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Photo Extensions by a Painter

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Photo Extensions by a Painter
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of the Rochester Institute of Technology
August 19, 1970
Advisor: Mr Fred Meyer
Photography should be a part of the art curriculum even in primary schools. I am lacking any experience in this vital area. I would like to take the opportunity, afforded by my graduate project assignment, to explore some photographic techniques as I intend to use the photographic image as a means of accenting my painting (by the use of emulsion pigment on canvas etc). My experiments will be aimed towards this goal; their pursuit will, I hope, make me a better teacher and artist.

I have the use of a private dark room as well as those of the media lab at school.
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INTRODUCTION

Our lives are bound to today's technological environment. It penetrates our very core of being and influences our actions and responses continuously.

"Education has been unable to adapt itself to the world of technology which bombards our youth. " Being still print-orientated... our current frantic and almost neurotic concern about literacy is but one example. An all-media literacy should command the same sense of urgency and commitment."¹ Perhaps the vital search for communications can begin in art education.

It is with such acute awareness that I found myself forced to re-examine my own tools: to delve in particular into the photographic image.

I have endeavored to explore basic darkroom techniques. What grew out of this, has led me to attempt to stretch these photographic images further, seeking a greater sense of our time with imagery produced and distorted through the use of duplicator machines and industrial reproduction methods (the process camera). Finally I have sought a means of integrating these images in my own particular area of concentration; that of painting. I have also tried a series of gum dichromate solution prints.
Two in a Boat, left, painted on canvas-board in 1891 by Theodore Robinson, still bears faintly the evidence of the squaring-off process used in the photograph, right, for its enlargement to canvas size. Painting is in Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.; the photo from the Brooklyn Museum.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING

The function of photography in relationship to art is far from a recent popular fad. Van Doren Coke has traced and documented evidence of the consistent use of the camera by a large number of better known painters since the early 1800's. Over the past one-and-a-half centuries he points out major changes in the role photography has played.

Until the advent of the camera, the role of the artist had clearly been defined. Plato compared the artist to a mirror whose sole purpose it is to reflect the images of nature in renderings so accurate one is unable to discern between the real model and the created one.

It was not long after the camera became a marketable item, in the early 1800's that the artist recognized it as a useful tool. It presented a new vision that could stop action and record an imitation of life beyond the limitations of the eye. It replaced time-consuming preliminary drawings and became a popular substitute for portraiture and figure studies. Delacroix wrote several essays on the importance of the camera in allowing the artist to see more accurately details. Cameras were also used as reference material by landscape painters.

Artists went so far as to project images on canvas and to trace around them as early as the mid-1800's. The technical ability to transfer an enlarged photo image on canvas, called photo painting, became used popularly even on an international scale.

The flat, dead-pan expressions of the work of that time became a focal point of much criticism. It wasn't surprising to find such artists as Cezanne and Degas seeking a fresh approach to the photo source material. Their imagery became rather a point of departure from which more personal innovative ideas evolved.

Van Doren Coke suggests that the prismatic patterns of natural foliage made with the early cameras of the 1840's was influential in Corot's impressionistic work.
Between WWI and WWII, strong forebodings were expressed over the industrial age that had enveloped the cities. The Dadists and surrealists reflected this overly exaggerated concern as they placed their emphasis on the 'real' world of the unconscious. Photo collage was utilized by them to question the new rationale. In particular, they were utilizing photo representations from the familiar physical world and giving them a new symbolic connotation by incorporating them in re-arranged, meticulously painted illusionary irrational scenes.  

With the photograph as a new art form in the 1920's, traditional painting was questioned. The photo montage became such a familiar medium that the critic Aragon wrote: "Its use for political and social ends is an answer to the sense of uselessness people felt about art."  

"The ritual around art, and the aura surrounding uniqueness, which some claim mechanical reproduction has made obsolescent, may, in fact, have been rendered by photography even more vigorous than before." For the abstractionists, the advent of photographic reproduction eliminated the traditional task of realistic renderings once expected of the artist. This new freedom released some to concentrate on elements of design in non-objective work, whereas others enlarged on revolutionary distorted inner expressions.  

Once again there is evidence of a new realism. The use of photography today has often been compared to that of surrealists of the 30's. However, there are important distinctions. The photos used by the Dadists actually grew out of a strong esthetic frustration, whereas contemporary artists have synthesized our mass media and electronic age environment. Some of these artists have allowed this to become a recognizable element in their work.
A continuous concern with imitation may be seen being used by many present day artists who work meticulously from the photograph. Especially typical of the pop medium are Malcolm Morley’s postcard renditions. The "S.S. Rotterdam" is a replica of a typical travel card painted on a monumental scale of seven feet in length. Work simulating photographic media takes on an almost staged reality...where a moment in time appears frozen, and details are magnified. It is interesting to note that people see what they allow themselves to see....what they are conditioned to pick out. Richard Estes (note illustrations on the back), Harold Bruder, and Joseph Raffael’s super-realism "dwell on images our minds usually correct and crop away."
Andy Warhol's series of repetitive photo silk screen scenes seem to generate a response closely akin to that of film footage. One can not help feel that the art work itself boldly attests to being systematically duplicated: a part of the mechanized world of our times. I am especially interested in his work titled, BLACK AND WHITE DISASTER #4. In this, we are made to witness, through the use of high speed photography, a split second of horror. The stark image of the nightmarish moment (as people attempt to escape from a car that has just rolled over) is repeated over and over before us. This is so much a part of our times. Today's instantaneous visual communication has laid a world at our feet and makes us all a party to a common knowledge and a "common guilt".

Rauschenberg's work is perhaps most particularly inspiring to me as a bridge between abstract expressionism's less structured intuitive turbulence and the more direct, defined imagery of today. His use of the graphic media is no longer for shock value, but because of its ordinariness and familiarity, representing our common experience...a frame of reference.

Rauschenberg juxtaposes the mechanized static recordings of the camera with painterly gesture. Such contradictory realities and visual forms cause an irrational paradox, revitalizing and heightening visual sensitivity. A tension is created between the real and illusion as Rauschenberg plays the internalized against the more readable external realities. The kaleidoscope of experience can't be caught in a logical form. Rauschenberg's ambiguity of style is a response
to the realization of life's complexities. We are living at a time when people have become aware of the implications of infinite time and space, the vast unknown, both outside ourselves as well as within. As McLuhan has stated, this is a time of "suspended judgement." 19

Haunted by questions of life (What is real?) and about art (What is real?), his responses surge with intensity and yet indeterminance. Rauschenberg explains his concern with illusive, fragmented imagery on the cover of a new book by Andrew Forge:

"A gesture that we receive as a communicative sign has little value as gesture, at least, not to the person who is waiting. For when the message is blocked off the gesture takes on an astonishing pristine reality... unstructured or placed, it has room to expand for the viewer."

"The more clearly I identify the cause for a person's behavior, the less room there is in my mind for whatever else might be bearing on him or whatever else his demeanor might mean."

The use of photo collage in the late 1950's 'combine-paintings' presented a problem. Their fixed size and opacity was difficult to integrate into the painting and led to Rauschenberg's more recent use of enlarged photo silk screens. 20 One of his most monumental works utilizing this media is BARGE done in 1963. Its imposing 33' scale incorporates images of today's throbbing city (its super highways, radar,
steel high-rise constructions). All are given a new life and context as his rush of paint rips through and binds imagery to another level of context. Perhaps it is relevant to note that Rauschenberg at one time has equated our modern world with Dante's Inferno. 21 This seems especially evident in his ESTATE 1963. Here he makes use of illusions with juxtaposed familiar photographs (of city buildings toppling, signs pointing in contradictory directions, and actions at a precarious moment suspended) while flanked by a sense of urgency that one sees subtly coming through visually as time references (candles burning, a sun dial) all intensified by his powerful painted gestures.

In recent years Rauschenberg has extended the context of photography as multi-media experiments with theater. He has integrated it with the live human moving element...heightening the impact on all our senses as he emerses us into an environment of lights, sound and moving things. 21
PHOTO RESOURCES AND PROCEDURES

In recording the progression of my work it is important to note the influence on the conceptual level that my technical experimentation has had.

THE ORIGINAL SOURCE: Of particular direction to the project has been my concern with the human image, in previous paintings. I have set up life drawing sessions in my studio. The availability of excellent models gave me material for my first endeavors into photography this winter. Becoming more involved, I found myself conscious of the superficially staged situation I was documenting, and allowed this to reflect in my work. It led me to a new viewpoint as to the masks man has placed on himself (so often contradictory to his real self). It has shown me his isolation. People together yet untouching, unable to communicate, needing each other, but unable to reach out...lonely people looking at their dreams.
THE DARKROOM

The darkroom work posed the most time-consuming aspect of my project as I was totally ignorant and inexperienced in the most basic techniques. Yet, it was through this period of concentrated work and experimentation that I found myself responding in a new way to images. I could manipulate and distort them in the darkroom, extracting a more expressive impact.

The following pages illustrate examples of techniques explored. The letters act as keys to the methods used. Below is an index for reference.

a. Multiple negatives projected simultaneously.

b. Two negatives projected separately onto blocked off areas of the paper.

c. Solarized darkened images; exposed to light while still in the developer.

d. The use of high contrast Kodalith Ortho Film type 3.
FURTHER MECHANICAL EXTENSIONS...

Later experiments with mechanical duplicating machines were of particular interest. I have indicated them with the use of letters for identification of particular processes in the illustrations following the text.

A. XEROGRAPHED PHOTOGRAPHS run through the machine without a screening film caused very interesting distortions.

B. XEROXED images with a SCREENED FILM maintain a more even tonality.

C. As a means of transferring the xeroxed image onto a negative for use on light sensitive material, I used the ROBERTSON 432 PROCESS CAMERA from our media lab. This is a machine that is ordinarily used to make negatives for plates used in mass production printing. The cost of the Kodalith Ortho high contrast film needed was so exorbitant in large sizes that I was forced to seek alternatives.

D. The search resulted in TRANSPARENCIES MADE FOR THE 3M OVERHEAD PROJECTOR. One merely sent the xeroxed image through the machine with a sensitized acetate sheet; thus a positive copy with slight distortions is obtained. These I then contact printed on paper. To derive a negative this print was then placed back through the 3M machine. Density can be controlled on the machine. This machine is readily available as an instructional source in most institutions at no cost, or, approximately, a few cents a sheet.
GUM DICHROMATE PRINTING
PRINTING WITH GUM DICHROMATE

New approaches to this process which dates back to the 1800's have recently been found. The basic procedure is simple:

- Dissolve 1 oz. dry gum arabic powder in 5 oz. H₂O
- Separately dissolve:
  - ½ oz. ammonium dichromate dry
  - 5 oz. H₂O
  (1 oz. dry = 28.2 grams)
- This solution keeps for several days when refrigerated.
- To use combine:
  - ¼ oz. liquid gum solution.
  - ½ oz. liquid ammonium dichromate
  - 1 oz. H₂O
  - And several drops of water-base pigment.

This can then be brushed on the surface to be used and, when dry, a negative can be contact printed by exposing the surface for 15 minutes with a 300 watt bulb.

There are several advantages this technique offers:

1- No darkroom is needed for printing as work may be done under indirect light conditions and needs only water to be developed.

2- Color overlays may be obtained.

3- Several types of surfaces may be used... in these prints I used Reves heavy weight drawing paper and pre-shrunk and sized the sheets.

Though I used Kodalith film in most of my work, regular 3M transparencies are usable and even less elaborate techniques such as drawing on acetate could be utilized.

Interesting to note are the affects one can get of rubbings using textured materials beneath the paper while developing the print.

This technique is especially adaptable for use in classroom work with younger students.
PHOTO EMULSION
PHOTO EMULSION ON CANVAS

I've directed my efforts in particular to the photograph's relationship for me as a painter. In my painting, I have tried to maintain a sense of the spontaneous gesture and found the use of a fluid photo emulsion to be particularly in keeping with my goals. It's advantages are several, as it allows for flexibility in size and permits underpainting to penetrate through its images. When painted on the canvas, the emulsion has a quality of painterly brushed strokes that allows it to become more easily integrated into my work.

This emulsion is obtainable from the Rockland Colloid Corporation (I have included their address and instruction sheets in the following insert...which includes mention that their solution can be applied to a vast variety of materials and objects.)

The processing itself is done in darkroom conditions and follows much the same procedures as straight paper work. However, preventing the image from peeling off through its various sponge baths can be most precarious. A subbing chemical is included with the package and aids adhering the emulsion. It is also important to note the complications of working with large canvases as one needs trays large enough to catch the chemical solutions while sponging them on the canvases' surface...(I found myself more than once standing in the huge tubs myself).

Another point to be considered is the availability of a light-proof ante-room in which to store the sensitized paintings over the 6-7 hour period needed for drying time after their emulsification and then again while making tests with the enlarger. It is also advisable to protect the finished image with a final coat of acrylic matte medium.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROCKLAND CONTINUOUS-TONE EMULSIONS, SERIES CB, BB, BX

These are high-quality silver halide emulsions especially made for darkroom coating. They are classified according to speed. BB emulsions are fast enlargement speed; CB are slow enlargement, or contact speed; BX are contact speed only. If handled according to the instructions below, they will give excellent results.

PACKAGING AND STORAGE: The emulsion is in three parts: (a) small plastic bag containing subbing powder; (b) the emulsion itself and (c) small bottle containing hardener. Only the emulsion is light-sensitive. It should be opened only in the darkroom. Store in the refrigerator, but do not freeze. Also store the made-up subbing solution under refrigeration. If refrigeration is unavailable, store emulsion and subbing in a cool place, never above 70°F. The shelf life of the emulsion is approximately one year under refrigeration.

SUBBING: The subbing solution helps obtain adhesion on non-porous surfaces, such as glass, plastic or metal. It is not necessary with wood, paper or cloth. To prepare, add the powder to one quart (1000 cc) of cool tap water. Allow to stand 10 minutes, then heat with constant stirring to about 120°F, when the crystals will dissolve. Pour off required amount in a clean container and warm to about 100°F. Add one or two drops of hardener (small bottle) per ounce before using.

The surface to be subbed must be chemically clean. Use cleansing powder, washing soda or dilute lye solution. Do not use soap or detergents as they leave a thin oily film. Rinse thoroughly and allow to dry at least several hours and preferably overnight. (The subbing will disappear as it leaves an extremely thin coat.)

SAFELIGHT: Use a series OC (amber), Ol (greenish-yellow), IA (light red) or 10 (dark amber) safelight filter with Rockland emulsions series CB and BB. BX emulsion can be handled the same way, or for short periods a dim incandescent light (test for fogging first.) Safelights should be at least 4 feet away from the emulsion. Be careful of ruby bulbs and other devices that are not actually safelight filters, as they often admit white light and cause fogging. For long periods of time, such as the drying process, shield the emulsion from the safelight, or dry in total darkness, as no safelight is perfectly "safe".

PREPARING THE EMULSION: In the darkroom, warm the emulsion to 90-100°F (no higher) by immersing the bottle in hot water until a portion turns liquid. It is not necessary to liquify the entire contents as the emulsion is homogenous. Pour out the desired amount of emulsion into a clean glass, plastic or stainless steel container. Never use containers or tools of iron, copper or brass, which will contaminate the emulsion. (Do not shake the emulsion when it is a liquid as this may cause air bubbles to become trapped in it.) Gently stir in an approximate amount of hardener. Use the entire bottle for one quart of emulsion, one half the bottle per pint, or five drops per ounce of emulsion. The hardener causes the emulsion to set-up, or become insoluble, after an hour or two. If faster set-up time is desired, use more hardener; if slower set-up time is desired, use less. Do not add hardener, or emulsion containing hardener, to the unused portion of emulsion.

APPLYING THE EMULSION: Pour the emulsion on the surface to be sensitized, which has been laid flat. Work back and forth gently with a flat stick, squeegee or brush, pushing air bubbles to the side. (If bubbles form, they can be eliminated by mist spraying alcohol--any type will do--over the surface with a small atomizer.) Allow the emulsion to level itself, forming a uniform, opaque coating on the surface. Allow the object to stay flat until it sets-up or gels and becomes sticky. Drying can then be speeded by standing the object and drying with a fan or electric hair dryer. (Caution: if warm air is used, do not let the temperature exceed 90°F or the emulsion may melt.) After the emulsion is dry, the coated object can be stored for several months, if desired, or can be exposed immediately.

NOTE ON COATING: There are many ways of coating the emulsion. That mentioned above is generally used. If cloth is to be coated, it should first be stretched flat. The emulsion can then be applied with a knife-edge coater, which distributes it evenly over the cloth. Flexible plastic materials should be pulled or glued flat before coating, in order to have uniform distribution of emulsion. If the emulsion is to be sprayed, it may be necessary to thin with distilled water. Immerse the spray gun occasionally in hot water, if necessary, to avoid clogging. Do not let emulsion remain in the spray gun for more than two hours at a time, as it may set-up and clog the gun. For very small objects, coating can be done simply by dipping the object in the emulsion.

(over)
EXPOSURE: Expose with an enlarger or contact printer, as you would photographic paper. When the emulsion is coated on transparent or translucent material, use a flat black background behind the emulsion to avoid halation. To determine exposure, use a test strip, made simply by smearing a few drops of liquid emulsion (no hardener is necessary) on a scrap of paper. Longer exposure is required to get adequate density on transparent surfaces like glass than is necessary on white background materials.

DEVELOPING: Develop in a slow-acting paper developer, like Kodak Dektol diluted 1 to 2 for one and one half minutes with continuous agitation. For large surfaces, the developer can be sponged or sprayed on, being careful not to scratch the emulsion. (When a sponge is used, developer temperature must be below 70°F, to keep the emulsion from softening. For uniformity of development, additional dilution with longer development time may be used.)

Development fog may occur with (a) developer that is freshly mixed or (b) developer that is too active. This occurs especially with emulsion that has been stored at high temperatures. With development fog, the image becomes visible during the first minute of development, but then gradually loses contrast as the emulsion turns gray. The remedy is (a) let the developer age overnight in an open tray before using or (b) use an antifog preparation such as Kodak Antifog #1 or other benzotriazole compound.

FIXING, WASHING, DRYING: Follow development with a rinse in clear water (do not use shortstop) and fix in fresh hardening hypo with frequent agitation. In the hypo, the emulsion will "clear." That is, the white color will disappear and the emulsion will become transparent. The usual rule is to fix for twice as long as it takes this to occur. If in doubt, fix for 4 to 10 minutes. Agitation is important, to keep yellow stains from forming, as is fresh hypo. Finally, wash the object for 40 minutes in running water (15 minutes if a hypo clearing agent is used) and dry gradually.

COLOR PROCESSING: Color can be incorporated with Rockland emulsions in a number of ways. These are (a) hand coloring with photographic oil colors or water-based dyes, (b) toning with conventional toners and (c) color developing. The last process gives more intense colors than are available with toning.

Consecutive layers of color can be built up with Rockland emulsions by completely processing one layer of emulsion, drying and recoating the object with emulsion and processing in the second color. With color developers, "process" color can be achieved with three layers of emulsion used with separation negatives and red, yellow and blue developing solutions.

REDUCING: Household bleach (Clorox, Purex) is handy to have about when using Rockland emulsions. A dilute solution removes developer and emulsion stains from the hands. Used full strength, the bleach both reduces and dissolves the emulsion, even after it has been hardened. Use to clean tools and containers. Also use to "fair" the edges when the emulsion extends beyond the desired area by carefully wiping away the unwanted emulsion. Follow by a thorough rinse and dry.

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* Surface shipment unless otherwise specified. $.90 per pint, $1.35 per quart, $2.75 per gallon.
For Canadian and foreign postage, check price and postage list.

If air shipment is desired: $2.00 per pint, $3.30 per quart, $9.00 per gallon. Outside of the continental United States, check price and postage list.

All shipments are made within three days of receipt of order and include subbing, hardener and instructions.

ROCKLAND COLLOID CORPORATION • PIERMONT, NEW YORK 10968 • PHONE (914) 359-5559
STUDIO PAINTING
I). FELINE: In my first painting most of the paint was applied before the photograph. Yet it was in this first attempt that I was able to most easily integrate the photographic image, as the strong underpainting comes through clearly and underscores the mysterious quality of the cat. Because of my lack of experience, the emulsion was applied so thinly that, in some areas, a weakened image resulted. Spot toner worked well to gain greater contrast in these areas and could be mixed to attain a close match to the tonality already there.
STUDY FOR THE PAINTING, FELINE......
EFFERVESCENT DREAM LANDSCAPE...
2). **EFFERVESCENT DREAM LANDSCAPE:**

Again a great deal of the actual painting and tissue paper application was completed before I began work in the darkroom. This canvas was particularly difficult for me technically as I used a repeated pattern of two different photo images over large areas. I needed to continuously protect surfaces that were not being used. In order to affect a sensation of film footage, I used a larger negative carrier and taped two negatives together. I was shocked to discover later how small my images were as I had not taken into account the two-inch depth of the frames around my canvas.

In these paintings, I attempted to seek transitions from the photographic images to the painted surface. In this painting, again, the painted surface can be seen through the photographs. The rectangular collage sheets relate with the enclosed rectangular space of the photographs; however, I felt a need to go beyond.

Hans Hofmann's last works utilized large geometric planes that functioned architecturally in space. I too, found myself utilizing such carefully defined shapes blatantly and irrationally floating above the painterly landscape. Unlike Hofmann's however my forms interact with photo images in combination with the very real imagery of the figures that are also caught within geometric forms.
3). FIGURE # 3: This painting needs little explanation as it is technically simplified and obvious to the viewer.
DREAM GESTURES
4). **DREAM GESTURES:** Here painted images and unconscious strivings are ever-changing in relationship and clarity, at times unable to be separated with logical identification. I began with a painted canvas, gessoing out large portions on which I then used emulsion. In this canvas I attempted to free the photographic image by using it for large scale multiple flowing figures...playing this against the painted figure counterpart. However, as I worked back into the painted areas, it became necessary to take issue with the photo, using precise hard-edge barriers of color to create a tension and cause added excitement. I feel that the left-hand side came off particularly well with the repetitive vertical use of the photograph.

In this work I attempted using rubbings from mass media as an aspect of a material world's values as pitted against our inner truths. Magazine rubbings were especially useful as they retain their mechanical properties and yet are softened in tone and texture, and allow the surface beneath to emerge. The slick-surface, enamel house paint I use created a real problem...it was only after many experiments that I was able to discover that I could transfer the magazine rubbings onto sandpapered surfaces.
CONFRONTATION
5). **CONFRONTATION**: The distorted photo imagery on this painting is the result of earlier experiments. I have illustrated the progressive steps of its evolution with an example of the original picture (figure 'a', selected partly because of its incomplete nature as a straight photograph). This was then xeroxed (as seen in figure 'b'). It was this distorted image I then enlarged onto Kodalith Ortho Film Type III. While still in the darkroom, I used a concentrated form of bleach crystals to create the strange tonality around the female figure. (figure 'c')

Of all the works, I found it most difficult to pull this one into a painting. The starkness of the photographs called for equally stark, harsh lines and counter statements. In this case the underscoring of obvious magazine collage was felt to be particularly fitting as a comment upon society's usual unreal formula for 'love'.

Figure 'd' is a test strip on canvas of a photo image using emulsion.
6). **IMAGE # 6**: This last piece involved my most creative work with emulsion: I used high contrast film that eliminated details and hence allowed for freer movements of forms within space. Large sheets of film were juxtaposed and played with. The final statement caught what I was after and with much deliberation I decided not to work further into this canvas with paint. I consider it a valid canvas as is.
THE EXPLORER IS TOTALY INCONSISTENT.
HE NEVER KNOWS AT WHAT MOMENT HE
WILL MAKE SOME STARTLING DISCOVERY.
CONSISTENCY IS A MEANINGLESS TERM
TO APPLY TO AN EXPLORER. IF HE WANTED
TO BE CONSISTENT, HE WOULD STAY HOME.

MARSHALL MC LUHAN
(FROM MCLUHAN: HOT AND COOL)
FOOTNOTES


5. Ibid., p. 5.

6. Ibid., p. 33.

7. Ibid., p. 10.

8. Ibid., p. 10.

9. Ibid., p. 65.


11. Ibid., p. 292.

12. Ibid., p. 296.


18. Ibid., p. 59.


21. Ibid., Introduction.

22. Ibid., Introduction.


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22. Individuals of immeasurable help:
   Judy Steinhauser; faculty Photography School R.I.T.
   Marlene Venetzia; faculty Art & Design R.I.T.

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   Albright Knox, Buffalo, New York.
   George Eastman House, Rochester, New York
   Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York
   Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York
   Senior Illustration Exhibit, RIT