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Art Feature

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ART FEATURE*Val Telberg*

MY WORK IN MY MEDIUM

FOR SOME reason unknown to me I have an urge to make a certain kind of picture, and the medium of composite photography which grew with me seems the most pleasant way of achieving it. When I paint I attempt to attain more or less the same kind of imagery as in my photography, but the brush is such a clumsy tool for what I want to accomplish that I find myself altering my style in order to simplify, and eventually my picture becomes a shorthand symbol of the title of a song heard from so far away that its force is lost. But I want force, and some detail, and some evidence that parts of my pictures are literal mirrors of tangible reality. The fact that my fragments of mirrors are true is testified to by the camera, a selective but otherwise impartial cataloguer. Camera is my proof and my intimate connection with reality.

Once I have this link with reality, once I have this stabilising element (this much of my feet on the ground), then I can venture out and create fantasy, super-reality or non-reality, with the impunity of a sane man. Then my fantasy gives me perspective on what is not fantasy—the daily life, the lemming world, and the people, wherever I went, who had an inbuilt hurt. These elements of physical reality are my negatives laid out on a ground glass panel and lit from underneath. These elements I can now maneuver by sandwiching negatives between two glass slides in the enlarger, and each combination becomes a dream which I have never dreamt and never shall, but which I want to crystallize for my self of long ago, for my self of the far future, and for

those people who may recognize in my pictures an echo of their own experience. This is the extent of my communication.

For instance I have on my glass table a negative of two large figures and in the middle distance smaller figures of nuns and a small girl. It is a good picture. I took it impulsively and I look at it with pleasure now. But the mind gallops and the stream of consciousness demands constant change, and so to keep up with this demand I elaborate my stage set and super-impose two children so that they co-exist in the same space as the parental figures but look, as children do, toward an opposite horizon. Then I make a print, and in another three minutes I add water texture so it looks like a never-seen kind of sky; and in another few minutes I add two heads, one live of myself and the other a Hollywood mask; and the print from this set is what you see here ("Journey"). But the kaleidoscopic process continues, and I keep changing and speculating with one concept and composition after another. Like stills of a movie film, prints emerge from the developer with bricks instead of water, Mexican masks instead of bricks, Boston cobblestones instead of masks; the cirrus sky of Paris, a checker board, a drape blowing toward horizon. The part below changes too: children playing, a nude, my own face again, a shot of a man killed on 34th Street in New York, a Spanish bull fight, a group picture I took at Yaddo. . .

This is the absolute uniqueness of the medium. Once the negatives are made the process of creation is ready for a complete, detailed and documented elaboration. Every negative represents a cut in time, a fragment of life, some more impressive than others, and the whole visual experience of living becomes material for artistic comment now or later. It comes very close to being stream of consciousness in visual form. The medium has the excitement of a movie for the maker, if not for the onlooker. It also has its frustrations, for the changes are so inviting that there is never an end—every print is work in progress and nothing is ever completed with finality, because not to end is so easy.



BOY IN ST. MARKS PLACE, NEW YORK.



SELF PORTRAIT WITH TOY SOLDIERS.



THE CITY.

COMPOSITION ON NIGHT THEME.



RETURN TO SUMMER: *ARRIVAL*.





JOURNEY.