

PHOTOGRAPHY

1995

INTRODUCTION

"a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket"

Like the white rabbit Alice sees
—just before she falls into the well—

Ellen Handy presents contemporary artists
who use photography in a *curious* manner.

Handy's thesis, that "straight" photographs are not useful
for some complex picture ideas,

is one with which many may argue.

But the author's proposal

is clarified by the work

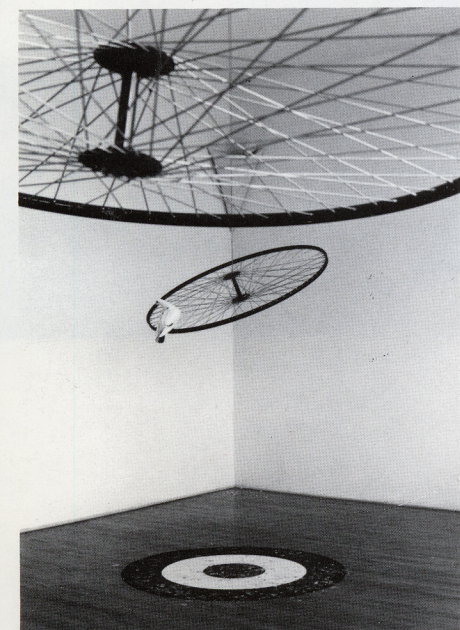
seen in this issue of the magazine.

Some may say "Oh dear! Oh dear!"

but others may—like Alice—

burn with curiosity.

Kathleen Kenyon, editor



Dove Bradshaw, Plain Air installation, 1969/1989

niques have become appropriate vehicles for artists' ambitions?

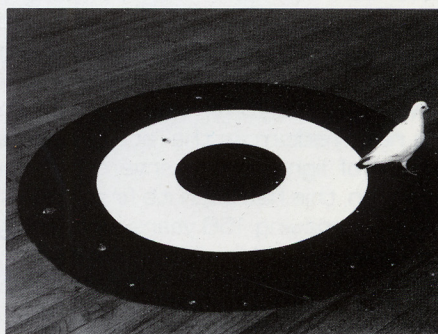
Using snapshots and media images to stimulate memory and to mark time is a common practice in everyday life, but how do photographers use the passage of time and the operation of memory in their work? This is a question that might have any number of different answers, depending upon the exemplars chosen. The creations of the six photographers discussed in this essay share this theme, and share a distance from 1980s-style post-modernism. More artful and less polemical than the work which characterized the first wave of post-modern photographic practice, this is photography for the end of this century and for the beginning of the next. These photographers (unlike the self-proclaimed "artists who use photography" of the last decade) are notably in harmony with the traditions of the photographic medium. Yet **Dove Bradshaw, Jungjin Lee, Mikael Levin, Wojciech Prazmowski, Barbara Rosenthal, and Paul Salamon** all make photographic objects, projects, or constructions that diverge considerably from the venerable style of modernist, so-called straight photography. While their work may not "look like" photographs, they do fundamentally affirm the richness, multiplicity, and invention that are the essence of photography.

These photographs don't necessarily look like memories. Resemblance is not at issue here, but identity is. Among these photographers' inventions are those that are made of the very stuff of memory and time themselves, rather than being a mere attempt to depict them. To Roland Barthes, photography was intimately and inevitably connected with death, loss, and absence. This is true enough in his rhetorical sense, and not at all necessarily true in other terms. Photography can be understood as standing on the side of life itself; naturally, life necessarily implies death—but what of it? Birth implies death too, but we are well able to differentiate between the two in practice. There is ample latitude in which photographic artists may work, other than in the precincts of mortality. That which finally eludes the photographer's grasp as she or he attempts to encompass time and memory may be described as life itself, not the finality of death.

In addition to the photographs, several texts are gathered here. This essay describes a context of thought into which certain photographic artists may be drawn. **Liz Waldner's** poems are a kind of improvisational writing that acts as analog to the work of these six photographers. Her poems (like their work) are made of the complex loop of time, experience, and memory which photography enters and exits in the course of individual experience, and of the wider historical sphere as well. **Alexei Bayer's** story works in a different way, as a chronicle of the manipulation of experience through time, memory and a photograph. This story comments on these phenomena, though as fiction it does so more gracefully and obliquely than an essay can do. Poems and a story do their work well here—they limn the limits of critical writing, just as Bradshaw, Lee, Levin, Prazmowski, Rosenthal, and Salamon press against those of photography.

As poetry and fiction have here become the means of discussing time, memory, and photography, so have stone, light, paper, silver, words, old photographic images, grids, painterly emulsion, gesture, and idea become the means and materials by which images are assembled. These six individuals' photographic works are quite dissimilar. Photographs notoriously bring together all that is disparate in reality—far places, past moments, unrelated fragments—just as memory is the web with which we weave continuity from unassimilably distinct experience, and just as time is the matrix of all consciousness. Is it not then appropriate to collect here a group of photographs that may never be reunited?

ELLEN HANDY has written for *Arts Magazine* and for issues of the *Quarterly* (summer 1993, fall 1991, summer 1991). Her essay, "A Life as More than the Sum of its Parts, and Photography as One of Them," was published in the Center's 1994 Manuel Komroff catalog *Keys to Unlock the Heart*. In 1995, Handy will be an Associate Curator at the International Center of Photography (New York, New York). **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:** *I want to offer thanks to the staff at the Center, who worked very hard to make this show happen. Alexei Bayer and Liz Waldner are superb collaborators whose texts embellish this project to a rare degree; Alexei and Andrea Bayer also diligently and generously abetted this project in other, more practical ways; and each of the artists involved has been cheerfully cooperative, as have Pace MacGill Gallery and Jackson Fine Arts.*



Dove Bradshaw
pages 6 & 7
plain air, 1989, installation: four pigeons, two bicycle wheels, two canvas nests, two zen archer's targets, two bowls, one water bowl

Dove Bradshaw

The processes that comprise Dove Bradshaw's conceptual art typically extend over significant and leisurely intervals of time, and frequently find their permanent form in photographic images produced after the fact. As is typical in conceptual work, these photos are direct surrogates for memories. Sometimes her work declines to assume a final form at all. Her photocopied artist's book *Nothing* elegantly chronicles and completes other projects in her oeuvre, some of which left no other trace. The unbound book is permanently unfinished; she adds to it at intervals, updating each copy wherever it may be.

plain air is a piece that Bradshaw has created on three separate occasions, varying it as circumstance demands. It now exists as a series of photographs and has existed as installation/performance pieces in specific places at specific times. Appearing and reappearing, it has been repeated or reconstituted while it is also already a memory. In installation form, it incorporates "real time". The piece involves the introduction of birds into a particular place: the artist's home, her gallery, an alternative space like PS. 1. The routines developed by the birds, the viewer's participation in their lives, the drama of whether birds would mate and rear young, and the curious practical problems posed by the presence of birds indoors, all are aspects of the piece.

Bradshaw's repetition and extension of ideas over time resembles memory's ceaseless reshaping of experience. Another example is her intricately self-referential postcard representing a fire hose that she once noticed at the Metropolitan Museum and "claimed" as a work of art by affixing a homemade wall label. Next, having fabricated a museum-style postcard reproducing the fire hose, she insinuated her cards into the racks in the museum shop where they sold briskly. Later, she arranged for the museum to accept a copy of her photograph of the fire hose, and from it to produce their own card. From her initial "claiming" to the museum's symbolic acceptance of her gesture was an interval of several years. The postcard piece both acknowledges and incorporates the passage of time, and addresses questions of institutional, museological memory and record, and of the place of photography within them.

Born: 1949 America
Lives: New York, NY
Education: BFA Boston Museum School, 1973

Selected One Person Shows:
Contingency, Sandra Gering Gallery, NY 1991 and 1993; *plain air* PS. 1 Museum, NY 1991, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh 1990; Sandra Gering Gallery, NY 1989; Stalke Gallery, Copenhagen 1989; Sandra Gering Gallery, NY 1988; Utica College, Syracuse University, Utica 1988; Wave Hill, NY 1983; The Ericson Gallery, NY 1982.
Selected Group Shows: *Rolywholyover: A Circus*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (and tour), 1993; *Work from the Permanent Collection*, Art Institute of Chicago, 1992; *Carnegie International*, Pittsburgh 1991; *Chaos*, The New Museum, NY 1989.

Selected Reviews: Reagan Upshaw, *Dove Bradshaw at Sandra Gering, Art in America*, November 1993; Thomas McEvilley, *In the Form of a Thistle, Artforum*, October 1992; Thomas McEvilley, *plain air, Artforum*, April 1990; *Sister, Can You Spare a Smile?*, *New York Magazine*, February 1980.
Artistic advisor to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, 1984-present.

