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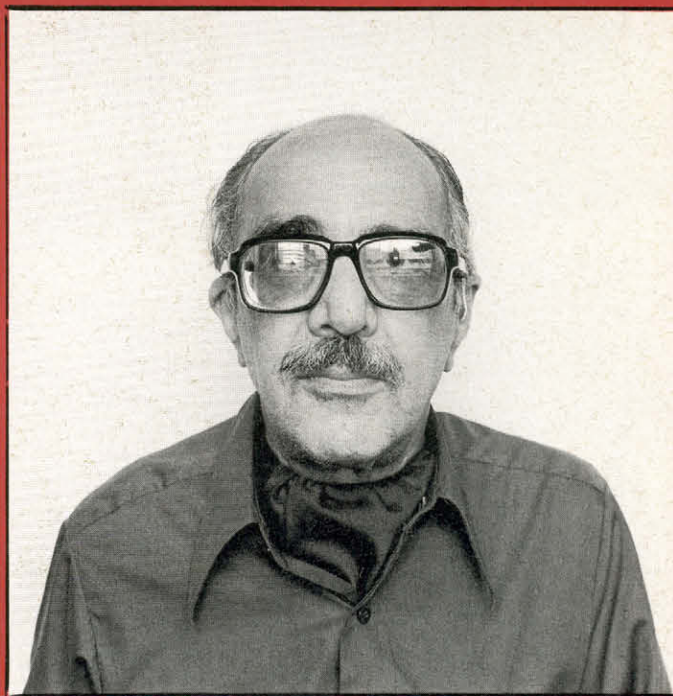
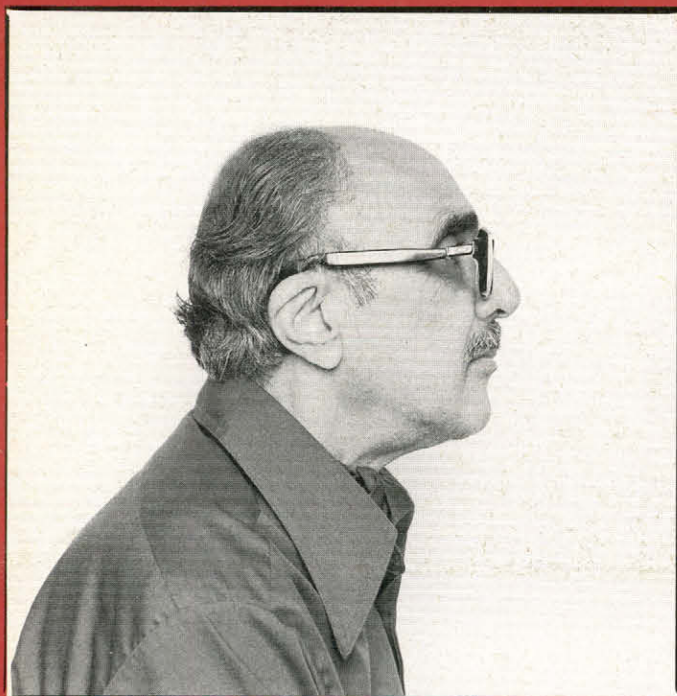
C O M M U N I Q U E

Arnaud Maggs: Anatomy of a Portrait

Sam Tata: Shanghai in the Throes of 1949

Aleksandras Macijauskas:
Photos of a Lithuanian Veterinary Clinic

Henry Wilhelm looks at the Disc Revolution



Arnaud Maggs
Sam Tata, 1982 (detail)

W. Eugene Smith
Master of the
Photographic Essay

William S. Johnson,
 Aperture,
 Millerton, New York, 1981;
 distributed in Canada by
 Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd.;
 223 pp.; hardcover, \$52.95

Eugene Smith is now so firmly established as a legendary figure in twentieth century photography that many who appreciate his work tend to think of his life's output in terms of several dozen extremely famous photographs and photo essays. This inadvertent compression of a forty-year career into a relatively small number of images may help the Smith legend, but it does little for an objective understanding of this remarkable artist's total accomplishment. *W. Eugene Smith: Master of the Photographic Essay*, recently published by Aperture, provides viewers with over 1800 reproductions of Smith photographs made between 1937 and 1975, and goes a long way towards demythologizing the man and illuminating the photographer.

Edited and with an introduction and commentary by William S. Johnson, curator of the Smith archive at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, this book provides valuable information on many levels. For those unfamiliar with the original *Life* magazine, it reproduces published and unpublished work from Smith's seminal photo essays, giving a clearer representation of this work than is possible to get through study of the Smith monographs or catalogues that are now available. For photographers who know these essays as they were published, the book provides alternate views, croppings, and even printings—giving a clearer sense of how Smith worked through an idea or how he made major changes in camera position, framing or print tonality in order to improve

an image or heighten its expressive value. (It is quite startling to see some of the 'alternates' to the most famous "Spanish Village" or *Minamata* photographs, or an unmanipulated print of the celebrated "Asylum Patient, Haiti" image, for example.) And for those interested in Smith as a creative figure who dedicated his life to humanistic principles as well as photography, this volume places the Smith legend in a different context by revealing a photographer who was as interested in the performing, visual and creative arts as he was in the issues with which his name is usually associated. Included in *Master of the Photographic Essay* are selections from Smith stories or projects on "Folk Singers" (1947), several short *Life* essays on theatre (1946-49) as well as the more extensive "Hard Times on Broadway" (1949), "Theatre Girl" (1949), "Recording Artists" (1951), "A Play for Churches" (1951), "Chaplin at Work" (1952), and the largely unpublished "Metropolitan Opera" (1952), "The Loft from Inside In" (1958-68), "Jazz and Folk Musicians" (1959-69); and a series of 'experimental' photographs made between 1958 and 1968. This work shows an involvement with and empathy for the creative process in any medium, and helps focus the viewer's attention on Smith's own growth as a creative individual as well as photojournalist.

While Smith's work has always shown a concern for drama and tension both in perspective and tone value, *Master of the Photographic Essay* shows us that this concern was not a fixed quantity but a constantly evolving aspect of Smith's style. Looking at his work in specific chronological order, one can see that over the years Smith's framing became more flexible, his timing more intuitive, his use of light and dark more suggestive, and his reportage more allusive and elliptical. (The only major exception to this

generalization is the "Beallsville, Ohio" story of 1969, which is stylistically reminiscent of much earlier work.) It seems quite evident that these changes were not simply a function of more large-scale and self-assigned projects in the last two decades of his career, but that they were representations of a creative growth that was at least in part fueled by Smith's protracted contact and involvement with the arts, particularly during the 1950s. The "Pittsburgh", "Haiti", and "Hitachi" projects, the "Loft" and "Jazz Musicians" photographs all show a stylistic evolution away from formalism and reportage towards interpretation, symbolism, and more personal expression. Events and places are somewhat less concretely described, and the photographer's interests seem to be gravitating more towards a type of photojournalism that includes freer use of expressive elements and more prominent development of personal themes. It could be argued that these changes simply reflected the various difficulties Smith was experiencing during these years, but the evidence of the photographs themselves indicates an artistic development that was greatly stimulated by Smith's exposure to music and theatre.

Valuable as it is from many points of view, *W. Eugene Smith: Master of the Photographic Essay* does have some drawbacks. The reproductions are too small (2 x 3 inches), the selection of these 1800 images from a body of over 10,000 available prints is not clearly explained or justified in the text, the quality of the reproduced prints is not up to Aperture's best standards, and most of the photographs are not titled or dated but simply grouped by project or assignment and year. Some readers may find these shortcomings extremely problematical, but most will find that these faults interfere more with the enjoyment of the book itself

than they do with an appreciation for and deepened understanding of Smith's photography. A publication such as this may not be the last word about Eugene Smith or even the best way to put together a visual reference, but it is a better source of a large quantity of material than any other book on Smith currently in print; and it also represents what may turn out to be a very significant departure from Aperture's traditional 'monograph' format.

Don Snyder

New West Coast Photographers

Peter Williamson, ed.,
West Coast Review,
Simon Fraser University,
Burnaby, British Columbia,
1981, 147 pp., softcover,
\$12

New West Coast Photographers is more promise than fulfillment. In choosing the portfolio for inclusion in this special issue of the West Coast Review, guest editor Peter Williamson opted for emerging photographers rather than well established ones. Only two or three of the eight have developed coherent bodies of work. Tom Knott, for instance, has made a sustained exploration of interior as well as exterior life in his breeding coastal landscapes. Dark forests, swales, rock formations, misty trees, and undulating grasses and water mirror sexual and spiritual relationships.

Henri Robitseau has spent several years gradually putting together his serial portrait of Jeanette Kamins. It is whimsical and touching. Perhaps it is because I know Jeanette, have felt her warmth, generosity, and sadness that I responded so strongly to this work. But I don't think that's the only reason. It's also because Robitseau's photographs are so unpretentious — they're like strange snapshots with a wet smeared underneath — and show such affection for the subject. Of all the images, it is one of Jeanette in her

Vancouver backyard that I like best. There she is, an instant expression on her face, a short knit dress riding up her legs, wearing ankle socks and lace shoes, spending alone with her lawn mower. It seems to sum up all her energy, all her vitality.

Most of the photographers represented in New West Coast Photographers, however, are still experimenting. John Wernschel has been looking at ways to defocus the north that still clings tenaciously to photography — that photographs are reality rather than a subjective interpretation of it. He has obtained visual information, combined imagery from different sources, and altered photographs by drawing and painting. Like Ingrid Tuller's collages with cut-out figures, though, Wernschel's images of parties and other celebrations lack overall coherence, emotional momentum, and staying power. It is only in an isolated portrait of an older man, whose features are covered impressionistically through dots and slashing lines, that Wernschel makes the breakthrough from partially to fully realized concept.

Jon Woodward's photographs, too, tend to remain in the conceptual stage. But a few have a definite fascination: a child sits surrounded by dead chickens; a tree which has been used is about to fall; a woman lies immersed in a bathtub outdoors. There is a sense of mystery, of portent about them.

Another young photographer, Dana Hagerman, has produced some fine portraits in recent years, but too many of those included in New West Coast Photographers are self-conscious. The most evocative one is the most direct: a man leans out of his truck in a pose which is ironically reminiscent of the famous Cartier-Bresson photograph of two prostitutes hanging out of their windows.

For all the unevenness which characterizes the work and quality of reproduction,

this anthology does provide a forum for photographers who are little known outside West Coast circles and suggest the directions in which they are headed. It will undoubtedly be interesting to watch them as they progress further down the road.

Louise Abbott

A Close Brush With Reality

Barry Parker,
published and distributed
by the Visual Studies
Workshop Press, New York,
1981, 57 pp., softcover,
\$12.95

It's late at night and Barry Parker is sitting up. His wife is sleeping, his son has gone west, and his daughter has left to sleep with a friend after a fight with her father. Parker is a man alone with his thoughts. Only the furnace makes a sound. Parker is an artist... thinking.... The furnace is unpaid for. A window is broken, a door hangs loose and the floor is littered with dog shit. His son has crashed the Volvo, and the tires are bald on the second car. The tuition for the kids is going to go up. The toilet is plugged. Parker suffers. His pain seems to be the whole standard catalogue of middle class agonies.

He reflects upon the life of an artist. The feelings of hopelessness if one's work is ignored and the hopelessness of success. The recognition that has come to certain friends is as heady-wrapped as a mine field. The successful are obliged to spend more time giving lectures, doing workshops and consulting than making art. The art that does get made becomes an alternate currency and the artist a mere businessman. The social put on the back, the establishment imprimatur, encourages aesthetic timidity. It makes the artist conservative. The attainment of a recognizable style and a seat in an artistic school suggests that the artist has become a cookie-cutter, not a visionary. Success is

alternating — friends vanish. Failure is alternating — nobody looks.

Where does Parker stand? He's had a half dozen one-man shows, a number of group ones and he's been published, an image here, an image there. Now he has a book. A Close Brush With Reality is more a scrapbook, a collage of diary notations, excerpts from articles, an assortment of images, and some stories.

The stories are really terse, rambling anecdotal tales that end with a book. He's on a midnight drive through the deep South. Parker, a resident of Rhode Island, is behind the wheel of a car he doesn't own. The car has Massachusetts plates. Parker has an expired Florida driver's license in his pocket and he's spending over a level crossing. In the mirror he sees a squad car do a power spin onto the road behind him and close in fast. Parker pulls over. It's lonely, black as pitch, and he's deep in redneck country. The cop is built like a house. Parker warms up his good old boy act, the excuses and explanations pouring out of him like grease off a damaged train. The behemoth just stares. Finally Parker runs out of steam, the last alibi drifting off into the night air. The great gun finally speaks: "I just wanted to tell y'all that one of us' headlights is out. But at the next station on the left will be you right up."

Then there's the story of the Xerox copy; the one about the pearl-handled, etched, gold-plated Swiss bar scout knife; and the one about the aluminum leg. These stories are neither depressed nor exultant. They're wry — exactly what you'd expect from a career artist who can look down as far as he can look up; a man in middle with, by his account, a middling career.

And the pictures? Well, some of them are very too. In the diptych "Would Will I, 1977", a wooden leg has fused on the deck edge of a swimming pool (would), and then

of the most celebrated photographs by Curtis of the Kwakiutl on Vancouver Island were actually stolen from this film.

The *Vanishing Race* may mark the start of another decline in Curtis's reputation as an ethnographic photographer. After the passage of years offered to Curtis in the 1970s, interpretations based more upon respect for his photos as art than as documents, Lemaitre's incisive narrative will be sure to open many eyes to the power of photos to alter our perceptions of reality.

David Morrison

1982 Manitoba Juried Photography Exhibition

The Winnipeg Photographers Group, Winnipeg, 1982; 73 pp., soft cover

"To expect an art to mature in six years," writes James Borcoman in one of the jurors' statements that prefaces the 1982 *Manitoba Juried Photography* Exhibition catalogue,

"is to be hopeful beyond reason. But if photography in Manitoba has not fulfilled the larger expectations between the first Manitoba Juried Exhibition in 1976 and this second one in 1982," he continues, "nevertheless it has reached a level of competence and self-confidence that suggests a vigorous maturity happily waiting around the corner."

This seems like a fair assessment. The 1982 Manitoba exhibition, which was on display at the Manitoba Archives Building Gallery during the month of May, has been reproduced in its entirety for this publication (copyright 1982 by the Winnipeg Photographers' Group), and includes 64 images, 22 of which are in colour, by 36 photographers. While the work does not break new ground, it does display a range of talents and interests to good advantage: generally speaking the photographs are current, stylistically

aware, and technically skilled, and in some cases considerably more. Images worth particular mention would include Hersh Gutwilik's "Dead Sea, Israel" (p. 28), John Hays' flash-and-available light landscapes (pp. 30 and 31), Bruce Kirton's finely balanced laundry-room still life (p. 42), Richard Skinder's "Kitsilano Pool, Vancouver" (p. 48), Marie May's untitled portrait (p. 53), and Debra Mosher's tightly-framed, harshly lit head shots (pp. 59-61).

So in terms of overall quality and some exceptional images, the catalogue comes across well. Its weak point lies in the fact that most of the work falls into fairly standard photographic categories: urban or suburban landscape (13 images), man-altered landscape (7 images), street photography or grab shots (7 images), and many interiors, both populated and unpopulated (9 images). The same is true for technique: we see black and white, colour, hand

colour, direct flash, flash fill with slow shutter speed, one assembled panorama, a few deliberately shifted horizons or camera positions, and so on. But there is a real scarcity of original or involving portraiture, and a complete absence of fantasy or conceptual imagery, multiple printing, non-silver work, Xerography, or instant-camera photography, which is surprising in a show drawn from over six hundred entries.

No group exhibition is perfect; probably all suffer to some degree from biases introduced in the selection and editing process. A viewer has no real way of knowing what the pictures that did not get accepted for the 1982 Manitoba Juried Exhibition might say about the breadth and scope of current photography in Manitoba, but one hopes there is more activity in some of these photographic areas than meets the eye in this one catalogue.

Don Snyder «



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