

ROBERT WEINGARTEN

NEW FRONTIERS: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ROBERT WEINGARTEN

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.—Marcel Proust

Robert Weingarten's career in photography has been guided by a desire to embrace projects and working methods that place divergent demands on his abilities. His journey as an artist calls to mind the central theme of Aldous Huxley's groundbreaking 1932 novel *Brave New World*, which presents an imaginative, idiosyncratic view of how creative and technological advances affect human beings. It was Huxley's belief that it is chiefly through scientific advances that the quality of life can be radically altered: "The machine turns, turns and must keep on turning—forever. It is death if it stands still."¹ Akin to Huxley's thrust in *Brave New World*, Weingarten's photographic practice is dedicated to breaking new ground—to never "standing still." His latest digital explorations in *The Portrait Unbound* have introduced a new kind of optically complicated still photograph that can seize and hold our attention equally as well as the illusory world of motion pictures and the hyperrealism of video games. In these photographs Weingarten synthesizes a medley of visual elements that are unrelated in time and space to propose a new way of thinking about both the portrait and the nature of seeing. He is able to do this, in part, because digital practice has introduced a new set of operations that have fundamentally altered the materiality and aesthetics of photography. His work as a photographer is embedded in this phenomenon and necessarily involves navigating between the polarities of the analog and digital models and the extremes of mimetic representation and abstraction. From the outset, Weingarten has been engaged in an effort to explore the world of images unseen or yet to be imagined. By keenly exploiting all the

capabilities of digital technology, his goal is to orchestrate a dimensional shift in the way we think about the photographic image. His vigorous embrace of the digital paradigm has prompted ventures into new aesthetic terrain and a direct engagement with a mode of production that changes how and what we see in the culture around us.

JULIAN COX

Beginnings

Weingarten was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, the only child in a working-class family. His father was a machine operator in a factory in the garment district and his mother was a homemaker. He grew up in a household where there was an appreciation for the arts but not the financial means to go to concerts or the theatre. At his parents' insistence Weingarten learned the violin, which instilled in him a lifelong passion for classical music.² Because they offered free admission, museums were also an occasional treat in Weingarten's teenage years. He attended *The Family of Man* at The Museum of Modern Art in 1955, an exhibition organized by Edward Steichen and designed to have broad popular appeal. It was seen by more than nine million people in the United States and abroad when it traveled, and consisted of more than 500 photographs made by 273 photographers from sixty-eight countries. It was the most successful photography exhibition ever mounted.³ Steichen described the rubric for the project as follows: "We sought and selected photographs, made in all parts of the world, of the gamut of this life from birth to death with emphasis on the daily relationships of man to himself, to his family, to the community and the world we live in."⁴

The photographs in *The Family of Man* were installed to suggest the cycle of life, beginning with love and marriage and proceeding into birth, family, work, play, spiritual

and religious observance, and death, with an interlude on hunger, barbarity, and war, and a closing section on the magic of childhood. The photographs varied widely in scale, from 8 × 10 inches to 10 × 12 feet, and all were mounted on Masonite panels, trimmed flush to

the image, and blacked out on the edges. They were hung from wires and fastened on pillars and poles at various viewing heights.⁵ For the teenage Weingarten the exhibition was a landmark event, and seeing photographic prints scaled as large as paintings made a lasting impression, as did the breadth of humanity represented in the work. He purchased the catalogue (fig. 1) and studied it closely, with Steichen's words striking a chord: "The art of photography is a dynamic process of giving form to ideas and of explaining man to man. It was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life—as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world."⁶

Weingarten's first attempt at establishing a darkroom came when he was twelve years old. In the bathroom of his parents' two-bedroom walk-up apartment he fabricated black shades and a plywood board to cover the bathtub, which served as a work surface for developer trays and an enlarger. In public highschool he made use of the darkroom facilities, and when he became editor of the school newspaper he gained access to all the photographic equipment. After attending Baruch College in New York as an undergraduate, Weingarten went to Wall Street and rapidly ascended in the world of business and finance. He created financial prod-

ucts, bought and sold publishing and insurance companies, and gained a reputation for his creativity and zeal in business. These same qualities were directed at his passion for photography, which he pursued alongside a variety of cultural endeavors throughout his business career.

Most of Weingarten's education in photography was self-directed. He read voraciously, took correspondence courses, and attended one-on-one master classes with photographers and printmakers in the United States and Europe.⁷ His early interest leaned toward landscape as a subject, since it provided the ideal counterpoint to his busy professional life in New York and Los Angeles. Weingarten was especially drawn to the timeless landscapes of Tuscany and Provence where, he said, "you can feel the hand of man."⁸ The beauty and efficiencies of the crop plantings and field systems, which impose an ordered pattern on the land, was a key stimulus for his picture making.⁹ He brought to this work his great respect and fascination for Impressionism, particularly the paintings of Claude Monet, whose intensive study of light and chromatic change has held an enduring attraction. Weingarten refers often in conversation to Monet's multiple views of the same motif, most notably the *Haystacks* (1891) and *Rouen Cathedral* (1892-1893) series. Eighteen of the *Rouen* paintings show the west façade as the subject of an elaborate set of color variations that evoke the varied angles of lighting and delicate mists that play on the architecture.¹⁰

Equally significant to Weingarten are Monet's works made in London between 1889 and 1901, where he painted the Houses of Parliament from a balcony at Saint Thomas's Hospital directly across the River Thames. Monet preferred to work in the late

afternoon, against the light or setting sun. He relished London's fog: "I like London a lot, but only in the winter. . . . Without the fog London would not be a beautiful city. It is the fog that gives it a grandiose breadth. Its regular and massive blocks look grand through its mysterious cloak."¹¹ One canvas—begun earlier but completed in 1903 (fig. 2)—conveys the elusive ambiguity of the building's form, shrouded in fog and verging on the abstract, shaped as it is by Monet's free, gestural brushwork. Weingarten's landscape photographs from the 1990s suggest his close study of Monet and his desire to define his subject in terms of form, color, and atmospheric conditions melded in subtle combination (fig. 3).

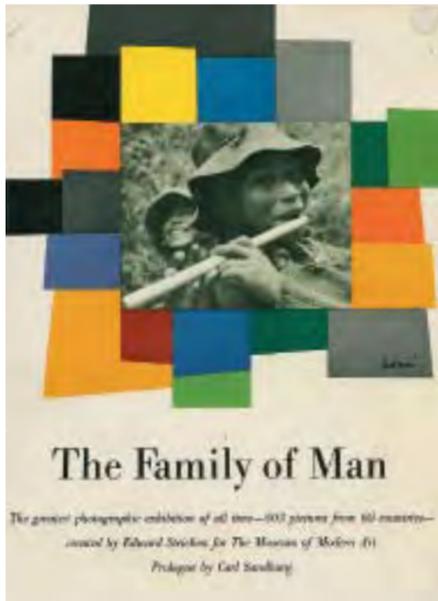


Fig. 1. *The Family of Man*, 1955, exhibition catalogue, 11 × 8½ inches, private collection.



Fig. 2. Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926), *Houses of Parliament in the Fog*, 1903, oil on canvas, 32 × 36¾ inches, High Museum of Art, purchase with Great Painting Fund in honor of Sarah Belle Broadnax Hansell, 60.5.

Fig. 3. Robert Weingarten, *Mist on St. Quirico II, Tuscany*, 1997, pigment print, 16 × 16 inches, collection of the artist.

His results are achieved through a balanced and sensitive handling of the environmental conditions in harmonious concert with his photographic materials.

Weingarten often spends hours waiting in a particular spot to release his shutter and compiles detailed field notes that log the transit of the sun and the angles of its rays, so that he knows where the shadows will be and what their effect will be on the composition. He studies the geometry of the landscape closely to extract the maximum structure and order from the scene. This systematic approach, wedded to keen analytical instincts, is fundamental to Weingarten's approach to photography.¹² While chance and play do enter Weingarten's work—especially in *The Portrait Unbound*—it all starts with his grasp of the process and his confident command of materials. For example, he photographed his early landscapes on film but printed them digitally, wholeheartedly embracing a technology that was in its infancy at the time. He chose to print the pictures on watercolor paper, enhancing their painterly aesthetic and underscoring his preference for a romanticized view of the landscape.¹³

Color and Light

In vigorous pursuit of a keener understanding of the mechanics of light—how it behaves in the landscape, and how its characteristics might be recorded—in 2003 Weingarten embarked on a project that he called the *6:30 AM* series.¹⁴ He was interested in exploring the phenomenon of chromatic adaptation and how changes in color and atmospheric conditions can elude human perception because the mind develops stereotypes of the

Fig. 4. Robert Weingarten, *6:30 #16, February 3, 2003*, pigment print, 40 × 40 inches, collection of the artist.

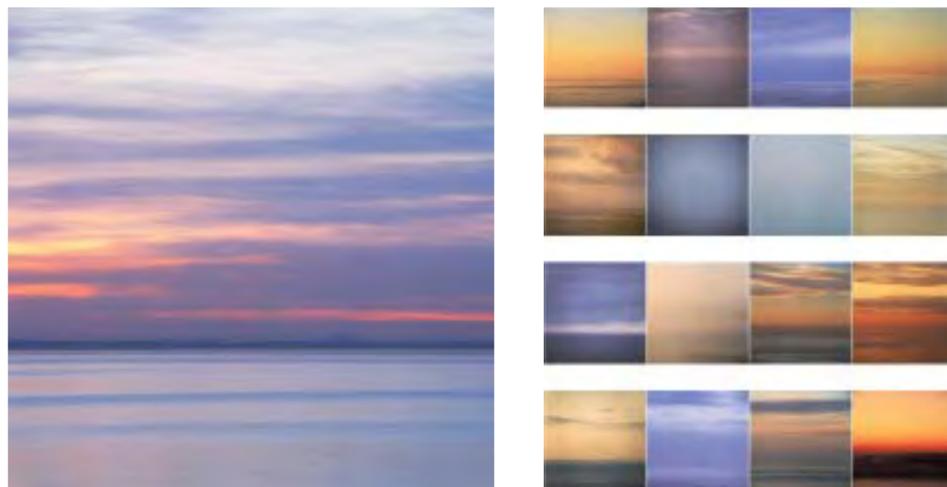


Fig. 5. Robert Weingarten, various images from the *6:30 AM* series, 2003, pigment prints, 12 × 12 inches, collection of the artist.

colors of the land, sky, and water. He hoped to show the diversity and subtlety of the palette of colors found in nature, which often remain largely invisible to the human eye. Weingarten made several key artistic decisions that determined the parameters of the project and bear heavily on the look of the pictures. He set up the camera, mounted on a tripod in a fixed spot in the bay window of his Malibu home, and photographed the identical ocean view at the same time every day, beginning January 1 and ending December 31, 2003. He elected to use a 2¼-inch square-format Hasselblad camera, because the square does not privilege any one side over the other. When trained precisely on its subject it delivers a composition that exhibits no visual tension. He selected a view that looks directly southeast from his home, toward Santa Monica Bay and the Los Angeles airport. The scene includes sea, city (to anchor the composition and provide a recognizable architectural outline), and sky, with the sky occupying the upper three-quarters of the composition (fig. 4). Weingarten used a long lens focused on infinity to compress the picture planes. He set his aperture to f22 and adjusted the shutter speed so that throughout the year it would remain consistent at around 1/30th of a second. The goal with the exposure was for it to be slightly longer than the involuntary blink of the eyelids during the gaze, which is typically estimated at 1/30th of a second.

Weingarten made three exposures each day he was at home, shooting color film procured from the same production batch and stored at a consistent temperature and humidity for the duration of the project. These precise rules of engagement enabled him to maximize the emotive and abstract potential of his subject. With several variations in climate throughout the year the most unexpected outcome of his formula was its effect on the role of color in each photograph. The results show a pulsating range of hues that suggest nature's infinite palette and powerful variability (fig. 5). To guarantee the faithful translation to paper of the data recorded on film, Weingarten worked closely with R. Mac Holbert, a founder and partner of Nash Editions in Manhattan Beach, California, who mastered the digital files created from the scanned film, making them conform as closely as possible to the original transparencies. Printed on softly woven watercolor paper, the

results are luminous, near-abstract compositions that approach László Moholy-Nagy's apposite definition of the photographic series: "Here the separate picture loses its identity as such and becomes a detail of assembly, an essential structural element of the whole which is the thing itself. . . . A photographic series inspired by a definite purpose can become at once the most potent weapon and the tenderest lyric."¹⁵ The *6:30 AM* series has been widely exhibited, never to better effect than at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House in the winter of 2006. In an inspired curatorial stroke, Weingarten's large-scale prints (40 × 40 inches) were installed on the snow-carpeted front lawn, bringing a splash of Pacific coast warmth to the big chill of winter in the Northeast (fig. 6).

Look More Closely

The gradual shift from representation to abstraction in Weingarten's photography intensified in 2004 as the results of his *6:30 AM* series provided greater insight into the nature of color and the behavior of light. He began to study the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system and how we develop our powers of visual acuity and perception. New ideas took shape about how the mind interprets the information it receives from the eyes. Weingarten became particularly engaged by the question of whether the color of light that great painters see in their studios informs the color palette in their paintings. Over a three-year period he contacted almost forty prominent artists, visited their studios, and engaged them in a dialogue about their use of color and the specific choices and makeup of their palettes. During these visits he made close-up digital photographs of their palettes and the paint drippings in their studios to form a new body of work he called the *Palette Series*. A smaller subset of works—pictures of paint cans, brushes, and studio accessories—he called *Artifacts*. Among his subjects, Eric Fischl had the most insightful response to Weingarten's line of questioning: "I believe there are two lights that I live with. One is the light that surrounds me daily here in New York City, and the other is my inner light. . . . It is my inner light that affects my palette no matter where I am in the world."¹⁶



Fig. 6. Robert Weingarten, *6:30 AM* series installation at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, 2006, collection of the artist.

In the *Palette Series*, the composition Weingarten framed within the camera in situ exactly matches the composition in the finished print. He worked with a 21-megapixel camera, which allowed him to produce a high-quality digital file that could generate a large print without sacrificing detail. He printed the pictures in his studio at a scale of 40 × 60 inches,¹⁷ using the largest commercially available fine-art printer on the market at that time. Weingarten wanted the pictures to match the scale and impact of paintings, giving full play to the dramatic nuances in texture and color that he encountered in his artists' palettes. In effect, he was striving to create large-scale abstract images from a starting point of representational photographic art.

Arguably his most satisfying studio visit was with the septuagenarian painter Jasper Johns, who politely advised Weingarten in advance of his trip that he was only



Fig. 7. Robert Weingarten, *Jasper Johns #1*, 2004, pigment print, 40 × 60 inches, collection of the artist.



Fig. 8. Robert Weingarten, *Jackson Pollock's Studio Floor*, 2008, pigment print, 40 × 60 inches, collection of the artist.

working with one color at the present time—gray. How could that possibly make for a satisfying photographic subject? After scouring Johns's studio, Weingarten honed in on a piece of glass swathed in gray paint that offered a rich study in texture and opacity. He moved in close and isolated a few square inches of it in his macro lens (fig. 7). As he always does with his subject, he sent Johns a proof print of the image to which the painter responded, "Weingarten is teaching us to look more closely."¹⁸

A fitting postscript to the *Palette Series* occurred in 2007 when Weingarten made an impromptu visit to the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center in The Springs, near East Hampton, New York. He had been in the vicinity to make photographs for his portrait of Itzhak Perlman (see pages 82–83) and found himself with some extra time between appointments. After calling to make an inquiry, he was granted access to the studio of Jackson Pollock (later used by Lee Krasner) and was permitted to photograph the floor where Pollock painted many of his masterpieces of the 1950s.¹⁹ In one study (fig. 8), the floorboards divide the composition down the middle, and the interwoven drips, blobs, and paint smudges unmistakably resemble a Pollock painting from the height of his powers.

Rethinking the Portrait

*It is not merely the likeness which is precious . . . but the association and sense of nearness involved in the thing . . . the fact of the very shadow of the person, lying there, fixed forever.*²⁰—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

For centuries artists have devised new strategies for capturing the likeness of another and have sought to distill the essence of other individuals (or indeed themselves) into a singular image. Photographers have placed themselves before the camera since the dawn of the medium. The French photography pioneer Hippolyte Bayard was perhaps the earliest practitioner of the photographic self-portrait. His pictures boldly rework a template that was borrowed from painting; they propose the self-portrait as a compelling proposition—a map of the most personal kind created in complicity with the self. Fundamentally, the making of a self-portrait involves the charting of the isolated face or body of the subject. What we see is the outward appearance, the surface of the subject. The German painter Otto Dix remarked, "There is no objectivity there, only ceaseless transformation; a human being has so many facets. The self-portrait is the best means of studying them."²¹

In the case of Chuck Close, the painter has adhered to a set of self-imposed organizing principles that have stimulated the birth of novel conceptual possibilities for the portrait that have sustained him for many years. In a picture such as his *Self Portrait*, 2002–2003 (fig. 9), where Close presents himself in three-quarter view, the composition is constructed on a rigorous grid and shaped by a multitude of handmade pixels that coalesce into a ghost-like, dematerialized image. The painting is six feet tall and is built around a visual system that blends together subtle combinations of white, velvety black, and luminous gray paint applied in looping brushstrokes in relatively large masses. The painting consists of a myriad of small, indistinguishable abstract paintings that are transformed into a distinguishable whole when the viewer perceives the global pattern through a series of adjustments in viewing distance. This dynamic tension between local and global patterns at once distinguishes Close's paintings and makes them an engaging study in visual processing.²²

In *The Portrait Unbound*, Weingarten is grappling with some of the same concerns that have preoccupied Chuck Close for so long. He sets out to construct a visual architecture of discrete elements that, when combined, stimulate new viewing habits rather than conforming to a prescribed and seamless visual reality. In this work he poses a central question: "Can you express a person's being and character photographically without showing them?" This began as an innocent inquiry a few years ago, but has since evolved into the challenge of devising a way of making a portrait that separates the subject from the specifics of time and place. Weingarten asks: Is it possible to produce a more biographical and metaphorical portrait that can be constructed without reference to the subject's visage?



Fig. 9. Chuck Close (American, born 1940), *Self Portrait*, 2002–2003, oil on canvas, 72 × 60 inches, High Museum of Art, purchase with funds from Alfred Austell Thornton in memory of Leila Austell Thornton and Albert Edward Thornton, Sr., and Sarah Miller Venable and William Hoyt Venable, and High Museum of Art Enhancement Fund, 2004.1.

Fig. 10. Robert Weingarten, *Self-Portrait*, 2007, pigment print, 60 × 90 inches, collection of the artist.



To test the feasibility of his ideas, Weingarten created a self-portrait that responds in a fashion to Otto Dix's definition of the multiple "facets" of personality. He built a metaphorical portrait around the key objects and preoccupations of his personal and professional life (fig. 10). The primary background images are the library in his California home (which includes a view into the garden) and the brick apartment building where he grew up in Brooklyn. Prominently placed at the center of the composition, drifting in and out of each other, are his violin and a Hewlett-Packard calculator, an allusion to his career in finance. Woven into the composition at right are existing publications of Weingarten's photography, and at left are two pieces from his *Palette Series*. The self-portrait comprises a sampling of images that are threaded together in a malleable mosaic form—a kind of "eruption of fantasy"²³ in which he thoroughly recasts the original photographic impulse. While the playful combination of diverse image fragments—commonly known as photocollage—is as old as the medium itself,²⁴ Weingarten adds to the tradition by moving beyond the instant of the photographic moment to conjure a more synthetic, impressionistic kind of picture that blurs the boundaries between fact and fantasy. His sustained, transformative handwork has been characterized by one scholar as "electrobricollage."²⁵

In order to generate a viable series, Weingarten concluded that his portrait subjects should be prominent and recognizable individuals who have in common a record of high accomplishment. They should be people already well known to us. He sought out actors, musicians, playwrights, scientists, statesmen, and other public notables whose achievements have earned them iconic status in our society. The groundwork required to produce one of the portraits involves the following: Weingarten writes to his subject introducing the goal of his project and requests a list of objects, places, and things that define who they are. He asks about their background, interests, experiences,

accomplishments, and the places that are important to them. Often the lists are compiled independently, but in some cases the list emerges from direct dialogue between the subject and the photographer. Weingarten then makes arrangements for a meeting and sets about photographing the contents of the list, maintaining the freedom to pick and choose the elements that make up the picture. His agreement with the subject is that he can eliminate elements on the list for artistic reasons, but he does not add anything without approval. Each subject is presented with an artist print of the portrait once it is complete. The process is collaborative to a degree uncommon in most photographer/subject transactions.

Weingarten's portrait of Colin Powell (pages 86–87) explicitly alludes to his life in military and public service. The list that Powell supplied the photographer (fig. 11) is compiled in the manner of an all-points memo, with Vietnam leading the way. The dominant motifs are the wall of the Vietnam Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C., and a children's wagon emblazoned with the words "America's Promise." A review of Weingarten's source photographs for these elements (figs. 12–13) demonstrates how



Fig. 11. General Colin Powell's list for *The Portrait Unbound*.

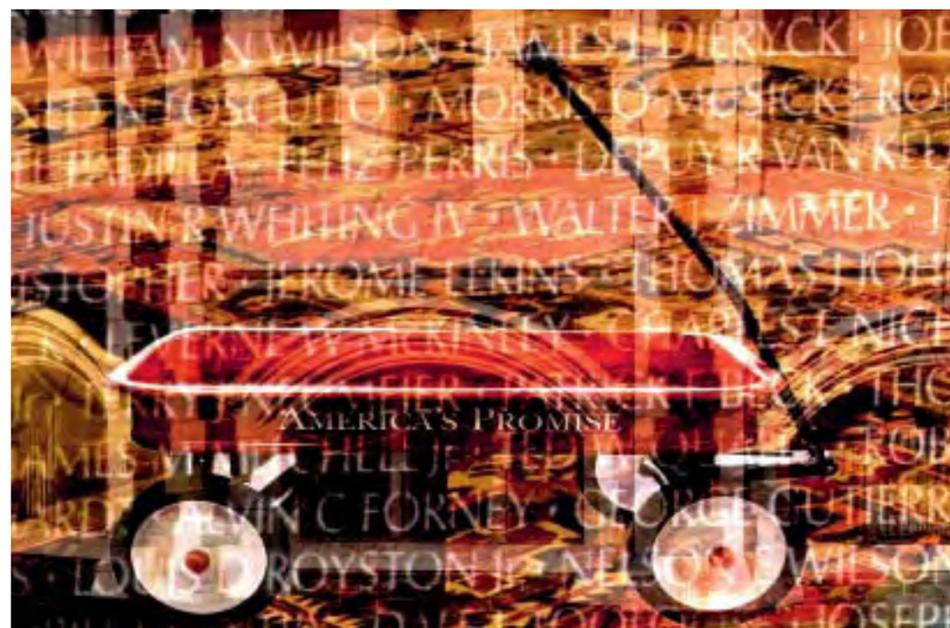
Fig. 12. Source photographs of the Jefferson Memorial for the portrait of Colin Powell.



Fig. 13. Source photographs of America's Promise wagon for the portrait of Colin Powell.

he systematically gathered the images for the composite portrait and reveals the extent of the manipulation that was required to arrive at the finished composition. Weingarten was particularly liberal with changes in scale, enlarging the form of Jefferson's statue in relation to the surrounding visual elements and establishing it as the anchor of the right side of the composition. A silhouetted Jefferson leads the eye in and behind the curtain of names from the Vietnam memorial, which covers every inch of the composition and serves as a matrix for the organization of all the complementary visual elements in the picture. Those include Powell's Purple Heart from Vietnam, his helmet, a map of Operation Desert Shield, the diplomatic rooms at the State Department, buildings at the City College of New York, and a view of the subject's childhood home on Kelly Street in Brooklyn. Powell's biography is encapsulated in the two words emblazoned on the red wagon in the

Fig. 14. Robert Weingarten, *Colin Powell* (detail of page 86).



lower left corner, “America’s Promise”²⁶ (fig. 14), which Weingarten takes pains to make legible, competing as it does with the blanket of names from the Vietnam memorial.²⁷

A contrasting American biography is found in the person of Dennis Hopper, the accomplished actor, director, and visual artist. After studying acting in both San Diego and New York City, Hopper landed his first film role alongside James Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955), followed by *Giant* a year later. This began a vibrant Hollywood career that exploded with the making of *Easy Rider* (1969), which he directed and starred in with Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, and Terry Southern. Hopper’s improvisational methods and innovative editing made this the iconic film of the Vietnam War era. The culture of the 1960s remains an integral part of Hopper’s identity today, and his motorbike from *Easy Rider* is one of the pivotal elements in Weingarten’s portrait (see page 62). The anchor image for the picture is a poster reproduction of a painted version of Hopper’s photograph *Double Standard*, which serves as a kind of proscenium in front of which is paraded an array of objects alluding to his biography and interests. Among the most unusual is an Andy Warhol painting of Chairman Mao, shot through with two bullets discharged by Hopper in a drug-crazed frenzy. To the left of it is a Hopper painting of a woman, a monogrammed director’s chair and golf bag, and in the upper left corner, a cigar. Weingarten playfully fuses this whimsical and diverse array of elements into a vibrant composition that acknowledges the influential pop-culture roots of its subject. He spent more than a month working out its details at his desktop. He abandoned an earlier version of the picture (fig. 15) because it was too grounded in a readily identifiable physical space—the garage of Hopper’s Venice, California, home—and created a new composition that was more ambitious and challenging in its articulation of depth and pictorial space.

Part of Weingarten’s motivation in *The Portrait Unbound* is to engage head-on with the complex phenomenon of seeing. He is interested in the capacity of the mind

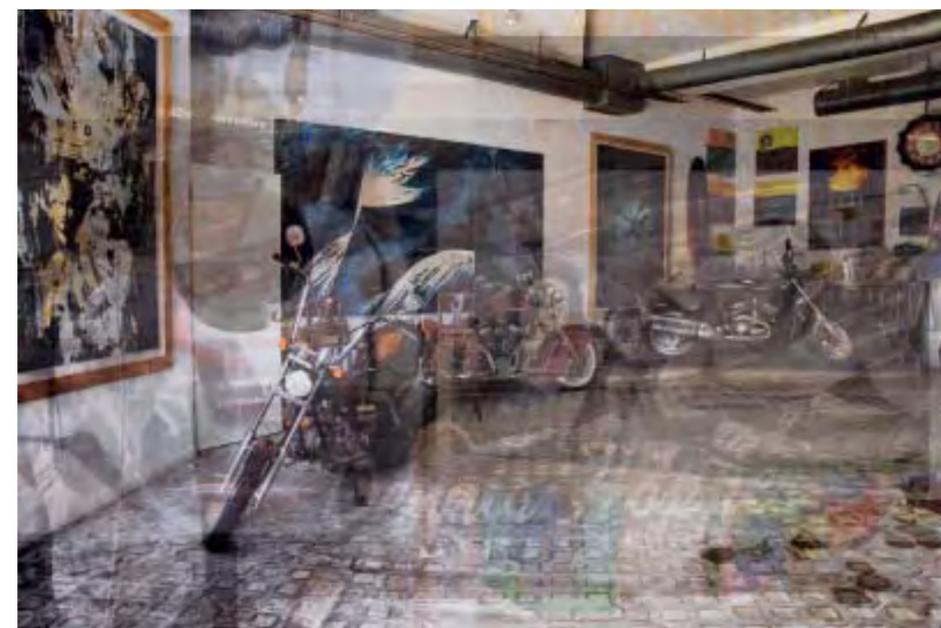


Fig. 15. Robert Weingarten, *Dennis Hopper—Working Study*, 2006, pigment print, 17 × 21 inches, collection of the artist.

to understand visual stimuli arranged in novel ways. He knows that when we look at an object we do not see it all at once, but go through a series of scans in which the eye momentarily alights on one feature and then moves on to another and another. Since this “scanning” process typically takes place over a short span of time, the subjective experience is that we are seeing the picture all at once, when in fact our visual perception of it is built up from a series of discrete “snapshots.”²⁸ He knows that human vision has its highest acuity in the center of the gaze. Our foveal vision is optimized for fine details and our peripheral vision is activated to process more generalized information. Viewers may alternate between one and the other by changing their distance or otherwise adjusting their way of looking.²⁹ The dynamic tension between the specific and the general is deftly articulated in these pictures. Weingarten’s choice of scale—the prints are 60 × 90 inches and produced on the largest currently available pigment ink printer—also takes into account the interrelationships among object size, object distance, and image resolution.

In the spirit of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Juan Gris and their early forays into Cubism, in *The Portrait Unbound* Weingarten explores the radical fragmentation and re-presentation of objects and their combination in light and space. In essence, the very process of image formation is the central subject of these pictures. Solid, tangible forms dissolve into an open, linear progression of shifting planes. The Cubists provided Weingarten with a model for an illusionistic art of seemingly transparent as well as opaque planes superimposed so as to suggest that the eye can see into and through objects. Weingarten has identified the term “translucent composite” as a new addition to the vocabulary that describes his digital practice and defines one of the primary characteristics of this work. Light passes through specific objects and elements in the composition, creating a new kind of depth perception and the suggestion of a three-dimensional space that functions within the confines of the two-dimensional surface of the photograph. Through

this technique Weingarten invites viewers to slow down and perhaps rethink how they process visual information. Sometimes the translucent composite unleashes details that make all the difference in the picture. In his portrait of Chuck Close (pages 46–47), he has lightened the thick impasto of paint that makes up one of the great figure paintings of the twentieth century—Willem de Kooning’s *Woman, I* (1950–1952)³⁰—to include two of Close’s most essential studio materials: paper towels and permanent markers (fig. 16).

The Digital Darkroom

Identifying the qualities that characterize photography and distinguish it from other art-forms, Edward Weston wrote:

First there is the amazing precision of definition, especially in the recording of fine detail; and second there is the unbroken sequence of infinitely subtle gradations from black to white. These two characteristics constitute the trademark of the photograph; they pertain to the mechanics of the process and cannot be duplicated by any work of the human hand.³¹

Analog and digital photography diverge most strikingly insofar as the essential characteristic of digital information is that it can be manipulated easily and rapidly by a computer—it is simply a matter of substituting new pixels for old. However, the art of digital photography cannot be understood exclusively as a matter of capture and printing, as Weston conceived photography. The intermediate processing of the image plays a central role. Computational tools for altering, combining, and analyzing images are as essential to the digital artist as brushes and pigments are to a painter. An understanding of them is the foundation of the craft of digital imaging.

The exploration of this technology in all its creative possibilities lies at the heart of *The Portrait Unbound*. Weingarten embraces the actuality that pixels can be combined seamlessly, allowing digital practice to blur the customary distinctions between painting and photography and between mechanical and handmade pictures. Like an Impressionist painter looking at a scene and converting it into discrete brush strokes, Weingarten applies similarly methodical and complex sampling and filtering strategies as he is building his compositions. While the painter performs sampling and filtering manually, and probably inconsistently, Weingarten’s digital environment samples and filters mechanically and consistently, directed by the photographer’s

strategic choices. As he is working on an image, Weingarten programs a stylus-controlled cursor on a tablet next to his monitor to behave like a brush, pencil, pen, or indeed as an eraser, to deposit or efface a color or pattern as it is dragged across the displayed image. Different tools deposit different patterns. Tones, colors, or shapes to be applied by a tool can be selected from displayed palettes or by pointing at areas in the image itself.³²

One of the most useful lessons of Weingarten’s photography is that it diverts attention from the common overemphasis on the moment of exposure. In *The Portrait*

Unbound he pulls attention away from the singular, isolated photograph as the unit of analysis.³³ In practice the photograph is often reliant upon other elements for its stress, sense, and the intelligibility of its form—just as are, say, a line in a poem or a strip of film in a motion picture. Photography in the digital age permits the reconfiguration of the image into a mosaic of countless changeable pixels, which can be engineered ad infinitum. We take for granted that photographs captured digitally are designed to be “effortlessly” altered, combined, replicated, and distributed. Increasingly in the digital environment most of the photographic process occurs post-exposure. The individual exposure is the initial research—the image draft—open and vulnerable to modification. The collection of pixels that constitutes an image can be readily manipulated to greater or lesser degrees of sophistication with image-editing tools built into cameras and computers. The digital photograph may become less a transcription of appearances and more an initial recording of a preliminary script that can be endlessly modified and refashioned. The photograph no longer need rely on its eidetic function but can be limitlessly explored for its capacity to suggest a more expansive linguistic fluency.³⁴

Throughout his career as a photographer, Weingarten has maintained a vigorous relationship with process and materials. One of his achievements in *The Portrait Unbound* has been his emphatic embrace of digital production processes, which offer the possibility of a new set of representational commitments and opportunities for artistic intervention.



Fig. 16. Robert Weingarten, *Chuck Close* (detail of page 47).



Fig. 17. Robert Weingarten, *Quincy Jones* (detail of pages 66–67).

The emerging graphic currency that digital imaging technology has generated continues to relentlessly transform and destabilize the old photographic orthodoxy. Weingarten has exploited that elasticity and demonstrated that digital technology can be harnessed to yield singular works that allow for new forms of visual understanding. In *The Portrait Unbound* Weingarten is trying to test the farthest reaches of visual legibility, placing a new kind of demand on the viewer. He has introduced a series of “effects” to accentuate the photograph’s ability to “speak” with a new voice (fig. 17). These photographs challenge our perceptual threshold. Their viewing unfolds at our self-selected pace, in an orchestration of our own devising. Of course Weingarten has made strategic compositional choices to help lead the way, but the traditional passive viewing habit is untenable here. It has been thoroughly overturned. Visual cognition involves the basic analysis of shapes, forms, colors, contours, contrast, and movement. Weingarten invites us to fully engage in the process and pleasure of looking, which places kinesthetic demands on the body to advance, retreat, and advance again. The work coheres powerfully with the viewer’s active engagement, stimulating in us a fuller grasp of our capacity for perception and the countless joys of sight itself.

Notes

1. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Cutchogue, New York: Buccaneer Books, 1991), 28.

2. Weingarten served on the Board of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association from 1990 to 2004. He was president and chairman from 1999 until the opening of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, designed by Frank Gehry, in October 2003. He has also served as vice chairman of the Board of the National Association for Advancement in the Arts, an organization that, among other things, nominates the Presidential Scholars in the Arts each year. Weingarten has also served on the Board of the Colburn School of Music, and he is a trustee at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House. He is currently chair of the Photographs Council at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

3. See John Szarkowski, "The Family of Man," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, ed. John Elderfield (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 12-27; and Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing An Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 39-75.

4. Edward Steichen, Introduction, *The Family of Man*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955), unpaginated.

5. The critical response to *The Family of Man* was plentiful, but not entirely positive, with prominent critics such as Hilton Kramer judging Steichen's concept a failure. See Hilton Kramer, "Exhibiting The Family of Man: The World's Most Talked About Photographs," *Commentary* 20 (October 1955): 366-367.

6. Ibid., note 4.

7. Weingarten credits Charlie Waite (whom he describes as "the Ansel Adams of England") as the most influential of his teachers for his acute sensitivity to the nuances of light and composition.

8. Weingarten in conversation with the author, February 6, 2009.

9. See Dennis High, Introduction, in *Robert Weingarten: Earthscapes* (Carmel, California: Center for Photographic Art, 1999).

10. See John House, *Monet* (London: Phaidon Press, 1991), 112.

11. Quoted in Karin Sagner-Duchting, *Modernism and Monet* (Munich: Prestel Books, 2001), 59.

12. Not discussed here is Weingarten's project on the Amish and Mennonite communities of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana, which generated a portfolio of work and the publication *Another America* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2004), with an essay by Robert A. Sobieszek.

13. Weingarten's earliest foray into digital printing in the 1990s came under the direction of R. Mac Holbert of Nash Editions. Holbert's mastery of craft provided a watertight case for proceeding with digital technology in all its aspects. Weingarten describes Holbert as his "digital mentor."

14. See Weston Naef, Foreword, *6:30AM: Robert Weingarten* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2005). Naef provides a thorough description of the series and useful technical information.

15. László Moholy-Nagy, "A New Instrument of Vision," first published in *Telehor* (Brno, Czechoslovakia: Frantisek Kalivoda, 1936), trans. F. D. Klingender and P. Morton Shand, in *Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger, 1970), 54.

16. Weingarten in conversation with the author, February 6, 2009. He paraphrases Eric Fischl slightly differently in an interview with Dale M. Lanzzone in *Robert Weingarten: Palette Series*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough, 2006), 2-3.

17. All but two of the *Palettes* are horizontal compositions. The exceptions are *Jasper Johns #2 (Detail of Study for "Bushbaby")*, 2004, which is reproduced in *Robert Weingarten: Palette Series*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough, 2006), 17, and *Louis Gordillo #4*, 2007, which is reproduced in *Robert Weingarten—Paletas de artistas (serie)*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Marlborough, 2008), 9.

18. Weingarten in conversation with the author, February 6, 2009.

19. When Krasner occupied the studio (beginning in 1956) the original floor was covered with linoleum and remained that way until 1984, when it was removed and the original floor was revealed. E-mail correspondence from Weingarten to the author, May 15, 2009.

20. See *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Charleston, South Carolina: BiblioLife, 2009), 34.

21. Quoted in Erika Billeter, "The Exhibition," in *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Image*, ed. Erika Billeter (Lausanne: Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1986), 8.

22. For more discussion on Chuck Close, see Margaret Livingstone, *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 184-185. See also the essay by Medeleine Grynstejn, "A Constant-In-Process: Chuck Close's Self Portraiture," in *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967-2005*, exh. cat. (San Francisco and Minneapolis: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Walker Art Center, 2005), 108-115.

23. See Ron Barnett, *How Images Think* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 28.

24. See Elizabeth Siegel, *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago with Yale University Press, 2009), and additional essays by Patrizia DiBello and Marta Weiss. See also Elizabeth Siegel with Martha Packer, *The Marvelous Album of Madame B: Being The Handiwork of a Victorian Lady of Considerable Talent* (New York: Scala, 2009).

25. See W. J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 1992). The word "electrobicollage" is not used here in association with Weingarten, but more broadly as a term that describes sophisticated forms of digital manipulation and image layering.

26. Colin Powell is the founder and chairman emeritus of America's Promise Alliance, an organization that is dedicated to seeing that children receive the resources that they need to succeed. For more information, see www.americaspromise.org.

27. The black-cut granite wall carries the names of 58,223 fallen soldiers. It was completed in October 1982 and dedicated on November 13, 1982. For more information, see "Facts and Figures," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, www.vvmf.org.

28. For a more detailed explanation of this process, see Robert Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), 26.

29. For a more elaborate discussion of this phenomenon, see Margaret Livingstone, *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 68-69.

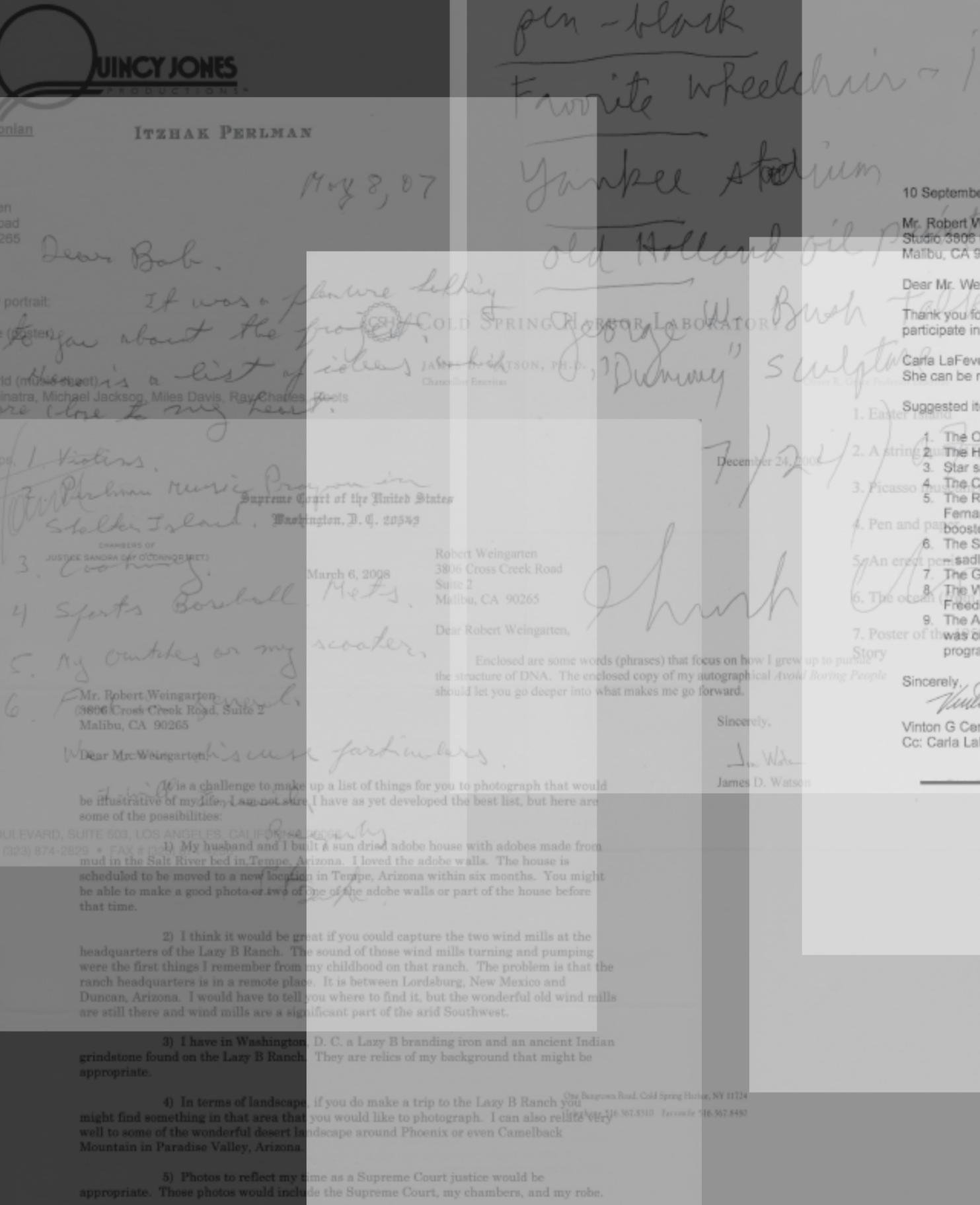
30. See Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 74; and John Russell, *The Meanings of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981), 310-311.

31. Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," *Encyclopaedia of Photography* 18 (New York: Greystone Press, 1965). Reprinted in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 169-178.

32. For the key textbook on the basics of digital darkroom practice, see Katrin Eismann and Sean Duggan, *The Creative Digital Darkroom* (Sebastopol, California: O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2008). I am most grateful to Suellen Parker for introducing me to this publication and for inviting me to join her classes in digital photography at the Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta.

33. For more on this, see Joel Smith, "More than One: Sources of Serialism," *Record* 68, vol. 67 (Princeton University Art Museum, 2008): 10-30.

34. See Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 31. This text presents a timely and thorough discussion of the rapid development of digital photography and its aesthetic, social, and cultural implications.



ITZHAK PERLMAN

May 8, 07

Dear Bob,

It was a pleasure telling you about the project. There is a list of ideas which I have close to my heart.

1. Violins.
2. Philharmonic Music Program in Stalker Island, Washington, D.C. 20343

3. Cooking.
4. Sports Baseball, Mets.
5. My outtakes on my scooter.
6. Mr. Robert Weingarten, 3806 Cross Creek Road, Suite 2, Malibu, CA 90265

Dear Mr. Weingarten,

It is a challenge to make up a list of things for you to photograph that would be illustrative of my life. I am not sure I have as yet developed the best list, but here are some of the possibilities:

1) My husband and I built a sun dried adobe house with adobes made from mud in the Salt River bed in Tempe, Arizona. I loved the adobe walls. The house is scheduled to be moved to a new location in Tempe, Arizona within six months. You might be able to make a good photo or two of one of the adobe walls or part of the house before that time.

2) I think it would be great if you could capture the two wind mills at the headquarters of the Lazy B Ranch. The sound of those wind mills turning and pumping were the first things I remember from my childhood on that ranch. The problem is that the ranch headquarters is in a remote place. It is between Lordsburg, New Mexico and Duncan, Arizona. I would have to tell you where to find it, but the wonderful old wind mills are still there and wind mills are a significant part of the arid Southwest.

3) I have in Washington, D. C. a Lazy B branding iron and an ancient Indian grindstone found on the Lazy B Ranch. They are relics of my background that might be appropriate.

4) In terms of landscape, if you do make a trip to the Lazy B Ranch you might find something in that area that you would like to photograph. I can also relate very well to some of the wonderful desert landscape around Phoenix or even Camelback Mountain in Paradise Valley, Arizona.

5) Photos to reflect my time as a Supreme Court justice would be appropriate. Those photos would include the Supreme Court, my chambers, and my robe.

Favourite food - Sharpie for pen - black
Favourite wheelchair - 11

Yankee Stadium

old Holland oil

George W. Bush
"Dummy" sculpture

Shush

December 24, 2008

Sincerely,
James D. Watson

10 September

Mr. Robert Weingarten
Studio 3806 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, CA 90265

Dear Mr. Weingarten,
Thank you for participating in the program.

Carla LaFever
She can be reached at 310.303.1111

Suggested items

- 1. The Oz
2. The Holy Grail
3. Star say
4. The Cell
5. The Road to Nowhere
6. The Star Wars
7. The Star Wars
8. The Star Wars
9. The Star Wars

Sincerely,
Vinton G Cerf
Cc: Carla LaFever