



ARTIST

Aaron Siskind

TITLE

Chicago 206

DATE

1953

DIMENSIONS

14.375 in H x 18 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 16 x 20"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2007.117

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-16B

DESCRIPTION

Donated to Light Work by Robert B. Menschel in 2007

AARON SISKIND

BORN

1903

DIED

1991

BIRTHPLACE

New York, NY

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Donation, 2007
by Robert B. Menschel

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 52
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 3

ESSAYS

Aaron Siskind has been making photographs for nearly a third of the entire history of the medium, and to a very great degree his contributions as an artist and teacher form an important part of that history. In the 1930's as a member of the Photo League, Siskind worked with fellow league members, on several social documentary projects including, "Harlem Document," "Dead End: The Bowery," "Portrait of a Tenement" and "St. Joseph's House: The Catholic Workers Movement." Siskind's contribution to these projects was significant and the work was widely published and exhibited. But when he turned his camera to subjects other than the social problems of man, the dominant preoccupation of the Photo League at the time, his new work was denounced by many of the League's members. In 1941 he left the League to pursue this new work which led him to "regard the picture as a new object to be contemplated for its own meaning and its own beauty." It was this change from documentary to non-objective interpretations that allowed him to explore works symbolically and to "place the power of descriptive illusion at the service of allusion." The first exhibition of this new work at the Egan Gallery in New York in 1947 received practically no acceptance by photographers, but eventually it helped bring photography in step with the 20th century by joining metaphor, structure and form thus providing photography with a means to escape from the limited restraints placed on the medium by its' documentary practitioners. And now at age 82 Siskind continues to bring to life forms that are as highly personal as any images invented from the imagination, and in fact, all of the photographs in this exhibition were made between 1980-1984. In this new work he continues to abstract the depth of visual poetry present in the objects that surround us by conveying photographically things felt as things seen. This conviction has been the hallmark of Siskind's work for the past 40 years and this contribution will forever allow us to consider the essence of photography's power as more than merely the accurate and faithful recording of visual facts. Jeffrey Hoone Syracuse, New York February, 1986

Train of Thought: Serial Images from the Light Work Collection Train of Thought presented the work of five photographers from the Light Work Collection, including Hollis Frampton, Arnold Gassan, Peter Max Kandhola, Judy Natal, and Aaron Siskind. Several photographs from each artist were exhibited with the intention of providing viewers, especially students, an opportunity to follow an artist through many different stages and approaches to one idea or subject and the chance to witness and consider their creative process through multiple images. Through the generosity of Robert and Joyce Menschel, Light Work recently received a donation of 150 photographs, including fifteen silver gelatin prints by preeminent photographer and educator Aaron Siskind (1903–1991). The images by Siskind included in this exhibition are strong examples of his interest in exploring the formal and abstracted views of urban decay—peeling paint, torn signs, and bits of graffiti. Like the other artists in this exhibition Siskind's work documented and ordered the world he encountered around him, with a unique ability to show us the profound beauty of the ordinary. Siskind viewed the photograph as a unique physical object in its own right, in contrast to many images today that exist only virtually. He stated, "When I make a photograph I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained, whose basic condition is order —(unlike the world of events and actions whose permanent condition is change and disorder)." Train of Thought included a variety of "altogether new objects," as each of the artists included can be said to have uniquely documented and ordered their world. Artist Judy Natal combined images made over a ten-year period while traveling the world to create her portfolio, The Hermetic Alphabet, a series of twenty-six silver gelatin prints. Natal used the alphabet as a structure on which she could organize and connect a series of seemingly random, ambiguous images. As the work moves us through the alphabet from A to Z, Natal investigates language, landscape, and travel. Arnold Gassan, a widely recognized authority on photographic processes as well as the history of photography, created the series Elegy in dedication to his mentor and teacher Minor White. The rich, elegant surfaces and tonal range of Gassan's images are created using the labor-intensive, antiquated process of photogravure. His images show familiar rural scenes of clotheslines, picket fences, landscapes, and portraits of friends and family. The exquisite care he takes in printing points to his belief that, "the photograph often leaves a residue of un-verbalized meaning." No Birds Do Sing in Blue Sky, a collection of eighteen unique silver gelatin prints by Peter Max Kandhola, continues his exploration of death and grief, an idea he has approached with several different photographic mediums over the years. In this series the artist scratches and distresses his negatives as a visual metaphor. His purpose for manipulating the negative is described in his statement that, "images come and go, they flicker unsolved, and time builds itself around them. We invent explanations which also remain unsolved, but we also retain the meaning of episodes in our past life, a museum of images." ADSVMVS ABSVMVS is a portfolio of chromogenic prints by Hollis Frampton, an artist and educator who worked in both still photography and the avant-garde film movement known as "New America Cinema," which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. He used his camera to record and order his unique collection of plant and animal specimens found in his travels, including road kill and delicacies from an Asian grocery. Each color photograph is paired by text of the object's Latin name, history, and mythology. Although his texts borrow the language and model of scientific classification, his version is quirky, personal, and humorous. His array of oddities and the stories of their discovery relay an artist's creative process of trolling his neighborhood for inspiration. Photographers and artists often seek an underlying structure or pattern in the world around them. As hundreds of students walked through this exhibition, some carrying cameras and a photo assignment, they were able to see how five different artists went fishing for inspiration and made, as Siskind said, "order out of chaos." Mary Lee Hodgens