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# P · H · O · T · O

## COMMUNIQUE

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Dialogue with Peter Plagens

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Flowers of Evil

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Photographs by Michel Lambeth

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Critical Issues

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Barbara Norfleet

selling art for money is contrary and aligned himself with the rhetoric that exchases capitalism and individuality. Then he translated it all into a satiristic, combative type of offensive, the real result of which is this book.

*Tactical Aesthetics* is combined text and colour photographs: the first two pages are photo-booth size pictures identifying the cast of characters that appear in the thirteen magazine scenarios such as *Purely Clouds*, *Scenariograph* and *Anachronism*, as well as nine animal figures from the *Pacific Magazine*. They are plastic moulded figures of the children's toy store variety, painted with colour stripes and camouflage splashes. The figures (all men) are soldiers, marines, cowboys and Indians used to set up the good guys, bad guys (the person really feels persecuted) scenes. For example, in one story the hero "ordered a timely retreat from the objectives of the Degrassographical. Which is plain unadorned English, represented advance in the broadest of terms." And the illustrating photograph shows the solons in their similarly camouflaged jumps driving away from the ivy encrusted diploma from the Rhode Island School of Design. And this is all titled *Biochemical Warfare*.

Next huh? The text that I manage to read before I give in is a poorly written, lot of big words, all tangled and struggling, formulating and creating more big words, some nouns. Basically I guess, the author is attacking the forms and foundations of the world and business of art through satiristic visuals and language: so maybe the guy is trying to parody and it's supposed to be a joke, but I'm not convinced. The photographs are ill-produced, despite the expensive stock and ink.

*Tactical Aesthetics*. Bristle white, high gloss, with bound, lamp black print, colour photographs. By all measures, one could rightly conclude that

the author really did want this book to be, in spite of himself, a successful, capitalistic venture. However, the unfortunate has been successful only in outmanoeuvring himself in this confused boring venture.

Connie Hayworth

## »» **The New Color Photography**

Sally Eauclaire,  
Abbeville Press, Inc.,  
New York, New York, 1981;  
287 pp.; 166 colour  
photographs; hardcover,  
\$39.95; softcover, \$24.95

Bookstore habitués may have recently noticed several new paperbacks on the shelves: called "no-frills" books, they represent common genres (mystery, science fiction, romance, etc.) and clearly state on their covers "Complete with Everything — Corpse, Mysterious Caller, Private Detective, Rain." In similar fashion, *The New Color Photography* comes complete with many typical features of contemporary photographic anthologies ("new" critical premise, lengthy essay, abundant reproductions, glossy paper), although it does not go so far as to list these features on the jacket. The photographs are enjoyable, but the book as a whole presents so many problems it almost becomes a classic example of good intentions gone awry.

Consider Sally Eauclaire's opening statement — that "Colour photography came of age during the decade of the 1970s, when many of its practitioners energetically probed its special capabilities. . . . No longer confined to the Procrustean bed of painting styles, living or dead, it emerged as a distinct art form with a unique visual syntax." Well, that's okay, but in defense of this hypothesis Eauclaire systematically declares the pre-1970 colour work of Paul Outerbridge, Eliot Porter, Ernst Haas and Irving Penn to be second-rate in one way or another ("Working out in the world, where directorial control . . . [is] dif-

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difficult to attain, color photographers mainly fumbled and floundered until around 1970 when they modified their traditional naturalistic priorities"). She neglects to mention much colour work considered significant (Lartigue's Autochromes, Steichen's Autochromes and Kodachromes, Penn's *Moments Preserved*) and entirely ignores Gjon Mili, Arthur Siegel, Gisèle Freund, Syl Labrot, Henry Holmes Smith, Harold Edgerton, Gordon Parks, Lennart Nilsson, Eliot Elisofon and John Dominis — all of whom have been influential in one way or another, and all of whom used colour extensively and effectively before the magical date of 1970.

Enter William Eggleston, however, and things start to improve: "Eggleston seems to have been the first photographer consistently to employ sophisticated formal strategies by which the medium could be controlled and from which its unique visual syntax developed." Having established the appearance of *William Eggleston's Guide* (1971) as the starting point for "sophisticated" colour photography, Eauclore proceeds to discuss this "new color" in seven categories: "Color Photographic Formalism" (Eggleston, Stephen Shore, Emmet Gowin, Joel Meyerowitz, Jan Groover), "The Vivid Vernacular" (Mark Cohen, Harry Callahan, Roger Martin, Meyerowitz and Eggleston again), "Self-Reflections" (Michael Bishop, John Pfahl, Eve Sonneman, Arthur Taussig), "Documentation" (Joel Sternfeld, Neal Slavin, William Smith, William Christenberry), "Moral Visions" (Helen Levitt, Sternfeld again, Eggleston a third time), "Enchantments" (Mitch Epstein, David Hockney, Joyce Culver), and "Fabricated Fictions" (Olivia Parker, John Divola, Les Krims, Sandy Skoglund, Lucas Samaras).

By the time we get through all this, we have looked at 166 reproductions, learned that Joel Meyerowitz's view camera weighs forty-five pounds,

been told that "telling the truth about the subject is not enough" for a modern documentary photographer, seen that Mitch Epstein's pleasant Nepal postcard image (plate 135) is really an example of how "interconnecting fields of color and texture converge from disparate spatial locations in the scene" and how "Fugal methodology dictates a more precise, ascetic means of achieving pictorial climaxes", figured out that Eauclore studied art history, and discerned that most of the photographers in her book probably like Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and Lee Friedlander. We begin to wonder just what all these categories really mean, and just how "new" the new colour photography is, so we turn to the biography section, which is by far the most illuminating chapter in the book.

Of the forty-seven photographers included in *The New Color Photography*, forty-two are American, thirty were born between 1940 and 1950, many have graduate degrees, and eighteen combine photography with ongoing work in other media or came to photography from other media or other disciplines (painting, film, sculpture, design, conceptual art, philosophy, chemistry, biophysics). Looking more closely, we see that these photographers draw their influences from a pretty well-established group of artists and photographers: Vermeer, Atget, Walker Evans, Muybridge, Cartier-Bresson, Emmet Gowin, Garry Winogrand, Joel Meyerowitz, Robert Heinecken, Imogen Cunningham, Robert Frank, Minor White and Nathan Lyons are all credited as influences by the photographers themselves, and Cartier-Bresson is mentioned more frequently than anyone. It doesn't take a brilliant analytical mind to deduce that these new colour photographers have a lot in common: age, circumstance, education, nationality, influences and cultural bias. More importantly,



Don Snyder

Robert Rauschenberg has made use of the photograph in his art since the 50s. Using found, pre-made sources from *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated* as well as his own work, he incorporated photographs within the continuous surface of the canvas or paper, setting up a network of internal correspondences in the work. The universal lack of photographs – raw material seemingly belonging to an inferior artistic sphere – appealed to Rauschenberg's constructive sensibility. Incorporated by him in a new, covertly assembled context, the straight familiar pictures which he chose preserved a sense of factual re-

Often classical in the transparency of their construction and evoking the work of Anselm Kiefer and Strand more than any other pictorial source, Rauschenberg's photographs, like his paintings and graphics, are visual assemblages which operate in that sphere of the interaction between art and life. 

Marius Brown

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