

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

Panopticon celebration is all encompassing

Anniversary exhibit ranges in time, style

By **Mark Feeney** GLOBE STAFF SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

The 19th-century British social thinker Jeremy Bentham invented the word “panopticon.” Coming from the Greek for “all” and “seeing,” it describes a facility Bentham proposed whose design would insure residents’ every moment could be observed without their being aware of it. Michel Foucault had a field day with the idea in “Discipline and Punish.”

Panopticon Gallery is having a field day of a far different sort, with its “40th Anniversary Exhibition,” which runs through Oct. 31. If Bentham used in a sinister way the word he invented to acknowledge the power of seeing, the gallery employs it in very much a happier sense. To see, per Bentham, is to control, yes. To see, per Panopticon, is also to educate, to liberate, and to delight.

The gallery has been a very welcome presence on the local scene, even as its location has shifted from Bay State Road to Newbury Street to Bay State Road again to Waltham and now Kenmore Square. Its mission when Tony Decaneas founded it four decades ago was, as he writes in a catalog that accompanies the anniversary exhibition, “to show local contemporary photography.” Over the years, that mission has broadened and deepened. The roster of photographers that the gallery has shown reflects that broadening and



Steve Wilstein’s “Super Champ: Muhammad Ali With Superman Cape.”

deepening. It runs from A (Aarons, Jules and Adams, Ansel) to Z (Zabarsky, Kal and Zaslow, Francine).

Some 75 photographers have work in the anniversary celebration, which has been put together by current owner Jason Landry. That roster “only” runs from A (Anonymous; Armstrong, Frank; Alexanian, Nubar) to Y (Youn, Mimi). That’s still an awful lot of alphabet - and with such photographers within it. The W’s alone contain Garry Winogrand, Andy Warhol (a Polaroid of Maria Shriver), William Wegman, Hiroshi Watanabe (his “Azusa Tukamoto as Osome, Matsuo Kabuki” makes a woman’s neck seem like the world’s most elegant light source), Ernest C. Withers, and Bradford Washburn.

Washburn is among numerous local heroes.

Others include Neal Rantoul, Stella Johnson, Rodger Kingston, Stephen Sheffield, Daniel Ranalli, Constantine Manos, Alex McLean, Dana Salvo, and that’s just for starters.

The show ranges far and wide in time and style, subject and location. A few themes recur. Rock ‘n’ roll is one. Some of the pictures you know. Rowland Scherman’s 1965 performance shot of Bob Dylan is the cover of his “Greatest Hits” album. Others you’re glad to make the acquaintance of. Roger Farrington captures a seated, guitar-playing John Lennon. Herb Greene offers a top-hat-wearing Janis Joplin. Bruce Springsteen seems to be staring into Ron Pownall’s lens at a 1984 Worcester Centrum concert.

There’s politics: Kingston’s 2006 portrait of Barack Obama, Withers’s image of Martin Luther King Jr. at Medgar Evers’s funeral; J.D. Sloan’s of Richard and Pat Nixon at the Grand Ole Opry; Jim Harrison’s of Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea Clinton in 1992. As all those names indicate, celebrity is another recurring element.

Best of all is the interplay among images Landry sets up. Obama stands before an American flag. In Stanley Forman’s unforgettable newsphoto of Theodore Landsmark being beaten on City Hall Plaza, the flag is weapon rather than backdrop. Johnson, Manos, and Decaneas offer different views of Greece. The play of picture planes in Johnson’s view



40TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

Panopticon Gallery, 502c Commonwealth Ave.,

Closing date: Through Oct. 31

from inside a bus on Crete is as bewitching as the delicacy of the colors she captures. The dead-center pall of smoke in Armstrong's "Old Weona, Arkansas" chimes with the placement of the sign in Brian Kaplan's "Blank Billboard #12" and the glow at the end of a bare-tree tunnel in John Rosenthal's "Central Park, NYC" - there's central, and then there's *central*.

Geoff Wainwright's "Valentine's 2nd Gives Splashes of Ice Water Between Rounds" is a very different view of prizefighting from Steve Wilstein's "Super Champ: Muhammad Ali with Superman Cape." The angel's-eye-view geometry seen in Paul Wainwright's "Box Pews, Looking Down, Rocky Hill Meetinghouse (1785), Amesbury, MA" chimes wonderfully with McLean's jaw-dropping aerial view in "Guillotined B-52 Bombers at the 'Bone Yard,' Tucson, AZ." Here panopticon, as concept, takes flight: What's more all-seeing than being high in the sky with an eye?

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