

Photo Tourism

Garry Winogrand was a hostile tourist in a world filled with oddballs and odd angles.

WINOGRAND: FIGMENTS FROM THE REAL WORLD, BY JOHN SZARKOWSKI (LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY, \$45)

GARRY WINOGRAND WANTED HIS PICTURES TO be felt, like a nudge in the side or a pat on the butt. And he expected them to be seen: from corner to corner, edge to edge. He had a puerile sense of humor and an eye for sexist, racist and socially insensitive visual puns. But he invented a new kind of photograph, one based on the inherent characteristics of the medium of photography.

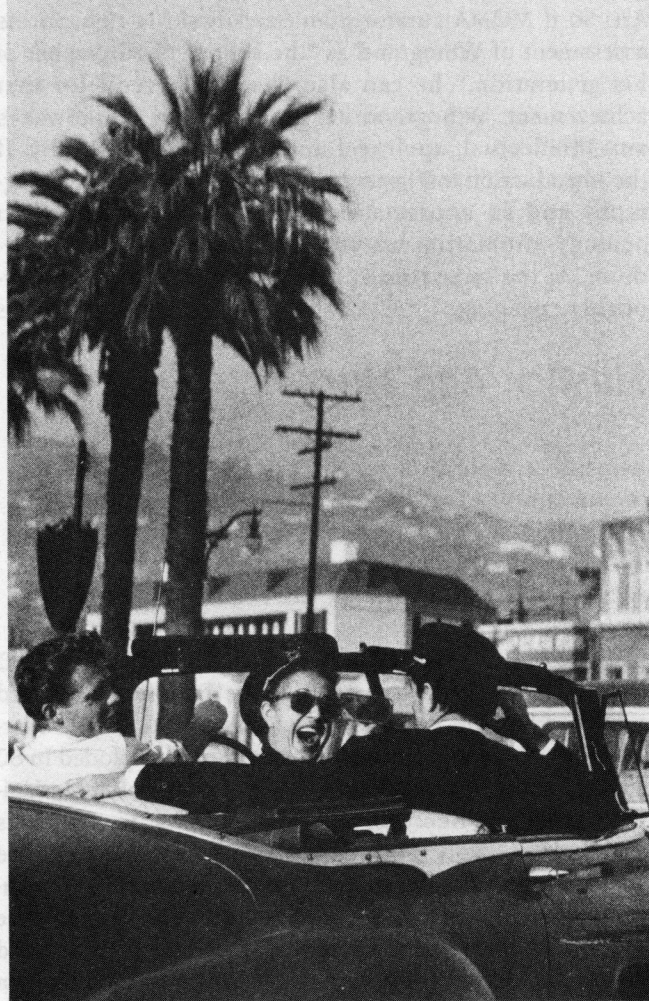
The cover image of *Winogrand: Figments From the Real World* is one of his best known. A young child stands at the edge of a gaping black hole—the dark interior of a tract-home garage. He is balanced on one foot, in the precarious way that toddlers stand, and he squints against the brilliant sun. The house, too, is balanced, perched at the edge of an expanse of concrete driveway that falls away to a scrubby

desert. In the distance great clouds blacken barren hills. In the foreground a tricycle lies overturned. This rich and compelling suburban metaphor of 1957 is not the kind of photograph Winogrand made in the artistically mature years before his death in Los Angeles in 1984.

The later pictures are far less literal, leaving doubt in the minds of some as to whether

they are open to a variety of interpretations, or simply uninterpretable. They are an indulgence in detail, photography's most obvious gift. Composition is typically centripetal, the forms apparently strewn across the page—or thrown at it.

These are the pictures it would take pages even to describe. Attempt a simple list, for example, of the characters and props in *Luling, Texas, circa 1977–80*, one of 25 pictures printed from the third of a million unexamined negatives Winogrand left behind when he died. List the



LOS ANGELES, 1955–60

archetypal forms of modern street-corner geography and architecture in the photograph: the types of dress, the men's hats, the women's hairstyles, the human gestures and body language. Now, does the list add up to an interpretation?

Winogrand said he photographed to see what the world looked like in a photograph. But his world was peopled by all manner of strange characters. A former student used to say that when he walked down a street with Winogrand it seemed to come alive with midgets, people on crutches and in wheelchairs, businessmen striking unbusinesslike poses. One critic called him “a hostile tourist in a world to which he does not relate.” It's true his style made no distinction between pictures of police-clubbed demonstrators in the 1960s and the crowd at Norman Mailer's fiftieth birthday party. Perhaps he saw no distinction.

But the pictures were not mere displays of technical and compositional virtuosity. It's just that they left the big political issues to the news media. They told small stories, about little intersections—the kind that take place within the frame of a 35mm photograph.

With the publication of this hefty retrospective survey, there are now six books of Winogrand's photographs. Three were produced by New York's Museum of Modern



LULING, TEXAS, 1977–80

Art. So if MOMA curator John Szarkowski is right in his assessment of Winogrand as "the central photographer of his generation," he can also share the credit for that achievement. Winogrand fits perfectly into Szarkowski's anti-intellectual, apolitical approach to photography. If the introduction to *Figments From the Real World* is a biography and an appreciation, it is also a Szarkowskian apology, promoting his subject-bound view of the medium. At the same time it is informative, witty and thoroughly engaging.

—CHARLES DESMARAIS