



ARTIST

Peggy Nolan

TITLE

Untitled

DATE

2005

DIMENSIONS

7 in H x 7 in W

MEDIUM

Chromogenic Color Prints

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 10 x 8

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2005.066

CURRENT LOCATION

1114-5C

PEGGY NOLAN

BORN

1944

BIRTHPLACE

Albany, New York, NY

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2005

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection
Contact Sheet 137

BIOGRAPHY

Peggy Nolan is a woman with keen sense of adventure, a passionate love of life, and endless energy. She discovered photography fairly late and then by accident, but has been inseparable from her cameras ever since. Seeing photographs all around her, she photographs her seven children and any aspect of her colorful life. Since coming to Light Work, Peggy has been photographing, printing, learning new digital processes, baking cookies, and sharing in the lives of the people all around her. This is a homecoming of sorts for Peggy, who attended Syracuse University in the 1960s. Peggy lives in Hollywood, Florida. Recent exhibition venues include the Museum of Modern Art ("Picturing Modernity"), Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, and more. Her work can be found in the collections of SF MOMA, Norton Museum of Art and Martin Z. Margulies in Florida.

ESSAYS

Describing her process of photographing the objects and remnants of activities in her domestic space, Peggy Nolan wrote "the secrets of life are lodged in ordinariness." This is the ordinariness that surrounds us everyday—a trace of light crawling across the ceiling at the end of the day, yesterday's dirty underwear waiting to be picked up off the floor, a forgotten accessory left behind on a freshly made bed. These are objects and moments we walk past on our way out the door and that surround us as we relax on the couch at the end of the day, the physical and visual clutter that we unconsciously amass through daily needs and habits. Nolan's carefully crafted photographs pay homage to these seemingly unremarkable events of domestic life with acuity and formal grace. The images are windows into a completely familiar yet surprisingly beautiful and mysterious world. Our bodies are the unwitting repositories of our conscious pursuits and of the unending familiarity of everyday, physical experiences repeated over and over again. In Nolan's work, this interior world is emulated through objects and mementos that surround most of us—a lock of hair from a child's first trim, fading black-and-white photographs of little known or forgotten relatives, receipts kept after uncertain purchases—ordinary possessions that for the most part remain invisible, becoming activated on occasions of nostalgic recollection or when put to use in the service of domestic necessity. The space between our experience and these objects, the private life they live, is often more elusive. Through these images we are reminded, not just of a forgotten memento or of a material function, but of the more organic function these objects serve. This physicality is alluded to through description of traces left behind, in the occasional self-portrait of Nolan's feet or hands, and perhaps most significantly in the photographer's gaze, which positions each viewer in the same intimate relationship to the artist's space as when the image was made. This metaphysical locale is revealed in images of a small bundle of hair and lint illuminated by light creeping under a door, in the gnawed leg of a kitchen table (the result of a disobedient pet), or in the anonymous gaze of a woman staring back at us from a cheap plastic frame on a kitchen wall. The subtle beauty of the images, with careful attention to color and light, hold the residue of a life lived, bearing witness to an experience of the banal made extraordinary. These depictions of domesticity act as proxies for the internal life of the artist, infusing each image with a certainty of purpose most provocative and mysterious. Nolan spent a majority of her adult life raising her seven children (I was fortunate to have been one of them). The demands of child rearing and the concerns of adolescence—subject matter of her previous work—are now replaced by a sense of quiet that makes its way into every corner of her photographs. Like most aging parents, especially those with many children, the artist has had to redefine her work, both as an artist and a parent. The spaces that were once the arena of dirty diapers and sweaty teenage bodies echo with silence and absence, and the photographs, in their spare eloquence, suggest empty stages. While these new images can be understood through the careful arrangements of the materials and surfaces they depict, they are perhaps more strongly read as the individual pursuit of the artist discovering the world anew. One could ask, given the necessity of daily routines and the gravity of world events, how art that takes the material of ordinary life as its subject could possibly compete for our attention? A better question might be, how we can make our way through the persistent media bombardment and the competing demands of our daily routines to have a meaningful exchange with the more intimate worlds of our inner life? Nolan's work attempts to address these fundamental questions in photographs that ask us to rejoice in the act of paying attention. (c) 2006 Abner Nolan
Peggy Levison Nolan lives in Hollywood, FL, and teaches at the University of Florida in Miami. She participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in June 2005. Abner Nolan is an artist and curator living in San Francisco, CA. He is currently an adjunct professor at the California College of the Arts. 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