

CAMERA WORKS

Or Gallery, Vancouver
December 3 — 20

This modest show at the Or Gallery presented one work by each of ten artists who use photography to deal in some way with issues surrounding representation. Curator Ellen Ramsey brought this work together in order to "locate a dialogue about camera work," and this collection of models, working notes and extracts from larger bodies of work reveals much of the strategies and issues being dealt with by conceptual photographers in Vancouver. The primary techniques utilized, both as strategy and to express that strategy, are tableau, assembly and appropriation. Tableau is the careful set-up of a scene to be photographed and its use requests that the image be interpreted a *mise-en-scène*, a photograph made, not found. Assembly, of some apparatus or an installation, demands an active reception of viewers by involving them in the relations of their looking, through placement or physical interaction with the work. Appropriation is a re-presentation of an image which has been previously shown to the public, often in printed or electronic media. Styles can also be appropriated to create new work. The use of this device accesses the fact that context has a determining influence on what meanings are assigned to an image, and the re-presentation includes contemporary significations as well as revealing aspects of the historical situation in which the image was first used. Each of these rhetorical devices, or strategies, hold as self-evident that no looking is neutral, or uninterested.

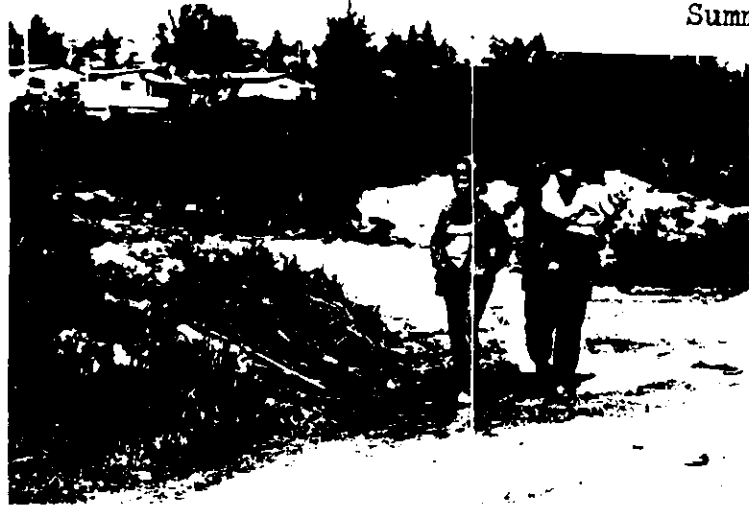
Of course, the photograph is also document, a false link to yesteryear which operates forever in the present. Ian Wallace presented a 4" x 5" color photograph of himself sitting at a table with the tools of his trade, pencils, rolls of paper, rulers, notebooks and books, spread out around him. This photograph referenced a performance Wallace presented at the Or Gallery two years previously when, to make material his concern with how the public understands the conditions in which art is made, he worked publicly for a week.

Jeff Wall and Kati Campbell physically immerse their viewers by bathing them in the light from back-lit transparencies, implicating them within the relations of photographic apparatus. *Making It (Standard Props)* is a 16" x 20" model by Campbell of a large scale installation. It features two black silk screened figures on white back-lit frosted plexiglas. One figure, a suited male with a briefcase, has the words, "I'll sell," floating near its head. The other silhouette, of a man with papers in his hand, is labelled with the words, "I'll buy." Campbell asks viewers to recognize their involvement, and that of the art world, with the exchange system of consumer capitalism. Wall's concerns are not so easily pinned down. He showed two pencil sketches and two photographs of *Diatribes*, a large color transparency in which a white woman carrying a white child walks beside a black woman on what may be a clearing or a road near a housing development. The white woman's body gestures and facial expression, as in the sketches, indicate that she is engaged in the diatribe of the title. The pencil sketches give evidence that Wall's work is a carefully planned tableau, in which no detail may be taken for granted. As viewers, we are not told what the subject is, but the picture could be used to illustrate such socially relevant topics as single parent housing,

racial relations, child care, parental responsibility,

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Jeff Wall, *Diatribes*, 1985
cibachrome transparency
fluorescent light display
case, 219 x 145 x 31 cm
Photo courtesy: Ydessa
Gallery.

notations on two pages of a music book is mounted by Douglas on the wall above a shelf which supports a player piano roll under a plexiglas cover. The roll is punched to make a player piano play "Bars 49-88 from the 2nd movement of Beethoven's Sonata in C Minor, op. 111." Called *Onomatopoeia: Residue*, this work is part of a larger installation in which Douglas combined a slide show of images of the interior of an automatic weaving mill with the sounds of the music being played on a player piano. The fact that this piece of music sounds very much like rag-time is stressed by the tonal quality of the player piano as it sounds to ears more used to stereo systems. A comment on the effect on art of mechanical reproduction, this work also critiques our notions of progress in the industrial age. The mechanical device which controls the player piano is the same as that which chooses wefts in the automatic loom, invented 200 years ago. The same digital principle operates a modern day computer.

McCrum's works are designed to engage an act of volition on the part of viewers, making them participants instead of passive spectators. *Simulacrum* requires viewers to step up onto a small platform to peer, in mimicry of a servant or voyeur, through a lens cum keyhole, into a peepshow box inside which are displayed six pictures of the artist in poses modeled from an old French book on acting. *Simulacrum* is that which artificially pertains to be the look of the real, and McCrum engages it on both the level of the viewer and the viewed. Viewers, simulating the salacious thrill of gazing at a pornographic peepshow, or through a keyhole in a bedroom door, see only pictures of a man wearing a dress who is merely acting out instructions from another form of coding of the real. The poses in the pictures only represent the French acting schools idea of how women should act out the looks of meditation, terror, disdain, remorse, secrecy and horror.

Arni Haraldsson presents a carefully directed shot that looks at first to be a candid snapshot. *Love/Hate* is a 16" x 20" black and white photograph of a young man in a rural setting, leaning back, hands resting straight-armed on a fence. The third joint of each finger sports graffiti lettering which on the right hand spells "love" and on the left "hate." The torso and tilted back head express the tension of a deep breath

about to be exhaled in a scream, or a deep sigh; but