

Notes on
Life Story #1

Casebere

*begin in
New York* The information which follows describes Life Story Number One
and finished ~~in New York~~ in L.A.. All of the
final prints were made in Los Angeles.

The work is intended to read as a life story in ten parts. Ten chapters are represented by and consist of one black and white photographic image each. There is no accompanying text beyond the title for the whole work.

If a photograph records an instant in the continuous movement of time, in this case the instant which is frozen by the photograph represents time in a larger sense. It represents what might be called "the time", a stage in a reconstructed life story. Each photograph is less an event than a stage or period in this life story. As such, each picture depends upon the larger context for its full meaning. This time (the past), becomes in the act of the completed work, categorically closed in ten pictures and enclosed all in one story.

Each picture presents itself as the arena and sign for a ritualistic act of returning to a studio daily with the intention to sum up a period of this life. This "summing up" is an act of reflective assimilation. It is the process by which we make meaning of our actions. Each image becomes an act of meaning formation. It is the separation of the continuity of experience into discrete units and their reassembly into a higher, more complex meaning context or configuration. This work is entitled Life Story Number One with the awareness that the meaning of a lived experience undergoes modifications depending on the temporal distance from which it is observed. The correct thing is to die upon completion of ones life story so revisions are impossible.

My use of photography has been related to the notion of metaphor in that a metaphor establishes a connection that is immediately and sensually perceived whereas an allegory starts with an abstract notion and almost arbitrarily chooses a way to represent it.

Each image either represents a different location or signifies a change in vantage point - from inside to out or near to far. Architectural landmarks herein structure memory according to location. The story of a life is indicated by the movement from one place to the next. It is not, however, necessarily a matter of the relocation of a personal dwelling.

There exist certain contradictions and ambiguities in each image and a confluence throughout. When those contradictions are the same from image to image they function as formal constraints. The fact of the recurrence of certain forms relates to syntactic construction. When those ambiguities stand out, one against the next, we confront the semantic half of the structure, the vertical axis of association.

Image #1 is a typical suburban home with a lawnmower out front. A sidewalk leads from the garage driveway to the front door. The edges of what appear to be identical houses enter the image from either side. There is a horizon line $1/3$ the way up the picture plane and the sky is bright. The windows are blank, and the black front door is slightly lower and to the right of center frame. The roof and chimney are dark, the facade slightly brighter than the sky. This is the "Once upon a time", the starting point.

Image #2 is more two dimensional than the first. Depth, in the first image is indicated by a.) the driveway approaching the bottom of the frame, or the foreground, b.) the line and shadow between the house and garage, c.) the sides and shadows of the adjacent houses. Otherwise, the facade and roof seem flat.

Image #2 is like a weather map. The leaves, trees, buildings and ground look like and are pieces of mat board against another flat surface. The basketball backboard casts a shadow, standing out in relief, having more dimension. The image refers to an idea of a place rather than looking like the space itself.

It is a transitionary image meant to move the viewer into what follows. It creates the aura of memory by referring to the T.V.

symbol we see when a station goes off the air. Since the picture is at a slight angle in the frame, surrounded by black, we think of a cinematic fade or flashback. The tilt refers to the turning leaves, turning seasons, the passing and dipping back into time.

Image #3 is a bedroom with bunkbeds on the left, two desks facing each other on the right and identical lamps on each desk. Books, a pair of pants and a chair are thrown on the floor. A small table is under the window and a sock hangs from a huge nail next to a picture on the wall at right. Unlike the first two pictures all the objects here are white. The ground is black. The space of the room is both defined and made ambiguous by the positions of the objects within it. The only two objects which overlap are the desks. The only shadows cast from one object to another are from one desk to the other and from the first desk to a pile of books. These elements, the position of the window, the enlargement of the objects and the loss of focus in the foreground create the sense of a room. The isolation of the smaller objects, (mainly piles of books), in the center and their creeping out to the lower right and left creates an entropic sensation.

Image #4 has to do with desire. It is meant to epitomize desire; to desire the viewer and instill the same emotion in him. Theoretically feminine, with billowing curtains, tile roof like curls, full moon, and a dark door at the center, it is a vertical building with a balcony that might refer to Rapunzal, Juliet, etc.. This is a romantic image. The image itself is vertical.

Image #5 represents desire consummated. This horizontal image is the lovers bedroom and the curtains from the preceding image are seen on the right from the inside. The bed, on a diagonal, has above it, and hanging from the wall a bow with arrow poised to shoot at it's two overlapping pillows. The objects are all a soft grey against a lighter grey background. The wall and floor are only nominally defined. There is a lamp and table in the foreground to the left.

Image #6 is formally the mirror image of the preceding one. The lighting, the values are the same, The grey now refers to green surgical attire, the lighter background the sterile operating room. The bed has become an operating table, the dresser a cabinet with surgical instruments, the doors the doors to a scrub room. The arrow is now a knife.

These two images form the symmetrical center of the work. They might, coupled with their counterparts on either side signify love and death. If I. signifies inside and O. outside, the entire work reads from left to right as follows: O.,O.,I.,O.,I.,I.,O., I.,O.,O.. The series begins with the exterior of a suburban home (innocent beginnings?) and ends with a confrontation with the big city (the real world, new beginnings).

There is an attempt to meet each of these image face to face. No obtuse angles are used, no aerial or macro-photography.

Image #7 is basically the same image as the first with a few exceptions. It is now night. The sky goes black. The camera moves back to encompass more space. The lawnmower cuts a swatch of grass in a curve to the outside, then back toward the center and falls on its side. Two of the windows are black and more of the houses on either side are now visible, including a portion of the driveway from the garage on the right. As desire had its consummation so too does illness reach an end. Whereas the fulfillment of desire leads one in to warmth, the circle of illness and death leads one back out into the cold to experience loss.

The problem of actor is now made apparent - the question of the mover behind the lawnmower. It may be that the "mover" went inside at the reception of the news of death and we are left looking at a house filled with tragedy. Where are the actors in the other photos? In the second one we seem satisfied to know that the wind is whipping the leaves in a circle - seemingly into and through the basketball hoop. In the third picture the actor may have just left by way of the lower left hand side of

the frame, knocking over the chair as he went. In the fourth we have the impression there is something waiting inside and we are invited to enter somehow, if we can. In the fifth we have entered into a union the signs of which are all around, the participants invisible (except obliquely represented by the billows). "We", of course, have entered into no union but have returned to the role of spectator. In the sixth, the room is ready and waiting, presumably for the patient. Finally, we are back to the seventh image where the actor appears to have gone inside. Once inside we arrive at the eighth image.

Image #8 is positioned vertically like the fourth. The objects are white against a black ground as in the third image. It contains components for both making and viewing video as well as film. They are arranged as if hung on a wall before us. In the image, the camera is aimed at the area above the stool, towards the wheels of the monitor stand. There is nothing there. That, presumably, is where the actor should be.

The intention is to embody the idea of self-investigation. The screens above are both blank. The equipment is ready to use. It could also be about making art, and the question "What do I do now?" It is about committing oneself, starting over, making a choice. It is a matter of responsibility for the anonymous actor, and by extension, the viewer as participant.

The flat space of the background relates strongest to that of the second and third photos. The screen to the shape of the houses, boxcars, and desks, and the video screen more to windows and doors.

Image #9 is the boxcar picture. The alignment of three rectangular forms in the center relates to the suburban house photos. The empty car with door open is thrust up at an angle at the center. This is where the actor resides - in transit. It is not a smooth ride. The open door refers to every dark door and black void in the group. The only pictures lacking this void are the two in the center where, obviously, experience is most intense.

The lighting from the lower left helps to indicate that the sun is low and the train on a cliff. One rear wheel of the center car has slid off the tracks. It is an alarming situation but we have no evidence that the train either has or will completely derail.

This picture is meant to function like the second image in that it moves one through time and space. That movement is dramatized by the pressure of one car against the next as well as the compression of this horizontal image between two vertical ones.

A similiar likeness can be seen between the third and eighth photos where the former contains tools for learning and the latter action.

Image #10 is New York City seen from the Staten Island Ferry. The gates to the city are the terminal ramp. Beyond the dark door on the right and the pilings on the left (ala homage to Stieglitz) rise the skyscrapers of the city.

This picture, like the other two vertical ones presents an invitation, however foreboding. It is multi-valued, not just black and white. Here the actor, or viewer, is left face to face with the archetypal big city. It is the real world in all its tumultuous complexity.