

Brief History of Color con't

- 1904 -- Lumiere Brothers obtain patent for the autochrome process (integral mosaic process).**
- 1907 -- Autochrome process introduced globally.**
- 1912 -- R. Fischer & H. Siegrist invent subtractive color film using chromogenic development.**
- 1935 -- L. Godowsky and L. Mannes invent for Kodak Kodachrome, monopack subtractive, reversal film.**
- 1936 -- Agfa introduces Agfachrome film.**
- 1942 -- Kodak introduces Kodacolor, color neg. film.**



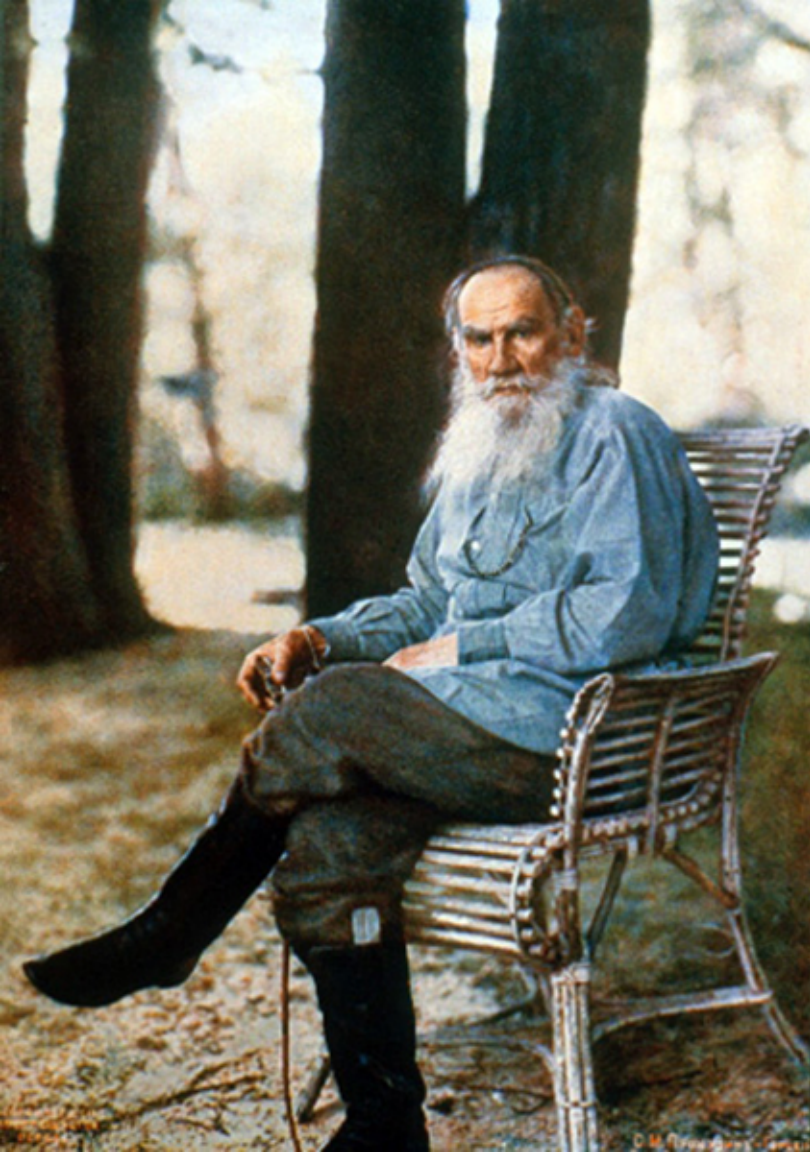
An Autochrome plate had to be placed in the camera so that the uncoated side of the glass faced the lens. The light coming through the lens would then have to pass through the filter layer before reaching the silver-bromide emulsion. Since the emulsion was not fully panchromatic, a yellow-orange filter had to be placed over the lens in order to compensate for the plate's oversensitivity to the blue-violet end of the spectrum.

"I have no medium that can give me colour of such wonderful luminosity as the Autochrome plate. One must go to stained glass for such colour resonance, as the palette and canvas are a dull and lifeless medium in comparison". Such rapturous statement came from Eduard Steichen, the prominent pictorial photographer from USA and founder member of the "Photo-Secession" when the Lumières demonstrated the autochrome process at the Photo-Club of Paris on June 10th, 1907. A few weeks later, Heinrich Kühn declared: "Only somebody who possesses a delicate sense of colours should work with the autochrome process, the palette is somewhat dangerously colourful."



Heinrich Kühn: "Walter in blue and Lotte in white lying in grass", not dated and signed, from about 1908, Autochrome, 18 x 24 cm





Brief History of Color con't

1950 - - self-masking Kodacolor introduced.

1963 - - Polacolor, diffusion transfer color, introduced.

1972 - - Polaroid introduces the SX-70 film/camera.

1975- - Cibachrome Process introduced.

1983 - - Polaroid Instant Slide film introduced.

Inexpensive, glowing color for everybody and for everything is new in our visible world. No other epoch was ever as highly colored as our own.

The Impressionist public could not put themselves into an Impressionist picture because their own interiors were not yet that brightly colored or lit. People lived in a cocoa-colored, gas-lit world until the chemist released from coal-tar in which they had been imprisoned, the colors of the prehistoric flowers. When the new aniline colors dyed clothes and furnishings in brightly lit homes, people could put themselves into an Impressionist canvas.

The Fauves were so easy to accept that no one really noticed them.

Figuratively, colour has always meant the less-than-true and the not-quite-real. The Latin *colorem* is related to *celare*, to hide or conceal; in Middle English 'to colour' is to embellish or adorn, to disguise, to render specious or plausible, to misrepresent. --David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (2000)

Kant goes so far as
to say that a color or a sound cannot be beautiful in itself, since they are too
material, too deeply rooted in our senses to be freely reflected in the imagination.
Only the design, the composition matter. These are the consitutive elements of
esthetic form, while colors and sounds are only adjuncts.

It is in fact one of the permanent principles of Western art theory. We encounter it in Alberti's *Della Pittura*, and again in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* where we are told that "in painting, in sculpture, and in fact in all the formative arts . . . the *design* is what is essential. Here it is not what gratifies in sensation, but merely what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste." As in Rousseau, color is excluded from the judgment of taste because it appeals to sensation; material substance is again subordinated to formal composition.

Charles Blanc on color versus design (19th C.):

'Here we recognise
the power of colour, and that its role is to tell us what agitates the
heart, while drawing shows us what passes in the mind, a new proof . . .
that drawing is the masculine side of art, colour the feminine side.' Or:
'As sentiment is multiple, while reason is one, so colour is a mobile,
vague, intangible element, while form, on the contrary, is precise, limited,
palpable and constant.' Or: ' . . . colour, which speaks to the senses
rather than to the mind' is 'more external, hence, more secondary'.

Why Color was late in coming to Art Photography

- 1) B & W seemed more pure, abstract.**
- 2) Philosophers always considered color as secondary quality to objects, as subjective.**
- 3) Early color processes had to be done in professional labs, so artist lost control over the final print.**
- 4) Color photography was associated with commercial work in the medium.**
- 5) Color prints did not have archival quality.**
- 6) Dye-transfer preferred to achieve quality, color stability, and permanence; but it was expensive and time consuming.**





Intuitively, Adams felt and vociferously advocated that understatement was preferable to exaggeration in color. He defined the potential aesthetic print as one that had the right "feel" or "rightness" of colors, and the saturation of dyes, pigments, and general color key had to be in harmony with the emotional feelings of the subject. He found most color photographic papers wanting in texture and quality. He, therefore, preferred the luminescence and color saturation of projected transparencies.





DRESSES

Revelation of Good Taste

CLEANERS

CERTAINS · BLANKETS
CLOVERS · DRAPES

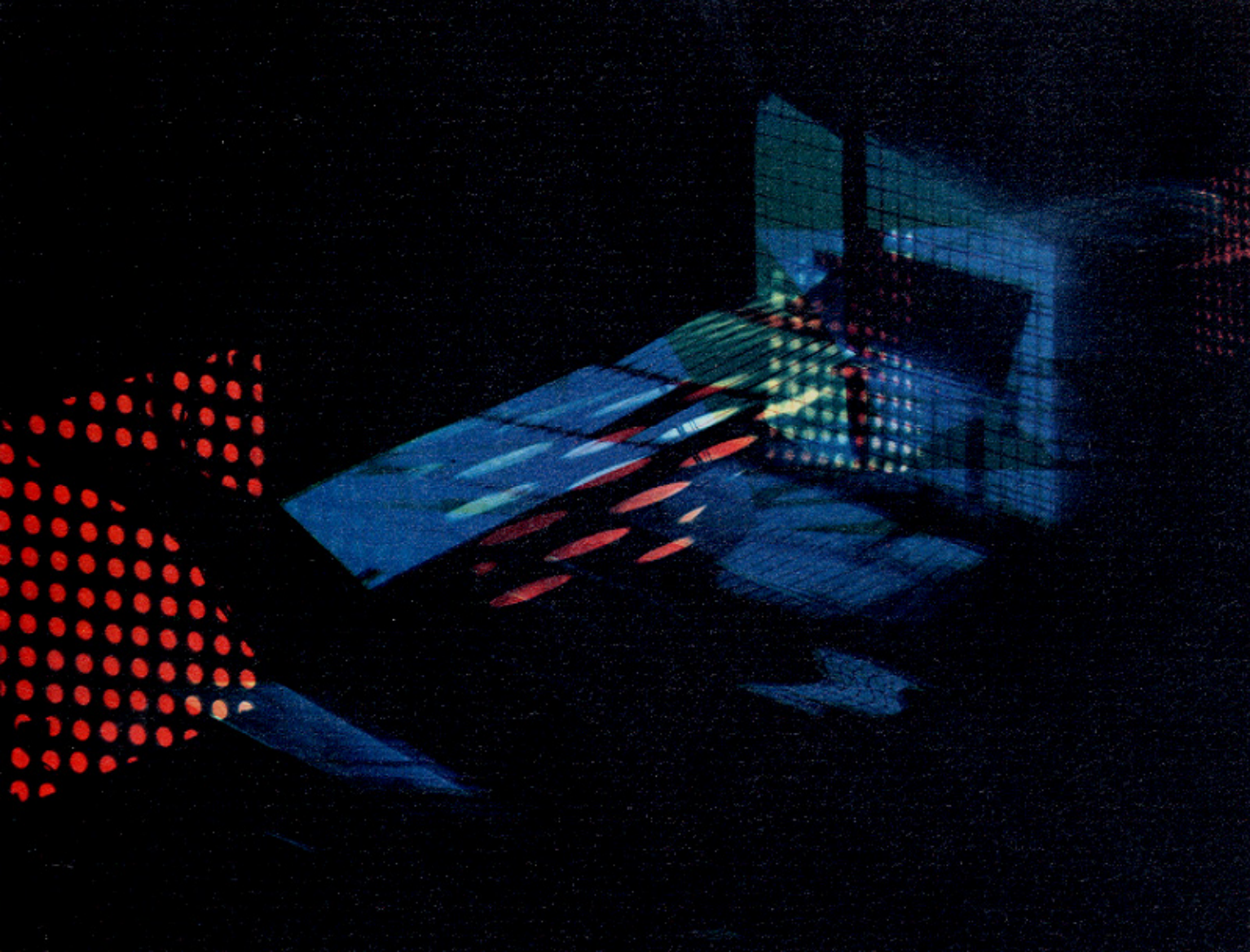
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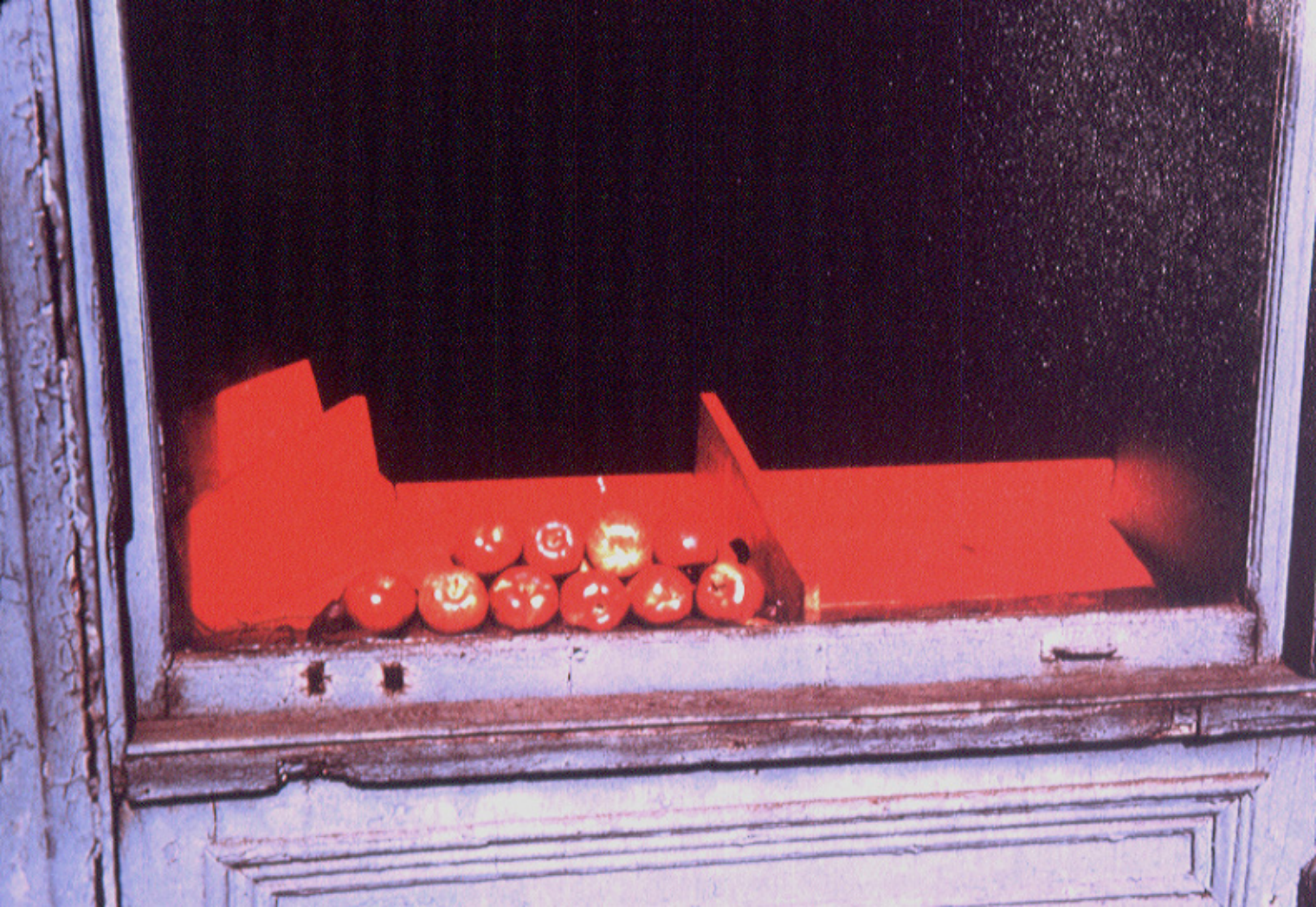
TEL 8066

FRESHNESS

GLOWING







Interest in color in 1960s photography

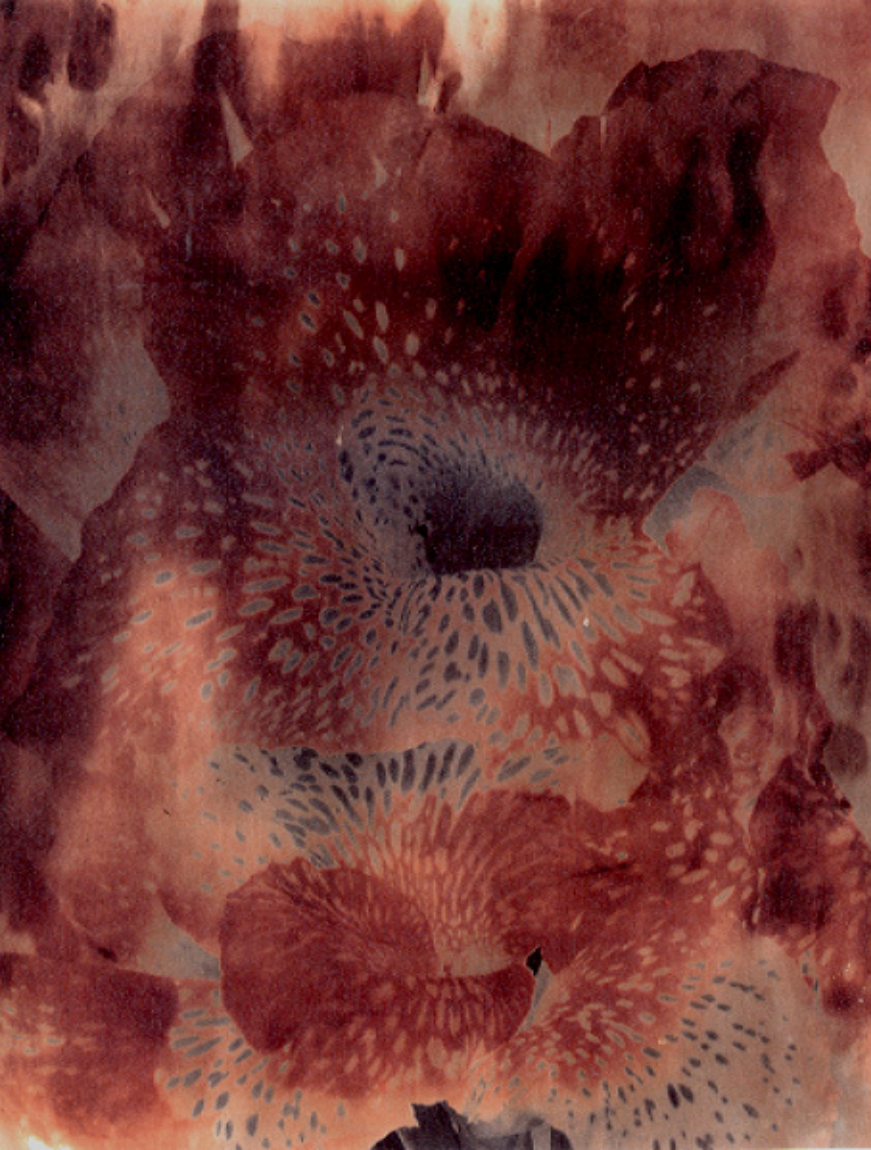
- 1) Drug-culture saw exotic color as expressive of representing drug experiences. Saturated color used in photos of record albums, often Infra-red color film used to get unusual color or solarization (Sabattier effect) used.
- 2) Color in kitchens and bathrooms became fashionable, more hedonism in the home.
- 3) Color as FORM, not description, seems, then, acceptable. This unrealistic color is achieved by:
 - 1) Infra-red film, solarization, saturation, dyeing in conventional photography.
 - 2) Or by gum bichromate, dye-transfer, color Xerox, hand-painting, Kwik-Proof instead.

Strand voiced his objection to colour with characteristic severity. 'It's a dye. It has no body or texture or density, as paint does. So far, it doesn't do anything but add an uncontrollable element to a medium that's hard enough to control anyway.' By 1961 the technical limitations had been comprehensively overcome but this served only to intensify the conviction, best expressed by Robert Frank, that 'Black and white are the colours of photography. To me, they symbolize the alternatives of hope and despair to which mankind is subjected'. For the master of serendipitous composition, Henri Cartier-Bresson, organizing the chaos of reality was complicated enough – 'imagine having to think about colour on top of all this'. In 1969 Walker Evans made his famous statement that 'Colour tends to corrupt photography and absolute colour corrupts absolutely . . . There are four simple words for the matter which must be whispered: colour photography is vulgar.' Within a few years Evans had acquired a Polaroid camera and would spend the rest of his life exploring its creative potential with unfettered relish. 'Paradox is a habit of mine,' he said. 'Now I am going to devote myself with great care to my work in colour.'





BERT STERN: Marilyn Monroe, 1960



PROCESSED BY KODAK • K



PROCESSED BY KODAK • K

116



New Color vs. Fabricated

Straight photography

**No intervention in the
Profilmic Event**

Subdued color

Modernist

Straight photography

**Intervention in the Pro-
Event**

**Often bright color (some
black and white too)**

Postmodernist

New Color and its Origins

- 1) Advertising/commercial photography.**
- 2) Travelogue photography.**
- 3) Color snapshots.**
- 4) Impetus given to color photo by John Szarkowski's show "William Eggleston's Guide" (1976) at MoMA, NYC.**
- 5) Super Realist's (e.g., Richard Estes) painting.**
- 6) Improved Type-C prints, Cibachrome prints.**

Szarkowski on William Eggleston's photos: The best of Eliot Porter's landscapes, like the best of the colour street pictures of Helen Levitt, Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore, and others, accept colour as existential and descriptive; these pictures are not photographs of colour, any more than they are photographs of shapes, textures, objects, symbols, or events, but rather photographs of experience, as it has been ordered and clarified within the structures imposed by the camera.



Two Contrasting Exhibitions

- 1) Marie Cosindas (1966) curated by Szarkowski at MoMA, NYC
Muted, baroque still lifes produced on early Polacolor film were first contemporary color photos given extensive museum attention.
- 2) William Eggleston's Guide (1976) curated by Szarkowski at MoMA, NYC. 75 dye-transfer prints, initiates move from expressionistic use of color for symbolic purposes to color as descriptive of light, atmosphere. Often the color is muted, or nearly monochromatic.





Green's Concept of "New Color"

- 1) Straight, non-saturated, color which is more descriptive than using color as form.**
- 2) Color is about light, not form.**
- 3) Green: "Light and color are the primary visual characteristics of their [New Color photogs] imagery.**
- 4) Sees these photos are akin to Luminist painting of the mid-19th century and cites John Baur's catalogue essay for "Luminism" (1954):**

"... a polished and meticulous realism in which there is no sign of brush work and no traces of impressionism, the atmospheric effects being achieved by infinitely careful gradations of tone, by the most exact study of the relative clarity of near and far, and by a precise rendering of the variations in texture and color produced by direct and reflected rays."

Some Precedences of use of color in Art Photography

- 1) 700 FSA photos shot as color slides, e.g., Jack Delano's *Stonington, CT* (1940).
- 2) First major body of color street photography was done by Helen Levitt in NYC (1959 - 1960).
- 3) Esthetic precedents (vernacular subject matter): Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander.
- 4) Esthetic precedents (lucid descriptiveness and evocative use of light): Eliot Porter, Ezra Stoller.





HOUSE

BAR

WALKERS GIN
Distilled
London
Dry
MADE WITH IMPORTED BOTANICALS

WARNING
BABACO





CHINESE CLASS

& ROLLS

SABRETT

HOT PRETZELS

SABRETT
40c
FRANKFURTERS & ROLLS

40c
SODAS 30c





new color/new work

eighteen photographic essays



sally eauciaire

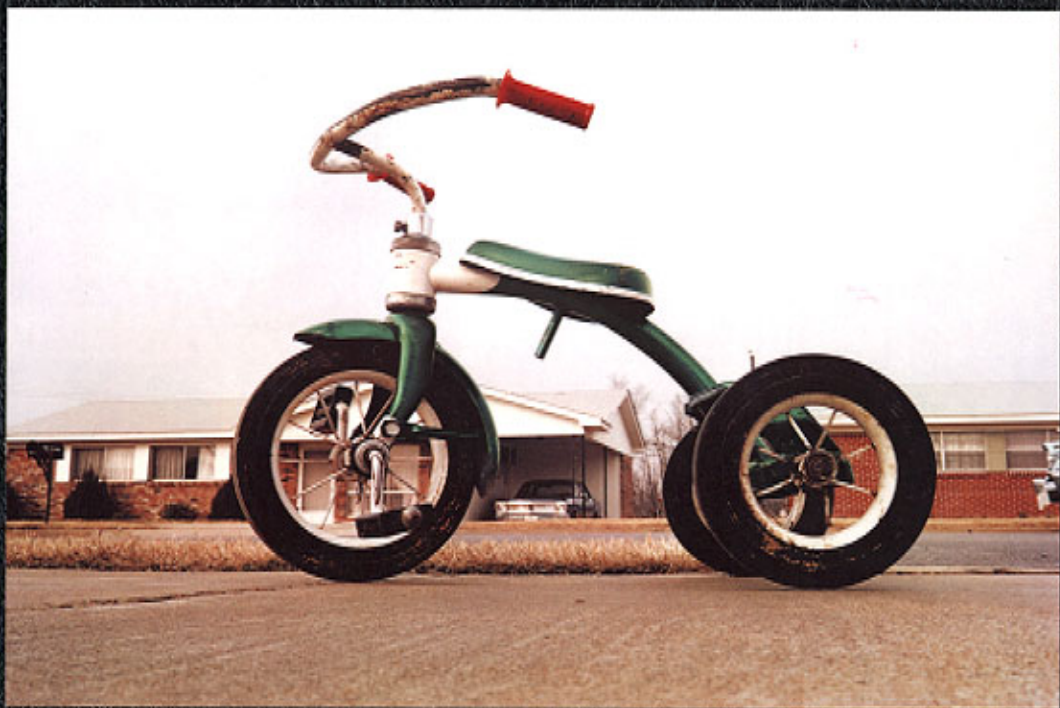
William Eggleston

(B. 1937, Memphis, TN)

Eggleston intensifies the banality of the color snapshot to a level that demands aesthetic response, something that many viewers were unprepared to give, responding instead with outrage that 'this' should be offered as art.

Viewers were forced to confront the emptiness, even visual insipidness, of typically American scenes.

One of these men, Joel Sternfeld, refers to this time as 'the early Christian era of colour photography', when small groups of converts would gather together and discuss their new-found subversive faith. This faith gained official acceptance in May 1976 with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York of photographs by William Eggleston.



William Eggleston's
Guide

Form is perhaps the point of art. The goal is not to make something factually impeccable, but seamlessly persuasive. In photography the pursuit of form has taken an unexpected course. In this peculiar art, form and subject are defined simultaneously. Even more than in the traditional arts, the two are inextricably tangled. Indeed, they are probably the same thing. Or, if they are different, one might say that a photograph's subject is not its starting point but its destination.

The simplicity of these pictures is (as the reader will have guessed) not so simple. When Alfred H. Barr, Jr., first saw a selection of slides from this series in 1972 he observed—surprisingly but in fact accurately—that the design of most of the pictures seemed to radiate from a central, circular core. In time the observation was relayed to Eggleston, who replied, after a barely perceptible hesitation, that this was true, since the pictures were based compositionally on the Confederate flag—not the asterisk, or the common daisy, or the dove of the Holy Ghost, but the Confederate flag. The response was presumably improvised and unresponsive, of interest only as an illustration of the lengths to which artists sometimes go to frustrate rational analysis of their work, as though they fear it might prove an antidote to their magic.

As pictures, however, these seem to me perfect: irreducible surrogates for the experience they pretend to record, visual analogues for the quality of one life, collectively a paradigm of a private view, a view one would have thought ineffable, described here with clarity, fullness, and elegance.

Not everyone was convinced. Eggleston's work was dismissed by the influential critic Hilton Kramer ('the banal leading the banal'), who failed to see that its subtle proximity to banality was crucial both to its disconcerting, enigmatic power and – as Kerouac had said of Frank – to its 'American-ness'.



Eggleston's images quietly dismiss received ideas of beauty

and importance. In his eye, ugliness is no sin, beauty no virtue;

they are just cultural and social attitudes that shape perception.





TO REIGHT OVEN FLOE.

Seal the oven door when it is closed.
Do not touch the oven door when
it is hot. Do not touch the oven door
when it is hot with a match.









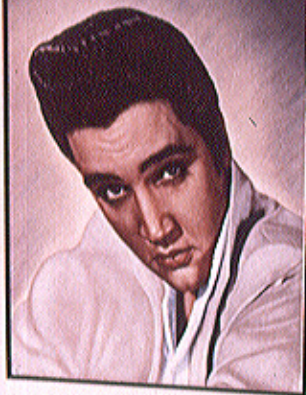




STAY CLEAR
OF PROPELLERS
AT ALL TIMES











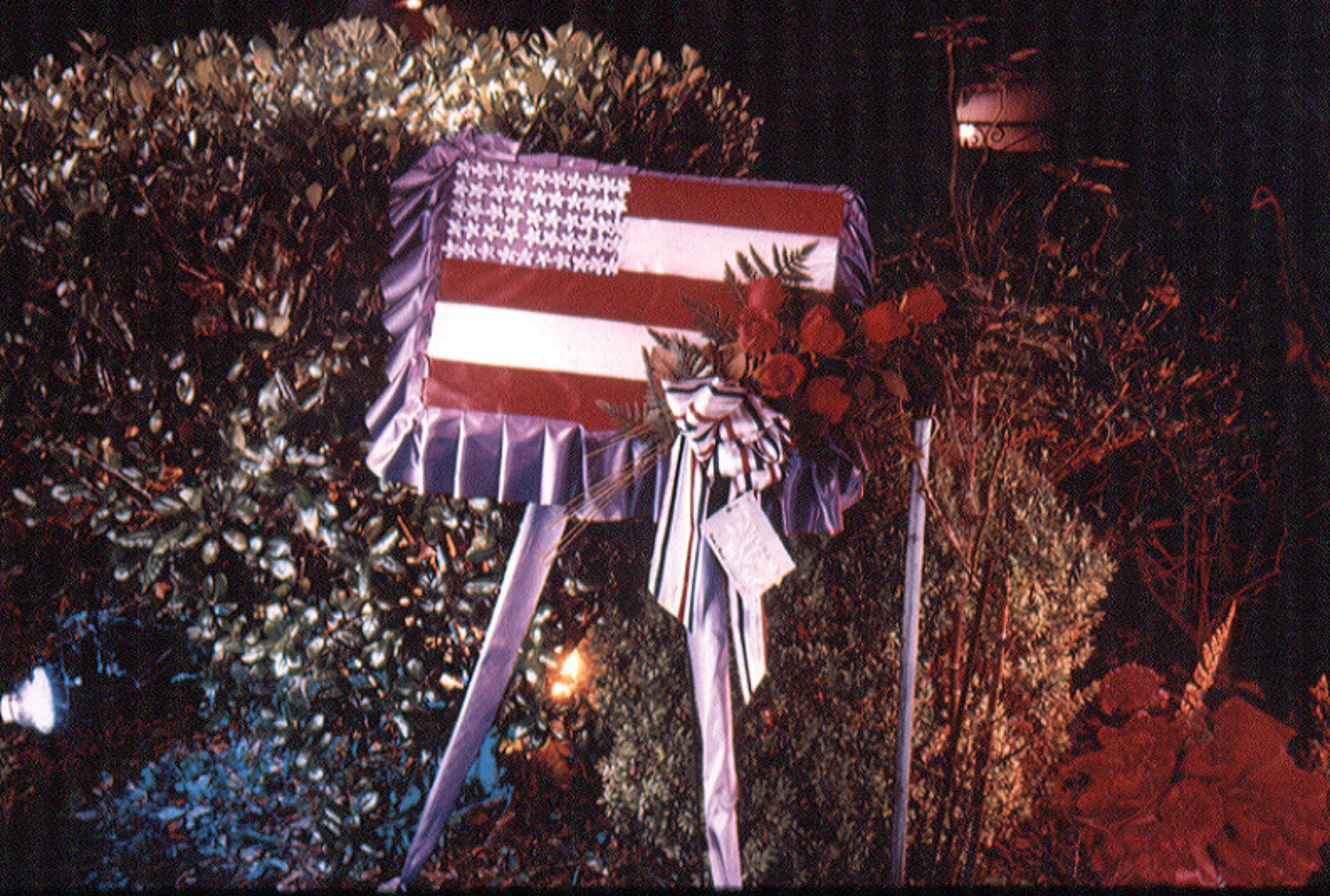
I LOVE
YOU
TENDER
L.M.
7-16-83

S.A.R.
1982

LINDA
LOVES
ELOHIM

BRIAN

CHERYL





VERNON
ELVIS
PRESLEY
JAN 8 1935
AUG 16 1976

ARON
PRESLEY
JAN 8 1935
AUG 16 1976

Joel Meyerowitz

(Born 1938)

Studied painting and medical illustration; worked as an art director and designer in NYC in early 1960s. Became a photographer in 1962 after working on an ad assignment with Robert Frank. Began to shoot 35 mm color street scenes, then in late 1970s began to use a 8 x 10 Deardorff camera.

Key books published in 1970s/80s:

Cape Light (1978)

St. Louis and the Arch (1981)

Wildflowers (1983)



It's the *risk* of taking a picture of the *small* thing in a big space that is exactly like the street pictures. In the street I make a picture, and I shove the subject off center, and I take a picture of the subject and the context—the subject as it stands with everything else—rather than limiting the picture just to the subject I first perceived. So I feel that's me; that's the wit of the street at work; that I'm willing to risk the distance to the subject. I'm trying to make an atonal photograph where everything is as important as everything else. It's difficult, I admit, because you have tendencies to celebrate one thing more than another. But I think it's possible to make a picture in which the photographer lays back enough so that the viewer comes into the photograph and has a chance to perceive things on his own terms, instead of only seeing what the photographer has hooked him to see. I think one of the reasons I'm using the 8" x 10" camera is that I felt that I could work with the large camera and make photographs in which the subject was everything in the frame.





ONE

NO STANDING
7 AM - 12 AM
2 PM - 7 PM

NO STANDING
EXCEPT TRUCKS
LOADING & UNLOADING
OTHER TIMES

Canadian Club
NY
BOYS

Castro
concert sales

EMBASSY

Nobodys lower
than Carlton.
Daily 2 for 1

FLGG
BRDS

BOOK



TH ST

AT ROOM

CAFETERIA



when you're on the street, and, as you're walking along, a woman turns the corner going away from you, and for an instant you have a glimpse of the side of her face, of the gesture of her shoulder, the shape of her body, and you are *committed* . . . You are in love for an instant, or your senses are *rocked* for an instant. That person then disappears and is lost to you forever. What you *feel* in that instant, that glimpse of something just out of reach, is what tells you to make a photograph. It is a *feeling*. That's my physical equivalent out there. For a moment she fills that place that is always open, a place where sensation can reside for an instant . . .

Modernity has been delineated as the establishment of a social order based on mobility, flux, exchange. Perhaps this is why Walter Benjamin read Baudelaire's sonnet "A une passante" as exemplary of both the thematics of the crowd and the ephemeral temporality of the modern city. In it, a solitary woman emerges from the crowd, captures the gaze of the urban poet, and then disappears ("A lightning flash . . . then night"). The sonnet ends with the line "O you I would have loved (o you who knew it too!)"



Coca-Cola

LUNCHEONETTE SODA SANDWICHES

Coca-Cola

CAPE LIGHT

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL MEYEROWITZ



MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON · NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY







cumberland farms

100%
LIVE
9

99

MILK
13.59

62

SMOKING
REGULAR

REGULAR

84 PLUS OCTANE

dis-gas

REGULAR

dis-gas

POLICE



Joel Meyerowitz: "John Szarkowski has used the expression 'nominal subject matter.' I think that's perfect for my behavior here. I'm not really interested in gas stations or anything about gas stations. This happens to be an excuse for *seeing*."

Tech data: Vericolor II Type L (long exposure)
Printed on Ektacolor 74 resin-coated
Average exposure time 1/2 sec. @ f/90.











DAIRY
Land

Enjoy
Coca-Cola

HAM
BEEF
STEAK
CHEESE
CHICKENS
SCALLOPS
SHRIMP
FISH-CLAM
LOBSTER
LINGUICA
FISH
SANDWICHES
ONION RINGS
FRENCH FRIES
HOT DOGS
CLAM CHOWDER

BURGERS

BASKETS

ROLLS



DAIRY LAND

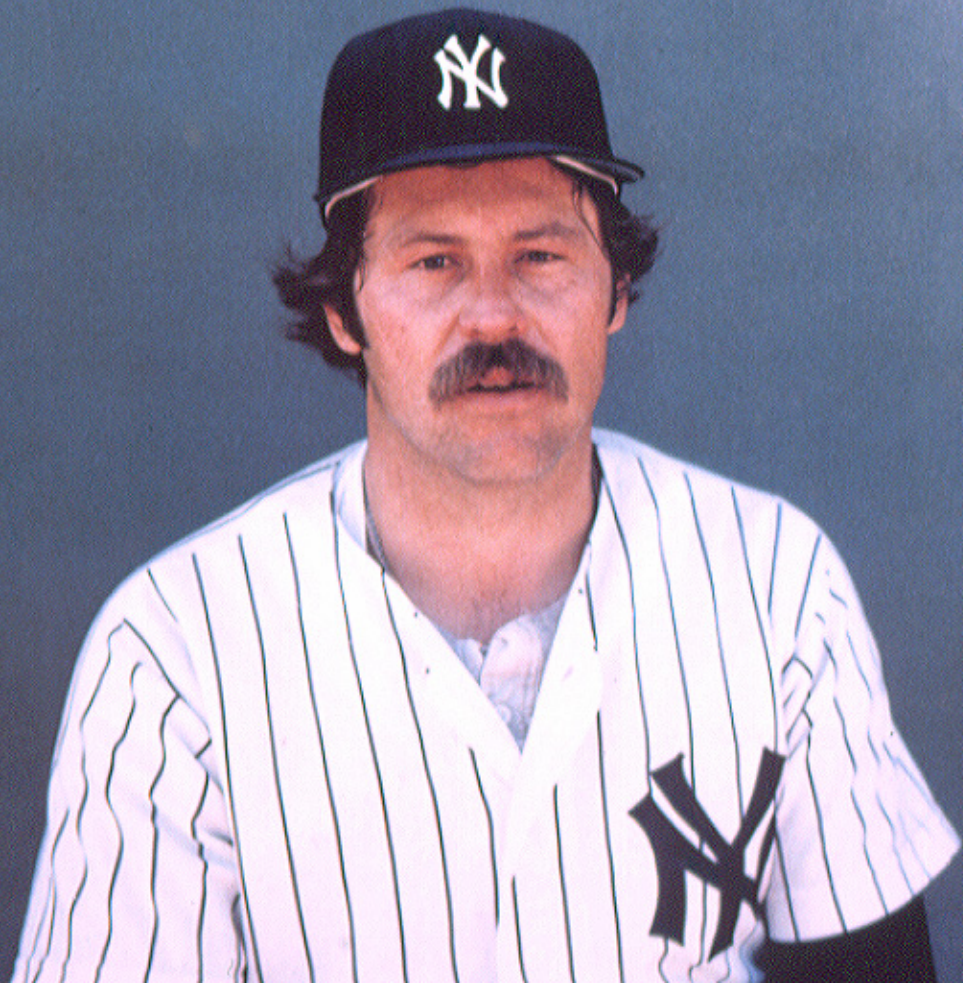
FOOD



Stephen Shore
(Born 1947)







John Humble

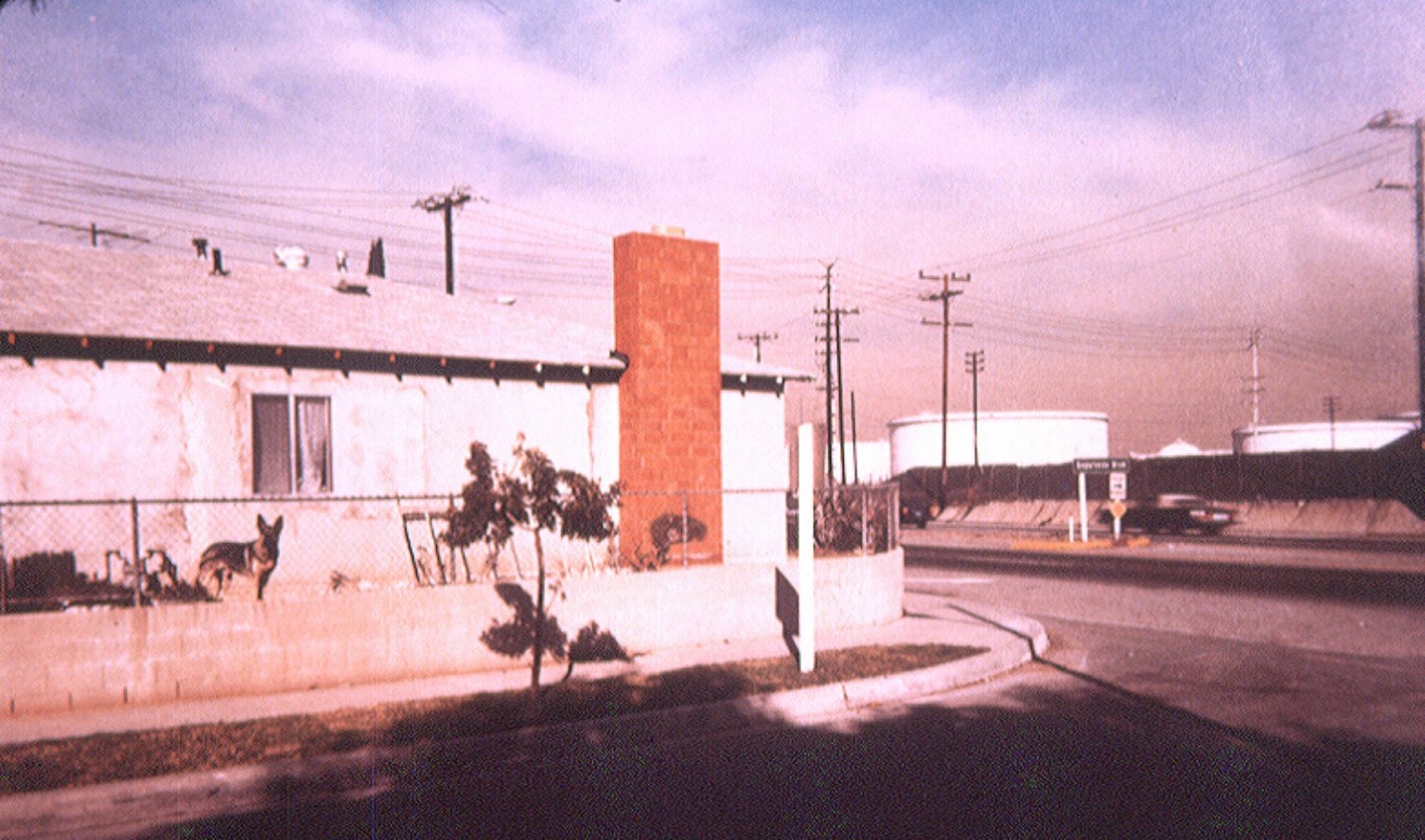
IT'S CHEVY'S
HOMECOMING

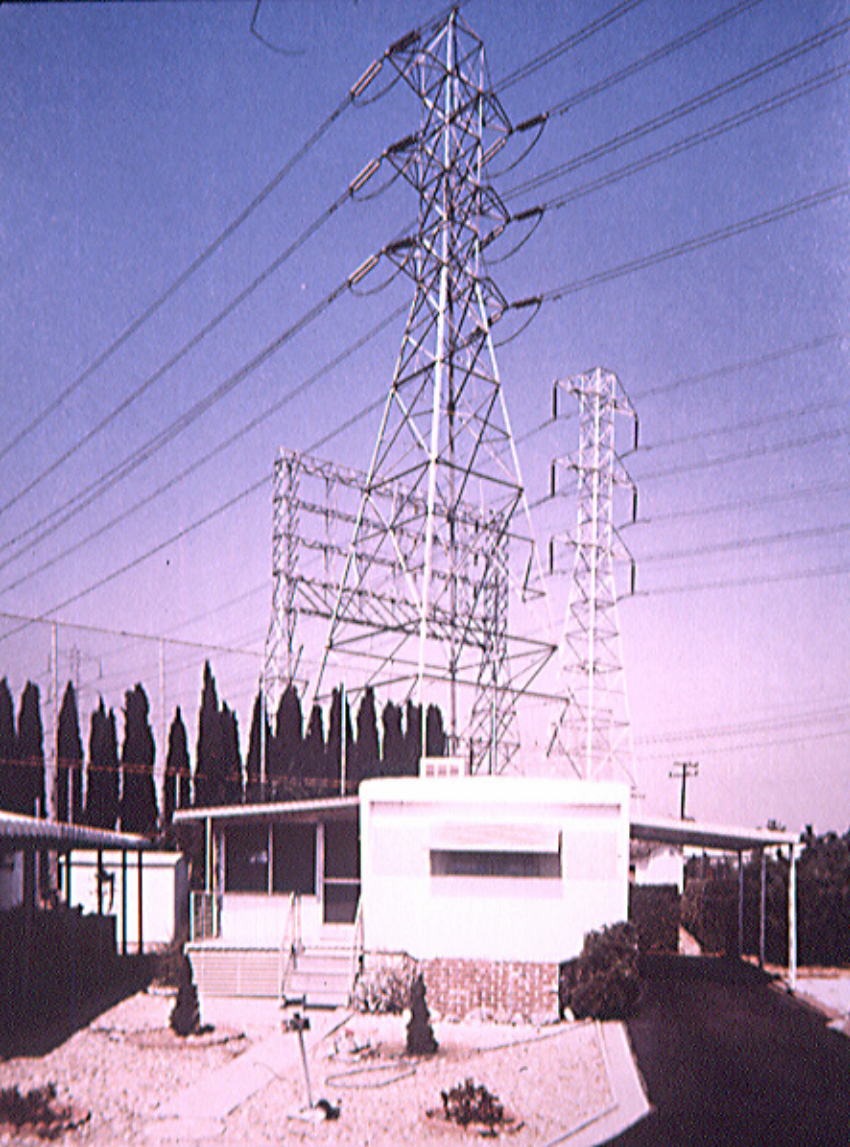


THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE IS ON.











Richard Misrach

Born 1949

Book: *Crimes and Splendors: The Desert Cantos of Richard Misrach* (1996)



















Joel Sternfeld

Born 1944

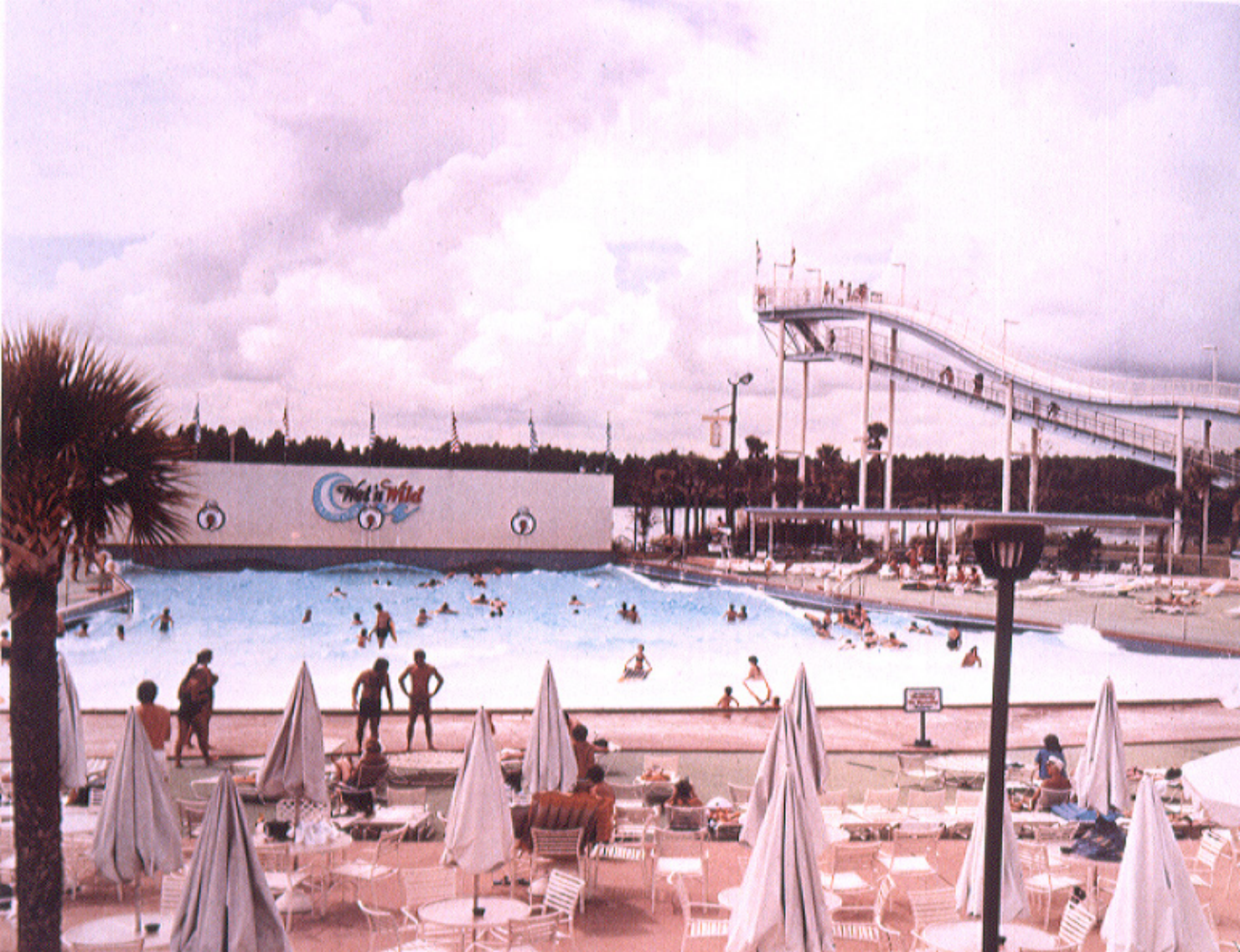
**Books: *American Prospects* (1987)
On This Site (1996)**



AMERICAN PROSPECTS



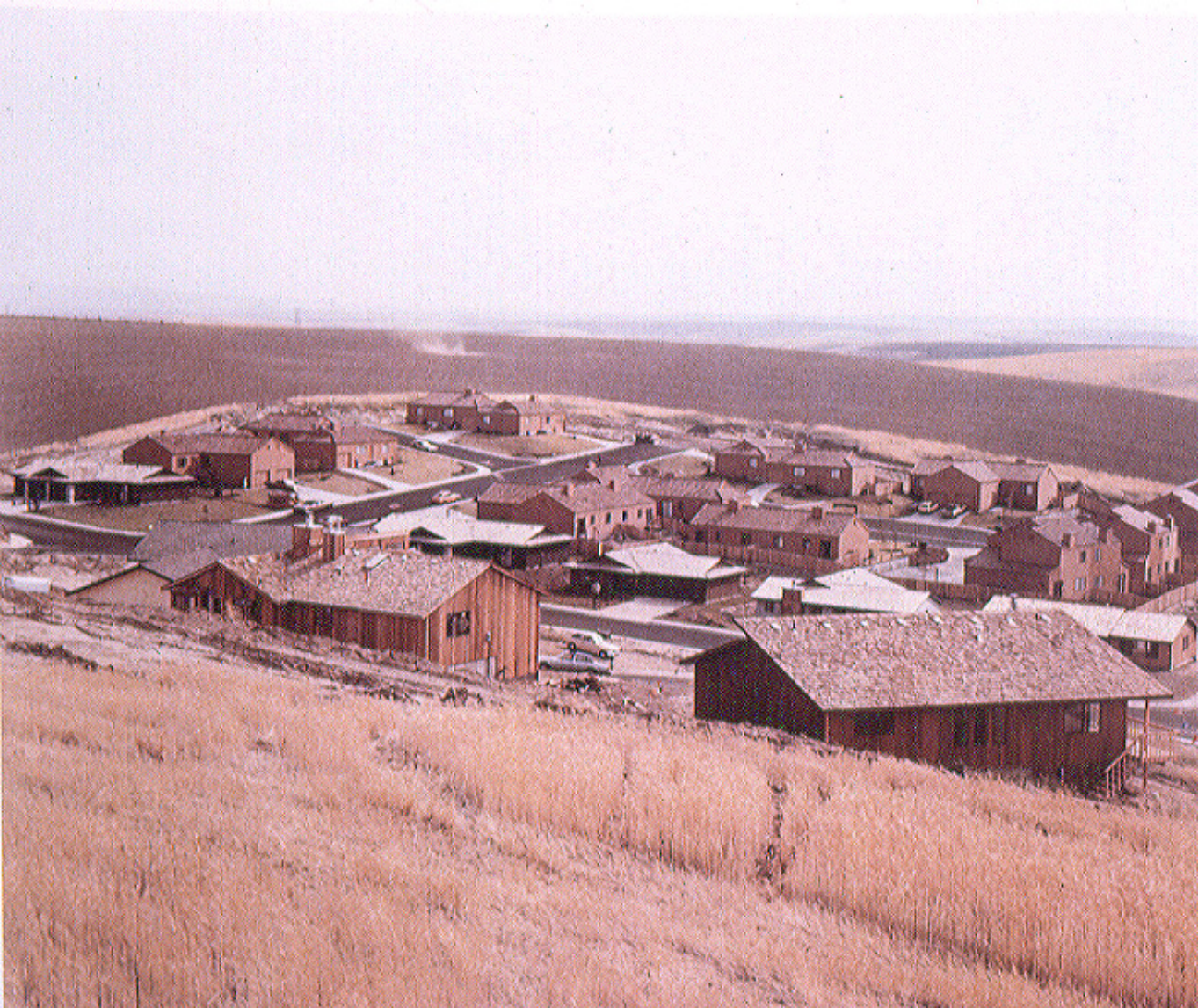
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL STERNFELD













Taylor Hall Parking Lot, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, May 1994

President Nixon's decision on April 30, 1970, to expand the Vietnam War into Cambodia incited protests throughout the nation. At Kent State University, demonstrators took over the campus and burned the ROTC building. On May 4, at 12:24 P.M., twenty-eight Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on students for thirteen seconds, killing Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, William Schroeder, and Sandra Scheuer in this parking lot.

Nine years later, without acknowledging wrongdoing, the state of Ohio paid the parents of each dead student \$15,000.

From On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam (1996) Joel Sternfeld



JOHN PFAHL

Power Places







Waste Land

Meditations on a Ravaged Landscape

Photographs by David T. Hanson

Preface by Wendell Berry





Edward Burtynsky

Edward Burtynsky's large-scale color photographs document the many facets of nature as it is transformed through human industry. Exquisitely detailed and exactingly rendered, his images strike an intricate balance between a somber reportage and a powerfully seductive aesthetic. His various series, including shipbreaking yards, rock quarries and industrial refineries, reflect the dilemma between society's desire for prosperity and the suffering it exacts upon the environment. Born in St. Catharines, Ontario in 1955, Burtynsky graduated from Ryerson Polytechnical University in Toronto with a B.A. in Photographic Arts.







Fabricated to be Photographed

Key Exhibition: Fabricated to be Photographed (1979) at the S.F. Museum of Modern Art curated by Van Deren Coke. Included:

Phillip Galgiani, Michael Levine, Ellen Brooks, Patrick Nagatani, Barbara Kasten, Robert Cumming, Victor Landweber, Mark McFadden, George LeGrady, Harry Bowers.

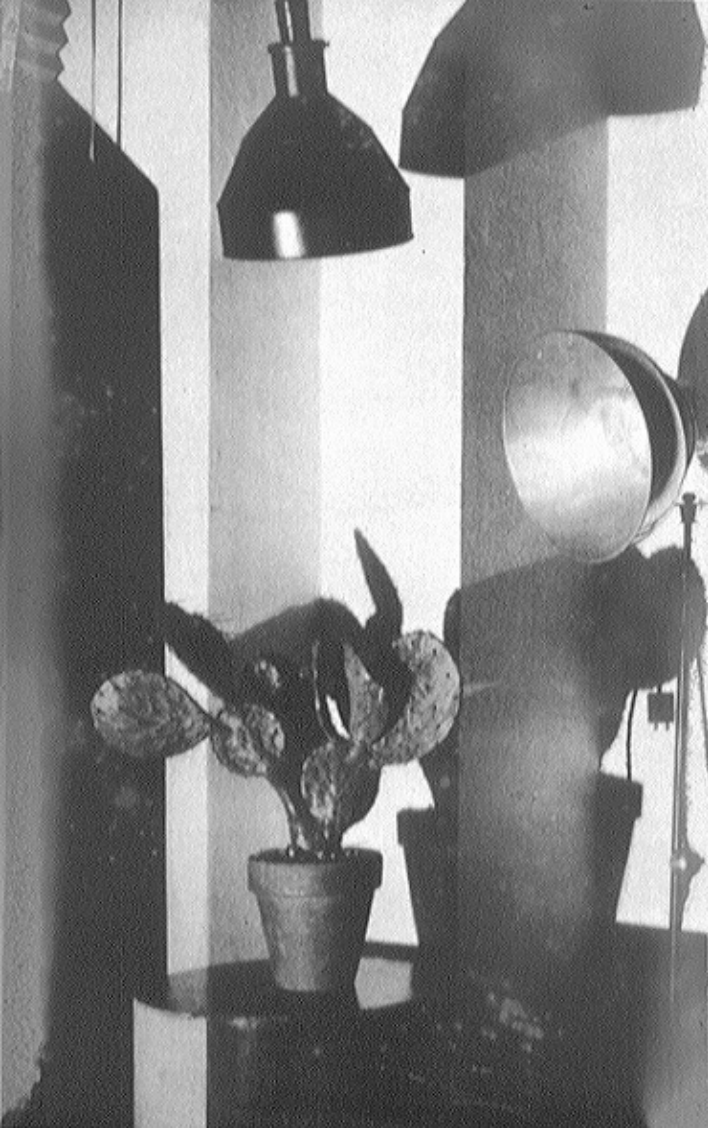
Other Major Exhibitions

Fabrications (1987) at Harvard University

The Photography of Invention (1989) at the National Museum of American Art, Wash., D.C.

This show included a wide-range of work that spanned conceptual and more traditional photographic approaches, blurring the distinction between photographers and artists who employ photography: Cindy Sherman, Zeke Berman, The Starn Twins, Joel-Peter Witkin, Sandy Skoglund, Richard Prince, Louie Lawler, John Divola, Clegg & Guttman, John Coplans, Eileen Cowin, Sarah Charlesworth, Jeanne Dunning, Tina Barney, Ellen Brooks, David Bunn.

In the face of the failures of representation, as Bertolt Brecht once claimed, “what we actually need is to ‘construct something,’ something ‘artificial,’ ‘posed.’” We need, in other words, to create a form of what might be termed “constructed representation”—aligned with Brecht’s theatrical techniques of alienation, which call attention to the workings of the theatrical apparatus in order to provide the audience a space for intellectual analysis of the events onstage. This constructed representation exists in opposition to the smooth, consumable forms of representation associated with the spectacle. It is rough; it produces friction.

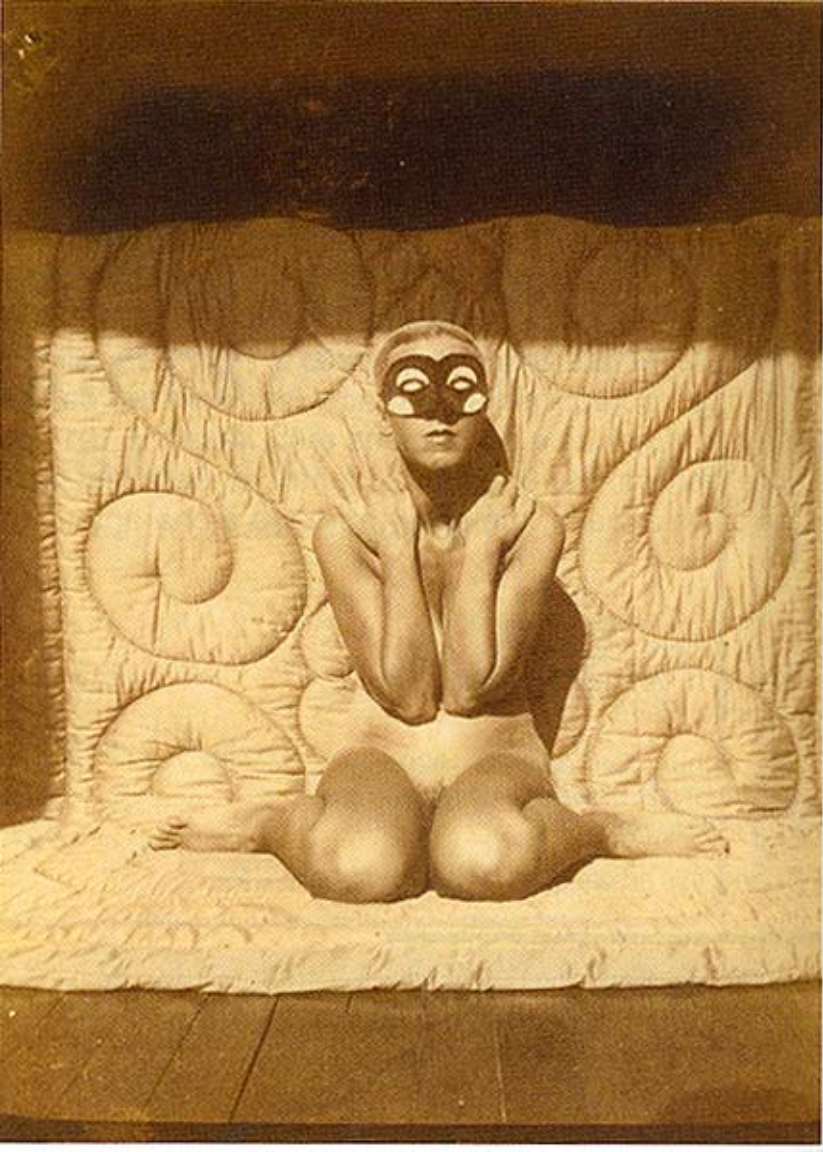


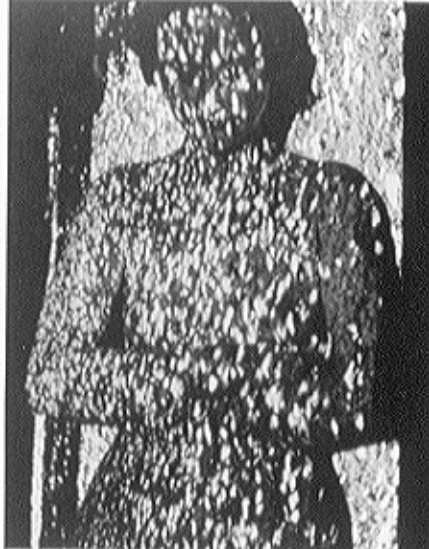
















Krzysztof Wodiczko







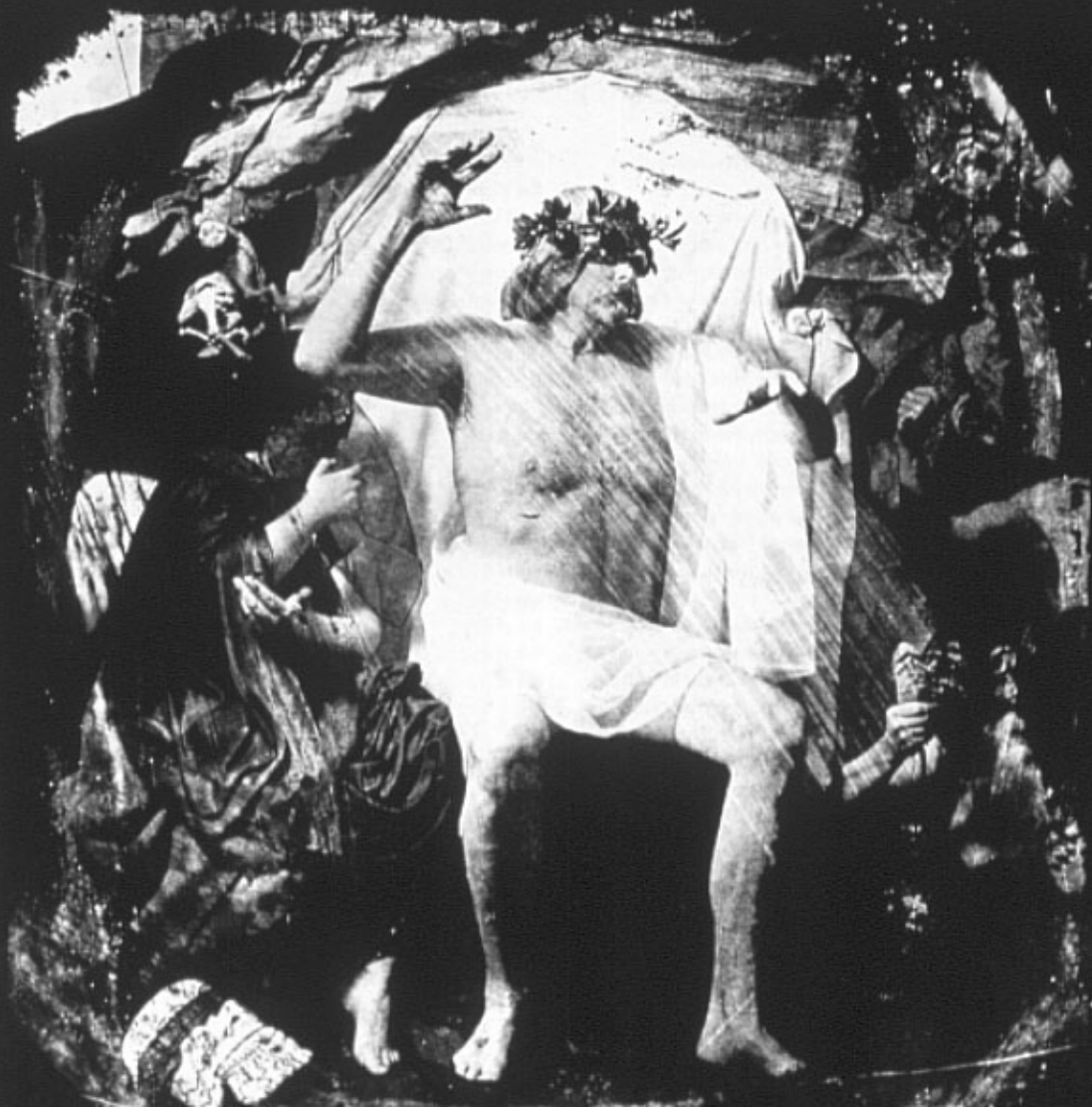














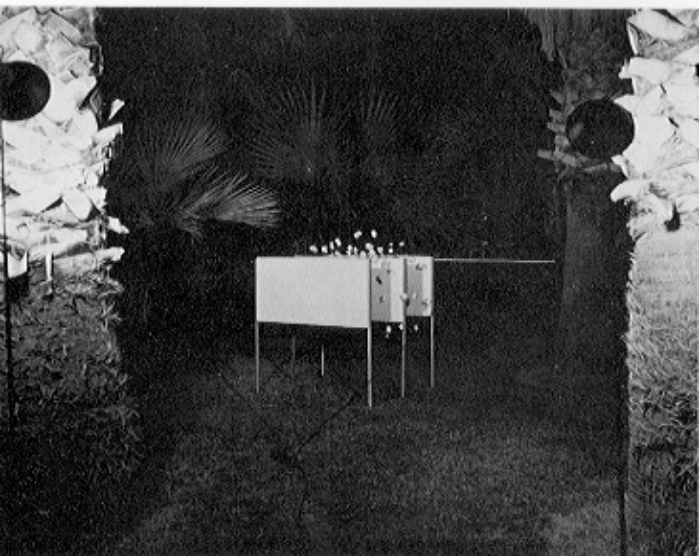
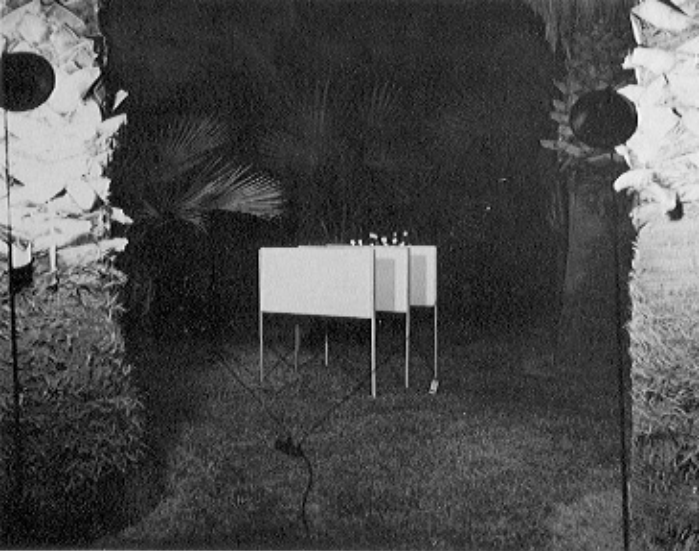
Robert Cunningham

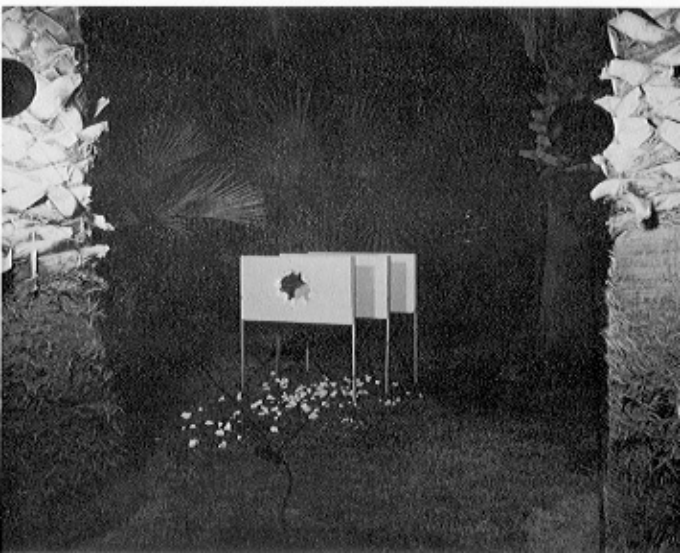
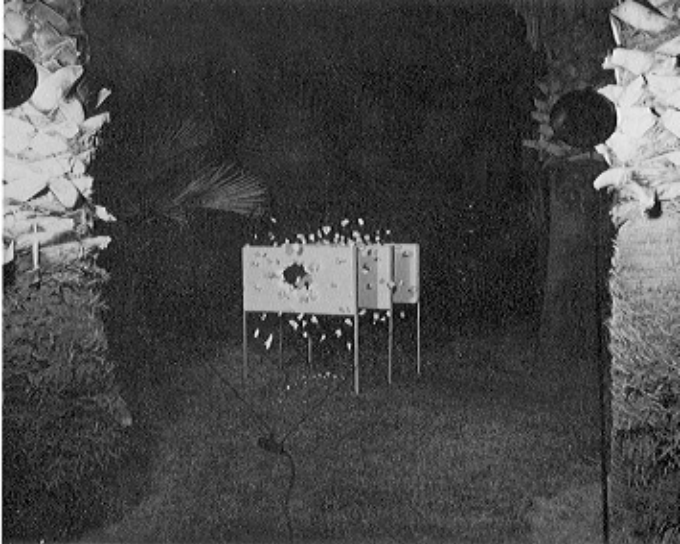
Do you see the art world and the photography world as being separate worlds?

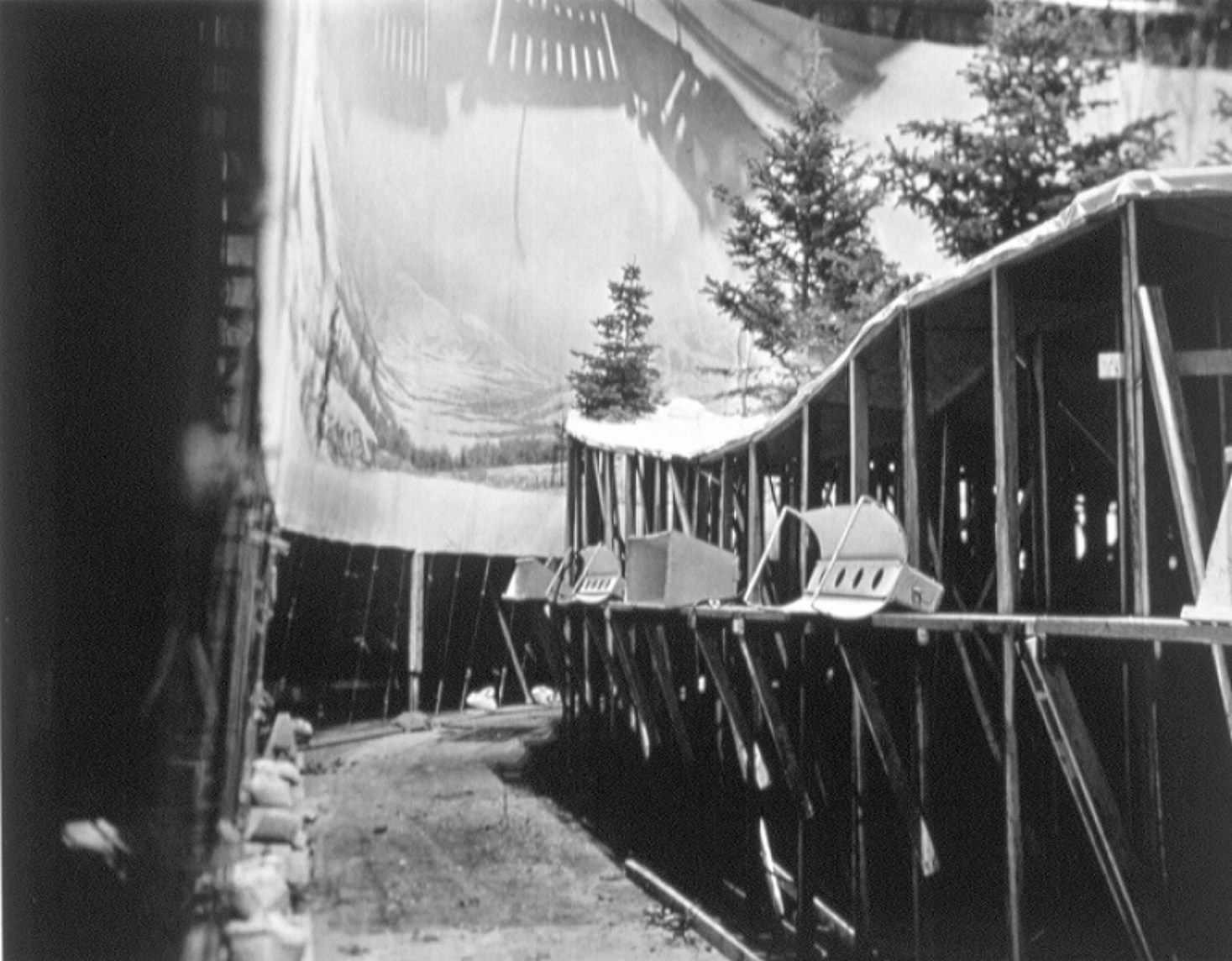
They have come a lot closer in the last couple of years. Many of the art galleries have opened up to photography. For example, in 1970 there would have been no way I could have gone to a gallery with a portfolio of photographs and presented them alongside my sculpture. They would have said, "What is this about? We only deal in sculpture." And the reverse was also true. I showed my early work to several photo galleries and they had trouble relating to my photographs and didn't understand my sculpture at all. To work in more than one area of art wasn't part of the dialogue back then. After these dismal early receptions, I pretty much decided to have nothing to do with the photo world, but to make photographs just because I liked them. And that's what I did for the next four or five years.



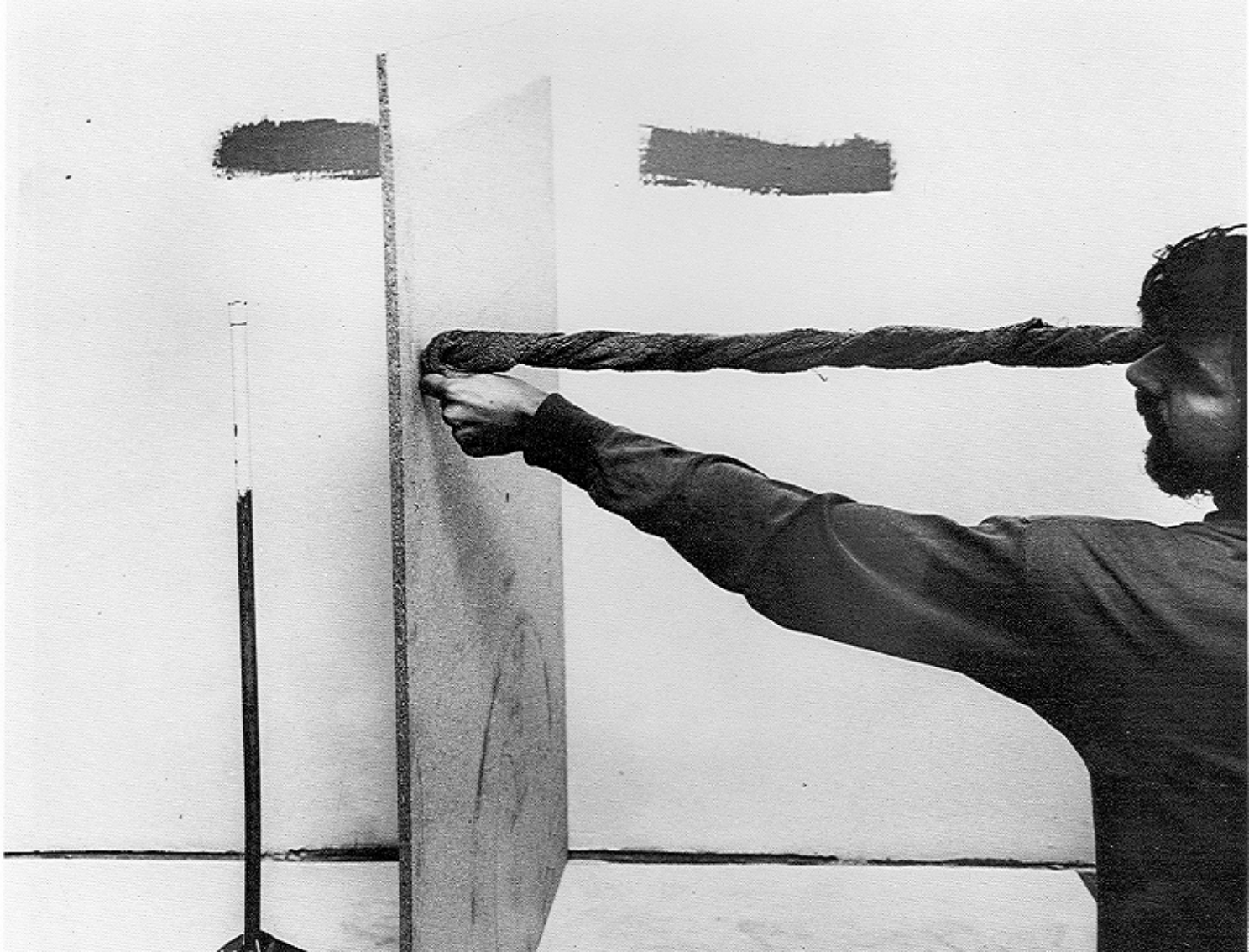
















ALL ABOUT?

PROBLEM?

Lily

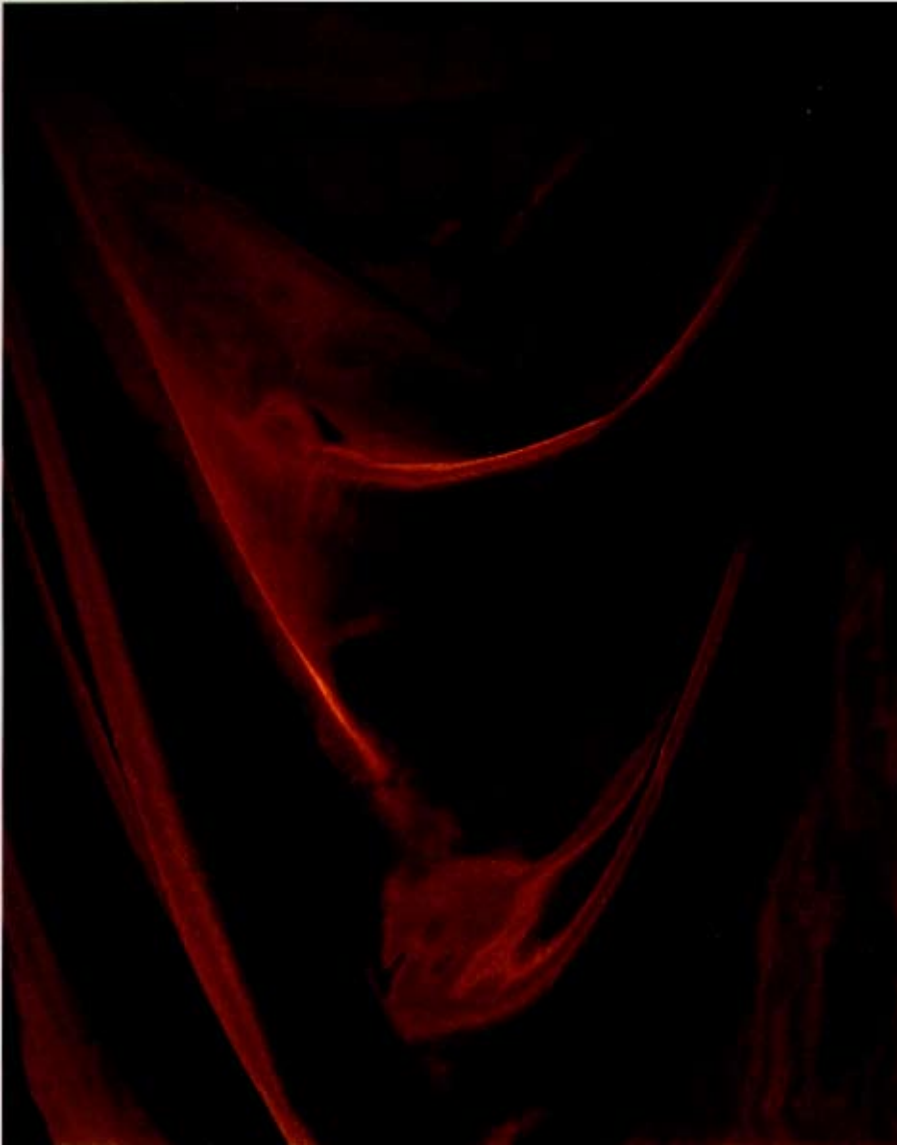






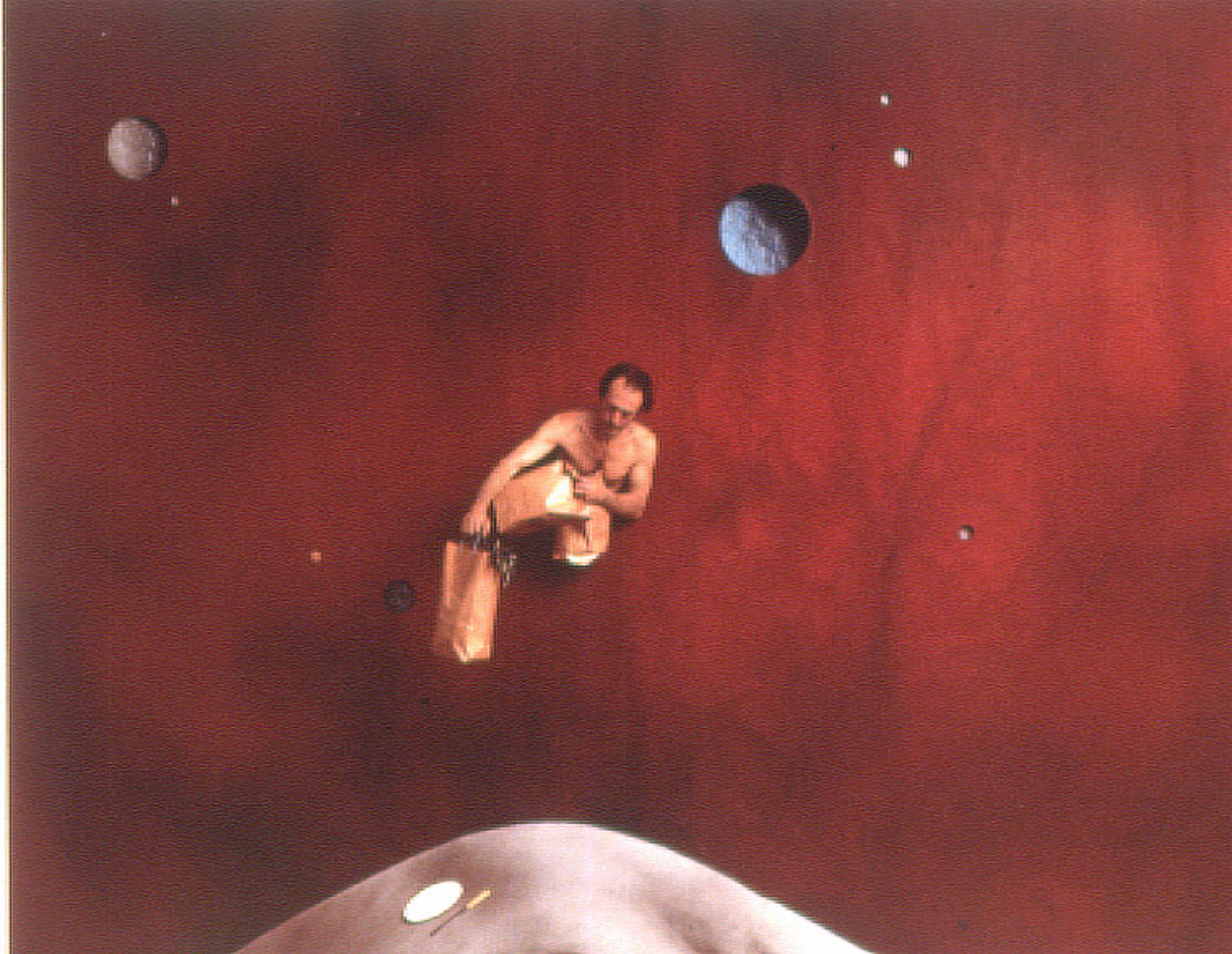




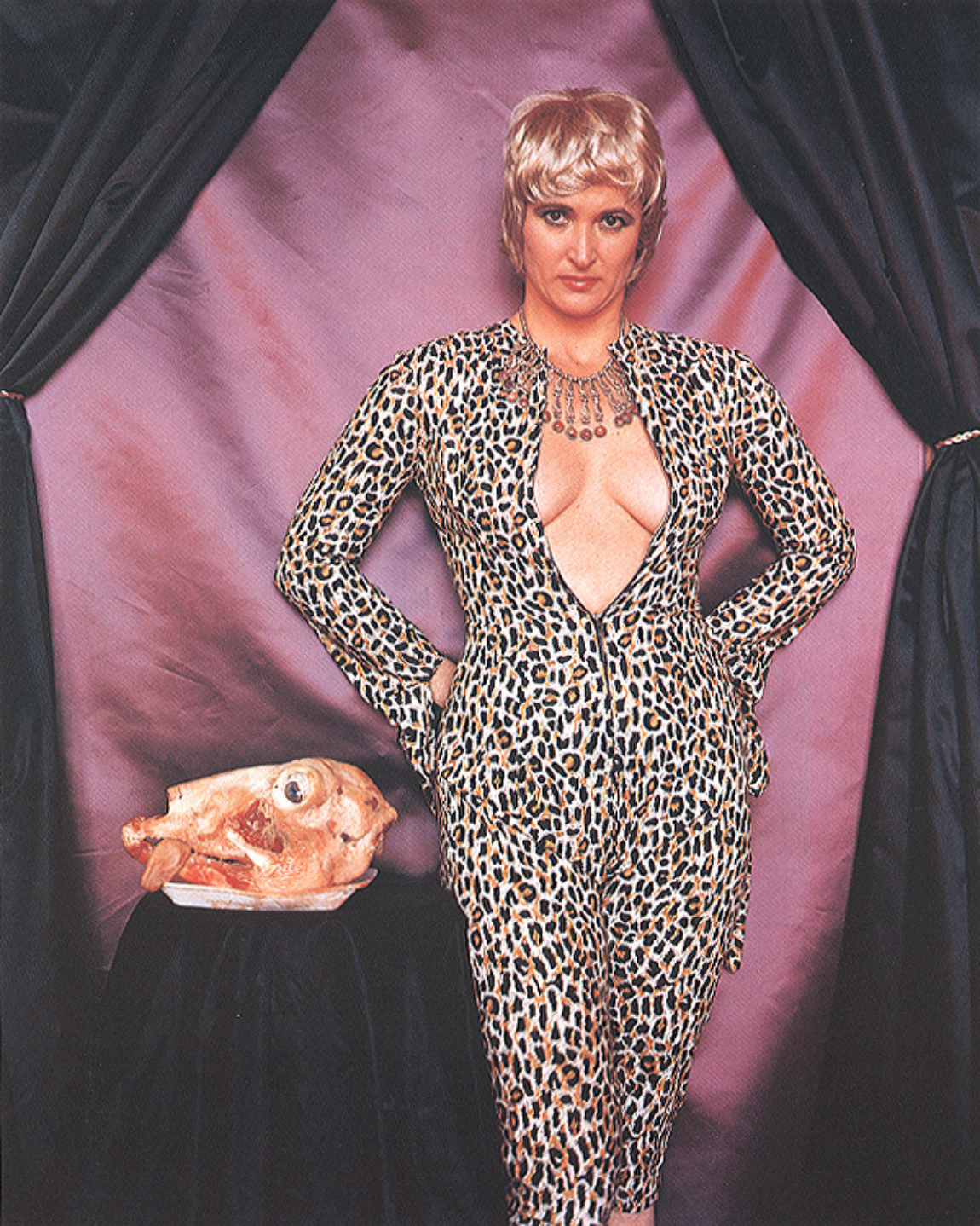




























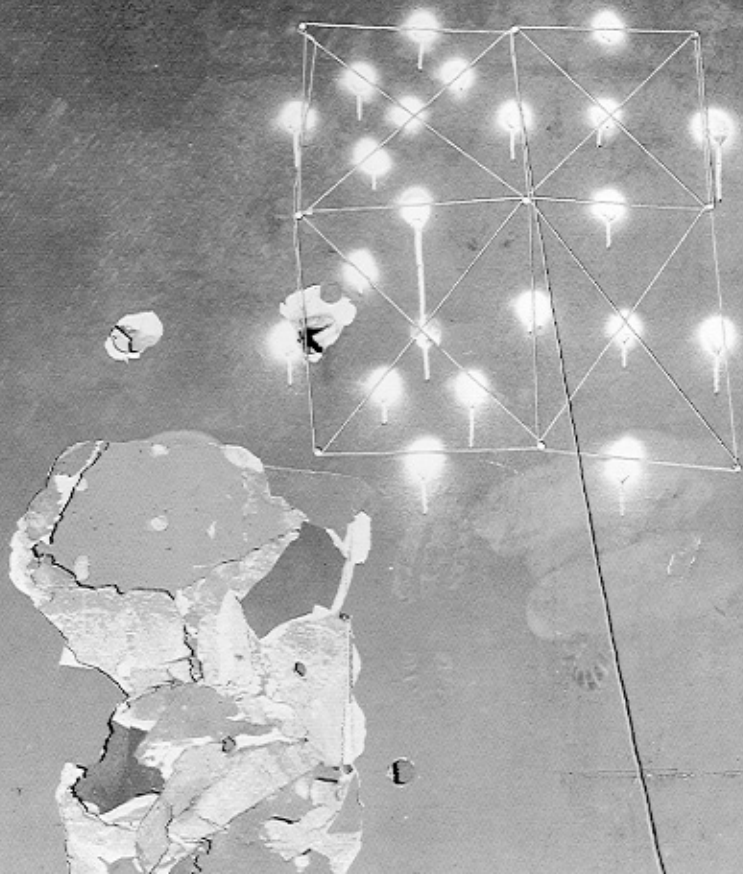


















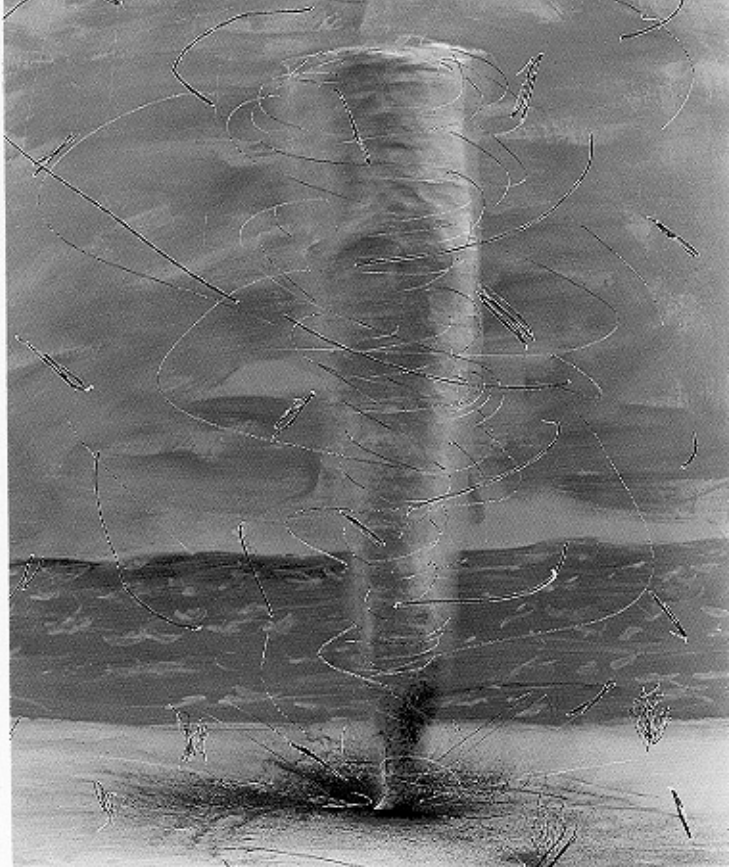


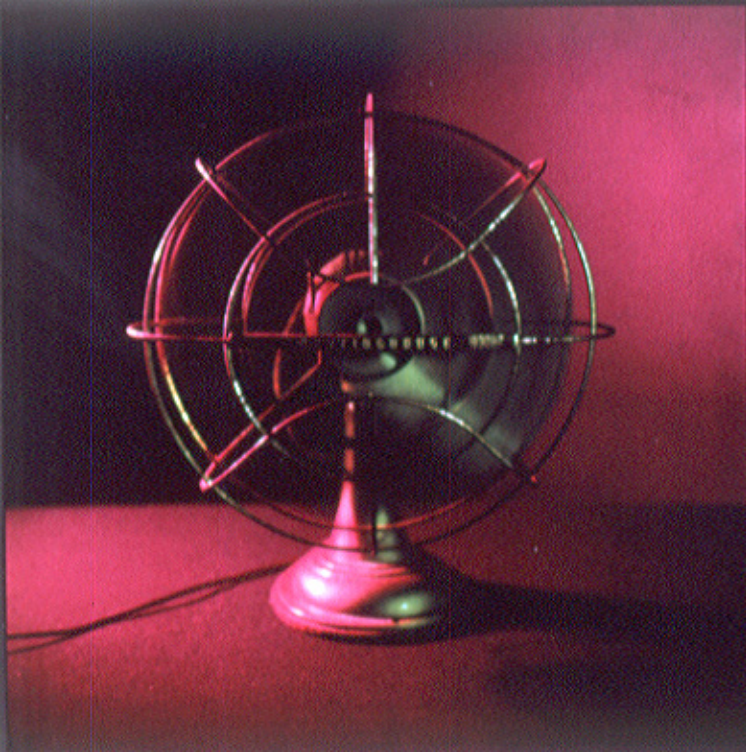




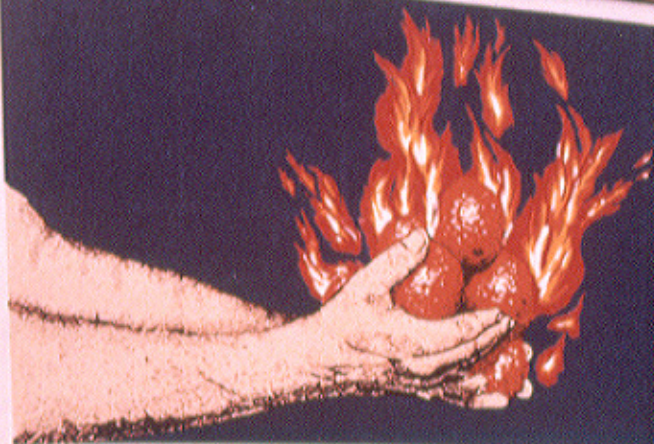
In *Destroyed Room* the knife-slashed mattress becomes the figure for something like the body of painting, embodying the picture that Wall will excavate and expose. As is well known, and as Wall has himself suggested, the central lozenge references the bed in Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapolous* (1827–28), the raft in Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819), and the female mannequin in Duchamp's *Etant donnés* (1944–66).





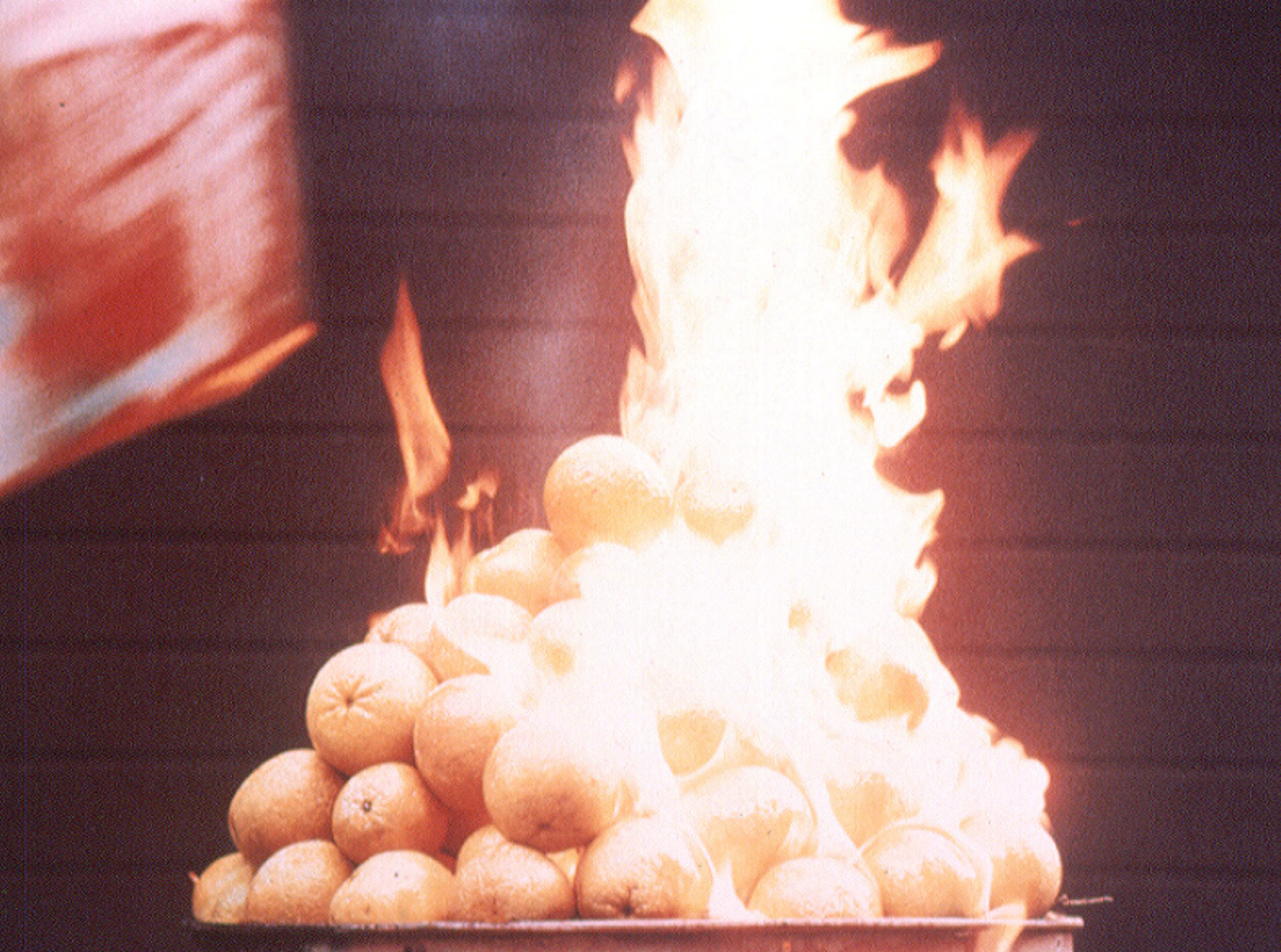


FOSTER & KLEISER



ORANGES
ON
FIRE



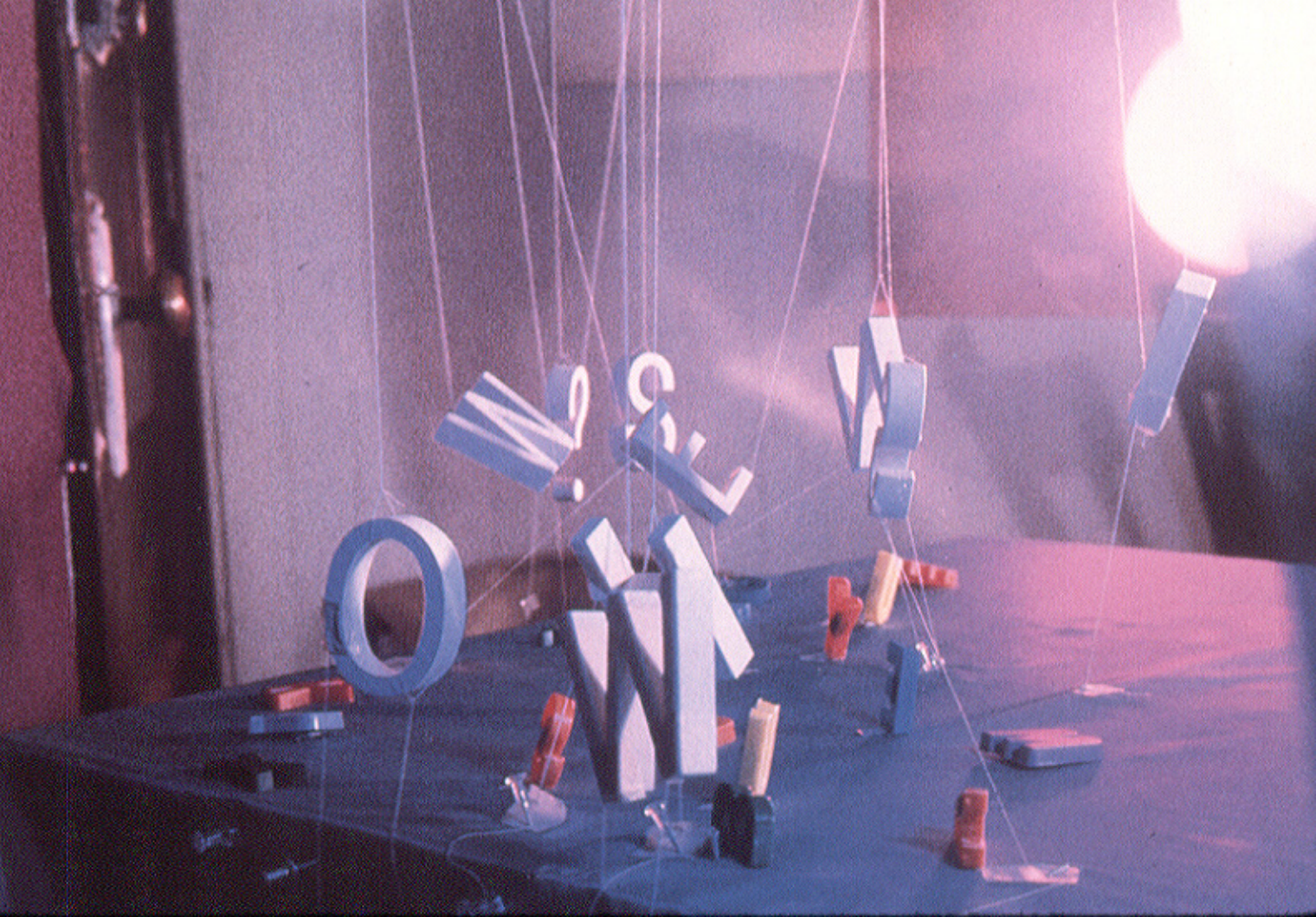


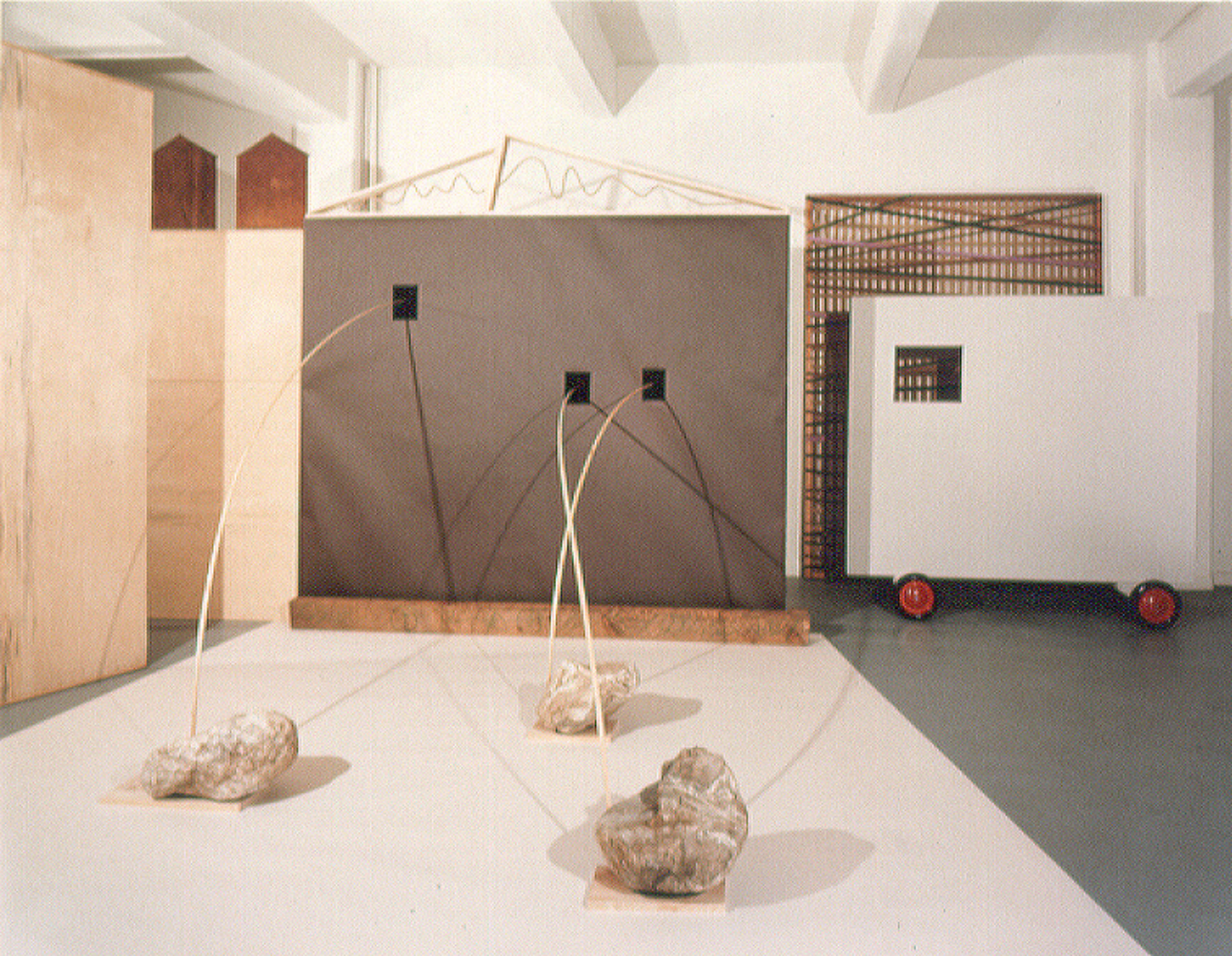
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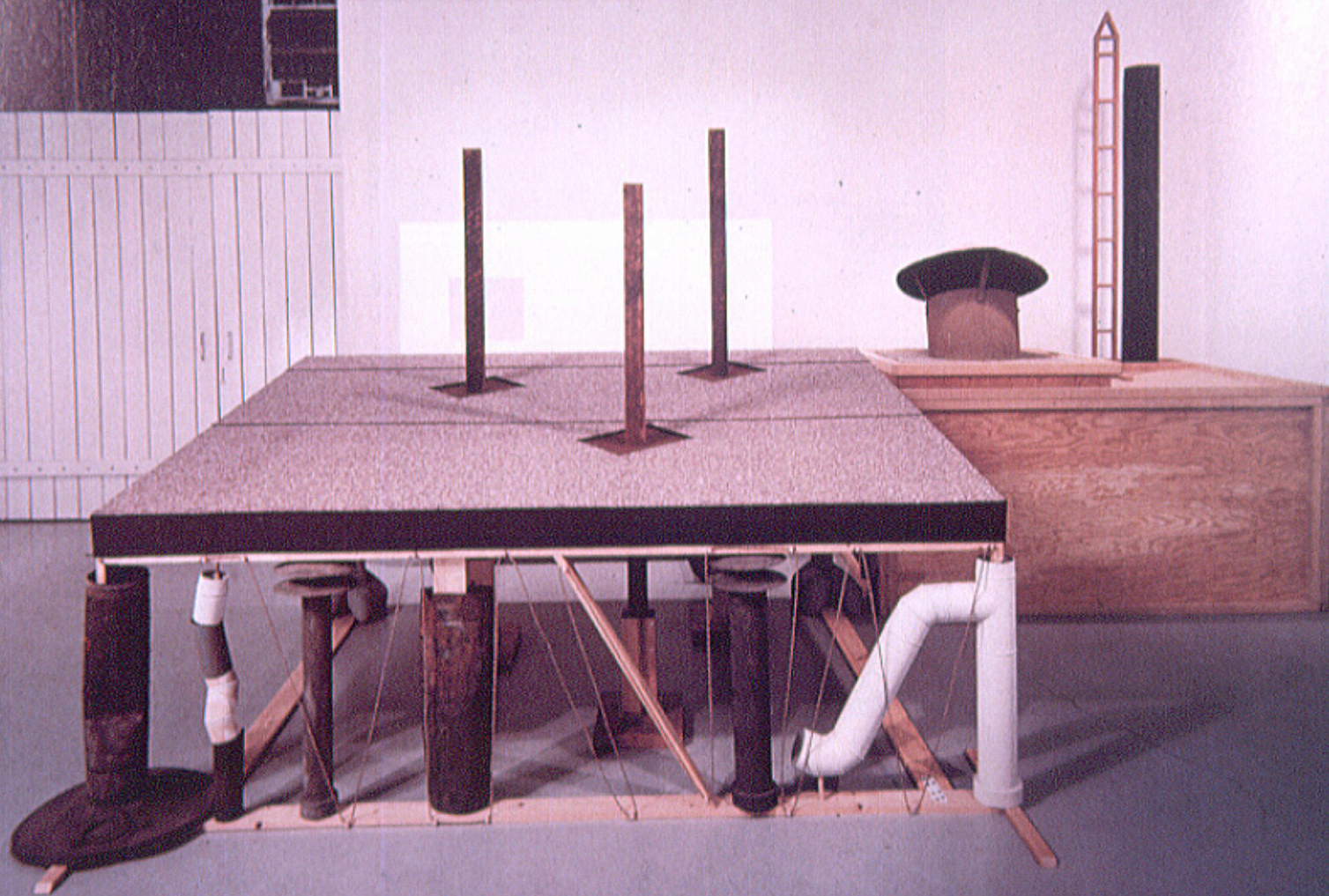
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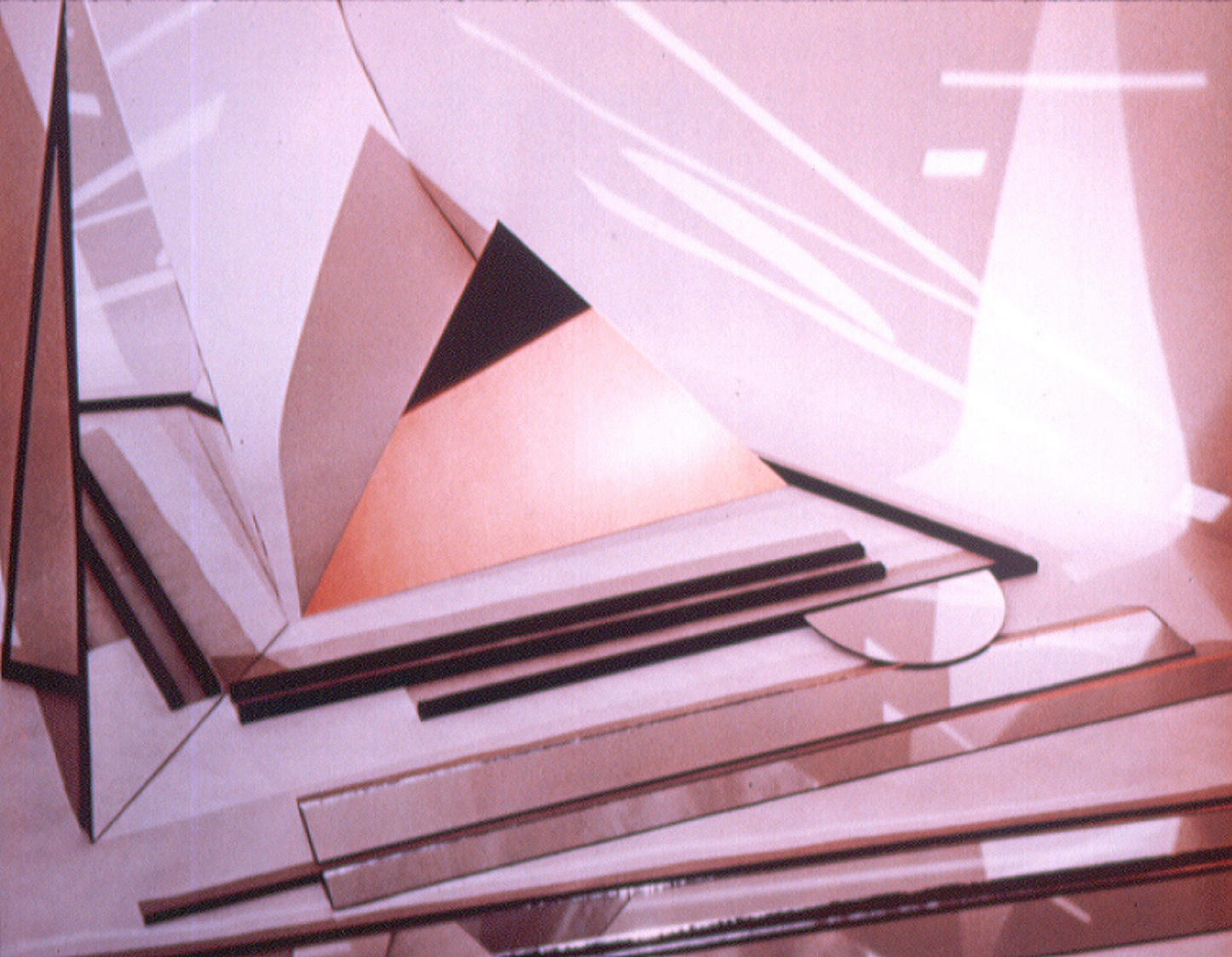


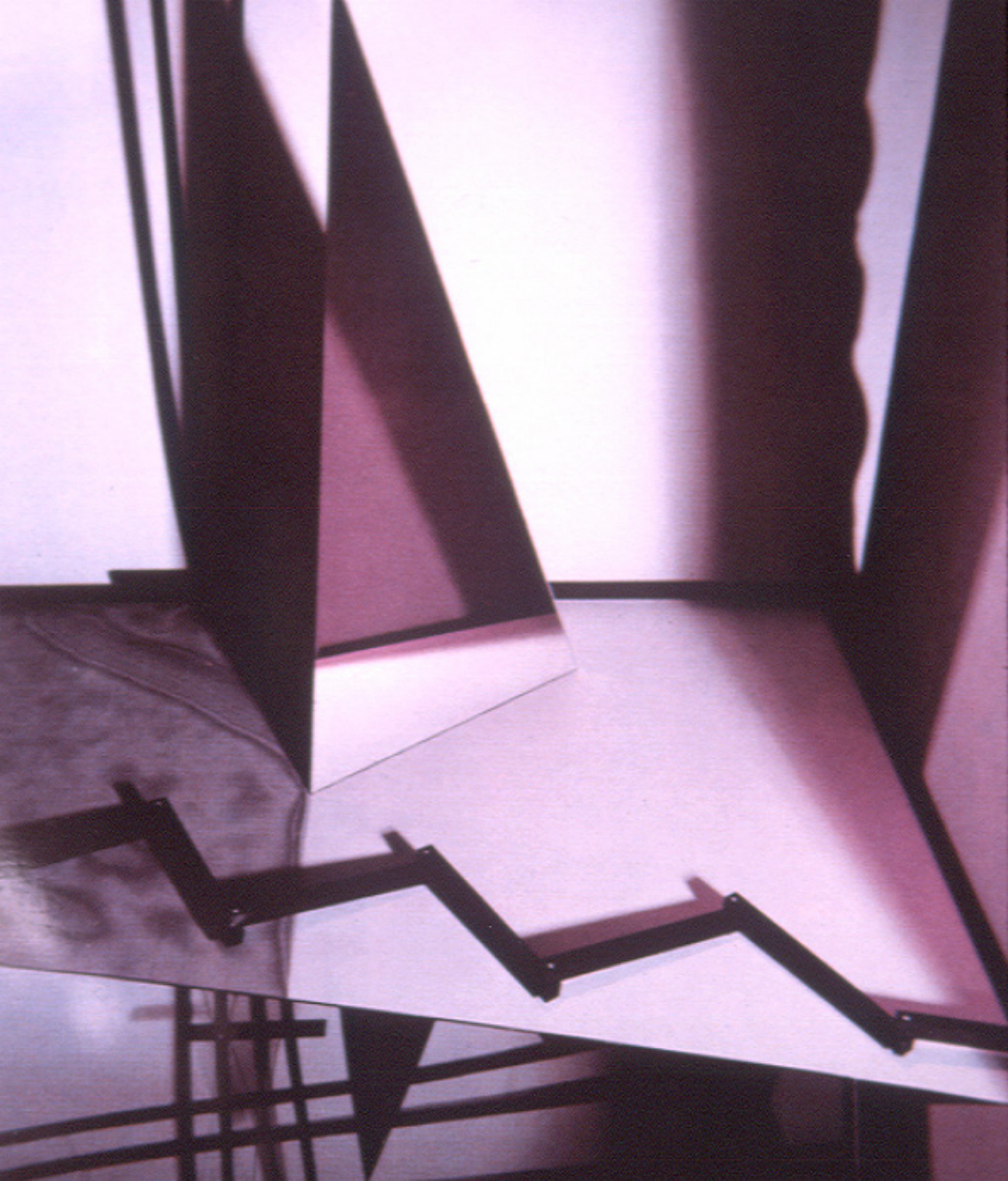














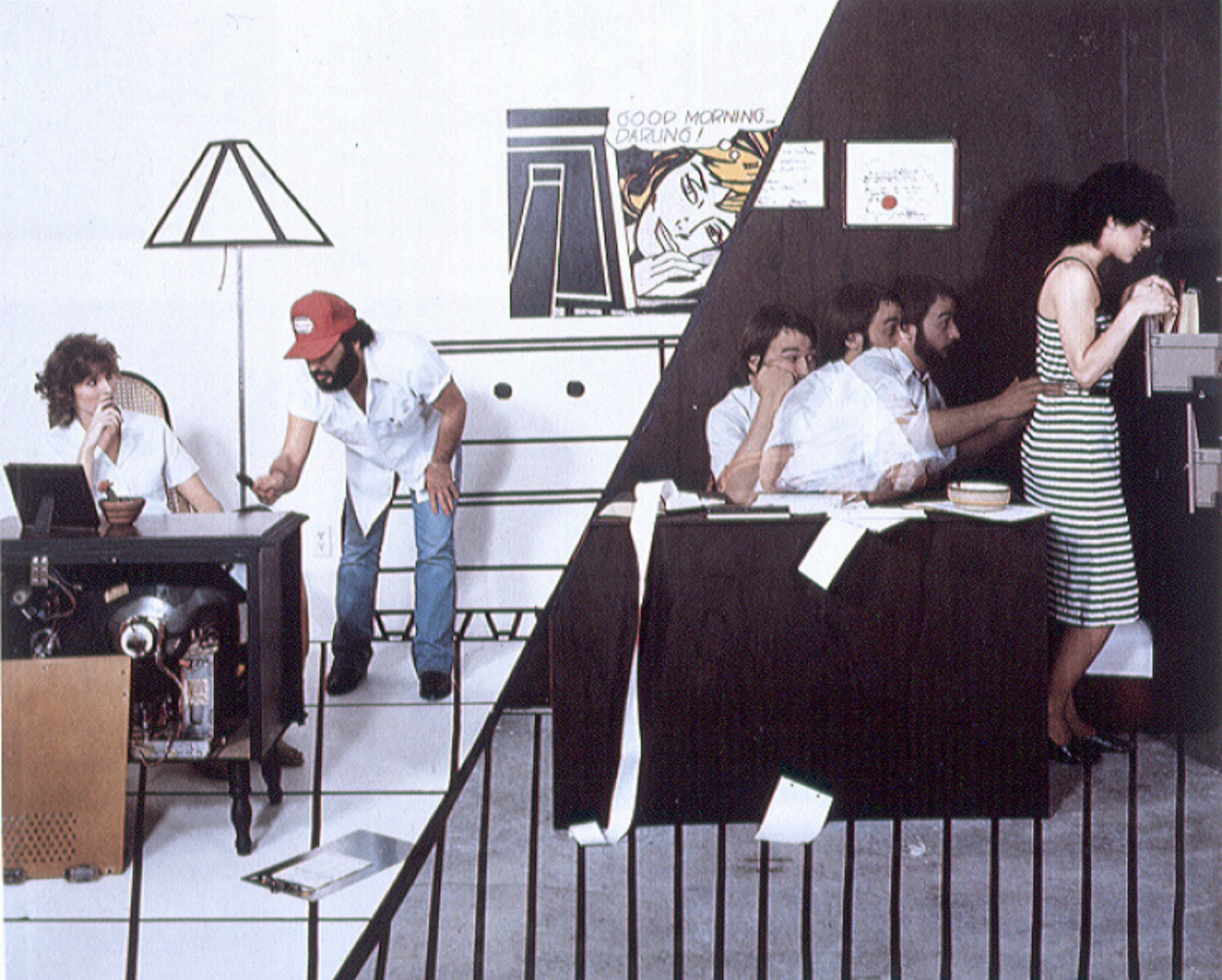
ROADSIDE GLORIES

WILLIAM CHRISTENBERRY FINDS
AN EXPRESSIONIST PARADISE IN HALE COUNTY







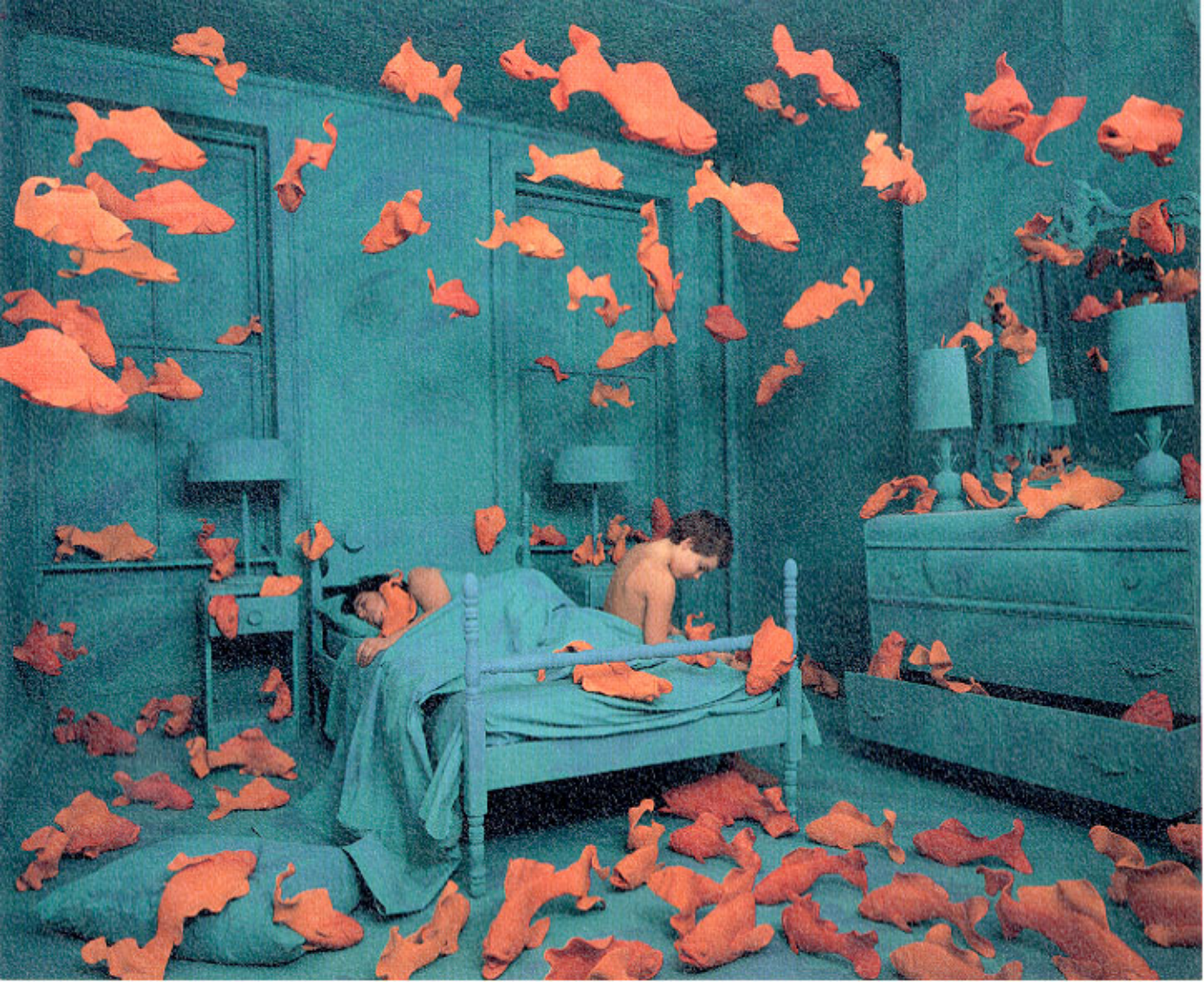


GOOD MORNING...
DARLING!



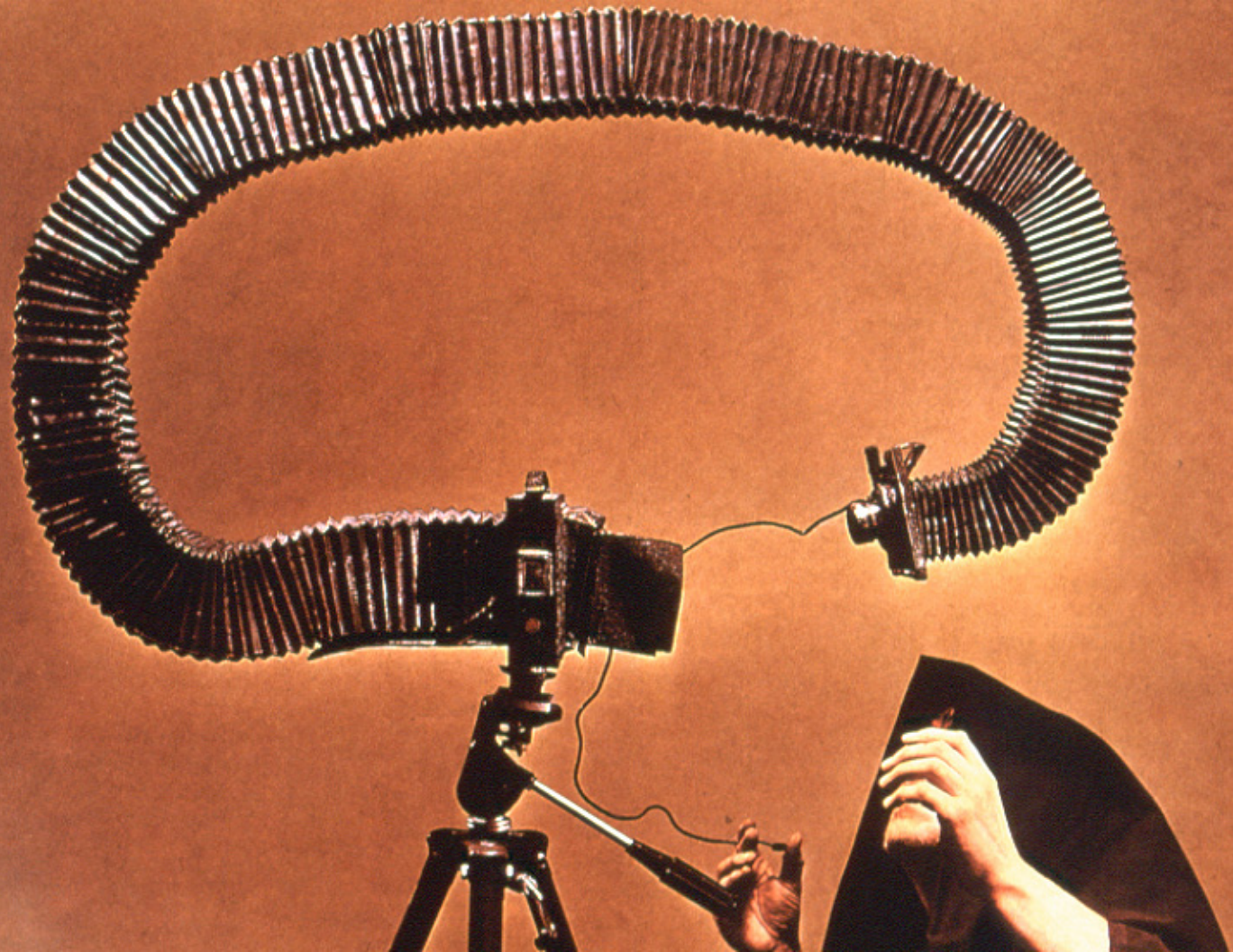














ESSAY BY RICK MOODY

TWILIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY CREWDSON



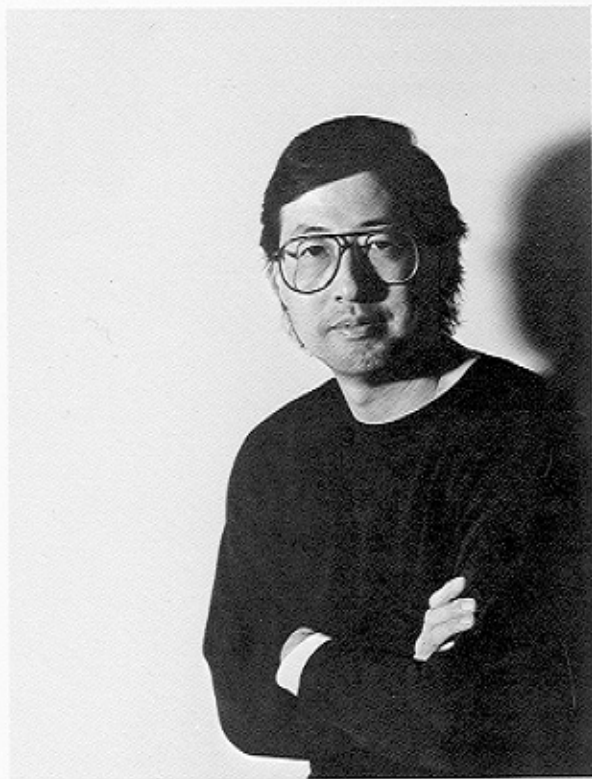
BLARNEY
STONE

SANDWICHES
DARK SPECIALS
HOT PLATES

The art of Wall, Lum and diCorcia is much more demiurgic, the presence of an author is more strongly felt. Their 'staged decisive moments' draw upon a very different context and tradition. They look back to the pictorial tradition of the tableau in history painting. And, I would argue, have lost something in the process. This is particularly evident in the quality of some of Wall's and diCorcia's tableaux, the sense of estrangement to do with that blank stare and expressionlessness of the people pictured: a sense of lack and inertia that would have been anathema to Cartier-Bresson, determined as he was to 'preserve life in the act of living.'



PATRICK
NAGATANI
AND
ANDRÉE
TRACEY



PATRICK NAGATANI
Photographer/Artist



ANDRÉE TRACEY
Painter/Artist

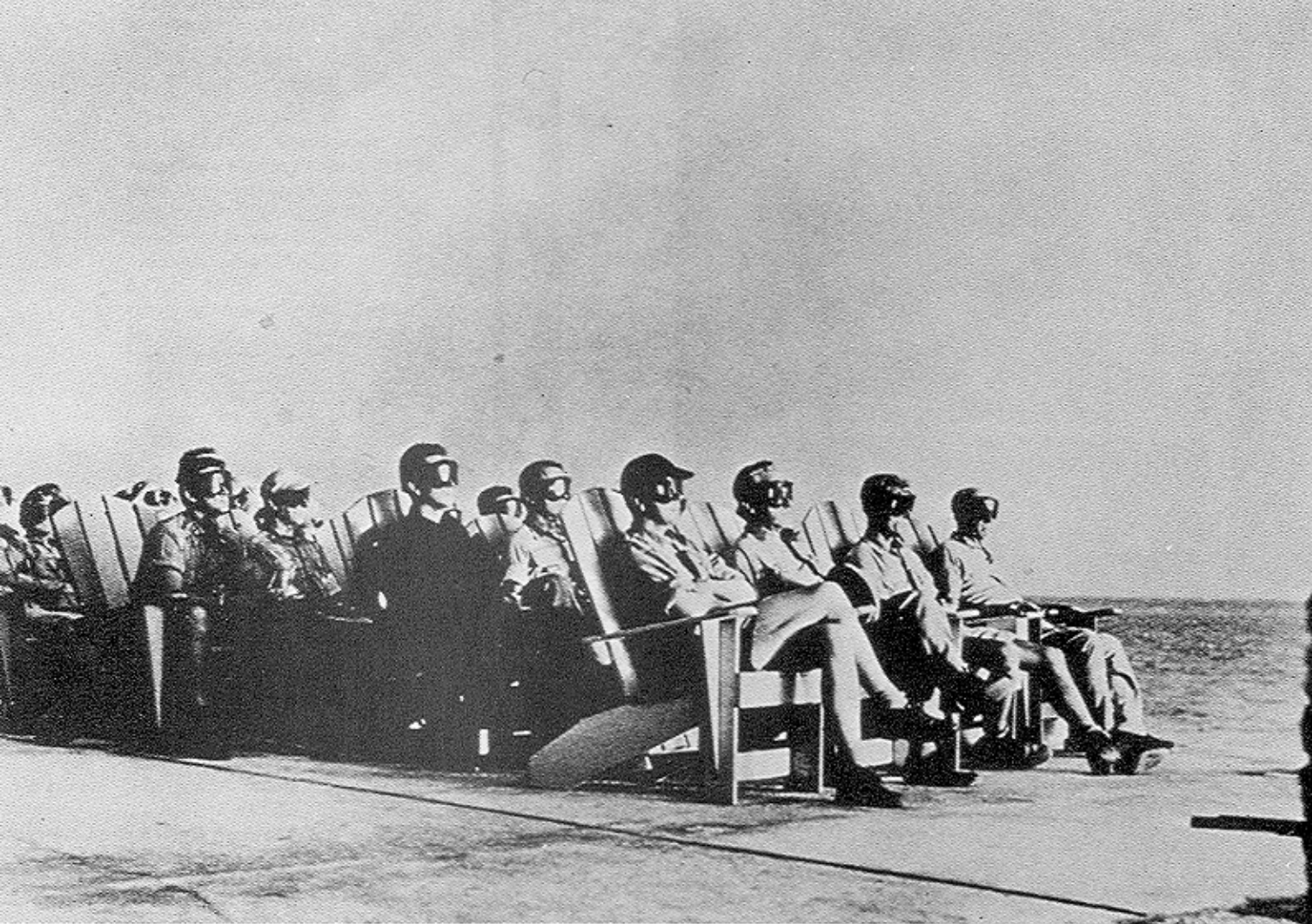












SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, CIRCA, 1944-1946



MICHAEL FRIED

WHY PHOTOGRAPHY MATTERS AS ART
AS NEVER BEFORE



Fried's claim, in brief, is that photography matters as art as never before because it has become the medium that raises the question of its own status as art most acutely. This, the argument runs, is because photography's mechanically produced (and reproduced) character – notably the causal, optical-chemical mechanisms underlying its indexicality – conspire to make the photograph resemble an object as much as, if not more than, a picture. In Fried's terms, this is an 'ontological' worry about photography per se, rather than a merely contingent worry about certain photographs, which arises as a result of the way in which photographs as a kind of image come into existence. As such, objecthood is a risk posed internally by the causal substrate of the photographic process that photographic artists must neutralize so as to secure their photographs' existence as art.

Much like minimalism, then, photography precipitates a crisis of the picture and thereby places a particular burden on the photographic artist to establish their photographs' credentials as pictures, and ultimately as art, rather than mere objects. The artists selected by Fried are thus seen to deploy various strategies for establishing their work's existence as art, many of which involve procedures quite alien to the sort of digital manipulation sometimes likened to painting with pixels. Think, for example, of Thomas Demand's idiosyncratic practice of building models of paper and cardboard to photograph, rather than photographing what his models represent directly. This is interpreted as establishing a thoroughgoing intentionality – in Fried's words, a Demand photograph is 'a wholly intended object'. Without some sign of this assurance, the photograph, much like the 'literalist' object according to 'Art and Objecthood', makes no particular demands upon viewers, who are thereby given free rein to substitute their subjective experience of the work for the meaning intended by the artist. The work, as Fried paraphrased Donald Judd, need only be 'interesting'.

Jeff Wall

Two basic types of imagery: 1) cinematographic (set up scenarios); 2) documentary (not staged). Some images Wall terms “near-documentary” (a sub-category of #1) in which he depicts “what the events are like or were like, when they passed without being photographed.” e.g., *Morning Cleaning, Mies der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999). Many images are digitally manipulated/composited.

Michael Fried refers to Wall’s images as anti-theatrical, focused concern on the everyday and increasingly using the “near-documentary” aesthetic strategy. Fried tries to link Wall’s aesthetic with high modernism’s touted anti-theatricality (see Fried’s essay: “Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday,” in *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 2007, vol. 33, no. 3).

Jeff Wall: I've been interested in computer montage for a long time, for a lot of reasons. I mean, when I was a student in London I was doing research on John Heartfield. I was interested in the dialectic between montage and so-called 'straight' photography. I really do think that photography only gained its aesthetic or artistic identity through its re-reflection back through the cinema. I really think that, historically speaking, photography as an art form only became comprehensible – or the problematics of it as an art form became comprehensible – to itself when the cinema emerged as this large construct in which every possible photographic means could be validly put into play. From the very beginning of film you have this idea of artificial, illusionistic trickery and yet, on the other side, the most direct use of the lens, its indexical aspect, to create the so-called document. That fusion which you see emerge from the origin of cinema, and which became more and more sophisticated in the 1920s and 1930s, I think had a beneficial effect on photography's own concept of itself

Fried explicitly argues that it is museum photography that has renewed the Western pictorial tradition that was once borne in painting, and that Wall was among the most important figures to have grasped that this was photography's proper task.

Wall essay, in which he argues that Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans and Brassai were making art by imitating photojournalism; this is a key claim for Wall, who cannot accept that reportage can be art, but would have come as news to all of them. See “Marks of Indifference”, *Selected Essays*, p. 145.



Plate 3 *Outburst*, Jeff Wall, 1989 (Courtesy of Jeff Wall)

Plate 4 *Mimic*, Jeff Wall, 1982 (Courtesy of Jeff Wall)







N. KOOTENAY ST

Working-class decline and defeat may be read into these images, which were made as neoliberal economics began its terrible unfolding. *Mimic*, for example, as Walter Benn Michaels points out, is not merely a reconstruction of a casual racist gesture, but should be set within the context of the wave of immigration to Canada from the 1960s onwards of well-educated Asians, who drove the existing working class to further economic disadvantage. *Abundance* (1985) sees two elderly women gathering cast-off clothes from a box marked 'Free', one of whom regards the camera in a self-aware fashion, displaying the many layers of clothes she has donned as an absurd sign of her need. To render such subjects in this cool, epic form speaks of an ironic detachment. *The Thinker* (1986), Wall's first work to contain elements of fantasy, is an explicit reworking of Dürer's proposed monument to the defeat of the Peasants' Revolt.⁵¹ The figure, a man in a suit and work boots, sits on a stump and pieces of concrete, overlooking a rail yard, the wheat silo of a long-established co-operative, and in the distance the towers of Vancouver. The man is of an age that, had he lost his job, he would be unlikely to find work except of the most unskilled, casualized and low-paid kind. As in Dürer's print, a sword protrudes from his back.

I don't like the idea of having extra-aesthetic interest in my subjects, as if I am interested in them socially. When I began, I was under the illusion that I did have those interests. I grew up in the 60s and 70s, amid the counter-culture and the New Left, and I still believe a lot of those things, but they don't really apply to my work. I once thought they applied to my work, but learned that they don't.

The change may be registered through Wall's extraordinary urge to remake some of his early works, in particular *Eviction Struggle* (1988), which has been digitally recast using the original working shots under the new title *An Eviction* (2004). The lightboxes were already held in collections so the owners had to agree to the replacement of their old works for new. In the later version, Wall made extensive changes to the placing of figures and cars, and lessened the photograph's tonal contrast. Most significantly, and in line with the change of title, Wall removes two figures who do not merely glance at the scene but watch steadily from a distance, and who may be read as officials or landlords overseeing the eviction.⁸⁴ So we move from a piece that was a long landscape view of class conflict, to one that may more easily be read as a meditation on human imperfection, in which power relations are toned down and 'struggle' is lost.





The tension between an apparently radical description of the social consequences of neoliberalism and the spectacularly commodified character of Wall's work has evaporated. In its place, we see a celebration of what the artist takes to be democratic life as it is lived. A clear example is *Dressing Poultry* (2007), which shows women workers preparing slaughtered chickens to be eaten. One turns to the camera, laughing as if enjoying a joke, and despite the mundane clutter of the shed and the bloodied labour, the scene is almost a cheery one. Whitman recommends variety and freedom as the founding principles of his vision of democracy, and 'the full play of human nature to expand itself in numberless and even conflicting directions'.

Certainly such work has not been undertaken by Wall, who seems to put more distance between himself and the legacy of conceptual art by the day. This is perhaps most pointedly indicated by the *Stereo* controversy, namely Wall's decision to alter *Stereo* (1980), so that what was originally a diptych (comprising separate image and text panels) is now exhibited without the text panel. This decision has been interpreted as emblematic of Wall's decision to distance himself from his early engagement with conceptual art.

This assurance was furthered by Wall's use of digital montage. It allowed detailed control over every element of the photographic scene, and broke the ironclad association of photography with the recording of contingency. As Wall put it, writing of his first digital picture, *The Stumbling Block* (1991), digitization furthered a 'visual poetry or prose poetry' which conflicts with the indexical aspect of photography. While very close readings of paintings in terms of the artist's intentions, and the interplay of a depicted subject and the form of that depiction—the stock-in-trade of art history, the in-house literature of the museum—would be nonsensical if used to describe a snapshot, they can with some plausibility be applied to a photography over which the artist has such great control.

It is perhaps a distinguishing feature of these artists that while all explore strategies which seem designed to question photography as the guarantor of 'truth' and 'reality', the work often subtly traverses the borderline between an obviously constructed or manipulated subject, on the one hand, and our continuing belief as to the veracity of the photograph on the other.



In Wall's most ambitious and complex works, such as *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* of 1993, the image is assembled from numerous photographic elements, digitally montaged, much as a nineteenth-century history painting would have been brought together from many individual figure studies. (Indeed, Wall's work appears to bear the traces of that technique, showing a slightly awkward interrelation of figures

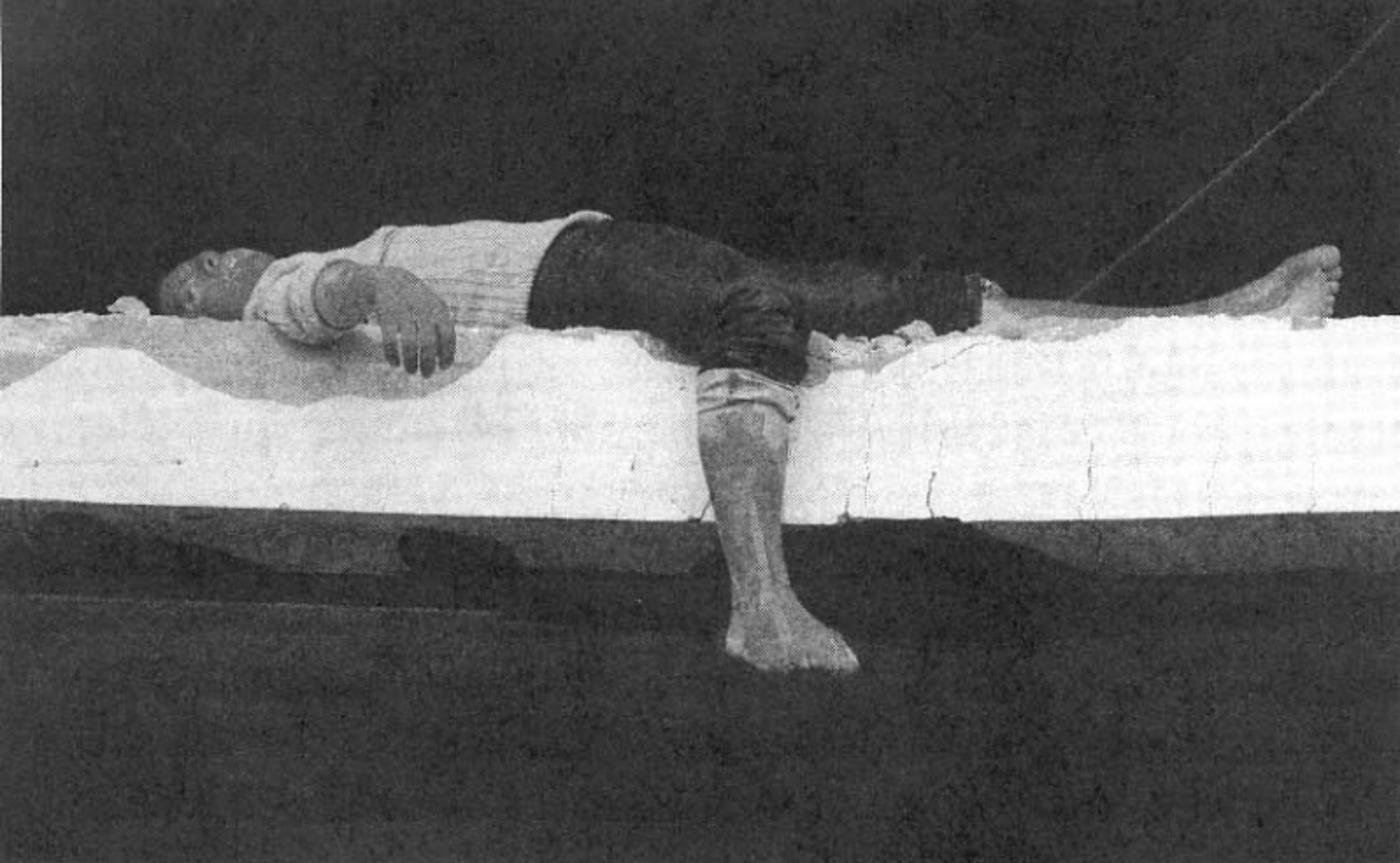
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spectator realises the artificiality of the scene but nonetheless is struck, I hope, by the certain vividness and also by the fact that it is technically accurate, to a certain extent realistic, but at the same time is made available only by a kind of technical illusionism. This meditation on the subject of dismemberment, of war, is made in a form of reflection, not directly. I don't know whether it would be as interesting to try and make it as if it were pure documentary because that, to me, is a direct treatment of violence and violence is only interesting, artistically, when it becomes very manneristic. One of the things that is going on in culture is this incredibly aestheticised, nuanced, stylistic, manneristic treatment of violence which, to me, proves many things.



The shard of truth that these views contain lies in the structural necessity of art photography to oppose the mass industry of image production, just as high art in general must distinguish itself from mass culture. Nevertheless, Wall's own views on this issue have changed dramatically, and he used to be happier to point to sources for his work in film, television and even advertising and commercial display.⁷⁰ The first lightbox, *The Destroyed Room*, took Delacroix as a source, as we have seen, but also indicated its commercial origins by reflecting on the artificiality of the room ensembles made for shop-windows. This piece of 'built disorder' was shown in a gallery window, facing the street, just like a shop display.⁷¹ These days, however, the artist does not want viewers to think about anything other than high art. In a reply to a question about whether *Dead Troops Talk* may be related to television or newspaper imagery, Wall said:

Just because I made a war picture doesn't mean that people automatically or necessarily have to associate it with media imagery. That presumes that media imagery is a total horizon of everyone's experience. Those presumptions have now reached the stage of orthodoxy. That is an unfree way of conceiving how individuals experience works of art, unfree and unrealistic. Conformist, institutionalized, academic, textbook and suffocating.

Wall goes on to say that art is an independent experience of the world, and that cultural studies and immersion in mass media threaten the Western canon.

In Fried's

book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, analysis regularly makes way for the mysticism of a timeless engagement with the autonomous picture. Of Wall's photograph of a cleaner washing windows at the reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe's famous Barcelona Pavilion (*Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona, 1999*), and the way in which Wall had staged and constructed the scene, Fried writes that it is:

a composition of great pictorial and intellectual sophistication, one that exploits the 'magic' of absorption to induce the viewer to accept as verisimilar something that he or she 'knows' to be improbable at best.

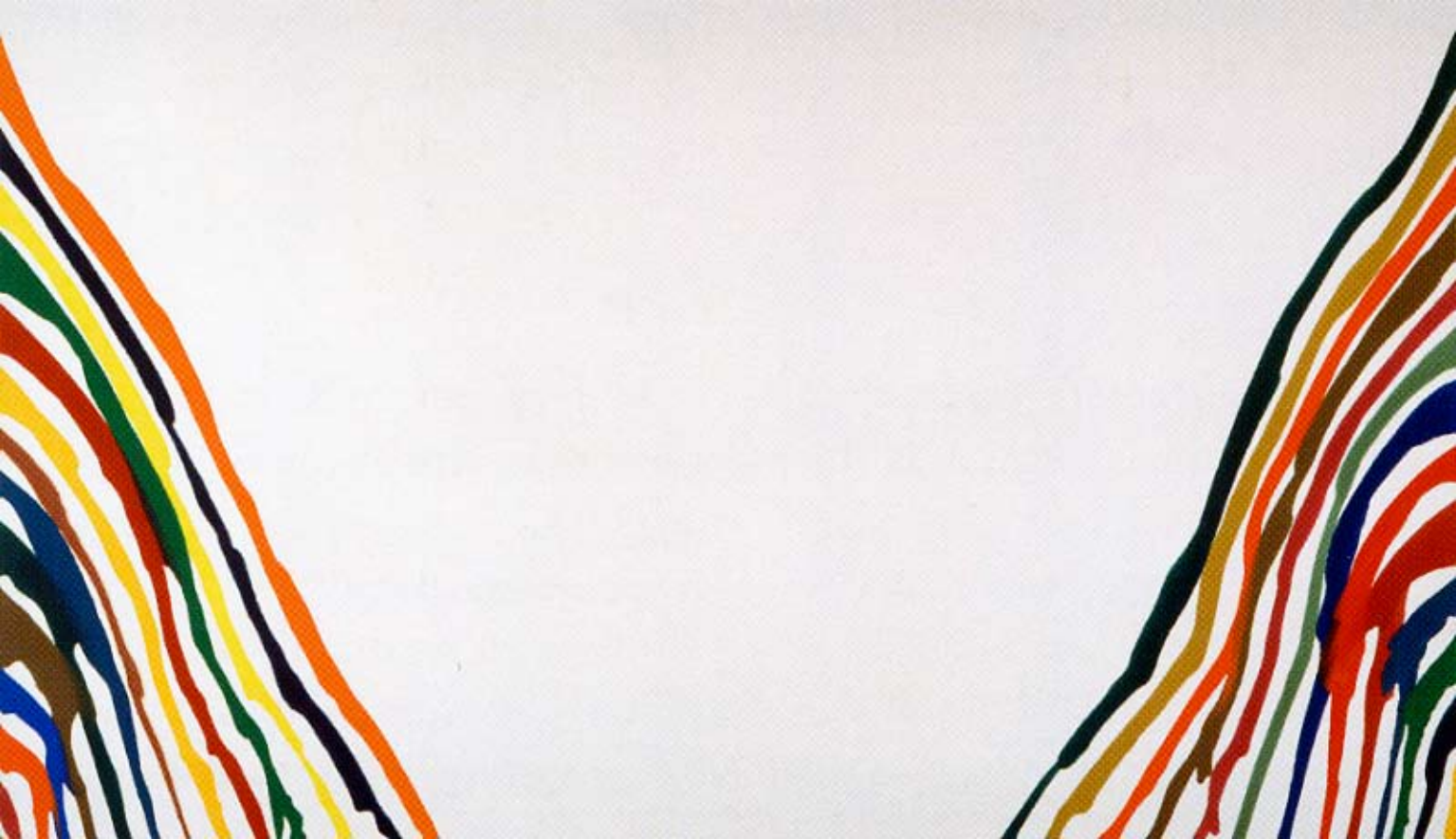


FIGURE 6. Jeff Wall, *Morning Cleaning*, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona, 1999. Transparency in 40 light-box, 187 × 351 cm. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Ugliness is associated with evil in the Western tradition, as Wall himself points out, and so by implication beauty with virtue, here with mundane daily activities, often those that imply care for a person or an object—in particular, cleaning. It is a concentration on the overlooked tasks of improvement and maintenance in a conservative art that tries to bring to expression the striving for modest improvement, and to give it beautiful form and coherence. This can be seen most clearly in the ambitious and complex montage *Morning Cleaning*.

The cleaner, as Wall

produces him in the picture, is absorbed in his task as we viewers should be in Wall's spectacular image. He is entirely, if not happily, lost in the elimination of suds from glass, and may be compared to those depictions of farm workers in eighteenth-century England, defined by their fixed place in the natural hierarchical order.⁸² The frame of a modern monument takes the place of landscape here, but the message is similar—of virtuous labour, ordinary but necessary, that plays its part in the maintenance of the 'imperfect order of democracy'. Art lovers, who like to think of themselves as complex creatures, may view it as a pastoral scene, in their sophisticated and elite appreciation of simple virtues.



This combination of epic scale and staged incident is only the most obvious of the distinctive features of Wall's work. Another is its relation to painting in his exploration of pictorial genre, and to making manifestly artificial, often strained, reworkings of traditional pictures in photography. While the works that made Wall's reputation are apparently mundane scenes of everyday life, they are posed in such a way as to evoke early modernist painting, the usual reference points being Courbet and Manet.



The contrast and chromatic vibrancy of the slide greatly exceed those of any print, and Wall's big pictures have long been among the most immediately impressive weapons in the museum's photographic arsenal: these huge, illusionistic photographs of apparently everyday contemporary scenes are highly readable, in the sense that their every element is clearly identifiable, and their combination suggests a narrative. Wall rejects the idea that the lightboxes are in and of themselves critical objects pitched against advertising. Rather, he says, they are 'a supreme way of making a dramatic photographic image'. He was among the first artists in the new wave of museum photographers to realize the spectacular potential of the massive enlargement.

Working usually from a newsworthy picture he has found in the press or on the Internet, Demand reconstructs the scene in his studio—full size and in color—using stiff, coated paper that he and his assistants cut, fold, curl, bend and otherwise shape. People who were depicted in the original image are omitted. Following weeks of work building the set, Demand makes his own photograph of it with a Sinar camera. In L.A. last fall, he replicated a scene from a cell phone photograph taken in the control room of Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant shortly after the 2011 tsunami hit.



But when Demand studies a photograph in order to re-create its subject, his goal is to eliminate detail: "The omissions are very important to me," he avers. Here is where he departs from Holmes, for Demand's destruction of the set after he's photographed it is less significant than the deconstruction of the subject matter entailed in the way he built it.

He does this the hard way, not only reconstructing the scene at full size but often doing masses of old-fashioned research on the event that made the setting significant. He believes such research is crucial in determining the point of view his camera should take toward the scene. In order to comprehend how his photograph will neutralize the sensationalism and voyeurism invited by the original photograph, he needs to escape the loop of facile access in which the digital age traps us. "Things must be slowed down," he has said, "and for me that involves making something with my hands."

practices of photography, finding its reference points instead in the relatively more 'internal' world of compositional reference to other pictures. Images which appear to reference real things photographed in the external world - real kitchens, real bathrooms and so on - are in fact photographs of studio-built, interior sets, and their reference point is really to other photographs. Thus an embeddedness in the external world, which was one of the things taken as most fundamental to photography in its twentieth-century histories, is precisely what Demand's work appears to have abandoned.

In an essay published in *Artforum* in 2005, Fried argued that Demand's work rescues photography from chance – the obliteration of authorial inscription which it always threatens – by restoring to it 'intendedness'. Every single thing in the photograph is clearly artificial, made out of coloured paper by the artist, and therefore clearly all a sign of the artist's will. Building on this, Fried argues, Demand's photographs 'thematize or indeed allegorize intendedness as such' in a way that is, for Fried, the hallmark of a serious art medium.

They call attention to another characteristic of Demand's work, the way that the light tends to be eerily pervasive and soothing. The slight luster of the paper components gives each scene a calm quality, that's disconcerting in pictures, like this one, where mayhem has occurred.

In Demand's view, the visual information glut diminishes our ability even to distinguish one event from another. As new ones replace those seen yesterday, all seem equally inconsequential. His work raises, as he puts it, "the question of whether these news reports really serve any purpose other than making us numb to the world around us."



Demand is just one example of an artist/photographer—other obvious examples include Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall—who has achieved prominence and whose work generates interest because process and concept can be located in the work that precedes the moment a photograph is taken. The photograph is simply the incidental conclusion, the polished index of a more complex back-story to be researched and unpacked by the viewer/critic. In this sense, the photograph is not independently productive of meaning, but is rather the document that records and implies the extended process behind the image.

though they could be read as a proper engagement with thoughtful contemporary art photography, they also look a bit like paintings. You could put them in your 19th century galleries, or you could put them next to Pictorialism, and somehow it could create seamless history. And it did mark a point at which photography, really interesting contemporary art photography, could look very coherent within a history of photography.





KODAK THREE-POINT REFLECTION GUIDE



In total this concern with photographic production and distribution, as well as its materiality, amounts to a second-order of self-reflexivity, or proposes an expanded frame for thinking about photographic materiality. It is important, I think, to reflect on photography in this way, because as a result the emphasis shifts away from two concepts that are paramount in the critical discourse around photography: the idea of the photographer-author; and the importance of the decisive moment. (*Afterall* 16, 2007)

Much of the photography we see in prestigious museums and lavish publications is decorative self-indulgence. Elegant, knowing riffs on the history of painting fill our commercial galleries and bring the highest prices at auction. Such work looks like a symptom of unraveling, a loss of vital purpose. Shouldn't photography—which began as a hyperdetailed record of our shared visible world—provide a close, critical examination of that world, the kind of jarring irritant able to rouse viewers out of a complacent, forgetful slumber, and into a wakeful regard of *what is?*

Photographs have already lost their bite, and now exist principally to reassure us, in much the same way oil paintings do.

One of the great ironies of the early 21st century museum world is that just as photography is losing its potency, curatorial positions dedicated to the form are sprouting like mushrooms. It is not a coincidence. Declaring a medium worthy of serious institutional attention in its own right is something of a death knell, because it is only when something is no longer dangerous that we clutch it to our collective bosom, like a giant teddy bear.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS BEING IN STORE FOR THE MEDIUM? (Todd Papageorge)

I'm not particularly sanguine about it all: après Photoshop, le deluge. At the very least, photography as an independent creative medium will be remembered—or, more likely, casually dismissed—as a quaint niche-practice of the past. Art, art-process, and artists will have finally absorbed it utterly: if any photograph can be anything at all (given the ability of digital manipulation to make it so), what logical relation will such a picture bear to those produced within the severe and limited practice of classic, “conventional” photography? What an end, Photography finally Art!

It was as if, in the wake of the troubling recognition of photography's malleability in the hands of instrumental use and its critical reappraisal by artists and critics in the sixties and seventies, the contemporary production of photographs required turning back to a time before avant-gardist debates or postmodernist dismantling—back to something akin to the Pictorialism of salon painting and the hearth of the Natural History Museum.

QUESTIONNAIRE / DEBORAH BRIGHT

WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGES THAT PHOTOGRAPHY HAS UNDERGONE IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

The change in its status as an art object that rivals painting for scale and sheer spectacle. It is no longer an intimate, democratic, documentary medium as far as art is concerned. Now we have to entertain, dazzle with our craft, and blow people away with big production numbers.