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Front cover: **Linda Connor**, Jain Nuns, India, 1979.

Back cover: **Linda Connor**, Hands, Canyon de Chelley, Arizona, 1982.

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LINDA CONNOR



White Sands, New Mexico, 1982

*On a rainy day in November, 1982, I visited Linda Connor in her San Anselmo, California, home. I brought a tape recorder and a vague notion that the **Bulletin** could serve as a forum for some of the ideas of this prolific and influential artist. After a full day of conversation, neither of us felt that our words had really achieved any sort of parity with her mythic, mystical pictures. Still, the much-edited transcript presented here does give a sense of the modest, intelligent person who has invested so much of herself in such voluptuous and sentimental images.*

Charles Desmarais

Have you given much thought to the difference between "documentary" photography, with all the assumptions we have about that, and something that is more a "creation" from scratch? Clearly your photographs are both.

Generally speaking, I'm now more interested in photographing things of the world than I am in creating pictures. I've grown tired of much of contemporary work. It is so often a glib, formalist exercise only meaning something in answer to other art pieces.

It does seem to be a very popular direction—it was one that I was more involved with a number of years ago. I think most of our photo education is training in that way, because it's easier to teach than creativity and fascination and passion. And when you're learning about your medium it's fun to answer it and fool around with it.

What brought about the change? Is it maturity?

Yes, I think so. But at the same time I would not call myself a documentary photographer, because what's always motivated me—in my appreciation for music, or wanting to be an artist at all—was some kind of stirring in my soul.

I want that personal sense of—this may sound corny, but—*ecstasy* that has nothing to do with politics or the specifics of documentary work. I try to deal with the wonderment, the intricacy of the world. Life is truly miraculous, if you pay attention to it.

Weil, if we expand the title "documentary photographer" to include, say, Atget, are you a documentary photographer?

I still don't think it's the right definition. It gets closer, though. I think where we differ is that Atget really did have a sense of history and a project that was more pragmatic than the way I go about things. Even though I do "clumps" of work. But my aspirations and my structure seem more emotional than his.

The structure of the project or the picture?

The project. The pictures are not made too differently. You do the best you can with what you've got. Now, there are certainly emotional passages and leaps of the imagination in his interpretations. But I think that the structure in which he saw himself working was much more pragmatic.

You know a great deal about the history of your own medium. Has that affected your work a lot, do you think?

Yes, of course it has. I'm interested in the history because I love looking at pictures, and the reinforcement of all those images of the past has been very useful for me. I could talk about specific influences that occurred at different times, but I think what's more crucial is an abiding commitment and love for the way photographs look, and interpret—whether they're by Timothy O'Sullivan or Paul Caponigro.

And I guess I am interested in how things change with different ages. I've been interested in the history of landscape photography for the last few years. And very interested in the way the nineteenth century had a different—totally different—mindset from the twentieth century, and how that can be seen in all the pictures. Take Freud's influence on the twentieth century as an example—you seldom had symbolic or metaphoric images in the nineteenth century. You had images that had to do with a sense of romance and a sense of place and a sense of sublime beauty, but you didn't have Paul Caponigro's *Apple*. They could do pictures of apples and still lifes until they were blue in the face, and they would never have seen that.

A long time ago you told me a nice story about seeing Atget's pictures at the Eastman House, but I don't remember the specifics of it.

I thought they were boring. It was when I was a student. I had seen some illustrations of Atget's pictures, and I kind of liked them. It was during my "Walker Evans Period," so I was just beginning to have a more subtle sense about things. A group of students took a field trip to the Eastman House, where we looked through a whole pile of Atget pictures. Several of them, you know, weren't his key images, but I was not at a point where I could discriminate that well between the strong ones and the more subtle ones—so I just thought they were pretty boring. I kept my mouth shut, I didn't say anything. And Emmett Gowin and Jim Dow and all these guys were oohing and aahing, and I thought, "I don't get it." It took another year or two before I could begin to see the way he saw, which was phenomenal. I still think he's probably the best, a most amazing photographer.



Embracing Trees, Thailand, 1979

What about your Walker Evans period? What was that? I don't know if I've ever seen a Walker Evans-like Linda Connor.

I could show you some. I got on the wrong track is what happened. I was very, very moved by Walker Evans' work about the time I was a junior and senior at the Rhode Island School of Design. I was beginning to work with a 4x5, and I was doing documentary pictures in people's homes. I was basically trying to recreate the Great Depression. Out of that came my fascination with "pictures within pictures." They were photographs of bureau tops, or, in a portrait, behind the person would be an old picture on the wall. And that's what I was really interested in, not so much the social situation.

Eventually I stopped doing the documentation part of it, and just started working with the actual photographs as objects. But where I'd gotten off the track was that I had seen Walker Evans' work, and knew I was moved by it, so I presumed that was a direction for me to follow. But I was not comfortable with the documentary way of working. I was not comfortable meeting these strangers and getting into their homes. I knew they didn't wholly understand what I was doing.

But what it was about Walker Evans that really affected me—and I did not realize it until a few years ago—was the way he *formed* his pictures: that kind of ritualized, altarlike, crystalline way he saw things with the view camera—flattening it out. Just the way he gave us that information. So I went off on the wrong track; I got around to it again, but it was kind of ass backwards there for a while. I was influenced, but at the time I didn't know what it was that was influencing me. I thought it was the general type of work, rather than the way it was done.

Somebody coming to your photographs cold might not fully recognize how the whole history of pictures goes into the way that you think of the world. I walk around your house and there are pictures everywhere, whether it's oriental art, or other people's photographs, or whatever. You're a collector of all kinds of images, and decorative pieces, and dried bones, and antiques, and odd knick-knacks. How much of photography, for you, is that instinct to collect?

I imagine it plays a real part. I haven't thought about it too much because it's like any obsession—you try to forget you have it. But I think photography's a very healthy outlet for that obsession.

Because you can fit more in a smaller space?

Not only that. I think it's good, if you're going to be collecting stuff, to develop your perception of the world and your own creative energy at the same time.

Your earliest work to become widely known was obviously constructed. That was part of what the work was about. And in the soft-focus work, again your hand is very obvious. Do you feel you're still "making" things in the more recent work?

Actually, when I started the soft-focus images they seemed very much "discovered" rather than made. Even though the effect of the lens is strong, they are not manipulated the way the earlier work was. The next step was to see what I could do without the effect of the soft-focus lens. So, at the moment, it seems like a more mature position: instead of manipulating the material, to be able to listen to it and respond to it. I know that going through the manipulative work, particularly the soft-focus work, was very crucial to me because it gave me a groundwork for the recent photographs, and produced images that I love and feel stand on their own. They just aren't what I'm doing now. Doing the earlier pictures gave me a clearer view of the emotional chords I wanted to hit—my palette, so to speak. And yet, at this point I know I can achieve that without the added influence of the soft focus. I think it takes a subtler photographer to make them, and a more in-tune viewer to see them.

So many of the new pictures are about things that are sacred, or were sacred, to some culture.

Or appear to be sacred. That's what was going on in the *Solos* book. Very little of that stuff is sacred. That's what I was talking about in reference to Walker Evans—that structure in the pictures which turned them into icons.

That's where I was going. The soft-focus work frequently is of very mundane subject matter, or I assume it would have seemed mundane if I had been standing there next to you. But you've moved from creating your own altars...

...into finding them. Well, I'm still to some extent creating, through context and suggestion. The sacred is basically the realm I want to work with. If I had any talent in music, which I don't seem to have, I probably would have been a classical musician. I do like rock and roll, and other types of music, but I think that the arena I want to work in—well, it's that soul-stirring business that interests me. Maybe that's gotten clearer in my mind. There again, that's why I don't think it has that much to do with documentary. I now understand that in the odd juxtapositions and the symbolic or mysterious quality of some of the collaged and set-up work I was trying to get at the same thing, but was much less clear about it. With the soft-focus lens, I could photograph that pyramid of cans, for instance, and transform it into something quite glorious. They still remain cans with a sharp lens—I did do a sharp picture; it's not bad, but it's not great. It doesn't go beyond the situation. The sharp lens, in a way, forces a more stringent selection process. I think I do have the ability to transcend, but it is harder and often I do need help from the content.

If someone wanted to be hard with you, they could say, "What do you mean, 'sacred' images? The visual tricks are fairly easy, right? So you center something. Symmetry, photographing from a low angle, chiaro-

scuro—these are very dramatic formal devices which say 'sacred' to us.'

Well, then you have to look at the content of *all* the work, and at the direction of that. I think the general direction is clearly in that realm.

So then it's the context of all those other pictures that makes us look at a particular picture differently?

Definitely, as well as the way it's formed. I am curious about some of the ones that are tougher and that are not necessarily in an "altar" configuration. One thing that attracted me to Asia and a thing I want to continue grappling with, is that in our culture we think of things that are

sacred as being sublime—just good, just lovely and angel-like; that's the vision of heaven. I'm interested in the polarities, in things that are horrific, or sexual, things that *conflict* more than just "radiate." I think that has a lot more to do with our real-life experience. I'm interested in that contrast.

A number of years ago when you were deeply involved in the soft-focus work, I remember you saying that you were concerned because you were a woman doing work that might be thought of as "pretty."

I think people could probably tell from looking at a lot of my work that a woman did this work, which is fine. But I



Untitled, 1976



Big Hand Panel, New Mexico, 1981

know that my interests are beyond just doing things that are delicate and lovely. Some of the work is. It would be just as much a lie to go just with the raw material. I go back and forth on that—it's the polarities and contrasts again.

The photographs of the petroglyphs came about because of your interest in that subject matter, and yet you photograph them very differently from the way you would if that was the only thing you were interested in—what those scratchings look like. What are you trying to do by providing the larger picture, giving a sense of what the environment is? How much of your hand is in these documents of somebody else's handwork?

Well, I'm trying to get my own art out of it, too. That's

where the context of the whole group comes into play again. For instance, if I just did all of them as simple, straight-on descriptions of the drawing and nothing else, that might be considered a document; I do that some of the time, but I have the orchestration of the other images to mediate that. Also, the subjects demand, photographically, different things. Some really are impossible to get close to, or you back up too much and the drawing becomes so infinitesimal that you can't see it. So, part of it is that the subject gives you problems and demands certain kinds of solutions.

Are you interpreting these earlier marks?

In a way. I'm placing them in my context rather than their original cultural or ritual one, whatever that might have been. I don't know their original context. I do my best to



Great Gallery, Horseshoe Gallery, Utah, 1982

show the integrity of the specific marks. I'm not applying any new symbolic meaning to them, but I am shifting their context. I am interpreting them in terms of their location, in terms of the way I arrange the picture and see it. And hopefully I can even heighten, intensify, or make the mark more expressive—so that it's not the way an anthropologist would document it.

I'm fascinated by the spirals, so there are a number of pictures with spirals in them. Maybe when the whole work gets together, like the way the pyramids show up in *Solos*, the spirals will be more personalized touchstones or symbols that run through that work. I don't think that's forcing a whole new meaning onto these things, but it is using the marks for my own expression.

That's actually what I mean by interpreting. You're

interpreting in the sense that you are respecting what they are and trying to make that more clear.

But I don't know what their ritual meaning was. There are a lot of marks that I don't photograph because I don't find them personally important. I respond very strongly to the handprints, and by choosing them I personalize that symbol, but I don't think I'm changing it. Its integrity is still intact.

Is there a way that you could photograph these petroglyphs that would be dishonest or that would hurt them in some way? And I don't mean by going and actually scratching on the rock.

Yes, I think so. There again, what comes to mind is the context that they're put in. I could imagine some conceptual photographer building a construct around that stuff

that would be pretty insensitive and cute and pat. Or even in the way that an anthropologist just goes and makes a simple picture of the *mark*, and pays no attention to where it's *located*. Once you've been dealing with these marks for a while, you find that some of the locations are incredible. The views that can be seen from these ledges are very special, for instance. It's not a perfect equation that if you find the best spot, there will be the petroglyphs—but in many cases they do correspond. That's one of the things that some of the photographs are attempts to do—to give a sense of the magic that's inherent in those places.

Last time we talked about the petroglyph pictures you were saying that what they're petroglyphs of, or what they mean, isn't really important to you. That occurred to me when you showed me the Australian ones. You would show them as if they were interchangeable with Southwest Indian markings, wouldn't you?

I'd label them, but yes. I think the marks have meaning, but I don't think their specific meaning is necessary for the way I am using them. A lot of what I'm attracted to is the mystery. They're very direct and intense marks, marks that obviously have a meaning that's no longer available to us. I think of the energy there, in that need for human beings to leave their mark on the earth, and to make a connection between themselves and their natural environment—their world. And they have a ritualized and symbolic feeling to them. I think that is at the basis of all art, although I'm sure that these weren't made as art as we know it. They're an answer to the mystery of being alive—to find some way to mediate that.

Mediate what?

Just the awesomeness you feel being alive. Mediate it: become a medium? Is that what mediate means? To be, somehow, a linkage between your internal state and the outside world. The marks, and the rituals that went into these things, whether they had very specific cultural significance or they were doodles: they still indicate somebody's presence and a very human response to the inner and outer environment.

They are a testimony to the enduring desire for people to transform the world in a human way. I think that's also at the root of photography. The photograph is a *result* from these carvings.

You said that these are people's attempt to "make a mark on the earth," or "leave their marks on the earth." But a photograph is so ephemeral as opposed to that.

So why aren't I doing petroglyphs?

Or sculpture or something. You keep going back to the idea of the environment—to saying "I was here."

Well, I doubt if they were doing it because it was more archival.

No, and when I say a photograph is ephemeral I

don't mean because it might be "unarchival," but just that it can be carried around, moved around. It's not site specific, certainly. Is that something that's lacking in photography? Do you ever think about it?

The final object is not site specific, but the act of photographing is very precisely that.

There is a relationship between your work and theirs, though, in that both are responses to the environment. You make landscape photographs.

Yes. Obviously photography is much quicker; you don't put so much energy into one mark—but I think a lot of it is trying to deal with your relationship to the world.

Working with a view camera is certainly not so quick. I like that.

Is that one of the big attractions of the view camera for you?

I don't know if I'd call it a *big* attraction, but I think that's part of it. There's something about the obstacle and the weight. As difficult as that makes it, it somehow—in a perverse kind of way—helps, too. We were talking about that in a class the other day: sometimes the best thing to do when you're making pictures is to clear your mind and really settle in and to be quiet. At other times, I think, it's not a bad thing to have obstacles. You pay attention to those obstacles, and a splitsecond recognition of other things might occur.

The view camera is a real obstacle, a useful one. I'm not totally clear why, while I found it much more difficult to photograph in India, the photographs are so much better than the ones from Bali, where I was quite comfortable and worked very hard and got zilch. I think a lot of it was just the discomfort in India—just being kind of overwhelmed and thrown off-balance enough for things to somehow penetrate. Tension can be a very important element.

To bypass your presuppositions?

Yes, I guess so. Although Bali was pretty amazing too, but it was just much more comfortable and wonderful to be there.

One of the things that's really clear from the way you live your life—you own a home by yourself; the way you work, traveling by yourself all around the world—is that you're a very independent, strong, individual person. Yet, you have lots of friends and you personally know a great many people in the field of photography. How do you work that out, on a personal level? Do you have to work alone?

No, I can work with people. Generally, I travel alone, not because I feel like it—I feel like I have to do the traveling. Often I would prefer to do it with someone, but that rarely seems to work out, so I end up doing it by myself. The second time I went back to Asia I went with the man I was involved with then. On the whole that made it a little easier—at least more fun.

It's confusing to me—the sense of independence seems



Petroglyphs Near Bishop, California, 1978



Hoof, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1980

very apparent, and yet I know how frightened and lonely and not-brave I am. I'm shy—very, very shy. Luckily I'm also stubborn, and I do set goals for myself.

Continuing on that same line, while I always think of your work as something totally separate and totally your own, yet I do think of you in connection with other people. I think of you, for example, in connection with Judy Dater—partly, perhaps, because the two of you came to prominence at a similar time and you both were living in the same city.

Judy's a very dear friend, and we're real chums. I think one of the reasons I wanted to move out of the city to this area was because she was out here. But I don't think of her work influencing me. I think Judy's work is quite terrific, but I think hers is hers and mine's mine.

What about Imogen Cunningham? I think of your great respect for her.

There again, it's not so much in the pictures, but it's more in her lifestyle. She was a model for me—although I think I became committed to photography very, very early; even before I got my first camera I knew it was going to be very important in my life. But Imogen showed me that you could outwork and out live the obstacles. That was helpful, because it's so easy to get frustrated with being overlooked, and the politics that go on in photography.

Have you ever felt overlooked? It seems to me you've had attention since graduate school.

Yes and no. I have been overlooked in a few specific places. On the whole, no—I haven't been overlooked. In fact, generally speaking I feel quite satisfied with the slow



Sleeping Baby, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1980

and steady "acclaim." But I get a little frustrated with people that come flying in with one idea and are very popular and sell oodles of pictures. I think I've paid more dues.

Also, I think being a woman has its problems in terms of acceptance and "success." It's not just individual people who are sexist. Really, the entire structure of our society at this time is sexist, and I think it affects all of us. There's more cultural support for the type of work that men do. You have all of art history that supports that.

Work by women is still in formation; its history is not as solid. It's more easily misinterpreted and more easily overlooked. It takes longer being a woman—I think you have to work harder. Not that being a man is going to be a guarantee, but I just look at some of these guys: they're creative and they're good and smart and clever, but I don't think it's enough. I think a lot of them have ridden through with one or two thin ideas.

Is that advantage a function of the way the work looks or the way men deal with the art world?

I think maybe it's the way the art world deals with them—but it's also, to some extent, the way the work looks. It has more precedent, so it's easier to define and easier to embrace.

I'm sure you can't make a generalization you're going to feel totally confident about, but are there some things that you think are hallmarks of women's work, generally, that makes it different from what men might do?

On the whole, it's more emotional. In some cases the scale is different—not the picture size, but the imagery tends to be more intimate. I think women's work tends to be—and this may be changing—more about their immediate experience: journalistic and diaristic and social. There is not one

woman that you would call a landscape photographer, that you would say, "Mary Jones is a landscape photographer," the way you would about Dave Bohn or Ansel Adams or Paul Caponigro.

Not even Laura Gilpin?

No, not when you look at her whole body of work. She did a lot of landscape work, but most of it echoed Edward Weston. I think her real vision was apparent when she dealt with the Navajo people. That work had a relationship to landscape. Her work with landscape was best in terms of how she saw those people *in* the land. So I would see her more as a *social* landscape photographer.

I think the underlying problem stems from the fact that landscape photography has developed out of our Western civilization, from territorial claiming and from land ownership and exploration and Columbus and pissing—male animals pissing: "This is mine, my territory." It also comes from the whole Western mythology about the land being a female entity, and the male's psychological and mythic attraction to the land.

Since women embody that, it may be that they don't need to manifest it outside themselves. Women have territories, but that territory has seldom been acknowledged. If you were to try to include women in landscape photography you'd have to start including manipulative works; you'd have to include still lifes. You would have to deal with *nature*, and as soon as you did that you would find quite a few women. Or social landscape—Dorothea Lange's road going through the prairie; Laura Gilpin's work; Helen Levitt and the way she activates that space in the street; Gail Skoff's hand-coloring. Women have done a lot in terms of landscape work, but the premise seems different. It needs a redefinition to include women.

So,...

...where do I fit in to all that?

I think it has to do with the emotional element in the work, its symbolic underpinnings, and its *intimacy*. Even if I photograph a big space, it becomes intimate because of the way it is seen. It's about an embrace.

If somebody else wrote that about your pictures, you might not like it.

Maybe! Though I would acknowledge the intimacy. Look at a Robert Adams picture. I think his pictures are very delicate and very fine, but they have a very different feeling to them—a different sense of territory and how that territory is defined and sensed.

Still, I think I'm unusual for a woman—working in landscape. Compared to most women, I think I take an expansive view.

For a while you wouldn't show work in women's shows.

Yes, I was very selective about that, unless the show particularly interested me as saying something more. I saw that most of those women's shows were tokenism. A gallery would have eleven male one-person shows all year

long, then do a group woman's show and say they were doing something for the gals.

Also, I don't like to see it separated—"men's work" and "women's work." I'd like to see the issues and ideas of photography investigated, by both men and women. I don't think women are the same as men. There's a cultural imprint that needs to be questioned and re-evaluated, of course. But my gut-level reaction is that, regardless of the culturalization, there are differences: women bear children—I think that makes an enormous difference. And this thing about territory—while it's culturally reinforced, I think it also comes from a behavioral base. My guess is that we're animals, and part of that animal activity carries through. I'm quite sure it does.

Maybe we look at everybody's work in relation to who they are, for a whole range of reasons. "This person is a man, but he's also spent a lot of time in Africa; or he happens to be gay; or he worked as a helicopter attack pilot or something." And that shows up in the work—surprise!

We talked about Atget; we talked about Evans. I am interested in your personal influences, the Visual Dialogue Foundation, Michael Bishop, Callahan, Siskind. Can you talk about some of those people?

Michael and you came to prominence at a similar time. In fact, there was a time when one would think, "Michael-Bishop-and-Linda-Connor." The work wasn't exactly the same, but there were some correspondences, I think.

Yes, I think there were some influences there, but we both have such a distinct way of working that they appeared very differently. Michael is very adept technically and has a real problem-solving kind of a mind. He's a real whiz kid. I think he would have been an incredible scientist if he had gone in that direction—very creative.

It was almost as if we were speaking different languages. My whole set of symbols is very different from his. At one point, for example, we were both doing fabricated work. I remember he did some things by cutting two negatives simultaneously and switching parts. They were very puzzle-like. I liked the idea, and it fit into what I had done earlier with cutting photographs—the cut edge—and so I did some things by cutting negatives.

But we both internalized those influences quite well. He was very private about his work. He didn't come rushing out of the darkroom and say, "Oh, look at this!" We talked about photography in a social atmosphere, because we were both around it so much; we were both teaching. But we didn't talk much about each other's work and critique it. I'd ask for technical advice, though. I think I wanted to talk about it more than he did.

Some of the still-life material and some of the view camera stuff he picked up from me—then he went back to the 35mm and into color. I think the influencing went both ways.



Blue Ridge, 1979



Landscape, Nevada, 1982

Was that group of people around Welpott at that time — which actually took a name, the Visual Dialogue Foundation — really a group in any true sense?

I think it was at the beginning; they were all students of his. It was one of those really remarkable, hot groups of graduate students that come along every now and then. They were concerned that when they graduated they wouldn't have as much contact or mutual support as they did when they were graduate students, so they thought that by forming a group they could keep the dialogue going. I think they functioned for about two years pretty well, and then it really dispersed. It died a natural death. I came in after it formed. For a year it was really quite a bit of fun. It was a way for me to feel attached to a snug support group, especially since I was new to the West Coast. We did some shows together, and a banquet every year where we would give somebody an award. We gave Imogen Cunningham this trophy with a stainless steel funnel engraved with her name.

Did their work affect your work?

No, I don't think so. It was more a social situation. The work I was doing during that period had most of its direction from the work I had done in Chicago. Being around Michael affected it some—and being in a new environment. That sense of play and manipulation expanded once I got out here. I started doing images outdoors and doing a combination of work.

I can think of a lot of ways in which the ideas of your early work show up in work now. Are there any ways that the technical experimentation that you were so involved with affects the current work?

A lot of it is the same technique. I've been working with the view camera for fifteen, sixteen years now. I've been working with printing-out papers since 1970—I started doing some cut-negative things on the printing-out paper. The way the petroglyphs look on the wall surface could be compared with those little shells and fossils I moved around in my old photographs. At the time it was a creative thrill and very exciting to tamper, to play, to fool, because when I started photography I had this idea that you had to approach the photograph as a document, in a straight way.

Do you know that Zen story?: At first, rocks are rocks and trees are trees and rivers are rivers. Just ask any fool, Is that a rock? Then, when you're a student of Zen, you ask, Is that a rock? No, it's a metaphor, it's a symbol, it's molecules, it's something else. When you finally gain wisdom, the rocks are rocks and the trees are trees and the rivers are rivers. That manipulative stage was a very important creative period for me. But I'm now more interested in seeing if I can somehow be more direct.

What other people were at the Institute of Design when you were there, as students?

A good friend of mine was Hans Schall, who's a filmmaker

—he's now at the Circle Campus. We spent a great deal of time talking. He was an old friend of Emmett Gowin's from Virginia. Cal Kowal was there. Barry Burlison, Jim Newberry, Barry Koral, Dan McCormick—I guess Dan had graduated—Charlie Lyman, Rosalyn Banish had graduated but she was still there. Eileen Cowin was there. Some of them were my friends, but, although my work changed drastically in Chicago—I think it was the first work that was really mine—the seeds for that all came from RISD. There's a lot more influence of Emmett Gowin, for instance, in my work than anybody that I could name in Chicago.

You were both at RISD at the same time?

Yes. He was a graduate student and I was an undergrad. I remember the way he dealt with photo history, because Emmett had a very unabashed way of revering a photographer's work so much that he would just go out and incorporate it, whereas I was more intimidated. So I watched Emmett make Alfred Stieglitz pictures, make Harry Callahan pictures, make Robert Frank pictures, make Walker Evans pictures. For instance, he and Jim Dow took a trip to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and they remade some of Walker Evans' pictures, just to see where he'd stood, what lens he'd used, and so on, because they liked them so much. Emmett gave me permission to understand and incorporate and take what moved me. He was very important in that way. His own work, too. I think there's an altarlike quality in his work, too.

You've said you don't like the word "sacred" in reference to the meanings of your photographs. What's a better word?

I just think that kind of thing is hard to talk about. Have you read Jose Arguelles' *Transformative Vision*? One of the things that he talks about is the shift away from sacred art in Western civilization from the twelfth century on. Western art is now about the secular and historical, and is egocentric—sort of "ownership"-type art. This move away from the sacred has also changed our ability to express ourselves about it. Our sacred language has atrophied; what terms remain often seem mundane. We don't have a language that makes it comfortable to talk about that material, especially in an art context. It's so much easier to talk about content and form—formalism, symbiotics, and, currently, politics.

Are you a religious person?

Yes and no. I think I have a lot of energy in that direction. I went to an astrologer who thought that I must have had a number of past lives in nunneries and religious places. But there aren't any religions, specifically, that I have a desire to join. In fact, I rather dislike most formal religions. They're very dogmatic and moralistic. They have much, much more to do with morals than they do with a sense of *true*—would you use the word epiphany?



Religious Effigies, Banares, India, 1979

