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PHOTO DISTRICT NEWS

While cities such as New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles generally get most of the attention when it comes to photography books, one of the most interesting and alluring publications from the past year actually focused on a place that usually gets more criticism than praise: Cleveland, Ohio. With a group of photographers that include Lee Friedlander, Larry Fink, Nicholas Nixon and Frank Gohlke, the book *A City Seen: Photographs from the George Gund Foundation Collection*, offers 12 engaging perspectives on one unique city.



© LOIS CONNER

One of Lois Conner's images of the Cuyahoga River.

A VIEW OF THE CITY BY CHRISTOPHER D. RINGWALD

WE THINK WE KNOW A PLACE, A neighborhood, a city through our senses. We trust that it's details remain fixed and that others know it to be the same place, the same neighborhood, the same city as that which we smelled, heard, tasted, felt and, most of all, saw. However, the city of Cleveland as seen by 12 famous photographers emerges as 12 cities in *A City Seen: Photographs from the George Gund Foundation Collection*. But is it the true Cleveland?

"It's a Cleveland," says Mark Schwartz of the design firm Nesadny + Schwartz, who coordinated the project and selected the photos for the book. "This is 12 Clevelands, but it's an honest Cleveland, though the photographers were generally drawn to the grittier side of life. It's 12 Clevelands by three Clevelanders and nine outsiders."

The pictures were originally shot for 12 annual reports of the Gund Foundation.

Gund funds work, primarily, in education, art, environment, human services, economic development and community revitalization, and civic affairs. In each case, the photographer's theme covered a topic associated with one of those areas. Gund received 10 to 14 original prints for its offices and for the report, selected from up to thousands taken by each artist during the periods of 8 to 30 days, says Schwartz.

Barbara Bosworth is one of the locals, though she now lives near and teaches in Boston. As a child, she walked the woodland paths of the parks that circle Cleveland. She returned 25 years later with her camera for Gund. Her shots for the chapter on the Metroparks system are in sets of twos and threes to capture the panorama of a settling, "to show the whole space and not lose the details," Says the soft-spoken and reflective Bosworth.



© LARRY FINK

Larry Fink goes inside the Cleveland School of the Arts.

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A City Seen: Photos from The George Gund Foundation

It's all flora and little fauna, though she likes the human trace left on nature. Here a trail disappears into the woods with a bench nearby for the weary; there timbered steps lead up into the leafy stillness away from a crowded swimming whole. Her other work is also outdoors, such as pictures of hunters who shoot for food and not trophies. An eternal stillness, dusted with humanity, inhabits her Cleveland shots. "I wanted to show that people have passed through this space." As with the hunters project, she says, "I'm Interested in the way people use the outdoors."

Among the 12 contributors, Larry Fink has had perhaps the more varied and commercial career. He is well known for his books on boxing, the fashion industry's backstage scene, and what he called "the social graces."

Fink spent four weeks, all told, photographing students at the Cleveland School of the Arts. They appear speaking, declaiming, yawning, stretching, dancing and acting in classrooms, hallways and studios. "I captured the kids' side, nothing more, nothing less." Afterward, Fink taught a photo workshop for the students. Next, he was shooting barbershops in Easton, Pennsylvania, near his home, for *Lehigh Valley Magazine*.

For all its fluidity and art, the book casts a certain die of Cleveland that will, no doubt, mold its future history. "A true city has a past, and a memory," writes John Szarkowski, former director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, in the essay that opens the book. "One might say that memory is a competitive sport, and that whoever remembers the most compelling vision of the past wins."



A Judith Joy Ross image taken in the public school system.



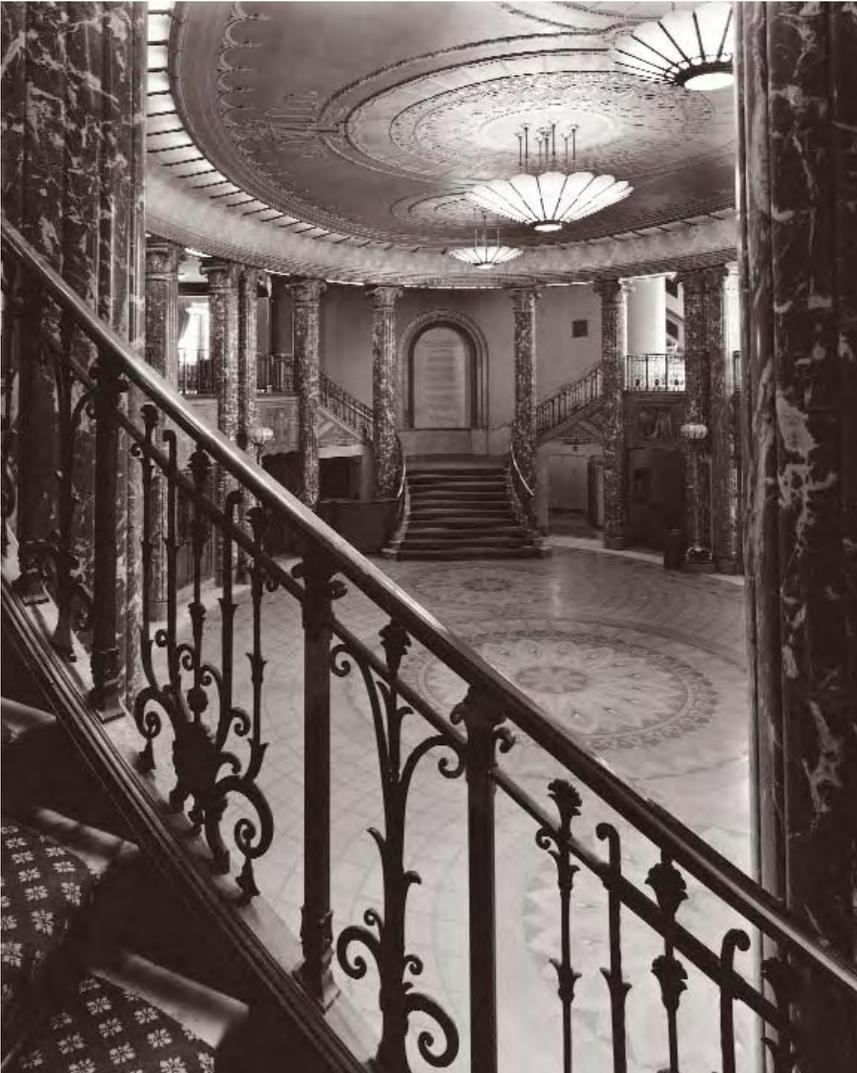
One of Michael Book's photographs from Cleveland's neighborhoods

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A City Seen: Photos from The George Gund Foundation



A image by Linda Butler

Some of the pictures appear ready to endure the decades ahead. Judith Joy Ross spent her time in the public schools. Her subjects pose for the camera, earning with their participation a dignity and timelessness. Lois Conner shot the Cuyahoga River and concentrated on some of the 20 bridges that cross it, to capture the mix of past and present, the mingling of urban, industrial and rural along its twisting banks and shores. Michael Book captured the stillness and astonishing emptiness of certain neighborhoods in his work, which he did in 1990. Thinking back, he wrote in a preface to his chapter, he remembered as he worked that "the city was quiet, as though whispering secrets."

The book is a marvel of production: 17 colors were used in printing, including a different one for each portfolio. Dawoud Bey, Linda Butler, Lee Friedlander, Gregory Conniff, Frank Gohlke, Douglas Lucak and Nicholas Nixon also contributed portfolios.

Gund issued 2,800 copies of the book, which sells for \$40 — basically, the cost of printing. "There are not a lot of these projects being done," says Schwartz, who could only recall, in recent decades, the Seagram-financed county courthouse project done for the U.S. Bicentennial. He says parties in several other cities have been inspired to call with questions. All 148 prints from the book, plus 35 more, were included in an exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art and then donated to them.

Schwartz says his job was to shield the photographers "from the process" and any interference so they could freely pursue their vision, or, as Szarkowski would put it, find what they didn't know they were looking for. Says Schwartz, "The camera is a license to look around and investigate."



A pinhole image by Douglas Lucak



A image by Barbara Bosworth