

Surface and Symbol

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Third World photography exhibited in Art Museum

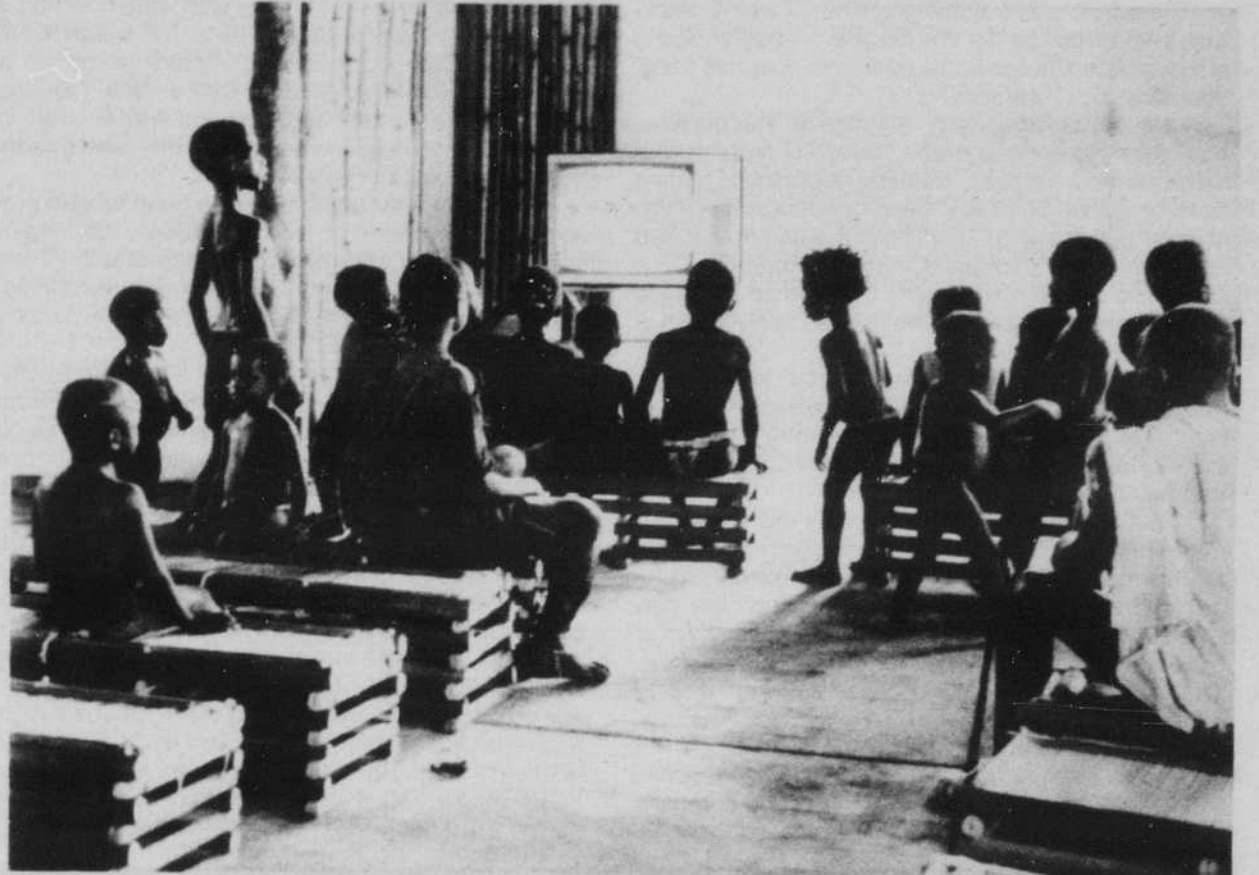
"The Path to Paradise" is the title of the Third World Exhibition of Photography which opened at the Museum of Art on Sunday. Organized by Germany's *Stern* magazine, with the photographs selected and the exhibition designed by Karel Pawek, "The Path to Paradise" presents 434 photographs taken in 86 countries by 170 photographers. During the course of its several-year tour, the exhibition will be shown in 367 different institutions in 51 countries. A catalog of the show, which includes all 434 photographs, is available at the Museum.

Like the Second World Exhibition, "Woman," which was shown at the University in 1972, the current offering consists of poster-sized blow-ups of small camera images. The physical presentation of the photographs has been improved since the last show, however. Instead of being mounted on heavy masonite panels, the photographs of the current show are laminated in plastic, protecting the photographs from scratches and

gouges. As a result, the current exhibition looks much cleaner, and the Museum staff has done an admirable job of fitting the exhibition into the limited gallery space. In another change from the past two shows, the new exhibition includes color photographs as well as black-and-white.

While it is unfortunate that many of the large prints leave much to be desired technically, it is not particularly important to the impact or intent of the exhibition. The show is in the form of an extended photo-essay, and is drawn from the work of photographers who are primarily known as photojournalists. Some of the names are familiar—Robert Capa, Ernst Haas, Leni Riefenstahl, and Leonard Freed are some—but most will be unfamiliar to American audiences.

Unlike the "Woman" show, which was little more than a collection of photographs with female subjects, the current one has a definite point of view. With a strong belief in scientific evolution and a belief that conditions today



This photograph is one of 434 hanging in the Museum of Art as part of an exhibit entitled, "The Path to Paradise." It was taken by Paul Almasy who is one of 170 photographers representing 86 countries.

are not the climax of evolution but only a stage of development, the exhibition searches for signs that progress is, in fact, being made.

The show is divided into 28 sections. The title of each section provides a verbal context within which the photographs are intended to be seen. The sequences of these sections is important in understanding the point of view of the show.

Although individual responses to the photographs will vary, the intent of the organizers reads like a basic textbook of world sociology: Even though the people of the world are culturally diverse, they are all searching for a better life—paradise. Some groups are relatively well off today, while others are not. Established methods of searching, such as religion, political belief, and acquisition of material goods, have not provided solid solutions. The world must still deal with universal problems of population control, war, environmental destruction, racial conflict, natural catastrophes, and death.

Unable to find answers, people have tried to hide through escapist activities. Others take refuge in cultural tradition, or through more personal solutions such as family or nature. World-wide trends can be defined which show a direction towards greater integration and solidarity of all peoples, trends such as the emancipation of women, children, and the human body; and increased understanding through increased mobility and communication.

Unfortunately this description is more simplistic and superficial as sociology than as a description of the show. With so many photographs to see, it is difficult to fight off the effects of visual overkill. This is partly due to sheer numbers, but also to the desire not to confront image after image of uncomfortable reminders.

Many of the photographs are totally forgettable, and the point can

be raised that the same, the greater, impact might have been achieved by working with a much smaller number of unforgettable images. Even within such great numbers, however, many photographs do stand out, like the one of a large group of Airstream trailers drawn up in a circle somewhere in Montana, with the car headlights throwing shades of yellow across the bluish modern conestoga wagons. (by Ralph Crane, USA.) Or the color photo-

Hopker, Germany.) The relevance of this image can only be understood upon discovering that the women are in Rhodesia, information which is only available in the catalog of the exhibition. This image, like all the photographs in the exhibition has been removed from its original context. For the most part, the assemblage builds new relationships which are easily perceived, but for some, the intent of the editor is obscured without caption material.

In other places, the thesis of the exhibition itself breaks down. For example, photographs of western tourists infiltrating third-world groups appear in both the "Environmental Destruction" and "Increased Mobility" sections. One section postulates the disintegration of traditional society with the influence of outside cultures, while the other section suggests that the mobility of western tourists helps in integrating the more traditional groups into general world development. These images would be interchangeable between the two sections; it is the outside meaning supplied by the verbal context which gives them their specific meaning.

The first two rooms of the exhibition (the two on the right as you go in) show the problems faced by the world. The final room shows the trends which suggest, at least to the editor, that people all over the world are coming together. The final effect of the exhibition is disturbing; not because of any feelings that we have so far to go in solving these problems, but because the images which are intended to show progress are generally so weak. It is far easier to show the realities of starvation than to show concepts such as the emancipation of women, but given the number of photojournalists worldwide, it would seem that images should have been available for the last third of the exhibition which would carry the impact of the first section through to the end.



Photo by Ken Heyman

By DAVID FEATHERSTONE
Of the Emerald

graph of a dead Bangla Desh soldier, his brown body lying in short brown weeds. The flesh on one side of his chest is missing, revealing a decaying red and white ribcage. (Anders Engmann, Sweden.) Or the black-and-white photograph of a large cemetery in New York, with acres of headstones merging in the distance with the skyline of New York City. (V.A. Wolff, Germany.) Or the black-and-white photograph of an innocent-looking, freckle-faced Irish boy with a toy gun, playing at being soldier behind a sandbagged fortification in Ulster. (Norbert Nordmann, Germany.)

There are problems created by including such a large number of images in a show. One effect of asking the viewer to absorb such a barrage of information is that the individual photographers tend to become lost. The names are all included in the wall labels, but once emerged in the show, it is simply too difficult to match each to its maker.

There are also problems created by the need for captions with some of the photographs in order to fully understand their inclusion in the essay. For example, in the section "Racial Conflict," there is a photograph of a group of well-dressed women at an outdoor garden party. (Thomas