

# The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release

## NEW PHOTOGRAPHY

August 22 - December 3, 1985

NEW PHOTOGRAPHY, an exhibition of recent black-and-white photographs by four young Americans, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from August 22 to December 3, 1985. The work of the four photographers--Zeke Berman, Antonio Mendoza, Judith Ross, and Michael Spano--reflects their individual responses to central issues of advanced photography today. Organized by John Szarkowski, director of the Department of Photography, the exhibition continues the Museum's long tradition of commitment to the work of less familiar photographers of exceptional talent. Each of the artists included in NEW PHOTOGRAPHY is represented in the Museum Collection.

The exhibition presents over forty photographs, including constructed still lifes, a series of portraits, technical experiment, and selections from an autobiographical portfolio that explores the relationship of pictures to text.

Berman, originally trained as a sculptor, taught himself photography in order to document his work. The ambiguities that resulted from recording three-dimensional objects on a flat surface fascinated the artist, and he soon began to make sculptural constructions designed to be photographed from a specific vantage point. He is represented in the exhibition by nine constructed still lifes. His work is characterized, according to Szarkowski, by false trompe-l'oeil effects, designed not to fool the eye but to tease the mind. Berman has said, "I make photographs that allude in various ways to the cognitive process by which we infuse meaning into what we see and, therefore, experience the world as constant and whole."

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Mendoza is represented by fourteen pages from his sixty-four page portfolio entitled Stories, a recent autobiographical work that combines photographs with short texts. His aim is to achieve a consonance between image and text, while preserving the independence and vitality of each. After emigrating from Cuba in 1960, Mendoza took his degree in architecture at Harvard. In 1973 he abandoned architecture to devote himself to photography. His efforts to find a more organic relationship between picture and text have been inspired by what he has called "the innate muteness and ambiguity of photographs."

Spano is a prolific and adventurous artist who has pursued a wide range of technical experiments, including lensless photography, solarization effects, fixed-interval sequences, and extremely wide-field panoramas. Three of his eight photographs on view were made with an unusual camera that produces eight exposures at predetermined time intervals. 81st and Broadway, for example, represents eight aspects of an event recorded from different vantage points during an elapsed time of twenty seconds. Spano has said that his photographs are "portraits of people who demand a space for themselves for the territory of their experience."

Since 1983 Ross has been working on an extended series of portraits at the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Thirteen of these pictures are included in the exhibition. Her studies express the profound emotional responses of visitors to the monument. Using an 8x10 camera, Ross takes her portraits with the cooperation of her subjects. In explanation of her series on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, she has said, "I made these portraits because I wanted to find out what other people and what I thought of life.... How does one deal with the pain and injustice of this world?" For her next major project she intends to photograph members of the United States Congress.

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For further information or photographic materials contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information 212/708-9750.

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Wall Text

The four photographers represented in this exhibition pursue different goals by means of different strategies. In terms of the conventional vocabulary of photographic criticism, one might consider Ross as a documentarian, Spano as a formal experimenter, Mendoza as a reporter, and Berman as a representative of the tradition that Edward Weston (while photographing green peppers in tin funnels) called straight photography.

Judith Ross's posed portraits of visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial attempt to describe the emotional states induced by that terrible stone document. Like Dorothea Lange's portraits of displaced farmers of the thirties, or David Duncan's of marines of the Korean War, Ross's subjects are insulated from self-consciousness by the memory or the vision of more important matters. The meanings of these faces are not clearly knowable, but we can think of them as surrogates for the unknowable meanings of the names carved in the wall.

Zeke Berman's still lifes are fabrications derived from the material of ordinary and intimate experience, reconstituted to satisfy the demands of improvised play, monocular vision, and the special characteristics of photographic description. They are concerned with the pictorial aspect of sculpture and the provisional nature of realistic indication. In the central tradition of still-life art, they aim to establish an unsuspected order in the congregation of unremarkable things.

Michael Spano explores photography's functional and technical limits with an audacious and high-spirited exuberance that recalls the spirit of European

experiment in the twenties. His use of extreme wide-field cameras for subjects in rapid flux, of cameras that produce serial images at predetermined intervals, and of lensless photography in conjunction with camera images suggest new possibilities for the development of a photography with extended narrative potential.

Antonio Mendoza has photographed himself and his family with candor, sympathy, and wit, and without the ponderous self-inflation that vitiates much work in this difficult genre. His joining of text and pictures is based on the understanding that they should not say the same thing, but two distinct, consonant, and complimentary things that together create a new whole. The fourteen works shown here are selected from the sixty-four in the 1984 portfolio Stories.

Aside from the differences that distinguish their work and ideas, these photographers share the knowledge that photography is not (not merely) a system for verifying theories derived from philosophy, or politics, or astrology, nor a quick way of illustrating artistic positions, nor a mirror, or xerox, or wax impression of unmediated life; but that it is a method of primary learning, a way of reconciling private intuitions with the disinterested possibilities of craft.

John Szarkowski  
Director  
Department of Photography

NEW PHOTOGRAPHY

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CHECKLIST

All works are gelatin-silver prints and are on loan from the photographers unless otherwise indicated by a credit line. Dimensions are given in inches (centimeters). Height precedes width.

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Museum No.

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ZEKE BERMAN American, born 1951

1. 85.1488 Untitled (chair and rope). 1984. 23 5/8 x 19 3/4 (60 x 50.2)
2. 85.1487 Untitled (banana). 1984. 23 5/8 x 19 1/2 (60 x 49.5)
3. 85.1483 Table Study. 1983. 15 1/8 x 19 1/2 (38.5 x 48.9)
4. 85.1484 Work in Progress. 1982. 15 1/2 x 19 1/2 (38.7 x 48.9)
5. 85.1486 Table Study from Current Events Series. 1982. 14 3/4 x 18 7/8 (37.5 x 47.9)
6. 85.1485 Untitled (bowl of fruit). 1984. 14 3/4 x 17 5/8 (37.5 x 44.7)
7. 85.1482 Interior. 1983. 19 1/8 x 15 (48.6 x 38.1)
8. 186.79 Cubes. 1979. The Family of Man Fund. 10 1/2 x 13 5/8 (26.7 x 34.7)
9. 185.79 Still Life. 1978. The Family of Man Fund. 11 1/2 x 7 15/16 (29.3 x 20.1)
10. 277.82 Still Life with Spill. 1979. Purchase. 5 3/4 x 13 5/8 (14.5 x 34.7)

ANTONIO MENDOZA American, born Cuba 1941

The photographs listed below are from Stories (1951-84), a portfolio of sixty-four plates. Each sheet measures 14 x 10 7/8 (35.5 x 27.6). Purchased as the gift of the Joel W. Solomon Estate.

11. 476.84.7 (Ana Maria's party for Sergio and Enid was very animated). 1975
12. 476.84.26 (Yeye's sisters, Magda, Tota, and Manana, used to make me nervous). 1983

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13.	476.84.31 (My mother kept a detailed baby book for each of her five children). 1984
14.	476.84.35 (I'm forty-two years old and I've never been married). 1983
15.	476.84.36 (My grandmother Otrin lived very happily with my grandfather for fifty-one years). 1976
16.	476.84.37 (During the past few years, the only photography jobs I've cheerfully accepted are weddings). 1983
17.	476.84.41 (I like to think that I'm an expert in French wines, especially those costing less than three dollars). 1984
18.	476.84.44 (I'm very thankful for being an artist and not having a normal job). 1983
19.	476.84.46 (Like the cliché, I moved to New York City in search of love, fame, and fortune: I'm still searching but I did find Ernie). 1980
20.	476.84.49 (Every summer my body requires that I immerse it into 83 degrees tropical ocean for at least one month if it is to function properly for the rest of the year). 1983
21.	476.84.51 (NEW YORK). 1981
22.	476.84.54 (WORKING MOTHER). 1982
23.	476.84.56 (While I was seeing Judy, I was constantly in awe of her dog, Lela, and I photographed her frequently). 1979
24.	476.84.62 (I attended five years of private school, four years of college, and three years of graduate school before I became an architect). 1984

JUDITH JOY ROSS American, born 1946

The photographs listed below are from Portraits Taken at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C., 1984; except for Marine Guards, 1983.

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|-----|---------|---|
| 25. | 85.1475 | (Man with short hair in T-shirt). 9 3/4 x 7 13/16 (24.7 x 19.8)     |
| 26. | 85.1473 | (Man in camouflage shorts and shirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.7) |

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Museum No.	
27.	85.1469 (Black man with open-collared shirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.7)
28.	85.1470 (Young man in black sleeveless T-shirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.7)
29.	85.1467.a-d (Four-part portrait). Each 9 5/8 x 7 11/16 (24.4 x 19.6)
30.	85.1472 (Woman with long hair wearing blue jeans and short-sleeved shirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.6)
31.	85.1480 (Young boy in hooded sweatshirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.6)
32.	85.1479 (Man in suit with medals on lapel). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.6)
33.	85.1471 (Man with blonde hair and mustache). 9 5/8 x 7 3/4 (24.4 x 19.7)
34.	85.1476 (Woman with black hair wearing striped polo shirt). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.7)
35.	85.1477 (Woman with striped blouse and suit). 9 11/16 x 7 3/4 (24.6 x 19.7)
36.	85.1474 (Two marine guards). 9 3/4 x 7 3/4 (24.7 x 19.7)
37.	85.1481 (Man with black hair wearing white polo shirt). 9 5/8 x 7 3/4 (24.5 x 19.7)

MICHAEL SPANO American, born 1949

38.	485.84 <u>Untitled</u> (portrait). 1984. Robert B. Menschel Fund. 34 x 27 1/8 (86.7 x 66.8)
39.	486.84 <u>81st and Broadway</u> . 1984. Robert B. Menschel Fund. 27 1/4 x 34 7/8 (69.9 x 89.8)
40.	85.1466 <u>Untitled</u> (seated nude, back). 1984. 35 3/4 x 27 1/2 (90.8 x 69.8)
41.	85.1465 <u>Untitled</u> (bending nude). 1984. 35 1/2 x 28 1/8 (89.5 x 71.4)

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<u>Museum No.</u>	
42. 699.83	<u>Photogram - Michael Spano.</u> 1983. Robert B. Menschel Fund. 57 7/8 (irreg.) x 23 15/16 (145.2 irreg. x 60.8)
43. 701.83	<u>Tribeca, New York.</u> 1982. Gift of the photographer. 12½ x 9 3/4 (31.5 x 24.8)
44. 702.83	<u>Rivington Street, New York.</u> 1981. Gift of the photographer. 10 5/16 x 13 3/8 (26.2 x 34)
45. 530.81	<u>Untitled (Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn).</u> 1981. Joseph G. Mayer Fund. 17 15/16 x 44 3/4 (45.6 x 113.7)