

Near & Far

Six Photography Portfolios from the University at Albany Fine Art Collections

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Photographers **Tom Baril, Andreas Feininger, Larry Fink, Mary Ellen Mark, Edward Steichen, and Andy Warhol** offer nuanced views of social class, power, desire, and beauty. Covering nearly a century of photographs taken throughout the United States, *Near & Far* brings us close to times past, yet the exhibition's underlying currents of class, unseen labor, and celebrity culture remain as salient now as ever.

We are drawn into the sensuous aspects of the world framed by each photographer's camera. We encounter a sense of tactility and intimacy in the sensitively lit, close-up botanical images by both Steichen and Baril. We feel longing and desire circulate through Feininger's photographs of Times Square in the 1940s and towering New York City skyscrapers, as well as in Warhol's black-and-white photographs of the city's empty streets. We feel the desire to see and be seen in the celebrity portraits by Steichen from the 1920s and 1930s and those by Warhol from the 1970s and 1980s, and although the styles of their respective decades may no longer be in vogue, the photographs echo our enduring fascination with fame.

The photographs in *Near & Far* at times subtly question standard American notions of success. Fink shows us a decadent world of rich debauchery both enticing and unseemly, while Mark's working-class subjects assert a quiet dignity being themselves as they meet our gaze or look thoughtfully out into their world. Warhol presents celebrities and anonymous sitters on equal footing in his series of Polaroid portraits—everyone getting their 15 minutes sustained in perpetuity through the timelessness of the photograph.

These six photographers show us the world as they have seen and shaped it through their lens and in the darkroom. From the earliest work of Steichen, who in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with his colleagues in the United States and internationally aimed to legitimize photography as an art form, to the latest work by Baril, each photographer offers us their poetic vision of the world. This notion of a singular point of view is embedded in the idea of an artist's portfolio, and each one quietly invites us nearer to worlds that might otherwise be far away.

First Floor

Mary Ellen Mark: *In America*

Mary Ellen Mark's 10 intimate black-and-white portraits from *In America* (1986–91) make strangers feel familiar. Throughout her international career Mark captured portraits of actors and presidents and produced numerous photo essays documenting people living in poverty. Whether in *LIFE* or *Rolling Stone* or another publication or in her own numerous books or her many solo exhibitions, Mark's work, due to her inimitable sense of empathy and humanity, always brings viewers close to people who might be far away.

As a photographer who spent time developing a rapport with her sitters, Mark hoped her photographs could “be a voice for people who have less of an opportunity to speak for themselves.” At the same time, she wanted to make pictures “that speak for themselves,” that is, to possess a beauty and emotional poetry beyond literal subject matter. It is perhaps due to Mark’s skill at the latter that we feel compelled to listen to those voices. In one image a young man gazing off in the distance holds a baby. The softness of the light echoes his touch, telling visually a story of care and devotion. In another, four older women, part of a Vegas performing group, smile excitedly as they prepare to go on stage. Their human desire for glamour, fame, and sparkle is relatable and resonates through many of the portfolios in *Near & Far*.

Larry Fink: *Social Context*

In Larry Fink’s portfolio *Social Context* (1975–1991), 15 black-and-white candid shots of socialites oscillate between satire and seduction as they offer windows to worlds of privileged revelry. In *Sneer and Waitress* (1991), Fink has captured a decisive—and unflattering—moment in which a wealthy partygoer sneers, oblivious to the waitress working behind him, her face obscured by the napkins she proffers. In *Peter Beard, Montauk, NY* (1977), we see Beard, a photographer born into privilege with an unidentified companion seated before a table whose excess of food, libations, and glittering glassware recalls a Dutch vanitas without the morality lesson.

Over his career, Fink has been a photographer for *Vanity Fair* and *The New York Times Magazine*, among other publications, and has taught at numerous universities, including Bard College, where he is professor emeritus. However, he grew up in a working-class family and his work demonstrates an ambivalent relationship to the world of the rich. In his monograph *Social Graces* (Aperture, 1984)—a dual-themed portfolio consisting of scenes of society benefits and parties, akin to *Social Context*, contrasted with the working-class Sabaine family in rural Pennsylvania—Fink writes that he, on the one hand, “was fueled by curiosity and my rage against the privileged class ...” He also writes: “The pictures are taken in the spirit of finding myself in the other. They are taken in the spirit of empathy ... This work is political, but not polemical.”

Andy Warhol

The Andy Warhol portfolios presented here consist of two bodies of work by the biggest name in Pop art: 102 color Polaroids and 51 8x10–inch black-and-white photographs shot in 35-millimeter film. In his studio, dubbed the Factory, which also hosted star-studded parties, Warhol used Polaroid’s The Big Shot model, a camera designed for standardized portraiture. In these Polaroids, which were often the source material for his large-scale silkscreen and acrylic portraits, our gaze is met by a veritable Who’s Who of celebrities of the 1970s and 1980s: fashion designer Carolina Herrera, basketball superstar Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and actress and drag icon Jackie Curtis, among others. We also see Warhol’s distinctive practice of masking some women’s faces in white makeup, including his own when he posed in drag. And we also encounter a number of children, either unidentified or the children of celebrities, whose guilelessness underscores a sense of play throughout all the model shoots.

These portraits poignantly contrast with Warhol’s 8x10–inch black-and-white prints. The result of his everyday practice of documentation with the 35-millimeter camera he carried with him at all times beginning in 1976, they form a visual diary of candid party shots with celebrities, fashion models on runways, anonymous laborers, and vacant street scenes. The latter quotidian views provide a surprisingly intimate view of New York in contrast to the glitz of celebrity culture.

Second Floor

Andreas Feininger: *Vintage New York*

Andreas Feininger offers a macro view of the city in the five large-scale photographs comprising his *Vintage New York* portfolio. Taken using his super telephoto lens—40 inches long and affixed to his 4x5 view camera held up by a five-pod he invented—they allow us to see New York from a distance yet elicit in us a yearning to be up close. Shot around the time the Bauhaus-trained artist first became a staff photographer at *LIFE* (1943–62), these works were selected and printed in 1987 under his supervision. That distance in time compounds the desire incited by flashing neon ads in *Times Square* (1942) with feelings of nostalgia. This longing grows as we look at *Midtown Manhattan* (1941), wondering about all those people who lived and worked behind each of the lighted skyscraper windows.

Although photography seems to capture reality, Feininger's interest in the medium had precisely to do with those aspects that deviated from reality: its two-dimensionality, its stillness, its silence, and its rendition of a colorful, radiant world into shades of gray. Telephoto lenses in particular offered a uniquely photographic vision, which in Feininger's words, enabled him to show "city scenes in that monumental and virtually distortion-free type of perspective" which for him was the "most effective representation in picture form."

Tom Baril

Tom Baril's eight-photograph portfolio (1993–2001) recalls a Pictorialist photographic tradition augmented by his contemplative palette of selenium and sepia tones. Baril's nostalgic, tactile sensitivity is equally felt in both the portfolio's urban views and his flower and landscape photographs. Many of the works were shot with Polaroid Type 55, a 4x5-inch black-and-white film which, when peeled apart, gave the photographer a positive image and, more importantly, a negative. This large-format negative lends itself well to rich detail and can be identified by the chemical borders Baril allows to frame his prints such as *The Chrysler Building* (1995), *3 Poppies* (1997), and *Verrazzano Narrows* (1993)—the latter of which gives us a rare moment of quiet solitude in New York. Some of the photographs, such as *Lumahai Beach #3* (1997), are taken with a 4x5 pinhole camera, that is, a lensless camera in which light enters through its tiny namesake hole. The camera produces a long depth of field and subtle vignetting and requires a long exposure, which we see evidenced in the gentle blurring of the waves.

A master printer, who printed for photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, Baril has also explored numerous historical photographic processes throughout his career including collodion wet plates and photogravure. In style and subject matter in this portfolio and throughout his career, Baril draws links between early modes of photography and today's world. His poetic vision in this portfolio particularly echoes the city views and botanical studies in Edward Steichen's portfolio on view in *Near & Far*.

Edward Steichen: *Twenty-Five Photographs*

Edward Steichen's *Twenty-Five Photographs* anticipate many themes encountered throughout the exhibition. The sensitive lighting in his closeups of flowers and still lifes brings forth the tactile. Mundane objects like flowerpots are transformed into cascading abstract forms. His New York scenes similarly offer a vision of architecture between abstraction and the sensual. And the iconic intensity of his celebrity portraits of actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson (1933) and actress Greta Garbo (1928) have become the enduring images of those figures. The range of his portfolio mirrors his far-reaching career: Steichen led the development of photography as a modern art

form in the early 20th century, transformed the world of fashion photography as Condé Nast's chief photographer (1923–38), and helped institutionalize the medium's legacy while the Museum of Modern Art's director of photography (1947–62).

Posthumously produced by master printer George Tice, the last printer to work with Steichen, the *Twenty-Five Photographs* were selected by Steichen's second wife, Johanna Steichen, who wrote and curated the definitive catalog on his work, *Steichen's Legacy* (Knopf, 2000). Within the themes that she organized, such as "Powerful People," "Glamour," "Artists," and "Nature," she selected works that "would be difficult to imagine being made by anyone other than Steichen." It is this notion of the photographer's unique vision and of photography as a mode of personal expression that was central to the work of Steichen and his fellow photographers like Alfred Stieglitz and Gertrude Käsebier in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who defined the way of working that we see throughout *Near & Far*.

Artists' Biographies

Tom Baril's (b. 1952, Putnam, Connecticut) images of urban architecture, minimalist seascapes, and detailed still lifes are quietly contemplative and imbued with a timeless and gentle luminosity. He has employed historical and alternative processes and equipment including the Polaroid, collodion wet plates, and pinhole cameras. Baril began working as a printer for photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in 1979 while attending New York's School of Visual Arts. Baril has had numerous solo exhibitions, and his work is held in public and private collections worldwide, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; and the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Two monographs have been published on his work, *Botanica* (Arena, 1999) and *Tom Baril* (4AD, 1997).

Andreas Feininger (b. 1906, Paris, France; d. 1999, New York, New York) was a prolific photographer known for his dynamic black-and-white cityscapes of Manhattan and as a staff photographer for *LIFE* magazine (1943–62), where he completed more than 430 assignments. The eldest son of painter Lyonel Feininger, Andreas studied architecture at the Bauhaus in Germany, where his father taught, and initially used the camera as a reference aide in creating his building designs. Feininger's photographs are in numerous collections including the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Baltimore Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and the International Center of Photography, New York.

Larry Fink (b. 1941, Brooklyn, New York) has achieved recognition for his black-and-white contrasting depictions of the elite and the working class. Leaving a lasting impression on the photographic community, his first monograph *Social Graces* (1984) traversed vastly different social worlds of the affluent in New York and his working-class neighbors in Martins Creek, Pennsylvania. Fink's monograph *Fink On Warhol: New York Photographs of the 1960s* (2017) features rare photographs of Andy Warhol and his friends at the Factory interspersed with street scenes and images capturing the political atmosphere of 1960s New York. Fink first studied under photographer Lisette Model. His photographs have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New Yorker*. He has received awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships, and his work is held in the collections of such institutions as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Mary Ellen Mark (b. 1940, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; d. 2015, New York, New York) documented marginalized people and communities around the world as well as the famous for over four decades. Mark, who worked

primarily in black-and-white, was a renowned photojournalist. Her work regularly appeared in publications such as *LIFE*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*, and she published 20 books, including *Mary Ellen Mark: American Odyssey* (Aperture, 1999). She won many important awards including the 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award from the George Eastman House, the Outstanding Contribution to Photography Award from the World Photography Organisation, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her work is included in the permanent collections of institutions that include the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Edward Steichen (b. 1879, Luxembourg; d. 1973, Redding, Connecticut) is considered one of the 20th century's preeminent photographers. A founding member in 1902 of the Photo-Secession in New York together with photographer, gallerist, and publisher Alfred Stieglitz, Steichen was instrumental in promoting photography as an art form. In dialogue with contemporary ideas in modern art, particularly geometric abstraction, Steichen created photographic compositions that did not always seek to document reality. During World War I he produced aerial photographs with the United States Army and during World War II oversaw naval combat photography. Beginning in 1923, Steichen was the chief photographer for Condé Nast's magazines *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. From 1947 to 1961, Steichen was the director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department, where he curated over fifty exhibitions including *The Family of Man* (1955).

Andy Warhol (b. 1928, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; d. 1987, New York, New York), a leader in the Pop art movement, created iconic paintings and screenprints that integrated mass-media and advertising images, the designs of Campbell's Soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, and faces of celebrities. He advanced the process of enlarging and transferring photographic images onto silkscreens to be printed onto paper and canvas. He began shooting Polaroid in 1958, and his work in 35-millimeter began in 1976 when he picked up an easy-to-use Minox 35EL camera, which became his constant companion. Turning an indiscriminate camera on all that he saw, Warhol shot over 200,000 rolls of film from 1977 until his death less than a decade later. Warhol worked in numerous media including film and video. He founded the magazine *Interview*, and his books include *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (1975).

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