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COMMUNIQUE



Photographs by Mario Giacomelli

» Books

Annie on Camera

Anne H. Hoy,
Abbeville Press, Inc.,
New York, New York, 1982;
192 pp.; 140 photographs;
hardcover, \$29.95;
softcover, \$17.50

Ours seems to be an age of new art forms, new equivalents and new miracles: recent years have seen, among other things, the birth of the 'non-fiction novel', the emergence of the 'moral equivalent of war' and the creation of 'the exposure meter that conquered Mt. Everest'. With the publication of *Annie on Camera*, however, we have something even more remarkable—the intellectual equivalent of E.T. Bubble Gum.

This volume purports to take itself seriously. It has a lengthy essay by Anne H. Hoy, who earned an M.A. in art history at New York University, and it contains beautifully reproduced work by nine photographers (Neal Slavin, Jane O'Neal, Stephen Shore, Garry Winogrand, Mitch Epstein, William Eggleston, Joel Meyerowitz, Robert Walker and Eric Staller) who photographed on and around the sets and locations of *Annie* during the making of the film. We are told, in an introductory statement, that the book "springs from a brief and brilliant marriage between two art forms... the Hollywood musical and vanguard photography" and at every turn we are confronted with more breathless prose, but the book leaves one with the unfortunate sensation of having just read an *American Photographer* gossip column that somehow ran amok.

Consider the following items. Established and lesser-known photographers were chosen for the book to "make a yeasty blend of interacting generations"; the large number of images of John Huston is explained by the fact that Huston "has a face as expressive as a van Gogh shoe"; and the author's pronouncements about style and technique in photography are backed by

references to "such widely recognized art photographs as Ansel Adams's [sic] transcendental Yosemite and Edward Weston's Platonic peppers" or statements like "Marie Cosindas's [sic] Polaroid portraits demonstrated that with enough vision, care, and filtering, the amateur's tools could even be made to produce Old Master photographs." Ouch.

It gets worse. A photograph of Albert Finney by Jane O'Neal is described thus: "O'Neal took the evocative photograph of [Finney] on Page 61 just after this rehearsal, in what appears to be an implausible moment of thespian concentration, preparatory to his playing a scene of awakening susceptibility to the blushing Grace. In fact, Finney was simply catching his breath. But such is the force of her images that one wants to weave a tale." Mitch Epstein's photographs generate the following by way of critical observation: "Light is also a subject of Epstein's pictures: the blitzkrieg lighting of night filmmaking and the huge hulking humanoid arc lamps that steam it into the sky, the ceiling, or the weeds. . . . These lights, coiled with cables like Star Wars Laocöons [sic], dwarf Ray Stark and John Huston on their brocade sofa on page 107, while the two old friends . . . continue their quiet discussion indifferent to the visual chaos." And Joel Meyerowitz's working methods are explained thus: "The agile hand camera lets one track a subject and records that picaresque pursuit in collisions of forms and gestures caught on the wing. . . . The 8x10 in. camera, however, is literally rooted: Meyerowitz's Deardorff weighs forty-five pounds and requires a tripod. The image that appears on its lens, in the dark under the black cloth, is upside-down and backwards, divided by a grid of hairlines." Well, most of us used to think that an image appeared on a view camera's *groundglass* . . . oh, well. The last sentence in the book gives us a little reassur-

ance: "Or so it goes in the movies."

The photographs themselves are pretty much what one would expect. A Neal Slavin group portrait makes its appearance, along with several studies of sets and cast members by Stephen Shore; there are tricks with lights, star filters and long exposures by Eric Staller as well as slightly melancholy room interiors by William Eggleston and so forth. Garry Winogrand is the real star of this group, providing thirteen photographs that are by far the finest and most original in the book. One shot in particular, of John Huston cutting up in front of cast and crew members, says as much about the director and about filmmaking as any image or chapter in the book. Even the quality of Winogrand's work, however, cannot get the critical text off the ground ("Uninterested in what was said, what happened next in the vignettes he captures, Winogrand refuses the photojournalist's old role as storyteller, though his flash and Leica and his speed and ubiquity are crucial to that athletic profession.") — one could go on and on. Spend your money if you have to — but don't say you weren't warned.

Don Snyder

Lake Louise: A Diamond in the Wilderness

Joe Whelan and Corby Harrison, Atlantic Publishing, Bardonia, 1982.
128 pp., \$10.95 and
\$14.95 (pbk.)

Lake Louise: A Diamond in the Wilderness is truly a diamond in the wilderness, an oasis in the desert of old guides. It's the quintessential Canadian picture and history book. The title makes me think of other interesting phrases I have heard used of Lake Louise: "This gem of Banff National Park" or "like an emerald set in diamonds," which seem to imply a simple sort of reverence as to the visual treasures of the Pharaoh's realm.

throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In those years, the picture postcard, and even photographers used the Falls, as it was a familiar, almost cliché image. He includes some of these images, one example being from 1951, by a Thomas H. Moran, of Martin Munro falling below the Falls, entitled "Martin on the Rocks." At this point a kind of twist had occurred with Niagara Falls, perceived as a photographic subject. Bennett sums it up: "Early Niagara photographs made the exotic common; photography today seeks to create the exotic" (p. 23).

Although the strength of Bennett's essay lies mainly in his historical sections, he handles the transition to contemporary photography gracefully. More recently, Niagara Falls has again been taken up by photographers, but of course in very different ways than in the nineteenth century. A work from 1982 by Thomas George entitled "Niagara Falls" is reproduced. It shows a hand printing sugar from a small measuring packet into a coffee mug. On the packet is a photographic view of Niagara Falls. To the Falls is not enhanced, Bennett writes: "The wonder of photography and its relationship with any object is the infinite of possibilities for picture making" (p. 23). Using Niagara Falls as his point of departure and as a screen for his discussion, Bennett ultimately has written a successful essay on the history of photography of this natural wonder as it has held different, changing images in our imagination.

Lo Wyle

Irving Penn:
Recent Still Life
Marlborough Gallery Inc.,
New York, New York, 1982;
28 pp.; black and white
photographs; softcover

Any response to the work in the Marlborough Gallery's catalogue *Irving Penn: Recent Still Life* will in some measure be conditioned by the viewer's

notions about still life, about photography and particularly about Irving Penn himself. If one believes that still life as a genre is best served by painting, these forty-odd reproductions of Penn's platinum-palladium prints may seem stiff, limited and imitative at best, no matter how clever. If one feels that photography can or should explore its relation—as art—to works in other forms or media, this series may come across as original, disturbing or inspiring. And either reaction will in turn be affected by whether one thinks of Penn as a commercial photographer doing 'art' in his spare time or as an artist doing 'commercial work' to earn a living.

If a viewer has the former concept of Penn, it would be easy to see his various publishing and exhibition projects over the last two decades as a necessary release from the stress or confinement of commercial life. Looked at in this way, Penn's precariously balanced studies of metal pieces, restricted in format to the unconventional proportion of a banquet camera negative and photographed with consistently tight framing, become expressions of latent frustration or even of a cleverly disguised rage. Similarly, the still lifes of bones, skulls, withered fruit and a smashed plate can be seen as slightly bitter musings about mortality and the decay of the flesh as Penn approaches his mid-sixties. The logical result of this kind of looking would be to place these still lifes in a relation to Penn's commercial photographs (especially the 'Clinique' advertisements) similar to the position *Nothing Personal* and *Avedon Portraits* might occupy relative to Avedon's fashion photography for *Vogue*.

If, however, one thinks of Penn primarily as an artist (he graduated from the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art; his early work included drawing, design and painting) who is incidentally a commercial photographer, *Irving Penn: Recent Still Life* can be

appreciated in quite a different way. Penn's inventiveness with crude objects, an essentially flat picture plane, featureless backgrounds and little variation in lighting, coupled with the successful use of an awkward rectangular proportion (roughly 11½ by 19½ inches) and a technically demanding material (platinum printing is no less difficult now than it was in the last century) can make the collective work a virtuoso piece—one that few photographers would attempt and almost none could bring off with any real success. (For example, John Gruen's book, *Objects*, while apparently similar to *Recent Still Life*, utilizes many more varieties of subject matter, and is far less intellectually rigorous.)

Probably the best interpretation of this work combines awareness of its thematic implications with respect for its visual skill and boldness. The finest images in the catalogue, such as "Steel Pieces with Dust", "Blast", "Bird Bones (Sweden)", "Three Steel Blocks" and "Eighteen Pieces with Medicine Bottle" are taut and arresting, compelling long viewing and considerable reflection and thought. How many exhibition catalogues from the current year show work of equal assurance and provocativeness?

Don Snyder

**Carnet de Visite in
Nineteenth Century
Photography**
William C. Derrick,
W.C. Derrick, Publisher,
Corryville, Pennsylvania,
1961, 22 pp.,
40 illustrations,
hardcover \$7

William Culp Derrick is an American who has written and published numerous books. His expertise embraces a wide scope of subjects, history, paleontology, biography and historical documentary, to name a few. In or about 1943 Derrick first came into contact with painted-image stereo views while involved in biograph-

ical research, and subsequently began collecting. By 1964 he had written *Stereo Views: A History of Stereography in America and Their Collection* followed by his 1977 *World of Stereography*.

There exist two major collections of painted-image stereo views in America, one being the Oliver Wendell Holmes Collection in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the other being the Derrick Collection. In 1978 Derrick estimated his collection to comprise of 110,000 views, having catalogued the work of 6,150 Americans and 2,000 foreign stereo photographers. At the present time the University of Georgia has acquired about 25,000 pieces of this collection, while on May 1 and 2, 1979, the other part was auctioned off at the Hastings Gallery in New York City. The collection had been compiled over a 40-year period and was known as the largest surviving collection of antiquarian stereo views. Derrick's immense respect for and knowledge of this photographic art form is reflected in his statement that "some of the earliest high quality half-tone colour printing was developed producing stereo cards in Chicago and New York. And many of the techniques in getting a fine register, to get a good image, were literally developed by stereo view printers."

And now it is in this same eclectic man who has compiled the definitive book on carnet de visite. *Carnet de Visite* is developed in three parts: The History and Theory of, A Subject Guide to, and the Documentation and Interpretation of *Carnet de Visite*. The carnet de visite is a single, copyrighted photograph usually 2½" x 3½" — this having been determined by the size of a photographic plate of 6½" x 8½" divided into eight sections (Following the carnet de visite, daguerotypes had been made as a sixth or an eighth of a plate.) It was the Frenchman, Adolphe-Eugene Niepce who introduced the