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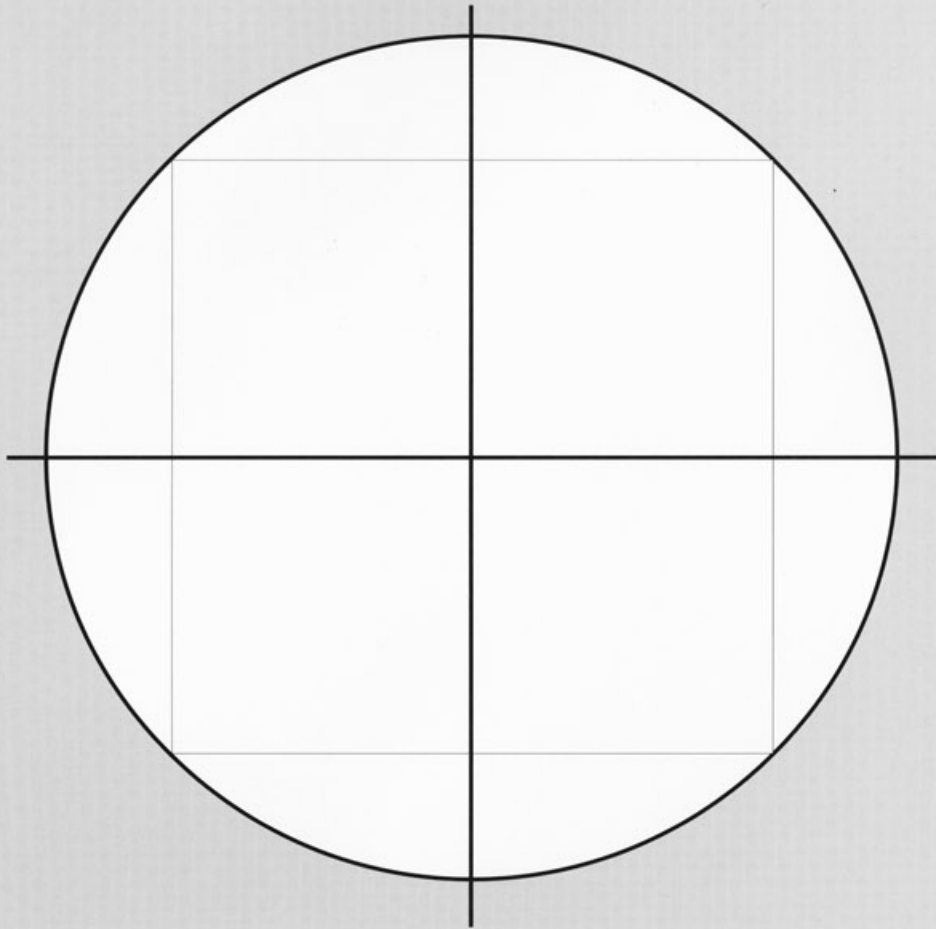
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EDITORS' NOTE

This issue of SPOT contains a series of articles written by artists, art historians, and scholars that attempts to address some of the issues of the photographic object.

As it turns out, the "photograph" can be many things. It can be an idea: Shannon Halwes discusses how, in the 1920s, Man Ray introduced conceptual photography into our visual vocabulary. The photograph can mask itself as evidence: Dennis Oppenheim asserts in no uncertain terms that his work is not photography; Alison de Lima Greene explains. A photograph can inspire the imagination: Richard Howard's poem about Nadar based on his portrait is a uniquely resonant response to the photographic medium.

A photograph can also lose its proper identity and become something altogether new and different. In the hands of an artist such as Max Ernst, the real becomes fantastic through collage; Bill Camfield tells us how. Photographs can be instruments of change or undergo metamorphoses themselves in order to communicate. Judith Hoffberg reviews the "Photographic Book Art in the United States" exhibition with a high regard for the fluidity and currency of the medium. Ann Cvetkovich analyzes Madonna's self-metamorphoses before the camera in her review of *Sex*. Photographs document; they can also entertain. Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom take issue with artistic obsession in their review of William Wegman's work.

In the end, as Susan Sontag observed in *On Photography*: "Photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information."

We, the editors, have derived a deep satisfaction from producing this and the three previous issues of SPOT, as they have each presented new challenges and unique rewards. Editing the magazine has been a wonderful opportunity for us to blend our diverse backgrounds in publications, art, and photography. As we pass the baton to the next editor(s) we would like to take this time to thank the staff of HCP, the writers, and the readers of SPOT for their support during the past year.

Marlee Miller and Maggie Olvey

Women in Photography Conference

The third Women in Photography Conference, held October 16-18, 1992, was successful because of the spirited, informal dialogue created by each event. The environment supported divergent viewpoints, allowing for a meaningful exchange of ideas and real personal growth among participants.

Organized this year by the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) at the University of Arizona, Tucson, the event was subtitled "Creativity, Body Image, Biography." The conference featured presentations and discussions by twenty-seven speakers, and it attracted 240 attendees from twenty-eight states and four countries. Major funding for the conference was provided by Eastman Kodak Corporation and the Arizona Commission on the Arts.

The opening event of the Tucson conference was a performance by Carolee Schneemann: *The Delicious Arousal of Destruction: or, is there a Feminist Erotic Iconography?* The 90-minute multi-media piece, which involved simultaneous slide projections, formed a semicircle on the stage and showed a retrospective selection of the artist's work. Schneemann, a performance artist, painter, writer, video, and filmmaker since the '60s, in a free-form performance style, moved around the stage, then laid down and recounted stories about her life and artmaking. The performance closed with a memorable series of gesture paintings in which a violin shape gradually metamorphosed into the outline of a woman's body. Unlike the usual keynote speech, this performance offered a provocative beginning to the conference. Many in the audience felt, however, that Schneemann's self-referential performance style never transcended her personal experience to address larger issues of women's sexuality.

The second day of the conference featured three major presentations, including a talk entitled *Women's Creativity: Women Photographers* in which Nancy Solomon and C. Diane Ealy discussed their collaborative interview and research project concerning women's artistic processes. Deborah Willis enlightened the audience with a discussion on the work of some developing and established mixed-media artists. She presented work by artists of diverse backgrounds, all of whom produced biographical or autobiographical work. Barbara DeGenevieve's *Sexual Subject/Sexual Object: Rethinking the Female Body* was a dense yet lucid overview of the history of women's representations of the female body—from the virtual "moratorium" on imaging the female nude in art in the late '70s to recent explorations in picturing women's body and desire.

On the last morning of the conference, artists' presentations were given by Judy Fiskin, Dorit Cypis, and Graciela Iturbide. Dorit Cypis' presentation was the highlight of the conference for many; it was an opportunity to see a broad range of her work that many know only peripherally through articles in national art magazines. She discussed her multi-media installations and performance work on issues of sexuality, power, and the body. Cypis' work deals with the dynamics of representing the body; she explained how her struggles with the power of "the gaze" changed her methodology from picturing a female model to imaging her own body. This work served as a form of art therapy for Cypis, confronting issues of sexuality and body shame with both her mother and father. She now gives workshops on picturing the body for individuals wishing to explore their own issues on sexuality. She is an important artist whose career deserves to be followed, although some were troubled by her attempt at providing a form of therapy to others.

The Women in Photography Conference is a vital forum for continuing communication on issues important to women artists. Each conference is planned and financed by a host organization. The Houston Center for Photography plans to organize the fourth Women in Photography Conference in late March 1994 to coincide with FotoFest '94. By offering the conference a year ahead of schedule, HCP will provide increased opportunities for dialogue and support in the community of women photographers, as well as offering the benefits of participating in an international photography festival.

Jean Caslin and Adele Horne

Cover: Max Ernst, *La santé par le sport*, c. 1920.
Courtesy of The Menil Collection.

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Dennis Oppenheim: No Photography

Alison de Lima Greene

*One day the photograph is going to become even more important than it is now—there'll be a heightened respect for photographers. Let's assume that art has moved away from its manual phase and that now it's concerned with the location of material and with speculation. So the work of art now has to be visited or abstracted from a photograph, rather than made. I don't think the photograph could have the same richness of meaning in the past as it has now. But I'm not particularly an advocate of the photograph.*¹

Dennis Oppenheim, 1970

Photography has played both a central and a peripheral role in the conceptual work of Dennis Oppenheim. On the one hand, photographs provide the sole documentation of a key series of ephemeral Earth Art installations and Body Art performances created by Oppenheim in the decade between 1968 and 1978. On the other, the artist has never considered himself a photographer: many of his documentations are made up of photographs taken by others; viewpoints are frequently informal; and the actual printing was executed by standard commercial labs. Indeed, even the photographs have proved to be ephemeral. Most of the photodocumentations were created for exhibition purposes and only a few survived past the initial presentations of that era.² Most important, these photodocumentations were never intended to be regarded as photographic works of art in themselves; rather, as the artist recently commented: "They were there simply to indicate a radical art that had already vanished. The photograph was necessary only as a residue for communication."³

In 1991, Alanna Heiss mounted a major retrospective of Oppenheim's work at P.S. 1 Museum and Institute for Contemporary Art, New York. In preparation for this exhibition, Oppenheim reproduced a number of his early photodocumentations from material that he had maintained in his personal archive. With the assistance of Amy Plumb, Oppenheim's archivist since 1977, these documentations were recreated true to the original scale and configurations of the early presentations. Three of these documentations were subsequently donated by the artist to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as part of a major gift.⁴

In the light of developments in photography over the past two decades, these photodocumentations have lost some of the shock value they once held. Jean-Louis Bourgeois, writing on Oppenheim in 1969, accurately summarized the sentiments of a public not used to looking at photography of this nature:

When shown in the gallery, such photos tend to trouble not only the casually curious but the devoted gallery-goer as well. One reason is that in a gallery everyone expects to find works of art. When you get 'stuck' with photos of art instead—whether of masterpieces or junk doesn't matter—it hurts. Going to a gallery and finding 'only' photos is a little like going to a warehouse and finding only pornography. You feel gypped.⁵

At a time when photography was widely regarded as a peripheral activity compared to painting and sculpture, the substitution of a photodocumentation for the actual object was itself demanding. Furthermore,

the sculptures recorded by these documentations issued an additional challenge in that they represented an aggressive move away from the object. Not only were viewers asked to relinquish the one-on-one experience with the actual object, but in a post-Duchampian gesture they were also asked to accept as art an object that no longer existed.

The photographic community, which might have been expected to support this new direction, was affronted by the unorthodoxy of the photodocumentations. The large scale, the intermingling of black and white with color images, the casual authorship of the images, and the combination of commercial printing and non-archival mounts alienated many of the scholars who were beginning to establish important photographic collections. Indeed, in many museums Oppenheim's photodocumentations continue to be collected primarily by sculpture and painting curators.

The function of photodocumentation in recording ephemeral activities had a certain ancestry before the conceptual artists of Oppenheim's generation. Yves Klein's 1960 *Leap into the Void* is perhaps the most famous precedent and whether or not the image of Klein hurling himself from a second story window had been doctored continues to be debated. The Actionist artists of Vienna—Gunter Brus, Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler—used photodocumentation in the early 1960s to record performances that were too shocking to be executed before a general audience. In the United States, the evolution of Happenings and Performance Art as conceived by Allan Kaprow, Red Grooms, and Claes Oldenburg among others was largely promoted by photodocumentation.

Not surprisingly many of Oppenheim's early projects can be related to Performance Art as the artist's presence as fabricator is clearly evident. For example, *Ground Mutations*, 1969, was created by the artist's self-conscious peregrinations across the urban landscape. As recorded by a five-part photodocumentation—among Oppenheim's earliest exercises in this format—the project is a combination of a carefully prepared premise and random elements. In the text panel the artist records:



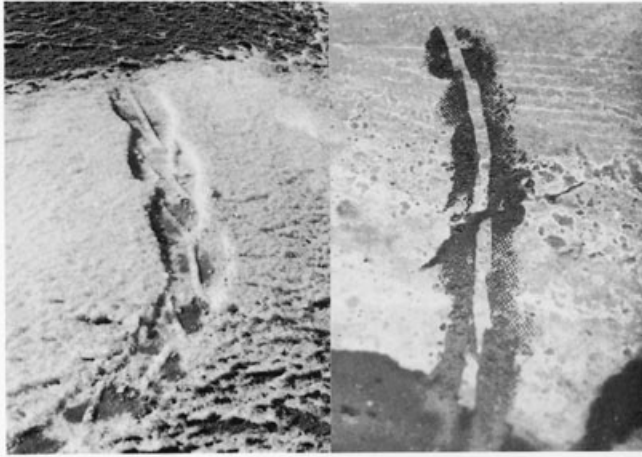
"Ground Mutations—Shoe Prints. November 1969. Kearny, New Jersey and New York, New York. Shoes with 1/4" diagonal grooves down the soles and heels were worn for three winter months. I was connecting the patterns of thousands of individuals. . . . My thoughts were filled with marching diagrams." On the lower left is a photograph of the left and right shoe prints. This image is surmounted by two photographs: on the left the shoes have shaped a three-dimensional ridge in the snow; on the right the muddy soles have printed a track on the pavement. In this fashion the artist establishes a basic lexicon. A dramatic change in scale, on a

Extended Armor, 1970, black and white photographs and text mounted on board, 60 x 80 inches, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the artist, 92.231. Video set-up by Dennis Oppenheim and photography by John Gibson.



EXTENDED ARMOR. PERFORMED AT GALLERY REESE PALLEY, N.Y., 1970. 55 MINUTES. MATERIAL: BOARDS, VIDEO CAMERA, AMPLIFIER, SPIDER, HAIR. A material is manipulated at greater and greater distances from the body that produced it. The mechanism that governs its direction (air currents through breathing) comes from the same system that once contained it. Greater demands are made upon the hair when it is used to block-repel an on-coming force (spider).





GROUND MUTATIONS—SHOE PRINTS. NOVEMBER, 1969. KEARNY, NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK, NEW YORK. SHOES WITH $\frac{1}{2}$ " DIAGONAL GROOVES DOWN THE SOLES AND HEELS WERE WORN FOR THREE WINTER MONTHS. I WAS CONNECTING THE PATTERNS OF THOUSANDS OF INDIVIDUALS... MY THOUGHTS WERE FILLED WITH MARCHING DIAGRAMS.



Ground Mutations, 1969, black and white photographs and text mounted on board, 62 x 78 1/2 inches, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the artist, 91.2030. Photography by Dennis Oppenheim; stock satellite photograph.

conceptual level at least, is introduced by the satellite view of midtown and lower Manhattan. Despite a lack of knowledge of the history of photography,⁶ Oppenheim had an almost cinematic grasp of the effectiveness of montage techniques. The static shoe-prints lead to the charted paths, which in turn reflect the urban grid. The narrative of the text panel gives the work an extended temporal context and is a combination of objective notations and introspective commentary. The fluidity of these transitions leads the viewer to accept the immensity of this project as Oppenheim leads us through the conceptual jumps that unify the work of art.

Extended Armor, 1970, documents a 55-minute performance at Reese Palley Gallery, New York. The photodocumentation is therefore both temporally and physically compressed in comparison to *Ground Mutations*. Whereas the earlier piece falls into the category of urbanized Earth Art, *Extended Armor* explores its microcosmic counterpart, *Body Art*. Here Oppenheim clearly takes center stage as performer—he is shown in an absurdist high-risk situation. For close to an hour he confronted a tarantula trapped in a narrow chute, keeping it at bay by pulling hair out of his head

and blowing it towards the spider. This action was recorded by video cameras, as well as by photographs taken by Oppenheim's dealer, John Gibson. To some extent, Oppenheim sacrificed a degree of the pictorial control he exercised in *Ground Mutations*. However, once again the montage of text, still images taken from video, and the oblique gallery view maintains its conceptual urgency. Oppenheim has insisted that his photodocumentations are not to be regarded as pictures "but information about something. Some of my contemporaries, like Gilbert and George, are emphasizing a strong image. I like to emphasize a strong concept. The photodocumentations carried a lot of weight because they were referencing a new conceptual art."⁷

Despite these disavowals, certain photodocumentations are extraordinarily beautiful. *Polarities*, 1972, is perhaps Oppenheim's most successful synthesis of conceptual premises, on-site execution, and documentary processes. As described in the two text panels, the generative images for the work were the last graphic gesture created by the artist's father shortly before his death and one of the first drawings of the artist's daughter. Oppenheim plotted these images with magnesium flares

on a five-hundred foot scale in the fields of Bridgehampton, New York. Lit at twilight, the flares burned for about twenty minutes. Given the scale of the work, it could only be comprehended from an aerial view and fifteen aerial photographs taken by Steven Pearlbinder record the images in the increasing darkness. A map of eastern Long Island, with the location clearly marked gives the work a geographic context, complementing the genealogical mapping which occurs on a conceptual level.

In retrospect, looking at these works in the context of the photographic developments of the past two decades, they appear remarkably fresh and unmediated. In contrast to Cindy Sherman's and Sophie Calle's manipulations of documentary procedures, Oppenheim's photodocumentations have a naïve immediacy, free of the layered interpretations discovered by the subsequent generation of artists who came of age in the 1980s. Instead of treating photography as an end in itself, he reduced it to one of its basic functions—documentation. And while formal links can be made to the New Topographics movement in photography of the 1970s, Oppenheim was never interested in interpreting the landscape. Instead, he transformed the landscape and his body into new arenas of action, and his photodocumentations fulfill the basic purpose of any documentary: they give evidence.

The artist has commented on the work of this era, "I didn't know what it was, but I did know what it wasn't. It wasn't painting. It definitely wasn't photography. I

think of myself as a sculptor, so I called it sculpture. If history was being made at all, it was being made in sculpture, not in documentation."⁸

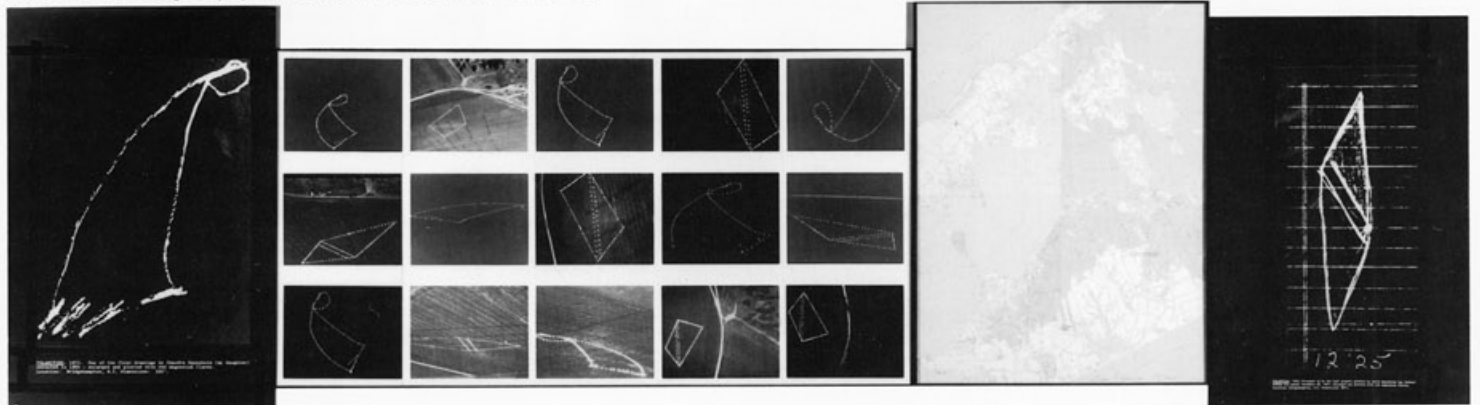
Alison de Lima Greene is curator of twentieth-century art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Bibliographic Note: The most comprehensive publication on Oppenheim to date is the catalogue of the P.S. 1 exhibition: Allana Heiss and Thomas McEvilley, *Dennis Oppenheim: Selected Works 1967-1990*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dennis Oppenheim, Interview with Lisa Béar and Willoughby Sharp, "Discussions," *Avalanche*, no. 1, New York, Fall 1970. Reprinted in Lucy Lippard, ed. *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object...*, New York, Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1973, p. 184.
2. Few photodocumentations were collected by individuals or institutions in the late 1960s and 1970s and the transience of early Type-C color prints has rendered some of Oppenheim's early photodocumentations virtually illegible.
3. Telephone interview with the author, 16 December 1992.
4. In the autumn of 1991 the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, purchased a monumental drawing by Oppenheim, *Chain of Pearls*, 1980. The artist later donated the three photodocumentations discussed in this article, as well as a sculpture, *Virus*, 1989, and an additional monumental drawing, *Study for Heart with Paper, Carved Hard Foam, Black Glass, Rolled Paper, Ceiling-Mounted Turntable*, 1992. In 1983 the museum had acquired Oppenheim's *Traps and Cowhide*, 1969, gift of Eve France.
5. Jean-Louis Bourgeois, "Dennis Oppenheim: A Presence in the Countryside," *Artforum*, vol. 8, no. 2. (October 1969), p. 35.
6. Oppenheim remembers that "my inspiration wasn't coming from photography, it was coming from sculpture." 16 December 1992 interview.
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*

Polarities, 1972, printed map, color photographs, and text mounted on board, 40 x100 inches, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the artist, 91.2031. Photography by Dennis Oppenheim and Steven Pearlbinder.



A Most Excellent Dog and Pony Show and Its Audience



Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom

In the spring of 1975 we received a short note from Bill Wegman that contained the drawing reproduced here of a parking meter with its arrow in the red zone—"expired"—and labeled on its face, "video applause meter." The occasion for this cryptic message was a letter we had sent him following an exhibition of video art we had organized for the Smith College Museum of Art in the fall of 1974. The show consisted of a series of daily tape programs plus video installations representing most every major American artist working in video at that time (including Andy Mann of Houston, then living in New York City). Wegman's "Selected Works" were the clear hit of the week-long event, and we wrote him saying our tabulations from the video applause meter indicated he was the popular favorite of the museum's enthusiastic audience.

From early in his career, Wegman's relation to his audience—"fans," more accurately—has been that of a comic actor who knows how to transform straight-faced, dumb situations into the enduring pleasure of wise and gentle humor. No party is injured; everyone is amused. The effectiveness of his absurd monologues and sight gags only seemed to be enhanced by the ridiculousness of his means: a chair, a (slap)stick, ladies' pocketbooks, spray can, photo lamp, his own face or stomach. But no prop in Wegman's world of plain and banal things could equal the pure charm of Man Ray, his first canine partner, straight man, and video co-star of the 19-inch luminous screen. It is safe to say that through these droll man and dog dialogues, the combination of minimal staging and Man Ray's responsive personality brought Wegman recognition beyond the general run of video artists in the early 1970s.

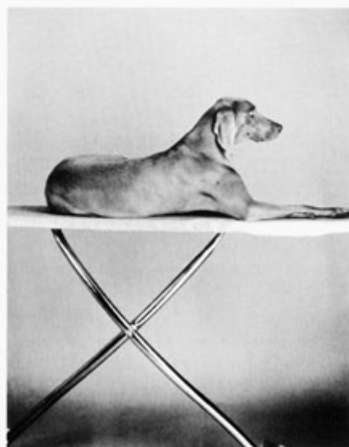
But, as we know, this is no one-talent Bill. His use of photographs and drawing demonstrated, from the beginning, the same canny humor addressed to our collective cultural pretensions about the serious business we believe Art must be. The operating standard of Wegman's videomanship, its apparent artlessness and look of unself-conscious, ad lib invention where familiars are enlisted to play out largely silly roles is also characteristic of his black-and-white photographs (e.g., *Doing the Dishes*, 1972). Man Ray made regular appearances in these conceptual photo works, many of which were composed in multiple frames; however, the static image of subjects kept at a distance from the lens limited the impact the man/dog relationship could have on an audience and did have in the videos. One exception to these limitations is the four-part piece, *Looking At*, 1973.

Photographed at fairly close range, a triad of woman, dog, and cat take turns looking at one another. As the unseen fourth party, we trace the alternating triangle of deadpan stares between real woman, real dog, and paper cat (head only) whose pupils shift appropriately. All the permutations of looking and being looked at are carried out, as in any respectable conceptual work—and, typical Wegman—it's the flat, black paper cat who articulates the visual geometry and who animates its delightful pointlessness.

It didn't take long for people, many people, to realize that Wegman, master of low-budget video and the photographic joke without a punch line, was a brilliant humorist (*Saturday Night Live* embraced him in the mid-1970s) and humanist (emphasis on the small "h"). Somehow his audience sensed there had to be in all of his absurdities something simple, honest, and true. Besides, his dog thoroughly trusted him. What he was dishing out to us really was a good dose of anti-aestheticism on four legs, inverted *dogmatism* about the nature of established art—if you will permit the pun. His best work has always appealed to our constructive imaginations, and imagination is only constructive to the degree it is liberated from dogmatic constraint. This project was not his alone, however; others had led the way, John Baldessari most conspicuously. But only Wegman had Man Ray on his team: Baldessari might try to teach the alphabet to a house plant; Bill Wegman could correct his dog's spelling!

Enter the pony. That homely, anomalous contraption, the Polaroid 20 x 24 camera, had a large presence on the photographic scene in the 1980s. Well, not exactly the camera but its rich, glossy product that provided photographers instant gratification on a scale such as never before possible. Given his origins in video and photography, it's surprising Wegman was ever seduced by the Polaroid aesthetic, although apparently he did resist. Artists change, of course. There were very likely a number of factors that contributed to his turn to the handsome print as art object. We might speculate about one of those: Man Ray had entered the bare stage of Wegman's work as easily and innocently as any other prop or actor; once there, however, the dog's winning ways inevitably made him a principal, not just another walk-on. An audience was generated around the appearance of this gorgeous Weimaraner (a perfect Zone V) and that audience wanted to see him as often as Wegman chose to show him.

The large format "instant" Polaroid offered Wegman the immediately viewable result that he liked so much about video,



William Wegman, *Fay on Board*, 1989.

which meant an idea could develop out of the kind of spontaneity with which he is comfortable and confident. At the same time, the camera was so infinitely satisfying in the ways it enhanced Man Ray's "inscrutable" presence. The rest is well-documented history—including the sad loss of Man Ray and his eventual replacement by Fay Ray. Over the last decade, Wegman's prodigious output on the Polaroid has secured his reputation, and, even though he has done many strong pieces without

putting nature on a shorter and shorter leash, fully intent on controlling if not destroying wildness. Of course, canines threw their lot in with humans a very long time ago; so it may be said they have been complicit in their own servile domestication. Nonetheless, we humans see them as standing far closer to animality than ourselves. In this ambiguity of hierarchical status, the dog represents the ascendancy of man over beast or the gulf between. Such is the case no matter how many human at-



William Wegman, *Arm Envy*, 1989.

canines, it is nonetheless the widespread perception that he's "the guy who does dogs." In collaboration with John Reuter (as the "pony master" from Polaroid) he has become, in spite of himself, dog trainer to the art world—incidentally pushing the pony into deeper water than anyone had before (i.e., in a Maine lake on the back of a pick-up to do the dogs-in-the-canoe shot).

Returning for a moment to the drawing with which we introduced this piece, it seemed curious that a so-called "video applause meter" would be turned into a parking meter. We read the allusion rather directly: Wegman was apologizing for the six-month delay in responding to our communication; he had been "parked" on it so long the meter had expired. Considering the pleasures we had derived from his art during the past eighteen years, it may appear ungrateful to apply that same graphic metaphor to his photographic production of the last several years, but perhaps there's no better way to say it: in our opinion, he has been parked too long on the "dog and pony show" even though the applause meter may be suggesting otherwise. It is a hard act to sustain at the level he began; brilliance inevitably diminishes into cleverness.

For all the commanding ease and apparent innocence of the dog photographs, there are fundamental and inherent problems with man representing animal. Historically speaking, modern man has been

tributes we dress them with in our fables and satires. The power of representation, of representing, lies in our hands and *in itself* amounts to domination by signification. It is our own stories we humans are telling when we enlist the dog, the bear, the fox, the crow, or the frog in the staging of our "truths." When we do attempt to look into their world, through their eyes, our description of what we see in their inscrutability is always construed as mysterious or ineffable. It is the animal inevitably viewed as Other.

It must be said that Wegman is not without a savviness in these subtle matters, and that he has effectively used absurdity and irony to convey his perceptiveness. *Arm Envy*, 1989, a tongue-in-check twist on Freud, is a marvelous if rare recent example of Wegman's ability to catch us up in the trap of received ideas. On the other hand, the more the "dog and pony show" finds itself performing to meet demand, the less able it is to do more than entertain us within the comfortable setting of our collective preconceptions about nature as pet. Meanwhile Wegman's fans continue waiting for the curtain to rise on yet another canine tableau.

Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom are collaborative artists exhibiting under the name MANUAL. Both are professors of art at the University of Houston. They are also recent recipients of an NEA fellowship grant in photography.

Man Ray and the Art of the Idea

Shannon Halwes

Most of Man Ray's art making between 1917 and 1921 was devoted to assembling everyday objects into what the artist would come to call *objets de mon affection*. Often, he discarded these objects after having photographed them. But not necessarily. Consequently, no one can quite agree on what to do with the object photographs: are they themselves objects, photographs,

or simply documents?

There is no precedent for these photographs. While photography of art works was not new, nor was the photography of the mundane items in our surroundings, Man Ray's intentions for this work were a distinct departure from the norm. He pushed photography beyond the experimentation with technique and formal composition encountered in Paul Strand's early work, or even the investigation into time and motion, such as was seen in An-

ton Giulio Bragaglia's futurist photographs and the abstract *Vortographs* of Alvin Langdon Coburn. Man Ray's object photographs were made in the pursuit of a new art of the idea—one based on the theories expressed by the French artist Marcel Duchamp and embodied in ready-made sculpture.

Man Ray's photographs record his ideas, but they represent more than mere documentation. In his hands, photographed objects are more complex than the objects themselves and, as Merry Foresta has suggested, "were, in fact, many things in one, photographs and objects, illustrations and works of art."² The artist himself would have probably agreed. One thing is certain: in making use of photography to record his objects and to develop his art, Man Ray became the first conceptual art photographer.

Duchamp created his first ready-made two years prior to meeting Man Ray in New York in 1915. In *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), Duchamp selected a common, utilitarian object and proclaimed it *art*. It became art essentially because the artist willed it so. Once Duchamp wrenched the object from its original purpose, he furthered its transformation into art by altering its normal orientation—in this case, by affixing the bicycle wheel to the top of a kitchen stool. For works like his 1915 snow shovel, Duchamp added an ironic title, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, to change its original intent and to distance the object from its normal context.

With the ready-made (in essence, art by appropriation), Duchamp asserted the primacy of the artist's decision over his skill as a craftsman. The ready-made was a way in which Duchamp attempted to return art to the service of the mind—a clear rejection of *l'art pour l'art*, of formalism's absorption with the visual aspects of art. The idea was the art.³ The ready-made was the evidence.

Man Ray's use of photography established his role in the development of this art of the idea. He liked the fact that this mechanical process was even further removed from the artist's hand and traditional notions of craftsmanship. At about the same time a few European artists, Christian Schad in 1919, László Moholy-Nagy, and Max Ernst slightly later, were experimenting in cameraless photography and photo collage with the same desire to remove art from the hand of the artist. Man Ray often stated that he considered the photograph to be a record of the concept not of the artifact. Photography was the means by which all of his objects (or the idea of them) remained permanent.⁴ Consequently, some objects existed only for the photograph—where Man Ray had absolute control over the image. In these cases, once the idea was recorded, the object became redundant. The photograph was an equivalent, if not more successful, vehicle for the concept.

The object depicted in *Man*, an eggbeater, could be considered a ready-made, but the work of art, completed in the photograph, is the simple kitchen utensil and its cast shadow. The object itself is not altered, but as it melds with its shadow on the plane of the photograph, it is transformed into a phallic form. Both the visual and the conceptual aspects of *Man* rely on the controlled perspective—including the shadows—of the photograph. Ultimately it is the title that makes the anthropomorphic connection and converts the object into the image of a man (probably a self-portrait),⁵ and links it to correlation between man and machine explored in contemporary work by Francis Picabia and Duchamp. Historic photographs of Man Ray's New York studio show the egg-

beater itself displayed as a work of art, but eventually *Man* probably was returned to its former life as a kitchen utensil.

Clearly, *Portmanteau* (1920), an object incorporating a live model behind a clothes display stand, existed only for the photograph.⁶ In the photograph, a creature—half human, half mannequin—appears to emerge from a mysterious black space. The model wears one black stocking that gives her the appearance of missing part of a leg; she seems mutilated and subhuman. The artist's control over the image is essential: the illusion would simply self-destruct upon seeing the figure in the round. Man Ray later incorporated the photograph into a collage entitled *dadaphoto* for reproduction in the only issue of the magazine *New York Dada*.⁷ Man Ray designed *dadaphoto* to look like an advertisement. To reinforce the commercial aspect, rather than signing the work, he attached an anonymous tag line: *Trademark Reg.*⁸ The woman thus evolves into not only an object, but a commodity, an item for sale.

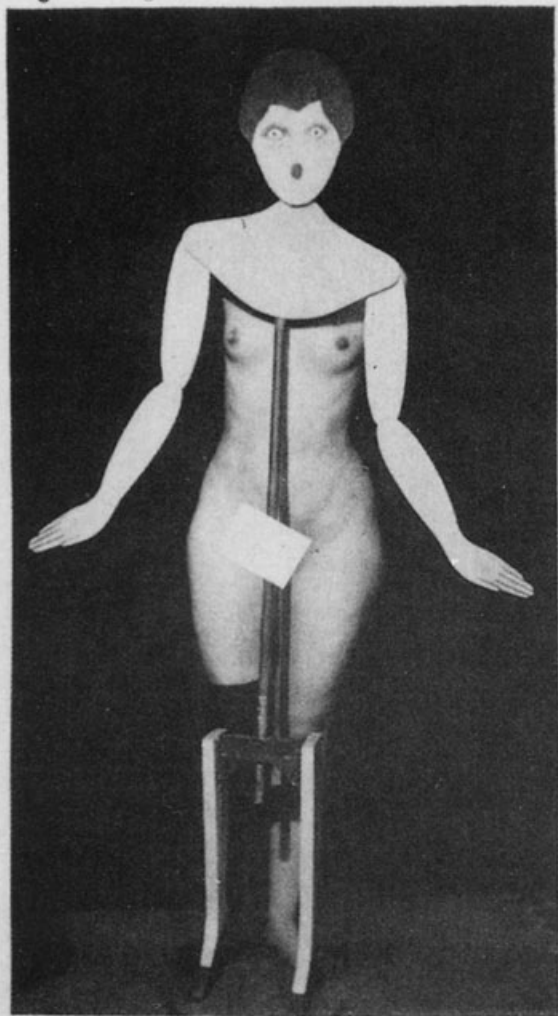
New York 1920 is a photograph of the contents of a spilled ashtray. A photograph that aesthetically and conceptually breaks completely with existing artistic standards, this truly absurd image of the city is also his most radical work of the period. Whether Man Ray created *New York 1920* for the purpose of being photographed or was simply recording a chance event, the circumstance is an issue less significant than the content of the image. As a subject for art or photography, the spilled ashtray was completely unprecedented. Carl Belz noted that while the various elements of the composition are discernible, and even the text is legible, the contents make no sense, constitute no literal theme or statement, and cannot be related to any traditional type of subject matter.⁹ In its rejection of acceptable aesthetics, *New York 1920* calls into question the validity of the concept of an appropriate subject matter.

Man Ray's interest in art as idea and his disdain for art as mere craftsmanship do not mean that his photographs were not well made, deliberate works of art. The artist used the photographs to control the way the viewer perceives the objects recorded therein, carefully composing them—by including shadows, by changing the scale, or by defining a new context—in order to present more than the object itself. This becomes apparent when comparing Man Ray's photograph of *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* with a later, three-dimensional edition of the object. The photograph transforms what is otherwise an unremarkable combination of rope and woolen blanket into something vaguely anthropomorphic, mysterious, and even eerie.¹⁰ Nothing illustrates this more clearly than when exhibiting these three-dimensional editions; the curators often reproduce Man Ray's original photograph in the catalogue instead of a photograph of the object in the show.

Walter Benjamin wrote of the loss of aura one experiences with the reproduction of a work of art.¹¹ With Man Ray's objects, however, it is the mechanical reproduction that provides the aura and elevates these photographs from the level of simple documentation. If the concept of making art by declaration were enough, then Duchamp would have had no need to make more than one ready-made. Man Ray would not have made these photographs. In fact, there would be no need to document the concept at all; it could all just be a rumor.

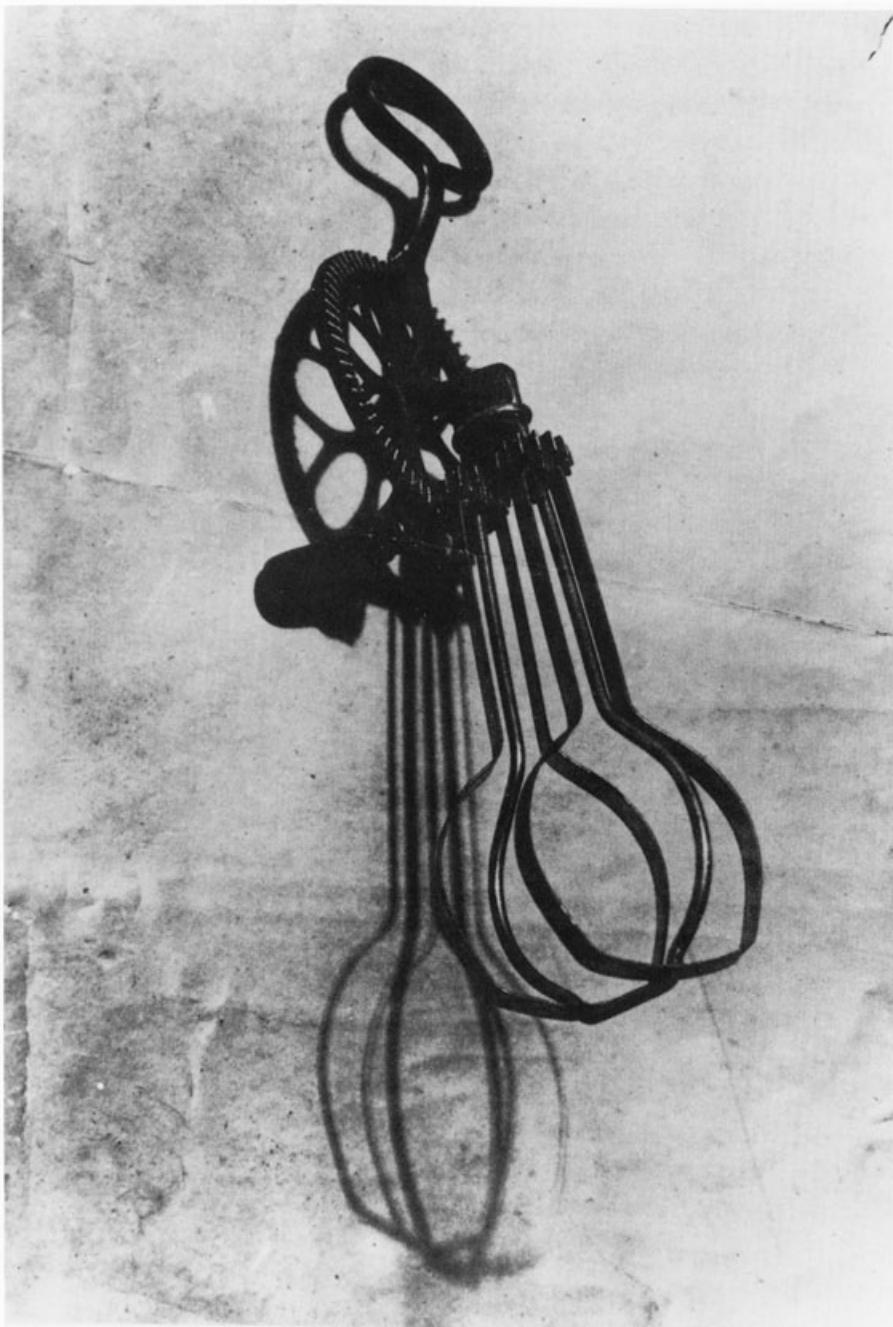
Shannon Halwes works at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as curatorial assistant for the Department of Twentieth-Century Art.

dadaphoto, 1921, collage, whereabouts unknown.



dadaphoto
Trademark Reg.

SMILING
KEEP



Man, 1918, gelatin silver photograph, private collection.

FOOTNOTES

1. For example, *Woman*, a concoction of photography paraphernalia, is included in the catalogue raisonné of Man Ray's objects, yet its companion piece, *Man*, an eggbeater, is curiously excluded. Both, however, are in the monograph on his photographs.
2. Merry Foresta, introduction to *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988, page 25.
3. George Heard Hamilton discovered in Duchamp's notes for *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, Even that Duchamp had given a name to the idea behind the art work: the word *cervellités*, or brain facts. G.H. Hamilton, "In Advance of Whose Broken Arm?," *Art and Artists* 1, No. 4 (July 1966), page 30.
4. Alexander Watt, "Dadadate with Man Ray," *Art and Artists* 1, No. 4 (July 1966), page 33.
5. One of Man Ray's favorite methods of self-portraiture was to employ the word *Man* (or the French equivalent, *Main*) in the title.
6. The photograph was titled *Portmanteau* after Man Ray arrived in Paris in 1921. Foresta, *Perpetual Motif*, page 24.
7. Francis Naumann suspects that the model is the Baroness Freytag von Loringhoven, a German member of the New York avant-garde. Conversation between this author and Naumann, 5 October 1989.
8. Dada, a revolutionary European art movement, was intro-

duced in New York as early as 1917, but American artists took no particular notice until about 1920. Man Ray and Duchamp produced *New York Dada* in 1921. It was abandoned after one issue, which as some have noted, is very dada.

9. Foresta, *Perpetual Motif*, page 24.
10. Carl Belz, *The Role of Man Ray in the Dada and Surrealist Movements*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1963, page 90.
11. For an illustration of an edition of *Enigma*, see William C. Agee, "New York Dada 1910-1930," *Art News Annual*, 34 (1968), page 112.
12. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, translation by Harry Zohn, New York, 1968, page 225.

L'énigme d'Isadore Ducasse, 1920.



Nadar

A portrait by Nadar Jeune for Rosalind Krause

You will be obscured by a cloud of postures
and a roster of great names,
but here, in your high thirties, you can hardly

be more distinct, distinguished
by hair, hope and the heroic resolution
to present life with an image

unretouched—had it not been the fallacy
of centuries to correct?
Edited, glossed, conflated, expurgated—

what was left to believe in?
*All men are mad when they are alone, almost
all women: that was your text*

and your testimony, the acknowledgment
of a balloonist whose pride
it was to announce that countless things have been

seen and remain to be seen,
and for whom humility was equivalent
to seeing things as they are,

opacity being a great discoverer.
Why else is it your portraits
loom likelier for us now than all preening

identifications since?
Because you made your Act between consenting
adults a Sacred Game

wherein the dead god is recognized, the change
being from darkness to light
and revelation—the god reborn. You were

our demiurge: from a world
where chaos and cosmos are superimposed,
from a world where anything

can happen but nothing happens twice, you spoke
your *fiat lux or fiat
nox* to bring forth the creation of nature

against nature within nature.
Now you have sixty years in which to retrieve
the visionary from the visual,

then fade into the once and future classics,
leaving us to enlarge on
what cannot be divided, individuals.

RICHARD HOWARD

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Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism

William Camfield

This text was excerpted from chapters IV and V of the manuscript for a forthcoming catalogue written to accompany a major retrospective of Ernst's work organized by The Menil Collection with the participation of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago. It is reprinted by kind permission of the author and The Menil Collection.

While relationships were chilly in Paris over the fall and winter of 1920–21, Ernst experienced one of the most productive moments in his entire life. The basic course of his work during this time is established by a number of dated works, by his correspondence with [Tristan] Tzara and [André] Breton, and by two exhibitions: one a group exhibition with Das Junge Rheinland in February–March 1921; the other his important solo show at Au Sans Pareil [Galerie] in May.¹ These documents indicate that by the end of 1920 he was working simultaneously with a variety of themes in four or five different processes: overpaintings of illustrations taken chiefly from the teaching aids catalogue, collages made with parts of photographs and illustrations (many from the same teaching aids catalogue), combinations of overpaintings and collages, photographic enlargements of some collages, and, finally, a special category Ernst called "Fatagaga," standing for Fabrication of Paintings Guaranteed Geometric (*Fabrication de Tableaux Géométriques Garantis*).

Ernst's work at this time is, in fact, so prolific and varied that the goal of presenting it in a coherent, structured manner becomes a daunting task. . . . Material and processes are important—intrinsic even to how Ernst sees, thinks, and creates—but these processes do not provide an adequate structure for the study of this period. Indeed, given Ernst's will and adeptness for concealing his working methods, the specific process employed is not always apparent, and to this day errors of media and process persist in publications of his work. Still more significant is the fact that the imagery—and often a dialogue between images and inscriptions—is of paramount importance. The processes that Ernst employs serve his intellect and vision, and our own personal experience of these works begins with a visual-literary encounter. Consequently . . . I will rely primarily on thematic structure [but] this approach entails problems of its own . . . [Themes] in Ernst's work are rarely—if ever—clear and simple. They are instead multivalent, veiled and overlapping, and quickly expose the arbitrariness of any effort to impose a rigid thematic order.

Several collages from the winter of 1920–21 appear to deal with the theme of war, although images suggestive of violence are frequently charged with themes of sexuality and/or religion that simply do not yield to rigid classifications or to pat interpretations. For these images it is necessary to [turn] to Ernst's work featuring human beings and hybrid beings. A common element in these works is a thing or a being which flies—an airplane, bird, angel, or some hybrid of human/angel/bird/devil/flying machine. A richness of such associations already existed in Ernst's experiences, beginning with the dangerous con-

fusion between birds and humans attributed to the simultaneous discovery of the death of his pet cockatoo and the birth of his sister Loni. Through church, classroom, and independent reading he had encountered concepts of birds and flights that ranged from the dove of the Holy Ghost to the eagle of Jupiter and Freud's interpretation of dreams about flying as a longing to possess sexual prowess. From Apollinaire's poem "Zone" he had been exposed to a heady pre-war association of religion, mythology, and technology:

*Christ who flies higher than the aviators...
Icarus Enoch Elijah Apollonius of Tyra
Hover near the original airplane...
Everyone eagle phoenix phis
Fraternizes with the flying machine.²*

From the war he was educated in the hypocrisy and corruptibility of such high-minded unions.

"Massacre of the Innocents" is a major representative of this genre. It is an exploding, fragmented composition that splinters our attention. We seem to be looking down at a city under an ominous sky, attacked from the upper left by a monstrous green hybrid fashioned from a Lilienthal glider and an angel guiding shepherds in Stephen Lochner's painting of "The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child." Three male figures—made with a stencil fashioned from the figures in "Young Man Encumbered with a Flowering Faggot"—attempt to flee the scene, striding over collage parts that have been described as looking like railroad tracks, ladders, or conveyor belts. They are actually parts of photographs of the facades of grand public buildings with long rows of columns or windows and arches—some viewed from sharp angles—which have been turned on end.³ Sensations of attack, flight, and confusion are vivid. The title painted across the lower left implies the biblical subject of Herod's massacre of the children, but the mature victims in this collage and the monstrous airplane suggest a reference to the recent war where for the first time man and his flying machines visited destruction on its victims from on high.⁴

Such references are not unique for Ernst at that time. This fusing of birds and airplanes emerged in Paul Klee's work as early as 1917–18 when one of his tasks in the army was to photograph crashed planes. Werckmeister has interpreted Klee's images of plummeting birds as references to falling and crashed airplanes, with an additional dimension incorporating God and man. He observes the tradition from Leonardo onward of comparing men in flying machines to angels, and associates a 1917 passage in Klee's diary to the theme of birds and war planes: "Something new is preparing itself, the diabolical will be merged into a simultaneity with the celestial . . ."⁵

A somewhat different, muted version of this theme appears in an untitled collage which depicts a hybrid airplane/woman flying over a barren plain with three men in the lower right corner, one of whom is injured and being carried off by his companions. The context implies an injury sustained somehow by an encounter with the monstrous female/machine hybrid, but the relationship between the men and the female/machine is not clear. No aggressive action or fear is expressed, and, indeed,

one's sympathy could be attracted to the female/machine, given the gesture of her arms and the turn of that unbearable engine/head which seems to recoil from the scene below.⁶

Two other hybrid creatures, "Health Through Sport" and "Above the Clouds Midnight Passes . . ." were produced in a photographic medium which suggests a document of something unworldly that really exists. The extant collage for "Above the Clouds Midnight Passes" provides a telling example of Ernst's goal in this instance. On a photograph of clouds viewed from above, he has constructed a strange hybrid female being from details of three black-and-white reproductions: a crocheted form which serves as a bifurcated, wing-like head that surmounts a ball-of-twine torso and the bare legs of a female model in high heeled shoes. The evidence of the cutting and gluing of these three parts and their contrast to the tan color of the cloudscape attract attention to the artist's hand in the creation of this work. But in the photographic enlargement of this collage (28 3/4 x 21 5/8 inches vs. 7 1/2 x 5 1/8 inches), the presence of the artist is removed by the suppression of the collage edges and by the overall black/white tonality of the photograph, further muted by the softer definition of the photographic print. With some visual effort, we may conclude that this strange creature was derived from some sort of photomontage—the tradition had been established early on in the history of photography—but that conclusion is not comforting for long in the face of the matter-of-fact presence of this armless creature whose eyes transfix us like those of the enchanted plant creatures in Ernst's animated landscapes. There is a more convincing quality to that crocheted head than to the human legs, and there is a more convincing quality to this creature overall than to the traditional hybrids of Emil Bayard.

The crocheted head of her male counterpart is likewise more riveting and animated than his body which appears to be an enlarged photograph of a male model in a conventional art studio pose. His murky space is not defined, and he is accompa-

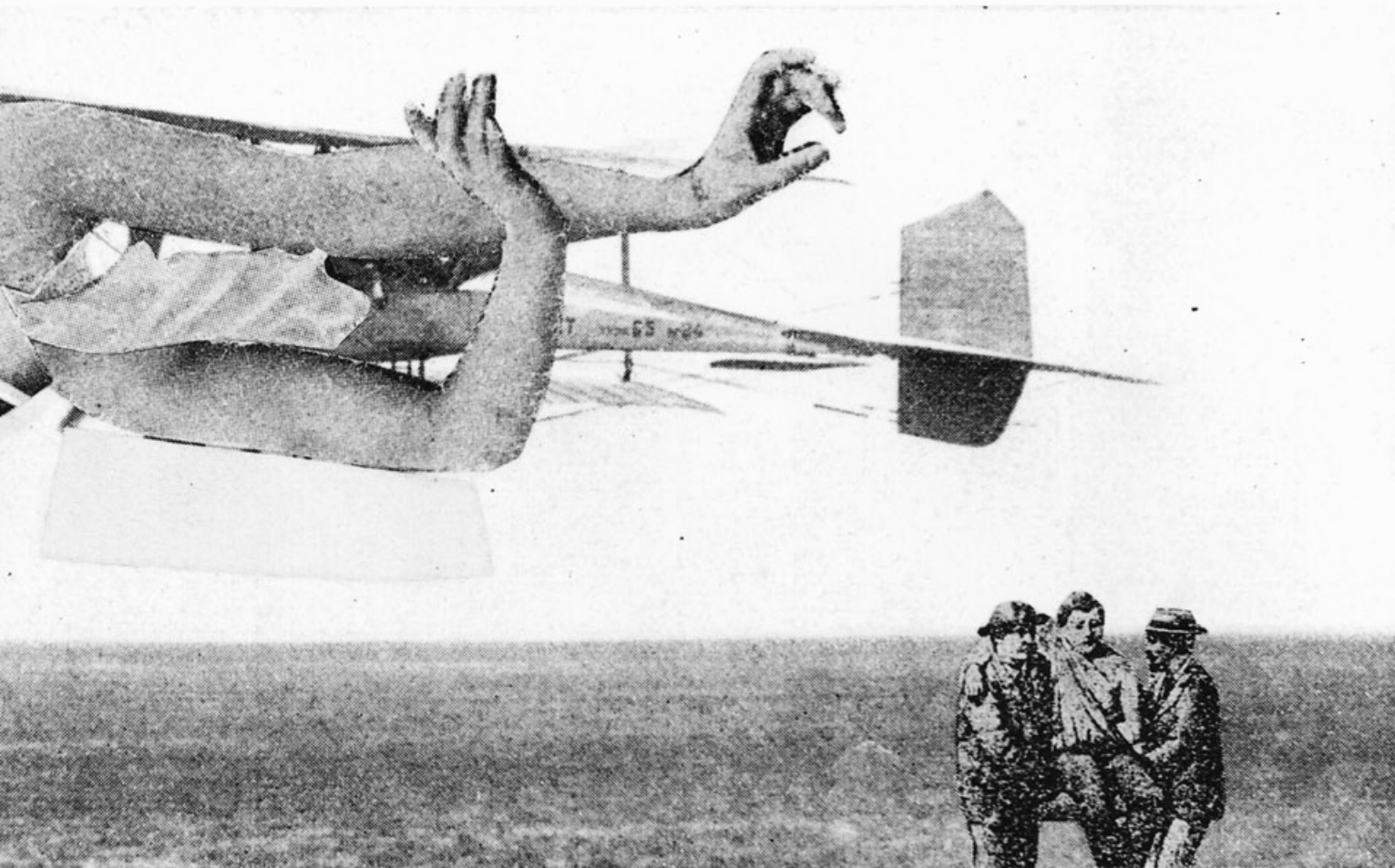
nied by a "hockey stick" and a cutaway view of the brain of an alligator held up like a trophy of the hunt.⁷ Both images seem to be related to their titles. The extended title for "Above the Clouds Midnight Passes . . ." is long and poetic: "Above the clouds midnight passes. Above the midnight hovers the invisible bird of day. A little higher than the bird the ether extends and the walls and roofs float."⁸ The title for "Health Through Sport" is brief, crisp, and, I suspect, satirical. The "hockey" stick and athletic body seem commensurate with the title, but what manner of sport is this, and what is one to make of this sportsman with his gruesome trophy and vaguely feline/female head that establishes eye contact with us? Our experience is further complicated by a recognition that the nude model injects the theme of art, especially the classical tradition based on Greco-Roman sculpture.

[The following] summer in the Tyrol was to be a period of fruitful experimentation for Ernst. In addition to [a new type of collage composed of nineteenth-century wood engravings], his work consisted of rubbings and more familiar collages employing parts of photographs and reproductions, including additional Fatagagas. . . . The new collages from wood engravings would, however, comprise the bulk of Ernst's work into the summer of 1922. . . . [The] uniform texture of these engravings—coupled with precision in cutting and piecing the parts together—permitted the appearance of a seamless whole, fully as convincing and matter-of-fact as the overpaintings and earlier collages based on photographs and photographic reproductions.

William Camfield is professor of the history of art at Rice University.

Editors' note: After this year of extensive and active use of photography in his work, Ernst virtually abandoned the medium in favor of other fields of exploration and experimentation.





Max Ernst, Untitled (formerly, "l'avionne meurtriere" (The Murderous Airplane) 1920. Courtesy of The Menil Collection.

FOOTNOTES

1 Regrettably, virtually nothing is known of Ernst's work in a third exhibition at the Kölischer Kunstverein, "Drei Generationen in vier Sälen," November 1920. One uninformative review has been reprinted by Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, p. 20.

2 Guillaume Apollinaire, "Zone," quoted from Apollinaire, *Alcools*, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 2-13; translated by Anne Hyde Greet. For Freud's interpretations of dreams and flying, see his article on "A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci" (*Max Ernst Loplop*, New York, 1983) and in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1977, p. 155; trans. James Strachey). Spies presents the most extended consideration of the human-bird theme in Ernst's work: see *Max Ernst Loplop*, esp. pp. 99-103 in this context.

3 The collage parts are difficult to identify. They include the building facades in the center of the composition, but the overall process is mysterious.

4 Aerial bombing was introduced early in the war and developed apace. Allied planes bombed dirigible sites in Cologne and Düsseldorf in the fall of 1914, and on June 3, 1917, German planes bombed London.

5 O.K. Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career 1914-1920*, pp.100-05, 241.

6 Ernst rejected the title "The Murderess Airplane" once applied to this collage (Spies/Metken, *Max Ernst Oeuvre Katalog*, no. 395), indicating perhaps that this woman-airplane was not presented as an aggressor. The three men (civilians) in the lower right were cut out of an illustration in the teaching aids catalogue (p. 472) depicting arm holds for carrying an injured comrade. All other

parts of this collage, including the landscape setting, are halftone reproductions of parts of photographs. See Foster ("Amour Fou," *October 56*, Spring 1991, p. 80) for another interpretation of this collage as an image of military-industrial shock with colliding images of war and peace, sex and death.

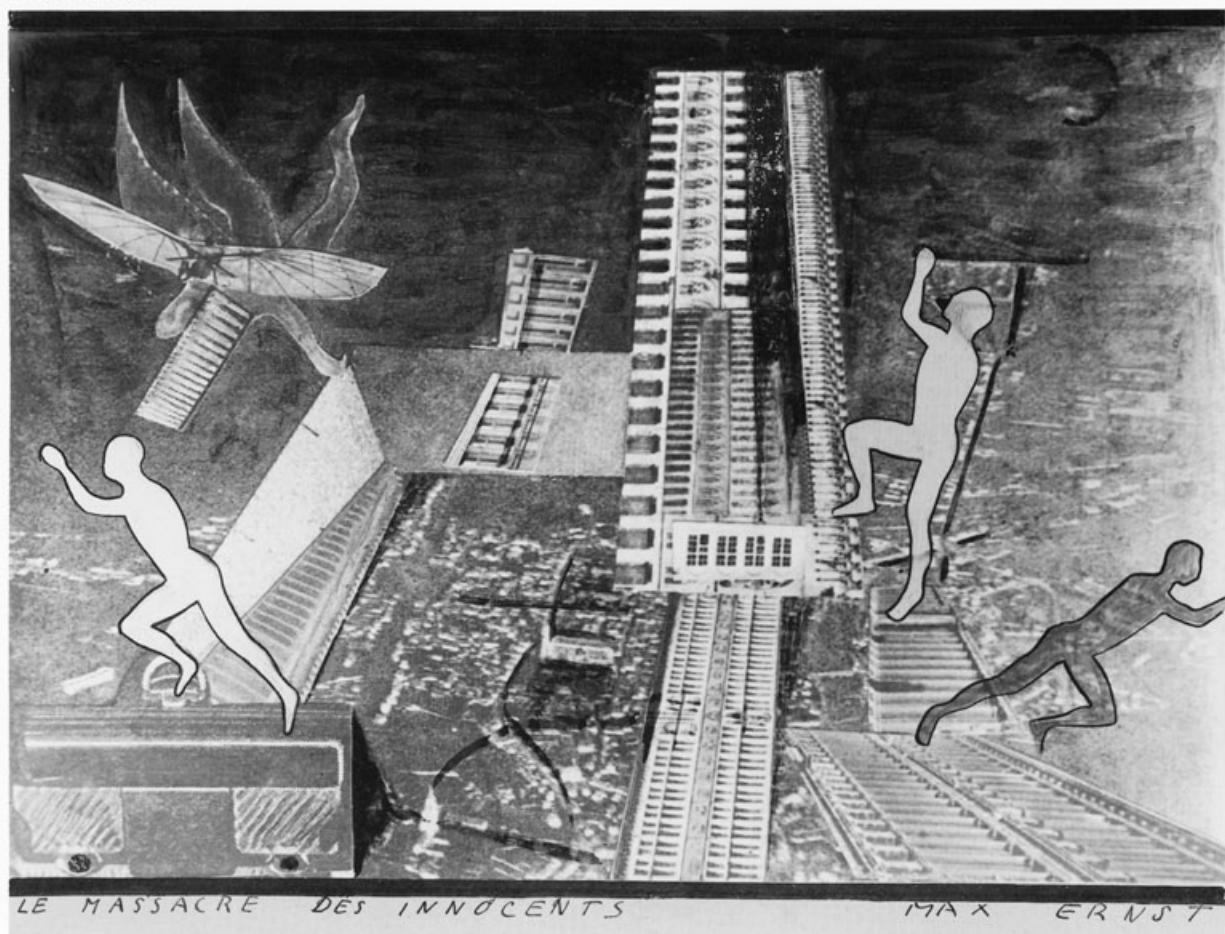
7 For the alligator brain, see p. 552 of the teaching aids catalogue . . . The sources for the other forms have not been found and the identity of the "hockey stick" is uncertain.

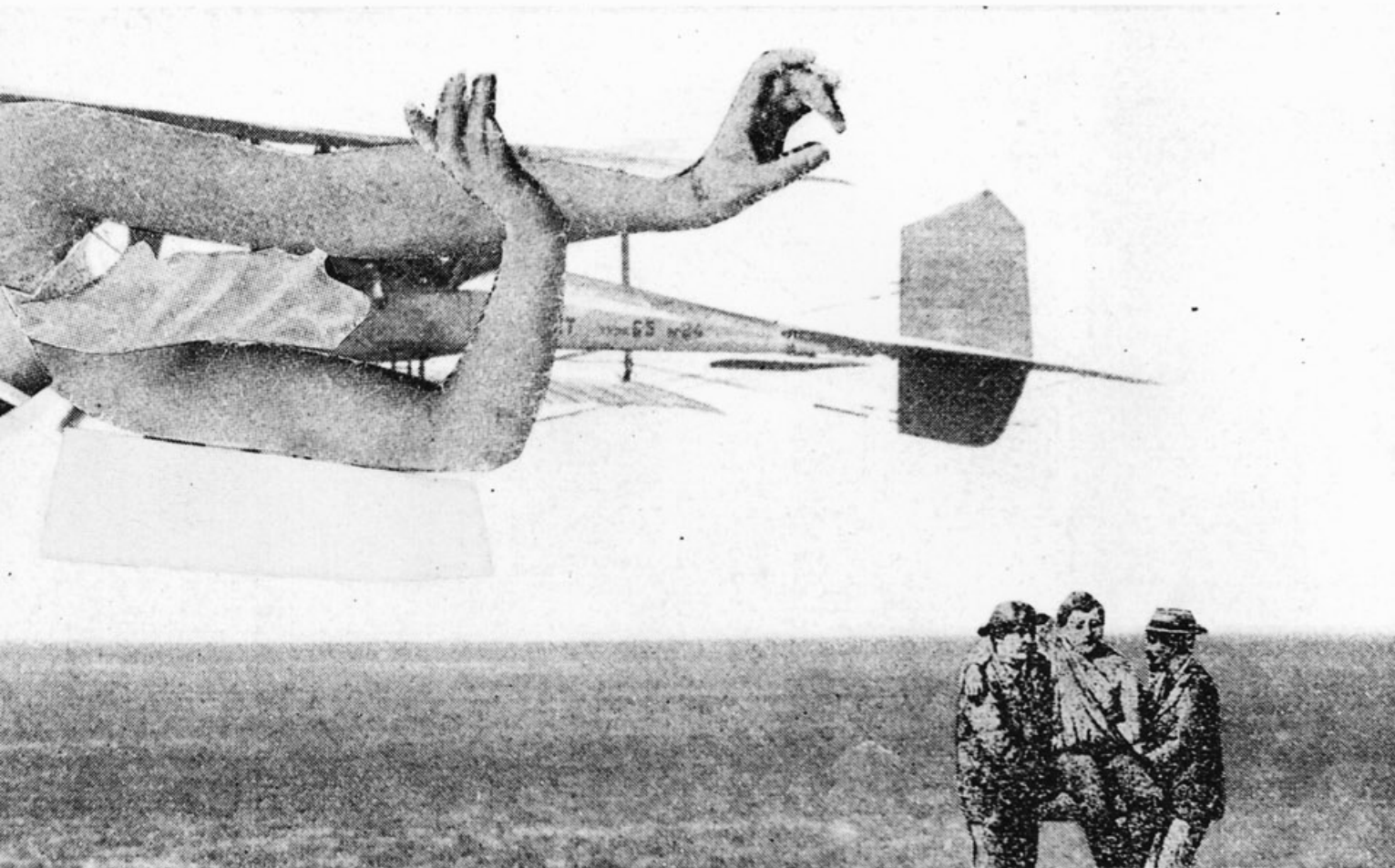
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8 The inscription in French reads: "Au dessus des nuages marche la nuit. Au dessus de la nuit plane l'oiseau invisible du jour. Un peu plus haut que l'oiseau l'éther pousse et les murs et les toits flottent."

9 Spies, in *Max Ernst. Collages*, p. 93, uses the term "total collage" for these new collages entirely composed of collage parts fitted together to conceal the joints.

Max Ernst, French, born Germany, 1891-1976, *Le Massacre des Innocents* (The Massacre of the Innocents), 1920, photomontage photo heightened with brush and ink, gouache, watercolor on tan paper in wood frame, 35.6 x 43.2 cm, Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection, 120.1991. Photograph courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.





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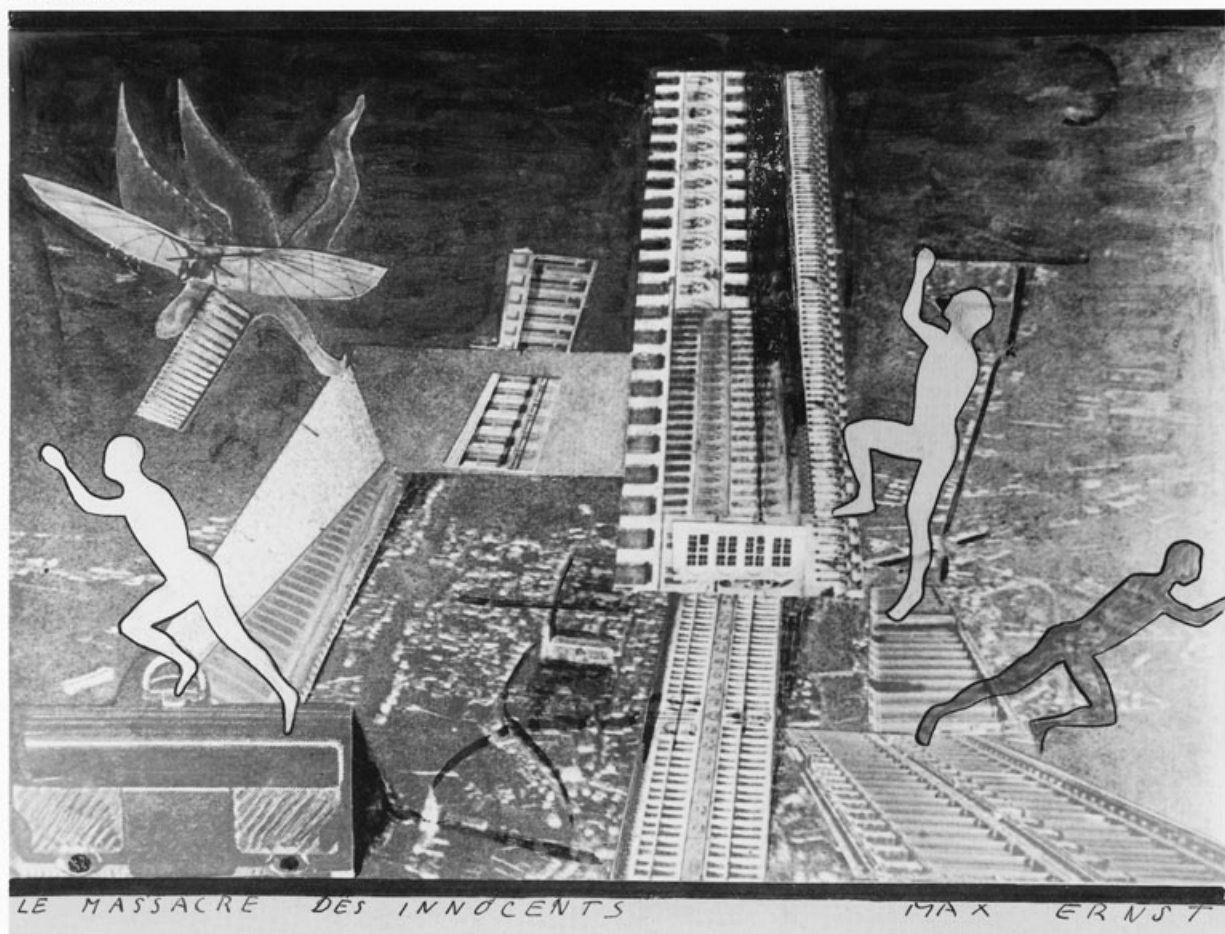
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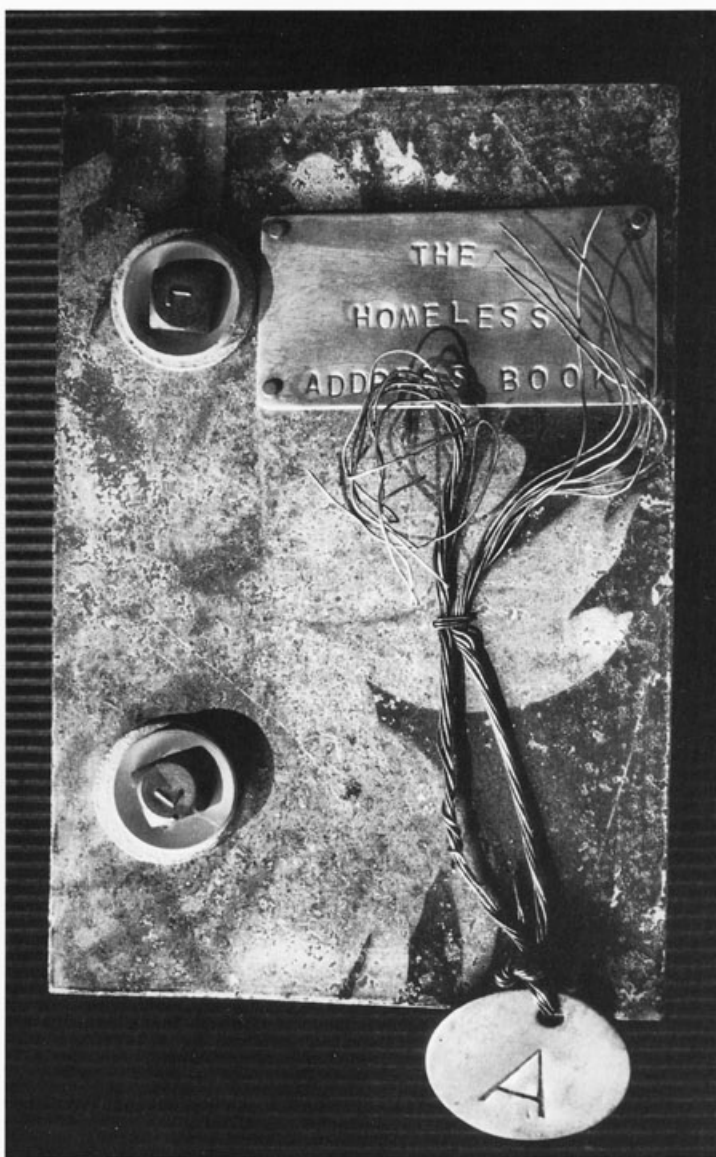
Photobookworks: Museum without Walls

Photographic Book Art in the United States, curated by Susan kae Grant, was shown at the Houston Center for Photography November 6–December 20, 1992.

Judith A. Hoffberg

In this most complicated world of high technology, in the midst of this, our second, industrial revolution, the book—a product of the Renaissance—has been a source of experimentation, a forum for ideas beyond words, which allows writer and artist alike to express themselves in much deeper tones than by words alone or through single images. The book, a cultural symbol of iconic proportions, has now entered the discourse of the photographic world as a rich source to mine for visual expression, for image transmission, for poetic experimentation, and for political and social discourse. Nor is this a novel gesture, since photographers from the beginning of the art form turned to the book as a natural vehicle for several reasons: first of all, the sequential nature of their work lent itself to visual communication through the book form. As early as William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the calotype, artists have assembled photographs into book form. Pasting photographs into books was a labor-intensive effort; therefore, artists had to make very small editions. The introduction of photomechanical reproduction and improvements in book production begun in the mid-1850s, some of which still exist today, increased photographic book production.

With the inventions of the offset press and the copy machine in the late 1950s, photographers could arrange their photographs in well-edited, tightly knit, organized groups or sets of images in a linear sequence in order to create narratives, events, progressions of things, conditions that flow as experience. As Alex Sweetman has pointed out, serial arrangements of photographs, which have expressive images and information, "can produce series, sequences, juxtapositions, rhythms, and recurring themes." (*Artists' Books*, Layton, Utah, Gibbs Smith, 1985). This trend has continued from the invention of photography, but technology has allowed artists to use any and all photographs in any sequence, manipulated or rational, to create a book, either with the Xerox machine or the offset press. The early images were not well resolved conceptually, but as the technology improved, the photographer easily made a museum without walls. Using the best distribution system in the world, the international postal system,



The Homeless Address Book, Page Moran.

the book could be sent to any and all colleagues, friends, and connoisseurs of the art.

In the 1960s, artists such as Ed Ruscha radically changed the whole concept of photography, formerly viewed as the handmaiden of Modernism, but not an art in itself. *26 Gasoline Stations* (Los Angeles, 1963) signaled the photographic artist book's entrance into the museum and the library as an autonomous art, reorienting the whole art world. Responsible for not only a bookwork revolution but also a revision of library cataloguing rules, Ruscha in

one fell stroke established it as an art form that had to be specially categorized even in the library world, since for years the Library of Congress catalogued *26 Gasoline Stations* under "Transportation" and *34 Parking Lots* under "Real Estate." They were not "miscatalogued;" they needed to be recategorized, and it took more than a decade to do it.

In the 1970s, photographers blossomed into bookmakers, using photocopy machines, halftone-printing techniques, silkscreen, photo-transfer, black-and-white Xerox, as well as 3-M and Color Xerox.

Becoming their own publishers, photographers also found a burgeoning distribution industry to allow them to reach art collectors, artists, connoisseurs, students, and innocent bystanders who were encouraged to see the "book" as an innovative, energetic, dynamic form of visual expression. Anything was possible, and in the 1970s, artists further challenged the form, structure, and concept of the book. Everything was distributable through the international postal system, and even a few commercial outlets, such as daring museum shops and artists' bookshops, serviced the public. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, with the invention of the offset press and the copy machine, everybody could become a publisher—and usually did.

In the 1980s, the market changed and so did many artists. Adjusting to the "boom," book artists decided to make one-of-a-kind books, unique books, imposing a definite "preciousness" upon the bookwork, as well as limiting the audience for their work, and as a result, prices skyrocketed. Even photographers could make limited edition bound books that served as expensive collectible books or collector's items. But technology marched on—and with duotone and tritone, with exquisite color laser copies and with computer graphics, laser scanning, and other techniques, artists were equipped with a vast array of choices for creating visual bookworks. As a result, serendipity and the fortuitous development of a larger group of collectors have allowed photographers and artists using photographs to create a myriad of diverse works in book format.

And now on the cusp of the millennium, the photographic bookwork has reached an apex: variety in form, function, and concept through the melding of technology and aesthetics giving rise to a body of work that has far exceeded anything dreamed of in the 1850s. Artists always have been adventurous, and this has allowed the form of book to be cut, pasted, constructed, and deconstructed. And the adventure continues as seen in the comprehensive—nay encyclopedic—exhibition, "Photographic Book Art in the United States," curated by Susan kae Grant. Stopping in Houston at the Houston Center for Photography on its two-year tour, the exhibition contains a wide range of bookworks using photography, text, and statements. From the physical photographic bookwork to the electronic media sweeping across the whole spectrum of our contemporary experience, the exhibition bridges book artists and photographers (82 of them), techniques of production as well

Land(scape), Amanda Degener and Barbara Schubring.



as techniques of binding styles, aesthetic movements and political, social, and cultural issues.

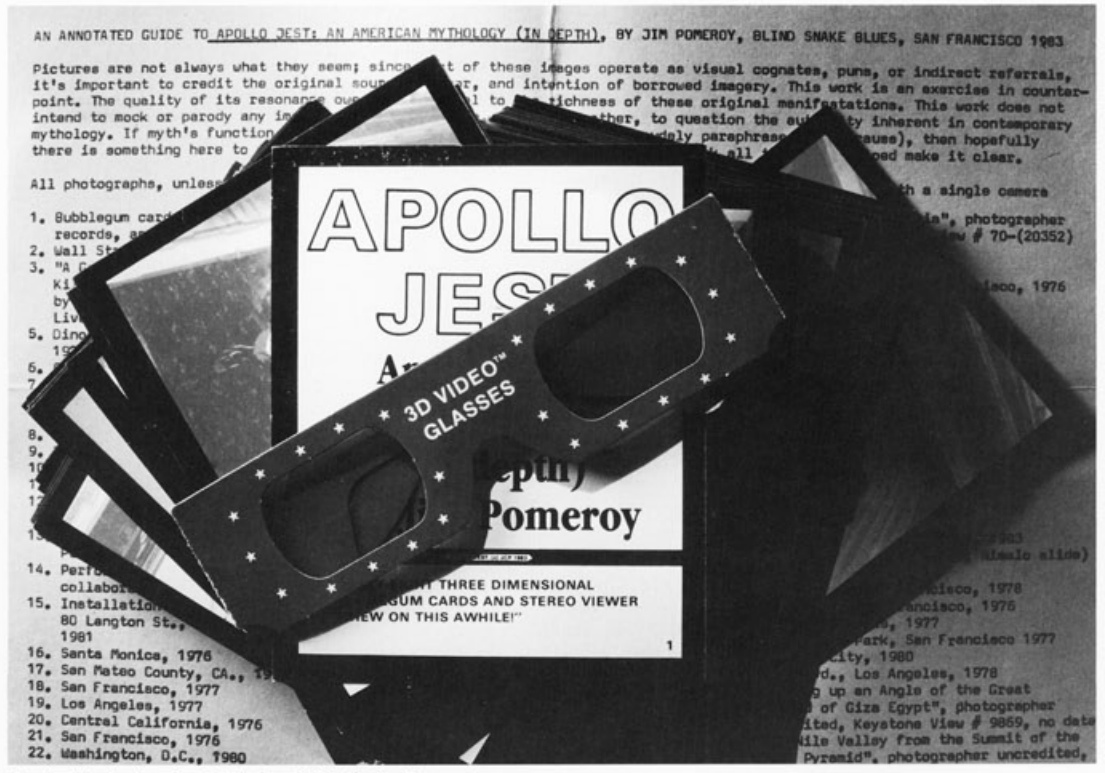
Some of the books are tiny, fitting neatly into the palm, making an intimate page-by-page experience. Yet other books, such as Douglas Beube's *Aloe Vera*, a virtual tapestry of photographs neatly joined to create a "hanging garden" in the literal sense, are wall-size and spectacular. The exhibition is a Herculean exploration of book as handmade, one-of-a-kind, sculptural book object and installation. But no bookshelves can hold all the ideas, issues, concerns, and structures that are included in this mammoth survey. Categories include the autobiographical journal, the book as object, handmade paper books, pop-up books, appropriated (recycled) books, and thematic works dealing with gender and sexuality, politics, and war.

The transformation made by the artist using appropriated page, images and texts, as well as a reworking previously printed materials, creates a totally unique visual statement, one that has resonance beyond the materials used. Take, for instance, Page Moran's *The Homeless Address Book*, which includes hardware found on the streets. It is a book that has irony and sarcasm built into its title, a book that screams out "danger," recycling the very materials the homeless find in their "neighborhoods." *Death and Life* by Terry Braunstein is an altered book, in which one explores the theme through incised pages, some of which have been glued together. The book is almost like a 3-D theater in which pages become stage sets using photomontage to develop the theme. Several of the books resulted from artists' grants funded by major book arts centers such as the Visual Studies Workshop Press in Rochester; Nexus in Atlanta; the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, New York; SUNY at Purchase; Pyramid Atlantic in Maryland; and Mills College in Oakland, California, among others. Carol Barton's *Loom*, created at Pyramid Atlantic, takes an old Victorian tunnel form with a peephole and creates a skein of the universe, simulating fabric. The sides of the tunnel have photographs of a total landscape with plants.

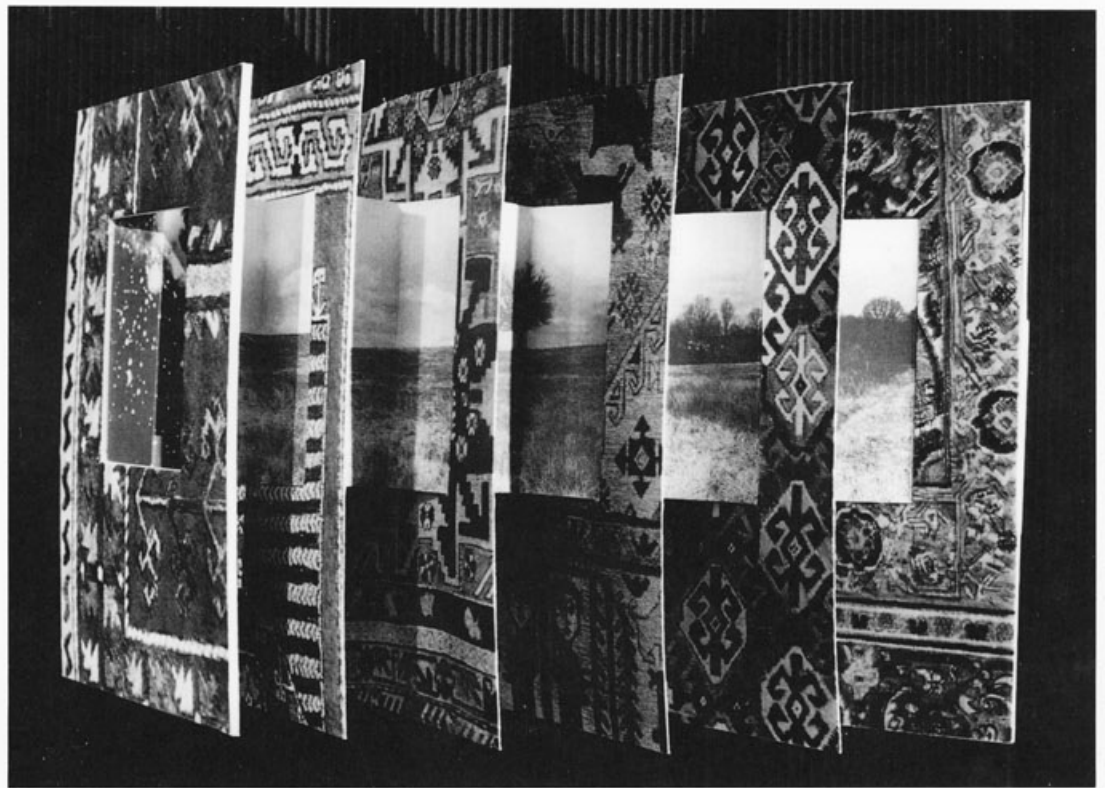
Several of the books deal with travel both in a literal and figurative sense. Amanda Degener and Barbara Schubring's *Land(scaped)* shows photographs taken along the road, but the documentation of the road and the people involved in the railroads, shows ways in and out of the memory tracks of a person's life. Both the real and the imaginary, together with a hint of poetry, are combined in this powerful sociological/anthropological tome. In contrast, Laurie Sieverts Snyder documents a trip to Colorado with photographs, decals, cyanotypes, stitching, handmade paper, collage, and painted papers. It is a stunning record of a visit to a state full of history, natural wonders and the strikingly beautiful colors of the Rockies.

Humor also is a theme within the book-works in the exhibition. Artists, in fact, have found that the book is a facile vehicle for the comical themes of everyday life. Jim Pomeroy's *Apollo Jest: An American Mythology in Depth* is a brilliant example. Pomeroy combined a provocative text with images that are so unrelated that the whole piece becomes a humorous commentary on the relationship of word and image as they appear in our everyday communications. Obviously, the concept of illustrated text is scrutinized with this example, as newsspeak revisited.

The book, in its reverence for memory and information, through the efforts of artist-photographers, has developed into a genre unto itself. Beyond the pages, binding, and structures that make a book, there is also the book as artifact, stretched by artists' imaginations, innovations, and creative intentions beyond any definition



Apollo Jest: An American Mythology in Depth, Jim Pomeroy.



Loom, Carol Barton.

in Webster's. No longer is the book a mere container for ideas; in this increasingly complex period of humanity, it is also a fertile laboratory for experimentation. The book serves not only as a means of transferring information, but also as a transformational vehicle for ideas and feelings, for constructs and concerns, for meaning and metaphor.

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Agents of Time, Christopher Burnett.



Sex Sells

Sex, by Madonna, photographed by Steven Meisel, art directed by Fabien Baron, edited by Glenn O'Brien. New York: Warner Books, 1992. \$49.95.

Ann Cvetkovich

Money. Commodity. Sex. Sex isn't called *Money* but it might have been, especially since, under capitalism, sex and money can be two ways of saying the same thing. One of the most interesting things about *Sex* is not its content but its status as a commodity. There has been considerable critical hostility toward Madonna's unabashed profit motive, but to me that only adds to the book's power. Even if it lacked originality (and it doesn't), *Sex* would still be distinctive in its mainstreaming of high art and low art as it pushes Steven Meisel's fashion photography and Madonna's celebrity image in contrasting directions as both respectable art and pornography. Photographers and cultural critics have some lessons to learn about visibility and marketing from the model of a \$50 book that can sell in such numbers.

Which isn't to say that the book's content is irrelevant or uninteresting. *Sex* is about sex because sex sells. But what kind of sex? The jaded critics who find *Sex* boring on the grounds that it's "just" pornography don't seem to have looked at their copies very carefully (or, for that matter, at pornography, which is by no means a monolithic or uninteresting genre). As more sympathetic commentators have pointed out, the gay and lesbian images in *Sex* shouldn't be taken for granted, and if they are, Madonna has succeeded rather than failed.

For its queer content alone, then, *Sex* deserves notice, especially since its gay and lesbian images are the fantasies of a straight girl, who thereby makes queer desire everybody's desire. Not that that automatically makes the book radical either as politics or as art, for Madonna could easily be accused of appropriating gay and lesbian sex for its shock value, marginalizing it once again as kinky or exotic. But the fact remains that no one is buying \$50 books of lesbian sex by lesbians, and as long as that's the case, Madonna's work will be of interest. *Sex* might usefully be compared with the work of lesbian photographers such as Della Grace, Susan Stewart, and Deborah Bright, who depict lesbian sexuality and fantasy in innovative and controversial ways.¹ Madonna's lesbian images, ranging from



debates about pleasure and sexuality should not be underestimated. Although within the academy and feminist and lesbian communities, pro-sex feminism has gained a strong voice, it is still a fairly common assumption in mainstream circles that to be feminist is to be anti-pornography.² Madonna embodies the possibilities of a feminism that can embrace sexuality, fashion, self-display, and femininity without capitulating to the patriarchy or the straight male gaze. Although many feminists have articulated more nuanced and sophisticated positions than Madonna, whose defense of s/m, well-intentioned though it might be, is highly problematic, their views rarely receive the mainstream attention she gets from a press that is all too willing to ignore or stigmatize feminism.

Lost in a too obsessive focus on *Sex* as a book about sex is its concern with fantasy, and the role of the photographic image in the construction of fantasy. Whether they're her real fantasies or not, Madonna reclaims the power to represent women and sexuality that has traditionally belonged to men and makes herself the subject of her own dramas. Divided into sections in which recognizable celebrities or "characters" appear with Madonna to create a range of scenarios, the book's individual images enable the construction of narratives, especially when juxtaposed with text or laid out in a series as they are on some of the pages. Reminiscent of Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" series, Madonna plays with a series of sexual roles—the daddy's girl, the dominatrix, the lesbian, the exhibitionist—that reflect her ongoing interest in female stereotypes and masquerade. But while Sherman tends to defamiliarize her images and roles, making them haunting or disturbing, Madonna, despite her potential to shock, primarily seeks to represent or produce pleasure. In both cases, though, they use the seductive appeal of the still image, which, in freezing or decontextualizing narrative, makes multiple interpretations or fantasies possible.

Fantasy is a more useful category than pornography for understanding *Sex*. It embraces a wider range of texts and images. Moreover, the feminist project of articulating women's fantasies, of exploring what women want in a culture that fails to represent or precludes their desires, is crucial. As fantasy, *Sex*'s power does not necessarily depend on the explicitness of the images or the radicalness of its sexual content, but on its ability to create a mood or desire. Some of the most successful images, such as the shot of Madonna masturbating over a mirror or the one in which she strikes a butch pose on top of a radiator, are not particularly outrageous, but that does not lessen their power.

Another significant difference between Madonna's work and that of feminist photographers such as Cindy Sherman or Nan Goldin is that she is not the one behind the camera. Yet her choice of Steven Meisel, and her work with other fashion photographers such as Herb Ritts, Bruce Weber, and Helmut Newton, is entirely

appropriate given fashion photography's relation to fantasy. Fashion photography creates fantasy by depicting luxury, glamour, and the power of appearance, and the photographers who have worked with Madonna have produced some of the most powerful and seductive images in contemporary culture. Often denigrated as low art in favor of realist or more overtly aesthetic photography, fashion photography has been unjustly condemned not only for its commercialism but for its content. I think Meisel's work should be taken seriously both for its capacity to produce pleasure and its commercial value. In some ways, the packaging of *Sex* as an expensive book makes the photographs more precious than they should be. The usual context for Meisel's work is a magazine in which his images stand out against a backdrop of text and less visually interesting ads. Part of the pleasure of consuming fashion images is that they provide a delicious thrill on the street or in the waiting room, during idle moments when distraction is welcome. More than that is not necessary. The cultural impact of such consumption is, however, far greater than time spent in galleries or reading books, and Madonna's choice of this genre is a shrewd one.

Which brings me back to the question of money. The cost of *Sex* to the consumer is formidable, as is the amount of money required to produce it. Persuading the mass public to buy \$50 books doesn't necessarily make art more accessible for pro-



ducers or consumers. On the other hand, given the competition the book industry faces from video, film, and music, it is interesting to see such a luxuriously packaged book make it big. Obviously, print and the still image are not dead. Madonna always treads the line between a democratic impulse that says anyone's desires count and a more elitist implication that only someone

who has her money and power can indulge as she does. With the production values of the multi-million dollar fashion industry at her disposal, Madonna can be the subject of photographs that are beyond the reach of many alternative photographers. Ideally, I'd like to see her work pave the way for more widespread production and distribution of photography that explores women's and gay and lesbian sexuality, work that already exists but that is marginalized.

In reviewing *Sex*, I find it hard to look at the book itself rather than at its reception. But its context is equally fascinating.



and defending *Sex* against the bad reasons for dismissing it involves the important work of discussing crucial issues about pornography, women's pleasure, and mass culture. When I focus on my own responses rather than speculating about those of others, I find that some of *Sex*'s images work for me, and others leave me cold. Figuring out why is important, as is the more immediate pleasure of just looking.

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FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, Kiss and Tell Collective, *Drawing the Line: Lesbian Sexual Politics on the Wall* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991); Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser, eds., *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* (London: Pandora Press, 1991); Della Grace, *Love Bites* (London: GMP, 1991).
2. For discussions of the 1980s feminist sex wars, and pro-sex feminism, see eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); and ed. Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

Madonna in the Movies

A group of people sit in a restaurant having a critical discussion about Madonna. It happens in real life because of the recent hubbub over her book *Sex*, but it also occurs in scenes in two recently released independent films. In *Reservoir Dogs* (written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, distributed by Miramax), a group of professional thieves has been brought together to pull off a diamond heist. The film opens with the men sitting in a diner after eating while one of them gives his theory on Madonna's oeuvre. He believes that all of her music is autobiographical. His main example is that "Like a Virgin" is about Madonna's sexual experience with porn star John Holmes, whose size made it feel like her first time. You can't listen to her music without seeing her life story, he believes.

Simple Men (written and directed by Hal Hartley, distributed by Feline Features) concerns two brothers (one a thief and the other a philosophy student) searching for their father who has been in hiding for 25 years for suspicion of terrorism. Their search takes them to a small New England town where they meet the owner of a diner, who is an ex-wife of an ex-con, and their father's girlfriend. One evening, the four of them and a local fisherman sit around one of the diner tables discussing whether it is any different for a woman, who has taken control of her life, to exploit herself than for a man to exploit a woman. The general consensus is that Madonna is in complete control and it is her decision to exploit her sexuality and therefore acceptable.

Although both scenes bring up interesting topics, what is most compelling is that the scenes exist at all. In creating these characters, with their links to the criminal (either implicit or explicit), the filmmakers needed to tie them to a mainstream segment of the population in order to help instill compassion in the audience for the characters. Madonna was that link. The Madonna phenomenon is so prevalent in popular culture that everyone is exposed to it and therefore talks about it. She has become an example of typical table conversation.

Michael G. DeVoll



poses with "real" s/m dykes to "pseudo-lesbian" scenarios with well-known and glamorous figures such as Isabella Rossellini, aren't necessarily original or cutting edge. On the other hand, given the marginalization of more radical work, the visibility that Madonna gives to lesbianism potentially contributes to a crucial project.

The importance of *Sex* and other works by Madonna in the context of feminist

Paris in Less Than a Month

Ed Osowski, a frequent SPOT contributor, had the opportunity to visit Paris during the Mois de la Photo '92 in November. The following is his assessment of the world-famous photography celebration.

Ed Osowski

Three days before I flew to Paris in mid-November I received a piece of mail from the friend with whom I was planning to stay. His letter included a brief note: "Good luck! You have your work cut out for you." I had asked my friend to send me information about Mois de la Photo and he had obliged with a page torn from the magazine *Art Press*. As I counted the exhibitions listed—twenty-one in galleries and twenty-five in museums and public institutions—I knew that I would need more than just luck to see them all. With only five days to take them all in, I'd also need a good pair of running shoes.

This year's Mois de la Photo was the seventh biennial appearance of the celebration of photography that inspired, seven years ago, the establishment of FotoFest in Houston. To see it all I hit the ground running.

The Palais de Tokyo, built for the 1937 World Exposition, sits on the right bank of the Seine directly in line with the Eiffel Tower. Adjacent to it is the City of Paris' Museum of Modern Art. Several years ago, the Palais de Tokyo evolved into the National Center of Photography, an institution that mounts an impressive number of shows annually. In addition, the National Center of Photography instituted a remarkable series of inexpensive paperbacks, published in the United States by Pantheon, that trace the history of photography with volumes devoted to individuals—Robert Frank, André Kertész—and to themes—the nude, American photographers of the Depression, for example.

I was one day late to see "En Avion," a show, judging from its catalogue, that presented the romance of flight. Once inside, I discovered not one but four other exhibitions installed in the impressive, starkly modern halls of the Palais de Tokyo. The principle show, "Images d'un autre monde: la photographie scientifique," was also the basis for the center's forty-seventh small publication. The show itself was staggeringly huge and filled five large galleries. I was reminded of the close link that exists between technology and photography and the questionable belief that photography, as an aid to science and medicine, somehow captures the "truth."

The first photographs to see were nineteenth-century images of the mentally and physically different and early examples of efforts to photograph the planets and the hidden world of cells inside plants and animals. That "truth" is a construct of its time became immediately clear in examining these "objective" images of persons suffering from physical or emotional illnesses and the naïve belief that some understanding of their state of health could be found by examining photographic images of them.

As the show advanced, huge color works dominated, demonstrating the continuing link between photography and science: NASA photographs of the sun, enlarged microscopic views of muscles and tissues. For the nonscientist, it was a daunting experience, a *National Geographic*-like exploration of unknown territories, some deep within the body itself, that left an odd feeling: little of what I saw made sense. But it was also very benign. Science here held no threats, no dangers. If nature is a foreign world, "Images" left one troubled by the reduction of its foreign-ness to a collection of swirling shapes and patterns.



Roland Bonaparte. Paris, 1892.

You don't rest at the National Center of Photography. Even its card shop was a venue for a small, charming show, "La danse," with works by Eve Arnold, Cornell Capa, Eadweard Muybridge, among others, and all reproduced in the center's 1993 calendar.

A show of photographs of series and sequences, "L'épreuve numérique" came next. Here the decorative qualities of the first show were jettisoned: normal, orderly, and expected flow of sequences was broken or discarded. High art mixed with low art; advertising hung next to portraits. But "L'épreuve numérique" suffered from being too large an assemblage to make a coherent statement. Its curators seemed so attracted to the notion of sequences that they failed to establish any distinctions between a series used to advertise Chanel perfume, to cite one example, and portraits of the painter Francis Bacon in which Bacon's face dissolves into an uncanny likeness of his own paintings.

The remaining show, "Digital Photography," was also an experience in coming home. Here were photographers familiar to Houston Center for Photography members: Paul Berger, Carol Flax, Esther Parada, and MANUAL (Suzanne Bloom and

Ed Hill). A bilingual catalogue came with the show. The works were beautifully shown and complemented each other thoughtfully. Here one saw that photographs can rewrite what and how we see, that the facts of history aren't frozen, that social patterns are open to redefinition, and that nature itself is an artificial creation.

Near the Bois de Boulogne, the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions attracts busloads of school children to its dioramas of life in France over the past centuries. What drew me was "Kaliña: des Amerindiens à Paris," a small show of ethnographic pictures taken by Prince Roland Bonaparte in 1892 when a group of natives from Guyana visited Paris. While the exhibition's catalogue reproduced more than fifty photographs, only thirteen were displayed in a tiny gallery. The French fascination with the "exotic" runs deep. One recalls the great success of "La Baker," the American performer Josephine Baker, three decades after these were made. Bonaparte's images are cool, remote, surprisingly modern. Like Irving Penn's images of the Indians of Peru, Bonaparte portrays his subjects "out of context" in neutral, white spaces, making

them into abstract representations of the other, the different.

Surprisingly Paris' two principal public museums devoted to art since the invention of photography (Musée d'Orsay and Centre Georges Pompidou) paid little attention to Mois. At the d'Orsay, the museum's permanent photography galleries were closed for physical repairs, a peculiar way to celebrate Mois, I thought. And where was "Hill et Adamson: la première reportage photographique," the show I had come to see? Three guards sent me in three different directions. A fourth simply pointed her hand to two small galleries, quite close by and empty. The d'Orsay is filled with treasures—major works by the Impressionists and post-Impressionists. But it is also filled with huge, pompous, tasteless works that are, actually, quite at home in a building that seems to try to overpower its art. Seeing the calm, repetitive images of Hill and Adamson was not a high priority to visitors to the d'Orsay: I had the exhibition to myself.

At the Pompidou, participation in Mois was even more low-key than at the d'Orsay: thirty-four portraits of Latin-American writers by Sara Facio and Alicia d'Amico were shown in the public library, a facility



Uwe Ommer, 1992.

that shares physical space with Paris' principal museum of modern art but is administered separately. Facio and d'Amico work with a style that is indistinguishable—direct, clear, sharp, producing the kind of image one might find on the jacket of a book by one of their subjects. The images of Fuentes, Garcia Lorca, Vargas Llosa, and others demonstrated the dangers of turning the artist into a celebrity. Facio and d'Amico offer romantic images that turn their subjects into Saturday matinee idols.

At the Musée des arts de la mode et du textile, in a building vacated because of I.M. Pei's redesign of the Louvre, I found "Man Ray: les Années Bazaar, 1934-42." Covering a period actually longer than its title indicated, the exhibition explored in depth Man Ray's fascination with surrealism and his efforts at dismembering and reconfiguring the female body.

Parisians love Paris. A visit to the Musée Carnavalet confirms that statement. Located in the Marais, not very far from the Musée Picasso and the Place des Vosges, this Renaissance "hotel" now houses the Museum of the History of Paris. It was also the one institution that seemed to take Mois most seriously. Posters with a photograph by Claude Baillargeon—a camera cleverly placed on top of the Eiffel Tower—led viewers to the museum and its principal exhibition, "Portraits d'une capitale." The Carnavalet has a huge collection of photographs that it has only recently begun to inventory. Accompanied by a catalogue, "Portraits" was a huge show that documented how Paris and Parisians have changed over time. At the Carnavalet, the emphasis is always on "documentation." Even the new photographs it purchased have a conservative feel to them. The installation of "Portraits" solved the problem of how to display hundreds of images in a limited space: viewers were given white gloves to wear and were allowed to flip through plexiglas holders, mounted on the walls, which contained the photographs. Cartes-de-visite were displayed in tall, thin, vertical holders mounted on posts. And slightly larger photographs were propped in rows in oversized easels.

The Carnavalet deals heavily in nostalgia, a dreamy reverence for "les temps perdus." It was the Carnavalet that employed Atget and commissioned him to document Paris. It bought and displayed his work during his lifetime. "Les voitures d'Atget," a show of sixty photographs of horse-drawn carriages, trams, carts, and trucks, was mounted in two galleries on the

second floor. Atget himself was no slave to the cult of nostalgia. Only his fans seem to be. While the visitors to the Carnavalet were more interested in watching a video of motorized buses and cars in Paris several years after the date of Atget's work, this visitor had the chance to look at Atget's images with few interruptions. What a close look reinforces is Atget's concern—nearly a compulsion—to use the camera to record things, without desiring to hold naively onto a fleeting or disappearing past.

At the Bibliothèque Nationale, "La photographie pictorialiste en France" compared several copies of *Camera Work* with images by French photographers—Robert Demachy, Georges Berteaux, Georges Guillaume—who worked between 1890 and 1910 and strove to impart to photography the same "fine art" qualities Alfred Stieglitz championed in the United States. It was a wonderful exhibition, small and precise, yet clearly demonstrating the continuities that link photographic expression across national boundaries.

Mois de la Photo held surprises of course. Not all exhibitions were exemplary. Galerie du Prévot showed fifty small, insignificant photographs of Parisian street life by Daniele Buertin. The majority were works a tourist would recognize as "typically Parisian." A few images of homeless Parisians held one's attention simply because they were so unexpected among the more charming and quaint works on display.

At a small gallery in the Marais, "À l'image grenier sur l'eau," there were crowds to see "Enfer et collection," a display of nude and erotic images. Not aiming at encyclopedic thoroughness (any show with only four male images cannot be complete) its eighty photographs—from the 1880s to the 1950s—included recognizable names like Baron von Gloeden and a large number of works by unknown photographers. It was a jolting, confused show, with beefcake and cheesecake images struggling for space with works that seemed more intense (that is, pornographic) in their appeal, and other works even more disturbing in their violent depictions of women. How the camera gazes and how the male eye invades were ideas never very far from the works on display.

Little did I know that I had saved the best for last. The night before I was scheduled to leave Paris, my host invited me to a small dinner party. The guests included several gallery owners, a painter, and a sculptor whose works the host admired and collected. I told them that I was in

Paris to write about Mois and asked what was the one show not to miss. The agreement was unanimous: the American photographer Andres Serrano at Galerie Lambert. The sculptor was rhapsodic in her praise. "Magnificent," she repeated, "like works from the Quattrocento."

I was back in the Marais at Yvon Lambert early the next day. Galerie Yvon Lambert is stunning; its principal room huge and tall, lit by an enormous skylight. It regularly shows, I was told, the best new art in Paris and rarely shows photography.

Serrano's series of eighteen huge (three by four feet) photographs was taken in a morgue. The works have titles like *Rat Poison Suicide, Hacked to Death, and AIDS-Related Death*. I thought of Georges de la Tour and Caravaggio whose dramatic lighting and lines echoed Serrano's works,

or, indeed, of Quattrocento paintings of Christ and the martyrs. The work also called to mind photographers like George Krause whose images of Mexican saints were echoed here. Serrano's images of the dead—victims of murder or fire or suicide—are dramatic, assaulting, disturbing, and incredibly beautiful. One does not forget them easily.

Thirteen exhibitions in five days. I had barely cracked the list sent me before I traveled to Paris. But I had added to that list—the exhibitions of nudes and of Serrano, for example. Mois contained more than I could see; I actually knew that would be the case before I began my trip. But there were exhibitions listed in the hefty catalogue of Mois that had not opened when I went to see them. (The catalogue actually lists seventy-two different exhibitions but gives no dates for them.) I went to at least six locations only to learn that exhibitions like "La Lithuanie au tournant du siècle" had not yet opened. And I also knew that I had seen Bert Stern's photographs of Marilyn Monroe or Helmut Newton's tired images enough times to make visits to those exhibitions unnecessary.

Mois de la Photo in Paris makes demands on the viewer that Houston's FotoFest never does. Quite simply, by grouping the majority of its exhibitions in one space, in the Brown Convention Center, a viewer is spared the task of getting around. And even though Paris is a wonderful city to move through and its Metro makes travel fast and inexpensive (except when there are slowdowns; I experienced one when I was there), I still had to move quickly and often to see even a small number of the exhibitions. But moving has its merits. I visited several galleries simply because I passed them on my way to the Metro. And moving gives one the time to absorb the images—thousands of them—that pass before one's eyes.

Ed Osowski is a member of the National Book Critics Circle and his reviews appear regularly in the *Houston Post*.

Binder-Mestro, étude, vers 1903.



The Force of Living Faith

Niño Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open, photographs and interviews by Dore Gardner, essay by Kay F. Turner. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1992. 135 pages. \$34.95.

Niño Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open, a traveling show organized by the Houston Center for Photography, was on view in Houston January 8–February 14.

Mercedes Pérez-Meyer

In her book entitled *Niño Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open*, Dore Gardner explores the force of living faith based on the interesting spiritual movement of el Niño Fidencio aided by a series of photographs and personal accounts. Although this movement originated in Mexico, it has spread across the border and has gotten as far north as Seattle and Chicago.

In 1898, José Fidencio Sintora Constantino was born in Guanajuato. He lived most of his adult life in a poor rural area in Espinazo, in the state of Nuevo León in northeast Mexico. At a very young age, some say as young as eight, el Niño Fidencio as he was called, became a *curandero* or healer. His talent with medicinal plants, curing potions, and his charismatic personality drew many followers. Although he died at the age of 40, his followers continue to call him "el Niño" because they believe he was a child from God, a holy person, and a man of faith. He was a healer of the body and the mind whose message was friendship, peace, and love.

This movement began at a very volatile time in Mexico. During the first forty years of this century, Mexico was going through many changes as a result of the Mexican Revolution. Also due to the economic depression of the country, many Mexicans migrated to the United States. During this time of unrest, el Niño Fidencio devoted himself to the poor and the needy; he was a healer and a real live miracle worker. When he died in 1938, he was the most famous healer in Mexico. El Niño even cured the Mexican president of the time, Plutarco Elias Calles.

Thanks to the intervention of the camera, many of el Niño's miracles were captured in photographs, some of which have been included in Gardner's book. These powerful photographs are undisputed proof of the reality of the miracles he performed, and more importantly the photographs were distributed widely among his followers very much like the images that are distributed of other saints among Catholics. El Niño Fidencio has reached the level of folk saint by popular acclaim, albeit as an unsanctioned interpretation and expression of Catholicism.

Following in this search for the force of



Outside the tumba. Espinazo, Nuevo León, 1988.

living faith, Dore Gardner has created a body of photographs that uncover for us some of the mysteries of this interesting and powerful spiritual movement. The photographs help us understand how this living tradition continues through active practitioners. Some of the photographs depict the pilgrimages that take place in Espinazo. They come in March, which marks the feast day of el Niño Fidencio's patron saint, St. Joseph; and in October, the month of el Niño Fidencio's birth and death. Pilgrimages, which were very popular in Europe during the middle ages, are continued today by followers as a form of offering pain or discomfort. The *fidencistas* believe that this pain and discomfort touches their spiritual belief and helps them renew their commitment to el Niño.

The photographs included in this book not only visually document the actual conception of a miracle, but they are also accompanied with written information describing the type of miracle or healing that is taking place. These photographs are very reminiscent of the Spanish old tradition of *ex-votos* or *retablos* (as they are more popularly referred to), offerings of gratitude that are placed on altars. It seems as though pho-

tography has replaced this old art tradition, since photographs can be mass-produced and therefore reach many more followers. Also, photographs are more believable and are regarded as true depictions of reality or an event.

and you must have faith for the power of el Niño to help you.

Also in the book, there is an insightful essay by Kay F. Turner filled with information and details about this movement. The essay really helps to summarize and clarify



Remedio for a blocked ear. Niño Fidencio Mission, Natalie, Texas, 1990.

Probably the strongest elements of the book are the actual testimonies and accounts by the *materias* and others. These testimonies are sometimes personal and intimate expressions of their contact or experience with el Niño. The *materias* usually

become chosen practitioners as a result of a miracle performed for them by the Niño and then work as channels to the power of el Niño and his prophesies. They are not the ones that make a miracle happen; it is el Niño who, through them, performs miracles. The *materias* establish missions, usually in their own homes, in a special room that has an altar called a *tronito* filled with images of Christ and photos and images of el Niño. Using the accounts and the photographs, we are able to learn more about the different types of people and the different types of miracles his followers have experienced. Even though the stories, opinions, and way each *materia* works differs, everyone agrees that there is only one Niño,

some important factors of el Niño Fidencio's movement. Turner has written and published widely in the area of Mexican folklore.

This book is very enjoyable and thoroughly done. The photographs and personal accounts go hand-in-hand and complement each other nicely. The book can be a reaffirmation of the belief in this movement or it can prove to be an in-depth look at the force of living faith. *A Heart Thrown Open* will clearly spread the message of el Niño Fidencio to those who believe, and it does provide a comprehensive look into this, a most interesting phenomenon, which has crossed the physical boundaries of our country's border and continues to be a popular and powerful force to this day among his followers.

Mercedes Pérez-Meyer was born in El Salvador and now lives and works in Houston at the Museum of Fine Arts in the Education Department.

El Camino de penitencia. Espinazo, Nuevo León, 1987.



Carter's Magic

Mojo, photographs by Keith Carter and introduction by Rosellen Brown. Houston: Rice University Press, 1992. 124 pages. \$39.95.

Elizabeth McBride

A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry, for common sense always takes a hasty and superficial view.

Thoreau

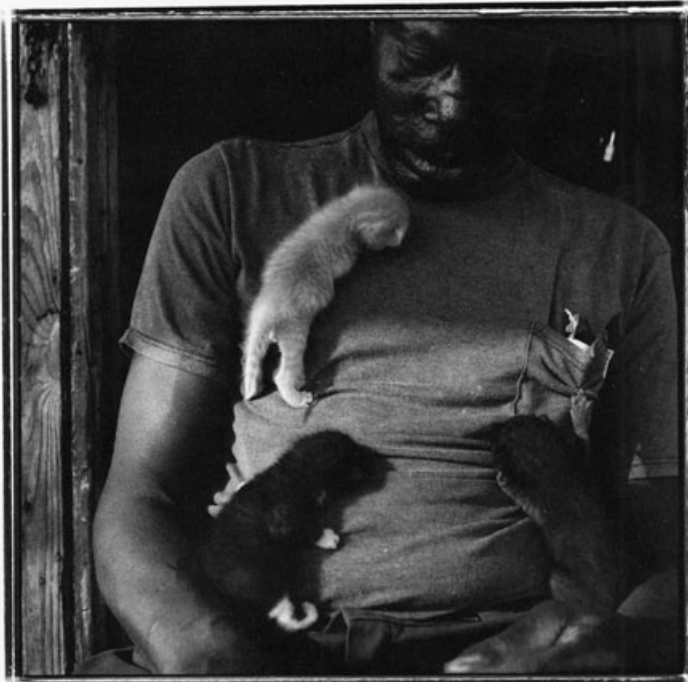
Born in Wisconsin, Keith Carter was transplanted as a very young child to Beaumont, Texas, where, except for small intervals, he has lived and worked since. This East Texas culture remains the center of his imaginative world even today—how often he travels—a definitive world of mystery and absolutes, and most important, of imagery: seductive, spiritual, and sensual. It was into this imagery and the world it represented, whether through information or myth, that he became immersed, deeper and deeper, as he lived and photographed. The pictures that have resulted testify to an intense dedication and faithfulness, to an affectionate vision of extreme clarity.

From Uncertain to Blue, Carter's first book (1988, Texas Monthly Press), matches the names of small, decaying Texas towns with photographs that, although compelling on their own, take on additional layers of meaning when titled. Names such

In *From Uncertain to Blue*, this aspect is minimal. A town seems deserted. A house is falling down. A string of flags is hung on a line—the American flag, the Rebel flag, and the skull and crossbones. A dog is caught in the act of eating the legs of a squirrel, whose head and eyes remain disgustingly intact.

Carter's second book, *The Blue Man*, published by Rice University Press, was photographed almost exclusively in Southeast Texas. More composed than his first, more calculated, and even more saturated with death and violence, the book represented a breakthrough, lifting the veils that mask the natural world (including its human inhabitants) in all its cruel beauty and exquisite horror. But in exchange, Carter gave up a certain richness, the presence of everyday life amidst the magic. In *Boy with Birds, Hardin County*, a young blond boy with jaggedly cut hair holds a snake around his body, displaying a scar on his torso and a tattoo above his right nipple. The image seems somehow off, as if we are uncovering another, more potent and frightening universe.

Other images support this reaction: a full-sized man dressed in a surprisingly threatening rabbit suit, trash piles ignited by fires, ghost-like horses, and the brutal scenes of slaughtered animals. In contrast to the excruciating beauty of blooming trees and of animals playfully photographed against heavenly painted backdrops, another atmosphere emerges: one of divisions, of life lived at the margins, of



Raymond, 1991.

might expect. The identification of human and animal life seems intensified, while all the work seems richer and more eloquent. Human images are closer, more personal, the characters of their owners clarifying through carefully chosen details.

Because of its exceptional value to the book, the essay by Rosellen Brown should be mentioned. Weaving itself into and out of the photographs, creating a world of recognition that both translates the work and speaks its own language, this essay supports and expands the quality of Carter's work. Writing in an uncommonly clear and sensitive style, touching the very depths of the photographic work, Brown has made a commentary of sheer poetics. It is rare to find an introductory essay that is a work of art but does not overshadow the work it considers. It is rare to read anything that taps so surely into the secret life of art and offers it to the public life, including the reader in worlds we could otherwise only distantly perceive.

In *Mojo*, Carter fully realized the potential of working with sentimental images. He uses sharp, cutting lines with ever-increasing skill. The clear curve of a butterfly wing against the soft dark skin of an African-American man (*Atlas Moth*) raises provocative questions. What is beauty? Are humans fated to dominate? Who will inherit this poor injured earth? Or is this another kind of juxtaposition, a mystery, metaphoric, and metaphysical? Straight lines, and clean, curved ones also, exist for Carter now not only to penetrate through the thick, highly romantic imagery, but to connect the concrete to the abstract. They move vertically, horizontally, and on the diagonal. It may be the sharp point of the tooth of a dog against its blurry fur. It may be the woman in *Garlic* with her back to us, throwing the garlic out with her two hands, letting it float and rise, connecting the earth to the sky.

Carter employs light and dark, black and white, with breathtaking dramatic appeal, varying from high contrast to a lack of it, as in the almost totally dark and completely enveloping image of the African-American man in the black tee-shirt (*Raymond*), whose torso is covered with the crawling kittens, which constitute his family.

It would be ignoring part of the book's content not to comment on Carter's portrayal of the communication and affection between blacks and whites that is real and that has existed for generations. But that is only part of the story—the Southern Myth. And there is a natural, intelligent sensitivity to Carter's work that reminds us

of this. The brilliant use of skin as object, skin as aesthetic value, is part of the inclusion of another kind of magical realism in his work, that which demands that we reconsider our first impressions, that which makes photographs seem to mean one thing while allowing the opposite to come to the surface. Such photographs force us to face the racial injustice that has long prevailed. It is the very affection that brings into high relief the more common occurrence—the racial tragedies of our lives, the many ways we have lived opposed to each other, in ignorance and hatred.

Metaphor depends as much on the differences of the objects compared as on their similarities. Thus, when Keith Carter both mystifies and clarifies qualities held common between two things, complexity is created. And *depth*, the potential for interpretation, naturally expands. The dark and the light, the magic of Carter's work (the word is used literally here), its power almost to hypnotize, its flirtation with a spirituality, which is so complex it might be either God-like or demonic, are used to penetrate into meaning.

Setting up a series of disagreements, he brings them into resolution. What distinguishes his work from that of others are the extremes of the disagreements and the success and power of the resolutions. In *Mojo*, Keith Carter has combined the natural surface strength of *From Uncertain to Blue* with the perverse undercurrents of *Blue Man*. *Mojo* is his strongest book yet, the darkest, the most honest and serious, the most accomplished.

Elizabeth McBride is a Houston writer who publishes poetry, fiction, and non-fiction.



Boy with Ice, 1989.

as *Peerless* and *Birchbright* and *Blessing* and *Elysian Fields* inspire insistently rural photographs that concentrate on people, animals, and nature. Some of the bravest selections are *Splendor*, a study of blank planked walls meeting in loneliness in the corner, and the excessively sentimental *Fate*, whose insistent morning glories climb up and over a window sill, filling a tumbling-down house with fresh life.

The structure of this book dictates choices that could be too obvious, but are usually imaginative visually and conceptually, their simplicity pushing toward an unaccustomed honesty. And each confronts humans with the power of nature. Not only *Fate*, but *Fearless*, a woodland scene, depicts nature as overwhelming man's constructions, which could only fall back to inconspicuous heaps, drowned in a dark primordial mix of lichens and mulch.

Perhaps the most surprising, most secretly urgent aspect of Carter's work, is the emptiness and violence that is portrayed.

a beauty that both uncovers and hides superstition and disease. But by alternating images of nature, people, and objects, Carter unites the three, creating a dark and mysterious but fully realized world.

Carter's tendency to avoid interpretation continues. *Man in Thicket* is a study of dark and light, mostly dark, of a man whose entire head seems hidden by leaves and twigs, whose torso is either covered or shadowed, whose only obvious body part is a leaf-covered arm. Such an image, allied both to paganism and male self-awareness, could be either terrifying or steady. We are knocked off balance by our incomplete understanding, so much so that it can be disturbing to look at these pictures, but that's as it should be.

Mojo, Carter's latest book (1992, Rice University Press), presents, without a doubt, the best of his work. The settings range from East Texas to Mississippi, from Louisiana to Mexico, but the book successfully absorbs the variety of images one



Atlas Moth, 1990.

Postcards from the Edge

From Media to Metaphor: Art about AIDS, organized by Independent Curators Incorporated. New York, 1992.

Tongues of Flame by David Wojnarowicz. Normal, Illinois: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1990.

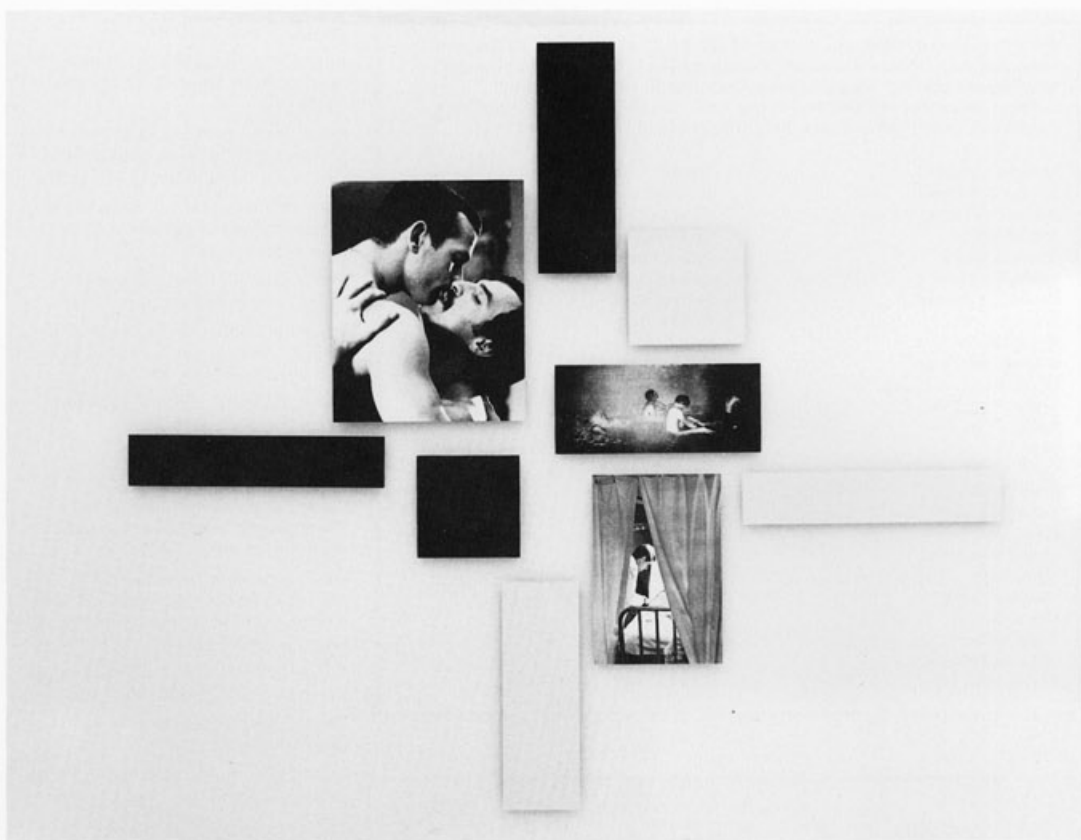
Nels P. Highberg

When my lover, Blane F. Feulner, died of AIDS in July, 1992, I went through the normal reactions: shock, anger. I did not really begin to deal with the situation and begin to accept what had happened until I started to write about it.

Creating art as a means of dealing with traumatic experience is certainly not a new idea, especially for the many artists who have faced AIDS in their own lives. *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS* is a collection of poems written on the subject, while *Personal Dispatches: Writers Confront AIDS*, edited by John Preston, is a collection of essays. In January 1992, a traveling exhibition organized by Independent Curators Incorporated, New York, entitled "From Media to Metaphor: Art about AIDS" began touring the country. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue bring together the variety of methods and mediums visual artists have used in their attempts to deal with AIDS in their life and work.

The catalogue begins with a dialogue by the two guest curators, Thomas Sokolowski and Robert Atkins. They place the work into an historical context by discussing early representations of persons with AIDS presented by journalists on television and in print as horrific, emaciated victims. As the title of the exhibition suggests, artists moved from the images presented by the media to create their own representations of AIDS in society.

All mediums are represented in the show, from paint-on-canvas and gelatin-silver prints to video and sculpture. The exhibition includes well-known work, such as Robert Mapplethorpe's stark, photographic self-portrait and the billboard design by Keith Haring originally produced for Art Against AIDS' "On the Road" pro-



Steven Evans, *Composition in Pink, Black, and White* (variation), 1986; gelatin silver prints and latex and oil paint on masonite and wood.

ently personal, such as the photographs of Kathy Vargas. Her series, "Valentine's Day/Day of the Dead," "began as a remembrance of two friends who recently died of AIDS. One loved the Day of the Dead; the other met his mate on Valentine's Day." The hand-colored photographs contain images of *milagros*, or miracles, tiny metal charms offered to saints and deities during prayer. As Vargas states, the miracles never came. Her elegiac images do what many artists attempt to do when they create work based on the loss of a specific person: to acknowledge and validate the dead one's life by invoking images of what made up their life, be it the enjoyment of a specific holiday or their belief in the meaning of objects like *milagros*.

images, coupled with the linear nature of the piece, suggest the rigid mode of logic perpetuated by those ignorant of HIV/AIDS: If A (sick), then B (quarantine); or if A (infected), then B (label).

While in no way exhaustive, the exhibition does an excellent job presenting the many different mediums and themes found in art about AIDS. A more comprehensive study of one of the artists in the exhibition, David Wojnarowicz, went into its second printing this year. *Tongues of Flame* is an exhibition and catalogue project curated and edited by Barry Blinderman for University Galleries at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. The catalogue contains essays about Wojnarowicz by Carlo McCormick, Curtis White, and John Carlin; an interview between Blinderman and Wojnarowicz; five autobiographical essays by Wojnarowicz; and one hundred reproductions of his work between the years 1979-1989.

Wojnarowicz's name has been associated with the federal funding for the arts controversy since November 1989, when then National Endowment for the Arts Chair John Frohnmayer rescinded a grant to Artists Space in New York City for an exhibition, "Witnesses: Against Our Time," for which Wojnarowicz had written the catalogue text. In 1990, U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) singled out Wojnarowicz as one of the pornographic artists funded by the NEA for this catalogue and exhibition. The debated work is Wojnarowicz's *Sex Series*, a collection of eight black and white photographs. The background of each photograph depicts an unadorned, outdoor scene: a crowd of trees in a backwoods bayou or an aerial view of bridges connecting Manhattan with the surrounding boroughs. Inset into each photograph is a still taken from a gay pornographic film portraying various sexual acts. As he states in the interview with Blinderman, the series grew out of a trip Wojnarowicz took to Mexico City. Wojnarowicz was standing on a cliff outside the city, above, as he states, "one of the most horrifying slums I had ever seen." He looked down through the lens of a super-8 camera into a yard where a one-legged man tried to help a baby ride a rocking horse with no head. Wojnarowicz used this experience

in his series to create a feeling of surveying suppressed information through a distancing telescope or binoculars. The work establishes a mood of seeing something forbidden and asks why these images are regarded as such. He makes people uncomfortable in the hopes that they will contemplate why they feel that way.

A common criticism of work of this sort is whether or not the controversial piece is art. Blinderman confronts this issue in the foreword to the book when he presents his definition of art:

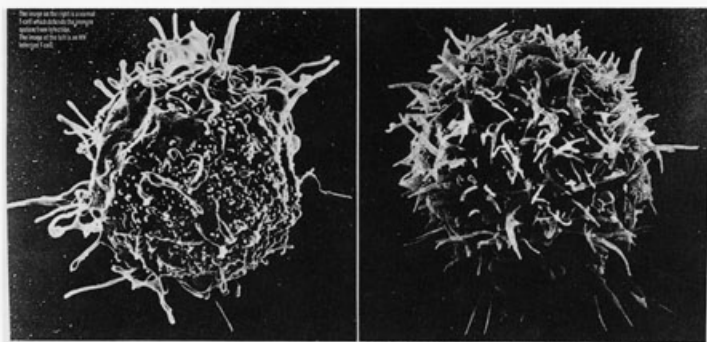
The primordial utterances we call art reflect the undying need to track our experiences in some poetic gesture. Art is not an end—it is a means of confronting an iota of the passion, striving, and mystery we engage. Art is a postcard sent from a place an artist's been.

While Blinderman's discussion of art is thought-provoking and the place of work such as the *Sex Series* in the context of artistic discourse is understandable, some of the most interesting work is found in other parts of the book.

Obviously, art about AIDS deals with issues of life and death. While this work may not save lives, as Sokolowski says, "It can help the rest of us live."

Nels P. Highberg will earn a degree in English from the University of Houston this May.

Kathy Vargas, *Valentine's Day/Day of the Dead #9*, 1989-90; hand-colored photograph.



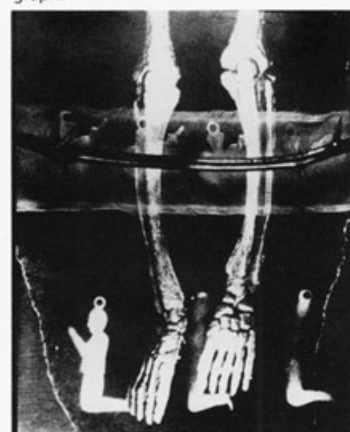
VISUALIZE THIS.

Nancy Burson, *Visualize This*, poster.

ject. The show also presents work by artists who use a medium that is more accessible to the general population. Nancy Burson's poster "Visualize This" uses photo-microscopic images of an HIV-infected and a healthy T-cell that was wheat-pasted on buildings throughout New York City. Diane Neumaier's photographs document the Metropolitan Health Association's plastering of AIDS information, such as how to clean needles and how to use condoms, on New York subway placards. Use of more public modes of expression shows how concerned these artists are with not only creating work that leads to a general discussion of HIV/AIDS but also educates viewers about the syndrome.

Some work in the exhibition is inher-

Other work confronts political issues brought to the forefront by HIV/AIDS. *Composition in Pink, Black, and White* by Steven Evans uses both photographs from Nazi concentration camps where homosexuals were imprisoned for their sexual orientation and stills from contemporary gay pornographic films. The structural placement of the individual components of the piece alludes to the constructivist tradition in art. The images refer to discussions of how to treat those with HIV/AIDS, whether to quarantine them as has been done in Cuba, tattoo all those who are HIV-infected like concentration camp prisoners as William F. Buckley has suggested, or kill all those with HIV as has been done in some Asian countries. These



As of February 9, 1993, the MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON has been unable to locate the artist-photographers listed below. If you can help, please contact Maggie Olvey, Coordinator of the Chasanoff Catalogue project at 713/639-7352 or fax 713/639-7399. Our publisher's deadline is imminent and your help will be greatly appreciated.

Atmore, Samuel L.
Bamberg, Steven
Blanca, Paul (born Vlaswinkel)
Bleviss, Shirley
Chalfant, Henry
Crane, Terrence
Denkeler, Friedhelm
Dru, Gregory
Fox, Sharon Lee
Goldner, Marcia
Green, Gary
Greenberg, Jill A.
Hanson, David A.
Irwin, Liza
Kelly, Joe
King, David
Kostiner, Louis
Limer, Lisa
Linder, Kaspar Th.
Love, Robin
MacLeay, Scott
Maine, Tony
McBride, Tom
McCarty, Mark
McCormack, Dan

Mennin, Georgeanne
Noren, Catherine
Norwich, Philip
Opalenik, Elizabeth
Palaia, Frank
Petoe, Denes
Pusling, Sandra
Rogers, Bob
Rome, Stuart A.
Rubin, Steven D.
Schapiro, Carla
Seltzer, Kathleen
Shiroma, Isami
Small, Rena
Smith, David
Smith, Paul
Somoroff, Michael
Sonnenborn, Barbara
Staszyn, John
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The Struggle for an Authorial Role

W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay by Glenn G. Willumson. New York: Cambridge University Press; 1992. 351 pages. \$65.

Mark Frohman

W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay has the initial appearance of a typical monograph on yet another canonized "photographic master." Upon further investigation however, it becomes clear that Glenn G. Willumson has compiled a rigorous study, particularly noteworthy for its extensive research, reprinted original sources, and exploration of the historical and ideological implications of Smith's work. This last characteristic is one that, regrettably, is often absent from such undertakings of photographic history writing.

Willumson's study does not claim to be a definitive or total reading of Smith and his work; the author prefers rather to examine Smith's combative relationship with the discourse of photojournalism, specifically the editorial structure of *LIFE* magazine. Willumson introduces his subject with a brief tracing of the picture magazine's ancestry, tracing its lineage to illustrated newspapers, chronicling the hierarchical relationship of editors and staff artists, as well as the technological advancements from engravings and drawings to the development of photography and the halftone process. The author is quick to point out, however, that his is not a technological history, but an attempt to situate Smith and his work within the institutional practice of the time, a move that is



Photograph of children selling bread in Barcelona, from "Spanish Village," 1950.

public discourse and opinion in post-war, pre-television America. Yet with such power and influence, *LIFE* had to retain a highly complex and structured organization. Despite Luce's theoretical empowerment of photojournalists, *LIFE*'s editors retained the ultimate decision-making authority, thereby controlling meaning of the final product through selection, sequence, layout, and captions. It was this highly mediated process that would ultimately lead to Eugene Smith's resignation from *LIFE* in 1954.

Willumson's book focuses on Smith's four major photographic essays for *LIFE*: "Country Doctor" (1948), "Spanish Village" (1951), "Nurse Midwife" (1951), and "A Man of Mercy" (1954). Each is reprinted as it originally appeared in the pages of *LIFE*. Dividing his analysis of each work into sections entitled "Concept

zine openly opposed Truman's package for "socialized medicine" in its editorials. It sided with the New York Academy of Medicine's plan for a redistribution of doctors from urban to rural communities. *LIFE*'s publication of "Country Doctor" portrays a romantic reverence for this hard-working profession as it also demonstrates the community's spiritual—and financial—support of its country doctor. It is uncertain how aware Smith was of the essay's broader political implications, though Willumson makes it clear that Smith's superiors understood them quite well based on their choice of the particular doctor and community. In this context, "Country Doctor" not only argues for the recognition of the ethical rewards of rural doctoring but also for rural communities to develop and fund their own medical facilities and staff in order to attract young modern doctors like the featured Dr. Ceriani.

As this example demonstrates, the publication of photographic essays served many possible interests at once; however, their meaning—upon which such interests depended—were not always univocal or unanimously determined. This can be seen throughout Smith's career at *LIFE* as he constantly fought for authorial control equal to that of the editors. Willumson demonstrates Smith's commitment to his projects by citing insightful letters written to his mother while on assignment, which reveal his emotional and personal investment in his work. Smith's perfectionism and skill are also evidenced by his personal research, extended stays on assignment, involvement with the individuals photographed, prolific note-taking, accumulation of thousands of negatives, and his determination to accurately represent his perspective in the final publication.

With a studied understanding of the editorial process, Smith attempted to make his photographs convey his interpretation as much as possible before submitting them. By publishing Smith's contact sheets, Willumson examines Smith's careful manipulation of his photographs. Repeated shots of the same scene reveal Smith's posing of his subjects in order to create a certain interpretive effect, as in having Spanish soldiers in "Spanish Village" face the sun and shooting from a low camera angle. The result, showing stern-faced soldiers in harsh contrast, contributes to Smith's condemnation of Franco's military dictatorship. When making his own prints—an uncommon practice for photojournalists—Smith would darken, lighten, or bleach areas to enhance both the emotion and interpretation of the work, claiming he was justified "if the rearranging that I have done is of the spirit and the truth of the actuality." While such techniques should not shock those familiar with photojournalistic practice, they are questionable given the rhetoric of "truth" surrounding such work. Yet at the same time, as Willumson points out, these

activities reflect Smith's active desire for control in the contest of meaning.

Motivated by his moral and ethical beliefs, Smith did not measure a project's success by personal recognition or praise, but rather by its ability to affect public opinion or help those photographed. "Spanish Village," in fact, received much attention from the photographic and artistic communities, yet Smith ultimately considered it a failure, feeling that *LIFE*'s final presentation of it watered down his anti-Franco statement. Centering on the efforts of missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer and his hospital at Lambarene in French Equatorial Africa, "A Man of Mercy" was Smith's last project for *LIFE*, leading to his final resignation. A great admirer of Schweitzer's humanitarian actions and writings, Smith initiated this project with great enthusiasm, yet ran into serious problems once on assignment. Not only did Schweitzer restrict what kinds of scenes Smith could shoot, preferring to pose himself in his own prescribed positions, but Smith found contradictions between Schweitzer's personal interactions and his humanitarian ideals. After delayed production, deadline and competition pressure caused *LIFE* to publish "A Man of Mercy" on November 15, 1954, knowing that Smith was unsatisfied with its reduced length and had threatened to resign if it went to print.

Though Smith's work was well received in his lifetime—he did achieve an unprecedented degree of freedom and decision-making power regarding his work—he was rarely satisfied. After his resignation, he worked irregularly facing the same authorial difficulties he had encountered at *LIFE*. Some consider him a tragic artist desperately struggling to realize his vision of truth, while others perceive him as a victim of his own liberal humanism, which made him unwilling to negotiate within the mass-audience institution in which he chose to work. Willumson treats Smith with obvious respect, while also exploring his subject with a deserved criticality. At times, it seems Willumson does not take it far enough, though, stopping short of fully delving into the important issues of representation and power that his topic demands. In this regard, Willumson's book often makes Smith's story seem more of a clash of egos than a conflict of ideology. Considering the institutional and discursive specificity of much of the book, it concludes on a somewhat too individualistic note, leaving Smith as a victim of his own personality and idealism. These relatively minor criticisms aside, more photographic studies like this one are much needed and long overdue.

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Photograph of dead man from "Country Doctor," 1948.

necessary to the understanding of both Smith's successes and failures.

In 1936, *LIFE* magazine published its first issue. The element distinguishing *LIFE* from its mostly European antecedents, as well as defining its commercial success, was its abundant use of photographs. At a time when photographic layout was remarkably unsophisticated in the United States, used mostly to illustrate facts from the text, *LIFE* made photographs the dominant narrative device. Publisher Henry Luce promoted the camera's ability to not only "report," but to "comment" as well, comparing the photographer to an essayist. The staff photographer, previously considered simply as a "visual thesaurus" by editors, was now endowed with a certain authorial role and encouraged to develop a "style" and the skills of interpretation. Analogizing photography with language, Luce wanted *LIFE* to present a point of view, constructed through the rhetorical capabilities of the photographic essay.

Reaching a mass audience of more than 7 million, *LIFE* magazine was a primary source of visual information and knowledge, having a profound role in shaping

and Publication," "Narrative and Aesthetic Reading," "Political and Ideological Reading," and "Public Reception," Willumson enacts what he describes as "close reading." He proposes the first reading (narrative and aesthetic) as the most obvious or "natural," directed toward *LIFE*'s "implied reader." Such a reading consists of examining the way in which the subject is portrayed—the country doctor as "secular sainthood," a role model for others to follow—and how the formal aspects of camera angle, pose, lighting, layout, and sequence directed the meaning and attitude of the essay. The second reading (political and ideological) then views the essay in relation to the historical context of its production, revealing "a number of hidden implications that the contemporary reader must have subconsciously absorbed."

For example, "Country Doctor" received widespread praise for its innovative layout as well as Smith's "emotional understanding" and visual intensity, setting the example for future projects. However, "Country Doctor" was not innocent of its political context, as it coincided with a key issue of Truman's 1948 campaign: the debate on national health care. *LIFE* maga-



Photograph of doctor from "Country Doctor," 1948.

Fiction, Sex and Violence

Critical Fictions, an exhibition curated by Richard Hinson and including David F. Donovan, Frank Golden, Peter Harvey, Richard Hinson, Maggie Olvey, and Donna Rydland, was shown at the Dishman Art Gallery, Lamar University, in Beaumont, Texas, November 6–25, 1992.

Hans Staartjes

In a show that intended to be "critical of some aspect of the (contributing) artist's life," it is curious that these aspects are mainly sex and violence. Even more curious is the unwittingly pitting of feminism as in the work of Maggie Olvey and Donna Rydland against the somewhat chauvinistic work of David F. Donovan and Frank Golden. Both Peter Harvey, with his comical video and Richard Hinson with his analysis of random violence, seem to stay well clear of this fracas.

When you say "crime scene photography," you might expect bloody night scenes, body bags, flashing police lights, and jostling video cameramen providing visuals of the latest homicide for the "news." Richard Hinson's black-and-white photographs of convenience stores, bridges, street corners, and alleys in Houston, on the contrary, are disconcertingly normal and show no physical evidence of violence at all. The indifference of these images are an ironic reflection of the public indifference to the daily list of violent acts. This apathy seems only stirred by ever more bizarre and callous cruelty.

The only hint of disorder in Hinson's images are in the text. A photograph of a "Stop 'n Go" store tells of a man trying to get cash from an automatic teller machine, but he can't because he's overdrawn, and "as he walked out of the store, a thirteen-year-old approached him and demanded his cash. He told him he didn't have any money and the thirteen-year-old accused him of lying . . . the youth then pulled out a gun from his jacket and shot him three times. He was pronounced dead at the scene and was still holding on to his bank



THIS CORNER WAS SIX BLOCKS FROM WHERE WE USED TO LIVE. SOMETIMES WHEN I WAS IN A HURRY I WOULD STOP AND EAT A HAMBURGER HERE. EARLY ONE MORNING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK, A YOUNG MAN STOPPED TO USE THIS TELEPHONE. AS HE WAS SPEAKING INTO THE RECEIVER, TWO MEN GOT OUT OF THEIR CAR, WALKED UP TO HIM AND SHOT HIM REPEATEDLY UNTIL HE FELL DEAD. THEY THEN CALMLY GOT BACK INTO THEIR CAR AND DROVE AWAY.

Richard Hinson, Untitled.

original images are black-and-white negatives that are scraped on, painted on, and subsequently printed on color paper. The found frames chosen for this work add a feeling of "individual pieces of art" compared to more "straight" photography. The thematic content of this work, it can be said, is like Hinson's, also about violence. But this is an anger that comes from within the artist and is not only evident by the heavy scratching technique on the emulsion, but also by the subject matter and the sardonic titles of the pieces: "Diazepam" (a tranquilizing drug) is an

and Christianity, and its appeal lies in its unashamed personal voice.

David F. Donovan's superbly printed black-and-white portraits of women, in contrast, seemed perhaps to fit the agenda of "critical fiction" least convincingly in this show. Donovan photographs female models in various rural or small town locations with the intention of giving "the viewer the idea that they are intruding into a very private portion of his subject's lives and (making) us think we are being excluded from their secret." The images have a sexually titillating and voyeuristic intent, as in the image of a girl pulling on her top revealing more of her breasts, or the image of two young women: one wearing a black negligee and drinking through a straw embraced from behind by the other, also in black. Some of the other images are reminiscent of Arbus, such as the image of a girl pricking her finger with a needle and thread. A more successful and compelling image is of a girl in front of a water tower holding her hair back from a gust of wind and holding a book in the other hand.

While Donovan has a fetish with the female body, Donna Rydland reacts in anger at the demands a male-dominant society and the media place on a woman's physical appearance. Her intensely personal work is an installation of "scrolls," seven of which are images of a pin getting progressively larger while the text above gets progressively smaller. A center "scroll" has three pairs of red shorts with text around them, and three "scrolls," on the right, decreasing in size, show photographs of the backside of a nude woman in a studio setting. The text above the pin images mentions the "goodness of thinness" and how it was believed in the Middle Ages that "fasting became associated with virtue and purity." It was thought that "angels were so good, so pure, that they must be awfully thin. People . . . debated over how many angels could dance on the head of a pin." (This last text is barely legible above the head of a very enlarged pin.) Current expectations leave women with a "bitter contempt for the feminine nature of (their) own body," writes Rydland "The sense of fullness and swelling of plenitude, which filled me with disgust, (are) actually the qualities of a woman's body."

Similarly, Maggie Olvey's work deals with the oppressive expectations often demanded of women in household and child rearing roles. Olvey's "Mixed Messages" was an installation of six double-sided panels that were suspended from the gallery ceiling. The panels provide two views, one outside and one inside. The outside panels are living room interiors showing, among others, chairs, windows, picture frames, and a dining room table. There is a warm inviting glow to these interiors provided by a late afternoon light coming through the windows. The familiarity of this living room is deliberate; it is meant to represent a generic living room in any house. These living rooms, however, provide only a superficial and "feel good" view of a house. The true interiors are on the inside panels. The inside views include a photograph of a clothes dryer with text that reads: "lingerie, a look to keep your eye on," a phrase with double meaning contrasting sexuality with the banality of the washing. Another interior includes a view of a dishwasher reading, "Mabel, Mabel, strong and able, keep your elbows off the table." One gets the feeling, with this work, of witnessing a theatrical piece of the daily drama of a domestically trapped life.

Peter Harvey's video art is a pleasant, lighthearted addition to this show.

"Verism" is a witty look at self-help books about personal image improvement. In it, Harvey follows his book's suggestion of gaining a better self-esteem by getting a haircut and wearing a pair of glasses. Sporting a crew cut and nerd glasses, Harvey discovers it isn't working. This hilarious fare is topped only by his piece "Verist," which is an analysis of the visual cliché. In it he mentions all the things you should do to avoid making clichés "if you want to do anything remotely resembling art." The piece is accompanied by a purposefully annoying sound of a loudly ticking clock. To avoid being a cliché, he explains pointing at his drawing on his blackboard, a picture should not be too central or too far to one side, it also shouldn't look "too good or too bad." He proceeds to erase the drawing because "it might be a cliché."

A good definition of a photograph is that it is a "critical fiction" of a human experience, tainted by the selectivity of the artist's experience and reinterpreted later by the viewer (who is, of course, also tainted). The stronger and more personal the artist's expressions, the more likely the viewer will be drawn into the artist's convictions. "Critical Fictions" is at certain times, quite powerful in this regard.

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Maggie Olvey, "Mixed Messages," 1989–90.

receipt when he was loaded into the ambulance." A photograph of a phone booth on a street corner reads: "A man stopped to use the telephone . . . two men got out of their car, walked up to him and shot him repeatedly until he fell dead. They then calmly got back into their car and drove away." The more cloistered life a citizen is forced to live, the less interest he will have in the suffering of others, permitting, perhaps, more callousness.

In contrast to the cool irony of Hinson's photographs, Frank Golden presents us with perhaps the most intriguing and powerfully emotive work in this show. His

image of a winged female nude in a heavily mutilated surface. "Untitled" is a scratched orange shadow of a dead body in an alley with hypodermic needles and garbage cans scattered around. "Fear of AIDS" is a female nude with glowing blue eyes holding a mask to her face in a somber curtained scene, with a skull in the foreground. "Fear of Christmas" is a haunting image of a vulnerable child sitting next to a Christmas tree with gifts; a ghostlike human figure appears to be falling from and through the tree; in the two corners of the frame appear the letters U and R. Golden's work is a dark, laconic, and chauvinistic look at sex



Frank Golden, 1991.

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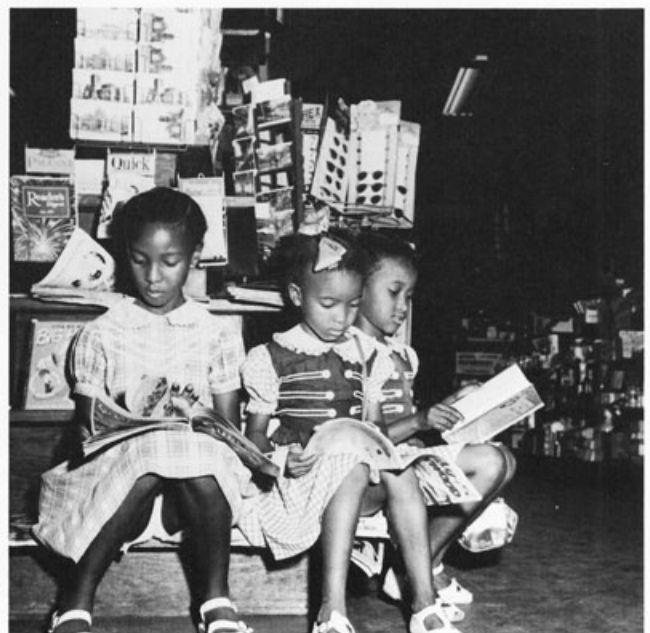
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© Julie Newton. "Eloina's Mother," 1978. Kodak Tri-X film and Kodak Professional paper. © Eastman Kodak Company, 1992.

*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.
Eloina told me later her mother was unhappy
with how she looked,
old and wrinkled.
"Julie's camera never lies," Eloina 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.

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