

Members' speN NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

SUMMER 2003

Excerpts from newsletter
2003 National Conference Report

American Vision

An Overview of the 2003 SPE
National Conference, Austin, TX

By Angela Kelly and Diana Gaston

The Society for Photographic Education (SPE) turned 40 this year, marking the occasion with its fortieth national conference in Austin. As the conference opened on March 20, the United States entered into war with Iraq; a spring blizzard temporarily shut down the Denver airport; 20,000 students and peace activists marched toward the state capital in downtown Austin; and some 1,200 SPE conference attendees and participants arrived in town to engage in a four-day dialogue about the field of photography and education.



Photo courtesy of Harris Fogel

Austin offered plenty of opportunities to show and look at photographs

The SPE staff arrived early to prepare for the conference, and the exceptional work of Jeannie Pearce, Mary Brown, Hannah Frieser and Ashley Peel contributed directly to its organization. Other ever helpful conference staff included Kelly O'Malley, Lincoln Phillips, Natalie Nadozirny, Jamie Suthard, Amanda Douglas and Megan Elcock. Two prominent SPE members were dearly missed this year; Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro, SPE Executive Director, and Carrie Peterson, Chair of the Board of Directors, were both at home, waiting out the final days of their pregnancies. But the conference ran smoothly, largely due to their efforts throughout the year to serve a growing membership. Lawrence McFarland served as conference chair, attending to endless planning and trouble-shooting to organize the conference in his hometown. His years of service to the field—and to SPE—have not gone unnoticed; just weeks follow-

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CONFERENCE **review**

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ing the conference, he was awarded the William and Betty Nowlin Endowed Professorship in Photography at the University of Texas at Austin.

Following a day of registration, portfolio reviews and workshops, the conference officially opened Thursday evening with a lecture by Joel Meyerowitz at the Hogg Auditorium at the University of Texas. Crowds of war demonstrators effectively snarled traffic throughout the city, sending buses transporting conference attendees on a long detour to the auditorium. What might have been a restless audience, as some 800 conference attendees waited for the lecture to begin, instead transformed into an impromptu reception: photographers greeted old friends, clinked bottles of Bud, and made introductions. Joel Meyerowitz, elegantly outfitted in a dark suit, also joined the crowd while he waited for the last few buses to arrive before beginning his talk. Following a warm introduction by Mark Klett, Vice Chair of the SPE National Board, Meyerowitz stepped on stage and launched into an eloquent and moving description of his experience photographing at Ground Zero immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

For a period of eight months, Meyerowitz photographed as crews worked relentlessly to recover bodies, personal belongings, and the smallest traces of the once living. Though access to the site was restricted, Meyerowitz was determined to record all phases of the recovery process, and he showed up daily to work. Eventually, he obtained full access to the site—the only photographer to do so—and he worked alongside rescue workers throughout the cleanup process to produce a vast photographic archive of the aftermath. He photographed with a heightened sense of drama, rendering the spectacle in almost painfully acute detail. As Meyerowitz paused at each slide to reveal a story or share an experience, it was clear that for each moment he created, he was reliving the experience as a witness. That said, the presentation was not only a profound tribute to those who perished but also to those who through their labor painstakingly transformed the devastating site into a place of honor, grief and memory. For SPE members who chose to proceed



with the conference on the eve of a much-disputed war, Meyerowitz's presentation was a fitting tribute to the significance of the photographic record.

Following the talk, the audience made its way over to the newly constructed galleries at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC) on campus. The event was hosted by Dr. Thomas F. Staley, director of the HRC, and Roy Flukinger, Senior Curator, along with other members of the museum staff, who graciously received visitors at the door and distributed hardhats for the abbreviated tour. The new space, opening in May, offers some 40,000 square feet of public space, including galleries, a new theater, and a state-of-the-art space for readings, lectures, film and performances. The Ransom Center houses more than 36 million manuscripts, one million rare books, five million photographs and more than 100,000 art objects. Among its most treasured objects is the world's first photograph by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (c.1826), which was made available for viewing.

The presentations began the next morning at 9 am with a diverse range of pro-



Top left: A friendly Freestyle staff, Patrick DelliBovi, Kristina Loughery and Sherry Lee, greeted people at their booth. The Exhibits Fair included over 70 exhibitors this year.

Top right: Corporate Sponsor Coordinator Jeannie Pearce takes a moment to talk to Natalie Nadozirny in the ever bustling SPE conference office.

Center left: John Freyer and board members Steven Bliss and David Taylor share the duties of drawing raffle winners at Saturday's packed Student Scholarship Reception.

Center right: Around 60 portfolio reviewers were available to look at work during the one-on-one portfolio reviews.

Bottom left: Board member Sandy Sorlien signs copies of her new book during a book signing session at the Exhibits Fair as Advertising Coordinator Mary Brown looks on.

grams. New York-based photographer and editor **Jill Waterman** presented a lecture to a packed audience on *Exhibition Options for the Photographic Artist*. **Mary Virginia Swanson** gave an informative and entertaining lecture on Ansel Adams, exploring his significant contributions as an educator. Based on her research in the archives at the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Swanson presented images of Adams and his colleagues through the years, as well as correspondence and various artifacts from the Center's collection. Contextualizing Adams as an early advocate for the study and preservation of photography, Swanson effectively reminded younger members of the audience of his critical role in shaping photographic education and museum collections in this country.

The afternoon sessions continued with a

memorable talk by **Mark Alice Durant**, *The Blur of the Otherworldly: The thought-graphs of Ted Serios*. Playing to a full house, Durant presented the story of Ted Serios, a poorly educated, unemployed Chicago bell-hop who was allegedly able to project photographic images onto Polaroid film by simply staring into the camera lens with intense concentration. Outlining the evolution of paranormal photography, Durant spun a believable yarn as he investigated both the rhetoric and the evidence of seeing what is not there. Like a good storyteller, the proof of his evidence was not so much in the blurry offerings on show but in the captivating narrative dexterity of Durant himself. As he paced his punch lines and propelled his story forward, a funny thing happened: the audience became aware of a huge, amorphous shadow gesticulating behind him, courtesy of the podium light. Like kids at the campfire toasting marshmallows, we stared steadfastly as the shadow rose and fell and for one tiny moment, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end.

That afternoon **Sally Stein** led a panel discussion titled *Flagging Spirits*, exploring the proliferation of patriotism and flag waving in evidence since 9/11. With campaign “Shock and Awe” unleashed by the American-led forces just the day before, an examination of patriotic exuberance seemed particularly relevant. Stein briefly introduced the project, and her colleagues who participated (although not all were in attendance) — Karl Baden, Leslie Ernst, Marion Faller, Margaret Morton, Melissa Shook, Jim Stone, Margaret Wagner and Daniel P. Younger. What began as a series of informal email exchanges between Stein and Wagner and their colleagues about the overwhelm-



Top left: Honored Educator Evon Streetman and Alida Fish pause their conversation for a photo op.

Top right: Featured Speaker Anne Wilkes Tucker and 2003 Conference Chair Lawrence McFarland get a chance to visit.

Center left: A.D. Coleman (center) enjoys the warm outdoor temperatures in Austin with Keith Carter and his wife Pat.

Center right: This year's conference volunteers, wearing Hasselblad volunteer t-shirts, were friendly and helped to create a great conference.

Bottom left: Phil Harris (right) and Thomas McGovern look at art work during the Sunday open portfolio sharing.

Bottom right: Former SPE chairperson Wendel White sits with former board member Stephen Marc during a break from the conference events.

ing presence of American flags, gradually developed into a full-blown website for the photographers to document what they were observing in and around their communities.

Later that afternoon, **Catherine Zuromskis**, Ph.D. candidate in visual and cultural studies at the University of Rochester, presented *Andy Warhol's Snapshots: Countercultural Identity and Photographic Practice*. She considered the snapshot in terms of its ability to shape individual identity and memory, particularly in terms of Warhol's obsessive documentation of the Factory and the celebrities he surrounded himself with. For all its banality, she argued, the snapshot was central not only to Warhol's art making, but also as a means of constructing his own private/public identity. His snapshots function almost as a family album, assembling his personal history and the familial network of the Factory.

On Friday evening, SPE members walked over to the Radisson to hear this year's Honored Educator, **Evon Streetman**, professor emeritus of the University of Florida. Before her talk, SPE presented a memorial tribute to the numerous photogra-

phers, scholars and educators who passed away during the last year. Following this solemn presentation, the house lights came up and SPE awarded 10 student scholarship awards, and the first Crystal Apple Award, presented by Freestyle Photographic Supplies, to graduate student Kelli Connell of Texas Woman's University. Kodak generously added product awards to this year's student awards.

Jerry Uelsmann, a long-time friend and colleague of Evon Streetman, introduced her as his favorite southern gentle-person, and recounted the story of Streetman advising a graduate student whose work was somewhat derivative; in his own deep southern drawl, he imitated her response to the student, which was, “son, someone has already licked that biscuit.” As part of her presentation, Streetman presented a short documentary film on her photographic career titled *Black Boiled Coffee and the Cacophony of Frogs*. Portraying her equally at home on a fishing boat, in a classroom, or photograph-

Photos courtesy of Harris Fogel



Left: Stuart Strong from Polaroid gives a demo on alternative photographic processes during the conference Exhibits Fair.

ing outdoors at Penland Studios, the film revealed a woman whose intelligence resonates with her humor and finely honed teaching skills. After the short film, she graciously chose to highlight the work of her students, many of whom have become prominent artists in their own right.

On Saturday morning, five past recipients of the Honored Educators Award—**Barbara Crane, Darryl Curran, Nathan Lyons, Esther Parada** and **Jerry Uelsmann**, all in near or full glory of retirement—sat down with an enthusiastic standing room only crowd to discuss the field. JoAnn Boehmer moderated the panel dis-

“I met some old friends and made some new ones and had fun in the process!”

— Shauna Church
conference attendee

cussion, which flowed organically from one artist to the other, as issues of technological shifts, students’ needs, along with producing one’s own work and maintaining a personal vision were raised. For Barbara Crane, “the goal is to focus one’s passion on vision and creativity. It is like a keel.” Esther Parada discussed the importance of directing students both inwardly and outwardly. She referenced the work of James Clifford asking the audience to be mindful of the corporate onslaught of technology. Nathan Lyons spoke to the give-and-take of teaching and the importance of challenging students to reach their potential. Darryl Curran spoke of his experience working with prospective students, offering parents the comfort that if your child chooses a creative life, they will never be bored. Nathan Lyons summed up the changing field as one that is changing in stages, and impacts how we exchange knowledge and information. In response to

the question about such changes, Lyons observed that while the literature of photography itself was sparse 40 years ago, today the debate about photography is outside the medium itself.

Keith Carter spoke on Saturday morning, presenting a talk that was arguably worthy of a keynote address. His lecture, *Ordinary Magic*, led the audience through exquisitely chosen examples of the early history of photography, and encouraged students to revisit this history as a source of inspiration and a means to move forward in their own work. The enigmatic quality of daguerreotypes, carte-de-visites and albumen prints offered this self-taught master inspiration for his own photographic magic, which followed. As a good old-fashioned photographer in love with the medium and its transformative powers, he wove eloquent words with glorious imagery. For Carter, the photograph reverberates with the quiet understatement of the ordinary, as captured in the poetic works of Walt Whitman. Carter’s own backyard of Texas offers the complex terrain where his quintessentially American vision lights up the neighborhood.

Later that afternoon **Aphrodite Desiree Navab**, visiting assistant professor at the University of Florida, presented *I Am Not a Persian Miniature: The Art of Iranian Women in Exile*. Through her own photographic images and those of Shirin Neshat and Ghazel, she discussed the complexities of cultural hybridity experienced by these women, their fractured narratives and the emergence of feminist consciousness in Iran. In another lecture hall, **Mel Rosenthal**, distinguished professor of art at SUNY/Empire State College, presented his expansive photographic series on the refugee populations in New York. His talk *Americans by Choice: The Arab Americans*, provided an overview of the project, which began with images of Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees who were resettled in the Bronx in the early 1980s, and continues with his exploration of Arab-American communities.

Among the graduate student presentations on Saturday afternoon was **Amber Marks**, second-year student at Rhode Island School of Design, who presented her ongoing documentation of the White Nationalist Socialist Movement. Working with the members’ full permission to document their

Thank you and congratulations!

RAFFLE WINNERS:

Steve Bliss, JoAnn Boehmer, Melissa Boyajian, Nancy Breslin, Stephanie East, Cara Garza, Marita Gootee, Larry Gregory, Darius Himes, Scott Landis, Natalie Nadozirny, Ardine Nelson, Sonja Rieger, Cole Robertson, Pam Rogers, George Slade, Andre Sloan, Susan Sponsler, Ken White, Cheryl Younger, Zelda Zinn

SILENT AUCTION WINNERS:

Susie Abright, Judy Allen, Brian Arnold, JoAnn Boehmer, Tabby Buckley, Roseanne Buckley, Jack Carnell, Juan Chen, Joy Christiansen, Lauren Clay, Robin Cobb, Gary Colby, John Michael Coppinger, John Craig, Frank Cricchio, Rebecca Cummins, Carola Dreidemie, Charly Earley, Stephanie East, Alex Emmons, Louis Faurer, Michael Ferrer, Ryan Flathau, Harris Fogel, Diana Gaston, Larry Gawel, Danielle Goodyear, Marita Gootee, Susan kae Grant, Josh Hailey, Chris Hess, Christine Holtz, Song Hong, George Hubl, David Husom, Heather Justice, April Katz, Jules Keith, Angela Kelly, Kelly King, Mark Malloy, D. John McCarthy, Paula L. McNeill, Chester Michalik, David Milne, Arno Rafael Minkinen, Gerald Moore, Jere Moore, Brian Moss, Hope Movsesian, Natalie Nadozirny, Dan Oostra, Robin Paris, Jeannie Pearce, Jonathan Pfaff, Betty Press, Jenny Price, Lynn Reynolds, Sonja Rieger, Erick Rowe, Nancy Rumfield, Amy Schreiber, Christine Shank, Mark Shuttleworth, Sandy Sorlien, Charlie Thomas, Judith Thorpe, Anna Tomczak, Hanna Tuominen, Virginia Vanneman, Genevieve Waller, Dorothea Wenzel, Eva Sköld Westerlind, Ken White, Gerald Wiggington, John Willis, Shar Wolff, Sarah Yankee, Mavis York, Marjorie Young, Cathleen Ziembra, Zelda Zinn.

Bulk raffle ticket buyers: Please contact the national office if you need a letter from SPE for your taxes.

private rituals and family activities, her chilling portraits explore the organization from an uncomfortably intimate vantage point.

The programming concluded with a broad selection of film and video presented by the Women's Caucus. Among the numerous screenings was a short film by **Gail Noonan**, *Our Name in Cellulite* (1995, Women Make Movies) commenting on the sad disparity between a woman's natural body and the unobtainable, idealized body. A documentary film by **Masuda Sultan**, *Afghanistan: From Ground Zero to Ground Zero* (2001, DCTV) presented the traumatic journey of the 23-year-old Afghan-American filmmaker, as she made her way from her home in New York City, where she grew up, to Kandahar, Afghanistan, where she was born. Following the U.S. bombings in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, which killed 19 members of her extended family, she returned with an American filmcrew to the rural hamlet where the bombings occurred.

As the conference drew to a close, attendees crowded into the Exhibitors' Fair to cast a final bid for lots in the silent auction and to wait for the results of the raffle winners. SPE national board members David Taylor and Steven Bliss drew the names of the lucky winners.

Following the success of last year, the 2003 national conference featured a silent auction and a raffle, in which attendees could buy "chances" to win donated photographs and equipment. National Board member Michelle Van Parys secured prints by Thomas Barrow, Betty Hahn, Mark Klett,

Deborah Luster, Robert ParkeHar-rison, Evon Streetman, and many others for the raffle, and Jeannie Pearce brought in donations of photographic equipment, books and supplies from generous corporate sponsors and publishers. The proceeds from these fundraising events go toward the SPE scholarships, which support students in their attendance of the national conference.

For the final program of the conference, attendees returned to the Radisson Hotel Ballroom on Saturday night to hear Featured Speaker **Anne Wilkes Tucker**, curator of photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Nathan Lyons, founding member and first chairman of SPE, gave a warm introduction, recounting his early memories of Tucker as a graduate student at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. During her tenure at the MFA, where she has worked since 1976, Tucker has amassed one of the most significant photography collections in the country, which now numbers over 20,000 photographs.

She presented a personal overview of the collection, and a few of the more prominent exhibitions she has curated, including Robert Frank, Ray Metzker, Richard Misrach, Joel Sternfeld, Catherine Wagner and the astronauts at NASA. She concluded with her most recent project, *The History of Japanese Photography*, a landmark exhibition and catalogue that presents the first comprehensive account of photography in Japan, from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The Featured Speaker presentation was sponsored by Calumet.



Top: Mary Virginia Swanson jokes around with an approaching photographer.



Bottom: Conference staff veteran Ashley Peel guided the Austin conference in her first time function as onsite conference coordinator.

Austin proved an ideal location for the conference. Against the din of news reports and anti-war demonstrations, a growing membership of photographers and educators, critics and historians exchanged ideas and images, and took in the down-home hospitality and relaxed atmosphere of this southern town.

Special thank yous go to all of our conference planners, staff, speakers, portfolio reviewers, exhibitors, facilitators, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers, conference hotel staff and to our conference attendees.

Conference presenters included: Keynote speaker Joel Meyerowitz, Honored Educator Evon Streetman, Featured Speaker Anne Wilkes Tucker, and general presenters Edmund Abaka, Julie Anand, Mark Andres, Eric Baden, Jessica Beagan, Lisa Bloomfield, Jo Ann Boehmer, Andrew Borowiec, Kathleen Campbell, Keith Carter, Stephen Chalmers, Kerry Stuart Coppin, Barbara Crane, Darryl Curran, Rick Dingus, Mark Alice Durant, Leslie Ernst, Cass Fey, John Craig Freeman, Phyllis Galembo, John Ganis, Gary Goldberg, Arlene Gottfried, Susan kae Grant, Robin Hann, Jessica Todd Harper, Allen Hess, Monica Hurtado, Julieve Jubin, Philip Krejcarek, Stuart Larson, John H. Lawrence, Sonya A. Lawyer, Ernst Leslie, Doug Levere, Matthew Linton, Nathan Lyons, Michael Madsen, Amber Marks, Annu P. Matthew, D. John McCarthy, Arno Rafael Minkkinen, Margaret Morton, Osamu James Nakagawa, Aphrodite Désirée Navab, Cindy O'Dell, Elaine O'Neil, Ellen P. Orrego, Will Pappenheimer, Esther Parada, John Reuter, Barbara Jo Revelle, Mark Rice, Mel Rosenthal, Cynthia Elyce Rúbin, Rishi Singhal, Irma Sizer, Karina Skvirsky, Sandy Sorlien, Sally Stein, Mary Virginia Swanson, David Taylor, Blaise Tobia, Jerry Uelsmann, Gregory Ulmer, Joseph Vitone, Margaret Wagner, Andrea Wallace, Jill Waterman, Bruce West, Wendel White, Melissa Z. Worthington, William Wylie, Catherine Zuromskis.