

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

BLOUINARTINFO

Three Photographers on William Eggleston

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William Eggleston "Untitled from The Democratic Forest," c. 1983-1986
(Eggleston Artistic Trust. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London)

William Eggleston's current exhibition at David Zwirner in Chelsea, *The Democratic Forest*, on view through December 17, is a tour through color, light, and things plainly celebrated. It exemplifies what Eggleston called his "democratic way of looking around." Comprised of works from the 1980s, it is the first exhibition of the photographer's work since the gallery's announcement of his exclusive worldwide representation in June. To acknowledge his wide-reaching influence we've invited three considerably different photographers—Jeff Brouws, Henry Chalfant, and Melanie Schiff—all of whom currently have exhibitions up in New York, to share their thoughts on this giant of the form.

Jeff Brouws

William Eggleston is a marvel—not only for his prodigious output, but for the way he slyly makes it look all so easy (when it isn't). That marvelousness also manifests itself in his adroit ability to combine formal brilliance with mystery—the only word I can think of that conveys the emotional tenor with which he oftentimes manages to imbue his best images.

If I had to analyze it I'd say Eggleston visually channels a narrative born of the southern gothic, an ineffable (yet unmistakable quality) found in the literary works of Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, or William Faulkner. His photographs suggest there is a foreboding failure in the present (and long-gone historic past) that inhabit the landscapes, architecture, and personages of Mississippi, Alabama, or Tennessee; that the world below the Mason-Dixon line remains askew and not quite right (and yet, even in that "unrightness" ... Eggleston finds a tragic beauty still existing. And perhaps that failure and tragic

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beauty—that duality—can be projected out into the larger world). Or there's a sense that something darkly portentous is about to happen, with outcomes dangerous, unsettling, and unknown. Whatever that thing is ... might even be happening off-camera and out of the frame ... but its presence is palpable.

Seeing Eggleston a few times on camera, via video or film, I like his unpretentiousness, his shyness. There's no bloviated rhetoric or art-speak affixed to his imagery; if anything he's like a Zen master that makes seemingly simple comments about his work (if he comments at all) that resonate powerfully. He engages the sadness of the everyday unflinchingly, unmasking the falsity of our American existence. A few lines from a Lucinda Williams song (another Southerner) could describe an Egglestonian vision:

My American Dream almost came true

But the things they promised me never came through

I believe in the American Dream

But things are never quite what they seem

It's all in the photographs.

Jeff Brouws is based in Stanfordville, New York. His recent body of work focuses on railroad landscapes and de-industrialized environments and is on view at Robert Mann Gallery through December 10.

Henry Chalfant

The cars in Eggleston's photographs are from the '50s and '60s, and with their toothy grills, fins, and gaudy chrome they are often the main subject of the picture. I'm a '40s baby, and I grew up in rural western Pennsylvania, so I share and identify with these images of cars. Some are with people, some parked, some faded and abandoned among the weeds, and like some of the houses and shacks, they trigger my sense memory and leave me with a taste of time past. Eggleston's photos are of everyday things, malls, roads, houses, parking lots and gas stations. The images are like paintings, well composed in the frame, usually simple shapes almost like color field painting—a road, a field, the horizon, the sky, and maybe a human figure or a sign. They are lonely, empty of traffic or crowds. Looking at these photos, I wonder, not so much how he chose the shot, but how he pulled it all together in a composition. With each photo you see that somehow he has found a nexus of lines and forms in his field of vision, in the 180 degree breadth and half dome of the vault of the sky that we all look out upon, to shoot, and reducing that vastness of infinite possibility, he frames it, and the result is a kind of instant painting.

Henry Chalfant is based in Brooklyn, New York. His iconic "1980" photographs of graffiti on NYC subway cars are on view at the Eric Firestone Gallery through January 21, 2017.

Melanie Schiff

I can't remember when I was introduced to William Eggleston's work, it must have been when I was a undergraduate student at NYU in the late '90s. I remember him being referred to as the Godfather or Grandfather of Color Photography—something I embarrassingly have also told my own students. I do remember being struck by his work. I took a while to warm to color, but Eggleston has such a unique and seductive palette. Even today, I don't really prefer color or black and white, but how the light is best seen. Eggleston is a master of capturing light, something I personally find more difficult in color than in black and white.

He's a very important photographer to teach for that very reason. His influence is broad and present in the work of so many other photographers I admire; Nan Goldin, Wolfgang Tillmans, Ryan McGinley, Margarete Jakschik just to name a few. Immediately I can think of several of his photographs that have followed me; "Glass on an Airplane"; "Nehi bottle on Car Hood"; "Girl With a Ring." I know I have

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conjured their likeness in my own photographs.

Eggelston's photographs are akin to Robert Frank's "The Americans," in their examination of life, wonder at the everyday, and revelations of the American psyche—or maybe of Ed Ruscha (/artists/edward-ruscha-109)'s gas stations, in their indexical nature; signs, women, light, country. Truth be told, they're a little difficult for me to look at right now. Post-election, living in what I heard best described as one of the costal citadels for the democratic party, it's hard to think about these photographs of a country I am having a hard time finding any romance in. While most of the images were taken decades ago, it's a reminder of how important it is to be present and paying attention to worlds that you easily occupy and those that are unfamiliar—which I suppose makes them all the more important to see.

Melanie Schiff is based in Los Angeles. In her show at Kate Werble Gallery, on view through December 10, she reprises art historical genres—the portrait, landscape, and still life—from the vantage point of contemporary California.