

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**



From *Untitled Slide Sequence*, 1972.

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

- Dismal Science*, New York, DAP and Normal, Illinois, University Galleries, 1996.
- Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*, Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1997, forthcoming.
- The Traffic in Photographs*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997, forthcoming.
- Fish Story*, Rotterdam, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Düsseldorf, Richter Verlag, 1995. Essay by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh.
- Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*, The Nova Scotia Series: Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts, Vol. XVI, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie, Halifax, Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984.

SELECTED ESSAYS AND PHOTO WORKS

- "Walking on Water," *Camera Austria* [Graz] 53, (1995) pp.20-32.
- "An Eternal Esthetics of Laborious Gestures," *Portrait d'un malentendu*. Montréal, Dazibao, 1995, pp. 27-36.
- "Untitled Slide Sequence," *October* 76 (1996). pp 44-71.
- "Gone Fishing," discussion with Hal Foster, *Cahiers* [Rotterdam and Düsseldorf] 4 (1995). pp. 8-26.
- "Juggling Painting, Socialism, and the Sea," interview with Sina Najafi and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Material* [Stockholm] 26, 1995.
- "Photography and the Limits of National Identity," *Culturefront* [NewYork] 2:3, Fall 1993, pp. 54-55.
- "Walker Evans and the Police," in Jean-Francoise Chevrier, Allan Sekula, and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Walker Evans and Dan Graham*, Rotterdam, Witte de With, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992, pp.193-196.
- "Dismal Science," *Forum International* [Antwerp] 15, Nov.-Dec. 1992.

- "Loaves and Fishes," *Real Stories: Revisions in Documentary and Narrative Photography*, Odense, Denmark, Museet for Fotokunst, 1992, pp. 52-55.
- "War Without Bodies," *Artforum*, November 1991. pp 107-110.
- "People Who Can't Afford to Live Here Should Move Somewhere Else," in Martha Rosler, ed., *Home Front*, New York, DIA Art Foundation, 1990, pp. 146-147.
- "Some American Notes," *Art in America*, 78:2 (February 1990), pp. 39-46. French translation in *Art press special: la photographie*, Paris, 1990.
- "Gay Bashing as an Art Form," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1989, B8.
- "Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes", *Ten-8* [Birmingham, England] 29 (1988), pp. 2-25
- "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), pp. 3-64. Reprinted in R. Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989.
- "Photography Between Labor and Capital," in B. Buchloh and R. Wilkie, eds., *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton, 1948-1968. Photographs by Leslie Shedden*. Halifax Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983, pp. 193-268.
- "Sketch for a Geography Lesson," *Camera Austria* 25 [Graz] (1988).
- "School is a Factory," in T. Neff and T. Frederick, eds., *Teaching Photography*, Denver, University of Colorado Press and the Society for Photographic Education, 1981, pp. 76-81.
- "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal*, 41:1 (Spring 1981), pp. 15-25.
- "Meditations on a Triptych," *Afterimage* [Rochester, N.Y.] 6:1-2 (Summer 1978), pp. 32-33, 43.
- "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *The Massachusetts Review*, 19:4 (December 1978), pp. 859-883.
- "This Ain't China: A Photonovel," *Journal* [Los Angeles], 10 (April 1976), n.p.
- "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," *Artforum*, 14:4 (December 1975), pp. 26-35.
- "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," *Artforum*, 13:5 (January 1975), pp. 36-45.
- "Aerospace Folktales," *Journal* [Los Angeles], 3 (December 1974), pp. 34-38.

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.
- 1991 *Vancouver Art Gallery*, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- 1989 *Western Front*, Vancouver. *Art Gallery of Windsor*, Windsor, Ontario.
- 1988 *Mendel Art Gallery*, Saskatoon, 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.
- 1980 *Anna Leonowens Gallery*, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax.
- 1974 *Brand Library Art Center*, Glendale, CA.

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.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Untitled Slide Sequence (1972)

Aerospace Folktales (1973)

Meditations on a Triptych (1973-1978)

School is a Factory (1978-80)

Sketch for a Geography Lesson (1983)

Geography Lesson Canadian Notes (1986)

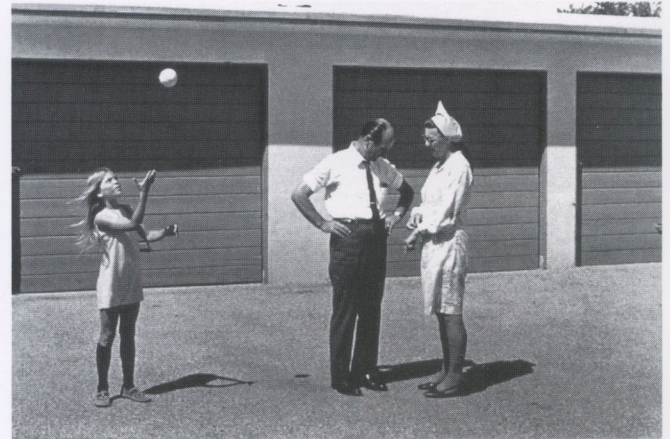
War Without Bodies: (1991)

Dismal Science (1989/92)

EXCERPTS 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 *Aerospace Folktales*, 1973

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..."

Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes (1985). Color and black and white photographs grouped into five sets. Spiral-bound book, reading table and chairs.

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.



Workers lounge overlooking Parliament Hall.
Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes, 1987

"...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..."

War Without Bodies (1991). A grid of nine large-scale cibachrome photographs with text booklet.



Victory Celebration at El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, Santa Ana, California, 28 April 1991. From *War Without Bodies*.

"...The bodies that don't exist in any official version are those many on the ground, for whom air war is always and already ground war.... On the one side, there are those bodies, many of them, too many of them, too many to count, too many to look at, as if the refusal to count was the crowning virtue of a higher morality, of a humanist revulsion against the quantification of death. On the other side, "our side", there are these bodies, subject to an almost microscopic attention, deployed and armored and monitored, expendable but relatively expensive...."

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.



Grave of Karl Marx and his family. Highgate Cemetery, London.
Dismal Science, 1989

*"...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**."*