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C O M M U N I Q U E



Arjen Verkaik

**Unseen Skies:
An Interview with Arjen Verkaik,
A Blind Photographer**

Out of the Victorian Era

Christo

PHOTOGRAPHY & ARCHITECTURE

1839 - 1939



Richard Pare
Introduction by Phyllis Lambert

Undoubtedly one of the finest photographic books ever produced, *Photography & Architecture: 1839-1939* makes accessible works from the Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture. From the ancient to the avant-garde, this important work presents a major new study of world architecture seen through the eyes of more than ninety grand masters of the camera. It is a unique study in that it reveals the history of architecture through photography and the history of photography through architecture.

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With more than 140 intricate offset plates, this fine photography book has been printed on specially manufactured archival quality paper and bound in imported cloth. The text includes an important essay by Richard Pare, Curator of Photography at the Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, and an introduction by Phyllis Lambert, the Centre's Director. Also included is an extensive catalogue of the plates with the accompanying biographies of the artists by Catherine Evans Indouch and Marjorie Munsterberg.

For anyone interested in art, architecture, travel, cultural history and photography, this extraordinary introduction to the subject will be a volume to be treasured.

9 1/2 x 12 284 pages \$75.00 clothbound



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The Canadian Publishers

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...men like Paul Lester have already begun to implement - a documentary work that gives a clear analysis of social conditions, that is committed to... the exposure of social ills, by the financier's growing hegemony over the cities, by racism, sexism, and class oppression.

The issues that Lester raises must be addressed by photographers, particularly here in Canada where the documentary tradition remains firmly entrenched, but little attention has been given to critical analysis of the genre.

Lois A. Allen

Harry Smith: *Magic Moments* *Photographs by a San Francisco Youth 1900-1913*

Stephen White, Editor,
Stephen White Editions,
Los Angeles, California, 1981;
128 pages; hardcover,
\$25

The Real Old West: *Images of a Frontier* *Photographs by Frank Matsura*

Text by JoAnn Roe,
Douglas & McIntyre,
Vancouver, British Columbia,
1981; 144 pages; hardcover,
\$29.95

The "new talent from the good old days" syndrome in photographic book publishing, which began with books such as E. J. Bellocq: *Storyville Portraits* and has continued with the likes of *Disfarmer: The Heber Springs Portraits*, has recently brought forth two similar volumes: *Harry Smith: Magic Moments* ("Photographs by a San Francisco Youth 1900-1913"), published by Stephen White Editions of Los Angeles, and *The Real Old West* ("Images of a Frontier / Photographs by Frank Matsura"), released by Douglas & McIntyre of Vancouver.

Each book has a lot of charm, each was a labour of love for those involved and

each presents virtually unknown work from just after the turn of the century. Frank Matsura, a Japanese whose origins are hardly traceable, came to the Okanogan Valley in the Pacific Northwest in 1903 and photographed in that region until his death in 1913. His glass plates came into the hands of the Okanogan County Historical Society in 1964, and were noted by JoAnn Roe (a Washington State journalist and photographer then working on a regional history) some ten years later; *The Real Old West* is largely the product of her interest and effort. Harry Smith, one of six children born to a Danish family in San Francisco, was a self-taught photographer who made images of family, friends, places and events in the San Francisco area between 1900 and 1913. His work was acquired by the gallery owner Stephen White in 1976; *Harry Smith: Magic Moments* is similarly the end product of White's fondness for and involvement with Harry Smith's photography.

From a historical point of view the Matsura book is considerably more important than *Magic Moments: The Real Old West* contains far more images, a greater variety of subjects, locations, attitudes and visual approaches, and vastly more raw information about a region and an era. Although stylistically mixed and somewhat erratically laid out, it provides a rich experience for the careful viewer. One sees many places, all seasons, a remarkable number of groups and individuals, and an incredible variety of events and circumstances, all photographed with an evident affection and fascination. Matsura was reportedly very popular with his Okanogan subjects; the ease and grace with which people, both old and young, Indian and white, posed for him is testimony to his popularity as well as his involvement with all aspects of life around him.

Harry Smith: Magic Moments is almost the obverse of *The Real Old West*. As a pho-

tography book, it is more satisfying, with better reproductions and layout and a far more consistent visual "feel"; as a record of virtually the same years in a different place, it is spotty and irregular and nowhere near as complete. Smith stuck close to home and involved himself primarily with relatives, acquaintances and familiar locations. Although he made a few excursions and extensively recorded the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake, his photography was personal and reflective rather than exuberant and curious like Matsura's. He had a finer sense of visual balance and a more distinct style than Matsura, at least judging by the work selected for these two books, and seems to have been as concerned with pictorial elements as he was with information, but he did not photograph as much or as widely. His output is nostalgic and evocative, but not terribly rich in specifics or broad in scope.

I would commend either book to anyone interested in regional photography from the first decade of this century. Both volumes provide pleasure and satisfaction (although of a relatively unchallenging sort), and the kind of contact with the recent, still-visible past that a rather disjointed contemporary society seems both to need and to enjoy.

Don Snyder

» **Bodies of Light: Infrared Nudes**

Steven Schwartzman,
Seattle.
Austin, Texas, 1981.
48 black & white near
photographic reproductions.
112 pages, softcover \$18

"Good taste is the first step
up of the noncreative. It is
the last-ditch stand of the ar-
tist."

Bodies of Light shows in-
frared nudes. It's a 5 1/2" x 8 1/2"
horizontally aligned wire
bound, softcover, black on
gloss white text. Inside are

pictures of girls/women with
no clothes on, mostly out of
doors. So you flip through the
book first, then return to the
front to begin reading the
4-page introduction in which
Schwartzman explains in with-
ering detail the "how come"
of this book. His point of view
is a serious liability to the pic-
tures: he speaks as with a mis-
sion of his pursuit of "ideal-
ized feminine beauty", gen-
erously crediting women with
innate gracefulness and com-
position. (Schwartzman photo-
graphs his subjects standing in
streams, lying against or
lying on boulders, wandering
in fields. I can just imagine
him getting that awful parody
of the calendar shot titled
"September Morn".)

"I try to bring out the best
in each woman I photograph",
says Schwartzman. With few
exceptions he asks his subjects
to shut their eyes, avert their
heads, face downwards, up-
wards, around or out of the
frame and their heads are cov-
ered with plastic bags, clothes,
grass and the like. Perhaps
what Schwartzman would like
to portray as the idealization
of Modernity could be Embur-
rassment. The bodies too are
posed in the most unseem-
ly awkward, unnatural if not
uncomfortable positions —
almost humorous except you
know that Schwartzman won't
laughing. He unseemingly de-
monstrates a liking for women
of less than full figure as he's
always having to direct them
to hold their arms above their
heads to help define the breast.
The infrared pictures are posed
with flowers and beads, beds
and bathroom showers. Cuts
and nips — it all smacks of a
latter Lennon Sisters yearn-
ing.

Last week I was writing
through some magazines that
were worth reading out and
found a ten year old issue of
International Photo Technik
wherein I found an article by
New York commercial photog-
rapher Peter Beach (who in
1957 published *Form and Fig-
ure* — as a post-war pioneer
of the Weston-Dorson-Cov-

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four-page introduction. Schwartzman uses of his use of infrared film, "it minimizes surface detail while emphasizing underlying forms." Let's review the infrared black and white image. It is made on specially sensitized film that records light rays that occur beyond the red end of the electromagnetic spectrum and that are invisible to the human eye. The net result is a slight atmospheric hazing on images of gradient areas of light and shadow, as is the case in these shots. Which is acceptable when desirable — but not in 3-D because the single most important factor in producing the ultimate 3-D is that all planes must be in highly resolved focus. When you look up from this magazine, across the room and back again to see your hands in front of you, it is possible to concentrate on specific plane areas while your peripheral is also in focus. You can "move about" in your field of vision, while never losing focus on any plane. And this is simulated when looking at a printed image with a stereoscopic prism viewer — but impossible to achieve if there are some planes that have not been recorded and printed in crisp detail. So when Schwartzman says "it minimizes surface detail" he is quite correct, but his rational "while emphasizing underlying forms", while rational, is feeble and embarrassing: it is impossible to proceed through a poorly produced 3-D image.

He glides on. "My use of stereo rather than conventional photographs here is a move in the direction of greater dimension, greater awareness, an expansive attitude toward life." Generally speaking, each picture is composed with the subject's nose placed in the center with most other information — rocks, water, branches — only incidental. He does not integrate the two distinct components in his 3-D photos. Actually, I feel that all he was concentrating on was the undressed girl in front of him and

the camera. Which is okay — lots of people employ the camera with ulterior motives (desires, wants, dreams) and what else can a healthy American man in Austin, Texas do on his days off. Now I'm hating him there, but, really, why doesn't he, I wonder, simply take pictures of undressed women, rather than waste his time taking them out to the wilds. Right. "Good taste is the highly effective strategy of the pretentious."

I had eight-visions determined that I could write this review since the book was billed as stereoscopic paired images. I felt competent in assessing 3-D and am always eager to see new contemporary 3-D publications. The first time I laid eyes on the book I was desperately offended — turned and roared to everyone with that initial shrillness that comes like a gasping for cerebral breath. And, conversely, looking at it again the next day I was truly abashed.

Notes

1. Marshall McLuhan & Harley Parker, *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting*, Harper & Row, 1968, New York, page 213.
2. Peter Beach, "Nude or Naked", *International Photo Technique*, Verlag Gansfeld, Technik, Munich, 1972.
3. McLuhan & Parker, page 213.

Cornia Hitzsack

»»» **B PNTME BEKA** *(Rhythm of an Era):* **Photographs by** **Izvestia correspondents**

Globe Publishing House,
Moscow, U.S.S.R., 1981;
88 pages, softcover

Roughly translatable as "Rhythm of an Era", the recent Soviet publication *B PNTME BEKA* is devoted to some seventy-five photographs by *Izvestia* correspondents, and contains at least one example of every important cliché about

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Toronto Photographers Workshop

'the good life in the Soviet Union' that the Soviet press has cranked out and sent abroad. Because of the patent falsity of its relentless optimism, the book is an easy target. As information it is close to ridiculous. Every photograph shows people who are happy, busy, eager to learn, proud of Soviet accomplishments, healthy, modern and productive; the land is rich and beautiful, the armed forces are strong, the factories and cities are energetic, the athletes are vigorous, the mix of cultures and ages is vital and free of tension or conflict — in short, one would get a much more accurate impression of the way things really are in the Soviet Union by looking at U-2 or spy satellite photographs. As photography, it is neither inspiring nor awful: most of the pictures look like they were made by Margaret Bourke-White clones, which is probably interesting if one has never seen her work, but a bit alarming if one has (the

copyright date of his book is 1981). As a book — well, the reproductions are quite varied in quality and the layout and design are uniformly artless.

This is the best that now comes out of the nation where *War and Peace* was written? No wonder Solzhenitsyn is a recluse in Vermont and Nureyev was overjoyed to finally get a Swiss passport. One wonders how many frustrated photographers there are in the Soviet Union and what they might accomplish if they were permitted: some of the images in this book show skill, imagination, involvement and even humor underneath the rigidly programmed subject matter.

One could go on in this way at some length, but to do so would be to miss an important point. Everyone knows that when political concerns control the arts or the press the results are predictable and disastrous, and most people assume that communist and totalitarian nations represent the only flagrant or really un-

fortunate examples of this sort of control. And yet the citizens of Ontario still acquiesce to the decisions of film censors, the voters of Canada still elect and re-elect officials who allow public money to be used for government advertising, and the U.S. government continues to pay for the making of propaganda in the guise of information (some extreme examples can be seen out of context in the recent film "The Atomic Cafe") — so the North American democracies are not above the very same abuses of the creative impulse that make *B PNTME BEKA* such a useless volume for anyone who is looking for real information, objective truth or individual expression. These practices are even less excusable here than in the Soviet Union. A book such as this should remind its viewers what the consequences can be should they be ignored on a large enough scale; in addition to criticizing, one should also take note.

Don Snyder

» **Rocky Mountain Madness: A Bitter-Sweet Romance**
Edward Cavell and Ian Whyte
Alma Publishing Ltd.
Burlington, 1982
128 pages, softcover \$16.95

The Rockies are always good for a book. Small publisher Alma Publishing, judging from the partial listing at the end of their current number, is dedicated to popularizing these western crags. *Rocky Mountain Madness* is this season's comic relief, balanced by the same publisher's gloomier look at the range called *Rockies*.

The longer description on the title page aptly summarizes what the title itself begs to offer. Here is a mountain book with a difference, a volume of the tragic and the sublime, the melancholy and the purely absurd, or as close to the absurd, as one can come in the mountains.

Edward Cavell, author of *Journeys to the Far West* (1979), and Ian Whyte, author of three books, have col-

