



ARTIST

Michael Schreier

TITLE

Portraits in Silence 03..05..05, 12..01..01, from the series 'Tears for An Empty Desert'

DATE

2005

DIMENSIONS

16 in H x 12 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 19 x 13"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2005.048

CURRENT LOCATION

1620-15C

MICHAEL SCHREIER

BORN

1949

BIRTHPLACE

Vienna, Austria

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

Canada

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-Canadian

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2005

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 137

BIOGRAPHY

Canadian artist Michael Schreier arrived in Syracuse with his digital camera and ready to photograph new work, which he describes as "portraits of anonymous people." He approaches strangers on busy downtown areas and asks to take their photograph. The encounter lasts only a moment and is documented by the date and time printed below each photograph. He is interested in the sense of integrity and overcoming of vulnerability that are established even in these brief, chance encounters. The emotional sub-context for this work is Michael's experience of moving from his native Vienna, Austria to Canada as a child. The Syracuse portraits along with interior/exterior architectural photographs will be incorporated in an ongoing book project Tears for an Empty Desert. He has been working on this project for the past two years. Michael lives in Ottawa, Canada. Recent exhibition venues include Peak Gallery in Toronto. He recently completed a residency at Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York.

ESSAYS

For some years now, Michael Schreier's work has followed two themes, portraiture and architectural spaces. His images of people illustrate Leonardo da Vinci's assumption that portraiture should capture the motions of the mind. His architectural spaces are influenced by Gaston Blanchard, who wrote in *The Poetics of Space*, "Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination."⁽¹⁾ All Schreier's work is rendered with a subtle visual poetry. His images show that a photograph may make us aware of sound or of silence. In the end, however, his art is a search for psychological truth. It is intimate and contemplative, personal and visionary. Schreier's vision is not controlled by the art dogmas of our time, but by a sincere belief in the medium's ability to suggest the existence of hidden meanings. Unlike the conventional idea of portraiture that takes place in a studio where the subjects have ample time to prepare themselves by adopting a public mask, complete strangers as well as acquaintances are confronted with his camera, unannounced, in both public and private places. Unlike many contemporary artists working in the medium, Schreier does not fabricate the situation. Nor does he surreptitiously shoot without permission. The subject is aware of what is about to happen. The camera is directly in their face. We are not sure whether we are privy to the pause in a private drama or simply witnessing the interaction between photographer and subject. The remarkable thing is that these people give themselves so spontaneously and so completely to the moment. Schreier finds in the commonplace not the sensational but the human essence - anxiety, vulnerability, sadness, frustration, innocence, knowing awareness. Recently, talking to a friend while standing in the middle of an exhibition space featuring his portraits, my field of vision caught his portrait of an elderly woman with a halo of white hair. Schreier had captured a vitality and an urgency in her expression that was desperately trying to tell me something. Then the answer came. If I were to listen with my eye, I might hear the message. These portraits, in which people pose with a casual ordinariness, are saturated with what it means to be human. Schreier's images of spaces have something in common with the portraits. They capture a corner of a room with nothing more than a bare wall with the horizontal line of a bar running from edge to edge, or a view from a rain swept window onto an unfocused landscape with one sharply defined edge of the plate glass in focus. These, too, say something of our times. Schreier's eye sees these spaces with a remarkable grace and beauty, and a sense of pictorial structure that is impeccable. Their minimalism invites the imagination. They are spaces into which we withdraw into ourselves, and with our eyes we listen to a sound that is pure, haunting, and at the same time, serene. Above all, however, they reflect the state of mind of an artist who is seeking to understand his own space as well as his relationship to the rest of the world. Schreier has abandoned the darkroom for the new medium of digital photography. Since the invention of the photographic picture-making process, the introduction of any changes has been regarded with suspicion. Every medium has its own particular physical and optical characteristics that artists must learn to take into account because the expressive content of any work of art comprises not only form and subject matter; it is also fed by the qualities that give it physical shape. Through his skills, Schreier has succeeded in exploiting the unique aesthetic of digital printing with the result that his images have a tonal subtlety and clarity of definition lacking in most digital work. (c) 2006 James Borcoman 1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p.136 Michael Schreier lives in Ottawa, Canada. He participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in May 2005. James Borcoman is curator emeritus at National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario, and an author, photographer, and art consultant.