

SPOT

HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY • FALL 1997 • \$5



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Aida Leleian



Patrick Nagatani and André Tracey



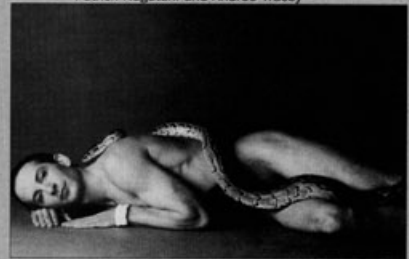
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Chuck Samuels



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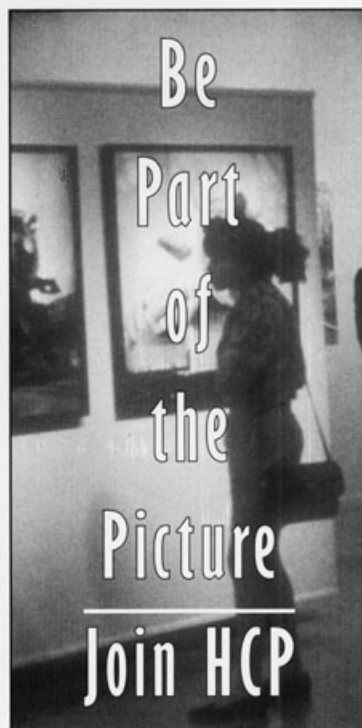
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EDITOR'S NOTE

To complete this issue of SPOT, we faxed Germany, e-mailed Vermont, telephoned Wisconsin and wrote to Austin. We received words and images on paper, on disks, on CD-ROMs, on the Internet. What a wonderful coming together of energies, ideas and creative forces for not only this publication but also the Houston Center for Photography itself.

At the onset of its 17th year, HCP reflects on a decade and a half of exhibitions, publications and educational endeavors. Condensing years worth of archives into a few pages was an enormous task aptly handled by Jean Caslin, our capable staff and volunteers. Each turned page or next viewed photograph recalled stories, individuals and conversations that helped build the rich tradition that makes HCP such a valued, treasured place.

As the new editor of SPOT, I am delighted to become a part of this heritage. I trust that these pages and images will come alive for you as they have for me in compiling this issue. Masculinity, women's photography, gardens, the World Wide Web, death and cultural influences all grace these pages and our lives through our association with SPOT and HCP.

As we look to the past, we also look to the future. Celebrate HCP's 16th birthday on November 14. Enjoy FotoFest's International Month of Photography from February 27 through March 31. And support Houston Center for Photography!

Carol Smith

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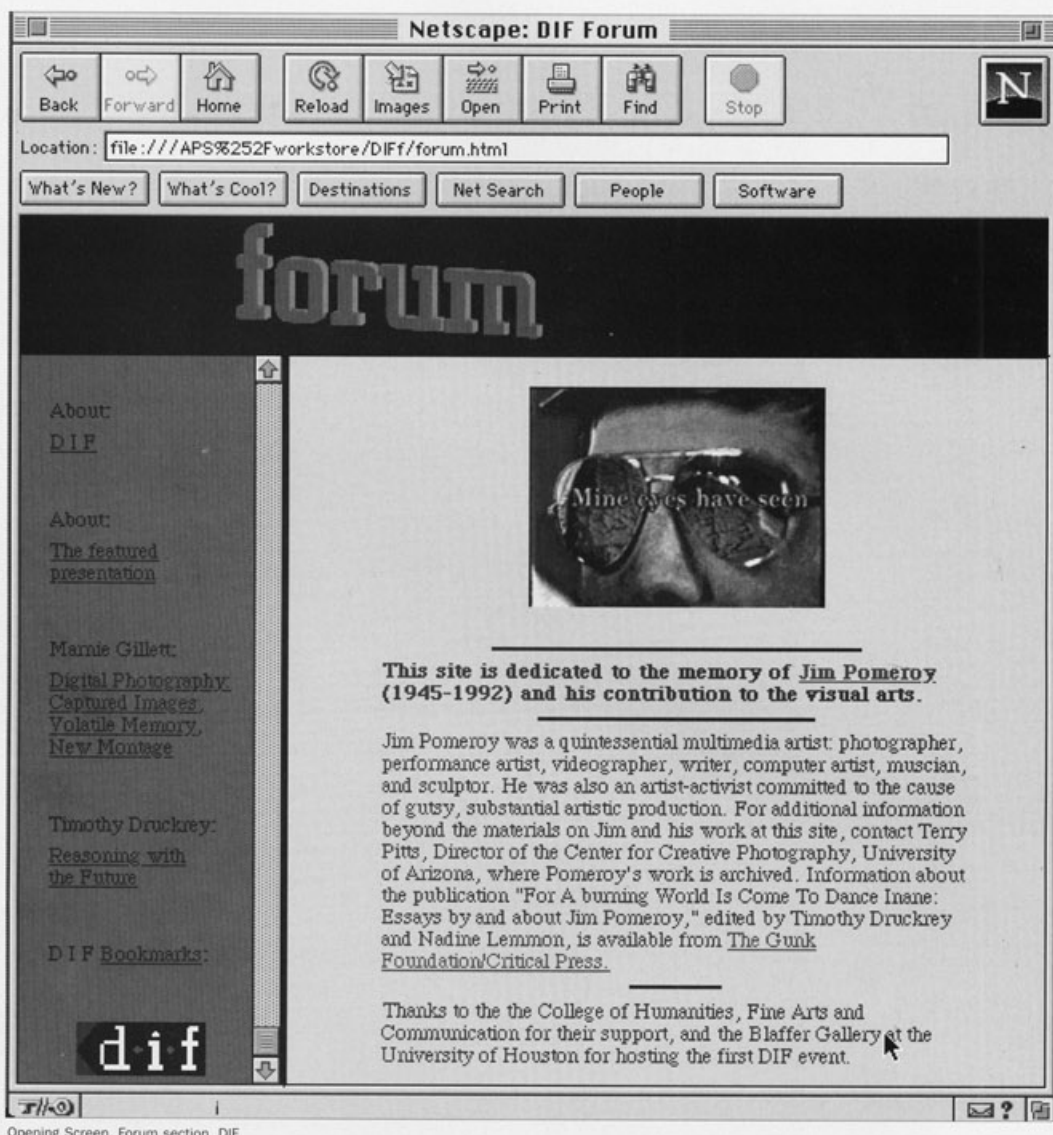
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That (Web) Thing Called DIF:

http://www.art.uh.edu/dif



Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill

There may be no better refutation of Joseph Beuys's famous assertion "Every Human Being Is An Artist" than that great egalitarian showplace, the World Wide Web. Here every bursting ego with a copy of Photoshop and Kai's PowerTools, the imagination of a ten year old and access to the Internet can proudly display his/her efforts at digital art. In principle this may be a good thing, but in practice it can be as predictable and interesting as a starving artist's sale and rather discouraging to anyone who believes electronic technology need not have a negative relation to quality in art. With those last three words we don't mean to open the door to the thorny question of *aesthetic judgment*, all the prejudices that support it and the arguments that perpetually surround it. Nonetheless, we do want to put ourselves on the side of a basically positive attitude concerning art and new technologies; for us the relationship is neither inherently bad nor good. At the same time, it has disturbed us to see how little of what one readily finds on the Web can be said to represent the best work that has been and is being done in the field of digital imaging. It is this critical yet positive frame of mind that gave birth to DIF, the Digital Imaging Forum.

The idea began its evolution in a casual discussion at the beginning of 1996 and two months later became the subject of a grant proposal "to set up a World Wide Web site for the visual display and critical discussion of digital imagery." The format of the site was to be an electronic blend of an on-going

colloquium and a scholarly journal. It would be a site in which the visual and textual material changed regularly and where there were dynamic elements such as "user responses and interactivity." Perhaps more ambitious, we wanted to establish a site which would become a resource for "the growing community of people interested in the medium." This was a crucial point for us because one of the basic revolutionizing aspects of the Internet is its potential for connecting interested constituencies.

Theorizing a Web site may well lead, as it did in our case, to the actuality of constructing it bit by bit (or byte by byte). This is not a task for the uninitiated or skittish technophobe. It is true that setting up a typical homepage can be accomplished relatively quickly by using a What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get (WYSIWYG) HTML editor and that the typical HTML page is only a mere 5K in size. However, the reality of building a multilevel, potentially unwieldy site such as the Digital Imaging Forum in fact requires some sort of master plan and allowance for considerable time-consuming problem solving.

Certainly some of you reading this have been through the frustrations of creating a Web site from zero K and are fully aware of what's involved. In our case, discounting the general research, logistic and learning (HTML) phases of the project were definitely the simplest parts. Getting DIF to the point of Web visibility took roughly six weeks, that is, four weeks of content preparation and site construction and two weeks of refining, debugging

and plugging-in to the server. Much of what had to be resolved concerned the site's structural and navigational needs: e.g., how could the site's organization reinforce the fact that this was to be a "forum" rather than a "gallery." We determined this distinction was important because we didn't want DIF to take on connotations of a marketplace. Also, for practical reasons there needed to be discrete sections, but just what sort of divisions into sections, how many sections and sub-sections, and how would they all be linked to each other? And finally, what should the "look" of the site be, especially if we wanted to emphasize substance rather than glitz (no drop shadows) and we didn't want the design concept to compete with the art stuff being presented.

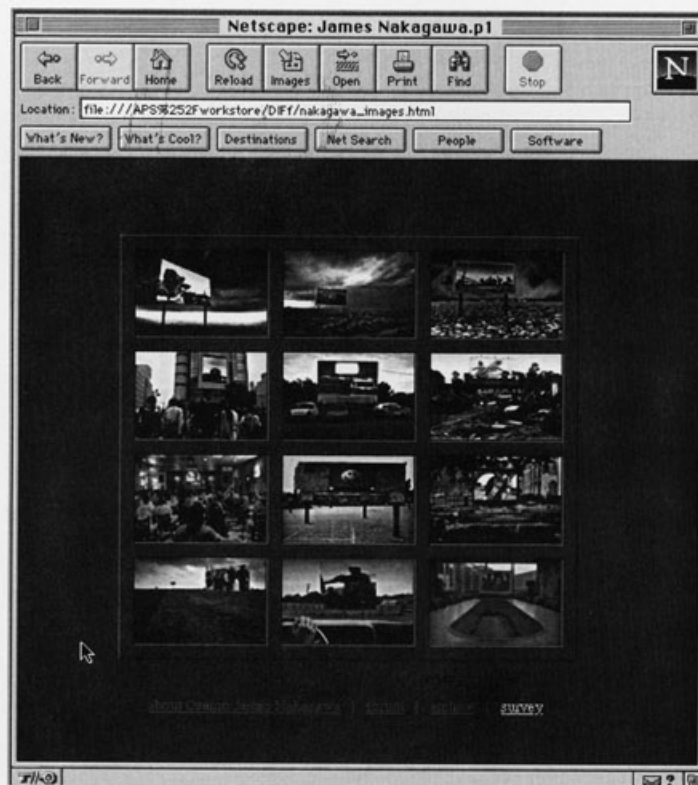
DIF's inaugural event unfolded sequentially over a period of 16 weeks beginning February 4, 1997. The idea was to begin with a survey of digital art but "publish" each artist's section progressively to emphasize the temporal aspects of Web culture. Also, although serious work in digital imaging is not new, its two-decade long history is frequently overlooked. We wanted the first presentation to refer to that history and become the basis for future developments.

The first feature then, *Digital Photography Redux: 1988-1997*, intentionally revisited and updated a group of ten artists included in a seminal exhibition, *Digital Photography: Captured Images, Volatile Memory, New Montage*, co-curated in 1988 by artist Jim Pomeroy and Marnie Gillette, director of SF CameraWork. Pomeroy, who died in 1992 and was himself a pioneer in the

digital realm, had not included his work in the earlier exhibition as a matter of principle. We decided not only was it time to include his work, it was entirely appropriate to dedicate the site to him given the prescient nature of his digital experiments — Pomeroy as patron saint, so to speak.

Besides establishing important historical grounding for DIF — *Attention Web World, good work in digital imaging has been going on for more than 15 years!* — the 1988 exhibition also provided the site with the model of artistic diversity we sought to represent — *Yes, there is more to digital art than cut and paste!* The group of ten artists from the 1988 exhibition had a record of distinctive uses of digital imaging and in recent years have further pushed and expanded the medium. Of course the best way to experience this diversity is to go in to the Archive section within the site and look at each artist's work as uniquely represented there. Describing a few examples here should help articulate the essential differences in their digital work and tempt you to visit DIF. It's important to note, however, that in all cases the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of each artist's work have been the instrumental force in determining their individual approach to electronic technology.

Alan Rath's early ironic sculptures which typically display short sequences of digitized images have evolved into more self-reflexive, programmable, robotic, punster-objects. Because they are time-based works, we have presented two of them in the form of short videos. Changes in Carol Flax's work



Osamu James Nakagawa, displayed in DIF, Featured Presentation

have been less technical and more interpersonal by comparison. The earlier digital collages exploring her unique family situation — as an adoptee — have become more select, minimal and, simultaneously, focused on the social issues of identity. Paul Berger's earlier use of the digital process as a metonymic sign for information systems at large has developed further by way of sophisticated 3-D mapping techniques which demonstrate, as well as play with, complex image-formation sys-

tems. Michael Brodsky has added color to his highly bit-mapped image captures but has continued to turn the digital signal back on itself to expose the contradictions contained within the ideology of technological utopianism. George Legrady, another critic of mass media and power and known for his image manipulation of broadcast television (Ted Kopel as generic anchorman), is now constructing complex interactive projects designed to juxtaposition personal against official narratives.

Christopher Burnett's earlier (hypercard) electronic book investigated the promise of technology promulgated by the 1964-65 New York's World Fair. His recent *Sun City* series, with its supersaturated hues and tacky clichés, has moved its view metaphorically and literally into the slick and simulated world of the 90s. The characteristic layering of Esther Parada's work has become increasingly subtle as her acquisition of digital technologies has advanced. As is the case for many of these artists, the digital process enables Parada to take apart, modify, contextualize, add to and reconstruct otherwise mute representations.

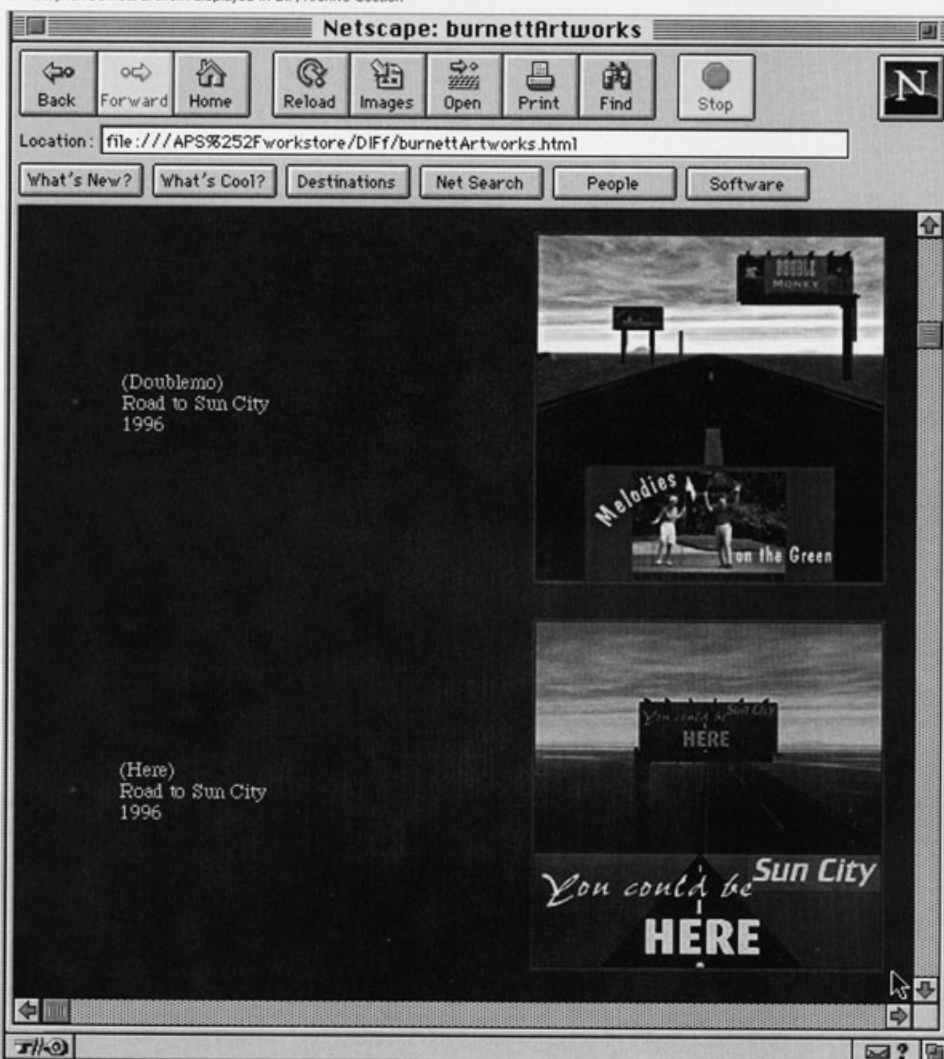
The shift of focus toward theoretical issues in text form represented in DIF's second feature is equally important to us. As we have said, DIF is not meant to be simply a virtual gallery. To encourage its role as a forum we felt it was necessary to bring the element of substantial theoretical discourse to the site. We were pleased that by special arrangement with Aperture excerpts from *Electronic Culture* — a newly published anthology of essays — became Featured Presentation number two. Although the topic of digital technology is very popular and has been the subject of a number of recent publications, as a collection of essays *Electronic Culture* stood apart as more thorough, diverse and original in its conceptual examination. The book is edited by Timothy Druckrey, a writer-critic whose knowledge of photographic history, electronic media and theory is exceptional in the field. His cogent introductory essay, reproduced in DIF in its entirety, provides a welcome overview of the complexities of the past, anxieties about the present and fantastical projections for the future of the enormous industry we call Electronic Media. Allucqueré Rosanne Stone contributes provocative prefatorial remarks, setting the tone of the inquiry; and, following Druckrey's introduction, the body of the book is sectioned into four main areas — *History; Representation: Photography and After; Theory; and Media/Identity/Culture* — each containing five to ten critical essays.

Following *Electronic Culture* we shifted back to visual features, beginning with the photo collages of artist Osawa James Nakagawa, whose inventive series of altered billboards and drive-in-theaters presents ironic commentary and reflection on the mix and clash that characterizes so much of world culture at the end of the 20th century.

As for the future, DIF will continue to present diverse attitudes toward imaging possibilities in digital technology. We also intend that by the time DIF reaches its first anniversary on February 4, 1998, it will have seen several design modifications, a few interface enhancements and, in particular, more effective methods of user input for the express purpose of realizing the forum as a true forum where ideas are shared, debated and developed.

Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill maintain DIF and make art in their Texas and Vermont electronic studios. Both are professors of art at the University of Houston.

Christopher Burnett artwork displayed in DIF, Archive Section



One
million
Web-site
names
are in
common
usage.
The
typical
Web
page
is only
about
two
months
old.

-Internet
Archive,
April, 1997

Frank Noelker, *BR OTHER*, 1991

Every MAN For HIMSELF

New Masculinities:
Cultural Representations
Houston Center for Photography
March 29 – May 11, 1997

William Thompson

During the last decade there has been a tremendous increase in the volume and sophistication of critical writings about masculinity, a subject that has been long overdue for serious scrutiny. Building on the success of programs in women's studies in the 1970s and 1980s, men's studies and gay studies emerged in the 1990s as legitimate fields of inquiry, bringing new ideas and directions to the investigation of gender. Today, historians, artists, critics and curators explore the role of masculinity in society and how it is represented. Recent exhibitions that have covered the topic include *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity* in Contemporary Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1994 and *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation* at M.I.T.'s List Visual Arts Center in 1995.

New Masculinities: Cultural Representations likewise raises questions about the ever-changing nature of masculinity: what is it, how is it constructed, and who does the constructing? Curated by Michael DeVoll, a Houston video artist and teacher, *New Masculinities* includes work by 15 photographers and video artists — all men — who have cast a critical gaze on the elusive and complex subject of masculinity.

As the exhibition makes clear, defining masculinity can be a highly problematic endeavor. Traditionally, the term has been freely applied in reference to all things having to do with men. Yet

masculinity has less to do with biology than it does with sociology, and its meaning, depending on one's point of view, may vary considerably. To some, the word implies strength, vigor and boldness; to others, it signifies aggression, violence and subjugation. The title of the exhibition, *New Masculinities*, refers to the fact that masculinity is in a perpetual state of flux and many of its older incarnations and traditions have changed or been replaced. Because of its malleable nature, masculinity is not a singular, culturally-fixed condition that universally applies to all men. Rather, it is an identity with countless possible characteristics all of which have been constructed by individual, social and political conditions.

As an exhibition comprised of male artists analyzing the social roles of men, *New Masculinities* possesses a unique, self-critical focus. By virtue of it being a show about male self-expression and creativity, the exhibition also participates in the construction of new definitions of masculinity while critiquing those already in use. The artists represented in *New Masculinities* make use of a variety of different techniques, from traditional straight photography to assemblage. Rather than presenting one or two prints by each photograph-

er, DeVoll has curated the exhibition with an emphasis on series of images that address the subject of masculinity. Accompanying text panels include statements from the artists explaining the premise of their respective works.

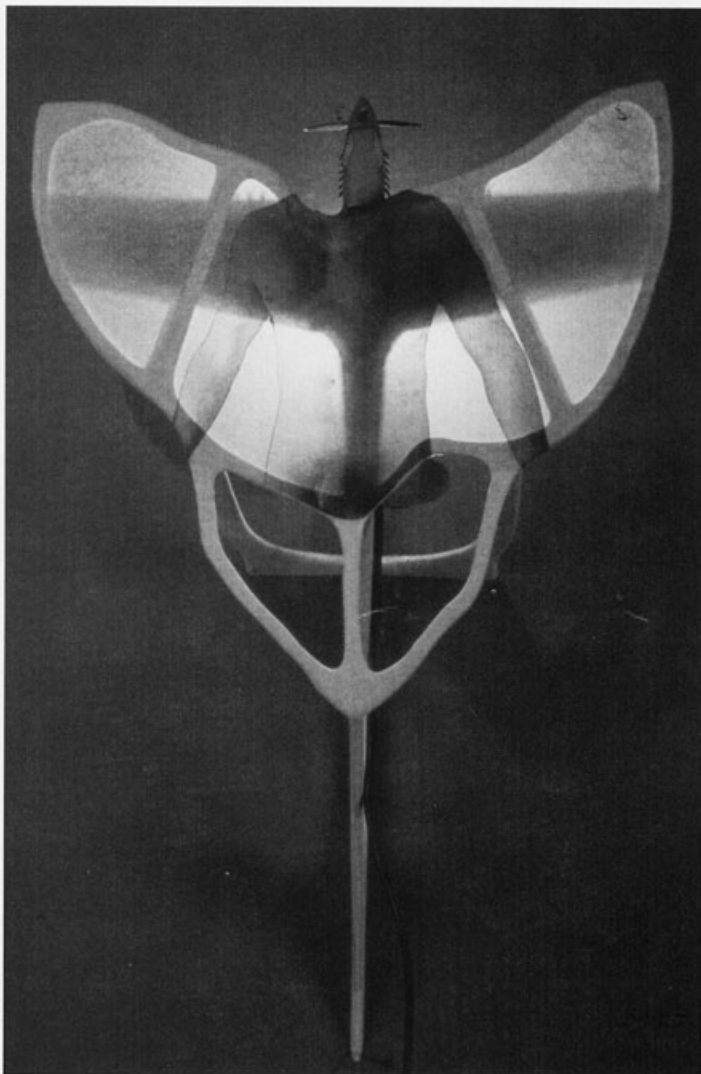
The construction of masculinity and its expression through codes of behavior and dress are recurring themes in *New Masculinities*. In Daniel Mिरer's *Inherit the Patriarch*, 1993/97, for example, the artist presents an installation of 32 C-prints on the wall. Many of the photographs depict adult men dressed in male uniforms and engaged in traditional male activities. Most every masculine stereotype is present: one image, for example, depicts a billboard of the Marlboro Man, a Madison Avenue icon created to convince men that smoking Marlboros was manly. There is one print of a man with army fatigues and a gun, and another depicts a man dressed in sweat pants who presses a barbell. Mिरer's prints reveal how men often surround themselves with objects and immerse themselves in activities that reinforce and define their masculinity. Costume, in particular, is central to the expression of their masculine identity — the garments in Mिरer's photographs range from cowboy hats, jeans and plaid

flannel shirts to starched Navy whites. The subjects complete their masculine images with overtly phallic accoutrements — cannons, guns, a surfboard — that symbolize danger, daring and power.

In Daniel Kaufman's series, *To Be a Man*, the artist asked his male subjects to pose before his camera and shoot their own picture using a remote shutter release. Each subject was then invited to write a statement describing what it means to be a man. In *Nick Sinn-White #53*, 1992/93, a young boy poses shirtless before the camera; he has an aggressive sneer on his face and makes a muscle with his left arm. Below the print, Nick's statement reads: "To be a man you need big muscles a full head of hair or most of it you should be good at sports and be loving caring and have a good education." These candid remarks contain a specific hierarchy of priorities. To Nick, muscles, hair and athletic skill are the three most important symbols of masculinity, whereas education, caring and the expression of love — qualities traditionally associated with femininity — are last. Nick's comments not only show how men begin to be socialized in the customs of masculinity at a very early age, but how those customs privilege traditional masculine values and devalue the feminine. While Nick thinks it is acceptable for a man to show love and caring, he must first demonstrate his strength and dexterity, or in other words, prove his manhood.

In another photograph from Kauf-

Daniel Mिरer, *Inherit the Patriarch*, installation detail, 1993/97



Top, John Ferdico, *Untitled (torso, front)*, Frank Yamrus, *Kurt* — Muse, 1995

man's *To Be a Man* series, a man poses before the camera dressed in camouflage pants, boots and a Guardian Angel's T-shirt and beret. In the accompanying statement, the subject writes: "the difference between a man and a woman is a man can do what he wants and a woman always cant [sic.] because of what she is." In this case, the subject seems to affirm the politically incorrect notion that biology is destiny — women and men act in a certain way because it is inherent to their respective natures. But, through his heavy reliance on masculine signifiers in his dress and stance, Kaufman's subject also illustrates the naiveté of his own words. His staid pose, macho garments and membership in the Guardian Angels express a masculine image that suggests he is tough and street-wise; his body, which of course determines he is a male, is almost completely concealed by clothing. In his written statement,

Kaufman's subject asserts that a man can do what he wants, when he wants. Ironically, however, he seems unaware that he is just as trapped by social expectations about gender. Men think that masculinity offers them unlimited freedom, but in reality, it can just as easily confine and limit their options. Vincent Cianni's gelatin silver print *Anthony with Tattoo, Knife Wound, and Scar, McCarren Park, Brooklyn*, 1995, also demonstrates how the male body may be 'dressed up' in order to express certain masculine values. In this print, Anthony, a young Latino man, stands defiantly before the camera, his body is closely framed so that it appears to dominate the landscape behind him. One immediately notices how Anthony has packaged his body using traditional military signifiers: an anchor tattoo, closely cropped hair and a necklace that resembles an identification tag. The long scar that runs verti-

cally from his naval to the middle of his chest reveals that Anthony, despite his youth, has sustained a serious wound; the viewer is left to ponder the circumstances surrounding it. While many people are reluctant to display their scars and bodily imperfections in public, Anthony flaunts his with pride. To him, it is a badge of honor that shows where sharp metal cut tender flesh, and one that serves as proof that he has endured great pain, confronted mortality, and lived to tell about it.

Although *New Masculinities* is primarily about men and their relationship to masculinity, several images of women are interspersed throughout the exhibition. John Ferdico's photo assemblage, *My Dream Bride*, 1993, depicts an idealized, smiling bride printed on the surface of a triangular, kite-like form. A plastic model of a sleek military plane is mounted in back of her image, and behind the jet, an electric light imposes the plane's silhouette on the bride. The work evokes both the potent authority of a religious icon and the comfort and security of an oversized night light. More important, it shows how such different and even

masculinity, class and the measurement of success in *BR OTHER*, 1991, an amusing series of ten dye-coupler prints that each depict a different businessman, all of whom share the same regalia — a dark suit, overcoat, and briefcase. When viewed individually, the image of a man dressed in business attire usually implies masculine respectability and financial success. When viewed collectively, however, Noelker's ten prints reveal how these men have sacrificed their individuality to conform to a particular ideal. These clone-like businessmen have subordinated themselves to a corporate style of behavior and dress in order to be successful as men. Such conformity stands in stark contrast to other images of society's ideal man — the independent-minded, rugged individualist, for example.

While Noelker focuses on the meaning of male clothing, Frank Yamrus uses the male nude as his subject. Years ago, such photographs could not be exhibited in public without causing a scandal. Images of the male nude, like those of George Platt Lynes, had to be taken in private studios; the prints were often pasted in scrapbooks and shown

clandestinely in the homes of gay men. In contrast to the historical closeting of the male nude and homosexual desire, Yamrus's prints were made with the public space of a gallery in mind — even his nude subjects are placed outdoors in natural, almost primeval settings. Yamrus, however, does not celebrate



Vincent Cianni, *After the NYC Marathon, Bedford Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn*, 1995

opposing values may exist side-by-side within definitions of masculinity, and subsequently, in the male psyche. Men are expected to desire marital and domestic bliss, as embodied by Ferdico's virginal bride dressed in white, but underneath that tranquil veneer may lie a desire for violence and domination, as symbolized by the model jet.

A number of artists in *New Masculinities* address how issues of gender, race and class can intersect with one another and forge new definitions of masculinity. Todd Yates's reversal print, *Million Man March 003*, 1995/97, depicts a group of black men marching at this historic gathering of African-American men in Washington, DC. One of Yates's marchers carries a poster with the phrase "I AM A MAN" written in bold letters. The sign asks a troubling question: why does an adult black man have to remind anyone that he is a man? While most Americans can recite the constitutional mantra that "all men are created equal," the American hegemony excluded generations of women and blacks from the political process. While times have changed, racism remains a fact of life for many black men, who must construct an identity for themselves within a society — predominately white — that is uncomfortable with the very notion of black masculinity.

Frank Noelker touches on issues of

the male body in a hedonistic display of flesh à la Bruce Weber or Herb Ritts. While there is a certain sexiness to the prints — Yamrus seductively juxtaposes the textures of skin and hair to water, earth and grass — the issue of desire is problematized through the photographs' suggestion of anxiety and death. In *RJ-Bronze*, 1994, a man sits amidst tall grass and clutches his shaved head as if in agony. In another work, *Kurt*—Muse, 1995, a muscular man lies on his back in a shallow pool of water; his eyes are shut and partially submerged so the viewer is unsure if he is asleep or dead. Either way, his passive stillness reminds us how vulnerable the strongest of bodies can be, and sadly, how close the association has become between desire and death.

As men negotiate the ever-changing social landscape, they are forced to reconcile personal realities with social expectations, and in the process, forge new definitions of masculinity for themselves and their peers.

William Thompson is the development and public affairs associate at The Menil Collection.

Havens of Tranquility

The Garden Project: Havens of Tranquility, Galveston Arts Center, April 26 – June 1, 1997

Ed Osowski

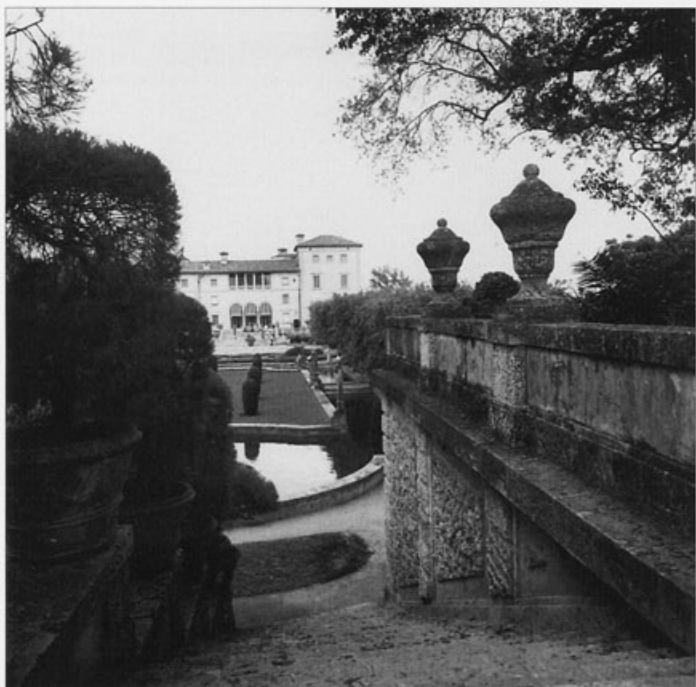
The 29 photographs by Roger Stone exhibited at Galveston Arts Center under the title, *The Garden Project: Havens of Tranquility*, give visual form to the ideas of order and control.¹

In 1980, when these images were made (they were printed later in either 1995 or 1996 for the exhibition), Roger Stone accompanied Doris M. Stone, a plant breeder, student of garden design and its history and, also, his mother, on a tour that started in South Florida and concluded after 19 stops in Boston. As spring unfolded Stone photographed what were to be "illustrations" for the

one's perspective.

If one looks at any of Ansel Adams' photographs from his Yosemite series, for example, one notes immediately that these are images which see the natural world as a place of freedom and raw beauty. Adams' photographs also give visual form to what might be called uncorrupted power and energy which, while awe-inspiring, is also reassuringly benign.²

Turning to Stone's photographs, made in the final years of Ansel Adams' life, one finds earlier influences among the American pictorialists and, more specifically, Eugene Atget. What Stone proposes in his photographs is a view that would have been understood by the 18th century rationalists, by Jefferson, for example, for whom the wilderness was a frightening place filled with



Roger Stone, *Vizcaya from the Mound*, Miami, Florida

book, *Great Public Gardens of the Eastern United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982). In the book they adequately fulfill their pedestrian purpose of illustrating points Doris Stone makes. But they are printed flatly, with murky grays and few crisp black or white tones, and also quite small, only 2 1/2 inches by 2 1/2 inches. What they only hint at in the publication is made abundantly clear in the exhibition in Galveston. These are photographs of great beauty, remarkably free of cant and pretense and conflict. Because of their small size (4 1/2 inches by 4 1/2 inches) they are intimate. And they are also nearly perfect.

The garden stands at the end of a continuum that begins with the wilderness. In philosophical terms, the garden — the emblem of a world made tame and brought under control — stands in direct contrast to the freedom of the wild, the natural landscape, a realm without restraint or design. The garden represents a world of order and control; the untamed world is the location of freedom or chaos, depending on

enemies such as Indians, the French, Catholic priests, British soldiers. Adams depicts a world of Edenic and beauty, but also brought under control by human contact. Stone plants man at the center of the world, man ordering and designing the natural environment, wresting shape from the shapeless.³

Stone's world is a built one. The land is tamed, made habitable, shaped to human desires and ends. Here, bridges cross rivers and streams, gates and hedges frame views, technology improves the raw by defining it. Quite simply, civilization reigns.

The built environment is present throughout Stone's photographs. In *Overlook at Fairchild Garden*, a low balustrade keeps the viewer from entering directly into the view but reinforces the notion that the scene one looks at is both created and controlled. Looking slowly and carefully is what Stone intends and what, finally, the intimate size of his works demands. *Pleached Allee of Yaupon at Tron's Palace* could actually be a diagram prepared by a renaissance draughtsman in achieving



Roger Stone, *Gunston Hall's 300 year old Hedge*, Lorton, Virginia

perspective. Vegetation, dense but lacy, covers an arched support. Light casts shadowed patterns across a paved walkway. And the point of view recedes ever so perfectly to a tiny spot of pure light in the center of the photograph. In *Three Hundred Year-old Hedge*, Stone finds an arrangement of natural shapes which become a lesson in abstraction, in refining and defining. In the photographs from *Four Acts Garden* in Florida, Stone plays off the built environment—walls, benches, side-walks—against the luxuriant and controlled growth within the semi-tropical setting. The tension between the created and the found is at its highest pitch in his photographs of Vizcaya in Miami. In *Vizcaya Viewed from the Mound*, the faux-renaissance palazzo sits in perfection, contrasting with the jungle which, quite literally, breathes at the edge of the photograph.

Roger Stone's photographs break no new ground and are removed from the politics of environmental awareness and protection. But they are beautiful, hardly simple, conservative and

supremely fulfilling. Nowhere in these works is the viewer dwarfed, made to feel inconsequential, made to feel alienated from the world of nature. Stone presents a world — and a vision — of harmony and he presents it convincingly.

Ed Osowski is immediate past president of the HCP board and a frequent contributor to SPOT.

FOOTNOTES

1. A somewhat different version of this exhibition was displayed at Transco Tower in Houston, Texas, during Fotofest 1995.
2. That Adams was responding, obliquely, to the storm clouds gathering in Europe and Asia now seems to be part of his project. His glorification of the American landscape is particularly apt when set against the German and Japanese industrial machines running at full strength. Adams presents a different type of strength—natural, awe-inspiring, impressive and yet unthreatening. Implicit in Adams' patriotic agenda is the juxtaposition of America's freedom and innocence set against the corrupt, martial exploits of our soon-to-be enemies.
3. Just two months after Stone completed the works exhibited, Mount St. Helen's exploded. One certainly does not sense the fragility of man's relationship with the natural world in Stone's work. But then Adams' works did not intend to warn the viewer that beneath the surface rumbles a threatening monster.

Roger Stone, *Pleached Allee of Yaupon at Tron Palace's*, New Bern, North Carolina



Synopsis by Andreas Müller-Pohle
Goethe Institut Houston
May 22 – June 26, 1997

By Johannes Birringer

Seeing Andreas Müller-Pohle's current exhibition of photographic works created over a period of almost 20 years raises questions that cannot be answered by our viewing of the works alone. The show is curated and hung by the artist himself as he travels with the work from Québec to Atlanta to Houston. He speaks to his audiences in finely-tuned lectures on his methodology and theory, provokes engagement and critical reflection beyond a reading of these pictures, a glancing at or immersion into their richly sensuous textures. These textures, however, are the first disorienting and captivating signs of a disturbance that once intimated the transformations of realist representation and later confirmed the power of abstraction in the history of 20th century visual art.

After Photography?



Andreas Müller-Pohle, from the Transformance series

The role of photography within the modern formation of perceptual systems cannot be overestimated. Yet all the techniques of exploring the limits of abstraction and representation, inherent in the medium itself, seem to have been exhausted. Müller-Pohle's work claims as much. As a synopsis of two work cycles created in 1979-82 and the early 1990s, his work continues an artistic and intellectual preoccupation of the experimental avant-garde shifting attention from technique, composition, content and display of the philosophical and nermenectic questions of process that point beyond specific medium. In fact, my first impression when seeing the prints is one of uncertainty about the medium. Are these photographs, film stills, collages, components of an installation? I also had an intense fascination with the contradictions of their stunning beauty, obfuscated content, blurred and blurring continuities, erotic tension and coldly diffused architectonics. Their titles point to the two series, *Transformance* (first published as a monograph in 1983) and *Perlasca Pictures*, and the actual dates and places where the photographs were shot.

Pictures from the *Transformance* series also carry numbers indicating their placement among the 10,000 negatives Müller-Pohle developed over a two-year period of daily experiments with a very specific method. In performance terms, this project constituted a

durational process of exploring a continuous gestic or physical expansion of the camera's relation to optical stimuli or accidental encounters with a motif. Like John Cage's philosophy of music-as-weather and the inclusiveness of his compositional process (allowing chance events, contingency and alcatory



Andreas Müller-Pohle, from the Transformance series

process to co-create the sonic world), the photographer-performer abandons the fixed and determined control of framing or focusing the object. Instead, the fluidity or perceptual impressions taken in during our own daily movement and interaction with the world is here taken as the visceral method of gestural action with the camera.

Müller-Pohle became interested in locating in the quasi-found material of his shoots what perhaps cannot be seen-as-controlled, what cannot be "captured," as if the camera were moving in the ephemeral bodily motions of a dancer who does not stand still. One cannot "capture" the dance. Subverting the determining techniques of making

the traumatic history of war, occupation, dislocation and the Holocaust, is intimated, made evident in precisely its impossible (or forgotten?) factuality — its repression or disappearance. I don't wish to use the phrase "Schindlers' Jews" as we heard it used in Spielberg's film. Müller-Pohle's *Perlasca Pictures* is a more provocative, more challenging testimony to the conflagrations and forgotten histories of our century. Paradoxically they raise the very questions whether photography or film can at all confront heroism, the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust, the flight of reason and destruction of sense.

The photographs themselves, shockingly, look similar on the surface to



Andreas Müller-Pohle, from the Transformance series

an exposure, thus questioning rules of frame-composition, lighting, shutter speed, etc. that are part of the more generally accepted aesthetics of the photographic image, Müller-Pohle breaks the still and the lines/shapes of composition. Similarly, he applies this gestural method, first tested against the formal apparatus of photography, in his recent collaboration with Berlin filmmaker Nina Gladitz. He contributed 230 photographs for Gladitz's documentary film on the Hungarian anti-Nazi hero, G. Perlasca, who pretended to be the Spanish ambassador in Budapest and succeeded in rescuing Jews from deportation to the concen-

those from the mundane *Transformance* series. Neither the apparatus nor the oppositional technique make a difference. Yet the abstraction of truth or the interpretation of reality fundamentally change once we accept the deconstruction of the picture's claim to represent a distinct moment, freezing time and space, objectifying it. Here the work is neither subjective nor claims any authority over the subjects it rescues.

I believe Müller-Pohle of course realizes that he was employing the same gestural technique of "wiping" the image or moving the camera so that the "smeared" effect may arise.

He sometimes ends up with astonishing contradictions within an image, as when the blurred mass of something suddenly appears to show clearly the door of a train racing by, or when I seem to recognize a man running through a tunnel (*Perlasca Pictures* [Budapest], 1992) or a hand reaching for a letter (*Perlasca Pictures* [Berlin-Kreuzberg], 1992). Yet what exactly is it I need to recognize, or what do these seemingly on-going poetic mediations on blurred abstraction, lost vision, turbulence and chaos evoke in me? When I first saw the synopsis from the two mixed-up and carefully conjoined projects in Atlanta, Müller-Pohle showed a video of another installation project (*Entropia*) that continues his investigation of the limits of the photographic system. Stunningly, the video projector displayed a close-up of a loudspeaker whose powerful amplified sound (of the noise of an industrial shredder) made thousands of little particles (shredded photographs) jump and bounce, as if in a dance. The image blurs and moves and vibrates, and it resonates in me, as I imagine the shredding of waste-paper and the ecology of recycling on which our late industrial culture proudly depends in its on-going hyperaccumulation and expenditure.

Müller-Pohle, respected founder-editor of the journal *European Photography*, calls the bouncing particles a "dance of death." He specifically uses video not only to expand his original medium but also to thematize reflectively the progression of waste and image-overproduction in late capitalism — a concern he has had for years during his travels when he collected postcards of cities and locations. Examining how favored topographical representations become icons and then kitsch, his work poignantly enters the cycle of degeneration, and it in fact cannot escape the paradox of our entropic conditions. If we can no longer see/recognize what has been overproduced in photographic representation, the blurred and disfigured image-content is perhaps a visceral reminder of organic waste, of the decrepitude of the medium and its postindustrial replacement by newer technologies (digital media). What Müller-Pohle's gestural action produces in print can be construed by the digital wipe or strobe functions of the video camera and its derealization of the image will perhaps become a cliché in television and advertising, today's avant-garde of the time-based art of entropy.

However, Müller-Pohle's work critically challenges precisely our adherence to the documentary fictions of the older photographic medium — a medium that cannot be rescued except in its cynical recyclings. Synopsis has already moved past the old debates about form and content; those no longer matter. The current exhibition is perhaps a melancholic résumé assembled on the threshold of a new digital era that will soon produce its own cycle of decadence.

Johannes Birringer is an independent choreographer/filmmaker and artistic director of Alien Nation Co. He has recently moved back to Houston to create a digital dance studio.

Bicultural Framing of

America Seen

Osamu James Nakagawa, *Windshield Washer*, from the *Drive-In Theater Series*, 1996

The American Dream, *Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, Texas, April 24 – June 22, 1997*
 New Work, *McMurtrey Gallery, Houston, Texas, June 7 – July 5, 1997*

Dana Friis-Hansen

Two area exhibitions presented work from three ongoing series by Osamu James Nakagawa, a Houston-based Japanese-American photographer. Nakagawa was born in New York in 1962, raised from infancy to a teenager in Japan and has lived and studied in the U.S. since high school. His bicultural insight provides a unique aesthetic and political view, and his deft computerwork provides the means to make statements that range from the playful and ironic to the poetic and politically engaging. The *Billboards*, *Drive-In Theaters*, and *TV Monitors* series offer a critique of the scarcity of moral messages within the mass media which envelops us.

Nakagawa's basic strategy is neither complicated nor unique; he makes computer photomontages. Nakagawa creates a dialectic tension between information carried by "figure" and "ground" or "subject" and "context" images. The viewer discovers meanings

by untangling Nakagawa's unexpected and seamlessly integrated juxtapositions and re-ordering the separate parts. Only then can we really ponder the question he poses: "What's Wrong With This Picture?"

To create his images, he works in the opposite direction, pasting together images from his computer's desktop until he finds an ensemble that clicks, a trial and error process that can sometimes take several years. Often numerous component images are assembled into a land/media-scape, making it all the more fun to peel back the layers and to enjoy his quizzical puns and twists of trivia. For example, in *Cowboys*, 1993, from the *Billboards Series*, he has inserted in a winking gesture an early cowboy image from another post-modernist, narrative photographer, David Levinthal. In *Smiley*, 1996, we discover a snippet of a Richard Misrach image documenting the violence of the Nature/Culture interface. Only the most eagle-eyed photo-fans would catch these. However, in the end the cute, art-smart irony distracts a viewer from the more serious intellectual, philosophical or political content in most of the works. The strongest images create sparks by rubbing the inset "subject" images against a

charged contextual yet usually contrapuntal "ground."

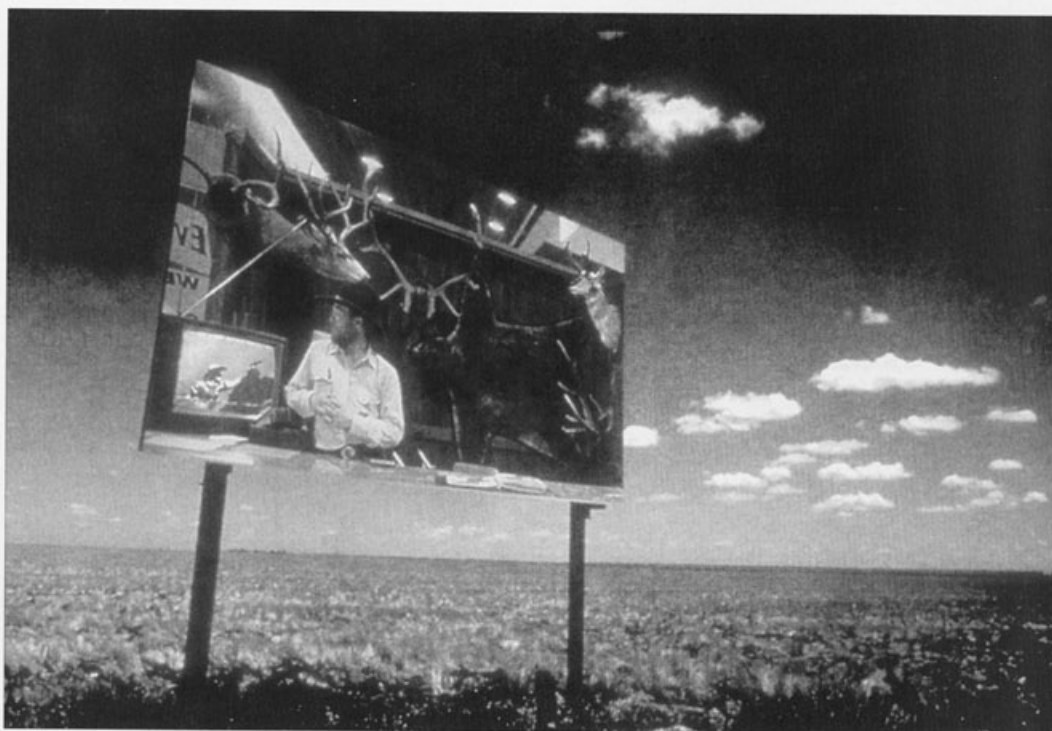
The "ground" images are often quintessentially American scenes — with a twist. Nakagawa revels in the drama of vast open spaces of the American West with an eye for the damage we have done through abuse, misuse and neglect as in *Mr. America*, 1997. In Japan, where land is very scarce, not only is the drive-in theater an unusual concept, but the unused and often abandoned expanses of land in these pictures are unimaginable.

Like Robert Frank and other itinerant/immigrant photographers, he's also attracted to America's social fabric, its rich patterns and tattered edges. For urban scenes, his eye seems drawn to the embarrassing gaps and gaffs in public planning of social spaces, whether it be disheveled, boarded up public housing against the backdrop of Houston's shining skyscrapers (*Basketball*, 1995-1997) or a friendly bar where all the chairs have been rearranged to face the TV (*Spiritual Help*, 1996-1997). In the land of his birth, he selects a corporate boardroom with an absurdly grandiose table as the trampoline off which to bounce.

The billboard, drive-in theater or public TV monitor that are the frames

for his inset subjects are each delivery systems for commercial propaganda or mainstream entertainment-fueled by the powers of mass media and advertising. Large in scale, often built high off the ground and located in high trafficked roadways or public gathering spaces, these forums for "communication" are the antithesis of the private, individual voice. With his computer, Nakagawa infiltrates these privileged spaces, overturns their authority by embedding carefully-selected scenes (usually his own, but occasionally appropriated images) into the message delivery system from which we Americans seem unable to turn away.

Many of the images he inserts into the public, mediated space address the political tensions of race, class, religion and patriotism. These topics are on the minds of many artists who, like Nakagawa, emerged in the 1980s, a time of creeping conservatism that seemed to absorb the progress inspired by the liberalism of earlier decades. Much of the source material was shot when the artist focused on street photography with a political bent: Ku Klux Klan marches on Houston's Westheimer Road, inner-city urban decay, local Martin Luther King Day marches. In earlier images in these shows, such as



Osamu James Nakagawa, *Cowboys*, from the *Billboard* series, 1993

American Indian Flag, 1992, *Martin Luther King*, 1993, and *KKK*, 1993, we find him developing a *modus operandi* that allows him to address social concerns in a more sophisticated, critical artworldly frame. We can sense his roots in the 1980s photographic/media thinking of Victor Burgin, Barbara Kruger, Hans Haake, Martha Rosler and his University of Houston professors Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom. But in the 1990s he has found his own more balanced sensibility that evens out a personal vision with political content.

The political issues that were important early subjects continue to play a role in the more recent pictures. Works such as *American Indian Flag*, 1992, *KKK*, 1992, and *Gas Mask*, 1993, show Nakagawa warming up to more subtle, graceful works with social and political meaning. Using such emotionally charged symbols in his subject frames could not fail to "push people's buttons," especially within the liberal-leaning art crowd. Putting them against bleak or eerie skies or in disheveled surroundings pushed the inherent politics further — too far — without adding insight or gaining enough ground.

In more recent works such as *Windshield Washer*, 1996, and *Border*, 1997, there is more a sophisticated expression of a more complicated problems. Yes, there are menacing clouds in *Border*, but he's created a nexus of details, cues and clues that forces us to think about more than one facet of the issue he wants to address. A blurred immigration patrol car that speeds toward us and a road sign that cautions drivers about families fleeing on foot on this lonely road provides contrast to the subject inset into a billboard, a busy bridge crossing point right at the borderline. The viewpoint is from just inside the U.S. side, and we see two women strolling in, while a Mexican border official glances off into the distance.

In contrast to these multiple viewpoints, in *Windshield Washer* he has created an image that puts us in the driver's seat. A brilliantly composed picture grounds us with a car dash-

board and hand on the steering wheel. We look through the windshield at a drive-in screen onto which he has projected a close-up of a windshield being washed by a young boy eager for a tip, shot through the windshield from within the car. Off in the distance is a billboard with an eerie photographic flashback: the propagandistically optimistic depression-era billboard that originally appeared over a breadline in a famous 1937 Margaret Bourke-White photograph. Here the winking art history component works because it is a well-placed layer in a matrix of references to class, poverty and the American dream.

Other key works deal with cultural difference, bringing international stereotypes down to a more human level. Often playful humor is used effectively to tease us. In *Godzilla and the White Trailer Home*, 1996, two of the metaphorical Japanese movie monsters appear grinning over a mobile home in front of which two guys sit unsuspecting. Beneath the screen is a

scene of violent disarray, as if the monsters had already passed. We might think back to all the other abandoned drive-in theater lots Nakagawa has found across America, but this work plays with the fear of Japanese economic domination prevalent at the start of the decade.

Another work is actually based in Japan, where the artist has been traveling more frequently lately to show and produce work. He puts the viewer at the head of a power-inducing boardroom table, now empty. We look at a white screen with a subway image of typical Japanese salarymen who have dozed off on their way to or from work. The power and subservience implied by the boardroom and its furniture in contrast with the humanness of the exhausted workers makes this photograph an elegant statement.

Postcards from Paris, 1996-1997, seats us in a charming, tree-shaded outdoor theater. On the screen we meet an African immigrant selling postcard portfolios at the base of the Eiffel

Tower. As tourists we might be inclined to smile at the grand cosmopolitan nature of this scene until we notice that most of the postcard images represent not monuments representing Old World sophistication, but New World Disneyfication. The joke is on us.

The passing of time and the disappearance of simple pleasures eradicated by waves of modernization are implied in the final and largest work on view, and it signals a quieter, elegiac mode. *Drive-In Theatre*, 1997, starts with a simple, frontal view of another abandoned drive-in theater, this one with three abandoned cars of different generations. Two face out at us; the third is facing the screen, its front wheels sunken into high weeds. On the screen is an appropriated photograph of special significance as it was taken in the 1960s by Nakagawa's uncle, Takayuki Ogawa, an important Japanese photographer who was an early and constant inspiration. This image is from the heyday of American drive-ins, and the lot is packed with station wagons, VW vans and other large, roomy vehicles full of families and couples enjoying the classic ritual of indoor/outdoor movie viewing. The screen within the screen shows no specific picture, but a warm, heavenly glow, a blankness that at once refers to Malevich's radical constructivist "white on white" paintings to Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theatre* photographs and to the death of the drive-in experience.

In these later works Osamu James Nakagawa has found an elusive balance in content and an even tonal sensibility that provides a quiet grounding. From the faux-apocalyptic *Godzilla* to the elegiac *Drive-In Theatre*, he shows he can make — with a computer no less — sophisticated American scene photographs that carry a strong political message that continues and extends the practice in a dignified, sophisticated manner.

Dana Friis-Hansen is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas.

Osamu James Nakagawa, *Beauty Pageants*, from the *Billboard* series, 1992



Charles Schorre

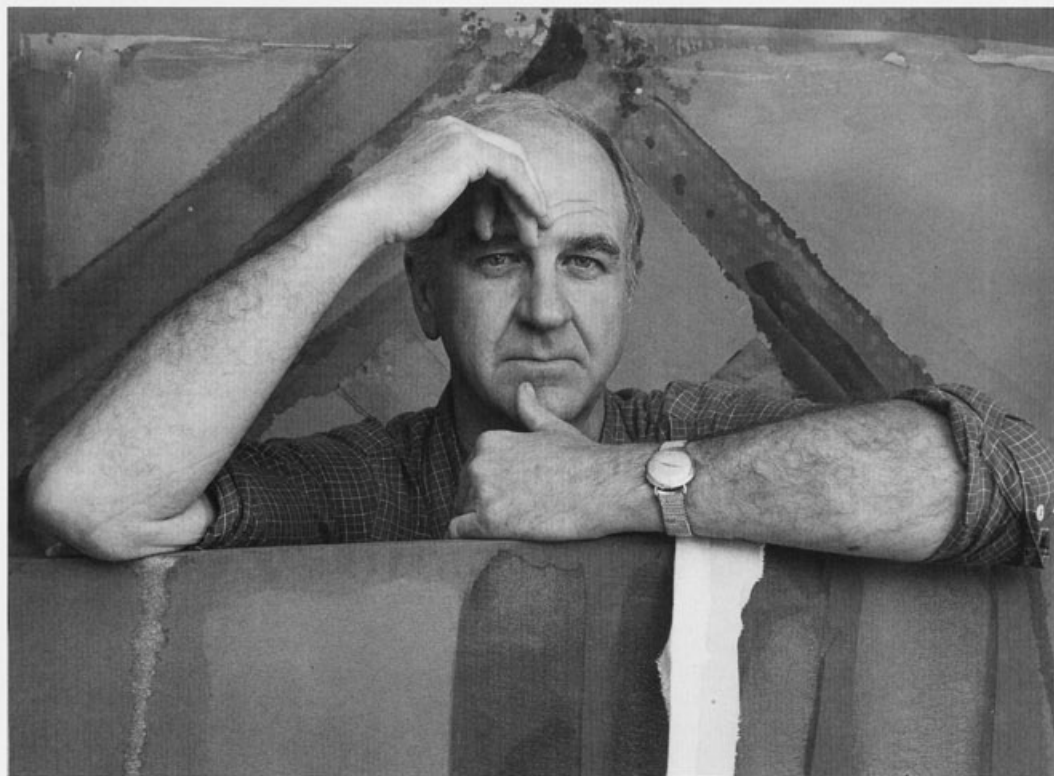
Peter Brown

Charles Schorre, even at 71 and burdened with Parkinson's disease, was one of the youngest people that I have known. He died, still open and still working, far too young and far too soon in the summer of 1996. His death, it seemed at the time, would leave a void that only memories of him and his art could begin to fill.

Yet recently, transposing some of this emptiness, there has appeared a startlingly beautiful new book, Charles Schorre, which, in small but important ways, stands in Charles' stead, mitigating, as words and images sometimes miraculously do, a transition from life to death and back again — not incidentally, a theme that reverberated throughout Schorre's art. Fittingly, the book and the exhibition curated by David Brauer that accompanies it were produced as a collaborative effort. The exhibition traveled to Galveston Arts Center, August 23 to September 28, 1997. It was begun before Charles' death by a group of friends and admirers who cared deeply for the artist and his work.

Charles Schorre was a warm, sympathetic, fiercely honest and engaged human being. His life, which he filled with family, art, friends, religion, and to varying degrees, the workings of the Houston art community, represented for me, and I think others, a model for what it might mean to be both a committed artist and a fully dimensioned human being.

Charles was smart and experienced and edgy. He was sane and kind and forgiving and gentle. He was also very funny. And he was helpful. He could, with an understanding smile and a sim-



Charles Schorre, March 1975

ple shake of his head, appear to accept and dismiss some particularly egregious human folly and then, in genuine puzzlement, mull it over for some time. He could gripe about the art establishment and about art in general, and he could talk and write — always with troubled conviction, about art and the making of art, in ways that sprang from himself but moved quietly into the lives of others.

These same humane qualities might be used to describe his art (a mix of oil

and acrylic, canvas, watercolor, paper, charcoal, pencils, photographs and, occasionally, writing). It was an art that was filled with mystery, grace, vivid beauty and a reverence for among other things: the natural world, the human form, the ability to make marks, the life of Christ, the best art of the past, the integration of hand with heart and the fumbling creative path that each of us makes to discovery.

Charles' virtues — a Boy Scout list of kindnesses, reverences, loyalties and

determinations I don't think came easily to him. My sense is that they were challenged by his energy, his humor, and his unique brand of Cuero, Texas, macho — a gentle gutsiness that could put one at ease, but that certainly, and often, went to work on his sweeter side with a devilish glee.

All of this is to say that he was remarkable and that he is missed. There were certain things it seemed that only Charles understood. Many in the Houston community sensed this, and David Brauer in his moving epilogue to the book describes this influence well. (See sidebar.)

Charles Schorre was born in 1925 and grew up in the small town of Cuero, in south central Texas. He attended The University of Texas, married Miggie Storm in 1948, and went on to dual careers in art and design in Houston. He taught at the Museum of Fine Arts and for a time at Rice; he had a wonderful marriage, raised a family, showed his work and was an integral and pioneering member of the Houston art community.

For all the reasons one might want to own a piece of Schorre's art, it makes sense to acquire this beautiful book. In a very appropriate way, *Charles Schorre* describes the work, the place the work was made and the human being who made it.

His career was varied: a mix of painting and drawing, multi-media/photographic collage, graphic art and design. In this book, each is given credence. Charles was of a piece, with one aspect of his creative life moving easily into the next. Just as his studio was set up to enable him to move from project

Charles Schorre, photographs for *Artist's Handbook*, Copy photographs by Rick Gardner.



to project, so too, the book moves — from interest to interest, from informative text, to Schorre's impassioned musings, to the art, to the studio, to photography, to family — all bound together by an enormously effective design.

The book design by Jerry Herring, Rick Gardner's photography and the various texts and interviews by Herring, Anne Tucker, Jim Edwards, David Crossley, Geoff Winningham, David Brauer, Lew Thomas and others, are visually integrated in ways that are reminiscent both of Schorre and his art. The book's diversity makes sense. It is profusely and imaginatively illustrated. The text, which dips in and out of the book, begins with an overview by Anne Tucker describing the man, his art and his place in Houston. And we dive then, quite precipitously, into the rabbit hole that was Schorre's studio, a place that David Crossley suggests should become a national shrine — a gorgeous multi-leveled warren of color, form, treasures, nooks, photographs, books and pockets that Rick Gardner, who knew Schorre well, photographs with skill and sensitivity. These photographs Herring collages and butts together, much in the way that the various bits and pieces of the studio itself seem to merge and repeat in theme and variation, and reminiscent also, of the way that Schorre's art itself was constructed. A more formal and quite informa-

graphs of artists, friends and artworld people with their hands cupped at the sides of their faces — looking either defenseless and cute, mock combative, belligerent or peaceful. Some fine quick portraits come out of this work. But the cumulative effect of all these fairly serious people — names such as Robert Rauschenberg, Gary Winogrand, William Wegman, Saul Bellow, Barbara Rose, Donald Barthelme and Robert Motherwell as well as a fair representation of the Houston art community, similarly posed in such an odd way, is fascinating — and daunting. I think the project was an ice breaker of sorts for Charles — a way for him to learn new things about the people he was photographing. Time, thought, relationship and the differences and similarities that we possess come into play. A publication of this work in its entirety would be fascinating.

As would a publication of the *Pages from Books Unpublished* — a sequence of work that combines the concerns outlined above in graceful, surprising ways — short lyrical visual stories that read well individually, but when sequenced, grow and build into an enormously effective body of work. All of his interests are dealt with — from mark-making, to desert work, to nudes, to cruciforms, to birds, apples, bones and shells, to landscape, trees and the use of vivid and celebratory color.



Rick Gardner, Charles Schorre's studio, 1996



Rick Gardner, Charles Schorre's studio, 1996

tive text by Jim Edwards follows that puts the work in both cultural and art historical context — an essay again that is filled with reproductions. And we enter Schorre's life as a teacher — class descriptions by Schorre himself, hand-written course notes taken from students' comments and an energetic remembrance by Geoff Winningham which describes his experience of Schorre's generosity as a teacher.

And the work: first, examples from his time as a designer. He worked for several businesses, won many awards and after a while, when the pressures got to him, worked only on his own terms.

He was a photographer. He often used photographs in his *Pages of Books Unpublished* (his monumental ongoing photo/collage project) and he used them as well in his design. Clearly his oddest work and his straightest photographic work was his *Artist's Handbook*. A gridded series of photo-

Charles' art contains many aspects, but a sense of expanding energy, a celebration of seeing and being, of delight in the things around combined with an exploration of the mystery within, best defines the spirit of his art for me. And *Pages from Books Unpublished* distills this.

Reproductions of Charles' paintings and drawings follow. The reproduced scale of the paintings is unavoidably deceptive in ways that the rest of the book is not, largely because his paintings have so much to do with physical impact. Charles' paintings are a sensory experience — large, enveloping — wild with color and space — or alternatively crisp, brooding in a way that suggests the religious connotations that night skies can imply. One flies through them, transported by color and symbol: diptychs, triptychs, cruciforms and always, that kind, electric color.

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A number of people are to be thanked and congratulated for the appearance of *Charles Schorre* — certainly at the top of the list is Miggie Schorre, Charles' wife, whom he also saw as his best critic (see the interview in the book with Lew Thomas and James Bell for her enormous influence); Mike McLanahan and Loomis Slaughter organized the Charles Schorre Project and created an advisory board of John Boehm, Frec and Betty Fleming, Lester Giese, Jane Gregory, Helen Morgan, Alton Parks and Wallace Wilson, Jr. Our indebtedness

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Book Epilogue

"Stylistic influence is the most superficial of influences. The greater achievement is to teach by example how one may become a thinking, functioning, creative being. That is why Schorre exerted such an influence on so many people who were not artists. That is why so many of his friends needed to own his work — not as a token of loyalty but rather to have a living example of his method in their private lives. Creativity is, after all, a way of being, not just a way of doing. It has been, more often than one might have wished, a somewhat disappointing experience to meet an artist whose works one has admired. I never met anyone who was not glad to have known Charles Schorre. In him one was reminded of the vigor and discipline of being an artist. Up or down, ill or well, he went to his studio and worked. He did what all true artists do, ignoring the fluctuations of taste and market.

He simply did the work." David E. Brauer, *Charles Schorre*, Houston: Herring Press and the Houston Artists Fund, p. 200.

Peter Brown is an independent photographer and writer. He lives in Houston and teaches photography in the continuing education program at Rice University. He first met Charles Schorre in 1979.

Rick Gardner, Charles and Miggie Schorre celebrating their anniversary, 1975.



to project, so too, the book moves — from interest to interest, from informative text, to Schorre's impassioned musings, to the art, to the studio, to photography, to family — all bound together by an enormously effective design.

The book design by Jerry Herring, Rick Gardner's photography and the various texts and interviews by Herring, Anne Tucker, Jim Edwards, David Crossley, Geoff Winningham, David Brauer, Lew Thomas and others, are visually integrated in ways that are reminiscent both of Schorre and his art. The book's diversity makes sense. It is profusely and imaginatively illustrated. The text, which dips in and out of the book, begins with an overview by Anne Tucker describing the man, his art and his place in Houston. And we dive then, quite precipitously, into the rabbit hole that was Schorre's studio, a place that David Crossley suggests should become a national shrine — a gorgeous multi-leveled warren of color, form, treasures, nooks, photographs, books and pockets that Rick Gardner, who knew Schorre well, photographs with skill and sensitivity. These photographs Herring collages and butts together, much in the way that the various bits and pieces of the studio itself seem to merge and repeat in theme and variation, and reminiscent also, of the way that Schorre's art itself was constructed. A more formal and quite informa-

graphs of artists, friends and artworld people with their hands cupped at the sides of their faces — looking either defenseless and cute, mock combative, belligerent or peaceful. Some fine quick portraits come out of this work. But the cumulative effect of all these fairly serious people — names such as Robert Rauschenberg, Gary Winogrand, William Wegman, Saul Bellow, Barbara Rose, Donald Barthelme and Robert Motherwell as well as a fair representation of the Houston art community, similarly posed in such an odd way, is fascinating — and daunting. I think the project was an ice breaker of sorts for Charles — a way for him to learn new things about the people he was photographing. Time, thought, relationship and the differences and similarities that we possess come into play. A publication of this work in its entirety would be fascinating.

As would a publication of the *Pages from Books Unpublished* — a sequence of work that combines the concerns outlined above in graceful, surprising ways — short lyrical visual stories that read well individually, but when sequenced, grow and build into an enormously effective body of work. All of his interests are dealt with — from mark-making, to desert work, to nudes, to cruciforms, to birds, apples, bones and shells, to landscape, trees and the use of vivid and celebratory color.



Rick Gardner, Charles Schorre's studio, 1996



Rick Gardner, Charles Schorre's studio, 1996

tive text by Jim Edwards follows that puts the work in both cultural and art historical context — an essay again that is filled with reproductions. And we enter Schorre's life as a teacher — class descriptions by Schorre himself, hand-written course notes taken from students' comments and an energetic remembrance by Geoff Winningham which describes his experience of Schorre's generosity as a teacher.

And the work: first, examples from his time as a designer. He worked for several businesses, won many awards and after a while, when the pressures got to him, worked only on his own terms.

He was a photographer. He often used photographs in his *Pages of Books Unpublished* (his monumental ongoing photo/collage project) and he used them as well in his design. Clearly his oddest work and his straightest photographic work was his *Artist's Handbook*. A gridded series of photo-

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Rick Gardner, Charles and Miggie Schorre celebrating their anniversary, 1975.



I am continually grateful for HCP's dedication to early and mid-career artists, particularly at a time when the cult of the personality often blinds us to the subtle brilliance of the unknown imagemaker. HCP continues to provide me with a touchstone to the world of imagemaking and the career benefits from association with the Center unfailingly complement the friendships made and maintained over these 16 fleeting years.

Sharon Stewart: photographer; founding vice president HCP

HIGHLIGHTS OF 16 YEARS AT HCP

1981

Original Invitation from Anne Tucker. What are the benefits for the photographers in Houston to meet, organize and form a co-op? Let's meet to discuss the possibilities. All photographers and anyone else who is interested are invited.

Wednesday, October 14, 1981
6:00 p.m. Paradise Bar and Grill
Please pass on this invitation and please come.

Founders organized
Houston Center for Photography (HCP), with Paul Hester elected as president.

1982

HCP moved into its first location at Bering Memorial United Methodist Church.

HCP's first exhibition was work by HCP members.

HCP incorporated as a nonprofit organization.

Collecting Photographs, lecture by Frank Carrell and David Mancini.

Dave Crossley became HCP president.

Photography Lecture Series, four part lecture series with Joan Seeman-Robinson, Anne Tucker and David Mancini.

Infrared photography, hands-on weekend workshop using infrared film. April Rapier, instructor.

The Nude, a two and a half day master workshop by George Krause.

Early Texas Photographers was an exhibition of photographs from the collections of the Harris County Heritage Society, the Houston Metropolitan Research Center and the Houston Public Library.

HCP held its first benefit auction at the Paradise Bar & Grill, December 11. The auction photographs were installed at the Rice Media Center the week previous to the auction.

"HCP and I have buttressed each other for 15 years."
Anne Wilkes Tucker

1983

HCP published its first issue of *Image*.

HCP moved to current West Alabama location and hired Lynn McLanahan (Herbert) as its first executive director.



AGENT ORANGE • EARLY TEXAS • EXHIBITIONS • BOOKS
TECHNICAL SERVICE • XXX • DENNIS HOPPER • CALENDAR

10 Photographers in New Mexico: contemporary work exhibition. Sept. 1983 (First exhibition in new space)

The Photographer as an Investigator, lecture by Betty Hahn.

Hand Coloring Photographs, workshop by Casey Williams.



1983 Fellows
(the first HCP fellowships)
Martin Harris
Naomi Bullock
Pamela Morris



Messages from Earth — national juried exhibition. Jurors: Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom. The show supposed the possibility of sending the group of photographs into space as "messages from Earth."

Petra Benteler and Frederick Baldwin conceived the idea for Houston FotoFest. Modeled after the "Mois de la Photo" in Paris, the purpose of this biennial celebration was to promote photography and enhance the growing cultural reputation of Houston and Texas.

Coast to Coast: Recent Work. Contemporary works exhibited from 34 different photographers across America.

Sally Horrigan became HCP president.



Tom Barrow

Basic Lighting, workshop with Jim Lemoine, instructor.

Agent Orange photographs by Wendy Watriss (USA), Mike Goldwater (Great Britain), Goro Nakamura (Japan) and Philip Jones Griffith (Great Britain). Photographic study of people and effects of the defoliant agent orange.

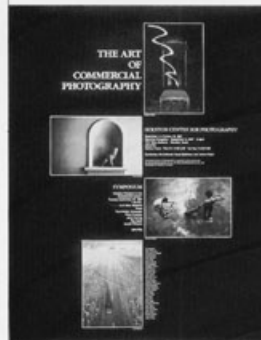
1984

HCP held its first board retreat and writes its mission statement:

The Houston Center for Photography is a non-profit membership organization that serves the community as a resource for educational exchange through exhibits, publications, lectures, workshops and fellowships. Our goals are to provide a forum for critical dialogue and to encourage diverse approaches to photography.

The Art of Commercial Photography, lecture by Joe Baraban.

Contemporary European Photography. Exhibit by 28 contemporary European photographers, curated by Lorenzo Merlo.



Introduction to Portrait Photography, workshop by Dave Crossley.

Gay Block became HCP president.

Eyewitness: News Photographers in Houston. Exhibit of work done by photojournalists living in the Houston area, curated by Wendy Watriss.

Photojournalism: Some Current Issues, lecture by Wendy Watriss.

Landscape Photography, field trip with Peter Brown, instructor.

A panel discussion on Social Responsibility in Photography: Can Photographers Make a Difference? Speakers included Fred Lonidier, Allan Pogur, Daniel Bustamante and Gay Block.

Photographing People, class by Peter McClenman.



After five issues, *Image* magazine became SPOT.

New Women: New Documents, exhibit curated by Jan Z. Grover.

Underlying Questions, workshop with Ray Metzker discussing fundamental issues confronting photographers.

Introductions: Judy Coleman and Barbara Norfleet. Exhibit of artists' works not previously exhibited in Houston.

HCP held its Black & White Ball benefit at the Magnolia Ballroom.

HCP is one of only a handful of non-profit spaces around the country that is committed to showing great new photography. HCP and its fellows program perform a vital role in the ecosystem of photography, providing the means for exciting photographers to communicate with each other and giving their work an audience. They're showing some of the most powerful and important art being made today, that would otherwise be unseen.

Christopher Rauschenberg: photographer; co-director of Blue Sky Gallery

1984 Fellows
Margaret Moore
Deborah Telatovich
Peter McClennan



Gallery space utilized by Children's Christmas Program in which children from all over the community came to the Center, learned about the history of photography, how to use a Polaroid Camera and then took pictures of each other. The children created an installation in the front windows of HCP.

Ansel Adams: A Tribute Exhibition

Self-Portraits and Portraits of the Elderly, lecture by Anne Noggle.

In SPOT, Paul Hester wrote about photography collections in Houston and around the state.

Dave Crossley wrote about how O. Winston Link's obsession with trains forms a strong social document.

Wendy Watriss interviewed Anne Tucker about the evolution of photography in Houston, the museum and photography in general.

1985

HCP hired Lew Thomas as executive director and Chris Lunceford as administrative director.

Amanda Whitaker became HCP president.

Aaron Siskind and Linda Connor. Retrospective exhibition later reviewed by April Rapier in SPOT.

Expose: 4th Annual HCP Members' Exhibition. Exhibition of Houston photographers in conjunction with the Houston Coalition for the Visual Arts.



HCP showed **Siliconstones: A Photographic Installation** (its first installation) by Carol Gerhardt and Mary Margaret Hansen.

Richard Misrach

Mary Margaret Hansen and Carol Gerhardt

Suspended Animation: Photographs of Houston Architecture. Over 100 photographs from historical to contemporary interpretations of Houston's architecture.

1985 Fellows
Dornith Doherty
Paula Goldman
Stephen Peterson



Workshop for children: Polaroids for Kids by Sally Horrigan.

On the occasion of his HCP exhibit, Peter Brown interviewed Richard Misrach about "the Berkeley wars to the mysteries of Don Juan."

Discovery Workshop, workshop led by Charles Schorre about awareness and helping participants to think about themselves and their art.

Dave Crossley reviewed the work of Houston artist Charles Schorre.

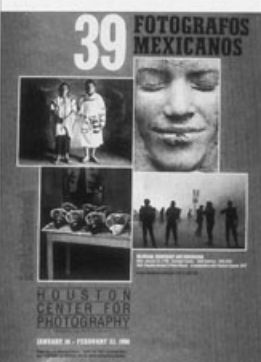


Nic Nicosia

Sally Gall discussed Barbara Kruger's work as shown at Houston's CAM.

Writing about Photography: A Practical Workshop for Reviewers, workshop led by Teresa Byrne-Dodge and Mimi Crossley.

1986



HCP showed Bernard Faucon during FotoFest.

39 Fotografos Mexicanos, curated by Pedro Meyer and Lew Thomas

Fifth Annual Members' Exhibition.

Introduction to Color Photography, workshop by Jim Caldwell.

Recording Sexuality: Photography and Video by Women.

Herman Detering became HCP president.

Grand Illusions: New Large Format Polaroids, exhibition of 75 artists.

Photography and Language, workshop by Lew Thomas.

Texas 150: New Texas Photography. In conjunction with the Texas Sesquicentennial.

Hopps and Gutmann: Four Walls/Five States. HCP's 5th Anniversary Exhibition

1986 Fellows
Roel Castillo
Bill Frazier
Frank Isaac
David Portz

1987

Maggie Olvey provided "a concise history of the photographic print" through the present in both exhibition format and for SPOT.

Richard Wolin looked at the 'dialectic at a standstill' in Robert Frank's images.

Love Letters and Pictures, lecture by Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom.



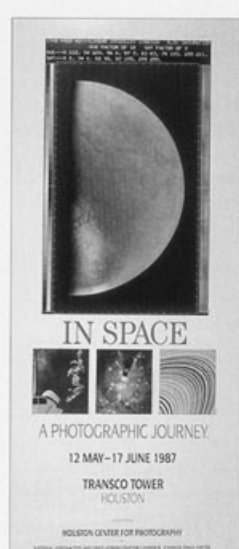
Four Anonymous "Janes," female Houstonians, discussed the controversial video tape, "Dick Talk," by yet another group of anonymous women.

April Rapier moved from president to interim executive director of HCP.

Dave Crossley became HCP president.

Workshop on darkroom safety: Risky Living in the Darkroom by Sharon Stewart.

Shoji Ueda: Sand Dunes. This Japanese artist's series depicted his own surrealistic theater of the absurd.



Fundamentals of Black and White Photography, workshop by Jay Forrest.

Slide Show- Photographs from the USSR

The Family/Extensions. Group show, curated by April Rapier.

"HCP has been central to the development of my career as an artist, educator and curator through a series of rewarding experiences and memories dating back to 1987."

Monica Chau

In cooperation with HCP, the East and West Galleries of Transco Tower showed "In Space: A Photographic Journey," the first large-scale exhibition of photographs taken for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, curated by Dave Crossley and Muffy McLanahan.

1987 Fellows
Jill Goodman
Elizabeth M. Grant
Carol Vuchetich

Cynthia Freeland critiqued the "real" Jean Baudrillard.

Peter Lehman examined representation of the waking and dream worlds in David Lynch's film, *Blue Velvet*.

One Eye - Group Show. 12 Houston artists, curated by Jack Massing.

HCP honors its mission statement. It has been a lively forum for anyone interested in photography. HCP has shown a much greater depth and diversity of photography on a regular basis than either Houston's galleries or museums have managed.
Anne Wilkes Tucker: Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator of Photography, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Doug Ischar examined artistic activism and AIDS.

Portrait Lighting, workshop by Carey Suttive.

Gay Block looked at the directions of the LA Center for Photography and Twelve Trees Press.

Joel Meyerowitz: *A Summer's Day*. Included works not previously exhibited in Houston using an 8 x 10 inch Deardorff view camera.

1988



Bruce Gilden

HCP showed *Beyond the Image*, curated by Robert Blake from the International Center for Photography for FotoFest.

Lonnie Shavelson: *I'm not Crazy, I just Lost My Glasses* exhibit.



"HCP has been like a good friend who has stuck with me through the thick and thin of my growth as an artist and teacher."
Cara DeBusk



Susan Ressler

HCP showed *The Other*, curated by Cynthia Freeland.

Know Your Camera, workshop by Bill Frazier.

Japanese Women Photographers from the 50s to the 80s exhibit.

HCP hired Jean Caslin as executive director. Clint Willour began a two-year term as president.

4 x 5 Photography, workshop by Jim Estes.

Digital Photography, a traveling exhibition from SF CameraWork, curated by Marnie Gillett and Jim Pomeroy

Pinhole Photography, workshop by Linda Heitcamp Gabbard.

HCP initiated Artists' Access Macintosh Grants

1988 Fellows:
R. Lynn Foster
Liz Ward
Paul V. Kuntz

Jenny Lenore Rosenbaum reviewed Japanese avant garde video.

Bill Frazier, Joan Seeman Robinson, David Lazar and Stanley Moore wrote of their impressions of FotoFest '88.

Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill explored the public fascination in Diane Arbus's photographs.



Betty Lee

Doug Ischar looked at how Judith Crawley's photography 'reclaims realism.'

Margo Reece examined how Dennis Hopper's films, "challenge ... Hollywood conventions."

Joan Seeman Robinson wrote about Joel Peter Witkin's photography and the traditions contained within.

Direct Exposure (DX) community outreach program begins through the efforts of Ben DeSoto. Darkroom installed at Ripley House.

1989

HCP hired Michael DeVoll as administrative director.



Dick Arentz

HCP showed *Beyond Permission* curated by Geoff Brune and R. Lynn Foster.

Three Hungarians: Work by Tibor Varnagy, Istavan Halas, Zsuzsi Ujj curated by John P. Jacob.



George Blakely

HCP began programming of Gallery X.

The Municipal Arts Commission and HCP with support from the City of Houston Department of Aviation and Continental Airlines, presented the first *Windows on Houston* public art project to be displayed at Terminal C at Intercontinental Airport, coordinated by Janice Rubin.

"I think that HCP is the most important and accessible institution for mid-career photographers and artists. A marvelous source of exhibitors, books, workshops and advice."
Keith Carter

Paul Vanderwood studied the stories behind the picture postcards from along the Mexican-American border.

SPOT featured reports on Photography and Conflict in Central America and the 150th anniversary of photography.

1989 Fellows:
Amy Blakemore
Monica Chau
Ben DeSoto
Elbert D. Howze

The Photographic Book: Documents of our Time, curated by Jean Caslin and Monica Chau.



Gillian Brown



Hollis Frampton

1990

During FotoFest, HCP hosted 3 x 5: 3D Installations by Five Artists: Gillian Brown, Robert Flynt, David Joyce, Susan M. Kirchman and W. Snyder MacNeil.



Scottie Stapleton

HCP held Photo Fiesta: Benefit at Magnolia Ballroom.

Joan Morganstern begins a three-year term as president of HCP.

Breath-Taken: The Landscape and Biography of Asbestos, photographs by Bill Ravanesi.

HCP entered NEA Advancement Program.



Anne Rowland

Reinventing the World: Photography of Folk Art Environments, curated by Jean Caslin and Elizabeth Claud.

Anne Rowland: Photographs. Color photographs incorporating self-portraits with projected images of famous people.

Hans Staartjes delved into the photographs of John Pfahl.



Esther Solondz



Sage Sohler

HCP was important as a center from which the photographic arts community could grow and communicate within itself. I participated in the early days of HCP when it was at the Bering Church. It was a place where professionals, like myself, could come together with other people interested in creative photography. It also became a catalyst in bringing to Houston nationally known photographers and providing contact between Houston photographers and photographic organizations elsewhere. As such, it nurtured the growth of the whole field of the photographic arts in Houston.

Wendy Watriss: photographer, FotoFest artistic director

Christopher Hillar: Computer Graphics, an exhibition of computer art by a 7th grade student.

Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill examined the issues raised in HCP's exhibition, The Landscape at Risk.



Michel Papeliers

Kirk Condyles reflected on his own work and argued in defense of the environment.

1990 Fellows:
Margo Reece
Scottie Stapleton
Sonia Yi



Margo Reece

1991



George Krause, Peter Brown, Ed Hill, Suzanne Bloom, Geoff Winningham

HCP held Birthday Blow up Bash at the James Gallery celebrating the organization's tenth anniversary.

Keith and Pat Carter looked at Felix "Fox" Harris in one of six articles to examine the status of folk art in the modern world.



Kathy Grove



Elise Mitchell Sanford

Cara DeBusk looked at the "aura of mystery and mythology" produced by Mike and Doug Starn.

Darkroom installed and DX classes presented at Hester House.

Joan Morgenstern began a three-year term as HCP president.



Martina Lopez

1992

DX updates darkroom at Community Artists' Collective with the help of George Krause.

With funding from an NEA Special Exhibition grant, HCP showed Tseng Kwong Chi: The Expeditionary Works during FotoFest.

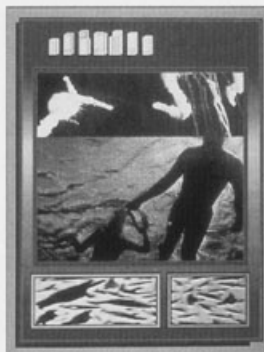


Tseng Kwong Chi

The United Way and HCP joined forces to exhibit See the Difference the United Way at the Galleria featuring 15 Houston photographers and 26 black and white images.

Level But Not Plain: European Landscapes, curated by Hans Staartjes.

Fantastic Voyages, curated by Clint Villour.



Paul Berger

Anne Tucker, David Jacobs and William Camfield discussed the issue of censorship in the arts as framed by the trial of Dennis Barrie and the CAC in Cincinnati.

Michael G. DeVoll, Peter Harvey and Nels P. Highberg reviewed the effects of that thing called TV.

1992 Fellows:
Cara Catherine DeBusk
Radislav Sinyak
Fannie Tapper



Lorie Novak

1993

Darkroom installed at George Sanchez Alternative High School and DX classes begin.

HCP commissioned and presented the project by Lorie Novak and composer Elizabeth Brown, Collected Visions, a multi-media exhibition.

HCP hosted Message Carriers, organized by the Photographic Resource Center in Boston, in the main gallery and Impressions of an Enduring Culture by Anna Strickland in Gallery X. This was the first major exhibition of Native American photography ever exhibited in Texas.



Zig Jackson

"I would characterize HCP as an extraordinary place to be connected with."

Jeannette Landrie

Nino Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open, photographs by Dore Gardner.



Dore Gardner

Ed Osowski began a four-year term as president of HCP

Egyptian Series, exhibit by René Sultra.

HCP displayed Keith Carter's On Higher Ground. This investigation of life along the Mississippi Delta was funded by Texas Commission on the Arts.

SPOT received recognition in two categories from the 1993 Women in Communications Matrix Awards. Co-editors Marlee Miller and Maggie Olvey and designer Jim Tiebout attended the ceremony.

SPOT contained a series of articles written by artists, art historians and scholars that addressed some of the issues of the photographic object.

Mark Petr examined the work of Lorna Simpson.

Jean Caslin, Michael G. DeVoll, Adele Horne, Nels P. Highberg and K. Johnson Bowles examined issues and artists working in "related media" that share photography's ability to freeze life's fleeting moments in time for later evaluation and enjoyment.

1993 Fellows:
Ann Stautberg
Bill Thomas
K. Johnson Bowles
Osamu James Nakagawa

1994



Ben Edwards

Terry Doody explored the benefits that continue to be reaped by students of Susan Sontag.

The Houston Center for Photography has occupied a unique place in contemporary American photography. The exhibition program has consistently provided both opportunities for emerging and mid-career photographers and a forum for other curators to look over HCP's shoulders. SPOT remains an important model to both nourish its immediate audience and add to the growing international discourse on photography in all its diversity.

Edward Earle, Curator of Collections, American Museum of the Moving Image, New York



Bill Thomas

FotoFest, HCP, the Houston Art Dealers Association and DiverseWorks organized Photography Houston/Spring '96, a ten-day photographic extravaganza, to coincide with the fourth Women in Photography Conference. The conference hosted by HCP, held on the



Marlon Fuentes



Gus Van Sant

University of Houston campus, attracted over 300 participants. Carolyn G. Heilbrun from Columbia University delivered the keynote address.

HCP exhibited *The Visual Diary; Women's Own Stories*. With funding provided by the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, HCP initiates Girls' Own Stories at Grady Middle School. Cara DeBusk, Marie Hernandez and Robin Reagler co-taught the classes with the goals of

teaching photography and raising the self esteem of pre-adolescent girls.

The Community Artists' Collective, HCP and the Houston Women's Caucus for Art cosponsored *I Remember it Well*, an installation by Pat Ward Williams at CAC.

About Faces: Approaches to the Portrait, curated by Clint Willour.

HCP hosted *Picturing Asia America: Communities, Cultures, Difference*, curated by Monica Chau during FotoFest.

"HCP has continued to nurture the photographic communities in Houston."
Wendy Watriss

1994 Fellows:
Janna Fullbright
Cynthia G. Rodriguez
Ko Yamada



K. Johnson Bowles



Picturing Asia America

Otilia Sanchez responded to questions surrounding the artistic tenets of the American Indian in two articles devoted to multiculturalism.

Vicki Goldberg reviewed the MFAH's recent acquisition, *The Allan Chasnoff Photographic Collection: Tradition and the Unpredictable*.

Celebrating My 40th Birthday Alone in the Blue Hotel Room, an installation by Dutch artist Lydia Schouten.



Lydia Schouten

A peer grant panel of the Cultural Arts Council of Houston characterized HCP as "... a very impressive organization."



Rea Tajiri

Jo Ortel discussed the role of the issue of quality in perceptions of the photographs in HCP's exhibit *Message Carriers*.

"HCP makes courageous and unusual decisions to show different types of photographic work, especially that of emerging artists who otherwise would have a hard time making a first step into public view."
Bastienne Schmidt

1995



Maggie Olvey

HCP paid tribute to Maggie Olvey (1952-1994) one of its founding members with a Gallery X exhibit of her work. Olvey served several years on HCP's Advisory Council and co-edited and wrote for SPOT.

Direct Exposure: An Exhibition of Student Work from HCP's Community Outreach Programs.

Rodeo, an exhibition of black-and-white photographs by Louise Serpa.

The Women Series, an installation by Gwen Akin and Allan Ludwig.



Gwen Akin and Allan Ludwig



Suzanne Williamson

Pedro Meyer's Truths & Fictions: A Journey from Documentary to Digital Photography, organized by the California Museum of Photography.



Pedro Meyer

HCP hosted Bring a Friend Luncheon to introduce new faces to the Center's activities.

HCP curated *Windows of Wonder* at the Clinical Care Center of Texas Children's Hospital.

The Contemporary Arts Museum of Houston hosted a retrospective of Andre Serrano with a reception at HCP and lecture at Rice University, cosponsored by HCP.

The group show *Digital Dramas* that featured Texas artists opened at the Arlington Museum of Art. The show, cosponsored by AMA, the Texas Fine Arts Association and HCP, traveled to Austin then to Houston.

HCP holds *The Transparent Ball*. No one showed up (as planned).

Jo Ortel, Peter Brown and Ed Osowski reflected on issues raised at FotoFest '94.

HCP debuted on the World Wide Web with the help of Sense Interactive Multimedia, run by longtime HCP friends Dave Crossley and Jeff DeBevec.

"As a photographer, it's important to get your work out so people will see what you do. The programs at HCP provide a great opportunity for a broad range of artists' work to be seen by a knowledgeable (and new) public."
Henry Horenstein

1995 Fellows:
Marilyn Brodwick
Claire Chauvin
Billie Mercer
Judy Sanchez



John Reuter

As HCP has grown and changed, my own visual literacy has developed along with it. In fact, the abilities I possess to look at photography have been developed at HCP... I think of photographs by Lyle Ashton Harris, Bastienne Schmidt, Nan Goldin, Marsha Burns, Keith Carter, Robert Flynt, Frank Yoncos, Chuck Samuels, John Dugdale, Milagros de la Torre, each artist very different, yet each one addressing issues central to the cultural and social landscape in which we live.

Ed Osowski: Immediate past president of HCP

Girls' Own Stories became part of ongoing summer classes at MECA.

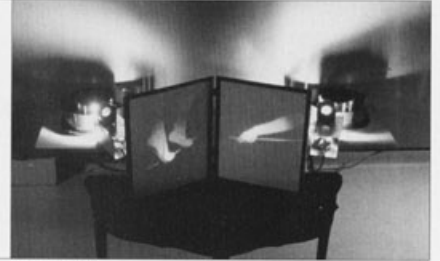
Multi-year Girls' Own Stories program began at Conley Elementary.

Girls' Own Stories and Boys' Own Stories classes presented at Our Lady of Guadalupe Elementary.

Ongoing DX classes through Childress Foundation Academy began at Northbrook High School.

Margo Machida, curator of Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art spoke about the issues of trans-cultural identity facing Asian artists at the south central regional Society for Photographic Education Conference, organized by HCP.

1996
HCP showed Hidden Mechanisms, a commissioned installation by Heidi Kumao, during FotoFest.



Heidi Kumao



Luis Mallo

HCP cosponsored Aspects of Identity by Jan Watten at the C.G. Jung Educational Center and Portrait Narratives by Jonathan Sharlin at HCP.

Picture This, work by students from HCP's outreach programs.



Donna Reidland Bourret

HCP showed The Poetics of Vision by John Dugdale.



John Dugdale

The Wall Street Journal acknowledged HCP as "a much coveted sponsor for emerging and mid-career photographers."

"HCP is a link between emerging artists and other institutions such as museums. HCP is an important stepping stone."
Bastienne Schmidt



Eduardo Muñoz

HCP showed Peruvian Visions by Milagros de la Torre and Flavia Gandolfo and Fragments of Death by Bastienne Schmidt.

HCP entered into the Stabilization Enterprise program of CACHH under which the Center created a three-year strategic plan.

HCP held its 15th Anniversary Party at Gremillion Fine Art.

David L. Jacobs interviewed Andres Serrano on inspiration and the evolution of Serrano's work.



An-Mylé

Robert D'Attilio reviewed, analyzed and dismantled different aspects of Tina Modotti and her Philadelphia Museum of Art installation.

Eric Davis reviewed Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age at the Blaffer Gallery.

New Typologies. A group exhibition of work in which the artists produce sets of images of similar subjects.

1997

The Medicine Show, conceptual and documentary projects about medical science and representations of the body, curated by Jean Caslin.

"HCP has been and continues to be an important presence in the cultural life of Houston."

Wendy Watriss

HCP's third annual exhibition of Latin American work, Myths, Dreams and Realities in Contemporary Argentine Photography, was held in conjunction with the Pan American Cultural Exchange.

HCP's 1997 Benefit Auction was held at St. Thomas University. Auctioneer Dale Stulz was on hand for his fifth HCP Auction.



Gabriel Diaz

Talento Bilingue de Houston darkroom installed and classes presented through DX program.



Jeannette Landrie

Marlee Miller began her term as HCP president.

Girls' Own Stories classes began at J. Will Jones Elementary.

DX classes began at Carnegie Library.

The Center emerged from CACHH's Stabilization Enterprise Program with a grant that will aid HCP in fulfilling its Vision 2000 plan.

"Photographs are the first thing — and are likely to be the only thing — I've ever collected. Almost"



Fazal Sheikh

everything on my walls has come from HCP's photo auctions. I grow in confidence thanks to the good eyes of the auction's selection committees."
Jeff Millar

Fernando Castro reviewed four FotoFest '96 shows that raised the question of the future direction of landscape photography.

Don Bacigalupi offered his thoughts on the photography of John Dugdale.

Fazal Sheikh: New Work. Black and white documentary series on refugees in Africa and Robert Flynt: Compound Fracture.

1997 Fellows
Bennie Flores Ansell
Jesse DeMartino
Jeannette Landrie

"I'm look forward to an additional 16 years — for us both!"
Keith Carter

ACTOR Actress



Self-portrait (Actress)/after Catherine Deneuve 1, 1996

Yasumasa Morimura: Actor/Actresses,
Contemporary Arts Museum,
Houston
May 10 – June 22, 1997

Ed Osowski

Few Houston spaces summarize a certain downtown New York look so successfully as does the Contemporary Arts Museum's (CAM) recently re-opened and expanded Perspectives Gallery.

Down a flight of stairs which awkwardly brings the viewer to the exhibition space one finds bare concrete floors and walls. Heating and cooling devices and lighting equipment cross the unadorned ceiling. This space, hard and tough and far from neutral, declares itself to be the sort of space where looking at art is to be done seriously. By extension, this is a space where the art shown is also to be taken seriously.

To inaugurate this expanded space CAM Senior Curator Dana Friis-Hansen has assembled a selection of 26 photographic images by the Japanese photographer Yasumasa Morimura. *Yasumasa Morimura: Actor/Actresses* is an exhibition perfect for its space and perfect for how it summarizes the aesthetic which accompanies the downtown New York space.¹

Morimura's works are free of humor or wit. While they play with the conventions of Hollywood glamour and publicity imagery, they do so with a profound sense of gravity and weight. These works proclaim their seriousness first, by their size: 18 of the photographs are nearly three by four feet or larger. They are derivative and referential in the best meaning of post-modern appropriation and quotation. Morimura works with keen awareness of the visual precedents that underline his work. These images attempt to make high art from the materials of low or popular art and

deliberately blur the boundaries that separate high from low, serious from kitsch. By using himself as the model and as the subject of the photographs, Morimura also places his work within the recent tradition of self-reflexive image making. Most obviously, because Morimura is a man, his posing as a woman raises the issues of androgyny, role playing, gender stratifications and the male gaze imposed upon the female subject. As an Asian, Morimura also entertains the subject of how Western concepts of beauty and publicity are understood when filtered through Eastern sensibilities.²

"Yasumasa Morimura: Actor/Actress" consists of works made in 1996. The actresses represented, however, cover over six decades, from the 30s and 40s — Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo — through the 50s and 60s — Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn — and into the 70s and 80s — Liza Minelli, Jodie Foster, Brigitte Bardot. Morimura limits his attention to that period of naive cultural awareness before the ability of the image to shape perceptions and to control expectations became as well articulated as it has been in the past ten years. He takes as

ter or Minelli. Morimura takes the look of publicity photographs, the black and white glossies that would have been displayed in a movie theater lobby, and explodes their size. In five cases, the photographs are larger than four by six feet, larger, that is, than a lobby poster. Morimura is quite adept at role-playing: he becomes she; the actor becomes the actress; the photographer becomes the object photographed; the person looking becomes the thing looked at.³

Morimura captures a look a pose, an aura that is culturally described as female. What he goes on to ask is whether femaleness lies at the center of his subjects or whether it is a cultural construction, something that can be put on and then taken off like a wig or a gown. The viewer immediately knows that this is not a photograph of Elizabeth Taylor in the role of Maggie the Cat.

What Morimura wants his viewer to notice is that originality is not what defines these actresses. They are fictions, packages of glamour, creations of desire, objects of lust; all artificial signs of the ways mass (Western) culture portrays woman.



Self-portrait (Actress)/after Ayako Wakao, 1996

his starting point a visual history when imagery could be viewed innocently. With great attention to makeup and costume, lighting and sets, he recreates the look of publicity photographs. Here is Rita Hayworth in "Gilda." Here is Audrey Hepburn in "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Here is Liza Minelli in "Cabaret."

Upon such examination one realizes that the model is not Hepburn or Fos-



Self-portrait (Actress)/after Audrey Hepburn 2, 1996

It may be appropriate to call posing as the act that defines both the art and the creative spirit of the 1990s. The restless shifting of self from one identity to another, each one scriptless and impermanent, none more meaningful than the next, is the cultural and psychic condition within which Morimura works. If there is a crisis at the core of the Western definition of the self, no artist better visualizes it than Mori-



Self-portrait (b/w)/after Liza Minelli, 1996

mura and his actor/actress photographs. These are works that are deliberately hollow and empty, thoroughly abstract despite the concrete trappings with which he costumes himself.⁴

Footnotes

1. Opening simultaneously in the upstairs gallery with the exhibition under review was *Finders/Keepers* celebrating CAM's approaching 50th birthday in 1998. If memory serves me one of CAM's most successful exhibitions was its 1981 survey of Ansel Adams' career, *Ansel Adams and the West*. Yet the Adams' exhibition is not discussed in the accompanying catalogue nor is anything by Adams among the works on display. One suspects that Morimura and the aesthetic he represents will be remembered differently when CAM celebrates its 100th anniversary.
2. Friis-Hansen links Morimura's cross-dressing strategies to the tradition of the Kabuki theater in which, beginning in 1629, men played women's roles and attempted to create idealized or abstract versions of the woman (catalogue p. 4.). *Self-Portrait (Actress)*/after Ayako Wakao refers to the Kabuki tradition as well as to the long history of Japanese wood-block prints of theatrical performers.
3. Morimura's photographs are not homages to photographers from Hollywood's golden past. The titles of the photographs refer to the actress upon whom the self-portrait is modeled and emphasizes both the self-referential and the low art origins of these works. Chuck Samuel's series of appropriated female images, *Before the Camera*, 1990, (shown at HCP 1992) refer to the male photographer Samuel's parodies in the title of each work (*After Bullock*, *After Man Ray*). Samuel's strategy seems much less ambiguous but somehow more ambitious than Morimura's. Samuel charges his works with irony and wit and political and historical currency.
4. Comparing Morimura's *Actor/Actresses* images to Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series, made early in her career between 1974 and 1980, serves to lessen Sherman's achievement. Even today Sherman's small black-and-white images have a crispness that seems beside the point to Morimura. While both Sherman and Morimura engage the viewer in a cultural critique, for Sherman the idea of examining woman's culturally defined place through staged/invented stills from imagined movies has a currency that seems gone by the time Morimura created his project. The small size of Sherman's images repeating the size of black-and-white glossy publicity

stills that formerly were displayed in movie lobbies raises the question of how stereotyping and role casting have made women small. Their size also forces the reviewer into a much more intense visual experience, something Morimura approaches in a grid of black and white "glamour" portraits. Sherman engages her viewer with the implied narrative of her images; for Morimura, telling a story seems beside the point. And if it is the frisson of gender bending that one wants, Morimura's photographs seem beside the point when Robert Mapplethorpe's 1980 *Self-Portrait* in furs, curly wig and makeup is recalled.

A Review of The 5th National Women In Photography Conference

Transforming the Mirror

Jo Ortel

Transforming the Mirror, the Fifth National Women in Photography Conference (WIP), convened earlier this summer in Boston, Massachusetts. This is the first conference since the highly successful one held in Houston and sponsored by Houston Center for Photography in 1994.¹ Begun in the early 1980s as a grassroots effort, the conferences continue to be ad hoc, held when and wherever any group of energetic individuals takes the initiative to organize and host one.

There is, however, nothing amateur about these affairs. This year's conference, like its predecessors, was thoughtfully planned and impeccably executed. As its mission statement promised, the conference encompassed the many genres of photography and focused on the concept, creation and reception of the photographic image at the turn of the 21st century. Panel topics ranged from the historical to the contemporary, covering everything from the relationship of photography to other media, to the role of women as objects and agents of the camera, and beyond, to the implications of digital technology in contemporary photography. Portfolio reviews were also arranged thus offering artists the opportunity to have their work examined by curators and dealers. In addition, over 30 area galleries and museums held exhibitions that dovetailed with the conference.

Diane Neumaier gave the keynote address on the first evening.² Wide-ranging, her talk characterized the present as an open historical moment, ripe with both opportunities and obligations to think anew. One observation I as an historian and critic found particularly striking concerned the lack of critical analysis of feminist imagery. Neumaier remarked that feminist art historians and critics currently seem more interested in deconstructing dominant cultural production than in analyzing and critiquing the alternative work feminist artists are creating.³ She called for more attention to *self-representation*, to attempts at defining ourselves as subjects. I would argue that because representation in *all* its forms produces social reality, feminist criticism and analysis is needed on *all* fronts. Still, her observation is trenchant and her point well-taken. We need to refocus our attention on contemporary feminist art.

Neumaier's assertion that representation is at the heart of all struggle resonated through the entire conference. Two sessions in particular, "Live Bodies" and "The Threat of Feminist Iconography," addressed aspects of women representing women. Panelists in "Live Bodies," for example, responded to the question, "Why and how is the body presented as an active instrument of performance rather than an object to be recorded?" Holly Smith Pedlosky offered her perspective on women photographers from history. African American artist Renee Cox



Laurie Long, *Airplane 50s* from the series *Becoming Nancy Drew*, 1996

presented her own strategy of reversal, in which she photographs members of oppressing groups in the stereotyped identities inflicted on oppressed groups. Susan Jahoda showed her current work, which evocatively combined text with photos.

In "The Threat of Feminist Iconography," moderator and photographer Barbara Yoshida, performance artist Carolee Schneemann and photographer Jacqueline Hayden explored "the ways in which women's work in photography has threatened the status quo ideas of sexuality, desire and eroticism."⁴ In my judgment and somewhat to my own surprise, Schneemann's presentation was the most theoretically-sophisticated and challenging of all those that addressed women photographing women, good as most of them were. Schneemann's work has been dismissed

as by turns too angry and/or too attentive to the male gaze and exploitive of women. And, as a multi-media artist, her relationship to photography is tenuous; indeed, her presence on a panel at the conference was questioned by some "purists." However, her com-

ments made it clear at least to me that she is formulating a theory of photography with far-reaching implications and incorporating it into her various artistic practices. Schneemann's uneasy status in and relationship to conventional mediums, her nonconformity and the discomfort her work produces are some of the reasons her art continues to deserve close scrutiny.

Naturally, there were many more significant moments and exciting talks, including Noriko Fuku's excellent, theoretically-informed survey of 130 years (sic) of Japanese women photog-

raphers. Fred Ritchin, too, presented a stimulating discussion of the "Potentials of the Internet." Drawing upon Donna Haraway and Danah Zohar's writings, he suggested a framework for thinking about the digital revolution, which he maintains has not yet arrived. His contention that the new technology initiates a paradigm shift affording us the possibility of reinventing ourselves is seductive particularly for a feminist audience, though perhaps overly optimistic.

Some may question the continued need for a women-centered conference. Vaughn Sills, co-chair of the steering committee, noted that although progress has been made, women's contributions to the field of photography are still too often overlooked and erased. The WIP conferences provide a forum where women can build commu-



Michiko Matsumoto, *Yayoi Kusama*, 1985

nity and talk with one another about subjects of special importance to them.

A variety of strategies has been employed in the past to facilitate this exchange. In Houston, organizers embedded breakout discussions within sessions to encourage interaction among attendees. In Boston, this structured-discussion format was eliminated; organizers instead chose to establish an intimate tone by limiting the number of attendees to 260. This strategy was somewhat counterproductive because interested folks had to be turned away so the limit would not be

exceeded. And the lack of formal forums for discussion meant opportunities for meaningful exchange were lessened within the conference proper. The problem came into focus at the "Mentoring and Strengthening Identity" session in which discussants spoke of their experiences mentoring women of all ages, classes and cultural backgrounds. Visual activist Robin Melavalin, for example, described how she uses photography as a tool to foster personal empowerment and promote social change. Conducting workshops in homeless shelters and elsewhere, she encourages women to experiment with attitudes and positions of power, both in front of and behind the camera. Her techniques could easily have been utilized to build both individual and group identity among conference attendees; unfortunately, this did not happen. Instead, we listened and remained seated in a darkened amphitheater, an environment seemingly designed to *inhibit* any sense of community.

In the end, this auditorium, where many of the sessions were held, became for me a metaphor for the primary concerns women in photography face at the turn of the century. In this room, an elaborate computer screen attached to the podium controlled slide projection. However, the screen was sensitive to the touch — and somewhat idiosyncratic besides. Odd as it sounds, presenters were instructed to wet their finger before pressing the screen when they wished to advance their slides. This, of course, elicited laughter from the audience. "It has to be saliva," someone called out when one health-conscious presenter produced a water glass. The audience member turned out to be right.

In this unexpected way, two overriding themes of the conference, the body and technology, were vividly fused. Increasingly, technology is enabling us to rethink notions of community and communication, representation and identity. That wetted index finger, I suspect, points the way to the prominent issues for the next Women in Photography Conference, when and wherever it might occur.

Jo Ortel received a Ph.D. from Stanford University and is an assistant professor of art at Beloit College in Madison, Wisconsin.

FOOTNOTES

1. Held June 5-7, 1997, the Conference was sponsored by the Institute for Leadership and Change at Simmons College, with support from the Massachusetts College of Art and the Photographic Resource Center. For reviews of the Houston Conference, see SPOT, vol. 13 no. 3, Fall 1994.
2. Documentary photographer Susan Meiselas gave the address on the second evening.
3. According to Neumaier, feminist theory/criticism has reached a plateau, propelling photographers to assume the "double burden" of being photographer and critic simultaneously. Neumaier is editor of *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*. See review, this issue p. 25.
4. From printed program notes.

Gladness in Remembrance

Looking at Death
Barbara P. Norfleet
Boston: David R. Godine, 1993
141 pages

Secure the Shadow. Death and Photography in America
Jay Ruby
Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995, 220 pages

Wisconsin Death Trip
Michael Lesy
New York: Doubleday, 1973

Richard Williams

Nineteenth century Americans saw the novelty of capturing a memory. They discovered that photographs could memorialize loved ones, preserving the physical reality of an individual forever. Photographers recognized this interest and began to advertise and emphasize photographic memorials. Soon requests for photographs began to increase. Everyday people from both rural and urban America wanted to be photographed. Hundreds and hundreds of prints were eventually produced, preserving both individual memory and smaller pieces of history.

In three publications, *Looking at Death*, *Wisconsin Death Trip* and *Secure the Shadow*, a specific subject variable was used as a primary reference by three separate scholars. This variable was found to be a common element in many of the collections reviewed by the authors and after considerable research was established as a category capable of supporting a "genred" division of historic photography called postmortem photography. This division consists of photographic representation of individuals dead or dying and focuses on the earliest and latest examples of an art that has not been well received in the latter part of this century.

The authors found in many of the historic photographs common techniques were used to support the development of the postmortem genre.



Steinmetz Studio, *Sea Widows Mourning Their Husbands*, Pennsylvania, 1942.

Standard procedures based on everyday 19th century photography were applied with very little deviation. However, the use of the dead as a subject matter held a certain fascination with these authors.

In each book, the authors reveal that 19th century Americans did not view death an unusual prospect. Society, they declared, had become accustomed to either dead or dying family members and viewed death as natural and part of the life cycle. In two of the books, *Secure the Shadow* and *Looking at Death*, a high infant mortality rate is noted which produced a particular phenomenon. Parents often refused to name their newborns until after their first birthday. These parents, the authors noted, did not recoil from the inevitable but instead were accustomed to loss. In fact, some scholars have presented this attitude as a significant cause in the rise of postmortem photography (Ruby, pg. 52-53).

Adept at advertising, 19th century American photographers had begun to characterize postmortem photography as a way of "securing the shadow, ere the substance fade" (Newhall, 1982, pg. 32). The three post-mortem collections reviewed in this article noted that families were encouraged to preserve physical memories of their dearly



Frank Monaco, from *Women of Molise* series, Italy, 1952-53.

departed. Distasteful by today's standards, this encouragement was not seen as something morbid or disrespectful.

Individuals were encouraged not to see the act of capturing the image of "a dearly departed" as something distasteful but as a common and socially acceptable form of remembrance. It was 19th century photographers who had created the "art" of postmortem photography and American society who had made it a common practice (Ruby, pgs. 59-60).

Rural families and poor urban individuals were not accustomed to spending money on frivolous photographs. They would, instead, quickly send for a

photographer at the time of death to preserve the physical memory of their child. The photographer made himself available at all times. He would go to the home of the deceased or make arrangements for the body to be delivered at his studio. He would arrange the dress, pose and light the corpse according to the wishes and money of the bereaved, then execute the photograph. As a further example of his "care and concern" the photographer would then help the grieving parents or family arrange for the burial (Ruby, pg. 54).

Between the middle 19th and early 20th century, postmortem photography did not change significantly.

Burial and remembrance services often included stylized postmortem photographs which helped the bereaved and allowed distant relatives a chance to participate in ritual burial customs. "Funeral photographs may be the only way in which family members separated by great distances (and the majority of the Americans at this time were immigrants) can participate in the grieving process." (Ruby, pg. 175).

Also, during this time, newsworthy deaths, such as that of a president or a notable citizen, were being memorialized with photographs. People could request individual photos of these famous fallen heroes with images produced in either a living or dead reference. Formal memorials that suggested the importance of these individuals were often found in American homes. This practice, the authors noted, led to the solid establishment of postmortem photography as a cultural event.

Changes in the world of medicine along with the decline of infant mortality resulted in a sudden cultural change. Americans began to accept the inevitability of death as a negative aspect. They saw their children survive serious infections that had devastated earlier societies. With this decline came a change in attitude toward post-mortem photography (Norfleet, pg. 13).

Barbara Norfleet concentrates on the photographic exhibition entitled *Looking at Death* held in the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University. Norfleet focused more significantly on psychological variables that relate to death and grieving. Her book, a pensive glimpse at something

she calls "this most natural event in our lives" highlights attitudes that have arisen over the decades concerning death.

Norfleet believes that different cultural and social customs help individu-



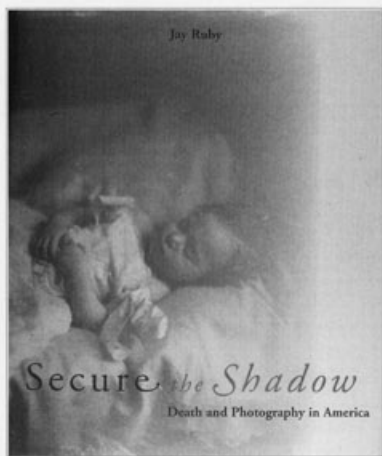
als signify the meaning of death. Her emphases on good death, staged death, violent death and memorialization illustrate different psychological attitudes concerning the way people die. Her choice of publishing historical photographs that are unusually gruesome and indelicate persuades the reader to examine his or her attitude concerning different ways that people die and the inevitability of death in general. A prime example of this can be found in the published photograph of the mutilated body of Benito Mussolini.

Norfleet highlighted the photograph of Mussolini, along with other published illustrations of suicide, murder, infanticide and accidental deaths to emphasize a slow but progressive trivialization of death. Her use of glaringly morbid postmortem photographs forces the reader to observe the effect that violent modern society has on the acceptance or denial of death. This observation, along with her text, suggests that death is not only something society has trivialized but also something which is often denied. It is this slow trivialization, she reveals, that allows individuals to develop inhibitions about death.

The gathering of the Carpenter collection and the acknowledgment of no recent urban city, battle zone or AIDS postmortem photographs helps Norfleet emphasize her beliefs concerning Americans and death. Her collection and text infer that the grieving processes used in producing post-mortem photographs are no longer appropriate for many deaths because of changes in the social attitudes of most Americans. "Individuals," she states, are "no longer using photographic mementos to console one another. Most of us have lost the art of sharing our own grief and helping others with theirs." (Norfleet, pg. 14).

This perception of the public's social attitude towards death was developed by Norfleet after her initial organization of the Carpenter collection. Her choice of recognizing the psychological aspects found in postmortem photogra-

phy, however, is in contrast to the next reviewed book by Michael Lesy. In *Wisconsin Death Trip*, Lesy does not wish to examine any aspect of the reader's psychological attitude toward postmortem photographs. Instead he encourages the reader to view the deaths and hardships of the inhabitants of rural Jackson County, Wisconsin. His purpose is to establish a connection that deals with death and photography and offers a causality.



Lesy's presentation of both photographs and text is chronological. He reports that both death and the daily ministrations of rural Wisconsin are available through preserved county records. His collection is centered on the numerous trials and tribulations experienced by the towns and villages of Jackson County during a five year period, 1895 to 1900. His book is a verbatim printing of the stories and accounts found in newspaper articles, local town meeting notes, asylum registers, and judicial recordings. The everyday life of the inhabitants of Jackson county is presented photographically along with specific notation of each individual character.

By publishing the daily events of these small Jackson county villages, Lesy allows a more intimate look at the individuals who inhabit rural 19th century Wisconsin. His photograph collection is a time capsule preserving the identity of the local inhabitants. It is a presentation authenticated by matching a photograph with a specific text from an original source. His approach allows the reader to focus on the constant hardships found in rural 19th century America. Individuals are given names, specific histories and, in some cases, psychological profiles. They are made to appear as real human beings who, if brought forth into the reader's time, could convey the truth concerning common death and interminable hardship.

The commonality of everyday life, along with death photos, highlights Lesy's collection. Common occurrences found in the everyday life of the individuals were essential to his publication. His view of a community surrounded by the constant demise of loved ones is an organized presentation that establishes a theoretical belief concerning the hardships of rural life. Madness, homicide, suicide, poverty, hunger and violence were all events that occurred commonly in rural American. Lesy's organization of post-mortem and living photographs was an attempt to authenticate the day-to-day life and death found in Jackson County.

Lesy used the day-to-day life and death of his photographic characters as the primary cause for postmortem photography. His historical focus on the chronological aspects of his subjects, supported by his photographic collection, allowed the reader to establish a causality concerning the need for certain funeral rituals. His combination of text and photography permitted a more intense examination of the origin of postmortem photography. The time frame of his focus occurred during the height of the postmortem practice. His frequent references to the death and tribulations emphasized the possibility of "why" 19th century Americans used this "death" custom. However, Lesy does not focus on the continuation of this behavior. His book, a theoretical source, develops a causal evaluation concerning late 19th century death customs. It does not acknowledge the continuation of the practice but, instead, establishes a reason for the behavior. This is significantly different from the third publication which focuses on the art of postmortem photography itself.

Secure the Shadow can be considered an ethnographic publication focused on the practice of postmortem photography. Its author, Jay Ruby, analyzes the history and current use of postmortem photography from an anthropological perspective by methodically examining historical facts and figures concerning the practice; and by



Elfie Huntingdon, Joe Bagley, His Children and Mother with Their Dog Spot, 1934.

contrasting these facts with other funeral rituals. The result is a highly defined discussion of the phenomenon of death intertwined with photography.

Ruby began his study of post-mortem photography by slowly collecting photographs from various sections of the United States. These photographs, chosen because of their emphasis on "the photographic representation of death in the United States from 1840 to the present" are organized into an ethnological survey of burial rituals and customs commonly practiced in late 19th and early 20th century America (Ruby, pg. 1). They include both antique and modern post-mortem photos plus illustrations of mausoleums, burial plots and funeral homes. This diversity allows Ruby to emphasize the complex relationships between death, photography, and the American public, and to highlight different perspectives relating to death. They have been chosen, he states, because they make the publication "comprehensible and useful for social scientists, historians of photography, and health care professionals who

work with death and mourning" (Ruby, pg. 1). It is this ideal, Ruby states, plus his fascination with things that are generally avoided that motivates his study. Ruby's motivation to present something useful to the public plus his interest in topics rarely explored help develop the outline of his text. His decision to divide the publication into four chapters focusing on the historical precursors, specific techniques, memorializations and motivations related to postmortem photography, occurred because of Ruby's quest for understanding. His search for a specific social behavior concerning the development of each photograph allows Ruby to follow the specific techniques used in relation to the cultural identity of the photographer. These cultural markers allow Ruby to focus on the origins of postmortem photographic behavior. They can be found in almost every chapter.

Ruby's belief, that the examination of postmortem photographs as something different from art, was a specific hypothesis related to his ongoing work in visual anthropology. It combined the art of photography and the principles of visual representation and permitted Ruby to state that "postmortem photographs studied are not valuable because they are rare, but because they are useful in exploring the attitudes of Americans toward death ... and because they serve as images which can be examined according to social context" (Ruby, pg. 5.6). This examination of the social context behind each

illustration and photograph found in his publication allows the reader to understand the motivation for postmortem photography. And this focus highlights most of Ruby's publication.

Ruby's references to assorted photographs usually include statements of intended use and therefore highlight a specific anthropological format found in other books. However, Ruby also admits that his hypotheses are inferences that constitute "an educated guess" (Ruby, pg. 7). His book, he states is an attempt to examine the social context of not only postmortem photography but also the attitudes of Americans towards death and the changes that have occurred in this area over the last 150 years. It is

this activity, in comparison with the other postmortem publications that allows the reader to see a common focus. Ruby, it seems, admires the preservation of history most of all.

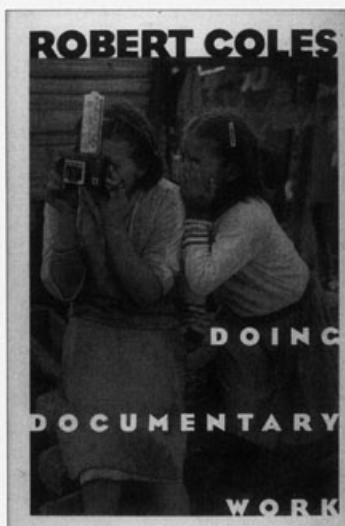
All three authors, Norfleet, Lesy and Ruby have attempted to establish an understanding of the act of post-mortem photography. Each assumed that death and remembrance were actively sought through the use of photography. But, in reality each publication explores the act of grieving. Norfleet, in her morbid and depressing illustrations, offers the psychological losses involved in postponing grief and the dangers related to denying it altogether. Her decision to present 18 years of postmortem research enabled her to state that the act of grieving had become a lonely and isolated behavior. Lesy, on the other hand, with his cold and calculated organization of facts focused on the sadness and despair of death. His decision to publish exact accounts of the trials and tribulations of a rural populace was to show how his textual selections had "permitted the earlier settlers the ability to share the misery by turning strangers into relatives." This activity, Lesy said, allowed individual's who were in despair "to be solaced by others' despair." Grief, he noted, was easier when it was shared (Lesy, pg. 6). However, Ruby with his focus on the use of postmortem photography by grief counselors as a healthy method in dealing with loss, continued to highlight the modern occurrence of the behavior. "Postmortem photographs," he said, "should be studied in order to discern how individual photographs were regarded by the people who made them and used them" (Ruby, pg. 5).

Ignoring the supposition that post-mortem photography is a healthy technique and that the prevalence of AIDS and other related epidemics cause death to be trivialized, not photography but the grief process and its relation to our own demise has been surreptitiously examined in each of these collections. All three authors have illuminated the process of letting go and the importance of accepting death and grief as a natural part of life. They have encouraged readers to focus on the importance of postmortem photography. Americans, they project, can often be brought together when sharing the past with the present; and through each individual photography collection the authors prove their point.

Richard Williams, M.Ed., is currently a graduate student working on an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Houston.



J. M. Brainard, Rome, NY. Photograph of unidentified deceased woman in parlor chair, ca. 1880 - 1900s.



Doing Documentary Work,
Robert Coles, New York: Oxford
University Press, 1997.

Julie Newton

The heart of documentary work is seeing, knowing and telling in some form that cannot possibly represent what was seen and known completely, but telling in such a way that it communicates not "the story, but a story," as Robert Coles so wisely puts it.

In *Doing Documentary Work* the reader travels an inspiringly honest, self-disclosing journey examining the documentary tradition in journalism, film and social science research through the author's experiences, through the experiences of people who have been "studied," and through the experiences of such luminaries as James Agee, Dorothea Lange, Orson Wells, Erik Erikson and Oscar Lewis. Fortunately, the book reads more like an extended conversation among the various protagonists than it does a work of historical, aesthetic or literary criticism.

Robert Coles is one of the best souls left in the late 20th century to write such a piece. From his own multi-volume work, *The Children of Crisis*, Volumes 2 and 3 were awarded the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches social ethics at Harvard as the James Agee Professor and helped found the Center of Documentary Studies at Duke where he also teaches and is co-editor of *Double-Take*, a slick, new documentary magazine. And he is a self-reflective child psychiatrist who studied with one of the great physician-poets-documentarians, William Carlos Williams.

Much of Coles' reflection has been written before: questions regarding editing, cropping, point of view, exploitation of subjects. But his revisit to old issues is one of the best compilations of concerns about documentary that I've found. The book is further strengthened by careful attention to those who have been the target of documentary, expressed through verbatim commentary.

The secret, Coles maintains, is that documentary is more about the doing, than about the work. In lyrical prose reminiscent of an earlier, less skeptical time, Coles courageously and unabashedly composes a reflective hymn to humankind's desire "to know, then tell," to confirm our own humanity by "connecting with others during the brief stay we are permitted here."

Coles has divided his discussion among three domains: the person as documentarian, the work and what he has dubbed the documentary tradition. While he offers notable definitions of documentary, he also asks many ques-

tions, focusing on a central issue: "What kind of work are we doing and to what purpose?" The answers are long and elaborate in keeping with the complex process of "doing documentary."

The book begins by examining one of my favorite passages from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. "If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here," Agee wrote. "It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement." Coles carefully assesses Agee's gifts and warts, weaving a characteristically human portrayal of the writer, and, ultimately, of documentary itself.

As in good psychotherapy, Coles maintains, good documentary is jointly conducted. He cites Nietzsche: "It takes two to make a truth." Yet Coles also considers documentary work "a narrative constructed by the observer ... meant not only to represent 'reality' but inevitably to interpret it," fulfilling "the reflective side" of service to others.

Coles addresses what he considers the dilemma of documentary, "the gulf that separates the reality of the subject from the point of view of the observer," by stressing the personal connections people make while "doing documentary." Citing Oscar Lewis's assertion that "maybe, sometimes, I hear a voice that says *this is the way to go, here, not there*," Coles affirms his faith "in a writer's, a researcher's, a documentarian's subjectivity as it takes hold of objectivity, the muse our nearest approximation of God."



Dorothea Lange, Ditched, Stalled and Stranded, San Joaquin Valley, CA. 1935



Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, Nipomo, CA 1936

In his chapter on "Fact and Fiction," Coles compares real documentary content with the imaginary life of novels: "What emerges, if it is done successfully, is a kind of truth, sometimes (as in Tolstoy, George Eliot, Dickens; we each make our choices from among these storytellers) an enveloping and unforgettable wisdom that strikes the reader as realer than real, a truth that penetrates deep within one, that leaps beyond verisimilitude or incisive portrayal, appealing and recognizable characterization, and lands on a terrain where the cognitive, the emotional, the reflective, and the moral live side-by-side.

Participating in, observing, reporting such enveloping truth is the doing of a continually developing "record" ... made in so many ways, with different voices and visions, intents and concerns."

Cole's words and style, reminiscent of Agee's, may turn off the skeptical critic of documentary who believes that subjective perception and otherization preclude any benefits of doing documentary. I have to confess to tiring during Coles' sometimes too lengthy and projective reads of a documentary classic. But for those of us who have felt the passion of the "doing," his words are a refreshing reminder of why we started "doing documentary" in the first place. One cannot help but ask: what is the alternative? To allow the fear of connecting poorly with someone, of telling someone's story inappropriately, keep us from connecting with them at all, just because it's complicated?

Coles' longest chapter explores "a range of documentary inquiry" from biblical narrative to "photographers under 25," includes a discussion of "the documentary impulse" evident even in young children. "This eagerness to catch hold of, to catch sight of, to survey and inspect, to learn and then convey to others what the eyes and ears have taken in," Coles writes, is "an expression of our creaturely interest in exploration, narration."

Those who "do documentary," Coles concludes, give us "the heartfelt tenderness that informs an attention to what is, what happens — documentary work as a kind of love that becomes expressed in those words, those pictures, a kind of love that is handed over, thereby to others."

Julie Newton is assistant professor in the department of journalism at The University of Texas, Austin, Texas. Newton is director of an ongoing research project, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, which examines the role of photojournalism in mediating reality.

Jack Delano 1914-1997

Lou Jones

I just looked him up in the telephone book and was invited over. A friend had given me a book of his photographs, *Puerto Rico Mio*, and I wanted it signed. That is how Jack Delano and I first met and it says more about him than even his photographs.

He had come with his wife, Irene Esser, who he met in art school, to live in his adopted country in 1946 after discovering Puerto Rico on assignment for Roy Stryker and the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography project. Now he was the last of that legend.

The FSA had given "voice" to such artists as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee and Arthur Rothstein, and it had allowed these luminaries to document the USA at a unique time in its history. Jack had outlived them all. He had almost outlasted his photography. I "collect" photographers, and Jack and I socialized several times over the next few years. I learned so much more about him during those intimate moments. He was a true renaissance man.

In his years in San Juan he had composed music that was performed by noted ballet troupes and symphonies, illustrated children's books, directed TV and films and designed a museum in El Morro. His new book of photography, *Photographic Memories*, is published by the Smithsonian.

Born near Kiev, Ukraine, Jack Delano had grasped Puerto Rican life better than its natives. In life, it was very typical to see him at every cultural event in his area. His death and funeral were state events and front page news.

He is survived by his son Pablo and daughter Laura.

Lou Jones is a Boston-based HCP member and commercial photographer.



WOMEN BEHIND THE SHUTTERS

Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present, ed. Liz Heron and Val Williams. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, 521 pp.

Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies, ed. Diane Neumaier. Foreword by Anne Wilkes Tucker. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, 319 pp.

Jo Ortel

For anyone unfamiliar with women's contributions to photography, two recently published books should fill the gap. One of these, *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, is a handsomely illustrated, thoughtful collection of critical essays and photo artworks by a diverse group of women working in the field today. It was edited by Diane Neumaier. The other book, *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, compiled by Liz Heron and Val Williams, provides a historical survey that excerpts the writings of women critics and photographers. Distinctly different philosophical approaches inform these anthologies, which alone suggests the variety and richness of women's work in and on photography.

In her introduction, Neumaier defines the focus of *Reframings*: artworks and essays that "explore the dynamics of visual images and ideology; how each is embedded in the other, and how together they contribute to the status of women." (pg. 1) According to Neumaier, the artists in this collection: make meaning through an awareness that receiving representation — working with the givens of visual culture — is a negotiable social process ... These artists share a consciousness that historically, women have been "framed" through the process of representation and can be "reframed" through the same process.

The editor does not suggest that pro-active work is the only or even the main direction constituting American feminist photographs today. This anthology makes no claims of comprehensiveness; indeed, that it draws attention to its contingent, partial nature is one of its strengths.

Yet within its carefully-defined scope, *Reframings* is surprisingly expansive and provocative. A great number of artists' works are included either in reproduction or in essay discussions, and the group is refreshingly multi-cultural. The book's organization is equally inspired. It is divided into eight suggestive rather than definitive thematic sections whose broad headings are not so much intended to delineate rigid boundaries as to "encourage the works to interact and thereby promote a kind of discussion within and among the sections." (pp. 8-9)



Pat Ward Williams, *I Remember It Well*, installed at Community Artists' Collective, 1994

Within these sections, the work of five to six photographers, each represented by several pages of handsomely reproduced works, is paired with an essay by a well-known feminist critic, historian or curator addressing some aspect of the same overarching theme. Thus, the first section, titled "Gendering Space," features photographs by such diverse artists as Barbara Kruger, Marilyn Nance, Anne Noggle, Kaucyila Brooke, Sherry Millner and Carol Simon Rosenblatt and an essay by Lucy Lippard on the tangential genre of landscape photography. Similarly, the fourth section, titled "Postcolonial Legacies," presents work by Martha Rosler, Esther Parada, Yung Soon Min, Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie and Pat Ward Williams paired with an essay by Julia Ballerini that explores a photographic project by Carlotta Duarte, using ideas adapted from the postcolonial theories of Gayatri Spivak, among others.¹

The essays in *Reframings* do not necessarily describe or explain the photo artworks that precede them although some do; rather, they complement and extend ideas propounded in the photographs. Or, they introduce other contemporary photographers dealing with related issues.

Some will undoubtedly judge this a limitation, for what is lost is contextual information for and "authorized" interpretations of the featured photographs. But for me, the advantages of this multilayering far outweigh the limitations. First, the reader is introduced to a broader range of artists and ideas. More importantly, the strategy shifts responsibility from the critic-historian-intermediary to the reader; it encourages her personal and active engagement with images. In effect, the format actualizes for the reader the artists' and editor's premise that "receiving representation is a negotiable social process."

Where *Reframings* is innovative and forward-looking, both in form and content, *Illuminations* is more traditional and conservative. The motivation driving this second anthology was the recognition that "women get lost, forgotten, overlooked." (pg. xi) The editors' aim, consequently, was to survey and collect within the covers of a

single book a representative sampling of women's writings on photography through history. The sheer size of *Illuminations* of 521 pages makes the point that women have written a great deal about photography, far more than is typically acknowledged. But, as editors Heron and Williams concede, their collection is not and cannot be, specifically feminist. They also rightly point out that the excerpted texts demonstrate there is no such thing as a "women's way" of writing.

I question some of the editorial decisions behind this collection. For one thing, primary and secondary source materials are not kept separate but are interspersed. A historical essay on "Photography during the July Monarchy," for example, by Gisele Freund published in 1974 follows an 1874 excerpt of Julia Margaret Cameron's writing. These leaps can be confusing even with the acknowledgment of original context and source the editors provide. I also found the idiosyncratic inclusion of reproductions curious and distracting. Why were illustrations deemed necessary accompaniment for only two of the 60 texts?

But my biggest reservation concerns the theoretical underpinnings of *Illuminations*. The selected excerpts rehearse or rehash the recognized canon of photographic movements and people. For example, Lee Miller is represented by a "remarkably self-effacing" (to use the editors' words) sketch she wrote of Man Ray. Why hadn't the editors instead chosen a historical analysis that presented Miller as subject? After all, their intermixing of primary and secondary sources allowed for this kind of re-visioning.

Although it concentrates on women writing, *Illuminations* takes an additive rather than a critical approach to the canon of photo-history. Some of the more recent selections such as such as by Mulvey analyze photography's role in gender construction. However, on the whole, this anthology largely leaves in place the very structure that excludes women.²

Still, there is room for both approaches represented by *Illuminations* and *Reframings*, different as they are. Individually and together, they represent the vitality of women's work in and on photography — in all its myriad forms.

FOOTNOTES

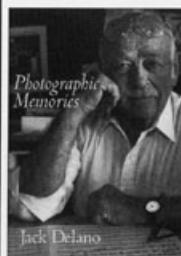
1 Other section headings include: Domestic Production/Reproduction/Resistance; Identity Formations; Rationalizing and Realizing the Body; Sex and Anxiety; Crossing Over; Reimagining and Reimaging; Rerepresenting Representation.

2 Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock's book, *Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology* (NY: Pantheon, 1981) is still the most trenchant analysis of male bias in art and art history. See also Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin*, 69 no. 3 (Sept. 1981), pp. 326-357.

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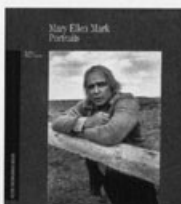
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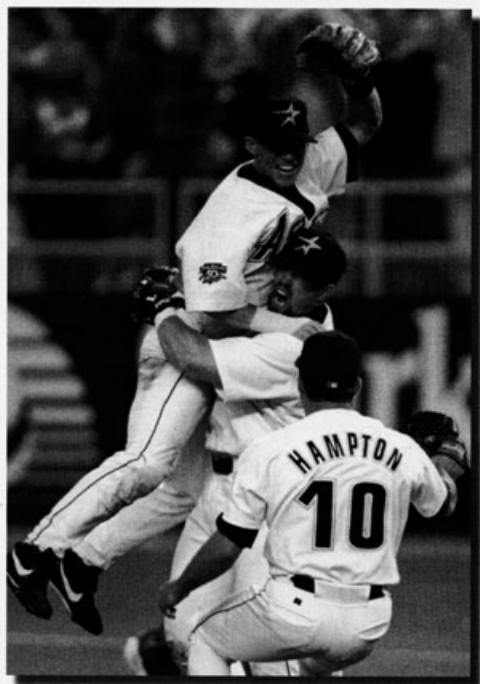
Compiled by Terrance Truxillo.

EXHIBITIONS

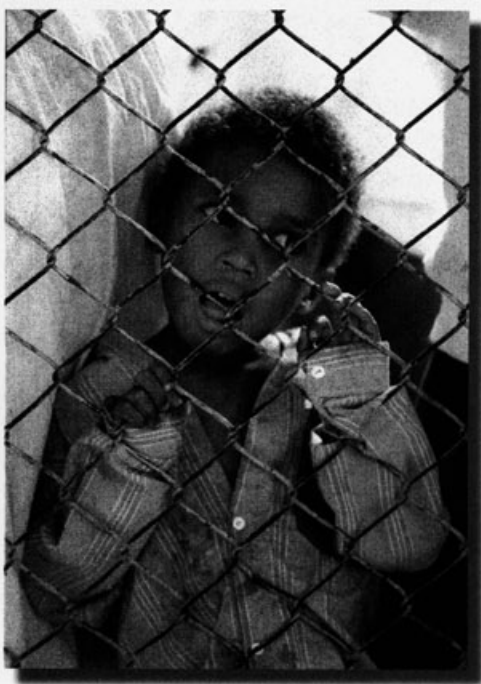
ARTISTS WHO HAVE EXHIBITED AT HCP SINCE ITS BEGINNING

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