

NEWSLETTER

Winter 1999

STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY

Schedule

February to June 1999



HOME

MICHAEL SCHREIER

JIM GOLDBERG

SHELBY LEE ADAMS

GROUP EXHIBITION
Until February 13

DESERT'S MUSE,
IN SEARCH OF A GARDEN
February 20 - March 20

RICH AND POOR
March 27 - April 24

APPALACHIAN LEGACY
May 1 - June 5

Openings take place between 2-5 p.m. on the first Saturday of an exhibition.

A talk will be given either by the artist or by an invited guest at 3 p.m.

Please feel free to contact the gallery for further details.

NOTE FROM STEVE

This year will be an exciting one for Toronto collectors, we will be helping with the **Toronto International Photography Fair**: May 14 - 16, 1999. There will be over 20 dealers, mostly from the U.S., who will be exhibiting the best of their inventories. These events, popular throughout the world, provide an unparalleled opportunity for collectors to sift through thousands of photographs. Many pictures that you have admired over the years will be on display, plus visitors will receive an introduction into the hottest new finds in the photographic marketplace. This event is presented by Pende Fine Arts, but details and admission tickets are available at the gallery.

The Photography Fair coincides with CONTACT 99, which promises to be the largest photography event Toronto has ever seen. There will be seminars on collecting photography, providing an opportunity to have all your questions about this marketplace answered. There will also be an active web site; a film series hosted by Cinematheque Ontario; historical workshops on platinum and Daguerrotype printing; and more exhibitions than the average person will be able to get around to see.

Gallery photographers have been quite active. Volker Seidel celebrates the success of his *Mainstreet* exhibition with a price increase of those pictures. He is also headed down to the Halsey Gallery in Charleston, South Carolina for an exhibition of the *Zoo Portfolios* which had a successful showing at Galerie VON

in Montreal last fall. The exhibition was the last VON presentation at that location, as they have a new home on rue St-Catherine. Shelby Lee Adams has been receiving much attention with the publication of his second book *Appalachian Legacy*. He has had very successful showings in New York, Chicago and Dallas. I was happy to assist the Musée de l'Élysée with their exhibition and large purchase of Shelby's work for their permanent collection. They have created a touring exhibition which will begin with a showing at the Renascence in Arles this July. Be sure to hear Shelby talk about his work during CONTACT 99 on Sunday, May 2. Lutz Dille's photograph "Young Couple Looking at Slides, MOMA, 1959" is the official image of CONTACT 99. Mark Rowndel and I have sold a complete set of his *Italian Navigator* series to the Library of Congress. Reva Brooks' travelling exhibition has been prepared by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography. Vil Ingelievics' *The Camera Obscured* arrived from England for a show at Gallery TPW, Toronto, and is presently installed at Presentation House, Vancouver. These past 6 months saw solo exhibitions at The Alliance Française of work by Denis Farley, Paul Hoeffler and Gerald Puzosowski. Galerie Mutual, in Montreal, has recently exhibited the work of Rafael Goldkorn, Ruth Kaplan, John Max, and Vince Petropoulos. Robert Butler and Debra Friedman will be presenting their joint effort during CONTACT 99 at the Ryerson Gallery. Gaber Sallasi will have two major exhibitions this winter. The Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, exhibits his photographs of Monet's garden and his retrospective appears at the CMCP in Ottawa. Photographs by Dick Arentz and Jack Sturges have also increased in price, please contact the gallery for details. I use this opportunity to welcome George Zimbal to my family of artists.

BOOK REVIEWS • HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Gabor Szilasi, *St-Catherine*, 1968

BY DON SNYDER

Don Snyder teaches at Ryerson Polytechnic University and for many years was a contributing writer for Photo Communiqué.

"Documenting is extremely dull," Cartier-Bresson stated in an interview. "Facts are not interesting – it's the point of view on facts which is important and in photography it is the evocation – if you evoke – en français c'est évoquer... There are no new ideas in the world, there is only new arrangement of things [sic]. Every thing is new, every minute is new; that means re-examining. Life changes every minute..."

Cartier-Bresson was talking about his own work, of

course, but what he had to say is an apt introduction to any discussion of photographic history. Despite his disregard for literalism or factuality, Cartier-Bresson clearly acknowledges the need to re-examine, and the prime importance of point of view. The histories of photography now in print present a wonderful variety of opinions and perspectives, and even the most fundamental assumptions about how and why photography evolved are continually being challenged and newly investigated in these books.

There are many kinds of histories of the medium presently available, but the principal categories remain fairly basic: the comprehensive survey, the specialized or subject-oriented history, and the visual anthology or historical collection. Surveys have been around for the longest period of time, but work in the latter two categories represents the kind of re-examining and shifting of perspective that Cartier-Bresson so vigorously advocates.

If one is looking for a basic "history of photography," there are three primary choices, and any number of secondary options. Helmut Gernsheim, a lifelong scholar and prolific writer about photography, wrote one of the original histories of the medium (with Alison Gernsheim), and has revised this work over a period of three decades. His two-volume work, *The Origins of Photography* and *The Rise of Photography, 1850-1880*, covers the first half-century of the medium's development with incredible thoroughness and dedicated scholarship; it was published by Thames and Hudson in 1982 and 1988, and remains a classic study. It is not, however, either well-designed or well-reproduced, and Gernsheim's writing style is dry, with a distinctly European bias to his historical perspectives.

Beaumont Newhall, author of the second history in this category, is a much better writer, and his *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the present*, published in a revised and enlarged edition by The Museum of Modern Art, is the one history most familiar to students of the medium, and the most widely distributed. Newhall's desire for narrative continuity in his account leads to imbalances in perspective, however, and his own preferences and interests are visible factors in many of his historical assessments. Readers often notice his overemphasis on work from France, England and the United States to the detriment of a full account of photography as a global medium, and the final chapters in his book, "In Color" and "New Directions," feel like add-ons, far too brief to really survey important developments in colour or the incredible level of photographic activity in the last quarter-century.

This leaves Naomi Rosenblum's *A World History of Photography*, first published by Abbeville Press in 1984, and newly released in a revised edition, as the best comprehensive survey in print. It may not be as detailed as Gernsheim's work, or as readable as Newhall's, but it transcends the limits of these works, does establish a world perspective on the medium, and has an intelligent structure, good design and reproduction values, and an admirable thoroughness to its discussion of both technical developments and contemporary trends. Rosenblum also deserves credit for her companion volume, *A History of Women Photographers*, published by Abbeville in 1994, which is by far the best such history that has appeared to date. Rosenblum's books are expensive, and they are not entertaining to read, but that isn't the point: they are good, systematic historical surveys, well-intentioned, quite free of rhetoric or cant, and very useful.

In 1991, Alma Davenport's *The History of Photography: An Overview*, was published by Focal Press. This work, briefer and more approachable than any of the four books just mentioned, tries to fill a gap by being formatted as a portable, category-oriented overview rather than a comprehensive, chronologically-structured synopsis. It does make sensible use of the categories it establishes, and is far more concise and less intimidating than Rosenblum's work, but it is written in a very unfortunate, dry style, relying on short declarative sentences and avoiding interpretation or value judgment to the point where the text has a curiously abstract quality (Chapter 5, "Landscape and Nature," is a good example of this shortcoming). A better choice in terms of a shorter historical work would be Graham Clarke's *The Photograph*, published as part of the Oxford History of Art series in 1997. Clarke writes with real engagement, isn't afraid to express opinion, and is bolder by far than Davenport in his establishment of categories. Some of his chapter titles give a good sense of this: he begins by asking "What is a Photograph?" and "How Do We Read a Photograph?", and ends with "The Photograph Manipulated" and "The Cabinet of Infinite Curiosities." I really enjoyed this book: it made me think anew about issues I thought I was familiar with, showed me images I hadn't seen before, was a pleasure to read, and wasn't overpriced. As such, it makes the ideal counterpart to Rosenblum's history, and it stands well on its own if you do not need the amount of detail or wider reference base that Rosenblum's work provides.

The specialized, subject-oriented histories of photography offer a different approach and provide a different kind of

insight, dealing with specific aspects of photography's evolution, and doing so with an amazing variety of subjects, points of view, critical orientations and uses of language and imagery. You can find good reference material on any historical process, period, movement, style or group; you can also find wonderful writing as well as boring, repetitive, axe-grinding prose. Of the many titles released in the last few years, I would especially like to mention John Wood's collection of essays, *The Photographic Arts*, published by the University of Iowa Press in 1997, as an excellent collection of ideas and insights, centering around Wood's vast knowledge of 19th century images, processes and artistic movements. Wood also wrote a fine monograph on daguerreotypes, released to coincide with photography's sesquicentennial (*The Daguerreotype*, likewise published by the University of Iowa).

At the other end of the historical spectrum is a book on digital photography, *Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age*, a collaborative project sponsored by the Siemens Kulturprogramm, and released by G+B Arts in 1996. It includes essays by, among others, Victor Burgin, Martha Rosler, Timothy Druckrey and George Legrady, and shows contemporary work by 30 artists. Some of this work is terrible, some of it is alarming, none of it is classic – but the book fills a need, and certainly reflects well on Cartier-Bresson's statement that “every minute is new: that means re-examining.” You won't learn as much about where photography is going as you will about where it has been, but these two books, representing opposite polarities in terms of time and approach, effectively bracket many critical and technical issues from the early years of photography to the present. Diane Neumaier's *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1995, is another contemporary, subject-oriented anthology that should be mentioned here. It provides an interesting counterpoint to *Photography after Photography*, presents a great deal of work, and includes essays by Lucy Lippard, Deborah Willis, Catherine Lord, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau.

The sharp increase in institutions collecting photographs, and a related increase in exhibition and publishing activity – all happening, ironically, during a time when conventional photography is supposedly on the decline – has had a corollary effect on photographic publishing, and many new visual anthologies have been released in the last few years. Two of these, each with a strong historical orientation, particularly stand out: *The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century*, and *An American Century of Photography: From Dry Plate to Digital*.

The first title, published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, shows selections from the Gilman Paper Company Collection, and was released in conjunction with a travelling exhibition of the same title. This is a beautiful collection of photographs; for this reason alone the book is outstanding, despite serious flaws in design (inconsistency) and reproduction (too much contrast). If you love to look at historical photographs, have some interest in history itself, appreciate brief essays and good notes, this book provides great satisfaction. If your concerns are more oriented toward the 20th century, Keith Davis' work in assembling *An American Century of Photography* provides equal satisfaction, and, probably, more actual reward in terms of information (more thorough essays) and appearance (more coherent design and improved reproduction). Davis' work centers on the Hallmark Photographic Collection, a strong rival to the Gilman Collection.

These two books emphasize European and American photography, but there are publications that present Canadian photography in a historical context. Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell's *Canadian Photography: 1839-1920*, published in 1979 by Coach House Press, is a good historical survey, although you'll have to find it in used book stores. Edward Cavell's *Sometimes A Great Nation: A Photo Album of Canada, 1850-1925*, Altitude Publishing, 1984, and Lily Koltun's *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839-1940*, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, are also well worth searching for, and serve much the same function for work in Canadian archives and collections that *The Waking Dream* and *From Dry Plate to Digital* do for the Gilman and Hallmark collections. And a recent release from the National Gallery of Canada, while not specifically Canadian in terms of the work it presents, should be mentioned here as a collection of great interest: *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in Science*, edited by Ann Thomas and published in 1997 to accompany the National Gallery's exhibition of the same title.

Since this article began with a quote from Cartier-Bresson (from an interview he gave in 1973, and published as part of a series of audio-visual programs by Scholastic Publications), it seems only appropriate to conclude with another reference to France: this time to Michel Frizot and his 700-page study of photographic history, *Nouvelle Histoire de la Photographie*. The original, French version of this book was priced at \$225 US, but the English version, published by Koneman, New York, in 1998, can now be ordered for \$40 US - which makes it affordable for the first time, a fact which nicely confirms Cartier-Bresson's assertion that “life changes every minute.”
