

"Quincy Gas," 1973

John Goodman's pictures ARE worth a thousand words

By DANIEL KANY

John Goodman's photographic prints are incomparably luscious. The idea of an aesthetic texture such as Goodman's exquisitely soupy grains is like brushwork. In some artist's hands – say, Van Gogh or Monet – style begins with the smallest bits in their pictures – the brush strokes – as opposed to artists like Andrew Wyeth whose critical textures are tied to the overall picture's high focus.

In his 2007 silver print "Father's Day/Coney Island," Goodman presents a young couple sprawled in a chaotically suggestive pose on a beach blanket, angled off with their feet away from the viewer. A bikini-clad young woman is on her back, passive but sexually splayed as her man lies on his side actively engaged as a paramour in hot pursuit. Their faces are covered with a towel for a bit of ostrich-like privacy – which feels fully invaded by the seemingly stolen snapshot evidenced by the crooked-elbow shadow of the picture-taker.

But something is wrong. The ostensibly-in-the-heat-of-the-moment couple's beach blanket is covered by long-blown sand. Its wrinkles belie a wizened artifact more than ephemeral passion. And the beach is the hard-tack, black-sealed, cement-solid surface of fine-sand low-tide.

It's the grain of sand and photo. It's a young woman's white knee pressing into the rich black upper left corner of the print.

This is no snatched kiss. It's an extraordinarily complex and well-composed photograph shot with the final print in mind. It is the soft white of her body against his chiseled dark form, the shape of the lovers' form on the sand, and the cacophony of textures and values that Goodman orchestrates into a symphony of formal brilliance.

It's about relative time – as is all of "Black White + Blue."

This is the subject of the high-focus "Emma Mahler," an old lady standing in a weathered garage with a 1930's car. Here Goodman plays the idea of age against something dated. The car is old-fashioned, but the woman – though undoubtedly sparky – is aged. We see ephemeral fashion in the design of the car and in her patterned dress and heels. The planks of the garage are past their prime and the way they block it

reveals the car is a relic as well. All this forces us to check the date of the photo – 1974 – and recast Emma and her accoutrements against the age of the print. It's an exciting process until you realize what 40-years-later means for Emma. And then we see that Goodman isn't just clever, but profound.

At his best, Goodman's gorgeously grainy images play solidity and motion against each other. In his "Domimos / Havana," we see two hands flying over a set of dominoes to mix them up. With increased motion, there is more blur – the lively vehicle of graininess. So the textures of the hands and closest dominoes stand in contrast to the sculpturally solid volumes of the untouched pieces in the middle. The table,



"Father's Day/Coney Island," 2007



"Summer Shower, Tuscany," 1993

too, plays this game since the paint has been worn away closest to the players' hands. This is Goodman's complete human-touch metaphor. We see the grain and the wear at the edges of human touch – in the objects as well as the photographs.

A particularly masterful print is Goodman's 1993 "Summer Shower / Tuscany" in which a man and horse shower after a ride. The man stands arch-backed and shirtless (and with his solid lower body in dark pants, satyr-like) under an outdoor shower while holding a hose on his equine companion. Because the strong sun is behind the shower-supporting building on the far left, the drops and spray are in white sparkling high-relief everywhere against the

contrasty-dark and silhouetted landscape below the light-burned sky. We feel the textures of the dazzling water: drops on the satyr-man and spray on the horse, as though shaking itself dry from a bath.

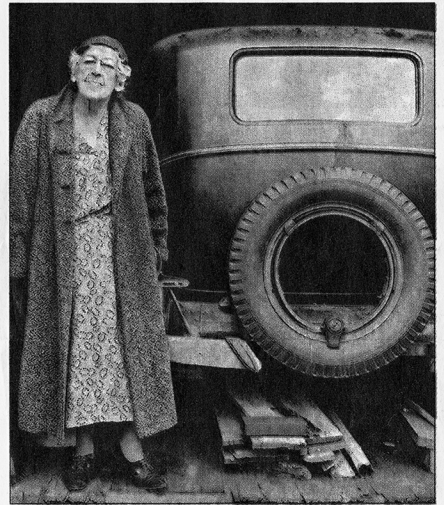
This is so much more than seeing and grabbing a picturesque moment with a camera. This print is a reminder that photography is a complete art when the person behind the lens is also a master printer.

The other part of "Black White + Blue" is a set of color images from slides shot in the 1970's and 80's and printed for the first time in 2010. This technological disconnect is fascinating – since "archival pigment prints" (a digital process) didn't exist when the slides were shot.

Once again, however, Goodman employs these as a

ART REVIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GOODMAN: "BLACK WHITE + BLUE"
 WHERE: Pho Pa, 132 Washington Ave., Portland
 WHEN: Through Feb. 22
 HOURS: Noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday to Saturday
 INFO: phopagallery.com; 517-0200



"Emma Mahler," 1974



"Domimos (sic), Havana," 2000

John Edwards. But following a 2012 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it's clear Goodman is also a player in the national photography conversation. Moreover, Goodman's prices – \$3,000 for a print – raise questions we don't have time to visit here, such as: Is the reason we don't have a functional photography market in Maine because of the disconnect with NYC bubble-market pricing?

Maine is soaked in great photography. Not only through the MMW+C but Colby, Bowdoin, Bates, PMA and artists throughout the state. This is the land not only of Berenice Abbott but Paul Caponigro and William Wegman, after all. But the Maine photographic community has yet to connect with a local market. Photography is here now; it just needs standards, leadership and time to find purchase in the market.

In a season when I have been writing about nothing more than photography, Goodman's "Black White + Blue" is a high water mark.

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