

SLIDESHOW / Darsie Alexander.--Baltimore, MD: The Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, in association with the Tate Modern, London, May 2005.--176 p.: ill.-- ISBN 0-271-02541-7 (pa., alk. paper): \$29.95.



Click. Aunt Dorothy and little Danny at Lake Whitney, summer 1967 – or... Click. The cave paintings at Lascaux and Susan Rothenburg's horse paintings – compare and contrast. Slides are a familiar part of modern experience from the living room to the classroom but are quickly becoming quaint artifacts in our digital age. This was made more evident in two recent exhibitions; *Alfredo Jarr: The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (on view during the ARLIS/NA conference in Houston, Spring 2005) and *SlideShow: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Both exhibitions elevate what was once a utilitarian object into fine art.

Exhibition curator Darsie Alexander and her fellow essayists Charles Harrison and Robert Storr carefully examine these phenomena, discussing slides and their projection in historical, social, and conceptual contexts. Of particular note is Alexander's thoughtful and detailed history of projected images beginning with the magic lantern in 1656 by the astronomer Christiaan van Huygens and ending with the public art projections of artists like Krzysztof Wodiczko. Harrison discusses the waxing and waning of the medium in a period of about forty years from the late 1960s work of Robert Smithson to the recent projections of Jonathon Monk.

In discussing artists' use of slides and projection as a medium, I was surprised to see the omission of Charles and Ray Eames whose use of sound, color, light, still and moving images were the precursor for multimedia and installation art. The Eames' presentations, while intended for educational purposes, were groundbreaking in their use of sensory effects and many contemporary installation artists should be, at least subconsciously, in their debt. Alexander, while crediting the rise in low cost slide projectors and focus free cameras, also misses one of the most basic elements in the explosion of the slide format in the late 1950s and 60s– the development of cheap color film and economical chemical processing. This was a watershed event, usually overlooked. It spawned the establishment of art history programs and, consequently, slide collections in secondary schools, colleges and museums, often with the gift of low cost purchase of the Carnegie Foundation's *Arts of the United States* slide set.

The book is divided in to two principal sections; the three essays and nineteen catalogue entries on the artist's installations in the exhibition. The artists include Marcel Broodthaers, Nana Goldin, Ana Mendieta, and Dennis Oppenheim, among others drawn from the United States and Europe. While one acknowledges the limitations of gallery space and a printed work, it might have been interesting to discover how other contemporary artists outside of the Western hemisphere have explored this medium.

While this reader may be biased towards this catalogue's content, the essays were both readable and scholarly. An informative two-page spread of slide projectors from the years 1870-2004 can be found between the essays and object entries. This book is well illustrated with both color and black-and-white plates and contains the usual, if abbreviated scholarly apparatus. I am puzzled by the binding, a minor point I must admit. The signatures are sewn onto fabric and glued in to a paper-laminated cover without boards. The effect is odd – becoming neither a hard nor soft cover book and I am skeptical of its durability in a library setting.

SlideShow, the exhibition and its catalogue, is timely. As traditional forms of projected images are supplanted by digital technology, it is good to look back and reflect on what once was. *SlideShow* is the first slide-based art exhibition in an American museum, although probably not the last. Alexander is to be commended for her work.

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