

The Museum of Modern Art

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RECENT COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS TO GO ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

An exhibition of color photographs collected within the past five years by The Museum of Modern Art will be on view from August 18 through the month of October in its new Edward Steichen Photography Center. COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS: RECENT ACQUISITIONS consists of approximately 35 works selected by Peter Galassi, Associate Curator in the Museum's Department of Photography. The color photographs, nearly all of which were made since the late 1970s, represent the work of some established figures, among them Jan Groover, William Eggleston, and Lucas Samaras. But the great majority of pictures are by younger photographers, such as John Harding, David Graham, and Lorie Novak.

Until recently, according to Mr. Galassi, most still photographers--accustomed to seeing the world through the familiar tonalities of black-and-white prints--would have agreed that color was not only unrealistic but vulgar, a medium for advertising, scenic calendars, and extravagant Hollywood fantasies. That this outlook has changed is due at least in part to technological advances in photographic materials. Up until the past 15 or 20 years, the complexity of processing and expense of materials have been deterrents to free experimentation in color photography. But improvements in commercially available color materials have offered an increasing number of creative photographers the inviting combination of reasonable cost, technical ease, and aesthetic beauty. Since the mid-1970s many young photographers of widely varied training and inclination have chosen color over black-and-white.

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In this new work Mr. Galassi perceives two opposing tendencies. The first arises from the richness and subtlety of the new materials, which have made possible ever more precise descriptions of the world in color. Of the photographers who have responded to the increased descriptive capabilities of the color medium, Mr. Galassi writes: "For them there is nothing vulgar about their medium: Life is in color, so color photography must be more realistic."

Running counter to this theme is a new fascination with the artificial colors, exaggerated effects, and conventionalized subject matter of advertising and popular culture. Some photographers have openly embraced this imagery, delighting in its unreal colors and fantastic themes. "Others have approached the subject with caution and distrust," states Mr. Galassi, "aiming to debunk the authority of deep-seated cultural stereotypes."

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS: RECENT ACQUISITIONS is not a systematic survey, but a partial report on the variety and liveliness of contemporary color work. It also reflects The Museum of Modern Art's active commitment to its acquisitions program, even during its recent expansion project, when construction radically curtailed exhibition scheduling. Writing of the great diversity of works on view, Mr. Galassi states that each picture "holds the authority of a successful experiment; together they offer the excitement of unfinished business."

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For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director, or Debra Greenberg, Senior Press Officer, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019. (212) 708-9750
