



Dennis Fagan

**Yasuhiro Ishimoto • Peter Goin • Nic Nicosia •  
Rick Dingus • Irving Penn • Nicholas Nixon •  
Dennis Fagan • Kate Breakey • Paula Luttringer •  
Philip-Lorca diCorcia**

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Jack Leigh, Tybee Island Bedroom, 1981

*The Land I'm Bound To, a slide talk by Jack Leigh on Thursday, August 10 at 6:00pm in the Freed Auditorium of the Glassell School of Art, 5101 Montrose. This event is cosponsored by HCP, the American Society of Media Photographers and the Glassell School of Art, with partial funding from Southwestern Camera.*

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SPRING/SUMMER 2000

VOLUME XIX

NUMBER 1

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SPOT is published twice a year by Houston Center for Photography; subscriptions are \$10 per year in the United States. SPOT is a journal of independent opinions published by HCP as one of its many services to the photographic community. The ideas expressed do not represent positions of HCP's administration or membership and are solely the opinions of the writers themselves.

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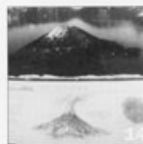
Houston Center for Photography deepens the appreciation and understanding of the photographic arts and supports emerging and mid-career artists and their audiences.

SPOT is sponsored in part by grants from National Endowment for the Arts, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Texas Commission on the Arts, and The City of Houston and TCA through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County.

For details about membership or advertising, contact HCP.

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Cover: Dennis Fagan, *Horse #6*, 1999. Gelatin silver print

# Of People & Buildings

Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Katsura Villa*, 1954. Gelatin silver print

**A TALE OF TWO CITIES:**  
**YASUHIRO ISHIMOTO**  
 ORGANIZED BY  
 THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
 OCTOBER 17, 1999–JANUARY 2, 2000  
 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

## Chas Bowie

*A Tale of Two Cities* is a quiet exhibition that museum-goers might pass through quickly, pausing at certain images, thinking that perhaps they recognized one of the 70-odd black-and-white prints in the show, and deciding that they were familiar with a different, similar photograph. The show is unassuming almost by definition: classic post-war street photography, architectural portraiture and meditative spiritual abstractions by a nearly unknown Japanese-American photographer. Looking closely at the work in the show, however, one finds a 50-year career on display, created by a photographic craftsman with razor-sharp eyes, whose nationalistic duality is subtly evidenced in his photographs of Chicago and Tokyo, his home cities.

Ishimoto's biography, an amalgam of influences and contradictions, is a good place to begin to understand his work. Most of the artist's life was divided (as is this exhibit) between Japan and the United States. Born in San Francisco in 1921 to Japanese parents, the Ishimoto family moved to Japan when Yasuhiro was three years old. As a young adult, Ishimoto returned to the U.S. and studied architecture and photography before being detained in a World War II internment camp for four years. In 1948, Ishimoto moved to Chicago to study photography with Harry Callahan at the Art Institute of Design, the state-side Bauhaus established by László Maholy Nagy, whose writings had deeply influenced Ishimoto as a student. This period in Chicago was a uniquely intellectual American scene, as Russian and European Bauhaus and International Style design and architecture minimally streamed its way into Chicago, influencing people such as Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Frank Lloyd Wright.

At this point, we have a young, American-born Japanese man whose primary interests are architecture and photography. Fresh out of American detainment, he is studying in an American hotbed of unadorned intelligentsia recently imported from behind the

Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Chicago*, 1950. Gelatin silver printYasuhiro Ishimoto, *Tokyo*, 1963/65. Gelatin silver printYasuhiro Ishimoto, *Chicago*, 1959/61. Gelatin silver print

Iron Curtain. This is where *A Tale of Two Cities* picks up.

The opening suite of black-and-white photographs — three shadowy black and whites from *Chicago*, 1950, starts the show off right by simply and harmoniously incorporating the major photographic styles and themes that Ishimoto would pursue throughout his career: social document; human/architectural interaction; and a concentrated, meditative working style. The photographs record an ordinary, dreary city wall pieced together

from wood panels that repeat upon themselves as they line the sidewalk. The wall runs at head level and is divided every three feet or so, creating a flat, modernist abstraction of perpendicular lines and blank urban rectangles. The shadows from the lampposts and street signs cast thick, blocky lines against the wall, crossing and countering the rigid formality of the wall's right angles. Ishimoto returns to the wall often, sometimes in the breaking morning sun, at other times after the day is nearly done; the shadows of the street life look

heavy, resigned and flat against the gridded wall. People pass by this shadow theater — pedestrians moving by quickly, leaving transient shadows that overlap and invade the static wall. Men walk by, triangular in their trench coats, legs pacing in sharp 45-degree angles. Their shadows mimic those of the signs and poles. They appear to have become harmonized with the landscape, to have assumed its structure and to have become assimilated to the structure of the street. Like the lampposts, the humans throw shadows





Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Chicago*, 1950. Gelatin silver print

Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Tokyo*, 1994. Gelatin silver print



Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Chicago*, 1959/61. Gelatin silver print

that snap and break into perpendicular segments, and even the bird that flies across the scene is mirrored in the blotchy sidewalk stain below. Ishimoto returns to this wall repeatedly, watching the city and light change before him, slowly capturing the differences photographically.

The formal harmonies among the men, architecture and shadows in these images look like things that we as viewers have learned from modern dance, as if the Chicago pedestrians were reacting to and interpreting the modern angularity of their surroundings. The strong shadowy black lines that transverse the pictures are notably calligraphic and predate Franz Kline's canvases by a number of years. Ishimoto has pinpointed the dichotomy of the city in these images — the individual within a larger structure, an organic creation in a crafted container. For Ishimoto, the shadows of lampposts become paintings on the walls of an urban cave.

Most of Ishimoto's street photography from the 1950s and 1960s are familiar to us, even if we have not seen his specific

images before. They are exemplars of post-war American street photography that was being practiced in New York by Bernice Abbott, Robert Frank and, to a lesser degree, by Harry Callahan in Chicago. Most of the photography of this genre shows street life as a desolate urban experience in which individuals interact without ever connecting, a place where individuality is dwarfed by metropolitan crowds, pavement and automobiles. The themes generally run along the lines of alienation, form, disjunction and irony. To produce this sort of work requires an intuitive sense of action and eyes and reflexes quick enough to capture the formal harmonies of human alienation. Like the 19th century Parisian *flâneur*, the street photographer is both coolly observant and deeply perceptive.

Having spent so many years photographing the streets of Chicago and Tokyo, Ishimoto produced an incredible body of work in this genre, which unfortunately falls a bit flat by virtue of its collective familiarity. In *Chicago*, 1960, for instance, a young black girl in a white

dress clutches an American flag in each hand, smiling at a trio of elderly women who glance at her disgustedly. As masterfully produced as this image is, it is difficult to remain surprised by these ironies of ugliness, no matter how well preserved on film. Logically, crowds are great fodder for this type of photography, and Ishimoto has worked the crowds as well, thrusting his wide angle lens into waves of people who brush shoulders without ever making eye contact. There are some fantastic images in this large chunk of Ishimoto's work; but to me, Ishimoto makes his best photographs when exploring the symbiosis of humans and buildings. Ishimoto's city portraiture is best defined by the relationship of structures and inhabitants.

In 1954, with the help of Edward Steichen, Ishimoto was the first person allowed to photograph Katsura Riky, a 17th century Japanese villa. For an entire month, Ishimoto shot daily in this bare, geometric classical Japanese structure. Ishimoto focused on the spare lines in the architecture, the simple horizontal

and vertical lines and the harmony of the building with the Japanese land. The absence of any decorative detail in the design and the sparseness of its functional aspects were astonishingly similar to the goals and practices of Western architects Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. The layers of cross-influences in this scenario are numbing, as the Chicagoans are influenced by the Europeans, who looked to the ancient Japanese structures. To have Chicago-based Japanese Ishimoto interpret the relationships between these ideologies produced one of the most famous architecture studies of all time.

For the past 20 years, Ishimoto has been looking at the ground more, creating close-up photographs of the surface of the earth, streets, snow and water. These photographs are exercises in harmony, and the concentration and meditation evidenced in the photographs lead me to refer to them as spiritual abstractions. Although some photographs near complete abstraction, as in the light reflecting off water, others are more referential and retain his concerns of the interaction of people and the street, nature and structure. In *Tokyo*, 1988, a leaf lies on street stones, so wet that it seems to have melted into the street. Only the ghost of the leaf is visible, having assimilated with the stones. In Ishimoto's photograph, there is no street without the leaf, and the leaf does not

exist as its own entity. As the cities are co-habitations of people and buildings, the leaf and the stony street combine to create a new entity, and the accumulation of history and experience piles upon itself — a transposition of time and a layering of the past. If the leaves then represent all the natural things that have come before and since the man-made structures, Ishimoto's images of footprints in the snow implicate us all in his cyclical history. The slushy footprints become pathways, and like the leaf, they become consumed by the ground, so that they are the pathways of all the people who have treaded there before. The street does not exist without the traces of the lives led upon them. These lives have no place to be lived but on the streets and within the walls they create. The dynamics between the two create a unique push-and-pull relationship between men and walls, and eventually, the two become almost inseparable. ●

Chas Bowie is a writer and artist living in Houston.

# RADON HEALTH MINES

## A Photographer's Perspective

Peter Goin

Eileen complains about sore knuckles and toes. She rubs her hands, over and over again. I am reminded of Shakespeare's familiar quote in *Macbeth*, "Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One; two: why then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie!" Whether blood that stains the psyche or an aberrant immune system response, the ailment is incurable. The die is cast. Blood tests confirm the possible onset of rheumatoid arthritis. This heroine is condemned to suffer in silence. Only the afflicted truly understand a chronic disease accompanied by marked deformities.

"Do you believe in homeopathic medicine?" I ask.

My friend is a scientist, a linear thinker who believes in the promise and hope of science. "All things are possible," she responds quietly.

I continue.

"Are you open to alternative forms of medicinal treatment?"

After a long pause, this heroine suggests, "Hmmm ... let's talk about something else."

As the brown hills of eastern Oregon pass by the window, I begin to think of the roots of landscape formation. I am not talking about Stephen J. Gould's distant view of geology that neatly ignores human presence. Instead, I am trying to understand how humans have created the world in their own image. I offer to change the subject.

"Do you realize that mining is one of the most significant and influential technologies in world history?" Living in my state, Nevada, means confronting mining as a dominant industry.

"Uh, mining?" She is not impressed.

Clearly, environmentalists have stigmatized mining as an easy target. Who can blame them? The physical act of mining has been injurious to workers. Mining operations devastate fields and forests. When the ores are washed, the water poisons the brooks and streams, destroying the fish or driving them away. Even the language of mining speaks of its devastation — blast, dump, crush, extract, spoil, waste and exhaust. EPA superfund sites, toxic waste designations, orange water and denuded streambeds offer silent testimony to the legacy of mining. There has been something sinister about the entire act of mining. No one entered the mine in civilized states until relatively modern times except as a prisoner of war, a criminal, or a slave. Mines became the first completely inorganic environment to be created and lived in by humans. Field and forest and stream and ocean are the environment of life; the mine is the environment of minerals and metals. Within the subterranean rock, there is no life. The face of the mine is shapeless, no friendly trees or clouds to greet the eye. Daylight has been abolished, and the rhythms of the natural world altered. Continuous day and night production first came into existence in the mine. This is an environment of *work*, a colorless, tasteless and shapeless world.

Yet these same roots spawned an increase in global capitalist economy. Mining provides gold that is still a universal indicator for currency value. From the



Earth Angel Health Mine. Their slogan is: "It's All in the Mine." The Earth Angel mine began in 1929 as miners searched for gold, silver and copper. In 1953, Earth Angel opened as a health mine. The entrance to the mine is wheelchair "friendly" with concrete pathways. The walkway extends nearly 600 feet to the back of the mine, with both dry and wet areas with seating according to your preference with electric lights and heat lamps throughout the mine tunnel. Because the mine is a constant 57 degrees all year long, blankets are available. Because this mine has a higher level of radon exposure, the management recommends 20 one-hour visits with two or three visits per day, with three to four hours of "rest" in between visits. This is a view of the old sign near the cabins. August 1998.

mine came not just reliable currency, but also the steam engine and locomotive, the escalator, the elevator, ventilating systems and the subway for urban transportation. Civilization, as we know it, depends upon the mining economy.

"I think I need to do a book about mining."

"You're crazy. Nobody is interested in mining."

I know this. For many years, I have felt that the study of mining as a cultural landscape would be unappreciated. Many years ago, while working as a book buyer for a large San Francisco bookstore, I noticed that people rarely bought books on mining. It is almost as if we prefer not to know.

"Who cares?" My friend's emphasis is not that people shouldn't care, but that the history of mining is a legacy of conquest and spoil. "It's depressing."

"But think of this. Mining is a major industry. Most books on mining focus on the evolution of the technology of mining or labor history. As an alternative, what about the role of the mine in developing a *sense of place*?" What about the Radon Health Mines in Montana?

"The what?"

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1951, during a period of ore exploration near Butte, Montana, a mining geologist stumbled upon an alleged health benefit from low-level exposure to radon. He noticed that a Los Angeles woman claimed that after several visits to one of the underground uranium mines, her bursitis disappeared. Brochures from the health mines proclaim that a stampede of sufferers demanded access to the now defunct mines.

Radon is a naturally occurring, inert, odorless and gaseous element found in

almost all types of rocks and soils. The aging or disintegration of radium forms radon gas. When inhaled, radon is easily absorbed into the blood stream. Radon enters the body in three methods — direct inhalation, absorption through the skin in water baths and through ingesting radon in water. Anecdotal evidence suggests that radon gas has an activating effect on the endocrine gland system. Visitors to the mines claim relief from allergies, arthritis, bursitis, gout, asthma, emphysema, lupus, sinusitis, fibromyalgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, enlarged prostate, eczema, psoriasis, headaches and from some symptoms of diabetes. Radioactive baths are alleged to lower blood pressure. Mine operators claim that a minimum number of 32 visits are necessary to allow the radon gas to start cleansing the body. Many visitors stay between 11 to 16 days to allow for three mine visits a day. Each hour in the mine requires a three-hour interval.

"I really believe in it," offers a relaxed but radioactive woman resting on a recycled couch deep within the Merry Widow Health Mine. At the Free Enterprise Health Mine, Phyllis N. wrote, "I feel so great since our visits to the mine I just can't believe it! I've never had to take my pain medication since my return. The joint pains and terrible headaches and fatigue are a thing of the past. I got home and house-cleaned like mad, figuring to do it while I felt so good, but I still feel great." Joe S. wrote that "A year ago I couldn't dress myself or get out of the bathtub without help. My feet were so swollen I couldn't wear shoes. At first I felt like I didn't get any results from my time in the mine. But now I've been deer hunting, danced a couple of times and played my guitar. I can even type a little. We'll see you next year ...." Anita M. wrote that, "To say that I was skeptical

would be quite a monumental understatement — desperate times call for desperate measures. I took 20 one-hour sessions underground in 1993. Five weeks passed. I began to notice an almost overwhelming sense of well being — even a feeling of strength — something foreign to me for the last 25 years. Living close by allows me regular attendance. In my opinion, God has given us each the opportunity to make an informed choice for this alternative to drug therapy." The health mines also offer therapy sessions for arthritic pets; space is available first come, first serve. Unruly pets and barking dogs may be asked to leave. Donations are cheerfully accepted. All mines are smoke — and fragrance — free.

The drive from Portland, Oregon, to Butte, Montana, is long and tiring. Eileen agreed to accompany me — to model in the mines. I knew from researching the sites that many people are not willing to be photographed. For example, the Amish, who believe in homeopathic relief and attend the health mines in great numbers, do not want to be photographed. I needed a model.

I was glad that my friend agreed to come with me. I wanted the company. In other projects, I had been in harm's way at the Nevada Test Site, the Trinity site, the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and the Marshall Island sites of Bikini and Eniwetok. Once again, I will be within a radioactive environment. This thought emerged again and again in my mind. After all, it is difficult to believe that sitting on an old folding chair or recycled couch under heat lamps 85 feet below the surface in a damp mine radiating radon can in any way be beneficial.

After the first hour in the Sunshine Health mine, my breath pushed the Geiger counter over the scale. The buzz





Merry Widow Health Mine. Their slogan is "Health is Wealth." Like all the other health mines, visitors offer testimonials such as "I had skin cancer on my head. After applying mud from wall of the mine, it was healed up by the time we left and has not returned." — B. R. Mont. The visitors also drink the mine water, which has been tested by the Montana State Health Department and found to be sufficiently pure for drinking purposes. View of corridor with ladies talking. August 1998.



Sunshine Radon Health Mine/The Cadillac of the Health Mines. Their motto is: "Come Join Us For 'Your Holiday To Health.'" The mine is located one-half mile up Galena Gulch. The mine features a radon tunnel, deluxe cabins, RV park, hot tub, gift shop, laundry room, hiking, fishing pond, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, panning for gold, western cookouts. Writing on walls and ceiling: "Other guests have found alcohol and radon don't mix ..." August 1998.



Sunshine Radon Health Mine. Grandpa reading during healing session. The recommended dose of radon inhalation is for 32 hours. Most of the mines report that the best dosage occurs during one hour in the mine, three hours out of the mine. August 1998. All originals in color

of the electrons was disturbing, and I can still vividly remember the staccato chatter.

"Stop worrying," a mine caretaker tried to reassure me. In areas of Africa, he offers, "... elephants, afflicted with arthritis, have beaten trails for hundreds of miles to radioactive ore outcrops to inhale radioactive gases rising from the earth fissures." I don't say anything.

Most of the people in the mines are retirees. Montana health officials have set voluntary guidelines that limit exposure to one-tenth of the federal standard for uranium miners. Pregnant women and children were restricted in 1988. "Howya feelin'?" A woman asks from the shadows. "Any better?" I am not entirely sure how to respond. "Whaddya doin'?" I begin to tell the story about my friend with the rheumatoid arthritis; but before I can finish, my inquisitor nods knowingly and returns to her reading. Before I can finish setting up my 4 x 5, an obese woman wearing a stained sweatshirt urges "... hang in there; it works."

Devotees speak of the healing mystery of radon with evangelical fervor. "The doctors told me there was nothing they could do for me ... after time at the mine for a few days, the pain in my hips and legs went away. My family and friends can't believe what they're seeing. I'm now able to clean and vacuum and many things I haven't done in years. I believe it is God's way of healing and I praise Him for it," writes Marie K. of Winnipeg. Radon users suspect that the medical and pharmaceutical industries covet high-priced practices and potions. They think that there is a conspiracy to keep people from knowing about the inexpensive radon remedy. Others simply believe that the mines are a poor man's resort where newly-found friends get together for dinners and take side trips and just watch the sunset. "What can it hurt?" I am told.

I tried to limit my visits to each of five mines according to the prescribed health formula — one hour in the mine and three hours out. I would start early in the morning — photograph for one hour and then wait for the next cycle. I would photograph throughout the day and night. The 1:3 break provided time for reading, hiking, sleeping or preparing meals. I watched all the videocassettes filled with earnest testimonials. I interviewed the mine operators. I photographed the exteriors of the mines. Then, after the timer buzzed, I went back into the mine.

But an hour is just not enough time. These mines are not easy to photograph. They are dark and damp, and each mine uses many different light sources from fluorescent to quartz halogen to sodium vapor lights. Heat lamps combined with blue and green incandescent bulbs make the interiors of these mines colorful and surreal. Corners are abysmally dark. A few lamps are extremely bright, but without reflective surfaces, the light falls off quickly. Mine people are either suspicious or object to having their portraits made. When I set the tripod up in a room, people tend to leave. I am earnest in my explanations, but, after all, this is a media-savvy population. I can make the photographs, but getting model releases is another story. Some mine people don't care about how the photographs will be used; others remain skeptical. When people get up to leave, they must walk on wood planks down a narrow passageway. The tripod is set up on these wood planks and their departure inadvertently disturbs time exposures. Light meter readings are ineffective. The humidity fogs the lenses.

Exposed bulbs reflect the aperture on the film. The field of view is extremely limited.

And after a day, even three hours' rest out of every four did not significantly reduce my radioactive breath. I tried conscious exhaling, so much so that I almost hyperventilated. I must have looked ridiculous to Oscar and Barbara as they calmly carried their towels into the damp mine.

"What's wrong with him?" I overheard. "Full of fear," Barbara said, quietly, but not that quietly.

Eileen's hair was still radioactive the next morning. I lost my ability to tell the difference between the increased humidity in the mine and my own sense of emotional fallout. While I know that radon is odorless, I swore that I could smell it. While I know that radon is tasteless, I avoided the water. After taking a shower, I realized that I had just immersed myself in a radioactive bath. Without thinking, I spit out as much saliva as I could bring into my mouth. Does boiling the water release the radon trapped in the water?

"We're here again, where we should be. To relieve our pains, as many will see. We've been to the Mine and feel much better. Bobby went down in shorts, no sweater. Thinks the more exposed, the better. Give me a jacket, it's too cold for me! Been coming six years, missed only one. That again will never be done! Bobby was in bad shape, he suffers with gout. We come to Free Enterprise to knock it out. The mineral water, we will always drink. It helps us also, or so we think." — Bobby & Brenda S.

The negatives came out! Multiple flashes and time exposures made the mines visible. Eileen's rheumatoid arthritis has receded. My breath is no longer radioactive. I am home. We need to have hope, and the idea of a health mine is more than an anecdotal expression of hope's effect. Perhaps the point is not whether the therapy actually works.

The idea of a health mine is hopeful. Uranium mines removed from the harmful paradigm of earth's destruction and exploitation and placed within the context of healing is truly remarkable. While it is clearly difficult to clinically prove the benefits of radon exposure, this symbol of a mine healing our bodies and ourselves opens the door to a different interpretation of the mine in western society. The testimonials continue. ●

**Peter Goin is a professor of art in photography and video at the University of Nevada, Reno. His photographs have been exhibited in more than 50 museums nationally and internationally, and he is the author of four books.**

A previous version of this article appeared in *DoubleTake* magazine, Spring 1999. It is taken from the collaborative project by Peter Goin and Elizabeth Raymond that interprets the perception of mining landscapes. All photographs are by Peter Goin, copyright 1998. All rights reserved.

The University of Texas Press published *Humanature* by Peter Goin in 1996, and the photographs were exhibited at the Houston Center for Photography in 1999. This article is Peter's research text for a chapter in a collaborative book co-authored with C. Elizabeth Raymond titled *Changing Mines in America* under development by George Thompson and the Center for American Places in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Nic Nicosia. *Love + Lust #6*, 1990. Original in color

## Twenty Years ...

REAL PICTURES 1979-1999

NIC NICOSIA

SEPTEMBER 24-NOVEMBER 28, 1999

CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Jacinda Russell

Nic Nicosia seduces his audience with rich, Cibachrome color and a 48" x 68", larger-than-life scale. Whether spotlighting a ballerina's private performance on top of a kitchen table or casting shadows on a bedroom wall, Nicosia uses light to create dramatic mood. He constructs illusionistic stages, painting two-dimensional backgrounds to resemble three-dimensional spaces, then fills them with people whose presence alters the perspective even further. He carefully controls every element within his camera's viewfinder — the position of a chair, the tilt of a glass, the expressions on his participants' faces as well as their gestures — creating complex compositions that border on chaos. He knows all the technical "tricks" to make a photograph aesthetically sound. With the emphasis placed on the intricate details of the scenario and the concentration on how it is photographed, Nicosia neglects to expand his 20-year exploration of a singular idea. His depictions of the banal abnormalities and sociological dysfunctions of middle class suburbia do not penetrate further than the over-emphasized actions within the photograph and remain boring and contrived.

Nicosia deconstructs typical notions of suburbia by exploring lust, violence and death. These elements have the potential to effectively comment on the oddities found in the otherwise mundane underbelly of middle class America, but the Contemporary Art Museum's survey lacks mystery, portraying incidents all too common to be abnormal. Consider the following examples: In a suburb outside Dallas, pre-adolescent, bored children burn down a tree in a fenced backyard; a family discovers a body, too-clean-to-be-authentic, in a drainage canal; and a clown gives the finger to a couple of men in an automobile.

Nic Nicosia, *Near (modern) Disaster #8*, 1983. Original in color

In an unnamed Midwestern town, a young man stops to examine an object hidden in the weeds and finds a dismembered human ear covered with insects, rapidly decaying in the warm air. After alerting authorities who respond too casually, the man begins his own investigation and enters a world of violent sex, murder and perversities imbedded far beneath the facade of small town, innocent America. In his 1986 film, *Blue Velvet*, David Lynch terrorized the suburbs with the unpredictable — bizarre characters with erratic personalities — deviants who entice the naive into a world of their own.

In his gallery talk, Nicosia stated that he "presents an image and relies on the viewer's life experience to interpret it." The scenarios in his photographs, however, require little explanation as we have seen them before on television, movies or Nan Goldin monographs. In *Real Pictures #2* (1987-88), gunmen chase a man on foot who is either caught or escapes, killed or set free; he is good or he is evil, or perhaps a combination of both. *Love + Lust #6* (1990) examines some of the same issues as Goldin's documentary work from the previous decade except Nicosia's characters are posed and less convincing. We know the sexual dissatisfaction on the woman's face, the man's potential avoidance by feigning sleep, and the indicated secrecy of the hotel room surroundings. Even though Nicosia's series is fictitious, his replication reveals nothing new in the genre — he merely duplicates a scene interpreted numerous times before.

Many of the situations are commonplace enough to have experienced ourselves though undoubtedly not in such an exaggerated manner.

In *Violence* (1986), a well-dressed man at a party punches another man in the stomach while five spectators stand by, some oblivious to the disruption.

The other guests function as props, exhibiting little emotion, while the action appears as false as the surrounding personalities. It is an overacted depiction of a climax without foreshadowing, yet another scene with a predictable outcome. These images are devoid of complexity,

replicating stereotypes that are not interesting.

The use of humor affects the interpretation of several of the pieces. It often seems misplaced and in other instances, outrightly unamusing. In *Near Modern Disasters #8* (1983), three characters in an invisible gale hold on for life on a two-dimensional backdrop. The hurricane force of the imagined wind normally ends in tragedy yet the actors' exaggerated expressions indicate that this situation should be funny. The video, *So ... You Want to Be an Artist?* (1997), ridicules the audience to the point of insult. The resounding laughter of a silhouetted man projected high above the viewers reverberates through the museum after he asks the rhetorical title question, creating an aura of condescension. Nicosia claims that when he created the video he was asking himself the question. The overall tone of the piece, however, implicates his audience in making a wrong decision.

The series, *Untitled* (1991-1993), comes the closest to thorough investigation of the underbelly of suburbia. Photographed in both his past and present houses, the images are more spontaneous and less contrived than the other work in the exhibition. The black-and-white oil-toned photographs are encased in deep shadows, photographed at night with careful attention placed on the source of lighting.

*Untitled #10* (1992) reveals a man looking at a glow on the other side of a fence. He is enraptured by the smoky haze of exploding firecrackers. A young girl watches sparklers set off in the foreground as the man is oblivious to the "fire" in his own backyard. In this photograph, the characters stand on their own more so than the actors of Nicosia's other series. They do not rely on each other to support their existence and maintain an individuality absent in much of the other work. Mystery extends beyond that of technical qualities into the characters themselves. They are less contrived — poised in their surroundings as if Nicosia let loose of some control. The characters are more fully developed although their actions are still predictable.

Staged photography is not a new venture into the medium. The late Ralph Eugene Meatyard and Nicosia's contemporary Jeff Wall have effectively worked with arranging subjects, creating multilayered, fictitious narratives before the camera. Meatyard, who lived the middle class life in suburban Kentucky, photographed his family in the 1960s wearing props, sometimes blurring his subjects beyond recognition. The humorous masks worn by his wife and children became villainous and disturbing as they stare calmly at the camera. He expanded the psychosis of the characters in his photographs by portraying the innocent as grotesque — developing his realities through fabrication.

Nicosia's *Untitled (Sam!)*, 1986, from the *Life as We Know It* series depicts a young boy in vampire guise grimacing before a birthday party table of girls as a mother watches over in the background. He wears red, plastic fingernails and fake

blood, displaying his fangs for all to see. His presence contrasts sharply with the girls dressed for a party and their red-heart-adorned tablecloth — he is the overacting brother desiring attention and the ensuing mayhem — the antagonist among ten-year-old girls. Unlike Meatyard's masked children, Nicosia's vampire boy wears a thin disguise. He is a stock character who offers description not discovery — his blatant pose erases any psychological depth, revealing all there is to know about the photograph without the need for further exploration.

Jeff Wall, a Canadian photographer, bases his constructions on modernist art and theory, exploring social and ethical issues in narrative format. Like Nicosia, Wall will build elaborate stages, controlling an entire neighborhood of activity down to the most detailed placement of a piece of trash. He will emulate famous paintings in a contemporary, theatrical style with characters that often exaggerate their gestures. In contrast, the subjects in Nicosia's photographs are contrived beyond definition — gestures and movements overemphasized to the point of disbelief. The interactions between Wall's subjects create nervous tensions and discomfort in a strange, often unfriendly environment. Nicosia's actors are placed together for support as very few are able to stand on their own. Wall delves deeply into the psychology of the people he portrays, causing viewers to think strongly about their own actions. The references to art history add to the multi-layered complexity of Wall's photography while Nicosia creates situations that do not penetrate beyond the climax portrayed before us.

Nicosia's work flows from series to series, from photograph to video, into a cohesive unit. It is not difficult to see where one piece stemmed from and where the next will go. The monotonous activity in the videos — the camera as passenger in an automobile, boiling water on a kitchen stove, a child lying face-up on a pool table — incorporates the same characters and actions as in the photographs. It is unfortunate that each resides on the same intellectual level, never quite capturing the psychological mishap that takes place in the banalities of daily activity. The search for abnormal in the familiar and the psychological in the mundane produced a trivialization of the ordinary, contrived dramas that lack new commentary on a subject explored many times before. Over the course of 20 years, Nicosia photographed a valid theme but sadly did not disperse his effort evenly as the concept never progressed beyond the first couple of series while the technical and stylistic proficiencies soared ahead.

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Nic Nicosia. *Real Pictures #11*, 1987-88





Irving Penn, *Truman Capote*, New York, 1965. Platinum palladium photograph

preoccupation with unexpected juxtapositions and fragmented, eroticized bodies. The glassy, unflinching eyeballs in *Optician's Shop Window* reappear in various forms throughout Penn's work. In *Contact Lens* (1981/printed 1984), a close-up of an anonymous model about to place a tinted contact lens on her eye, the photographer transforms his subject into an idealized abstraction of mascara, eye shadow and fingernail polish, while the viewer plays the role of squeamish voyeur.

Penn's uncanny ability to make the familiar seem exotic was the dream of every fashion editor and advertiser and not surprisingly, he will forever be known for his early ground-breaking photographs for *Vogue* and other glossy magazines. The exhibition was generously peppered with signature examples of Penn's fashion work. Among these prints, *Harlequin Dress* (1950/printed 1979) — a portrait of Penn's wife, Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn, in a checkerboard-patterned dress — stands as a seminal image of post-war glamour. Posed within a neutral studio space and adorned with dark gloves, pearls and a cigarette, she looms before the viewer with steely nonchalance, like a pyramid in the desert. Penn's love of formalism and mastery of black-and-white photography is evident in another well-known image from this era: *Black and White Vogue Cover* (1950/printed 1968),

showing model Jean Patchett in a dark hat and dress with netting stretched over her face. She, like Fonssagrives-Penn, appears completely detached from the concerns of the so-called real world, an image perfectly suited to selling the fantasy of high fashion. Penn's sharp modernist aesthetic was a refreshing change from the pomp and stiff formality found in the work of forerunners such as Cecil Beaton and George Platt Lynes and his imagery helped redefine the look of fashion photography in the second half of the 20th century.

Penn's icy, idealized models swaddled in haute couture could not appear more different from the fleshy, anonymous nudes he photographed from 1949 to 1950 and exhibited in 1980 at the Marlborough Gallery in New York. In this series, Penn seemed to distance himself from the heavy artifice of the fashion industry and instead depicted the body in its most natural state. Closely cropped by the picture frame, these figures read as gently rolling landscapes or ancient Greco-Roman sculptures. Always one to experiment with the printing process, Penn used bleach to soften the appearance of these photographs and to heighten their abstract qualities.



Irving Penn, *Lion Skull*, Prague, 1986. Gelatin silver print

Models were not the only subjects to sit before Penn's camera. A master of portraiture, he has photographed hundreds of people, from avant-garde artists and celebrities to egg sellers and pastry cooks. In the 1940s, Penn often made use of unusual props to divert the attention of his more imposing subjects. In 1948, he individually photographed Georgia O'Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp, Martha Graham and other art world notables wedged between two angled theater flats. Gradually, Penn began to focus more intensely on his subjects in jarring close-ups. In his portrait of Miles Davis from 1986, Penn concentrates not on the musician's face, but instead on his weathered palm and fingers, posed as though playing an imaginary trumpet. Penn's portraits of the indigenous people of Peru, New Guinea and Cameroon have often been categorized as "anthropological studies," but in reality they differ little from his commercial work. The subjects in *Three*

*Asaro Mud Men* (1970/printed 1984) are positioned in his traveling studio, divorced from their cultural context and perform for the camera-like veteran fashion models.

Among Penn's most interesting and perhaps least appreciated works are his still lifes, particularly those



Irving Penn, *Tumbul Warrior*, New Guinea, 1970/printed 1979. Platinum palladium photograph

addressing the subjects of death and decay. Laden with symbolism, these images have given Penn a venue for exploring themes usually denied him by his commercial assignments. The disintegrating cigarette butt in *Cigarette No. 69* (1972/printed 1975) appears all the more unsettling when compared to his shots of tantalizing consumer goods. Likewise, the stacked human skulls in *The Poor Lovers* (1979/printed 1980) stand in sharp contrast to Penn's countless images of young faces in their prime. *Fish Made of Fish* (1939/printed 1983), a photograph of hundreds of tiny sardines arranged in the shape of a fish, is a captivating, whimsical reflection on the competitive nature of the food chain. Even the playfully balanced fruits and vegetables in *Frozen Foods with String Beans* (1977/printed 1993) take on a weighty air, wryly evoking the melancholy of 18th-century Dutch still lifes in which aging produce — the bounty of economic prosperity — becomes a metaphor for the transitory nature of life. ●

William R. Thompson is curator of the El Paso Museum of Art.

All photographs courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

## Art and Commerce

IRVING PENN  
A CAREER IN PHOTOGRAPHY  
ORIGINATED BY  
THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
MARCH 25–JUNE 4, 2000  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS HOUSTON  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

William R. Thompson

Few artists have negotiated the realms of art and commerce as successfully as photojournalist Irving Penn. For more than 50 years, Penn has received critical acclaim and lucrative assignments from magazines, designers and corporations. Yet throughout his prolific career — despite the fickleness of the fashion world, the demands of clients and consumers alike — he has never stopped growing artistically or investigating the limits of the photographic medium. While some photographers maintain strict separation between their commercial work and personal exploration, Penn has found inspiration in both and his imagery reflects a half-century-long dialogue between a highly marketable salesman and introspective artist.

Penn's photography was one of a number of highlights at the inauguration of the Audrey Jones Beck Building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, a grand, austere space designed by Spanish architect Rafael Moneo that opened to the public on March 25. On view in the lower level of the Beck Building, *Irving Penn: A Career in Photography* featured more than 100 of Penn's works from the late 1930s through the present. Although many of the photographs on view were vintage, others were later prints made from Penn's old negatives using the platinum palladium

process, which produces rich, grainy tones as well as more durable images. Since 1964, Penn has reinterpreted much of his oeuvre in this way and fostered a new market for his work among collectors and museums. In the mid-1990s, Penn donated his archive to the Art Institute of Chicago, which catalogued the material and organized this traveling exhibition. Penn's alluring mix of glamour and stark modernity was an apt choice for the MFAH's opening festivities.

One of the earliest photographs in the exhibition, *Optician's Shop Window* (c. 1939/printed 1982), which depicts an oversized pair of mock eyeglasses with two painted eyeballs for lenses, foreshadows several directions in Penn's later work, including his penchant for classical composition, unusual found objects and of course, the visual language of advertising. Like many photographers in the 1930s, Penn fell under the influence of Surrealism, particularly the movement's

Irving Penn, *Harlequin Dress* (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn), 1950. Platinum palladium photograph



**ARTWIRED INTERNATIONAL**  
MARCH 3–APRIL 8, 2000  
O'KANE GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF  
HOUSTON - DOWNTOWN AND ART  
GALLERY/LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF  
HOUSTON - CLEARLAKE  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Johannes Birringer

A glimpse of the future? A foreboding of digital art exhibitions to come? *ArtWired International's* casually suggestive invitation card displayed a green-tinted close-up of an electrical socket, its holes smiling at the viewer with a friendly face as if the entrance to the wired world of the Internet promised a few good tales and a kiss. Or was this version of the smiley face a bit treacherous, like a blind date? In the context of the FotoFest's International Month of Photography, the presence of digital images should come as no surprise. Surprising, rather, was the dearth of progressive video and interactive multimedia art installations amongst the sprawling net of exhibitions in the city of Houston.

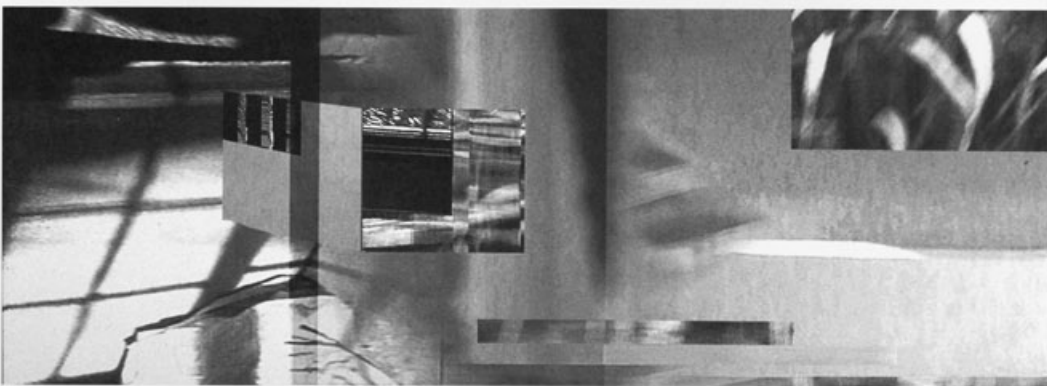
With traditional fine art photography taking center stage, the question of photography's relationship to the moving image media and the new computer-assisted and online artforms gains a specific critical momentum if we look at the curatorial challenges posed by media that cannot, or should not, be framed and hung in the traditional manner. The FotoFest co-founders, Fred Baldwin, president, and Wendy Watriss, artistic director, have in fact encouraged "breaking the frame" and extending photography's reach to abandoned downtown buildings, storefronts, restaurants and the street, thus performing modest situationist interventions into the urban infrastructure. The outcome of this can be debated because FotoFest's curatorial agenda was hardly radical or focused on particular urban, social or economic issues intrinsic to changing concepts of local and global public spheres. Rather, photography appeared to support the downtown revitalization, lending the business district artistic flair while generating its own map, so to speak, of a gigantic festival of images, shuttle service included (for the tourists). Committed to internationalism, the Houston festival also interacts with festivals elsewhere in an international consortium (festivaloflight.org).

Tourism and education intertwined, the map of FotoFest 2000 directs the viewer to, potentially, more than 100 exhibition sites which, again potentially, could link diverse cultural communities through the flows of information and inspiration provided by the medium. The map implies constant movement; it is a network of sites that is based on a conception of interfaces, communication, drifts and random access. In reality, of course, each site "houses" art and locks it up, framing the prints and carefully hanging them under its spotlights.

I speculated that digital art could not possibly be compromised so disastrously, as it doesn't depend on a physical gallery or museum space. *ArtWired International* was initiated and organized by Ann Trask (O'Kane Gallery, UH-Downtown) and Martin Wnuk (Art Gallery, UH-Clearlake) and shown simultaneously at both locations. Featuring 34 artists (mostly from the U.S.), the show was juried by MANU-AL (Suzanne Bloom/Ed Hill), local artists who have experimented with digital media for many years. I do not know on what basis they selected the artists from the pool of the 70 or 80 works that were submitted, but they posted a brief, modest



Paul Berger, *Card-Plate #10*. Original in color



Kathryn Vajda, *Untitled*, Iris Print

note saying they attempted to show work "that illustrates our belief that so-called 'digital art' is as diverse in its manifestations as any art medium even though it is not, in fact, a distinct medium in itself. Basically, computers have allowed for the expansion of existing media by providing a whole new set of extremely powerful and exciting tools." The curators claim that the purpose of *ArtWired International* was "to acquaint the viewing public with new artforms and to give digital artists an opportunity to exhibit their work as it was intended to be seen."

Unfortunately, no information was provided to acquaint the viewing public a bit more thoroughly with the contemporary contexts of digital culture, electronic imaging technologies, online art and various interactive design and installation practices. There was no information about the artists, their production processes, tools, platforms and output preferences. I suspect that perhaps none of them would have liked the way their work was exhibited in Houston. The curators mention that the components of *ArtWired* included digital movies and CG animation, videotapes, CD-ROMs, image files stored on ZIP disks or diskettes and "computer-generated prints."

Some of the folders I was able to open included Read Me! files with detailed technical notes and specifications on how to install and execute the interactive programs. Not all of the programs worked. The teleconferencing between the two galleries planned for the opening night had to be canceled. During my first visits, I found O'Kane Gallery closed but stumbled upon an Apple monitor in one of the offices. It told me "to follow the directions

on the screen or just watch and enjoy the *ArtWired* show."

I later realized that the downtown campus was undergoing extensive renovation; the gallery had moved to an awkward and cramped balcony space on the fourth floor. When it reopened, some works were shown on an iMac and a video monitor perched high under the ceiling. All the "hard copies" (prints) were installed in the two university galleries (except Weihong's ambitious, 180 feet long *Chi-Line* installation of digital prints on transparent film, which was mounted

digital videotape or scanned from a pre-existing photo, transparency or slide, has been modified and processed in the computer with graphic software systems such as Photoshop or Painter. The work in the darkroom has been replaced by the processing, collaging and reworking of digital information on the computer screen. The onscreen images of Kathryn Vajda, Phillip Fass, Paul Berger, Peter Patchen, Prince Thomas and Hans Staartjes show a strong painterly quality with luminous colors and striking compositions.

Vajda's *Untitled* and Fass' *The Art of Diplomacy* also reveal the pleasure these artists must have in the creation of complex layerings and surreal montage effects in their architectural scenes. Others play with inversions and various filter effects or, in the case of Sheila Pinkel's *Site/Unseen* or Colette Veasey-Cullors' *Childs Play 4*, utilize image-text combinations that betray a compositional affiliation

## BREAKING

on the Clearlake campus library windows). Moreover, the still images from the show are accessible on a CD-ROM "catalogue" identical with the Director program running on the *ArtWired* Web site by Wnuk ([www.cl.uh.edu/hsh/fotofest/Artwired.html](http://www.cl.uh.edu/hsh/fotofest/Artwired.html)).

I find it hard to make sense of this exhibition project because it presents itself as a conceptual muddle while also betraying a lack of technological knowledge and aesthetic sensibility towards electronic media. The latter would seem to be a basic precondition for mounting a successful and challenging exposition of "new artforms," while the conceptual differences between the cultures of the Internet (online art), interactive art and installation are fundamental for our understanding of the new interface conventions and the distributed content of digital art information. I will address these differences and the emerging parameters of interactivity as I offer modest introductions to the aesthetic content of selected works from *ArtWired*. The experience of such content resides precisely in the different interfaces, and the curatorial shortcomings of *ArtWired* can perhaps be made productive if we reflect on the relations between old and new media and explore the distinctiveness of new digital parameters.

### Digital Prints

The majority of the works displayed in *ArtWired* bears an obvious relationship to art photography's production process, printing, framing and mode of presentation on the gallery wall, except that the "original" image material, captured on 35mm black-and-white or color film,



Hans Staartjes, *Wisp*, 1999. Digital photograph, Original in color

with graphic design and advertising. Not surprisingly, some of the work is abstract or fantastical, other images seem indebted to familiar photographic conventions of social documentary (Pinkel, Susan Kirchman, Dwayne Carter, Norwood Viviano, Liz Lee), landscape (Katie Miller, Zoe Sheehan Saldana), still life (Viviano) or erotic portraiture (Shannon Raske's *Lolita* series). Berger's *Card-Plate #10* is a mosaic of many small images arranged in a rectangle, and their appearance on the screen makes these inserts look like "windows" that open out to the visual clutter of an interface-saturated world.

*ArtWired's* CD-ROM catalogue and Web site, composed as a Director movie, runs its inexorable course, one image page



dissolving into the next, making the exhibition as a whole appear to consist of layers upon layers upon layers of visual facets, virtual stories, a kind of graffiti that can be erased and reappear the next day. Conceptually, it is helpful to think of the onscreen images as digital information in a highly fluid state; these images don't seem fixed like the older media or art objects. They don't aspire to objecthood but are subject to change, further modification, conversion, and different output options, frames to be reframed, a part of the morphing motion-graphics we encounter daily on the Internet.

The digital revolution, to some extent, happens within the plasticity of the frame. Compositing allows to seamlessly manipulate and bind elements within a frame that may come from radically separate sources. And as we learned from the fabricated special effects in Hollywood movies, we will grow accustomed to the emerging genre of fake documentaries and virtual

the resolution and strength of color, and partly because the hard copies, mounted under glass, deprive the images of the sensory information the user gains from the more direct screen interface.

#### Video and Installation

Rather than emphasizing the problem of degeneration here, digital printmaking implies a transfer process to a different medium. As in the output of digital video from the computer to magnetic video tape or enlarged projection, the transfer may alter digital information in discrete, material ways, not the least of which is the context of its social reception. To view a dark, grainy video with muffled sound in a brightly lit or noisy room is not very appealing. Some contemporary video installations, such as Shirin Neshat's *Rapture* or William Kentridge's *History of the Main Complaint* (both on view in CAM's Outbound exhibition) surely require enclosed, cinematic spaces for

By Her Bachelors, Even ... More, and Bart Woodstrup/Matt Biederman's *Pixave* added to the dreary look of the 2-D format prints in O'Kane Gallery. The 3-D quality of the videos, implied in Summers' digital animations, and the densely layered textures, superpositions and soundtracks of *Pixave* and *Hildegard*, were barely perceivable due to the poor quality of the remastered VHS tape. There were two attempts at 3-D installation, Kirchman's *Mothers, Daughters, Sisters* (iris prints, ink jet printed books and cutout figures) and Pinkel's *Site/Unseen: Guards at the L.A. County Museum*. The latter added a pair of shoes on a box to the prints on the wall that render the museum guards invisible and then tell us, with the pointed finger of a Hans Haacke, about the plight of the underpaid workers. Kirchman's sophomore cutouts and books filled with lengthy private e-mail correspondences about illness in her family seemed no less embarrassing and self-indulgent. Finally, the curators' decision to exhibit a video copy of one of the most interesting interactive CD-ROMs (*Monk@Sea*) made nonsense of the whole concept and design of interactive digital art.

#### Interactive Media

Like Marilyn Waligore's fascinating minimalist animation piece, *Nagasaki*, and Ron Geibert's complex, mysterious and often hilarious doublespeak interrogator v.1.5, Keith Roberson/Regina Frank's *Monk@Sea* is conceived as an interactive installation that invites the user to take time and investigate the visual and auditory structure of the work, trying out the feedback loop and the sensory and narrative associations it entertains.

*Nagasaki* is a small work, requiring less time to peruse than the meandering hypertext of Geibert's *doublespeak* that both delighted and angered me (when it got stuck or derailed in its strange "processing" logic of numbers and words). Browsing the works was done via the now utterly familiar mouse-and-keyboard interface at the PC. Apart from Geibert's and Waligore's, there were other interactive Director movies and animations whose content I found less stimulating (Vonda Yarberr's *Loq@lity*; Sonya Wilkinson's *Little Boxes*; Robert Bowen's *Now U C It, Now You Don't*) or simply trivial (Roswell Angier's *Jack & Helen's*

After hitting the keys, the scanned image of Caspar David Friedrich's romantic painting of a solitary monk looking at the vast ocean appears, his tiny figure dwarfed by the immensity of the horizon. Then the image dissolves, and I see German textile and performance artist Regina Frank, clad in a long black dress, standing on the bottom right of the projected seascape, while another close-up of her inserted on the left side shows her in the anguished twitching motion of a near-freeze frame — she is caught in the tiny space or delay between code that triggers her motion, trapped in what could appear to be an increasingly frightening stranglehold, because I recognize, as I begin to play with the keys, that I am in fact weaving the white band around her body and engulfing her further. The cinematic film collage is beautiful; I notice the perpetual motion of the clouds on the right, and each time I hit the letters of the alphabet (spoken and sung as musical notes in Frank's German voice), I move her tiny figure on the bottom right towards the center and then the left side window where her larger image is writhing like a captive prisoner. On the top of the landscape I see the scrolling letters I type, both in alphabetic language and in encryption (an older, World War II military ciphering communication code).

In the concentrated space in which this drama unfolds, I barely have time to reflect; I become entranced with the musical language I compose, and then suddenly I hit a point when the transmission is corrupted. A warning signal appears and Frank unwinds from her tight band like a mechanical puppet, flung out into the sea. I pause to take stock of the associations that crowd my mind, but there's her voice again, like a siren call, "hey, type me ...". Frank, who is internationally known for her performance installations of dresses she encodes with random communications captured from the Internet, has here created a delightful, critical allegory-loop, on a digital platform (designed by Roberson), for our intricate net condition that links language, digital code and romantic vistas of cyberspace to structures of dependency that are perhaps much less comforting that we would like to believe.

#### Online Art

I tried to hint at the differences between static 2-D digital prints, digital video, 3-D multimedia installations, interactive designs and the fluid culture of the Internet, and regrettably *ArtWired* neither included online art nor addressed some of the aesthetic and political questions of contemporary cyberculture. It thus missed a real opportunity to connect the fledgling local discourse on digital technology in the arts to the wider world of net projects — inside and outside a given local exhibition — as well as the critical debates on new media art, electronic information, copyright, random access and distributed content. The jurors, whose provocative if sometimes overintellectualized new work on the boundaries of nature and digital culture (*Time Out Of Joint*) was seen at Moody Gallery and who entertain a "Digital Image Forum" on their Web site, inexplicably left the installation of *ArtWired* in the hands of inexperienced curators, with disappointing results. It is to be hoped that FotoFest 2002 will probe the intersections of art and digital culture more deliberately. ●

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## THE FRAME



Sheila Pinkel, *Site/Unseen #7*, Ink Jet Print



Phillip Fass, *The Art of Diplomacy*, Laser Master Ink Jet print

realities, built, bit by bit, from the computer's software capabilities to render the fantastically real and to create things that in essence do not exist. These images have a screen life.

I first saw *ArtWired* on the Web site, and the curators easily could have provided us with the URLs to visit the artists' own sites on the Web. Instead, the galleries chose to present "hard copies" of the screen images. The physical installation of the works proved to be a letdown, partly because the output transfer to print (ink on paper or canvas in most cases except Saldana's intriguing transfers to the quilt medium of cross-stitch linen) can weaken

their projection to facilitate response to their emotional content. Other videos may work better in the trance-like environment of the techno club culture. Installation environments for digital art need to focus on the parameters of physical interaction with the medium, especially if a work asks the user to become immersed and to navigate the sensory experiences within the sonic, tactile and visual interface.

At *ArtWired*, little if any navigation design was explored. The muted presence on a single classroom video monitor of Vonda Yarberr's *Vision of Hildegard*, Denis Summers' *The Bride Stripped Bare*

*Book of Changes* and Fumiko Chino's *Cathy*.

The interactive installation for *Monk@Sea*, according to the artists, requires a video projector and a remote keyboard that functions like a musical instrument/encoding device. At O'Kane the work was simply dropped onto the little iMac desktop, thus altering the spatial distancing between "code" and image. When I enter its interactive parameter, I see a small white band of code running across a black field, and a gentle female voice beckons me to activate her: "Hello, hey, type me, I'm hanging on your words, I can't move without you!"

# The Joy of Literacy

DENNIS FAGAN  
FEBRUARY 24–MARCH 26, 2000  
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF HOUSTON  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Nancy Frankel

"LITERATURE IS NO ONE'S PRIVATE GROUND, LITERATURE IS COMMON GROUND, LET US TRESPASS FREELY AND FEARLESSLY AND FIND OUR OWN WAY FOR OURSELVES."

— VIRGINIA WOOLF

As I was leaving Dennis Fagan's exhibit, *Reading Rally*, I realized that I could have written a description of the show without ever having seen it. I say this because I know firsthand how children respond when they learn to read and how wonderful that response is. Fagan's work absolutely captures the emotions displayed by students when they begin to experience the joy of literacy. Fagan's work shows the sheer exuberance, heart-bursting pride and absolute enthrallment with the printed page.

Since 1992, Fagan has volunteered to photograph the children of Zavala Elementary in Austin as they participate in their annual reading celebration and parade. Fagan explains that he hopes *The Reading Rally* exhibit will encourage all children to discover the "cool" and "joy" and "power" of reading.

In his artist's statement, Fagan enthusiastically describes his observations and participation in this annual event. (See sidebar)

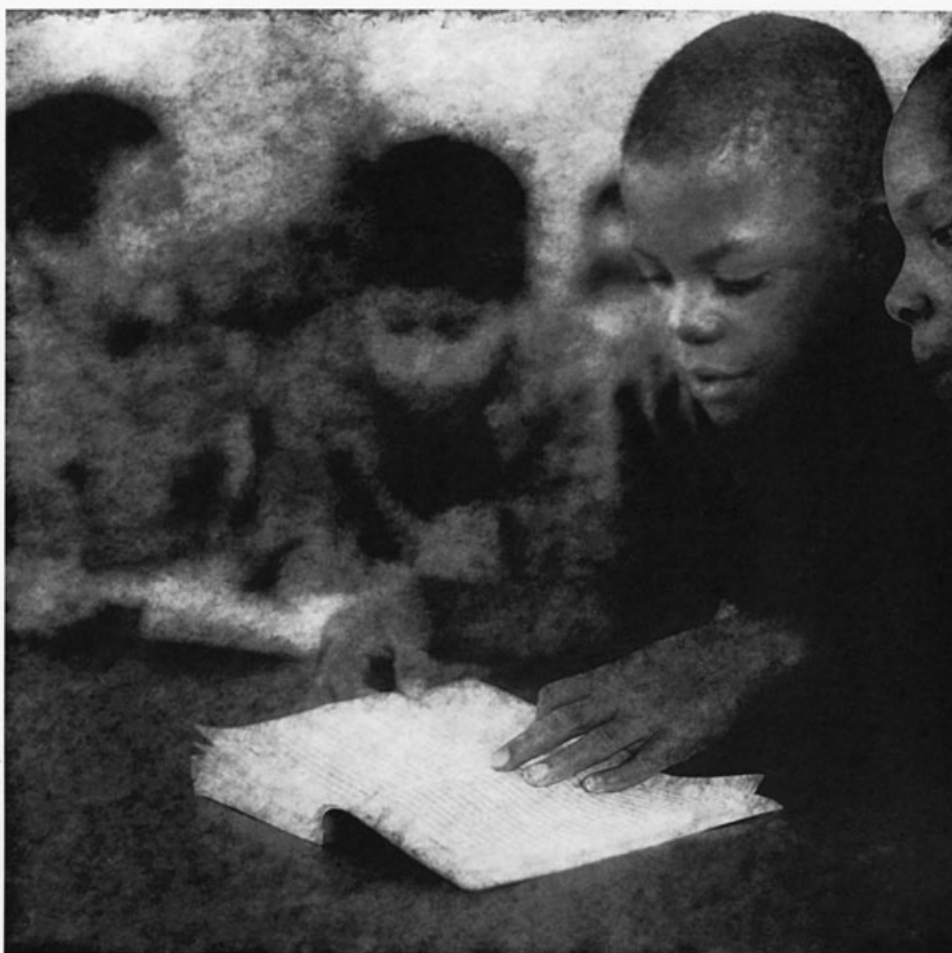
In *Desmond* (1998) we see a child reading a book with great concentration. The boy's finger runs under the text; we all do this when the reading is challenging. We sense the effort and concentration the boy summons to understand the author's message. Other students are in the background involved in their own work. The children in the photograph are blurred; the printed page and the reader are the only parts in sharp focus.

Fagan seems to be reminding us that the only aspect of reading that remains constant is the author's words. The reader will grow, change and mature. The setting in which the work is read will always be different. Generation after generation of young readers will delight in the work or muddle through it, but the words on the printed page will always remain the same.

As an adult whose professional focus is to help children learn to read, I cannot help but feel optimistic when viewing Dennis Fagan's photographs. This generous photographer not only captures the joy on a literate child's face but also places enough emphasis on this goal to make it a recurring subject — to share with others the need to help children learn to read. For readers and future readers everywhere, Dennis Fagan has truly shared a great appreciation of the written word and of the importance of personal success.

Fagan succeeds in showing us the joy and pride young readers feel as they "trespass freely and fearlessly" into a good book. ●

Nancy Frankel is a certified reading specialist who administers literacy programs for struggling readers in Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.



Dennis Fagan, *Desmond*, 1998. Gelatin silver print

I love that one day a year when I get to shoot my photos at the Reading Rally. I've done it every year since 1992. The kids are always rattled with excitement and joy waiting outside the school for the parade to start. They've clumped in groups under the elm trees in front of their school, while police officers clear the street and position their motorcycles to mark their place at the parade's front line.

The University of Texas cheerleaders and marching band get out of their busses to take their places behind those cops. Each bus is parked further down the street among the little houses that line Robert Martinez, Jr. Street.

Following behind the motorcycles and the UT contingent are droves of "exemplary" kids in convertibles and pickup trucks. Behind them, more kids organized by classroom proceed on foot, dressed in paper costumes that declare "Reading is Cool," or display names of favorite books and favorite characters. There are wide-eyed five-year-olds who have never heard a brass band before, let alone seen cops who weren't attending to some dark tragedy.

They march down the street turning onto Third and begin the circle that will take them between two federal housing projects and their own school and school yard. All this to celebrate reading, once a year, every spring, every Zavala kid.

The big noise and procession mark the most unusual approach to celebrating graduation from elementary school that I have ever witnessed. This approach has turned around what had been labeled one of the worst "performing" schools in this often impoverished state of Texas.

The kids end their parade at an outdoor stage behind the school. As their names are called out, they come to collect the book awards or receive special recognition for their success.

In the middle of all this I make pictures, madly make pictures. Some faces I know. Mostly I am surprised by the new faces that sprint from the crowd. Some kids are surprised at being photographed, others are oblivious to the camera, and still others welcome its attention.

Dennis Fagan



Dennis Fagan, *Clifton*, 1995. Gelatin silver print



Dennis Fagan, *Louis*, 1993. Gelatin silver print



# Flowing Waters, Wild Horses



Dennis Fagan, *Crossing #1*, 1999. Gelatin silver print

**SMOKE: HORSES AND RIVER**  
**DENNIS FAGAN**  
 APRIL 1–MAY 7, 2000  
 GALVESTON ART CENTER  
 GALVESTON, TEXAS

## Ileana Marcoulesco

Dennis Fagan does not make Nature into a backdrop to human action. While valuing childhood, family and friendships, when in nature, he is at one with it. The series, *Horses and River*, attest to his total immersion in the *Spirit of the Horse* and that of the Waters.

It starts with *Swan* (2000): ruffled black feathers and classically curved neck: gliding as if on polished floors, barely indenting a ripple with its beak — the waterfowl introduces the still waters. Rivers and their sand beaches appear solidified, in selenium grays, no turbulence, just intimated plant patterns, too obscure to decipher. Thus, *Crossing I* (1999) and *Crossing II* (1999) are pure play on shadows.

None of these minimal effects betray painstaking experiment; on the contrary,

they flow easily from the “pen” of the artist. I would venture that he writes and narrates the scene, attentive to its literary, besides visual, qualities: not for nothing was Fagan’s graduate work in writing and journalism.

At the conjunction of two streams in *Dos Rios* (1998), a bunch of children with laughing faces styled as in retouched portraits, with flailing arms, show obvious delight in splashing about. The scene is conveyed in “Cartesian” manner, not in the least Impressionistic, with the focus being on “realistic” narration; whereas in the distance, a overburdened quadruped is about to ford the river in a fog. Here are the two modes of Fagan’s photography combined: the narrative — clear and optimistic — of humans and the impressionistic clip of nature kept hazy, indeterminate.

*John on Llano* (2000) brings the vivid presence of the artist’s son: a boy in a plaid shirt, leaving his sandals on the bank of the river, gauging the distance before jumping in.

\*\*\*\*\*

The artist’s past work at a horse farm yields an abundance of other images. There is this ghastly anthropomorphism of horses. Fagan portrays them wild, even though they may be tame. *Tye* (1998) is a close-up of one, with white nose bridge and brilliant, piercing eye, who stands under a tree in bloom. The contrast of blacks and white flowery spots in the tree’s crown lends it a god-like stance. Most other horses are rendered in blurred *grisaille*, reluctant to confess their secrets.

In *Two Windows* (1997), a horse is hazily projected between a small square of light and a huge luminous tear in the roof of the barn. Other images are of pure speed like *Galope* (1998) — a rush through wind and mist of a disheveled sprinter. *Spook Horse* (1998) with the anguished eye of a haggard soul, embodies the icon of animal neurosis. *No. 6* (1999) draws the rising skull of an immensely frightened animal whose violent neighing seems all-too-audible. *Stallion* (1998), wildly accented with charcoal, has a steadier, more satisfied and wiser look.

*Galiesteo* (1997), perhaps the most intriguing piece in the show, features two white horse silhouettes bathed in a diffuse light, lovingly seeking for one another at an improbable angle. The well-studied asymmetric composition, obviously taken in stables complete with brick floors, wood post, metallic bars and stone piers, is loaded with emotion. May it be read as a symbol for love reaching across barriers?

Together with the form of “organic minimalism,” the main accomplishment of the show was the transmission of a contagious empathy with the living, in a strikingly novel form. ●

Ileana Marcoulesco is freelance philosopher and art critic living and working in Houston.



Dennis Fagan, *Galiesteo*, 1997. Gelatin silver print



Dennis Fagan, *John on Llano*, 2000. Gelatin silver print



Dennis Fagan, *Stallion*, 1998. Gelatin silver print



Rick Dingus, *After the Collapse, Crater Lake, OR*, 1998-99. Chromogenic color photograph

## TECHNÉ: A CANDID LOOK

**RICK DINGUS:**  
REGARDING TECHNOLOGY  
NOVEMBER 19–DECEMBER 23, 1999  
JAMES GALLERY  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Ileana Marcoulesco

The ancient Greeks made no distinction between art and techniques, even though poetry and drama were supposed to provide pleasure and catharsis. The making/generating — poesis — of the fine arts was called, at the dawn of this civilization, *techné*, implying craft — a precursor of technology. Hence artifacts. Little by little, art detached itself from utilitarian values, espousing instead ritual, religious, political and social functions, until finally it declared independence from any outside criterion of reference except its own. Technology in its turn became the true medium of the progress that we cultivate and in the light of which we bask, the "enframing," subjugating, enslaving force that we know today.

Yet ours is the time in which, as Martin Heidegger repeatedly pleaded, we must turn back to the primordial fusion of arts and techniques. The artist alone has this "saving power" to "frame the enframing" by setting it at a distance, and thus, through a calm and unpretentious look at all its paradoxes, restore Earth to a site worth dwelling on — poetically and productively.

This show contains 23 chromogenic color photographs all from a 1998–99 series that marks, in the course of Dingus' career, something like a turn: from the purely lyrical meditation on nature to a more severe, inquisitive look into the meanings of technology as part of the global environment and reflective of ourselves. The theme, obsessively treated in this past century by philosophers and sociologists alike, and admitting of all possible angles and biases, animated innumerable ideological and intellectual debates.

As purely visual exploration, however, it seldom was tackled in such an even-minded, straightforward and simultaneously ironic way as we see it is presented in this exhibition.

There is no false purism here, no preconceived idea, or affectation of any sort; just a wondering at what is, a letting things speak by themselves, even though the artist speaks eloquently enough through his choice of subjects and their framing.

In an overall neutral fashion, Dingus reviews vital nuclear installations or giant electronic plants originating in the twentieth century, as well as minuscule additions to long forgotten sites of archeological import, pieces of ancient habitats, geological structures. All are panoramic vistas achieved with a WideLux panoramic camera and exhibit his signature rectangular format (16" x 38") with curvature on the horizon.

The intensity, sometimes even stridency of some colors, the severe, raw illumination of rooms where technologies are devised, experimented with, and later applied to the control of life, contrast powerfully with the soft colors and the nebulous horizons in those rural places where the impact of technology is incidental or only marginal.

The artist holds neither a theory about "the goodness of technology," capable of infinite development and self-improvement through constant scientific self-criticism, yet eventually conquering the human universe; nor that it is evil — the root of all evil — the consequence of a Fall. Nor does he hold a theory of unlimited optimism and ensuing beautification of the technical devices nor demonization of their catastrophic misuses. Dingus' fascination with the miracles of atomic physics (his brother was a physicist), for example, is balanced by an empathy with man's primitive attempts at modeling his immediate environment, creating his niches, as well as by a nostalgic look at some of yesterday's grandiose constructions, today slotted for removal.

All in all, a show of a naive yet reflexive "regard," — beginning of all true thinking on shapes and destiny.

Dingus' mentor or precursor was the famous American photographer of the classical era, Timothy O'Sullivan (1840–1882), on whom Dingus wrote his master of art thesis that was later published.<sup>1</sup> O'Sullivan's 100 year old *oeuvre* testified to an exquisite artistic integrity that led to a style of "artlessness," an avoidance of formal devices, a blend of scientific precision of detail and contained artistic impulse. It abounded in scenes of the Civil War, ruins of Indian settlements, geological structures, archeological sites, canyons, bridges, pontoons, and boats, details of forts, earth works. Like Borges, O'Sullivan had a sense of mythology and the Heraclitean impermanence of all things. To capture in an unity the mosaic multiplicity of fragments (of time and

space), he had used multiple angles and the whole variety of shots available to him — long, medium and close-ups — synthesizing several viewpoints and juxtaposing different moments in time. All these images and procedures exercised a crucial influence on Rick Dingus.

Animated by a similar curiosity and passion for the truth of things human, Dingus exhibits the same fundamental integrity as his predecessor, in the choice of frames as well as in the objective, uncontrived manner in which he juxtaposes them. But the drama underlying contemporary uses and misuses of technology, added to the chromogenic effect, even in this rather scant format, surpassed in both intensity and formal effect his mentor's vision.

Here are a few of the most unusual photographs in this show:

*Solar Powered Home in Fog near Boulder, CO* (1999) expresses a mild irony: the house situated on a slope is a modest, old-fashioned structure enveloped in a dense morning fog, and yet it claims to heat and cool itself by means of solar elements visible on the roof. The irony may be misplaced; apparently, the latest models of devices capturing solar energy have the power to extract and accumulate energy even under overcast skies; nevertheless, as a work of art this photograph makes visible the contrast between high and low technology in a suggestive way.

*Caged Cave near Los Alamos, NM* (1999) is a dusty pink view of an old Indian dwelling probably more than once defiled by impious visitors. The iron gate, a look alike of prison gates at the turn of the century, seems to muzzle the entrance, if not, as the artist himself thinks, to put a chastity belt around it. Of course there is no way of deciding between these two functions of the "cage"; this indeterminacy makes the picture even more attractive with its mixture of poetry and the cruel limits imposed on it by civilization.

Similar in color and impression of vast loneliness are the two images of dams (*Upper and Lower Elwa River Dam, WA* [1999]). Under the common title, *Scheduled for Removal*, they definitely point to the transiency of technology: pride of builders and inhabitants alike one moment, become obsolescent and victims of ecologically corrective demolition the next moment. In the *Lower Elwa River Dam* photograph, the water tower is a stylish, turn-of-the-century building, similar to a castle (the name for a water tower is, in French, Spanish and other Romance

languages, "Water Castle" ...) of an antiquated beauty that makes its imminent razing even more poignant.

*Recycled Beetle, Swetsville Zoo, Fort Collins, CO* (1999) is a funny take of an old VW beetle perched comically atop some curved pipes, as on legs, looking like a sculpture of a giant insect hopping in the grass.

*Dam and Viewing Platform, Shoshone Falls, ID* (1999) is a spectacular view of the falls in the majesty of an opulent and dangerous cascade, an outpouring of natural violence. There is stark historic and visual contrast between this picture and the one immediately below it: the placid, if not depressing, photograph of the *Statue of a Water Witcher, Waterville, WA* (1999); the pewter cast shows a man searching for a water source with his old cane-detector in the middle of a small town plaza paved with cobblestones.

A strong comment on human hybrid is the photograph of the *Movie Theatre/Picture Window, Mt. St. Helen's Visitor Center* (1999). The backstage of that theater has an enormous window, framed with red scalloped curtains, that opens on a view of Mount St. Helen's with its snow peaks — as if the owner wanted at all costs to possess the sublime landscape forever, at least visually.

The most striking picture, however: *After the Collapse, Crater Lake, OR* (1999) is that of an extinguished volcano half-immersed in the deep blue waters of a lake. With the exception of the close-up of a marker explaining the geological phenomenon to visitors, nothing is man-made in the subject of this picture. It emerges at the end — or the beginning — of a series to which it does and does not belong — a powerful outsider image — witness, as it were, to the entire exhibition.

The installation was quite thoughtful as far as gradation in intensity of colors and meanings is concerned. Also, by having the descriptive titles placed next to the pictures, it responded well to the need of the visitor to rapidly connect the visual artifact with the referent that localizes the scenes in time and geography, and thus makes far more intelligible the artistic intention. ●

### FOOTNOTE

1. The Photographic Artifact of Timothy O'Sullivan. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982

REVIVAL

KATE BREakey

MARCH 3–APRIL 13, 2000

ORGANIZED BY

STEPHEN CLARK GALLERY, AUSTIN

708 MAIN AT CAPITOL

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Sharon Lynn

Artist Kate Breakey shows larger-than-life photographs of heads and torsos of dead birds, lizards and flowers from a series she calls *Small Deaths*. Each photograph is hand-painted in transparent oil washes, and then the details are redefined by tracing each petal, or feather, or eyelash onto the image with colored pencils. In this series, begun in 1995, Breakey raises the dead.

The Danish writer Isak Denisen (the Baroness Karen Blixen) who spent so much time in Africa told a story about admiring a lizard colored in iridescent hues that were breathtaking and almost otherworldly. A friend of the writer killed the animal for her and had it made into a belt. Denisen later regretted the death of the creature because in death it had lost its vibrancy and had become ugly.

Kate Breakey makes small dead things come alive. But she is more than a funeral cosmetician. She enlarges the image to heroic proportions (32" x 32") that allow the viewer to see life up close, in a way rarely seen in nature, and then she washes and draws the living spirit of the thing onto the paper. It is in this way that she immortalizes her subject. And you can see that it is something other than color that makes the images come alive, in the two monotone photographs, *White Horse* (1977/printed in 1999) and *Accipiter cooperii*, *Cooper's Hawk* (1998), demonstrate. Breakey says that it is in her attempt to examine the remains that she can comprehend what life is and therefore, also, what death is. "My friends and their friends give me small dead things as gifts. It is because they know that I will try to give them life."

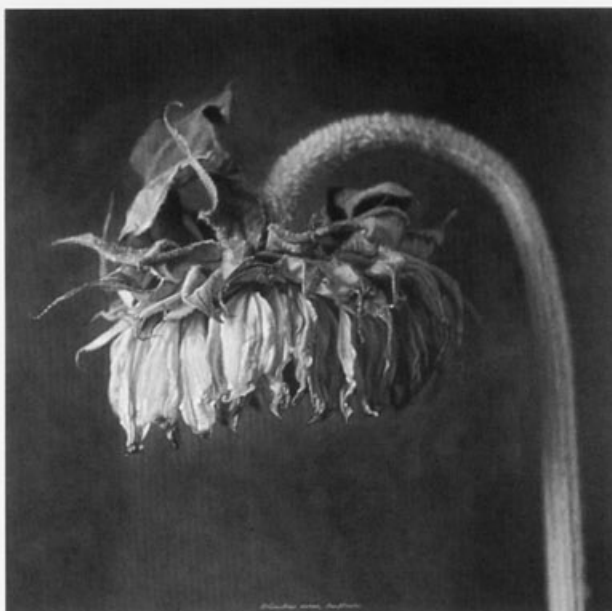
Only one photograph in the series is of a living thing: the head entitled *White Horse*, which is neither small nor dead.

Says Breakey, "The photographs are not always just fresh dead birds and flowers but all states in the process of decomposition, disintegration — the whole transition into nothing. Soon they'll be gone, they'll be nothing." ... "There are photographs of mummified birds that have been left out in the sun so the feathers are gone and the skin is like leather. And there are many skeletons.

Breakey has ties to Texas. She received an MFA from The University of Texas in Austin where she also held a faculty position in the department of photography until 1998. One day she walked into the Stephen L. Clark Gallery on West Sixth Street and bought a Keith Carter photograph. She told Clark she was a photographer and invited him to her studio to



Kate Breakey, *Northern Cardinal, (Male) II*, from the *Small Deaths* series. Gelatin silver print, hand colored



Kate Breakey, *Helianthus annuus, Sunflower*, 1998. Gelatin silver print, hand colored

see her work. Clark, who represents other critically acclaimed photographers, like Mariana Yampolsky and Geoff Winingham, says the hair on his arms stood on end when he saw Breakey's work because he was so physically affected by the images.

She usually makes no more than 10 images are printed from one photograph. Because it takes time to diligently hand-color each image, there is always a backlog of photographs to be finished for exhibition and for buyers. Breakey has painted only a small percentage of what she has photographed. Steve Clark says that there are lots of things sitting around in freezers all over Austin waiting for Kate to photograph them.

Says Breakey, "[Bill] Wittliff (of the Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern and Mexican Photography at Southwest Texas University in San Marcos) collects the skeletal pieces but dealers usually pick the pretty pieces, the colorful ones that will not offend an audience." ●

Sharon Lynn is a writer and editor and has collected art for more than 25 years.



Paula Luttringer, *Untitled from El Matedero/The Slaughterhouse*, 1995–1996. Fresson print

PAULA LUTTRINGER

EL MATEDERO (THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE)

MARCH 3–APRIL 13, 2000

HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CENTRAL GALLERY OF ART

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Kathy Aron

The beef industry is an enormous and important business in Argentina. As such, animal rights and working conditions are rarely questioned. But when Paula Luttringer sees fear in the animals eyes and the horror of the slaughter, she is reminded of her past. Luttringer's exhibition, *The Slaughterhouse*, at the Houston Community College Art Gallery was one of the most meaningful, thought-provoking exhibitions mounted for FotoFest.

As a young woman, Paula was one of thousands of innocent Argentines who were kidnapped by the government and secretly imprisoned during the country's civil war of the late 1970s. Like slaughterhouse procedures, the "Dirty War" was an undeniably atrocious set of events that most would rather not know about. Although she is visibly uncomfortable going into any detail about her incarceration, she does point out the close association between the frightened, caged cattle in the slaughterhouse and herself. "When you are imprisoned, the only way you can fight is in your mind. ... The project was a way to reorganize thoughts and deal with the memory."

Her carbon prints are beautiful, full of depth and texture, yet simultaneously grotesque due to the difficult theme. Blood-stained walls, limbs suspended from meat hooks and frightened cattle are inherently difficult to look at. But it is this delicate juxtaposition of technique and subject matter that have created a truly engaging and important body of work.

Luttringer, who now lives in France, only recently left her career as a gemologist to pursue photography. Her technical skill and deep, intuitive nature earns her a career worth following. Kudos to the FotoFest collaborators for bringing this emerging artist and her work to our attention. This is the kind of photography that galvanizes the medium. ●

Kathy Aron is director of the Society for Contemporary Photography in Kansas City, MO.



Bohnchang Koo, *Portraits of Time*, 1998. Gelatin silver printSangil Lee, *Mangwalldong*, 1990. Gelatin silver printBienu Baie, *Sonamu*, 1993. Gelatin silver print

## Contemporary Creative Photography From Korea

Gabchul Lee, *Untitled from the Series Han*, 1996. Gelatin silver print

CONTEMPORARY KOREAN PHOTOGRAPHERS: A NEW GENERATION INITIATED BY FOTO FEST AND CO-CURATED WITH KOREAN ARTIST/CURATOR BOHNCHANG KOO MARCH 3-APRIL 3, 2000 WILLIAMS TOWER GALLERY HOUSTON, TEXAS

### Chris Raney

"The ten photographers in this exhibition were all born after 1950 and came into their own during the 1980s. The exhibition presents the work of contemporary Korean photographers who distinguished themselves from the preceding generation of Korean photographers by looking at photography as art." — Wendy Watriss

"This may be seen as a first and modest step for Korean photography, which does not yet have the international audience of Korean art and music. FotoFest 2000 is one of the first occasions in modern history, however, in which a group of contemporary Korean photographers will exhibit their work in the international art scene." — Bohnchang Koo

A sense of loss, grief for the fallen and trepidation over the future are the concurrent themes running through the work of this new generation of Korean photographers.

The work of two photographers in particular reflect the emptiness of death and the loss of loved ones. In Bohnchang Koo's series, *Goodbye to Paradise*, the photographer's installation consists of insect specimen boxes; but instead of squadrons of butterflies and legions of beetles, we see only their images, not the critters themselves. These images, printed on emulsion-coated rice paper, snipped out and stuck on pins suddenly takes on all the poignancy of a reliquary of the dead.

Seokjung Kim, *Museum Project*, 1995. Cibachrome print, original in color

In Sangil Lee's graveyard photographs remembering the government's massacre of protesters in Kwangju in 1980, we find ourselves standing before the grave of a young woman looking at us from her own photograph. Dressed in bridal regalia, she casts a serene and mournful presence as her photograph now leans against her own gravestone. In another print, a young man's framed photo is encrusted with frost and streaked with dampness as his image fades from sight, if not from his family's memory.

Not all of the work is as mournful as these two artists, as can be seen in Gabchul Lee's series entitled *Han*, a Korean expression reflecting "deep ancestral longing and sorrow." In arguably the most memorable and certainly the most often reproduced image throughout FotoFest, a lone monk stands with his back to the viewer atop an out-

cropping of rocks from which a foaming stream pours forth. As a work of subtlety and reverence, this image is phenomenally simple in staging, yet magnificent in its impact.

Bienu Baie's photographs of Korean pine forests present subtlety in the form of fine art. Lest the reader imagine this series to be little more than a classically traditional study of trees, it should be understood that Korean pine forests are as twisted and gnome-ridden as anything out of Tolkien or the Black Forest. The viewer is left to speculate what generations of Korean children would have imagined could be standing behind those trees.

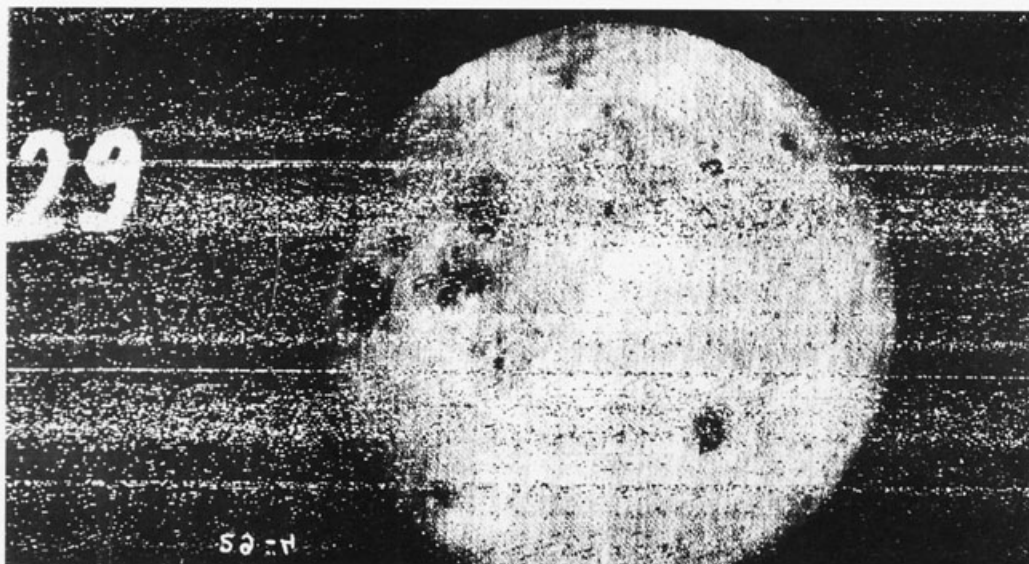
Alone among the photographers in this show, Seokjung Kim has adopted a post-modern strategy to comment on Korean society. In his work, humanity has been encapsulated in transparent

boxes that at their most expansive represent small tableau and at their most confining contain only naked individuals. Five stony-faced women in traditional garb fill one of Kim's large Plexiglas boxes. But even in the photographer's vivid Cibachrome print the women appear as little more than mannequins lending a human form to their quaint and ancient costumes.

The final images of Kim's work were installed at FotoFest headquarters on Vine Street. Nudes in boxes suddenly become modern *objets d'art* as they are placed in a boulevard crosswalk; installed in a snazzy home where they adorn the living spaces; even stacked outdoors as lawn art. Kim continues his symbolism with a man and woman seated at a restaurant table with two boxed nudes positioned behind them like potted plants or aquarium curios. But the real cynicism occurs when we see, with no subtlety at all, that the diners themselves are confined within their own larger box. Kim is suggesting, and no doubt most of his colleagues in this show would probably agree with his suggestion, that even affluence is no guarantee of escaping the greater cage that Korean society is creating for itself. ●

Chris Raney is an HCP member and president of the Houston Photographic Society.





Soviet Mission, Luna 3, 1959. Collection of Randy Liebermann

# THE ALLURE OF THE AUTOMATON'S GAZE

LUNAR LANDSCAPES:  
UNMANNED SPACE PHOTOGRAPHY  
MARCH 1-JUNE 4, 2000  
THE MENIL COLLECTION  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

David Enslinger

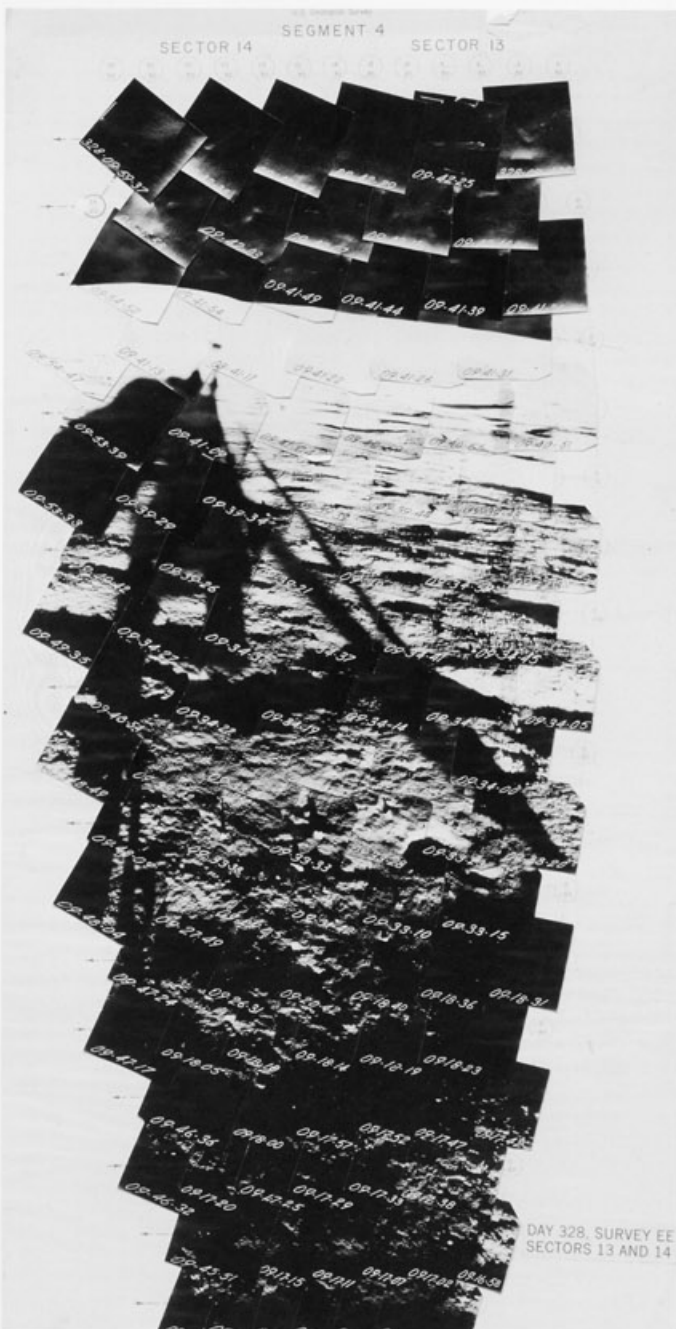
Looking at early satellite photos of the moon leaves a viewer with a disembodied effect, one that does not recall Yur Gagarin or Neil Armstrong, but a sense of dead space transmitted by cathode rays and TV cameras in the midst of an uneasy era battered by race riots and Vietnam. Not only do the photos skirt the boundaries between history, technology and art, but leave the viewer asking, "Where is the human hand at work?"

In the 19TH century, photographers developed a vocabulary that fit poetic needs. But the poetry of these photographs, with titles as neutral as *U.S. Surveyor VI Mission*, spring from the binary logic of now outdated pieces of space debris.

Recently, we have been inundated with John Glenn's rather prosaic return to space and the equally tepid exploits of Mir clunking around the outer horizon, events that have little consequence on the adventuring spirits of 12-year-olds mesmerized by the updated version of Game Boy. Even as adults, we are indifferent to the gray lunar body that arcs above us nightly, as if looking for the man in the moon is an infantile act and the high-wire acts of past strong-jawed and fiercely American astronauts are the flotsam and jetsam of lowbrow cultural concerns.

It is okay to muse about Picasso's *Guernica* or the installations of Barbara Kruger, but to muse on the moon is akin to taking crystal therapy and biofeedback sessions. It is foolish stuff. But as Borges once said, "historical truth is not what took place, it is what we think took place." A selective memory is natural to us; we distill and recreate our past almost every day. These moon photos, however, are naked reminders. Though the moon is passe and Mars hangs above us as a highly sought space terminus, we were once obsessed by the immense gray disc of the moon and the idea of landing in its dust.

What humans cannot do themselves, they build an apparatus to do it for them.



US Mission, Surveyor VI, Day 328, Survey EE, Sectors 13 and 14, 1967. Collection of Randy Liebermann

By the 17TH century, astronomers like Galileo, with the help of telescopes, could map the surface of the moon with astonishing accuracy, even by today's standards. But years later, as photography took root in the sciences with the help of people like William Bond and John Adams Whipple, it became a preferred way of knowing the moon's idiom of landscapes — huge deadlocked craters, dry ominous mountains and whole valleys of night. Photography and science beget an idealism, a geometry of dreams that would yield filmmaker George Melies' 1902 comedic exploit, *A Trip to the Moon*. This idealism eventually propelled the development of the moon's first explorers, the Soviet Lunar satellites that extended the shelf life of communism into space.

The 1965 Soviet Luna Missions photographs, made using specially heat-resistant designed 35mm cameras and converted to electronic signals that were later transferred to photographic recorders on earth, are the most primitive pieces in the show. The images are as rough and grainy as shoddy photocopies and are instantly gripping because they don't provide concrete answers. The moon is shapeless, confounding and mutating. It is all enigma. Nothing is really clarified. The close-ups reveal a moon that resembles cells beneath a microscope. The gaze of the Soviet automaton unlocks new intrigues, a ground zero for guesswork and puzzles.

In contrast, by the time the U.S. Lunar Orbiter Missions were paving the way for the Apollo crews, American scientists had developed an in-house developing system that allowed the photos to be fully processed deep in space. The pictures were scanned, then transmitted back and first recorded on magnetic tape, from which negatives were later made. The result is a supreme, but not highly stylized, crispness that reveals every pore of the moon, as if the satellites were traversing the outer rim of a person's face.

Gathered and plotted using a strict adherence to a grid, the photos, especially those of the U.S. Surveyor I, V, VI and VII Missions, are arranged in a rough mosaic that creates a staggered but emergent continuity. The moon is broken into biomorphic shapes printed on a deck of picture cards and spread in an uneasy pattern. Actually, it is not the moon that is necessarily documented but the fragile crash course between the moon and the satellites themselves, as if the machines are autonomous stand-ins for a human experience that is painstakingly reconstructed. In contrast, the *Lunar Orbiter Mission* series capture a moon that is unencumbered, and surrounded by a radiant, impermeable blackness. It is less an energy field or delayed pendulum of light than a monochromatic desert.

Eventually, over a period of five missions, 97 percent of the moon was mapped in this manner. But the allure of these photos is not their archival or technical importance. After viewing the works, one sees the moon as a different kind of poetic refuge, one filtered through the halls of NASA and one with the shadow of machinery cast over it. The show neither recalls Neoclassical gardens or indulges the prefab fetishes of channel surfers, but documents the moon as distressed surface and icon, and laments already forgotten distances. ●

David Enslinger writes for *Thirsty Ear*, a music publication, and is a college instructor in Houston, Texas.

10 X 2 + 2: TWENTY-TWO  
TEXAS ARTISTS  
MARCH 4-APRIL 5, 2000  
DIVERSEWORKS  
ART LEAGUE OF HOUSTON  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

### Tex Kerschen

What a subdued year for photography in Texas. Between the 22 artists and two venues featured in this exhibition, the one visceral point of connection between artist and audience occurs above a haphazard piling of crumpled cigarette packages in Jacinda Russell's mixed-media installation, *Fear of Schizophrenia*. This nexus is a scrap of brown paper marked with a handwritten admonition by the artist's schizophrenic Aunt Eleanor. It reads, "Don't mess with this pile, trespasser." The writing is birdlike, it possesses the purposeful purity of the thing-in-itself, and the paper itself is carefully mounted to give it a professional appearance that belies its own perverted instinct for self-containment. The artist herself may have even fabricated the note, but at this moment the artist pulls her obsession into the world, and the world opens up to her obsession. Revealed by this scrap of paper, the ghost image of Aunt Eleanor appearing above and below the artist's own self-portraits brings with it the artist's fear of her own genetic inheritance and a sense of general menace.

Like Jacinda Russell's installation, the best experimental works in this exhibition share this outward movement from the art object to the outside world — the moment of uncertainty that resembles epiphany. The nearly unintelligible rush of voices in Bill Shackelford's audio tracks overpower his poster size plotter prints of convicted prisoners. However, as much as the prints move towards the distances of abstraction (through the enlargement of halftone patterns and rough printing), the voices keep the viewer/listener captive to the particular details and complaints of captive humanity. Less dense and more lyrical, Dornith Doherty's photographic elegies succeed in escaping the linear narrative and the myth of depth of field by overlaying sets of resonant stock images (fallen leaves, young women, cult of Demeter references) that a loose composition frees of their stock connotative values.

Elsewhere, the exhibition contents itself with the demonstration of its central premise, the reversal of traditional gender biases in the presentation of art. To this end the artists are separated by gender, the women showing at DiverseWorks and the men at the Art League of Houston. The exhibition succeeds on this count, the women benefit from the larger walls insofar as their prints are either physically larger or their series more revealing than those of their male counterparts. This placement presumably abridges the men's work. The distinctions of scale with which the art world has traditionally sifted the genders, men to the heroic, women to the domestic, are here reversed.

Unfortunately, very little of the photography in either show rises above the level of a supporting clause in this curatorial argument. The video throw-aways most amply demonstrate this. Jim Shelton's *Beyond Babylon* is an undergraduate film noir cliché from shot to shot, full of Western-style showdown angles and hurrying down the affected road to a trick ending. *Flora Moon* goes the opposite route, taking too much time to relate an unstructured recounting of a family history during the Chinese Cultural



Jacinda Russell, *Fear of Schizophrenia*, 2000.  
Mixed media installation

Revolution, which manages to speak of everything but culture or revolution.

Despite the implications of the decision to separate the sexes, the works themselves are not particularly strident in tone. On the contrary, they suffer from an overabundance of amiability, of niceness, and a vague sense of the technical art issues of the times. All of the photography is professional looking; much of it is lightly experimental. The mood throughout the exhibition falls somewhere between the posed surface quirkiness of John Fulbright's work and the domestic pause of the loving and incommunicative portraits of Ken Hatch or Joseph Vitone.

Digital manipulations, late conceptual serialism, installations, video works, light

shredding the prints like criminal evidence. Her installation is enigmatic and tame. Likewise, Will Michels' off-the-cuff self-portrait, apartment survey and bedroom studies allude to some uneventful central event which is itself never seen. Conceptualism, it appears, has finally come of middle age, trading in its revolutionary schemata for an inventory of Prufrockian concerns.

For some reason, perhaps the urge to elide the heavy scrutiny that accompanies overstatement, the studies in subtlety and domestic tidiness are given a larger amount of space to play out than the more provocative or experimental works. Ann Stautberg's *AM, TX Coast* umbrella pictures, for example, emphasize a controlled environment and its unseen specifics, and they gently address a short-list of formal elements, accidents of light

and primary coloration. Even large, however, these are just garnishes for an otherwise unremarkable vacation resort still life. The umbrella at a heroic scale somehow manages to escape its epic connotations. The tameness of works doesn't end here. For the most part, the variations from the conventions of photography stop at the level of gimmicks. Nate Cassie's refrigerator light box gags, which chronicle the diet of the middle class with a deadpan anthropological manner, would work well in the medium of a time capsule or a lifestyle magazine. Celia Munoz introduces tinted black-and-white photographs, alluding to issues of color, and mother-daughter relationships through her techni-colored *Patterns* series. While

one that makes a more charged statement by setting the artist between warring cowboy and Indian figures. Presumably this is the print the curator hoped to exhibit.

Jack Thompson, Debra Rueb and Robin Dru Germany also present kitsch-laden works that are readable and hence more evocative, whereas the icons Castillo uses (here as compared to the cowboy and Indian piece shown elsewhere) remain mute, the latter group makes their play dolls and staged gags speak. Kitsch and Pop icons lend themselves to closer readings and external (to the art world at least) allusions, because by themselves they are not very expressive. Used successfully, they reduce or subvert, either pulling high art down from its elitist cultural structures or exposing the ideologies behind mass-media artifacts. Debra Rueb's Tammy doll is a liberated Barbie, given to promiscuity and career advancement; but the doll is a cipher in the artist's sketch comedy, and the photographs themselves exist primarily as frames or backdrops for the social commentary. Robin Dru Germany appropriates the kitschy look of outdated technology in her digital prints to offset the essential narrative question of gender. Similarly, Fanny Tapper's staged scenes, mixing slapstick humor and sexist confrontation, fall somewhere between Cindy Sherman and Nic Nicosia.

The most unassuming works turn out to be the most engaging. O. Rufus Lovett's small portraits deliver more questions about their subjects than facts. The recent dating on the labels contradicts the age expressed by the pictures, that of being pulled out of a scrapbook or an anthropological digest. The sense of down-home synecdoche in the balloons, hands and other elements leaves a space for new interpretations. The scenes appear commonplace and everyday, but the internal motives in the composition, the hands as building blocks on a round wooden post, the white balloons against impassive faces and the diamond space between open legs and an open wallet suggest the timeless rituals of geometry. The serene faces of the immersed bathers in Janice Rubin's *Mikvah* series also serve as poetic metaphors for the staying power of ritual ideas within the passage of time. These pictures are honest, affectless and ambitious, challenging time to stop and explain itself.

Littered throughout this exhibition is the physical evidence of the 1990s — a loose amalgam of curatorial and artistic choices that put forward the look of mainstream post-modernism, a lax, dispassionate itinerary of heroically cast minutiae and heterodox styles. The many interesting possibilities of the exhibition's gender-specific organization remain largely unexplored, a curatorial shortcoming. The works are well-executed, but the intentions hidden. What is left is the overall feeling that what is going on isn't that important anymore. ●

Tex Kerschen is a curator at the Art Car Museum, the author of an upcoming collection of short stories, *Dead Souls Looking for New Bodies*, and a rock and roller with the band *Japanic*.



Ken Hatch, Santiago and Maria, 1998. Gelatin silver print

boxes, hand-treated works, audio enhancements, the usual extra-media expansions are all present. What is lacking is urgency; the exhibition ambles along artist to artist, with some of the artists over-represented, and others cut short.

Many of the artists here have appropriated the look of conceptual documentation through the use of photographs that resemble supplements to larger projects, which, unfortunately, do not exist. Susan Sponsler's *Baby Book Series* on self and extra-racial adoption possess the sweetness and necessary nostalgia of the baby-book form, but it fails to re-define the form or expand its message beyond the personal. Kathy Lovas' installation also makes mention of conceptual concerns, beheading the photographic subject,

the series is lovingly and cheerily executed, the juxtaposition of her human subjects and the project row houses remains cryptic and unexpressive. Charles Wiese's portraits of his family, hand-colored and half-toned a la Warhol and Lichtenstein, also convey little besides the artist's tenderness toward those he loves.

Brevity renders certain inclusions, such as Jimmy Castillo's look into his origins, inscrutable. Castillo's identity trinity, from left to right a groom doll, a toy stork and self-portrait set against a glossy blackboard filled with a chalky handwritten memoir appears to be the predecessor to a more complete autobiography, the toys and text feel like interchangeable symbols in the contemporary shorthand of kitsch. The brochure accompanying this exhibition features a different print by Castillo,



Rita Marhaug, *Princess*, 1997. Original in colorPhilip-Lorca diCorcia, *New York*, 1993. Ektacolor print, original in color

**HIGHLIGHTS IN  
NORDIC PHOTOGRAVURE  
MARCH 3–APRIL 3, 2000  
WINTER STREET ART CENTER  
HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**Jacinda Russell**

*Highlights in Nordic Photogravure* is an immense exhibition of over 120 works by 37 Scandinavian artists curated by Finn Thrane of the Museet for FotoKunst in Odense, Denmark. FotoFest sponsored its U.S. premiere in the Winter Street Art Center in Houston, Texas, a space as equally expansive and inspiring as the exhibition itself. It is a richly layered, in-depth look at an antique process, combining a classic form of printmaking with contemporary, late 20th century artistic philosophies and technologies.

Eli Ponsaing, a Danish graphic artist and photographer, discovered the photopolymer gravure plate in 1989 — an inexpensive, nontoxic alternative to the original photogravure copper printing method. The new plates, composed of soft plastic, light-sensitive material and thin sheet metal, were easy to use, thus lending itself to experimentation. The reemerging interest in exploring antique photographic processes and non-silver printing techniques in the 1990's led the Museet for Fotokunst in Odense, Denmark to invite artists from Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland and Greenland to work with Ponsaing's new discovery. From 1995 through 1997, the 37 artists included in this exhibition perfected the technique by producing works that challenge both the photography and printmaking aesthetics.

The main strength in *Highlights in Nordic Photogravure* lies in the diversity of subject matter and style generated from artists in several disciplines. Sculptors, painters and graphic designers

worked alongside printmakers and photographers to create an unparalleled range of work in response to a singular technical process.

Peter Esdaile and Inger Lise Rasmussen use multiple sheets of Plexiglas, creating an architectural building of portraits and body parts. The translucent layers are encased in blocks of dark wood — free-standing altars to the persons they embody. Finn Naur Petersen's haunting portraits of children grown old way before their time — hollow-faced death camp images revisited — are punched out in the form of jigsaw puzzles. Even though they are displayed untouched and whole, they indicate temporary completeness — the fragility of being torn up at a moment's notice and placed forgotten in a closet in the back of one's mind.

By referencing the past in the recreation of the present and introducing current day issues of gender and examination of the self to historical art references, Rita Marhaug creates the strongest bridge in the combination of contemporary artistic philosophy and antique methods of printmaking. Her 66" x 27" self-portraits are layered over classical sculptures transforming male figures into that of her own female body as in the triptych *I.D. 1-3* (1997). In *Princess* (1997), Marhaug's uses the same layering techniques by posing her daughter as the little princess in Velasquez's *Las meninas*.

*Highlights in Nordic Photogravure* is an exhibition of great importance in the overview of 20th century photography. It not only documents the advances made since the 1800s but removes photography from contemporary silver gelatin, Cibachrome and ink jet printing, emphasizing the strengths of collaboration and the study of a multi-disciplinary medium. ●

Jacinda Russell is an artist living and working in Houston, Texas.

**PHILIP-LORCA DICORCIA  
MARCH 3–APRIL 15, 2000  
LAWING GALLERY  
HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**Eric Zapata**

Philip-Lorca diCorcia's work at downtown's Lawing Gallery is comprised of three bodies of work, all in color that explore society but with drastically different approaches and results. The first series, *Hustlers*, shows a fringe world of street people and male prostitutes marginalized by society. The second, *Streetwork*, are street scenes taken in major cities throughout the world, and the third are from the *Friends and Family* series.

In *Hustlers*, photographed from 1990 to 1992 in Hollywood, diCorcia paid male prostitutes and others a fee to take their pictures. His titles, such as *Major Tom*, *Los Angeles \$20*, raise issues about this fringe society and treatment of these men as commodities with product name, place of origin and their fee. Using his talents and skills, diCorcia's portrayal of these men contradicts this view by humanizing them. The artist creates beautiful images that belie the life and situation of these men.

In the more recent *Streetwork*, diCorcia makes street photography fresh and exciting. diCorcia's approach is to set up his camera and lighting. Then over a two-hour period, he photographs the scene as characters enter and exit this stage. diCorcia's use of selective focus and lighting give the images a staged feel, as if these were movie stills rather than documentary street scenes.

In the image, *London*, the artist uses lighting, focus and placement to bring attention to a businessman reading a newspaper, and away from the other suits in view. The position of the figures adds to the scripted feel, as if they are on marks. diCorcia's choices of film and printing also heighten this feeling. The colors in the prints are very saturated, making the images more vibrant than in reality. His most important innovation is the use of a stationary camera. Rather than searching for an image, diCorcia finds a backdrop and then lets the images unfold, catching the characters off guard.

diCorcia's creative approaches have produced intriguing work — one that addresses a societal subculture and another runs counter to the conventions of a photographic style, reinvigorating it and his audience. ●

Eric Zapata is a MFA candidate in photography at the University of Houston.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, *London*, 1995. Ektacolor print, original in color

Linda Orloff, *Untitled*, 1995. Polaroid print

**LINDA ORLOFF**  
MARCH 3–APRIL 3, 2000  
VINE STREET STUDIOS  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

**CHEMA MADDOZ AND NEIL MAURER**  
MARCH 3–APRIL 3, 2000  
PURSE BUILDING STUDIOS  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

**Barré L. Bullard**

If Virginia Woolf had picked up a camera instead of a pen, traveled to Iceland, and then made her way into a darkroom of one's own, Linda Orloff's stream of consciousness photographic images may have been the result. Linda Orloff, Danish photographer and one of this year's FotoFest finds, was part of a three-woman exhibition with Linda Darling and Robin Hill entitled *Installations*. Held at the Vine Street Studios, this exhibit was a somewhat cerebral venture into some traditional, but primarily experimental photography.

*Saga Blot* (1996) and *Amnesia* (1995) are the two books from projects from which Orloff's contribution to *Installations* is derived. Her images are haunting portrayals of what you might find if you had the ability to look inside the brain and observe it performing its visual function. Bits and snippets of random, sometimes cohesive, visual imagery. Mental Polaroids.

Referring to the Polaroids that were initially part of the 1995 *Amnesia* exhibit, Orloff states that they are "pictures of remembrance" and illustrate the way silence is disturbed "for a short moment by a cross-section through the memory ... I prefer to think that every picture in the book has a lot of layers behind and in front of them, like the way human beings are using their brain to think in many layers and shiftings at the same time. Developing the memory from the deep of oblivion bit after bit."

Issues of time and change as well as memory have significance in Orloff's work. These are illustrated by the use of ring symbology in her book project *Saga Blot*. Recurring images of "earth rings" hint at the cyclical aspects of nature and change and the potential of life. Such rings can be seen in *Boilingpoint*, a red filtered Polaroid image of a geyser just before explosion, or in *Pseudogyser*, which Orloff describes as "not a real volcano crater, but a ring created by an enormous air bubble underneath the ground." They allude to the "Heimskringla," Icelandic for "World Circle," and the age-old theme of death and rebirth and how the human mind interprets these events. They are also reminiscent of fantastical terrestrial landscapes, alien worlds that occasionally incorporate human elements like a wooden bridge, a veiled figure or an outdoor bathtub. They are science fiction mission of discovery. A haunting visual stream of consciousness, or as Orloff puts it "ritual

and rhythm over again, the act of creating a stream of pictures." *Saga Blot* means literally "a pictorial tale without time."

Along with the occasional photo-gravure, most of the images displayed in *Installations* are framed Polaroids. The exception is *Saltwork*, a series of color photographs floating in circular

pans which rest on the floor and are lined with salt. *Saltwork* also has a life-birth-death symbology, with its recurring image of a girl swimming beneath a salt-coated surface.

Chema Madoz, *Untitled*, 1996. Silver Bromide print

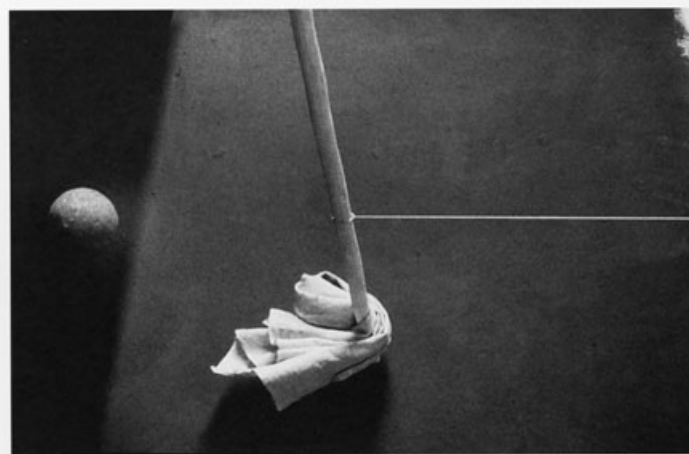
Linda Orloff's work is ghostly and transparent, suggesting the temporal nature of mind and memory and their relation to the cyclical nature of life. It has the mysterious quality of somehow representing the past, present and future simultaneously.

Madoz's work occupied the left side of the gallery "mirroring" Maurer's on the right. This mirror imaging suggested a simple and straightforward representation; however, because Madoz's work is strictly about contemplation, the arrangement appeared to mock a certain perplexity inherent in this seemingly direct work.

Madoz has been characterized elsewhere as working in a surrealist tradition of photography. President of the Xunta de Galicia, Manuel Fraga Iribarne says, "Madoz's images are populated by objects from everyday life, images that nonetheless evoke an unreal world, since they are manipulated with subversive intent, the product of a profoundly analytical way of seeing. Without ever falling into banality, his brilliant associations — not merely visual, but arising from a play of concepts — bring into question our very perception of reality."

You might say he creates his images from opposites, using trickery; yet the work is thought-provoking for both its insight and its humor.

He photographs sculptural ideas. In his untitled gelatin silver prints, he juxtaposes elements of life that would seem completely different, and yet, in typical surrealist fashion, he is able to relate them in provocative ways. A dining chair with a back made of suspenders, a cane serving as the hand rail for a staircase, a pair of sandals with soles made from grass. Others works evoke a more philosophical or social interpretation: darts and a dart board with an image constellations as its face, a jewelry mannequin of neck and chest with a bike chain displayed as a necklace, an ant climbing the sands in an hourglass, and a water drain in the middle of a patch of cracked earth.

Neil Maurer, *From the series, Cloth, Stone & String*, 1996-97, 1996.

Orloff's work is a striking contrast to fellow FotoFest exhibitor, Chema Madoz, whose photography is as direct and linear and Orloff's is phantasmal. In spite of their stylistic differences, the two photographers do have things in common.

Madoz's work appeared in a FotoFest-sponsored exhibit, *Minimalism/Modernism*, at the Purse Building Studios. A joint exhibit with Neil Maurer, this proved to be one of the FotoFest 2000 highlights. Both photographers' works appeared to be linear and direct, and likewise the exhibit. Maurer deliberately confuses the origins of his imagery. He often utilizes fragmentary things and abstract forms from commonplace objects such as fans and bottles.

Madoz creates the quintessential surrealist picture by making objects other than what they are. He does so with a careful rendering of light that limits needless effects and therefore minimizes interference with his symbolism. Though his images read as perfectly ordinary objects, they manage to fool the eye and confound the mind with questions about the simple practices of our day-to-day lives.

Like Linda Orloff, he uses photography as a way to provide new interpretations about what we already presume to know.

● Barré L. Bullard is manager of John Cleary Gallery, a fine arts photography gallery in Houston, Texas.

**MOMENTS: THE PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHS. A VISUAL CHRONICLE OF OUR TIME. COMPILED WITH TEXT BY SAL BUELL. FOREWORD BY SEYMOUR TOPPING NEW YORK: BLACK DOG & LEVANTHAL, 1999.**

**Julianne Newton**

Be forewarned.

If you pause to ponder the visual and verbal content of this book, giving it the time it deserves, you will never view history or photojournalism the same way again.

But to get the full effect, you must read the book five times. The first time, simply look at the pictures — as if one can simply look at pictures such as these. But try; look into them, do not read nearby words as you look, just see into the time feelings held in the photos. Suspend as well as you can any judgments you might have about the photos or what they portray. Give the content its due.

The second time, read the words — the introductory material as well as the individual vignettes describing the contexts in which the pictures were made.

On your third reading, walk along the visual timeline, a path of additional pictures, words and dates that will help you locate the prize-winning photos in history.

Next, work back through the book, from start to finish, pausing on each photo or group of photos to soak up bits of the lives within the frames. Finally, on the fifth read, think critically as you scan the volume. Think about the content of the pictures, about the thrust of the timeline, about photojournalism, about societal rewards for public work, about how we decide what to remember from our history.

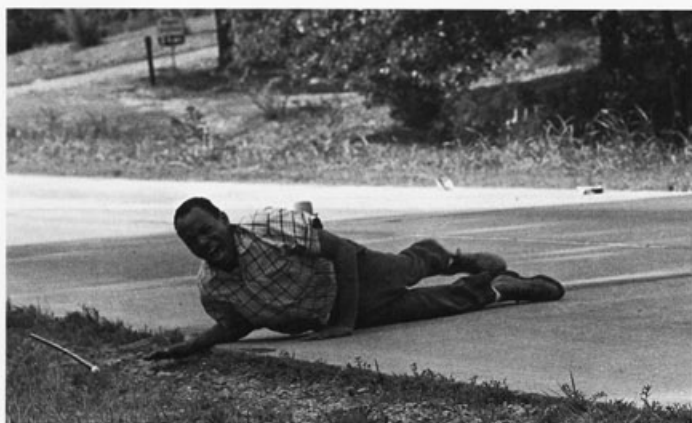
Excessive, you are thinking.

How many times have you re-read a poem or studied a painting, waiting for the work to open to you a little more each time, I ask. But this is not poetry or art, you are thinking. This is journalism. Depending on your opinion of journalism, you may inherently respect or disregard images of photojournalism. You cite examples of photographs that have been manipulated, that mislead, that tell only part of a truth, that were published primarily because of color or aesthetic appeal. The fact that the best images of photojournalism increasingly find their way onto the walls of art galleries does little to convince you of their worth, much less their authenticity.

I suggest that you approach these photographs from a perspective outside the frames of your past perceptions of journalism and art. The photographs in the 1999 edition of *Moments: The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Photographs*, deserve far more of your consideration than a quick dismissal based on the rationales of subjective perception and media manipulation. Subtitled *A Visual Chronicle of Our Time*, these words and pictures tell significant stories, both as individual units and as a whole. They define the essential moments of the last half of the 20th century — or do they? At the very least, they define the vision photographers, editors and each year's Pulitzer Prize committee decided was important. And that very vision has framed the way we have viewed and remember events of the 20th century. That alone makes them worthy of thoughtful reading.

But there is far more to learn from sitting a while with this book. Compiled by a master editor of 20th century photo-





Jack Thorneil, *Civil Rights Shooting*, 1966. Civil rights activist James Meredith grimaces in pain as he pulls himself across Highway 51 after being shot in Hernando, Miss. June 6, 1966. Meredith, who defied segregation to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962, completed the march from Memphis, Tenn. to Jackson, Miss., after treatment of his wounds.

journalism, *Moments* provides remarkable fodder for discussing the significant issues of vision and reality facing the global citizenry in the 21st century: How does photojournalism influence our understanding of world events? How does photojournalism affect what we remember about those events? Should these photographs have been taken or published? Had they not been taken or published, would history be different? What factors determine whether we are drawn to a picture or remember it at all? What will the revised *Moments* published in the year 2100 contain? Little of consequence because we can no longer believe photographs? Or a compendium of images chronicling the 21st century with the dedication and integrity made clear by this current volume?

The book is well done: quality reproductions in both black and white and color, quickly readable vignettes about the photos and photographers, careful design to give the best pictures their due, clean use of type and white space. One particularly interesting characteristic is that no captions accompany the photographs. At first, I found the idea refreshing; the viewer must look at the photos more carefully to discern their narratives. The pictures must stand on their own. Many times I have been annoyed by the draw of words next to an incredible image, even the tiny titles posted next to works exhibited in museums. The habit of turning quickly to caption material led me to be similarly annoyed when my eye moved quickly to the bold-faced technical information located near each major photo. For clarification and background, text that is much fuller than a caption describes how the photos came about.

Written and compiled by veteran Associated Press executive Hal Buell, we can trust the validity of the material. The foreword by Seymour Topping, who administers the Pulitzer Prizes and is professor of international journalism at Columbia University, offers a brief but informative background on the Pulitzer's beginning, as well as on their subsequent development and the selection process. Buell's introduction takes on the difficult question, "What is it that makes a Pulitzer Prize picture?" The Pulitzer requirements are straightforward: "The photo, or photos, must have been published in a daily newspaper in the United States, and must have been made in the calendar year prior to the year of the award." Buell notes, however, that the rules "offer no guidance about picture content, historical significance, technical skill, journalistic experience, or cultural impact." The pictures vary from the horrors of war to tender exchange between people, from surprising historical events to the quiet reflection

of everyday life, from high drama to subtle glances, from the vision of seasoned photojournalists to that of an amateur passerby. Buell writes:

In light of this diversity of images, one must say that the Pulitzer-winning photos by and large document universal moments in the passage of time that take us to places we otherwise might not have seen. Frequently they are the chapter headings of history. Too often they are pictures of violence, because history is more likely to be written in blood than beauty. But the Pulitzer catalogue also includes pictures of those delicious moments that each of us encounters individually, those sweet, gentle insights that separate us from the routine of our lives. Shared through photography these pictures also become universal.

Buell divides the book into four insightful, self-explanatory sections: The Large-Format Camera and the Early Pulitizers; The Small Camera and the Vietnam and Civil Rights Pulitizers; A New Kind of Pulitzer: The Picture Story; and Color and Digital Photography, Women Photographers and the Africa Pulitizers. These categories alone provide a means for analyzing the course of photojournalism in the 20th century.

Here's how it works. Eddie Adams, an experienced photojournalist, walks around Saigon, camera gear in tow, living the dangerous life of a war photographer in order to cover Vietnam. Alerted by gunfire, Adams encounters Vietnamese soldiers escorting a prisoner and takes a few pictures. With his camera to his eye, Adams sees a man walk into view and pull out a pistol. The gun fires, a bullet enters a man's skull, Adams' finger pushes the shutter. An unbelievable moment is documented, a moment few would have witnessed were it not for the process of photography and Adams' courage and talent. The photograph is published worldwide, showing its viewers a side of the war in Vietnam they did not want to believe, much less see. They react with individual and mass responses: horror, disgust, disbelief, denial, voyeuristic compulsion. The photograph is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for News Photography. The moment as captured becomes one of a handful of pictures that define public memory about the War in Vietnam. Most of those who lived through the Vietnam War can readily call the picture to mind. The moment is one moment, as seen from one man's eyes. The moment is published innumerable times in newspapers, magazines, history books, photography books. The moment itself occurred. Adams recorded it.

That is what distinguishes these photographs. In a time when some have declared photojournalism dead, when public cynicism about news media is

justifiable, authentic images of photojournalism stand above all other media imagery. Photographs recognized with a Pulitzer Prize represent the proverbial tip of the iceberg of the reliable visual reportage made available daily. The Pulitzer photos are especially significant, however, because each has been carefully investigated, corroborated by witnesses, and selected from among hundreds of others along the way to nomination. And they have framed the way we will remember the 20th century.

One problem is that the photographs are decidedly North American. Although citizens of other countries have won the Pulitzer, the award can go only to work published in U.S. newspapers. That fact alone should give the careful reader pause. Editors select images for publication based on criteria ranging from "the public needs to know" to "our readers do not want to see this on their breakfast table." Yet by stressing significant American points of view, the photographs reveal what was important to 20th century Americans: war — both victory and defeat, human suffering, human cruelty to other humans, the capriciousness of life and death, the potential gentleness of human interaction.

Another problem is that the photographs are those selected for honor by the Pulitzer Board. Furthermore, the volume includes only the pictures that won in categories of Spot News Photography (1942–1999) and Feature Photography (1968–1999). Not included is a significant body of photographs that exhibit the best spirit of visual reportage, the photographs that tell, along with words, stories that won Pulitizers in traditional word categories, such as investigative journalism, explanatory journalism, public service journalism. Professor Topping notes the omission and highlights the 1997 prize for explanatory journalism awarded in 1997 to journalist Michael Vitez and photographers April Saul and Ron Cortes. His words betray traditional thinking: "The Pulitzer Board quite often has been so impressed by the manner in which a story submitted in a print category has been brought alive by illustrative photos printed with it that it has been compelled to divide the awards between the nominated writers and photographers involved" (p. 7). Even in complimenting photojournalism, the head of the Pulitzer process continues to call the visual reportage "illustrative photos" that help bring a story to life, rather than visual stories containing information that cannot be communicated in words. This volume has been sorely needed to update the 1982 version of *Moments*. Reviewing both editions will be valuable to the serious student of photojournalism. The earlier edition contains material not included in the 1999 edition. In fact, the statement on the back cover of the recent version is misleading: "*Moments* ... collects every Pulitzer Prize photograph from 1942, when the photography award was founded, through 1999..." According to the Pulitzer Prize Web site ([www.pulitzer.org/navigation/index.html](http://www.pulitzer.org/navigation/index.html)), 20 photos composed the 1999 award-winning package produced by Associated Press photographers. The book includes only six. Furthermore, of the six photographers in the winning team, only three are noted in the text.

*Moments* raises a number of other issues: the effects of prize competitions on photojournalists and the kinds of pictures they take; whether or not some of the pictures should be taken, much less published and rewarded; what factors influence the political and ideological

points of view inevitably conveyed via journalistic imagery. My research has determined that even the process of nominating a photographer for a Pulitzer can be a carefully managed political process. One can make an argument that the book is primarily a promotional piece for the Pulitzer Prize and possibly for The Associated Press because so many of the photographs published are courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos.

However, to focus on such points is to undermine the indisputable value of the work of men and women who often risk their own lives to show the world to itself. *Moments* offers important insight into the minds of photojournalists. The 1943 winner is a good example. Contemporary postmodern scholars might denounce the photograph as another example of U.S. colonialism. However, a careful reading of the accompanying text published in *Moments* reveals that AP photographer Frank Noel literally was in a similar boat as the Indian man with desperate eyes and outreached hand that he recorded on film. Both men had set to sea in lifeboats with no water after their Burma-bound freighter was hit by a Japanese torpedo. Buell writes, "The demoralizing progress of the war, the withering Asian sun, the destructive grip of malaria, and the hopeless situation all failed to lessen Noel's photographic instincts. ... He raised his camera and made an exposure of the wretched sailor whose eyes spoke volumes as his hand reached out to seek help, his expression reflecting the woeful news that there was no water." Though "the Indian sailors were never seen again," Noel and his 4" x 5" film were rescued after reaching the coral reefs off Sumatra.

Remember this, if nothing else: the purpose of images of photojournalism is to tell the truth visually. Whatever we have come to understand about the nature of human perception, about the relativity of truth, about the diversity of perspectives humans hold, we cannot deny that female genital mutilation occurred, that babies died in the Oklahoma bombing, that a fire escape collapsed with a woman and child or that such pictures can make a difference. Neither the overt manipulation of advertising nor the fantasy of entertainment can touch the profundity of what actually happens in the course of people's lives. The photographs are made by imperfect human beings using various forms of recording technology — which will continue to change — and individual points of view — which also will change. However, the goal is the same: to report to the world the happenings of life and death as best as humanly possible. The only alternative is not to see at all. ●

Julianne Newton, an Austin photographer and scholar, is author of the forthcoming book, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in Mediating Reality*.

Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 1986. Gelatin silver print

**THE BROWN SISTERS**  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICHOLAS NIXON  
AFTERWORD BY PETER GALASSI  
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART,  
NEW YORK, 1999

**Peter Brown**

This is a mesmerizing book. I have left it around various vacation homes over the past few weeks, and family and friends — particularly women, (and even more particularly, those in their 40s or 50s), pick it up, sit down, drift into it as into a dream, and do not re-emerge until they are awakened by something in the present.

Generally, most people do not react to photographic books in this way. More often than photographers like to admit, there is a swift riffling of pages from back to front (a sweep that often dings up the reproductions), a few glances, three or four long stares, and then that pole-axed look, upwards, blank, maybe thinking, maybe a little irritated. But down goes the book. Finished.

Not so this time. The Brown sisters get questioning brows, wry smiles, knowing nods, shaking heads — a reaction that is almost the body equivalent to that of listening to salsa music — and this bobbing and weaving goes on, oblivious to all surroundings.

Like many, I have been aware of Nicholas Nixon's long-term portrait project with the Brown sisters. The photographs have been shown singly and in small groups in many places over time, but have not, to my knowledge, been exhibited or published in such quantity before. (Twenty-five years and the cusp of a new millennium are good places to pause and reflect.)

These sisters — Heather, Mimi, Bebe (Nixon's wife) and Laurie have been photographed — grouped together, standing in the same order, annually (one chosen photograph a year) for the past quarter century. An 8" x 10" view camera (a beautiful, bulky machine mounted on a tripod) and black-and-white film have been used, as they have in Nixon's past work.

The portraits, which are varied in place and season, have, in their early stages, a cool if not combative distance about them; yet as the series progresses, a mix of intensity, care, warmth, and indifference shift from year to year, and from face to face, until a closeness that the sisters share with each other, and ultimately with the viewer, becomes paramount. The photographs are of interest individually but come into power when viewed as sequence. And in some ways,

they are as compelling for what they refuse to show, as for what they reveal.

What they do show, and what seldom fails to rivet those who pick up the book, is the sight of a small group of our contemporaries aging before our eyes. These are beautiful and, as Nixon says in his short acknowledgment, "strong" women. They seem (and "seem" is the mystery word which swirls with glee throughout this book) to be members of a family from which most of us would be happy to be counted. A poet friend of mine, an only child (like Nixon), after finishing the book, looked at me with the eyes of a woman more than a little cheated by life and said in the voice of a small girl, "I want to be one of them! I want them for my sisters!"

What do we know about these women? Not much, really. At bedrock, we understand what they have looked like for fractions of 25 specific seconds over the course of 25 years. We also know that there are four of them — a fact remarkable in its own right. (I am 51 and have known only one other "four-sistered" family in that time.) There is an age difference of 10 years between the oldest and youngest, with the series beginning in 1974 when Mimi was 15 and Bebe 25. The sisters are carefully and "tastefully" dressed, though in casual ways, with Mimi, the youngest, being the most maverick in terms of style. She alone appears pregnant (in the 1992 photograph), the only obvious pregnancy. The fair-skinned Bebe, the eldest, seems to have aged the most in conventional ways (though in the last few years she seems to have turned back the clock). The sisters are photographed with little identifiable background — though beach, ocean rocks, shrubbery, lawns and, a couple of times, a wall make their presence known in the background. The photographs are taken most often during the summer. We seem to be on the East Coast, and the sisters seem to be middle or upper-middle class Easterners — but perhaps not. In some photographs they hold each other, in others they are more separate, and in some there is a mix of embrace. Their facial expressions vary, but in the earlier photographs seem to more strongly confront the viewer than in the more receptive images that end the book. And there are many facts of dress, hairstyle and posture that would be of interest to a cultural anthropologist (facts that will increase in power over time), but facts that the rest of us interpret in spontaneous ways.

Peter Galassi's Afterword fills in more, but not much: a college graduation after which the photographs began in earnest;

the Brown parents' habit of photographing the sisters for Christmas cards when they were kids; the fact that Nixon is not only an only child but also the son of two other only children; a few dates from which we can guess at ages, but purposely, Galassi's essay gives away little. We are meant to react to these photographs only as images, without much backup or explanation. And this is both interesting and irritating. And interesting in its irritation.

We know nothing, for example (apart from intuition), of the obviously complex relations between the sisters, of their mixed responses to the photographer, of their marriages or the lack of them, of children, jobs, educations, pasts, senses of humor, passions, hates, homes, health.

Yet I drifted happily and easily into speculation. As Galassi notes, the portraits are like the family photographs that all of us have in albums and boxes at home (though these are considerably more disciplined, of course). And he points out what we're not a part of: the subtext, of course, the intimacy that these people have shared over many years.

What are we to make of these photographs then? For that matter, why should we care about them at all? A variety of responses popped up for me, all interesting, and all intertwined. I'd like to separate them a bit, to pull them apart,

Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 1975. Gelatin silver print

because the book can be approached from a variety of points of view. (Though that first confused rush of connection, curiosity and voyeuristic fascination is perhaps the most fulsome response we will have, and such a reaction, without a lot of structured thought may be the best way to think of the book in the long run.)

But as preface, the idea itself, a very simple one, is overwhelming as we watch it move through a quarter of a century. This clearly is a collaboration. Nixon is the photographer, but for 25 years, the sisters have choreographed these images with him. And they seem much less subjects of a photographer's scrutiny than active participants in a long-term process (though again, we don't know the full story). We do understand quickly what these people are up to, however, and I wished (somewhat grumpily) that I had had the forethought to do the same with my own family. Anyone could create something roughly equivalent with a point-and-shoot (though again not as far reaching or beautiful), but still, a few hours at most, once a year, and a resonant record would exist. What else is there?

In an expanding order of my own interests: first, I'd like to dispense, at least momentarily, with the questions of background and look at the images simply as visual material, non-metaphoric and unladen by content: the facts, simply those photographic facts. I found that, as a photographer, and with some difficulty, I could examine the photos as I might a hyperrealist painting of a shop front, say. Just ferreting out information. I watched,

from image to image, as Nixon's camera moved in front of the sisters, changing its line of view, ratcheting up and down, moving back and forth, occasionally throwing a shadow over the four — but each time culminating in a photograph that by virtue of the camera's positioning created a specific mix, a structure that might be construed as intimate, dominant, careful, mysterious, neutral ... a construct that, among other things, might create a mood or a set of interpretive feelings. I found myself looking at this structure as well: the way the sisters are sometimes centered, sometimes not, sometimes cropped on one side or another (a leg, an arm, half a face missing). I looked at occasional lens distortion (which can give a creepy migraineish quality), at the varied light that Nixon is interested in (normally a sensual part of his work) — and on occasion, its drab lack; at the intermittent use of flash; at the various ways the women fit into the background of leaves, rocks, sky; at the mix of tonal values (their beauty, derived from the 8" x 10" contact prints from which these reproductions are made); the lack of grain; the intimate size of the book; the sisters' eye contact with the lens, or not; and so on. And while this is an interesting exercise, it ultimately pales because of the human content of the photographs. These are multi-layered

pictures of people, and we want to make more of them than a formalist reading allows. (Though on formalist scores, it should be noted that Nixon has worked with large-format cameras in the street, at home and in a variety of hospitals and schools for many years, and with remarkable dexterity. And while these portraits are more studied and compositionally doctrinaire than most of his other work, lyrical flourishes of line and back-

ground are still a motive force — although in a kind of miniaturist fashion.)

Second, one might put on another set of blinders and look at the book just as pictures of these particular women, again without metaphoric thought — just considering the "news" of their metamorphoses — watching them grow, change and age. You could leaf through the book a number of times, keeping an eye out for specific things: each woman as an individual; the group as a whole (the sisters' dresses, the changes in group facial expressions and body language, the shifting sibling alliances we note through the linkage of arms and the like) — and as a finale, you might zip through the book quickly, almost as if viewing a film, just to see what holds.

Third, one can't fully consider the images outside of the historical context of the last 25 years. The Brown sisters, at some point in our thought, will stand in for white middle-class American women who have grown up in a particular segment of the 20th century, and some distillation of all we have come to believe about this generation will make itself known.

In the progression of these images, there seems to me to be a parallel to the lives of many women I have known of the Brown sisters' age, women both in my family, as well as friends. First, these are photographs of four sisters. Just that. Four sisters who react to each other and to another family member who happens to be photographing them in the same sorts of ways that we all have reacted in



our own lives. And there is a sweet intimacy to this that we all attend to and appreciate — as well as a mute tenderness and vulnerability from which other issues spring. Grossly oversimplified: the expressive stances of the sisters move (in varied ways) from somewhat symbolic postures taken in the seventies, which can be read, either as an immediate reaction to Nixon and the act of being photographed — or, more interestingly perhaps, as having been generated by these particular times, set in response to a configuration of cultural expectations: generational politics, patriarchal and feminist issues particularly, but also a wide variety of undefined social and immediate photographic concerns. Each woman seems, in general, more alone than a part of the group, yet still hangs onto a great deal of self-sufficiency. The look and feel of the gentler aspects of Judy Dater's early work comes to mind as a parallel. In the eighties — greater closeness (photographically speaking) develops between the sisters, yet still, a somewhat confrontational stance is taken in regard to the outside — not a lot of smiling, but arms linked, ample strength apparent, yet less as individuals and more as a group. And in the nineties, little of this strength is lost. What is won, however, is a visible warmth and a difficult but resonant peace — just look at these faces now. We have watched the sisters age for a quarter of a century in a matter of minutes and these women though changed are still beautiful and in deeper ways than when they were young. They greet us openly, if mysteriously, and the bond between them is profound (as is the courage that they show in allowing us to watch them age in this era of perpetual youth).

As clichéd and absurdly rushed as this synopsis may sound, the cumulative effect is very moving. To witness, as confrontation, strength, love, and wisdom combine, in individuals, in a group and in this group's relation to the outside, is remarkable in its own right. Yet it's also an experience that can help one review one's own past and the lives of one's loved ones.

To some degree, all of this is, of course, conjecture. And there still is unresolved tension. But in viewing the book again and again, this multifaceted change, though impossible to pin down, is beautiful to watch.

One can try to decipher the series by reading the work in more literal ways — but this is a difficult job. The sisters' postures, expressions, clothing, and various on-camera roles — as sisters, individuals, symbolic forces — have been formed by an enormous mix of personal and cultural forces. The worlds of sibling politics, the wider family, the lives of women in strongly feminist times, the inner-workings of the art world, the inconsistencies of the moment are all at play. And there is so much more . . .

Hundreds of variant thoughts and questions, times four, inform the creation of each image. And this does not include the input from Nixon, which is considerable. Once his decisions are factored in, we might multiply each set of annual influences by the 25 years to arrive at the web of cross-currents that create the book's infrastructure. All of which is to say, that to try to divine in credible ways, the reason that one sister looks pleased for example in 1995 and is vaguely troubled in 1996, say, is, given the information that we possess, beyond thought.

(And again, we have Nixon, the wild card, who in making his 10 or 12 negatives a year, affords himself an interesting choice as editor of this work. How do

his interpretations affect the soul of the series?)

Finally, I give up trying to recreate biography from these images and move on to fiction, or at least a non-fiction novel, projecting first into the future (thoughts of aging and death, by their nature go hand in hand) and wonder where these women will be in another 25 years. How long will the series continue?

Which leads to the fourth, and to me, the most enjoyable way to consider this book: just let your imagination run rampant. Flip the pages back and forth (carefully), trying to figure out what has happened: wonder about the frowns and smiles, watch Laurie age, watch Mimi change her hairstyle, consider the remarkable intensity of Bebe . . . wonder if that's Lake Michigan or the Chesapeake Bay or Maine . . . think of the cousins playing tag in the background. Think of the poor husbands, talking among themselves as they wander about on the lawn checking in with their law firms or sociology departments by cell phone. Think about the bad pictures, the outtakes, the laughs, the spaghetti spilled on the blouse that was just right for the photo. Think about the elderly Browns doing the dishes, the dinner table conversation, the sibling rivalry, the new job, the warmth, the backsliding into bickering, the phone calls, the e-mail, the ball games, the rides to the airport, the rental cars: the whole ragtag novel of lives shared and denied; a hodgepodge of thoughts that are linked uncontrollably and comparatively to one's own life, one's own friends and family, and one's own recollections of time past . . .

And finally, we should take Galassi's reticent and wise approach seriously, in which he maintains that as introduction, at any rate, little need be said about these images at all. But if little is to be said, it is because the photographs hint at so much and are so easily accessible. No commentary is necessary, of course, when we can each provide our own. To say too much about them as interpretation, however, is (as is often the case with photographs) to clumsily cobble a reproduction of something that has already been communicated with grace and circumspection.

Still, a wide variety of thought does come rumbling into consciousness as we wander wistfully or march purposefully through this book. And it's this slippery, serious, happy and very multi-faceted potential (from photographs that are very quiet) that gives the book its power and its mystery.

This world is one that has been shared. In the last analysis, and in the most humane way, the Brown sisters do become our sisters. We are curious about their lives because, if given the opportunity, we are curious people. An invitation has been offered by Nixon and the sisters. It's been made quietly, lovingly and with an artful attempt to define a limited but powerful set of truths. We recognize the validity and seriousness of the attempt and say, "sure we'll take a look," and do so, with interest.

In the end, this is a book, which like these women, ages well. Their lives, to a surprising degree, have become an open book. One opens *The Brown Sisters*, this haunting, intimate, literal book, again and again, each time hopeful of new things. ●

Peter Brown is a Houston photographer. W.W. Norton published his book *On the Plains* as a DoubleTake book last summer. An excerpt won an Alfred Eisenstaedt Award in 1999. His photographs have been published recently in *The New Yorker*, *LIFE* and *Texas Monthly*.

## BOOKS RECEIVED AND NOTED

The Houston Center for Photography receives review copies of books from publishers around the country. These books are available to visitors during gallery hours.

Bickel, Karl. *Walker Evans: Florida*.

Los Angeles, California:

The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000, 68 pages

Includes 54 of Evan's photographs capturing Florida in 1941, along with novelist Robert Plunkett's essay "Call me Mr. Chatterbox."



Bill Brandt Archive. *The Photography of Bill Brandt*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999, 320 pages

Features 350 photographs spanning more than 50 years of Brandt's career. It includes an introduction by David Hockney and essays by Bill Jay and Nigel Warburton.

Bogdan, Robert. *Exposing the Wilderness: Early-Twentieth-Century Adirondack Postcard Photographers*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999, 251 pages

Bogdan joins text with illustrations to develop biographical sketches of these pioneer photographers on the Adirondacks, its inhabitants and visitors.

Boult, Thierry. *Hotel People*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999, 38 pages

Presents a series of portraits of people in hotels.



Brookman, Philip. *Arnold Newman*. New York: Taschen, 2000, 276 pages

Newman presents a retrospective collection of iconic portraits of artists, musicians, actors and politicians for over 60 years.

Ewing, William. *Love and Desire Photoworks*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1999, 400 pages

A visual survey of 150 years of photographic history observing how the camera has been used to articulate ideas, thoughts and sentiments related to the most turbulent of human emotions.



Fellman, Sandi. *Open Secrets*. Edition Stemmler, 1999, 112 pages

Contains Fellman's collection of large scale, sepia-toned photographs of flowers.

Gertsman, Valentin L. *Houston Architectural Ballade*. Houston, Texas: Mills & Morris Publishing, 2000, 127 pages

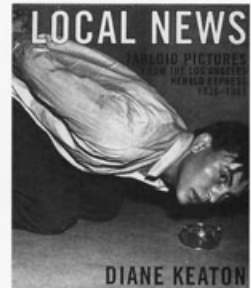
Contains 104 color images based on contemporary architecture and outdoor sculptures of Houston.

Greiner, William K., *The Reposed*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999, 140 pages

Presents 62 color photographs that capture the visual landscape of Louisiana graveyards.

Harrison, Stephen R. *Whispered Prayers: Portraits and Prose of Tibetans in Exile*. Santa Barbara, California: Talisman Press, 2000, 167 pages

Harrison shares the inner experience of Tibetan refugees and exiles through his photographs and narration.



Keaton, Diane. *Local News: Tabloid Pictures from the Los Angeles Herald Express 1936-1961*. New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 1999, 139 pages

Keaton presents a collaboration of 79 unusual tabloid images on the darker side of the City of Angels.



Lyon, Danny. *Knave of Hearts*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 1999, 141 pages

Contains a visual memoir of Lyon's adventures as a photographer and includes an autobiographical text that reveals his family's history.

McGovern, Thomas. *Bearing Witness*

(To AIDS). New York, New York:

Visual AIDS/ A.R.T. Press, 1999, 129 pages

McGovern presents portraits and interviews on a wide range of people with HIV/AIDS. Also included are images of health care, demonstrations, memorials and funerals that go beyond a journalistic approach. It captures an intimate, historical and artistic narrative of the AIDS epidemic.

Minkinen, Arno Rafael. *Body Land*.

Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999, 47 pages

Minkinen captures himself and sometimes his son in photographs merging past and future as well as individual bodies with the earth, sea and air.

Rodger, George. *Photographic Voyager*.

Petaluma, California: Barry Singer Gallery, 1999, 91 pages

Includes a wide range of photographs documenting WWII, Post-War and several villages in Africa.

Rosenthal, John. *Regarding Manhattan*. New

London: Sunapee Editions, 1998, 80 pages

Presents a series of images on the still points of a constantly moving city.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, 299 pages

Smith's visual text uniquely demonstrates the contested terms of American identity.

Westerbeck, Colin. *Yasuhiro Ishimoto: A Tale of Two Cities*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1999, 144 pages.

Ishimoto's photographs of Chicago and Tokyo bring together two cities of two different cultures.

Compiled by Sarina DeNardo



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Casablanca Lily, 1987  
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Pink Pig and  
Painted Walls, Mexico, 1992  
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