

\$3.50

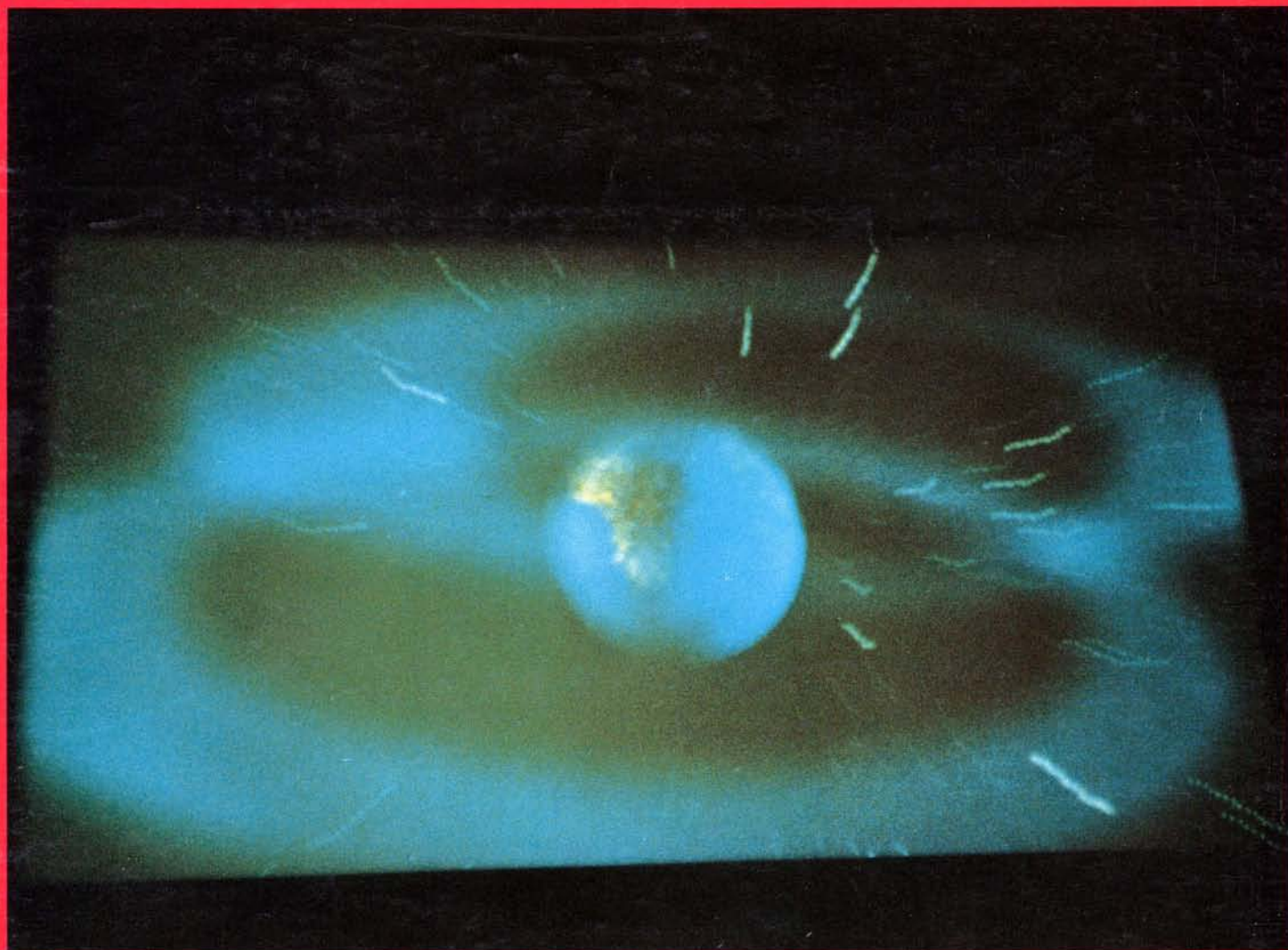
Fall 1984

# P · H · O · T · O

## C O M M U N I Q U E

CC 70417

Jayce Salloum, 1984



To Russia With Love

Photography, Computers and the "Man in the Stands"

in his studio is used as his workbench table. In the background "the wall" props up some of his paintings.

The people of the Chaires are close to the edge, some definitely closer than others. Edging or communicating this with the stark blacks and whites of his prints tells consideration is given to mid-range, grey tones. These extremes emphasize the Chaires inhabitants' commitment to a certain lifestyle—one that might be less than advanced in other towns.

As I move through the book page after page, I feel as though

I could be a camera robot, ascending from floor to floor, proceeding from room to room. I am given admittance; the residents afford me some of their time, allow me a private view of their homes. But how was it that Edging actually gained access to these rooms with his camera? Among many others he acknowledges the hotel manager, Stanley Reed, and I wondered to what degree he was involved in this project. Speaking with me on the telephone, Mr. Reed said that he had indeed effected many of the introductions between Edging

and the Chaires residents. "I have been manager all my life," he declared. "My father was manager here in 1939. I have many, many friends here. I know the people." But why was I talking to him, he wanted to know. Wasn't this a book about photography? I pointed out to Mr. Reed that I had wanted to confirm my hunch—and that he had indeed done so for me—that the photographer had actually used the good will and concern of the trusted manager to make these photographs, and that this was an important element of this book as the

photographs themselves. Mr. Reed was flattered.

We closed our conversation on the topic of room rates. A room with a private bath is \$50 to \$55 (in 1989 it was \$2.00); though the Chaires Hotel is generally at 100% occupancy—"most people live here"—Mr. Reed said if I was ever in town I should call and he'd see what he could do to fix me up with something nice. I forget to ask him if he keeps a guest book. The Chaires Hotel: 1-212-243-3300.

Connie Haysworth

## William Christenberry: *Southern Photographs*

William Christenberry,  
*Aperture, Inc., Millerton,*  
*New York, 1983; 136 pp.;*  
*72 photographs;*  
*hardcover, U.S. \$40*

One's first reaction upon picking up *William Christenberry: Southern Photographs* would almost certainly be positive. Christenberry's photographs, seen in print from time to time (*Aperture* 81; *Camera*, May, 1980), are attractive and intriguing, the more so because of Christenberry's now-celebrated links with—and blessing from—Walker Evans. The book itself is thoughtful and gives evidence of painstaking attention to reproduction quality. And enough work is included to enable the viewer to assess Christenberry's output over the last two decades with some degree of familiarity.

It's unfortunate, then, that a book which promises so much ends up being very disappointing. The problem has partly to do with editorial issues: R. H. Cravens' lengthy and well-illustrated introduction is interesting, but is without any clear focus—Cravens is gossipy where he should be precise and biographical where he should be analytical. In trying to give a complete picture of Christenberry as human being, artist and photographer, Cravens leaves the reader without an

accurate perspective on the evolution of the photographic work itself. To choose one example, Christenberry's all-important switch from small cameras to the 8 x 10 format, which occurred in 1977, is dealt with in two paragraphs—less space than Cravens allots to the theft of Christenberry's "Klan Room" sculpture from his studio in 1979. And while it may be admirable to include so many references to Christenberry's life and his work in other media, in a book titled *Southern Photographs* this kind of critical balance does not make sense.

Another problem arises because of layout. In order to accommodate the 8 x 10 images, Christenberry's early work, which is small in scale, is reproduced on large pages. The white space glares, reducing the contrast and also the scale of the small prints and making them actually difficult to look at from normal viewing distances. This is particularly hard to accept since *Aperture* solved the same problem successfully once before: *Aperture* 81 left a small white border around each image and used a visually comfortable off-white for the page area. This is not carping; a book of this price from a publisher of such repute should be a pleasure to look at, and *Southern Photographs* suffers inordinately from poor layout and page design.

Ultimately, however, the disappointment engendered by

*Southern Photographs* comes from its content: the 8 x 10 images which compose the latter two thirds of the book simply do not stand up to repeated viewings. Christenberry's early work had an intuitive feel and a certain "rightness" that really is remarkable. One can still stare at and enjoy these little prints for long periods of time, and they continue to provide a most welcome directness in contrast to the gimmickry, artifice and wanton imitation which is so much in evidence as a by-product of photography's recent boom years. The 8 x 10 work, although more complex and intellectual, is not correspondingly more probing, more meaningful or more evocative, even though in many cases Christenberry has rephotographed old familiar subjects. The Newbern Warehouse, the "5¢" wall painting in Demopolis, the Palmist Building in Havana Junction, Bloody Pond at Shiloh Battlefield, the Bar-B-Q-Inn in Greensboro and the Spratt Church are all rephotographed—sometimes more than once—in 8 x 10, and various other subjects (gourd trees, graveyards) are carried over into large-format as well. But Christenberry is not reinterpreting with a deeper understanding—he is simply making another photograph, and in some cases (for example, "Church, Spratt, Alabama," 1981, reproduced on page 125) the more recent photograph is embarrassingly

worse than the earlier image. Certainly there is more detail, more perspective control and frequently a more complex plastic balance in the view camera imagery, but there is not more poetry or more inspiration. And there is nothing integral to the photographs that justifies the change of format, either in terms of subject, vision, style or idea.

So what *Southern Photographs* ultimately provides is a retrospective look at the work that established Christenberry's reputation coupled with an extensive presentation of imagery which will, most likely, not stand the test of time. The stylistic split between the two bodies of photographs is neither explained nor presented well, and at the end of the book one tends to go back over the pages thinking that one has missed something or believing that a lingering sense of irresolution will disappear if one looks again more carefully. But this does not happen. Christenberry can be a fine photographer but he also is an erratic one, as this book demonstrates only too well.

Don Snyder

## The Wise Silence

Paul Caponigro, *Little, Brown and Company, Boston, in association with the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1983; 204 pp.; 143 photographs; hardcover, \$70; \$50 U.S.* ►



In a volume of criticism titled *The Spirit of Romance*, Ezra Pound observes that "There are two kinds of beautiful painting . . . one looks at the first kind of painting and is immediately delighted by its beauty; the second kind of painting, when first seen, puzzles one, but on leaving it, and going from the gallery one finds new beauty in natural things . . . Thus, there

are works of art which are beautiful objects and works of art which are keys or passwords admitting one to a deeper knowledge, to a finer perception of beauty . . ." He goes on to say that "Dante's work is of the second sort." Were he writing about photography instead of literature, and if he knew the work in question, he might well have added that Paul Caponigro's

work is of the first.

*The Wise Silence* is Caponigro's most recent book, published to accompany the major Caponigro exhibit which opened at Eastman House last year and which is now traveling to many North American museums. It is, certainly, a "beautiful object"—both in its own terms and in terms of the photographs reproduced within. The entire

production has an understated elegance and an admirably high level of craftsmanship, and the book does full justice to its contents, serving as a fine vehicle for Caponigro's vision.

This volume cannot be faulted as a representation of an important photographer's work; and yet, beautiful as it is, it could never be thought of as something "admitting one to a deeper knowledge, to a finer perception of beauty." Somehow there is too much control, too much intellection, too much technique, too much poise in these 143 photographs, when what is needed is more blood, more spirit, more substance and more daring. What Caponigro does well, he does exceedingly—occasionally transcendently—well, as in his best, usually early, studies of natural forms: the photographs made in the Connecticut woods in the 1960s; certain images made in Wales, Scotland and Ireland during the 1960s and early 1970s; and some few landscapes of the American southwest made in the recent past. But there are many empty pages in the book and reproductions of prosaic or repetitive—although beautiful—imagery. And frequently the photographs simply represent the result of a fundamentally mundane idea executed with magnificent control and technique (for example, the images from Caponigro's 1976 trip to Japan, the photographs made in Alberta in 1978, or the work done in Mexico in 1979).

Caponigro's flashes of brilliance indicate he is capable of far more than what is included in *The Wise Silence*. This is exactly the problem: while one cannot help admiring the book for its many qualities, one is not left inspired or challenged or even provoked by fully half of the images it contains. One wonders, also, how often in any artist's lifetime an opportunity to produce a book of such quality and scope presents itself—and this wondering is reinforced by the book's pretentious title and by Caponigro's self-serving preface: "I work to attain a 'state

## Exhibition



Joseph Bonomi, *St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, 1839*, Paris, 1840  
 Bonomi, *St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, 1839*, Paris, 1840  
 Collection: Centre canadien d'architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture

### Photography and Architecture: 1839-1939

until 11 November

This exhibition, organized and circulated by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, is comprised of 150 photographs selected from one of the most important photography collections in North America. Thirty-five works, including rare albums and daguerotypes, not included in the U.S. European tour of the exhibition, have been added for the National Gallery showing.

A complementary Symposium, 29 and 30 September

### Photography and Architecture: 1839 to the Present Day

The two-day Symposium features architectural historians, architects, critics, art historians, photographers and social historians from Canada, the United States and Europe. To name a few: John Szarkowski (Museum of Modern Art, New York), François Hers (Musée Photographique de la Cite de l'Art, Paris, France), John Breckenhoff Jackson (author, *The Necessary For Rome*, Santa Fe, U.S.A.), and more!

Saturday, 29 September: 9:30 am, doors open at 9:30 am

Sunday, 30 September: 10:30 am, doors open at 10:30 am

A Symposium programme will be available at the Information Desk in the lobby of the National Gallery, or by writing to the Department of Exhibitions, National Gallery of Canada, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, K1A 0A8

Admission is free

### National Gallery of Canada

Sign and Store, Ottawa: 952-4636

Information available in the handbook: 1-800-387-6666



National Museum  
of Canada

Musée national  
du Canada

Canada

of heart,' a gentle space offering inspirational substance that could purify one's vision. Photography, like music, must be born in the unmanifest world of spirit . . . Achieve the mystery of stillness, and you can experience a dynamic interaction with the life force that goes far beyond intellectual thought and touches the deepest wells of existence."

In light of the above, of which there is more that is not quoted, it seems fair to make some observations. Minor White, although admittedly prone to hyperbole, once commented that Edward Weston's late photographs from Point Lobos "may parallel in content . . . the late quartets of Beethoven." Another critic, writing about the work of van Gogh, said that van Gogh "was empowered to see the banners of final reality unfurling within the least thing and most humble person." Statements of this kind cannot be made about *The Wise Silence* or about Caponigro's accomplishment to date—the potential may be there, but the actuality falls far short.

Don Snyder

»»  
***Under the  
Looking Glass:  
Color Photographs by  
Olivia Parker***

Olivia Parker, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1983; 43 photographs, hardcover, \$46; \$35 U.S.

Olivia Parker first came to prominence with the publication in 1978 of *Signs of Life*, a collection of split-toned black and white photographs, and since that time her work has appeared internationally in exhibition as well as on the pages of several major photography magazines. In a relatively short period she has also achieved—in a time of generally decreasing gallery and market activity—the distinction of becoming one of the best selling "art" photographers in North America.<sup>1</sup> *Under the Looking Glass*, her second book, presents work

similar in spirit to the imagery in *Signs of Life* but vastly different in execution, as Parker has turned away from black and white and is now exploring the affective and symbolic uses of colour in photographic still life.

Parker's early work has remarkable beauty and elegance, as well as a certain ephemeral or evanescent quality. As she herself noted in the introduc-

tion to *Signs of Life*, "The living world seems to consist of fine balances and thin edges: small variation within fragile structure, delicate membranes, narrow temperature and pressure tolerances . . ." This attitude, or perception or world view, is clearly evidenced in the "fine balances, thin edges, small variations and fragile structures" that can so frequently be found

in this work. Carefully poised are light against dark, brown against grey, edge against surface, three dimensions against two. The results are possessed of a fascinating admixture of imbalance and equilibrium, permanence and temporality.

These same qualities carry over into the photographs in *Under the Looking Glass*, but the addition of colour has enabled



**An extraordinary tradition worth looking into**

For more than 50 years Rodenstock view camera and enlarger lenses have represented the ultimate in lens perfection. They are for photographers who live from their image and shun the ordinary.

Send for your copy of the new Rodenstock catalogues.

**Rodenstock**

Wild Leitz Canada  
1110 Woodbine Avenue, Willowdale, Ontario M2H 1T9 (416) 491-1900

Parker to take the genre of still life through a quantum leap. The classic ingredients, both of still life and of Parker's creative system, remain: the photographs are evocative and nostalgic, reaching us through our sense of past and memory, and cuing our feelings with their faded images, bric-a-brac and memorabilia, flowers, trinkets, postcards and trivia; also used are paintings, drawings and fabrics, bones, feathers, fruit, pieces of mica, mysterious containers and pages from unknown but somehow remembered or familiar sources. There are varying degrees of hand-work, varying amounts of collage and construction, different kinds of complexity or simplicity; but all the photographs meet the established criteria of still life and all reflect Parker's personal style and outlook. New, however, are certain qualities of resonance and depth made possible by Parker's incredible virtuosity with colour. Finding colour, responding to it or adding it where necessary (as in her clever, perhaps too frequent, use of red lines and red yarn), Parker always creates a harmonious relationship between colour and mood, meaning and subject. Related shades and hues reinforce and deepen each other; opposing colours accent physical space and visual tension. And after repeated viewings,

one discerns that Parker uses colour as a key element in creating the symbolic overtones and emotional "feel" of each image.

We take for granted the perennial drawing power of memory and association, and in an age that places so much emphasis on pop-Freudian symbolism we tend to overlook the purely visual elements of art and immediately involve ourselves, particularly with constructed rather than found imagery, in thematic analysis. This approach can easily be taken with the photographs in *Under the Looking Glass*, and one could no doubt have a field day using certain reappearing motifs to do an amateur work-up on Parker's psyche. Such a course might be fun, but it would inevitably draw one away from careful looking, which the photographs really deserve, particularly since the images result equally from Parker's ability to visualize and assemble still life and her skill as a photographer. More valuable than guesswork about the photographer's unconscious is an understanding of her use of space and scale, her ability to make the contrast between flat planes and three-dimensional objects seem completely logical and her sense of how to combine visual elements within the frame to achieve the strongest possible result. Images

such as "Child, 1980," "Maples, 1980," "A Reasonable Argument, 1980," "Red Cages, 1980," "The Black Package, 1980," "Possibility, 1979," "The Eastern Garden, 1980" and "Street Flowers, 1981" show one aspect of Parker's style: they are dense, balanced, low in key and show a tendency to recede behind the picture plane, creating a self-contained, static world that draws the viewer inward. Other photographs—"Isabella's Bit of the Florida Coast, 1982," "Marine II, 1981," "Three Feathers—Three Crystals, 1981," "Swan's Ladies, 1982" and "Turkey Shoot, 1981"—are higher-keyed, more rhythmic in structure, more open in form and more elliptical in meaning; rather than draw the viewer directly in, they encourage fantasy and a much more oblique way of looking.

Some images, particularly the studies of fruit, are fairly typical and weak in comparison with Parker's best photographs. For some reason a truly original or convincing composition using only three-dimensional objects seems to elude her, and the inclusion of more than one or two of these studies is questionable given the level of imagery in the rest of the book. But for the most part this is a fine collection, involving the viewer on many levels.

A lover of still life would not

fail to enjoy this work, nor would a photographer concerned with the expressive uses of colour. And those who struggle with the capriciousness of Polacolor emulsions can only admire the control and subtlety that Parker achieves in such abundant measure, although in fairness it should be pointed out that she has been more than casually subsidized by the Polaroid Corporation,<sup>2</sup> and that Polacolor prints are often seen to better advantage in reproduction than in the original due to a slightly brassy quality that the originals often possess. In any event, both the work and the book are highly recommended.

#### Notes

1. See "Boston Photography: Is Its Renaissance Over?", *Boston Magazine*, December, 1983.
2. Polaroid has long followed the practice of making its films available without cost to certain recognized photographers. Also, *Under the Looking Glass* was "planned, prepared, and produced by the Publications Department of Polaroid Corporation," according to the book's copyright page.

Don Snyder would like to thank the Ontario Arts Council for its assistance during the writing of these reviews.

#### The Klondike Quest: A Photographic Essay 1897-1900

Written and edited by  
Flora Barton, photographic  
research by Barbara Sears,  
Little, Brown and Company  
in association with The  
Atlantic Monthly Press,  
Boston and Toronto, 1983.  
280 pp., hardcover, \$20

Barton, Newfield and Sears have collaborated to produce a large, rich and impressive publication which is a most distinguished photographic essay. *Klondike Quest* is at once a lecture and a lecture note; what Barton calls "one of the strong-



Unattributed. Avalanche victim. The Yukon Archives, Whitehorse; from *The Klondike Quest*.

est new movement in history" one hundred thousand people set off in a rush for the Klondike gold, only to grind to a halt eighteen months later. Barton's strong and compelling narrative in nine chapters is liberally illustrated with photographs, exhaustively researched by Barbara Sears from archives and collections on both sides of the border. Newfield has unearthed 15000 photos and was to create a journal with the readability of a photo album; the photographs are augmented by captions and facts, while each chapter of the legend is enriched by the immediacy of the photographs.

The dimensions of Klondike