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Poems/photographs/printing: a handmade book
by Jeffrey A. Wolin

Jeffrey Wolin

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**POEMS/PHOTOGRAPHS/PRINTING:
A HANDMADE BOOK BY JEFFREY A. WOLIN**

A Thesis Report

Presented to

**the Faculty of the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
The Rochester Institute of Technology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts**

by

Jeffrey A. Wolin

Accepted by his Thesis Board, February 21, 1977

Professor Owen Butler, Chairman

Professor Kathy Collins

Professor Archie Provan

**Professor Al Lawson, Special
Advisor**

Owen Butler

Kathy Collins

Archie Provan

Alexander Lawson

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Title Page

Title: Poems/Photographs/Printing:

A Handmake Book by Jeffrey A. Wolin

Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Submitted by Jeffrey A. Wolin May 21, 1976

Advisor:

Approved by Graduate Committee: Date:

Chairman:

Thesis Board:

Owen Butler - School of Photographic Arts & Sciences

Kathy Collins - School of Photographic Arts & Sciences

Archie Provan - School of Printing

Alexander Lawson - Special Advisor

Purpose of the Thesis:

In the tradition of the finely crafted book, I will print a book of my poems and photographs.

Scope of the Thesis:

Today we are bombarded with endless numbers of books of photographs, yet rarely are we presented with a book that is carefully designed, well printed and bound. This has not always been the case. Many photographic books of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries were flawlessly planned and impeccably printed. Furthermore, these books of photographs by some of the finest photographers accompanied prose and poetry by great writers and were designed and printed by the most eminent typographers/printers of their day. An example of a brilliant collaborative effort of photographer, writer and printer is the "Kinnerley" edition of The Door in the Wall. Written by H.G. Wells, the book contains photogravures by Alvin Langdon Coburn and was printed by Fred Goudy. Some other examples of this kind of collaboration are the Grabhorn Press book, Taos, with gravures by Ansel Adams and text by Mary Austin; The Idylls of the King by Tennyson, with original prints by Julia Margaret Cameron, and The Queen's Bible, with illustrations by Francis Frith.

In the tradition of these inspiring books, I will print a book containing my own poems and photographs. The poems, written over the two year period of my stay here in

Rochester, concern themselves with my specific experiences/ recollections. They are "regionalistic" and yet personal statements - they describe what it is like for me to be in this place at this time. The photographs to be used in this book will attempt to embody the spirit of this place. The subject matter consists, then, not only of land and cityscapes, but also of the people that dwell in this place and more specifically the people most important in my life. The photographs, when sequenced with the poems, will not be merely illustrations but rather have lives of their own. They will be coequal with the poems and the dialogue between the poems and the photographs will create a third form: a whole which is somehow greater than its component parts.

The book, which arises out of layout and design and the sequenced combination of poems and photographs, will take advantage of the interplay of the forms. For example, a photographic portrait of someone might well accompany a poem about that person to form a more complete description and understanding. Primarily the poems and photographs will describe a particular mood or tone and will be related in this way.

Procedures:

The poems will be set in a typeface selected for its compatibility with the mood of the poems and photographs. The book will be printed on a fine, rag paper for strength

and long life. The printing will be done letterpress for a deep, relief impression which imparts a special, sculptural quality to the page. The photographs will be 5 x 7" contact prints, archivally processed and tipped into the book by hand. Finally, the books will be quarter-bound in leather. The edition will consist of approximately 10 copies.

An exhibition of the book will consist of companion pages of the book, matted and placed behind glass. Several finished copies of the book will be placed in glass cases for viewing.

Report on the Project:

For a number of years I have been occupied with three major interests: photography, printing and poetry. These three forms of personal expression arose in me at approximately the same time in my life, towards the end of adolescence. Having been a student of these three subjects for some time, it was only natural that I should continue in their pursuit while at R.I.T. The thesis was for me an opportunity to bring the three forms together and make a whole unified piece which would give me insight into the separate entities and into myself.

At the Cary Library and at the Eastman House where I am employed, I have seen some examples of attempts to bring together the work of photographers, writers, and printers, many of which examples were very exciting and inspiring. Perhaps the best example of the combination is The Door in

the Wall, written by H.G. Wells, with photogravures by Alvin Langdon Coburn and printing by Fred Goudy.¹ Interestingly enough, I have been called upon at the Eastman House to print the original negatives from the Coburn Collection and I have also undertaken to print original glass negative portraits of Fred Goudy (in the possession of the Cary Library). In many ways The Door in the Wall was the catalyst which led to my decision to bring my interests together in the book format.

It turns out that most of my poetry is written in the Spring and my best photographs often taken in the Fall. The Winter is generally the most convenient time to print books (and bind them) and the Summer is ideal for employing the P.O.P. (printing out paper) process. Most of the work for my thesis was done over the course of a year. I tried to reflect the seasonal nature of the work in the thesis. The opening poems in the book are about observations of the transition of Winter to Spring, as are the first few photographs. Then there is a movement in the photographs and the poems into the Summer and finally into Autumn. The colophon ends the book with a haiku: "Snowflakes have begun to drift outside noiselessly down upon the ground." Winter approaches, and the cycle is completed.

Another movement in the book is from less personal, "street"-kinds of observations about places and things to statements about photographers and photography, defining my interests, to more personal reflections about my wife and

our relationship, ending finally with a "religious" purpose to my life and work. "Light" is my muse. The last two photographs in the book attempt to reflect the brilliant kind of light that touches me so deeply and drives me so strongly.

I began experimenting with P.O.P. sometime late in the Spring. I discovered that Kodak Studio Proof had a number of qualities which would be of advantage to me. First of a-1, in combination with gold chloride, a wide range of tones were possible, from warm reddish-brown to a cold purple tone. I wanted to facsimilate the tones of the French photographer, Eugene Atget, because of the intriguing and seductive effect they had upon me. I soon discovered that Arget's sepia tones were attainable using nearly the minimum amount of gold to effect the toning. Well, Atget was poor. Shortly after I was able to match Atget's tones, I arrived at the color that best suited my taste, a rich chocolate brown. This tone was arrived at by adding 12cc of gold chloride (1g. of which was dissolved in 500cc. H₂O) and 12cc of ammonium thiocyanate to 500cc of H₂O.²

In addition to providing the tone I was seeking, P.O.P. also had the advantage of being an extremely long scale paper. It was perfectly suited to reproduce the brilliant lighting conditions I was working with, while obviating the need to compress the scale of the negative during the development. The reason for this property of P.O.P. to render the long scaled negative is the process known as "self-masking."³ The exposed shadow areas on the paper mask their underlying

layers so that the shadows darken slowly after a point and the highlight areas begin to fall.

By the time I began to really get going with the P.O.P., I had already written and revised most of the poems for the book and selected perhaps half of the photographs. At about this point I began to think about some of the more formal problems of designing and printing the book. After some consideration, I finally selected a typeface known as Bembo. Bembo was designed in the late 15th Century by Aldus Manutius' punch cutter, Francesco Griffo. It has a quiet, subtle and yet in many ways progressive feeling to it. Historically, Bembo was a typeface that departed from previous types, known as Venetian Old Styles, and began a whole new trend in letterforms which lasted for two hundred years.⁴ For my purposes, it matched the quality and feeling of the photographs done with P.O.P. toned in gold.

I chose a light brown rag paper stock (Canson Mitienties) on which to mount the photographs which were first tipped onto a mount of the same paper stock (Curtis Rag) on which the poems were printed. This tied the book together a little better. To further accentuate the overall warm brown tonality of the book, the titles of the poems were printed with a brown ink which was similar in tone to the photographs. Gold headbands were used and the cover was quarter-bound in brown leather and Belgian Linen.

Conclusion

I feel that my expectations were met in this thesis project, working in the tradition of the finely crafted book. Not only does this "wrap-up" some of my ideas along these lines, but also I am guided to a next step. The next place for me to go with the book is to a reproduction method for the photographs. The glossy surface of the photographic paper becomes a problem for me in enjoying the integrity of the book. The Woodburytype and photogravure processes, employed in the 19th Century, are both continuous tone reproduction methods and when plates are made from original large-format negatives and the results are of incredible beauty. These processes are virtually lost in the incunabula of photography. Research and work could make them viable in the future.

Footnotes

¹H.G. Wells & A.L. Coburn, The Door in the Wall and Other Stories, (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1911).

²Ernest Pittaro, ed., Photo Lab Index 30th edition, (Hastings on Hudson: Morgan and Morgan, 1972), p. 22-09.

³Ansel Adams, The Print, (New York: Morgan and Morgan, 1961), p. 4.

⁴Alexander Lawson, Printing Types: An Introduction, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 59.

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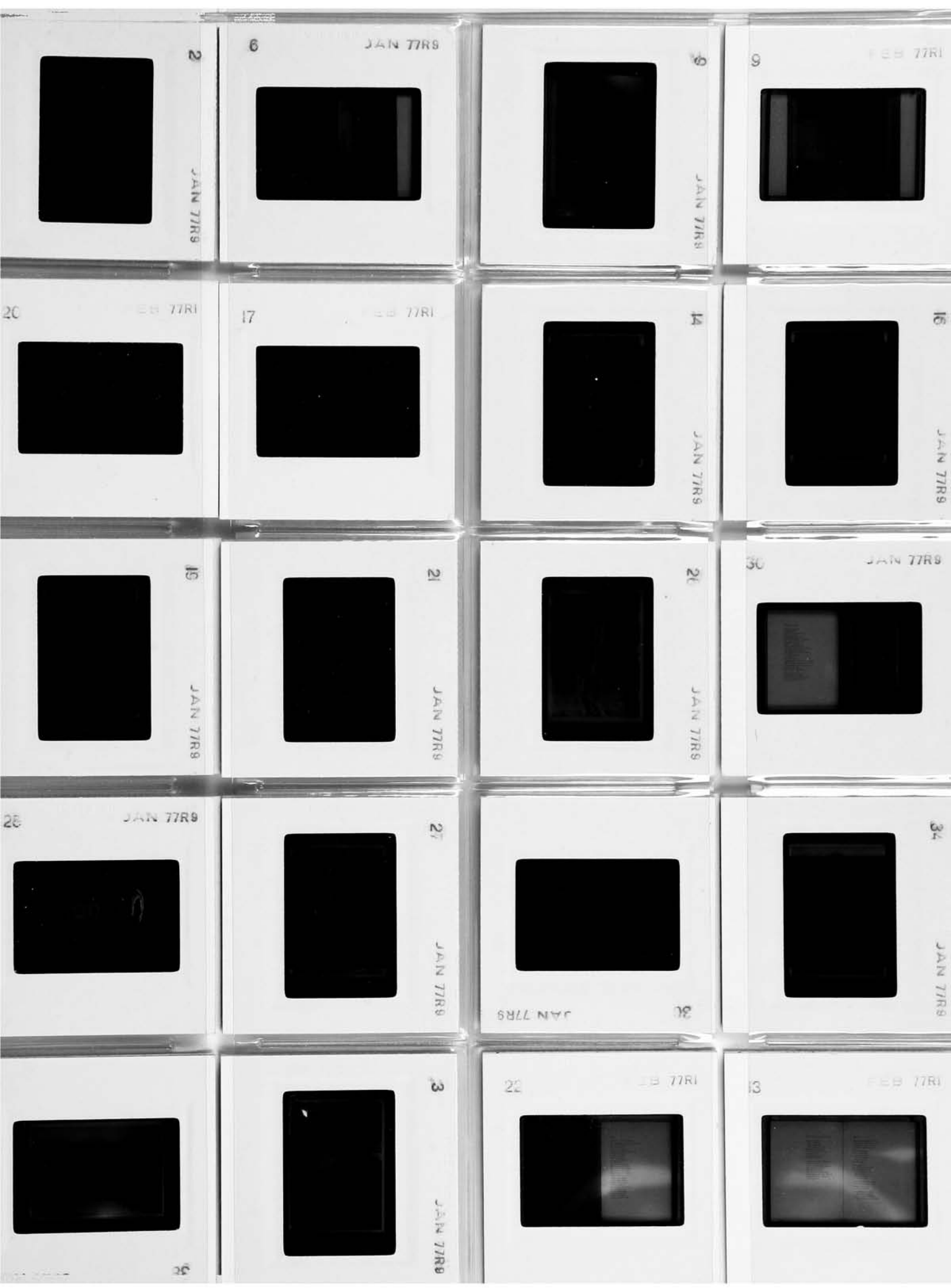
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