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

EDITORS' NOTE
This issue of SPOUT contains a series of articles written by artists, art historians, and scholars that attempt to address some of the issues of the photographic object. As it turns out, the "photographs" can be many things. It can be an idea. Shannon Halvorsen discusses how, in the 1920s, Man Ray introduced conceptual photography into our visual vocabulary. The photography can also be evidence: Dennis Oppenheim presents us with uncertain terms that his work is not photography. Allison de Lima Greene explains. A photographer can impose the imagination: Richard Howard's poem about Nadar based on his portrait is a uniquely resonant response to the photographic medium.

A photographer 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. With Hoffberg's review of the "Photography Book Art in the United States" exhibition with a high regard for the fluidity and currency of the medium. Art Cvetkovich analyzes Madonna's self-metamorphoses before the camera in her recent book Sex. Photographs documents they can also entertain. Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom take issue with artistic obession in their review of William Wegman's work.

The opening event of the Tucson conference was a performance by Carol Scherrer. The "Delirious Annals of Desperation: or, is there a Feminist Erotic Videography?" The 90-minute multimedia piece, which involved simultaneous slide projections, formed a seminal on the stage and showed the repressive selection of the artist's work. Scherrer, a performance artist, painter, writer, video, and filmmaker since the 60s, in a live form performance style, moved around the stage with her hands axed to her body and talking. 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 speeches, this performance offered a provocative beginning to the conference. Many in the audience felt, however, that Scherrer's self-based 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 Marcy D. Diamond discussed their collaborative exhibition which was a research project concerning women's artistic practices. Deborah Wills enlightened the audience with a discussion on the work of some developing and established mixed-race women artists. She presented a slide show of diverse backgrounds, all of whom produced autobiographical or autobiographical work. Barbara DeGarrucio's "Sexual Subjects Sexual Object: Rethinking the Female Body was a dense yet lucid overview of the history of women's representations of the female body in the virtual "masochism" on imaging from the female nude in the late 70s to recent explorations in picturing woman's body and desire.

On the last morning of the conference, the artists' presentations were given by Judy Fishkin, Dori Cipri, and Gisele Brecher. Dori Cipri's presentation was the high point 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 multiple credits and performances on issues of sexuality, power, and the body. Cipri's work deals with the dynamics of representing the body; she explained her struggle with the power of "the gaze" on her methodology from picturing a female model to the body of her own body. This work served as a form of art therapy for Cipri, 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 tempted by her attempt at providing us with a therapy for 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 the women themselves. The Houston Center for Photography plans to organize the fourth Women in Photography Conference in late March 1998 to coincide with Fotofest '94. By offering the conference a year ahead of schedule, HCP hopes to increase opportunities for dialogue and interaction in the community of women photographers, as well as offering the benefits of participating in an international photography festival.
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 material 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 all photographs could have this richness of meaning in the past as they have now. But I'm not particularly an advocate of the photograph.

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, or at least many of his documentation strategies were made up of photographs taken by other 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. The most important, these photographs 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."

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

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 photographs of this nature: "When shown in the gallery, such photos tend to trouble not only the curiosity but the devoted gallery-goer as well. One reason is that in a gallery everything expects to find works of art. When you get 'snuck' 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 whorehouse and finding only pornography. You feel gypped."

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

The function of photodocumentation in recording ephemeral activities had a certain ancestry before the conceptual artists of Oppenheim's generation. Yves Klein's 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 documented continues to be debated. The Actionist artists of Vienna — Gunter Brus, Otto Muhl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwartzinger — 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 propelled 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 prearranged 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 matching diagrams." On the lower left is a photograph of the left and right shoe prints. This image is surrounded 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, PERFORMED AT GALLERY REESE PALLEY, N.Y., 1970. 55 MINUTES.
MATERIAL: HOARDS, VIDEO CAMERA, AMPLIFIER, SPIDER, HAIR.
A material manipulated at greater and greater distances from the body that produced it. The mechanism that governs it's direction (air currents through breathing) comes from the same system that once controlled it. Greater demands are made upon the hair when it is used to block-repel an approaching force (spider).
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, Oppenheim had an almost cinematic grasp of the effectiveness of montage techniques. The static shoe prints lead to the spelled 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 notation 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.

Exposed Armor, 1970, documents a 55-minute performance at Reese Palley Gallery, New York. The photodocumentation is therefore both temporally and physically comprised in comparison to Ground Mutations. Whereas the earlier piece falls into the category of urbanized Earth Art, Exposed Armor explores its microcosmic counterpart, Body Art. Here Oppenheim clearly takes center stage as performer—he is shown in an absurdly high-risk situation. For close to an hour he confronted a tautnail trapped in a narrow chasm, 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 carry a lot of weight because they were referencing a new conceptual art.”

Despite these disagreements, certain photodocumentations are extraordinarily beautiful. Palatinus, 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 photoboothed three images with magnumon apples on a five-hundred foot scale in the fields of Bridgwater, New York. Lit at twilight, the apples 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 Pearlstein 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 immediate. 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 documentation: 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.”


FOOTNOTES
2. Few photodocumentations were collected by individuals or institutions in the late 1970s and the transition of early color prints has rendered some of Oppenheim’s early photodocumentations virtually illegible.
6. Oppenheim remembers that “my inspiration wasn’t coming from photography, it was coming from sculpture.” 16 December 1992 interview.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

A Most Excellent Dog and Pony Show and Its Audience

Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom

In the spring of 1975 we received a short notice 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 approved." 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 hit of the weekend event, and we wrote him saying our tabloids from the video appliance market indicated he was the popular favorite of the museum's estimable 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 tight gags only seems to be enhanced by the ridiculousness of his means: a chair, a (duplicit, ladys' pockets-envelopes, 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 photography 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 lack of self-consciousness, all lib invention where families are enlisted to play our largely silly roles is also characteristic of his black-and-white photographs (e.g., Daugle et Dieben, 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 trial of wuv, a dog, and car turns looking at one another. As the unseen fourth party, we trace the alternating trinity 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 permutations.

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 humanities (emphasis on the small "h") is. Somehow his audience sensed there's to be in all of his absurdities something simple, honest, and true. Besides, his dog thoroughly trusted him. What he was doing out there to us really was a good dose of anti-aesthetics on four legs, inverted dogmatics about the nature of established art—if you will permit the pun. His humor always related to our constructive imaginations, and imagination is only constructive to the degree it is liberated from dogmatic constraints. This wasn't just his work, 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 hyped, anomalous contrapuntal, the Poloroid 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 photography, it's surprising to see how far Wegman's eye 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 these: 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 wall-orn. An audience was generated around the appearance of this gorgeous Weimarner (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; canines, it is nonetheless the widespread perception that he's the "guys who does dogs." In collaboration with John Reuter (the "pony master" from Polozodi) 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 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 appliance" 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 communications; he had been "parked" on it so the meter had expired. Considering the pleasures we had derived from his art during the past eighteen years, it may appear ungrateful to apply such 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 shows" even though the appliance meter may be suggesting otherwise. It is a hard act to sustain at the level he began brilliant inevitably diminishes into cleverness.

For all the commanding case and apparent innocence of the dog photographs, there are fundamental and inherent problems with man representing animal. Historically speaking, modern man has been putting nature on a shorter and shorter leash, fully intent on controlling if not destroying wilderness. 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 scented domestication. Nonetheless, we humans see them as standing far closer to animality than our selves. In this ambiguity of hierarchical status, the dog represents the ascendency of man over beast or the gulf between. Such is the case no matter how many human at-


HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
Man Ray and the Art of the Idea

Shannon Holmes

Most of Man Ray’s art making between 1917 and 1921 was devoted to assembling everyday objects into what the artists 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 Vorticists of Alvin Langdon Coburn. Man Ray’s object photogra phes 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, photographs 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.” 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 an art. It became art essentially because the artist willed it so. Once Duchamp wrenched the object from its original purpose, he transformed 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 a25-cent price tag, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, to change its original intent and to distance the object from its normal context.

With the ready-made (its exactness, 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 *For fetes d’art*, of formalism’s abstraction with the visual aspects of art. The idea was the art. 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 Duchamp. The fact that his 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 photographs to be a record of the concept or the artist. Photograph was the means by which all of his objects (or the idea of them) remained permanent. Consequently, some objects existed only for the photographs—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 *Mam.* on 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 it is made into its shadow on the plane of the photograph, it is transformed into a phallic form. Both the visual and the conceptual aspects of *Mam.* rely on the controlled perspective by which the shadow—of the photograph. Ultimately it is the title that makes the anthropomorphic connection and comments on the image of a man (probably a self-portrait)*, and links it to correlation between man and machine explored in contemporaneous work by Francis Picabia and Duchamp. Historic photographs of Man Ray’s New York studio show the eggbeater itself displayed as a work of art, but eventually *Mam.* probably was returned to its former life as a kitchen utensil.

In time, the photograph, an object incorporating a live model behind a clothes display stand, existed only for the photograph.* In photographs, a creature—a half-skeletal, half-living human—emerged from a mysterious black space. The model wears one black stocking that gives her the appearance of missing part of a leg. *Nu descendant un escalier* reemerges, 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 photographs into a collage entitled *dadaephone* for reproduction in the only issue of the magazine *New York Dada*. Man Ray designs a frame to look like an advertisement. To reinforce the commercial aspect, rather than signing the work, he attached an anonymous tag line: *To look like an advertisement. The 商 mark evolves into not only an object, but a commodity, an item for sale.*

*New York 1929* is a photograph of the contents of a spilled ashtray. A palette that aesthetically and conceptually breaks completely with existing artistic standards, this truly absurd image of the city is also one of the most radical work of the period. Whether Man Ray created *New York 1929* for the purpose of being photographed or was simply recording a chance event, the coincidence 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 discernable, and even the text is legible, the contents make no sense, constitute no literal photographic representation, and cannot be related to any traditional type of subject matter. In its rejection of acceptable aesthetics, *New York 1929* 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 does not mean that his photographs were not well made, deliberate works of art. The artist used the photographs to control the way the viewer perceived the objects. The objects were 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 objects themselves. This becomes apparent when comparing Man Ray’s photographs of *The Enigma of Isadora Duncan* with a later, three-dimensional edition of the object. The photograph transforms what is otherwise an unremarkable combination of rope and wooden blanket into something vaguely anthropomorphic, mysterious, and even eerie.* Nothing illustrates this more clearly than when exhibiting these three-dimensional editions; the curators sometimes reproduce Man Ray’s original photographs in the catalogue instead of a photograph of the object in the show.

What is most wrote of the loss of aura one experiences with the reproduction of a work of art. 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 conceive of more than one ready-made. Man Ray would not have made these photographs. In fact, there would be no need to restate the concept at all: it could all just be a rumor.

Shannon Holmes works at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as curatorial assistant in the Department of Twentieth-Century Art.
Nadar

A portrait by Nadar shows for Ronald Knauf

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 Acc 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 demigame: from a world where chaos and cosmos are superimposed, from a world where anything can happen but nothing happens twice; you spoke your flat back or flat nose 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

Originally published 1979 in Misgivings, reprinted by kind permission of the author.
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 raisonné of Ernest's work organized by The Met's collection with the participation of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the State Archive of the city of Cologne. It is reproduced here by kind permission of the author and The Met Collection.

While relationships were chilly in Paris over the fall and winter of 1920-21, Ernst experienced one of his most productive moments in his entire life. The basic concepts of his entire work of this time are established by a number of dated works, by his correspondence with Tristan Tzara and André Breton, and by two exhibitions, the former in his native Rheinland in February-March 1921; the other his important solo show at the Secession Gallery in May. These documents indicate that by the end of 1920 he was working simultaneously with a variety of themes in four or five different processes of his imagination. It is not clear, in fact, to what extent Ernst, himself, can be credited for the creation of this new concept. His work of this time is in a curious, fragmented compartment of his mind, which has been the subject of much debate and some controversy. His work of this time is a reflection of the world as he saw it, a world of images, words, and ideas that he has put together in a new and unique way.

There are two main themes in this section: the idea of a landscape created by the mind, and the idea of a new form of art that can express the complexity of the human experience. These themes are interrelated and are evident in Ernst's work of this time. The first theme is evident in the way he uses the landscape as a metaphor for the human mind. The second theme is evident in the way he uses the landscape as a means of expressing the complexity of the human experience.

The first theme is evident in the way he uses the landscape as a metaphor for the human mind. The landscape is a place where the mind can be free to wander and explore. The mind is a place where the mind can be free to explore and imagine. The landscape is a place where the mind can be free to explore and imagine.
FOOTNOTES

1 Regrettably, virtually nothing is known of Ernst's work in a third exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, "Drei Generationen in vier Jahren: November 1930. One uninformative review has been reprinted by Spies, Max Ernst Collages, p. 20.


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 bombedifiable sites in Cologne and Düsseldorf in the fall of 1914, and on June 3, 1917, German planes bombed London.


6 Ernst rejected the title "The Murderous Airplane," once applied to this collage (Spies/McKens, Max Ernst Documents, 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 companion. All other parts of this collage, including the landscape setting, are half-tone reproductions of parts of photographs. See Foster, "L'Amour Fou," October 56, Spring 1981, p. 460 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. 562 of the teaching aids catalogue. The sources for the other forms have not been found and the identity of the "hockey stick" is uncertain. Although this is a photographic enlargement, it has an "original" signature in pencil, not a reproduction. Because the "original" collage is missing, it is difficult to know what sort of surface was recorded in this photographic enlargement. The smoke may have been done largely in pencil; there are black specks on the thigh and suggestions of ink brushed over the shadowed side of the body. The man's right foot, the socle, and the hockey stick all lack the definition of the torso and crocheted head.

8 The inscription in French reads: "Au dessus des nuages marche la minute. Au dessus de la minute plane l'oiseau invisible du jour. Un peu plus haut que l'oiseau l'étoile pesante 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.
FOOTNOTES

1 Regrettably, virtually nothing is known of Ernst's work in a third exhibition at the Kölnische Kunsthalle, "Drei Generationen in vier Jahren," November 1930. One uninformative review has been reprinted by Spies, Max Ernst Collages, p. 20.


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 divisible sites in Cologne and Düsseldorf in the fall of 1914, and on June 3, 1917, German planes bombed London.


6 Ernst rejected the title "The Murderesses Airplane" once applied to this collage (Spies/Metken, Max Ernst Zwinni 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's "Amour Fou," October 16, Spring 1991, p. 86, 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. 582 of the teaching aids catalogue. The sources for the other forms have not been found and the identity of the "hockey stick." is uncertain. Although this is a photographic enlargement, it has an "original" signature in pencil, not a reproduction. Because the "original" collage is missing, it is difficult to know what sort of surface was recorded in this photographic enlargement. The socle may have been done largely in pencil: there are black specks on the thigh and suggestions of ink brushed over the shadowed side of the body. The man's right foot, the socle, and the hockey stick all lack the definition of the torso and crocheted head.

8 The inscription in French reads: "Au-dessus des nuages marche la minute. Au dessus de la minute plane l'oiseau invisible du jour. Un peu plus haut que l'oiseau l'étroit poussée 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.

Photobookworks: Museum without Walls

Photographic Book Art in the United States, curated by Susan Kay Grant, was shown at the Houston Center for Photography November 6–December 26, 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 resource 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 Schweitzman has pointed out, serial arrangements of photographs, which have expressive images and information, "can produce series, sequences, juxtapositions, rhythms, and recurring themes." (Artsite’s 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 Xeror 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 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 museums 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 cataloging 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 “misclassified” they needed to be reclassified, and it took more than a decade to do it.

In the 1970s, photographers blossomed into bookmakers, using photography 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 collectable books or collector’s items. But technology marched on—and with digital and trinitone, 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, versatility and the fortuitous development of a larger group of collectors have allowed photographers and artists using photography to create a myriad of diverse works in book format.

And now on the cusp of the millennium, the photographic bookwork has reached an apogee 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 Kay Grant. Stepping in Houston at the Houston Center for Photography on its two-year tour, the exhibition contains a wide range of bookworks, ranging from the concrete 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 and production as well...
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 Huebler’s Aloe Vera, a virtual tapestry of photographs recently joined to create a “hanging garden” in the literal sense, are wall-size and spectacular. The exhibition is a Herculean exploration of book as hand-made, 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, image, and text, as well as reworking previously printed materials, creates a totally unique visual statement, one that has resonance beyond the materials used. Take, for instance, Paige Morgan’s The Hamlet of Adders 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,” reciting the very materials the homeless find in their “neighborhoods.”

Death and Life by Terry Brauning 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 cleaver 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 tangle form with a gargoyle and creates a sleigh 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 Degen and Barbara Schubring’s Landscaped 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 Neves Snyder documents a trip to Colorado with photographs, decals, cyano type, 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.

Homer is also a theme within the bookworks 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 provocitive 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 unresolved, with this example, as newspaper revisited.

The book, in its reverse 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, shaped by the artist’s imagination, innovations, and creative intentions beyond any definition 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 concepts, for meaning and metaphor.

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Sex Sells


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 profiteering motive, but no one that only adds to the book's power. Even if it lacked originality (and it didn't), Sex would still be distinctive in its mainstreaming of high art and high fashion. (It doesn't have to mean anything more than that to be interesting.)

Sex, as is typical in the book, is the path to the book's center. It is the path to the book's center as it is through Steven Meisel's fashionable photography and Madonna's celebrity image in contrasting directions as both respectable art and pornography. Photography and cultural criticism have some lessons to learn about visibility and marketing from the model of a $50 book that can sell in such numbers. What isn't said 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 esthetic who finds Sex boring on the grounds that its 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, which thereby makes queer desire everybody's desire. Not that this necessarily makes the book radical either as politics or as art, for Madonna could easily be accused of appropriating gay and lesbian sex for her shock value, marginalizing it once again as kitschy 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 other lesbian photographers such as Della Grace, Susan Stewart, and Deborah Bright, who depict lesbian sexuality and femininity in innovative and controversial ways.

Madonna's lesbian images, ranging from poses with "real" s/m dikes to "pseudo-lesbian" scenarios with well-known and glamorous figures such as Kathie Rossellini, aren't necessarily original or cutting edge. One other thing has been given unprecedented attention of more radical work; the visibility that Madonna gives to lesbianism potentially contributes to a crucial project. Madonna's work by Madonna in the context of feminist debates about pleasure and sexuality should not be set apart from the context of within the academy and feminist and lesbian communities. (feminist) has gained a strong voice, it is still a fairly common and mainstream circles that to be feminist is to be anti-pornography. Madonna embraces 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 taken up a more sophisticated position than Madonna, whose defense of s/m, well-intentioned though it might be, is highly problematic, in their views they receive the mainstream attention she gets from a press that is all too willing to ignore or stigmatize feminism.

Sex, in too a obsessive focus on Sex as a book about sex is in its concern with fantasy, and the role of the photographic image in the construction of fantasy. Whether they're real fantasies or not, Madonna's choice to represent women and sexuality that has traditionally been treated as men and males has been the subject of her own dramas. Divided into sections in which recognizable celebrities or characters appear with Madonna to create a range of scenarios, this 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 dehumanize her images, Madonna is making them haunting or disturbing. Madonna's potential to shock, primarily seeks to represent or produce pleasure. In both cases, though, they use the interplay 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 preclude their desires, is crucial. As Sex, for example, it requires a new approach to depicting the interests of the image 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 masquerading over a mirror or the one in which she strikes a boxing pose on top of a radiator, are not particularly outrageous, but do not lessen their power.

Another significant difference between Madonna's work and that of feminist photographers is that while Manon, Schieles, and Sontag's images in particular are not about the woman, in Sex it is not the woman 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 realism or more overtly aesthetic, fashion photography has been unanimously 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 parts. Art 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.

Sex, 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 middle class to buy Sex is not dealt with; Meisel's expensive book may make art accessible for some, but not for others. Madonna and Sontag's book, on the other hand, given the competition the book industry faces from videos, film, and music, it is interesting to see such a luxuriously packaged book made it big. Obviously, print and the mill image are not dead. Madonna abandons 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 many alternative photographers. Ideally, I'd like to see her work pave the way for further widespread production and distribution of work celebrating women's and gay and lesbian sexuality, work that already exists but that is marginalized.

Returning to 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 need to 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. Feminism is, as I see it, the more immediate pleasure of just looking.

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FOOTNOTES


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 Reece's Days (written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, distributed by Miramax), a group of professionalhas been brought together to pull off a drug deal. The book, once it is given to his friend, has given the theme of Madonna's content as the book's style is, but has given the theme of Madonna's content as the book's style is, it gives throy Malone's concerns. He believes that all of her music is autobiographical. His main example is that "Like a Virgin" is about Madonna's sexual evolution with pop star John Holmes, whose face she 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 FineLine Features) concerns two brothers (one a thief and the other a philosophy student) searching for their father who has been missing for five years. The brothers' search takes them to England room where they meet the owner of a diner, who is an ex-wife of an ex-con, and his father's girlfriend. One evening, the four of them and a local fisherman sit around one of the dinner tables discussing whether it is different for a woman who has been taken care of her life, to keep her self in a man to repel 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 cinematic (either implicit or explicite), Madonna needed to tie them to a mainstream segment of the population in order to help mold compassion in the audience for the characters. Madonna was that link. The Madonna phenomenon is so prevalent in popular culture that it has been exposed to it and therefore talks about it. She has become an example of typical table conversation.

Michael G. Devoll
Paris in Less Than a Month

Ed Oosowski, 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 Oosowski

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 a lot of 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 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 PhotoFest 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 instantly 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 “corrects” errors.

The first photographs to see were nineteenth-century images of the mentally and physically disabled 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 naive 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 mucus 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: like what I saw made sense. But it was also very benign. Science here held no threats, no dangers. If nature in a foreign world, “images” left one troubled by the reduction of its foreignness to a collection of swirling shapes and patterns.

You don’t rest at the National Center of Photography. Even its card shop was a venue for a small, charming show, “Le dôme,” with works by Eve Arnold, Cornell Capa, Edward Murphey, among others, and all reproduced in the center’s 1993 calendar.

A show of photographs of series and sequences, “L’expérence numérique” came next. Here the decorative qualities of the first show were forgotten: normal, orderly and expected flow of sequences was broken or disrupted. High art mixed with low art, advertising hung next to portraits. But “L’expérence 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 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 unanswerable 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 Parda, 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 faces 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 displays of life in France over the past centuries. What drew me was “Kaléidos: des Amériindiens 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 Belle,” 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, reverent 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 Alice d’Amico were shown in the public library, a facility
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 J.M. Pei's redesign of the Louvre, I found "Man Ray: les Années Bazar, 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 as disseminator 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 "hôtel" 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 of Claude Baillard—a camera clearly 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 pleather holders, mounted on the walls, which contained the photographs. Carnavalet displays 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 the "temps perdu." It was the Carnavalet that employed Arreté and commissioned him to document Paris. It bought and displayed his work during his lifetime. "Les voitures d'Arreté," a show of sixty photographs of horse-drawn carriages, rams, carts, and trucks, was mounted in two galleries on the second floor. Arreté 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 slide of motorized buses and cars in Paris several years after the date of Arreté's work, this visitor had the chance to look at Arreté's images with few interruptions. What a close look reinforces is Arreté'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 Doisneau, Georges Batailles, Georges Guillaumé—who worked between 1890 and 1910 and strove to impart to photography the same "fine art" qualities as 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 Prévert showed fifty small, significant photographs of Parisian street life by Daniel Burein. 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 quirky works on display.

At a small gallery in the Marais, "La image genrée au XIXe," there were crowds to see "Enter et collect," 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 (but that, portraiture) in their appeal, and other works even more disturbing in their violent depictions of women. How the camera gazed and how the male eye invaded were to be seen 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 guest included several gallery owners, a painter, and a sculptor whose works she had 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 rooms 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 Rare Paolian Sniffice, Hocked to Death, and AIDS-Related Death. I thought of Georges de la Tour and Caravage whose dramatic lighting and lives 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, astounding, disturbing, and incredibly beautiful. One does not forget them easily.

Thirteen exhibitions in five days. I had barely cracked the last sent me before I traveled to Paris. But I had added to that list—the exhibitions of nude 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 si"cle" had not yet opened. And I also knew that I had seen Bert Stern's photographs of Marilyn Monroe or Helmut Newton's titled 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 more 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 Oszvák 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


Nito 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 Nito Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open, Dave Gardner explores the force of living faith based on the interesting spiritual movement of El Nito 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, Jose Fidencio Sistoma Constantin No was born in Guanajuato. He lived most of his adult life in a poor rural area in Espinazo, in the state of Nuevo Leon in northeast Mexico. At a very young age, some say as young as eight, el Nito Fidencio, as he was called, became a swindler or healer. His talents 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 Nito because they believe he was a child of 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 emigrated to the United States. During this time of unrest, el Nito 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 Nito even cured the Mexican president of the time, Plutarco Elias Calles.

Thanks to the intervention of the camera, many of el Nito’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 most importantly, the photographs were distributed widely among his followers very much like the images that are distributed of other saints among Catholics. El Nito Fidencio has reached the level of folk saint by popular acclaim, albeit as an unsanctioned interpretation and expression of Catholicism.


Probably the strongest elements of the book are the actual testimonies and accounts by the miraculous and others. These testimonies are sometimes personal and intimate expressions of their contact or experience with el Nito. The miraculas usually become chosen practitioners as a result of a miracle performed for them by the Nito and then work at channels to the power of el Nito to his prophesies. They are not the ones that make miracles happen; it is el Nito who, through them, performs miracles. The materials establish missions, usually in their own homes, in a special room that has an altar called a tronisa filled with images of Christ and photos and images of el Nito. 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 ways each material works differs, everyone agrees that there is only one Nito, and you must have faith for the power of el Nito 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 some important factors of el Nito 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 to complement each other nicely. The book can be a reaffirmation of the belief to 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 Nito 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 Perez-Meyer was born in El Salvador and now lives and works in Houston at the Museum of Fine Arts in the Education Department.
Carter's Magic

Elizabeth McBride

A true account of the actual is the recent poetry, for common sense always takes a history 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—however often he travels—a definitive world of mystery and absolutes, and most important, of imagery seductive, spiritual, and sexual. 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 as Pearles and Birdbright and Blessing and Elsdon Field inspire insistently rural photographs that concentrate on people, animals, and nature. Some of the bravest selections are Splendora, a study of blank planked walls meeting loneliness in the corner, and the excessively sentimental Fotot, whose insistently morning photos 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 uncommonly honest human. And each confronts human without the power of nature. Not only Fotot, but Pearles, a woodland scene, depicts nature as overwhelming man's constructions, which could only fall back: inconspicuous heaps, drowned in a dark primordial mix of lichen and mulch.

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

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 South-eastern Texas. More composed than his first, more calculated, and even more untouched with death and violence, the book represents a breakthrough, lifting the veil that masks 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 Blue Bird, Hardin County, a young blond boy with jaggly cut hair holds a snake around his body, displaying a scar on his torso and a tattoo above this 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 heavily painted backdrops, another atmosphere emerges: one of divisions, of life lived at the margins, 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 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 fascination with a spirituality, which 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 is the extremes of the disagreements and the success and power of the resolutions. In Majo, Keith Carter has combined the natural surface strength of From Uncertain to Blue with the perverse undertones of Blue Man. Majo 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.
Postcards from the Edge


Nels P. Higbie

When my lover, Blaine F. Fenster, 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. Poem for Life and Six Poems Pursued 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 between 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, vacated 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 pain-on-canvas and gelatin silver prints to video and sculpture. The exhibition includes well-known work, such as Robert Mapplethorpe's stark, photographic self-portraits of the artist, design by Keith Harvey originally produced for Art Against AIDS "On the Road" poster. Nancy Burson, Visualize This, poster. 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 child with the infection and the clustering 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 inherently 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 widows, or miracles, tiny metal charms offered to saints and deities during prayer. As Vargas states, the miracles never came. Her elegiac images do so 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, in the enjoyment of a specific holiday or their belief in the meaning of objects like milagros.

Other work confronts political issues brought to the forefront by HIV/AIDS. Compotions 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, taking 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. There 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 A (fished out), then C (closed).

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 a second print run, "Tongues of Flame," 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 Carlo; 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 the 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 Dan 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 depictions an unadorned, outdoor scene: a crowd of trees in a backwoods bayou or an aerial view of bridges connecting Manhattan with the surrounding boroughs. Insert into each photograph is a still taken from a gay pornographic film portraying various sexual acts. As he states in an interview with Blinderman, the series grew out of a trip Wojnarowicz took to Mexico City. Wojnarowicz was standing on a bluff 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 where he presents his definition of art.

The primordial urgings we call art reflect the unyielding 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, one 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. Higbie will earn a degree in English from the University of Houston this May.
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The Struggle for an Authorial Role

W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay has the initial appearance of a typical monograph for yet another category of "photographic master." Upon further investigation however, it becomes clear that Glenn G. Williamson 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, regretfully, is often absent from such undertakings of photographic history writing.

Williamson's study is best defined as a 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. Williamson introduces his subject with a brief re-reading 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 advances from engravings and drawings to the development of photography and the halftime process. The author is quick to point out, however, that this is not a technological history, but an attempt to situate Smith and his work in the institutional practice of the time, a move that is necessary to the understanding of both Smith and photojournalism.

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 still in the commercial experimentation stage in the United States, used mostly to illustrate faces 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, as@login_user_23433245], for example, was endowed with a certain authoritative role and encouraged to develop a "style" and the skill associated with this photograph with language. Luce wanted LIFE to present a point of view, constructed through the rhetorical capabilities of the photographs and layout.

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 public discourse and opinion in post-war, pre-television America. Yet with such power comes responsibility. Smith is often credited as an artist who could 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.


activities reflect Smith's active desire for control in the context 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 was watered down his anti-Franco statement. Centering on the efforts of missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer and his hospital at Lambaréné 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 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 March 15, 1954, knowing that Smith was unsatisfied with its reduced length and had threatened to resign if it went to print.

Three years' 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. Williamson treats Smith with obvious respect, while also exploring his subject with a deserved criticality. At times, it seems Williamson 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, Williamson's book often makes Smith's story seem more of a clash of egos than a conflict of ideology. Considering the profound 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 ideology. These relatively minor criticisms aside, more photographic studies like this one are much needed and long overdue.

Mark Frohman is an art historian and art critic for Public Radio International, an alternative newsweekly in Houston.
Fiction, Sex and Violence

Critical Figures, an exhibition curated by Richard Hinson and including David F. Donavan, Frank Golden, Peter Harvey, Richard Hinson, Maggie Ohey, and Donna Rydbland, 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 uncharacteristic writing of the exhibition as the work of Maggie Ohey and Donna Rydbland against the somewhat chauvinistic work of David F. Donavan and Frank Golden. Richard Peter Harvey, with his comic video and Richard Hinson with his analysis of random violence, seem to stand well away.

When you say "crime scene photography," you might expect bloody night scenes, bodies bags, flaslighting, 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 indiscernibility of these images is 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 in Gogo" 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

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 an" 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 idiosyncratic sides of the pieces. "Diazepam" (a tranquilizing drug) in an

David F. Donavan's superbly printed black-and-white portraits of women, in contrast, seem perhaps to address the agenda of "critical fiction" least convincingly in this show, Donavan photographs female models in various rural or small towns locations with the intention of giving "the viewer the idea that they are intruding into a very private portion of her subject's lives and (mocking us) in that she is being excluded from their secret." The images have a sexualized 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 pinching 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 gun of wind and holding a book in the other hand. While Donavan has a finish with the images, Donna Rydbland traces in anger at the demands a male-dominated society and the media place on a woman's physical appearance. Her ironically personal work is an installation of "scraps," seven of which are images of a pin getting progressively larger while the text above gets progressively smaller. A center "scrap" has three pairs of red shorts with text around them, and three "scraps," 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 "biten contempt for the feminine nature of (their) own bodies," writes Rydbland. "The sense of fullness and swelling of plentitude, which filled me with dignity, fate) actually the qualities of a woman's body."

Similarly, Maggie Ohey's work deals with the oppressive expectations often demanded of women in household and child-rearing roles. Ohey'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 interior 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 home. These living rooms, however, provide only a superficial and "feel good" view of a house. The true interiors are on the inside panel. The inside view includes 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 is a pleasant, lighthearted addition to this show. "Verismo" 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 "Verita," 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 amusing sound of a loudly ticking clock. To avoid being a cliché, he explains, painting at his drawing on his blackboard, a picture should not be too simple and one should "look too good or too bad." He proceeds to erase the drawing because "it might be a cliché." A good definition of a phonograph is that it is a "critical fiction" of a human experience, tainted by the selectivity of the artist's experience and reincorporated 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 con
tivations. "Critical Figures" is in certain times, quite powerful in this regard.

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receipt when he was loaded into the ambulance. A photograph of a phone booth on a street corner reads: "A man stepped 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 called the untruthfully painted feminee away." The more cloistered life a citizen is forced to live, the less interest he will have in the suffering of others, permitting, perhaps, their deaths.

In contrast to the cool irony of Hinson's photographs, Frank Golden presents us clear of the thorny 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 garage cans scattered around. "Fear of AIDS" is a female nude with glowing blue eyes holding a mask to her face in a somber contemplative 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 a ghostlike human figure appearing to be falling from and through the tree in the two corners of the frame appear the letters L and R. Golden's work is a dark, laconic, and chauvinistic look at sex and Christianity, and its appeal lies in its unshamed personal voice.
March 10, 1993

Ann Fessler
Robert Flynt
Hollis Frampton
Sally Gall
Dore Gardner
Flor Garduno
Judy Ellis Glickman
Peter Goin
E. L. Goldbeck
Luis Gonzalez Palma
Phyllis Hard
Goodwin Harding
Rick McKee Hock
Henry Horenstein
Earlie Hudnall, Jr.
Birney Imes III
Alan Janus

Michael Kennedy
Ferne Koch
Heinrich Kuhn
Gay Lang
Robert B. Longham III
Russell Lee
Arthur Leipzig
Stu Levy
Martina A. Lopez
O. Rufus Lovett
Charles Luce
Allan Ludwig/Gwen Akin

MANUAL
Neil Maurer
Lawrence McFarland
Ralph Eugene Meatyard
Ray K. Metzker

Richard Miserach
Joan Myers
Patrick Nagaizani
Barbara Norfleet
Lorie Novak
Michael Nye
Sylvia Plachy
April Rapier
Christopher Rauschenberg
Barbra Ridley
Philipp Schole Ritterman
Ron Rosenstock
Anne Rowland
Meridel Rubenstein
Janice Rubin
Sheron Rupp
Adrienne Salinger

Chuck Samuel
Else Mitchell Sanford
Naomi Savage
Charles Schorre
Victor Schrager
George H. Seely
Michael A. Smith
Sage Sohier
David M. Speer
Hans Staetjes
Sandy Stark
Edward J. Steichen
Sharon Stewart
Jim Stone
Martin Strick
Pietr Styhalski
Fannie Tapper
John R. J. Taylor
Maggie Taylor
Bill Thomas
Gwen Thomas
Ruth Thorne-Thomsen
George A. Tice
Jerry Uelsmann
Kathy Vargas
Vida
Catherine Wagner
Wendy Water
William Wegman
Jack Welpott
Clarence H. White
Charles T. Wise
Casey Williams
Geoff Winningham
Marion Post Wolcott
Bill Wright
Holly Wright
Daniel P. Younger
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.
Eleana told me later her mother was unhappy with how she looked, old and wrinkled.
"Julie's camera never lies," Eleana 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.