



ARTIST

Vincent Cianni

TITLE

Series: The South Side. Nelson with Skateboard, Bedford Avenue, Williamsburg, Brooklyn

DATE

1995

DIMENSIONS

17.75 in H x 14 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 20 x 16"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2000.088

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-11B

VINCENT CIANNI

BORN

1952

BIRTHPLACE

Scranton, PA

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2000

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 112

A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection

BIOGRAPHY

Vincent Cianni is a photographer and educator utilizing image, audio, and text to investigate social justice issues, community, and memory. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Community Development at Penn State University, attended Maryland Institute College of Art and received a Master of Fine Arts in Photography at SUNY New Paltz. Cianni teaches photography and theory at Parsons The New School for Design and is the founder/director of the Newburgh Community Photo Project, a grass roots community-based organization that teaches photography to local citizens to explore topics relevant to their lives.

Duke University's Archive of Documentary Arts at the David M. Rubenstein Manuscripts and Special Collections Library established a study archive in 2007 to insure the preservation of all photographic works created throughout his career as a documentary photographer, including contacts sheets, negatives, video, audio, digital files, notes, camera and darkroom equipment and correspondence made in conjunction with the projects. His photographs are represented in major collections and have been exhibited nationally and internationally.

Cianni's first monograph, *We Skate Hardcore* was published by NYU Press and the Center for Documentary Studies in September 2004 and was awarded the American Association of University Presses Best Book Design award. A major survey of this work was exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York in 2006. *Gays in the Military*, his second monograph, was published by Daylight in May 2014 and exhibited at the Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago. This work was featured on the Katie Couric Show and published in *The New York Times Sunday Review*, *Slate.com*, *LA City Watch* and *TruthDig*. Among numerous lectures, presentations, panel discussions, and conferences, Cianni lectured at the Library of Congress in Sep 2014 and presented at TEDxUniversityofNevada in 2015. He currently lives and photographs in Newburgh, NY since 2007.

circa 2018

ESSAYS

Vincent Cianni has been photographing teenagers on the streets of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, since 1994. He approaches his subjects much like that of a studio photographer making portraits with a large-format camera and Polaroid film. His studio is an entire neighborhood and his subjects reveal themselves to the camera with a range of reactions from shy self-conscious poses to boisterous and aggressive posturing. There is a certain level of comfort that the teenagers have found with Cianni. Having their portrait taken by a professional with sophisticated equipment is an experience that few teenagers have outside of stiff school portraits, and they each seem to revel in the experience like they know they are being given a special opportunity that won't come along very often. Cianni has created this sense of ease and privilege through his long-standing commitment to the project and his insistence on allowing the teenagers to participate in and control the process of being photographed as much as possible. Cianni says, 'The south side of Williamsburg is a Latino neighborhood in the northern section of Brooklyn. The East River divides Williamsburg from Manhattan on the west, and the close proximity provides easy access via the Williamsburg Bridge and public transit. The bridge and surrounding area is infamous for being tough. It is an environment that is isolated and protected by well-defined geographic and cultural boundaries. At the same time, because of easy accessibility to Manhattan and popular culture, it is integrated into the larger society which is rife with the social ills usually connected with a large urban environment. The neighborhood is in transition because of the influx of young artists into the area, with a possibility of the dominant ethnic flavor of the community becoming distilled or even lost.' He continues, 'All this provides a somewhat volatile environment in which children are raised. Growing up amid the violence and drugs of the city, but within a very strong social, religious, and family structure, can produce a peculiar blend of street smarts and innocence. Life unfolds on the street where social roles are developed, relationships are formed, culture is defined, and celebrations are enacted.' In this description of the social life of the south side Cianni could also be describing the key visual element in his photographs—the observation of transition. Teenagers are in transition from child to adult and Cianni's photographs show the range of that transition from shy uncertainty to aggressive and defiant confidence. Posturing and posing are unavoidable when one is allowed to perform in front of the camera, and Cianni doesn't try to exaggerate these moments or miss the opportunity to capture them in his portraits. At the same time, he says, this behavior comes from 'a life's perception of how to act out in a social context,' and he understands that 'realizing that who a person wants to be is partly who he is.' Within all this posturing and posing Cianni is able to find moments of vulnerability, which we would expect from teenagers, and the tension between their shyness and their showing out provides us with the authenticity that we imagine each of his subjects is trying to achieve. In his portraits Cianni has skillfully described that the process of transition is the most authentic aspect of the lives of the teenagers that he photographs and that self-image is a quality always in flux. Jeffrey Hoone Vincent Cianni lives in Brooklyn and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in April 2000. *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 MarienA 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