

BOOK REVIEW

Gay Block - *About Love*

By Tim O'Brien



Rescuers 1986/1988-Zofia Baneicka, Poland, 1986

In Gay Block's new career retrospective *About Love*; readers will be treated to an intimate look into her process and the people that drive her work. The title refers to the love that Block has for the people she has photographed and met over the years. *About Love* includes writing about each body of work, short films that Block has made, and a detailed interview by museum curator Anne Wilkes Tucker. All of Gay Block's work displays an intimate connection with the people she photographs. She is careful to bring a great sense of dignity to the subjects of her portraiture.



Early Portraits 1975-1981-The family business, Lou, Barry, and Gene, 1975

Gay Block shows us the wonderful and heroic people that she encounters in her work. This is apparent in the images of Jewish retirees in South Beach Miami. Her portraits take a different turn compared with her earlier black and white portraits of members of the Jewish temple that her family was from. These images of the elderly in South Beach are in vibrant color and celebrate the happiness these people have found late in life. They want only to be happy and have found a great place to meet this end. In the accompanying video for the South Beach series one of the retirees simply says, "The sun is great, I'm so happy here." Although their children had moved on from their Yiddish tradition to blend in with American culture, the older generation held on. Even those who were American born still carried the accent. Later in Block's career she would go on to make portraits of non-Jews that helped Jewish people during World War II. After her work with the elderly Gay Block turns her camera on young girls attending the same summer camp she went to as a child.



Miami, South Beach 1982-1985-Untitled

Camp Girls has an interesting contrast between childhood and adulthood with most of the girls, now women, having children of their own. Just as Block went to Camp Pinecliffe as a child she returned with her own daughter to make more complex portraits than earlier in her work. The use of black and white on the camp images adds drama and helps focus on the emotions of having fun being a child. The sense of wonder and curiosity that this moment in time represents, being at a camp for the summer as a child, is a fun and fantastic place and a great memory to pass on.



Camp Girls, 1981/2006 -(Diptych) Front row: Lovey Morse, Lennie Schwartz, Jessica Lieberman.
Back row: Stacy Cohen, Melinda Abrams, ?, Susan Golkin, Chrissy Sherman, ?, Camp Pinecliffe, Harrison, ME, 1981
Right: Chrissy Sherman Robinson, Greenwich, CT, 2006

About Love does a wonderful tribute to Gay Block's work and shows the passion she has for the portrait displayed by the layers of information associated with her images. She loved talking to the people in her images almost more than photographing them. Block's pictures convince the viewer that who she photographed is the same as the person represented in the image.

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