

Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950

MAY 18, 2013 TO SEPTEMBER 1, 2013

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<http://www.mmoca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Abramson-Perv%20House%20LR.jpg>

Michael Abramson, *Perv's House*, Chicago, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 11 x 14 inches. Collection of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Purchase, through a National Endowment for the Arts grant with matching gifts from museum members.



<http://www.mmoca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Truax-Whoosis%20LR.jpg>

Karen Truax, *Whoosis* (from the *New Mexico* portfolio), 1975. Hand-colored gelatin silver print, 11 x 14 inches. Collection of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Museum Purchase Fund.



<http://www.moca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Kersels-Tossing%20a%20Friend%20Melinda%20R%20LR.jpg>



<http://www.moca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Kersels-Tossing%20a%20Friend%20Melinda%20B%20LR.jpg>



<http://www.moca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Kersels-Tossing%20a%20Friend%20Melinda%20C%20LR.jpg>

Martin Kersels, *Tossing a Friend (Melinda)* (1, 2, and 3), 1996. C-prints on Fujiflex, 33 x 45½ inches each. Collection of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Museum Purchase Fund.



<http://www.moca.org/sites/default/files/images-exhibits/Brown-Pink%20Trailer%20Tit%20LR.jpg>

Ken Brown, *Pink Trailer Tilt* (from the *American Roads* portfolio), 1976. Ektacolor print, 11 x 14 inches. Collection of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Gift of Lawrence Landweber.

By the end of World War II, the photographic image had become ubiquitous in everyday American life. Photographs were commonplace in the tabloid press, for example, and in large-format news magazines like *Look* and *Life*, where they took precedence over text. The fine art photograph, however, as opposed to the commercial, scientific, or family photograph, was primarily an expression of the artist's vision, not a simple record of an event. Just as a "focal point" in photography indicates an area of sharp focus, *Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950*, on view in MMoCA's main galleries from May 18 through September 1, concentrates on important thematic interests of American photographers in the last sixty years. These themes—American Road Trip, City and Suburb, Fantasy, Nature, The Body, Rural America, and We the People—cut across the decades and are not limited by school, formal styles, technique, or critical discourse. What unites them is their visualization and expression of American identity.

The unusual as subject, a deep vein in American photography, is evident in *Whoosis* (1975), a vibrant, hand-colored black-and-white photograph by Karen Truax. A young woman masks her face with a large heart-shaped leaf from a Fiddle Leaf Fig Tree. With one eye peering through a hole in the leaf, she is transformed into a leaf creature—the metamorphosis all the more arresting with Truax's vivid coloration of green leaf, blue eye, and scarlet red lips and nail polish. Concocting a surrealist riddle out of ordinary things, the photographer has created a fantastical "whoosis," someone whose name one does not know or cannot recall.

More down to earth or rather, up in the air, is Martin Kersel's color triptych, *Tossing a Friend (Melinda) (1, 2, and 3)*, created in 1996. Kersel is a Los Angeles-based artist who applies the principles of performance to his photography, audio works, and sculpture. With great abandon, and against a background of blossoming lilacs, he appears both to catapult a young girl away from himself and to catch her. His actions, caught time-lapse-style in three consecutive moments, celebrate the joy of being temporarily free from all physical constraint. In keeping with aspects of contemporary art since the 1980s, Kersel explores the body as an emblem of personal identity—here with typically American high spirits.

In addition to photographs by Truax and Kersel, *Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950* presents over 100 works from the museum's permanent collection by American photographers of regional, national, and international reputations. Among the artists represented are Michael Abramson, Diane Arbus, Cecilia Condit, John Coplans, Vernon Fisher, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, O. Winston Link, Robert Mapplethorpe, Duane Michaels, Eva Rubinstein, Cindy Sherman, Alec Soth, Minor White, Garry Winogrand, and Ida Wyman.

Exhibition Sponsors

Generous support for *Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950* has been provided by Perkins Coie, LLP; MillerCoors; The DeAtley Family Foundation; a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts; and MMoCA Volunteers.

LEARNING RESOURCES

For Families

[Focal Points Lets Look Family Guide \(/sites/default/files/pdf/Lets%20look%20focal%20points%20for%20web.pdf\)](#)

These fun, interactive hand-outs help children to think imaginatively about what they are seeing while learning about photography. Let's look handouts are designed for families to use together and are available free of charge in the galleries.

For Families

[Imagine ArtPack Insert \(/sites/default/files/pdf/Artpack%20Insert%20focal%20points%20for%20web.pdf\)](#)

Stop by the reception desk in the MMoCA lobby and ask for the MMoCAkids ArtPack, the museum's hands-on discovery kit for exploring art. Designed for family members to use together, the ArtPack contains a variety of activities, including Imagine, that promote observation and imaginative thinking about visual art.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

Friday, June 7 • 6–9 pm

MMoCA Nights

Gather at MMoCA on the first Friday in June to kick off the museum's summer season. Enjoy an opening celebration for three new exhibitions: *I Dream Too Much: Paintings by Leslie Smith III*; *Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950*; and *Los Grandes del Arte Moderno Mexicano*.

Attend a gallery talk with Leslie Smith at 6:30 pm, receive an additional 10% discount in the Museum Store throughout the evening, and take in the evening sun on MMoCA's rooftop. Live music and refreshments from Fresco will be offered in the sculpture garden. After sunset, watch the season's first Rooftop Cinema film. MMoCA Nights are free for museum members and \$10 for non-members.

Saturday, June 8 • 1–1:30 pm

Drop-In Tour: Gil Hillman on *Focal Points: American Photography Since 1950*

Led by MMoCA's docents, these free, 30-minute guided tours provide visitors with the tools to consider artists' creative decisions and construct meaningful interpretations of their work. Meet in the museum lobby.

Thursday, June 13 • 12:30–1:15 pm

Richard H. Axsom on What's American about American Photography?

In this gallery talk, MMoCA curator Richard H. Axsom will discuss developments in recent American photography and speak to those qualities that distinguish it from other national traditions. To do this, he will address seven photographs that incorporate themes around which the exhibition is organized, which include The American Road, City and Suburb, Fantasy, Nature, The Body, Rural America, and We the People. Main galleries.