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MYSELF & MY SPACE

thesis project and report
presented by

Jennifer Dossin
candidate

as partial fulfillment for
the requirements of Master of Fine Arts Degree
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York

June, 1977

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DEDICATION

To bea, wes, daniel, elaine, mikekras.,
carol, debby, my shower curtain, but
mostly to my parents who consider me
their Greatest Investment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For excellent assistance and admirable
patience: c. frazier, c. fyke, pierre,
woody, and a. provan.

For tasty quiche when it was needed:
bea, daniel, billy, kathy, carol,
debby, and me.

TITLE PAGE

THESIS PROPOSAL

for
The Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Graphic Arts and Photography
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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TITLE: Bare Breaths of Light

SUBMITTED BY: Jennifer Dossin

DATE: January, 1977

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THESIS BOARD

chief advisor: Bea Nettles, instructor

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
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associates: Weston Kemp, professor

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PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

To investigate the potential of duotone reproduction of high-key black and white photographs in untried combinations of pastel colors.

SCOPE OF THE THESIS

My interest in photography began, has continued, and now soars with curiosity about the range and subtle possibilities of light - as it veils, reveals, and shimmers on surfaces of my world. First attracted to dramatic contrasts of light and shadow, I have found myself increasingly drawn to contrasts not so easily perceived - those of faint tones overlapping each other by bare breaths of shading. Paul Strand, particularly by his "Mexican Portfolio", and Imogen Cunningham are constant sources of re-reincarnation for me with their respect for the happenings of whites on white.

Perhaps it is Imogen Cunningham's "Two Callas" that initially drew me into my own exploration of high-key imagery. The images I have selected to work with share in their attentiveness to barely-seen, barely-recorded veils of light.

Perhaps, too, it is "Two Callas" that has turned me to the possibilities of replacing the grey modulations of silver imagery with pastel splashes of non-silver imagery. From Imogen's callas I turned to Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings of flowers. And the breath-taking exchanges of tone, shading, and color that I saw in one petal of her orchids has left me swimming in a sea of hues.

I shall separate the limited tonal range of my images with two 150-line screened halftones; I hesitate to call these separations "duotones" because the tonal characteristics of my photographs demand exposure formulas not quite in step with "industry specifications." I choose the duotone process because it gives me the best control in tonal placement and manipulation essential for my projections of pastel intermingling. I shall check tonal placement in each duotone set by proofing with either color-key acetates or Kwikproof, a commercially-manufactured light-sensitive emulsion most similar to gum bichromate. I may choose to keep my presentation pieces at the Kwikproof stage, offering a hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind image, or I may carry the image to the Heidelberg Kord, an offset press located in the School of Printing. Ideally, I plan to use both processes, making my decision of selection on the basis of individual suitability.

PROCEDURES

During the summer, and fall and winter quarters at RIT, I have collected photographic images which share both high-key and less-definable ethereal

qualities. These are images of myself, my surroundings, and my possessions. This winter quarter I am working in the Photo. Reproduction lab in the School of Printing, making, checking, and remaking sets of duotones from my photographs. During the spring quarter, I shall have continued access to the lab for processing of Kwikproofs and access to the Heidelberg Kord. I expect to be completed with my project by May 9, 1977, coincidentally the date of my gallery opening at the MFA Gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York.

ADDENDUM

Because of the increasingly introspective or at least self-revealing nature of my thesis project, I shall be changing the title to "Myself and My Space," altered by the suggestion of a friend from "Myself and My Place." She advised that place had such grossly political connotations as "Keep your place, boy," and "A woman's place is in her home." This sociological slip of mine embarrasses me; for all my feminist training and exposure at Smith College, I still revert to associations of place rather than my own space.

DISCUSSION

- * In attempting to bring a useful discussion to the images of my thesis, I shall consider here the recognizable origin of the project and mutual growth within and about that beginning. Noted in my proposal are three image-makers I most consciously recognize as major influences to my own work: Imogen Cunningham, Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe. From study and near worship of their various works, I believe that I have gained in my perception and appreciation of the intricacies of subtle, "breathably-light" shading - barely hinted and yet so richly articulated in their images. Yet I cannot say how long this appreciation would have remained just that had I not had certain experiences during the summer of 1976 at a photographic workshop in Penland, North Carolina.
- * Up until June, 1976, my photographic images indicated a contented wallowing in the precision and finesse of "shadow-detail illustration." Though my heart inclined towards lighter and more softly-dramatic images, my eyes and mind preferred the seductions of master silver printing. Was it just by the fact of staying in a sun-drenched, white-walled room that finally prodded my love of Imogen's callas to take a more definitive aggression on my selective vision? Or was it the purchase of a white linen nightgown? Obviously, whatever reasons are as unsubstantive as the images they fostered. I began photographing in a room whose gauzey definitions of lighting contrasts were visually and aesthetically distinct from the more familiar effects of severely-dramatic lighting. What sprang from my Penland experience was a series of portraits, both self

and other, both straightforward and elusive, utilizing the touch of bright, northern exposure to barely and gently embrace and model the folds and curves of my subject's clothes and body.

* When I returned to Rochester from Penland, I sought out and moved into a white-walled apartment with the same possibilities of soft and bright lighting. I continued my exploration of lighter imagery, photographing numerous corners, objects, friends, and myself in my living space.

So began the formulation of my thesis project..

* As the proposal indicates, my initial concern was in personal recognition and photographic illustration of "breathably-light images." It was a step beyond the qualities of the photographic process I sought to hold and exercise - to capture not the physical detail of an object or person, but rather, its spirit, whisperings of those details. And, if I may depart here on a political venture, it is this spiritual insight - as it were-- that I believe is the pressing challenge of the photographic illustrator after the zone system and pristine elegance of 8x10 format are overcome. It is not merely what we see but what we see exclusively by the camera that we should seek fervently to share with others. It was this special vision that I wished to experience and share in the process and presentation of my thesis.

* As I proceeded with my thesis project, testing and coming closer to an understanding of the exclusive vision I wished to exercise, I learned of another special quality to the craft and practice of photography. "Discover your self through photography," Ralph Hattersley has written. This potential in photography came to be the flower in the growth of my thesis project. There came a point during the course of my work that my enthusiasm for the earlier images was diminishing; not that they were

unsatisfactory, but they were not deeply satisfying. I turned the camera on myself more aggressively and sharply than I had ever done before, no longer in times of composure, but now in times of personal urgent need. Both the experience and results were challenging and "uncomfortably close." I gained invaluable insight not only from viewing the images themselves but also by viewing them in conjunction with earlier images. I found deeper spirituality in the first pieces that I had previously overlooked without the aid of these later images. This is perhaps the lesson of my thesis project. As a project evolves from stage to stage, nothing is lost in its progression - in the pruning and cultivation of various qualities, greater growth and understanding flourish both in the main stem and fruits of one's work.

TECHNICAL PROCEDURES (briefly explained)

1. In order to record the strength of white tonal gradation at the intensity I wished, I had to manipulate slightly both the exposure and development slightly. Using Ilford HP4 35mm film, I exposed $\frac{1}{2}$ stop over to an exposure index of 350. I developed the film in a full-strength solution of D-76 for 15% over the development time recommended by Kodak for its Tri-x in full-strength D-76. The combination of film, exposure, and development brought about an enhancement of the grain pattern and dense negatives which admirably held the subtlest shift of recordable tone.
2. I printed the negatives onto Portriga-Rapid #3 and #4 papers, 118 surface and developed in a 1:3 dilution of Ilford ID-62 - with a still $2\frac{1}{2}$ min. development and 3 min. still water bath. I believe that the paper and developer combination and still development technique yielded the best and most definitive transfer and recording of those tonal shifts that I could see and generally transfer in the silver negatives.
3. I then took these silver images down to the Photo. Reproduction lab in the School of Printing and made two halftone separations from each. Using a 150-line screen and DuPont ortho-lith film, I shot one halftone to carry a full scale of the silver image - that is, in a tonal step tablet range of 1-12, all tones would carry to the reproduced image. Since my images were of a high-key nature, only steps 1-6 would actually be utilized. This halftone was made with standard main and flash exposures. The second halftone carried steps 2-4 or 5, thus reproducing the original image in a more compact or contrasty tonal scale. I made this halftone with a shorter main exposure and proportionally long bump exposure. The rationale behind this fancy exposure manipulation was to isolate certain tones of the original image to one or the other negative, and to overlap other tones onto both negatives. The result would be and was a choreography of hues, dancing in and out of each other in a single image.
4. These two halftones were my negatives which I then exposed onto Kwikbase substrate coated with Kwikproof pigment, one negative at a time, one Kwikproof color at a time. I found it helpful to strip up the negatives in such a way that sometimes I could expose only certain areas or corners of the negative, giving me the option of coloring a camisole yellow without making my skin appear gangrene. I exposed the substrate for times between $\frac{1}{4}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ min., depending on the intensity of color I wished to hold in an exposure.. My exposure unit was a Berkey ultra-violet light source, although one may use as inexpensive and common a source as the sun. Since the Kwikproof

pigment is light-hardening and water dissolving, I processed the exposed pieces in a solution of ammonia and water, drenching the Kwikbase in a splash of water solution and washing the unexposed pigment away with soft cotton padding. If I found that my exposure had been a bit stronger than I had desired, I would apply some straight ammonia to the problem area; an effective if also unpleasant remedy. The substrate, because of its plastic content, dries very quickly, and I could fairly immediately afterwards coat it with a second color. Coating the substrate is simple but must be done quickly and thoroughly; otherwise uneven coating will cause streaking that will unavoidably and indelably show up on a processed sheet. Remember: the pigment is light-hardening, so if you make a mess of coating, you can wash it off and start over (and over and over). To coat: have three cotton pads ready; wet back of sheet with water and lay on dry surface - the water will keep the sheet from slipping while coating; pour a quarter's worth of pigment onto sheet and with logical use of pads, spread coating on sheet, using horizontal, vertical, and diagonal strokes.

5. The above information, steps 3-4 apply to fifteen of the eighteen images of my thesis. The three large head self-portraits are not "Kwikproofs" but offset duotones, printed off the Heidelberg Kord located in the School of Printing. The screened halftones for these images were made according to standard exposure formula for duotone reproduction. Essentially, the halftone that carried black ink was more contrasty because I wanted black to carry or enhance the deeper shadow areas. So a proportionally longer bump exposure in conjunction with a flash and main exposure was used to contract the tonal scale. The brown printing halftone was made to carry a more even gradation of tones from step 1 to 12, so its bump was minimal, while the main and flash were calculated to standard calculation procedures. I know that these terms "main", "flash", and "bump" probably are driving my reader crazy - but when minimal research in any photo. reproduction textbook or industry pamphlet is made, the terms will become instantly understandable. Frankly, I do not believe it my function here in this thesis report to attempt a basic course in photo. reproduction. Given the basic knowledge, I wish to communicate my utilization of the tools and technique.
6. The halftones of step 5 were then used to make offset plates (I used S. D. Warren paper plates and found them to be adequate for my short run). I then attached them to the press and ran first the brown then the black images.
7. Voila!

* Best reading matter on photo. reproduction and offset lithography available in School of Printing's Photo. Repro. lab in form of Kodak pamphlet handouts on halftone reproduction and DuPont pamphlet on halftones available from manufacturer, and Straus' The Printing Industry. Information and supplies of Kwikproof material available exclusively from DIRECT REPRODUCTION CORP., 835 Union St., P.O. Box 356, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215. Collect calls accepted: (212) UL 7-6116

addendum to PROCEDURES (problems)

3. The formula derived to obtain a set of duotones that would yield that "choreography of hues" took some amount of trial and error. First, I attempted to use a standard duotone exposure combination - like that used to obtain the sets of step 5. However, proofing with Kwikproof indicated that such a set, each negative exposed to one of two colors, yielded what appeared to be merely a toned silver print. When brown and black or blue were used, for example, a reproduction of the original image as printed onto Protriga-Rapid was obtained. I panicked, for I had secured hope, belief, and confidence of success in the use and resulting visual effects of this standard formula; using such a simple method of tonal separation - that is, two exposures of two negatives - would have enabled me to carry all of my thesis images to the Kord and thereby produce a large portfolio edition. So much for the early campaign promises of this thesis candidate.

"When all else fails, posterize," a sagacious photography professor has said. So I did, and with equally disastrous results. Using a combined exposure of the negative and positive of an image filled in all areas of the substrate, neither remaining any white negative space to act as counterbalance and comparative value to the subtle gradations of tone nor allowing an intermingling of hues to occur by its exclusive area recording of the two halftones.

Return to the drawing board. In rethinking what exactly I wanted - dropping in and out of pastel tinting within the image, I realized that this could be obtained by manipulating the tonal density range of the halftones (as measured visually by a standard 12-step gray scale) - to be more contrasty on one halftone and less contrasty on the other halftone. With that idea, I was able to acquire just such a set of separations with accurate and fairly predictable use of main, flash, and bump exposures - main to place the highlight value on step 2 or 3, flash to place the theoretical shadow value on step 10 or 12, and selective use of the bump to expand and contract the tolerance of the film to the density range of the original copy.

4. It took a few mistakes to acquire a knack for selection of color combinations on the Kwikbase. I could never use the three process colors together in the same area of an image by the very nature of subtractive color theory: cyan, magenta, and yellow in combination absorb all wavelengths and thereby produce a neutral grey non-color. What I did do to overcome this problem was to mix two of three colors or use one color alone, then a second for tinting with a second exposure. Also, I learned that masking out selective areas of the halftone negative allowed me to utilize all three colors without their overlapping and neutralizing each other. Rubylith is a commercially-made masking film used mostly in offset plate-making that proved to be easiest and most flexible to use for sometimes tricky masking. At this point, I would suggest if it does not seem obvious already that inclusion of register marks on the original copy to be photographed onto the halftone negatives would facilitate accurate registration in multiple-color exposures.

This is a useful worksheet for calibrating and producing halftones from original copy. Courtesy of Photo. Repro. lab., School of Printing, R.I.T.

CALIBRATION NEGATIVE INFORMATION

Contact Screen Information	Calibration Exposure Information	REFLECTION GRAY SCALE READINGS
Screen No. _____	Main Exposure _____	
Magenta _____ Gray _____	Aperture _____	1. ____.
Neg. _____ Pos. _____	Magnification _____	2. ____.
Screen Ruling _____	Basic Flash Test _____	3. ____.
		4. ____.
		5. ____.
		6. ____.
		7. ____.
REMEMBER - PLACEMENT	Shadow Density ____.	8. ____.
main exposure - highlight	Highlight Density ____.	9. ____.
flash " - shadow	Basic Density Range ____.	10. ____.
bump " - contrast		11. ____.
		12. ____.

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COPY INFORMATION

Copy No. _____	
Shadow Density ____.	Lens Aperture _____
Highlight Density ____.	Magnification _____
Density Range ____.	Main Exposure _____
Basic Density Range ____.	Controlled Flash Exposure _____
Excess Density Range ____.	% Bump Exposure _____



