

# **Storyville portraits : photographs from the New Orleans red-light district, circa 1912**

**E. J. Bellocq, reproduced from prints made by Lee Friedlander, preface by Lee Friedlander, edited by John Szarkowski**

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*E. J. Bellocq:*  
*Storyville Portraits*

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE NEW ORLEANS RED-LIGHT DISTRICT, CIRCA 1912





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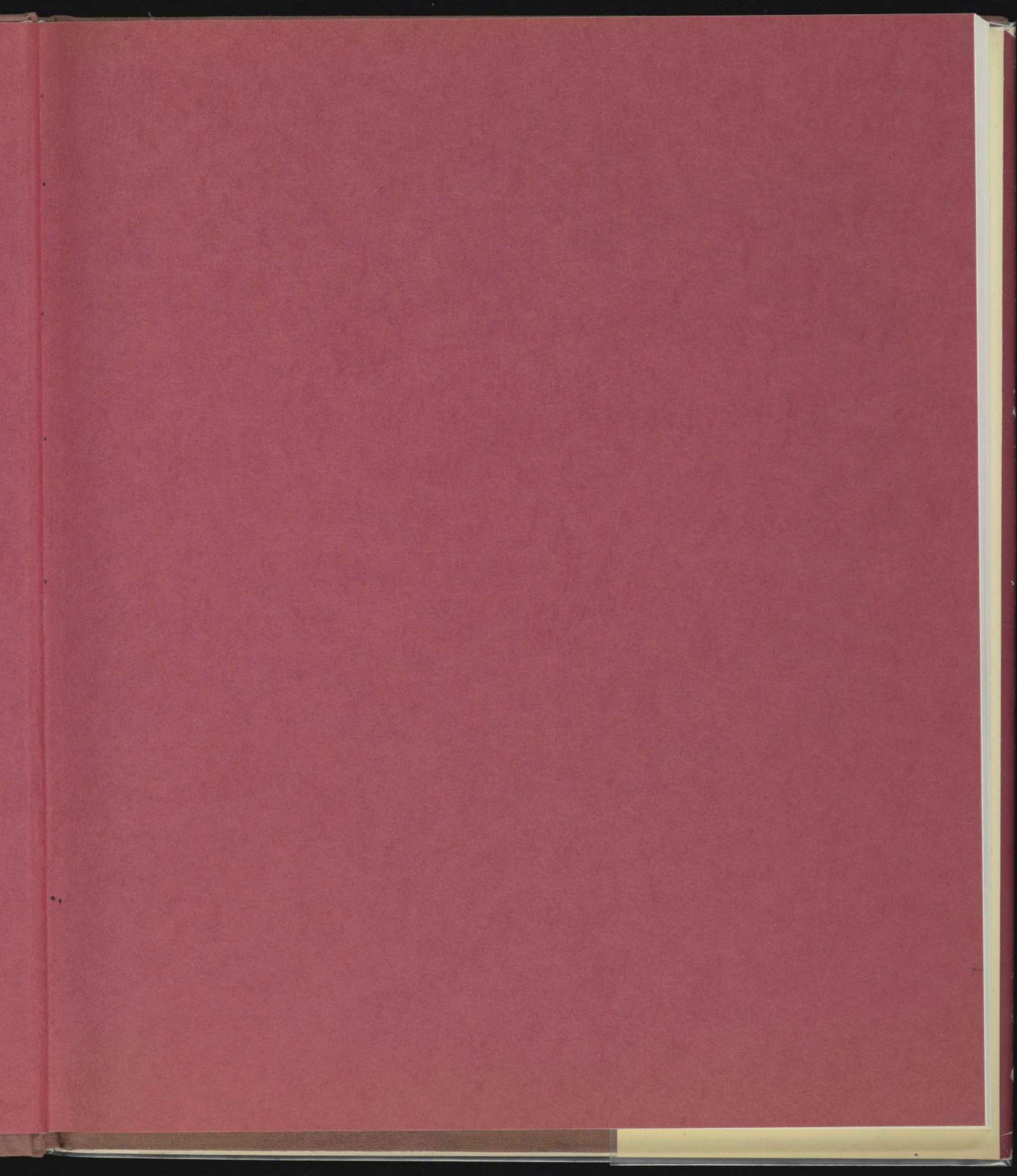
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE NEW ORLEANS  
RED-LIGHT DISTRICT, CIRCA 1912

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Edited by John Szarkowski  
Preface by Lee Friedlander

THESE BEAUTIFUL PORTRAITS of prostitutes in Storyville were made early in the century by a little-known photographer named E. J. Bellocq. One of this country's few closed and legalized red-light districts, Storyville got its name when, in 1896, Alderman Sidney Story attempted to clean up the New Orleans waterfront by restricting prostitution to a circumscribed area. Much to his chagrin, the area came to be called "Storyville," and it was so known until the United States Navy closed it for good in 1917, at the beginning of the country's entry into World War I. Storyville also became famous as the home of New Orleans jazz, when many early jazz musicians played there.

Selected from a group of glass plates discovered in Bellocq's desk after his death, the portraits were printed especially for this volume by the photographer, Lee Friedlander, and constitute the only fragment of Bellocq's work known to have survived. The text, edited by John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, is based in











*E. J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*







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The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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## Preface

To Bill Russell

Larry Borenstein has an instinct to gather around him rare and beautiful things. I met Larry in 1958 while listening to Kid Thomas' band in Larry's art gallery on St. Peter's Street near Bourbon, where many great New Orleans jazz bands would come to play—a story in itself. Among his treasures at that time were the Bellocq plates, and late that night after the band had gone, Larry showed them to me.

Late that year, or maybe the next, when I was again in New Orleans to listen to jazz and to photograph for myself, I asked Larry if I could see the Bellocqs again. At that time, too, he gave me a print. I left New Orleans and returned to New York with the beautiful photos very much in my thoughts. I talked of them to my friends and to museum and magazine folks who, I hoped, would become interested in the plates and find a home for them where people could appreciate and see them. In 1966 I decided I would ask Larry if he would let me either purchase the plates from him or borrow them to make good prints. He agreed to sell them and I packed them and came home to print.

I soon found I could not use my conventional method of printing, as the plates did not respond well to bromide paper. The tonal range was too limited even on the softest grade. Some research led me to a printing technique popular around the turn of the century called P.O.P. (Printing Out Paper) which has an inherent self-masking quality. In this method the plates were exposed to the P.O.P. by indirect daylight for anywhere from three hours to seven days, depending on the plate's density and the quality of the daylight. Then the paper was given a toning bath of the gold chloride type. Fixing and washing were done in the usual manner but with greater care, in that P.O.P. emulsion is especially fragile.

This method, pursued with patience and elbow grease, provided me with a full set of eighty-nine prints which satisfied my idea of what the prints should look like. Since I have never seen any prints made by Bellocq himself, I was forced to use my own taste in printing, which I hope has not perverted Bellocq's intentions.

I should like to thank the following people for their generous help in supplying background information about Bellocq's life: Richard B. Allen, E. Lorenz Borenstein, Allan Jaffe, Sandra Jaffe, Dan Leyrer, Al Rose, Bill Russell, Joe Sanar-ens, Johnny Wiggs; and Eugene Ostroff for his assistance on preservation problems with several of the original plates.

Lee Friedlander



## Bellocq

E. J. Bellocq was a commercial photographer who worked in New Orleans before and after the first World War. A plausible guess might be that his working life reached from about 1895 through the first four decades of this century. The thirty-four pictures reproduced here are selected from a group of eighty-nine plates—portraits of Storyville prostitutes—which were discovered in Bellocq's desk after his death. These negatives were made about 1912. As far as is known, they constitute the only fragment of his work to have survived.

The following discussion never took place as printed here. It is rather a synthesis of four long conversations recorded by Lee Friedlander in 1969, plus excerpts from a letter from Al Rose to Lee Friedlander, dated July 12, 1968. The source materials have been heavily edited, intermixed, and changed in sequence. I believe, however, that the participants' meanings have been accurately preserved. Editor's comments are in italics.

John Szarkowski

## Participants

LEE FRIEDLANDER, photographer, New City, New York

DAN LEYRER, photographer, New Orleans

AL ROSE, writer, Hollywood, Florida

BILL RUSSELL, musician and jazz historian, New Orleans

JOE SANARENS, photographer and former banjo player, New Orleans

JOHNNY WIGGS, cornetist, New Orleans

ADELE, formerly of the District, subject of several Bellocq portraits



DAN: The first time I saw Bellocq was I guess about 1912, about the time he took these pictures. It was down on Dauphine Street. My uncle was stage manager of the old Greenwall burlesque house, and Bellocq used to hang around there. My uncle and the stagehands all called him papá. Not *papa* now, *papá*, cause he was French you know and he had a terrific accent and he spoke in a high-pitched voice, staccato-like, and when he got excited he sounded like an angry squirrel. It's true. And he talked to himself, and would go walking around with little mincing steps. And he waddled a little bit like a duck. And he had this terrific head . . .

JOE: It looked like you took the head and squeezed it so it popped up about this high.

DAN: What I think made it look worse than it really was, was because from the eyebrows, instead of receding like a normal person's head it went straight up. Now I don't know whether it was higher than an ordinary person's or not but it certainly looked that way.

JOHNNY: He had a very, very high forehead which came to a point, and he was somewhat bald, or at least that's the impression that I have, and he must have had some kind of brain disease.

ADELE: A waterhead. You know, one of them high heads.

JOHNNY: This vast forehead going up and coming to a point, and it seems to me his face widened out as it came down to the chin, so you got a sort of pyramid effect. I remember him being very fair.

BILL: And light-colored hair, what he had left. Blue eyes or dark eyes?

JOHNNY: I can't remember that. I hardly ever look at eyes unless they're startling blue. A brunette with blue eyes, you can't hardly help but remember that. Elizabeth Taylor, they say her eyes are a violent violet. Just stops you cold, you've just gotta stay there and get a look at her.

BILL: How tall was he?

JOHNNY: Oh, I would say he was five feet. He was short. And his sitdown place was very wide. And he had very narrow shoulders. I'll tell you who would just love to paint him is Noel Rockmore. Rockmore gives everybody narrow shoulders and a big sitdown place.

*This is an unpromising beginning. We are being told of a hydrocephalic semi-dwarf, a good subject for a caricaturist, who cultivated the company of prostitutes. Surely none of these qualities*

*would disqualify Bellocq as an artist; nevertheless, one feels that the idea has been used before, in various embarrassing movies, and that it is in any case of marginal relevance. One does not become an artist by cutting off an ear or by having a misshapen head.*

LEE: The impression I've had is that nobody seems to really know Bellocq.

JOHNNY: No, he was awful hard to get to know. And of course nobody was that interested in knowing him. I mean, there was a funny looking little guy, you know, and he wasn't interested in whether you were nice to him or not.

LEE: In other words, he didn't pursue being invited to your home, or . . .

JOHNNY: Oh, my goodness no! No indeed. That's the last thing in the world I would have ever thought of.

LEE: Just because of the way he looked or dressed?

JOHNNY: No. His whole make-up and whole being. I mean he would start out by being hard to get along with, and that would stop you right off the bat with most people. It does with me because I'm extremely sensitive along those lines.

LEE: Well, everybody seems to be. Dan Leyrer says that people did tease him.

JOHNNY: I'm quite sure. And you can't blame the man for getting in the frame of mind that he was in. I mean not having trust in anybody. Say he was thirty-five years or better, and I think he was, and I'm quite sure he got teased throughout school and, ah . . .

LEE: Yes, and into manhood.

JOHNNY: I think if he was on the street going the opposite direction from you that he wouldn't make any attempt at all to speak to you. In other words, he could do very well without you, and of course if you were with a girl you wouldn't make any effort to speak to him because he was a real peculiar-looking guy. I think he would have resented anybody talking to him over an extended period. I think he would be suspicious that the thing would end up bad for him. I questioned him some about the technique of photography and he'd warm up to you more along those lines than any other lines.

LEE: He really liked to talk about it?

JOHNNY: Well, no; he didn't like to talk to strangers and I was a stranger as far



as he was concerned. I think that he had been razzed so much in his life that he just didn't have any trust in people left. He was afraid that a conversation was just going to be a continuation, eventually, of being razzed. Because of his physique.

BILL: Did he ever give any indication of his hobbies, or any other interests? Or any favorite food, or any place where he'd go for lunch?

JOHNNY: I just imagine he was the kind who would bring his own lunch.

BILL: He never mentioned about going to any theaters or shows or art galleries or any other kind of interest? Or sports? You don't know if he ever was interested in boxing or betting on baseball games or anything like that?

JOHNNY: No, he'd be the last one in the world. Did you ever hear anything like that about him?

BILL: No, I'm just trying to think of every possibility.

JOHNNY: I never did either. It's hard . . . I don't know, he had something that he could express himself with and he was whole hog for that.

*This seems more to the point. The world has always been half-full of people who have been teased, always cruelly and often unjustly, and most of them have been remembered briefly with pity, or not at all. Bellocq—whoever he was—interests us not as an object of pity but as an artist: a man who saw more clearly than we do, and who discovered secrets. He was not an "important" photographer. Even if the pictures reproduced here had been widely known a half century ago, they would not have changed the history of photography, for they did not involve new concepts, only an original sensibility. Seeing his pictures we are persuaded that he had knowledge of the nature of other human beings.*

JOE: I only knew the man to talk to from 1938 on. He wasn't doing no more photography when I knew him.

LEE: What did he tell you about these Storyville pictures?

JOE: Nothing much. He only kept mentioning Adele. He never said anything else over there, but he always talked about Adele. I think his memory was gone. He didn't talk much of anything of the past. He would say now and then, "When I was photographer at the Foundation Company . . .," but then that's as far as he would go with that, and then of the other, he would only mention Adele.

LEE: He didn't talk about the other girls?

JOE: No, he never mentioned any other woman's name except Adele.

LEE: Did he say what the pictures were used for?

JOE: The nudes were just for his own. All these pictures he had in a trunk at home when I visited him, oh I guess about three or four years before he died. And like I says, he keeps showing me pictures and he'd say here's another one of Adele, here's another one of Adele, so that's why I figured that Adele must have been a girl friend down there.

ADELE: He always behaved nice. You know, polite.

BILL: When did you work with him, Johnny? When did you first know him?

JOHNNY: I think it was 1918. It was right after the Armistice I met him, at the Foundation Company. That was a shipbuilding company and they were finishing up some ships which they had started on before the Armistice. And Bellocq was the photographer for the company.

LEE: Was it pictures of boats and boat parts?

JOHNNY: Parts of boats and parts of machinery. I'm quite sure the negatives and everything belonged to the Company, and they just destroyed them, I imagine, with the exception of a few maybe of the big brass.

BILL: They're out of business now, are they?

JOHNNY: I don't know what it may have turned into. The ships were supposed to be non-sinkable, and most of the non-sinkable ships went down with the greatest of ease.

LEE: Was he a good commercial photographer?

JOE: Yes. I saw some of his commercial pictures, and I wouldn't say he was an outstanding one, but he was a good commercial photographer. He'd make a good straight picture.

JOHNNY: I imagine Bellocq was just cold turkey; do the job . . .

LEE: Well, he was an ultra-clean realist; what was there must be. I suspect that's why he was good at ships and parts, because he wanted everything to be clean and sharp, and I think in photography that's even more artistic than making it romantic and fuzzy.

JOHNNY: I agree with you. There is such a thing as making negatives so that they



produce a very interesting picture, there's no question about that, but I go along with you about this realism. I'm a sort of fanatic on realism myself.

LEE: Well the one thing about the camera is that in a hundredth of a second or less it renders everything. And I think Bellocq was excited by that kind of magic. It really is a sort of magic.

*Perhaps much of the magic—the mystery—lies in this: a good photograph convinces us that it does indeed render everything; we would not know how to add to its completeness. And yet half a dozen photographs made in a given room at a given hour will each describe a different reality. None renders everything, and the best are those that describe without evasion or vagueness a single, coherent perception: not everything, but the precise intuition of a truth. Photography has enabled us to explore the richness of that swarming, shifting, four-dimensional continuum that we choose to call reality. It has shown us that what is "out there" is not a catalogue of discrete facts and Ptolemaic measurements but a sea of changing relationships.*

*Thus these works by Bellocq seem both totally real and totally unfamiliar. Real because their component allusions—their forms and textures and spaces—are described coherently; unfamiliar because Bellocq had a different fix on the continuum—different eyes, a different mind, different knowledge.*

BILL: You don't remember ever seeing many pictures of prostitutes around?

JOHNNY: Well they were so commonplace; I mean we knew all the people who he was taking pictures of. There were a vast number of people there you know. It was at this time there was a saloon, maybe you've heard of this, there was this saloon on South Rampart, and above this saloon was a little room, and in this room were thousands of pictures; they looked like they were made in France, of fornication and anything related to that in all its possible . . .

BILL: Variations.

JOHNNY: Variations, yes. *Positions* is the word I'm trying to think of. You never saw anything like this. And they tell me the men used to drink up downstairs, go upstairs and look at these pictures and then run over to the District which was just two blocks away. Then there was the Stag Saloon, on Gravier Street. You were supposed to take at least a beer as a sort of admission to this place. It was a very fine high-class saloon. They had imported everything on these tables and you just helped yourself to anything, and all you had to do was take a ten-cent beer. You can imagine how expensive that was around 1918 when you could get a great big bottle of beer for a nickel, and here was a glass for ten cents, but the food was fabulous. Another saloon, the Olympic Saloon on the corner of Canal and Royal had a complete meal for five cents. A plate of soup, red beans and rice, and a glass of beer for five cents. From a grocery you could get a half a nickel of red beans and



half a nickel of rice for a nickel. Louis Armstrong talks about his mother making them all the time, and I guess it cost them a nickel to feed the family.

*Bellocq was presumably a competent and reliable mechanic, who lived with a degree of economic security—a step above the regimen of red beans and rice. But this is a guess only. His economic situation, like almost everything else about him, is unknown. Like many of the working photographers of the time, Bellocq was an excellent craftsman. If he was typical of his calling, he was also a man of modest expectations, alternately a small entrepreneur and a skilled hireling, according to the winds of chance. The portrait of his work desk (frontispiece) describes a man of uncultivated tastes and unexercised intellect.*

*It is possible, notwithstanding Joe Sanarens' opinion to the contrary, that the Storyville pictures were a commercial assignment—perhaps as an equivalent of the standard theatrical publicity portrait, useful to the subject in seeking a position in a better house, or to the house in making its staff known to their potential customers. But the pictures themselves suggest that they were not made on assignment, but as a personal adventure. They possess a sense of leisure in the making, and a variety of conception not typical of photographic jobs done at the customer's request. It is more likely that Bellocq photographed the women of Storyville because he found them irresistibly compelling.*

JOHNNY: Did Al ever tell you about that woman who either ran a house in the District or worked in a house? She must have run a high-class house, because she eventually married a very well-to-do man and became a top leader of society.

BILL: And she'd been in the District?

JOHNNY: I'm quite sure they all have to start out as whores. And then maybe if they have enough personality or initiative—I believe that's the American way.

LEE: That's right.

JOHNNY: Let me tell you about a horrible thing that happened in my life. When they were tearing down Mahogany Hall, several of my acquaintances went over there to collect souvenirs, and luckily they told me about it and I went over and got some fantastic wallpaper in small pieces, a collection, a great variety. I was teaching mechanical drawing, and I wouldn't take the wallpaper home because I'd have to answer too many questions. So I got some disinfectant and put it in the blueprint developing tank I had, and sterilized and stuck them all over the blackboard, so they'd dry. If anybody had come in the room I was going to say I got this from old Louisiana plantation homes, and I wanted to use this as an exhibit for the boys. And the boys said what in the hell you doing with that crappy stuff up there? Some of it was brown, inlaid with gold leaf, and green on top of that—the most fantastic colors you ever saw in your life. Well, I bundled it into a thick bundle and stuck it behind an old Victrola in my house, an old Victrola that didn't



work. And I thought it would be safe. I didn't tell my wife what it was because I didn't want any trouble. Well, I went to New York and I stayed there for about six months, roughly, and when I came back it was gone. Well, I didn't even ask what happened. I knew damn well that the lady that comes to clean up once a week had taken it out and burned it up. It looked like old trash. And all this fantastic stuff, the wallpaper from Lulu White's, got burned up.

*The District possessed a magic too. Johnny Wiggs described Storyville as a commonplace; yet he thought it reasonable to collect bits of wallpaper from its empty rooms, as relics of something that had been important. Or perhaps as talismans of something still important, totems with a life to be disinfected and hidden and dissembled about.*

DAN: Another thing Bellocq did, he photographed Chinatown here in New Orleans. Chinatown was between Basin and Rampart and between Tulane and Canal, a whole square there, maybe two squares or a square and a half. Nothing but Chinese, and Bellocq got in there; I don't know how he did it but he got inside the opium dens and he photographed them where they're laying and smoking opium.

JOE: Yes, it was strictly Chinatown there, and his photographs showed me what I didn't know even though I was living here. He showed the inside, with the lacquer woodwork opium things like berths in a train, one on top of another.

DAN: If they could find those Chinatown things, they'd be probably as valuable as these here, because I'll bet nobody in the world has got any pictures of that. Those Chinese—I don't know what charm he had over them, but he got pictures of the interiors.

LEE: Well, besides getting into these places, he was a very good photographer, you know.

DAN: Yes, for his time he was fine, yes.

LEE: He was terrific.

*He was indeed terrific. Within the span of his horizons, he was perhaps perfect. Confident, at ease, patient, skillful, he allowed the picture to find its own solution. Taste—good taste or bad taste—did not enter his scheme of working values. Art, if he thought about it, meant the cheap sentimentalized prints that hung over his work desk. His own pictures were concerned with a more immediate problem—with satisfying the curiosity of his own eyes. This appetite was the engine that gave his skill a use, and his skill in turn dignified his appetite, by objectifying it, by making of it a picture that existed independent of his own mind and body.*

LEE: Evidently the girls must have liked him, to allow him to photograph them.

JOE: Well, they were down there. He might have paid them.

LEE: It almost looks as if each girl decided what she wanted to be like. I mean some of them wanted to be nude and some of them wanted to look like they were going to church. He just let them act out whatever they had in mind for themselves. He seems to have gathered their confidence enough to allow them to be exactly what they felt they were. I don't know if I expressed that right.

JOHNNY: I understand you.

LEE: The prostitutes liked him considerably.

JOHNNY: You got that impression, did you?

LEE: Yes, I get it from the photographs. They seem very relaxed with him. That's something you can tell; he seems to be not rushed or in a hurry with them or quick with them, because they seem to be very content.

JOHNNY: Well, you know, looking at his photographs, those are really the only pretty whores that I've seen in my life. Some of them were very pretty, and that's something that I never ran across in my life, was a pretty whore. I mean, that I knew of. Maybe I've seen some on streetcars, and, you know, buses, and they may have been. I wouldn't know that. But I mean in any of those places, I've never seen anything that resembled beauty.

AL (to Adele): Do you remember any pictures being taken by other photographers?

ADELE: Yes I do. In fact there were so many taken, I don't know why they're so scarce. Lots of, you know, dirty pictures.

AL: Did Bellocq ever make any dirty pictures?

ADELE: I don't believe, anyway not around here.

DAN: The girls liked him, yes, but the men didn't like him. They didn't dislike him, I mean, but they had no use for him. His men friends thought he was queer, but he wasn't queer with men.

ADELE: I don't know if he ever wanted to do nothing but look, but I know he done a few months in the ice house, so you can't tell. He always behaved polite.

*Adele questions the variety of Bellocq's response to women, but what is perhaps more interesting is its quality. In his own way, in these pictures, Bellocq consummates many love affairs. Johnny*



*Wiggs understood this when he saw, to his amazement, that Bellocq's prostitutes are beautiful. It is true, they are all beautiful. Beautiful innocently or tenderly or wickedly or joyfully or obscenely, but all beautiful, in the sense that they are present, unique, irreplaceable, believable, receptive. Each of these pictures is the product of a successful alliance.*

*A skillful photographer can photograph anything well. To do better than that he must photograph what he loves. Some love geometry; some love sunlight on mountains; some love the streets of their city. Bellocq apparently loved women, with the indiscriminating constancy of a genius. If he was in conventional terms impotent, he was in his eyes and spirit an indefatigable lover.*

BILL (to Johnny): Did you know anything about his brother?

JOHNNY: No, I never knew his brother was a priest until recently.

BILL: Anybody know if he's living?

LEE: He's not living.

BILL: That's good. You can talk about Bellocq then without embarrassing anybody.

LEE: Joe, when you saw the plates, were there faces scratched out on any of them?

JOE: No.

LEE: Somebody said they thought it was his brother who was a priest who scratched them off.

DAN: No, no. His brother who was a priest, I don't think the brother ever saw the negs. He wouldn't have scratched the faces, he would have bust the heck out of them. I mean being a priest.

LEE: It's a funny idea to scratch only the faces; you might as well have broken the plates, you know.

DAN: Well no, if he'd broken the plates you wouldn't have the plates today.

LEE: That's true, but I mean . . .

DAN: But why did he do it?

LEE: Yes. I don't know.

JOE: There were several negatives that were scratched when I saw them before

Larry Borenstein got them. What I judge from what Ruiz told me, after Bellocq died, the brother took what was photographic. But there was old furniture left, and these negatives were in some of this old furniture, and it sat there and sat there and sat there. Finally the people who Bellocq was renting from must have asked the brother, "Well look, what you going to do about the furniture," and he must have said he didn't want it. I mean it wasn't nothing that you could actually sell for an antique. And it wasn't nothing that anybody would buy for use. So they told Ruiz, make a price and you've got to take everything, we want these two rooms emptied out, see. So Ruiz bought this furniture and that's where these negatives jumped up. But no Chinatowns. Borenstein—he's a friend of mine and we both had interests in photography and magic, see?—so when Ruiz told him that this was Bellocq's negatives, he phoned me. I said tell Ruiz hold it till I get there, because I was after the Chinatown negatives.

LEE: Be interesting to know what happened to them. Probably someone threw them away. What kind of pictures did he take in his later years?

JOE: In his later years, the years I knew him, he was doing nothing but just walking around. Bellocq was by 1938 absolutely unknown as a photographer as far as the general public was concerned. What year he went out of business I don't know. My knowledge of him only goes back to '38 and he wasn't doing anything, that is photographically. Now he had a Bantam Special, which he was always running around with. That was on him day and night. He missed half the time when he shot. He'd have his biggest fun just standing on Canal Street with his exposure meter taking readings.

LEE: Did he take pictures of people walking around Canal Street?

JOE: No. Well, like one time we had a streetcar painted red, white, and blue, War Bonds, you know, and he tried and tried but he never did get a whole picture of that car. He'd always snap it just as it moved off, and he'd catch either this end or that end but he never did get a picture of the whole War Bond streetcar. But that was all, just things like that. Most of the time he would miss the essential thing he was trying.

LEE: But he knew what he was after, at least.

JOE: Yes, he knew what he was after, but it looked like he didn't co-ordinate the timing. I think it took him too long to get the rangefinder image together, and by the time he got to the viewfinder the time was over. I think by the time he reached '38, I don't mean thirty-eight years old, I mean 1938, I think he was starting to forget.



DAN: I think he retired in 1938, and the only time I seen him after that was when he'd go down to the Eastman Kodak Company when they were on Canal Street, and he'd sit in a chair in the front of the store where there was a water cooler, and he'd fall asleep. He was an old man then, and everybody'd get a laugh out of him, he'd look so funny. The cap would fall off once he dozed off a little. But the people seemed to like him, the people who ran the store. And then finally he died. But now there were other things that we have to tell you about him, that I can't quite remember—oh, things that really did happen.

JOE: He dropped right on Common and Carondelet, because a porter came in the store and he said, "Oh, Mr. Joseph, you know that man used to come in here, he had an unusually shaped head . . ."

LEE: He carried his camera all the time even until the last.

JOE: Oh, he carried that Bantam Special. I'm positive he had that; I didn't see him, but I could almost bet that he had that Bantam Special on him when he fell.

Plates



























PLATE 5

















PLATE 8















































PLATE 16







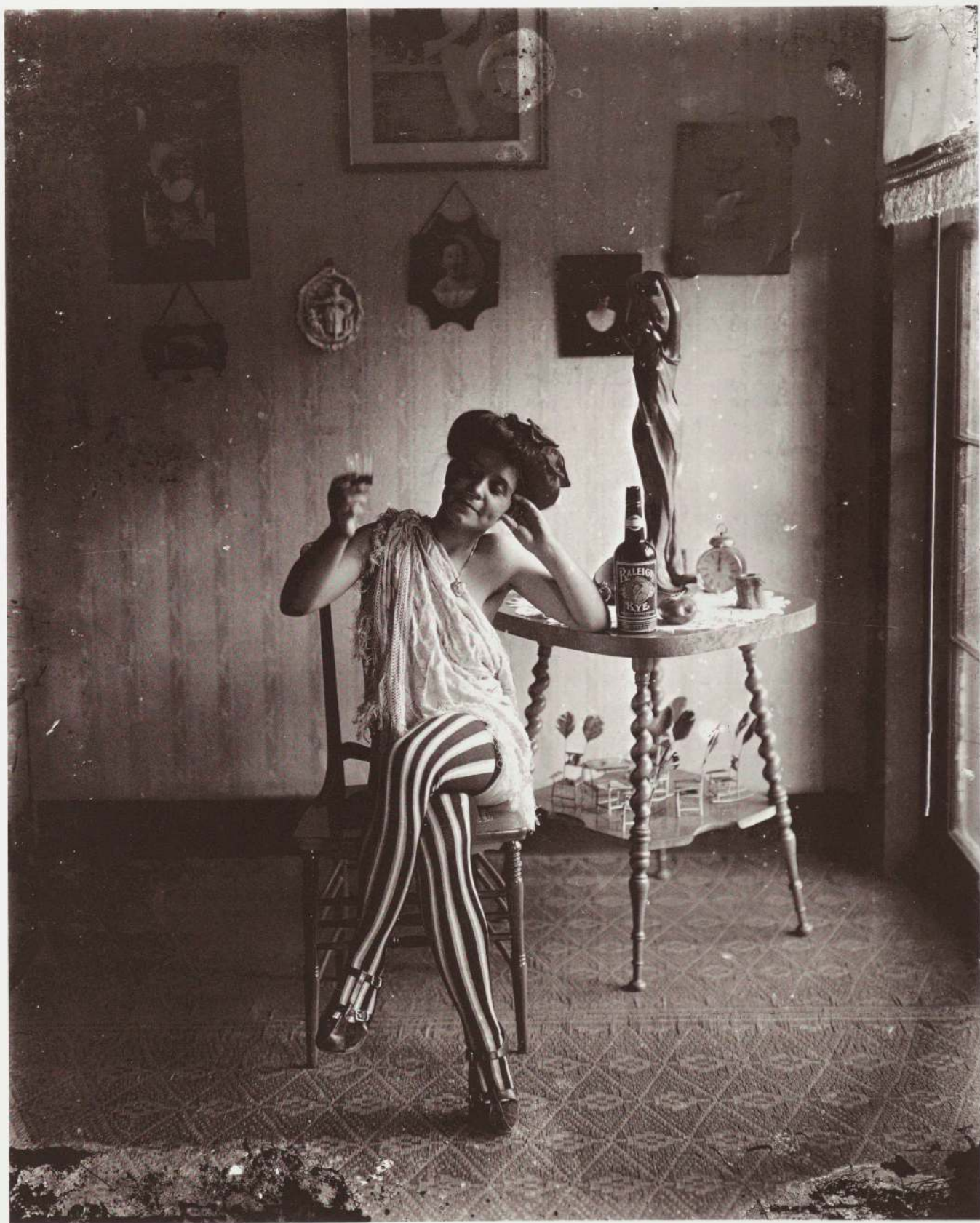




PLATE 18













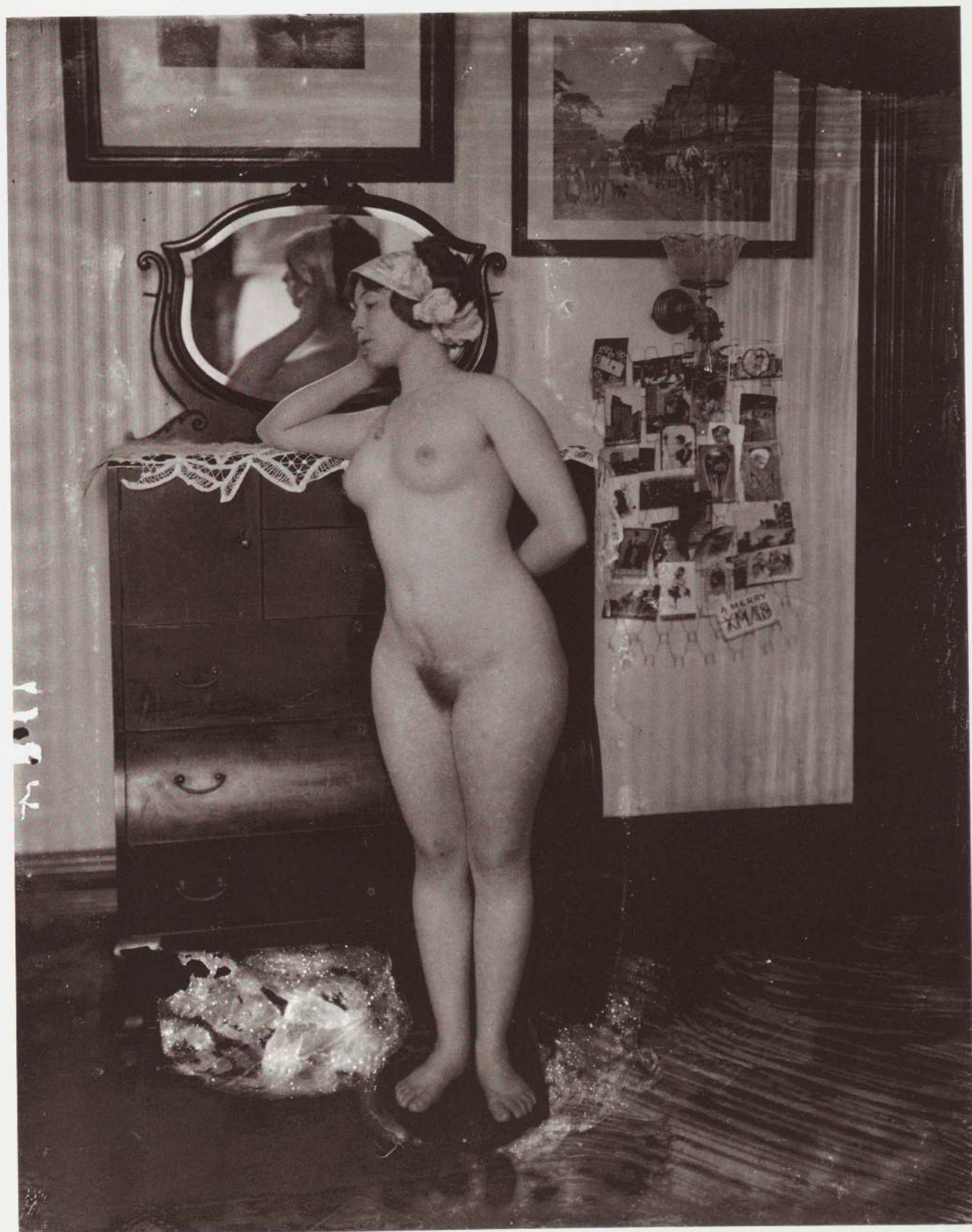




























PLATE 25



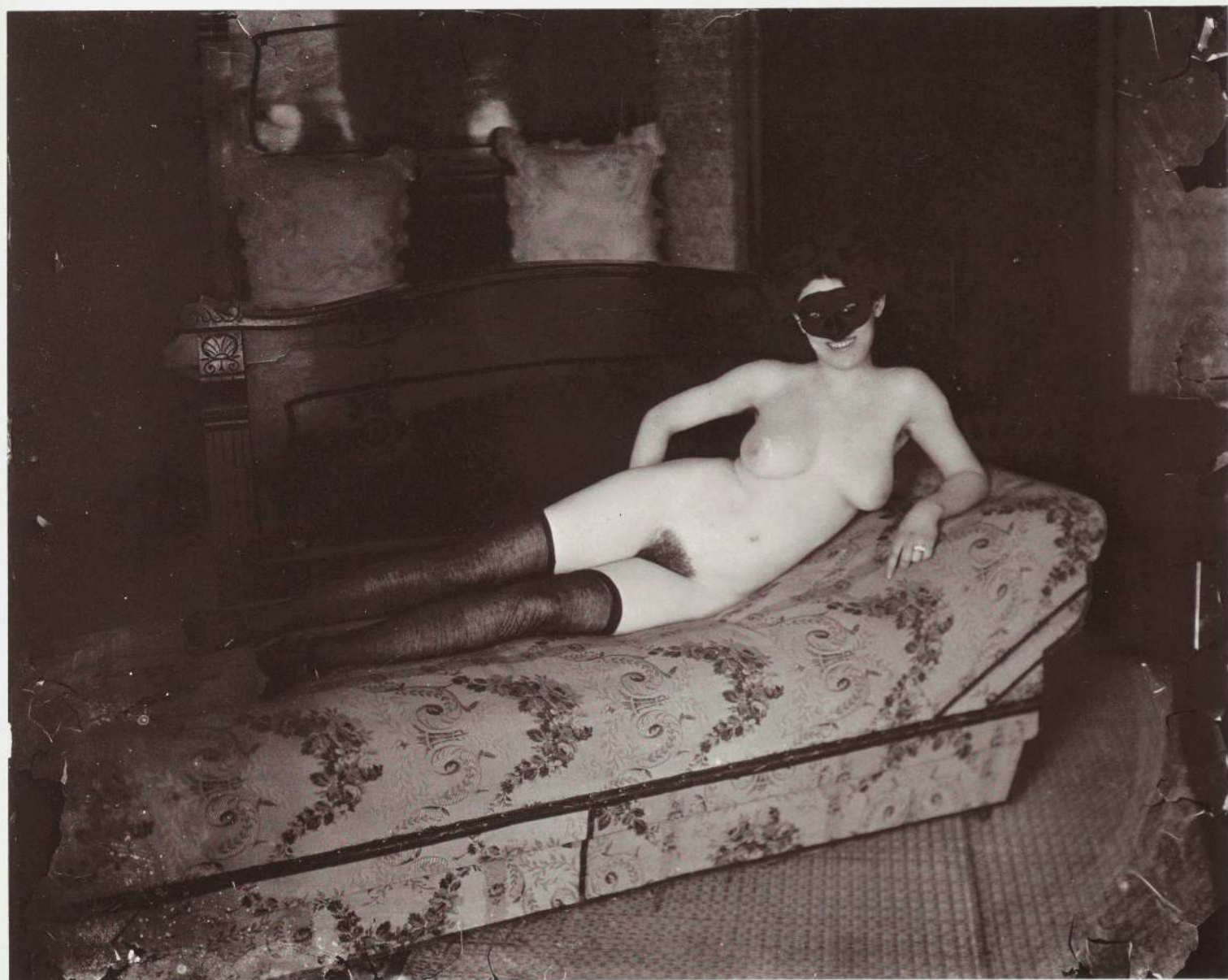








PLATE 27





































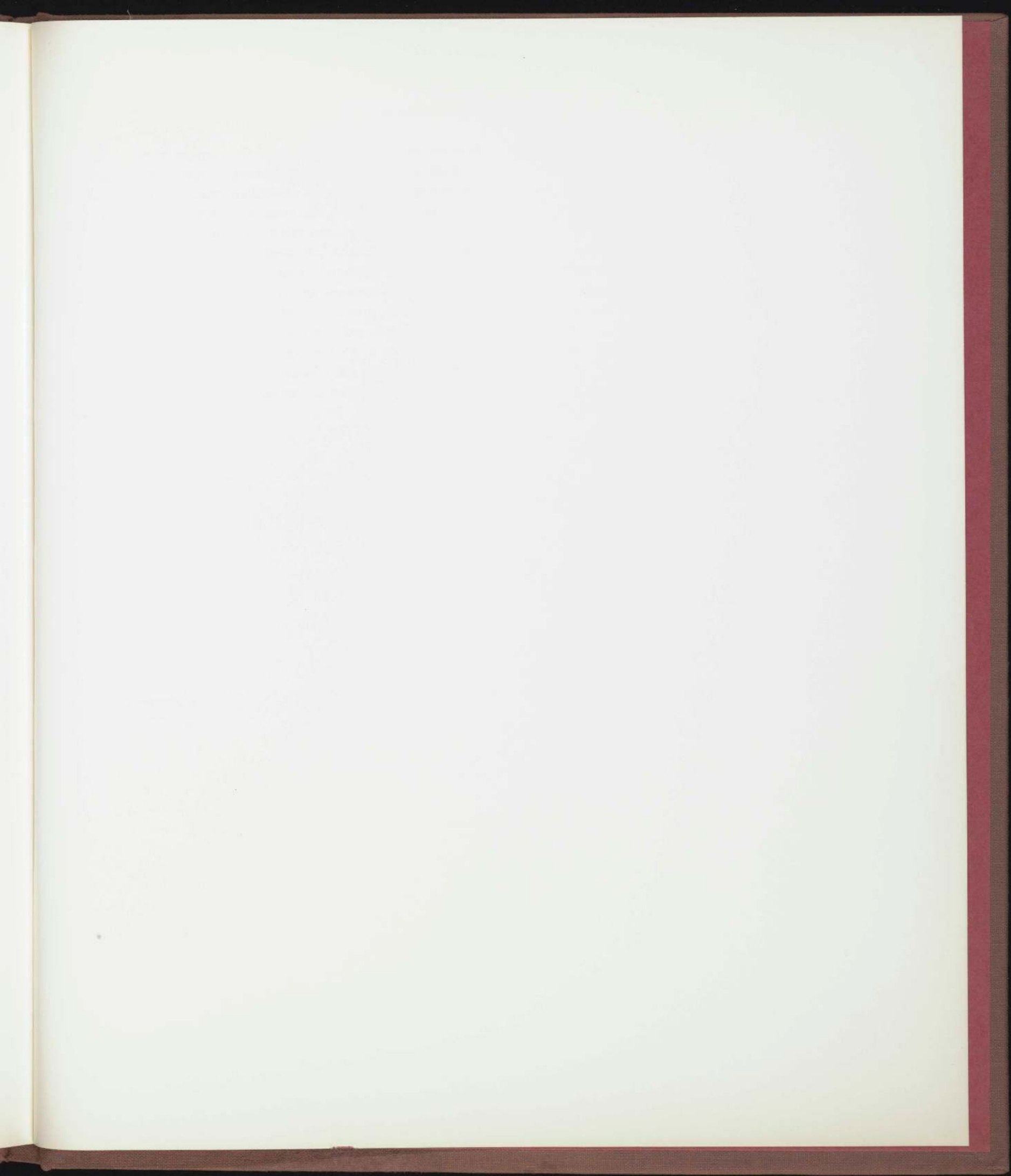




TRUSTEES OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

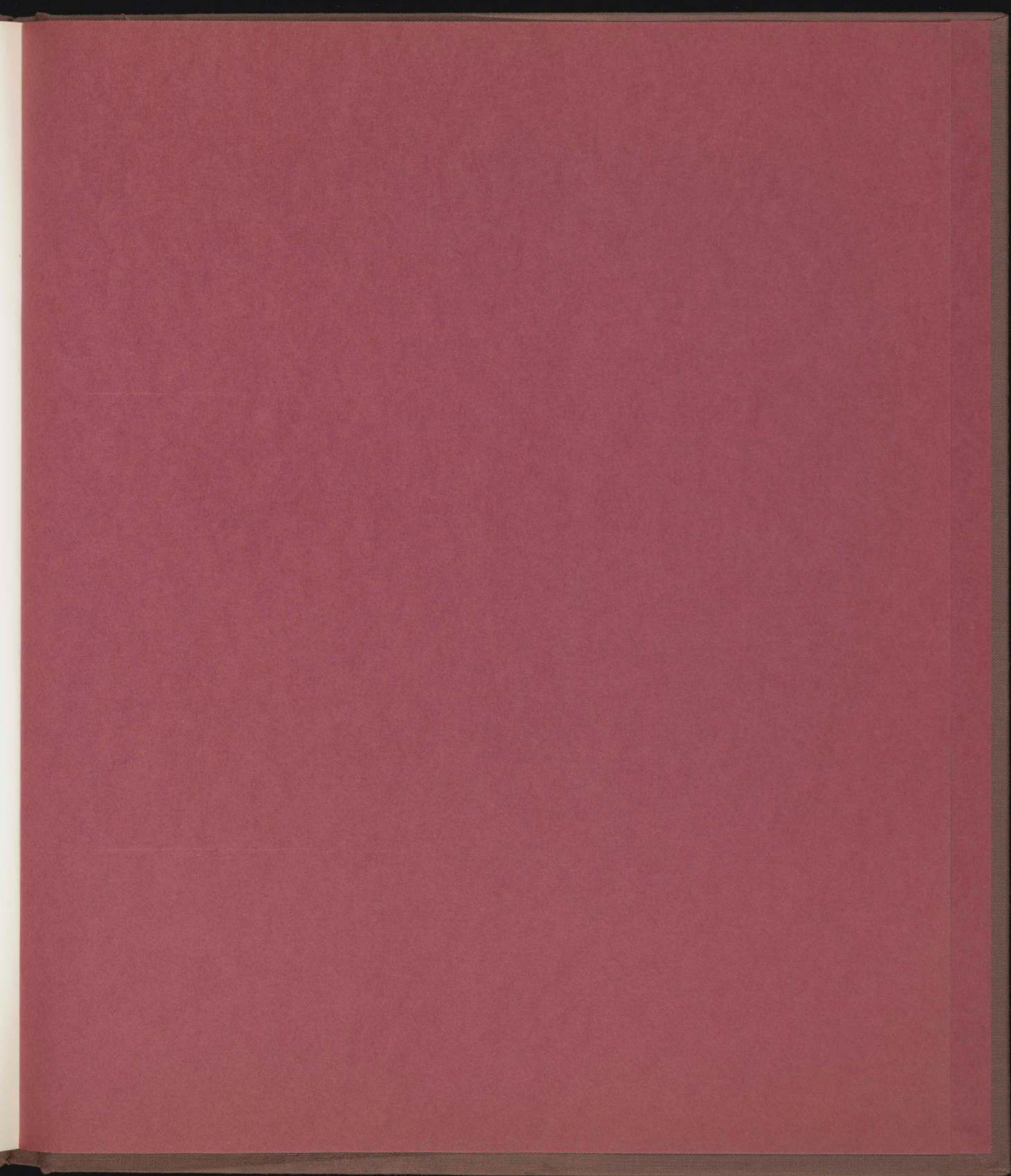
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part on several interviews conducted by Lee Friedlander with persons who were acquainted with Bellocq—a fellow photographer, several musicians, a writer, and a former prostitute who is the subject of many of Bellocq's portraits. Sketched in these conversations is the picture of a small, misshapen man—reminiscent of the artist Toulouse-Lautrec—whose craft seems to have absorbed most of his energy and interest and of whom little else is known.

His pictures tell us, perhaps, more about Bellocq than can those who remember him only as an odd character with a camera who kept very much to himself. They reveal an artist of considerable skill and uncultivated but compelling sensibility. "Seeing his pictures we are persuaded that he had knowledge of the nature of other human beings."

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