## Lee Friedlander In the Picture Self-Portraits 1958–2011





I have found it helpful at any given moment to know who I am, not to speak of where I am geographically, historically, botanically, geologically.

from The Games of Night, by Jim Harrison

## Lee Friedlander In the Picture Self-Portraits 1958-2011

AFTERWORD BY RICHARD BENSON

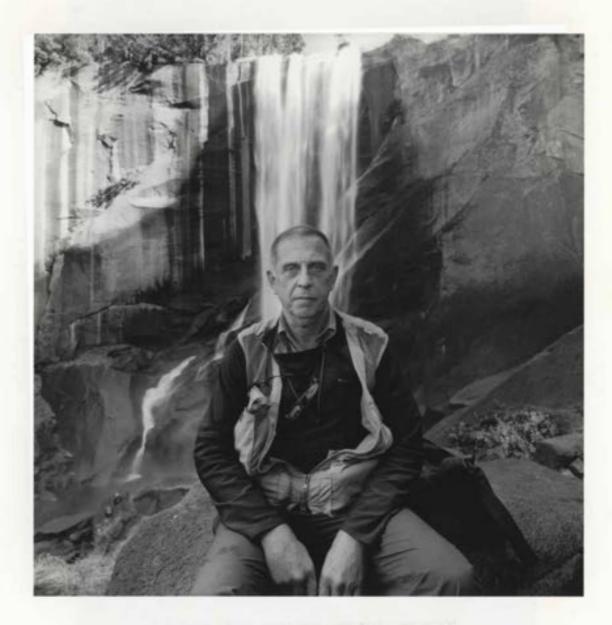
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW HAVEN AND LONDON
YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, NEW HAVEN

If I'm in a crowd, if I'm alone on the street or in my home,

I'm going to live the life I sing about

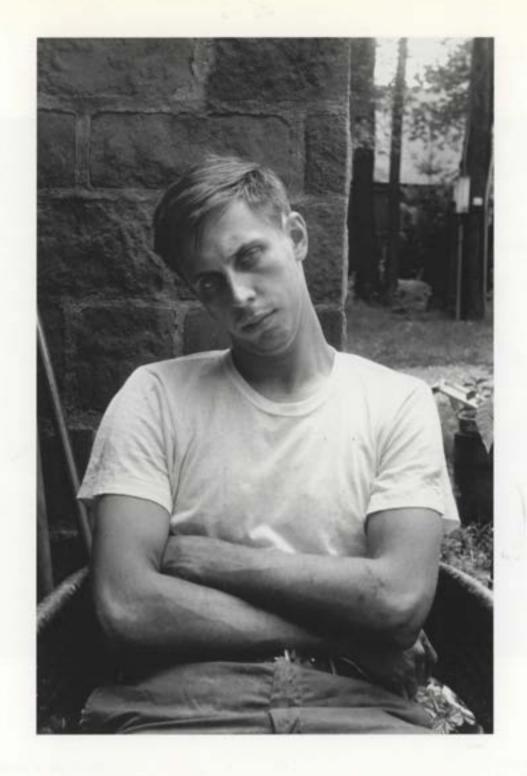
in my song.

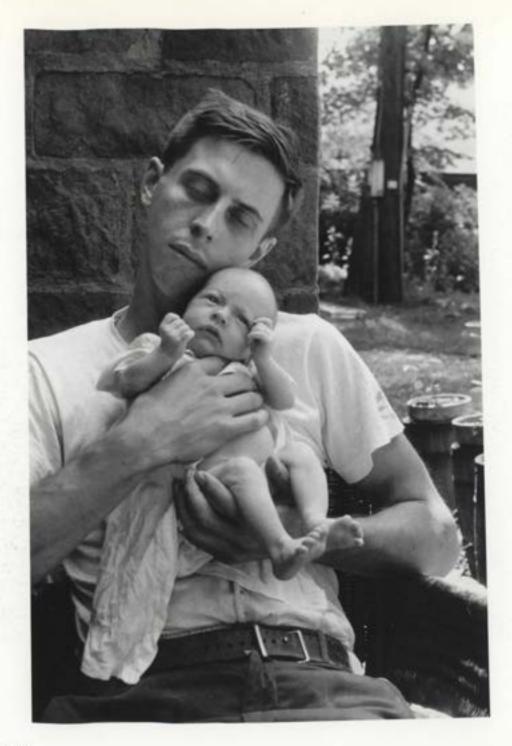
from "I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing about in My Song," by Thomas A. Dorsey



Again for Maria, over and over and over again.











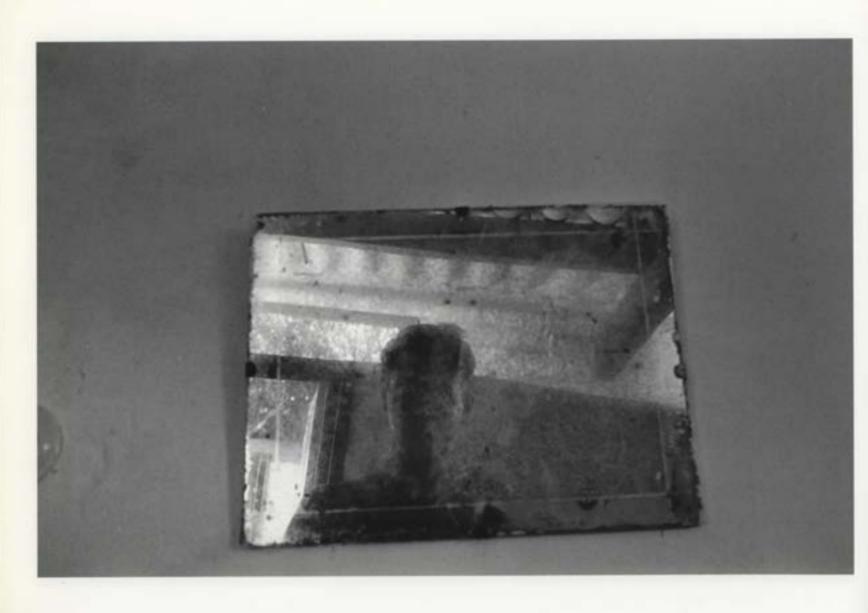










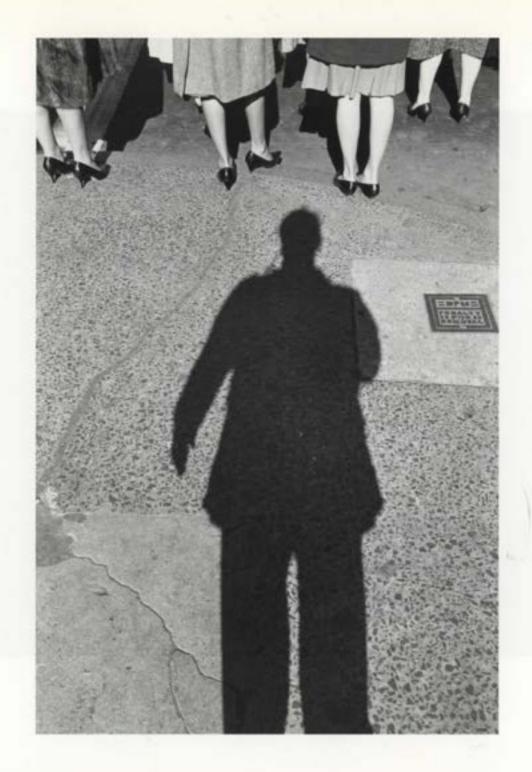


















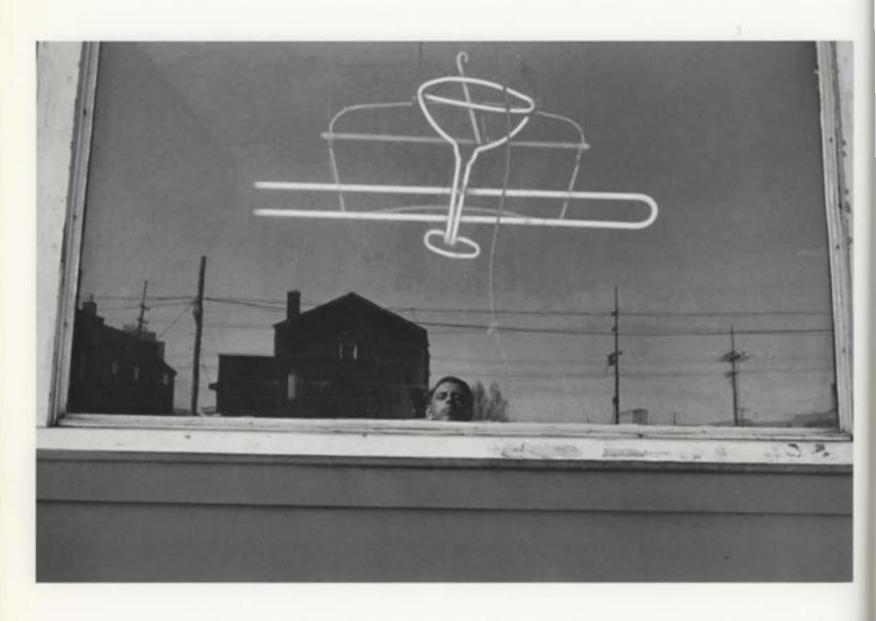






























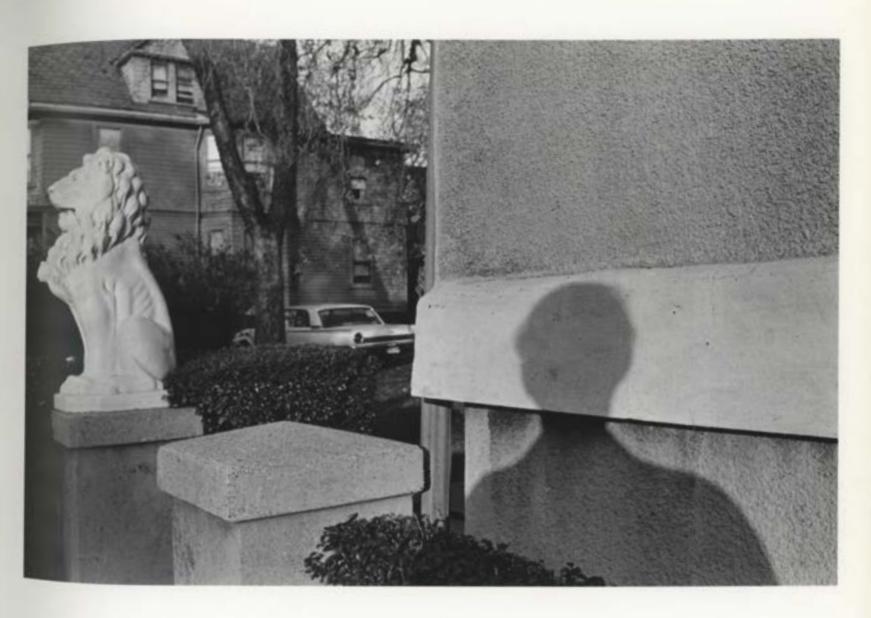




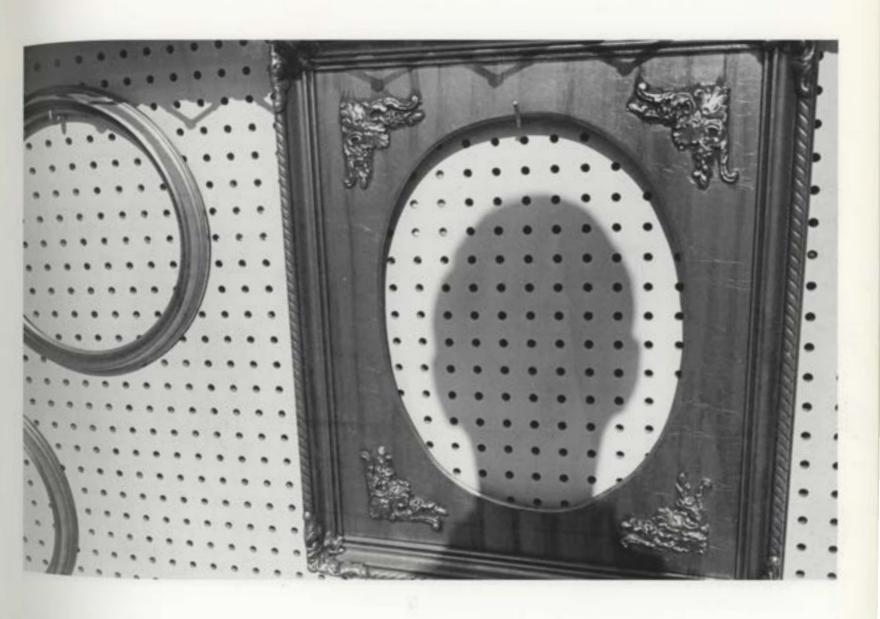












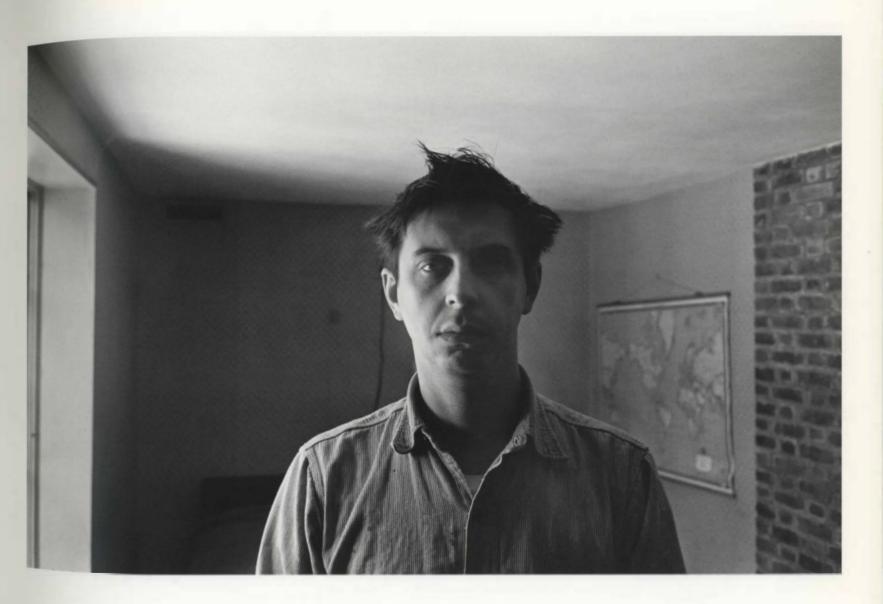














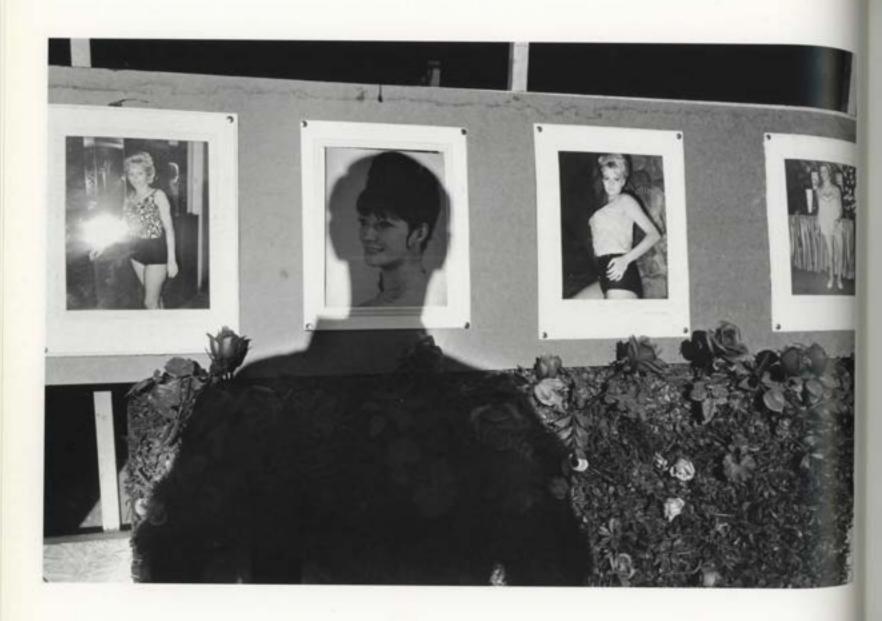












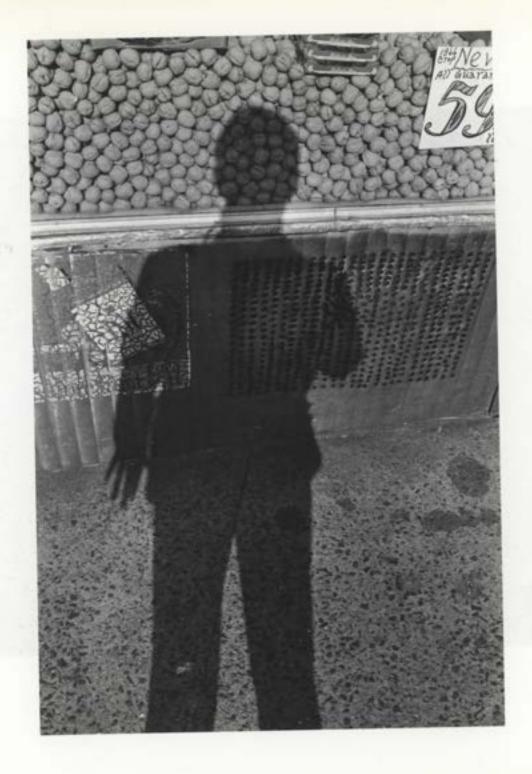








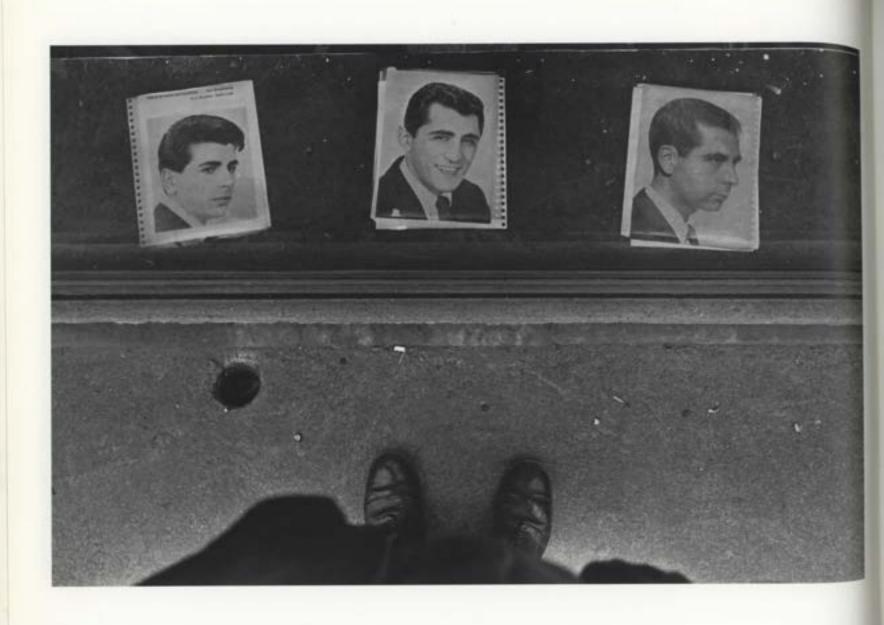






## AMERICAN TEMPORARIES MALE DIVISION













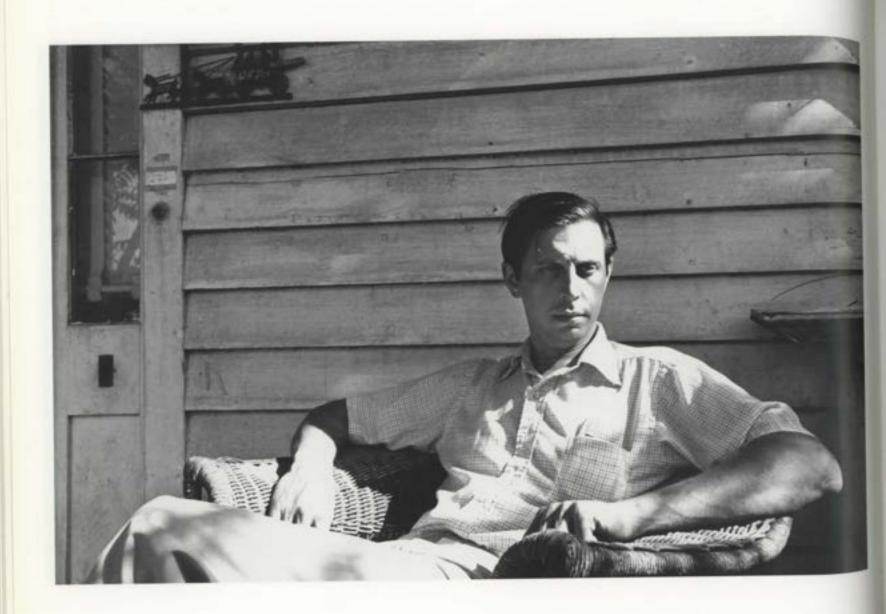




















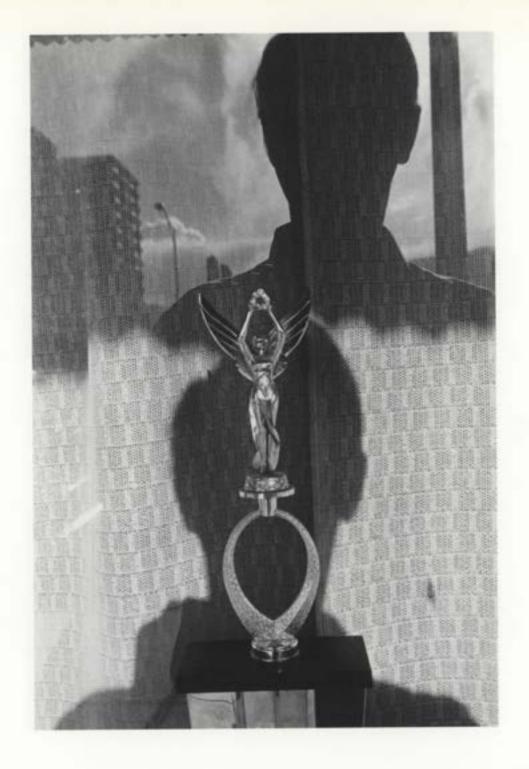






























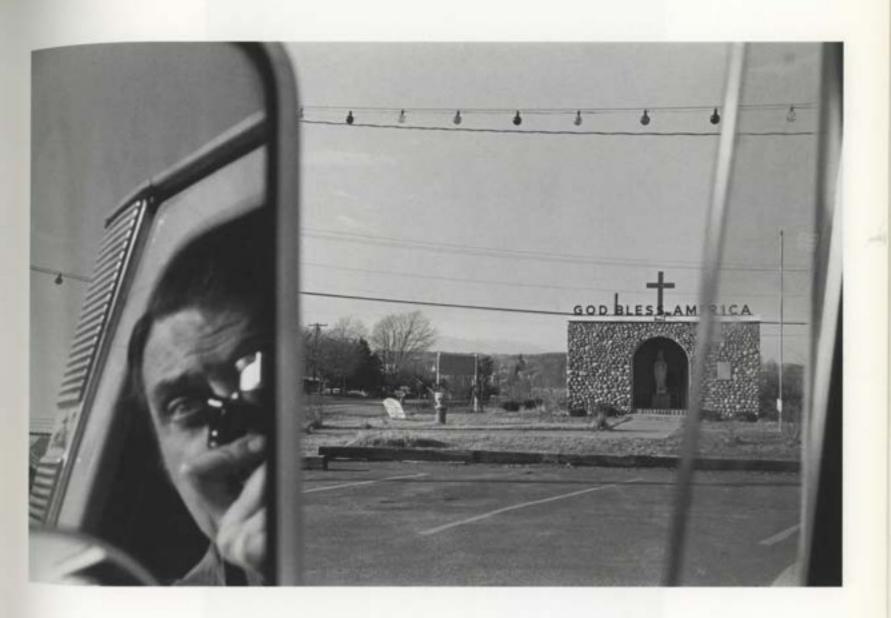




















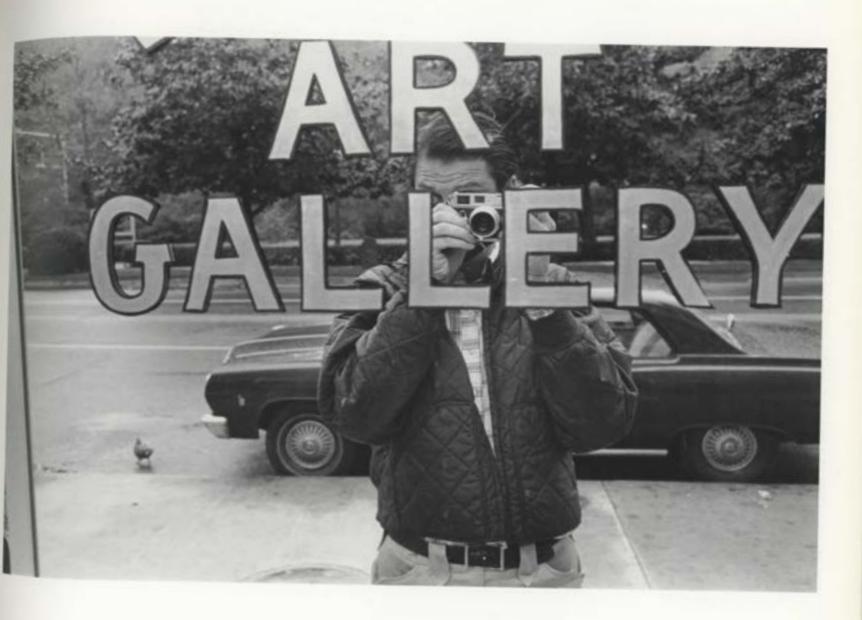






















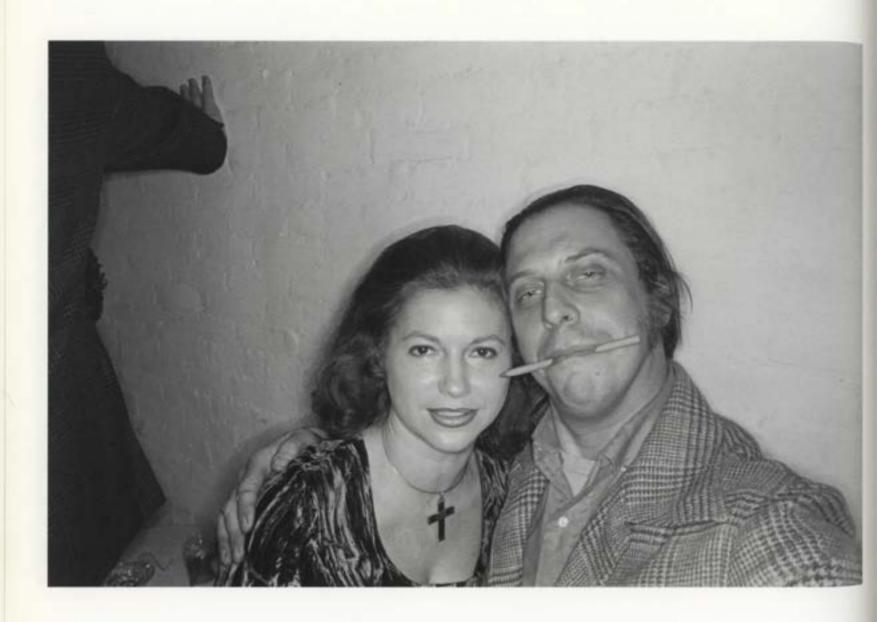
















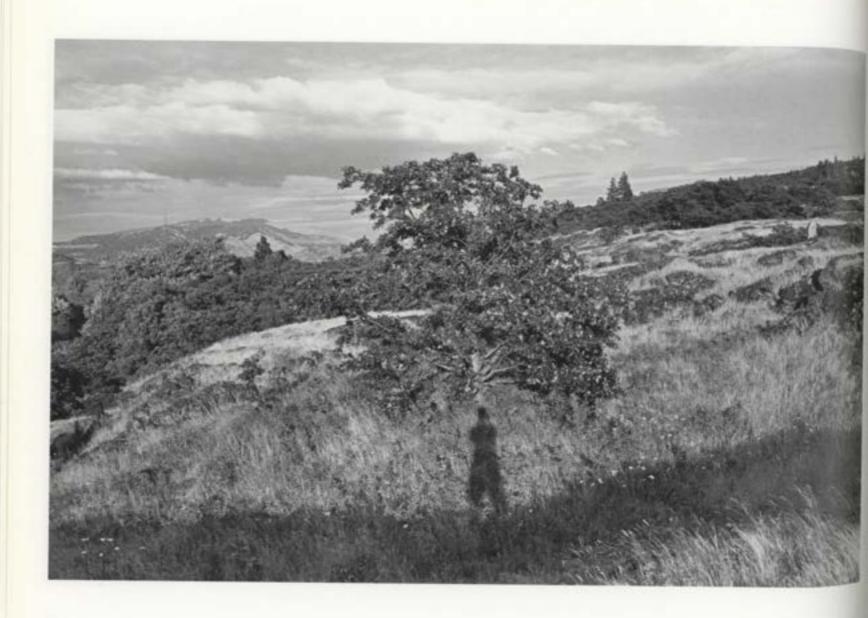


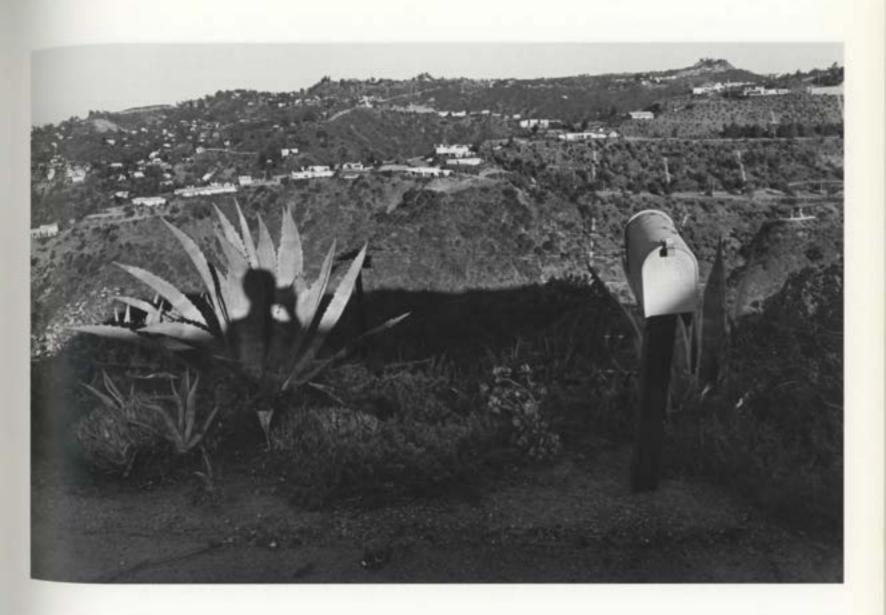












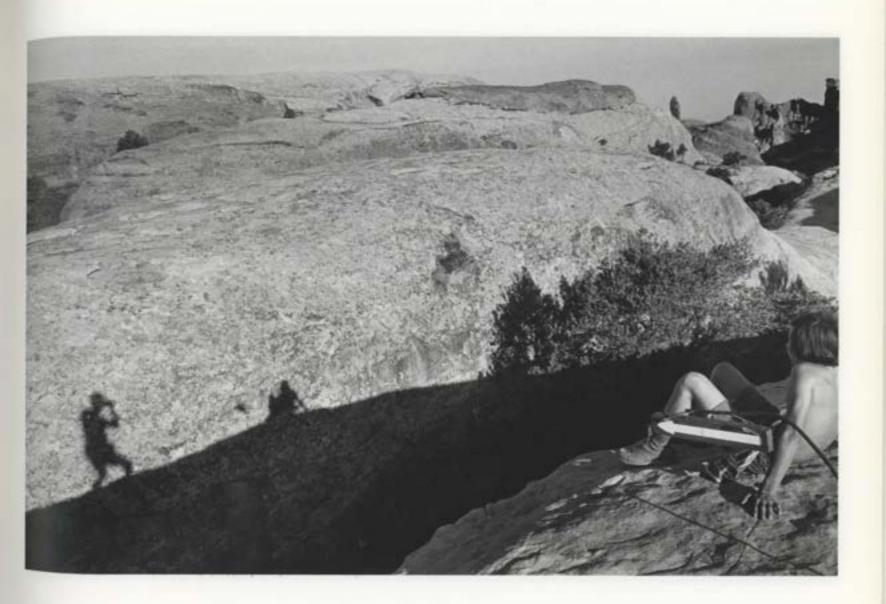


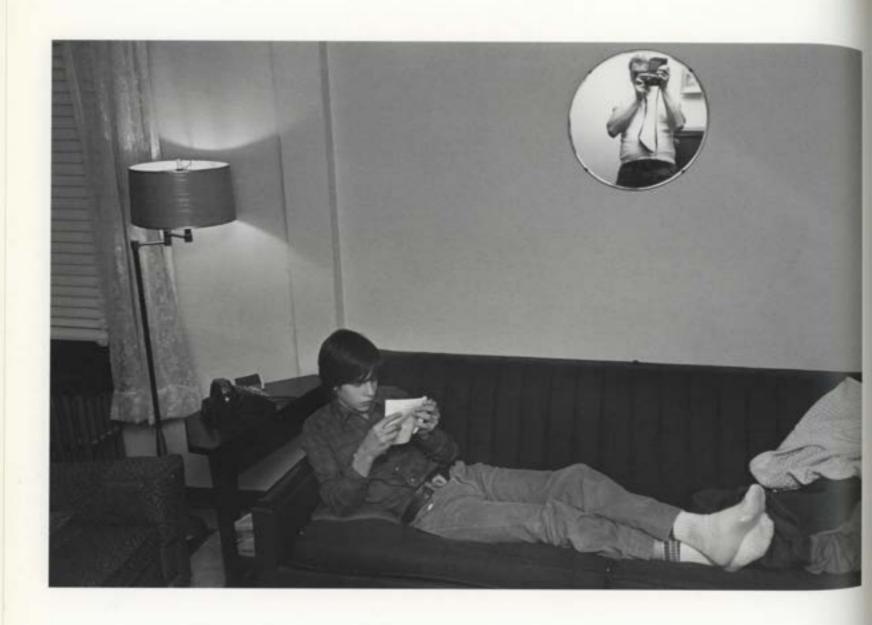








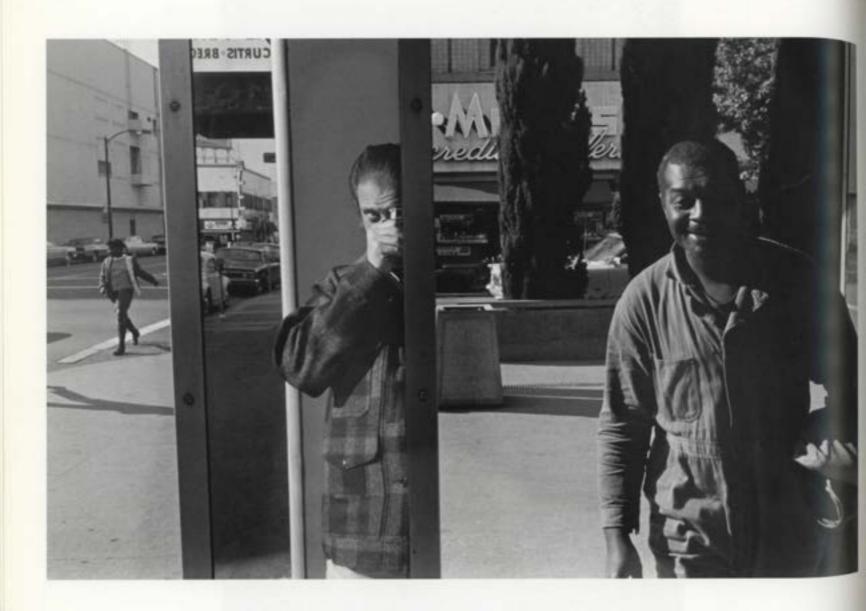


























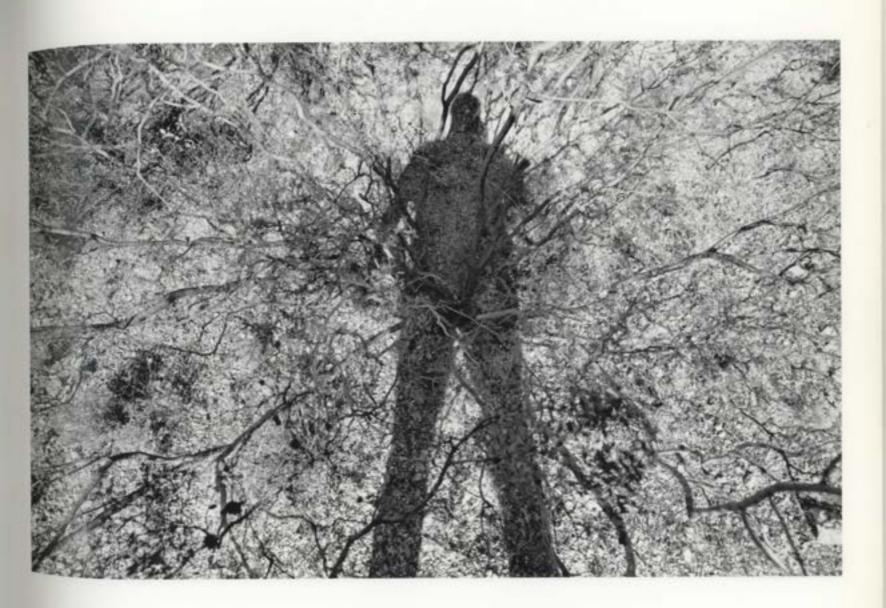


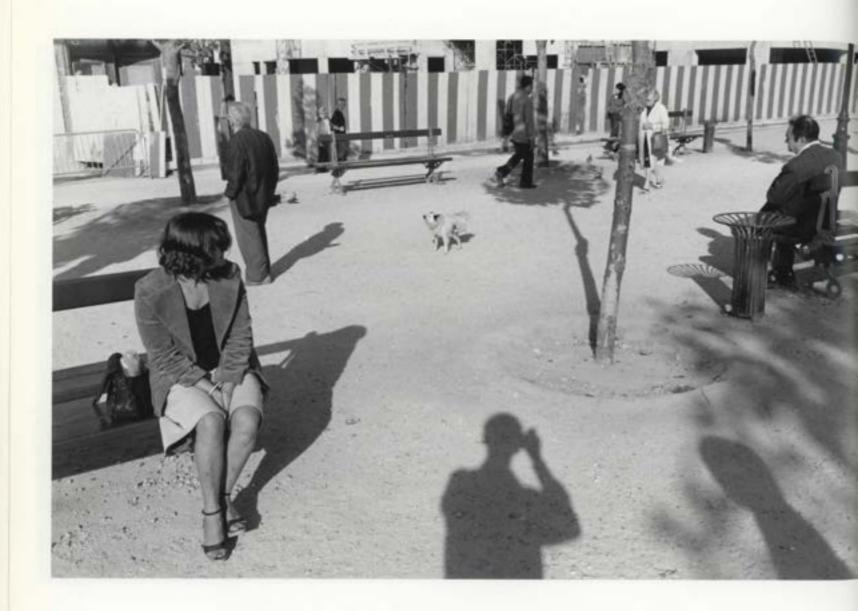








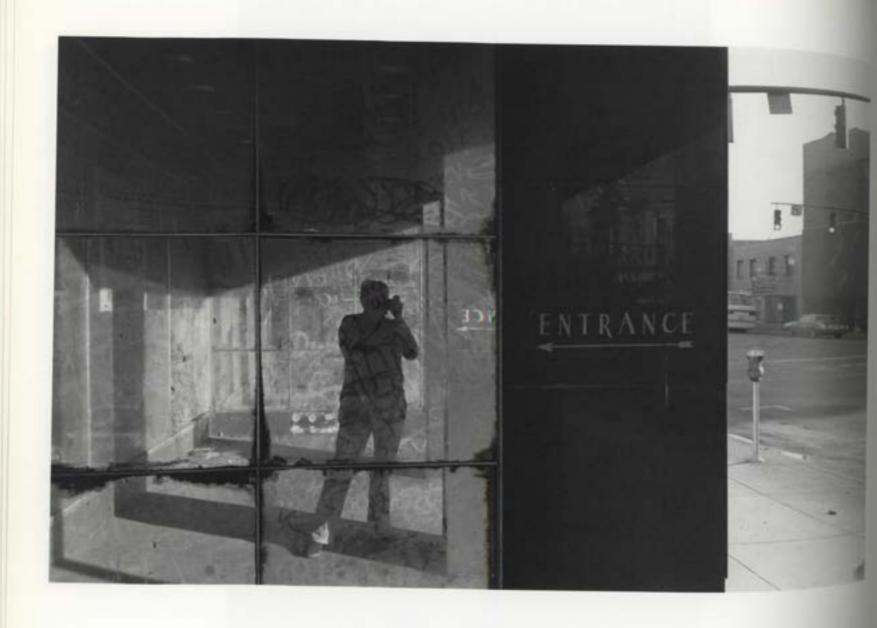




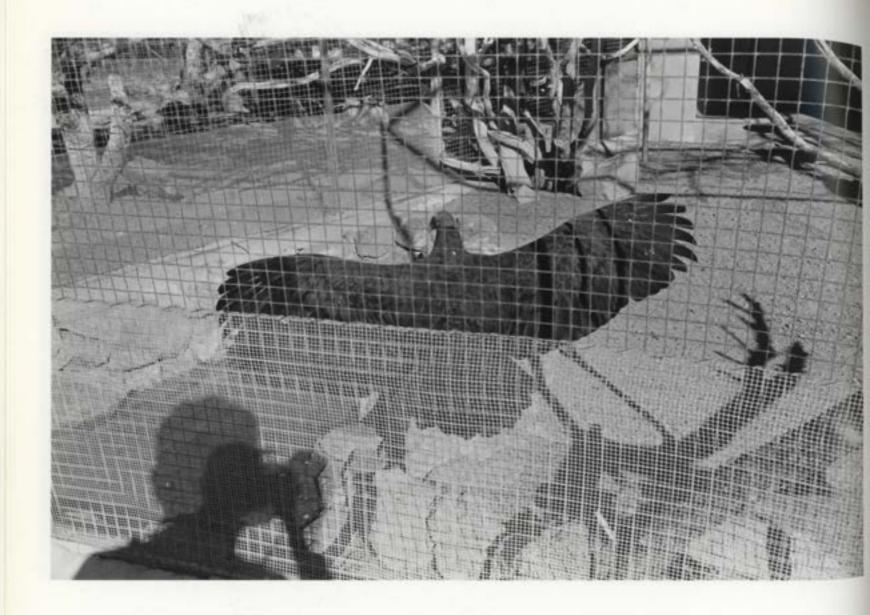














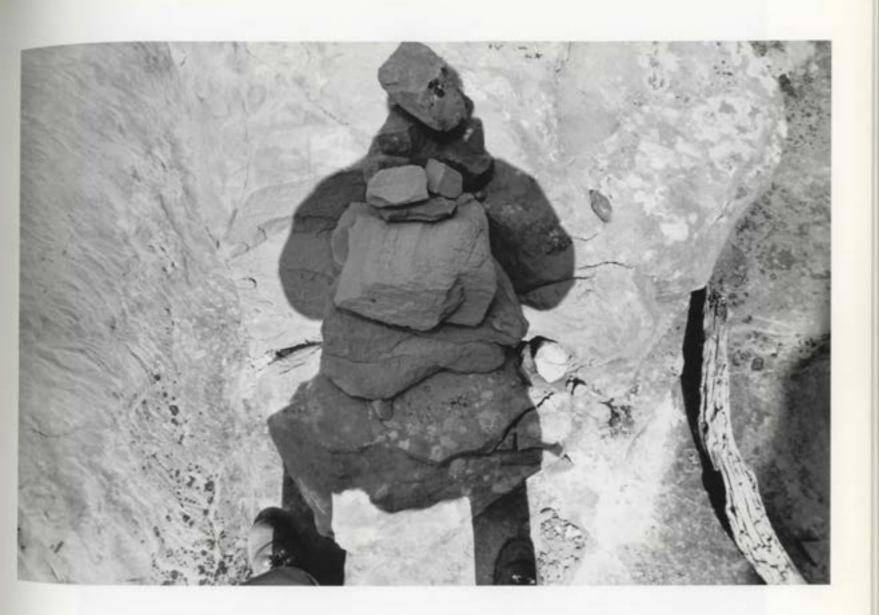


















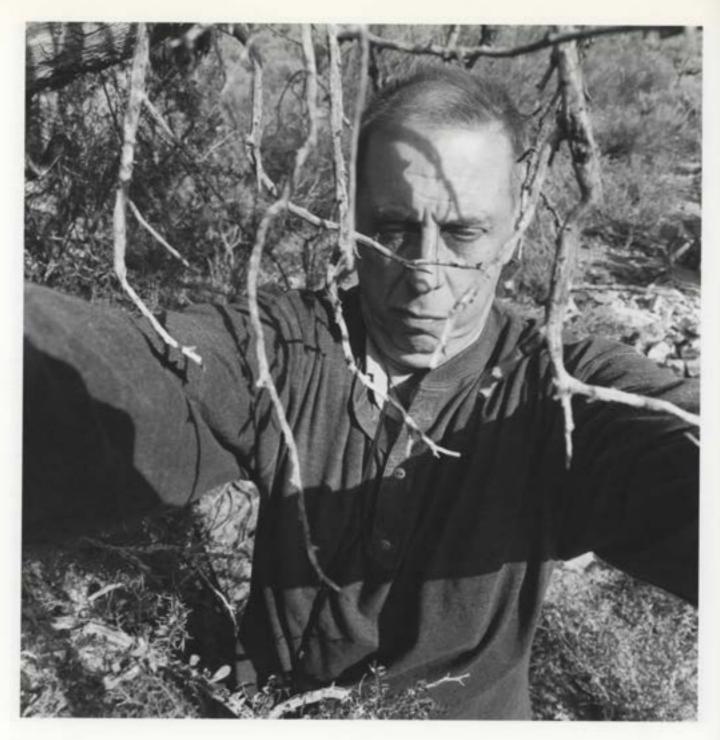




















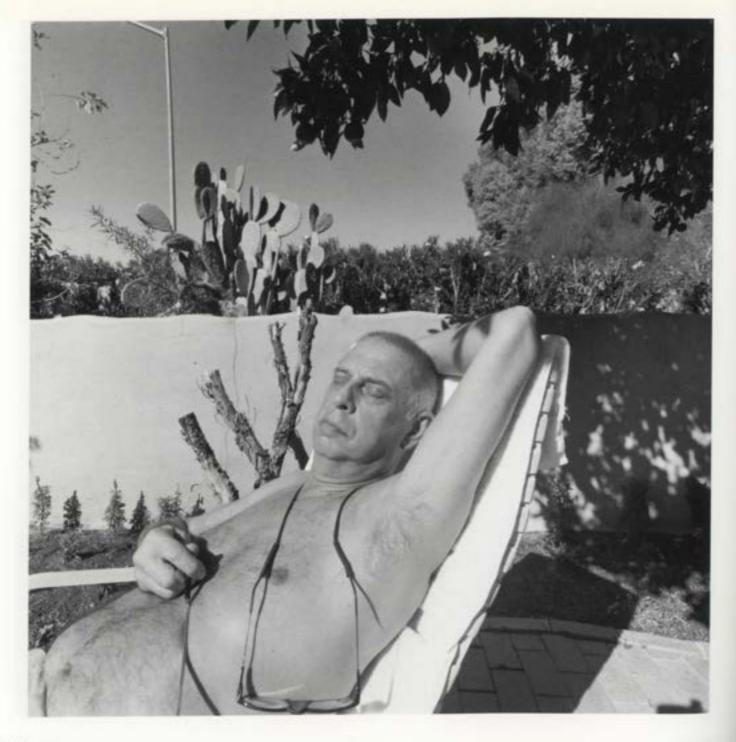








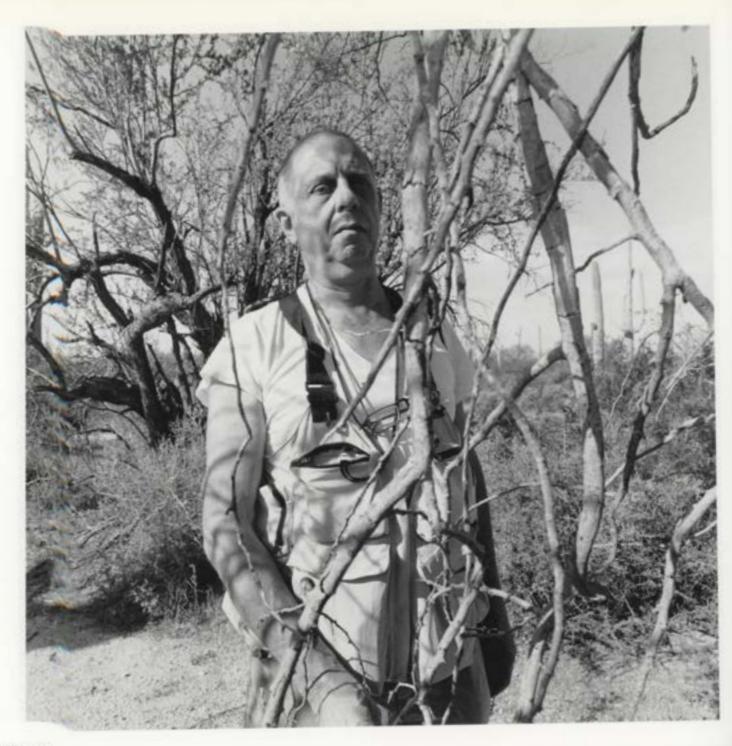








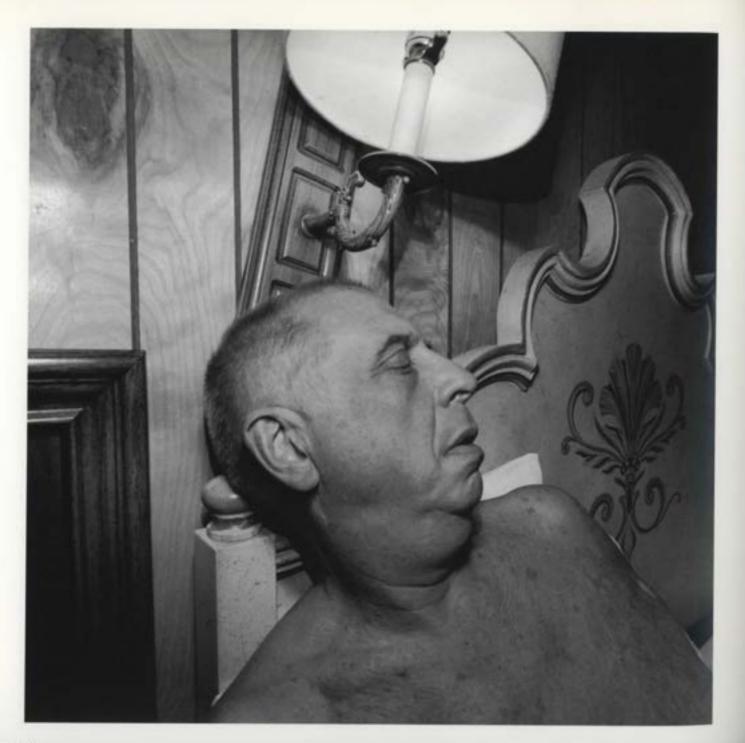








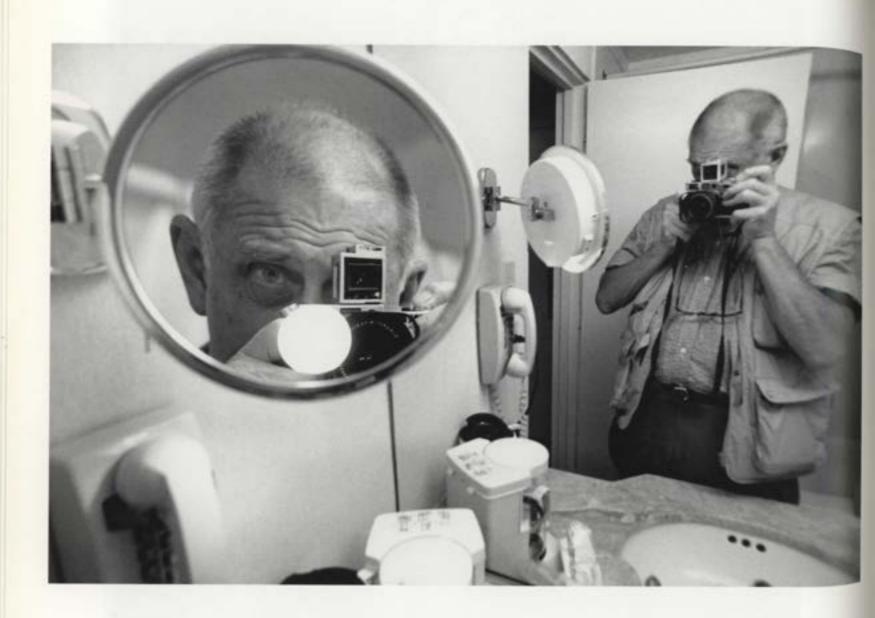




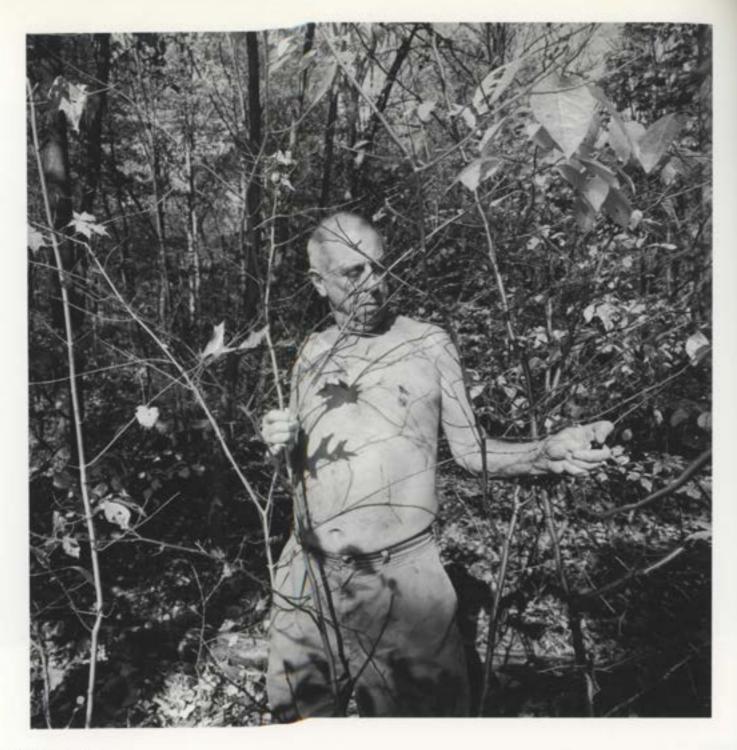










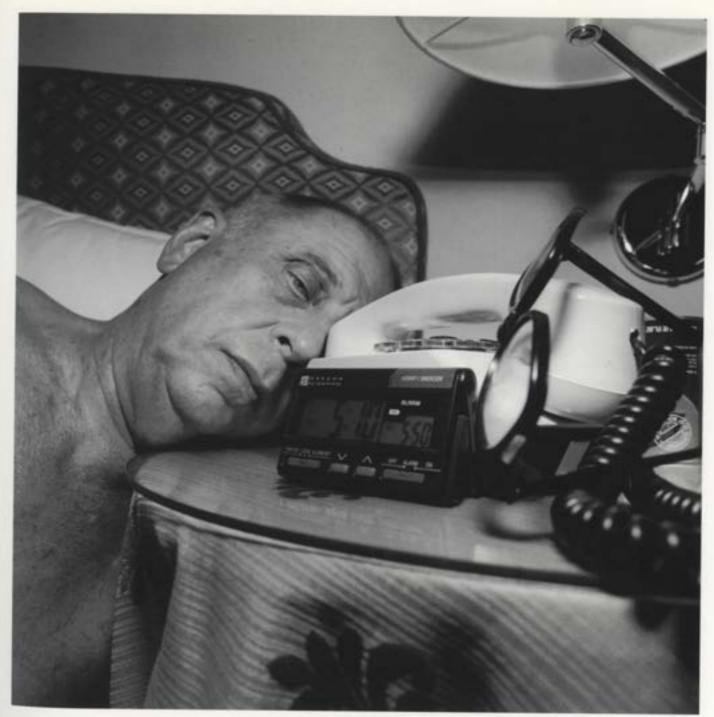




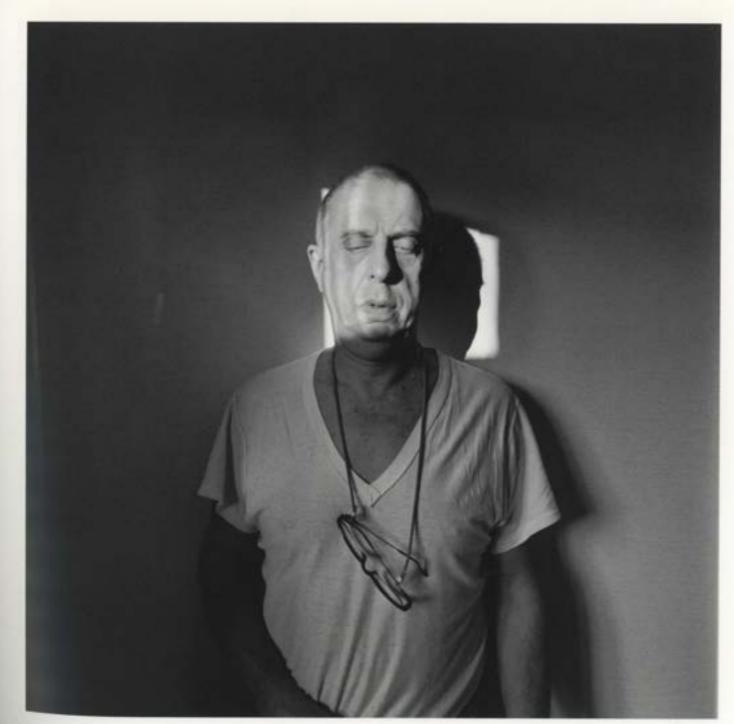




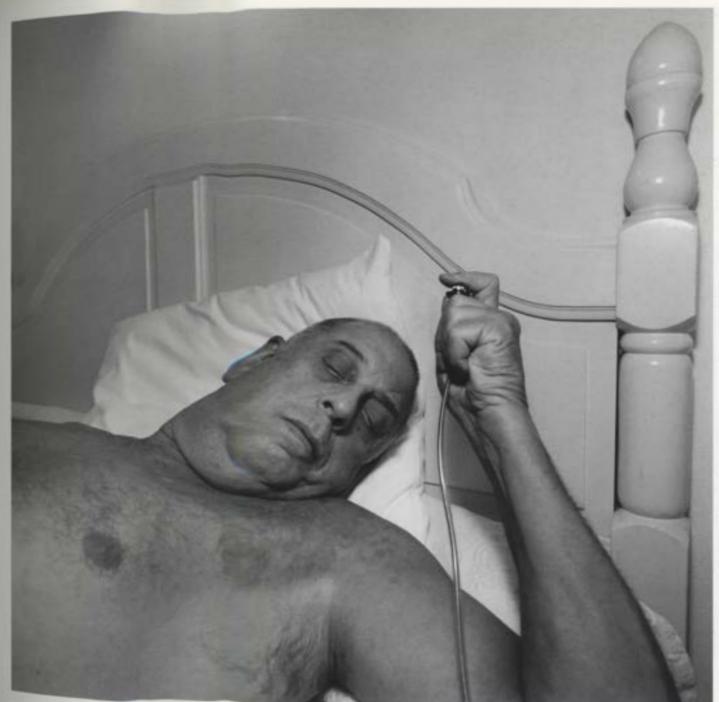






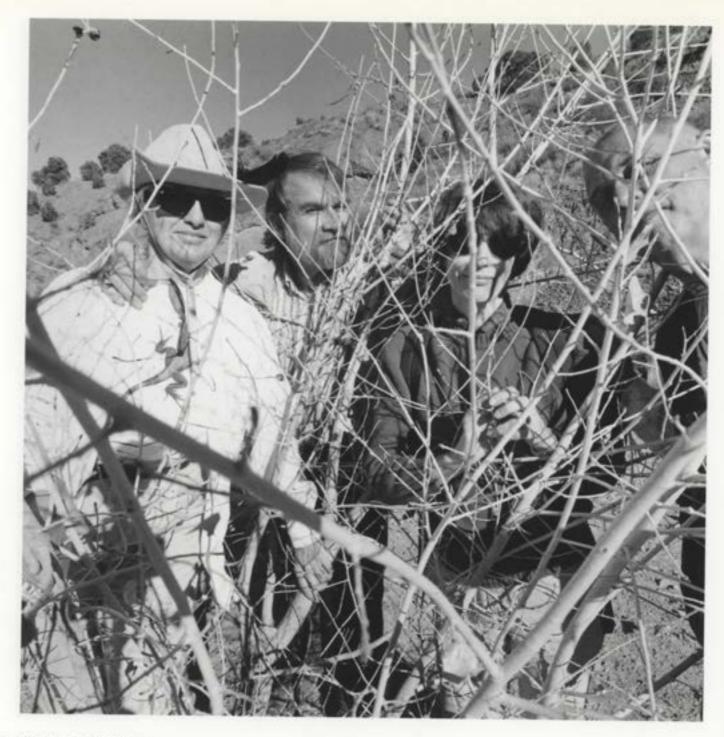










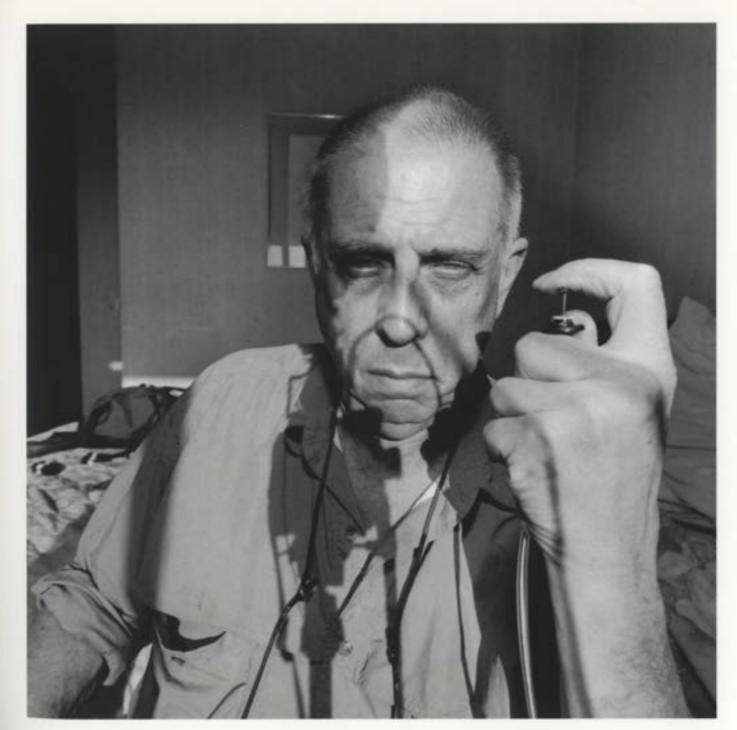






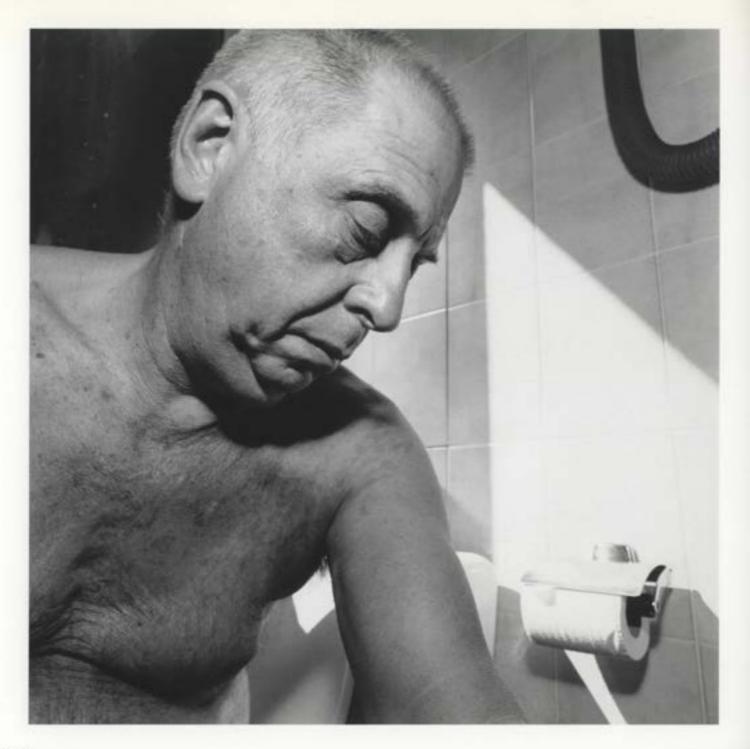












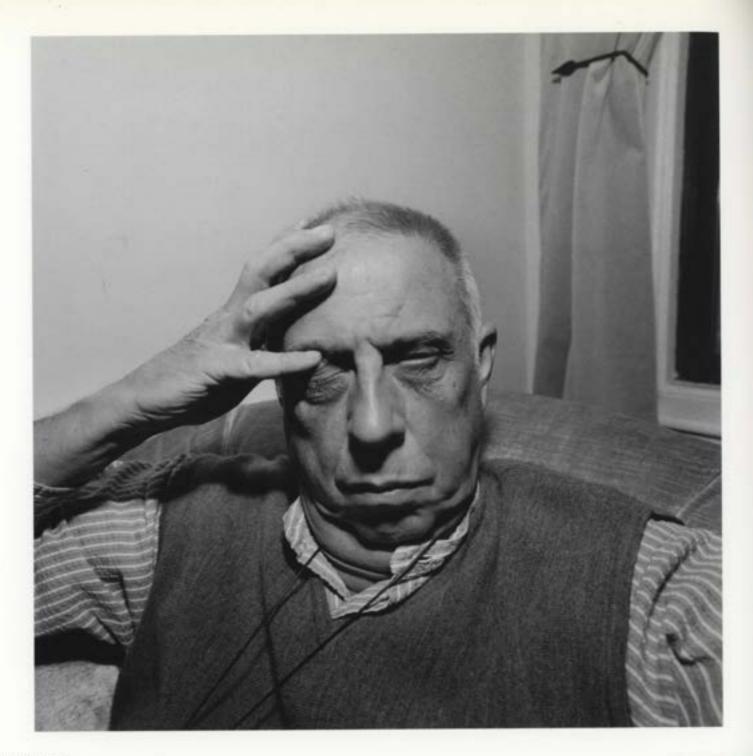


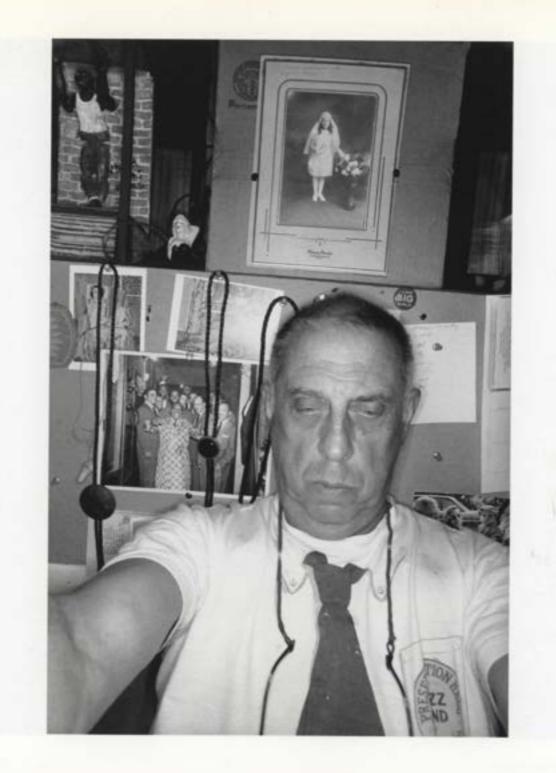


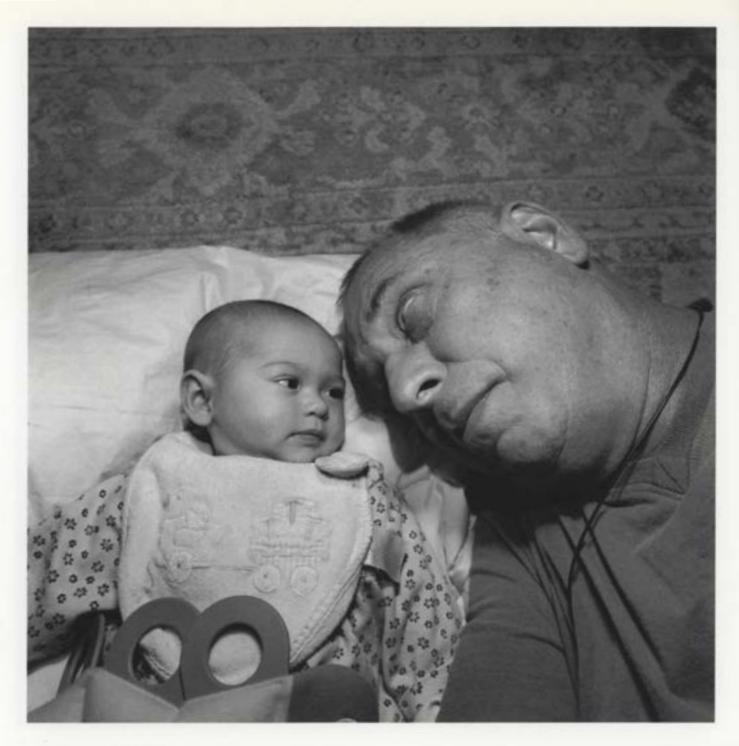


















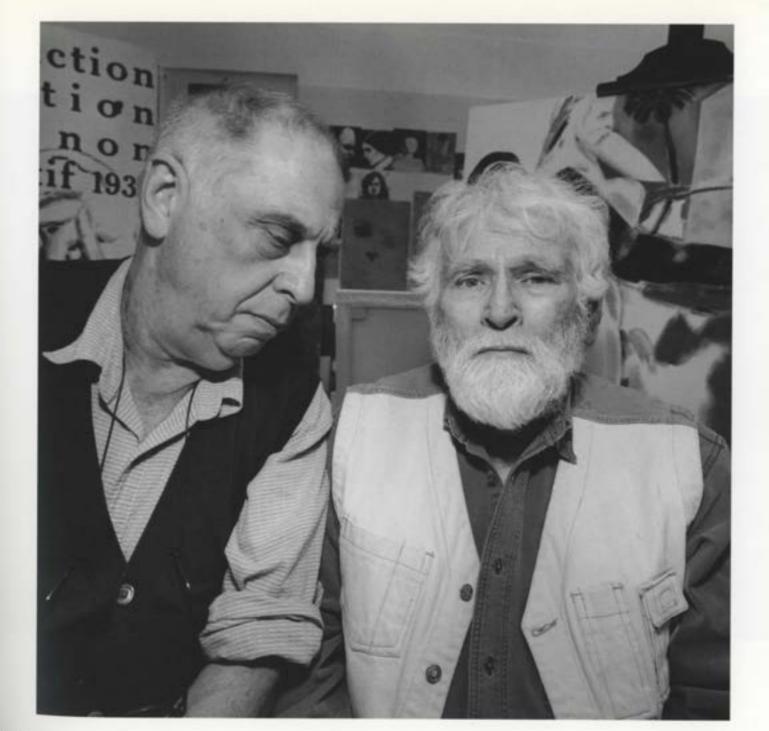
































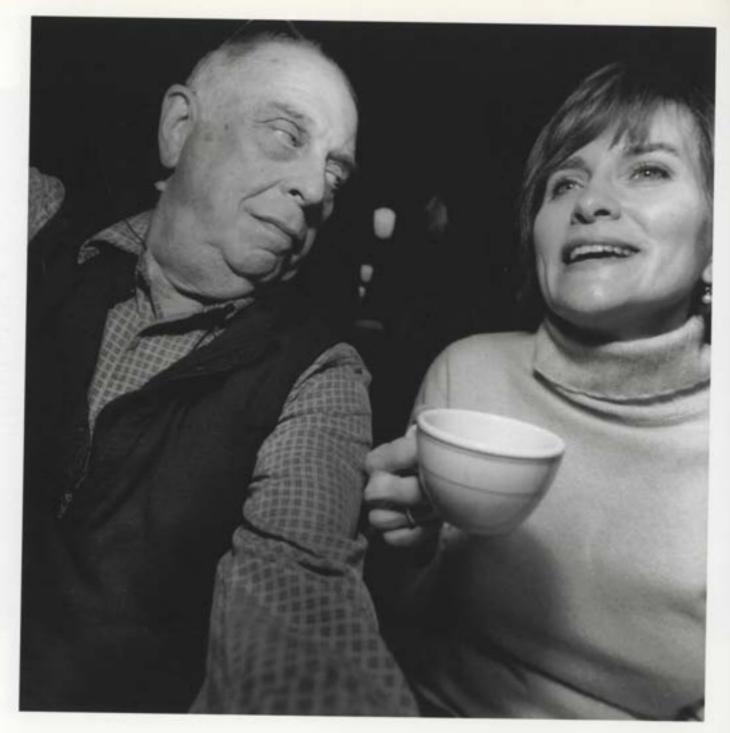
281 New City, New York, 2004 (with Sandy Andrews and Maria)











































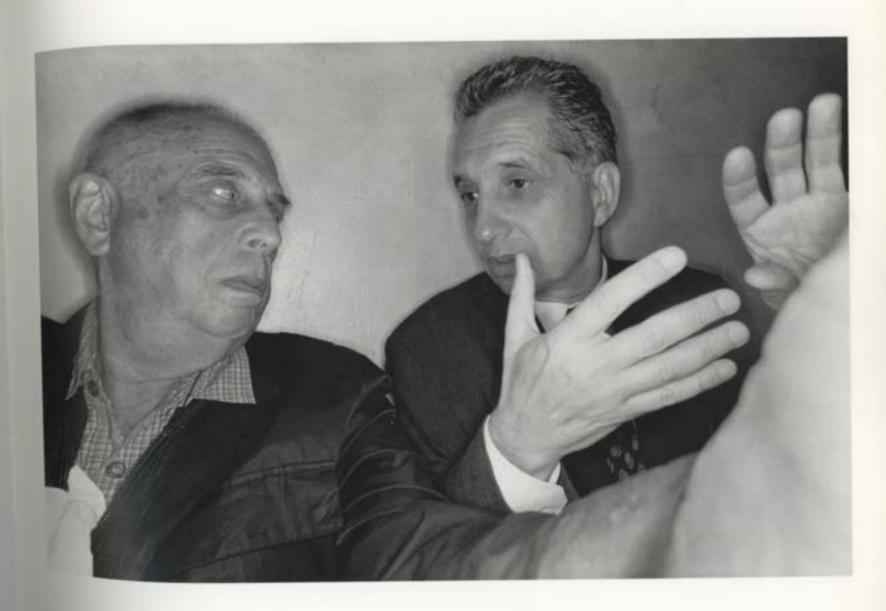


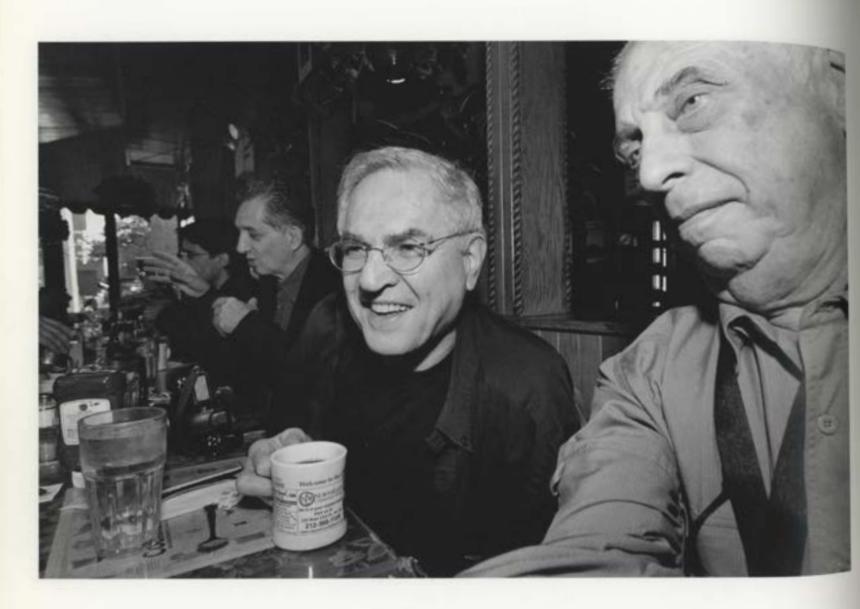
273 Mordana, 2004 (with Fredericka Hunter and Richard Benson)

















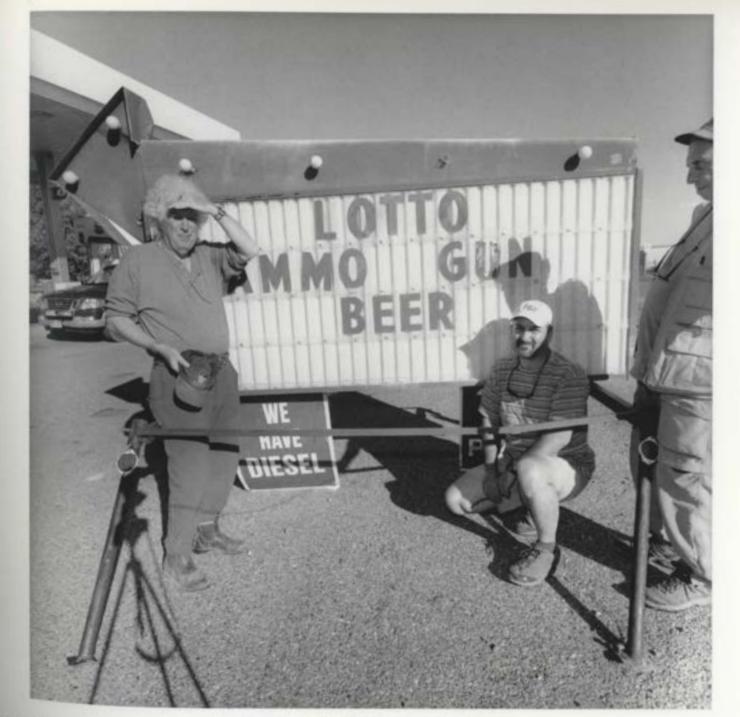


















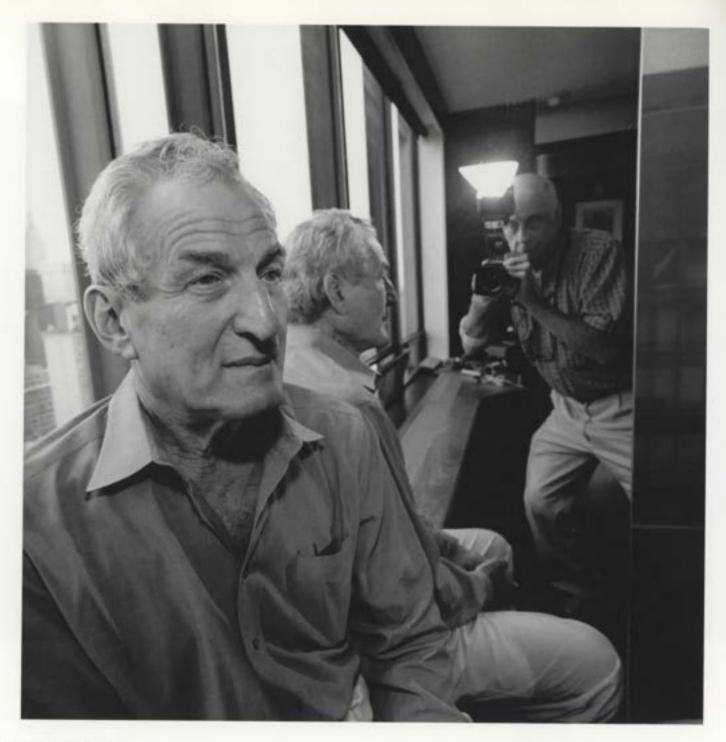






















See Soutino, Japan, 2008 (with Marie, Koko Yamagishi, Alan Mark, and Jeffrey Fraenkel)

























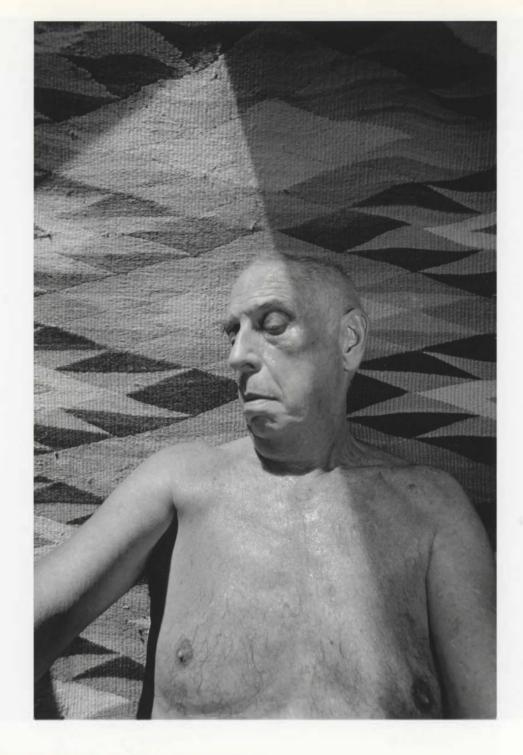




































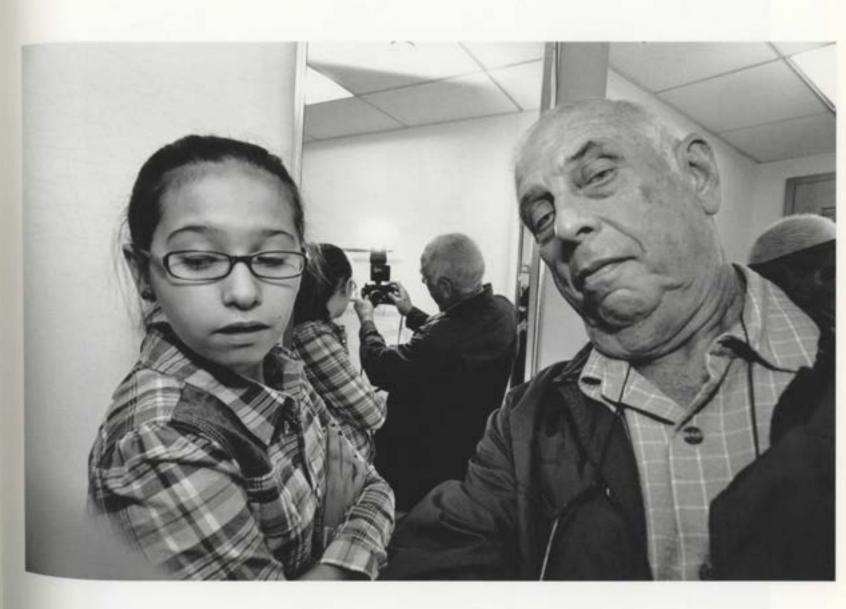




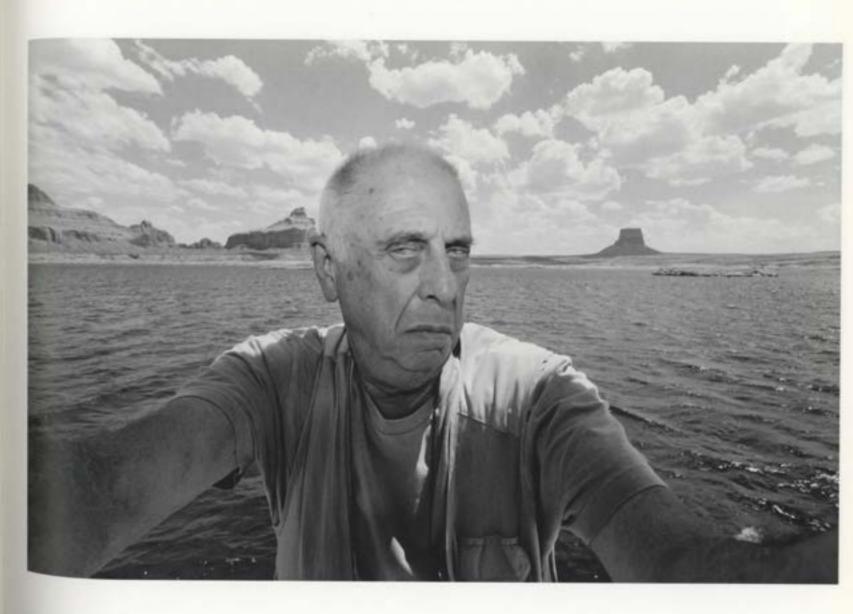




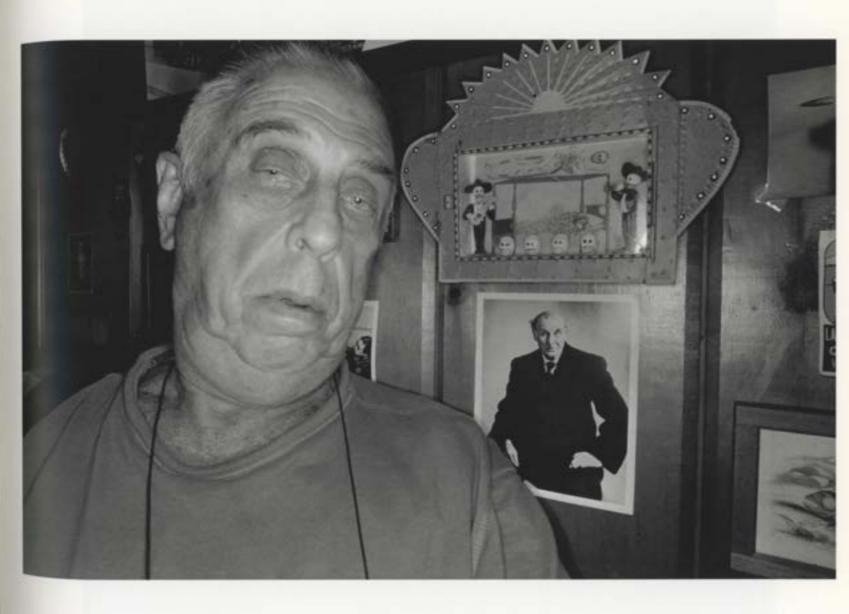














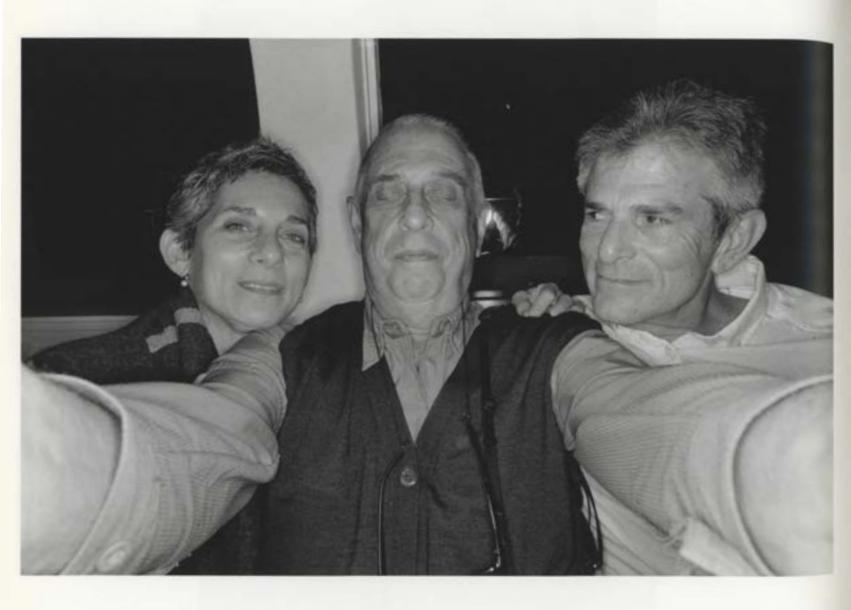




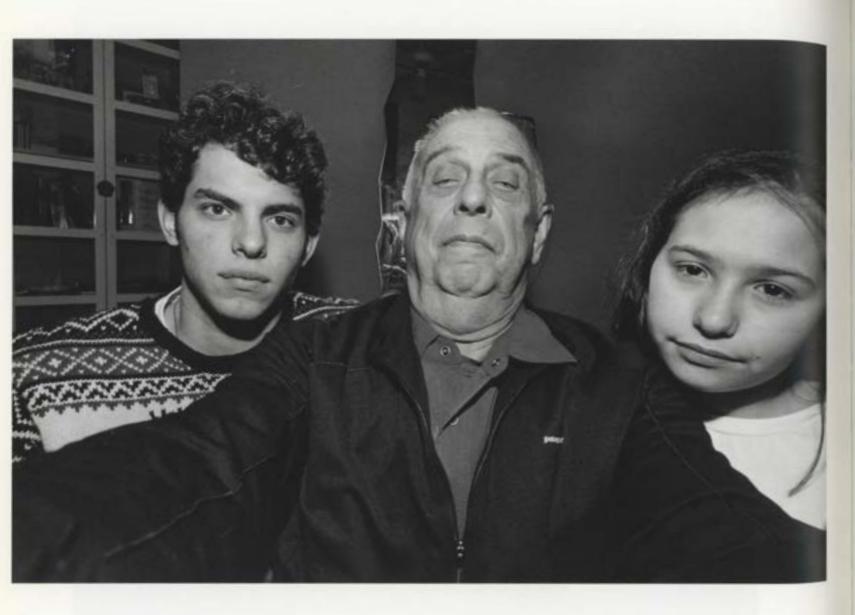


































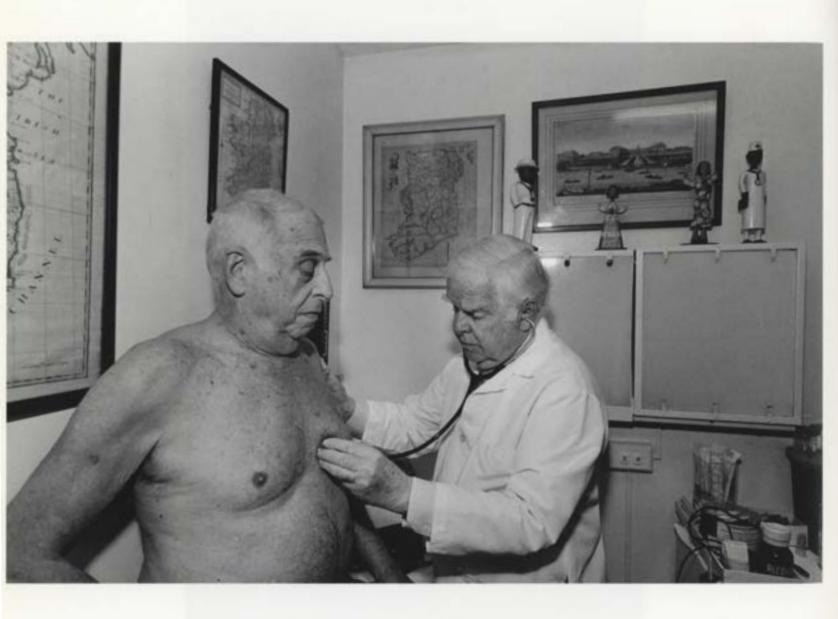
A novel is a mirror passing down a road.

César Vichard de Saint-Réal (1639-1692)







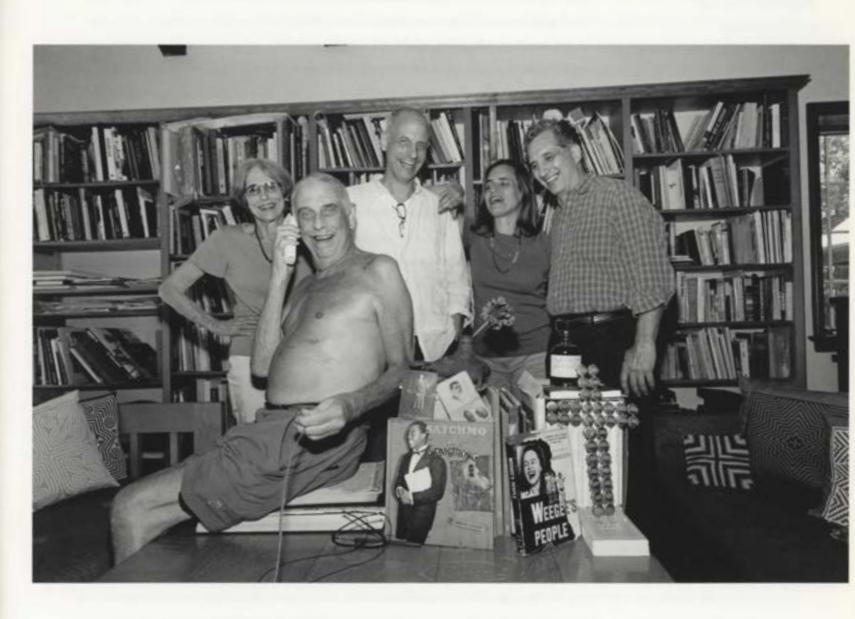












## Afterword

RICHARD BENSON

The focal length of photographic lenses changed as photography evolved. In the beginning, photographers used long lenses, which described the world in a fashion similar to that seen in nineteenth-century paintings. The perspective was calm and perfectly drawn, portraits had noses of the right size, and feet at the bottom of the frame didn't distort or enlarge to an embarrassing degree. These early long lenses were also the best that could be made at the time—the state of optics wasn't sufficiently advanced to produce a short-focal-length lens that could adequately render a wide angle of view. The pictures of photography's first half century retained that comforting and proper appearance that was similar to what the mind thinks the eye is seeing, an ordered vision of the world that was acceptable in the art of its day. In spite of this, critics and scholars were hesitant to admit photography into the higher realm of artistic expression; for some reason they thought the camera to be a more complex machine than the paintbrush, which is a delusion absent in the mind of anyone who has used both these devices.

Things started to change visually around the turn of the century, when radicals such as Eugène Atget began to photograph with short-focal-length, rapid rectilinear lenses. This early design could be stopped down to a tiny aperture, used for long exposures on a tripod-mounted view camera, to produce sharp pictures with a novel wide angle of view. The elegant carved empire vases in French gardens loomed huge and overwhelming in Atget's photographs, disrupting the calm order imposed by the landscape designers who laid out the gardens a century before. Modern photography was born out of this change in the nature of its description, and a rich adolescence developed when wide lenses were soon adapted to the new hand-held cameras of the early twentieth century. The history of photography is one of a steadily increasing angle of view as the focal lengths became shorter and shorter. Nothing is more archaic today than the pictures made by tourists using zoom lenses, which can extend their length back into the nineteenth century as they make compressed, comforting, and deeply boring views of flowers and distant landscapes.

A curious thing happen's when one photographs with a short lens: the attentive photographer is often faced with the annoying choice of finding either the sun or his shadow in the picture. The instructions on the Kodak film box advised that the sun be behind you while making a picture, and if the lens is long many pictures can be made without the photographer's shadow being present. If the lens is wide, however, gathering up that broad and disquieting handful of what lies before the camera often resulted in the shadow of the operator's
head turning up in the bottom of the picture. This problem is so extreme that I can remember
Lee turning to me in a grassy field and telling me that the new lens he was testing, a 15 millimeter on his Leica, could not make a picture that didn't have either the sun or his shadow
in it. This was not so much an irritation to him as a pleasure, since he had long been playing
visual games with his gray silhouette, which appeared frequently in his photographs.

Something that distinguishes the innovative artist from his less imaginative peers is the ability to find a new use for disruptions to the old order. Few operators in the early years allowed their shadow to appear in their pictures (although I remember a terrific O'Sullivan group portrait taken out on the Great Plains in which his shadowed head and arm define the foreground), but our friend Lee saw new possibilities and ran with them, creating a series of himself as a featureless imp, turning up on streets and billboards or caressing an unknowing face or body in a picture being made. These shadow self-portraits run through the fifty years of photographs in this book, and they teach us how a master can turn the fears of the present into the pleasures of the future.

Of course, the book doesn't show Lee just as a shadow; he is also fully defined in various reflections and intentionally inserted into portraits taken with friends and the land-scape. He is so dedicated to this latter group that he always has a six-foot cable release and tripod tucked away in his traveling kit, ready to make a new picture of himself interacting with a bush or a person. If I were of a scholarly frame of mind I might break these delights down into subgroups—shadow, friends, mirror, twigs—and sort out the enjoyable mayhem that shows up here. The far more interesting question is why has he made all these pictures, and how they became a lifelong obsession.

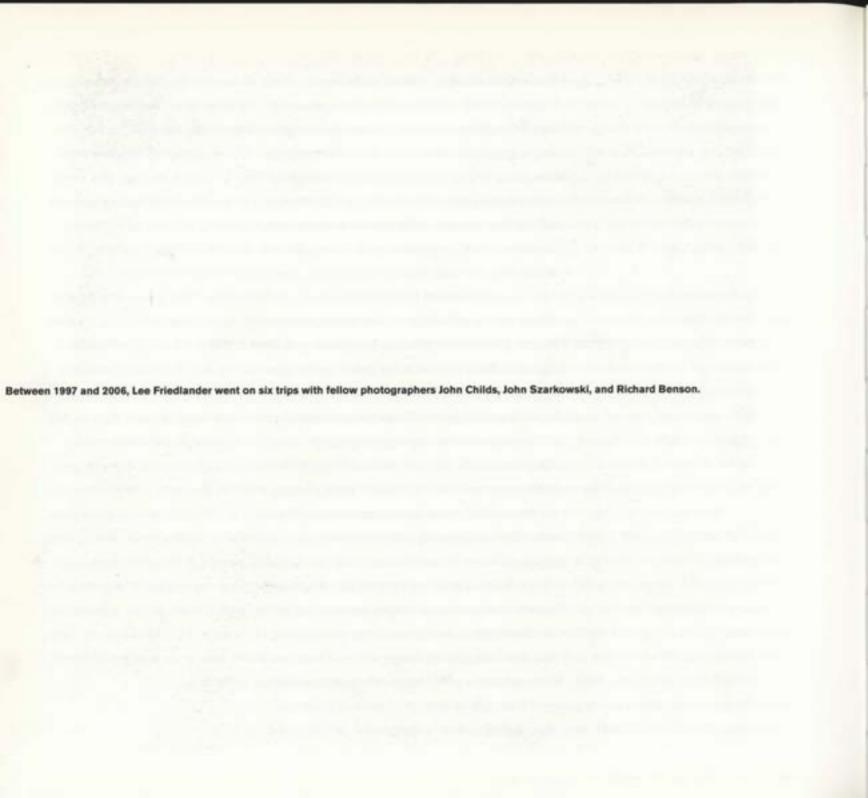
Lee has often worked without a specific project in mind, simply making pictures of what he saw, in order, as Garry Winogrand once said, to see what it looked like when photographed. This way of working led him to look at his contact sheets (of which there have been an astonishing number) to find out what was there that he might not have expected. His shadow, and more clearly defined versions of himself, turned up with regularity. At some point early on Lee realized that he was making self-portraits along with many other photographs that were defining a new landscape for all of us who saw his work. There is a great lesson in this for photographers of today who dedicate themselves to one project or another, failing to understand that the best work might come with an obsession with the medium rather than the personally oriented choice of what might be done with it. Lee always has a camera with him and is constantly making pictures. How much better the work of today might be if all the young and dedicated photographers took up this habit.

I believe this string of self-portraits turned into a lifelong exploration because Lee saw very soon that his pictures were records of change—in himself, in the landscapes he was photographing, and in the friends and family he pulled into the frame. Perhaps the changes seen in his children preceded his interest in the changes he observed in his wife, Maria, and himself, so these family descriptions sharpened his understanding of the changes he was recording in others who turned up in the pictures. Whatever the case, the portraits in this book, often only marginally of self but so poignantly of others, form a record of change in an extraordinary population that this artist has photographed repeatedly through his working years. Dark hair turns white, small people become large, and large ones shrink as Lee's self-portraits render his own aging along with that of the extended group he has loved.

We have all these pictures, but we also have the book. Not just this book, but many others, the count now somewhere around forty. In this remarkable sequence of publications there have been five self-portraits books, of which this is the most recent (I don't dare tempt fate and call it the last, because if I do he is liable to go on and make another). When Lee made the first self-portraits book, in 1970, it was an uncommon thing for a photographer to do. He created his own imprint, the Haywire Press, published and paid for the book himself, and Maria packaged and shipped orders while the unsold copies were stored under their bed. I once asked him why he became so dedicated to making books, and he told me that when he was young he found a copy of Walker Evans's great book *American Photographs*, and every

time he went through it he saw something new. The book became the ultimate venue for Lee, not the transitory one of the gallery show, where the pictures could be seen only for a short time, but instead a visual structure that lasted and could repeatedly reacquaint us with what we thought we already knew so well. In a mere instant, often no more than a hundredth of a second, a photograph can gather in an astounding mass of information. How naive we are to think that we can see it all at first glance when hung on a wall or displayed on a computer monitor. The book solves this problem because we can look long and hard, without distraction, and return to it again and again. Photographs can become old friends, and like the best of them they can reveal themselves endlessly as we come to know them better.

Lee's first book, Self Portrait, was quite crudely printed. It has been a pleasant quirk of fate that the technology of offset printing developed in concert with Lee's string of books, and the quality of their rendition came closer and closer to that of the actual prints as each successive book was made. Many photographers bemoan the loss of old times, when photographic papers were richer in silver, and they even yearn to return to when chemical photography itself reigned supreme. Lee and I take the other view-that the books show us that old stuff appears in our mind's eye through the rosy filter of nostalgia and flawed memory. The books we make today with the aid of digital technology are far superior to anything we had before, and to me this is true of photography as well. Lee, the maker of all the innovative wonders we find in this volume, has embraced the march of technology, and his books have defined the development of modern photographic reproduction. I guess we all have our limits, though, as he still stocks his freezer with film and paper, aware that soon it might no longer be available. I recently heard that he has bought up the remaining supplies of Microdol X, his favored developer. Using a digital camera would be unthinkable to him, and he once accused me of being made promiscuous in my picture taking by the ease of the new electronic cameras. How lucky that his failings are in such an unimportant area, so we have the full benefit of his radical eye in the fifty-year-long vision presented in this book.















I do miss our photo trips. Strangely, I have no other friends for whom the idea of driving around with no clear destination for a week or ten days, doing nothing but repeating stories, eating motel food, and exposing film has great appeal. Perhaps you forecasted it accurately when you said that if we stayed too long on the road our personalities would go out of style.

from a letter to Lee Friedlander from John Childs, October 15, 2010

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This book was made with the help of my old pals Richard Benson, Katy Homans, Thomas Palmer, and Danny Frank, and my new ones at Yale – Jock Reynolds, Joshua Chuang, and Patricia Fidler.

L.F.

377, 378, 379 top to bottom: with Katy Homans; Thomas Palmer; Danny Frank and Kevin Reph. 2011





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