



ARTIST

Les Krims

TITLE

Deerslayers

DATE

1972

DIMENSIONS

6 in H x 5.5 in W

MEDIUM

Artists' Books

IMAGE NOTES

A Boxed portfolio of 23 images out of 24 offset prints with an introduction by Alex Sweetman. Incomplete set. Un signed/Unnumbered; Donation from Paul Stein.

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2015.070 - 2015.094

CURRENT LOCATION

3D-3

DESCRIPTION

TARGET: THE DEERSLAYERS

Each year thousands of Americans from cities and suburbs take to the woods in isolate and stoic fashion to spend their vacations far away from the secure comforts of family and routine in cold and lonely silence, waiting, hoping to kill. Each fall the great American myth, the Deerslayer that Cooper immortalized in his book of that title, comes to life in the spirit of some Americans. Then there is a great subjective urge to slough off the civilized and return to the primitive and intrinsic heart of the American wilderness. The hunter comes to life after weeks and months of planning and preparation and dreams. It is a different man who stalks through the forest with a gun in his hands.

But not everyone is the ideal woodsman and, naturally, there are accidents. Hunters shoot each other, horses, cattle, dogs and sometimes even themselves. Some die from the unnatural strain of the endeavor. Others shoot beer cans instead of deer and spend long winter nights in the small town bars that get rich during deer season. And there are traffic jams in the mountains, hills noisy with hunters at dawn. Yet somehow the trophy and the glory or even a valiant attempt and near miss can make it all worthwhile.

Snapshot photography is not unlike hunting; there is art as well as craft in the taking of pictures as they present themselves to the trained observer. In THE DEERSLAYERS the hunt turns on the hunter himself as the trophy becomes his own image. The idea was simply to remain in an area and to photograph extensively. The pictures are arranged by the hunters themselves. They provide their own props. The snapshot becomes their stage. The photograph portrays them. Krims just waited for the right moment, chose a position and shot. And the hunting has been good! The 24 photographs presented here are the selected trophy, the best of hundreds. And each seems a revelation. With these pictures we see a sensibility that declares itself a major voice in photography today.

Each photograph is like a short poem or a long question. But they are structurally very simple. The three elements of vehicle, hunter(s) and deer conspire to tell all. The meaning of the various images is a function of the relationship, interplay and tensions of these three elements. The attitude of display, the emotion or lack of lit expression of the hunter and/or deer, their arrangement, tone and shape all combine as the formula for a specific character and particular event. The idea of the event introduces the ever present but usually invisible forth term: the photographer, who reveals his intention and presence best in absence. We adopt his point of view, we wear his eyes, and forget that it is he who is making us see.

The first image of the folio, the cover image bearing the title, is also the symbol of the group: a hunter with the deer emblem, his totem animal, on his sweater stands next to his kill. (Is there a resemblance between them or is it my imagination?) The emblem signifies his clan. It means THE DEERSLAYERS, a clan that is varied and drawn from all ages, both sexes and many walks of life but unified by one thing, their kill. Their stories, the folio's theme, is the variation among these few structural elements across the 24 photographs. Its meaning is what these deerslayers are.

When we consider the relation of THE DEERSLAYERS to the entire body of Krims' photography it becomes consistent with the previous work in any interesting ways. First, we may point to prior and related ideas; death as still life. There are two categories of dead objects. One is the actually dead, as the animals in ROADSIDE DEATHS, photographed where they fell. The other is the fictionally dead, as in the early "murders" and more recently in THE INCREDIBLE CASE OF THE STACK O'WHEAT MURDERS, where the idea of "killer" is the pretext for the still life picture record of the killed. The difference here is that in THE DEERSLAYERS the killer is pictured directly in relationship with the thing killed and we are not at the scene of the killing, obviously. Second, deer hunting has been alluded to in previous pictures where "deer targets" for hunters, similar to "man targets" for F.B.I. agents, have appeared on the walls of rooms as part of the picture environment sometimes ambiguously related to the theme, sometimes just there, suggesting other and encircling realities.

Third and more generally, the work itself is generated by the idea as are all the photographs and especially the folios. Fortunately, Krims' ideas are rich and varied as the wide range of material demonstrates. The aim here as elsewhere is not to represent an experience but to present an image that is the experience. The photography, if staged, portrays. (Exactly what is portrayed is another problem. At this point I would just point out that the word is from the Latin and means "to draw forth.") If "straight," as in THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF AMERICA 1971 or THE DEERSLAYERS, I would suggest one meaning of portray is to depict, "to make a picture or portrait of" and that another is "to picture on the stage" We can all agree that Les Krims' photographs are always a stage. In fact the main characteristic of all his work is the mise en scene. But we may wonder if the audience is not the real performer.

Finally, the underlying subject, the theme of the photographer, is the same in both the imaginative creations and the "straight" or "documentary" work. I once asked Krims about the apparent contradiction of mixing both types in his show at the George Eastman House Museum called "Fictions" and he remarked, "There are certain ambiguities." The specific ambiguity is that both types of work spring from the same impulse and exist to achieve the same end: the image as experience. And I would urge that the distinctions between "straight" or "documentary" and "manipulated" have always been problematical and that since the exact boundary has never materialized for any length of time the categories prove themselves shallow if not irrelevant. The important thing for Krims and us is that the image, however formed, exists as a document of our collective present.

Throughout THE DEERSLAYERS we are led to understand the characters and enter into their passions and motives. And like all good work, the effect is a revelation of reality. Krims' photography adds a new constellation to our human universe a new segment to the great realistic drama of history. Meet the deerslayers.

If it seems that I am suggesting that Krims is a historian, I am. The entire body of his work is the creation of a sensitive and responsive observer of modern life dedicated to the present for the future. But we should not forget that history is an art and that this artist is a great photographer.

Alex J. Sweetman

Rochester, New York, 1972

This folio is also available as an original print double portfolio containing twenty-five selenium toned Kodalith prints, signed, numbered, and mounted on 14"x 17" Lightweight Strathmore boards. The prints are contained in a brown flocked, 14 1/2" x 17 1/2" x 11/2" hinged, archival folio box. The second flocked folio box contains two deer targets, a piece of deer hide, a deer hoof, a point from an antler, four 12 Gauge deer slugs, rifle targets, instructional sheets on field dressing deer, and tapemeasure.

The price of the original print version of "THE DEERSLAYERS" is \$1,000. Individual prints may be ordered from the folio for \$60 each. Folios or original prints may be ordered by writing to: Leslie Kirms, 298 Fargo Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14273.

LES KRIMS

BORN

1942

BIRTHPLACE

Brooklyn, New York

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Workshop, 1973

Light Work's first Artist program Workshop, 1976

Light Work Gallery, 1978

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

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