

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOMEN:**

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

OCTOBER 24, 2014 – MARCH 21, 2015



## **A NOTE ABOUT THIS GALLERY GUIDE:**

This gallery guide was written by Linnea Brotz '15, as part of her Independent Study at the museum. The essays in this guide are meant to function as a supplement to the wall texts, elaborating on the processes and inspirations of each artist, as well as providing deeper analysis of their works. The essays are arranged in the order that the artists appear in the gallery.

As part of her Independent Study, Linnea also recorded a conversation between herself and Dan Mills, the Director of the Bates Museum of Art and the Curator of this exhibit. This conversation covers topics everything from the conception of the exhibit to how the artists were chosen and how to works were arranged, to interesting thematic or stylistic comparisons between artists. At the end of each essay is a list of the tracks, which featuring that artist. The link to the conversation is below.

# Claire Seidl

(American, born 1952, lives in New York City and Rangeley, Maine)

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Claire Seidl has been a successful abstract painter for more than 30 years. She was inspired to take up photography by summers spent at her family's camp in Rangeley, Maine. She was trained at the International Center of Photography in New York City. Seidl has been showing her photographic work for about 15 years and today splits both her time, and her artistic practice, between New York City (where she paints) and Rangeley, ME (where she photographs).

In both practices, Seidl explores themes of space, memory, and time through layering, themes which extend from her greater interest in “how we see (or don't see) what's right in front of us”.

The three works by Claire Seidl on display here are exemplary of her photographic practice. Because she works in two mediums, Seidl takes advantage of the unique capabilities each offers. In her photography, she tries to emphasize the fact that the camera allows us to see things that the naked eye cannot. Thus, Seidl shoots at night with a long exposure in order to capture a continuum of space and time that we would register as incremental moments, not a unified image. *Porch Dinner*, for example, condenses an entire dinner into one image. Seidl captured the photo by setting up her camera with an exposure of somewhere between 30 minutes to an hour while her family ate dinner in Rangeley. During a long exposure, the shutter remains open and lets light into the camera, exposing the film. Things that move, such as Seidl's family members eating dinner, become blurred, while the static chairs and architectural elements remain in focus. The ghostly figures not only hint at our impermanence, they also act as a record of motion over time. Seidl has said that in her photographs, “time becomes enmeshed with the representational subject matter and then becomes the subject itself.”

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It is interesting to think about how time manifests in the two other works on display here as well. In *Look Out*, the passing cars are reduced only to their headlights, emphasizing the stillness of the parked car in the foreground. *Priscilla* is a portrait also shot at the Rangeley house. There are many layers in this photo: first the transparent image of Priscilla's face and striped shirt; then a more substantial image of Priscilla—her leg is more defined than her ghostly head and neck); and finally the crisp architectural setting. These layers tell us about the trajectory of Priscilla's movement. The human eye would register her movement as thousands of individual, in-focus moments, but the camera is uniquely able to collect it into picture. Seidl refers to this as a “flash of memory.”

Seidl's work is discussed in tracks #5, #9, and #11 of the Podcast, linked below

#5: Why Seidl's works were hung at the beginning of the exhibit

#9: The gaze in *Priscilla*

#11: How Seidl's connection to Rangeley, ME impacts her work

## **Donna Ferrato**     *(American, born 1949, lives in New York City)*

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These images are from Donna Ferrato's TriBeCa series, a ten-year photographic study documenting the changes in her Manhattan neighborhood after September 11th. Ferrato moved to Tribeca in the mid 1990s, when it was an untamed haven for renegade artists. After 9/11, there was increased security, increased tourism, and eventually, an increase in luxury condominiums and celebrities. With this series, Ferrato not only sought to document these changes, but also to preserve the essence of Tribeca.

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Ferrato's work is the result of her insatiable curiosity about the human experience. She aims to "capture the very essence of people," which she does in a photojournalist style that refuses to sugarcoat reality. Ferrato uses a small, easily portable Leica M4 35mm film camera, which allows her to capture spontaneous, everyday moments in the neighborhood. The surprising angle in "*Jesus*" *Franklin St.*, the in-progress high five in *Little Girl on Leonard St.*, and the rapt crowd in *Puffy's Tavern* are especially representative of Ferrato's ability to quickly capture everyday moments.

While all of these images feature people, some works like *Provenzano Garage* and *Liquor Store West Broadway* seem to focus more on the urban landscape. The hazy, grittiness of these images seems to be Ferrato's reminder of what Tribeca used to be.

Many of her subjects do not seem to notice that they are being photographed, which makes the viewer feel like they are observing everyday life in Tribeca. This is telling of Ferrato's background in photojournalism. Nevertheless, Ferrato's images are intimate and empathetic, conveying not only her love for the neighborhood, but also her status as a local.

The artist was introduced to the camera by her father, a surgeon, who relished taking photos in his spare time. Ferrato writes that his often-intrusive photography made her realize that "the camera is only an extension of the person who shoots with it." Ferrato has successfully become an unimposing observer, capturing touching moments in her city at a distance. This skill for empathetic, somehow unobtrusive documentary photography is also evident in Ferrato's two other major series, which document domestic violence and, conversely, love and lust.

Ferrato's work is discussed in tracks #5, #7, #8, #9, #10 and #11 of the Podcast, linked below

#5: Why Ferrato's works were placed where they are in the gallery

#7: To what extent are Ferrato's snapshots of Tribeca depicting "reality"

#8: Ferrato's photojournalistic style in the context of voyeurism

#9: The gaze of Ferrato's camera is discussed

#10: learn more about Ferrato's camera

#11: Ferrato's work is discussed in relation to her deep connection to Tribeca

## **Irina Ionesco**     *(French, born 1938, lives in Paris)*

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Irina Ionesco began taking photographs in the mid 1960s in Paris with a Nikon F that her partner gave her. Since then, Irina Ionesco has photographed only women and consistently incorporated sensual, slightly kitschy props and costumes. The artist's fantastical, mysterious, aesthetic comes from her childhood in Constanta Romania where she was surrounded by the costumes and traditions of a melting pot of religions and ethnicities, as well as the architectural remnants of a mixed Ottoman and Byzantine past. The result is images that have been described as a combination of gothic romanticism, baroque orientalism, and surrealist fantasy. Her works seem to operate in the same sublime dream state that Romantic artists like Goya tried to evoke—sometimes frightening and haunting but also strangely beautiful.

The artist was raised by her grandmother and has said that she constantly dreamed of her estranged mother. Her photographs, intensely focused on women and surrounded by a deep blackness, are intended as an homage and representation of these dreams.

To create these images, Ionesco started with the model, then added costume, props, and set decoration as she went along. The composition was never planned but instead evolved organically. Despite this fluid process, the final images are very static, almost reminiscent of Byzantine idols that Ionesco would have seen in her childhood in Constanta. Ionesco used a great number of different models. In fact, each of the seven photographs on display in this exhibit features a different woman. And while Ionesco's camera focuses on the model's faces, their powerful, uninterested gazes give them a sense of anonymity, even as they engage the viewers gaze.

In the mid-1970s, Ionesco photographed her daughter Eva in the same manner she did adult models. Because Eva was between the ages of four and twelve when the photographs were taken, this embroiled Ionesco in a controversy that has surrounded other artists, such as Sally Mann, David Hamilton and Jock Sturges, who have also photographed nude or semi-nude children. The controversy surrounding the photographs of Eva increased when Ionesco allowed her to appear in magazines like Italian Playboy and Spanish Penthouse. Eva went on to be an actress in Paris and in 2010, she directed the film *My Little Princess*, which is inspired by her relationship with Irina. She also sued Irina in 2012, winning 10,000 euros in French court for damages. Nevertheless, the two maintain a relationship and today, Ionesco works primarily in fashion photography and also works to document UNESCO world heritage sites.

Ionesco's work is discussed in tracks #6 and #9 of the podcast, linked below

#6: a comparison of Ionesco's and Froehlich's work

#9: to hear about the gaze of the photographer and the returning gaze of the subjects

## Denise Froehlich (American, born 1967, lives in Portland, ME)

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Denise Froehlich lives in Portland, where she is a fine art photographer and a board member of the Maine Museum of Photographic Arts. She has taught photography and art history at numerous schools in the area, including Bates College and Maine College of Art.

These works are from the *Pathos of Eros Series*, which Froehlich developed for the exhibit Maine Women Pioneers III in 2012 at the University of New England Art Gallery. The series was inspired by the writings of French philosopher Roland Barthes and the painter Lucien Freud. Barthes writing on love and Freud's depictions of the human body are fairly dark, but Froehlich injects humor and optimism into her work.

The small pear and delicate teacup, for example, are unexpected props. But when we realize that the humor of the images lies in the juxtaposition of the *femininity* of the pear and teacup to the *masculinity* of the model's musculature, we are forced to confront and question deeply engrained gender associations. The buoy and lobstering rope in *Bouy* and *Rope Tricks* not only serve to exaggerate the model's naked-ness, but also represent the model's profession as a lobsterman in a witty way.

It is slightly ironic that while Froehlich seeks to make this man anonymous, she also inserts symbols of his identity. The lobstering rope tied on his forearm is reminiscent of butchers twine on a roast. In other images of this series, Froehlich drew lines on her subject's body, like cuts of meat in order to make a pun of 'beefcake.' While this is another aspect of her humor, it also refutes a longstanding gender dynamic. It is usually women who are made anonymous in art or considered "a piece of meat." Power is central to these works. Male nudes are still fairly rare in art, and these images turn the idea of the male gaze on its head. The female gaze of the

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artist's camera is heightened by the strength and power that the model's musculature represents. While there is power in Froehlich's gaze, it is not as objectifying or sexualized as male nudes by other artists like Robert Maplethorpe.

Froehlich's work is discussed in tracks #6 and #9 of the podcast, linked below

#6: a comparison of Ionesco's and Froehlich's work

#9: the female gaze and the importance of male nudes

## **Kristin Capp** *(American, born 1964, lives in New York City)*

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The works by Kristin Capp in this exhibit are images of three Hutterite colonies that Kristin Capp photographed over four years in the mid 1990s. Capp befriended the Walter family while living nearby. This Hutterite family then introduced her to other families and colonies.

Hutterites, like the Amish and Mennonites, developed out of the Anabaptist movement in the 16th century in Switzerland. The Hutterites have largely maintained the same communal, agricultural lifestyle since their founding. This can be seen in works like *Potato Harvest* and *Harvesting Watermelons*. While Hutterite colonies are insular and maintain a safe distance from modern American society, they have no fear of the "outside," and they adapt to modern technology when necessary. For example, they use electric sewing machines and drive cars and trucks. Nevertheless, their style of dress remains traditional, as you can see in these photos, and they speak an archaic dialect of German.

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Hutterites traditionally do not allow themselves to be photographed, especially by outsiders, but it is not completely banned. Today, some Hutterites even have small, personal cameras that they use to document weddings and other special gatherings. Nevertheless, photography is by no means commonplace, especially by an outsider. This brings up interesting issues of gaining access as a photographer. While some of the Hutterites make eye contact with Capp's camera, like in the portrait of *Carol Walters*, others seem to shy away from the gaze of the camera. Even the boy in *After School* seems slightly uneasy despite looking into the camera. Nevertheless, the fact that Capp was allowed to take these photographs and was welcomed into the community signals a high degree of mutual trust and respect.

Capp uses a large format film camera, which requires a tripod. Thus these photographs were all planned and the subjects had complete knowledge that they were being photographed. The beautiful composition of *Carol, Janet, and Deborah Walter*, with the three sisters in an angled line receding backwards that is transected by the fence, also shows how the large format camera and tripod allowed the artist to arrange her subjects for this portrait.

Capp's work is discussed in tracks #7, #8, #9, and #10 of the podcast, linked below

#7: How much truth is there in these images of Hutterite life if Capp only had limited access?

#8: Capp's outsider status is discussed in terms of voyeurism

#9: how do the Hutterites react to the camera and how/when do they return the gaze?

#10: Capp's large format camera is discussed

## Susan Moldenhauer *(American, born 1951, lives in Laramie, Wyoming)*

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Susan Moldenhauer works as an artist and museum director in Laramie, Wyoming. She received an MFA in Photography from Penn State University in 1982 and has been a strong force in the Wyoming art community since the early 1990s, both as an artist and curator.

Wyoming's expansive landscape is the primary inspiration for Moldenhauer's photography. This group of four works comes from the series *Mind Place Spirit* and spans the years 2004 through 2007. In this series, Moldenhauer seeks to capture "synchronistic, transformative moments when earth, sky, wind, and human presence are one." It is the artist herself who appears in these images. To give the sense that she is "becoming one" with her environment, she moves with a large piece of fabric during a single long exposure. Each photograph essentially documents a small performance in the plains. The panoramic Hasselblad X-Pan digital camera allows Moldenhauer to capture these wide-framed scenes without cropping or combining multiple images. There are three elements at play: the artist, the cloth, and the landscape. How they combine is determined by chance. Moldenhauer never knows exactly where she will be in the composition, what the scale of landscape to figure will be, or the movement of the fabric. While most photographers make their artistic choices before they take a photo by composing it in the viewfinder, Moldenhauer does the opposite because she is in front of the camera. She makes choices after taking a photo by choosing which ones 'work.'

It is interesting that we can see Moldenhauer's face in the print from 2004; she is veiled yet her features are defined. This gives the sense of an apparition—weightless but present; fading into the landscape but still her own entity. The strong dividing line down the center and the crisp landscape stand in stark contrast to the work in which the fabric takes over, essentially becoming the sky. The four works on display here are arranged, from left to right, so that the

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fabric increasingly blends into the landscape.

In the photograph from 2007, Moldenhauer's face is barely discernible in the lower left corner. The transitions and various states of being in these works is fascinating. Stillness and motion blend, allowing us to track the artist's movement through space. Yet the immobility of the landscape contrasted with the fluidity of the artist creates a tension that complicates Moldenhauer's intention of connecting with her surroundings.

Moldenhauer's work is discussed in tracks #5, #9, #10, and #11 of the podcast, linked below

#5: find out why Moldenhauer's images were hung where they are in the gallery

#9: the gaze is discussed in terms of Moldenhauer's self-portraiture

#10: learn more about Moldenhauer's long exposure technique

#11: Moldenhauer's work is discussed in terms of her connection to the Wyoming landscape

## **Sally Gall** *(American, born 1956, lives in New York City)*

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The two works in this exhibition by Sally Gall are part of a series on swimmers that the artist photographed between 1978 and 1986. This grew out of her broader interests in water, landscape, and our place within nature. Gall has a deep connection to nature, traveling the world to see and appreciate new things.

Gall has said that through her travels, she has gained an "appreciation for how this 'place' shapes us, even as we shape it with our passage." *Swimmers*

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#1 and #2 neatly illustrate this. One woman swims through the water, moving and re-shaping it, while the other seems lost in contemplation. These images are very silent and calm but there is a hint of the sublime as well. The high horizon line in *Swimmers #2* emphasizes the vastness of the ocean, reminding us of the latent, ominous power of the water. Gall often uses the words *visceral* and *sensual* describe her photography. The tension between the calm beauty of the water and the vastness of the ocean in these images (we see no land) reinforces Gall's description.

Gall is a master of manipulating the images while developing in the dark room. She works primarily in black and white, and, in fact, used it exclusively for the first 30 years of her career. This technical choice stems her deep appreciation for early abstract work, especially that of Mark Rothko. This influence can be seen in the soft gradations between light and dark, which she creates in the darkroom. The glowing skin of the swimmers and the silkiness of the water are indicative of her skill. Working in the darkroom also allows Gall to intensely lighten certain areas, like the swim caps and the crossed straps of the bathing suit in *Swimmers #1*. The artist often uses the words visceral and sensual to describe her style. The smooth gradations and the sublime subject matter no doubt substantiate this claim.

Gall's work is discussed in tracks #9, #10 and #11 of the podcast, linked below

#9: learn more about the gaze in Gall's work

#10: Gall's use of the square print is discussed

#11: learn more about how Gall's connection to nature and the world influences her work



