

Beyond

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Fragments, small, square colour prints, more than twenty years old — but entirely new for me. I knew Roy Arden as an artist who used found, archival photographs in his work, while also making his own photographs in a Realist realist style, probing his environment for motifs that reveal the rapid development of urban space and the associated social history. Like many other interesting photographers, Arden has not travelled widely to extract general statements from specific objects. Looking at his pictures I always learn something about Vancouver, his home city, and about myself.

However, Arden's early photographs, the subject at hand, show an aspect of the photographer previously unknown to me. These pictures depict his personal interests — his friends, the medium of photography, his meandering journeys though the city — in an almost melancholic manner. Each of these images is conceived as a discrete work that can stand on its own. However, considered in sequence each picture also augments the next, adding complexity to the reality Arden's pictures purport to reflect. The portrayal or representation of reality becomes an artistically well-grounded idea of the world, ; the photographer becomes an author.

The square format of these photographs creates a sense of stasis, and their colour also suggests that things long past still live on. Implying a preference for the seemingly banal and trivial, the subject matter attests to the insatiable interest of the young photographer in the history of his medium; in Eugène Atget and Walker Evans, photographers who knew how to conceal their passionate interest in a subject behind a matter-of-fact approach. In Arden's work we also find commonplace motifs that, through the photographer's vision, are transformed from dross into compelling, poetic photographs of everyday experience, taking on a larger-than-life significance.

Two self-portraits show the photographer in a mirror. With his jacket pulled up to hide his face, the artist comes to embody the camera. These programmatic images lead us to assume that the author was afraid of revealing too much of himself — an unfounded fear because his pictures, while personal, are not private at all. They are imbued with emotions that we are privileged to share: respect, yearning and affection.