



## **MIXED BOX:** The Making of the **SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY PORTFOLIO**

**Photographs have significance both as images and as objects.** This limited edition portfolio, published by George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film to mark our sixtieth anniversary as a public institution, presents twelve photographs in both capacities. Each is a thing, painstakingly crafted and housed, signed and numbered, to be preserved for generations so as to outlive us and our time. This concern with an object's material existence is at the heart of much of our mission here at the Museum. We grow and care for our vast and important collection so that it may matter after we are gone. It is our message to the future. At the same time, the photographs in this box, like the photographs in the Eastman House collection, are also images, and, as such, they are ideas, manifestations of culture, personal expressions and the embodiments of a particular artist's vision. It is this aspect of photographic meaning that we consider when we produce exhibitions, publications, teaching aids and other forms of interpretation. It is fitting that this special box of photographs should embody both aspects of what we do here.

**The translation of twelve singular works of art into a unified production such as this has required not only the trust and enthusiasm of thirteen individual artists, but a number of intellectual and aesthetic decisions that were made collectively by the staff of the Eastman House Department of Photographs.** From the first, we were determined to celebrate this important anniversary, not by looking back, but by looking forward. Thus, the Museum best known for its unrivalled collection of nineteenth century photographs had to be represented by a diverse range of equally significant contemporary color work by living artists. We take seriously the word "International" that became part of our institutional name in 1972; it was by choice that the artists in this portfolio represent not only the United States but also Canada, The Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. They also represent our recent history. All of the artists whom we invited to participate in this project have been exhibited at George Eastman House, and each is represented by several prints in our collection.

**The diversity of these artists and their work is not limited to nationality. They range in age from 34 to 70 and, most importantly, can be seen as representing the wide range and variety of approaches, techniques and aesthetics that characterizes today's photographic art practice.** In this portfolio we bring together both the

transcendent and subtle landscape work of **JOHN PFAHL** and the cool and minimal documents that **JOHN DIVOLA** extracts from isolated houses in the California desert. **EDWARD BURTYNSKY** photographs real features in the landscape as well, but in his quarry series he chooses a stance that emphasizes their formal and abstracting qualities over their realistic specificity. **ABELARDO MORRELL** and **RICHARD MISRACH** both make contemporary art that includes references to past photographic technology, Morell with his *camera obscura* images of paintings and classical architecture, and Misrach with his exploration of the aesthetic of the color negative. **ALEX WEBB** and **MARTIN PARR**, both of Magnum Photos, show the varieties of truth that can be achieved by the unmanipulated photographic image. Though both images are strongly composed, Webb's moody and evocative portrait of a passenger on a Turkish ferry could not be more different in either palette or mood than Parr's wryly matter-of-fact depiction of sausages on meat hooks arrayed against the grid of a white tiled wall.

**A rich and expansive component of this gathering of photographs is the willingness of several of its artists to use fiction to create the photographs they envision, thereby playing the assumed realism of photographs against itself.**

**ASTRID KRUSE JENSEN** implies a complex narrative with the careful set-up of her dark and suggestive image. **ERWIN OLAF'S** elaborately costumed and carefully posed female figure references both painting and the stage. **HARRI KALLIO** and **LORI NIX** both fabricate intricate models and maquettes to produce the photographic subjects they imagine but would not find in the world around them. **MARK KLETT** and **BYRON WOLFE**, as a collaborative partnership, use a different kind of craft, digitally combining their own images with scans of vintage prints from museum collections to fashion impossibly time-transcending images. The very different pictures that make up this portfolio must each be understood as a fragment of their maker's overall sensibility and artistic intention. There are twelve bodies of work represented by the twelve photographs in this box.

**We rarely look at photographs one at a time.** They are almost always accompanied by other photographs, whether in a book, a newspaper or an exhibition, and we must recognize that proximate images create a new context when and wherever they occur. Thus this boxed collection, drawn from a wildly divergent group of artists to celebrate and honor a great museum, becomes a distinct object in its own right with its own new meanings. Of this small edition, a set will be given to each of the artists who have taken part. Another will remain at Eastman House, as a permanent record of the anniversary project. The twenty-five numbered portfolios, of which this box is one, will make their way to private and public collections around the world, where each will inhabit a new and different place, context and meaning. The new knowledge and experience that each box of photographs embodies will, in each instance, affect the pictures it lives with and the viewers who may find them to be objects of thought or delight. So has the work of George Eastman House enriched human experience for sixty years, and so may it continue.

*Alison Nordström, PhD, Curator of Photographs*  
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