



Photography in Transition

DONALD WOODMAN

Acknowledgments

This exhibition and catalogue would not have happened without the foresight of Mary Anne Redding, who offered me the opportunity to premiere *The Therapist* series and curated an overview of twenty years of my four decade career. And, many thanks to Christina Anchondo for her fine work on the catalogue design.

To my wife and life partner Judy Chicago, who constantly encourages and supports my working as a creative person and photographer, I am deeply thankful for her patience and, of course, appreciative of her understanding. As always, she has taken time out of her own work and given me many valuable insights into both preparing the work for exhibition and in the creation of this catalogue.

I want to thank Edward Lucie-Smith for bring to bear his incredible knowledge of art history and deep understanding of photography in looking at my work. The brilliance of his essay does credit to my work. To Don Fineberg, profound appreciation for allowing me to bring my camera into the sanctuary of therapy, which provided me a special vehicle in my personal development. Without his help in decoding the world in which I live, I would not have been able to achieve what this exhibition documents. To Michael Kimmel, much gratitude for his thoughts on the construct of masculinity in relation to the world of Rodeo and the West. His essay creates a wonderful avenue into my photo series and I hope my images shed some light on his premises.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the people who guided me early on in my career. John Peterson, who plucked me out of architecture and headed me down the road of photography; Ezra Stoller and Minor White, who taught me how to both work and make photographs and most importantly, how to see the world with my camera.

Donald Woodman
Belen NM, 2005

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Introduction

MARY ANNE REDDING

What are the relationships we “sculpt over time?” Donald Woodman’s therapist, Dr. Donald E. Fineberg, says that what is revealed in *The Therapist* series is the nature of relationships sculpted over time. I would add that this is the extended subject of each of the series included in this catalogue and the accompanying exhibition. Over the past several months, I have had the pleasure of getting to know Donald Woodman, first through brief but intense studio visits and then, more intimately, through his photographs. This relationship continues to deepen the longer I look at each of his images. Individually they begin to reveal an artist’s vision of the world, collectively, they reveal the man behind (and sometimes in front of) the camera. What do I know? That he is a big, sometimes blond, Jewish man who has been in therapy for an extended period of time and is married to artist Judy Chicago; that he is fascinated by the mythically masculine sport of the rodeo as it is played out in the Southwest under the kinds of clouds not found elsewhere in the United States; that he is horrified by the political, economic, and moral disparities of many of the scenes he records with his camera.

Sure, that’s the easy part. I sense there is much, much more to the inner life of this man and I invite you to develop your own relationship to the artist through his images. These series are stunningly beautiful in a world where beauty is often suspect and they are technically sophisticated in a world where it is all too easy to call yourself a photographer because you have a digital camera and access to a printer. Donald Woodman is one of an ebbing breed of Renaissance men who explore deeply and with unflinching vision, no matter how personally or universally difficult, the subjects that interest them. Working with Donald has been an opportunity to spend time together accepting the private challenges of curator and artist collaborating on a public project that includes looking, conversation, editing, display, and publication. The relationships Donald has with many of his collaborators are evidenced in this catalogue. Each contributes more fully to the viewers’ experience of the man and the artwork. Edward Lucie-Smith sums it up quite eloquently: “What I admire him for most is the courage with which he presents himself to us as a human being.” These images – taken together as an extended portrait of the man who made them – offer us a glimpse into the contemporary male psyche replete with emotional and physical contradictions, but honestly struggling to come to terms with his place in the world today, smartly observed through the lenses of history and art history and at the same time, permitting us an opportunity to gain a deeper insight of our own place in relationship to the internal and external landscapes we inhabit.

Photography in Transition

EDWARD LUCIE - SMITH



Untitled (detail)
1971
Silver gelatin print

Artistic Ancestry

Donald Woodman has what might be called a 'classic Modernist' photographic pedigree since he began his career as a student of Minor White [1908-1976]. In career terms, White stood at the very center of the group that created American photography as we now know it. In his youth White worked for the WPA, which fostered work by so many major photographers. After World War II, he was closely associated with Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and through them, with Alfred Stieglitz, the doyen of American Modernist photography and indeed, in many important respects, the founding father of the whole Modernist Movement in the United States.

White's work, technically, marches in step with that of these other masters. Typically, he used large format cameras, often with special filters, to produce immaculate, often quasi-abstract compositions that push the possibilities of black-and-white photography to its apparent limits.

There are, however, special features to White's work, which give it its highly individual flavor. He believed passionately, for example, in the metaphorical power of photographs, and in their ability to correspond with mental states. 'If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself -' White said, 'that is, the photograph mirrors something in himself - then his experience is some degree of Equivalence.' This is a reference to a theory already enunciated by Stieglitz, and realized in the famous series of cloud studies made in the 1920s, but White was to push things much further. It is easy to see how his attitudes find an echo in much of Donald Woodman's photography, as presented in this exhibition.

Two more of Minor White's pronouncements are also worth keeping in mind when we look at the material in this show. He often worked in photographic sequences and noted that, 'to engage a sequence we keep in mind the photographs on either side of the one in our eye.' This is advice one would do well to heed here.

The other is his perhaps unexpected declaration that 'there's no particular class of photograph that I think is any better than any other class. I'm always and forever looking for the image that has spirit! I don't give a damn how it got made.'

The Technical Background

This last pronouncement is particularly well worth keeping in mind because Woodman not only belongs to a different generation, but also operates within a very different technical sphere.

Photography — together with film and video — differs from other forms of artistic expression in several important ways. First, it is a vernacular form. In the world 'outside art,' photographs are a principal means of visual communication. Indeed, the vast majority of photographic images are made for purely practical purposes, without any form of artistic intent. In this sense photography resembles literature, whose basic material is words — words which are far more often used for strictly non-literary purposes. Some photographs made without any artistic purpose can, nevertheless, be transformed into art or incorporated in art works. One or two examples are present here.

The technical issue, in the present context, is in my view, even more important. Photography has never been a stable entity. The two forms with which it began, the daguerreotype and the calotype, were rapidly superseded, and throughout the 19th century, and throughout the 20th, there was a rapid evolution. Glass plates gave way to film; cameras became easily portable and could be held in the hand.

The emphasis, during this long evolution, was always placed on increasing convenience. The major reason for this was not simply a desire to improve photography in general, but because the photographic market was increasingly dominated by the needs and desires of non-professionals. In addition to being a vernacular form, photography was a democratic one. It seemed to make it possible for anyone to make art — or at least art of a sort.

Evolution has occasionally been combined with revolution — moments when all previous assumptions about what photography was seemed to be suddenly overturned. What was perhaps the most drastic of these moments occurred only recently, with the birth of digital photography.

This is now such a familiar means of making pictures that we tend to forget that it has been with us for only a very short time. The world's first megapixel sensor was invented by Kodak in 1986. The first professional digital camera system, a Nikon F-3 camera equipped by Kodak with a 1.3 megapixel sensor, appeared on the market in 1991. The first digital camera for the home-consumer market, which could be linked to a computer through a serial cable, was launched by Apple in February, 1994. The first digital camera with an LCD monitor appeared in the following year.

Not surprisingly, digital photography at first met with great resistance from many professional photographers, and perhaps most of all from those who belonged to the Ansel Adams, Edward Weston line of descent. Conversion to digital image-making seemed to involve the abandonment of all the darkroom skills they had so painstakingly acquired, and with pure digital, as opposed to images made by conventional machines and then scanned into a computer, there were at first severe limitations concerning the actual size of the end product. It is only very recently

indeed that these have been at least partially overcome. Using special software, it is now possible to take an image from a 5 megapixel camera and enlarge it without distortion to A1 size [594 x 841 mm or 23.386 x 33.11 inches]. In a world where photography increasingly competes with very large paintings, even this is not always large enough.

One unexpected result of this huge technological change has been a reconsideration of the early history of photography, and there has been an increasing tendency to revive and experiment with methods of image-making long discarded as obsolete. A well known example is the series of daguerrotypes made by Chuck Close in 2001-02.

Donald Woodman's work occupies a fascinating position in this ongoing technological debate, since it represents a highly original, and extremely various mixture of methods, both traditional and new.

One can go further than this, and say that the series which go to make up this show offer a highly sophisticated examination of the fluid, ever-changing nature of early 21st century photography, and a perhaps wider-ranging and more radical examination of photographic possibilities than any other American photographer active at the present moment has been willing to make.

The Holocaust Series and Harbingers of Which Future?

The most nearly conventional of these series, from a technical point of view, are the earliest. Both use long established photographic means, and both are dependent on the impact made by a sequence of images and the relationship of each image to those in immediate proximity to it.

The *Holocaust Series* springs from Woodman's collaboration with his wife, the celebrated feminist artist Judy Chicago, on the *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light*, which features a unique combination of painting and photography. These images, however, are not left-over raw material, but were made for their own sake. The photographs made by Woodman himself are interspersed with a few others that are documentary records made by the Nazis — prisoners being carried off to the camps in cattle-cars, prisoners who have committed suicide by flinging themselves against electrified barbed wire.

Each image in this series is precisely chosen to make a point — it begins, for example, with a still life of sacred books rescued from a Lithuanian synagogue. Their survival, and their battered condition, both bear witness to the stubborn sur-

vival of Jewish culture. There is a preference throughout the series for simple, iconic presentations — a few strands of barbed wire, a mortuary slab, a heap of eye-glasses preserved as plunder after their owners perished. The sequence concludes with a powerful portrait of a concentration camp survivor rolling back his sleeve to show his identifying tattoo. His level gaze holds that of the spectator.

While the series is a historical commentary, it is also deeply personal — an exploration of the photographer's sense of his own Jewish heritage and what it means to him.

Harbingers has both a narrower and at the same time a less personal focus. Made in conjunction with a project facilitated by Woodman and Chicago at Cal Poly Pomona in 2003 entitled *Envisioning the Future*, it contrasts wealth with poverty, and wasteful affluence with deprivation. The images are paired to offer social and ecological contrasts, with an emphasis on the automotive culture for which California is famous — for example a huge, apparently endless parking lot is paired with a picture of people who are homeless, and forced to live in their cars. Each pair consists of a black-and-white image linked to one in color. And garish photographic color is used in most of these pairings, to condemn the wasteful aspects of the contemporary Californian life-style.

The Rodeo and the West

As Michael Kimmel says, in his brief essay included in this catalog, 'The idea of the West has always been at the heart of the American experience.' He also notes that the rodeo has also been 'something of a fraud.' 'The rodeo was the hypermasculinity of the western cowboy rendered as a spectacle for eastern "dudes" (hence the origin of the dude ranch) with about as much authenticity as professional wrestling today.'

It is, therefore, interesting to note that the images themselves, the largest in the show, are technical hybrids of an unexpected kind. They were originally made in the mid 1980s, using a battered old 4 x 5 box camera, originally meant for glass-plate negatives, but now adapted to take 4 x 5 Polaroids. Hugely enlarged by digital means — not available when the pictures were first made — these pictures bring the spectator extremely close to the action in the arena, so much so that one feels that the photographer has sometimes had to jump aside to avoid being ridden down by the contestants.

The majority of the compositions have the composition placed on a steep diagonal — the ground-line bisects the image from corner to corner. In addition, there is a good deal of blur in many of the photographs, which emphasizes the



Sacred Heritage (detail)

Books saved from the 60 synagogues that once existed in Vilna, Lithuania prior to 1939. They were being kept by a Leningrad Refusnik, to be returned upon the completion of the restoration of the last remaining synagogue in Vilna.

1987

Silver gelatin print



The Rodeo and the West #22 (detail)
1988/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

speed of the physical actions portrayed.

One of the things that photography has inherited from painting — though too few photographers, including much-employed professional ones, seem to realize this — is a set of general laws governing pictorial composition. Every successful picture is an arrangement of shapes, within a rectangle (or, more rarely, within a space of some other kind, such as a circular tondo). These shapes have to have a satisfactory relationship to one another, and also to the edges of the containing space, or the composition will not be fully dynamic.

The *Rodeo* pictures obey these rules in a slightly unorthodox way. The use of the diagonal, combined with the amount of blur, tend to flattened the image, and bring it close to the picture-plane. These are characteristically Modernist devices and anyone reasonably familiar with early Modernist styles will notice a current of influence from Italian Futurism.

The Futurists did boast a few photographers among their number, though these are not nearly as well-known as the painters who belonged to the same group. The best remembered of these is Anton Giulio Bragaglia [1890-1960], author of the manifesto 'Fotodinamismo Futurista,' published in 1911. Bragaglia's photographs of figures in motion are more extreme in their use of blurring than Woodman's *Rodeo* series, but they belong to the same photographic family.

The fascination of the *Rodeo* series is that it ties Woodman's work so closely to the Modernist mainstream, while at the same time offering a commentary on typically American subject matter, which is deliberately and successfully heroized. These are mythical images, whose connection with what is 'real' is becoming tenuous. In photographic terms, this makes them distinctly paradoxical.

Fifteen Clouds and The Therapist Series

In different ways, these two series probably come closest to some of the ideas enunciated by Minor White. *Fifteen Clouds* is a very direct homage to Stieglitz's *Equivalents*, which use exactly the same imagery.

In terms of technique, however, they could hardly be more different. As Donald Woodman explains, in a note in this catalog, the process of producing them was particularly demanding and elaborate, despite the small size of the images themselves. The prints began as Polaroids, but the finished result looks like an etching or photogravure, with the image sitting within an embossed space.

To obtain this effect, the photographer had first to persuade Photoshop to do things that it doesn't always want to do, using Layers, and interchanging one Layer for another. Anyone who has tried scanning Polaroid prints will be aware that they

frequently have a bias towards magenta, and this was one of the problems Woodman had to overcome.

Another problem was the nature of the Iris printer, a machine now generally thought of as obsolete, because it is so inherently cranky and difficult to get consistent results from. Its attraction was that it puts one color directly over another, instead of laying down the pigment dots side by side, in the fashion of more recent and reliable digital printers.

The image is printed on a very fine, fragile rice paper in a variant of a traditional etching process called *Chine Colle*, where the paper is brushed with a coating of wheat paste, then laminated to stronger paper beneath using a press. The advantage here is that the pigments can actually penetrate the surface of the super-fine top layer, as they cannot do in most digital printing, since digital is a non-contact method.

Fifteen Clouds are an exercise in virtuosity, but also a meditation on the shifts in technique that have taken place in the eight decades since the original series of *Equivalents* was made.

The Therapist series is meditation of a different and more personal sort. As Woodman's therapist, Dr. Donald E. Fineberg, notes in his explanation, also printed here, therapy is a two-way street — the patient looks at the therapist, just as much, and just as intensely, as the therapist looks at the patient. The series is a record of these acts of observation. Woodman made a single image on every occasion that he visited his therapist. Some of these images are formal, some are spontaneous; some — the double images — required previous preparation. Some did not. They were made with several different camera, using a variety of photographic techniques.

In the most literal sense, these photographs enact a psycho-drama. We see two personalities in conjunction — colliding, overlapping, melding. They reveal the essential fluidity of human personality, in a uniquely dramatic, memorable and original way.

All this of course is something that would have deeply interested Woodman's original mentor, Minor White. Yet it also represents a level of candor that he, a deeply closeted gay man living in a far more repressive social situation than our own, could never attain.

If this exhibition has a moral it is that photography, in the right hands, can be a uniquely liberating force. For me, Donald Woodman is admirable for more than his fluid, innovative, and virtuoso approach to technique — his willingness to embrace the new without renouncing photographic tradition. What I admire him for most is the courage with which he presents himself to us as a human being.



The Therapist 7/17/1997 (detail)

1997/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

The Therapist Series

DONALD E. FINEBERG, M.D

Therapy is about a relationship. Therapists focus on their clients. They forget, all the while, that their clients are looking back. *The Therapist* documents Donald Woodman's journey of participant observations.

The photos - some candid, some posed, some multi-exposed - tell a very personal story. As with all perceptive art, Donald Woodman looks deeply inwards and from that inner vision, creates his images. Any meaningful relationship includes your anticipations and expectations. You create this important other person. Donald Woodman brings this process to light.

Photography is at the center of Donald Woodman's life. He could show a therapist his photographs and talk about them or let them talk for themselves. But, Woodman is no art critic, one step removed from the art. He makes the art in a process that had become so much a part of him. Talking about it could not convey its meaning. Doing it, right in the moment, came much closer. He aimed his lens where he aimed his attention. In the opening moments of a therapy session, he aimed at his therapist. The developed photographs themselves were never the objects of analysis. They were Donald Woodman's record of his experience. He wondered about his perceptions and his choices.

His self-exploration later became this exhibition. Woodman constructs the photographs of his outer world by using his inner vision. The process could only be understood in a series. Harsh artificial light contrasts with warming sunshine. Some images are ominous, others benign. Out of focus moments later become crisp and noted details of intense attention. Sometimes, the therapist appears in isolation, and at other times he merges with Woodman's sense of himself or of his uninhibited fantasies. In the multiple exposures, Woodman applies more than technique. He reveals his process of heart, head and spirit.

Take a moment and reflect on important people in your life. You shape every single one by your observing gaze or touch or comment. In this same way, they shape you back. You apply your own personality and your own life to the experience. You create your own world in this crucial person-to-person way. So does Donald Woodman. He invests *The Therapist* with the emotional validity and perceptual eye of his art.

To those people who ask, "So, what do these photographs mean?" I would suggest looking beyond the therapy context. Pay attention as you react to this series of photographs. These images evoke feelings about people and relationships in the life of the viewer. Each photo in the series reveals something about its subject — not just the therapist or the photographer, but the nature of relationships sculpted over time — the true subject of the exhibition.



The Therapist 7/17/1997

1997/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative
30" x 24"



The Therapist 10/21/1997

1997/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative
30" x 24"

The Therapist: An Intimate, Extended Portrait/Self-Portrait

DONALD WOODMAN

One of my first mentors and teachers, Minor White, spoke of the act of turning the camera on oneself. Consequently, in 1972, when I was working with him, I began to do self-portraits as an exercise in intuitive self-exploration. Since then, at infrequent intervals I have revisited this pursuit.

The Therapist series, which I started on July 17, 1997, some time after I first started therapy with Dr. Donald Fineberg, is both an intimate portrait of 'Dr. Don' and a self-portrait of the patient 'Donald'. The relationship between therapist and patient served as a vehicle for exploring interpersonal relationships and personal identity. The images reflect both the tenor of the session and the emotions of the moment ranging from humor to pathos. The camera became a tool for the patient/artist as I explored various states with my therapist, including resistance; the interpretation of statements; perceptions and dreams; the act of transference; along with flights of fantasy. These images act as a window into myself and metaphorically as a way to access the complexity of humanity. Thus, *The Therapist* series might be said to be an extension of my personal self examination/exploration through portraiture.

To create this series, I photographed Dr. Donald Fineberg each time that we had a therapy session. I set up the following parameter: I allowed myself only one negative at each session. I started the series using my 100 year old, 4 x 5, "Brownie Style" box camera (a camera I frequently use), shooting with Polaroid type 55 positive/negative film to record the images. As the series progressed, I chose other equipment to suit the technical requirements necessary to execute each image, working with either a 4 x 5, Graflex, single lens reflex camera or my 4 x 5 Sinar view camera, but, always using Polaroid type 55 p/n film and making one negative at each session.

To create the final prints, I first printed the Polaroid negative in the darkroom creating a traditional silver gelatin print. Then I scanned these prints and manipulated them in Photoshop. It should be noted that the multi-exposures were created in the camera and not in Photoshop, thereby adhering to the original concept of allowing myself only one negative at each session. The final prints were produced on Epson Ultra Smooth Fine Art paper using an Epson 9600 ink jet printer. Although I originally conceived for the series to last one year (an arbitrary time frame), I found the challenge of the photographic problem, making only one negative at each session and the idea of a portrait as a series of images creating an extended portrait, very interesting. Thus, I continued making images over a four year period. I made the last exposure on September 24, 2001, two weeks after the infamous events of 9/11/2001, at a time when I was teaching at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, KY and commuting back to New Mexico. It seemed to both me and my therapist that the series was at an end. The process was occupying too much of our sessions time and we had new work to take on, which required more focused and traditional therapeutic methods.



The Therapist 6/18/1998

1998/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative
30" x 24"



The Therapist 8/12/1999

1999/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative
30" x 24"



The Therapist 6/29/2000

2000/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

30" x 24"



The Therapist 8/10/2000

2000/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

30" x 24"



The Therapist 10/26/2000

2000/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

30" x 24"



The Therapist 4/5/2001

2001/2004

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

30" x 24"

Fifteen Clouds

DONALD WOODMAN

Fifteen Clouds represents an investigation into the use of digitized photography and Iris printing to transform imagery as opposed to making the type of contrived images so often seen in these techniques. The original photographs were created using a Polaroid Spectra camera and film, with the subject matter harking back to the series *Equivalents* created by Alfred Stieglitz. The premise of his photographs was that clouds are there for everyone to use; my challenge was to make personal images which could evoke a myriad of feelings.

The process I employed is simple in concept, yet complex in execution. The modest 2"x3" prints were scanned at very high resolution and then the images were taken into Adobe PhotoShop and manipulated. My overriding goal was to find a way to create a tonally rich image that evoked in the viewer all the delight and imagination one experiences when looking at clouds. In order to achieve a rich range in tones, I chose to print a seemingly monochromatic image using full-four color when outputted to an Iris Printer. I chose to keep the size small (4"x5") in order to maintain a relationship to the scale of the originally captured image and also to create a visual context which can afford the viewer an intimate experience.

When exploring the Iris Print process I chose to draw upon ideas and techniques that I have previously employed in creating photogravure prints. After much experimentation and lots of trial and error, I found a way to print on *Chine Colle* paper using a copper plate to create both an embossed space for the image to sit and an ultra-smooth surface to print on. The resulting print has the rich tonal qualities I was after as well as great depth of surface, both qualities I have found lacking in traditional Iris Prints.



Cloud #2

from *Fifteen Clouds*

1988

Iris print on *Chine Colle* from Polaroid Spectra print

4" x 5"



Cloud #6

from Fifteen Clouds

1988

Iris print on Chine Colle from Polaroid Spectra print

4" x 5"



Cloud #9

from Fifteen Clouds

1988

Iris print on Chine Colle from Polaroid Spectra print

4" x 5"



Harbingers of Which Future? 1A

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"

Harbingers of Which Future?

DONALD WOODMAN

I have learned too much about the extreme disparities of our world. Consequently, on TV, in other media, in advertising, during my daily activities, and on the streets that I travel each day, I find myself constantly confronted with painful contrasts and polarizations. These seem to exist side-by-side everywhere I turn and these contradictions are very difficult to escape. Most of the time I feel helpless in the face of them and, truthfully, would rather not deal with them at all. At the same time, I believe that taking pictures is a way of bearing witness to the inequities about which I can do so little, but nevertheless, upset me.

The series was created and exhibited as part of the *Envisioning the Future* proj-



Harbingers of Which Future? 1B

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"

ect which I co-facilitated with my wife, the artist, Judy Chicago at Cal Poly Pomona in the fall of 2003. The work from the project was on exhibition at multiple venues in January and February 2004. *Envisioning the Future* was a unique interdisciplinary project in which we facilitated a group of over 70 artists to imagine, create, and exhibit diverse images of the future.

The series of paired images which I created attests to some of the scenes I encountered in my four months living in the "Inland Empire," the area surrounding the Pomona Valley east of Los Angeles, CA. When I think about the future, I wonder what it will be and for whom.



Harbingers of Which Future? 4A

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"



Harbingers of Which Future? 4B

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"



Harbingers of Which Future? &A

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"



Harbingers of Which Future? 8B

2003/04

Ink Jet print from scanned 6 x 7 film

44" x 53"

17 Images from the Holocaust

DONALD WOODMAN

In 1985 my wife, the artist Judy Chicago, and I embarked on an eight year exploration into the subject of the Holocaust. Our journey took us to many Holocaust museums and archives around the world. We spent 2½ months traveling through the “landscape of the Holocaust,” visiting concentration camps, massacre sites, abandoned Jewish ghettos and cemeteries, as well as death camps. Both Judy and I came from non-religious families and had very little exposure to the Holocaust. My most vivid memories were from TV programs aired during the late 50’s that chronicled the events of WWII and also from the very striking photographs by Margaret Bourke-White, which I became familiar with in my exploration into the history of photography.

This journey culminated in a large traveling exhibition, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light*, which explores the subject matter of the Holocaust in depth and asks many questions of the viewer, the least of which is, what does it mean to “never forget?” These seventeen photographs are a series of images selected from the hundreds of photographs I made during our travels and exploration into the subject and was created to give an brief overview of my experience. Included are several historic images which were chosen because they were images that kept showing up at various archives we visited and I felt that most people’s experience of the Holocaust was from photographs taken of the camps and prisoners at and after liberation. I wanted to tie what I found forty-three years later with images that were now deeply embedded in my consciousness.



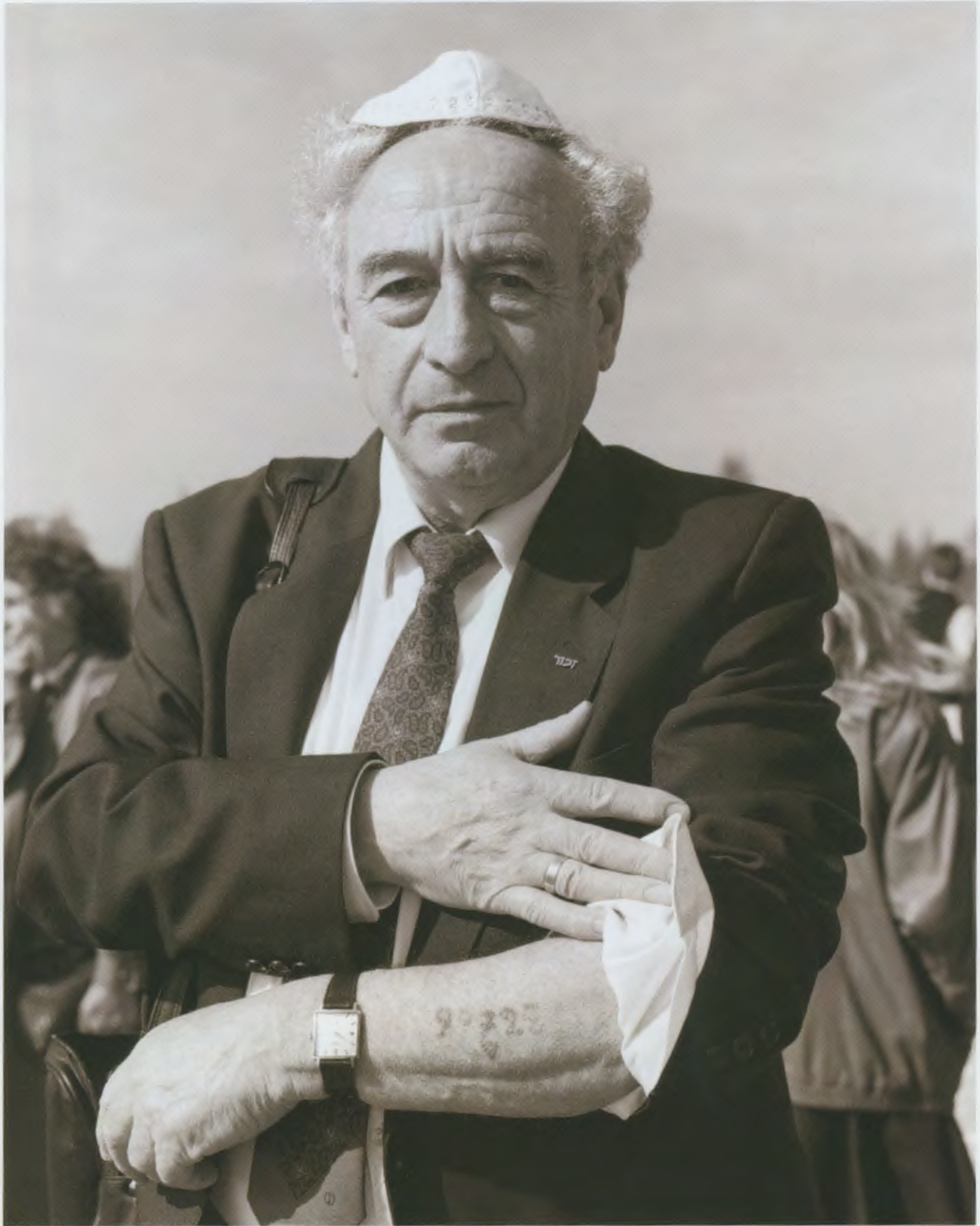
Eye glass case at Auschwitz

Eye glasses collected from people murdered in the gas chambers.

1987

Silver gelatin prints

14" x 11"



Pain Revealed #99722 – Max Mannheimer

A survivor whom I met at a Day of Remembrance at Dachau.

1987

14" x 11"



The Rodeo and the West #23

1988/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

44" x 53"

The Rodeo and the West
The photographs of Donald Woodman

MICHAEL KIMMEL

The idea of the west has always been the heart of the American experience. It's a simple equation: frontier plus freedom equaled hope, possibility, optimistic exuberance. It's the place where failed easterners could reinvent themselves, start over. It's the land of the do-over. And since the end of the 19th century, that idea has been captured by the rodeo, a showcase of the skills and thrills necessary to tame the wilderness, stake one's claim, and finally succeed.

From its origins, that ideal has also been a powerfully masculine one. The west is a world of men, a world where they test themselves against the forces of nature and tame it. And the rodeo is the spectacle of that masculinity, a world of men's men, of men among men.



The Rodeo and the West #21

1988/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

44" x 53"

And it's also been something of a fraud. The rodeo was the hypermasculinity of the western cowboy rendered as spectacle for eastern "dudes" (hence the origin of the dude ranch) with about as much authenticity as professional wrestling today.

You see, by the time the rodeo was formally created, by such showman as P. T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill Cody, the frontier had just about disappeared. The rodeo cowboy arrived just as his real-life prototype had been reduced to a soggy, lonely proletarian, "less a knight errant and more a hired man on horseback," as Wallace Stegner put it. The first rodeo was held in Pecos, Texas in 1883; five years later, folks in Prescott, Arizona actually paid an admission fee to see those cowpokes poke those cows. Within a few years, rodeos were highly disciplined, rules-bound affairs,

an “annual resurrection of the west as it was, for the edification of the west as it is” proclaimed a booster for Cheyenne, Wyoming’s “Frontier Days.” A magazine writer explained in 1909:

Civilization is pushing everything before it: thriving cities and well kept farms are taking the place of the cattle upon a thousand hills. But the pioneer still clings with a pathetic tenacity to the old customs ... a pathetic but vigorous desire ... to prove that strong arms and courageous hearts still existed on the range.

What we lose in reality, goes the Freudian truism, we recreate in fantasy.

As fantasies, rodeos became big business, glamorous displays of hardy untrammelled masculinity. And they became professionalized, touring the south and west, harking back to the turn of the century, honing increasingly anachronistic skills while hawking the latest trinkets and souvenirs. Whatever might have been left of that virtuous virility the rodeo had initially celebrated had melted into consumerist stew except at the local level, among everyday folk who returned the rodeo to its original purpose — the preservation and celebration of those masculine skills, testing one’s mettle against the forces of nature. While the large-scale national rodeo is the domain of rhinestone cowboys, at local rodeos people still got dirty.

One of the most startling qualities of Donald Woodman’s photographs in *The Rodeo and the West* is the raw immediacy of the images. They’re blurry, off-center, and frenetic. Sometimes, he feels too far away for the stylized close-up of the professional rodeo portrait of those blow-dried buckaroos. He’s a spectator as we are, a little distant. Yet at other times, he’s right in the ring, and one can almost feel him jerk the camera away as he snaps the shutter, a split-second before the horse or bull got too dangerously close. As he’s there, so are we: dirt flies up in the air, and we wince lest it hit us. We can hear the galloping hooves. As a viewer more than once I started to shout out to the rider to pull up to keep from falling.

To somehow capture the authenticity of this local rodeo, Woodman stripped down his equipment, refitting a turn of the century Brownie camera, which enabled him to reveal to modern eyes what rodeo must have been like to real people in real life. Of course, reality is not the same as pretty. It’s unsentimental, unromanticized, entirely lacking in glamour. In that sense, the rodeo represents the other side of the American dream — not the one that flamboyantly triumphs over nature, but the one that fails, the one that starts over, that falls off their horse, picks themselves up, and does it again.

Michael Kimmel

Author of *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*



The Rodeo and the West #33

1988/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

53" x 44"



The Rodeo and the West #22

1988/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

44" x 53"



The Rodeo and the West
DONALD WOODMAN

The Rodeo and the West #39

1985/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

44" x 53"

The Rodeo and the West is a series of photographs made at small town Rodeos including: Galisteo, NM; Faith, SD; Belen, NM, and includes a glimpse of the western range land. It is an unpretentious observation of a romanticized west, looking behind the hype and myth surrounding this now highly commercialized 'sport.'

Photographed with a 100 year old Brownie Style box camera, fitted with a Polaroid back and using Polaroid 4x5 type 55 p/n film, the series emphasizes the rough and tumble, gritty side of this super macho arena, where women are allowed to excel only in a single event — Barrel Racing — that requires both speed and extraordinary 'horsemanship.' The language used behind the scenes and in the chutes reflects the battle to control then tame and conquer 'wild' beasts, a metaphor for the subjugation of nature, and exudes a brutal sexuality.

To create the prints, I made traditional silver gelatin prints in the darkroom and then scanned the images and worked on them in Photoshop. The final prints are produced on Epson Ultra Smooth Fine Art paper using an Epson Ultrachrome ink jet printer.



Where the Buffalo Roam

From *The Rodeo and the West*

1985/2005

Ink Jet print from 4x5 Polaroid 55 p/n negative

44" x 53"

Biography

Donald Woodman graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1969 with a BS degree in Architecture along with an extensive background in photography. During his last year in school and immediately after graduation, he worked as an architectural photographer and assistant to architectural photographer, Ezra Stoller. From 1970 - 1972 he developed his creative photography abilities working with photographer Minor White at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. He assisted White in teaching workshops and was director of the Creative Photography Lab's Gallery. In 1972, Woodman settled in New Mexico, working for five years at the Sacramento Peak Solar Observatory, doing sophisticated scientific photography and solar observations, including land-based and Sky-Lab photographic research. This later endeavor stimulated his interest in filmmaking and video work. Woodman pursued this work by enrolling in film courses at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM. In 1980, he enrolled in the MFA program in photography at the University of Houston, Houston, TX, studying with George Krause. He continued his interest in film and video, working on documentary film projects and doing live video with various performance artists. At the University of Houston, he taught photography and helped to establish the University of Houston's Lawndale Annex, an alternative exhibition space for artists. From 1977 - 1983 he worked as painter Agnes Martin's personal assistant while continuing his own studio work. From 1985-1993, he collaborated with artist Judy Chicago on the *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light* which uniquely combines painting and photography and aptly demonstrates his impressive photographic skills. This exhibition has traveled extensively. For the past twenty-five years, Woodman has maintained a freelance, commercial photography business. His work includes location and studio photography as well as film, video and digital work. He has worked with a variety of subjects, using all camera formats and specializing in large format photography for architectural photography, editorial photography, fine art photography and catalogue and product photography. He has received support from the Polaroid Corporation and his work is included in the prestigious Polaroid Collection Program. His work is also included in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; the Museum of Art and History, Fribourg, Switzerland; the Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM; The Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, NM; the New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Butler Art Institute, Youngstown, OH, and various private collections.

Selected Invitational Exhibitions:

Common Ground: Discovering Community in 150 Years of Art, Selections from the Collection of Julia J. Norrell, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. October 2004 - January 2005.

Aging: A State of Mind, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY. September 2003 - June 2004.

Naked Before God, The Museum of New Art, Parnu, Estonia, May 2003.

Jewish Artists: On the Edge, College of Santa Fe Fine Arts Gallery and The Anne & John Marion Center for Photographic Arts, June 2000; Yeshiva University Museum, Center for Jewish History, New York, NY, August 2001 - April 2002.

Photographic Fin-De-Siecle Self Portrait Show - Part Two - Toward A New Millennium, Andrew Smith Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, December 2000 - February 2001.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

Fifteen Clouds and Rodeo and the West, Paul Paletti Gallery, Louisville, KY, November 2002 - January 2003.

Fifteen Clouds, Flanders Contemporary, Minneapolis, MN, May 31 - July 6, 2002.

Looking Back: Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman, Lyons Matrix Gallery, Austin, TX, 1994/95.

Selected Group Exhibitions:

New Mexico 2000, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM, October 1999 - April 2000.

In the Documentary Tradition, Etherton Gallery, Tucson, AZ, January - March 1999.

Iglesias Antiguas, Scheinbaum & Russek Ltd. Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, 1992.

TIP 85 FRIBOURG, 4th International Triennial Exhibition of Photography, Fribourg, Switzerland, 1985.

Donald Woodman: Photography in Transition Exhibition Checklist

The Therapist

61 Images

All images are Archival Ink Jet Prints from 4"x5" Polaroid 55 p/n negatives, 30"x 24" each.

7/17/1997/2004	11/17/1998/2004	6/29/2000/2004
7/21/1997/2004	12/3/1998/2004	8/10/2000/2004
8/4/1997/2004	12/18/1998/2004	9/14/2000/2004
8/18/1997/2004	1/14/1999/2004	9/27/2000/2004
9/7/1997/2004	1/25/1999/2004	10/26/2000/2004
9/18/1997/2004	3/5/1999/2004	11/1/2000/2004
10/21/1997/2004	3/18/1999/2004	11/17/2000/2004
11/15/1997/2004	6/4/1999/2004	12/1/2000/2004
12/11/1997/2004	8/5/1999/2004	12/22/2000/2004
1/8/1998/2004	6/4/1999/2004	1/5/2001/2004
1/19/1998/2004	8/12/1999/2004	2/12/2001/2004
2/5/1998/2004	10/28/1999/2004	3/22/2001/2004
4/30/1998/2004	11/5/1999/2004	4/5/2001/2004
5/5/1998/2004	1/10/2000/2004	5/2/2001/2004
6/18/1998/2004	1/17/2000/2004	5/16/2001/2004
7/16/1998/2004	2/7/2000/2004	5/31/2001/2004
8/6/1998/2004	3/2/2000/2004	6/14/2001/2004
9/1/1998/2004	5/11/2000/2004	7/10/2001/2004
9/17/1998/2004	5/17/2000/2004	7/24/2001/2004
10/8/1998/2004	6/6/2000/2004	9/24/2001/2004
10/22/1998/2004	6/15/2000/2004	

Fifteen Clouds

1998

All images are Iris Prints on Chine Colle from Polaroid Spectra prints, 4"x 5" each.

Cloud #1	Cloud #9
Cloud #2	Cloud #10
Cloud #3	Cloud #11
Cloud #4	Cloud #12
Cloud #5	Cloud #13
Cloud #6	Cloud #14
Cloud #7	Cloud #15
Cloud #8	

Harbingers of Which Future?

2003-04

8 Diptychs

All images are Archival Ink Jet Prints from scanned 6 x 7 film, 44"x 53" each.

Donald Woodman: Photography in Transition Exhibition Checklist

Holocaust Series

1987

Sacred Heritage

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Remnant

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

A Train going through the Woods of Frankfurt, Germany.

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Jews being Transported to the Camps.

Historic Photo

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

The Ramp at Birkenau (Auschwitz).

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

Natzweiler - Struhof KZ

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Barbed Wire

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Prisoners who have Committed Suicide on the Electrified Barbed Wire Fence of the Camp.

Historic Photo

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

The Autopsy Table at Natzweiler.

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

Medial Science

Historic Photo

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Canada

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Male Prisoners at Roll Call.

Historic Photo

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

Eye Glass Case at Auschwitz.

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

Mass Murder

Historic Photo

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Jewish Cemetery, Warsaw

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

Jewish Cemetery, Vilna, Lithuania

Silver gelatin print

11" x 14"

Pain Revealed #99722 -

Max Mannheimer

Silver gelatin print

14" x 11"

The Rodeo and the West

25 Images

All images are Archival Ink Jet Prints from 4"x5" Polaroid 55 p/n negatives, horizontal 44"x 53" each, vertical 53" x 44" each.

01-1980/2005

03-1985/2005

04-1988/2005

11-1985/2005

12-1980/2005

13-1980/2005

16-1986/2005

19-1988/2005

20-1985/2005

21-1988/2005

22-1988/2005

23-1988/2005

25-1988/2005

31-1983/2005

33-1988/2005

36-1980/2005

37-1988/2005

38-1980/2005

39-1985/2005

41-1980/2005

43-1980/2005

47-1985/2005

48-1999/2005

Home on the Range, 1985/2005

Where the Buffalo Roam, 1985/2005



DONALD WOODMAN