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GARRY WINOGRAND 1964

International Center for Photography

By Bob Nickas

How often have you taken a picture that's not at all what you'd seen? This never happened to Garry Winogrand. Or it happened all the time. He knew that "the photograph isn't what was photographed. It's something else. It's a new fact." Winogrand never staged anything. He had a restless nature, a restless eye, and was so often on the move that he almost always managed to be in the right place at the right time. In the fall of '63 he applied for, and received, a Guggenheim fellowship, intending to drive cross-country and take pictures along the way. He was propelled as much by a need to be in motion as by his despair at the state of the world. In the statement of intent he'd written: "I look at the pictures I have done up to now, and they make me feel that who we are and how we feel and what is to become of us just doesn't matter." But at the close of his statement he would stake his claim: "I cannot accept my conclusions, and so I must continue this photographic investigation further and deeper. This is my project." Within a month, the president would be dead, and Winogrand was soon in a car headed west. Forty years later, the selection of images in this show takes us along for the ride.

In a picture from Lake Tahoe, vacationers relax poolside behind a frieze of transparent yellow and blue panels held between a parked red car and a motel sign above. A smaller sign, with a silhouette of a stagecoach and horses and the phrase TALLY HO, is surrounded by blue sky and tall pines, and the country's pioneer spirit hovers over this newly mobile leisure class. America as theme park and our notion of an all-encompassing image world were well on the way. Again and again in 1964 Winogrand is taking pictures of people taking pictures. At football games and state fairs, at national landmarks and sometimes just out in the middle of nowhere. When he stands across from the "grassy knoll" in Dallas, what does he see? Tourists with cameras examining a postcard of the Texas School Book Depository against the actual scene. He wasn't alone in his restlessness, but as he catches others in passing, he identifies how escapism and a troubled mind are somehow entwined, and how they define us still.

On a warm night in Houston, when Winogrand is looking down from a hotel window at a woman afloat in a luminous pool below, so are we. He makes the camera seem to disappear and redefines being there. His is an art of consciousness, of life lived as well as recalled: every image an after-image, his eye both highly focused and nomadic. At the time of Winogrand's death, in 1984, he left behind more than three hundred thousand pictures he'd shot and never even looked at! It was as if he were attempting to photograph every single inch of the world around him. And us. His field of vision accounts for those moments in which life appears to be doing almost nothing to attract our

attention, and it's there in those empty pockets of time and space that Winogrand not only captures the way life looks but how it feels. When you're waiting for a plane in an airport, you're in a Winogrand. Even walking down Seventh Avenue after seeing this show, you find the street offering up one Winogrand after another. The best photographers do that don't they? Remind us that we inhabit the world, that it comes to life because we're in it. When you look at Winogrand's work you can't help but think about how so many pictures today, and the people who take them, make us feel like spectators and not much more.

Until now, Winogrand's color photographs have never been exhibited or published, and their effect here was nothing short of revelatory. Interspersed among black-and-white photographs throughout the galleries, the color work is so finely attuned that these pictures seem almost hand tinted, the colors, even white, appearing tipped-in. A woman walks past a nondescript building in LA, and only details register as color: her yellow dress, white purse and shoes. Have the white lines of the parking lot been freshly painted in at her feet? Winogrand's painterly eye for color and composition are uncannily in sync, and when pop-inflected signage figures in the equation, you'd swear it was by sleight of hand.

The pictures Winogrand brought back from his cross-country trip form a definitive portrait of America, on a par with Robert Frank's landmark *The Americans* (1959). And while Winogrand rendered the country at the end of its innocence and still in mourning, his heightened sense of visual poetry and humor transforms "Garry Winogrand 1964" into one of the great road movies of all time. With almost two hundred prints from his archive, chosen by Trudy Wilner Stack, many never before shown, this was nothing less than an event. In the gorgeous book that accompanies the exhibition, Wilner Stack's essay begins with a tease, the punch line to Winogrand's favorite joke: A woman walks through a park with her grandson in a stroller. When a passing couple gush over how cute he is, the grandmother replies, "That's nothing. You should see his picture." You can't help but wonder at how in tune Winogrand was to a moment like this ... to see in it something absurd but true about human nature, and about photography as well.