

LETTERS

READING LESSON

To the editor:

I found the bulk of Michael Starenko's article ("History and Geography: The California (Photography) Lesson," *Afterimage*, May 1984) on education and California photography to be interesting. However, since it accompanied my own, I feel it necessary to amplify a number of points that seem to be important in making a reasonable judgment of the exhibition and accompanying book, *Photography in California, 1945-80*.

An examination of the effect of MFA-educated photographers on "art photography" is no doubt of major significance. But to put the whole phenomenon into proper perspective would mean marking the effect of higher education on the other visual arts (painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, cinema), as well as conceptual art and criticism. A question might be developed to identify the similarities or differences that exist in "academic" and "non-academic" photography, as compared to other media and forms of expression. In a historical context the question might be posed as: "How was the work of academy-trained painters different from that of unschooled painters at the beginning of the nineteenth century? Do those same differences exist today?" Obviously such a comparison does not exist for the entire history of photography. But frankly I don't think Starenko's division of concerns ("issues of gender, race, and class . . . and so on") can be determined solely by the decision by someone to take photography courses in college or to teach.

Starenko develops a persuasive argument on paper for his thesis without seriously examining the work itself. A veritable "who's who" list of names in art and photography is presented in various groups as if there is a certain common feature to all the ideas and work. There seem to be an underlying and unstated assumption about what is "art" or "art photography," and what is not. My criticism of Katzman's organization, which I would also apply to Starenko's attitude, is that it is not expansive enough. It assumes a clear definition and understanding of photography and the art world where none exists. For example, why don't our discussions of the growth of photography at the university level include an examination of how it was incorporated into departments of American studies, anthropology, cinema, journalism, and sociology? Why isn't it tied to the growth of television and cinema? Photographers have not existed in a vacuum during the last forty years—why is their work considered in such a narrow fashion?

I found myself agreeing with many of Starenko's observations—until his discussion of the photographers' work. At this point in the article it is unclear whether he is basing his evaluation on the plates in the book, a combination of reproductions and show checklist, or outside knowledge of the photographers' work. His curt dismissal of almost every post-1970 photographer serves little purpose. If Starenko's intention is irony he fails by assuming a disdainful and depreciating tone in his writing.

Finally, I was a little bothered by his intimation of Van Deren Coke as an influential counterpart to John Szarkowski. Coke assumed the directorship of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art department of photography in 1979. Szarkowski has been at the Museum of Modern Art in New York since 1962. Beyond this obvious difference in years are innumerable other determinations of influence and power, such as sitting on grant evaluation panels and the direct acquisition of work. I don't think that the two can be compared as equivalent influences for the period of the 1960s, or for that matter, even the 1970s.

—Mark Johnstone

Michael Starenko replies:

Since I devoted at least three paragraphs to the distinction between "art photographers" and "artist/photographers" (not "art or art photography," as you erroneously put it), your claim that my assumptions are "unstated" is simply preposterous. Furthermore, although you wrote next to nothing about the photographs themselves in either your review of "Photography in California" or in the above letter, you still have the temerity to charge that "Starenko develops a persuasive argument on paper for his thesis without seriously examining the work itself." For you, evidently, "serious" must mean the same thing as "positively," because a few sentences later you complain: "His curt dismissal of almost every post-1970 photographer serves little purpose. If Starenko's intention is irony he fails by assuming a disdainful and depreciating tone in his writing." When I wrote that Judy Dater's new photographs "are sometimes funny but, more often than not, truly bizarre" or that Jack Welpott makes "lascivious female nudes" I was trying to be, well, serious. Naturally, I don't expect that you, or anyone else for that matter, necessarily agree with the four paragraphs I wrote about this work. One could argue, for example, that Welpott's nudes are not lascivious, but something else, say, classical.

Nevertheless, while you do seem to be appalled at my generally negative estimation of this work, you provide absolutely no counter-argument to my criticism except to say that it "serves little purpose." (Well, it serves my purposes.) Since you, not I, are making the charges here, it is your responsibility to actively persuade us—your readers—of the inher-

ent virtues of '70s art photography. As a long-time follower of this work, you, of all people, should be capable of mounting a good defense. Yet instead of arguing against my critique of the work and its supportive institutions, you inexplicably conjure up various "problems" in my essay. But these "problems" are a direct function of your inattentive reading. For instance, I couldn't agree with you more that "issues of gender, race, class, and institutional affiliations" cannot be determined solely by someone's decision to take photography courses in college or to teach photography. And that's precisely why, in the sentence immediately preceding the one you (mis)quoted, I wrote: "Like the photographers in *Photography in California*, all of these artist/photographers have been university-educated, yet they largely reject the attendant liberal humanism." Finally, although I did in fact compare Van Deren Coke to John Szarkowski, why does this bother you? Did I contend—or even imply—that they "can be compared as equivalent influences" for any period, as you put it? Quite the contrary. Here's what I actually wrote: "It should be clear—if ever it was in doubt—that Szarkowski is ideologically and temperamentally indisposed towards university-based photography." "At the moment, it would appear that Van Deren Coke and Louise Katzman of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art are the mainstream museum curators most willing to accommodate the new generation of university-trained and -employed art photographers." You're badly mistaken if you think I consider them "equivalent."

MASS APPEAL

To the editor:

While I found David Trend's article, "NEA/AFI Regional Media Grants and State Arts Councils" (*Afterimage*, Summer 1984), to be very informative, I would like to correct two statements concerning the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities and their media funding programs.

The Cable Television: Partnerships in Production Program provided \$140,000—not \$500,000—to Massachusetts organizations sponsoring projects by film and video artists. These projects included six film and video productions, a series of workshops, a series of commissioned articles on video, and a distribution project providing works of quality video to the state's cable system.

One sentence in the article, however, is particularly disturbing: "A group of independent producers in Boston is currently charging that the Cable Program and the CAT Fund are designed to spend the majority of their funds outside of Massachusetts." The Council *only* funds Massachusetts cultural organizations. As far as the Cable Program is concerned, all, but one, of the artists who were commissioned through that program work and reside in Massachusetts.

The CAT Fund is a partnership between the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and WGBH. While artists from Massachusetts as well as those who reside outside of the state are eligible to submit proposals, all of the commissioned works will be broadcast on WGBH or exhibited at the ICA. Both the Council and the CAT Fund are interested in commissioning works of outstanding quality which will be seen and appreciated by Massachusetts audiences. To date, the CAT Fund has not announced its first group of commissions. To charge that they will be spending the majority of their funds outside of Massachusetts is both premature and shortsighted.

—Anne Hawley
Executive Director,
Massachusetts Council on the
Arts and Humanities

David Trend replies:

I thank Anne Hawley for correcting the one statistical error in my article, but I take issue with her second point. In a story dealing with each of the nation's 50 state arts councils, it is impossible to fully describe the programs—and problems—of each. The Massachusetts media artists I mentioned were basing their arguments on funding practices in the MCAH's New Works category, a program similar in structure to the CAT Fund. Through both programs MCAH grants are awarded to Massachusetts organizations to commission projects by artists from anywhere in the world for view by Massachusetts audiences. The 1983 New Works commissions, I was told, went primarily to non-Massachusetts artists. This was certainly the impression I got from the MCAH 1983 funding announcement for New Works. It listed 53 awards, the apparent majority of which went to well-known non-Massachusetts artists. Now, when I contacted MCAH staff last month, I was told that the actual number of commissions made was 98, with 68% to Massachusetts residents. Of awards made from

An Editorial

Longtime *Afterimage* readers will note the absence of a familiar name from our masthead this month. Last June, Martha Gever resigned her position as associate editor to assume new responsibilities as editor of the *Independent*, the monthly publication of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers. In leaving, Martha drew to a close an involvement with *Afterimage* and the Visual Studies Workshop spanning nine years. We will not attempt to summarize the numerous contributions as a writer and editor that Martha made to this publication and to the fields it covers; her work, as it has appeared in these pages, is the most accurate record of her accomplishments. We wish Martha well in her new endeavors.

1981 through 1984, commissions to individuals living outside the state totalled 40%. While not a majority, this is clearly a hefty minority—and I understand the concerns expressed by Massachusetts artists.

BRANDT REMEMBERED

To the editor:

Michael Sladden's fine obituary of Bill Brandt (*Afterimage*, February 1984) does much to correct the mythology that has grown up around him, but as someone who has known his work in print for almost 50 years perhaps I could be allowed to add some other details. He was in fact born in Hamburg of British parents but he disliked the fact being known, and although it appears in several biographical pieces he usually found ways to avoid specifying his exact place of birth. His parents were not Russian emigrants, but his father was a prosperous South London merchant with a fine detached residence in Sydenham. He never knew of any Russian origin until he acquired the family heirloom, the folding screen with inset photographs to which was added a picture of his father on pony and trap outside the Sydenham house.

His familiarity with the British social stratification came from his middle-class background. His father in retirement moved to a house near Hyde Park, still a good residential area. His famous picture of the parlor maid and the story he did for *Picture Post*, reproduced in *Creative Camera* (No. 211, July/Aug. 1982), are in fact pictures of his father's servants. He was strongly motivated towards the non-political Socialism of that period, like so many of the British middle class of the 1930s, including those who went to fight in the Spanish Civil War for non-political reasons. It was out of this background

that *Picture Post* arose, to achieve its greatness under Tom Hopkinson.

In the '30s, Brandt was not only documenting social life in his by now well-known pictures, but he was trying to make himself a thoroughly professional picture producer. He worked on the staff of the magazine *Weekly Illustrated* unpaid in order to obtain practical experience of how the best British picture magazine of its time worked. It is nice to think that when Henry Luce and Margaret Bourke-White paid their famous visit to *Weekly Illustrated* prior to the founding of *Life* they may actually have passed Brandt quietly working away in a corner.

Brandt's strength, however, was not in the hustle of the picture story where the hard-working photographers like Kurt Hutton, Felix Man, and Bert Hardy would often produce two, three, or more stories per week for *Picture Post*, but in the monthly *Lilliput* where the picture sections first saw his portraits of artists and the blackout scenes and in the annual *Saturday Book* where he and Edwin Smith dominated, but there were commissioned works from a variety of other sources. Michael Sladden is obviously guilty of a slip of the pen in talking about blasting flash pictures, because the essence of his great London series was available light even when London was under total blackout. The transformation of Brandt came from America, and *Perspective of Nudes* was criticized by those not familiar with his streak of experimentation and ingenuity acquired in his journalistic background. Fame did not come until the exhibitions in the USA and the unanswered question about what motivated the decision to print the prints "American Style." The Subjective Fotografie movement made little impact in the UK, having been crudely dismissed as soot and whitewash but its influence in North America was much greater. There is a widely held belief that the change of style of Brandt's printing, so obvious

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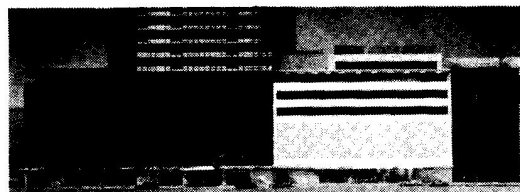
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COVER: Photograph of a model of the recently expanded Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Designed by Cesar Pelli, the expansion includes a new Edward Steichen Photography Center, which is three times larger than the previous center. See "An Interview with John Szarkowski," by Andy Grundberg, p. 8.

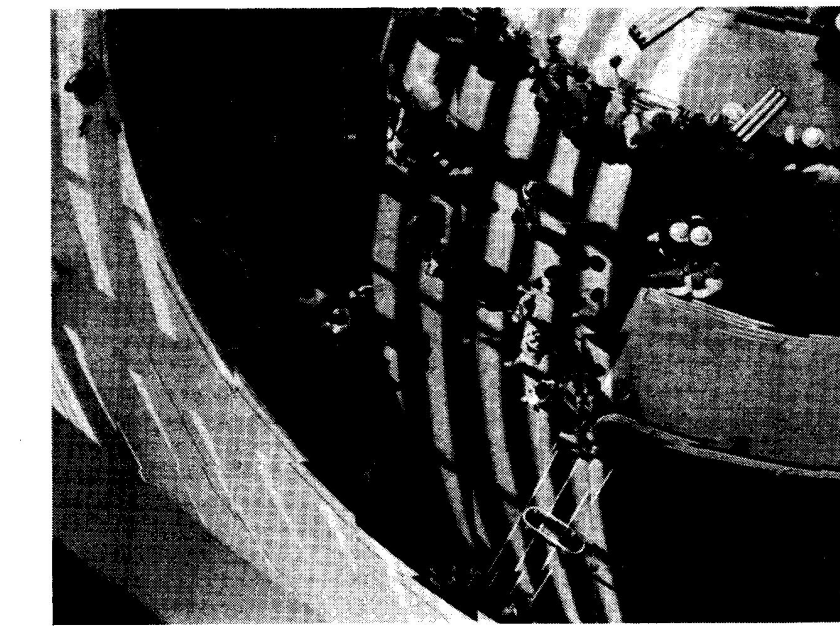
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photographic record—comprise a body of portraiture that, at least, makes the text come alive by grounding it in the experiences of specific people and, at best, stands alone as a record of human pain and struggle. Though the photographs as a whole seem illustrative of the text rather than vice versa, their impact as individual photos, however, is often weakened by captions which state the obvious. The most powerful photos are those with the briefest titles, such as *Front Porch Warfare II* (a photo taken in a vet's front yard of an old dryer riddled with bullet holes) or *Universal Braille* (people at the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, crowding about the memorial, their hands reaching up to touch the names engraved on it). One photo in particular, that of a veteran seen in profile, a tear trickling down his cheek, seems emblematic of the veterans' (and the nation's) struggle. It is captioned, "I prayed for survival, but forgot peace of mind." It would be hard to find a more poignant image of the task still awaiting post-Vietnam America.

—CO

CATALOGUES

Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist as Photographer, essays by Franklin Riehlman and Tom Wolf, and Bruce Weber. Edith C. Blum Art Institute (Milton and Sally Avery Center for the Arts, The Bard College Center, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 12504)/80 pp./\$10.00 (sb). In presenting and documenting an exhibit of Yasuo Kuniyoshi's paintings and photographs, the curators and catalogue writers attempt to compare and contrast the media of painting and photography. Although they restrict their discussion to Kuniyoshi's images, they make references to Kuniyoshi's



World's Fair Ceiling (1939), by Yasuo Kuniyoshi, from *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist As Photographer*.

contemporaries, other 1930s and '40s American artists such as Charles Sheeler, Ben Shahn, Reginald Marsh, Ralston Crawford, and Konrad Cramer.

The exhibit is predicated on the belief that it took a painter's eye for composition and style to take photography beyond its purely "documentary" capacities. For example, while the catalogue places Kuniyoshi's work in an art-historical ("fine art" tradition) and biographical context, it makes no reference to the general history and practice of photography and "art" photographers of the early twentieth century.

Despite this somewhat off-putting omission, however, the basic intention of both the catalogue and the show is intriguing and serves as a good introduction to the work of Kuniyoshi, a relatively unknown Japanese-born, American artist. For, though both essays are, from a critical point of view, problematic, they are also informative and effective; my appreciation of the images was greatly enhanced and determined by the texts.

In the first essay, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Painter/Photographer," Riehlman and Wolf confine their discussion to the formal proper-

ties of Kuniyoshi's images. By this, they suggest that it is mainly through the manipulation of composition that the photographer creates "art," rather than simply documenting reality through an unmediated process. They cite an example in which Kuniyoshi consciously manipulated the image a step beyond the actual shooting of the photograph: "We can see, comparing a photograph from their trip, *East Kingston*, with its negative, that Kuniyoshi cut out about one-fourth of the negative, cropping it on all sides to purify the image into a near-abstract composition of contrasting angles and textures." This indirectly suggests that the hand-cropped, i.e. human-crafted, image reigns above the merely photographed, or mechanically reproduced, image.

Similarly, this formalist approach leads these authors into another critical *faux pas*—the lack of any serious discussion of the content of the images. In the second essay, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Symbolic Still Lives: Mind at Work," Bruce Weber overcompensates for this omission. He, however, relies too heavily on biographical anecdotes to identify and interpret the presumed symbolic content of Kuniyoshi's paintings. Weber's conjectures from life to art result in too-simple equations and pop-psychologizing.

For the most part, I think Kuniyoshi's photographs are worth further study both in terms of and for their historical and aesthetic qualities and import. His paintings, on the other hand, appear much less sophisticated and much less interesting from anything other than a biographical point of view. Perhaps a better subtitle and premise for this catalogue and show would have been "Photographer as Artist," rather than its reverse.

—LK

CPB ANNOUNCES GRANTS

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has announced funding in rounds two and three of its Open Solicitations category. Reviewing the 462 round-two applications was a panel comprised of: Mary Benjamin, independent producer, Cambridge, Mass.; Bernie Seabrooks, independent producer, New York City; Shep Morgan, independent producer/president, Past America, Inc., Miami, Fla.; Rick Tejada-Flores, independent producer, San Francisco, Calif.; David Othmer, vice president of programming, WHYY-TV, Philadelphia, Pa.; Terry Sanders, vice president, American Film Foundation, Santa Monica, Calif.; Avon Kirkland, independent producer, Berkeley, Calif.; and Carolyn Lewis, independent producer, Ocean View, Del. Those receiving funds from the \$1.7 million disbursed in round two are:

KCET, *Paper Angels*, produced by Phyllis Geller, written by Genny Lim; The Film Company, *Herman Melville*, by Bob Squier and Karen Thomas; The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, Dance and Performance, *The Kitchen Presents*, by Carlotta Schoolman; WETA, *First Lady/A Lady of Firsts: The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt*, by Ricki Green; Seven League Productions, Inc., *Cuba-1984*, by Suzanne Bauman, Jim Burroughs, and Carol Polakoff; Robert Richter Productions, *Do Not Enter: The Visa War Against Ideas*, by Robert Richter; *Sexploitation of Children: The Seattle Solution*, by Rachel V. Lyon; *Dr. Charlie Clements: An Odyssey of Conscience*, by Deborah Shaffer and David Goodman; Creative Talent Associates, *O'Neill*, by Fred Barzyk and Olivia Tappan; Nelvana, Ltd., *The Green Limousine*, by Eli Noyes and Kit Laybourne; Educational Film Center, *Powerhouse*, by Stephen L. Rabin and Ira Klugerman; Blackside, Inc., *Eyes on The Prize*, by Henry Hampton.

Reviewing the 412 round-three applications

was a panel comprised of: Juanita Anderson, executive producer of special projects, WTVF, Detroit, Mich.; William Arhos, vice president of programming and production, KLRV, Austin, Tex.; Ken Burns, independent producer, Walpole, N.H.; James Day, Publication, New York City; William Mason, independent producer, Silver Spring, Md.; Howard Rosenberg, freelance journalist, Silver Spring, Md.; Mercedes Savio, Public Television program director, WOUB, Athens, Ohio; and Tony Silver, Public Art Films, Inc., New York City. As of this publication the total amount of funds disbursed in this round had not yet been determined. Those receiving funding are:

Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium, *The First Americans*, by Frank Blythe; *Watch Me Move! A Historical Appreciation of Black Popular*

Dance in Twentieth Century America, by Arthur Cromwell; WHMM-TV, *Four Little Colored Boys Alive and Well in the U.S.A.*, by Charles Sessoms and Samuel D. Pollard; *The Philippines: America's Next Crisis*, by Stanley Karnow and Andrew Pearson; *Living Latin*, by Rick Tejada-Flores; *God and Money: The Catholic Bishops Confront the American Economy*, by John de Graaf; Walker Arts Center and KTCA-TV, *Alive From Off Center*, by Melinda Ward; Miles Film Productions and WNET-TV, *Black Champions*, by William Miles and David Loxton; Actors Theater and Louisville Productions, *"American Shorts"*, by Clay Nixon; WETA-TV, *Comet Halley: Here It Comes Again*, by John L. Wilhelm; *American Consumer Protest: A Documentary History*, by Morton Silverstein and Alvin H. Perlmutter; Don Mischer Productions, Inc., *Baryshnikov by Tharp with American Ballet Theater*, by Don Mischer; *The Poetry Project, Heart of a Dog*, by Mirra Bank and Perrin Ireland; KCTS-TV, *Peace in Our Time: The Knife Edge of Deterrence*, by Joseph Russin and John Coney; KPBS-TV, *The Lemon Grove Incident*, by Paul Espinosa.

RAINBOW, CONT'D

(continued from page 4)

Angel Franco—for a series of articles illustrated with his photos in the *New York Times Magazine* and *Fortune*; Helinde Koelbl—for three published picture essays in *Zeit*; Stephen Shames—for his portfolio, "Juveniles in Adult Jails"; and the Central American Team of the *Tucson (Arizona) Citizen*, including Glenn S. Capers, Bernice Chambers, Mari A. Schaeffer, and P.K. Weis—for a five-part special report on conflict in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and the plight of the Central American refugees in Mexico and the United States. Andy Grundberg of *Modern Photography* and the *New York Times*, Brent Peter-

son of *Parade*, and Arthur Rothstein of the Focus Workshop judged the entries.

The following artists will be artists-in-residence at the Visual Studies Workshop for 1984-85: Cherie Hiser, photography; Jim Stone, photography; Barbara Bosworth, photography; Jim Pomeroy, video; Chris Kraus, video; Frances Butler, book arts; Betsy Davids, book arts; Gulsen Calik, book arts; and Jean-Paul Curtay, video installation. The artists will each receive a \$1,000 honorarium and a month to work on a project of their choice. The artists were chosen from a field of 100 applicants by panelists Roger Martin, Keith Smith, and Nancy Norwood.

Tanya Weinberger of Rochester, N.Y., has won the Playboy Amateur Film Competition

for her animated film "Gulliver Comes to Lilliput." Selected from over 200 applicants, Weinberger was awarded \$1,000. Her film will be shown on the Playboy cable channel.

Luc Bourdon and Francois Girard of Montreal have won the Grand Award in *Under 5*, a Canadian national competition for video shorts, for their video "Distance." Judges for the competition were Martin Truax, program director, Rogers Vancouver Cable 10; Michelle Gibson, broadcaster, CKVU 13; Liz Vanderzaag, independent video artist; and Eric Metcalfe, artist and director of Western Front. The competition was sponsored by Canada Council/Explorations, Simon Fraser University Centre for the Arts, and the Western Front.

The Mid-America Arts Alliance/National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowship Program has awarded \$3,500 fellowships to Karen S. Kunc of Lincoln, Neb., and Randall J. Kust of Wichita, Kan., for their artists' books. They and the other winners (18 artists working in printmaking and drawing) were selected from a field of 243 applicants by a panel comprised of: Jane Abrams, associate professor of art and art history, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; Jan Howard, former curator of prints and drawings, Spencer Art Museum, University of Kansas, Lawrence; John Dowell, printmaker, Philadelphia, Pa.; and John Ross, chairperson of the art department, Manhattanville College, Purchase, N.Y.

LETTERS, CONT'D

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from a comparison between early vintage and later prints, was made under that influence of museum directors rather than by choice.

None of this should be taken in any way to minimize the man but simply to try and set him in a more human context, for it was a gentle humanity that made him so beloved in the later years. He was by no means reclusive—he was a gentle man who did not like to be battered by journalists looking for sensation... and the crowded fame of opening nights was not his scene. But dozens, perhaps hundreds, of students who phoned him up would be invited round to discuss their work with him, quietly and patiently. This perhaps is the

memory that most of us who knew him think of as the most typical.

—Colin Osman
Co-editor, *Creative Camera*

MORE COPY

To the editor:

I found Rebecca Lewis' article *Spreading the Word(s) and Images: Artists' Book Distribution* both interesting and informative. I was, however, surprised to find that although photo copying was mentioned as a publishing alternative it was given short shrift and no mention was made of the I.S.C.A. Artists' Bookworks Catalogue which pres-

ently lists 75 titles.

As a non-profit organization the Society is primarily interested in acquainting libraries, museums and other exhibition spaces with the availability of exciting and innovative electrographic prints and bookworks. Through our traveling show of prints and bookworks, *ISCAG-RAPHICS*, the *I.S.C.A. Quarterly and Newsletter*, our *Bookworks Catalogue* and our *slide registry* we have spread the word among collectors, institutions, and artists about the great potential of the photo copier as a creative tool, printing and publishing medium.

For book artists in particular the copier may be seen as a combination camera, darkroom, and printing press accessible in a way that offset print-

ing is not. The artist is free to experiment with many bookforms, in small editions, without the expense of plates and high priced printer's labor. Although several of my books have been offset printed—they all began as xeroxed editions.

Although Printed Matter now sells the I.S.C.A. Quarterly and a number of our books, the I.S.C.A. was founded by me in 1982 in direct response to Printed Matter's unwillingness at that time to handle xeroxed books. Serious artists and enhanced copier technology along with the educational efforts of the I.S.C.A. have helped to establish electrographic bookworks as a major alternative for book artists.

—Louise Neaderland
Director, International Society of Copier Artists