



ARTIST

John Collier

TITLE

Sign in Cortland

DATE

1941

DIMENSIONS

7.25 in H x 9.5 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

Printed by the Library of Congress, signed by John Collier

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1981.004

CURRENT LOCATION

1620-18B

JOHN COLLIER

BORN

1913

DIED

1992

BIRTHPLACE

Sparkill, NY

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Light Work Gallery, 1981

Light Work Retrospective Exhibition, 1985

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 20

FSA Postcard Set

A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection

ESSAYS

In the early 1940's John Collier and Jack Delano made photographs in Central New York for the Farm Security Administration. The photographs documented life in America during the nation's recovery from the Depression for the US Department of Agriculture. John Collier 'swung through here' during October in 1941. He spent about four days ranging along the barge canal from Albany, through Amsterdam and Syracuse, and on to Oswego. He then headed down through the Finger Lakes and into the Pennsylvania Amish country. He stopped at a good many joints for coffee and a sandwich, paused at many a farm, hit the gun counter at Sears in downtown Syracuse, and roamed the docks at the port of Oswego (he was a seaman at the age of 19). Jack Delano came upstate earlier in September in 1940 to photograph FSA clients who were attempting to reclaim farmland on sub marginal lands near Ithaca. His portraits of farmers are striking. These photographs are held in the public domain by the Library of Congress and are copyright free. Tom Bryan (c)1981. A Just Image As it plays out in the headlines, justice means equality, fairness, and the rule of law. Yet beyond the events broadcast on television and the news alerts flashed instantly to laptops and PDAs, there is a large realm of justice that eludes reporters. Throughout daily life - at home, in school, doing errands, tending children, making dinner, playing sports - perceptions of justice often float just below the radar. The Light Work Collection offered plentiful proof that photographers frequently make images of routine daily life and its relationship to a sense of justice. However, as members of the Fine Arts 395 "Art and Identity" class noticed, scholars seldom extend the concept of justice into aspects of living that are legal, but sometimes ethically questionable. Counselors, social workers, and therapists seem to take over where the justice system stops. Nevertheless, the line between the legal system's purview and personal life is not fixed. Class members were careful to insist that the law is often less subtle in its grasp of situations and unaware of complexities than are the images included in this show. Nowhere in the law is it written that by embracing a stereotype one can sometimes achieve influence skin to contesting the mold. Thoughts and feelings such as these coalesced as the subject of this exhibition. Work and family emerged as sites where what is fair is not always what is equal, and what is equal is not always fair. However fair or unfair, the triumphs and annoyances one experiences at work mostly fall below the threshold of the law. It is conventional wisdom, not the IRS, which suggests that wealth carries no guarantee of happiness. Creating this nuanced exhibition about justice in everyday life led the class into hearty and un-nuanced discussions about the slights, snubs, and rebuffs of an ordinary day. The students chose the title A Just Image for this exhibition before they read about the expression in Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida. With the phrase, he and they recognize that art coaxes the world of appearances to create symbols signifying ideas for which there are no words. Just an image becomes A Just Image. Mary Warner Marien A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection is the result of a collaborative effort by thirty-one Syracuse University students enrolled in Professor Mary Warner Marien's "Art and Identity" course. The exhibition examines the Fall 2007 Syracuse Symposium theme of justice. The students chose images from the Light Work Collection, considering the personal and societal meanings of justice. They have created an interactive exhibition, where, as the students write in the exhibition catalogue, "ironically... the viewer is still judging." A Just Image invites viewers to explore the photographs and rethink their definition of justice. As the students of the "Art and Identity" course discovered, though justice is a universal concept, it does not necessarily carry the same meaning for everyone. This can be seen in the different perceptions of stereotypes, families, occupations, and leisure activities, which are some of the topics examined by the class. According to the students, "The Pictures we have chosen require more than just superficial judgment; they require the viewer to acknowledge their own stereotyped projections." Roslyn Esperon