

# *The Chronicle Review*

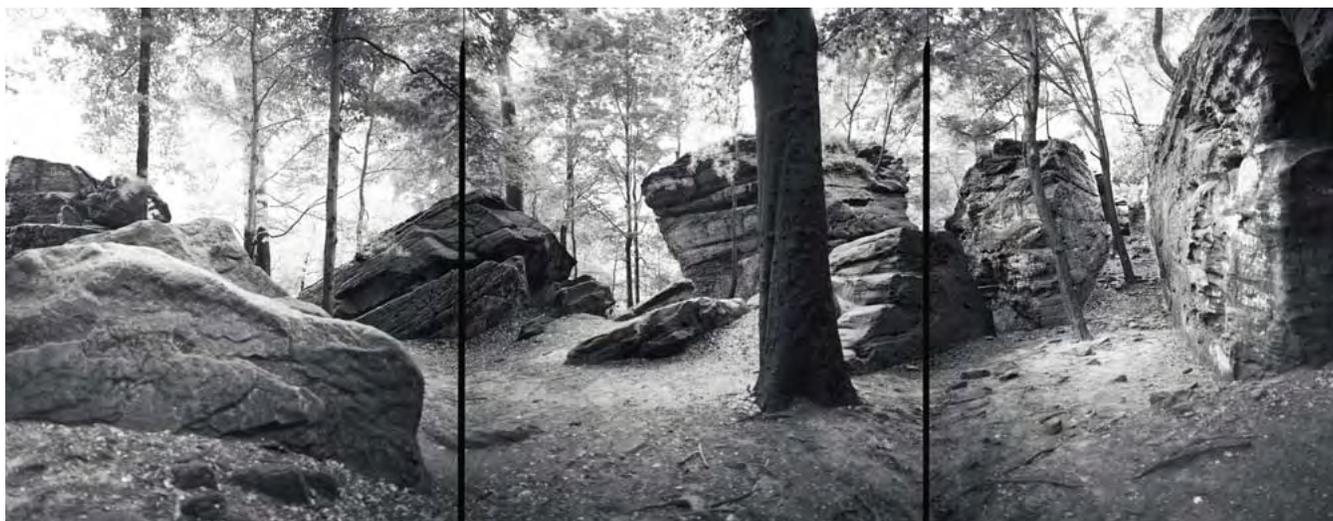
THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

November 15, 2002

## A City Seen



"CAHOON CREEK BOATING CLUB, BAY VILLAGE," 1997, BY FRANK GOHLKE



"HINKLEY RESERVATION," 2001, BY BARBARA BOSWORTH

A City without a past is only a big boom town. A true city has a past, and a memory. If we think of Silicon Valley (for example) not as a city but as an expensive strip development, a place of not much gravitas, it is perhaps because we suspect that its entire memory might be wiped out by one really big electromagnetic storm.

One might say that memory is a competitive sport, and that whoever remembers the most compelling vision of the past wins. One might speculate that those places of the past whose names we



"BRANDON BROWN," 1992, BY JUDITH JOY ROSS



"LINCOLN ELECTRIC," 1995, BY LEE FRIEDLANDER

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A City Seen: Photos from The George Gund Foundation

remember—Troy, Bethlehem, Agincourt, Plymouth Rock, etc.—are remembered well by poets. Rome exists where it does because that is where Romulus and Remus were found by the wolf, if she was a wolf, or where they found her. So at least goes one version of the story, which I have no reason to doubt. In any case, after that first beginning there were many other new beginnings, each putting down fresh foundations on top of old ones. This process of constant revision is not celebrated as often as one might wish by mythic ballads, sung by bards accompanied by plucked-string instruments, but in our time photography might serve a part of that function. When the photographers are sharp-eyed and clear-minded their pictures can seem to describe the very flavor of the moment—the fulcrum on which the present changes to the past....

A great city is in its natural condition more like a work of art in progress than like a museum. It is in a constant state of revision. Decay and rejuvenation stand tooth by jowl, and improvisation and contingency trump theory. Surely we would not choose that it be other-wise. We owe to our museums much of what we know, and we love them for it. But we would not wish to live in one of them, and give up the lively chaos of the street, out of which we might, with luck and close attention, make art.

*The images are from the exhibition "A City Seen: photographs From the George Gund Foundation Collection," at the Cleveland Museum of Art from November 17 through January 226, 2003. The text is by John Szarkowski, a historian of photography and the director of the department of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art from 1962 to 1991. The text is from the exhibition catalog, published by the Cleveland Museum of Art.*



"FREE MEDICAL CLINIC OF CLEVELAND," 2000, BY NICHOLAS NIXON



"MILDRED ALLEN, NATHANIEL, DOMINIC, NATHANIEL JR., JESSICA, AND JEAN MARTIN," 1993, BY DAWOUD BEY



CUYAHOGA RIVER "UNDER VETERANS MEMORIAL BRIDGE," 1991, BY LOIS CONNER