

MOMENTO AMORE

The Photographs of Jack Pierson

BY JERRY SALTZ

Jack Pierson is an artist of style and sensibility, nuance and fleetingly special moments. His photographs (which make up only one portion of his work) exude a spent inadvertent power - a *nothing specialness*. They're pictures of places and people that feel, at once, foreign and familiar, wildly exotic and absolutely everyday. They're, so guileless that at first you don't know what to make of them or how to trust them - like maybe they're trying to put one over on you: like they're totally accidental, or don't mean a thing -like throw-away images. They can make you feel unsure -even with all your opinions about art. Couldn't they be taken by anyone? Well, yes and no -but that's not the point, is it? However it is the mysterious source of their magic, their pedestrian seductiveness.

In a way Pierson's photographs are the exact opposite of those of Robert Mapplethorpe. Mapplethorpe posed his portraits and still-lives as if they were timeless pieces of classical sculpture -

erotic perfect moments -as if there were only one right way for these images to look. In so doing he drained the life out of his subjects and infused them instead, with a vampire-like and Olympian, otherworldliness, haunted and unreal. Pierson, on the other hand, makes perfect moments last by making pictures which are far from perfect. There's nothing artificial in Pierson's dreamy work. He replaces perfection with something lyrical and poetic, something visually celestial. His pictures feel supple and easy -as if they were slices from some whimsical, limber life -they have that unbearable lightness of being. Pierson's pictures feel flawed, they're all a little out of focus, grainy, tilted or off-colored, but this gives his work an off-hand exquisiteness and an enchanted simplicity.

Remember To Remember

Pierson's hand feels innocent but his soul feels old. He's one of those artists who make you feel like maybe you should be

living your life differently -like maybe you should appreciate all those little things going on around you all the time. His work is filled with wonder for the moment, he makes everything reek of a subtle glamour, as if the incidental moments in life are some of the most alluring and lovely. Pierson's work reminds you of how difficult it is to really describe a moment.

He makes souvenirs out of life, he makes memory real. (Have you ever wanted to thank an artist? Pierson may make you feel this way.) It always feels like Summer in Pierson's work. Those moments when you smell the humid air, a gentle breeze blows and your lover walks into sight naked, just in front of you. That time when you and your friends were laughing and one of them cocked their heads just so - and the time of day merged with the place, a profound silence filled the air and you knew why you cared about them so much, as love filled you up. Or a rose - a luscious, delicate red red rose - in a

garden filled your lungs with visions of serene promiscuity. An open road, or a bewitched parrot in its cage that captivated you for hours, or billowy damp white clouds, or the gentle blowing leaves of a palm tree you spotted one day when you felt so far away from it all - drifter, a floater, free from gravity. A Pierson picture can bring a tear of joy to your eyes, can make you feel really good about yourself -happy again - like you were before, like you believe in things, even if you can't say exactly what those things are.

He makes his pictures so personal that they open out and become public -so public that you, in turn, privatize them for yourself. Remember a day in Summer when you were in no particular hurry to go no place in particular? -well Jack Pierson does too. That's the ravishing epiphany-like quality, the witchy poetic magic it exudes and what makes it feel slightly clairvoyant.



Jack Pierson, *Daisy's*, 1992. Color print, 30 x 40". Courtesy Tom Cugliani G., N.Y.

Secret Sides of Life

There's a hidden, secret side to his work, a secret side you share (in your own private way). There's a sexy side to his work, even a seedy side, a little dark or furtive. His pictures remind you of good times, bad times, wild times and wicked times; moments of wild pain and intense pleasure. But most of all his enchanted - almost ecstatic - pictures remind you of times when you were alone, maybe, crazy with passion, looking for love or sex or connection or whatever - times when you are utterly and totally yourself. Times filled with private thoughts and secret fantasies that only you -and that other person -take to your graves. These people -the ones Pierson photographs -stand in for (actually become in some cases) the ones we loved or slept with or were lonely with or were loved by. They are our biographies -who we are. The times Pierson has the deepest empathy with are these moments - the ones when you get away from yourself - to yourself.

It's probably too soon and too great a claim to make about such a new artist but it's possible that Pierson's particular photographic style could have as much effect on the way things look in the near future as Barbara Kruger had on graphics and advertisement from the late 80s' onwards. Pierson's look is that strong and deep. His effortlessness is that refined, special and addictive. Once you've seen his photographs you really

want to see more -and it almost doesn't matter which one, so filled with love for them are you. And in the same way we don't label Kruger a commercial artist, so too Pierson cannot be thought of as a 'photographer' because he's just not, it's too small a label. He's an artist who seems poised to play an instrumental part in changing the way we look at -not only the world -but each other. His eloquent, restful work has that kind of pull and potential. Pierson's pictures of people and places are changing visual ideas about narrative in uncanny ways.

A Begar's Bhagavad-Gita

The book he did last year, published in Cologne by Aurel Scheibler, titled 'Angel Youth' is incredible -it's got a fantastic Khundalini spell. It feels like something printed in Turkey or India, the colors are so over-the-top and the paper so thin and odd. There is no text only picture (seventy-five of them) -out-takes from life. It reads like an epic, an Upanishads for the lonely, an Arabian Nights. It's a jewel - like a pageant, a prayer, a road-picture from the heart, or a down-and-out 42nd Street sexcapade. There's lot of sex in the book. Sex in hotels and on the beach and alone: beautiful muscular flesh, clothes strewn casually aside in sex-piles (something we all recognize), longing looks and lingering gazes. It's steamy -but sumptuous steamy -almost as if male pornography had mystically mated with female literary-romance-pornography.



Jack Pierson. *Winterlong*, 1990. Color print. 20 x 30". Courtesy Tom Cugliani G., N.Y.

Pierson is a little like Ferlingetti or Ginsberg in 'Angel Youth'. He's got a 'beat' touch about him that he mixes with something entirely unnamable. You can never reach the end of 'Angel Youth' -you drift off, lost in thought, hypnotized in a wakeful trance. You begin it over and over again, but you can never finish it -and this feels *important* - and a little like life. This little book starts to feel pretty big. There's always a lot out in front of you, things you haven't used up, or don't know yet. Pierson's is a never-ending-story with saints and sinners, angels and loss, place and placelessness, and light,

rich, deep, lotus, enigmatic, indolent color: skies of azure turquoise peacock blue, walls of crimson glowing swollen red, hair as sandy saffron sulphur yellow as you have ever seen, peach flowers and verdant fields of luscious grass.

Really, Pierson has a touch of the poet about him, like Cocteau, but also the "gee-wizz" innocence of Warhol, mixed with the world-weariness of all those weird creatures in Warhol's world. Pierson never tries too hard to do what he does and that's what gives his photographs their sublime free-floating liquidity (it's the key to all his work: I've

tried to make 'a Pierson', it's impossible.) You enter his world completely and unknowingly -or maybe his world enters yours. They're like posters for your life, ad-campaigns for your life. His work has a blank narrative to it; each image isn't so much like a film-still as it is some kind of magical movie unto itself. They've got a cinematic sweep to them, even though they feel so slight and delicate. They're broken sentences (odes really), stops along-the-way until we all become more or less than we are. In the meantime Pierson makes it all so glamorous, as he fills your life with a visionary aloofness.