

Past



Present

Future

**PAST PRESENT FUTURE:  
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA'S  
PEOPLE AND PLACES**

Silver Eye Center for Photography  
June 27–August 19, 2017

#### PAST PRESENT FUTURE

Presented by Silver Eye Center for Photography  
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## INTRODUCTION

Silver Eye celebrates its reopening and move to the Penn Avenue Arts District with *Past Present Future: Western Pennsylvania's People and Places*, an exhibition that explores and celebrates the history, current moment, and future of photography in the region. The expansive exhibition and this accompanying book features landscapes and portraits of Western Pennsylvania, spanning over 100 years of image making in the region. The exhibition features the work of over 40 artists and is presented in a nonlinear salon style that creates visual connections between the photographs of giants of photography like W. Eugene Smith and Esther Bubley and contemporary artists making work today throughout the region. Ross Mantle edited this book to echo these lyrical connections between images and, in doing so, found many new ones.

*Past Present Future* makes visible the overwhelming and complex changes that have occurred in Western Pennsylvania through industrial and demographics shifts over the years. Despite these changes, there is a persistent beauty in the hills, valleys, and people of the region. This exhibition is a celebration of that beauty and of the community of artists who have worked to capture it over the years. It is this community of photographers and art lovers that have enabled Silver Eye to carry out its mission for nearly 40 years, and this exhibition is a testament to their passion, hard work, and talent.

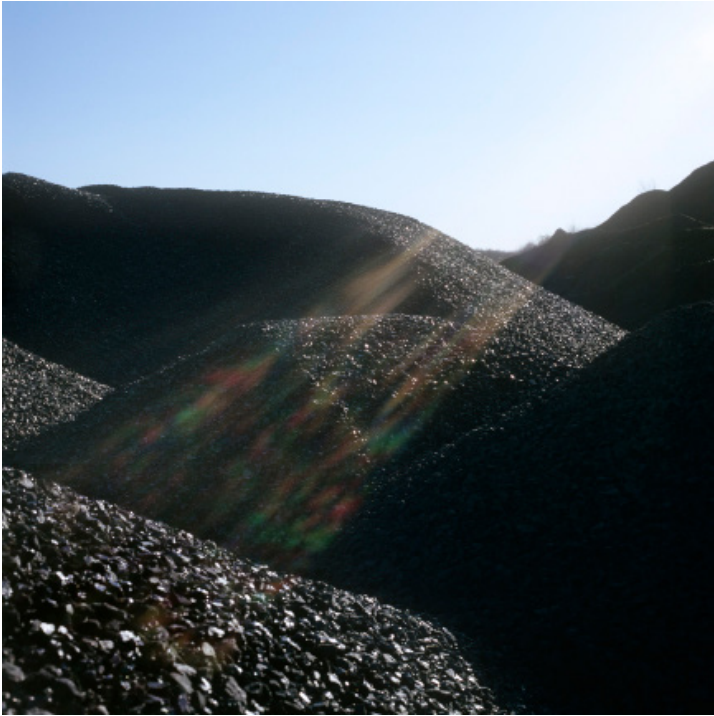






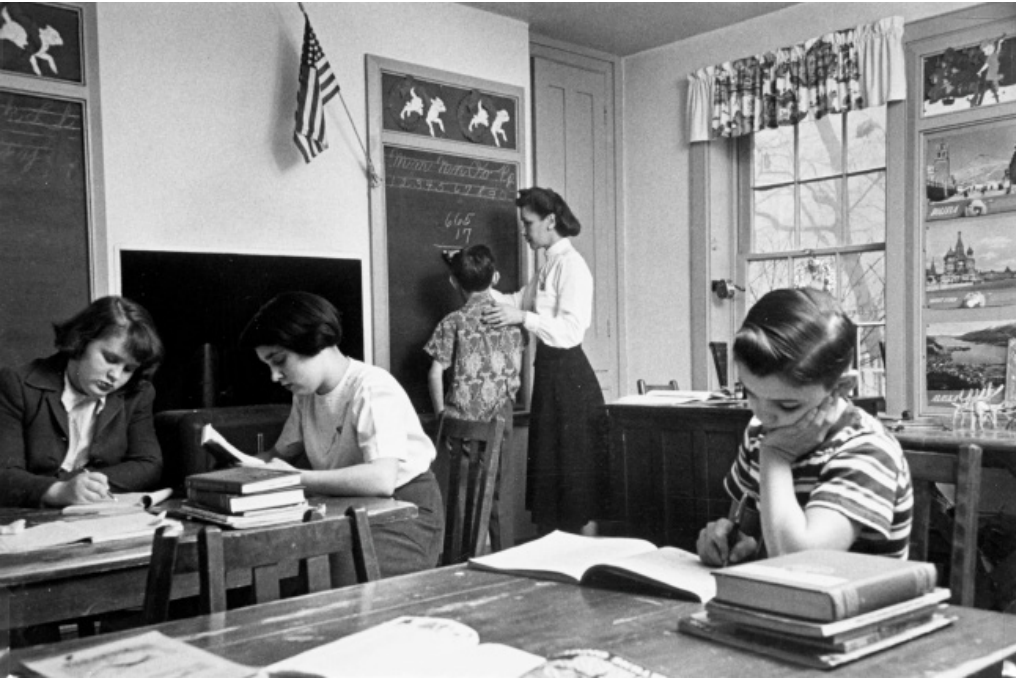
















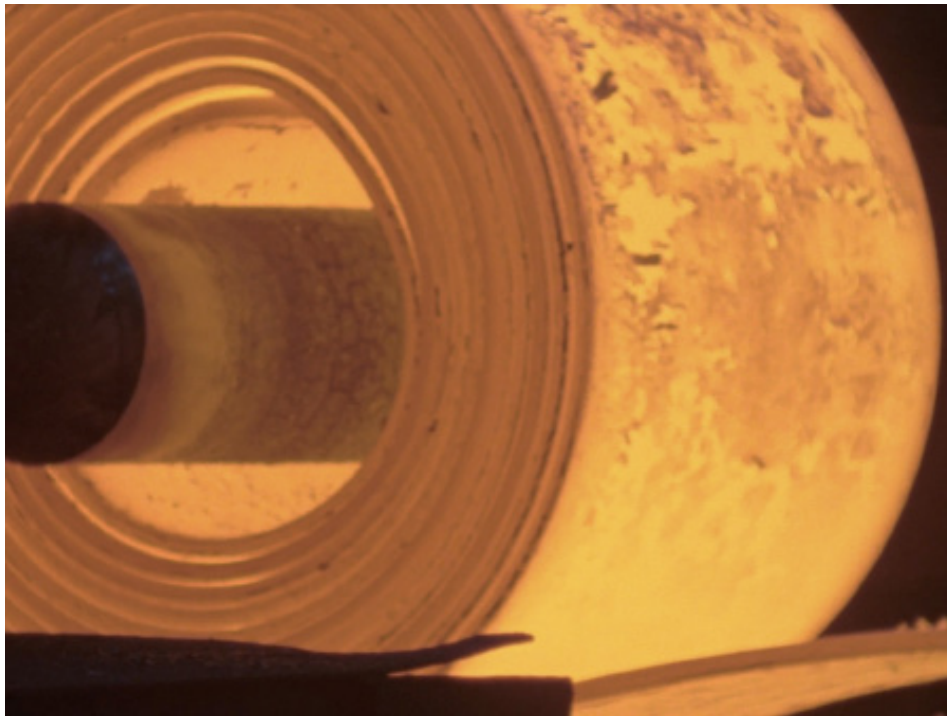




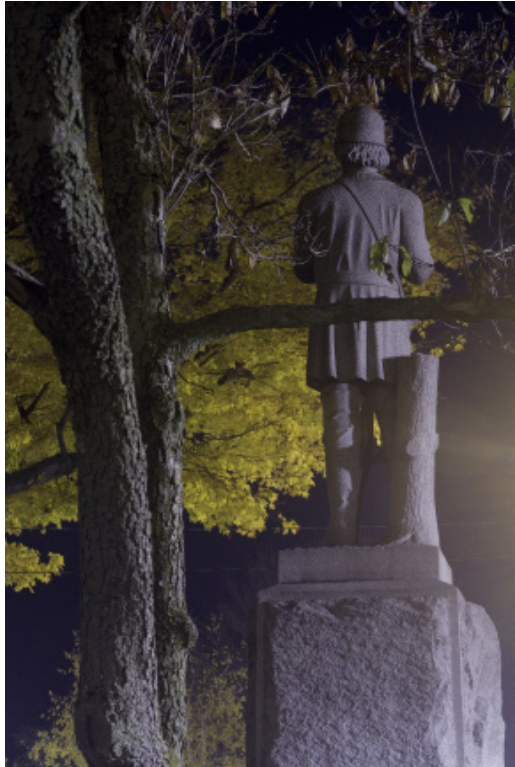










































































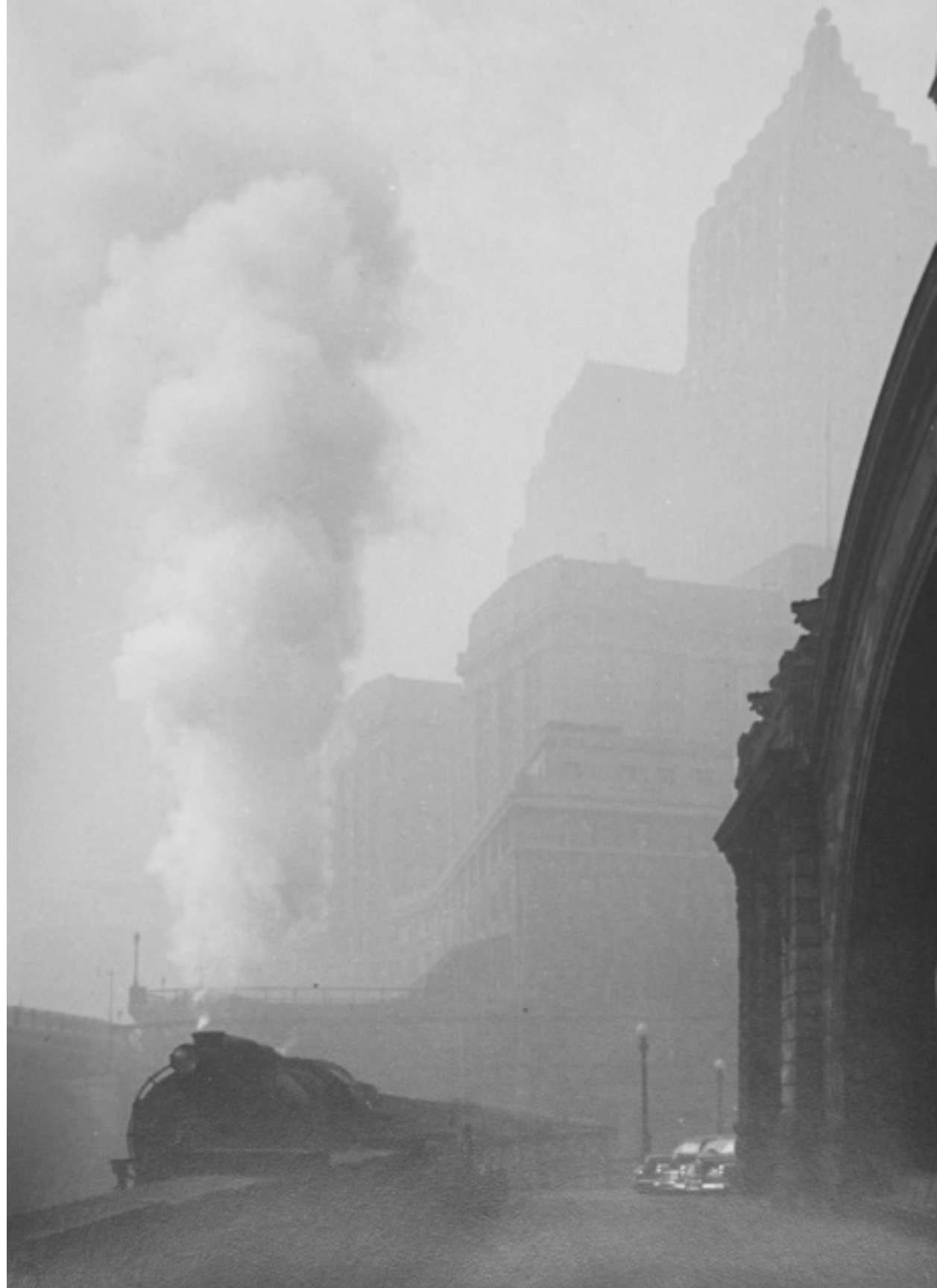












# A Place for Serious Artists

David Oresick speaks with  
Ross Mantle

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- RM How has photography shaped your view of Pittsburgh?
- DO Photographs of Pittsburgh have taught me how beautiful this city is. I feel like everyday here, I see a valley or hillside that makes me reach for my camera. It's so verdant and lush, with views that feel nearly prehistoric, I'll never get over it. But photography is tricky, it's deceptive. There can be a tendency to focus too much on our "grit" and to romanticize our industrial roots — or to pay too much attention to the progress we've made, hyping how "liveable" we are when the region is still not very livable for a lot of people. Of course The Steel City is famously a working class city, and that's something to be proud of, but there is also a lot of pain in those roots and in our transition to a post-industrial city. I am moved by photographs that are honest about that fraught history and admire artists like Njaimeh Njie, Ross Nugent, and Ed Panar who are working with these difficult questions.
- RM Not many other American cities commingle with the landscape like Pittsburgh. That uniqueness must help keep so many native Pittsburghers, yourself included, in its orbit. Has your relationship to the city changed since you've returned?
- DO I left just after I graduated high school and was beginning to study photography in a serious way. As a teenager, I thought I knew everything, and assumed Pittsburgh was too provincial for me. I spent 2003–14 primarily in Chicago, and in that time Pittsburgh changed so much. When I came back to join Silver Eye in 2014, I realized Pittsburgh is an ideal place for creative people. It has a vibrant creative landscape, really an embarrassment of riches in cultural organizations and community, for a fraction of the price of New York or Chicago. Artists can get work done, can have time and space

to create, and that is everything. Now I understand that Pittsburgh is a place for serious artists, that is why so many of them have found their way here.

RM What is Silver Eye's role as a space for these artists today?

DO It's a place to share work that's pushing our field forward, and help people fall in love with it the way we did — as an art form, this medium is new to lots of people. Silver Eye is the only organization in the region dedicated exclusively to photography, a medium now at the very core of our culture. We are lucky that we are not a commercial institution — we can share work because it is essential, not just because it's sellable. I've found that our limited resources make the biggest impact by supporting emerging and under recognized artists and I love supporting new work. Silver Eye's role is to be a platform for artists, to share their work and help put it into a meaningful context for a wide audience.

RM How do you see yourself fitting into Silver Eye's lineage?

DO I love that we have always been a bit out of the mainstream, you see something unique here. As an artist, I have also always been attracted to artist-run organizations, and Silver Eye has that identity in its bones — it began as a space created by artists because no one was going to give them one. It's amazing that this free artist-led gallery has existed for nearly forty years. Most spaces like us don't make it to ten years old. The fact that Silver Eye has is evidence of exceptional community and leadership. With *Past Present Future* we are trying to honor a lineage of Pittsburgh photographers, and in my work as Executive Director, I am working to honor this incredible organization, while bringing my own voice and experience to our work.

RM Why do we need to show contemporary photography here?

DO Photography has always been at the crossroads of technology and creativity, always reinventing itself. Similarly, Pittsburgh has replaced so much of its industrial past with science and technology. Many people think art and science are in opposition, but photography shows how complementary they can be. I'm often asked if I prefer film or digital photography and I answer, "Yes!" I want the old and the new, history and future. I love photography because it speaks to both so easily and beautifully.

RM Even when it was still known primarily for industry, it was the city's embrace of new technologies that enabled it to develop. It's cynical, but it seems appropriate that we have a robotics industry where for decades we relied on inexpensive immigrant labor to run its factories and mines. With art and technology playing their own complicated roles in photography, it might be the most appropriate medium for speaking about Pittsburgh.

DO That's right. To extend the comparison, photography has largely embraced these massive changes in technology, just as Pittsburgh has. Artists have to confront technology in whatever form it takes because it will always be built to serve commercial needs first.

RM How is the region's rich and complicated *Past Present Future* addressed in this exhibition?

DO The exhibition has amazing vintage photographs and images from some of the most interesting artists working in the region today, as well as work by talented middle schoolers from Assemble, a neighborhood organizations that teaches kids about art and technology. I was looking for things that tied all these artists together, their common fascination with the region. There is a kind of affection in the work in this show, a genuine love of this place that I connect with very

deeply. To display it as a salon was a natural choice, and I love its non linear, non chronological format. To have a photo from a historical giant like Gene Smith or Esther Bublely, hanging next to contemporary artists like yourself, Sue Abramson, Sean Carroll, Charlee Brodsky and many others who work everyday in this region, and to see they shared so much of the same inspiration just amazes me. I love making connections like that in shows, and this one was so much fun that way.

I also returned to some of my early teenage ideas about photography. I remember walking around Panther Hollow in high school, looking ways to fit this crazy landscape into my viewfinder. At the time, I didn't realize how exceptional it was. For this show, I was looking for images that could not have been made anywhere else, for photographers whose projects were deeply rooted here, and who were as fascinated with Pittsburgh and its valleys as much as I was.

RM What were you unable to say about Pittsburgh through this selection of images?

DO Photographs can only show the surface of things. There are volumes of history, of stories, that these photographs hint at, but can't fully share: *Who is this person being photographed? What does their voice sound like? What brought a photographer to that spot on that day?* It's this mystery that I find compelling. Loving photography is, in part, embracing a feeling of not knowing the exact circumstances of an image. I think this is echoed in the landscape here as well, I've always loved how the hills and forests hide so much, adding to that sense of mystery. In the summer a whole hillside is washed in deep green, it's totally opaque. Pittsburgh always feels mysterious, as though the land itself is trying to hide its history.

RM I often have this sense of the hills and rivers being alive, begrudging of our attempts to live along them. Like when a home is abandoned on a hillside, the land takes it over and we can see how temporary our marks are. It's beautiful how we are constrained by the topography, we're equally reliant on and restricted by the hills and rivers. It forces people to be thoughtful with even the most mundane tasks or travels.

DO I think that's a perfect description, and those ideas are also evident in the Pittsburgh mindset. Nothing but the rivers and hills feels permanent, and even if a place isn't terribly far away, the idea of having to cross a river, or go over a hill can make the distance feel like much more than it is.

RM How would you like to see photography fit into Pittsburgh's creative and social landscape in the years to come?

DO I would love to see our audience grow, to get more people seeing shows and thinking and talking about photography. In our new space we can also offer more workshops and help people learn about making photographs.

RM How has your involvement with Silver Eye impacted your personal relationship to photography?

DO My wife, Deanna, and I have gotten excited about collecting photography, and I've become fascinated by art can grow in your home over months and years, not the seconds or minutes that you see something in a book or gallery. We bought a picture a few years ago by Daniel Coburn, who exhibited at Silver Eye in 2016. Originally, I loved it because it had a beautiful darkness, a sadness to it that was really powerful. Somehow, lately I've been thinking I can't believe how joyful it feels. I love how art changes you with time. You never look into the same river twice.



# A Collective History of Silver Eye

As told by [Larry Rippel](#),  
[Lorraine Vullo](#), [Sue Abramson](#),  
[Jennifer Saffron](#), and [Dylan Vitone](#)

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*How did you become involved with Silver Eye?*

LR The creation of Blatent Image Gallery (which became Silver Eye around 1985), emerged from Pittsburgh's punk scene. Karl Mullen, from the punk band The Cuts, encouraged Stacy Weiss and me to start a photography gallery. Along with the photographers Butch Belair, Kevin Brunelle, Dennis Childers, Seth Dickerman, Tim Fabian, Genevieve Harm, Tom Jefferson, and Lorraine Vullo, we formed a collective and found and remodeled a space on Forbes Avenue in Oakland. Our first show, entitled *First Images*, opened on April 24, 1981, and featured work by these founding members.

LV Karl and Stacy — who were visionaries in the beginning — lived on Forbes Avenue with several artists and musicians, upstairs from a storefront formerly occupied by a Krishna House. Ten of us started a gallery in the space. Stacy was the first President; Seth was VP; and I was treasurer.

We promoted our shows with handmade postcards, flyers, and 4' by 8' fiber-based prints mounted on Masonite and hung on the building. The openings were really crowded — bands would play, alcohol would flow — and they distinguished themselves from museums and other galleries because they were loud celebrations for the artists, art, and friends.

Later, Bill Wade, Sue Abramson, Tom Underiner, Wes Morar, and others joined. This was a co-op of photographers, for the purpose of exhibition because we wanted our work to be seen. Each member paid \$30 a month or worked the equivalent of hours in the gallery. In between shows, artists of other media could do pop up shows and bands would play.

SA Shortly after I moved to Pittsburgh in 1984, Blatent Image moved to the Southside and I was fortunate to be in a three-person exhibition with Lorraine Vullo and Patty Calderone. This was the first time I exhibited a large grouping of my photographs in town so it was extremely important to me.

JS I went to CMU for art when there wasn't a photo program there. I used to sneak into the design studio darkrooms or install makeshift ones in the basements of my apartments. I was hungry for knowledge about the medium, visiting Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Photo Forum and Silver Eye to look at images and meet artists.

In 1992, a year after graduating from CMU, I submitted work for the Emerging Artists Award at Silver Eye. The board picked Tim Kaulen and me and we had our first gallery show, of large-scale photo installations and documentary work. Tim was in the early stages of what would become the Industrial Arts Co-Op, making guerilla installations in abandoned buildings on the South Side near the gallery — South Side at the time was still in its post-industrial throes and there was a lot of decay. I exhibited documentary images of gay men's leather pageants, a project I worked on for two years — some of the men came in full regalia to the opening. My grandmother was impressed.

Jody Guy was the Executive Director at the time and she asked me if I would be interested in working part time. I said yes, and worked there from 1993–1994 managing membership and promotions. Linda Benedict Jones, a later Executive Director, came on as a part-time curator from the Polaroid Collection while I worked there; we hung Fazal

Sheikh's show after he won the Infinity Light Award and that work of displaced people in the Sudan really changed me — I worked his images into my lectures later as a professor at Pitt. Prior to Fazal Sheikh's there was a Clyde Hare retrospective and prior to that, a Robert Frank show with his books. Pretty amazing. When the Warhol museum opened, Lorraine Vullo called up Billy Name and got him to show at Silver Eye when the museum opened — hot.

DV I won the Silver Eye Fellowship in 2004. It was my very first solo show and the prize gave me enough money to pay my bills in the first few months I moved to Pittsburgh.

*How did the gallery fit into the social and creative landscape of Pittsburgh when you first became involved?*

LV The artists of Blatent Image/Silver Eye and band members who hung out all worked together. We were in our late teens to mid-twenties, mostly not originally from Pittsburgh, working on art and sharing music. The *Non-Punk Show* at SPACE Gallery, curated by Larry Rippel and Dennis Childers recently, really exhibited the feeling of art, music, and friendship coming together in this basement-style youth culture, which revolved around an organic process of being and creating together. The majority of us are still friends, we've raised our families together and supported each other in our careers.

The majority of the founders also worked at a professional photo lab downtown called the Darkroom Inc., which has long since closed. The owners at that time, Nancy Adam and Jack Wienhold, were extremely encouraging and

allowed us to work on our photos during off hours. We only had to pay material costs for our supplies. This enabled a lot of us to create photos which we wouldn't have been able to afford, including extremely large prints by Seth, Larry, Stacy, and myself, just to name a few.

SA The gallery was definitely the only game in town and seemed to show some of the most talented photographers in Pittsburgh. The opening events were wonderful parties and a good way to connect with peers.

JS Silver Eye was where I got to witness and talk about artistic ideas, outside of art school. I was big on going to literary readings at the time, and other art exhibitions, but Silver Eye was where actual exchange and dialogue took place. Salons where people showed their slides, gallery talks, and pin up shows where we stuck our work right to the wall with push pins made photography accessible and immediate. This was still a time when we literally created work in the dark, alone. Coming out of our caves, into the light and into common space was necessary and important. It was also a time in our country when artists were being vilified — Robert Mapplethorpe was censored from the Corcoran Gallery and I was working a summer job in 1989 at the *New Art Examiner* when Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* was on the cover, talking openly about attacks on artists like the NEA Four, speaking out against politicians like Jesse Helms, trying to live as artists through the Recession. We needed each other for encouragement, for jobs, for shows, for feedback. For me, a lot of that took place at Silver Eye.

*What was the photography community like in Pittsburgh at the time? How has it changed?*

LV There were photo clubs, there was the Photo Forum on Ellsworth, and there were some photos in the museum, but Blatent Image created a scene that laid the foundation for a lot of creativity to come forth.

Francis Lackey, an artist friend, suggested that Blatent Image, a co-op at the time, become a non-profit and he worked us through the process. As a co-op, we did what we wanted, as a non-profit, we had less freedom but more money. We started to apply for grants — our first was from Westinghouse, they gave us fluorescent tubes for lighting.

Tom Underiner and I moved to the South Side in the early 80s, to 1015 East Carson Street — there was an empty storefront below us, not unlike the old Krishna House, where we relocated Blatent Image. Around that time, Barbara Runette and Jo Leggett, who eventually took over Photo Metro in San Francisco, created Silver Eye in Pittsburgh. They would bring in serious photographers like Larry Fink, Duane Michals and Joel Sternfeld for weekend photography workshops. After Blatent Image moved to the South Side, around 1985, the two merged into Blatent Image/Silver Eye.

SA The photography community in Pittsburgh has always been a little odd because the Museum of Art and major universities in town never truly supported it — only in recent years has the museum created a curator position for photography, Carnegie Mellon University includes photography in its Design department, and the University of Pittsburgh offers

almost no photography. So the community was more grassroots, supported by local art centers and Silver Eye. Pittsburgh Filmmakers was pretty much the only place with decent labs and workspaces. Silver Eye would bring in visiting artists and do exhibition competitions and eventually exhibit more national names. There is so much more going on in town now, and Silver Eye has increased contemporary photography's visibility.

DV It seems like the photography community has grown. It is an on trend medium now, more people are drawn to it, which is great. There are lots more people in the early stages of their careers involved in the community.

*What impact has Silver Eye/Blatent Image had on your work?*

LV A lot of this has to do with the friendships that I made and kept. Professionally, I met John Caldwell, former contemporary art curator at the Carnegie Museum of Art. John came to the exhibition *The Neighborhood Parades 1984*. This show was a photographic installation with music composed by Dave Doremus and John Creighton, comprised of images of five buildings that were 8 x 12' and 8 x 16'. Among the buildings were life-size images of people, cut out and mounted on Masonite, placed so that when you walked into the gallery, you were in a parade of people. John loved the show and he became a close friend and advisor.

Also, I am of Italian descent and through my photography connections with Dennis Marsico and my exploration of my heritage, I met the curator from Prato,

Vittoria Ciollini and we began a series of exhibitions and exchanges, which included extended visits and stays in Italy and an exchange exhibition.

JS Since I had my first show at Silver Eye, I realized I could have more shows — Silver Eye helped me understand what really goes into making an exhibition happen. I have since gone on to organize and curate my own exhibitions of photography with more confidence and technical understanding. For example, Bill Wade brought in the first international show at Silver Eye, from Prague, right after the revolution in 1989. I am still connected with curators and photographers in Prague and am currently planning a project there.

SA Silver Eye has given me the opportunity to show my work alongside my peers and so partly motivates me to continue working at the highest level possible. Through exhibitions, lectures, and portfolio reviews I've been exposed to and inspired by incredible work and artists over the years. I was also given the opportunity to curate a show, *A is for Aperture*, which was a privilege because it allowed me to visit artist/friends' studios to discuss their work on a more in-depth level.

*Why is there a need for a local institution dedicated to photography?*

JS Look at all of the learning, exchange and foundational work for people's careers that have come out of this place — enough said.

LV Why is breathing important?



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THE HILLS OF PITTSBURGH



The hills of Pittsburgh lie along its river banks like sleeping women. This is the way they looked before we all arrived, and how they will look long after we are gone.

Aaron Blum, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, Alfred Watson, Charlee Brodsky, Charles "Teenie" Harris, Charles Biddle, Charles Burlingham, Christine Holtz,

Clyde Hare, Dan Wetmore, Duane Michals,

Dylan Vitone, Ed Panar, Esther Bublely, Heather M. Mull, Ivette Spradlin, Justin Visnesky,

Karen Antonelli, Kevin Francis Sweeney, Lauren S. Zadikow, Luke Swank, Maranie Staab,

Martha Riad,

Melissa Catanese, Morris Berman, Njaimah Njije, Pamela Z. Bryan, Pete Marovich, PF Squier, Robert Raczka, Ross Mantle, Ross Nugent,

Sean Carroll, Sean Stewart, Selden I. Davis, Stephen Grebinski,

Stephen Joyce, Stephen Speranza, Sue Abramson, Unknown, William D. Wade

