

## LETTERS

### Stereotypes

#### To the editor:

Obviously people's opinions on any given subject vary widely, and there is no reason for me to expect all reviews of my photographs to be favorable ones. I must complain, though, when my book is given to a reviewer so clearly hostile to my work that she loses all objectivity and, rather than discussing the book fairly, launches into a diatribe against "white men exercising power and privilege." She never mentions anything about the book's fine reproductions (200-line duotones individually spot varnished), which distinguish it from many other small press efforts. In a publishing world where 3-D books appear extremely rarely she mentions the word "stereograph" exactly once, and never assesses the quality of the 3-D effect at all; she also fails to mention that a reasonably nice stereo viewer is included with each copy of the book. Nowhere does she discuss the composition of the photographs or the layout of the book. Completely absent is the fact that all the photographs were taken on infrared film and that the combination of stereo and infrared is unique: these are the only such books ever published anywhere in the world. The reviewer never made it past her own prejudice against the book's subject.

I am very concerned about the kind of manipulation of the English language that George Orwell exemplified in 1984 with slo-

gans like "Freedom is Slavery." Similarly, during the Nixon years an invasion was referred to as "protective reaction." The fact that I portray women traditionally and gracefully doesn't mean I hate women. For your reviewer to turn an appreciation of women into misogyny is an unforgivable distortion of the proper meaning of the word [sic]. It is also an affront to the women who collaborated with me to produce the pictures in the first place. None of them feel that I hate women in general or them in particular. If the reviewer had read the book's introduction she would know that these are talented women working in different fields, not mindless beings "perniciously" manipulated. They are as responsible for the poses in *Hill Country Women* as I am: I assure you they are not misogynists.

I've had a feeling for a long time that certain critics have become so "inbred" due to constant contact with others of the same specialized views that they have lost touch with the rest of reality. In absolute numbers there are probably thousands of people who share the reviewer's attitudes, but relatively speaking they make up only a very tiny fraction of the whole spectrum of opinion. Speaking for myself and on behalf of the models in *Hill Country Women*, I feel we have been misrepresented. I believe you owe it to your readership to be more objective. I ask that you at least assign reviews to people who will remain reasonably objective and not exploit their position to disseminate propaganda for personal causes.

If possible I would like you to print this letter because the issues involved here—impartial analysis versus special-interest promotion or detraction—concern all of us who

are involved in the arts. Thank you.

—Steven Schwartzman  
Austin, Tex.

#### Ed.'s note:

The short book reviews in the "Received and Noted" section are intended to combine concise description with comment upon the ideas which inform the book under review. When editing this section, I look for accuracy in background facts and a tenable critical argument.

Martha Gever's review met these criteria. Photographic criticism in *Afterimage* is not equated with description of layout, varnishing, choice of film, or printing technique; Martha Gever—in the three adjectives she applied to the noun "stereograph"—conveyed the necessary information on the appearance of your photographs. In her interpretation of your chosen subject matter, she also suggested some of the ramifications of what your self-promotional material identifies as "a reaffirmation of woman's undiminished value as a spiritual archetype." Since she was here treading a path beaten down some years past by propagandists such as John Berger and Linda Nochlin (to keep the list short), I decided that her three-sentence review was premised on a tenable argument. I am aware that the position which that argument reflects is not the dominant ideology, but I find the idea of using majority opinion to determine the validity of critical thinking a form of intellectual Newspeak.

However, the conflict between defining criticism as the reasoned articulation of a response to work reviewed, in contrast to "impartial analysis," is the real issue here. I employ my definition of criticism because I have

never encountered an impartial analysis of any subject in any field: an attentive reading of any text naturally reveals implicit beliefs.

—Catherine Lord

#### Martha Gever replies:

Your photographs are romantic views of women situated in natural environments, which, whether or not you accept my conclusions, raise questions about the implied relationship between women and nature. For centuries the "special" relationship of women to nature has provided easy rationalizations for restrictive definitions which govern women's lives and underlies all concepts of the feminine ideal. This view has been consistently articulated in the visual arts as well as in physical ("objective") science, literature, social science, etc. It becomes a form of misogyny because within this belief system women are identified with their bodies while men are identified with their actions. In other words: men *act*; women *are*. With or without your verbal endorsement, your photographs maintain this point of view. These beliefs are pernicious insofar as they affect social relations—for example, job segregation and inferior wages or reproductive freedom. Neither your genial relationships with your models nor your personal motivations are the issue here, but rather your pictures, which exist comfortably within an ideological tradition with a clear social function.

I refrained from a detailed discussion of your book's graphic qualities because the underlying conception—3D or no 3D—seemed to me indistinguishable from that of the coffee-table art book.

## PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEA MEDIA GRANTS POSTPONED

Despite the lack of a confirmed budget, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Media Arts Program has begun to act on proposals for projects scheduled to begin in January 1982. Word of the NEA's initial funding recommendations went out to organizations applying under the categories of Media Arts Centers, Film/Video Exhibitions, and Services to the Field in time to meet the originally scheduled December notification date. According to the Media Arts Program's assistant director, Virgil Grillo, the move to award grants based on a speculative NEA

budget was motivated by a concern about the effects of interrupting funding for certain projects.

In August, panelists reviewing applications had been asked to recommend funding for projects based on three possible Endowment budgets. But all fail, the Media Arts Program delayed approaching the National Council on the Arts with its final funding suggestions—the expectation was, of course, that a federal budget was just around the corner. According to Media Arts Program specialist Cliff Whitham, as the deadline for

announcing awards began to approach a decision was made (with Reagan administration approval) to make the awards—but at the lowest level—a full 50% reduction from the NEA's originally projected 1982 budget. As a result, most organizations applying this year were recommended to receive half or less than the previous year's funding.

Because virtually all applicants received far less than they requested, however, no official announcement of the grants has been made. The logic is, according to Whitham,

that some groups might decide that they are unable to complete their projects at, say, 25% of the requested funding. Still, if the budget now being discussed by Congress survives possibilities like a Presidential veto, the 1982 NEA budget will be 72-95% of the originally projected 1982 figure. Should that occur, additional support for the media grantees may be forthcoming. Said Grillo, "It is very important for our constituency to know that at this point there still isn't any clear scenario."

## MASS. MEDIA GRANTS

The Artists Foundation recently announced its 1982 Massachusetts Artists Fellowship awards in film and video. The video fellows—Elliot Vincent Grabill and Abraham Ravett—were selected by a panel comprised of Barbara Buckner, Matthew Geller, and William Wegman. The film fellows—

Mary Benjamin, Daniel Eisenberg, and Ann Schatzel—were selected by Mary Beams, Ellen Hovde, and Ken Kobland. The fellows carry an award of \$5,000. For further information on the program, write: The Artists Foundation, Inc., 110 Broad St., Boston, Mass. 02110.

## FILM AND VIDEO IN UTAH

Plans were recently announced for the U.S. Film and Video Festival to be held Jan. 22-31 in Park City, Utah. The program is primarily geared toward commercial film and television professionals and includes workshops led by director Sydney Pollack and film critic Roger Ebert. One panel, "And Where It Stops Nobody Knows: The Video Phenomenon," will appeal to independent producers. It will feature John Alpert and Keiki Tsuno, documentarians and independent video artists; David Ross, curator of the U.C. Berkeley

Art Museum and the Pacific Film Archives; Thomas Brown, Zoetrope Studios; and Larry Kirkman, director of television services at the American Film Institute. Winning tapes in the U.S. Film and Video Festival Video Competition will also be screened. Registration fees for the entire festival are \$145 for students, \$160 for others. For further information, write: U.S. Film and Video Festival, 1177 E. 2100 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84106. (801) 487-8571.

## NEW VISUAL ARTS FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED

Awards in the Visual Arts (AVA), a new granting program for individual artists, recently announced its first fellowship awards. The program—sponsored by the Equitable Life Insurance Society of the United States, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts—is administered by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA). Recipients of the \$15,000 awards are:

Michael Singer, sculptor; Richard Bosman, painter; Edward Flood, sculptor; Maurie Kerrigan, painter/sculptor; Douglas Bourgeois, painter; Michael Luchs, painter/sculptor; Stephan Schultz, painter; Marsha Burns, photographer; Richard Schaffer, painter; Terry Allen, videomaker.

The artists were selected from 500 nominees who had been nominated by a group of 50 curators, artists, and critics (five from each of ten regions within the U.S.). Final selections were made by a jury comprised of George Segal, John Neff, Thomas Leavitt, Marcia Tucker, Carlos Gutierrez-Solana, Janet Kardon, Sandra Langer, Ellen Johnson, Richard Hunt, Clayton Pinkerton, Fritz Scholder, and Sebastian Adler.

In addition to providing fellowships, AVA is mounting a traveling exhibition of fellowship recipients' work, scheduled to open at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. on May 4, 1982.

**COVER:** Top: Installation shot of *Investigation/Observations* (1975), by Rita Myers. Middle: from the Beijing archives of the Chinese Photographers' Association. Bottom: From *Body Count*, a videotape by Dan Reeves and Jon Hilton.

# CONTENTS

## News page 2

## Features

CHINESE PHOTOGRAPHY: NOTES TOWARD A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A WESTERN MEDIUM

by Sandra Matthews page 4

MYTHIC SPACE: THE VIDEO INSTALLATIONS OF RITA MYERS

by Shelley Rice page 8

STATE OF THE ART SCAN: THE ITHACA VIDEO FESTIVAL

by Lucinda Furlong page 12

## Reviews

ANOTHER STAR IS BORN by Jan Zita Grover page 15

CALCULATED EXPRESSION by Martha Fleming page 16

SECOND HAND CLOTHES by James and Juliet Kaufmann page 17

RECEIVED AND NOTED page 17

## Notices page 18

*Afterimage* is published monthly, except July, August, and September (nine issues) by the Visual Studies Workshop for its members. Editorial and membership offices: 31 Prince St., Rochester, New York (716) 442-8676. Second class postage paid at Rochester, N.Y. *Afterimage* (ISSN 0300-7472) January 1982, vol. 9, no. 6. Membership in the Visual Studies Workshop is available for \$18.00 per year in the U.S. and \$20.00 per year elsewhere. *Afterimage* is indexed and abstracted by the *International Repertory of the Literature of Art*, and supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum Services (both federal agencies), the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. © Visual Studies Workshop 1982.

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