

Creative Living

Mario McGee editor/591-2300



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JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Head by Gordon Newton still has recognizable features. Later in the chronology of the heads, the features become more distorted or disappear altogether.

Heads show Newton's skill

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Detroit's Gordon Newton's portraits, "Love, Life, Geometric Heritage," at Susanne Hilberry Gallery through June 10, leave strange after-images.

They may resurface and come clearly into view in a restless moment in the middle of the night, over coffee the next morning or while talking to a friend on a street corner.

The staying power of these works is something to be reckoned with and certainly not anticipated when one walks into the gallery and sees 67 heads, each about 17-by-14 inches, in a single row along the gallery walls.

Hilberry put these works on paper in chronological order and that adds interest as well. The faces go from more to less complex works of art as the artist refines and simplifies his approach. Newton works with two fundamental geometric shapes — circle/oval for face and cylinder for the neck. He has used a variety of media, from oil, pastel, car paint to collage, and covered his completed work with many layers of polyurethane varnish and resin to achieve a glossy, well-sealed finish suggesting that of an old oil painting. Because of the finish, these works can be treated almost like oil paintings,

but Hilberry said the perfect style of frame has yet to be found.

Newton's quick, bold strokes of black and colors, his suggestions of features, rather than careful delineation, and his slashing style, give the works a compelling immediacy — as if each had just been done a moment before in a fit of anger, excitement or wild inspiration.

In the progression, one eye and eventually the other fall away, an ear grows larger and necks more cylindrical.

To his credit, Newton has an appreciation for a lot of great artists — Braque, Roualt and Dubuffet come to mind. But, upon study, and these definitely call for that, the works and their creator steadily take on a stronger and stronger individual spirit.

Newton studied at the then-Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts and Wayne State University. He was born in Detroit in 1946 and still lives there.

His Marine Light Studies are on display at Joy Emery Gallery of Grosse Pointe through Saturday. This kind of joint showing between two widely respected commercial galleries may not be unique, but it is a bit unusual and is done in a warm spirit of cooperation.

Susanne Hilberry Gallery, 555 S. Woodward, Birmingham is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Focusing on faces

By James Radebaugh
staff writer

Royal Oak-bred photographer Nicholas Nixon issued a challenge of intimacy to an audience that came to hear him speak at the Detroit Institute of Arts last week.

"I'm not the kind of artist who gives speeches," the 42-year-old photographer said during a slide show of his work, his arms wrapped around the lectern in a near bear hug. "So if you want to know anything, you'll have to ask questions."

Fortunately, the audience wasn't shy, and Nixon, a youthful man with a neatly trimmed beard and wire-framed glasses, was able to address inquiries about almost all aspects, from the technical to the ethical, of a career that began in 1969 when he left the University of Michigan with a degree in English literature.

What emerged was an improvised explanation of an evolving career.

Parting ways with most other photographers in the early 1970s, Nixon adopted a bulky large-view camera that allowed him to shoot 8- by 10-inch film. Such film, huge compared to conventional 35 millimeter film, allows for greater clarity in printing. For his subjects, Nixon chose buildings and landscapes.

Over the years, Nixon remained loyal to the bulky camera and to black and white film, which he insists is more engaging than color. What has changed is his subjects. His later photographs are almost exclusively of people, and more recently, of people's faces.

"The work took me there," said Nixon, who now teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston.

The shift began in the late 1970s with a series of photographs he took of people on their front porches. He found his subjects in both rural and urban settings and captured them in the act of living, unposed.

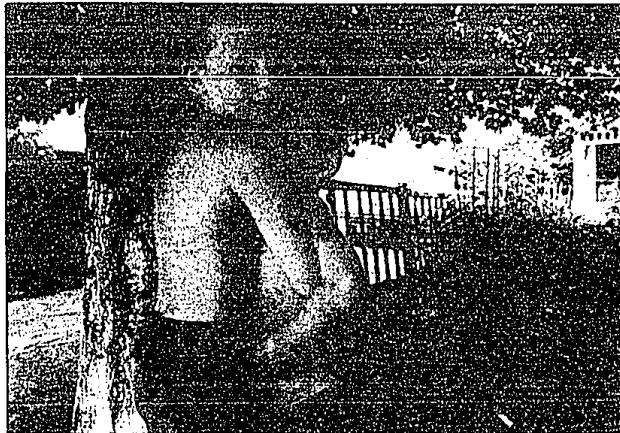
"I'm a recognizer, not an inventor," he said as he operated the slide projector.

His approach to human subjects became more intimate with a later series of photographs he took in a Massachusetts nursing home where he has done volunteer work. In one photograph, an elderly man casts a woe-filled look at the camera.

Nixon said the man was telling him "with his eyes" that he would die soon.

The photographer continued his exploration of people facing imminent death with a series on people with AIDS. He photographed several AIDS patients from shortly after their diagnosis right up to within hours of their deaths.

In the process he came to know his subjects well and he easily recounted details of each one's circumstances. The only information he didn't volunteer was how each



Nicholas Nixon's photograph of the two boys is entitled "Plant City, Florida," 1982. Below is "F.K. Boston." Both are part of "Nicholas Nixon: Pictures of People" at Detroit Institute of Arts through July 2. The exhibit is divided into

five series that he has produced since 1977 — people outdoors, elderly, nude studies of Nixon's family; annual portraits of his wife and her sisters; and people with AIDS.



subject was infected. He told the audience to ask him if they wanted to know. And with a dark-eyed woman's face on the screen, the audience did ask, and he answered bluntly.

"She had a drug-using boyfriend

who was also a liar."

Wary of such emotional work, Nixon said his next project will involve attaching a camera to a bicycle that he will ride everywhere he goes for a couple of weeks. He said he doesn't know what will come of

it, but that he thinks it will be fun.

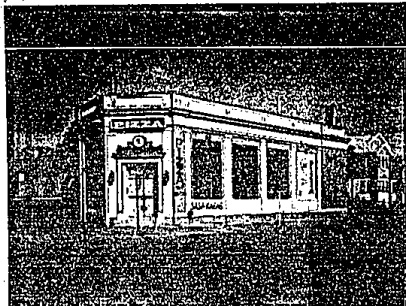
Nixon's photographs will be on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts through July 2. The museum is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

Artists interpret the urban experience

"Urbanology" is the theme of a multiple site, multi-media exhibit of juried works by artists from across the country taking place this month and next in the Detroit area. All of the 98 artists from the Midwest, California, New York and Canada address urban issues and experiences.

The exhibition will be documented in a 112-page catalog with 43 color and 40 black-and-white illustrations, essays and exhibitor's data. Urbanology will be the subject of a symposium scheduled for June 16-17. For information, call Rose E. DeSloover or Doug Alkenhead, co-directors, 662-8000.

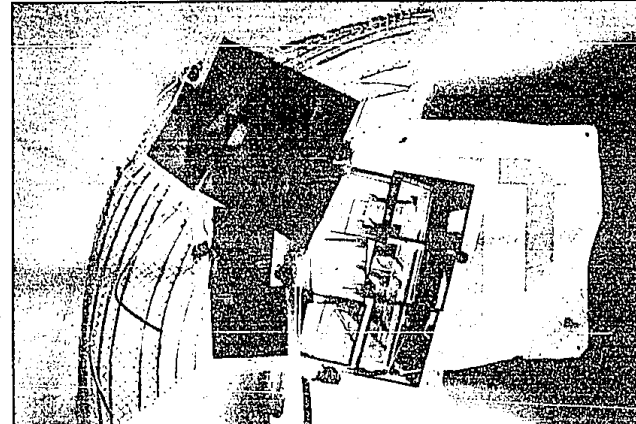
The locations are: Detroit Artists Market, 1452 Randolph; Detroit Focus Gallery, 743 Beaubien; Detroit: Engine Co. 84, 1037 18th/Lafayette; Detroit: Front Room Gallery, 47 E. Adams; Detroit: City County Building, East Jefferson; Detroit: Artelle, Mackinac Hall, 3277 Sandwich; Windsor: The Gallery, Marygrove College, Liberal Arts Building, 4295 W. McNichols; Detroit: Michigan Gallery, 2681 Michigan; Detroit: Sarkis Gallery, center for Creative Studies, 245 E. Kirby; Detroit: Community Arts Gallery, Wayne State University, Detroit; Wayne Gallery, 423 Willis; Detroit: MCA Gallery, 1200 Sixth, 11th



Cibachrome print, 20 by 24 inches, in from Elise Tobia's "Pillars of the Community" series shot in Detroit 1982-84. It is part of the exhibit at Detroit Focus Gallery which deals with active responses to urban environment.

floor, Detroit.

"Urbanology" will begin at all exhibition sites with a day-long opening event noon to 8 p.m. Saturday, June 3, and continue through the month.



"Fan with Exit Sign" is by photographer Samuel Trella of Bloomfield Hills. It is a mixed media work, done in 1988 and is in the Urbanology exhibition at Detroit Focus Gallery.