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WOMEN IN PHOTOGRAPHY

4 Women and Telling Stories: Links between Art and Life
Nancy Solomon recounts the theme emerging in the fourth Women in Photography Conference—women and telling stories. From "Women and the Land" to "Women and Technology," each panel discussion led to the basic act of sharing stories and strengthening the female artistic voice.

6 Women as Women, Women as Artists, Women as Photographers
The fourth Women in Photography Conference held in Houston March 24-27 is reviewed by Marilee Miller, a former co-editor of SPOT and a conference participant.

7 Carolyn Heilbrun—Excerpts from her keynote address at Women in Photography Conference

8 Women and the Faces of Aging
Aging is what makes you of it. This seems to be the essence of the varied approaches to photographic portrayals of women included in two exhibitions reviewed by Meg Highberg: "Women and the Representation of Aging" and "Nina: Portraits by Herlinda Koebel," both held in conjunction with Photography Houston/Spring 94, offered alternative views—both light-hearted and serious—of aging.

9 The Look of Love
Carole DeBakey discusses Laura Lutinsky's efforts to explore issues of love and intimacy.

10 The Adventurer
K. Johnson-Bowles interviews historian and photographer Anne Noggle, who was a captain in the U.S. Air Force when she retired in 1959 to pursue a career in photography. Noggle is the author of A Dance With Death: Personal Memoirs of Soviet Air Women in World War II.

12 Questions of Identity
The essential constructs of race are approached and answered in entirely different ways by two exhibitions. Jo O'Dell examines Pat Ward Williams' "I Remember It Well" and the group show "Portraits of Community: African-American Photographe in Texas" and the separate paths these shows took in search of answers to the foundations of racial identity.

14 Songs of the South
After growing up in the segregated South of the 1950s, Barney Iynes discovered the region's jive joints, its patrons and proprietors, and with them a stage for developing a style both technically and artistically his own. Holly Hildreth examines the artist's work and the methods he employs in capturing this vanishing subculture of the South.

15 Seeing Isn't Always Knowing
Emily Godfrey's "Classify and Construct" tests the epistemological limits of visual communication and its dependence on the way information is manipulated, used and missed. Reviewed by Ed Owscht.

16 The Artist as Exposer
The isolation, fear and loneliness often evidenced in modern life found form in Lydia Schouten's installation "Celebrating my 60th birthday alone at the blue hotel room." Marc Steaenur discusses the artist's work and the trend toward the artist acting as social critic.

BOOKS

18 Books Received
Compiled by Juan Garcia

Cover: Barney Iynes, Girl on Canfield Alley, Columbus, Mississippi, 1990

Editor's Note
To live is to have a story to tell. The artist, in particular, often releases portions of her personal story to the world in a work—a unique and powerful position indeed. But it is a double-edged sword. This revolutionary process empowers the ruler and enlightens the listener. From classical mythology forward, the art of storytelling has been celebrated and cherished by many cultures, not only as a means of education, but for bonding the participants and creating a feeling of shared purpose and history. For these reasons it seems inherently right and natural to women and storytelling, the theme of the fourth Women in Photography Conference be intrinsically linked. This powerful tradition can serve women well today by linking them to their histories while helping them toward the future.

Carolyn Heilbrun, professor emeritus, English and Comparative Literature, at Columbia University and keynote speaker at the Women in Photography Conference, addressed the importance of sharing one's story in her writings as well as in her remarks to conference attendees in Houston in March. "Essays from her address are included in this issue of SPOT," Marilee Miller, former co-editor of SPOT, sums up the conference itself with an overview of its strengths and weaknesses in her story "Women as Women, Women as Artists, Women as Photographers." Nancy Solomon recounts the fruitful explorations of the Women and storytelling theme that unfolded during Women in Photography and Telling Stories: The Link Between Art and Life. According to Solomon, the strength of this idea amounted to itself in all aspects of the conference appearing both in informational and visual settings. The Adventurer by K. Johnson-Bowles, an interview with Arne Noggle, recounts the fascinating story of a woman who rejected limits when shaping her life. Books' interview highlights Noggle's past books while previewing her newest book, A Dance with Death: Personal Memoirs of Soviet Airwomen in World War II published by Texas A&M Press. Featured in SPOT is Song of the South, an essay by Holly Hildreth, tracing the sources of the photographs of Barney Iynes on the occasion of his exhibition at the Galveston Arts Center. This photographer's twenty-five years of following the trail of the Southern restaurant known as the jive joint have resulted in a time capsule of these vanishing social spots. Reviewed in this issue by David L. Jacobs are two books, Images Congenial: New William Essel, edited by Richard Lorenz, and The Exchanged Landscape: Wyman Bullock, published by Aperture. Jacobs examines the success of these books in preserving the reputations of these two photographers.

Also in this issue, we have incorporated some design changes to the layout of SPOT. These were done in an effort to improve the presentation of the work and make it more engaging to the reader. We welcome your comments.

Karen Gillen Allen

SPOT / FALL 1994 / Houston Center for Photography

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WOMEN Telling Stories
Links Between Art and Life

This essay was based on the fourth Women in Photography Conference hosted by Houston Center for Photography in association with the University of Houston, Department of Art, March 24-27, 1994.

Nancy Solomon

"Women and telling stories" was not the announced theme of the fourth Women in Photography Conference, but it was the conceptual thread that captured the attention of participants.

The very structure of the conference encouraged the telling of individual stories. The format was one track with everyone focused on the same primary sessions and ideas. Yet, rooms and time were scheduled and available for breaking into small groups, and discussion questions were suggested, such as: If you had been supported in your resistance to gender stereotyping, how might things have been different for you? Is it possible to resolve a difficult relationship with a parent while that parent is still alive? How does that parent's death facilitate resolution?

The form of the conference also gave rise to fundamental questions. How do life and art overlap? When does the individual become universal? Where is the boundary between therapy and making art? Why grapple with personal issues if your art is not narrative, realistic, or autobiographical? The answers were not neat or complete. Months later, the questions still resound.

"Women and telling stories" was not the theme of Carolyn Hellburn's keynote address, but it was no longer far away. Women's biography is the focus of Hellburn's current work, and she opened her address with a question that she asked when examining the lives of accomplished women. How did it happen? And, what did accomplished women have in common? Her research yielded an unexpected answer: their ability to resist socialization.

How can this be done? The first chance comes early, for instance. Gloria Steinem, the subject of Hellburn's next book, avoided early socialization by not starting school until she was 11. Reaching 50 is another watermark when many women often take more risks, as if becoming 50 initiates a rite of passage marking the possibility of change.

Hellburn said: "Every woman needs to rename herself [to create a new story] and make a list of everything she wants out of [both meanings] and in her life." Understanding the truth of women's experience is essential to making these changes. Women need to talk to other women regularly to share stories, and to trust and support each other. In the nineties, she sees the best hope in women's writing groups that meet regularly, particularly "those that transform into something else."

In the days that followed, several individual presentations and panels revealed different ways that transformation grows from telling stories. Lorie Novak in the "Women and Autobiography" panel discussion described a flash of understanding. While choosing snapshots from her own life for a large-scale projection piece, she realized that she had become universal. She began to expand imagery from the lives of others, because the art itself carried a universal human message. On the same panel, Ann Feisler told how her exploration into being adopted was manifested in an installation and an artist's book titled "Grown-Up Lessons." The art was not overtly about her personal quest. Rather, Feisler confronted a homogeneity assumed by society and schools and exposed it as a mythology. She established an elementary-school setting, where the viewer encountered a student lesson requiring a family history that most adopted students would not know. Here a personal exploration was transformed into a larger societal issue.

Gay Block integrated narrative with images in a strong and emotional presentation entitled, "An Autobiography of My Mother." Block described a moment of transformation that occurred as she continued to work on the piece after her mother's death. Suddenly, she could not distinguish between her mother's version of reality and her own perception at the time.

"Women and the Representation of Aging," Anne Nagle discussed the invisibility of older women in our society—its benefits and its problems. For Nagle, a person's face "doesn't even get interesting until they're at least 60." She showed portraits and told the story of Russian women flyers who were active during World War II and are now abandoned by their society. Nagle derived her own fundraiser to help these women in conference hallways and at the Firehouse Gallery, she offered her photograph Myself as a Pilot in exchange for a $50 donation. Hellburn Kodell presented Ninas, a series of portraits and made exhibited at the Goethe Institute—Houston—images that tell a story of dignity and long life. As one student observed, "I never knew there would be wrinkles all over your whole body."

Joanna Fuchs focused on "Polyphthorous Pervenues: Female Perversions, Female Pleasures, and the Post-Monogamous Woman." She stressed the importance of telling new love stories for older women, "women with flesh that moves."

Another strategy Fuchs envisioned...
is artists developing the archetype of the crane.

June 11 was surprised to hear the "Women and telling stories" theme in Joanna Frank's lecture. I was equally surprised to find it emerge in the "Women and Advanced Technology" panel. During

her studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, Wendy Snyder MacNeil was intrigued by the way new technologies change the way that stories are told. She wanted to find a new narrative form that encourages interaction and narrows the gap between the maker and the viewer.

Surroundings and interactions with other attendees are often just as valuable as the planned sessions at any conference. The "Women and telling stories" theme continued to develop throughout the city of Houston, nearly fifty photography exhibitions were on display, and many of them showed art with narrative elements. The Firehouse Gallery offered the opportunity to see the prints of work by Gay Block, Anne Noggle, and Joan Myers shown in slide form at the conference. The greatest impact for me was Houston Center for Photography's exhibition "The Visual Diary: Women's Own Stories." Wall photographs, installations, artists' books, and video art were all presented in an exhibition that took hours to see. This element of time was crucial to every work. If exhibitions were reduced to equations, this one might be 10x/10= intimacy.

In the "Visual Diary," artists used low tech ways to narrow the space between maker and viewer. For instance, Sadie Benning used a Fisher Price toy video camera to create "Jello," an exploration of an emerging lesbian identity. There is a sense of immediacy in these videos with their simple, contrived black-and-white imagery. The viewer lives in the moment with the artist;

even her titles and credits are part of the picture. In Giving Piece a Proper Name, Detroit, Susan Rae Grant grabs the viewer's attention by integrating parts of her body such as fingernails and self-portraits punctuated by pins and intensified by text. If the use of text and image is expected in books, art and video art, it was also used by the artists like Karen Johnson showing photographs on walls. Looking in and reading the photographs in "Valuable Papers: Constructing My Father/Myself" the viewer is drawn into a story from different viewpoints and creates his or her own version of the whole.

The resistance of some conference participants to the impact of telling stories continued to facilitate me, as if the artists who attended raised questions that added another layer of inquiry to the conference. What does self-examination have to do with art? Is it essentially human communication? Isn't developing an authentic human core an ongoing part of an artist's work? How does telling stories initiate change on a personal level—for the artist and the viewer? When does the personal become universal expression, isn't all art autobiographical in some way? For artists whose subject matter is not overly personal, telling stories, developing one's authentic core, might find expression in a freer line or a more intense color.

For me, the best story that surfaced during the conference belonged to several people. During the panel "Women and the Representation of Aging," Joan Myers was showing slides of her large-scale platinum-silver dioramas portraits of elderly women. As a characteristic of her work, form and emotion combine to create powerful imagery. When Myers's modeled nude portrait of a woman who bears the mark of a radical mastectomy was projected on the screen, Arnie Ticker, curator of photography at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, called out from the audience asking for the story. The woman in the photograph had seen Myers' work in this series and offered to be a subject. Before her surgery, she had no image of what her body interests of her museum community. A woman in the audience offered to donate the photograph to the museum, and it is now in its permanent collection.

This is not just one person's story; it is four people's stories. We can label them, artist, curator, subject, and donor. But that misses the point. Their interaction reveals that telling stories is a complex expression where internal and external experiences are integrated. Each one: Speaking and hearing. Giving and getting.

Through this multi-layered example, we return full circle to that need expressed by Carolyn Hailman at the start—understand the truth of women's experience. Sharing stories is a way to find this understanding. Listening is as important as telling, and giving is as crucial as receiving. Honest stories are a powerful means of growth and expression on all levels, both individual and universal.
WOMEN as Women, WOMEN as Artists, WOMEN as Photographers

The fourth Women in Photography Conference was held in Houston, Texas, and presented by Houston Center for Photography in association with the University of Houston Department of Art, March 24-27, 1994.

Marlee Miller

Nationally renowned feminist, scholar and author Carolyn G. Heilbrun set the stage: "Women's Lives—Telling Our Own Stories." She opened the fourth Women in Photography Conference with challenges, insight and humor. Women and women's stories.

It was an art beginning, but what came after her inspiring address were three days of interaction with more than 300 women who are living their lives as women and showing it through their art, work and love.

Participants of the Women in Photography Conference came from all across the nation, with thirty-two states represented and four foreign countries. The conference was held at the University of Houston, hosted by Houston Center for Photography. The lead sponsor was Professional Imaging of Eastman Kodak Company and additional support was provided by Compaq Computer Corp., Texas Committee for the Humanities and American Airlines.

Keynote speaker Carolyn G. Heilbrun

Keynote speaker Heilbrun, who is the Avalon Foundation Professor Emerita in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, spoke of what it is that allows a woman to become "accomplished"—it is her ability to resist socialization. Some women resist socialization as girls and others have a second opportunity past 50, according to Heilbrun.

She spoke of telling the advantages of being past 50 to younger women: "It is a lot more fun being me than you. One day when you are banded down with all the marvelous thrills of youth, I hope you'll look ahead to that wonderful time when you're 50, when you can really be yourself. People don't look at you very much, but you will look at them. It is better to look than to be looked at."

Glenda Steinem is the subject of Heilbrun's next book and she quoted Steinem's 1994 commencement address at Wellesley College. Steinem suggested to the graduates that women invert the Golden Rule: "To learn to do for oneself what one has been doing for others."

As Heilbrun concluded her remarks that Thursday night, and answered a variety of questions from the audience, we knew we would soon be called upon to interact among ourselves. We all tentatively "broke out" and sat with strangers to hear their stories and possibly share our own. It began slowly. Our group decided to go around the circle, introduce ourselves and tell a little about our lives. It was a good beginning, some of us were academics, some professional photographers, a few under 30 and a few over 50.

We discussed Heilbrun's theory on power and where the women's movement had gone. Heilbrun had said: "The hardest thing about power is personal cost. We all grew up thinking that if we are nice, they'll love us. If we're good they'll love us. When you get into any institution—academic, religious, business, government—they don't love you. And power is not a source of love, it is a use of love."

One of our group members had never lacked for respect of power in her academic career, yet her husband had felt it in the business community. Another woman had raised her children on her own and felt power from that and enjoyment of her freedom after 50. Yet another woman spoke of her struggle to do her art while working full-time and mothering three children.

And so the conference began.

We were starting to talk, we were sharing our stories and bringing it all back to ourselves as women, some as visual artists, others as scholars, curators, mothers and daughters.

This aspect of interaction was a predominant theme. We weren't allowed to sit back and listen. We were forced to tell our own stories through breakout groups. The plenum of the Women in Photography conference—Jean Caslin, Executive Director of Houston Center for Photography; Adelle Horne, Houston Center for Photography Program Coordinator; and Nels Hiebig, a graduate fellow in the Women's Studies Department at Ohio State University—developed this essential difference through their experiences at previous Women in Photography conferences, similar events, feedback from more than twenty focus groups, and a desire to present women the opportunity to share and grow from one another's friendships and experiences. They had even taken the advice of a few psychologists on how to best set up the interactive groups.

From the positive responses of conference attendees, the interactive groups provided them with opportunities to personalize the broader issues being discussed at the conference. Sometimes this was very painful," wrote one woman on her conference evaluation form. "However, women must face their fears in the supportive environment of other women." A few women expressed frustration.

RECURRING THEMES

Thirty-one speakers participated, including specialists in the fields of photography, video, literature, art history, psychology, law, medicine, clinical and women's studies. The panels discussed women and the representation of aging women and their relationship to the land, women and autobiography, women and technology and glass ceilings and closed doors.

The theme winding throughout the discussions and panels, however, were not so clearly marked. Anticipating and/or celebrating ourselves and our lives as we age, exploring our relationships with our mothers and how they have impacted our lives and art, and finding strength and kinship in others' stories as we struggle to keep art from being a low priority in our lives.

In reading the participant questionnaires from the conference there are no favorite speakers or topics but there are standouts and a few disappointments.

Nationally-known artist Gay Block's moving slide show and discussion of her mother and their relationship clearly impacted the entire audience. Block photographed her mother for eighteen years but did not work with the images until her mother's death two years ago. She said that now maybe it is possible to see her mother as a person.

Block began her presentation by showing a series of family photographs—of her mother growing up, herself through the years, and her own portraits of her mother. As slides slowed, Block turned to the screen and said: "Hello mother, I love you.

She housed her mother most of her life. Block said, and felt overwhelming guilt in her presence because she had wanted her dead. "My anger interfered with my life more than my mother's. The purpose of this work is redemption for her and for me."
BREAKOUT GROUP QUESTIONS: Photography by its very nature can provide routes of interpretation that differ from traditional means. The group is a reflection of our needs for representing maternal and paternal relationships.

One of the most favored panels of the conference was "Women & the Representation of Aging" moderated by Linda Kases, professor in the School of Nursing and the director of the Center for Aging at the University of Texas at Houston Health Science Center. She was joined by German photographer Herlinde Koelbl and Mexican photographer Joan Myers Anne Noggle, a former captain of the U.S. Air Force, a photographer and photo historian; and Ohio professor and photographer Elie Mitchell Sanford.

The session focused on photographing women over 50. They spoke of the fact that in our society women must be invincible. Television and films have given little visibility to the aging female except as a caricature and seek to counter existing stereotypes, creating new ways of picturing the vitality and sensuality of their subjects.

BREAKOUT GROUP QUESTIONS:
(1) What are your greatest fears about growing old? (2) If you were to ask three questions of an older woman about growing old, what would you ask? (3) What are the things that you share with an older woman?

Both of the panels "Glass Ceiling/Closed Doors" and "Making a Living While Making Art (Homemakers or Occupations)" dealt with the realities of work in the world of photography—and working as a woman in general—whether you are an artist, curator, administrator or academician. "Class Ceiling/Closed Doors" was inspired by men in the Aaron Siskind Foundation and by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, photography curator Anne W. Tucker told us that just to think of Flip Willows is to tell yourself "Just do it—don't worry!" Tucker urged everyone to network, to turn to our colleagues for ideas of orienting ourselves to that glass ceiling were given. Other panels gave encouraging words to give up. Others spoke of the "gatekeepers" and cautioned us against looking at leadership and professionalism in traditional ways. Offer an inspirational voice at key moments, said Los Angeles photographer Pat Williams, as well as keep quiet when needed. When it comes to making art and making a living, most agree that promoting oneself and exhibiting take as much time as making the art itself, and that most people don't make a living through their work but make a living while making art.

K. Johnson Bowles gave us a list of skills needed to make a living—besides having multiple personalities. She said the one needs the ability to communicate—write and speak about one's work—organizational skills, ability to edit one's work, create promotional packets and know how to pack the art and get it sent where it needs to go.

MINUSES
Only a few panels and speakers were repeatedly listed in the conference surveys as disappointments. "Women & Advanced Technology" and "Women & Their Relationship to the Land" were two of them.

Throughout the conference, women spoke of moving more and more into using computers to create their art. Many said it was a necessity in their jobs, others were fascinated with the possibilities, the freedom it gave them. The panel didn't seem to meet the needs of the audience. "Not only were the presentations long and tedious, but most of the speakers were obviously uncomfortable addressing a large group," wrote one attendee.

"I think the topic is just too broad." The high sugar content of the food, the lack of audio visual expertise exhibited by University of Houston staff (double focusing), and the somewhat haphazard car pooling arrangements during the conference were mentioned in the questionnaires, but only briefly compared to the praise given to the HCP staff for their helpfulness and organization—Carole Herne, Sam Lasater, Michael DeVol, and HCP board member Deborah Ganz were all mentioned.

Several of the few men who attended the conference had complaints that they felt excluded. One wrote to HCP to say: "I believe that the several males attending were looked upon as observers rather than participants... You will note that none of the males ever were in discussion circles. Although this might well have been good because of the content of the discussions, it made the males feel alienated and unwelcome. Perhaps in the future there can be some way to include males from this meeting... (Yes, I know that it is illegal.) Maybe a registration category called observer." During the first session several discussion groups, men were segregated to their own groups, especially when it came to gender relations and self-esteem discussions. But later in the conference, the groups were encouraged to "adopt a man" into their discussions. Including men wasn't a major concern, according to the organizers, because the conference was designed for female photographers and administrators, and only twelve men attended.

Ideas of orienting ourselves to that glass ceiling were given. Other panels gave encouraging words to give up. Others spoke of the "gatekeepers" and cautioned us against looking at leadership and professionalism in traditional ways. Offer an inspirational voice at key moments, said Los Angeles photographer Pat Williams, as well as keep quiet when needed. When it comes to making art and making a living, most agree that promoting oneself and exhibiting take as much time as making the art itself, and that most people don't make a living through their work but make a living while making art.

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BREAKOUT GROUP QUESTIONS:
(1) How do you go about experiences that can be shared with the panel? (2) Are there experiences that were not brought out in the panel? (3) Have you developed personal methods that help you through personal or professional barriers?

EDITOR'S NOTE: THE FOLLOWING REMARKS ARE EXCEPTED FROM CAROLYN G. HEBERTON'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO ATTENDEES.

I've been thinking more and more that there comes a second chance in women's lives to resist socialization... One thing that happens to women or girls who resist socialization is that they are often what they and others call lonely. It has taken me many years to realize that loneliness is something someone can choose to be in, and that loneliness can be an active choice, anywhere. We tend to think that those who go their own way are especially lonely. I think we have to learn to call it something else.

I've been learning rather hard the help of a lot of people to find a ritual that could be undertaken, say on a woman's fiftieth birthday. To metaphorically mourn the possibility of this change. For one thing I think the woman needs to take a new name. She should rename herself. Then she should decide, make a list and write it down, of everything she wants written on her tombstone. In a first marriage, in a change partnership—anywhere. We tend to think that those who go their own way are especially lonely. I think we have to learn to call it something else.

"I know I wanted that as I was looking through my pad. I wanted a strong,"—quoting Naomi Wolf.

The hardest thing about power is its persistance cost. And that is something we all have to learn about power. We all grew up thinking if we're nice they'll love us. If we're good they'll love us. When you get into any institutions (academic, religious, governmental) they don't love you and power is not a source of love, it's a threat.

When there are women [in power] in the army, navy and all the military bodies in great numbers we'll have fewer wars. Many men go to war to get away from women.

I don't go to weddings much anymore, I've read too much feminism and I know what weddings are about. Even when they reded them, the sight of some woman who's been living with a man for ten years in a white gown always disturbs me a little. I believe very much in rituals but we must keep asking ourselves what they mean.
Women and the Representation of Aging: Gay Block, Anne Noggle, Joan Myers, and Elin Mitch Mitchell Sanford at Firehouse Gallery, March 12-April 9, 1994, presented by Houston Women's Caucus for Art: Nina: Portraits by Herlinda Kooli at the Goethe Institute-Houston, March 19-April 15, 1994. Both exhibitions were presented in association with Houston Center for Photography.

Nels P. Higberg

Carolyn G. Heilbrun writes, "[T]he last third of life is likely to require new attitudes and new courage." In Writing a Woman's Life, Heilbrun reflects upon these challenges and points out that there are few outstanding women available for women to look to for guidance as they age. One example, May Sarton, began a new journal on her 70th birthday and later published it as At Seventy. In it, Sarton discusses her attitudes towards aging:

What is it like so severe? If someone else had lived as long and could remember things sixty years ago with great clarity, she would seem very old to us. But I do not feel old at all... I suppose real old age begins when one looks back on rather than forward... but I look forward with joy to the years ahead and especially to the surprises that any day may bring.

For "Photography Houston/Spring '94," two exhibitions were displayed by five women who deal with the representation of aging. Like Sarton, these photographers, Gay Block, Joan Myers, Anne Noggle, and Elin Mitch Mitchell Sanford at Firehouse Gallery and Herlinda Kooli at Goethe Institute-Houston, created work that articulated the experiences of older women with clarity and honesty.

A sense of fun infiltrated much of the work, and Sanford's gelatin silver prints most explicitly expressed this sense of playfulness. In her images, women over 50 from Athens, Ohio, dressed up as famous women including Herta Tullmann, Marilyn Monroe, and Georgia O'Keeffe. At the fourth Women in Photography Conference on a panel exploring "Women and the Representation of Aging," Sanford discussed how the process of photographing these women revealed a group of strong, tough, independent women who did not fit the stereotypical doleful older women who needed to be cared for. Thus the images expressed more than the fun of dress-up. They also showed how the subjects took on the role and modeled themselves after these strong women from their past.

There was also an interesting sense of light that infused some of the work of Gay Block. In the Type C prints Fresh and Marxism, Block photographed each of these women in two ways. First, the photographed them clothed and seated in their homes. A sense of starchiness and stiffness surrounded these women as they sat upright and formally for the camera. Next to these images were photographs of the same women standing naked in the same setting. Literally stripped of clothing and the social expectations associated with them and their surroundings, the women laughed and relaxed.

The emphasis on the real bodies of older women carried over into the work of the other photographers. For example, one print from Anne Noggle's 1975 series "Facelift" shows the Stitches that initially remained after her eye surgery. Noggle looked directly into the camera, confronting both women like her who want such surgery for themselves and women who reject it as a tool that subverts women and makes them conform to societal expectations of beauty. In the photograph, Noggle does not hide from either scrutiny or approval. A similar sentiment holds true in the work of Joan Myers, particularly Mammatomy (1993). In this image, a woman stands before the camera holding her bra so that it covers one breast while exposing the space left by the removal of the other by a full mastectomy. Again, the woman looks directly into the camera, facing an eye that has for years forced women to hide such bodies from view.

The work of Herlinda Kooli utilized a somewhat surreal approach towards the body. Kooli photographed a long-time artistic model from Munich named Nina. Some of the images are conventional, such as Nina wearing an elegant hat with a veil while holding her poodle. In others, the camera moved closer to Nina's nude body. These images accentuate the results of the aging process, the wrinkles and softness of the skin. During the panel discussion, Sanford described how these photographs reminded her of a landscape. The use of lighting to create long shadows in a closeup of Nina's abdomen creates an ethereal world landscape because it is an image so often hidden from view.

Sanford noted that as women scholars, they begin to write and theorize about aging, and this fact is reflected in the recent writings of Heilbrun, Sarton, and others, at least as it pertains to the tradition of women. Women's voice. The same theory holds true for these photographers, as well. As they age, they present their lives to the camera and the viewer with candor, humor, and, most importantly, honesty.

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FOOTNOTES
Laura Letinsky: Venus Inferred at Lawndale Art and Performance Center, March 26-May 7, 1994 and Intimate Stages at Sally Strauss Gallery, March 10-April 16, 1994

Cara DeBusk

The Look of Love

The subject of romantic love has fascinated philosophers, writers, musicians, and artists of all media for centuries. Expressions of love and intimacy are as varied as the humans who practice them, yet certain images of love have predominated in Western culture. The female body has been used to represent “love” and “sex” from the Venus of Willendorf to contemporary advertising and film. The symbolic equation of “female body” + “sex” has had a profoundly narrowing effect on the expression of female subjectivity and female desire. Individuals of both sexes have struggled to explore female desire in ways that counter commercially-produced images of women as objects (not subjects) of desire. In particular, some women artists have tried to incorporate a woman-centered experience in work dealing with sexual expression.

Yet few artists have faced the difficult task of redefining what it means to be sexually-empowered by commercial media. In “Venus Inferred,” Laura Letinsky, who spent last year in Houston as a visiting professor at the University of Houston, attempts to deal with images of love and desire that incorporate a female subjectivity. She photographs heterosexual couples, usually young, captured in intimate moments in their own private spaces. She presents these as framed 20 x 24 inch or 30 x 40 inch Type C prints. On first viewing, the initial reaction is a series of questions: Are we looking at real people who are really in love? What is the image of love in the minds of people being photographed? What do they want Letinsky, and consequently the viewer, to see about their relationships? The answers gleaned from these photographs is that the couples show us exactly what they think we expect to see, and no more about themselves than is comfortable, which is very little.

Of the sixteen photographs shown at Lawndale Art and Performance Center, images of one couple (Robin and Ken) seemed to dominate, although they comprised only three images. This couple is an expert at imitating the classic poses of pornography: the straining, the arching, the biting of the lip. With their acceptably blonde, buffed and tanned physiques, Robin and Ken demonstrate how internalized these commercial images of sex have become. This acting shields the viewer from any glimpse of these individuals’ true feelings about one another; complex feelings that may not be present during sexual play, authentic or posed. These photographs contextualize the images of other couples so that it is difficult to read them except as staged scenarios that explore only the image of heteronormativity and coupling. This in itself could be powerful, yet runs counter to Letinsky’s goal.

The female subjectivity alluded to in “Venus Inferred,” which Letinsky represents here by posing many of the couples so that the woman faces the camera, is Letinsky’s strength. She favors the viewer to contemplate the possible realities of each woman. What is she thinking? How does she feel about being photographed? What does she think of the man with her who is gazing at her in such a lovingly-proprietary way? How does she relate to the female who is photographing her? Why is she doing this? These questions are never answered adequately in the photographs themselves. It is noteworthy that in the one image of herself with her partner, Letinsky poses herself looking down and away from the camera. Where is her subjectivity?

Letinsky’s stated goal in making these photographs is to explore issues of love and intimacy—renderness, vulnerabilities, regret, and disgust—through male/female couples in various stages of intimacy, with an emphasis on female subjectivity. Unfortunately the result is only a “posed” intimacy, and very little resolution beyond sexual practice. The question is: is it really possible to get to the highly-couples feelings that couples experience only through representing them in a sexual context? Is it possible to achieve intimacy and authenticity through photography that is so loaded with implications of voyeurism and pornography?

Letinsky explores the issue of female subjectivity with greater success in the exhibition “Intimate Stages” at Sally Strauss Gallery. Again, using large Type C prints, Letinsky presents both couples and women alone. Far and above the strongest work in either of these exhibitions are Letinsky’s photographs of women alone. One image depicts a woman, perhaps 30-40, hugging alone on a couch dressed in a silky slip. The traditional pose, referencing a history of art crowded with paintings and photographs of hugging women who have been put on display for the pleasure of men, is subverted by the expression on this woman’s face: an intricate mixture of desire, loneliness, fear and amusement that says volumes about how many women relate to themselves and their own feelings.

These quietly powerful images are simultaneously beautiful and disturbing. The women are seen in moments where they are both vulnerable and strong, seeming to be feeling a mixture of emotions that draws the viewer to look deeper.

Included in the exhibition are more images of couples, with many of the same problems as the work in the Lawndale show, yet the context is much altered by the presence of the photographs of women. In “Intimate Stages,” much more is being said about the issues of self and desire that women face, in or out of relationships with men. The women alone may seem sometimes sad, or frustrated, but they are always self-possessed. The women in relationships look questioningly at the camera, as if to ask if the male partners gave them with love and desire that seems so skinny or easy to own-ership. The work in “Intimate Stages” alludes to the complex issues that women face in relating to themselves and their partners with a power and thoughtfulness absent in “Venus Inferred.” These subtle issues of self-identity in the face of love are delicately and successfully addressed in the less overtly-sexual images.

Cara DeBusk is a photographer and video artist, teacher, and the curatorial assistant at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in the Film and Video Department.

Laura Letinsky, Untitled, 1990, original in color

Laura Letinsky, Untitled, Francesca and Don, 1992, original in color

SPOT / FALL 1994 / Houston Center for Photography
THE Adventurer

K. Johnson Bowles

"I think I've always had a sense of adventure. It doesn't happen to everyone."

- Anne Noggle

Joseph Campbell, explorer of societal and personal myth and "self-construction," has examined the individual's need and/or desire to seek self-actualization as opposed to conforming to options thrown upon one from chance or inaction. He describes this process as "following your bliss." According to Campbell, the path to fulfillment is blocked by many obstacles, some internal and some external, and great personal effort—and risk—is required. The person who successfully follows his/her bliss recognizes the risks and accepts them as part of life's experiences. As one progresses, fear dissipates and life's "shoulds" and "should nots" are forgotten. Such strong people become the heroes of society, those that break, or set, the archetypes to which we compare our life experiences.

Anne Noggle is one of Campbell's strong people. She has always followed her dreams and desires and lived a life filled with the exceptional—exceptional to everyone but her. First she found her spirit and breath in flying, both physically and metaphorically, as a pilot and as a photographer. She has challenged conventional views of women in their life and in print, thriving on the energy and fulfillment her experiences have produced. In 1939, at the age of 17, she gained her pilot's license. From 1943-44 she was a Woman Air Force Service Pilot; from 1945-53 a flight instructor, air show stunt pilot, and crop duster pilot; and then a captain in the United States Air Force from 1954-59.

In 1959 she retired from the Air Force due to disability and decided to return to college. About this time in her life Noggle recalls "I was excited about the possibility of going back to school. At first, I decided to be an art historian. I attended the University of New Mexico when I was 37. In my last semester Van Deren Coke came to the university as chairman of the art department and started the photography program. So I took a class in photography." In Noggle's first photography book, Silver Lining, Noggle explains the power of photography had over her. "It was the first time since I'd been grounded that I felt completely happy. I knew what I was going to do for the rest of my life."

Noggle finds being a pilot and being a photographer fulfilling in much the same way. "The similarities between photography and flying are that you are totally independent. Once you're off the ground flying you are completely on your own. I've always wanted to be completely independent and photography is a very important thing.

You either rise or fall because of that. There is no question in your mind about who is responsible."

Being a pilot also affected her way of looking at the world when she began to photograph. "Initially, I used a wide-angle lens to take in all I wanted around me. I used to look at things and really look at them as portraits."

Her influences are as wide-ranging as Ansel Adams, Sander, Avedon and the like. Noggle contends, "The only one who influenced..."
me was August Sander. I liked the very straight-forwardness of what he was doing, even though he was categorizing the people. My greatest influence was having lived and done all the things that I had before I approached photography. Some of my friends had died flying. I had lived in Europe. I had seen an awful lot right down to the raw bone. I believe that it was my experience of life more than it was external influences that caused me to photograph the way I do.

Nogga’s insistence on doing things independently and on her own terms is deceptive. She is a humanist nourished by her relationships and life experiences. Her photographs are not those of an outsider looking in or of cold scientific categorization by an anthropologist. “My approach is very personal. It is the way I feel, it is the rapport between myself and the person being photographed. What I wrote some time ago I still find to be true. To look straight into a face and find a pulse of what but strength, and beauty and humor and the aging of real human beings whose lives are so visible. Now I am one of the elderly and I use my self-images in a humorous way, being perhaps naive, reminding us of the sensuality and playfulness that remains with us even as ancient citizens. And I offer it to the viewer in hopes that while they are enjoying the images they will also see us as visible human beings. Attitudes are changing and the elderly are speaking up nowadays.

“The second book, For God, Country and the Thrill of It, 1999, explored the uniqueness of Women Air Force Service Pilots. It was the first book I had ever done that was formal. I photographed a good number of people in a short period of time at a reunion of Women Air Force Service Pilots. I felt it was time to photograph us. I knew we were special in relation to what we had done. In the late ’30s, it was uncommon for women to fly airplanes. I wanted to see if there was something visual I could photograph their snapshots from World War II. The book is called A Dance with Death: Personal Memoirs of Saint Airwomen in World War II. The text is so powerful I decided to make the images secondary; it is not a coffee table book.

“They (the Russians) were the first women ever to be in combat. I think it was the only freedom they ever knew. Most of them were born about the time of the Communist Revolution and spent their whole lives under that dictatorship. To get to fly in an airplane was a real release. They were such daredevils in the air! Once they were off the ground, as long as they fulfilled the mission, they got away with naughtly things like slow rolling the field—things they would have never done, never allowed to do during peacetime.

The interesting thing is that they are a lot like us at least in looks. There is a powerful thing in them that gives them a sense of self. They have certainly proven themselves.

Nogga and the Russian women developed a decisively caring friendship going beyond the distance implied in the artist/model relationship. “When I arrived in Russia, the women came to my hotel where I interviewed and photographed. The very fine ones that came gave me bear hugs and a kiss on either cheek. Even though I couldn’t understand the language there was understanding in a number of ways. We were the same age. We had been in the same war helping each other. We were all pilots or crew. There is something in those things that makes you alive. We formed a friendship in spite of the lack of language through our translator. I never felt the distance that might have been between us.”

Nogga’s concern for their well-being turned to action. “Since they have to spend all their money on food they have nothing left over. They can no longer afford medications from the West. I carried over a lot of medicine. What I took over there did not solve the problems, but every little bit counts. I realized that in order to raise the money for the medicine I would have to do something. I made a whole bunch of prints of myself as a pilot and offered them to anyone who could give at least $50 I raised $8,000. That’s a lot of prints.”

The content of Nogga’s photographs express the strength of women. “Women have many modes of expression and each adds to our knowledge of theme, style of hair, makeup, clothing, almost everything about her is chosen to effect her self-image. The body, the stance, the smile and then the face, the eyes, the face—all of it to see if there was something visual

Anne Nogga’s, Manjya Dalton, photo: 1991

and impressive. And on the face of an older woman you can often trace a life, not just a mood. I believe when women are old they grow stronger. Not physically of course but inner strength. I find them to be beautiful. I do and don’t call myself a feminist, I think the ideas of the basics of feminism I certainly agree with. I don’t call myself that for one thing. I don’t call myself much of anything. I’m not a joiner: but I do believe in the rights of women.”

Nogga, in her life’s process (or progress) did not purposely reject the typical for the atypical, for her beliefs was not in being a rebel but to be completely herself, an individual in search of her soul’s desire and her heart’s excitement. Just as with her subjects, on her surface, from looking at her or talking to her in everyday conversation, she could be anyone/everywoman. Just as with her subjects, it’s only through her photographs and writings that those who are not intimates of hers can experience her uniqueness. Through her documentation of her own and other women’s lives, she has significantly contributed to an expansion of expectations of what is possible/typical for anyone/any woman. But Anne was just being herself.

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Anne Nogga’s, Manjya Dalton, from A Dance with Death.

Anne Nogga’s, Valentina Volkova-Tikmanova, from A Dance with Death.
I Remember It Well
by Pat Ward Williams at the Community Artists Collective, co-sponsored by Houston Center for Photography, and Houston Women's Caucus for Art, with funding from Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, March 26-April 30, 1994 and Portraits of Community: African American Photography in Texas, group exhibition, at Diversoworks, March 19-April 24, 1994.

Jo Ortel

In her talk at the Women in Photography Conference, Pat Ward Williams posed some seemingly straightforward questions: "How, she wondered, do we use the term 'race'? What does race mean? How do we evoke the images of race?" Two exhibitions on display in Houston in the spring of 1994, including Williams' own at the Community Artists Collective, offered opposing but complementary ways of addressing questions of racial identity. "Portraits of Community: African American Photography in Texas," hosted by Diversoworks, was representative of the view of race as an essential fact, and from this starting point it celebrated the richness and variety of African American experience. By contrast, "I Remember It Well," Williams' installation, looked more critically at the underlying concept of race and examined how racial identity is constructed through representations.

"Portraits of Community" showcased the work of fifteen African American photographers, many of whom began their careers in the 1930s and 40s, and most of whom earned their livelihood by providing services within their communities. Commercial studio portraits and "glamour" shots hung beside photos of the urban landscape framed within a self-consciously modernist high art aesthetic. The photographs documented both the ordinary and the extraordinary events and individuals in various African American communities in Texas. From photographs of parades, weddings, confirmations, and church ground-breaking ceremonies, to Lucie Martin's poignant photographs of a mournful Coretta Scott King, and Robert Whitney's pleasing Idle Things (1957) composed within a more formalist aesthetic, the "portraits" of African American community presented was rich and multifaceted. In its eclectic selection, the exhibit offered a powerful and textured alternative to the stereotyped (and often negative) image of African American identity so pervasive in our media saturated visual culture.

Defining one's identity, whether with words or with images, can be empowering, and empowerment constitutes an important step in any liberatory struggle, as African American cultural philosopher bell hooks has pointed out. She writes, "a dimension of the oppression/exploited, exploited/ exploited relationship is that those who dominate are seen as subjects and those who are dominated objects. As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject." Later, hooks goes on to write that "oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story." Taken together, the works in this exhibition defined a reality, shaped an identity, just as individually each photograph had been framed by an African American photographer who had a story to picture, a reality to name. In its overall conception and its details, "Portraits of Community" was constructive, hopeful, active it sought to replace invisibility with representation and recognition.

Still, there was something troubling about the definition of race that lay just beneath the surface. "Portraits of Community" embraced unproblematically the concept of race as something permanent, inalienable, and natural (as opposed to socially constructed). As Rosemarie Tong has written, "falling into the trap of essentialism... is an analytic dead end as well as a political danger." Because the essentialism rests and indeed, celebrates the categories of race as they have been produced historically, the possibility still exists that these categories can be used to justify marginalization and oppression. Ironically, "Portraits of Community" exploitation just as readily as it can be used as a strategy for empowerment. As Tong has written, essentialist claims about what makes certain groups of people the way they are (for example, women, blacks, Jews) are the political and philosophical constructions of conservatism. The history of essentialist arguments is one of oppression telling the oppressed to accept their lot in life because "that's just the way it is." The practice of lynching in this country is an example of what happened when, instead of understanding that race is a socially constructed (and therefore arbitrary) system of classification, a community of people operated under the belief that race is fixed, constant, and therefore constitutive of a given person: individuals were singled out and murdered in the most gruesome ways "because of their race." In her installation at the Community Artists Collective, Pat Ward Williams took an alternative approach to the issue of identity. Whereas "Portraits of Community" accepted race as an essential fact, Williams' art reminds us that the very concept of race is itself a social construction. Her work seeks to analyze and scrutinize the processes by which identity and difference are constructed.

For her pieces exhibited at the Collective, Williams used photographs and snapshots gleaned from her family's phone albums, many of which her father had taken. Some, enlarged to mural size, had been overlaid with unaltered snapshots, great swaths of paint, and bits of handwriting or penciled text; others were combined with found objects. In Unhappy Children, for example, nine snapshots were tacked to the wall around a simple wooden shelf in a random arrangement that recalled the way treated photos and mementos get wedged among miscellaneous clippings and coupons on

Questions of Identity

American life in the nineteenth century. Included here was a sizable number of tintypes made by anonymous photographers of equally unknown African American sitters. In addition, there was a group of four or five photographs hidden from view beneath draped patches of black fabric. When the viewer tilted the thongs, horrific scenes of lynchings and lynching victims were revealed. Hanging beside the door that served as both the entrance and the exit to the exhibit, these photographs beheaded, both literally and figuratively, the main body of photographs of African Americans by African Americans in the main hall. The lynching photographs serve as a stark reminder of the "trap" of "essentialism," of the way essentialism can be used as justification for oppression and exploitation just as readily as it can be used as a strategy for empowerment. As Tong has written, essentialist claims about what makes certain groups of people the way they are (for example, women, blacks, Jews) are the political and philosophical constructions of conservatism. The history of essentialist arguments is one of oppression telling the oppressed to accept their lot in life because "that's just the way it is." The practice of lynching in this country is an example of what happened when, instead of understanding that race is a socially constructed (and therefore arbitrary) system of classification, a community of people operated under the belief that race is fixed, constant, and therefore constitutive of a given person: individuals were singled out and murdered in the most gruesome ways "because of their race." In her installation at the Community Artists Collective, Pat Ward Williams took an alternative approach to the issue of identity. Whereas "Portraits of Community" accepted race as an essential fact, Williams' art reminds us that the very concept of race is itself a social construction. Her work seeks to analyze and scrutinize the processes by which identity and difference are constructed.

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some other signifier of middle-class American propriety.
To four of the women in the mural, Williams has added gaudily bright paint. One seems enfolded by flames; torches of red paint leap from her head and spread upward onto the wall above. Two other women have been singled out, given painted dresses, blue and green. Here, too, the paint extends beyond the mural and drips down the wall below in sloppy rivulets, as if in mockery of the elaborate care with which the women have presented themselves.

In an earlier version of Lovely Ladies, Williams included text that read: "As a child of the '60s I often criticized my mother for not upholding the race by being more Afro-Centric. I realize now that learning to use the correct fork was her idea of progress." This text reveals a fruit line in Williams' thinking about identity, one that the artist herself apparently recognized before the Houston exhibitions of Lovely Ladies. Williams saw her mother emulate and aspire to white, middle-class values and lifestyles, and she interpreted this as her mother's attempt to evade differences between black and white—
as if racial identities were monolithic, fixed, and unchanging. Yet Williams' own work suggests that race and identity are neither stable nor permanent. Our various identities are always changing in endless reconfiguration. Different companies, different settings, different circums- tances: we continually dip on identities like so many items of clothing from a safe rack. Still, we communicate our values to others. Just as cultural values concerning desirable skin, eye, and hair color were conveyed to the little black girl in Unhappy Children through her little blonde, blue-eyed doll, Mother's preferences and aspira-

I and my pictures," Williams compels us to consider the relationship between self and the representation of self. What role, she seems to ask, does the photographic image play in our understanding of who we are? Williams gently prods us to acknowledge that history, memory, and identity are produced in and through representation. Moreover, by phrasing a question that has complicated implications as a simple "if-then" equation, much as a child might, the artist allows us to see the naiveté of believing in and seeking such absolutes as a simple truth, a single history. These concerns reappear with greater nuance in Lovely Ladies, an enlarged wall-size photograph of ten glamorous women of color lined up in a companionable row, their arms clasped around each other's waists. The women wear formal evening dresses and sparkling jewelry, and flash beaming smiles at the camera. Their hair has been straightened, curled, coiled, and pinned into stylish coiffures. Superimposed on the enlarged photo are tiny snapshots in which (presumably the same) women are shown at other moments in their lives, posed before a shiny automobile, in a fur coat, or with their blue eyes, she was no one and nothing. In her art, Williams consistently addresses the construction of identity. Her work interrogates "the inaccurate and interlapping processes which work together to produce all seemingly 'natural' or 'given' identities." She explores how we learn who we are by taking a dose, critical look at the sites and the mechanisms where and by which identity and difference are produced.

In her book, The Blue Eye, Tani Morrison tells the tragic story of Pecola, a young black girl in Ohio who prayed every night for blue eyes. Pecola was convinced that if she only had blue eyes, she would be beautiful, she would be noticed and her life would be perfect. Her parents hoped to stop fighting, her father would not drink, her brother would stop running away from home. Of course, Pecola never actually received her blue eyes, but she was finally noticed, by her drunk father, who raped and impregnated her. I was reminded of Morrison's story as I viewed Par Ward Williams' installation last spring. Williams' work is not pitched at the same level of high emotional intensity as The Blue Eye, but her work does explore the processes by which we learn that we are different, the processes by which Pecola, for example, came to believe that without blue eyes, she was no one and nothing. In her art, Williams consistently addresses the construction of identity. Her work interrogates "the inaccurate and interlapping processes which work together to produce all seemingly 'natural' or 'given' identities." She explores how we learn who we are by taking a dose, critical look at the sites and the mechanisms where and by which identity and difference are produced.
Songs of the South

This essay traces the evolution of Birney Imes’s work and was inspired by the exhibition Juke joints at the Galveston Arts Center July 16-August 28, 1994, Represented by Radcliffe Morgan Fine Art, Houston.

Holly Hildebrand

As a child growing up in the segregated South of the 1960s, Birney Imes says he never faced the question of race head on. What he calls the “richness and diversity of a culture” had been hidden from him, and when he began photographing in the 1970s he chose, as a way to overcome his “ignorance,” the rural life and culture of his native Mississippi.

University Press of Mississippi, 1999 — Whipping Pines — University Press of Mississippi, 1994. Many of the Mississippi clubs portrayed in Juke Joint are gone now, and since he took these clubs on as subjects in 1983, Imes has extended his geographical range to Texas. A selection of his Texas photographs were exhibited at the Galveston Arts Center. As a first look, the world of Imes’ juke joints seems other-worldly, even ghostly. Imes himself admits that although he’s been photographing the same subject for nearly twenty years and people understand what he is trying to accomplish, he remains “an alien of sorts, coming into a world in which I’m an outsider.” Yet human beings in general seem alien in the world of the juke joints; rare is the figure who makes a solid appearance in our culture in these photographs. For instance, pool players in Riverview Lounge. (Shaw, 1984), are transparent blues, and in Leaded Light, (Leeland, 1983), the face of a man, cut in hand, is partially hidden by a translucent red car. Even when figures are sharply defined—a man standing by a “King of Bees” sign in Emma Beryl Place, (Marcella, 1989). custommen at The Playground Club, No. 2, Louisa, 1983.—they often serve only to remind us how odd their lives—and how far from the realm of possibility—are the often regretful,。vicious imagery of their surroundings.

Imes explains that the ghostly blurs in his juke joint photographs resulted from a preference for as full lens apertures as he could achieve adequate depth of field. This required exposure times that ranged from several seconds to several minutes, and any movement within the frame usually appeared as one of the ghost-like blurs.

Instead of trying to control them, Imes let the blurs occur, adding to the mystery and the power of his photographs. But even without figures or “ghosts,” Imes makes the human presence almost palpable, and, therefore, poignant. The textures of the walls, the layers of thick, bright paintings, the signs promising sexual Nurena (“Sooner or Later”) or warning against “No Drunk Language,” the empty beer cans left on empty tables, and the empty chairs—all these bespeak the dreams and foibles of humanity. Someone might have left his beer can on the table, a bed might be rumpled and unused, no one might be playing the scattered balls on the oak-like green of the pool table, but Imes seems to be saying, “They’ll be right back in a minute, maybe not the same person, maybe somebody different, but somebody.” There is even a corne de sable quality to some of them: in The Sexual Inn (Gonzales, 1989), a clock marks the time next to an orange, yellow and black mural of male and female Playboy bunnies. “Yo Baby Yo Baby You,” the male bunny is saying. It is a Mississippi Delta variation on the gift of a would-be lover’s rose, a reminder that tomorrow we die. In one of the most beautiful photographs in the Galveston exhibit, Imes recalls Van Gogh with saturated, chrome yellow, emeyp paint and suggestion of imminent return. Carle’s Place, (Gladewater, 1993), is reminiscent of the painter’s portrait of his own smile.

Part of the power and interest of Imes’s photographs comes from the juxtaposition of dream and grotto reality; as Muriel’s Place; (Merigold, 1989), a painting of lovers hangs next to a crude sign that says, “Please do not put cups on or cars on the table. Thank you, Monkey.” The bright yellow Magy: Star, (Falcors, 1984), seems never to have been touched by fortune, and Christmas lights on a dilapidated Ford’s Place bed at the end of a dirt road (LeFlore County, 1989). Similarly, Developmental Dance, (Tylers, 1993), in the Galveston exhibit offers a contrast between the dole bege of the building itself and the promise of something exciting playing in the reflection of lights in a puddle on the muddy drive. In his introduction to Juke Joint, novelist Richard Ford tells the story of one of Imes’s friends who suggested that the juke joints had never really existed on earth and were only the subject of Imes’s imagination. Ford says Imes laughs at the story — and well he should. For while Imes makes the juke joints seem exotic, he shows us all too much how they are rooted too solidly in this world.

Imes shows us places that, although unable to stop time, still manage to slow it down; his prime subject here is Whipping Pines, a restaurant bar built in 1949 with a “black side” and a “white side.” The lord of Whipping Pines was Blaine Clayton “Trigler,” and when Imes found the place in 1976, he struck up a friendship with Trigler and Rose. The black woman who worked there for decades, gradually taking over the run of the place, made the “white side” of Whipping Pines unfilmable, so Blaine turned it into his “archives” and moved over to the “black side.” Fascinated by this world of the old melding into the new, Imes began photographing Whipping Pines and Blaine.

A salty old character, Blaine is captured by Imes firing off his guns, celebrating his birthday, smoking his cigars, and sitting in bed. Moments and memorabilia, ranging from family photographs to old jukebox title cards to newspaper clippings about a Chuck Berry arrest, become elements of fascinating time capsules as Imes photographs them in bright colors stored in the old cigar boxes that fill Whipping Pines. But even here the clock hasn’t entirely stopped. The demarcation of black and white is no longer enforced; after the death of his wife, Blaine came to depend more and more on Rose, and one of the most touching photographs, Blaine and Rose, 1986, shows him with his arm affectionately about her shoulders. Rose wears a gentle smile.

Joyful, skeptical, weary, calm—these are the other faces Imes gives us in the photographs of Portrait to House taken between 1979 and 1991. From barbecues to baptisms, ball games to barbecues, Imes shows us the spectrum of human activity in rural Mississippi. In one of the most moving photographs we see the arm of a black woman reaching down to hold the hand of a white child. The child wears a poor, but turn a few pages and you will see the contagious joy of Alligator group. (Alligator, Mississippi, 1982), or witness the remembrance of Goldsmith baptism. (Crawford, Mississippi, 1979). Intimacy, tenderness, openness, and sensitivity mark the work of Birney Imes, and his involvement with the life of the South reflects the viewer as well, for the benefit of human understanding and compassion.

A former photo editor, Hildebrand is a writer, critic and playwright.

Since those days in the 1970s when he began rambling around the countryside with his camera, Imes’ work has evolved from taking black-and-white photographs of people and events in Mississippi to the portraits, in exotic, saturated colors, of juke joints and the “irresistible” world of the restaurant bar that he discovered at Whipping Pines in 1976. Three books display many of these photographs: Portrait to House — Smithsonian Institution Press by Constance Sullivan Editors, 1994 — in the Photographers as Work series; Juke Joint —
Seeing Isn’t Always Knowing

Classify and Contain, an installation by Emily Godfrey, at Houston Center for Photography, Gallery X, June 3–July 3, 1994

Ed Osowski

A large, red, plastic sign, hanging from the ceiling and positioned over a wooden desk, greeted the visitor to Emily Godfrey’s "Classify and Contain."

ART INDEX

the sign announced.

REFERENCE & INFORMATION

it offered. And, then it encouraged the viewer to

ASK QUESTIONS HERE.

Paul Hester, Installation photograph of "Classify and Contain," 1994

Asking questions is at the very center of Godfrey’s installation. Specifically, Godfrey is concerned with how the visual information found in the photographs (and related media) can trick, mislead, and misinform. Her questions are basic to the very nature of epistemology: how, why, and what we know.

Godfrey takes her cues from two sources, both of which address the question of how information is manipulated. In the center of the gallery she placed a desk. Be- hind it and waiting for a reference librarian to take her place was a chair; quite ordinary, on first inspection, seemingly quite sturdy, also, with a passage inscribed rather crudely into its back. Quoting a passage from the story: "The Analysical Language of John Wilkins" by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, the passage claimed to derive from a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" that contained an early system for classifying animals. There are fourteen ways, the encyclopaedia advises, not all of which are mutually exclusive, to arrange animals. First are: those animals "belonging to the emperor," a category large enough to include all those that follow. But the category of " tame" animals excludes those that are "learned." Those that are "drawn with a very fine camel brush" may include those "that from a long way off look like flies." Borges has found—and Godfrey is clearly taken by—this systematic ordering that is, actually, illogical or irrational, certainly non-linear, surely imperial.

Her second cue can be found in five medium-sized panels of text spread across one wall that reproduced the "tables" or classification systems employed by the Library of Congress to catalog books in two areas—Technology (Class T) and Fine Arts (Class N). Among the arts listed in Class N—painting, sculpture, drawing—one does not find photography. It is with the other tools of technology that the Library of Congress classification system places photography, because of its origins in eighteenth and nineteenth century experiments with optics and related visual equipment.

What Godfrey has done in "Classify and Contain" is look at the ways in which information and, here, specifically the information found in photography is used identified by the name of the photographer, the world’s title, and a date. One pulled out the decks large enough to find twenty-eight compartments, each one large enough to hold one of the cards and each compartment labeled with a category: "children," "male nude," "male female," "portraits," "urban scene," "botanical," "the blur" (a favorite of mine), "vacation," "industry," to cite just a few. The cards, spread out across the desk, were waiting, inviting, encouraging the visitor to impose order on them, to box and contain them.

One began to work, or began to play. Because the seriousness of Godfrey’s installation left room for great amounts of humor and wit. One could take the Chinese perspective. Or one could proceed with the perspective suggested by the Library of Congress tables. Where does one put the female nude by Clarence White? Into the box labeled "male nude," of course, until one spotted another category, "self-reflexive photography" is complicated by the most fluid part of the information equation: ART.

How context can skew one’s reading of the photographic image is made clear when one uses the card catalog that sits on the desk’s left edge. Here the official symbol of how the library controls and arranges access to information is made into anything but an authority figure. Look under the heading "Photography" and one does not find the San Francisco organization housed at the Ansel Adams Center. What one finds, barely larger than a postage stamp, is a small black and white photograph of Georgia O’Keeffe. Yes, she was indeed a friend of photographers (Stieglitz, Strand, Gilmour, among others), but, how odd, how enlightening, how funny is Godfrey’s choice of illustration? Look under the category "Recollecting Flies at a Distance" and one finds two images—Knud Rasmussen’s 1890 photograph New Year Drill of the Japanese Fire Brigade and an other, dated 1860, by Alexander Gardner showing the Lincoln conspirators’ausasus hanging from scaffolds. Yes, indeed, they resemble flies when the image is so reduced to fit on a small card.

Godfrey subtly pushes one to conclude that any system that attempts to control and contain by its very nature is aggressively limiting, is about reducing the power of the object that is "contained," is, in the case of the images which quite people with flies, about reducing the person to the non-person.

For Godfrey information contained in the photographic image is not fixed by cultural schemes but is trick and unwilling to sit quietly in a box. She fills one corner of the gallery with crumpled sheets of newspaper that have seemingly exploded from the pages of three sculptural books that stand over them. Godfrey urges the viewer to recognize that the ways in which photography functions are too many and too alive to stay in one place. In "Classify and Contain" she acknowledges those points in a clever, intelligent, and playful manner.

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

FOOTNOTES

1. It is instructive and amusing to see how one dictionary visually makes the point Godfrey is making. What does one look up in the dictionary of "decollage" in the first edition of the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1976) one finds a photograph of Marilyn Monroe. Interestingly, Monroe herself does not merit an entry in the dictionary, although President James Monroe does. The date of Monroe’s photograph and its photographer are not provided. Subsequent editions of the dictionary cropped her illustration.

2. Godfrey deliberately made the process of seeing and knowing difficult. Two walls of Galler Y were lined with small specimen boxes, each one about one cubic inch in size, which contained miniscule versions of "The Twenty Biggest Pictures in Gardiner’s Art through the Ages," scaled down with such exactitude that much certainty of what one was viewing. One looked and squinted and finally identified the images only because one had seen these famous images reproduced so many times before.

3. In the profile of his Order of Things, Foucault quotes the Borges’ passage that Godfrey finds so important and goes on to describe how, upon reading the section in Borges, he began to laugh, laughing from within himself at Borges’ claim that systems of classification are based on the perceived systems of classification that are classifications of the same names, he, writes, are actually efforts to "name the wild proliferation of existing things."

SPOT / FALL 1994 / Houston Center for Photography 15
The Artist as Exposer

Celebrating my 40th birthday alone at the blue hotel room... was an ambiguous occasion. I claimed unreasonably to be about a single woman's feelings of fear and loneliness living in New York City, where in it was a display of multiple levels of fragmentation. I was fortunate to meet Schouten and exchange a few ideas with her during her stay. Many of our observations seemed similar, perhaps because we share the same nationality (Dutch) and experiences of living in this country. As European nations we have a penchant of coincidence of condecoration towards the United States, depicting the egocentricity that seems to cover every facet of life in this country. Life here is visu-
ally and physically more tumultuous (as is the case with the artist's creative process and the accompanying artists and flaming lights of the police cars more loud. Mural is more analytical where and frequent, and the television viewers' appetite for highbrow-
ness is unfettered; the television screens and manufactures heroes (O.J. Simpson) out of ostentatiously gifted but effectively anony-
mous individuals and then glows with- out compunction (helicopter videos of a white truck driving down a freeway) at their disposal, while laughing the way to the bank. The public appearance of someone in the nude brings out loud proclamations of "pornography" which our proselytism seems hardly necessary for sexual activity behind closed doors. Life in Europe just doesn't seem as dramatic.

Her installation came to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts at the Julio S. Souto Gallery in New York, where it had been previously shown. In addition to being a photographer, Schouten is a sculptor who balanced a performance art backdrop; she is also well versed in the projection of her own films. Her installation consisted of sculpture, drawing and photography. It was also proof of the blurring of lines between artistic media, something that applies to the work of the photographer, who were displayed on the large front windows of HFC gave little hint of the intimacy the theme-processing work within. The show was a reflection of life as a woman today under a constant threat of violence, and the ensuing feeling of personal isolation. This woman was dramatically symbolised through a bodiless female form being in a bed in the middle of a blue-green bedroom. Long locks of hair from her sleeping head flowed over the bedclothes. The bed was actually a bulbous, transparent mattress filled with substances and yellow, frilly bedspread. The glowing effect originated from a strong light source underneath. It created what seemed like a tongue-in-cheek, art historical reference to a Dürer's Self-Portrait.

On the surrounding walls were the blurry and ominous television-programmed images of captured murderers: male faces that appeared to be the spectres at a wake. They had behind lines of text from sexually-charged personal ads. Superimposed over the twisted face of a dishevelled man with a black beard read: "SWM, 40, depressed but somewhat glb and has nice manners. I need a kind woman to rehabilitate me." Another, over a fence, unempt face read: "GWM, 26, healthy with great appearance & I'm HIV + like Lewis Jones. Interested in similar F who likes weekend and fun times." Around the room there were five, small round tables covered in a translucent white cloth. On the surface of these holdit tables were transparencies of female faces, the victims of violent crime. The sculptural execution of this family of elements was quite extraordinary. The normative formalism holding up the tables and bed clearly took some careful design and thoughtful use of lighting to create these glowing volumes. The use of these sculptural devices aided in the objectification of the victims and the assemblage alike. Moreover, it was impossible not to notice the glaring irony of the missing bodies. The supposed victims were of a body under assault, a body denied, and a body "celebrating" its fourth of yearless end. The clearly sexual content of the text and the persistent reminders of vio-
lation, refer to a body who, though visually absent, is strongly present in the mind of the viewer.

The appropriated imagery (taken from New York City's nightly television news) poignantly exaggerates this distance from the body. The (sexual) murderer's assault of the body, echoed the television's removal assault of its viewers' bodies, through the nightly propagation of fear and sensational-
ism. Even the viewer cannot disassociate him-
self from this relationship. By hallucinating on the faces of the victims and their murderers, the television viewers complete a parasitic circle. Promoting the viewer's feelings of guilt is probably the artist's intent, but I doubt this work is simply morbidizing.

The artist is encouraging introspection and highlighting contradictions. She is high-
lighting the tyranny of the spectator, where the spectator becomes the spectacle, where the innocents become guilty. Perhaps un-
wittingly so, the artist can't separate herself from this game, in the position of the provider of her own spectacle.

The underlying sadness expressed in this work left some lingering effects on me, and added to a sense of construction over certain
temporary artistic trends, that I have felt for some time. Not necessarily seeking to categorize this show as such it is nevertheless
clear that the purpose of much postmodernism are reflected also in art. There are certain features of Postmodern art, says Sarno; "the delineation of the boundaryetween life and art, the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between fine and popular culture; a stylistic eclectic-
ing and the mixing of codes. There is a parody, parodic, irony and playfulness." Among many examples, Andy Warhol is a very good embodiment of this. The most
notable feature is that "Postmodern theory has become identified with the critique of uni-
versal knowledge and foundationalism.

1. "The rejection of the grand idealizing, universalizing theories of modernism, is cur-
rently felt to be a more realistic position. But it also leaves a vacuum of dreams and sources of hope. The thoughts of the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard seem to carry a more positive note. Sarno notes: "Postmodern art is valuable in that it suggests that we are always thinking of what we are, we cannot "let go. We are always deconstructing things, we cannot enjoy them for their own sake. In Lyotard's view there should be a shift from the dominance of dry abstract thinking to a greater appreciation of the emotional..." Post-structuralists like Lyotard say; "that there is more to life than politics. If we are totally immersed in the analysis of the political, we miss what is going on here and now. Marxists are always criticizing the status quo in the name of an ideal. Militants are inflexible that they have no time to enjoy life as it is now. Idols cut off us from the present. Instead of having nostalgia for an idealized community that may have existed in the past we should celebrate the aspects of contemporary life—in its anony-
mity, its fragmentation, in its consumptionism.

Whether you agree with the idea of "celebrating anonymity, fragmentation and consumptionism," it seems clear that the motivation we sometimes feel as artists is not one created by circumstance alone, but by our own conscious detachments, or willing

Lydia Schouten, creating "Allusion makes the heart" on the windows of HFC.

Hans Staartjes is a photographic artist, of Dutch nationality, living in Houston.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Modem Survive, Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism" (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995) 130
2. "The end of the postmodern" (in 1991) 100

All photographs by Adrie Hooge

Hans Staartjes is a photographic artist, of Dutch nationality, living in Houston.
Controlling Posterity


David L. Jacobs

When an important artist dies, family and friends often try to assure her of her ongoing legacy. Those who were closest to the deceased often control the estates, and their decisions can be affected not just by the terms of the will, or the express desires of the deceased, but more elusive elements that linger from their relationships with the artist. The cataloging impulse can sometimes extend for decades after an individual's death. To be sure, it is hard to generalize on such matters, since the management of artists' estates is determined by the nature of the will, to say nothing of the abilities and motives of the executors. One need only think of the very different estate fates of Ansel Adams, Minor White, Diane Arbus, and Brett Weston— to say nothing of Mark Rothko, Georgia O'Keeffe, Joseph Cornell, and Andy Warhol—to glimpse the range of possibilities.

Still, it is generally the case that the first wave of posthumous publications, retrospectives, and symposia attempt to place the artist in a particular niche in history, one that is often undertaken with the kind of enthusiastic energy that predates critical questioning. The rhetoric of immediacy is intended to serve the memory of the life and art of the deceased, even while it is fed out of the needs of those who were left behind. Such efforts are deeply human and, in more cases, deeply false, but they also are tinged with an unmitigated pathos. We know, on some level, that oblivion is the fate of all but the fewest of us, and that those who are remembered are seen dimly through distorted lenses. I daresay that not a single reader of this essay knows (or cares) which emperor Flavio Nerone. Or do you remember the name of Chester Arthur's vice president? or, for that matter, anything about Chester Arthur (was he the 21st or 22nd?). Today's names will, doubtless, rush into oblivion. The histories of art and letters, music and philosophy speak to the current generation's inability to assure or predict which events or people it will be remembered by. The music of Bach was unperformed for several generations before Mendelssohn rediscovered him, and Agier was the proverbial "anonymous" until Bertrand Abbot plotted the Middle. We may not even know the names of the artists through which our species will be remembered 200 years hence.

Imogen Cunningham and Wynn Bullock both led for many decades within the San Francisco-Carmel corridor that was the seed bed for the West Coast style of art photography. Although both photographers were strongly influenced by Edward Weston, Cunningham and Bullock's oeuvres extend considerably beyond a single aesthetic. For many years Imogen Cunningham was a mainstay in the small art-photo community that fought the good fight for photography's status as a bona fide art. But it wasn't until the late 1950s and 70s, when she was adopted by San Francisco's flower children, that she gained her full measure of renown. Imogen's ornamentalist happiest served as a reminder to those of us who are more disinterested "generation gap" wasn't inevitable. Cunningham was a spiffily presence, whose joyful de eurere shore through both in her photography and in her nimble wit. She photographed until the very end of her life, and the years only seemed to heighten her appeal.

Wynn Bullock was no less enamored of photography, though he lived a quieter life in Carmel, within the shadow of the celebrated Point Lobos. While his two best-known images were among the most successful in Stockman's "Family of Man" exhibition, Bullock was mainly a photographer's photographer who appealed to a relatively narrow but influential audience through a purity of dedication to the medium. He worked closely throughout his career with his wife Edna and their daughter Barbara, who was the model in many of his figure studies, and, later, the author of Wynn Bullock: Photography—a Way of Life (1973). During the 1960s Bullock struggled in lectures and writings to articulate what he referred to as the "time-space" components of photography. Those efforts, driven by extensive readings in various disciplines, were both compelling and frustrating to him.

Wynn Bullock, Child in the Forest, 1951

Although Imogen Cunningham and Wynn Bullock are still well-known figures, there has been noteworthy slipage in their reputations in recent years. Cunningham was the subject of a notable fiasco, Imogen Cunningham: A Portrait, in 1979, and, more recently, a thin volume published by the Clio Press. In 1984 Bullock was the subject of two book-length treatments: a highly forgettable scholarly analysis (Clyde Willey, The Photography and Philosophy of Wynn Bullock) and a short book on his work with the nude, written by his daughter Barbara (Wynn Bullock: Photogopying the Nude). Both photographers were sporadically included in major surveys like On the Art of Fighting a Shadow, Photography and Art and The New Vision. In recent years their one-person shows have been small exhibitions centered in or around the West Coast. Their images are seen by the new generation of photographers as late modernist work born in a different, if not very distant, age. Their highly crafted, formally sophisticated, single-frame, black-and-white images are not of utmost importance to contemporary photographers or curators, who look to color, installations, mixed media, assemblage, and digital imaging for formal models. The full-throated idealism of Cunningham and Bullock may ring hollow in some Postmodern ears. The attitude that Bullock's major monograph—Photography: A Way of Life—applies to very few prominent art photographers of our day.

Cunningham and Bullock, despite the range of their work and their shared experiments, in the main have been relegated to the dust bin of comfortable historical niches. Each is known for a handful of signature images that assure their place in history while lessening their appeal to practicing photographers. These two books provide the opportunity for presenting these photographers in a new light that could enhance their relevance to contemporary photography.

In Imogen Cunningham: Ideas Without End, Richard Lorenz has assembled nearly 200 photographs that attest to an artist who was constantly experimenting with the medium. The book includes virtually all of the signature images that had defined the popular perception of her output—early male nudes of her husband and sons, picturesque still lifes, flowers, studies in abstraction, and portraits of artists and friends. But the plates extend considerably beyond her most familiar images to give an expanded sense of Cunningham's versatility. Richard Lorenz's text conveys a good deal of information while shedding light on various elements of her work. As a co-author of the Cunningham estate he knows this territory thoroughly, but he refrains from becoming an overt advocate. Instead, he wisely lets the selection of photographs and his straightforward analysis make the case. There is fine, terse writing on the mutual influence that Cunningham enjoyed with a wide circle of friends, including Edward Weston, Man Ray, Minor White, Ilieete Model, and Dorothea Lange. Lorenz ably contextualizes Cunningham's work within a given period. Regarding her nudes early in the century, he writes:

She readily accepted the nude as a subject, a natural expression of her liberal family, upbuilding, years of life's ceasing, and probably exposure to Die Bruche artists who were painting and exhibiting in Dättlen during Cunningham's stay in Berlin. The Bruche view of the nude in the landscape, of nude lady looking and recreation, was an expression of the original and pristine being as well as a story of transcendental nature. Men and women became integrated parts of nature.

Imogen Cunningham, Unname ide, 1957

most defined, Cunningham, Bullock, and many of their photographic contemporaries—their enthusiasm for photography—is perhaps the thing which most sets them apart from the cool, downward cynicism of the 1980s and 1990s. The subtitle of SPOT / FALL 1994 / Houston Center for Photography

17
the other hand, fail to add anything of consequence to Bullock's waggish reputation, in large measure because it replicates earlier publications without extending their terms. The Cunningham book has moved beyond the terms of eloquently well-intended love; the Bullock book, unfortunately, languishes in the past. Both of these highly engaged photographers were deeply committed to photography per se, as well as to the processes of knowing and communicating through camera work. In Images Cunningham: Idea Without End, this spirit of inquiry is evident throughout. In The Enchanted Landscape, Bullock is preserved as a master photographer in a manner that suggests strain and stodginess instead of process and passion. He deserves better.

David L. Jacobs is Chair of the Department of Art at the University of Houston.

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