

# Sun Pictures to Photoconceptualism

Roy Arden

## Introduction

This exhibition presents over three hundred photographic artworks dating from 1844 to 1981, all graciously lent by thirty different private collectors. While many of these collectors are directly involved in the visual arts, others work in a variety of professions. While one collector has provided nearly over one third of the works here, others have lent just one or two. Yet, all of these acts of generosity were important to the success of the exhibition.

This exhibition's organisational structure combines both chronological and stylistic considerations. Its structure should not be read as intending an authoritative history. Art is always resistant to easy classifications, the categorical divisions employed here should be seen as aids for interpretation rather than absolutes. This selection was made from locally available works and so could not represent an adequate or complete account. It is instead a celebration of photographic art, collecting and community.

Photography has been largely responsible for the democratization of art's reception through multiple editions and publications. *Sun Pictures to Photoconceptualism* attempts to reflect this ongoing relation between the unique, auratic object and mass-produced, usually printed, forms of photographic art. Vernacular and commercial forms of photography have been an inseparable aspect of the development of photographic art. Ideas about what constitutes a work of artistic photography are always changing. Pictures made for strictly instrumental purposes have often been later admitted into the art canon. With a few exceptions, this exhibition has focused on intentional efforts at photographic art for purely practical reasons.

Photography has been central to Vancouver art since the nineteen-sixties. It is intended that *Sun Pictures to Photoconceptualism* will add to the wide array of efforts aimed at providing a context for contemporary photographic art in this place.

## Sun Pictures

There were many involved in the technical invention of photography and debates continue today about who was the true originator of the medium. Consensus generally points first to Niepce and then Daguerre, who entered into a partnership with the former and continued his work after his death. Daguerre's tiny, unique, and precious daguerreotypes were the first practical fixed images produced by photographic means, but his direct-positive process would not permit multiple copies or enlargement and was limited in application. This exhibition begins with photographs by the Englishman William H. Fox Talbot, the inventor of the negative-positive process. It was Fox Talbot's notion, to make a second, positive photograph from an original negative that permitted photography to become what we understand it as today.

In his 'sun pictures' displayed in this exhibition, we see evidence of two aspects that marked the earliest photographs. One was the domestic, or 'close at hand' subject matter; the first cameras were cumbersome devices, and so the first subjects were often still lifes, portraits of family and people close to the photographer and the buildings and landscapes nearby. The second aspect was the immediate recourse to old pictorial conventions and genres. Painting was the visual language of the time and it was not immediately possible to fully comprehend the ways that photography might expand visual language. Instead, Talbot's *Loch Katrine* (1845) speaks of the tradition of the picturesque and Hill & Adamson's

1845 *The Fisher Lassies*, despite its proto-documentary intent, transforms a group of working women into a genre picture. Rather than exploring new worlds, the old world and its old order were reproduced.

Many of the first photographers, such as D.O. Hill, were themselves painters and practised photography as a new tool with which to continue an old art, rather than something that might destroy that old art and its very foundations. Hippolyte Bayard, another contender for the title of 'inventor of photography' made many staged self-portraits. His rustic *In the Garden* (1844) is not so very different in its aesthetic strategy from a contemporary work by Jeff Wall or Cindy Sherman.

The value of the photograph as a document was also readily apparent. It could be argued that the invention of Cartesian perspective was tied to the need for a rational language for architecture and that photography is a product of the science and art of perspectival rendering. Looking at John W.G. Gutch's c.1850 views of two mansions it's clear that no hand-made picture can compete with the objective vision of the lens. Photography would be of use not just to artists, but also to industry and commerce. While Gutch's pictures might arguably be reduced to early real-estate photos, we are still in awe of the seemingly magical phenomena of 'drawing with light'. As with so many early photographs, whether intended as art or not, the careful description afforded by large negatives, slow exposures and serious intention, produced images that remain a reference for the best practitioners of today.

### **The Spell of Personality**

In Hill & Adamson's portraits *Horatio McCulloch or Handyside Ritchie & Wm. Henning*, the poses continue the aesthetic and social conventions of painted portraiture. In the nineteenth century, photography's rise spelled doom for the business of portrait painting. For a fraction of the cost, likenesses could be obtained that made up for their lack of painterly charm with indisputable veracity. The craft magic of the *beaux arts* or the hand-crafted was exchanged for the uncanny aura of the indexical trace. The cheaper cost of photo portraits made them available to almost everyone and millions were produced, but a hierarchy of quality was immediately established. Probably the most important of the first portrait photographers was Nadar. Nadar was an inventor, entrepreneur and balloonist who had previously been a publisher of mass-produced caricatures of French statesmen, artists and celebrities of the day. Not unlike a Karsh or Robert Mapplethorpe, he would make his reputation with portraits of the famous to make his fortune from those who weren't.

Employing 'Rembrandt lighting', Nadar's Woodburytype portrait of *Gustave Droz*, published in the serial '*Galerie Contemporain*' (1876-84) is a picture of a 'great man'. Other important photographers who published in this serial included Carjat, Petit and Adam-Salomon. Their portraits of the colonialist Faidherbe, the authors Erckmann & Chatrian and the novelist & dramatist Octave Feuillet exhibited here, are sharp focused and fine grained. Julia Margaret Cameron preferred the 'mystical' effects of soft focus and blur. Her 1867 portraits of the astronomer Herschel and the scholar Carlyle didn't require poses and props to inform us of the sitter's greatness. Instead, the aura of genius radiates a glowing light. Cameron's Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is most evident when she depicts women. Unlike the men, whose genius is sufficient to behold, the women are transformed into madonnas and angels — as in *Ellen Terry at the Age of Sixteen* or *The Seven Stars*.

### **Bringing Home the World**

No time was wasted in using the camera to bring home pictures of the distant and exotic — for both enlightening and entertaining purposes.

The 'Grand Tour', where moneyed Europeans would travel to the older parts of the world to see the ancient monuments of civilization, or the wonders of nature, was now possible without leaving one's armchair. Even if they could manage it, few would want to get as close to the crater of an active volcano as Giorgio Sommer's albumen print *Vesuvius* (c.1880), could bring them. These photographs were often bound in albums which one could purchase at a site of pilgrimage like Rome or Cairo. One could also forego the exhausting trip and buy it at home in London or New York.

Photographs such as Robert McPherson's view of the Roman Coliseum or the photo of statues at Luxor by an anonymous photographer, could alternatively fuel fantasies of exotic worlds or be employed as aids in the study of the history of architecture. The clarity of Samuel Bourne's c.1863–66 *Vishnu Pud & Other Temples, Benares*, is astonishing enough to be described as hallucinatory, one needn't have the slightest interest in India or architecture to appreciate it, yet every detail is visible for those with more scholarly interests. Foreign peoples were also pictured for a variety of reasons, as images of the exotic 'other', Felice A. Beato's c.1860 hand coloured photo of Japanese women smoking a pipe, or Pascal Sebah's *Whirling Dervishes* (1870), would serve the daydreamer or the anthropologist.

While some traveling photographers were no more than business men, others were artists or scientists. Edward Curtis was all of these. The proprietor of a photo studio in Seattle, a film-maker and a publisher of illustrated volumes, he both studied and fantasized his subject, the North American Indian. The beautiful and delicate cyanotype entitled *Mask Dancer, Cowichan* (1912) is at once an invaluable anthropological document and a rare piece of photographic poetry. As moving as this image is, Curtis also contributed to the white man's ideology of 'manifest destiny'. His sepia toned print entitled *The Vanishing Race* (1904) is unwitting propaganda — consigning a living people, whom he genuinely admired, to the dustbin of history.

Photography could also serve the 'News' business, and would profoundly transform it. Robertson & Beato's *Interior of the Redan, 10th September 1855*, showed those at home the horrors of a distant, or not so distant, Crimean war. These pictures of a hellish landscape would alter people's perception of organized violence, causing them to question age-old notions of 'glorious battle'. Quite visible in John Burke's c.1870 photograph captioned *Second Afghani War*, is that early photographs of conflict tended to display its periphery or aftermath, and were usually devoid of action. This was largely due to the unwieldy cameras of the time and their long exposure requirements.

### **Pictorialism**

At the beginning, photography was seen as a marvel of science, and only gradually became accepted as a tool for the 'low' art of print making. Pictorialism arose as an attempt to secure photography as a medium for both expressive and 'high', or religious art. While photographs could show one all the miracles of the world, there were those who wished to have it reflect the world within; 'feeling' rather than fact, would be the goal of the Pictorialists. This tendency started with a naturalism inspired by the Naturalist painters and evolved into a Symbolism characterised by allegorical subjects and soft focus images.

The work of British photographer P.H. Emerson was one of the models for Pictorialist art. His platinum print *Fowler's Return* from his illustrated publication *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (1886) is a masterful example of his aesthetic. Inspired by painters like Millet and a love of nature, Emerson employed 'selective focus' and constructed his compositions as a painter would have. The Canadian photographer William Notman's 1886 photographs of rustic moose hunting scenes; *The Breakfast*, and *The Death* are from a series staged in the comfort of his studio. Notman's influences are academic, and the effect is stiffly theatrical.

The English photographer Julia Margaret Cameron was an important proto-Pictorialist. She made portraits and allegorical pictures using faulty lenses and unnecessarily long exposures to frustrate the camera's insistence on recording surface particularities. Cameron was a Victorian and a Christian who derived her themes from the Bible, Shakespeare and Tennyson. *Call and I Follow, I Follow* (c.1864) depicts two women, transformed into an allegorical scene by a few yards of drapery and some goose feathers.

The Pictorialist movement grew into an international phenomenon through various associations and photography clubs that organised exhibitions and produced publications. The most famous of the publications was *Camera Work*, edited by the American photographer and gallerist Alfred Steiglitz. From 1903–1917, it reproduced Pictorialist photography in rich gravure plates. *Camera Work* championed the work of early artist photographers like Cameron and charted the evolution of Pictorialism over its course in the decades before and after the turn of the century. Artist photographers featured by *Camera Work* included Baron Adolphe de Meyer, Alvin Langdon Coburn and Clarence H. White.

Pictorialists disdained the sharper new lenses and more sensitive plates being developed and continued to pursue means to make their Symbolist photos have the appearance of charcoal drawings, etchings and other fine art mediums. The soft, hazy or blurred image became a convention whose simple code; fuzzy photo equals feeling — equals art, became a hallmark of mediocrity in the hands of lesser artists, and was eventually questioned by even Steiglitz himself. Pictorialism has often been criticized as a kind of kitsch; to quote Kracauer, “Photographic artists operate within those social areas which are concerned with a veneer of spirituality because they fear the true spirit...”. It is a fact that the codes of Pictorialism have predominantly survived in calendar art and advertising. Yet, the relationship between photography and painting is still being negotiated today. Although largely seen as an early twentieth century movement, the strategies of Pictorialism continue to reappear.

### **The Camera's Objective Eye**

Not everyone was as concerned as the Pictorialists with establishing photography as a medium for art by aspiring to the model of painting. Industry and science seized on the new tool to explore the visible world beyond the limitations of the human eye. Still others did not see a conflict between photography's descriptive possibilities and its potential for art. Eadweard J. Muybridge was a Californian famous for his romantic pictures of the dramatic landscape of the American west. In 1872 he was commissioned by a railroad baron to resolve an outstanding conflict regarding the exact positions of a horse's legs while trotting. Muybridge's first attempts were disappointing, but he made many subsequent experiments and developed various new devices in his quest to capture movement in chronologically ordered split-second exposures. From his photographs it was discovered that the conventions by which the movements of men and animals had long been depicted by painters were incorrect. His many studies of different animal and human movements were published as finely detailed gravures in a bound volume entitled *Animal Locomotion*. These miraculous images, at once scientific and Surreal, were put to immediate use by artists who wanted to correctly depict figures in motion. The systematic rigour of Muybridge's studies have influenced artists ever since, and found a particular favour with photoconceptual art from the nineteen sixties to eighties.

The criteria for a decent scientific or industrial photo in the nineteenth century have become, over a hundred years later, identical to the criteria by which much art photography is made. An anonymous botanical study from the late nineteenth century describes every millimeter of every vein, every point of every thistle and every serration of the leaf edges, that are visible from one angle. This albumen print may, or may not have been intended as art, but today we find it difficult to appreciate it as anything else.

Unlike the camera, the human eye tends to see what it expects, or wants, to see. Against this, it could be argued that photographic vision has been nothing but a product of human will and has been developed according to Renaissance pictorial conventions. For example, there is no absolute law that requires lenses to be 'corrected' to render straight vanishing lines, nor do photographs have to be rectangular. However, at one level at least, cameras are not subject to the filters of human convention and desire. Of the work of Karl Blossfeldt, Walter Benjamin wrote: “One experiences this optic-unconsciousness with the help of the camera, just as one learns of the impulsive-unconscious through psycho-analysis. Structure, cell tissue, with which technology and medicine strive to come to terms - all this is far more relevant to the camera than the atmospheric landscape or the soulful portrait”. Blossfeldt was a teacher in an industrial arts school in Berlin. His studies of plants were intended as study aids for students who might go on to design bridges, coffee pots or machines. His work appears at once a part of the nineteenth century encyclopedic project to document and classify the world, and the twentieth century 'New Objectivity' that sought to shake from photography every pictorial convention inherited from painting.

### **The New Vision**

Right from the start, photographs presented new views of the world that could be unsettling. Many of these were produced by accident or in the hands of amateurs. The development and mass production of small hand held cameras produced a proliferation of images that showed things in a new and strictly photographic way. These aberrations of the visual order might have been disdained and discarded had not the social order itself been turned upside down. The

advances in science and industry around the turn of the century were accompanied by revolutions both philosophical and political. The rise of Democracy, Fascism and Communism produced a need for new visual languages to express modern ideas and realities.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the camera was placed in positions it had never been before; looking up from the pavement, down from airplanes, in moving cars and boats. Telescopic, macroscopic and microscopic views of just about everything were proliferated through the new mediums of offset printing and the cinema. The horizontal view through the Renaissance window was no longer the rule. Distortions too were welcome, whether produced by trick lenses, double exposures or darkroom gimmicks. From Cubism to art deco, to Russian Constructivism to the Bauhaus, a new geometry was explored. What was invented in Moscow as a visual language meant to represent the destruction of the old, capitalist order, could be recycled by a Madison Avenue firm to sell laundry detergent or a Nazi propagandist to extol the glorious future of the Third Reich.

In Andre Kertesz' photos we see him move from the postcard sentimentality of *The Kiss* from 1915, to the cubist/deco inspired *The Satiric Dancer* from 1926, to the Surrealist nude of *Distortion#40* of 1933. In his *Untitled (nude)* the Berlin Dadaist Raoul Hausmann abstracts a woman's *derriere* into a peach. Margaret Bourke-White worked as a photojournalist for Life magazine. Her dynamic style of dramatic foreshortening in *New Tractor, Russia* (1930) seems borrowed from Soviet Constructivism but was applied in her photojournalism to make just about anything appear heroic. Berenice Abbott's jazzy 1932 *New York at Night* plays with the patterns of city buildings dizzily abstracted by lighted windows. *Labor 2* (1927) by Tina Modotti, a Mexican photographer and communist, reduces a worker to an element in a composition that seems to predict Franz Kline's abstract painting. Like Pictorialism, the New Vision often placed effect before substance. While Lisette Model's *Promenade des Anglais, Nice, 7 Aug. 1934* captures the wary gambler from an extremely low camera position, in grainy high-contrast, her subject has not been reduced to a formal composition. Instead, she caricatures him with the same 'equal-opportunity' misanthropy with which she viewed everyone. Model would one day teach Diane Arbus how to see and is considered a forerunner of the New York School's brand of street photography.

### **Candid Photography & Photojournalism**

J.H. Lartigue began his career as a photographer in 1902 at the age of eight. He started with snapshots of his toys, such as a balsa airplane caught in mid-flight, and progressed to bicycles, cars, airplanes and eventually women. As a child he had a knack for catching adults looking ridiculous, later his distorted images of race cars would parallel the experiments of the Futurists. A photograph of his wife, *Chamonix, Hôtel des Alpes, Bibi*, of 1932, displays the mischievous, child-like manner that characterised his photos of people.

Candid photography was given a huge boost in 1925 with the introduction of the Leica camera. This compact device used the same 35mm. film as movie cameras and its sensitive f.2 lens would permit shooting by available light in almost any situation. The Leica was widely imitated and artists and journalists were quick to put these new cameras to the test. Erich Salomon was a lawyer turned photojournalist who specialized in candid photography of politicians and celebrities. He would sneak his tiny camera with its silent shutter into guarded realms to document his prey. His *Vanity of a Spanish Dancer* (c.1932) displays his proto-paparazzo's passion for getting behind the mask that public figures don when facing the world.

More than any other photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson came to represent candid photography as an art. Using the Leica, he developed a lyrical *oeuvre* built of instants in time. Cartier-Bresson was influenced and later championed, by the French Surrealists. While at the time his photographs were often seen as lacking compassion, they usually appear to have been made with their subject's cooperation, and are recognised today as models of humanistic photography. Cartier-Bresson was interested in making a living from his photography, he played down the 'Surrealist' label to present himself as a photojournalist and so receive magazine commissions. Together with Robert Capa and several others, Cartier-Bresson started the famous Magnum agency. In photographs like *Brussels* (1932), he produces an absurd theatre

that would have pleased his friend André Breton. In others, such as *Alicante, Spain* (1933), we are amused and reassured by his humanist vision. While these photographs depict scenes that feel suspended in a limbo outside history, *In a Deportee Camp...* of 1945, is a haunting image of the consequences of human attitudes and actions.

Robert Capa once declared, "If your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough". Capa took his maxim seriously and risked everything to obtain photographs of front-line action. A photojournalist who worked mostly on news assignments, Capa is most famous for a photo that appeared in Life magazine showing a soldier at the instant a bullet struck his head. His photographs in this exhibition depict the messy business that followed the liberation of Paris. Capa had earlier parachuted into France along with the invading Allies. He would lose his life on assignment in Indo-China in 1954. Lee Miller was a photojournalist who also worked as a model and consorted with *avant-gardistes* like Man Ray. Her photograph of the aftermath of a German bombing of London, *Piano by Broadwood, London* (1940) is starkly graphic. She would later follow the liberators into Germany and make photographs of the obscenity and horror of Buchenwald. While Manuel Alvarez-Bravo's photo of a murdered man, *Striking Worker, Assassinated*, of 1934, is usually presented as part of his mildy Surrealist, lyrical *oeuvre* it could just as well function as a news or propaganda photo.

Arthur Fellig was a New York news photographer who changed his name to 'Weegee' to reflect his ability to arrive at a crime or accident scene before anyone else. Using a 4x5 press camera and flash bulbs he made dramatic, often brutal, pictures of human tragedy. Working with a police radio and a car trunk full of supplies, he would sleep during the day and awake in the evening to cover the various murders, robberies, suicides, fires and accidents that occurred through the night. During the 30's and 40's the tabloids required a steady stream of lurid photos. Weegee, more than any other, mastered both the art of finding the newsworthy event and capturing it on film. His sometimes callous regard for his gangster subjects is apparent in such hard-boiled title/captions as *Here he is as he was left in the gutter... he's got a DOA tied to his arm, that means 'Dead On Arrival'*.

Weegee also made many photographs of the city's social life and its many different tribes and classes. *At a Concert, New York City* (1946) is one of many pictures he made of crowds and people engaged as a social body. These ranged from moving photos of children escaping the summer heat by sleeping on tenement fire escapes, to scathing pictures of society matrons looking like pale corpses in minks and diamonds. Formed by his own experiences as an impoverished immigrant child in the slums of the Lower East Side, he possessed a strong, if crass, sense of humour and an unsentimental compassion for ordinary people.

In *Naked City*, published in 1945, he edited his tabloid work into a disturbing portrait of New York that would make him famous. He went on to publish *Naked Hollywood* — a frank autobiography, and other books. He traveled to London and Paris as a celebrity, made short films and contributed photography to, and acted bit parts, in feature films. Later in his career he would market his gimmicky trick photography and make portraits of stars. A relentless self-promoter, he appeared to take full advantage of the opportunity his fame provided to leave behind the grisly subjects that originally made him a household name. The later work is usually trite or corny, Weegee was resting on his laurels and enjoying his hard earned success. He is often cited as an influential figure for the 'New York School' of artist photographers such as Diane Arbus, Robert Frank and William Klein.

Bill Brandt developed a high contrast, graphic style of photojournalism to best exploit the usually coarse quality of printed reproductions. Originally from Germany, he produced an impressive portrait of England's rigid class society, publishing his photo essays in popular journals such as the *Picture Post* and *Lilliput*. The high contrast of his tones equaled the dramatic contrast between the lives of the people he depicted. With photographs like *Miners Returning to Daylight, South Wales* of 1935 and *Cocktails in a Surrey Garden* (1938) he exposed the haves and have-nots to each other. Brandt was not interested in the 'decisive moment' and carefully posed his subjects into tight and striking compositions that were often melodramatic. Over the course of his career, he made remarkable photographs in many genres, including portraits, landscapes and nudes. He had spent time in Paris and collaborated with the Surrealists, including Man Ray, whose studio he once worked in for three months. The influence of Surrealism is evident in all of his work but

most obviously in his night photos and distorted nudes. Brandt came to be considered the greatest modern British photographer. His photographs exerted a powerful influence on subsequent generations.

Two British photographers who benefited from Brandt's example were Philip Jones Griffiths and Tony Ray-Jones. Jones Griffiths first produced images like *Children, Laugharne, Wales* (1952) depicting the gritty realities of his homeland. He went on to cover conflicts, from Rhodesia to Bosnia, for *Life* and other magazines. His 1971 book *Vietnam Inc.*, was enormously successful for its critical view of that doomed American project. Tony Ray-Jones was not interested in working for the mass media and developed a personal and humorous style indebted to Cartier-Bresson. Today he is regarded as a precursor to contemporary British artist photographers like Nick Waplington, Richard Billingham and Chris Killip.

Steven Shames is an American photojournalist who works not for the media so much as for particular social causes. In *His Tear Gas Grenade, Berkeley* of 1970, the clouds of gas in the background make the figure stand out; turning what could have been a mere document into a striking motif of the tumultuous social upheaval in America at that time.

### **The Documentary Project**

At a fundamental level, all photographs are documents. Documentary photography then, is a matter of particular intentions and functions. Largely understood as an engagement with social facts and issues, the documentary mode differs from the photojournalistic in that it is not necessarily at the service of the news business, but instead to a larger social, scientific or educational purpose. Yet, there is no such thing as an uninflected, purely objective document and so we are left to consider the problems of the *art of the documentary style*.

Thomas Annan was a commercial portrait photographer who was commissioned by the city of Glasgow to document the 'closes & wynds' of urban slums which were soon to be demolished under an urban improvement scheme. In 1868 he ventured into these narrow, dank passages and made haunting studies of the spaces and their inhabitants. These were reproduced as photogravures initially sold in an expensive, limited edition volume bound in 'Morocco' leather. *Close 3101, High Street*, displays how the long exposures required to expose his plates produced ghostly images of those subjects who moved. This could not have been a desired effect, but is a contributing part of their poetry, and a key factor in the fascination they hold for contemporary viewers. Annan's slum studies were the first of their kind. Where previous photographs of the lower classes cast their subjects in terms of the picturesque, genre 'types' or Christian iconography, Annan provides a paradigm for the dispassionate approach to documentary work.

While Annan was paid to photograph the slums, others emerged who would work on their own initiative in the hope of affecting change. The Dane, Jacob A. Riis, did not limit himself to the street but entered the homes of tenement dwellers in New York. Using dangerous magnesium flash powder, he recorded the dismal conditions with little regard for aesthetics. Riis published his photos with involved texts — first in newspapers and then books. His most famous book, *How the Other Half Lives*, was published in 1890 and was followed by several other titles including *The Battle With the Slum* in 1902. As a result of Riis' books & articles, sweatshops were closed, slums demolished, and parks and progressive programs were created.

Eugène Atget was not a social reformer but simply hoped to document a world before it disappeared. That world was nineteenth century Paris and its environs. Atget is considered by many to be the greatest photographer of all time, and if such distinctions are worth the energy, clearly only August Sander and Walker Evans provide serious competition. Originally trained as an actor, Atget gave up that pursuit at thirty and turned to producing photographs as 'documents for artists'. He started with images of trades people in 1897, moving on to architectural details, statuary, the architecture of Versailles, common shops, domestic interiors, trees, the Parisian countryside, and the dwellings of rag pickers. Atget worked systematically, producing over seven thousand 8x10 inch glass negatives that he catalogued and sold individually or in volumes to artists, architects and libraries.

His photographs were admired for their uncanny stillness by the Surrealists. Man Ray befriended Atget and introduced Berenice Abbott to him. Abbott would later purchase Atget's archive of prints and negatives and bring them to New York where they were eventually acquired by the Museum of Modern Art. *Interior of a Worker's Home, rue de Romainville, Paris, 1910* looks like a crime scene photo in its attention to every detail. Atget was a Socialist and it is his sense of history that informed his practice, as Walter Benjamin noted: "Atget's pictures begin to take on the role of documents in a historical trial. That is their hidden political significance".

Berenice Abbott began her career with photographs in the style of the 'New Vision' but later arrived at a documentary approach. With funding from the WPA she proceeded to make her in-depth study of the dynamics of *Changing New York*. In *Construction Old and New, 38 Greenwich Street from 37 Washington Street, (1936)* the old buildings rub shoulders with the new. A line of laundry is like messy life spilling out into the world and contrasts with the corporate discretion of an office tower with sealed windows.

Some documentary projects of note were produced by commercial photographers. C.D. Hoy was a Chinese-Canadian commercial portrait photographer working in Quesnel, B.C. in the first decades of the last century. His sensitive, observant photographs of Native people and Asian and European settlers transcend their vernacular origins.

Little is known of E.J. Belloq's life or his motive for photographing the prostitutes of New Orleans. His glass plate negatives were found after his death, and fortunately made their way into the hands of the renowned photographer Lee Friedlander who printed them and saw to their exhibition and publication. The trust between Belloq and his sitters is evident in their calm composure — this was a collaboration done for its own sake. Belloq was one of those rare photographers to carry out a project that could not be supported by his time, but became a gift to the subsequent era.

A biologist, linguist, art historian, philosopher and photographer, the Russian born Roman Vishniac took thousands of photos of the everyday life of Eastern European Jews. Made between 1934-1939, his pictures of the *shtetlekh* of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and the Baltics, are a passionate record of a people and way of life that was brutally destroyed by the Nazis. Although made in the street, pictures such as *Father Bringing Boy to Cheder, Mukachevo* or *The Old Ghetto of Lublin*, are calmly composed and suggest that he waited for his subjects to enter his view. Vishniac was imprisoned many times and interned in a concentration camp before arriving in America with two thousand of his remaining negatives.

Documentary projects often suffer from lack of support and must be carried on the backs of their creators. Aaron Siskind's book *Harlem Document, Photographs 1932-1940*, was not published until 1980. The son of Russian Jews, Siskind was involved in The New York Worker's Film and Photo League and later started his own documentary association, the Feature Group. His Harlem photographs depict a vibrant, if disadvantaged community. Siskind's compositions — involving dramatic contrast without sacrificing the information in intermediate tones, remained responsible to his documentary mission while also betraying his aesthete's eye. Siskind would later become famous for his 'abstract' photographs that echoed the painted compositions of the Abstract Expressionists.

An African-American, Roy DeCarava was intent on recording his Harlem through an artist's eye. One hundred and forty of his photographs appeared along with a text by Langston Hughes in the highly lauded 1955 book *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*. DeCarava had a polarized view of documentary versus art photography and felt that a documentary approach was condescending or patronizing. He intended for his own work to define a black aesthetic. Ben Fernandez was engaged in the civil rights movement of the sixties and followed Martin Luther King to various rallies and marches. His 1968 *Stop the Black Riots* is a blunt image of racism as an emotional illness passed on through families.

Bill Owens' 1973 book *Suburbia* is a collection of views of interiors and exteriors of the new American suburban development and its inhabitants. The wide-angle lens he preferred produces an alienated, Martian's view effect that is both comical and bleak. Seemingly artless, Owen's photographs struck a chord with the 'baby boomers' who had grown

up in suburbia and would eventually question its' complacent lifestyle. In *Richie* the ubiquitous 'Big Wheel', and the toy gun, are now obvious signifiers for the ideology of a culture that was beginning to be critiqued from within.

Although his project to record the railway legacy of America was ostensibly documentary, O. Winston Link accomplished it with a theatrical touch. As in *Main Line on Main Street*, of 1955, Link would use staging, dramatic angles of vision, and elaborate lighting to make fantastic scenes that bordered on the Surreal. His manipulations make his project as fictional as it is factual. The compositions of Link's tableaux are masterful — but in the service of a Norman Rockwell type of nostalgia. Because his subject is relatively innocuous, we tend not to linger on the absence of a believable historical or social dimension, and can instead give ourselves over to the enthusiasms of a 'train buff'.

Without support or a context for understanding the value of their work, untrained photographers generally view and present their work as a hobby. When the work transcends the level of hobbyism, the humility of its producer makes it all the more disarming. Kennedy Bradshaw's photographs of life in 1950's Yukon are a prime example of a perceptive amateur with a historical vision. To most people the idea of taking a picture of an empty room would be pointless, but Bradshaw must have seen that the Eames chairs in his photo of a worker's cafeteria were at once an index of modernity, and a figure for the community that sat in them. His other picture of kitchen workers finds as much interest in the material culture and technology of the room as in the people. This is not the logic of the casual snapshotter. When he focused on people, Bradshaw again takes that step back from the snapshotter's predatory aim and instead situates them in their environment and settles them in the frame of the image. In his photo of a group of Native and European children, these anthropological and aesthetic criteria are both addressed.

Fred Herzog was employed as a medical photographer but took thousands of photographs of Vancouver's street life and cityscape. Arriving from Germany in the nineteen fifties, he was especially interested in those aspects of the city that were specifically North American. He made many studies of commercial signage as well as street photos of people against urban backdrops. *Hastings Street, Vancouver* (1958) is one of many Kodachromes he made using a long lens to compress distance. Herzog was impressed by Walker Evans and was similarly motivated to make records of quotidian reality.

An example of an extremely personal approach to documentary portraiture can be found in the work of another Canadian, Nina Raginsky. Her sepia toned or hand-coloured street portraits are willfully nostalgic and whimsical. She would simply photograph people who appealed to her for one reason or another. Raginsky's subjects do not have anything in common except their humanity.

### **Walker Evans and the F.S.A.**

Probably the greatest documentary project of all time, the Farm Security Administration photographic group was formed under F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation in 1935. One of the main focuses of the F.S.A. photographers was the plight of the rural people whose lives were most affected by the Great Depression. Walker Evans played a leading role in defining the approach and style of the project although his uncompromising character and aesthetic position eventually led to his ouster. So much did Evans's photographs come to define our view of America and the Depression that years later John Szarkowski would write "It is difficult to know with certainty whether Evans recorded the America of his youth or invented it."

Evans began as a writer but decided that he could never reach his own high standards in that art and turned to the new art of photography. His earliest photographs show the influence of the New Vision but, informed by his respect for Flaubert and Baudelaire and inspired by the example of Atget, he soon developed his own 'documentary style'. One of his earliest projects was to provide photographs for a book entitled *The Crime of Cuba* by Carleton Beals. His street portrait from that book, *Havana Citizen*, (1933) well fulfills the criteria set by Baudelaire in his prescriptive *The Painter of Modern Life*. Photographs like *Main Street, Ossining, New York* (1932) would later inspire Robert Frank to make his own record of America.

For Evans, modern photography would be a descriptive art, his 1938 *Street Signs, NYC* demonstrates the attention to seemingly banal details and the registering of human civilisation through its creations that will define his practise. *Graveyard, Houses and Steel Mill, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (1935)* is novelistic in its scope, for many a person's whole life was played out within the landscape it describes. Evan's was attracted to vernacular signage, which he also collected. Both *Signs, South Carolina* and *Atlanta Georgia* display his dry wit and anticipate Pop Art's obsession with commercial art. *Post Office, Sprott Alabama* and *Cabin, Hale County, Alabama*, demonstrate Evan's interest in recording a disappearing culture.

For an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1938, Evans produced his book *American Photographs* which presented his photographs to be read as one would read a text. After the F.S.A, he would go on to a variety of projects and eventually found a niche for himself at Fortune magazine. *Labour Anonymous (1946)* took dispassionate photography to an extreme, here Evan's acts almost as a machine, standing on a corner and snapping each worker as they pass. *Beauties of the Common Tool*, a pictorial spread from 1955, reveals the form that human eyes miss. Here his manner of looking reminds us of Blossfeldt, but Evans was bored by nature as a photographic subject. His life-work was encyclopedic and has earned Evans overwhelming recognition as the greatest American photographer.

Dorothea Lange is probably the second most famous photographer of the F.S.A.. Her evocative *Drought Refugees at Sunday Prayer* of 1936, displays an intention that is as pictorial as it is documentary. While the musical composition of Lange's *Prison Detail, Outside Huntsville, Texas, (1936)* is accomplished, its human subjects are subordinated to a visual order. *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota (1939)* is closer to Evan's directness, but lacks his intensity and precision. Lange wasn't content to simply document things and wanted instead to direct the viewer in how to *feel* about the subject. It was Lange's heroic humanism that became the preferred style of the F.S.A.'s administrators in the end.

While Evan's photographs decidedly avoid atmosphere, the weather was an important factor in the economic life of rural Americans. In F.S.A. photographs by Arthur Rothstein and Marion Post Wolcott, the dry prairies are shown below a sky with clouds that possess more than a picturesque promise. Russell Lee's famous photograph *Kitchen of a Tenant Purchase Client, Hidalgo, Texas, 1939*, was intended as propaganda for reform. What was once an image of an enviably modern kitchen has transformed over time into an accidental piece of Surrealism.

In Jack Delano's 1939 moody photograph of Chicago's Union Station, the light streaming down in rays, and the people who have become silhouettes, are inherited pictorial conventions that go against the grain of documentary intention. As masterful as it is, this picture seems to have more to do with the artiness of the *Camera Works* period than Evan's commitment to eradicate everything from the photograph but the subject.

### **Symbolisms, Surrealisms & The Uncanny Body**

While the term *Surrealism* did not come into use until the nineteen-twenties, its roots extend back to Romanticism and beyond. Photography, as a technology that preserves and presents the absent, has always been received as something magical, spooky or uncanny. As a tool for extending the rational, Enlightenment project of cataloguing the world, it would be invaluable — but photography would also lend itself to an exploration and imagination of the irrational.

Man Ray was a founding member of both the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. A close friend of Marcel Duchamp's, he was a painter and photographer who also made sculptural objects. Ray's *Optic/Topic (1974)* displays his photographic and sculptural talents as well as his fondness for anagrams. If worn, the metal mask would filter vision in a bizarre way. Its perversion of normal vision is an invitation to other transgressions.

A Parisian Surrealist whose work has recently emerged from obscurity, Claude Cahun explored identity and sexuality in a game of 'dress-up' that draws parallels to the more recent work of Cindy Sherman. In one self-portrait she appears with long hair as a feminine prisoner in a glass bell, in the next as a tonsured, asexual or androgynous ascetic. In their

design and use of props, her photographs often reflect a Bauhaus preoccupation with geometry. At other times they display the influence of the Surrealists Yves Tanguy and Salvador Dali, whom she admired. An uncloseted lesbian at a time when this was extremely dangerous, she performed spontaneous acts of resistance that caused her arrest and imprisonment by the Gestapo. Cahun questioned every conventional notion of fixed identity, true to Rimbaud's dictum "I is an other".

In Wols' still life photograph of a rabbit carcass, comb, harmonica and button, he plays with visual rhymes. The form of the comb and harmonica respond to the form of the animal's ribcage; the plastic to the texture of bone and cartilage. Wols seemed to want to pull everything down to a slimy and horrifying *nature*. A German who lived and consorted in the same Milieu of 1930's Paris as Cahun and Man Ray, Wols produced a remarkable body of photographs that synthesized the lessons of the New Vision and Surrealism into a new and personal language. Famous in Europe as the originator of *Tachiste* or *Informale* painting, Wols demonised the organic and reminds us that we cannot escape our own animal origin. His enemy was the idealism that would lead to European fascism.

Photography and the cinema, being variants of the same technology, have always had a close relation. While the Bourgeois affection for easel painting has coloured our view of historic Surrealism, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of photographic media to the development of the movement. The films of Luis Buñuel and Jean Cocteau are especially central, and represent the dispersion of Surrealist ideas to a larger audience and their eventual absorption into mainstream culture. Other than the spectacular phenomena of Salvador Dali, Jean Cocteau's film *Beauty and the Beast* is probably the most widely known Surrealist work. Aldo's production still of Jean Marais as the 'Beast' against the architecture of his palace, looming like the melancholy architecture of the unconscious, perfectly captures the gothic mood of the film.

Surrealism may have been centered in Paris, but its effect was international. In Mexico, Manuel Alvarez Bravo developed a personal, lyrical photography that adapted Surrealism to his local circumstances. The Magic Realism of Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez appears continuous with Alvarez Bravo's world of reverie under an equatorial sun. The large number of female figures, clothed and nude, carries on the Surrealist obsession with the feminine body as the object of desire and symbol of the 'irrational other' to a masculine order. Unlike his European cousins, Alvarez Bravo exempts his women from dismemberment and fragmentation but idealizes them nonetheless. His women are also invariably self possessed, as in *Daydream* (1931), or asleep as in *La Buena fama Durmiendo* of 1938. The sleeping figure or portrait with closed eyes was a staple of Surrealist photography and was meant to reference Freudian theories of the subconscious and the significance of dreams.

Josef Sudek developed his Symbolist and Surrealist art in his native Czechoslovakia. Sudek made pictures of natural scenes, sometimes employing panorama format cameras, as well as portraits, nudes and still lifes. A tree stump in a photo from his 1959-70 series *Vanished Statues in Mionski* becomes a grotesque, rearing monster. An uncompromising craftsman, his warm-toned photographs were imbued with an unabashedly antique aura. While most of his work post-dates the historical Surrealists, his prints seem like lost nineteenth century precursors, they feel closer to the Symbolists of the *fin de siècle*.

Beginning as a painter of obsessively detailed erotic fantasies in the tradition of Hans Bellmer, Pierre Molinier turned to photography as a vehicle for his auto-erotic theatre. In a tiny studio in Paris, using masks, costumes and props, he would stage his self-portraits wherein he usually appears as a dark, but delicate, feminine figure. *La Poupée* (1957) is a prime example of the painstaking craft that went into his intimate prints. Often montaged from several negatives and retouched, they indulged his 'male-lesbian' fantasies, such as sodomizing himself with a phallus shaped high-heel on a shoe which he hand-crafted. For commitment to his fetishism, Molinier is unequalled. Like Cahun, his work is an affront to normative notions of identity and sexuality

Ralph Eugene Meatyard was born in Normal, Illinois but moved to Kentucky where he made most of his pictures.

Inflected with the American South's own brand of gothic strangeness, these photographs were made in the artist's immediate surroundings, employing family and friends as actors.

Many of the photos feature children, often donning dime-store Halloween masks, as in *The Romance of Ambrose Bierce* of 1964. Meatyard was drawn to the textures and patterns of decay and also experimented extensively with blurred motion. The blurred photos exploit photography's ability to make things appear or disappear like magic or produce ethereal traces. Emmett Gowin is another photographer who produced staged fantasies. His 1971 print, *Edith, Danville, Virginia* presents a fundamental taboo as an erotic, poetic moment. Ralph Gibson was an extremely popular photographer in the nineteen seventies. His textless bookworks like *Days At Sea* (1974) brought him to the attention of a wide audience. Gibson's debt to Surrealism is apparent in his soft-core eroticism and fragmentation of the body.

### **Post-War American Modernists**

The seeds for post-war Modernism in photography were sown in Pictorialism and the New Vision. Edward Weston's influence in particular was important within the American context. Minor White was a botanist turned photographer who took his cue from Steiglitz' Symbolism. White was interested in expressing his 'inner feelings' through photography and was influenced by Zen Buddhism among other philosophies. As a teacher, and founder of *Aperture* magazine, he steered a generation of photographers towards subjectivist photography. While Aaron Siskind began his career with socially conscious documentary photography, he later made pictures like *Jalapa* (1947) which usually consisted of close-ups of graffiti and found textures. These pictures bear strong but superficial resemblance to the Abstract Expressionist painters. Concerning his later 'abstract' photographs Aaron Siskind said, "I'm not interested in nature, I'm interested in my own nature". His movement from Realism and leftist political thought to Abstraction and a concern with apolitical philosophies was typical of many American artists in this period and has been critiqued as a reaction to the pressures of McCarthyism in American post-war culture.

Harry Callahan was a friend of Siskind's and shared his interest in metaphoric form. One of his recurring subjects was his wife, seen in his 1953 photograph, *Eleanor, Chicago*. Callahan was a craftsman of the highest order. If he often chose inherently beautiful subjects, it is ultimately the beauty of his prints, as something independent from his subjects, that strikes us. In *Chicago* (1960) the black building has taken on a visual form that is something different from what the building is in the real world. Yet, the image has not completely given itself over to abstraction and the automobiles and other things in the rest of the image keep us anchored in the world. Callahan's work is marked by a taut balance between Realism and Abstraction, between an interest in the historical world and formal beauty.

### **Celebrity & Pop Culture**

While this exhibition focuses on photography as fine art, the relationship between so called 'high' and 'low' art has always been a factor and deserves consideration. The invention of the half-tone screen reproduction and the motion picture brought us mass visual culture as we understand it today. The fame machine was also given an effective new tool in photography which was immediately exploited by early entrepreneur artists like Nadar.

Charles Lennox Wright's production still for D.W. Griffith's 1920 film *Way Down East* could stand as an emblem for the beginnings of these relationships. Wright was a popular landscape and genre painter. He was also a pioneer of photomechanical printmaking who later worked in Hollywood. Although it appears quaint today, this publicity photo of Richard Barthelmess and Lillian Gish is functionally no different than an Annie Leibovitz shot of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman.

David Bailey's 1965 portraits of Andy Warhol and his Factory 'superstars', are a meeting of the archetypal pop photographer and pop artist. Bailey embodied London's 'swinging sixties' more than any other photographer, becoming a celebrity himself and the model for David Hemmings character in Antonioni's film *Blow Up*. His photographs argue for consideration as fine art whilst simultaneously performing the most commercial function. Warhol's 1967 *Index Book* is a milestone, more of an experience than a read, it is a sculptural event in print that destroys the neat lines drawn between forms of expression and different media. Warhol's *Jackie II* (1966) could be seen as a modern history painting. It also

mythologises its subject into a *Madonna dolorosa*. In this respect it is not far from Julia Margaret Cameron's Symbolist icons which aspired to the function of sacral art.

Richard Avedon worked both as an artist photographer and commercial photographer and became famous for his portraits of political and cultural celebrities. A friend of Diane Arbus' he was influenced by the New York School aesthetic and this informed his portraits and fashion work. His 1964 collaboration with James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* is a lavish publication reproducing his photographs with no loss of quality whatsoever. Avedon's *Portraits* (1976) is a pantheon of American public life that recalls the *Galerie Contemporaine* portrait serial of nineteenth century Paris.

William Claxton represents a quieter approach to celebrity photography than Bailey or Avedon. Although subjects like the melancholic jazz trumpeter and singer of *Chet Baker, Los Angeles* (1954) is romantically portrayed, Claxton's involvement with his subjects was involved and more long term than most. He is more like a scholarly fan than a competitor with his subjects for the spotlight.

Although he worked briefly as a fashion photographer, Robert Frank's 1972 photographic layout for the Rolling Stone's *Exile on Main Street* album was a rare foray into commercial art. A memorable collage attached to a legendary recording, the layout features photos from Frank's *The Americans*, footage from his Rolling Stones documentary *Cocksucker Blues* and found photographs of 'circus freaks'. This work perfectly captures the gritty excitement of the band at that period and is an example of how film, photography and print media had merged into an integrated machine for image production and consumption.

### **In and of the Street**

'Street Photography' emerged as term in the nineteen sixties to describe work that was neither documentary nor photojournalistic in the usual sense, but sought to capture lived experience in the public realm in a poetic way. The post war period saw a rise in street photography that probably had to do with the increasing respect given to the notion of photography as an autonomous art. While earlier artists like Cartier-Bresson could certainly be considered as pioneer street photographers, they were dependent on the news business for employment. After the war, photography began to be taught in art schools and exhibited in galleries as a legitimate form of expression. In the nineteen sixties there was an explosion in the number of artist photographers. Many were churned out by art schools and most were inspired above all by Robert Frank's *The Americans*.

Robert Frank worked as a commercial photographer in Switzerland and in New York after he emigrated to the United States. Shooting fashion for Harper's Bazaar he one day quit and left for Peru where he began his serious work as an artist photographer. Upon returning to the U.S. he made the acquaintance of Walker Evans who would write a letter referring him for a Guggenheim fellowship to travel across America and compile a book of photographs from the experience. Unable to find an American publisher for his work, *The Americans* was first published in France in 1958. Due to the acclaim it garnered, it was then published in America in 1959. The book was new, strange and disturbing. It was met with a largely negative response by Americans who saw it as an attack on their country.

Frank had meant for *The Americans* to be a textless book, but was pressured by publishers to allow introductions or other texts appear in the various editions that were printed over the years. Unlike Cartier-Bresson, who aimed for single photos that could stand alone, Frank saw in a cinematic way and intended for his photographs to work in sequence. In photographs as early as 1951-3 such as those made in Britain, we can see the influence of Cartier-Bresson and Bill Brandt, but these pictures are also wholly Frank's. He wasn't after anecdote or Surreal moments so much as a dark, existential silence.

*The Americans* begins with *Parade, Hoboken, New Jersey* (1955-56) an image of a woman obscured by the 'Stars & Stripes'. The flag recurs periodically through the book. That this woman's identity is obscured by a symbol tells us that this book is not a typical documentary but a visual prose poem. Frank was drawn to overlooked places and people and

tried to find a language that was appropriate to them. His subjects often appear as in a trance but they remain very much in the historical world. Frank has perhaps not created another world so much as shown this one to be as strange as it is. Class and race both figure strongly, but are not treated polemically, the black and white riders of *Trolley — New Orleans* (1955), are all riding the same train in the end.

A contemporary of Robert Frank's, William Klein grew up in New York and living in Paris returned there to make his most important photographs. His style shares some characteristics with Frank but Klein favoured a more violent, graphic aesthetic. *Rant* (1955) is a photogravure made from a photo that displays Klein's interest in vernacular signage and a proto-pop sense of design. With its blank billboards proclaiming nothing, Charles Harbutt's New York nocturne, *Empty Buildings, Avenue of the Americas, NYC* (1965), reflects the critical view of capitalist culture that his generation was formulating.

Garry Winogrand exemplified a sort of knee-jerk, predatory street photography that was to become widely practised in the nineteen seventies. He captured the manners, gestures, costumes and attitudes of a specific time and place whose centre seemed to be Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. The two examples here, *Tenth Anniversary Party, Guggenheim Museum, NYC* (1970) and *Centennial Ball, Metropolitan Museum* (1969) are less typical interior scenes, but are excellent examples of his raw, rhythmic compositional style. Winogrand often shot photos on a diagonal which had the effect of approximating a mobile viewer's shifting perspective. He was fond of stating that he didn't know what street photography was, that he photographed *animals*. Yet his thousands of photographs constitute the ultimate model for the photographer as modern *flaneur*.

Lee Friedlander worked in New York but also traveled across America. His style was calmer and more balanced than Winogrand's and like Frank, he was as interested in the rural landscape as the urban street. As with many of those influenced by Frank, Friedlander made photographs that come across as questions more than answers. However, Friedlander's questions were of a more strictly metaphysical than social or political nature than Franks. As in *Shadow, New York City* taken in 1968, he often included his own shadow as a self-portrait, and reference to the fundamentals of photography.

Friedlander was also interested in the fragmented image, finding situations where mirrors or the arrangement of things produced collage-like compositions. Absurdist serendipity, As in *House, Trailer, Sign, Cloud — Knoxville, Tennessee* (1971) are an integral aspect of his *métier*. Friedlander could also get serious, *T.V. in Hotel Room — Galax, Virginia* (1962) is an ominous image. It was made when people were deeply disturbed by the things they were seeing on television for the first time. Rather than showing these terrible things, such as race riots or the war in Vietnam, it is as though the T.V. is projecting an image of the uncertain viewer.

Diane Arbus worked in fashion photography before moving on to define its antithesis. Arbus used a flash and a square format camera to make her portraits of drag queens, giants, twins and average people with characteristics that she found odd, into direct and often brutal comments on humanity. Her point was not to laugh at the abnormal but to inform us that we are all freaks. According to those who knew her, she would focus in on a person so intently and with such gentle, and genuine curiosity, that they could not refuse her attention. When Arbus first made these pictures they seemed like the hardest things to look at, today their language has been absorbed into mainstream culture and they are constantly referenced by television commercials, print ads and rock videos.

Danny Lyon and Larry Clark represent a closer engagement with their subjects than the previous street photographers. Where their vision was built on alienation, Lyon and Clark would immerse themselves in an identification with the tribes they photographed. *Cal, Elkhorn, Wisconsin* (1968) is from a series Lyon produced on motorcycle gangs published as *The Bikeriders* in 1967. It is an in depth and sympathetic view of an outsider or outlaw culture. *Cell Block Table* and *Texas* are from another series that spawned a book entitled *Conversations With the Dead* (1971). Here again, Lyon established trusting relationships with the prisoners that continued long after his project finished. Lyon was not making educational documentaries but followed in the footsteps of Robert Frank's poetic paradigm.

Larry Clark also found his audience through publishing books. *Tulsa* (1971) and *Teenage Lust* (1983) brought him fame and infamy for their uncensored view of various taboos. Clark worked in his native Oklahoma neighbourhood and glamorized his subjects as much as studied them. A heavy drug user himself, in *Tulsa* Clark hid nothing of the painful and sordid details of addiction. In *Teenage Lust* he created scandal by telling America what it knew but didn't want to hear — or see, that young people take drugs, steal and have sex. Like Frank and Lyon, Clark progressed to film-making — achieving success with *Kids* and the more recent *Bully*.

### **New American Landscapes and The New Colour**

The distinction between street photography and the new landscape photographs being made in the sixties and seventies is an academic one, for many photographers worked on both subjects. In this period, the American landscape received more attention than it had since the days of the Farm Security Administration project. Indeed, this new interest in landscape was probably due to a reevaluation of the F.S.A. that was centered in the new art school photography programs. This connection is reflected in the presence of 'road pictures' by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange in the 1982 *American Roads Portfolio* included in this exhibition.

The new landscapes had little to do with the ahistorical, romantic pictures of popular photographers like Ansel Adams — they were instead, its antithesis or antidote. The Museum of Modern Art exhibition *The New Topographics* gave this critical, 'unromantic landscape' movement its name. However, this new movement was not monolithic with respect to style.

One of the artists in *The New Topographics*, Lewis Baltz photographed in a style influenced by minimalism but with an especially historical documentary intent. His graphic, black and white views of housing developments published in *Park City* (1980), were informed by a new ecological consciousness.

Harold Jone's *Baptism, Sabino Canyon* (1976) takes a point of view similar to Dutch landscape painting of the seventeenth century. The level of detail is fine and even across the picture plane. There is a certain pleasure in the way the eye is forced to roam the surface. Michael Becotte's 1974 untitled road souvenir manages to combine a landscape and a still life. These photographs engage a matter of fact Realism.

Frank Gohlke's *Aerial View, Tulsa, Oklahoma* from 1981 is remote from the pictorial traditions of the picturesque that informed traditional American landscape photography. That an airplane view could be made, and accepted as art, reflects a radical questioning of tradition. Gohlke, of course, also worked with a high degree of sophistication within older pictorial conventions. Robbert Flick's grid of 'nowhere' views show the influence of conceptual art strategies. The photographs are treated as 'information' and the grid structure itself as a kind of sculpture becomes as important as what is depicted.

Leaving the city no longer meant one could escape commercial culture. Whether the vernacular, folk expressions of Ken Brown's 1976 *Pink Trailer Tilt*, and Steve Fitch's dinosaur or the corporate presence in Nathan Lyons' airport billboards, it seems that everywhere, the signs have replaced the trees. In Michael Bishop's 1974 untitled picture of a stop sign or Elaine Mayes' *Pegasus* (1972) the signs are not seen as anthropological curiosities but as secret messages from another world.

Victor Landweber's 1978 photo of a car wreck looks like an updated Weegee, or an insurance photo with high production values. With the arrival of conceptual art, words were infiltrating visual art like never before. Barbara Jo Revelle's *Untitled* from 1981 addresses the same subject as Landweber, but from the new angle of the 'photo-text' piece.

By the seventies, colour photography had established itself as a legitimate medium for art and much of this colour work focused on the landscape. Sally Euclaire's 1981 anthology *The New Colour Photography* featured the best of it and inspired photographers everywhere to explore colour. Two of the leading proponents of the new colour, Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld both made landscapes that recalled the traditions of Realist painting.

Stephen Shore makes contact prints from eight by ten inch negatives. The intimate prints possess a clarity of detail and subtle colour. Shore's photographs achieve a balance between subject and effect, between document and the pictorial. It is hard to say whether the quotidian subjects, or the light and colour, are the point of the exercise. It is as though the precision of the nineteenth century travel photographers was combined with the colour of Vermeer. Shore doesn't usually look for the anecdotal and rarely focuses on a single particular thing. Instead, we find ourselves in the midst of the everyday — perceived as though its existence was just discovered.

Joel Sternfeld shares many aspects of Shore's style but is more subject oriented. *His Exhausted Renegade Elephant, Woodland Washington (1979)* provides ample evidence that he was not opposed to the anecdotal.

These photographers' styles and especially their handling of colour, would influence the next generation of photographers including the German 'Becher school' of Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky and others.

### **Photoconceptualism**

Pop Art's tautological representations of low culture, along with a rediscovery of the historic avant-gardes by the baby boomers, did much to breakdown *beaux-arts* tradition and pave the way for conceptual art. The zero-degree of conceptual art's iconoclastic project occurred when language invaded art and displaced the image entirely. That this language was not even any traditional poetic one, but a bureaucratic technical jargon, as exemplified in Joseph Kosuth's dictionary definition works, made the development all the more devastating to traditionalism in visual art.

Photography was quickly taken up as a tool of this new 'idea art'. Vernacular and instrumental styles were in particular favour as the anti-aesthetic antithesis of traditional photographic art. Where the New Vision sought to expand the vocabulary of the image, photoconceptualism used photographs in an editorial, archivalist way, usually as one element in projects employing language and other media.

Like many Pop artists, Ed Ruscha first supported himself as a commercial artist. His predominantly photographic bookworks are revered today as the definitive paradigm for photoconceptual art. With these cheap paperback books he discounted all of the criteria by which previous photography worked to legitimate itself as art. If the instrumental style of the photographs in books like *Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966)*, or *Royal Road Test (1967)*, are the opposite of 'creative photography', they are employed within a larger structure that is essentially poetic. This is made explicit when Ruscha sets up a categorical list and confounds it with an incongruous addition, as in *Various Small Fires and Milk (1964)*, or *Nine Swimming Pools and Broken Glass (1968)*. As with other works that seemed to destroy the notion of the auratic, precious art object, the effect was temporary. Sold for a few dollars when first published, these bookworks are now traded for thousands of dollars, not to mention exhibited in vitrines in art museums.

Bruce Nauman's bookworks follow Ruscha's example. His *Burning Small Fires (1968)* pays direct homage to Ruscha with a certain glee in the most literal poetics. Nauman's tautological *Clearsky (1967-8)* consists of nothing but snaps of different blue skies. Despite the many references made to structuralism, semiotics, Godard or Robbe-Grillet, as the influence behind photoconceptual art, with works like these by Nauman and Ruscha, the American tradition of poetic literalism might be just as relevant.

The German husband and wife team of Bernd and Hilla Becher modelled their practise on the high technical achievements of nineteenth century industrial photography. Fittingly, they chose nineteenth century industrial architecture as their main subject. They have relentlessly assembled a massive inventory of such disappearing structures as blast furnaces, water towers and mine heads. The grid like structures in which their photos are often arranged, as in *Anonymous Sculpture (1973)*, allow for typological comparisons. Their systematic approach invites comparison to Atget and Blossfeldt and influenced a generation of artist photographers. Sorel Cohen's *After Bacon/Muybridge: Coupled Figures* of 1980, marries the scientific structure of Muybridge's chronophotography with a more expressive intent.

Where Ruscha or the Bechers employed instrumental modes of photography which approximated commercial standards, Dan Graham developed a successful working method from the model of amateur snap-shots. His compositions are often haphazard, his colours shifted or 'off', but over time the consistency of his vision has marked his photographic work with the stamp of his persona and philosophy. Graham's photos have largely concerned themselves with issues around architecture and settlement in North America.

Robert Cumming and Les Krims both brought humour into photoconceptualism. Krims' manipulated photographic fictions owe a debt to Surrealism via hippie 'freak' culture. The female figure was again put through the torture test and Arbus' dwarfs reappeared as a challenge to values of 'normalcy'. Cummings used photography as a vehicle for conceptual sculpture and as pseudo-museological documentation as in *American Bullet-Proof Vest* (1979). Both artists take their cues from the tradition of the tinkerer or *bricoleur* as artist. Duane Michals made more traditionally crafted photos and employed them within story-boards that included hand-written texts.

Toronto's General Idea employed different styles of photography in their camp investigation of the image in high and popular culture. Their Polaroid work *Kevin Staples/Any Varda* (1977) documents the punk era continuation of Warhol's camp subversion of the constructs of glamour and personality. A Yugoslavian artist who has worked in Vancouver, Sonja Ivekovic's low-budget bookworks, *Double Life 1959-1975* and *Tragedy of a Venus* (1975) are models of aesthetic economy. *Double Life* compares personal photos of the artist's life with depictions of women in print advertisements whereas *Tragedy of a Venus* compares Ivekovic's life with Marilyn Monroe's. Both Cindy Sherman's interrogation of the media construction of femininity, and Barbara Kruger and Sherrie Levine's appropriations, were incubating in Ivekovic's feminist photoconceptualism.

Robert Smithson's *Torn Photograph from the Second Stop (Rubble). Second Mountain of 6 Stops on a Section* (1970), is an economical and effective translation of his 'earthworks' project into a photographic form. Photoconceptualism overlapped with Fluxus, Pop Art, Minimalism, Earth Works, and other avant-gardiste projects of the sixties and seventies in a complex weave that is difficult to untangle or dissect.

Performance Art was one of these new avant-garde strategies or disciplines to make effective use of the new handling of photography. Joseph Beuys had his performances captured by the camera and produced catalogues, posters and postcards to reach a larger audience. The Viennese Actionists used the camera to preserve their somewhat secret and eventually illegal rites which were intended to resurrect a dionysian attitude towards human existence. Herman Nitsch's stark documents of his quasi-religious, theatrical art could be seen as an attempt to exorcise Nazism and other twentieth century demons via a sort of shock therapy. Valie Export along with Chris Burden and others, used the print media to document and disseminate their equally visceral body theatre. Burden in particular, mastered the art of documenting performance and was always careful that his daredevil exploits generated compelling and iconic photographs.

### **Vancouver Photoconceptualism**

Being a relatively young city with a modest tradition of painting and sculpture, it was natural that Vancouver would embrace the new mediums of photography, video, performance and the avant-gardism of conceptual art. One of the tenets of the new art was that it could be made anywhere — even in a then sleepy colonial backwater like Vancouver. The domination of the world-historical centres was over. Nonetheless, artistic developments still largely filtered out from those centres, and developments in Vancouver photoconceptualism lagged a few years behind New York or London.

Perhaps the strongest exponent of photoconceptualism in Vancouver was N.E. Thing Co.- aka Ingrid and Ian Baxter. N.E.Thing traded in the Romantic notion of the artist for a campy pseudo-corporate entity that would conduct the business of investigations into the nature and possibilities of art. They adopted bureaucratic formats for the documentation and display of their findings which usually included a photographic component. Duchamp's importance as predecessor is directly referenced in their photo-text work *Act #19 - Marcel Duchamp's Total Art Production Except His*

*Total Ready-made Production & Art #19 - Marcel Duchamp's Total Ready-made Production Except His Total Art Production (1968)*. *A Portfolio of Piles (1968)* was produced as a folio of cards mimicking a collection of tourist postcards. Instead of monuments and gardens, it catalogued various piles of raw or manufactured materials. Their Oedipal relation to traditional aesthetic criteria resulted in a reversal of values where 'bad' photography could become good art .

Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual (1969-70)* takes the form of a cheaply printed booklet with typewritten texts and half-tone reproductions of city views of indifferent quality taken from a car window. The anti-aesthetic strategy is reinforced by the printing of the affordable "25¢" price on the cover. Wall's interest in the 'defeated landscape' and his low budget strategy was shared by Christos Dikeakos whose *Car Scan, 6th. Ave & 2nd. Ave, South Shore of False creek, Nov.7th -20th, 1969* consists of snapshots arranged in a storyboard structure. Ian Wallace's *Maquette for Melancholie de la rue (1972)* also employs snapshots of the landscape but in his full realization of the work it became a large hand coloured triptych signaling his move towards the pictorial *tableau*.

Theodore Wan used photos with text in his works about identity, the body and perception. *I Did it in Just 10 Min.!(1975)* is both a performance document and a deconstruction of advertising codes. *Bound by Everyday Necessities (1979)* is one of many works he made that critiques the rationalised, scientific view of the body. These works were accomplished, staged *tableaux* employing a Becher-like systematic logic while parodying the conventions of medical photography. Wan's oeuvre constitutes Vancouver's most austere and formally handsome photoconceptual art of the period.

Many artists who did not have a pure conceptualist approach nonetheless contributed to the development of photoconceptualism. Roy Kiyooka was a gifted painter in the Abstract and colour-field veins who switched to poetry and photography. His *StoneDGloves* was produced in book, poster and wall-mounted photo-piece variations. The small work *from StoneDGloves (1969-76)* is derived from a larger work that employed an inspired sculptural and cinematic handling of a photographic ensemble. Kiyooka's technique points to the debt owed by photoconceptualism to the tradition of collage in the manner of Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg.

Kate Craig, along with other artists centered around the Western Front Gallery, used photography especially to document performance. Craig's *Flying Leopard (1977)* uses imagery made with the then newly available video equipment and produces a print which is both document and autonomous image. It's fiction is reminiscent of nineteenth century hoax or 'fairy' photography. David Ostrem was a draft-dodger with a penchant for Pop Art who found himself in the exuberant environment of The Vancouver School of Art where conceptual art was the order of the day. In his still life series, he manages to squeeze a panorama of concerns and interests onto the surface a small studio table. His *Smash Your Face In (1978)* exhibits a requisite unconcern for fine photographic technique that aligns it with the proletarian, d.i.y. aesthetic of punk graphics.

Rodney Graham's *Rome Ruins (1978)* look like aged autochromes but were in fact made with a pinhole camera constructed from a matchbox, bubble gum and a Instamatic film cartridge. Jeff Wall's study for *Steve's Farm, Steveston (1979)* is a small work print for one of his Neo-Realist illuminated transparencies. Both of these works signal an end to the period's anti-aesthetic iconoclasm and the beginning of a return to pictorial problems in photographic art. The avant-gardist myths of radical discontinuity with tradition and the utopian desire for a merger of art and life were themselves subjected to critique. Unlike the attempt to restore expressive painting in the nineteen eighties, post-conceptual photography's move toward the pictorial was not a reactionary restoration. Instead, it would prove to be a continuation of the critiques of representation from a more sophisticated position.