

EXHIBIT | CINCINNATI ART MUSEUM

Color gets respect in photos from '70s

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CINCINNATI - Color is so prevalent in contemporary photography that it seems hard to imagine that anyone could have ever considered it lowbrow or kitschy.

Yet, until the 1970s and even into the '80s, many critics and curators thought color photos lacked proper gravitas. Although tradition and early technical limitations certainly played a role in that perception, the fact that color photos were widely used in advertisements and by amateurs helped support negative connotations.

A survey of color photography of the 1970s - "Starburst," at the Cincinnati Art Museum - offers a compelling exploration of a formal and conceptual transition.

Organized by the museum's curator of photography, James Crump, and independent curator Kevin Moore, the show underscores the lasting effect that the era had on contemporary practices and issues.

Color photography has a long history with many developmental steps. In 1936, Eastman Kodak introduced Kodachrome color film to the commercial market.

Other film types and cameras followed. In 1973, the medium leapt forward with the C-41 color-negative process. But the first major exhibit of color photos by an individual artist didn't come until 1976.

Presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the exhibit of William Eggleston photos of ordinary moments and experiences signaled a new type of photographic vision. Calling Eggleston's work "perfect," MoMA curator John Szarkowski drew the ire



**An untitled chromomeric print
(1978) by Jan Groover**

of critic Hilton Kramer, who responded: "Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly." Such a response emphasizes the opposing entrenched positions that color photography inspired.

Included in "Starburst," Eggleston's work focuses attention on the unremarkable. He revels in moments in which saturated color belies the comedy of a situation.

Jan Groover's stunning, formal color studies of dishes and cutlery extend the modernist approach of photographers such as Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston.

Exploring a more conceptual approach to image-making, Eve Sonneman's diptychs are enigmatic but compelling. All feature two images of the same place moments apart. *July 4, 1976* features a group of people photographing a flotilla of ships from a tall bridge.

During several journeys through North America, Stephen Shore shot deadpan views of discovered locations. In *West Ninth Avenue, Amarillo, Texas, Oct 2, 1974*, the back of a drive-in theater's screen shows signs of age. Monumental and unexpectedly iconic, the image defines a distinctly American cultural landscape.



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