



**ARTIST**

Jon Reis

**TITLE**

Cordwood, Clinton Airport, Plattsburg, NY (PLB)

**DATE**

1986

**DIMENSIONS**

8.75 in H x 13 in W

**MEDIUM**

Gelatin Silver Print

**IMAGE NOTES**

sheet 11 x 14"; Aug. 13, 1986, roll 2168

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2010.059

**CURRENT LOCATION**

1620-40B

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**JON REIS**

**BORN**

1949

**BIRTHPLACE**

New Rochelle, NY

**GENDER**

Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

European-American

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Light Work Gallery, 1984

Light Work Grant, 1979

Lecturer, 1984

Light Work Retrospective Exhibition, 1985  
NYSCA Conduit Grant, 1986  
Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 2010  
Light Work Grant, 1991  
Lecturer, 2010

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 9  
Contact Sheet 25  
Contact Sheet 42  
Contact Sheet 71  
Exhibition Catalog: Light Work Retrospective  
A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection

## ESSAYS

Jon Reis has actively participated in Light Work's programs from early on. He received the Light Work Grant in 1979 for his series of hand-colored black-and-white photographs of people at leisure. The brightly tinted views of tourists and attractions were published as a series of postcards that simulated the hand tinted linen cards from the 1930s and '40s. He received the Light Work Grant a second time in 1991. Other activities have included lectures and exhibitions. In 1986, Light Work was also able to support Reis in his major grant as part of the NYSCA Conduit Grant program. In 2009, he made a major gift to the Light Work Collection, donating nearly 90 photographs and photo postcards, including a full set of the exhibition prints from his Aviation series, which were part of the 1986 NYSCA grant. An extensive exhibition of Jon Reis' photographs in the collection is planned for 2010. Reis continues to work actively as an artist and runs a photography business in Ithaca, NY. His work can be viewed online at <http://www.arttrail.com/artists/REIS.html> and <http://www.jonreis.com/fine-art-prints.htm>

The Light Work Collection is comprised of over 3,500 works, almost all of which have been donated by our Artists-in-Residence over the years. In 2009, we received a large gift of ninety-three silver gelatin prints from Ithaca-based photographer Jon Reis, whose long-standing relationship with Light Work represents the kind connections that happen here. Back in the mid 1970s when Reis started coming to Light Work, both he and we were early in our careers. Light Work had just been "born" in 1973, and Reis was a young and hungry photographer looking for images and people to connect with. He was also on the lookout for places to exhibit his growing body of images. (At the time, and still now, Reis calls himself a street photographer. He is a documentary photographer of the American social landscape who counts Gary Winogrand among his heroes.) Reis had heard that universities usually had small galleries tucked away in their many buildings. He called the main number at Syracuse University hoping to expand his horizons as well as the possibilities for showing his work. Thankfully, the operator he spoke to put the call through to Light Work. Soon Light Work founders Tom Bryan and Phil Block were telling Reis about the lecture, workshop, and grant programs here and urging him to apply. He listened, applied, and received the first of his two Light Work grants in 1979 (followed by another in 1991). His work was featured in an exhibition in the Light Work Gallery in 1984 and again in a Light Work retrospective exhibition in 1985. Light Work supported him in his application for a NYSCA Conduit Grant, which he received in 1986. Reis used this money to, among other things, fly to and photograph municipal airports all over Central New York. Reis's aviation images are an excellent entry point to the world of municipal airfields. These small airports are tucked into the landscape all over the place, kind of like galleries in large universities. They are usually placed pretty close to one another so that pilots of small craft can take off, fly for an hour or so, and then swoop down and take a break as frequently as they need to. Maybe it is because they are almost always deserted save for the radio operator, or maybe it is just the unnatural quiet you feel after getting out in the middle of nowhere after the constant droning of a small engine craft, but these airports tend to be places where little idiosyncrasies in the buildings and landscape are magnified until they become monuments to the surreal nature and quirkiness of being human. Reis's images capture those magic instants—the ones the camera somehow sees best—that reveal us and the places we build and live in for all of their beautiful irony and poignancy. Reis imbues his work with a good natured humor, which makes his 2009 gift to the Light Work Collection especially great. His gift of ninety-three silver gelatin prints gives us all a lasting opportunity to delight in life's sometimes amazing improbability.

Mary Goodwin The exhibition Jon Reis, *By the Way: Two Decades of America Observed 1973-1993* was on view from April to December 2010 at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery, Schine Student Center, Syracuse University.

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 Marien *A 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