

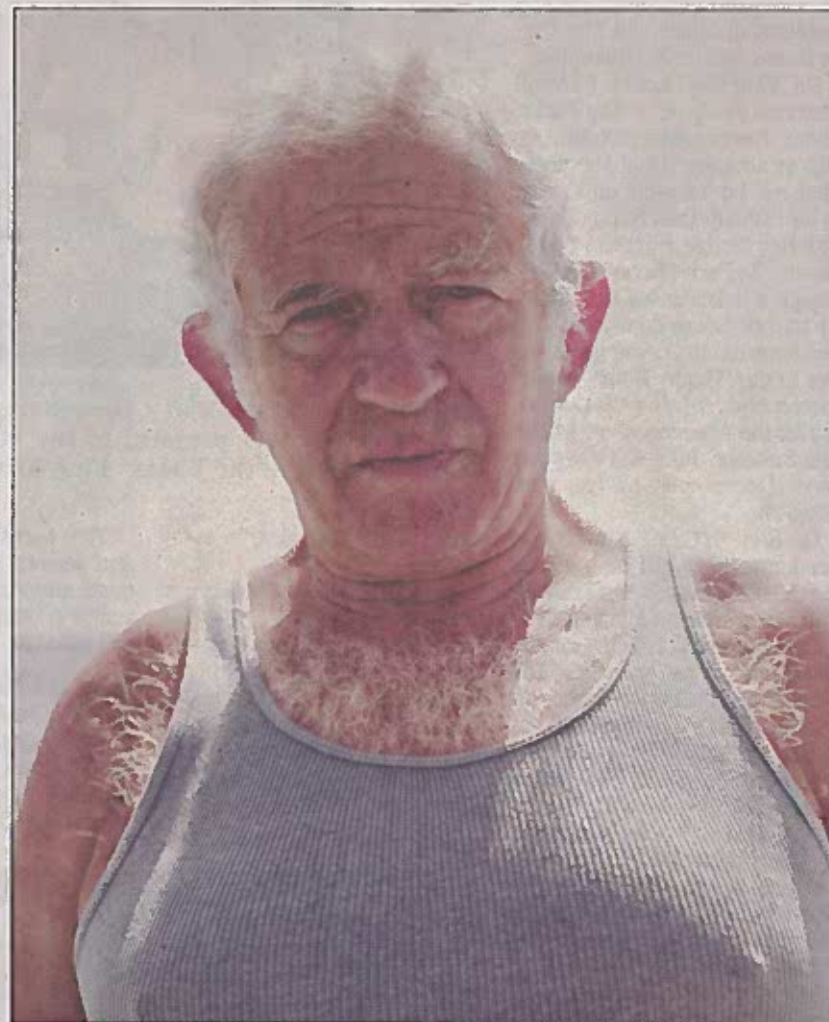


Fragile memories



JOEL MEYEROWITZ

"Red House, Truro," 1982, vintage chromogenic print, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Gift of Randy Kohls, 2014.50.1 © Joel Meyerowitz



JOEL MEYEROWITZ

"Norman Mailer," 1982, vintage chromogenic print, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Gift of Robert and Kathi Steinke, 2014.46.5 © Joel Meyerowitz

Joel Meyerowitz photographs on view at MHC Art Museum

By JENNA CARERI
For the Gazette

EXHIBIT REVIEW

THIRTY-THREE photographs in the exhibit hang in neat rows, mounted on otherwise blank, white walls.

The show, "Fragile Paper Timeships," at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum in South Hadley, is a collection of comforting images, in muted colors, taken by Joel Meyerowitz — a photographer who pioneered the use of color photography. To take the photos, which measure 8 by 10 and 11 by 14 inches, Meyerowitz used a Deardorff 8x10 field view camera — an archetypal wooden field camera that weighs in at about 12 pounds. The pictures were donated to the museum in 2014

by a group of photography collectors.

The building was nearly deserted on a recent Sunday — typical, perhaps, for a weekend on a college campus — except for an elderly man with squeaky brown sneakers and a rather large bald spot on the back of his head. (He didn't appear to pose much of a threat, and the security personnel looked rather unemployed.) A donation box to the right of the museum entrance lets visitors know that, while admission is free, "Your contribution will help support this exhibition." Duly noted.

Black-and-white beginnings

Meyerowitz was born in 1938 in New York City.

When he began work as a photographer, in 1962, he took mainly spontaneous black-and-white street photographs in New York, but he abandoned that approach later in the 1960s in favor of color, and became one of the biggest proponents of color photography at a time when it was not taken seriously as an art form. His 1979 book, "Cape Light," was influential in gaining acceptance for the medium.

He also started experimenting with photography equipment; in 1976, he switched from using a 35mm camera to the elephantine Deardorff. The pictures in this exhibit were taken with the Deardorff between 1979 to 1989.

The display begins with a collection of still lifes, a genre Meyerowitz undertook only after his shift

to the Deardorff. Still interested in spontaneous imagery, despite the inconvenient size of his new equipment, Meyerowitz rejected typical staged still life images in favor of found scenes.

One of those is a 1983 work, "Early morning still life." On a deck overlooking a pale beach, a wrinkled cloth covers a table that is littered with used place settings — a memory, perhaps, of a carefree summer evening.

Next to that is "Trading Post, Florida," a 1982 gem depicting the front of a faded wood building so cluttered with miscellany it could only be an antique shop. A "Help Wanted" sign sits in the

■ See JOEL / Page C4

Joel Meyerowitz photographs on view at MHC

■ Continued from C1

window, with colorful license plates in green, red and blue perched above. A cardboard figure of a lone reindeer, unhappily separated from a certain mythical figure's sleigh, roosts on the edge of the roof.

Detail and depth

On an adjacent wall are pieces from Meyerowitz's "Bay/Sky" series, taken near his Provincetown summer home. In a 2014 interview, Meyerowitz said that the switch to the Deardorff was prompted by a desire for more detail and depth in his color work, particularly in landscape scenes like the ones in this series. The size of the camera, he noted, produced higher-quality images, which allowed him to better capture the way the light could give a familiar countryside new life.

One piece in the series, the 1982 photograph "Red House, Truro," examines a solemn red house, standing alone on a rolling hill. It is bordered to the right by a sea of cloudy water and to the left by a swatch of yellow-green grass that disappears at the side of the photo, swelling to unknown proportions. The sky behind it is a solid mass of faded blue, which feels suffocating in its blankness, despite the open space.

Down a row and over one is a photo taken in 1983 of a young Paul Theroux, a travel writer. Here, he sinks knee-deep in water, sporting thigh-high khaki shorts and a bare, tan chest. He holds his rowboat close behind him, grasping it as much for support, it seems, as to prevent it floating away. His smile is tight, perhaps from the effort of controlling the boat, but it translates happily to his bespectacled eyes. The water meets the horizon behind him in a cloud of white, creating an endless expanse that Theroux and his rowboat might roam.

An evolution of style

This type of picture was an evolution for Meyerowitz. In the 1960s and '70s, most of his portraits were taken in New York City of chance meetings and seconds-long relationships between strangers. When he switched to the cumbersome Deardorff, his ability to improvise diminished and his portraits became more intentional and intimate, often focused on family and friends.

Right next to Paul Theroux on the exhibit wall, it's still 1983, but now Meyerowitz's daughter Ariel squishes her feet in the sand on the beach, skinny legs splayed and bushy red hair trapped in a ponytail. The long arm of her oversized sweater trails down to her knee, and she looks vaguely irritated by her father's insistent photographing. Maybe now, in retrospect, she likes these pictures better.

Author Norman Mailer, trapped in 1982 on the next wall over, hardly looks more pleased than Ariel. The white hair on his head fades into the white sky behind him, but his fuzzy white chest hair stands out brilliantly against his red skin.



JOEL MEYEROWITZ

"Early morning still life," 1983, vintage chromogenic print, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Gift of Chris Hughes, 2014.47.8 © Joel Meyerowitz

The "fragile paper timeships" of this exhibit flash back to easy summer days spent on cool beaches in crisp air. They offer a glimpse into Meyerowitz's own life in an intensely personal way, capturing feelings of peace and the slow march of time. But they also push viewers back into fond memories of their own places of magic and serenity, covering busy lives in a blanket of calm, if only for a moment.

"Fragile Paper Timeships" is on view in the T. Marc Futter Gallery. Also on view, in the Weissman and Garonzik gal-

leries, is "Dancers of the Nightway," an exhibit of Navajo blankets, woven with an explosion of red, orange, turquoise and black, that are shockingly pigmented compared to the light-washed scenes in the Meyerowitz show. Both exhibits are on view through May 29.

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum is at Lower Lake Road in South Hadley. Museum hours are Tuesdays through Fridays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. For information, visit www.mtholyoke.edu/artmuseum.