

Paris Visone, A Culture of Looking

Paris Visone combines portraiture and documentary work to create a compelling investigation of American popular culture through the example of her own life. She has committed her time and energy to a long term view of people and places she knows as well as anything in her life: the homes and members of her own family. But the editorial choices and almost decade long investigation of them is revelatory. The dedication to photographing almost every aspect and activity of her extended family has forced them to quit posing for her pictures and just do whatever they were doing. What is revealed in the the shifts between public and private and between those with subjects aware of the camera to many completely unaware give her work both unquestionable authenticity and a resonance with our country as a whole.

The seemingly contradictory identifiers of income, taste or class are underscored by the locations that frame them: Boca Raton, Florida, Peabody, Massachusetts and Nantucket, Massachusetts. The trendy look of Florida's glittering, tan and sexy styles abruptly transition to the mix of styles layered into a savvy, city, street look in New England. The images that represent these locations are as much caricatures as they are documentary truths. Using familiar repeated characters which effortlessly slip from one lifestyle to the other Visone's photographs force us to realize the assumptions we are making about "types" of people are as shallow as the postcards stacked in the storefronts.

A cultural overview, a fashion conscious snapshot of America, an insider's portrait of two different sides of a typical family, or an edgy take on environmental self portraiture, these images are rooted in documentary. And that may be the most interesting thing about them. How do you recognize while you are *inside* a family that it is emblematic of something larger? Can you really be objective? Do you even need to be objective about such subjective topics to record them for others?

Like people watching, there is something irresistible about looking at photos of regular people. We see ourselves, we see fashions we laugh at, wish we could still wear or would never touch. We see natural beauty and we see garish artificiality. Paris uses her family and friends to record cute looks and tacky ones in the same light—and we catch ourselves making all the judgments and playful jabs that as kids we would make at the mall or as adults in traffic or on the subway. She takes us along as she gathers evidence of how "hard wired" we are to visually compete with one another for attention. By using such empathetic subjects Paris Visone reveals how looking at these photographs perpetuates the cycle of this "culture of looking", indicting and rewarding us in equal parts for our participation.

Also on view: A series of photographs taken for Debbie Harry during the "Blondie

Endangered Species Tour". Using her unobtrusive style of camera work Visone captures backstage shots which describe the duality of aging punk rockers, groupies and the realities of life on tour.

– James Hull, Curator