

Members' speN NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY

FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

SUMMER 2002

Photo courtesy of Jeff McConnell



Excerpts from the
Summer 2003 newsletter

SPE on the Strip

2002 Las Vegas conference
wraps up as popular success

The recent gathering of SPE members in Las Vegas is a testament to the fact that national conferences are more exciting and complex than ever. On the weekend of March 21-24, over 1,200 people migrated to the Tropicana Resort & Casino to be refreshed by an oasis of panels, lectures, and imagemaker presentations, an impressive exhibitor's fair, and the ever-popular portfolio reviews.

At the 39th annual Society for Photographic Education conference, there were, all in all, a total of ninety-nine speakers, over seventy exhibitors, and eighty-nine portfolio reviewers. The Las Vegas conference was graced by four fantastic featured presentations. Tracey Moffatt, sponsored by Calumet, commenced the programming with a technically seamless and very impressive presentation of her work. Bart Parker, this year's honored educator, gave an overview of his work and interesting glimpses into his perspective on photography, education, and life philosophy that encouraged us to enrich our minds and our lives by taking the road less traveled. Dave Hickey's views on the nature of education in the arts, including the roles of its various professionals, served as a good reminder that the structure of the art world is indeed a fabricated structure. Reverend Ethan Acres' presentation was an unforgettable celebration of life, in addition to an introduction to his work. Another highlight was the mar-

2002 NATIONAL CONFERENCE **review**



Photo by Aubrey Trinnaman

Honored Educator Bart Parker presented his lecture to a packed audience in Las Vegas.

riage of Sandy Wassenmiller and Gary Goldberg. Congratulations Sandy, Gary, and Willa!

Conference staff arrived as early as Monday to get the operations up and running behind the scenes. We were fortunate to have a number of very committed SPE members return again this year to work, work, work at the conference. I am indebted to Jeannie Pearce and Hannah Frieser for their year-round support, commitment to the organization, terrific ideas, energy and constant refinement of fundamental SPE operations. Natalie Nadozirny, Jamie Suthard, Ashley Peel, Lincoln Phillips, Amanda Douglas, and Megan Elcock did much to

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2002 NATIONAL CONFERENCE **review**

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make the conference run smoothly, as did my wonderful assistant Joy Christiansen and our new team member Mary Brown. The local support from the University of Nevada Las Vegas' students and faculty, especially Catherine Angel, was invaluable. Dave Taylor, the 2002 conference chair, arrived early, pulled up his shirt sleeves and worked hard behind the scenes on-site, just as he had worked throughout the year and a half of planning. Rebekah Modrak, Joann Brennan, and Garth Amundson worked as a team in the coordination of the portfolio reviews this year. Response from the artists and the reviewers indicates that this is an extremely valuable aspect of the conference. The reviewers applaud the opportunity to see great work and the artists benefit from the enthusiasm and honesty of the reviewers. Thanks to Rebekah's experience and the collaboration of the coordinators, conference committee, and conference staff, a new and improved sign-up system was introduced in Las Vegas. While the lottery style of sign up alleviated long lines in the morning, the new system was not without problems. In order to accommodate as many participants as possible, some spontaneous decisions were made on-site to change the number of reviews that one could register for. However, these adjustments created some confusion for which we apologize. The



process will be refined for next year's portfolio reviews. A new component was added to the reviews in Las Vegas: the mentoring program. Developed and organized by Elizabeth Lee and Rebekah Modrak, the goal of this service was for experienced and senior faculty to offer career advice to MFA students looking for jobs.

Since the conference, we've heard that at least two students who participated in the program have been offered tenure-track



positions. Because of the positive feedback and its popularity, the mentoring program will be developed and expanded next year.

The incredible response to the recruitment of volunteers resulted in more than 150 volunteers working at the conference. I would like to thank all of the students who participated in the conference by volunteering to work. Your presence made a huge difference in the smooth operation and overall success of the conference. The volunteers that arrived in time for the training sessions on Wednesday had an opportunity to attend a lecture at a nearby campus by Linda Troeller, a long-time member of SPE. As soon as registration opened on Thursday morning, it was inundated with anxious conference attendees. The student seminar, an innovative program proposed and planned by Hannah Frieser, was launched this year on the first day of the conference weekend. Susan kae Grant and Mary Virginia Swanson worked together to present students with strategies for building careers as photographic artists. Tony Corbell and Keith Johnson, both from Hasselblad, teamed up to share their own areas of expertise. Tony addressed one of his specialties, light control in the studio, and Keith presented some of his own fine art photographs and the choices that he made about his career in photography. The student seminar was open only to student scholarship recipients and student volunteers and over 150 students attended the program. Many thanks to our great speakers and to the enthusiastic



audience for making this new program such a success. All of the speakers have already agreed to come back to do the seminar at next year's national conference in Austin. The welcome reception, generously sponsored by Beaver Hollow Design and Fuji Photo Film USA, Inc., was the first event open to the general attendance and it was so crowded that it was difficult to move. The friendly faces and animated conversation at the welcome reception pleasantly foreshadowed the success of the weekend.

The exhibits fair was the first event to begin the major days of conference programming, opening at 8:00 am on Friday morning. The fair displayed a wide range of photographic equipment, supplies, and products, as well as recent books and publications. The publishers' tables were especially busy and popular this year with questions about new books and ideas for future books. Anderson Ranch, the Center for Photographic Art, the Maine Photographic Workshops, Penland, Speos, and the Visual Studies Workshop, some of the most prominent institutions that offer classes and work-



shops in the arts, were present to share their wide array of educational opportunities. By displaying new products, sharing techniques, announcing programs, and providing a dynamic place to gather, the exhibits fair offered many benefits to visitors. The Freestyle booth was buzzing with activity over its "apple for the teacher" program. Adobe, Epson, Calumet, and Polaroid gave frequent demonstrations that were very popular. Mamiya and Leaf also attracted a lot of attention with their demonstrations. Although I am an art historian and not an artist, which I am reluctant to admit after hearing Mr. Hickey's assessment of my particular profession, seeing that gorgeous red Hasselblad made me want to become a photographer worthy of such camera (and equally fantastic coordinating red patent leather shoes, of course)! Some of the exhibitors gave presentations in addition to participating in the trade show. In addition to the dynamic duo of Tony Corbell and Keith Johnson from Hasselblad, Julienn Kost, from Adobe, introduced the newest

features of Photoshop, Epson's Fabia Ochoa addressed the transition to digital and its impact on education, John McCarthy, a representative of Fuji, presented some of his award-winning panorama photographs.

Interspersed throughout the exhibits fair were the items on display for the silent auction. The 2002 national conference continued the tradition of the silent auction and introduced the raffle, in which attendees could buy "chances" to win specific items. National board member, Michelle Van Parys, was able to secure photographs by prominent artists for the raffle and Jeannie Pearce brought in donations of great photographic equipment and supplies from generous corporate sponsors. The proceeds from both of these fundraising events go toward the SPE Outstanding Student Award fund (known formerly as student scholarships), which supports ten students in their attendance of the national conference. We are appreciative to everyone who has supported this program through donations to the auction, raffle, and directly to the fund and to everyone that bid and purchased books and tickets. (Monetary donations are gratefully accepted all year). During Reverend Acres' revivalist style emceeding of the raffle, one

Special thanks to our contributing photographers: Steven Bliss (SB), Sylvia de Swaan (SD), Joy Christiansen (JC), Allison Cosper (AC), Fern Logan (FL), Jeff McConnell (JM), Jeannie Pearce (JP), Sarah Vinci (SV), Aubrey Trinnaman (AT), Jon Yamashiro (JY)

LEFT PAGE (first row, from left): Mary Virginia Swanson advocated opportunities for artists to enter the commercial market during the Student Seminar for volunteers that included presentations by Keith Johnson, Tony Corbell and Susan kae Grant. (AC) Conference attendees crowded through the hallways of the Exhibits Fair that included over fifty exhibitor booths and many tables with book publishers. (JP) (Second row, from left): Rev. Ethan Acres made a compelling appeal to the audience to buy more raffle tickets and repent for their sins. (SD) Jim Stone reviewed portfolios during the one-on-one portfolio sessions. (AT)

(Third row): Board-members Stephen Marc, Kathleen Campbell and Diane Gaston enjoyed a break on the Tropicana's beautifully landscaped grounds. (SB) (Fourth row): Conference chair David Taylor and executive boardmember Mark Klett brainstorm new possibilities for SPE's advancement. (SB)

RIGHT PAGE (first row, from left): The Saturday Night Party was a full success with a tightly packed dance floor. (FL) SPE's legal counsel Allan M. Harris, former SPE chairperson Cheryl Younger, executive director Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro and former boardmember and conference chair Jon Yamashiro enjoyed dinner at one of the Tropicana's many restaurant venues. (JY) (Second row, from left): Conference chair David Taylor, auctioneer John Freyer and Rev. Ethan Acres made the raffle a not-to-be-missed spectacle that brought in around \$7,500 for student scholarships. (SV) Executive boardmember Angela Kelly shows photographer and former Steven Bliss that she means business. (SB) (Third row, from left, staggered): Volunteers assembled over one thousand conference packages during the Wednesday volunteer training. (JP) Keynote speaker Tracey Moffatt enjoyed an outing to Zibrisky Point after the conference. (SV)

item was auctioned live: John Freyer's white western style shirt. This shirt has been sold off of John's back in the past, but made its way back to the auction block this year. Sant Khalsa, the lucky bidder this year, is the proud owner of the coveted shirt.

The conference theme, fact or fiction, generated much interest and there were fantastic general sessions investigating reality and a multitude of its counterpoints. Many of the speakers addressed the issue of reality and the mediated experience in a city overflowing with contraction and illusion. Nick Tobier's consideration of collage on the Las Vegas Strip and Rebecca Cummins' connections between historical forms of illusion and works by contemporary artists focused on these themes. Richard Krueger's smart

lecture also compared historic technology to the current presence of illusion through technology that we confront today. Cheryl Younger's presentation on the reaction to the September 11th attacks as they were occurring made the poignant observation that we have come to rely on media to narrate and understand world events, even those that are happening right before our eyes. This reliance on media to convey reality serves as an interesting flip side to Makeda Best's presentation on crime-based reality TV shows that have become standard fare as entertainment. Cass Fey's panel discussion and Trudy Wilner Stack's presentation on Garry Winogrand contributed to the notion that mediating devices, such as photography, can bring order to chaos. Are we dependent on a mediated experience for bringing meaning and order to our lives and on reality for entertainment instead of the reverse? Susan kae Grant's scientific investigation into the nature of dreams resulted in an innovative artistic expression of dreaming, marking those occasional but intense impressions that a dream makes upon us even in our waking moments. In Grant's work memory mediates dream from lived experience and through manipulated photographs something otherwise intangible becomes visible, audible, and physically present. Robert Parke Harrison's work makes a similar sort of leap from the imaginary land of mythology to moving representations through the medium of photography, as presented by Margot Anne Kelley's lecture. Ellen Carey's panel addressed the dilemma of interpreting a photograph that does not represent a recognizable image. David Bate examined the difference between avant-garde surreal images and the common appropriation of surrealism by mainstream imagery today. CBS's television show *Sunday Morning* reviewed an exhibition of surrealist visual works, currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and concluded similarly that while the avant-garde movement has passed, the word and its currency in popular culture has a strong presence. Kelley, Carey et al, and Bate approached the compelling theoretical issues of photographing non-existent or fleeting images that escape documentation, but are expressed through the photographic medium. Karen Norton and Susan Ressler's panel also engaged in this discussion from the point of departure that we desire an authentic experience, which we extend to photographic representation. Richard Gray,



(top): The national board put their heads together for three days of meetings after the conference. (JC) (right): Proud conference attendees showed off their polaroids taken during the Saturday Night Party. Polaroid and Mamiya donated their time and materials to shoot hundreds of portraits of Saturday's party goers. (FL)

Angie Buckley, and Gary Goldberg all addressed issues of biography and identity through photographic representation. Gray's work alludes to the impact of science, specifically the Human Genome Project, on our impossible strive for perfection. Angie Buckley's work, on the other hand, is autobiographical and deals with the theme of mixed cultural experience. Audience members noted that Gary Goldberg's tribute to Roger, a friend who looms larger than life, was respectful and unique.

Other topics addressed by speakers included censorship, collaborations, curriculum and pedagogical issues, performance, war, history, and multi-cultural and transnational subjects. Trudy Wilner Stack's presentation on Garry Winogrand was particularly well received, noted as scholarly, inspiring, and poetic. Deborah Bright's talk on her body of work "Being & Riding" was also a big hit. Jim West's presentation on how to get donations from state and federal agencies was another heavily attended session. Kelli Connell, Todd Jokl, Nate Larson, Tone Stockenström, and Sarah Kankiewicz-Arkins with Stephanie Wratten, Christine Holtz, Stacy Finkelstein gave great graduate student presentations this year, which comprise a valuable aspect of the programming.

Meetings were scheduled to take place amidst the on-going conference events and the regional meetings were well attended. A member of the Southwest region reported record attendance and very positive energy



at this region's meeting. This is a great opportunity to get involved with the organization and people who live in your area—though, admittedly, some of the regions are very large. The multi-cultural caucus and the women's caucus seem to have new life. The intense days of programming came to a close with the festive dance party on Saturday night, sponsored by Mamiya America Corp. and Polaroid Corporation. Barry and Stuart, now favorites at the dance party, generously photographed many individuals, couples, and groups ready to pose for a picture. Bill DuBois deserves a special note of thanks for his expert assistance with the impromptu photographs of happy SPE attendees. Some of the subjects would have given Victoria Secret models some competition! Despite the draw of the Strip and all of its various entertainments, the attendance at the conference was excellent. Las Vegas was an exciting venue that was perfect for the exploration of the mediated experience. We're looking forward to another wonderful reunion in Austin, Texas next year to consider facets of the American experience. Hope to see y'all there!

Sincerely,
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