



ARTIST

Lou (Louis) Draper

TITLE

Tom Sommerville, Painter from the New Jersey Artists Series

DATE

1996

DIMENSIONS

6 in H x 9 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1997.082

CURRENT LOCATION

1114-15B

LOU (LOUIS) DRAPER

BORN

1935

DIED

2002

BIRTHPLACE

Richmond, VA

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

African-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 1995

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

ESSAYS

Since 1957 when he began to pursue photography as a serious endeavor, Lou Draper has sought the company and counsel of other artists. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he sought out Harold Feinstein and W. Eugene Smith, and worked with them both in private workshops. In 1963 Draper became one of the founding members of the Kamoinge Workshop along with Ray Francis, Herb Randall, Albert Fenner, James Mannas, and Herman Howard. The Workshop began as a group of Black photographers who met regularly in New York City to discuss their work, arrange exhibitions, and share ideas and techniques. Soon after its formation, Beuford Smith, Roy DeCarava, Shawn Walker, Calvin Wilson, Anthony Barboza, and Adger Cowans, among others, became regular participants. Draper's participation in the Kamoinge Workshop proved to be more than an exchange of ideas and techniques. In these early workshops Draper found a sense of community that would inform his work for the next 30 years. Draper describes their influence and the opportunities that photography has created for him when he writes, 'I will never be able to make graphically possible most of what photography has caused me to experience. The participation in it has led me to worlds of interest which I believe would have remained dormant otherwise.' Over the past several years Draper has continued his involvement with a community of artists in two recent projects, Trenton Takes, 24 Hours in the City and New Jersey Artists. Trenton Takes is a photo-documentary project sponsored by the Trenton Artists Workshop Association that Draper participated in and helped organize. The project focused on an ordinary day in the life of Trenton, New Jersey, where participating photographers documented the city during a 24-hour period on May 3, 1995. The photographs were exhibited at the Trenton City Museum as part of a larger project called New Jersey Family, a celebration of family and cultural events throughout the state. Draper's New Jersey Artists series is a collection of portraits that he has been working on for the past three years. Draper states his intentions for the project simply as, 'I'm hoping to catch some of the spirit of the artist in his/her environment.' But we sense that Draper's photographs are about locating and participating in a community, and that his camera is his key for admittance. Photography is a medium of access, providing the photographer an entree into private or restricted places. Access is a defining component of photography, as critical to the understanding of an artist's work as any technical or expressive element of the medium. Photographers can get to go back stage, and sometimes they can become as famous as their subjects. Photographers can travel with generals and presidents, and sometimes they uncover evil and corruption. Photographers can trespass in forbidden zones, and sometimes they cause scandals and controversy. Photographers can be invited into the lives of strangers, and sometimes they locate and describe the meaning of community and the formation of character, like the photographs of Lou Draper. Jeffrey Hoone (c)1996, Lou Draper, photographer, teacher, and one of the founding members of the Kamoinge Workshop, died in Trenton, New Jersey, on February 18, 2002. Lou participated in our Artist-in-Residence program in 1996, and the following is an excerpt from an essay that accompanied his work in Contact Sheet 88. Since 1957 when he began to pursue photography as a serious endeavor, Lou Draper has sought the company and counsel of other artists. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he sought out Harold Feinstein and W. Eugene Smith and worked with them both in private workshops. In 1963 Draper became one of the founding members of the Kamoinge Workshop along with Ray Francis, Herb Randall, Albert Fenner, James Mannas, and Herman Howard. 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Jeffrey Hoone 2002 Draper was a professor and coordinator of the photography program at Mercer Community College. On May 19, 2002, an auction of donated drawings, paintings, and photographs was held at the college in order to raise funds to produce a book of Draper's photographs. The auction was sponsored by Mercer Community College and the Trenton Artists Workshop Association, and profits from the book will go to the Louis H. Draper Memorial Scholarship for Photography Fund.