Dismal Science
Photo Works by Allan Sekula, 1972 - 1996

October 8 - November 17, 1996
*University Galleries, Illinois State University
January 14 - March 16, 1997
*Palmer Museum, Pennsylvania State University
October - December, 1997
*daad galerie, Berlin
SELECTED BIOGRAPHY: ALLAN SEKULA

Allan Sekula lives and works in Los Angeles. He was director of the photography program at the California Institute of the Arts from 1985-1993, where he is currently a member of the faculty.

BOOKS


Fish Story, Rotterdam, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Düsseldorf, Richter Verlag, 1995.

Essay by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh.


SELECTED ESSAYS AND PHOTO WORKS


SELECTED ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1996 Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA

1995 Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. Tramway, Glasgow, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Le Channel and Musée des Beaux Arts, Calais

1993 University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA.


1989 Western Front, Vancouver.

Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario.

1998 Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan.

Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C.

1987 P.S. 1 (Institute for Art and Urban Resources), Long Island City, NY. Forum Stadtpark, Graz, Austria. A Space, Toronto. Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA.

1986 Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA.

1985 San Francisco Camerawork, San Francisco.

1984 Folkwang Museum, Essen, West Germany.

Ohio State University Art Gallery, Columbus, OH.


1974 Brand Library Art Center, Glendale, CA.

Cover image: Man on bus passing abandoned waterfront factory.

Dismal Science, 1989/92
**Dismal Science:**
Photo Works by Allan Sekula, 1972 - 1996

*Dismal Science* is a museum survey of eight photographic projects produced by artist and writer Allan Sekula during the past 24 years. Sekula's art interrogates the traditions of documentary photography and romantic notions of the artist's role in society. He reached prominence as both an artist and theorist in 1984 when a book of his works, *Photography against the Grain*, was published by The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Sekula’s discursive texts, sequential photographs, slide projection pieces and audio recordings appeal to reason as well as emotion. His art is designed to increase our capacity for discernment and engage us in struggles for social transformation.

Early works such as *Aerospace Folktales* and *Meditations on A Triptych* explore the ways in which family and personal life are shaped by religion, gender roles and class. More recent works, including *Canadian Notes, Fish Story and Dismal Science*, examine abandoned, camouflaged, and abstract landscapes marked by the global movement of labor, goods and power. Crucial to Sekula’s projects are the ironies he finds in our culture’s blind economic optimism and its blatant disregard for consequences.

In this era of dissolving boundaries between academic disciplines and cultural traditions, museums must question existing concepts of art and its social role. Sekula’s audience is international and interdisciplinary in scope. His projects address the struggles of individuals and cultures caught in cold war and post cold-war economies. His narrative elements—assembled from news, advertising, literature and everyday experience—trace the impact of a shifting global economy on the lives of working people. We must navigate between several points of reference in Sekula’s narratives. The media consumer, interviewer, subjective narrator and objective reporter are among the many voices we may encounter in a given work.

Concurrent with the exhibition, University Galleries will publish a 212 pg. book with 35 color plates and 80 black and white reproductions. Available through Distributed Art Publishers (DAP) in NYC, the book will also include three of the artist’s essays and an interview with curator, Debra Risberg.

This project was funded in part through grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Illinois Arts Council. Allan Sekula's book *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972-1996* was partially funded through a generous contribution from Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) in Berlin.

For more information, please contact Debra Risberg at University Galleries, Illinois State University, Campus Box 5620, Normal, Illinois 61790-5620. T(309) 438-5487, F (309) 438-5161.

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**EXERCPTS FROM SELECTED PROJECTS**

*Aerospace Folktales* (1973) A series of black and white photographs with three separate unsynchronized voice recordings playing continuously.

A micro-history of a white collar family under siege.

From "Interview with the Engineer's Wife":
"...I grew up with seniority. Lived in a railroad town...I can remember hearing them say, "I was bumped", railroad slang for the fact that when the layoff came, somebody with more seniority than you took your job, and you either bumped the man below you or you just kept right on going. I think the analogy comes from switching the train, just as you bump the car off, so you were the one who was bumped off the end of the train..."

*Meditations on a Triptych* (1973). An extended reading of three "found" family photographs:

"...Two medium shots bracket a somewhat wider shot. The two outer images angle out from the symmetrical central image. We might be reminded of the half-open doors of an altarpiece. A red dress is repeated three times. There is an abundance of primary colors. A camera is confronted squarely in daylight..."

A meditation on connections between landscapes and money, moving between a bank that masquerades as a landscape and an industrial landscape that masquerades as a bank.

"...Like the Bank of Canada, Sudbury makes an open show of money. A giant nickel overlooks the smelter stacks and the massive bulwarks of slag. Nickel is a curious metal, a promiscuous alloy, but the nickel is a modest coin, more modest than one of John D. Rockefeller’s dimes. In Ottawa, gold is hidden. In Sudbury, nickel is on display, although its many uses are eclipsed by its exaggerated presence as a token of exchange...."


"...And now I recognize myself in their mistake. A location scout. A small camera. A slide projector dropping its two-inch squares with the primitive industrial regularity of a miniature hammerhead crane. No ships in bottles, no movie, no narrative other than that produced by walking and riding the bus in places that are strange but familiar and, in a word, uncanny."

**Dismal Science** (1989/92). 76 projected slides, text booklet and enlarged map detail.

One of the “chapters” of the extended work Fish Story (1988-1995), this slide projection follows several days of movement along the Rivers Tyne and Clyde, the great spaces of British and Scottish shipbuilding during the first and second industrial revolutions, tracing a ghostly connection between derelict and active maritime worlds.