



ARTIST

Michael Martone

TITLE

English Leather '72 from the series 'Dark Light'

DATE

1972

DIMENSIONS

5 in H x 7.625 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1978.025

CURRENT LOCATION

1114-2B

MICHAEL MARTONE

BORN

1941

BIRTHPLACE

New York, NY

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1978

Lecturer, 1978

Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 1989

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 3

ESSAYS

Time allows photography to record the evidence of memory. Regard for time as a measure of our existence and as a link to our emotional past saturates the photographic work Michael Martone has produced over the past three decades. He provides us with the opportunity to contemplate the importance of the evidence of memory. Through this process the artist reveals an eternity of emotion while reflecting on a universe of personal surrealism. Most of the work in the current exhibition, *Verismo*, was completed within the past few years. Many of the images are being exhibited for the first time. Rooted in the artist's childhood the iconography revealed in this recent work covers the tragedies, memories and triumphs of his life. The recurring themes from opera and music and the images of clowns show the early influences of his father, a classical violinist and a painter, whose work depicted grotesque forms and figures of clowns. His father's death in a mental institution, his brother's departure to fight in the Korean war, a suicide attempt by his mother and his own incarceration in a mental institution are among the other early experiences that inform his work with an unparalleled sense of urgency and resolve. From this plethora of tragedy and pain Martone has focused on the soothing and complicated comfort of music to thread his way from one experience to the next, weaving images with memories that "...ask that the viewer believe more than just the appearance presented by the photograph...they ask the viewer to believe in the truth of their emotional quality, in their integrity" - from an essay about the artist by New York University graduate student Edward Clift. *Verismo*, the title selected by the artist for the exhibition, is the name of a short lived school of 19th century Italian Opera. Operas written in the *Verismo* school attempt to accurately portray everyday characters and situations without idealism, a strong departure from the costume plays and historic legends of the classic opera. Like the *Verist*, Martone presents vivid melodramatic plots that arouse sensation by violent contrasts to create a cross section of the psychological interludes and attachments that lurk under the banality of everyday life. Each image in the exhibition is a unique print that begins with a photograph made by the artist embellished with a variety of inks, chemicals and collaged materials. Many prints are photo-celluloids, images enlarged onto graphic arts film and backed with foil and other materials. The backing material is seen through the lighter image area of the print adding color and dimension. The embellished photographs are often built over time and negatives made years before are often used as components of recent work. These assemblages poignantly remind us of our connection to our past and our reliance on our accomplishments, failures and contributions of other human beings as a starting point to discover our own sense of identity and importance. The physical process of making his images by building up, altering, rearranging and discovering new materials and techniques resembles the emotional and mental process necessary to build a life out of painful experiences, determined aspirations and human needs. What the images say and how they say it become one in the same. The artist tells his story in confidence while displaying a virtuosic command of his materials. Over time Michael Martone has transformed his demons into elements of understanding and icons of his personal history. For us they become universal signs of strength and symbols of hope. Jeffrey Hoone (c)1989 Michael Martone *VERISMO* MARCH 12 – APRIL 23, 1989

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