication, several photographs from each of his major series are gorgeously reproduced in more than one hundred plates. Here, for the first time, we see the breadth of Meatyard's vi-

sual achievement. Accompanying the images are four essays, full of anecdotes about this enigmatic man's life and work, as well as thoughtful interpretation. Although all the essays are well written, each providing a different perspective on Meatyard and his art.

The first essay, Fiction at a Higher Tempo, by Tannenbaum, director of the Akron Art Museum, outlines Meatyard's life work, with critical commentary on each of his seven major series. One of his early series is called No-Faces. Before making these images Meatyard spent three months just looking at the world through an unfocused camera—without taking any pictures—in order to accustom himself to this new way of seeing. The No-Focus photographs explore the capability of the unfocused camera lens to soften and dissolve the edges of objects so that they appear to have lost their solidity. Tones of black, white, and grey melt into one another, forming abstract patterns that only sometimes border on being recognizable forms. Completed in the late 1950s, this investigation of the camera's unique way of seeing is nothing like the straight landscape and documentary photographs that were being made by his contemporaries. Meatyard seems to have been more influenced by other art forms such as poetry, literature, and painting. He was an avid reader, and educated himself in art history by studying reproductions in books. Perhaps some of the inspiration for his No-Focus work came from the Modernist credo of faithfulness to the essential qualities of one's medium. A particularly compelling series is Zen Twigs. In these photographs the photographer's 85 millimeter lens is limited to an inch or two so that only a small segment of a twig is in focus. The sharply focused area emerges from the blurred background. Tannenbaum likens these images to the literary device of "synchadache," in which a part stands for the whole: the small focused area representing the life of the entire tree. This seems a very plausible reading, especially considering Meatyard's interest in Zen philosophy. The Romances, Meatyard's figurative works, are quasi-narratives staged in crumbling buildings. His family serves as actors in the dramas he creates. Their faces, usual by masked or blurred, are both questioning and contemplative. Although these images bear little resemblance to his more abstract work, there is a likeness in the images' relationship to Zen philosophy. In reaching the way of Zen, a tool called a "kien" is sometimes used. A kien is a deliberately paradoxical question or riddle that baffles logic and encourages contemplation instead. "The kien is compared to a koan in Buddhism, probably because of the way they combine the absurd, the grotesque, and the beautiful.

Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Untitled (Twig), 1963

movement in others monotonous nature scenes. He entitled the series Medium Sound. This work accomplished a goal he had set for himself in the No-Focus series: to represent the area of a single picture, the entire area of several frames of a motion picture, or several actions of life . . . to express the movement and the passing of a time that is relative to me, to my life.

The appearance of vibration in these photographs implies sound as well as the passing of time. Tannenbaum observes that Medium-Sound images are an amplified version of the presence of nature expressed in the Zen Twig photographs. She goes on to make a rather stretched comparison, though a rather particular Medium-Sound image of a building to a mask of the human face. Most of Tannenbaum's insights are very enlightening, but there are a couple of instances where she should have hedged Suzuki's caution about over-expressing stiffly suggestive. For the most part though, her interpretation of Meatyard's imagery is thoughtful and intelligent, a valuable piece of work, considering how little serious criticism his photographs have received in the past, and that Meatyard himself said almost nothing about the meaning of his work.

David L. Jacobs, chair of the University of Nebraska at Omaha Department, contributed an essay entitled Seeing the Unseen, Saying the Unsayable: On Ralph Eugene Meatyard. Jacob's piece together Meatyard's artistic and intellectual influences, creating a fascinating account of the development of his photographic vision. Although it is tempting to look to Meatyard's life history for some clue to his mysterious imagery, the facts available can only make one more curious about the man and his photographs. Meatyard's life is as much a parable as it is on his images. On the one hand, he lived a very ordinary middle-class existence. Born in Normal, Illinois, in 1925, he later moved to Lexington where he had a very limited optical business. "Explanations of Kentucky." Working six days a week and devoting much of his time to family life, he had, at most, one day a week to spend on photography. On the other hand, Meatyard created an enormous amount of photographs—an archive of more than five thousand prints—and developed a unique and memorable artistic vision.

Jacobs quotes Guy Davenport as saying, "Meatyard lived an ordinary life, but he made an extraordinary man." Meatyard's study of photography introduced him to several gifted artists and writers in the region who stimulated his intellect and encouraged him in his work. In 1956, Meatyard attended a photography workshop where he met Minor White, who introduced him to Zen and its relationship to photography. Meatyard became a devoted student of Zen philosophy, incorporating it into his art and his daily life. Meatyard also collected a number of books, mostly ones that his literary friends recommended, but he was no mere dilettante. Any book he read got a thorough reading, with lots of notes made in the margins. Meatyard had a lively curiosity and would doggedly pursue any subject that interested him. He even read telephone directories, glancing at unusual names to add to a list he kept in one of his notebooks. An especially delightful example of Meatyard's eclecticism is that, according to Guy Davenport, he had in his house a recording of the Andrew Sisters singing Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven." A good balance to the more scholarly essays by Tannenbaum and Jacobs are the essays by Van Der Coke and Wendell Berry, both close friends of Meatyard. They provide personal insight into his character and vision. Van Der Coke, his mentor in photography, explains Meatyard's formative influences. He asserts that Meatyard was more inspired by words than by photographs, which he read voraciously. Coke admits that even he, who knew Meatyard well and with whom Meatyard must have discussed his work to some extent, "cannot decode the iconography of his work. That is part of its appeal." Wendell Berry, who collaborated with Meatyard on a photographic book documenting the Red River Gorge, tells of watching him transform an unremarkable scene into a magical, otherworldly picture in the ground glass of his camera. He also speaks of Meatyard's courage in his battle with the cancer that led to his death in 1972. Up to the end, Meatyard continued to work and photograph, bringing life to the fullest, even as he was dying. For all of Meatyard's examination of the dark realm of the psyche (many of his photographs contain large pools of deep black, often in the very center of the image), his work and his life assert the transcendent power of the spirit.

Berry summed up Meatyard's artistic achievements best in an essay he wrote for their collaborative book of photographs, The Unfurnished Wilderness.

[Here pictures... are not ornaments, but windows and doors, entrances to our living spaces, entrances to the register of our life dramas. Let us look to look and be know how to see. We make a mistake, for they suggest always the presence of the unknown, the mystery, the possibility of the sudden access of delight, reality, beauty, joy, that exist to be kept alive, and reward for our livings they can serve as spiritual landmarks to the pilgrimage that is the earth each one of us must undertake alone.

Adèle Horne is an artist who works in photography and video, and is membership assistant at the Houston Center for Photography. Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Lucile Beeler Crater and Friends: Our Neighbors' Sweet Children, 1969-72.}
A Clear View
Of Their Reality


Ed Oswalz

Statistics can never tell a complete story. Recalling what we know about the Great Depression, we are still caught short about what we see—after looking at Walker Evans and James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. In their collaboration, the economic and social effects of the Depression in the rural South become hauntingly specific. Their subjects were not simply statistics—they were living persons, victims of a system that had failed them, prisoners of war, beaten in a battle fought not with bullets but with dollars.

Two recent publications, Living with the Enemy and Shooting Back, underscore a point that Agey and Evans knew well to understand and solve a problem, it is necessary, first, to feel the problem. Donna Ferrato's photographs of battered women, their personal stories, and the individuals who staff the agencies that serve them, coupled with photographs by homeless children collected by Jim Hubbard, address two social problems with emotions and directness. These photographs are engaged in changing hearts, and then minds. Whether these images fit standard tests of photographic excellence is not a question that concerns either Ferrato or Hubbard. Writing recently in The New York Times, Vicki Goldberg considered the issues such photographs raise: "Photography of this order cuts through the net of aesthetics with the sharpness of its emotional power."

Ferrato, a gifted photojournalist, has been documenting domestic violence in the United States for more than ten years. Her position is quite clear: she does not stand apart, watching and photographing objectively from the sidelines. She calls herself "obsessed" with her task and frustrated by the resistance of magazine editors to publish her work. Her camera is her weapon, she tells us.

Living with the Enemy is a record, then, of Ferrato's ability to win the trust and respect of the women she has photographed. Gaining the permission to enter the home of a battered woman is a rare gift, she writes. Domestic violence is one of society's great secrets. That its victims, shameless and powerless and abused, would allow such requests is exactly what she came to expect.

Still, eight women agreed to let Ferrato come into their lives. They are famous: Charlotte Fedders, whose husband was an official in the Reagan administration, and Hedda Nussbaum, whose companion Joel Steinberg was convicted of murdering their adopted child Lisa. Her other subjects could be any number of women. Statistically, claim no one is an exception. Experts call domestic violence "violence that goes unreported" and guess that one in two women will be physically battered in a marital or quasi-marital relationship.

In her book, Ferrato, a former sculptor, writes: "Loving an enemy has as its goal to depict with text and photographs the evidence of spousal abuse. But she does not stop there. When Ferrato photographs the activities of groups that offer counseling to spouses who batter and to their victims, there is some reason to hope. But

Donna Ferrato

Japanese Playboy had commissioned Ferrato to photograph couple who epitomized the glamorous lifestyle of the 1980s. At first, Ferrato writes, she found Liz and Garth to be "privileged people with all the happiness money could buy." She moved into their home. "No one ever seemed uncomfortable with my camera," she said. "A sense of trust and ease was quickly established." But their parties quickly turned to slug feasts: Garth forced his wife to have sex with male friends, and alcohol and drugs fuled a rage that soon seemed to consume Garth. He beat her repeatedly, always denying his actions even when confronted with the camera's evidence. So great was the hope or optimism—filling Shooting Back: Mario Lamont (age 12), in Sewer Grave, photographs a young girl, smiling, as she clings to the grating over the sewage pipe. There is nothing precarious about her life as we read it in this image. In these photographs, children play wherever they can find a place to play. The smiles of Lamont's subject makes this point obvious. In a caption beneath Daniel Hall's (age 9) Twins in Bath, is a child's comment: "This exhibit shows the children's struggle and the fight and not the way magazines want us to."

One finds children at play and at rest, posing in an alley, jumping into a swimming pool, examining a trowel, hugging their parents, their siblings, their toys—"the world's most children trustingly in habit. These are photographs remarkably free of cant, free of any hidden tricks, free, in a sense, of the burden to prove how inhuman it is to live a homeless life. That joy survives is a sign, for some, that the human spirit can take great amounts of abuse before it crashes. These were the only images in Shooting Back, one might be hard pressed to understand what makes these children homeless. Their in-habit rooms; they have beds and places to play and to be quiet. But Shooting Back does not create a place called "homelessness" that we would all enjoy visiting some day. Caris- sa Eberth (age 15) photographs a rat growing through garbage. And the concluding pages of the book show how deeply violence is woven into the lives of these children. Daniel Hall and Kevin photograph with permission from adults. In Scafell, Chris Heffin (age 9) photographs two youths fighting. Facing his opponent, one young man smiles. Is their fight just a game for Hall and Kevin? At the right edge of the photograph stands a young girl, watching and watching the fight. A television, an image, a child, stands in the middle of the room. Is it turned on to Vanna White or to a cops and robbers broadcast? Heffin, surely too young to realize it, has summated a world of violence, a world in which violence is just another fact of life for the homeless.

Ferrato's and Hubbard's projects speak directly to another world. Ferrato's and Hubbard's projects are raw, angry. The works by Hubbard's students belie their youth. They range from formal, posed portraits to images that shock the viewer and quickly seen and then photographed on the street. Both projects are serious, committed, and important.

Ed Oswalz is a member of the National Book Critics Circle and contributes to various papers appearing regularly in the Houston Post.
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The light through the doorway pressed gently on her face, showing me her world, her house, her bed, her eyes.

She looked into my eyes through the camera, as if she knew she would be looking at the world, and without fear.

She always cried when I showed her a picture of herself.

Elena told me later her mother was unhappy with how she looked, old and wrinkled.

"Julie's camera never lies," Elena said.

I never thought of her as old and wrinkled.

I saw a woman, a friend.

And she always asked me to take another picture.

—Julie Newton

Julie Newton is a photographer in Austin, Texas, and a faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin.