

ROBERT
BERGMAN

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*SELECTED
PORTRAITS*

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PHONG BUI

Essay by David Levi Strauss

PS.1
PROVINCIA

P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center

FOREWORD

This volume is published on the occasion of Robert Bergman: Selected Portraits, an exhibition which will further P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center's ongoing mission to present adventurous work by the most accomplished contemporary artists.

Robert Bergman was born in 1944 in New Orleans, Louisiana, to a well-educated middle-class family. His father was an eye, ear, nose, and throat doctor and his mother was a Shakespearean actress at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. As early as the age of five, Bergman began to develop an intense love for photography, which, in many ways, shaped his vision of the world and defined the particular kind of work that he would produce in years to come.

It would be an understatement to say that Robert Bergman's career has been remarkably unconventional.

Although Bergman had never shown his work in either galleries or museums prior to his debut exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., in the fall of 2009—only the fifth living photographer for whom the Gallery has organized a solo exhibition—his peers have regarded him as a legend in the world of photography. Toni Morrison and Meyer Schapiro have commented in their contributions to Bergman's *A Kind of Rapture* (Pantheon Books, 1998) and elsewhere, on the masterful revelations contained in each of his portraits. In spite of the prevailing trends in contemporary photography, which favor certain formal and conceptual tendencies, there have been many critics—including Vicki Goldberg, A. D. Coleman, John Russell, Paul Mattick, Katy Siegel, and John Yau—who have embraced Bergman's singular effort.

As David Levi Strauss observed in his insightful essay for this catalogue, "The Democracy of Universal Vulnerability: On Robert Bergman's Portraits," Robert Bergman's work has affinities with that of his friend Danny Seymour and also that of Robert Frank. All three of these artists found ways to encompass contradictory impulses, both affirming and denying the conventions of narrative, and all arriving at a simplicity and spontaneity which is in fact deeply formal. All "work up close and from the heart." The complexity of Bergman's portraits opens a striking range of emotions. As David Levi Strauss also remarked, "There is no such thing as a 'typical person.' People are very different, one from another. . . . It is really an admixture of emotions that most attracts Bergman: menace mixed with affection, fear with curiosity, clarity with dejection, sorrow with delight, and many other combinations for which I have no words, which can only be *seen*."

With his ability to render his subjects with such an exceptional fullness, Bergman's work may be seen as proposing that we are both more and less anonymous than we care to realize, and that we should consider there is no *us* and *them*. For however many ways we may appear in the world, in our physical and spiritual embodiment, there is a common humanity and ultimate vulnerability within each of us.

This challenging exhibition presents a strong representation of Bergman's color work, which transcends boundaries between painting and photography, in large scale well suited to contemplation and debate in P.S.1's open-space gallery. It is our hope that it will generate the level of excitement and broad public participation that Bergman's unprecedented portraits deserve at this moment in history.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge Phong Bui, the Curatorial Advisor whose commitment and enthusiasm for Bergman's work has been demonstrated in all aspects of the project; David Levi Strauss, who has made an exceptionally incisive and moving contribution to the literature on Bergman; Antoine Guerrero, Director of Operations and Exhibitions; Tim Goossens, Curatorial Assistant; Christopher Y. Lew, Manager of Curatorial Affairs; April Hunt, Marketing and Communications Coordinator; and the rest of the staff at P.S.1 for their supervision; and the many others who have contributed their advice, assistance, and expertise to the realization of this whole undertaking. I would like to thank the excellent staff of The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Graphic Design, especially Hsien-Yin Ingrid Chou.

We are deeply indebted to Robert Bergman who generously diverted so much time and energy from his own work in order to help P.S.1 on every aspect of this project.

On behalf of the Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art, I would like to send my emphatic thanks to Agnes Gund and to Alfred and Ingrid Lenz Harrison for their vision and unmatched generosity.

Glenn Lowry

Director

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

ROBERT BERGMAN: SELECTED PORTRAITS

I first met Robert Bergman through Meyer Schapiro, the venerable art historian, and his wife, Dr. Lillian Milgram Schapiro, in the summer of 1990, six years before Schapiro's death and well before Bergman's legendary 1998 volume, *A Kind of Rapture* (published by Pantheon with an introduction by Toni Morrison and afterword by Meyer Schapiro). I was immediately taken by Bergman's intelligence and critical mind; he knew an unusual amount about the psychoanalytic tradition and about philosophy, particularly existentialism. During later visits to the Schapiros', Bergman showed us exquisite and moving photographs of just faces, in both black-and-white and color. My interest in his vision and his singular direction continued to grow even though my own involvement in the rough currents of contemporary culture and society was intensifying and taking my work in many other directions. In time, as I often found myself turning to his images as a touchstone, it became clear to me that Bergman is one of those great artists who are essential, necessary, and irreplaceable to the expansion of the universe of art and to our unfolding understanding of ourselves as mortals, alive in that and other universes.

With Bergman, I am reminded of Jean Genet's two powerful essays, "*Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers et foutu aux chiottes*" (What Is Left of a Rembrandt Torn Into Four Equal Pieces and Flushed Down the Toilet), first published in the structuralist periodical *Tel Quel* in 1967, and "*L'Atelier D'Alberto Giacometti*" (The Studio of Alberto Giacometti), which became the preface for the painter's third solo exhibit at the Galerie Maeght in 1957.

The first Genet essay gives an account of his sitting on a train, observing an ordinary and poorly dressed man whose face bears a certain gravity of life's hardship and the inevitability of old age. Yet it also emanates a somehow familiar sense of dignity. And in that brief encounter, Genet sees himself through this old man and comes to recognize a universal truth of humanity, which leads to a new understanding of the singular greatness of Rembrandt's late self-portraits. As we know, Rembrandt's biography is readily detectable throughout his life's work; many of his early self-portraits reflect only the mask he held up before the world. Not until confronting the age of fifty—after the death of his first wife, Saskia, when bankruptcy and dispossession had sunken him into a state of demoralization that divided him from his mistress, Hendrikje, and his children—did he undergo an incredible regeneration, in which he reconciled with his inner conflicts and accepted the universality of his anguish. And in this, he linked all who would look with mortal truth and transcendence. In other words,

Rembrandt required years of misfortune and pain before he could abandon his restraint and paint himself without sentiment or revulsion. He looked in the mirror, only to find his face lined with age, just like any other old man. He saw his flesh, with all its firm purpose, displaying the flaws of his character and the ruins of his life. He saw his presence whole, a spectacle of a self-destroyed man. He saw his own searching eyes penetrating into the human soul.

Genet begins the second essay, after having sat for a portrait by Giacometti, by remarking on our powerlessness over the visual world. He then declares that Giacometti makes the visual world all the more intolerable: here is what would be left of humanity if everything artificial were stripped away. Giacometti and Genet, in that shared time of unspeaking solitude and inward concentration, nevertheless found in one another the transcendence of being. In a fleeting moment, the exploration of the will and the non rational aspects of existence became interlaced.

Both essays transpose portraiture into a form of subjectivity. The painting or sculpture is no longer an object in itself or a reproduction of a person. Paradoxically, by positing the extinction of personality as the authorial presence itself, Genet found in his presence with the old man on the train a way to understand Rembrandt. Similarly, he realized that this process of observing and posing for Giacometti is an identical extension of the artist's seeing and creating experience. The two seemingly different activities became inter subjective, hence intensifying the recognition of oneself in another through representation.

I feel strongly that showing Bergman's work at this moment in history, when every artist's subjects and intentions are under such intense scrutiny by the public, critics and commentators, and other artists, could not be more timely—or more necessary. Bergman's photographs represent an ecstatic counterpoint to the post-formalist attitude, which has resulted in the prevalence of emotionless, staged, serial, and conceptual elements in contemporary photography. Paradoxically, in making images that open the universal and the eternal, Bergman has created photography that is totally new in our time. His art, as art and as philosophy, is at once classic and radical. It alters the terms of the contemporary photography debate and could reorder the public aesthetic.

Unlike Nan Goldin, for example, whose portrayals of the "marginal" post-punk, new wave scene and hard drug subculture can be misconstrued for glamorizing and glorifying their subjects, Bergman's search has earned a kind of clarity or, if you will, purity in the belief that each particular likeness is, indeed, inseparable from the universal. Bergman's work can be no less unsettling, but his representation of faces, which are subject to great differences in age, ethnicity and circumstances, offers the real cross-sections of social existence. He makes

visible profound currents in everyday life. He does not represent faces as either clichéd or idealized, but, for the sake of physiognomic truth, sees unidealized features as signifiers of human dignity and spirituality. These photographs remind us—as we must be—that we find ourselves through others. It is only then that the nakedness, which exists within all of us, can be accepted as part of our own human condition.

Not only do I feel honored to organize this exhibition at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, I think of it as a rare opportunity to celebrate a great artist who, in spite of the pathos of stylistic changes that come and go in the light of public reception and the demands of novelty, has stayed true to his vision, often to his own disadvantage. Bergman's achievement can be an example for artists of singular vision and fraying resilience, wherever they find themselves in the local and international art communities.

On behalf of our curatorial staff and colleagues, I would like to thank Agnes Gund for her long and unyielding commitment to Bergman's unique enterprise; Alfred and Ingrid Lenz Harrison, who have unfailingly understood the universality and inventiveness of Bergman's gifts as an artist; and Michael Washburn, who, in addition to being a good friend to both Bergman and me, has been supportive on all fronts. Without them, this first and, I hope, historic presentation of his portraits in New York would not have been possible.

My appreciation and great thanks go to David Levi Strauss for his thoughtful and illuminating essay, Robert Hennessey for his magnificent separations and his technical supervision of this publication, and Barbara de Wilde for her elegant design. It has been, of course, a pleasure and privilege to work with Bergman on this remarkable selection of photographs, which are only a fraction of a body of work that will in time be seen.

Phong Bui
Curator

THE DEMOCRACY OF UNIVERSAL
VULNERABILITY:

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ON ROBERT BERGMAN'S PORTRAITS

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

There is not enough kindness in the world. Human beings are notoriously cruel in their treatment of the other species that share our planet. But compared to the brutality we regularly visit upon our own kind, this chauvinist violence pales. We injure, torture, terrorize and enslave each other on a massive scale. We have killed millions of our own kind, not for food or territory, but because we have discerned some difference in the other that we imagine overrules our common humanity. Some of us even treat those closest to us, our loved ones, badly, inflicting wounds that may remain invisible, but that never heal.

Over the past nearly two hundred years, photography has served as faithful witness to and interrogator of this legacy of unkindness, with remarkable tenacity and inventiveness. Each new generation of image-makers finds fresh ways to make human cruelty visible. The motivations for this are many and complex, both personally and socially, but the

underlying premise is that of productive self-consciousness. If we can only *see* what we are doing to each other, if it is materialized before us as an image, we might become conscious of it as a thing in the world that can be changed. This premise has been questioned, criticized, and mocked over the years, but it has never been abandoned.

It is said that, once photographically derived images became ubiquitous, any reflective distance they might once have engendered diminished or disappeared. There are now too many images coming at us too fast for us to consciously respond to them. The once-imagined evidential veracity of these images has long ago dissolved into imperceptible patterns of endlessly mutable pixels. But still we believe and depend on them, and they continue to play a key role in our political and moral determinations.

The art history of photography (or the history of art photography) is riven by the attraction/repulsion to the empathic powers of photography. Edward Steichen believed that photography was conceived as “a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world,” and he organized “the greatest photographic exhibition of all time” at The Museum of Modern Art in 1955 to celebrate this mirroring. *The Family of Man* was a tremendous popular success, but drew critical fire from both right and left. Conservative critic Hilton Kramer complained that the exhibition embraced “all that is most facile, abstract, senti-

mental, and rhetorical in liberal ideology.” Photographer and educator Henry Holmes Smith later called the show “white supremacist, anti-black, anti-Third World.” Allan Sekula, who wrote the most trenchant critique of *The Family of Man* from a left perspective in 1981, revisited it in 2002, two years into the Bush/Cheney administration, and observed that “It is hard (for many Americans, at least) not to look back at *The Family of Man* today without a tinge of nostalgia for an exhausted liberalism.”

Steichen included a number of Robert Frank’s photographs in *The Family of Man* exhibition and book. But a few years later, in 1959, Frank produced a book that might be seen as the broken *Family of Man*, and signaled a whole new generational approach to documentary practice. If *The Family of Man* represented an implicit empathic approach that still relied on a mostly restrained, “objective” visual rhetoric, Frank’s *The Americans* opened up a strikingly subjective vein in an attempt to collapse the distance between image and viewer, to bring the viewer *inside* the experience.

The critical reaction to *The Americans* was immediate and vociferous. Whereas many viewers saw the book as courageous and true, some popular critics saw it as dishonest and morbid. The hapless Bruce Downes, editor of *Popular Photography*, who had already fulminated against the new “Photo Bohemians” and “Photointellectuals, look-

ing like beatniks,” saw *The Americans* as the ultimate manifestation of everything he despised in the new photography. “They are images of hate and hopelessness,” he wrote, “of desolation and preoccupation with death. They are images of an America seen by a joyless man who hates the country of his adoption.” Downes quickly gathered six other critics to help heap calumny on Frank’s book in the pages of *Popular Photography*. Arthur Goldsmith said the book was not about a real America, but about the “wild, sad, disturbed, adolescent, and largely mythical world” created by the Beats. Charles Reynolds complained that “the only slight vestiges of nobility left in this wasteland of vehicles, juke boxes, and American flags are possessed by Negroes and small children,” and James Zanutto called *The Americans* a “sad poem for sick people.” The *Popular Photography* critics were joined by a chorus of aggrieved patriots from around the country, including William Hogan at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who called Frank’s photographs “neurotic, and to some degree dishonest.”

For Robert Frank in 1959, the only way to tell the truth about America was to make it *personal*—to come out from behind an imagined journalistic objectivity or distanced reportage and work up close and from the heart, subjectively. Because of his later success, it is easy to forget how thoroughly this decision exposed him to some very extreme abreactions, and exacted a tremendous emotional

toll. It is also easy to forget how completely this new subjective approach flew in the face of every reigning institutional photographic aesthetic regime of the time, including the one propounded by Steichen’s successor at The Museum of Modern Art, John Szarkowski.

During his tenure as Director of the Department of Photography at MoMA, from 1962 to 1991, Szarkowski became the single most powerful arbiter of photography in the world. His kind of minimalist formalism was inhospitable to Robert Frank’s expansive, engaged responsiveness to social reality. Frank made his own way, regardless, but many others working in this vein were marginalized during this period. Bergman managed to survive.

Certain photographers—Robert Frank, as well as Robert Bergman, come to mind—discover, like the poets, otherwise ignored qualities of the person and environment, hidden moments of feeling, and present them to our entranced scrutiny—for our meditation.

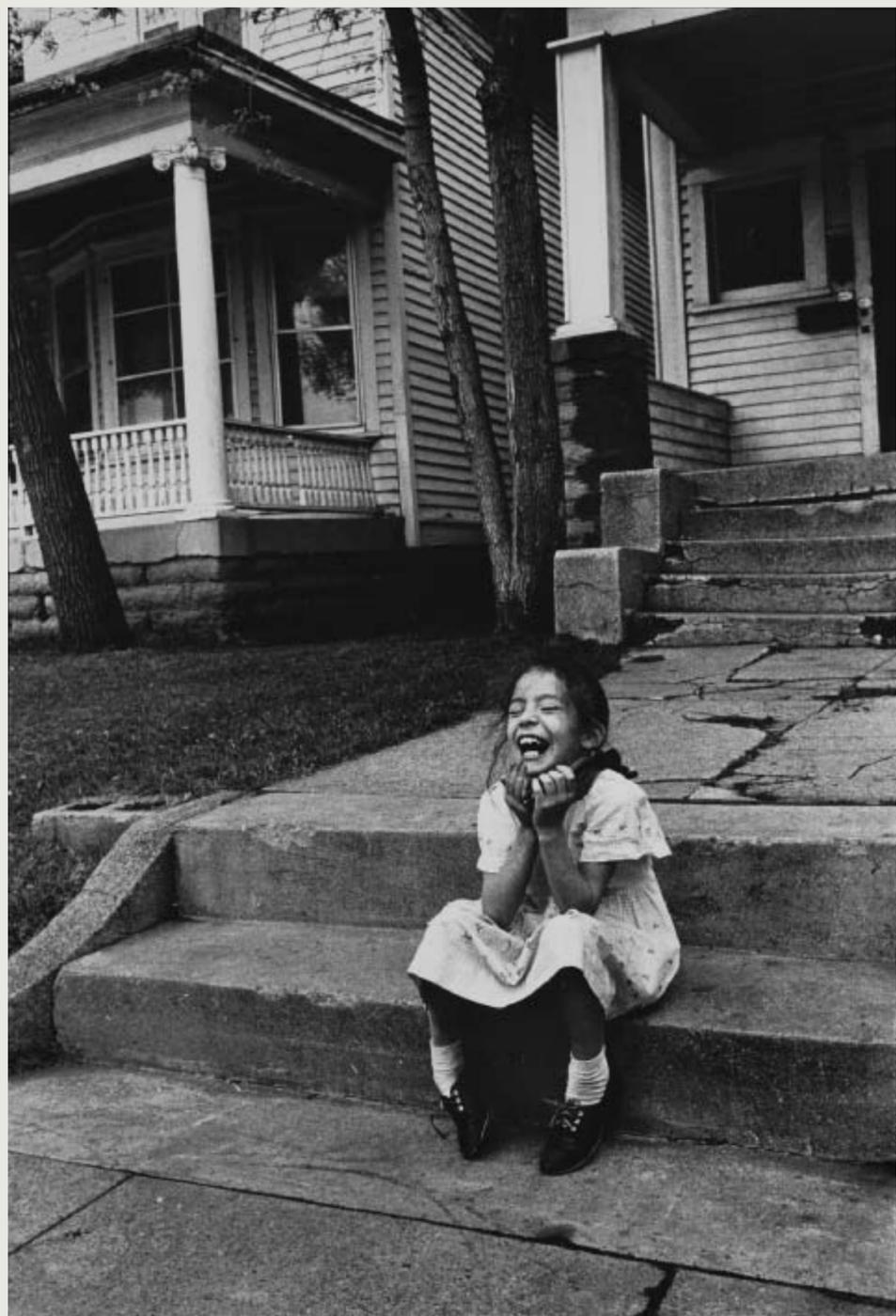
—Meyer Schapiro, Afterword to *A Kind of Rapture*

What Bergman’s photographs have in common with Frank’s is that they are intuitive *recognitions* rather than formalist constructions. Both of these artists go looking for something in the world and discover “otherwise ignored qualities of the person and environment” and “hidden mo-

ments of feeling.” When we look at their images, we are put in the place of this recognition. The distance collapses. It is not epistemological, but phenomenal.

Bergman’s early (c. 1965–68) black-and-white photographs of people on the street share with Frank’s that certain bemused awe—again, finding something in the world that tells us something about our condition: four faces in the crowd, contemplating their own mortality; a little girl on a concrete step before two clapboard houses, laughing in the face of it; and a woman in a raincoat and galoshes, striding between two dark windows, utterly self-contained. Even a double image of Bobby Kennedy in an elevator is singularly haunted, suspended forever between life and death.

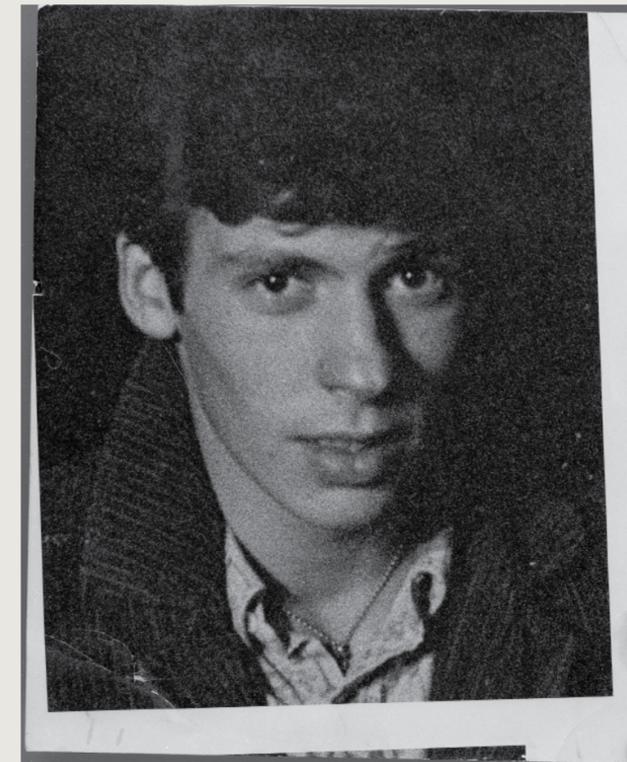






CRAZY ABOUT IMAGES

Dr. Sam Bergman was an eye, ear, nose, and throat man, but his son Robert concentrated early on the first of these. He was attracted to all kinds of optical devices—microscopes, telescopes, cameras—as a child, and began developing an intense interest in photography at the age of five or six. When his father died prematurely, at age forty-five, Bergman found solace using his Brownie camera to make images of the people he loved, the ones who were left, bereft—his mother and his younger brother Bill asleep in the Pullman car on the train from New Orleans, where his father died, to Minneapolis, where his mother had grown up.



But Bergman's life took a more radical and decisive turn in 1963, when he and Danny Seymour, a neighbor of his in Minneapolis, made a pact, at ages nineteen and twenty, to become great visionaries and artists of the camera. On their first night out to photograph, Bergman took Danny's portrait with a borrowed Nikon, and they rushed back to Robert's mother's laundry room to develop and print the image. From that point on, they were inseparable, until Danny moved to New York and began working with Robert Frank.

In 1971, Ralph Gibson's Lustrum Press published Danny Seymour's book *A Loud Song*. I discovered it a few years later,

and it had a tremendous effect on me. I had never seen anyone use words and images in such an immediate and effective way. And it was the first photographic work I ever tried to write about, as a poet, in 1975. I was twenty-two years old.

Danny Seymour's life story was a very complicated one, but in *A Loud Song* he managed to tell it with only a few scattered images and some scribbled words, and he did this in an emotionally powerful way without falling into sentimentality. After working with Robert Frank on the filming of the Rolling Stones chronicle (and brilliant meditation on the dark side of fame) *Cocksucker Blues*, Danny Seymour "disappeared" from a sailboat returning from Colombia in December 1972. In his introduction to *A Loud Song*, Seymour wrote, "When I turned to photography, it was as a drowning man reaches out for a liferaft. . . . This book is not an autobiography. It is not that complete. It is an attempt to use the photographic image as a language, and with that, to make literature."

In 1972, Lustrum Press published Robert Frank's *The Lines of My Hand*, which was thought to be an homage to *A Loud Song*. Or perhaps the reverse is true, since Frank must have been working on *Lines* when Seymour made his *Song*, and the lines of influence are more likely to have run in that direction. In any case, when Frank made later versions of *The Lines of My Hand*, he included a double image of Danny holding a microphone, over this epitaph:

WE MEET IN NEW YORK. He is young—crazy about images. We become friends. Daniel Seymour travels fast. We work together—it ended with Cocksucker Blues. Fate. And Danny will never return from his last trip. GOOD BYE—CUT

RAPTURE AND KINDNESS

In 1998, Pantheon Books published a selection of Robert Bergman's street portraits titled *A Kind of Rapture*, with an introduction by Toni Morrison and an afterword by Meyer Schapiro. The book is dedicated "to the memory of Daniel Seymour and Martin Lenz Harrison," and it includes an epigraph by Danny Seymour's mother, the poet Isabella Gardner:

If there is a theme with which I am particularly concerned, it is the contemporary failure of love. I don't mean romantic love or sexual passion, but the love which is the specific and particular recognition of one human being by another—the response by eye and voice and touch of two solitudes. The democracy of universal vulnerability.

The portraits that follow are unlike any others in the history of photography. A superficial glance through them will yield little, but prolonged viewing opens up worlds of

connection. This is what I wrote after Phong Bui first showed me prints of some of Robert Bergman's portraits, in 2004:

When my mother died, I was holding her face in my hands and looking into her eyes. I wanted to see what she was seeing, then, but I couldn't. I could feel it, but I couldn't see it. I thought that I should be able to save her, and I tried to hold her gaze, to hold her here, but the moment she died, her eyes went out, and I was left alone.

In the last weeks, the skin of her face had pulled taut around her skull to create a face I had never seen before, though I'd known her all my life. It was her face, definitely, but she'd never shown it to the world before this. It was her true face, and it was new, and it was the most beautiful face I have ever seen.

This is what I remembered when I first saw Robert Bergman's photograph of the old woman in a lavender robe, with light on her hair and behind her eyes. It's the first photograph in his extraordinary book, *A Kind of Rapture*, and it's still the hardest one for me to look at.

Cartier-Bresson has said that one of the most difficult things to do in photography is to make a portrait. It's no problem, of course, to aim a camera and shoot someone, but to portray (literally, *to draw forth or reveal*) another is something else en-

tirely. Cartier-Bresson said his passion "has never been for photography 'in itself,' but for the possibility—through forgetting yourself—of recording in a fraction of a second the emotion of the subject, and the beauty of the form: that is, *a geometry awakened by what's offered.*" The poet Robert Duncan wrote that "To see the face rightly, one must see the skull in the face; to see the skull rightly, one must see the face."

The faces in Robert Bergman's photographs are all so penetrating that one must spend a good deal of time looking at them to begin to realize their scope. Finally, it is difficult to identify a human emotion that is not revealed in them.

The truth is, photography can only do a couple of things really well. It can make visible the tracery of a relation, beginning with the relation between the photographer and his or her subject, and it can reflect on death. Neither of these effects is automatic, by any means, but it is possible. One would think that, out of the millions of photographs that have been made between people over the last 170 years, it would have happened more often, but in fact it is exceedingly rare.

I guess that's because real portraits enact a contradiction: that each human being is unique and, at the same time, alike. There is no such thing as a "typical person." People are very different, one from another. But when you get down below the surface, to the skull, we're ultimately the same.

Robert Bergman is a great portraitist. What's going on in these images can't be faked. We've never met, but based on these portraits, I trust him. I would even have trusted him with my mother's face.

I trust him still, because I think he knows what images are and what they can do. He knows how dangerous images can be, and so is extremely careful with them. And he recognizes that photographs are not only formal constructions, but also magical acts.

[The] space and time peculiar to the image is none other than the world of magic, a world in which everything is repeated and in which everything participates in a significant context. . . . The significance of images is magical.

—Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*

The vicissitudes of light among bodies can give rise to any number of effects which we cannot resist comparing with the states of our inner sense of perception.

—Paul Valéry, “The Centenary of Photography”

Robert Bergman found these states in human beings, out in the world, and photographed them. Somehow, Bergman managed to make one truthful portrait after another, to draw forth the inner life of perfect strangers—not

once or twice, but time after time, over twelve years. What emerges from these street portraits after prolonged viewing is the astonishing variety of states expressed: affection, pity, anger, contempt, confusion, ecstasy, pain, sorrow, regret, dejection, delight, curiosity, predation, shyness, menace, hatred, compassion, clarity, confidence, despair, shame . . . But it is really the admixture of emotions that most attracts Bergman: menace mixed with affection, fear with curiosity, clarity with dejection, sorrow with delight, and many other combinations for which I have no words, which can only be *seen*.

THE LOST BEAUTY OF MANKIND

Since at least the middle of the sixteenth century, ideas about portraiture in art have turned on the distinction between imitation or mimesis (representing things according to particular principles) and portraying (representing things as they are and not as the artist believes they should be). The rise and fall of portraiture in people's estimation over the past five centuries has been largely determined by fluctuating attitudes about imitation and portrayal. Although this distinction is sometimes reduced in theory to that between beauty and truth, the relation is more complicated in practice.

The rise of photography nearly two centuries ago complicated this distinction even more, by introducing the idea of inherent likeness in the medium. This inherent likeness, or direct relation to the real, recalled earlier senses of the *acheiropoetic* image, an image “not made by hand,” such as the True Image of Christ in the Veronica or Mandylion. These icons had special power because they were believed to be direct traces of the divine, unmediated by human agency. Although these beliefs were thought to transcend art, they also engendered and empowered it. As Hans Belting wrote in his groundbreaking study *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, these earlier beliefs in images survived and influenced everything that came later: “The image and its beholder, in ultimate terms, related to each other like archetype and copy, like Creator and creature. The material image, as a mediator, thus became the tool for a contemplation of *the lost beauty of mankind*.”

In the modern period, and especially in photography, portraiture has concentrated more on the physical traits of subjects in an attempt to reveal social typologies and assert identity, and also to explore the evolution of physical, psychological, and social types through the conventions of representation. The older sense of portraying moral or spiritual ideals, in the direct contemplation of the “the lost beauty of mankind,” has been mostly eclipsed in recent times.

The great art historian Meyer Schapiro knew the details of this history, and their implications for the art of his time, better than anyone. And this is what he said about Bergman’s portraits:

Robert Bergman’s color portraits of people encountered by chance on the streets of American cities address the viewer with captivating simplicity and directness, in an idiom that is unencumbered by the norms or conventions of a period style. . . . The resulting energy and beauty of forms imbue these portraits with unnameable yet compelling spiritual qualities. . . . He has introduced the processes of unification, as in a painting, with the search for harmony, movement, variety and distinction within it, beyond what I have ever seen in a photograph.

Who are these people? I think the question contains its own answer. They are “the people” in “We the people,” the sovereign populace on which American democracy is based. They are “chosen” not by divine intervention, but by virtue of having come into relation with an artist intent on representing them. And whatever they do or are in front of his camera is faithfully and lovingly embraced, not as a personality or as a type, but as a true physical and spiritual embodiment of our common humanity and ultimate vulnerability.

Where does the age-old struggle in figural art between resemblance to the subject and idealization or transfiguration leave us today? It leaves us with the willful contemplation of each other. This is what art can do. If we can see each other clearly, in our revealed radiance, then perhaps we might recognize one another again, and bring some kindness back into the world. It can't be too much to ask.

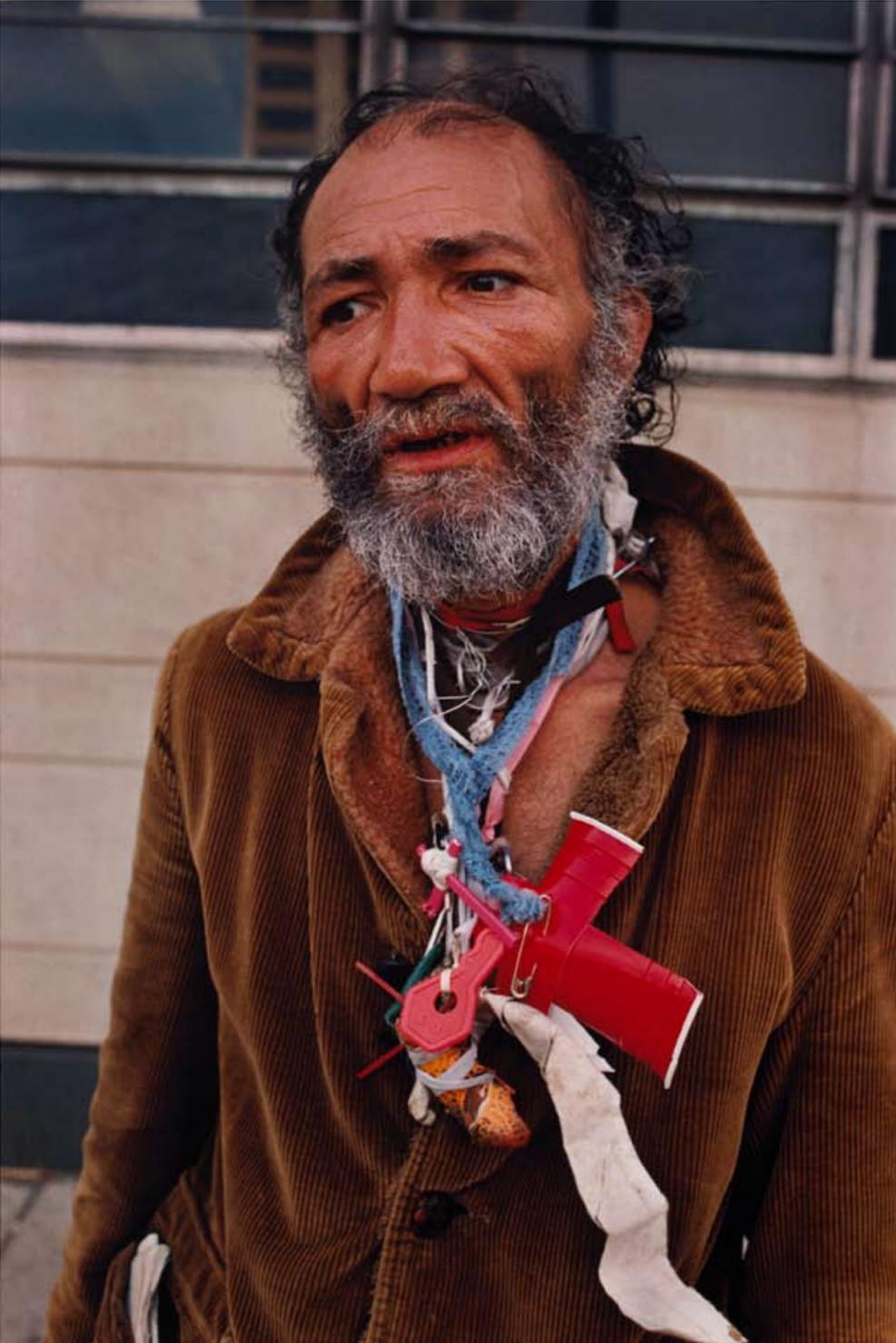
David Levi Strauss

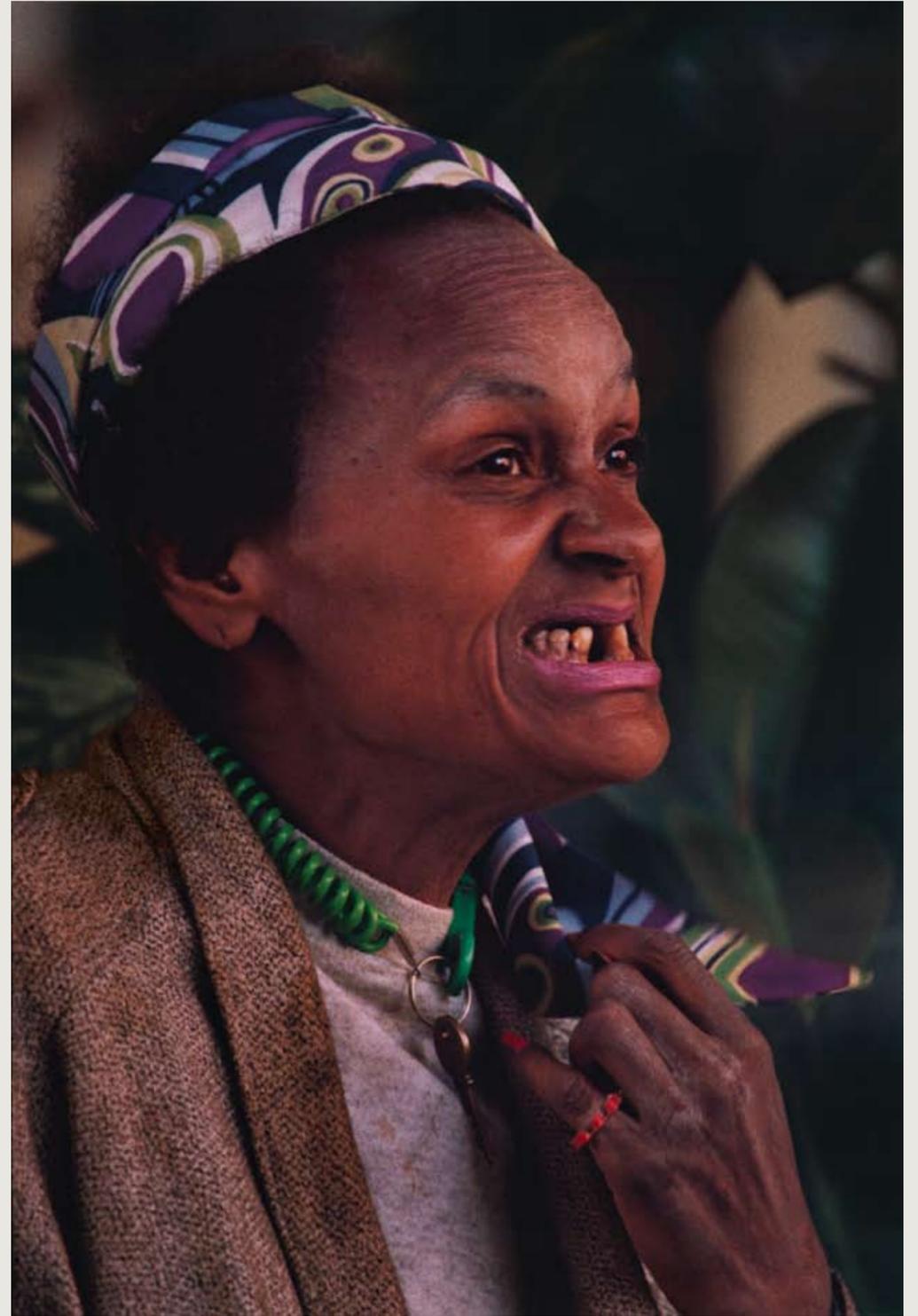
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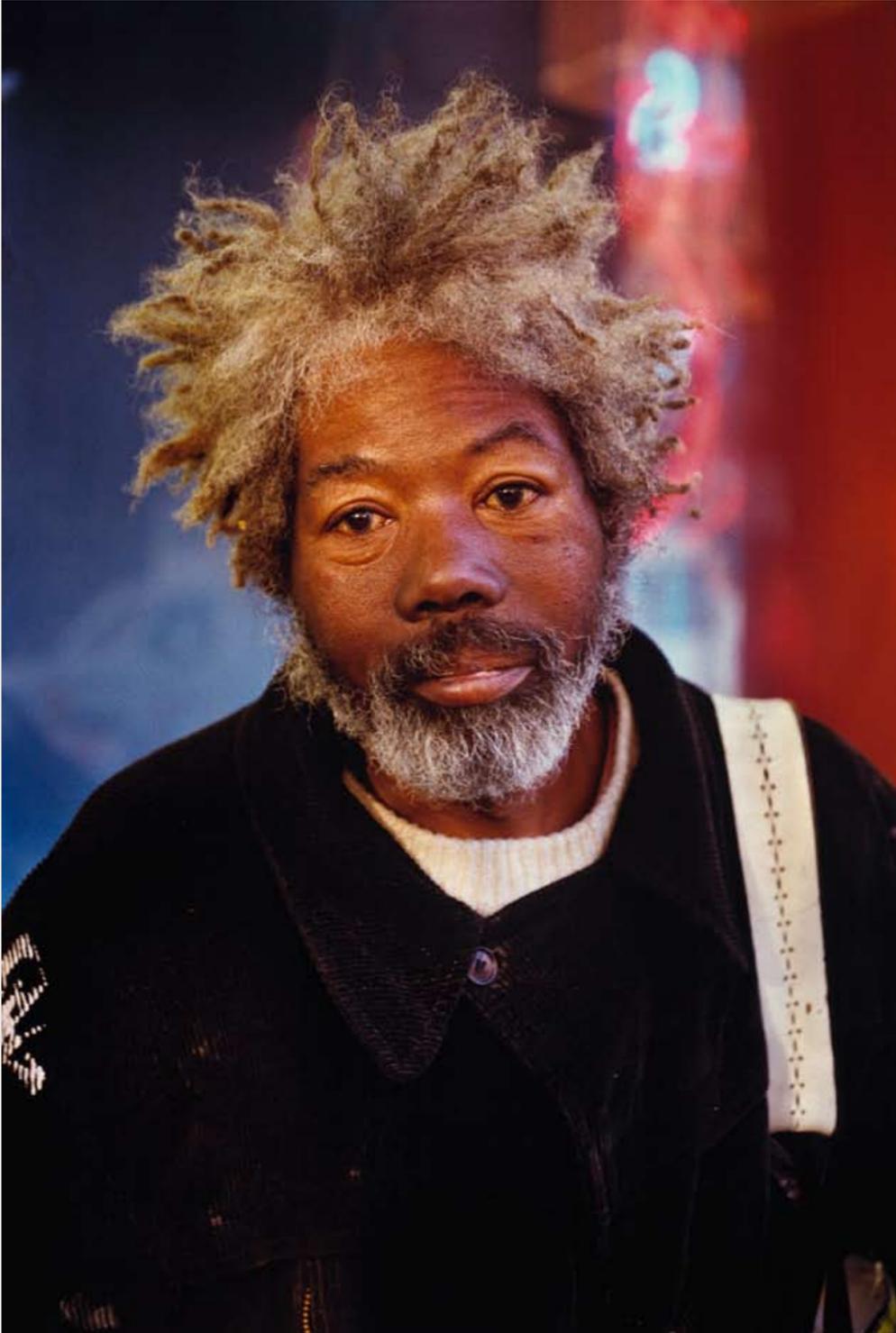


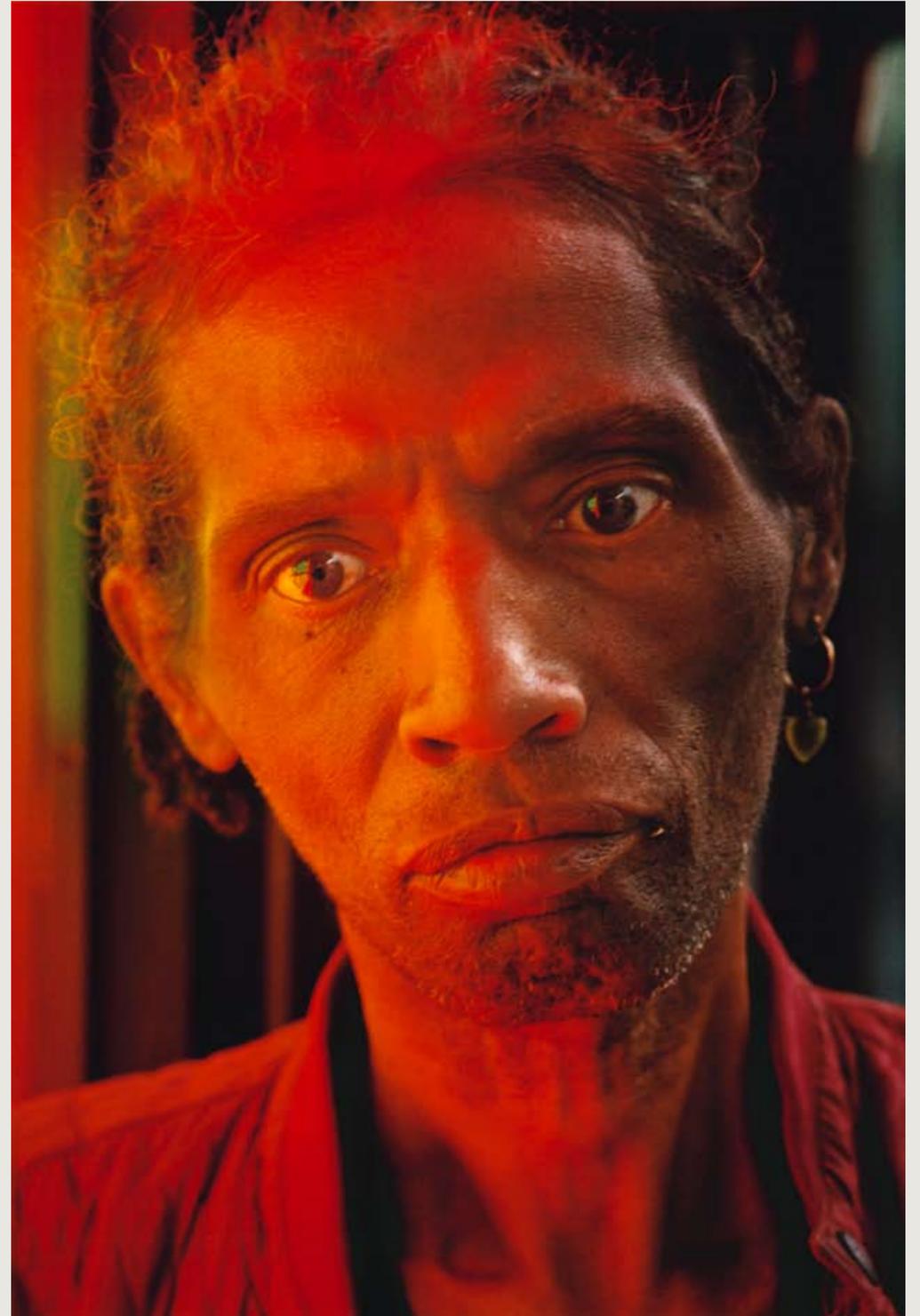


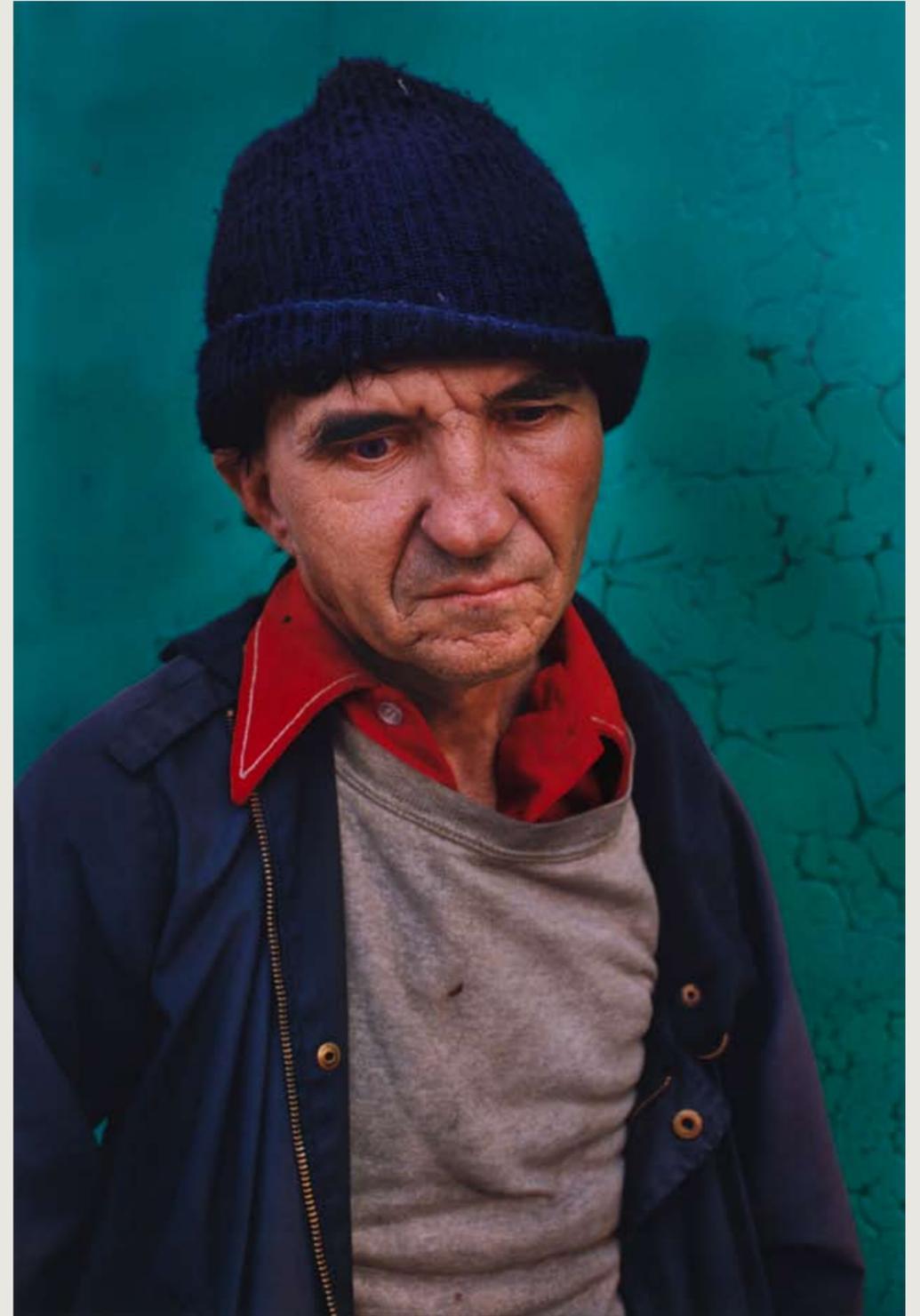




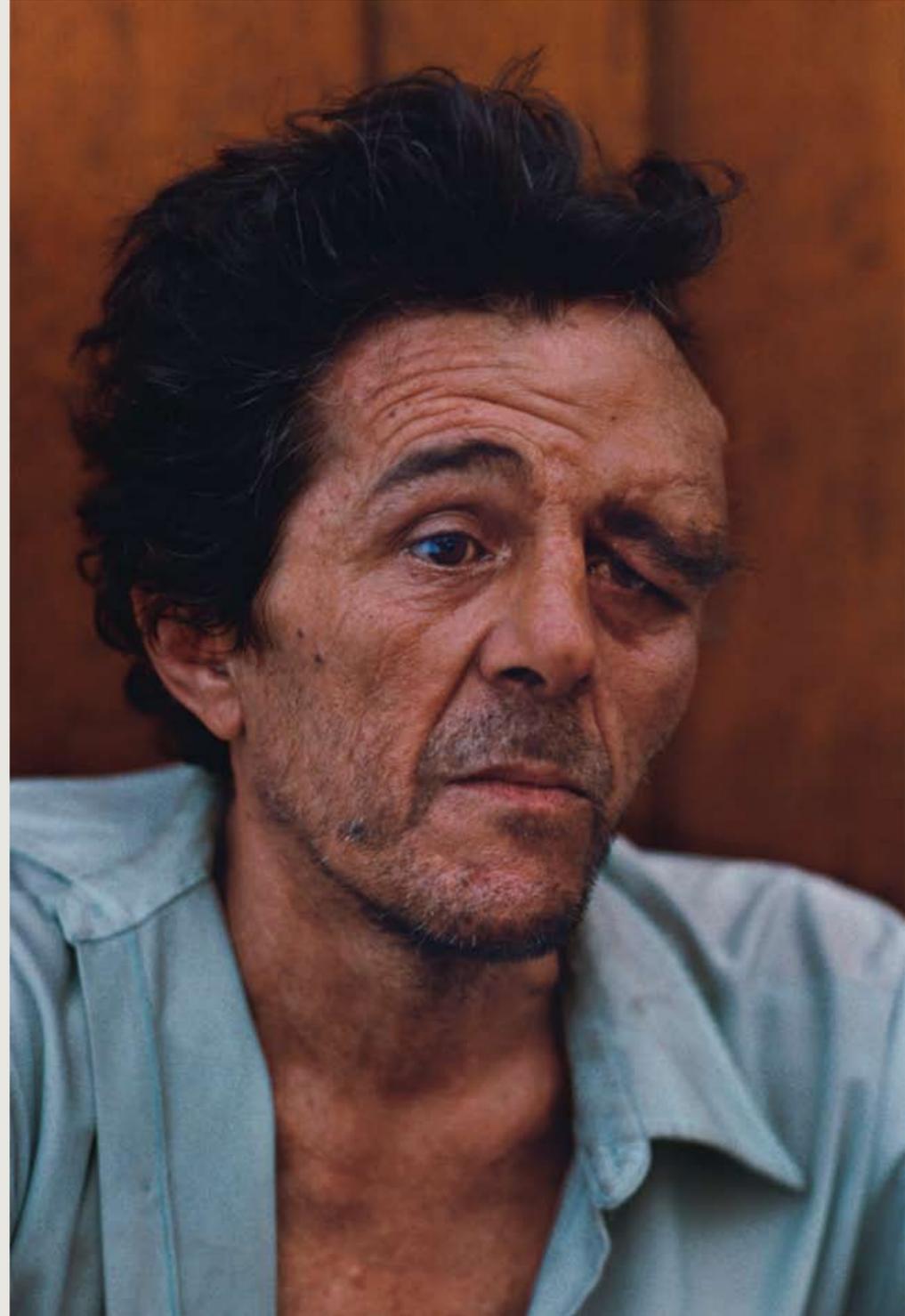




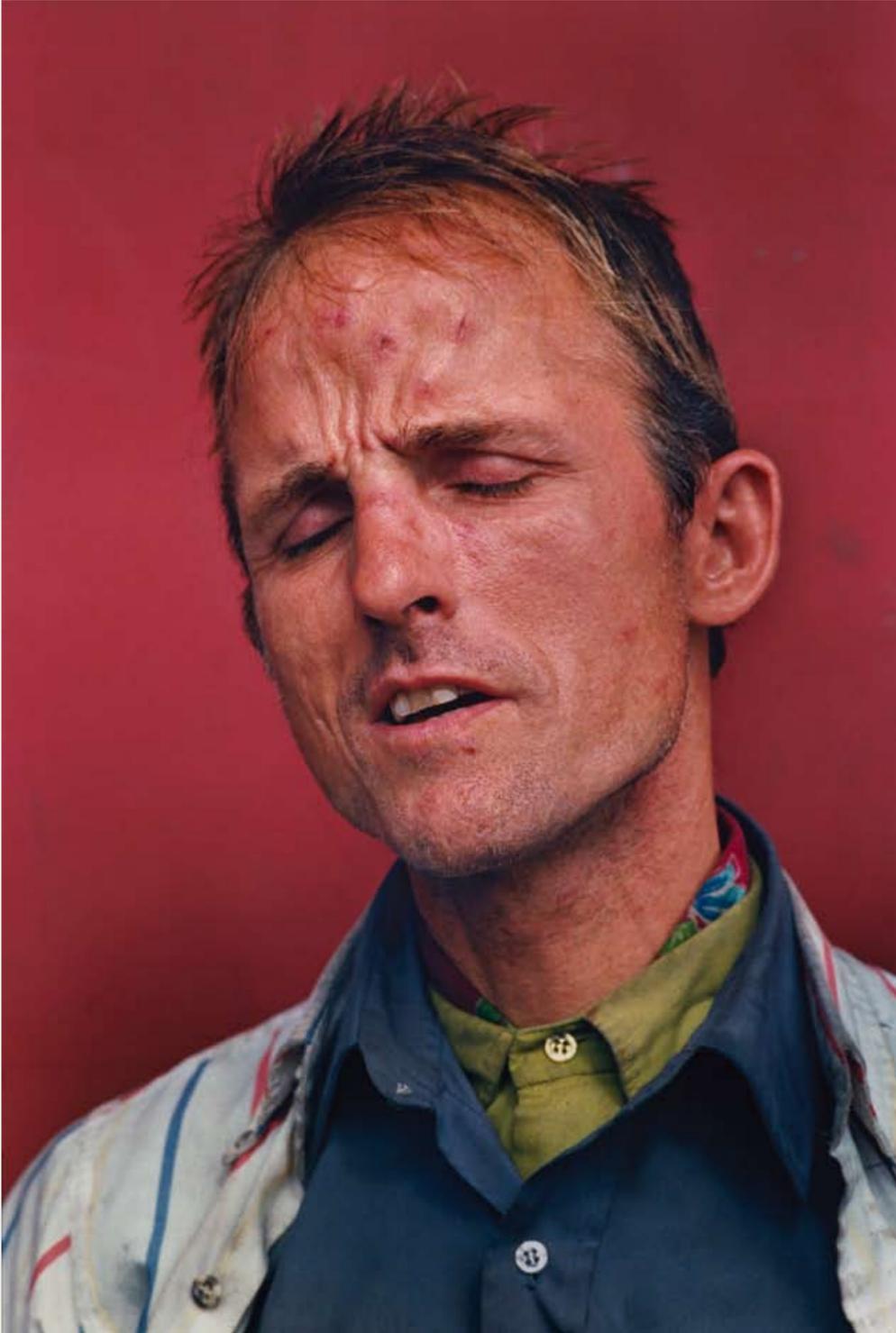






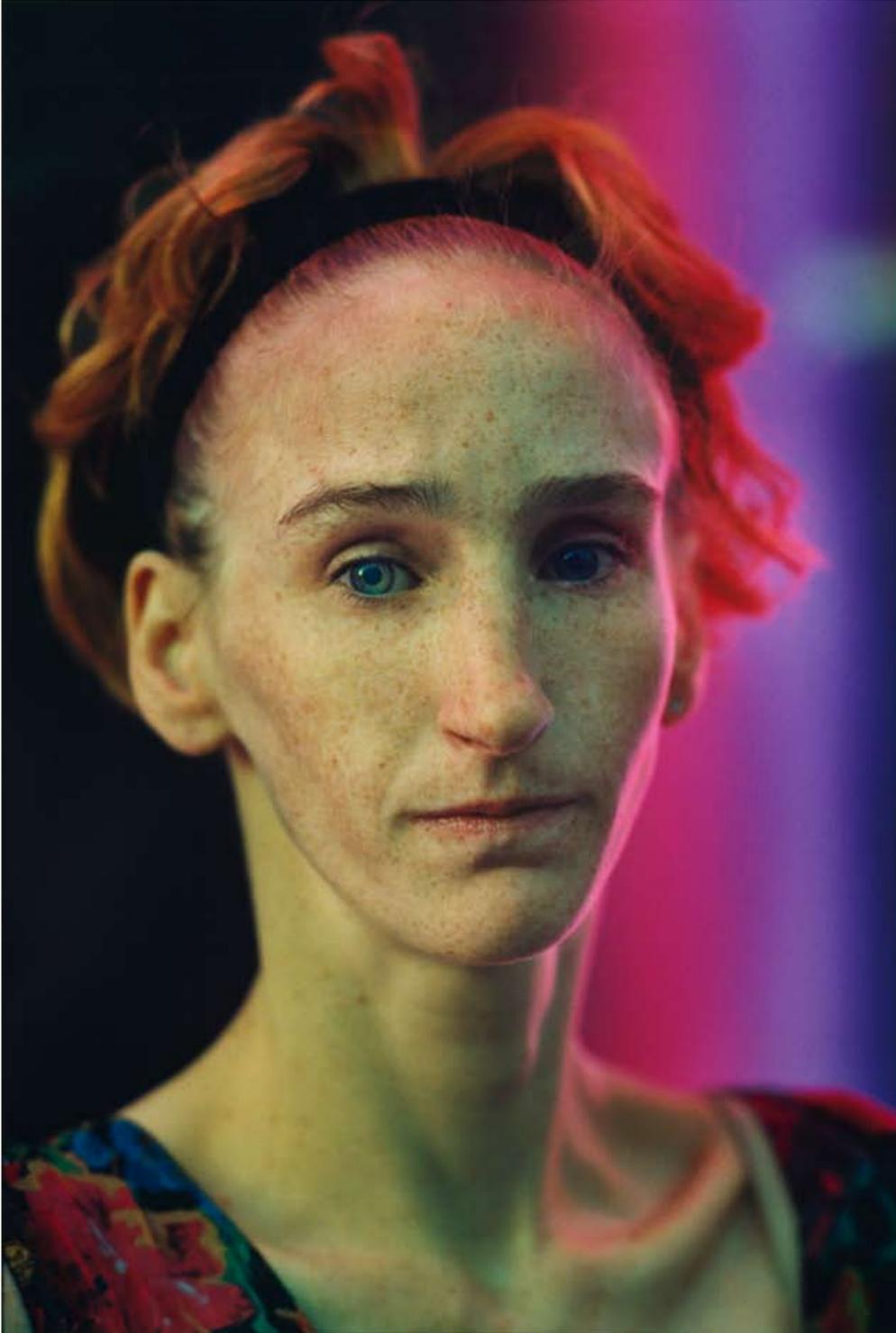




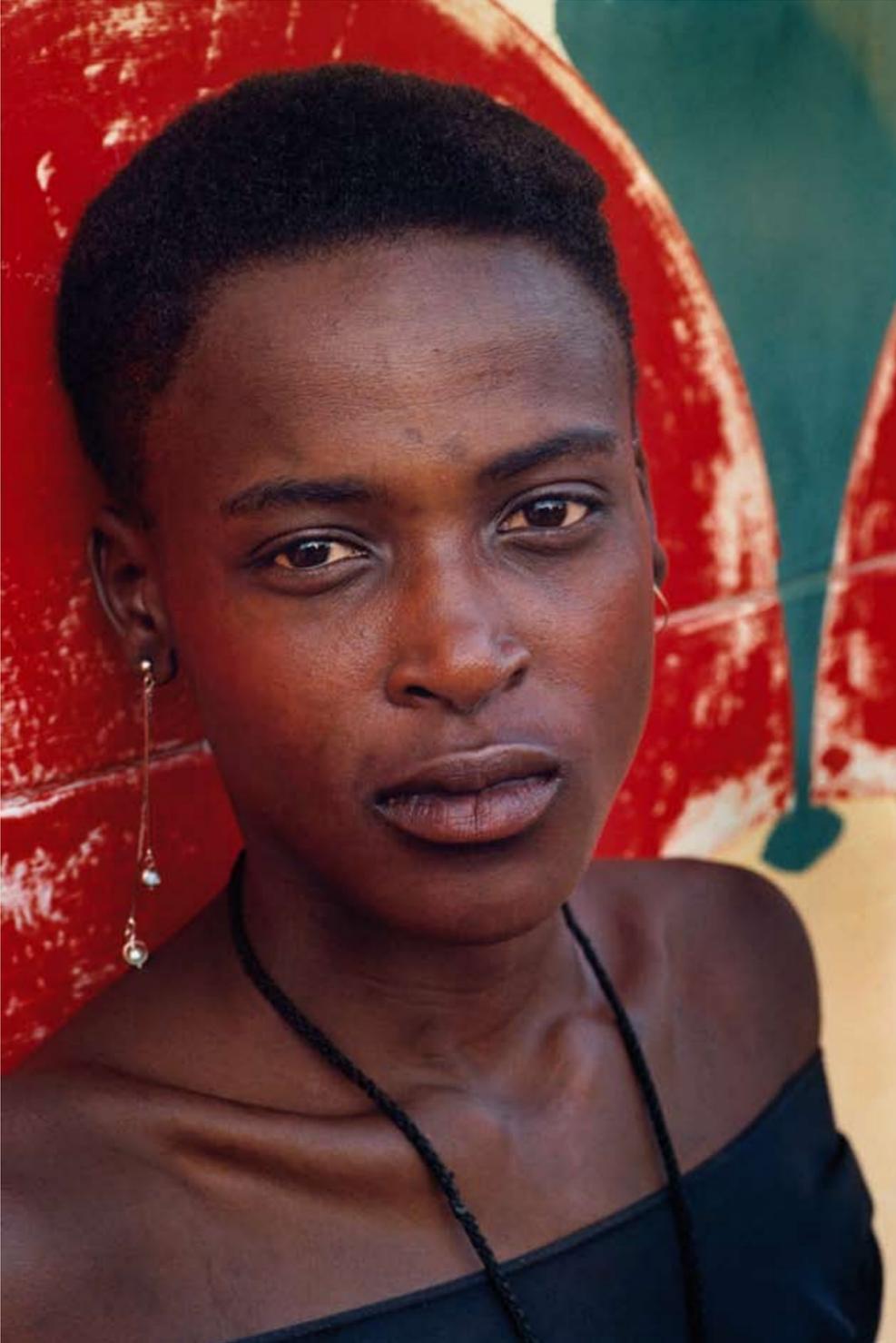


















COLOPHON

ROBERT BERGMAN: SELECTED PORTRAITS
P.S.1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER, NEW YORK

OCTOBER 25, 2009–JANUARY 4, 2010

The exhibition is organized by
P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center.

EXHIBITION:

Curator: Phong Bui

Curatorial Assistant: Tim Goossens

Director of Operations and Exhibitions: Antoine Guerrero

Manager of Curatorial Affairs: Christopher Y. Lew

Chief of Installation: Richard Wilson

Head Preparator and Production Coordinator: David Figueroa

Registrar: Summer Kemick

All exhibited prints are untitled, 2009, 37 x 25 inches.

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