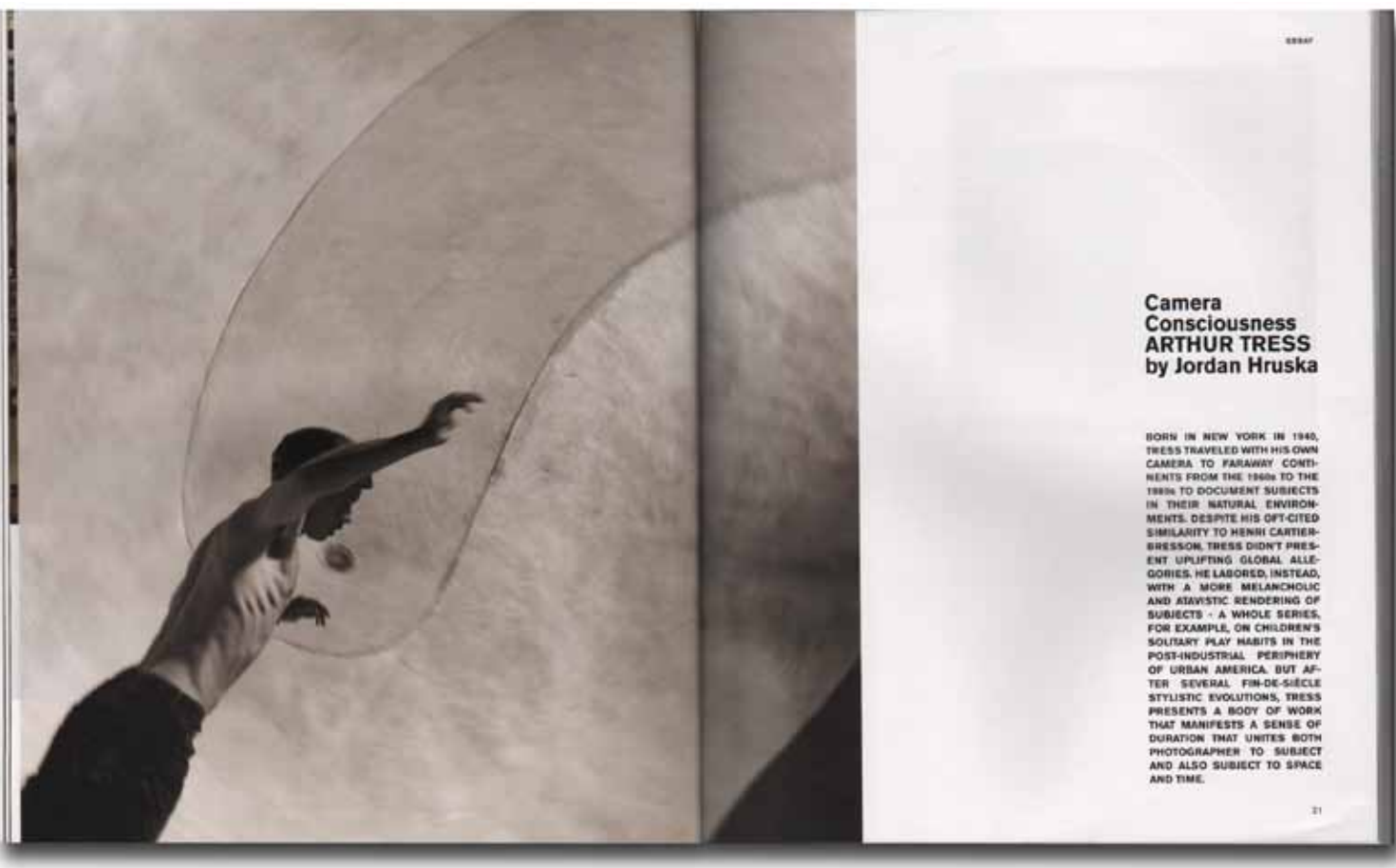




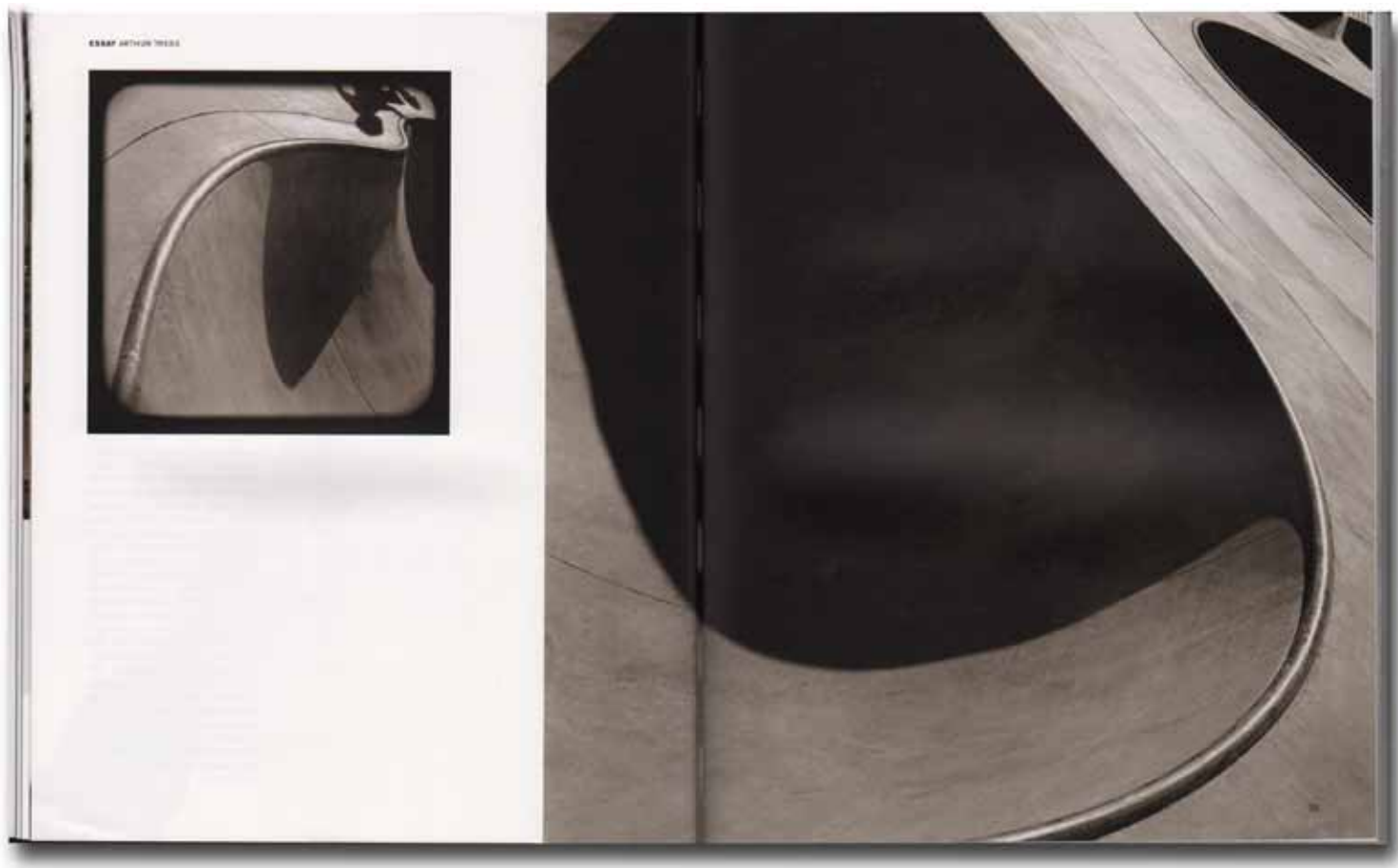
FANTOM

PHOTOGRAPHIC QUARTERS
MAY 2011



Camera Consciousness ARTHUR TRESS by Jordan Hruska

BORN IN NEW YORK IN 1940, TRESS TRAVELED WITH HIS OWN CAMERA TO FARAWAY CONTINENTS FROM THE 1960s TO THE 1980s TO DOCUMENT SUBJECTS IN THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS. DESPITE HIS OFT-CITED SIMILARITY TO HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON, TRESS DIDN'T PRESENT UPLIFTING GLOBAL ALLEGORIES. HE LABORED, INSTEAD, WITH A MORE MELANCHOLIC AND ATAVISTIC RENDERING OF SUBJECTS - A WHOLE SERIES, FOR EXAMPLE, ON CHILDREN'S SOLITARY PLAY HABITS IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL PERIPHERY OF URBAN AMERICA. BUT AFTER SEVERAL FINE-DE-SIÈCLE STYLISTIC EVOLUTIONS, TRESS PRESENTS A BODY OF WORK THAT MANIFESTS A SENSE OF DURATION THAT UNITES BOTH PHOTOGRAPHER TO SUBJECT AND ALSO SUBJECT TO SPACE AND TIME.



ESSAY ARTHUR TRESS



For several years, Tress has observed the skaters in his adopted home of California. His photographs in *Blue Print* (Black Books, 2010) capitalize on the motion that skateboarders use as a form of protest. Inertia and reaction govern each second of a ride - not a preordained choreography. Furthermore, in his *Blue Print* series, the skate park architecture itself is a record of the ride. In the same way that the photographer creates a moment from the grasp of time with a photograph...



ESSAY ARTHUR TRESS

For several years, Tress has observed the skaters in his adopted home of California. His photographs in *Blue Print* (Black Books, 2010) capitalize on the motion that skateboarders use as a form of protest. Inertia and reaction govern each second of a ride - not a preordained choreography. Furthermore, in his *Blue Print* series, the skate park architecture itself is a record of the ride. In the same way that the photographer creates a moment from the grasp of time with a photograph...

In black and white compositions, Tress first presents these concrete bowls and wooden half pipes as objects without figures - activities without people. Still, they are active. In walls and decks offering penetrating records of time that result in a warped continuum. But then, skaters come into the frame - first as shadows, then as blurry forms hovering nearly out of focus, set against the mottled backdrops created both by the grain of the film and the reflectivity of the skaters. To a capricious eye, the photographs seem like unbalanced compositions, or images better left to the red 'X' of the editing room. Collected, they comprise a powerful portfolio of the reciprocal struggle of skater and photographer - the desire to outmaneuver time with film.

A possible connection between the two practices lies in Henri Bergson's 1906 work *Matter and Memory*, wherein the philosopher presents an individual definition of space and time beginning with the collapse of our "instinctive" perception one of his own body in relation to images around him, and another where those same images react to every other image. Already 100 years before Tress, for Bergson, "images" both...

one such moment, "like a compass being moved about." To understand these images, an intermediary, such as the aforementioned compass or body to cross the beam, which directs them and an organism throughout the task. And finally, one could argue that the camera functions as such a device - record images or movements for the photographer. An image received by Bergson's body may produce one of two reactions: an instinctual response or movement that begins other images, or one that doesn't produce an instinctual reaction, and instead "penetrates itself into consciousness."

Similarly to the photographs, two actions take place. Tress is recording the images and impressions of his subjects through his camera, and at the same time the skaters resemble an image in perpetual reaction to other images. They lean with great speed and instinct across a space designed specifically to make them in a constant, fluid state of flux - an act that Tress splits into memory. A photograph becomes the common ground while viewers assume a participatory role by becoming aware of the caprices of image capture.

Outside of the bowl, however, the skater subjects take on a new form - not one of motion, but one of perfection. Here Tress' gaze shows them to exist on their skates, creating form - motion in a different, wholly ambient, plastic context. When not in motion, Tress sees them as a different kind of ideal image, leaving only the viewer to react.

All images © Arthur Tress. Blue Print.



ARTHUR TRESS ESSAY

