



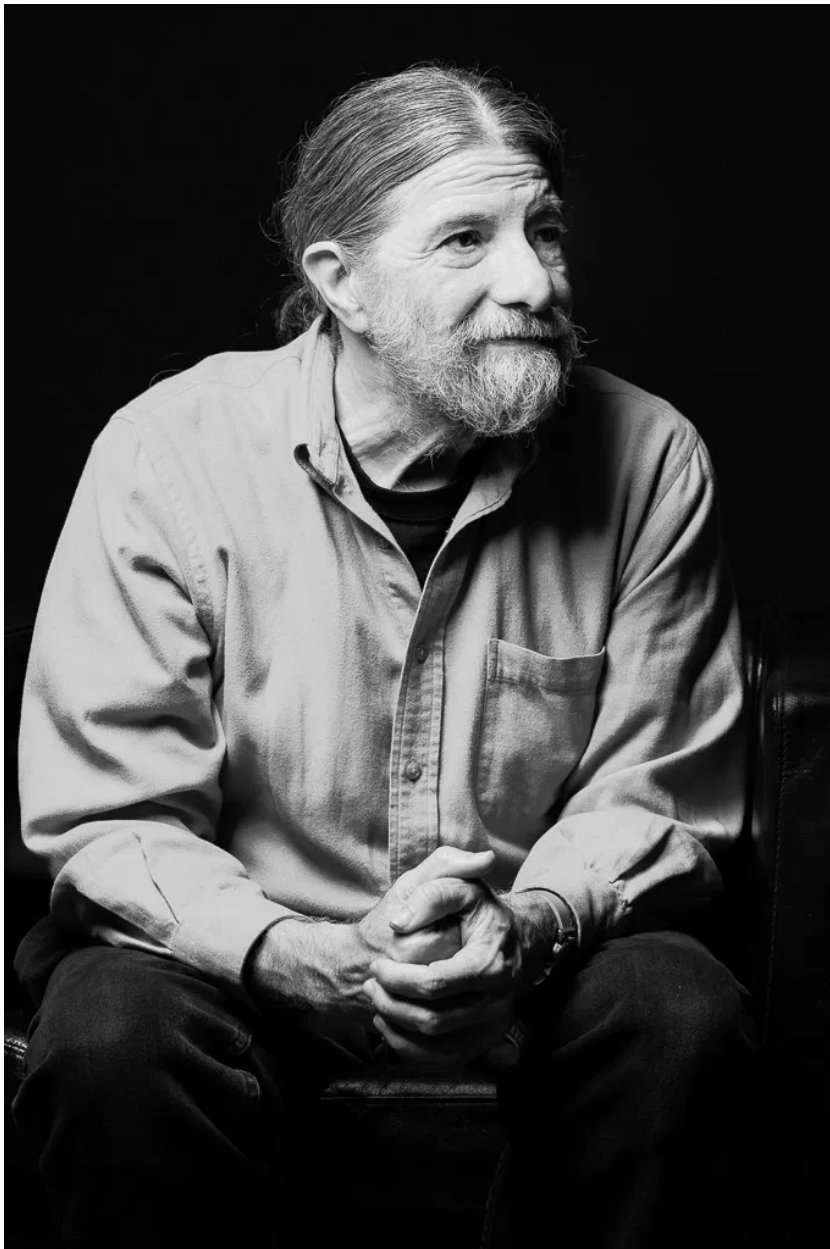
Oregon ArtsWatch

CULTURE

The Artists Series 4: Visual Artists

Ten more portraits in black and white by K.B. Dixon of Oregon artists who are helping to define what Portland and the state look like

JULY 27, 2020 // CULTURE, VISUAL ART // K.B. DIXON



**TEXT AND
PHOTOGRAPHS BY K.B.
DIXON**

This is the fourth installment of portraits in *The Artist Series*. The first two focused on Oregon writers. Part 3 and this installment, Part 4, focus on visual artists—the gifted, award-winning painters, sculptors, and photographers who have made invaluable contributions to the cultural life of this city and state, people whose legacies are destined to be part of our cultural history.

For an introductory look at their work, I refer you to their digital digs—their virtual ateliers.

**CHRISTOPHER
RAUSCHENBERG:
PHOTOGRAPHER**

Rauschenberg has photographed around the world. His work has been featured in more than a 100 solo shows. He is a co-founder and past president of Photolucida and a co-founder, co-curator, and Board Chairman of Blue Sky Gallery.

Examples of Rauschenberg's work can be found at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

The bucket, not the Taj Mahal

orartswatch.org/christopher-rauschenberg-the-beauty-of-the-bucket

Paul Sutinen



OREGON ARTSWATCH

OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

John Cage said, “Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look.” That seems to be the point of Christopher Rauschenberg’s photographs for more than 40 years.

Beyond that work as a photographer, Rauschenberg was one of the five founders of Blue Sky Gallery—now one of the premier photography institutions in America—back in 1975. He founded the Portland Grid Project in 1995. As the website states: “Christopher Rauschenberg took a pair of scissors to a standard map of Portland and cut it into 98 pieces. He then invited a group of 12 Portland photographers, using a variety of cameras, films, formats, and digital processes, to all photograph the randomly selected square each month. By 2005 they had covered every square mile of Portland and shown each other over 20,000 images.” The Grid Project is now on its third round of photographing the city.



Christopher Rauschenberg, Warsaw, 2016

In 1997-1998 he spent time in Paris rephotographing 500 scenes shot previously by Eugene Atget, who Rauschenberg considers “the greatest photographer of all time.” His website portfolio includes photographs from travels to Europe, China, Tanzania, Thailand,

Brazil, and Guatemala. From March 26-April 19 a selection of recent photographs from Poland will be shown at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#).

When did you start taking pictures?

When I was six years old in 1957, maybe five years old.

When you were doing that, were you thinking that you were a photographer?

No. My mom [artist Susan Weil] had a Rollei [Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex camera], and I took pictures with it—it weighed about as much as I did—one of those things like a shotgun, when you trip its shutter you gotta brace yourself. But she got me a little [Kodak] Brownie, one of those Bakelite cube kind of cameras, and then she and I would go walking around taking pictures together. When I was six and seven she taught me how to print badly in the darkroom and I made these—I won't say books exactly, but connected matted prints—sort of book like in their final form, that I gave to people that I gave Christmas presents to, my grandparents. So I was publishing books at an early age. Then I stopped doing it 'til I was in high school. I bought myself a camera with my saved-up money and started doing more photography again.

So then were you thinking of yourself as being a photographer?

No. I didn't start thinking of myself as being a photographer until my third year in college when I transferred from Reed up to Evergreen State College. I took a class that was photography and filmmaking. I love film and I'm very interested in film. I figured out it was too hard to make film. It was too expensive. It was too complicated. You were a filmmaker, but you never actually accomplished any filmmaking because it was just so logistically hard.

You have to deal with all those people too.

Yeah. I'm going to shoot something, I need eight people there, so I have to tell three of them I'll do their laundry for them and one that I'll do the grocery shopping, so they can be there. And film was very expensive. Just using one roll of 16 mm film (three minutes or something)—to buy the film, get it developed, get a print made so you're not putting your original in a projector (which is a very dangerous place for some film to be)—the equivalent of a month's rent. I wouldn't be able to shoot enough film to learn how to do it.

Were there any kinds of photography or photographers who were influencing you at that point?

My original influence of course was my mom taking me out and photographing together, but I was interested in Minor White, his idea of making pictures of the ordinary world that seem to be some transcendent thing organized in the sequences where it wasn't necessarily

so much about an individual picture, the way a poem is not necessarily about the individual words. That was probably a pretty big influence. Obviously one creates oneself as an artist out of the bits and pieces you take of the artists you're interested in. It ended up that my most important influences were Lee Friedlander and Eugene Atget.

Atget seems to have done that thing of looking at the ordinary Paris and making it somehow extraordinary, even though you look at it and you can't figure out why that particular picture is extraordinary.

What I'm interested in from the very beginning: looking at ordinary things and thinking "that's not boring that's interesting." And of course that's what my father's [artist Robert Rauschenberg] work is all about. I think my father's work is very much based on a photographer's point of view. He did some work in photography himself, and he did work that incorporated a lot of photography. But I think just the basic—when he says, "I think I'm gonna put this necktie and that sock into my painting,"—I think that's the kind of thing that a camera teaches you, that something that would be insignificant, that you would ignore, the camera doesn't ignore, it sees it just the same. If you're sitting at this table and there's an old dirty sock on this table, the camera sees the old dirty sock just as much it sees your soul coming through your eyes.

When you're out there photographing do you feel you're finding pictures or that you're making pictures?

Finding.

So the world is presenting you with the picture and then you just need a lasso it?

When somebody sees a show of my work, what I want them to think is "Oh, gee, well the world is kind of more interesting than I thought. I need to keep my eye out for stuff like that." It's very much about having a sense, for the viewer, that I'm just pointing at stuff that's there, and giving them a heads up, a "hey, look out for this," because it's cool.

One of my theories is that art helps you to see the world. You might first notice something in artwork and then you go out into the world and say, "look, I think I've had this experience before"—but it was in an artwork. Landscape painting defines what is cool in landscape because of the ways certain artists decided to paint this tree or that river or whatever it is.

It teaches you to see it in a certain light.

And not necessarily just the "picturesque." Seventeenth century Dutch landscapes are pretty mundane if you really evaluate what's in the pictures—the road, the house, the fence, the tree—but it's more than that.

To see the music of how things come together. A picture, a painting, a photograph or whatever, can consist of entirely ordinary mundane objects, but there may be a visual spatial relationship, there may be echoing forms, there may be things that are aesthetically pleasing in the work and also in the real world.

There are a lot of people who walk through the world and never “see” it. It seems that something a photographer, or any other artist, is saying is, “Here’s a situation that I find interesting. How can I make my equivalent to a poem out of this that communicates to somebody else about that?” How do you tune your poem about this experience?

I think it’s a continuous learning experience. I don’t think it’s one of those things where at first you’re visually literate and then you read perfectly. It’s this thing where you’re continuously learning. You are continuously in the education biz. You see something that makes you realize that it’s not just a bunch of weird icky people on the bus and you wish you had your own car, but then you look at a Diane Arbus book and you think, “Oh look at these interesting people on the bus with me!” And there’s this process of “in what light can I see something?”—I’m not going to use the word “beautiful”—but by “beautiful” I mean fascinating, strange, I don’t just mean pretty. I mean something that I can benefit from looking at harder.

That’s one of the things I think about with your earlier early black-and-white pictures in the ‘70s—looking at a dishpan rack or looking at the cords coming down the wall, little things. You see them all the time, but whether or not you notice them is another question. Whether or not that would be “beauty” to a philosopher, I don’t know.

I am comfortable using “beauty” that way. You think about people who say, “Oh look that’s



Christopher Rauschenberg, Warsaw, 2016

a beautiful woman.” Well, you’ve learned to see that a particular person who looks like a Barbie doll—we call that beautiful. But then, as you continue to be out in the world, you discover that maybe even if somebody has brown skin and they don’t look like Barbie, maybe they’re kind of heavier than Barbie (which virtually everyone in the world is)—maybe that’s beautiful.

Rubens had a particular idea about beauty somewhat different from the runway model.

There’s a wonderful quote from my dad: “I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly because they’re surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable.”

I think the main job—photography can do lots of different things—but for the kind of photography I’m doing, what’s at the core of the medium of photography I think, is that your job as a photographer is to get yourself to actually pay attention, and to actually see what’s ahead of you, on either side of you, what you’re standing underneath, whatever. I think it sounds easy to say, “Why don’t you pay attention and really see everything around you?” but it’s not easy at all. It’s the task of a lifetime.

I remember that you used to say that when you go out to take pictures you could only go out to take pictures. You couldn’t be on the way to the bank and take some pictures or your brain would still be thinking about going to the bank. Or if you ran into somebody, you knew your whole day was shot because you couldn’t get back into that space for taking pictures. Do you still carry that frame of mind when out photographing?

Yeah, I think that your job is to get yourself into a state where you’re really paying attention to what’s around you, and if you’re paying attention to what’s not around you, it kind of eliminates the possibility of really paying attention. As a photographer going out photographing, I’d go back later and look at my contact sheets, back in the pre-digital days, the pictures are lousy lousy lousy lousy lousy lousy. And then there’ll be like four great ones that are in seven frames. And then maybe I remember, “I got to go to the bank. What time is it?” And that would sort of break the spell. Then they’d be lousy again. So it’s like you could see the evidence: OK, here’s where I really broke through and started to see what’s going on around me in a rich way. There is a way in which the pictures before that are necessary, but they’re necessary in the way a piano player is playing their scales.

One of the funny things about photography is that when you’re just taking a picture of something that you think might not be very important or you’re thinking about the way an artist might make a little sketch or something in a sketchbook—maybe that’s something I should think about in the future. With photography there’s no way to tell if you’re making a little sketch in the sketchbook or you are making your masterpiece—that it’s the greatest

picture you've ever made in your life. It's a 60th of a second either way, and that's something you just decide later. That's sort of a funny unique thing about photography—what you think of as playing scales could turn out to be your masterpiece.

At some point you switched from being a black-and-white photographer to a color photographer.

It was right around 2000.

So what was your thought around that?

I've always liked both black-and-white and color. It's easy to do black-and-white and it used to be hard to do color.

With black-and-white just go downstairs your darkroom.

I would go down to the basement. I'd load my own film, develop my own film, make my own prints—really easy. Color wasn't very easy. I started the Portland Grid Project. If I want the largest meaning of my work to be “the ordinary world is wonderful and you should pay attention to it” but all of my portfolio is taken in exotic places—that's a bad mismatch. I needed to do a project in Portland.

But when I started doing that, I thought, “Well, the ways in which color is difficult is less difficult now.” It used to be much more expensive to print in a book—well, the Portland Grid Project is too big to be a book, it's going to be a website. On the website it doesn't matter if something is black-and-white or color, so I started putting a second camera in my pocket with color film in it, and I mostly shot black-and-white, but now and then I'd think, “I wonder what that would look like in color” and I'd shoot it. Then I'd almost always like the black-and-white one better. I kept doing it. Then sometimes I like the color one better. Then I'd usually like the color one better. Then I'd always like the color one better. Then I stopped shooting black-and-white. So that was the transition. I slowly taught myself to actually see better in color.



Christopher Rauschenberg, Warsaw, 2016

The show you're having Elizabeth Leach Gallery is pictures from Poland.

If you go to the Poland page on my website it's a series of short stories. The first one is kind of a novella. It's in a clothing market sort of like a Saturday Market or something. Because the weather in Poland is not exactly like Florida, there's a lot of covered spaces which made these great shadows, and some of the coverings were a sort of translucent blue and green and these funny little spot spots of light. I mostly photographed in the parts where the stalls were closed, and it's really about the light landing on the ground.

When you walk into a place like that do you just go "Ooh! Ah!"?

Right, I'm in heaven. It's interesting because Warsaw was a place that was bombed to smithereens and then rebuilt in Russian practical style. It's a place that is not rich in architectural beauty. Somehow your task of paying attention and finding the beauty in your surroundings is sometimes easier and sometimes harder.

But sometimes these more boring places are more interesting because there are things that are more surprising. If the buildings are richer, you might not notice the light and shadows because you will be distracted by the buildings.

Yeah, there are lots of things I would typically photograph, like what's in the store windows and everything, and I didn't really use that system. They don't really have shop windows with stuff in them. Same thing in China. You walk down a business street and what they would have in the window is a pile of newspapers leaning up against the glass. Windows are just to let light into the room. There wasn't any display aspect involved in it.

I was there for a photography festival in Lodz, and I spent some time in Warsaw, some in Kraków. Most of the photographs are from Warsaw, some are from Lodz, a couple I think are from Kraków.

Looking through your website, your trip to India in 1975 seems to be your first bunch of travel pictures.

I think it was. That was funny because I was really working every day. I didn't have much time to make photographs. I was helping my dad make these prints that were made out of handmade paper and sort of a paper-based clay that they build buildings out of. When we would run out of, say camel whips, I'd say, "Oh I'll go get them." Then somebody would drive me into town to the camel whip store and I would photograph out the window of the car. It was like trying to take pictures when you're on one of these bus tours.

It was very different different from your previous photography, looking at the nooks and crannies of things, and showing us things in a different light. In India you're looking at a strangely different culture. Did you think about how you were going to deal with this cultural aspect?

Yeah. One of the most important things about travel is that before you travel, however you're used to things being done, you think that's the only way to do them. You have a menu like you might have at a hotdog stand. What's on the menu? Hotdogs! What would you like? I'll have a...hotdog. But then you travel and see other people do things other ways. It makes you think: look there there's croque monsieur, pad thai all these other things I could be eating! But you also sort of look back and say, what's up with this hotdog? You look at your own culture differently, our own baseline assumption of how everything gets done. So it's partly about going to someplace, seeing how they do things, how it's different. When I was in India one of the most fascinating things was: what does a bucket look like in India? Looks different than a bucket in America. It's about seeing/seeing. Seeing the Indian bucket differently and also about seeing the American bucket differently—and our assumptions, what we think. Certainly in this country the people who haven't traveled, haven't seen other ways to do things, are at a disadvantage in terms of how they can understand what's happening in the world, but also how they understand what's happening in their own hometown.

When you go to what we think of as exotic places you seem to be looking for the local ordinary, not the exotic.

Yeah, I photograph the bucket not the Taj Mahal

WinchesterPatch

Arts

New Art Exhibit on Display at the Griffin Museum

Photographers Christopher Rauschenberg and Fred Sway have speak to local residents about their work.

By Jonathan Pickering
September 23, 2010



For an artist, inspiration can come from anywhere. For Fred Sway, it was moving into a new house. Having previously lived in an apartment, Sway now got to enjoy a large backyard as well as a porch.

For Christopher Rauschenberg, his inspiration was Paris.

The two artists are currently having their work displayed at the Arthur Griffin Museum of Photography until Nov. 7. And on Wednesday, Sep. 15, local residents and art enthusiasts got a chance to meet with and have a discussion with the two men.

Sway's collection, entitled *Porch Light*, centered around the often over-looked aesthetically inspirations centering around the exterior of his home. Sway gave a talk to those at the Griffin, discussing his artistic inspirations and his move from film to digital photography.

"Digital photography has more subtly in it than film does," commented Sway. "Artistically, I started shooting grand mansions right before the housing collapse. I was drawn to the idea of the 'perfect mansion.' I never found it; it became more of a sociological and economic endeavor.

"Focusing on walls of color [in architecture], it was easier to communicate the idea of why people decorate their homes the way they do."

Sway's sociological/economic lens gives his work a voyeur aspect to it, as if one relates not only the artist's musing of the photograph, but also something about the people who inhabit the dwelling.

Christopher Rauschenberg's gallery, *Marche' aux Puces*, named after the flea market in Saint-Ouen, France, just outside the Paris city limits, was a display centered in the main hall of the Griffin.

According to Rauschenberg, his photos have a surreal, yet centered quality to them, as it takes a moment to realize what exactly you're looking at. The images are all a collection from the Marche' aux Puces, highlighting its many wonders that the bazaar holds.

"Having seen other art, you follow your own train of thought," Rauschenberg said. "My train of thought basically always came back to this station. It's funny that people talk about the art business, as if that makes any sense. It's really an oxymoron, the art business. You do this because you love art, it's what you want to do, it's that simple."

For more information on these photographers or the Griffin, head over to their website at www.griffinmuseum.org.

A flea market fever dream at the Griffin in Winchester

By Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF

Posted Sep 19, 2010 @ 04:00 PM

WINCHESTER —

Instead of bargains, photographer Christopher Rauschenberg wandered through the world's greatest flea market hunting the improbable beauty of secondhand goods.

On a recent trip, he photographed "a museum of antiques" all jumbled together at Marche aux Puces, or "market with fleas," at Saint-Ouen just "an inch or two outside" of Paris city limits.

Displayed at the Griffin Museum of Photography, Rauschenberg's 2-by-3-foot color photographs provide jolting, gorgeous and sometimes weirdly funny glimpses of his fever dream of castaway art and artifacts.

Titled "Marche aux Puces: Christopher Rauschenberg," these photos celebrate, he said, a "stream-of-consciousness dream world in search of commerce but in search of poetry too."

What a photographer's dream!

A hairy buffalo hoof sits atop a bland chest of drawers. A statue of a brazen nude shares a tabletop with a blue demon with a gaping mouth.

Left in a vacant corner, a mushroom-shaped table, an astronaut's spacesuit and something like a lava lamp wait for buyers. A marble chorus of cherubs sing on a desk top while nearby a bronze monkey hugs an armload of cocoanuts.

The exhibit in the Winchester museum's Main Gallery will run through Nov. 7.

Griffin Executive Director Paula Tognarelli said she first saw Rauschenberg's photos in Photolucida, a photography festival Rauschenberg organized in Portland, Ore.

"I thought these photos would appeal to viewers in Massachusetts because they're lush and light-spirited. And I think people will enjoy a vicarious trip through this world-famous flea market in France," she said.

Compared to items found in a typical U.S. flea market, Tognarelli said the opulence of the objects in Marche aux Puces suggested interesting differences in French and American attitudes toward decorative arts. She said Rauschenberg did not label his photos in this show so he wouldn't predispose viewers to see or interpret them in any particular way.

A New York native, the 59-year-old Rauschenberg wrote in a statement for the show that he began practicing "photographic art" at age 6. Over the next half-century, he earned a degree in photography from Evergreen State College, taught art and photography at Maryhurst College for 14 years and has co-organized 650 solo and 45 group shows.

The son of abstract and Pop Art painter Robert Rauschenberg, he has made curiously beautiful photographs from coincidental combinations of genuine antiques, probable junk and lots of things in between.

A viewer's initial reaction might be, "These photographs are beautiful."

They are. Like many images of art, Rauschenberg's photos capture the object's craftsmanship and beauty and then add a new dimension by showing these artworks sharing space with interesting looking trinkets.

It's not so different as a photo of Angelina Jolie, Stephen Hawking and Osama bin Laden sharing a taxi. It's intriguing. But does it mean anything?



Chris Rauschenberg photographs of a flea market outside Paris are on display at the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester.

Since viewers want to make sense of things, they are likely to superimpose onto these groupings, as Rauschenberg likely expects, narratives based on the memories they stimulate.

Oh, here's a chart of the human circulatory system next to a painting of an exotic flower.

Maybe he's making a profound comment on different kinds of organic life.

More likely, the photo catches our eye because it juxtaposes a pair of unlikely things. If he'd merely shown two flowers or two circulatory charts, it wouldn't be interesting at all.

Rauschenberg's father once said, "An empty canvas is full." Through these photos, his son might be making just the opposite point.

THE ESSENTIALS:

The Griffin Museum of Photography, 67 Shore Road, Winchester.

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Closed Monday.

ADMISSION: \$7 for adults; \$3 for seniors. Members and children under 12 are admitted free. Admission is free on Thursday.

INFO: Call 781-729-1158 or visit www.griffinmuseum.org. To learn about Christopher Rauschenberg, visit www.christopherrauschenberg.com.

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Focusing on the ins and outs

Flea markets and porches provide setting



"Oak Bluffs, MA" is one of Fred Sway's photos of porches.

By Mark Feeney
September 18, 2010

WINCHESTER — The world's largest assembly of antiques sellers is Paris's Marché aux Puces, the Flea Market. Of course, there are fleas — and then there are fleas. It must be said that the rooms and displays seen in Christopher Rauschenberg's 21 large color photographs (they're 2 feet by 3 feet) are pretty tony looking. There's nothing dark or musty or junky about the mirrors, frames, furniture, statuary, and various bric-a-brac lovingly rendered by Rauschenberg. Clearly, he's the one you want to do the catalog when you have your estate sale.

"Marché aux Puces: Photographs by Christopher Rauschenberg" runs at the Griffin Museum of Photography through Nov. 7. In a charming fillip, the show includes several items from Winchester's Lion's Head Antiques & Collectibles.

The Surrealists loved flea markets for the opportunities they offered for incongruous juxtaposition. There's almost nothing surreal about Rauschenberg's images. Is it his sensibility? The nature of the displays? The luck of the draw? Who can say. The displays here have a sense of rightness to them rather than an air of oddity. Everything belongs. The sole exception — admittedly, it's a whopper — is a room with what looks like an Apollo astronaut's spacesuit, complete with helmet and visor. There's a white, plastic biomorphic chair, too. Who knew Alphaville had antiques shops.

The collections and rooms Rauschenberg has photographed, like the photographs themselves, have an inviting quality. These are not objects you might necessarily want to own (even if you had the space). Certainly, though, they are ones to appreciate and savor. Underscoring that sense of an invitation is the fact that the only people we see are two-dimensional, on canvas or ceramic, like the woman in a painting who peeks out over a set of light sconces (they go for 160 euros — kind of pricey). There's no one to intrude on the viewer's sense of privacy.

Strangely, neither are there any people visible in Fred Sway's "Porch Light." The strangeness comes from the fact that porches, besides being about ventilation and shade and architectural variety, are also about society. The first home theater, they were like a box at the opera house, with the viewers' attention directed to sidewalk and street as substitute for stage. The one complaint to register about Sway's 20 color photographs is that they include no views looking out *from* a porch. That was a role the porch very much played in the pre-television era, back when people looked through screens rather than at them.

Where Rauschenberg presents a world of interiors, Sway takes us outside — but not too far. Part of the appeal of porches is that they're a kind of borderland, not quite indoors, not quite out. They are the outdoors domesticated, and indoors opened up. Nicely timed, this is definitely an end-of-summer show. There are no icy or leaf-strewn steps to be seen.

Sway, a former director of the New England School of Photography, retired two years ago as head of photo services at Boston University. In high school, Sway moved with his family from an apartment to a house with a screened-in porch and lush garden. Begun last year, his "Porch Light" series owes something to "those memories of another time and place," as Sway puts it.

"Porch light" usually means an electric light fixed to a porch ceiling or wall. "It's getting dark out here. Turn on the porch light." Here it refers to natural light illuminating porches — and not just them. We get a bit of terrace here, a nicely planted corner of yard there, a deck.

No stickler, Sway is as interested in furnishings as setting. He presents accoutrements both artificial (planters, chairs, garden hoses) and natural (the plants in the planters, vines, and other plantings). The finest sight is a magnificent beech, from Santa Rosa, Calif. The most peculiar is a life-size color cutout of Judy Garland in "The Wizard of Oz." Toto, we're not in Kansas, anymore? Austin, Texas, actually.

ARTFORUM

Christopher Rauschenberg

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

417 N.W. 9th Avenue

January 7–January 30

Christopher Rauschenberg's photographs of flea-market scenes in Paris's Marché aux Puces in Saint Ouen were taken over several trips to the City of Light in 2008 and 2009. Rauschenberg knows the city well. For his study "Paris Changing," 1997–1998, he rephotographed five hundred places depicted in Eugène Atget's heroic documentation of its streets and surfaces. Rauschenberg then paired eighty-eight of his images alongside Atget's originals in a book published by Princeton Architectural Press. The work is as intimate and distilled as the memory of a loved one.

The Marché aux Puces prohibits photography. Rauschenberg skirted the issue by mentally composing each image, quietly removing the camera from his pocket, and shooting from the hip. He positions the viewer below the picture plane. As a result, the viewer gazes upward into many of Rauschenberg's rich constructions. Like his father's "combines," these photographs speak to the history of assemblage and Surrealism; they contain a welcoming sureness achieved only through many years of looking.

In the "Paris Flea Market" photographs, two- and three-dimensional spaces morph and switch states. Objects like the flat cardboard astronaut in *Paris Flea Market XXI*, 2009, seem animated and alive while surrounded by a hanging wire chair, an old dressing mirror, and a cacophony of ephemera. In other photographs, paintings and mirrors reflect and multiply the things around them, obscuring individual objects within an expanding landscape. The effect is lulling and dreamy, like a hall of mirrors full of welcoming distractions.

Rauschenberg is well known for his passionate desire to experience the world photographically. The "Paris Flea Market" series forced the artist to work a bit differently—perhaps more slowly. The satisfying result of this shift in practice is one of the artist's strongest bodies of work to date.



Christopher Rauschenberg, *Paris Flea Market XXI*, 2009, color photograph, 24 x 36". From the series, "Paris Flea Market," 2009.

— Stephanie Snyder

A successful photograph 'has a conversation with you every day'

Let's say that I was forced to list my favorite photographs of all time. One would undoubtedly be a snapshot of my late father walking along the beach talking to my son Thomas, almost 3 at the time, who trots along splashing in the water. It makes me laugh every time I see it.

I also would include more family snapshots and some historical photographs — almost any of Abraham Lincoln. Then I'd get into images by famous photographers — Imogen Cunningham for sure (what a great spirit!), the Frenchman jumping through a puddle immortalized by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Adams landscapes, Edward Weston nudes and peppers and so on.

When I think about it, there must be hundreds of images floating around inside my head — snapshots, family portraits, images carefully hunted down and composed by "real" photographers, even X-rays of broken bones and ultrasounds. It's a mess up there.

So, it was time for some spring cleaning, and the guy I wanted to help in my sorting was Chris Rauschenberg, photographer and founder of Blue Sky Gallery. He makes beguiling, deceptively simple images (like the ones at Elizabeth Leach Gallery right now), and he also has an advanced sorting mechanism for photographs. Which is to say, he's thought about the whole subject a lot.

We started with his photographs at Elizabeth Leach (you also can see them at his Web site, www.christopherrauschenberg.com). As you look, his seemingly simple pictures blossom into complexity.

Please see **JOHNSON**, Page B2



BARRY JOHNSON

Sometimes it's incongruity: an abandoned running shoe at the edge of the labyrinth of an old cemetery in Marrakech, Morocco. Sometimes it's the jumble of subjects — a shop in Juarez with the oddest possible collection of small statues. "I wouldn't buy this, but I'd like it tumbling around in my head, please," Rauschenberg says.

As we look at each photograph, he explains a little about it, and then I start to see some of the reasons that little slice of found reality appealed to him. Some of them are easy: The white caftan stretched out to dry on a special contraption in Morocco will appear in a nightmare near me soon. Others, you have to look a little longer — to find a ghostly shadow rising above an abandoned mattress on a rubble heap.

Strangely, the photographs teach us to "see" them. Or not so strangely, because Rauschenberg encourages us to "notice things like these when you are walking around" — the odd juxtapositions, the visual puns, the textures and structures in everyday objects. A successful photograph "has a conversation with you every day, so it needs a lot of things it's willing to talk about."

In the gallery's back room, the lesson kicks into high gear with pictures by other photographers. Rauschenberg did some quick explaining — the "photography world" photographs (represented in the back room by Melody Owen and Matt McCormick) are images taken from the world, rendered two-dimensional and

shown to us.

The subjects of the "art world" images are created by the artists themselves — Malia Jensen didn't just happen upon the word "Bobcat" in giant lights on the beach at dusk. Different methods and approaches to get interesting images.

That helped a lot, actually — two categories of photographs, I exclaimed! Rauschenberg looked at me quizzically (or was it the way a teacher looks at an especially dim student?): "I like to think there are lots and lots of categories," he said. Of course! The snapshots, historic photographs and art photographs are just the beginning. Photojournalism,

nature photography, landscapes — each with its own history and brilliant images. And then there are photographs that straddle two or more categories. Suddenly, I was creating dozens of categories in my mind.

So yes, I'm sorting through my mental attic of stored images. And now I'm thinking that with so many new files and bins, I'll be able to accommodate a lot more photographs.

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The New York Times



Christopher Rauschenberg's photograph of Minoru Yamasaki's Pacific Science Center Courtyard is also in the exhibit.

November 23, 2008

Art

Saving That Landscape, in Pictures at Least

By KATHRYN SHATTUCK

IN his six decades as one of America's pre-eminent landscape architects, Lawrence Halprin has seen his creations come and go. He has watched as they've been neglected and abandoned, distorted from their original vision, rendered irrelevant or tweaked by others in the name of bringing them up to date.

"I have indeed had that happen, and it makes me sick to my stomach," said Mr. Halprin, 92, whose Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington and the Sea Ranch community in Sonoma County, Calif., are among his most celebrated works.

In a phone interview from his office in Marin County he spoke of the public's lack of understanding of landscape work. "I think it's very much easier to look at a piece of architecture and a building and say, 'Here they put in some tower and some plaza,' than it is to understand what we do and why we do it," he said.

"That's where the difficulty is," he went on, "because our work is much more poetic and has themes and reasons for its design which are much more deep-seated and almost biblical very often. Our work is harder to appreciate because it's more difficult to understand its steps."

That's where Charles A. Birnbaum of the Cultural Landscape Foundation comes in. For the past decade he has been viewed as something of a savior by Mr. Halprin and his peers, whose works are threatened by declining maintenance, encroaching development and a simple lack of interest, as trends in landscape design fall in and out of favor.

As president of the foundation, based in Washington, Mr. Birnbaum, 47, is an advocate not only for historic landscapes, created or natural, but also for the visionaries who have shaped them.

"He's like a little Johnny Appleseed for the design professional and landscape architect," said Tom Fox, a principal with SWA Group, a planning and landscape design firm in Sausalito, Calif. "He's spreading the word."

But Mr. Birnbaum, who speaks in exuberant paragraphs that weave together history and observation, knows that it doesn't matter how widely the word has spread if what is being spoken about is not actually seen — particularly by a society that so often renders landscapes invisible.

So for a second year the foundation, in collaboration with Garden Design magazine and the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, has commissioned photographers to capture for posterity significant landscapes at risk of being lost.

In "Marvels of Modernism," the latest installment, 10 photographers have translated the design elements of 12 postwar Modernist landscapes — kidney-shaped pools, Miró-esque reservoirs, boomerang curves, floating cantilevered decks and adventure playgrounds — for the 21st century. The exhibition, which opened Wednesday, will run through Jan. 4 and then travel to museums and botanical gardens. The sites were selected from the foundation's annual "Landslide" list of endangered places and plants, which was culled from hundreds of nominees and then vetted by a panel of designers and preservationists.

"What we're trying to do with the Cultural Landscape Foundation is to begin to get people to recognize that the American landscape is in fact a cultural institution worthy of celebration," Mr. Birnbaum said. Featuring works like the daunting horizon of Boston City Hall Plaza, designed by I. M. Pei & Partners, and Dan Kiley's orthogonal Miller Garden in Columbus, Ind., designated a national historic landmark in 2000, the disparate sites are linked by the civic ambition of those who designed them.

Their creators — people like John Ormsbee Simonds of Pittsburgh, Edward L. Daugherty of Atlanta, M. Paul Friedberg of New York and Mr. Halprin of San Francisco — "were city shapers, players in the '50s, '60s and '70s," Mr. Birnbaum said. "They did a lot to affect the form that the city ultimately took."

Aside from creating a permanent record of the landscapes for the foundation, the photographers involved in "Marvels of Modernism" have donated images to the Eastman's permanent collection.

"It becomes part of the memory chest, if you will, of all of these places," Mr. Birnbaum said.

Christopher Rauschenberg composed panoramas of multiple frames to evoke the expanse of the Pacific Science Center Courtyard in Seattle, where Minoru Yamasaki's white sculptured arches evoke his later design for the World Trade Center towers. Mr. Rauschenberg used the same technique to capture the Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks in Kent, Wash., an environmental artwork by Herbert Bayer composed of mounds and excavated concentric circles intended to collect storm water.

Mr. Fox hung out of a small helicopter hovering at 500 to 1,500 feet to capture the hub-and-spoke design of Parkmerced in San Francisco, often described as a city within a city with landscape architecture by Thomas D. Church with Robert Royston and a model of postwar urban planning.

Heather F. Wetzel used the 19th-century technique of ruby ambrotype to render dark clouds hovering above Lake Elizabeth, the trapezoidal gem designed by Mr. Simonds for the 1967 renewal of the Allegheny Commons in Pittsburgh.

"I'm not a fanatic on preservation," said Mr. Friedberg, 77, whose Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis is listed among the "Marvels." "I don't think everything I've done deserves to be preserved. I think it works at the time, and then we go from there."

Still, he argued that the values embedded in the original design should be honored as time unfolds. "So often there is no basis for criteria," he said. "Some banal administrator makes a

decision on the basis of his own needs and feeble desires. There should be a national committee, an organization that is given responsibility for arbitrating and assessing these things."

Mr. Friedberg estimates that the United States had about 5,000 landscape architects in 1965. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, that number soared to 28,000 by 2006. (Mr. Birnbaum and Mr. Friedberg estimate it is closer to 35,000 or 40,000).

As the profession grows, so does Mr. Birnbaum's organization. Next year its Web site (tclf.org), already a veritable garden of factual accounts and written and oral histories, will be "updated to 2.0 so that everything will be linked and Wiki-like," he said.

"What's Out There?," a major project in development for 10 years, will allow users to type in a geographic location, designer or landscape style and bring up visual and written records. A downloadable form will encourage people to submit entries of heretofore forgotten landscapes that will then be vetted by a project manager and posted. And a segment called "You Tell Us" will seek submissions of detailed narratives by those who worked on those creations or who watched from the sidelines.

Part of the larger problem, Mr. Birnbaum said, is that no one really knows what is out there. As layers are added to the collective scholarship of the nation's landscape heritage, he and other enthusiasts will be able to fit together histories like Russian nesting dolls and discern how they stack up. They will also have to determine which are the most important.

"Many of the landscapes that are on our list this year will quite easily die a quiet death," Mr. Birnbaum said. "And so what we want to do is make them visible, put a bit of light on them so that they too have a discourse instead of letting them one day just be gone. They've deserved it."

A fresh feast from the past

By **BOB HICKS**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

The past is dead. Long live the past. We can hide it, or hide from it. Still, there it is, waiting.

That's what makes "Homage: Re-enactments, Copies and Tributes," the latest show in The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, such an intriguing experience.

Looming like a brilliant time warp over "Homage" is Sherrie Wolf's giant recreation of Gustave Courbet's 1855 painting "The Painter's Studio: Allegory of Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life." To Wolf's audacious act of reinvention, curator Terri Hopkins has added a liberal smattering from photographer Christopher Rauschenberg's passionate pursuit of Eugène Atget's Paris, plus a pair of largely academic projects that, while they don't add much to the visual pleasures of the exhibition, nimbly frame it and give it context.

That context? The flexibility of time, and the fugitive nature of imitation.

Brad Adkins peels historical onions. His contribution to "Homage" is a re-enactment of an earlier piece, from 1991, in which Nate Slusarenko had sanded away a portion of the gallery wall to reveal part of an even earlier work painted beneath, Tad Savinar's "Champ" from 1983. Adkins lets the ghosts breathe.

Inspired by her own copying of Tannic meditation drawings, Michelle Ross created several abstract paintings on paper, then asked 18 other artists to copy each image in a series she calls "Small Wild Things." The resulting copies are rather like mimeographs, fading and diffusing from the crispness of the original. It seems stamped in the blood that each copyist will bring something of himself or herself to the process, subtly changing what is, after all, not inherently reproducible: Even trying, we can only approximate.

Continued from Page 31

Atget shot from 1888 until his death in 1927, Rauschenberg decided to see if that world was still there and how, if at all, it had changed. On three trips to Paris in 1997 and 1998 he re-photographed 500 of Atget's scenes, plus a few dozen more that Atget hadn't shot but seemed as if he might have.

There is a see-and-compare quality to The Art Gym's pairings of Atget's and Rauschenberg's views of the same places. But more important is the mood, the timelessness, the strangely opaque clarity of these images. What counts is Atget's way of looking at the world, which Rauschenberg has sought to emulate and make at least partly his own. There are differences.



Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris
Photographed by Christopher Rauschenberg

But Wolf and Rauschenberg are where the action is. Wolf has been playing the art-history card for a long time in her paintings, but never on such a grand scale, and always before with much more obvious personal incursions. Here, her own touch is more subtle. She reproduces Courbet's grand original in size — 12 by 20 feet — and detail, altering it only in minor ways, such as "borrowing" a woman's face from another painting to put on a body from this one.

What's going on here, I think, is a celebration of representational art's rediscovered vigor in the wake of the abstract hurricane. By its nature the Courbet re-visitation wears an academic perfume —

what, really, are we looking at when we look at this 21st-century antique? — yet Wolf finds contemporary freedom in the mastery of old-fashioned skills. Look at the almost 3-D angle of the ear sticking up on the cat in the center foreground, for instance, or the look of pleasure on the artist's face as he works on his landscape, contrasted with the more anxious look on the face of the nude model gazing over his shoulder. She might be shivering in the studio cold. Storytelling, Courbet and Wolf tell us, is alive and riveting.

Long an admirer of the brilliant, almost mystic photographs of Paris that

Please turn to Page 32

Rauschenberg's lens tends to be crisper; Atget often revels in a mist that shrouds his city. His images recede into the unknowable. Rauschenberg's piece as far as technically possible.

They are the same, and not the same. Past, you might say, but not past recognition.

•
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Mapping Portland

by Phil Harris

The Portland Grid Project. 1995 – 2004

"...In our American cities, we need all kinds of diversity, intricately mingled in mutual support. We need this so city life can work decently and constructively, and so the people of cities can sustain (and further develop) their society and civilization...[M]ost city diversity is the creation of incredible numbers of different people and different private organizations, with vastly differing ideas and purposes, planning and contriving outside the formal framework of public action."

— Jane Jacobs, from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Grid Participants (over time):

Jim Carmin
Tom Champion
Dawn-Starr Crowther
Deborah Dombrowski
Barbara Gilson
Ann Hughes
Tom Kearcher
Ann Kendellen
David Potter
Doug Prior
Christopher Rauschenberg
Rich Rollins
Patrick Stearns
Paul Sutinen
Bill Washburn

In the fall of 1995, Christopher Rauschenberg, a photographer in Portland, Oregon, had a realization. The realization emerged from a contradiction, and, as sometimes happens in these situations, an idea was born. The realization was that, although he believed that his photographs should help us notice that "the ordinary world around you is wonderful, and not ordinary at all, and you should pay attention to it," he was so busy with his not-so-ordinary life traveling to Paris, Stockholm, and Mexico City, that more and more of his photographs documented everywhere, in fact, except Portland. "My work [was] starting to mean the opposite of what I want[ed] it to mean: it [was] starting to mean, 'Don't bother with boring places, only go to exotic places.'"

Rauschenberg also realized that like most people, he had a habitual set of destinations and routes through town that he knew well, and that he wanted to go outside what he knew, to really get to know Portland in its entirety, to break out of his known little world. But he didn't want to pursue this as a solo project. If one photographer could write a love letter to a city with a camera (e.g., Atget), think how much more eloquent two or four or a dozen people could be. Rauschenberg also knew that he wasn't interested in simply "divvying up" the city among various photographer friends, in the interest of efficiency. The idea was

companionship—everyone would photograph everything, and then share the results. "I wanted to do the whole thing," Rauschenberg said. "But I wanted company along the way." Thus, the *Portland Grid Project* was born.

The *Grid Project* began as an amorphous collection of photographers, united by nothing except a love of the medium and a collective fondness for the city they live in. Most of the photographer/participants had day jobs, and most were connected through Blue Sky Gallery. Blue Sky has existed as a loose collective for 29 years, a membership-driven anomaly that has amassed an enviable prescience for showing undiscovered talent that has later been lauded by the cognoscenti. Every Wednesday night, for the last three decades, all members have been invited to help choose the gallery exhibitions. Christopher Rauschenberg has been one of the gallery's guiding lights since its inception, when he and four other photographers established Blue Sky in 1975. He is currently co-director and board chairman.

In 1995, after Rauschenberg's epiphany, he gathered a small group of photographers together to talk about his big idea: what would it be like to try to explore (and photograph) every bit of the city of Portland, over time? Estimates of the size of the city vary from 130 to 145 square miles, excluding outer suburbia; Portland is a relatively compact city, but the idea was still audacious. The photographers had mixed reactions—great idea, but a nine year commitment? Most of them were pursuing bodies of work, exhibiting, and participating in the photographic community on various levels. Did they want to put all that on hold while undertaking such a massive project?

The *Grid* photographers arrived at an elegant approach to a visual problem that looked, at first blush, overwhelming. Once a month, the members gathered at one or another's home to review images they'd taken that month and to choose a locale for the following



above left: Tom Kearcher, *N7*, October 1995
above right: Rich Rollins, *M6*, May 2003
previous page: Doug Prior, *F9 & 10*, March 2003

month's work. They'd cut up a AAA map of the city into its component grid squares and assigned themselves one square (roughly one square mile) of the city to photograph each month, by picking a square out of a hat.

Each person was completely free to interpret the designated locale in whatever style suited. The only constraints were geographical and temporal: you had to have at least one foot in the grid square while you took the picture, and you had to work consistently, so that you had something to show at the end of the

"This weekend a man came up to me in our current grid square and told me, 'There's nothing to photograph here. It's just a neighborhood.'"

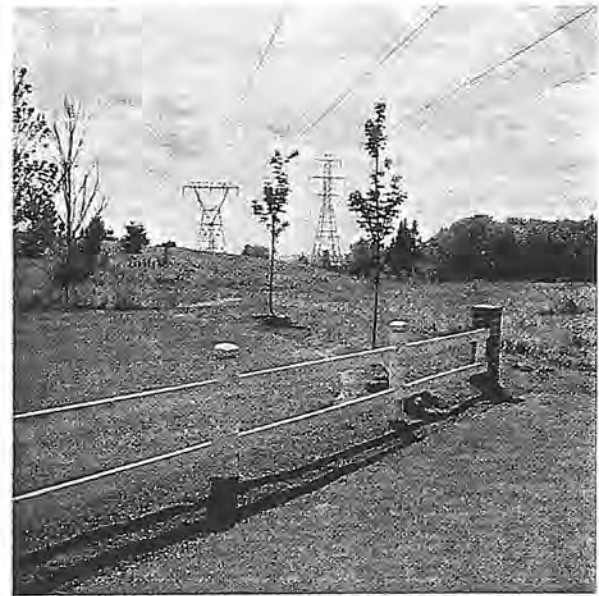
— Christopher Rauschenberg, grid square J11, September 1997

month. This method ensured that a document would be produced over time that would be as imaginative, and as idiosyncratic, as the participants. The resulting pictures would be as varied in their depictions of time and geography as they would approaches and techniques used by those who wanted a piece of the action.

Portland's two well-defined seasons (wet and dry), its mixture of urban, suburban, and quasi-rural scenery, along with two major rivers, and a wide seasonal variation in the amount of daylight, added plenty of built-in challenges to the ambitious project.

Aside from people with too much time on their hands, where does something like the *Grid Project* come from? Though this endeavor feels like a typically collaborative contemporary-art effort, its roots go back to both European and American photographic surveys and eccentric passions.

In France, the obvious precursors are the 19th century photographic inventories of Edouard Baldus (government-financed), and Eugene Atget (heartfelt, personal, and obsessive). These two men (along with the Bohemian writers, musicians, and painters of the Second Empire) established the image of "Olde" Paris in the popular mind. It was easy for Brassai, Doisneau, and others to follow in their footsteps, cementing Paris as the preeminent spot for romance (heartfelt or tawdry) on the planet.



In Germany, photographers took a different tack. There, the fondness for monuments and ruins, and the nostalgic *temps perdu* desire to ruminate over them was replaced by a cerebral/mystical need to catalog people. Which brings us to August Sander, premier librarian of humanity.

Baldus photographed monuments and architectural achievements with the eye of a nationalist; Atget took in the fading Paris of his youth with an intimate nostalgia. But Sander approached the German people with rigor and political rectitude. His desire to pin down every



type of person by their profession, handicap, haircut, sartorial sense and/or social increment is unparalleled in photography. His indelible purpose has marked his descendants, Karl Blossfeldt and Bernd and Hilla Becher, and his grandchildren, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Uta Barth (though their work has evolved to the point that its connection to Sander's meticulous cataloging can only be inferred).

In America, the need to document where we live and who we are (as a consequence?) has been a central strand in photography since its importation in 1839. The fountainhead of the landscape-as-mirror genre is probably Timothy O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan's Civil War experiences were doubtless partly responsible for the unique quality of his western expeditionary work. The haunted emptiness in so many of his images is the great taproot of American landscape photography: the tension between the enigma of the land and the human who dares to crawl across its crust.

When O'Sullivan's work is crossed with Atget's, their hybrid offspring sprouts up as Walker Evans. In Evans, the refined modern American sensibility appears; the tension between the restless and the fixed, the commercial and the private, the local and the generic. Evans said that what he prized as a documentarian and as an artist was the "vernacular." There has been a great deal of debate about what Evans meant by this word. But it seems from the evidence of his pictures that, if Evans was reticent when it came to explanations, he knew the "vernacular" when he saw it. His pictures are a document of home places: the handmade and homemade next to the manufactured; eccentric personal choices constrained by questions of livelihood; oddities of language, like backwater eddies in a world of burgeoning mass communications. Evans, like Atget, foresaw the withering of the sorts of idiosyncrasy he treasured, and reached the same conclusion: large leveling forces are unstoppable, but small treasures can be preserved, and photography is an ideal preservative.

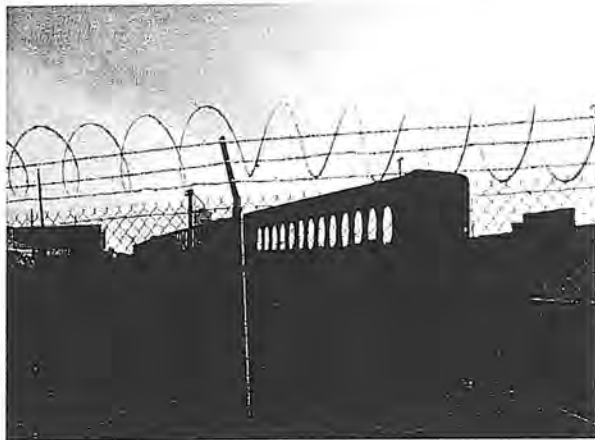
From Evans, the impulse to photograph the man-made landscape

eventually gave rise to a group of American photographers that curator William Jenkins called the New Topographers: Ed Ruscha, Lewis Baltz, Robert Adams, Stephen Shore, Joel Meyerowitz, Joe Deal, and younger artists like Len Jenschel and Diane Cook. Though their differences as photographers are much more apparent than their similarities, these photographers share the same interest in a sense of "home" in the landscape, the tension between commercial culture, nature and the individual sense of self. Whether they are driven by a sense of joy, outrage, irony, loss or just plain curiosity, these artists have elected to explore the American outlook by way of the American outback, or at least the American backyard.

Since the *Grid Project's* inception in 1995, about a dozen and a half photographers have participated for varying lengths of time. The participants agreed to limit the number of people working at any given time by the amount of pictures they could look at in an evening. The consensus was that the most boring and unproductive squares were perfectly maintained suburbs. The houses were all set back so far from the street, and often so inaccessible on foot, that the pictures were hardly worth making. As Rauschenberg says, "No one ever got excited by perfectly clipped lawns." The best places, by some accounts, were mixed residential/commercial areas; alleys were particularly prized for their views of backyards, where life really happens.

Over the course of nine years, much of the original intent of the project has come to pass. Patrick Stearns, a participant for almost the entire nine years, says that the biggest eye-opener for him was "going to different locations around Portland that I had never gone to before, and probably never would have if it hadn't been for the Grid. And sometimes, it felt like I wasn't in Portland at all, but some other city, just because it was so unrecognizable to me."

Another participant, Bill Washburn, was amazed by the amount of shoreline inside the city limits, much of which he explored and photographed by kayak (which he dubbed "an unfair advantage").



above top:
David Potter, E5, April 2002

above:
Barbara Gibson, M9, December 2002

previous page:
Doug Prior, M9, January 2003

"If anything informs this area, it's water. You could forget it because we're in a city, but we're in the delta of one of the great rivers of the world...when you get out onto the water itself, and you get to see the point of view from the water, it's astounding."

The solidarity of the participants seems to have been one of the Grid Project's strongest attributes. Ann Kendellen, another long-time participant, emphasized that the "opportunity to get together with a group of photographers on such a regular basis, simply to look at each other's work was really valuable. And focusing on the same project and seeing how it looked to other people when they were out there, what it was they saw was really interesting." Members of the group would often see something that they knew would excite one of their colleagues, and it was not uncommon for someone to let the group in on a particularly good find in a grid square, or a hidden entryway or access route.

Rauschenberg notes that there were some unforeseen outcomes in generating this vast body of work. For one thing there are almost no pictures of people. People, particularly in some of the least populated areas, were not amenable to being photographed. And, although there have been some exhibitions of work-in-progress, there had been no culminating event planned for the Grid Project. The project, which has been financed entirely by the participants, does not, as yet, have either funding or venue to realize a major exhibition of even a small portion of the work that has been generated.

As one might expect in a long-term group project, the lineup of

the participants has changed over the years, and a few grey hairs have sprouted. Meanwhile, the city has grown, the rivers have flooded and receded, the economy has boomed, built, and gone bust. Participants have dropped out, dropped back in, changed their means and methods, seen their vision open, and experienced mixed feelings about the rising mountain range of images. At this point, by Rauschenberg's conservative estimate, some 20,000 prints have been generated, and a new issue has come to the fore: what to do with all this work?

"What are we going to do with this vast inventory?" asks Kendellen. "So many of us have so many things going on in our lives, and we know [it would] be a huge effort to do some kind of grand finale show, or if we were fortunate enough to be able to publish..." The end of the project, at this point, seems much less definite than its inception; but it's too soon to tell how the work will be shown, collected, archived. The ultimate concern for nine years has been the process, not the resolution of the product: The fact that Oregon ranks near the bottom in funding for the arts hasn't stopped people from participating in the *Grid Project*, but, as Rauschenberg says, "somebody's going to have to show some actual financial interest and some commitment to the idea to make [the compilation and archiving of the project] happen." Although it might look to the untutored eye as if Blue Sky is a logical sponsor or venue for sharing the fruits of the Project with the public, the gallery is simply too small and too marginally funded to sponsor work of this scale and complexity.


Characteristically, the spirit of the group seems undiminished by the passing of the accumulation phase. Kendellen thinks the Grid photographers will probably continue meeting. "Even if we're not collaborating on a project, we've built this nearly-ten-year-old relationship of a certain kind, and we're all really reluctant to just end it because Portland's run out of mileage for us. Which it really hasn't

"The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it and not at all famous to the one who is pictured."

— Naomi Shihab Nye, from her poem, *Famous*

in a way. I think some of the areas we've gone to would be really interesting to revisit."

Rauschenberg is more emphatic about making another circuit, a sort of photographic Saturn return. "A few months ago, I was scrambling down this really sharp embankment along the Columbia Slough, and I thought to myself, 'Well, let's see, I'm 52; nine years from now when I'm scrambling down this embankment I'll be 61. Well, whatever.' I don't know if I'll get my walker down there, but it might all be paved by then, anyway."

What is the significance of this project? For the participants, the Grid Project may be less about pictures generated than about initiatives taken and bonds formed. For the rest of the world, it's another signpost pointing in the direction that the arts seem to be headed: decentralization, collaboration, an attachment to the local and the regional. While a suburban consumer society (and its stepchild, the Internet) have encouraged us to think that everywhere is a bit like everywhere else, a few contrarians beg to differ. The stubborn specificity of where we live, how it feels, what it looks like—these are the real objects of wonder. 

Phil Harris is a Portland, Oregon-based photographer. His images have been shown around the US and in Europe, and are held in various collections, public and private. In 2000, he published *Portrait* (ISBN 0203402061), a retrospective book of photographs.



Christopher Rauschenberg

PARIS CHANGING

Revisiting Eugène Atget's Paris



Between 1888 and 1927 Eugène Atget carefully photographed Paris and its environs, capturing in thousands of photographs the city's parks, streets, and buildings as well as its diverse inhabitants. His images preserved the vanishing architecture of the ancien régime as Paris grew into a modern capital and established Atget as one of the twentieth century's greatest and most revered photographers.

In the late 1990s Christopher Rauschenberg revisited and rephotographed many of Atget's original locations. *Paris Changing* features seventy-six pairs of images, beautifully reproduced in duotone. By meticulously replicating the emotional as well as

aesthetic qualities of Atget's images, Rauschenberg vividly captures both the changes the city has undergone and its enduring beauty. His work is both an homage to his predecessor and an artistic study of Paris in its own right.

Each site is indicated on a map of the city, inviting readers to follow in the steps of Atget and Rauschenberg. Essays by Clark Worswick and Alison Nordstrom give insight into Atget's life and situate Rauschenberg's work in the context of other rephotography projects. The book concludes with an epilogue by the well-known art publisher Rosamond Bernier and a portfolio of Atget-inspired images of contemporary Paris by Rauschenberg.



Oregon-based photographer **Christopher Rauschenberg**, son of artist Robert Rauschenberg, is cofounder of the nonprofit Blue Sky Gallery. His work has been widely exhibited.

Clark Worswick is the author of a number of important books on photography.

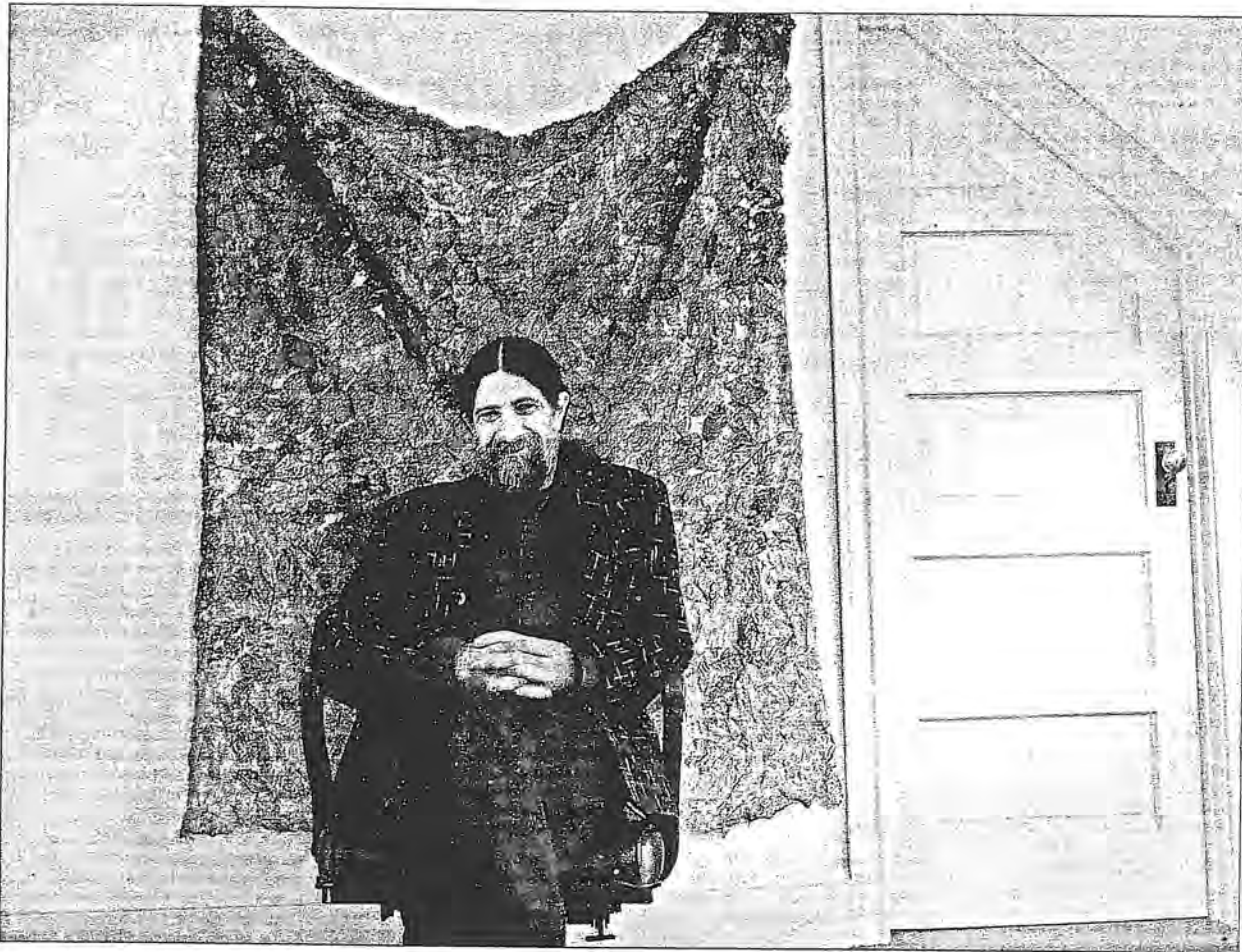
Alison Nordstrom is a curator at the George Eastman House Museum, whose writing on photography has appeared in numerous publications.

Rosamond Bernier is a professional lecturer, speaking at institutions such as the Louvre, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She was the founding publisher of *L'Œil* magazine.



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Front cover, top:
Jardin du Luxembourg, 1906 and 1998
Front cover, bottom:
Rue Galande, 1899 and 1998
Back cover, left:
Rue des Nonnaines-d'Hyères, 1900
Back cover, right:
Rue de Fourcy, 1998



Like father, like son

Christopher Rauschenberg's new photo exhibit adds to his already-solid rep

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

Finally, a chance to put to Christopher Rauschenberg the question people want to ask when they first meet him but are too afraid to: What's it like to be the son of one of the most influential contemporary artists of all time?

"My dad's the best artist in the world," the 51-year-old photographer says with a laugh about Robert Rauschenberg, the artist who popularized assemblage-like combine paintings. "I agree with everyone else's opinion that his work is amazing."

Rauschenberg the son is no slouch, either. The opportunity to ask about his father comes during a month when there's a celebration for the photographer's own accomplished career: Rauschenberg

has a show of landscape photographs at The Heathman Hotel's Mezzanine Gallery. And Thursday night, at a ceremony held at Reed College, Rauschenberg received the Bonnie Bronson Fellowship Award for his acclaimed artistic work and years of commitment to the local community. The award, which includes a small cash gift, is named after a sculptor who died in 1990 in a climbing accident.

The honor is a fitting and long-deserved one for a photographer whose accomplishments have been both behind the camera and behind the scenes. Rauschenberg is one of the region's most dedicated and versatile photographers of the past three decades. He's also been a tireless champion of the medium, serving as a founding member of both the

28-year-old Blue Sky Gallery and the monthlong annual celebration of photography, PhotoAmericas.

Born in New York, Rauschenberg moved to Portland to attend Reed College for two years before transferring to the Evergreen State College in Washington. Classmates at Evergreen included "The Simpsons" creator Matt Groening and cartoonist Lynda Barry. It's a measure of Rauschenberg's "free-wheeling, free-thinking ways that the intellectually challenging Reed atmosphere wasn't independent enough for him.

"Evergreen took this attitude that you don't need to memorize all the stuff," he says. "It was more like: 'Why don't you learn how to operate the world' as opposed to

the usual attitude of 'Sit back, shut up and learn.'"

After graduating with a degree in photography, Rauschenberg returned to the Rose City, pursuing a photographic career when the art scene here was still a modest-sized affair. Carrying one of the most recognizable last names in art history might have been a burden, but Rauschenberg instead felt liberated by it.

"I was raised to look at the world in this rich, delicious way," he says about his father's influence. "I never felt the pressure to reach the same level of success. How do you equal that?"

Instead of trying to equal his father, Rauschenberg learned to operate the world. In 1975, he co-founded Blue Sky with a group of other re-

Please see **PHOTOS**, Page 63

You can call him Chris: He's won an award for an accomplished career and he has famous artistic lineage, but photographer Christopher Rauschenberg is a pretty laid-back guy.

ROSS WILLIAM
HAMILTON
THE OREGONIAN

REVIEW

Photographs by Christopher Rauschenberg

Where: The Heathman Hotel's Mezzanine Gallery, 1009 S.W. Broadway

Hours: Open during hotel hours

Closes: May 31

Photos: Color panoramas are stunning

Continued from Page 60

spected shooters, including Craig Hickman and Terry Toedtemeier, now the photography curator at the Portland Art Museum. In the years since, the gallery has become a nationally acclaimed venue exhibiting photographers interested in social or political issues.

Most of all, since the early 1970s, Rauschenberg has created his own extremely varied body of work, one distinguished by intellectual adventurousness rather than slick polish. He's long worked in black and white but in recent years has moved to color film. He's taken pictures that freely echo heroes from photography's Golden Age, such as Lee Friedlander, Robert Frank and Walker Evans. He's gone to Paris to re-photograph the same streets and corners visited by Eugene Atget in the early 20th century. And he's taken a bounty of landscape photographs of Europe, South America and his home state. The Heathman show consists of panoramic color pictures of the Garamond Zumwalt Prairie, a 160,000-acre parcel of land on the edge of Hell's Canyon.

Using a Widelux panoramic camera with a rotating lens, Rauschenberg creates color photographs of sweeping, green prairie land that are quite different from his past black-and-white works. His earlier photos are notable for their quiet focus on a particular event or moment. But these wide-angled color views of unpeopled, hilly lands are about sheer, vast perspective. Look in one direction, then another and another. Rauschenberg has spliced together multiple prints into one big gridlike picture that looks like an opened fan.

"The viewer is the co-explorer (here)," Rauschenberg says about the super-wide angle that he creates with these multiprint pictures. "It's about taking the initiative to look at the pictures themselves."

But, like all of his past projects, these landscapes, too, avoid mere prettiness to explore the nature of looking and seeing. And they once again reassert the restless, always-questioning spirit of a photographer who in his work has somehow managed to embrace both the trickiest shooter — Friedlander — and the least trickiest — Atget.

"The camera is like a flashlight you use to explore a cave with," Rauschenberg says. "But it can't stay in the same place. It needs to keep going from one point to another, to keep looking."

Oregon

Christopher Rauschenberg at Nine Gallery

Christopher Rauschenberg, one of the three or four pre-eminent Oregon photographers, has long had a deep-seated admiration for Eugène Atget. The turn-of-the-century French photographer left an astounding body of work—about 8,000 photographs—that is recognized today by

scholars and photographers alike as one of the most important, if not *the* most important, corpus in early twentieth-century photography in shaping the development of photography as an art form. He worked in series, producing many images of a given subject, always with an eye and intelligence that took his pictures well beyond reportage. Among them the series titled *Old Paris* is probably the most widely known. Empty streets, parks, doorways, grillwork, shop windows—all these ordinary subjects became extraordinary in his photographs. They are an invaluable record of a singular city and its beauty, a poignant beauty charged with the absence of those who created that beauty as well as the identity of Paris as the epitome of cultural achievement. This enduring

series captured Rauschenberg's imagination and inspired his own recent series consisting of photographs of the places and scenes that were Atget's subjects.

In 1997 and 1998 Rauschenberg made three trips to Paris, searching out and rephotographing 500 scenes that Atget photographed. Since that time, selections from these have been shown extensively at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery and the Nine Gallery in Portland as well as in Ohio and New York City. Becoming so absorbed in Atget's actual sites, Rauschenberg began to see with Atget's eyes and to seek out and photograph places in Paris where he felt that his esteemed predecessor's spirit seemed to linger. From more than 100 images of such places, thirty comprised his recent show at Nine.

There may be a practical reason that humans rarely appear in Atget's pictures. After all, the long exposures necessitated

by cameras of that time made movement impossible to register. With many fewer vehicles and less pedestrian traffic to contend with, Atget wasn't faced with the problem Rauschenberg had in today's Paris of 24-hour-a-day activity. Even with his 35 millimeter, fast camera it must have been difficult to catch moments devoid of people. Yet, to obtain that empty, timeless, haunting aura permeating Atget's photographs, it was essential. Also, in emulating Atget's approach, he needed the even, diffused light of winter, in which shadows have less definition. In *St. Cloud*, for example, the grays stay in the middle range, the darkest being the two tall, bare trees framing a pile of leaves and beyond, a lighter gray statue. He wasn't completely averse to starker contrasts, however, as *Rue St. Rustique*, in which the stone statue of two strange, sitting figures stands out against the black wall and street, demonstrates.

The narrow, ancient brick street that carries the eye deep into the distance, between rows of buildings in *Rue St. Rustique*, exemplifies another characteristic of Atget's work. Rauschenberg, like Atget, draws the viewer into his pictures' psychological intimacy by their relatively small size. Like Atget's, Rauschenberg's photos are about 8-by-10-inches, requiring enlargements to approximate Atget's contact prints. Nonetheless, they often convey an illusion of scale as well as space that is sometimes claustrophobic and at other times, infinite. We may not know the significance of the gargoylish carved figures sitting on the street corner in *Rue St. Rustique*, but they mark the pronounced division between deep space and the closeness of the curious figures.

Among later American photographers who were influenced by Atget, Walker Evans is considered closest to him in style and vision. Although not as well known as Evans, Rauschenberg, who

employs contemporary photographic strategies, is equally influenced by the great French photographer. From Rauschenberg's early work, marked by compositional structures built on contrasts in light, to later landscape studies, he has been mindful of the master. His landscapes, frequently of exotic or overgrown places, are particularly rich in association as well as visual detail. By shooting areas sequentially, then mount-

ing the prints in a disjunctive line, he extends their drama as well as their visual scope. With the Atget project, he turned to a more focused endeavor. He sought the essence of pictorial meaning in Atget's vision by following his path, observing with this eye similar remarkable sights that continue to resonate in contemporary consciousness. John Szarkowski explains Atget's greatness in his book *Atget* (published by The Museum of Modern Art/Calloway, 2000): (He) "shows us an unfamiliar world, full of rhythms and consonances that we had not heard before, and of allusions to experience that we had wholly forgotten, or that we had perhaps never known." Szarkowski's written tribute is translated into pictures by Rauschenberg.

—Lois Allan

Christopher Rauschenberg—Atget's *Winter Shoes* closed February 1 at Nine Gallery, Portland.

Lois Allan is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.



Christopher Rauschenberg, (top) *Rue St. Rustique*, 1998, gelatin silver print; (above) *St. Cloud*, 1998, gelatin silver print, 9" x 6", at Nine Gallery, Portland.

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THE OREGONIAN, FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 1991

VISUAL ARTS

Seeing the unseen

By RANDY GRAGG
of *The Oregonian staff*

Though he doesn't take pictures of mountains, flowers, cats or sunsets, Christopher Rauschenberg could be called a "genre" photographer.

Tour Rauschenberg's mid-career retrospective at the Oregon Art Institute, and what you'll see is a whole lot of photography about photography. It's about seeing the world through a frame. It's about the compression of a three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional illusion. And it's about evidence — how what you see tells you something about what you can't.

The exhibition, organized by longtime Rauschenberg associate Terry Toedemeler (the two were among the founders of Blue Sky Gallery for photography, which Rauschenberg still directs), surveys 17 years of this 39-year-old photographer's work.

Toedemeler has done an admirable job of sifting through Rauschenberg's eclectic oeuvre to find some cohesion. The unifying thread is Rauschenberg's interest in black-and-white photography's ability to abstract from the everyday world fascinating studies in light, perspective, scale and form.

Rauschenberg's genre falls loosely under the rubric of "Modernism." While painters reached for what was most painterly about painting and sculptors for the essence of the object, photographers searched for an individual vision.

During the 1950s and '60s, in the hands of Robert Frank, Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander, the modernist view was nothing less than a revolution in photographic seeing.

However, in the '70s, the trails they blazed became the colonized territory of university art departments. As with flower pictures or mountain scenes, innovation soon amounted to little more than prod-

REVIEW

Christopher Rauschenberg

Where: Oregon Art Institute
Address: 1219 S.W. Park
Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Tuesday-Saturday, 1-5 p.m.
Sunday, closed Monday
Closing: April 22
Admission: \$3 general, \$1.50 students, 50 cents ages 6-12, free to ages 5-younger and to senior citizens every Thursday

uct differentiation — a little stylistic twist here, a historical quotation there. The wider culture, once seen through the camera so forcefully, was increasingly ignored by the hordes of art school prodigies.

How successful Rauschenberg's photographs are is to a large degree dependent on how successful you believe his genre can be. This exhibition builds a case for Rauschenberg, but it also thwarts him. It argues for photography about photography and against it.

The show begins with a 1973 image of a shaft of light projected from a window that dissects the image diagonally. The light is so bright as to be nothing less than an absence. No silver particles here. It's a multi-leveled pun on the "negative" space of a photograph.

While this image is, perhaps, Rauschenberg's most widely published, having carved out for him a niche of photoworld notoriety, others are far more satisfying.

One 1977 photograph, for instance, offers a simple view of an arcane piece of machinery. The function of this strange box would be utterly indecipherable were it not for the shadows cast upon it — from the carnival riders it whirls high

above us, outside the camera's view.

In one of the most unassuming pictures in the show, the center of the frame is dominated by a strange convergence of foreground and background. A dormant tree seems to sprout from a freshly de-branched post. A car fender, a shack, an empty bird cage and a clump of trees are like pieces of paper in an idiosyncratic collage. But more than simply a composition, the photograph is a collection of seemingly arbitrary human actions.

This melding of form and evidence is even more effectively realized in a 1986 picture from Marseilles, France. As you pan from left to right, urban planning becomes a collage of time. Beachfront blends into '60s apartments into a winding parking lot that snakes up the hill (just follow the arrows) to an 18th-century cathedral.

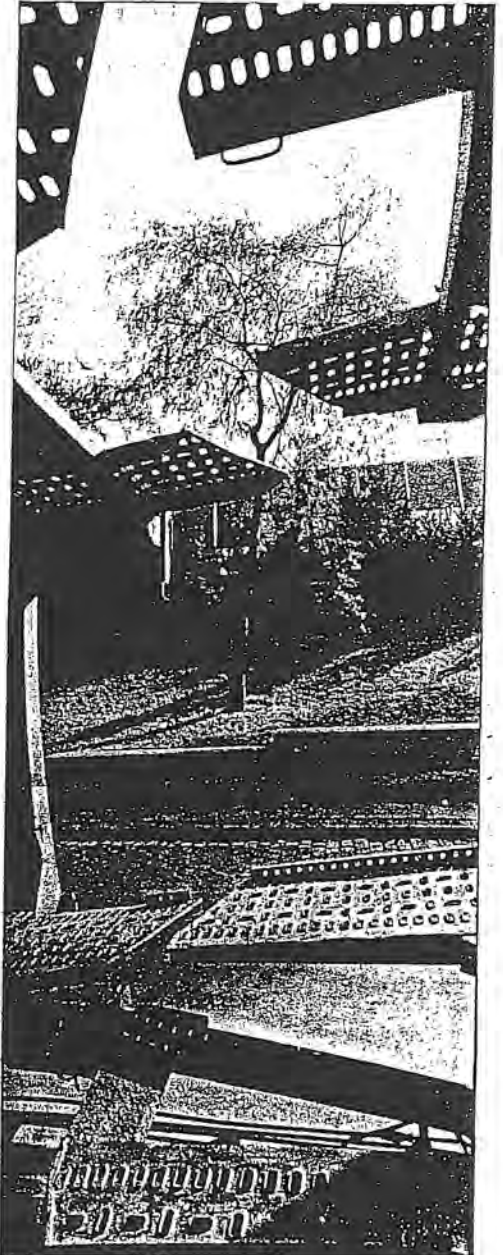
At his best, Rauschenberg's work demonstrates a rigorous sense of discovery. His pictures are the residue of an eye constantly prowling for a fusion of the seen and the unseen, the meaningful and the meaningless. While humans are in sight, we glean fascinating insights into their individual and collective actions.

However, in the late '70s, Rauschenberg must not have got out of the house much. His world comprises electrical cords, bookshelves and kitchen appliances, which through his camera become studies in pure form, dramatic light and distortion.

While Rauschenberg has made formally enticing studies of this homey world, the elements from which lasting pictures are built usually suggest other dimensions — history, culture, politics, irony — in other words, *content*.

At his very worst, Rauschenberg's work portrays a desperate search for subject matter, a codependent relationship with the act of taking pictures that seems blind to his previous successes.

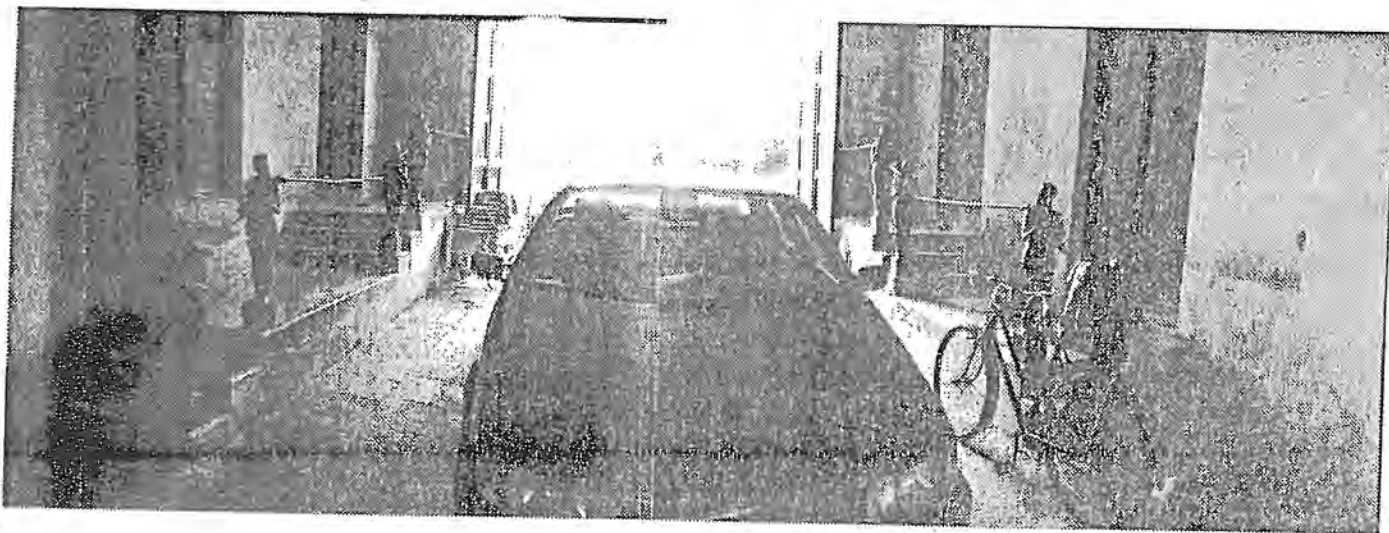
Most of the work, however, falls in between, luring us with sophisticated visual trickery into a timeless, meaningless space. Were half a dozen of Rauschenberg's pictures not as good as they are — in fact, comparable to some of the best ever taken in the Modernist tradition — perhaps the rest of the show wouldn't seem quite so trivial.



Christopher Rauschenberg merges the foreground and background in an arresting untitled photograph from 1988. A mid-career retrospective of his work is currently on view at the Oregon Art Institute.

207 SW Pine Street
Portland, OR 97204
503-224-0521
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WW FRESH PICK



Although Christopher Rauschenberg's black-and-white photographs were taken in exotic lands, the dramatic power of his work comes from intriguing compositions and superb execution. The photographs have a remarkable depth of field; the fine detail extends from foreground to horizon in areas of both light and shadow. The most compelling prints in this exhibit at Elizabeth Leach are panoramas of multiple overlapping frames that transform "360 degree vision" into a two-dimensional series of prints. Unlike artists such as David Hockney who use multiple photographs to create fractured, almost cubistic panoramas, Rauschenberg emphasizes realism, clean sutures and compositional cohesion in order to expand our perceptual range. A panorama of Perugia, Italy takes the viewer on a visual roller coaster through multiple levels of sidewalks, steps and narrow streets; the passages climb from left to right, creating a dramatic tilt to a progression of conventionally balanced frames. Other panoramas (such as *Veneto, 1992*, pictured), though lacking the same kind of distorted space, capture a comprehensive and moving sense of place. An ironic sense of humor pervades many of the juxtapositions in these images. A photograph of a Sicilian park shows a person sleeping on a bench in the foreground while newlyweds in full wedding regalia seem to float down a sidewalk in the background; the exceptional ordinariness of the scene and the bizarre punctuation of the couple sway together in a surreal dance. The strange combinations in Rauschenberg's photographs succeed because they are subtle accessories to otherwise captivating images.

Grid project: variations on a 1-mile theme

BY JANET GOETZE
THE OREGONIAN

When you're at home and going up the stairs, you don't admire the handrail as sculpture. You just grip it.

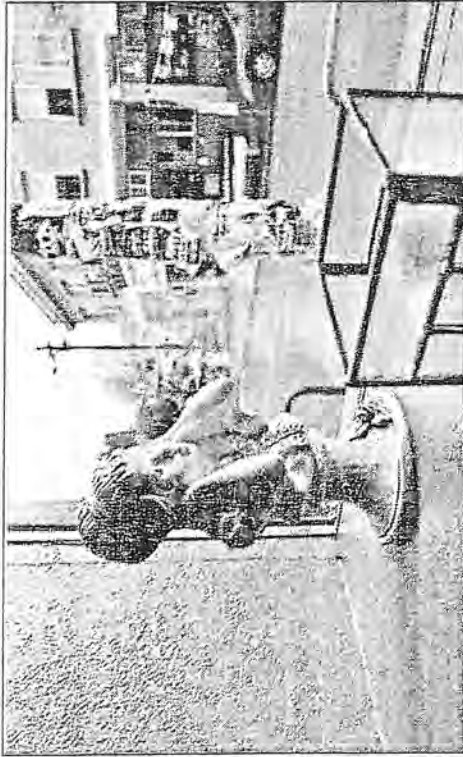
But if you're in a foreign city, every architectural detail seems unusual and worth capturing in a photograph, said Christopher Rauschenberg, 51, who has done his share of foreign travel, including retracing Paris through the images of Eugene Atget.

After studying Atget's early-20th-century images, regarded as the most vivid record of a city ever made, Rauschenberg returned home to Portland. He had fallen in love with the city, he said, when he arrived from New York City to attend Reed College more than 30 years ago.

"I said I wanted to do a big project, right here in Portland, where I live," he said.

The result is the Portland Grid Project, which has included eight to a dozen photographers for nearly a decade. On their own time, all walk the streets of the same one-mile grid of the city each month. Each takes his or her own images of scenes or structures. At the end of the month, they meet over dinner at someone's house to share their prints.

An exhibit of photographs from



CHRISTOPHER RAUSCHENBERG
The beauty is in the details for Christopher Rauschenberg, who says he fell in love with the city more than 30 years ago.

a section of Southeast Portland

opened Sunday at The Art Gym at Marylhurst University.

In December, the photographers explored neighborhood and industrial areas between Southeast Seventh and 33rd Avenues, from Division Street to Holgate Boulevard. Among their subjects were a construction site, a stand of grass, a tree trunk against a wall and a figure in a storefront window.

They work with a variety of cameras, from 35 mm and Polaroid to digital and even cheap plastic

ART PREVIEW

Portland Grid Project

What: Photographers capture images from the same one-mile grid of the city.

On display: Photographs from a section of Southeast Portland are on display through May 17 at The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, 17600 S.W. Highway 43, Lake Oswego, noon to 4 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays (closed Friday through Monday for Easter); free.

Special event: Grid Project photographers will talk about their work at noon today in the gallery.

Information:

www.marylhurst.edu

small parks and interesting buildings tucked away in various corners, she said.

"I would hope the project helps people appreciate the place they are in," Kendall said. "It's a matter of taking the time and being open to what is there and appreciating what's around you."

Rauschenberg, who started the Blue Sky Gallery in 1975, said the photographers have exhibited grid pictures periodically, usually at regional colleges.

When the project winds up in the next year and a half with the last visit to the last grid he drew nearly 10 years ago, Rauschenberg said he'd like to have a show of local images in each Portland neighborhood.

"To see the whole thing," he said, "you'd have to go all over town."

The project has been an intriguing way to get acquainted with all parts of Portland, said Ann Kendall, 48, a Northeast Portland resident who moved to the city 17 years ago.

She usually takes interior photographs with a domestic theme, Kendall said, but the Grid Project gets her outdoors. The city has surprised her with its number of

Sometimes four or five photographers record the same subject, but the angle, the lighting and even the colors can vary, said Paul Sutinen, 54, a Portland-born artist who joined the project in its early years, dropped out for a while, then re-joined a few years ago.

With the variations in subjects and angles, Sutinen said, "People should get the idea that the photography is not in the camera."

Oregon

Blue Sky's Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition at twenty-four gallery locations in Portland

In 1975, the year that five Portland photographers pooled their meager resources to open a tiny gallery, photography was still regarded by many in the art world as too mechanical a medium to be regarded as "fine art." A handful of photographers commanded respect—Ansel Adams, Minor White, Paul Strand and Imogen Cunningham among them—primarily because their aesthetic goals emulated those of painting. As it turned out, however, photography, as an art form rife with its own unique capabilities, was on the cusp of a wave that has carried it into the mainstream, with all the attendant effects: photography departments at museums, critical as well as theoretical writing, and inclusion in art school curricula. Blue Sky, as the little Portland gallery was named, caught the wave and rides it still. It was, and remains, an alternative space run by artists for artists and the art-inclined, one in which, for two decades, monthly shows have brought to Portland a full range of contemporary photography from all over the world.

More than fortunate timing has contributed to Blue Sky's longevity, however. The twentieth anniversary exhibition, for which twenty-four Portland galleries mounted work by artists who have had shows there, demonstrated the real

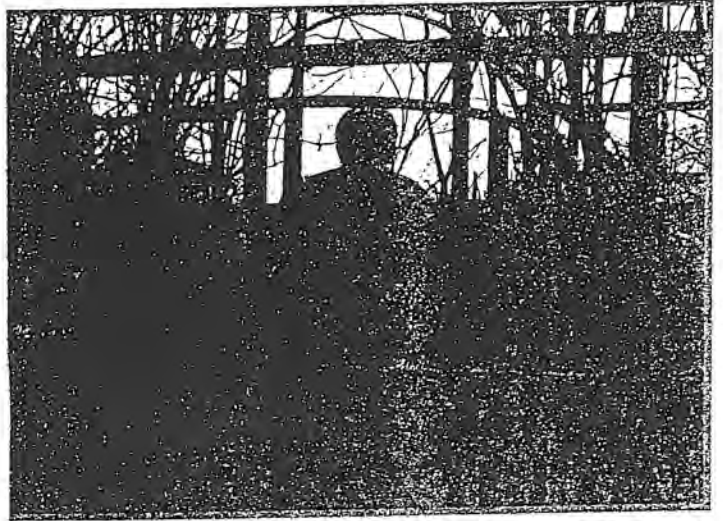
strength as well as the scope of Blue Sky's programming. It also demonstrated the possibility of success for an informal, egalitarian organization with modest financial resources. Finally, it was evidence of a singular sense of community in Portland. Every gallery director who was asked agreed to take part in the project. Panel discussions and artists' presentations were arranged by Phil Harris, photography director at Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, and sponsored by local businesses. Volunteer expertise and labor produced a CD-ROM as a complete exhibition catalog.

The entire exhibition consisted of approximately 800 photographs by 160 artists. Gallery selections were based on available space as well as individual preferences regarding thematic coherence and artists. The Art Gym at Marylhurst College, for instance, chose social relevance as a theme, with works by Les Krims, Ruth Morgan, Gail Rehban, Mary Lou Uttermohlen, Steve Davis and Steve Hart. At Quartersaw, portraits were featured: unmounted, manipulated images of African Americans by Willie Middlebrook, and assemblages incorporating old photos and memorabilia produced by the team of Joe Biel and Richard Kraft as conceptual portraits of literary figures.

The one exhibition perhaps most indicative of Blue Sky's eclectic, personal approach was presented at Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Although landscape was the nominal theme, the mix of subjects and especially of artists made it a standout. The main space was taken up with large chromogenic prints of cloud formations by Richard Misrach and dramatic Ektacolor prints by Larry Schwarm that featured swaths of fire across smoky, dark backgrounds of fields and sky. But it was the black and white photographs in the

second, smaller space that held more personal associations. Although Robert Frank's stark images of dangling, dead

thematic exhibitions such as *The Worst Picture You've Ever Seen* and *Twenty Odd Visions* have undermined conventional



Christopher Rauschenberg, *Amsterdam*, 1994, silver gelatin print, at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

blackbirds from his *Mahon* series commanded attention, viewers were quickly drawn to the work of the two Rauschenbergs, Robert and Christopher. The elder Rauschenberg's two photographs, dated 1950 and 1951, were precursors of the processes and style that have since become his trademarks: one, a still life, was filled with a pair of old shoes and other discarded objects; the other was a head-on view of a sitting woman in a checked dress—his wife at the time, painter Susan Weil, pregnant with Christopher.

Christopher Rauschenberg, on the other hand, excels at finding extraordinary qualities in ordinary moments, evident in pictures of unpeopled places that are nonetheless imbued with a wry romanticism. Nearby were Terry Toedemeier's well-known expositions of geologic basalt formations. Both Toedemeier and Rauschenberg were among the five founders of Blue Sky (the others being Ann Hughes, Craig Hickman and Robert di Franco); both have achieved success, as well, as educators and curators (Toedemeier is curator of photography at the Portland Art Museum) and as artists who have wedded traditional black and white photography to contemporary content.

As Susan Sontag notes in *On Photography*, it isn't reality that photographs make so accessible, but images. Thousands of images have appeared at Blue Sky, producing a significant impact on artists and the public alike. Conceptual artist Tad Savinar summarized the effect of Blue Sky's presence in Portland as "exposing me to a different set of eyes every month." Meanwhile,

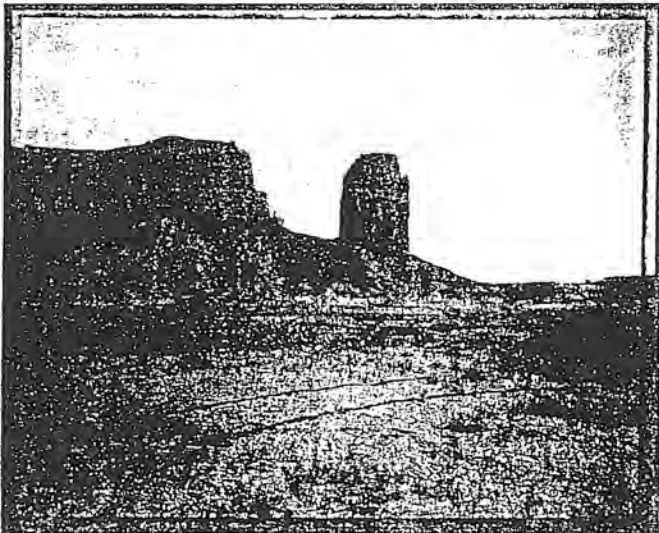
notions of aesthetics, of the photograph's authority, and of content. Not everyone's imagination has been stimulated, perhaps, but at least visitors to Blue Sky have reason to see the world differently.

—Lois Allan

Blue Sky Gallery's 20th Anniversary Show was held in January at twenty-four Portland galleries.

Lois Allan writes about art in the Northwest, and is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

Mark Klei, *Strata Lines & Tracks Near Caineville, Utah*, 1993, silver gelatin print, 16" x 20", at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.





Christopher Rauschenberg's panoramic views of nature are wider than the camera lens — so he takes several pictures and meticulously assembles them into a continuous scene.

Doing the Rauschenberg shuffle

The Portland photographer puts viewers through their paces with his South American panoramas

By VICTORIA ELLISON
Special writer, *The Oregonian*

If you're going to see Christopher Rauschenberg's impressive black and white photographs at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, be sure to wear your best hiking boots.

Rauschenberg's work has recently undergone a transformation.

"In my older work," the artist says, "I was kind of singling out something — clearly, the picture is about one thing. Basically, my pictures were like, 'OK, I'm going to go out and find something cool and bring it back to you,' almost as if I was bringing it back in my hands and showing it to you."

The Leach show does contain some of these old-style Rauschenberg images, such as "Buenos Aires," which captures a simple scene: a female figure stands near a patch of peeling paint on a gray

wall against which her shadow starkly falls. It is a purely formal composition.

The newer trend in Rauschenberg's photography involves a Widelux panoramic camera with a rotating lens. Though he has used this camera before, his new idea is to study more than one point of interest in a picture.

"I wanted to get a sense of the space where you would actually kind of go into the picture," he explains, "and making it so the viewer is wearing out their own shoe leather."

Indeed, Rauschenberg's highly detailed panoramic photos of Iguazu Falls, the waterfall between Argentina and Brazil, encourage the viewer to pace back and forth. In a single rectangular print, you can see several different pathways to the falls, and bridges, and a palpable sense of the sheer vastness of the falls, which Rauschen-

berg calls "the most beautiful place I have ever seen."

Its beauty is different than, say, the familiar sight of Multnomah Falls.

"Multnomah Falls is fabulous," Rauschenberg says. "But it's one thing. Iguazu Falls is the archetypical waterfall — it's like something from a dream. The water is like chocolate milk, and there's this stunning blue sky. It's densely foliate and densely butterfly-ated."

What interests him, though, is the multiplicity of the experience of Iguazu.

"It takes all day to hike along the waterfall on the Argentina side, and every time you take ten steps it's a different falls. All day!"

The art conveys a sense of the experience of traversing great distances by using composites of several photographs, usually

taken from different angles and by focusing on many points of visual interest.

Rauschenberg is not an artist in the tradition of his father, Robert Rauschenberg, who some have called the greatest living American painter. Oregon's Rauschenberg proclaims himself the heir to photographers such as Walker Evans and Atget. "They're trying to get you to just forget that there's an artist involved. In a Walker Evans picture of a country store, you can read the label on every box, and it's like BEING in a country store."

The last thing Rauschenberg wants you to think is what a genius he is.

"With painting or printmaking or sculpture, the easiest path to go down with the viewer is to say,

Please turn to
RAUSCHENBERG, Page 51

VIEW

Photographs from Argentina and Brazil

WHO: Christopher Rauschenberg
WHERE: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 207 S.W. Pine
HOURS: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday-Saturday
PHONE: 224-0521

Rauschenberg: Goodbye to preconceptions

■ **Continued from Page 49**
"Oh, look at this beautiful thing they made, that genius." But that doesn't empower the viewer — that says, well, somebody is smarter than me, someone is a better painter than me. And the thing about photography that I like is you look at it and go, "Wow! I gotta keep my eye out for that!" You're saying to the viewer, "Hey, let's do it together. I found this neat place, you should go there."

Some of the most striking images

in the show are the most intimate. "Sao Paolo" is a wonderfully geometric view of the street out of the artist's low-rent hotel window. The window panes break up the cityscape like one of Rauschenberg's composite prints.

"Bahia" features an interior of a curtained room with light streaming through and a beautifully drawn, classical mural of what seems to be one of the Three Graces on the wall. In front of the window

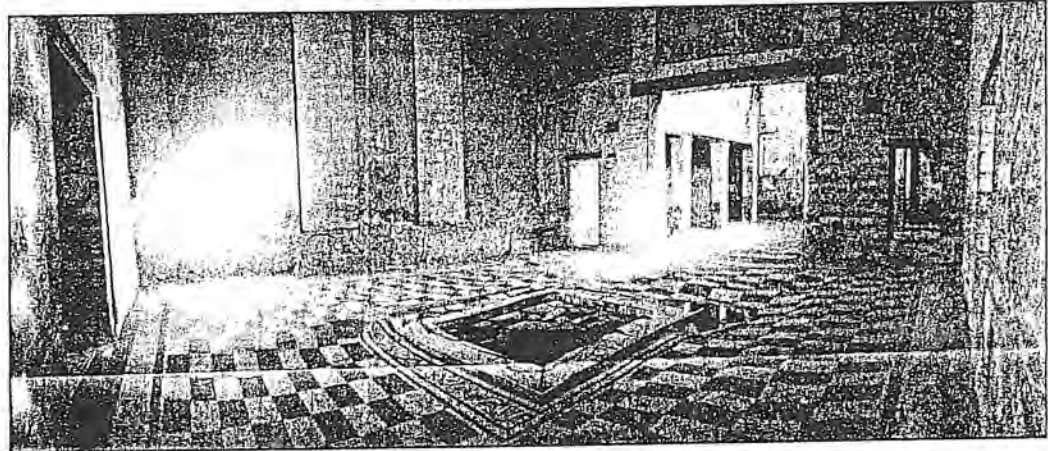
is a wooden scaffolding whose primitive quality contrasts with the refined mural. No one is there but the viewer, and the effect is eerie and enveloping.

At his best — which is very good indeed — Christopher Rauschenberg proves that we see most deeply when we are deprived of our preconceptions and don't know what we're supposed to be looking for — when we're forced to see with the eyes of a child.



Above: Erich Müller, *Kira—Wolf's Lunch*, 1990, gelatin silver print, 8" x 19", at Photo Metro Gallery, San Francisco.

Below: Christopher Rauschenberg, *Herculaneum*, 1988.



The photograph, the finished act of the mechanical process of imperistic appropriation, is conventionalized within the modest rectangle, a neutral form which has become accepted as the representation of the photographer's worldview. First die-cut through the camera's viewfinder and then stamped on the negative, that world is printed on a letter-size sheet of photosensitive paper. The extent to which we unconsciously have granted that standard was challenged by *Extended Views*, an exhibit of seven wide-field photographers at the new Photo Metro Gallery, in the production offices of *Photo Metro* magazine.

The panorama was the summa of nineteenth century photography. Mastering all that it surveyed, it could strike a catalogue raisonné within one authoritative shutterclick, and so reinforce imperialist expansionism and the celebration of man's victory over nature. Though most of the images in the Photo Metro show are landscapes,

Broad Perspectives

Extended Views at Photo Metro Gallery

BY TONY REVEAUX

these artists reach for distinctively postmodern statements of depiction.

While early explorers returned with wide-angle shots of steamy tropical jungles, none would have been satisfied with Kate Jordahl's ribbonlike strips of textural studies. Her vines and palmettos are captured in bands of patterning sliced into minimalist rhythmicity, like stanzas of music by Steve Reich or Philip Glass. Thea Schrack's Widelux shots of decaying antebellum South Carolina mimic the framing of the classic "scenics," but then, with forced-exposure infrared film, topple those delicate sensibilities into fevered, dreamy hallucinations.

Many of these current panoramic photographs are little more than "stretched" normal compositions. In the right hands, the wide view can suc-

ceed as a complete and indivisible conceptual gesture. But Timothy Hearsun's powerful—if sometimes overplayed—ironic counterpoint is captured in swaths of panoramic color. His remarkable *Signs of Life, Baghdad, California* (1990) takes the classic center-weighted landscape and transforms it into a constructivist event. His open shutter views the tranquil desert while from the left, the streak of a speeding train is recorded as an architectonic extrusion, the cars' windows a glazed strip that mirror the mountains to the right. In another, a curvilinear swimming pool, empty and dry, presses against the luminous azure expanse of a mountain-crested bay, as if the pool were a dam of negative space holding back the sea. Hearsun balances the illusory and the real, using the long axis of the

panorama like a conceptual seesaw. A Southwestern commercial building that hosts a mural of majestic badlands, complete with wild mustangs, is set off by the flat and empty wasteland that surrounds it. And, the street facade of a building sports a veristic mural of a garage at work, complete with customers. The only thing truly alive here is the iridescent blue blur of a car hurtling past on the road.

The axis of time can be an unexpectedly active element in some wide-format photographs, notably here by Christopher Rauschenberg and Erich Müller. These artists present formal compositions which present a holistic totality that can be received in one glance, but they also draw the viewer's eye within, where the elements may be "read" in linear continuities.

Rauschenberg brings the

viewer into the frame through the harmonic subdivision of the picture plane and deep-focus directional branching. In a constructed wide-field piece—which is a composite of several normal prints rather than a single shot from a panoramic camera—the field includes an interior stairway whose shadows lead the eye right through a doorway, and down a drive into the sunlight.

In *Hunts* (Pair-o'-dice Press, Portland, Oregon, 1991; 186 pp.), Rauschenberg continues his narrativity of experiential exploration in book format. In many of these photos, spaces are supported and mediated by a seamless use of strategically positioned structural elements. A pole, a window frame, a stair, a curb, a wire, a shadow—compose diptyches, triptyches and serialisms in which the viewer is invited to access the construct as a cinematic sequence. While the Widelux photos retain their power in book form, the constructed pieces lose some of their collagist immediacy on the flat page.