

SCHEINBAUM'S SHOES

AT AGE 55, AND AFTER THREE DECADES OF MAKING HIS MARK IN THE WORLD OF FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY, DAVID SCHEINBAUM CAN BE SAID TO HAVE REACHED THE HALFWAY POINT OF HIS CAREER. WE ASKED MICHAEL MORE TO CHRONICLE SCHEINBAUM'S IMPRESSIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS PHOTOGRAPHER AND TEACHER, AS WELL AS HIS TRULY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE SANTA FE PHOTOGRAPHY SCENE.

The tall figure in the dark suit walked to the podium to introduce the great photographer Sebastião Salgado. He was a fine photographer himself, as his books and exhibitions proved. He had worked intimately with major players in the history of photography. Salgado's presence was proof of the remarkable success of the college photography program he designed from scratch. At 50, he could have been forgiven for playing the role of the grave wise man. And the audience probably would have bought it. Except for those bright red sneakers.

David Scheinbaum's odyssey of roles, relationships, influences and projects defines a life at the center of American photography. It's a story made better for its humanizing touches, like his closet of crazily colored Converse.

To understand his journey you have to know a few things about Santa Fe. At 7,000 feet and 75 miles from the Albuquerque airport, Santa Fe retains a small-town feel. Its population hovers around 70,000, making it the 205th largest city in the country. New York City is 115 times bigger, Los Angeles some 50 times. Yet Santa Fe is the third largest fine art photography market in the country.

Ansel Adams called New Mexico "the most beautiful place I have ever seen." Big skies, pueblos, canyons, and deserts are easy pickings for any tourist with a camera. Serious photographers haul view cameras to Canyon de Chelly, Chaco Canyon, or the adobe church at Rancho de Taos. Their persistent problem—to find pictures that don't imitate masterpieces by Edward Weston, Paul Strand, or Laura Gilpin.

The arts permeate Santa Fe as jazz flavors New Orleans. There are huge markets for paintings, sculpture, and Native American



DAVID SCHEINBAUM BY JANET RUSSEK—2006



BISTI, NEW MEXICO—1984



EAGLES NEST, BISTI, NEW MEXICO—1985

pottery and weaving. Local museums are dedicated to Georgia O'Keeffe, Native American art, folk art, and Spanish-American art.

On the recent July weekend, more than 40 exhibitions opened in Santa Fe, including the sixth biennial at Site Santa Fe, the city's most notable arts event. Conspicuous too was a lovely show at the Monroe Gallery: 50-plus black and white prints celebrating the dean of *Life* photographers, Alfred Eisenstaedt. Photography exhibitions are always running at Andrew Smith, Photo-Eye, Verve, Monroe and other galleries. Big names come to open them: you might bump into Jerry Uelsmann, Paul Caponigro or Lee Friedlander on the street. There's always a photography talk coming up; admission is usually free. The Photo-Eye Bookstore stocks new titles from around the world. Photo-Arts Santa Fe is a biennial fair with workshops, exhibits and lectures. Review Santa Fe is an annual three-day conference for 100 photographers who want their work critiqued by curators, editors, and art directors. The Santa Fe Photography Workshops draws hundreds of students. The New Mexico Council on Photography dispenses grants to promising photographers.

BEGINNINGS

Now 55, David Scheinbaum has been in the thick of the Santa Fe scene since 1978. Born in Brooklyn, Scheinbaum finished high school in 1969 and snagged a job in Manhattan shooting slides for advertising presentations. "I discovered that shooting a flawless photograph of a Maxwell House coffee can is not a simple thing," he recalls. "But type B Ektachrome film was \$3 a roll. I could shoot 100 slides for under 10 bucks. Through trial, error, and luck, I'd eventually get the shot. This haphazard method didn't bother me at first. Remember, this was 1969. I was working on Madison Avenue. I thought I was rolling in dough. What more could a Brooklyn boy want? But it started to bother me that while I always got the picture, I never knew why."

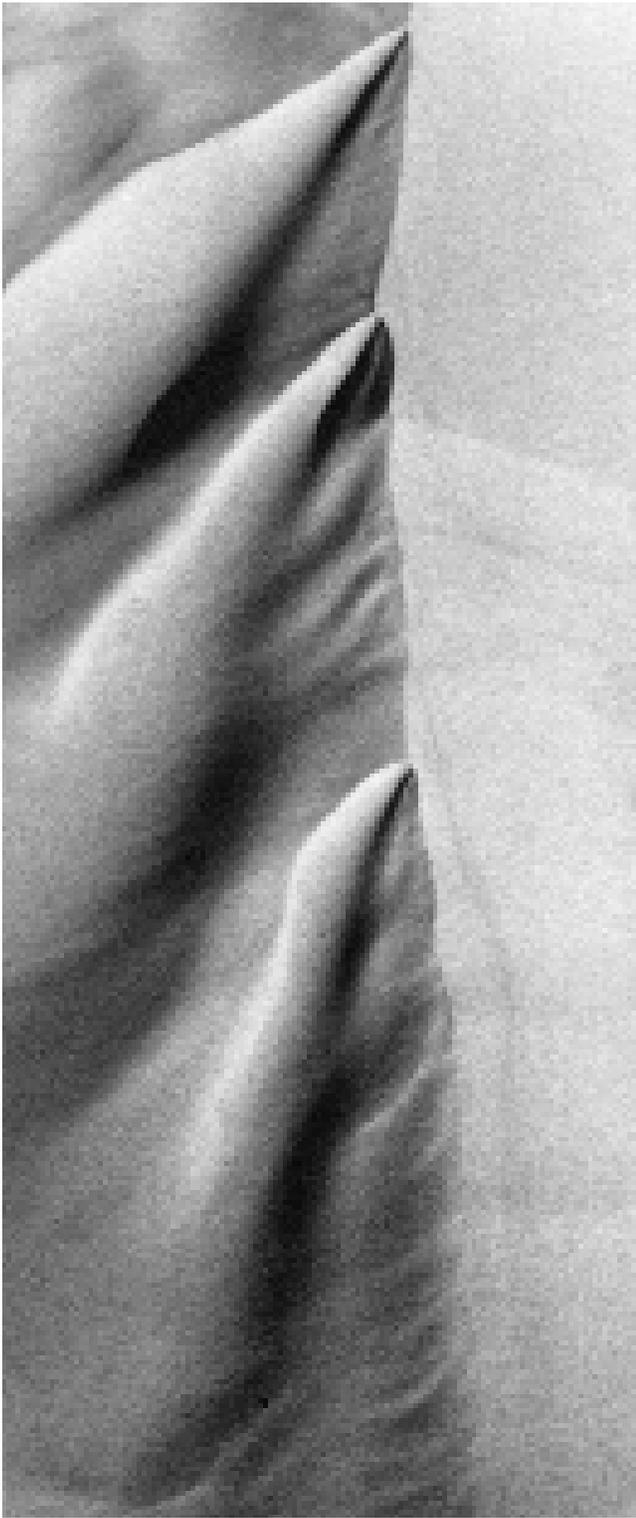
To find out why, he quit the slide shop and enrolled in master photographer George Tice's photography class at the New School. Tice's elegant black and white prints were unlike most prints Scheinbaum had seen—on a higher level in every way. He enrolled in Brooklyn College and raced through in three years. A month after graduating in 1972, he was teaching photography at Pace University in Manhattan. Over the next six years he was instrumental in bringing photography into New York schools and colleges. He also began to photograph the impoverished elderly in the Jewish community in Miami Beach.

THE APPRENTICE

In 1978, Scheinbaum put New York City in the rear view mirror and began the first of more than a dozen roles, if not lives. He headed for Santa Fe where Beaumont Newhall, the most influential curator since Alfred Stieglitz, was then still living. Newhall (1908–1993) had been the founding director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), and later the head of George Eastman House in Rochester. His gracefully written 1937 classic *The History of Photography* remains indispensable. He was a superb photographer himself, but refrained from showing his work, believing it might



BISTI BADLANDS, NEW MEXICO, I CHING, HEXAGRAM #1—1984



DEATH VALLEY, DUNES IV, CALIFORNIA,
I CHING, HEXAGRAM #42—1999



RIO GRANDE GORGE, NEW MEXICO,
I CHING, HEXAGRAM #43—1997

compromise the neutrality required for a curator.

Scheinbaum recalls waiting for hours on the steps of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art to hear a Newhall talk in the early 1970s. What he heard then and read later led him to seek out this obviously great mind. After Scheinbaum arrived in Santa Fe, he spent weeks working up the courage to call Newhall and show him his Miami Beach pictures. When he started to explain why he was calling, Newhall cut him off and invited him over that afternoon. The two clicked, and Scheinbaum became his assistant and printer until Newhall's death.

"Beaumont was the man I most wanted to be like," Scheinbaum says. "He was not just a historian, photographer, and critic. He was a gentleman in the genteel Ivy League tradition, with great tact and impeccable judgment. But he was a regular guy, too, unpretentious, generous, kind."

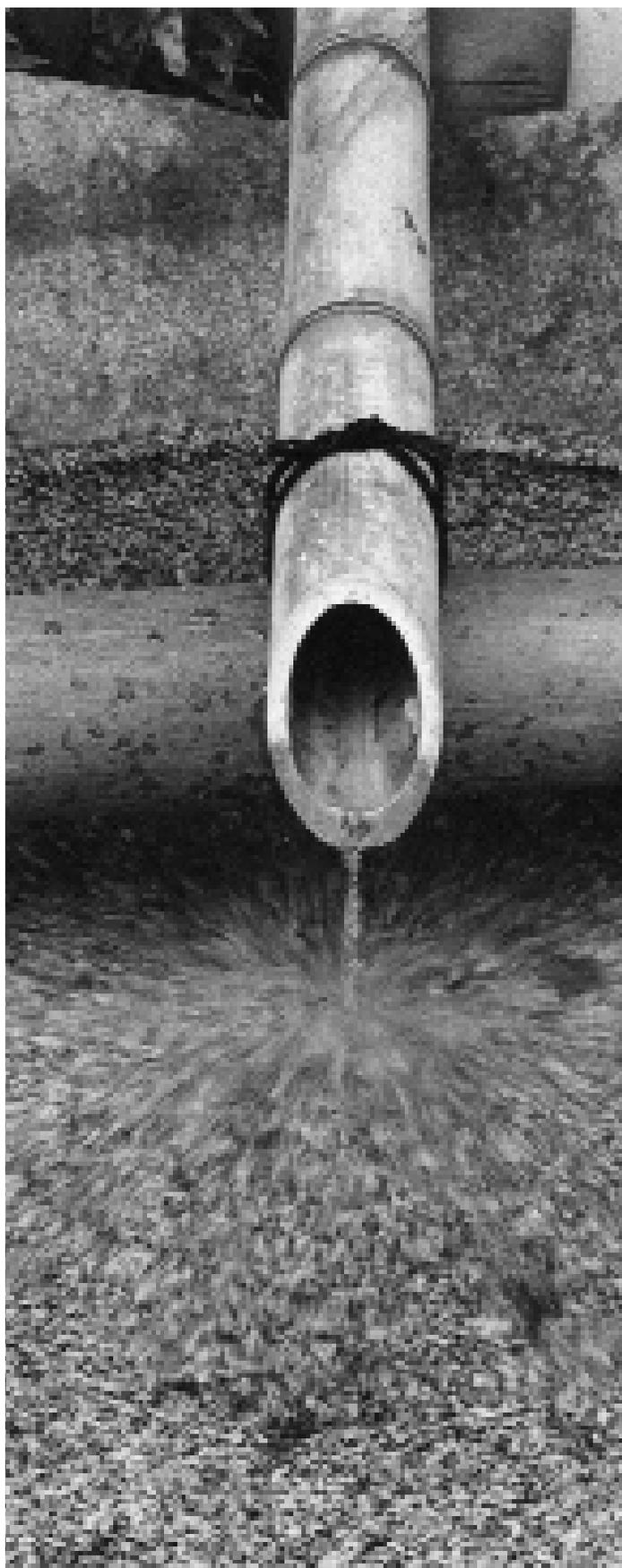
THE PARTNER

Clichés about strong marriages tend to celebrate loving if not subordinate endurance: the "you were the wind beneath my wings" sort of thing that makes many weep, others hurl. But there is nothing sentimental about the complementary careers of Scheinbaum and his wife, Janet Russek, who followed him to Santa Fe in 1980. She became his partner in their gallery, a collaborator on many projects, a superb black and white photographer on her own, and mother of their three children.

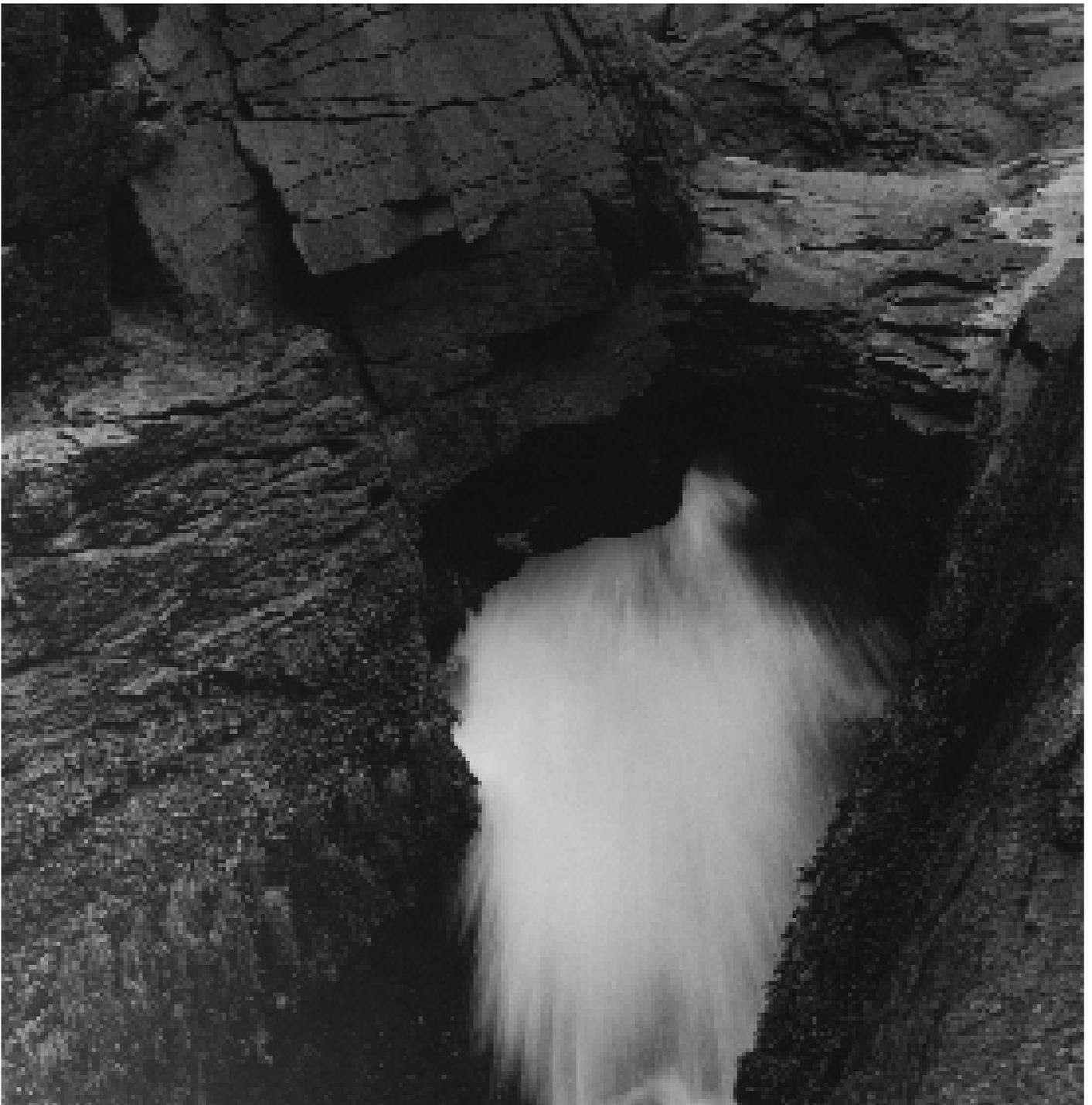
PORTER'S PRINTER

Newhall was not the only master nearby. Eliot Porter had been living in Tesuque, a few miles away, since 1946. As noted in *B&W*, Issue 45, Porter (1901–1990) was the most influential color photographer who ever lived. Using the technically demanding dye-transfer process, he created color prints that displayed a degree of control associated only with black and white prints created by darkroom masters such as Ansel Adams. In 1962, his book, *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World*, placed 72 of his view camera studies of skunk cabbages, water lilies, and trilliums next to quotations from Henry David Thoreau. It cost \$32.50 (some \$200 today) and was wildly successful, selling nearly 60,000 copies. Many insist that two others, his autobiographical *Eliot Porter* (1987) and *Intimate Landscapes* (1979), set standards never equaled for the deep responses they evoke in their viewers.

In 1980, Porter, then 79, heard about Scheinbaum from Newhall and asked him to



RYOAN-JI TEMPLE, KYOTO, JAPAN,
I CHING, HEXAGRAM #57—2000



THUNDER HOLE, ACADIA NATIONAL PARK, MAINE, I CHING HEXAGRAM #16—1972

assist him as well. Scheinbaum was too busy, but Newhall recommended Russek. She began cataloging Porter's work, mounting prints, and helping to curate his books and exhibitions. Porter worked long hours every day, including weekends and most holidays, and Russek often had to remind him gently "tomorrow is Saturday" and she had blocked out the time for her family. She discovered much unpublished black and white work, and Scheinbaum soon collaborated on its publication, printing photographs to Porter's requirements. The result is seen in *Eliot Porter's Southwest* (1985). Russek worked for Porter until his death.

"Unlike Adams," Scheinbaum notes, "Eliot wasn't looking for grand vistas or the big white glowing object, a cloud, an aspen, or a waterfall. He was moved by the delicacy of the smallest flowers or the way bare branches formed lattices in the air. His ground glass was scored with a grid pattern and he told how he examined each square to verify its contribution to the overall frame.

"I learned more about the black and white process than I ever could have imagined. He tore up an awful lot of prints I thought were made to his specifications. He taught me a new darkroom language. That black and white prints could be subtly colored to degrees of coolness and warmth was a revelation. Eliot produced a new developer for each new print. They are his prints, not mine. I was a mechanic really, following his instructions.

"Someone asked me the other day what he might have thought of digital technology," Scheinbaum adds. "Eliot the scientist would have been fascinated. But I don't think he would have considered it for his own work. The people I know who best understand how much a fine print can express tend to be wary of digital, much in the way that the keenest audiophiles often prefer vinyl records over CDs. Such people may see and hear deeper than the rest of us. No one made better color prints than Eliot's own dye transfers. I can't see how any technology could have improved them."

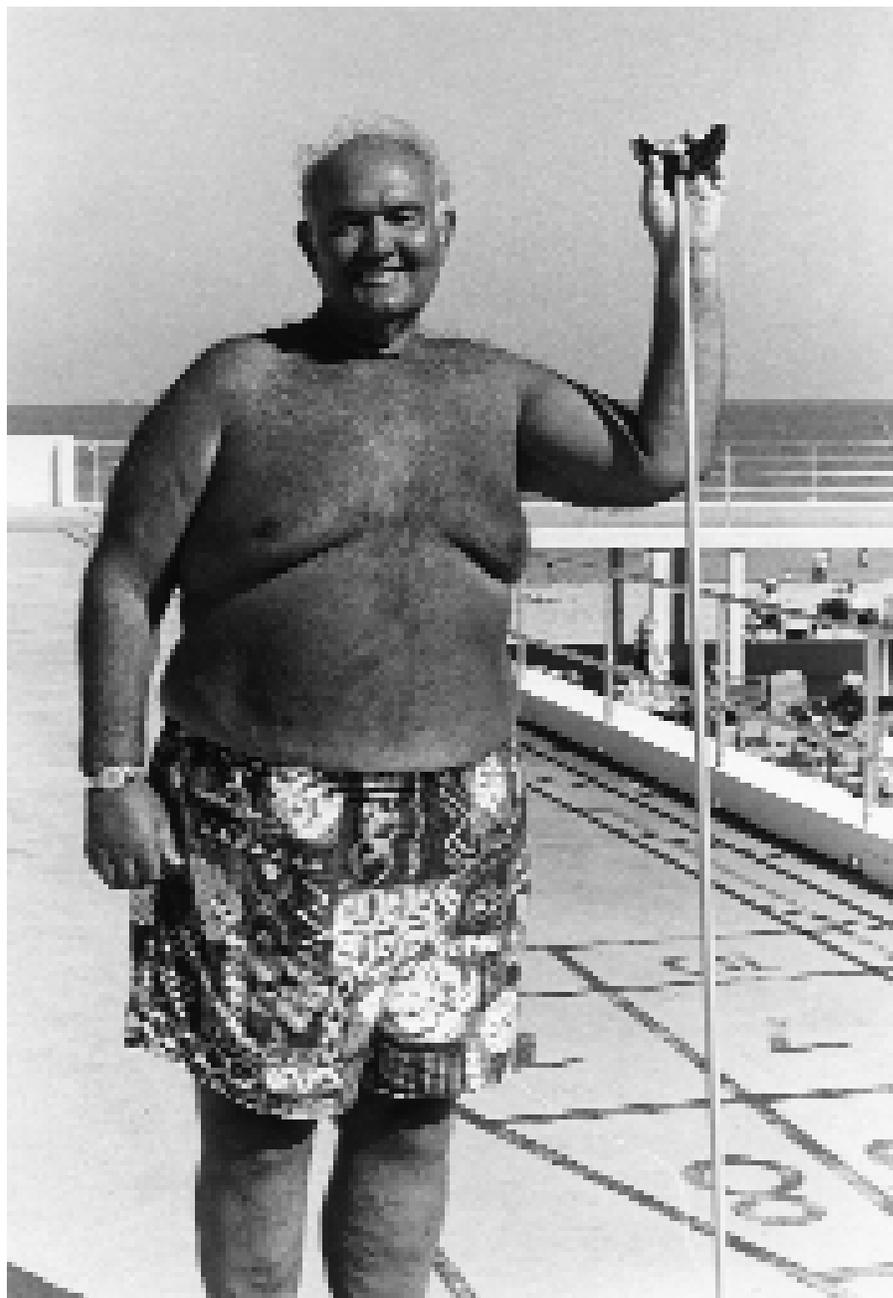
THE SANTA FE DEALER

Relationships with Newhall and Porter led quickly to Santa Fe representation. In 1980, Scheinbaum & Russek, Ltd. was formed. Twenty-six years later, the business flourishes. They continue to represent the Newhall and Porter estates. But they also offer fine prints from 30 or so great photographers, from Berenice Abbott and Ansel Adams to Edward Weston and Minor White. This is most clearly elaborated at their website: www.photographydealers.com. The gallery is located in a building near their home just outside of town.

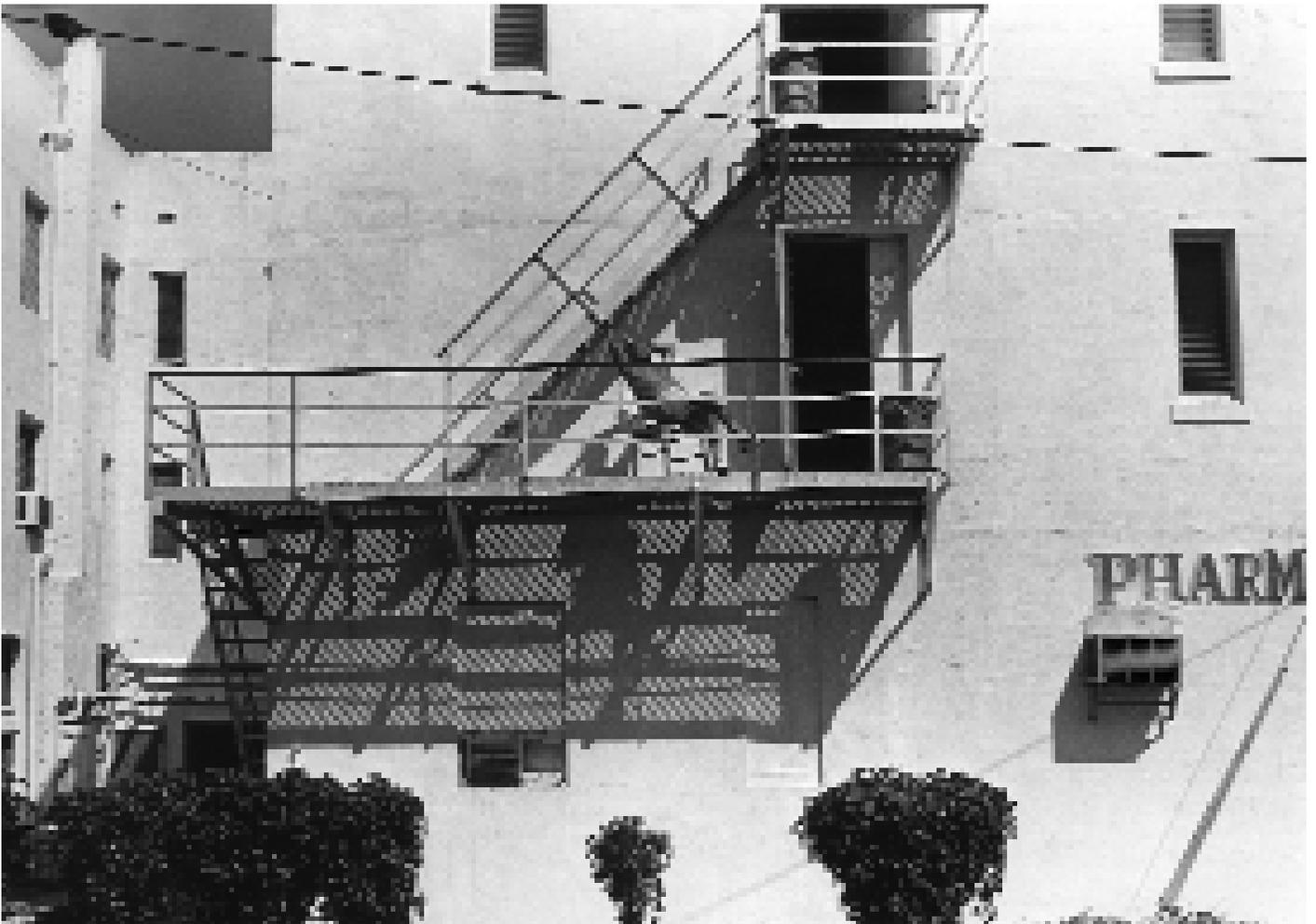
THE TEACHER

Just as the gallery was getting established, Scheinbaum got a call. Did he want to teach two courses at the College of Santa Fe? He did. Did he understand that working with 15 students in the field and in the darkroom would take most of his waking hours? He understood. Would he work for \$2,400 a year? No problem.

Thus began a 25-year teaching career at the College of Santa Fe. Without a word of complaint, Russek took over full-time management of the gallery as well as the children. Over the years Scheinbaum has lectured to, demonstrated for, and otherwise guided hun-



JOE STERN, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA—1975



SUNBATHER, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA—1974



MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA—1975

dreds of students through the basics. His students loved him, and not just for the shoes. He always took the time to make sure they understood.

THE GRAND PLANNER

During the formation of the photography department at MOMA in 1940, Ansel Adams and Beaumont Newhall discussed a new idea: a practical college program where students could learn the basic requirements for a life in photography. It would include not just picture making, but the history of photography as well, along with lessons in practical skills—mounting prints, staging exhibitions, bookkeeping, and so on. The idea was the subject of further discussion in the 1960s. However, nothing came of it.

But Scheinbaum never forgot. In 1992, he proposed such a program for the College of Santa Fe. It would require a new state-of-the-art building with classrooms, studios, and pollution-free darkrooms. Not to mention staff and administrative support.

The proposal was accepted. The building was funded by art patrons Anne and John Marion, and the Marion Center was a conspicuous success overnight. Housed in a ravishing cluster of buildings designed by internationally renowned architect Ricardo Legorreta, it remains one of the best such programs in the world.

SALGADO'S PARTNER

Scheinbaum's most conspicuous contribution to the College of Santa Fe developed from his long friendship with Sebastião Salgado, the most influential photojournalist alive. Salgado and his wife Lélia have worked together since 1991 to restore a small section of the Brazilian rain forest where their Instituto Terra, an environmental educational center, has planted more than half a million trees.

Scheinbaum proposed a documentary studies program (now directed by photographer Tony O'Brien) in which 15 students a year visit Brazil. Each designs a documentary photography project. Given Salgado's status and participation, the program would be a crown jewel at the most exclusive campus. Scheinbaum notes with pleasure that 30 students have now come through this program, and emerged "prepared to champion causes and drive meaningful change." Partly in recognition of his contribution to Instituto Terra, Scheinbaum was named last year to an endowed chair, the Anne and John Marion Professorship.

THE COUNCIL MAN

In 1985 Gil Hitchcock, a Santa Fe businessman, approached Scheinbaum and Russek with an idea to support photography in New Mexico. Within a year the New Mexico Council on Photography was formed. Porter and photographers Willard Van Dyke, William Cliff, and Joan Myers were founding members. Twenty-one years later the nonprofit organization has made dozens of awards. The council now offers grants named for Porter, Van Dyke, Newhall, and



NAS, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2003



GANG STARR, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2001



Z-MAN, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2005



DEL THE FUNKY HOMOSAPIEN, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2002

the late photo historian Van Deren Coke, whose wife Joan remains a principal board member.

THE HOODOO MAN

A “hoodoo” is a geological formation found in the badlands of northern New Mexico. It’s a rock formation that rests on its narrow base, much as a loaf of bread might balance on a bottle. Hoodoos appear throughout the black and white photographs in Scheinbaum’s 1987 book, *Bisti*. That’s the Navajo word for the section of the badlands now preserved from coal mining. They emphasize the stark and breathtaking weirdness of a place where almost nothing remains alive. The lucid essays by a paleontologist, an anthropologist, and others depict an equally stark picture—the extent to which strip mining can wipe out in days the work of wind and water over millennia, and how sly and conniving the people can be who control how land is managed.

THE GRANDSON

Scheinbaum’s grandfather, Hyman Feerman, spent the last four or so years of his life in a section of Miami Beach populated almost exclusively by elderly Jews. By the time Feerman died in 1977, Scheinbaum had made many visits. *Miami Beach: Photographs of an American Dream* (1990) was the result. The book might seem easy to dismiss: Who needs more photographs of old people playing shuffleboard? But as one looks carefully the pages come alive. We are startled to realize that every person we’re looking at thought about the Holocaust every day of their life. We realize too, that one by one, they’ve all died since. Yet Scheinbaum’s energized portraits bring them back to life for as long as we care to look at them. There is rich humor here, too, like the fat grinning man in the skimpy bathing trunks who sits all day at the entrance to the ladies room, exchanging greetings as the women come and go.

GHOST RANCH

On the 25,000 acres of Ghost Ranch, 60 miles northwest of Santa Fe, there is a huge flat-topped mesa called the Pedernal. “It’s my private mountain, it belongs to me,” Georgia O’Keeffe famously joked. “God told me if I painted it enough, I could have it.” It appears over and over in her paintings, just as it does in Scheinbaum and Russek’s *Ghost Ranch: Land of Light* (1997). Scheinbaum’s landscapes suggest great scale, while Russek’s more inti-



ERYKAH BADU, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2003



PUBLIC ENEMY, PROFESSOR GRIFF, SUNSHINE THEATER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO—2002



MF DOOM, THE PARAMOUNT, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO—2004



CEE LO, SHORT LIST, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA—2002

mate photographs usually house a strong central form. "This is not an O'Keeffe book," Scheinbaum notes. "We were not permitted to photograph the buildings. But at times we stood where she stood when she painted. We realized the ingenuity of her interpretations. It became a game to get the mesa into the scene."

BEFORE THE ORACLE

Amazon.com lists 701 entries for the I Ching, the ancient Chinese oracle introduced to the West by the famous German psychiatrist Carl Jung. Jung believed the book could deliver sound guidance to a sincere inquirer who wanted to clarify a question. Tossing sticks or coins six times would result in a hexagram, six solid or broken lines stacked in patterns that synchronized with the invisible forces that affected the outcome. *Images in the Heavens, Patterns on the Earth*, the edition prepared last year by Russek and Scheinbaum, may be the only edition that is not designed to help the reader forecast. Each black and white photograph is based on one of the 64 hexagrams and is intended for contemplation. Russek drew upon dozens of renditions to synthesize her own poetic translations.

WITNESS TO STONE

Scheinbaum's next book is scheduled to be published in October of this year. The 120 photographs that appear in *Stone: A Substantial Witness* required more than a decade of traveling the world. As he visited Stonehenge or Kyoto or the Great Wall of China or the Brooklyn Bridge, Scheinbaum carried two point-and-shoot Contax cameras. They were set on a panoramic mode that masked much of the 35mm Tri-X negative, creating, in effect, half-frame exposures.

There is a simplicity and beauty here that signal a breakthrough in Scheinbaum's perception, tempered by a sense of enduring calm. If the publication lives up to its pre-press promise, it should be a serene, engaging book.

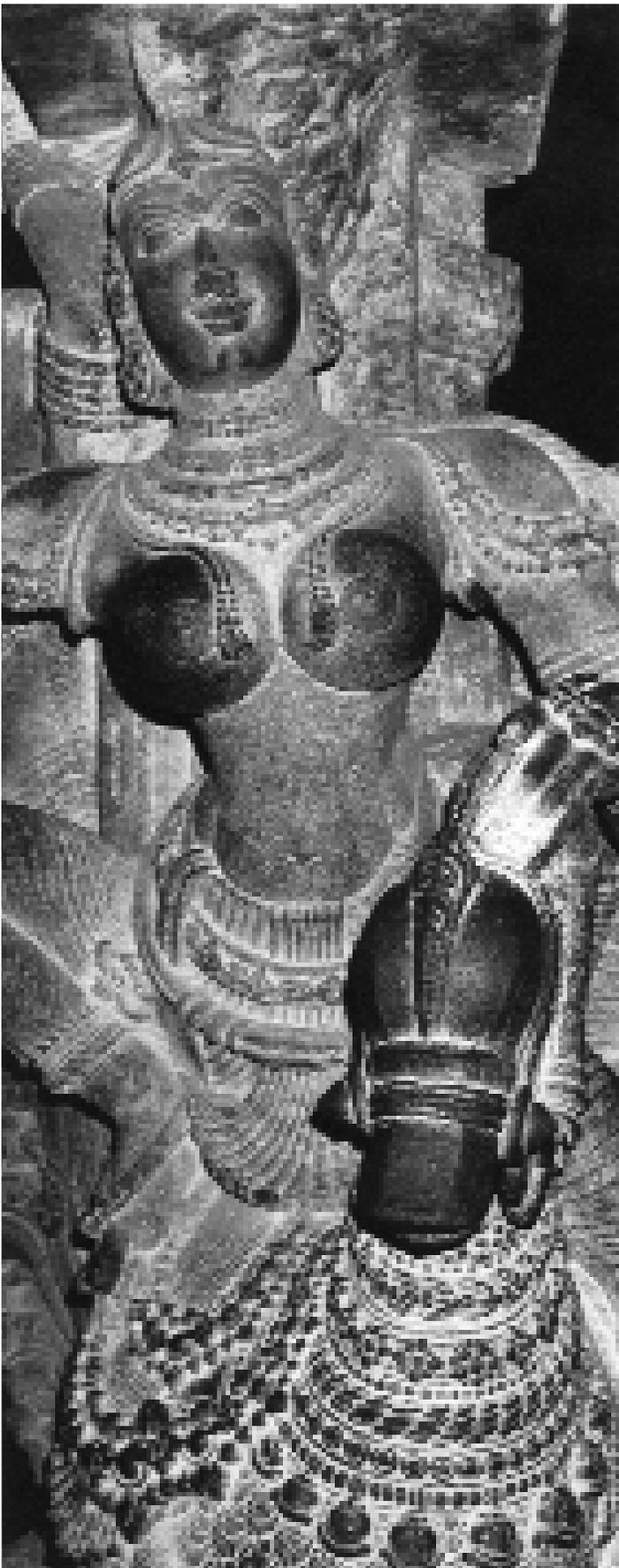
EMBRACING HIP HOP

Six years ago, Scheinbaum agreed to chaperone his 13-year-old son Zac to a hip-hop concert. Nothing had prepared him for the intensity of the music and the collective good will that seemed to unite the crowd, as the groups on stage hammered home the message: "Stay off drugs." "Stay in school." "Vote."

He drove his son and his friends to more concerts. He got hooked. He took pictures from the stage. And he traveled to places like



RANO RARAKU, EASTER ISLAND (RAPA NUI)—2003



KANCHIPURAM, INDIA—2000



PSYCHE REVIVED BY CUPID'S KISS, THE LOUVRE, PARIS, FRANCE—1997

Oakland to visit with musicians. "The image of Gangster Rappers, with the negative overtones of sex, racism, drugs, murder and guns, is the image that most people have of the Hip Hop culture," Scheinbaum has written. "It is this image that I hope to be able to change through these photographs."

An exhibition of his hip-hop photographs is scheduled to appear at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., in 2007.

SCHEINBAUM'S SHOES

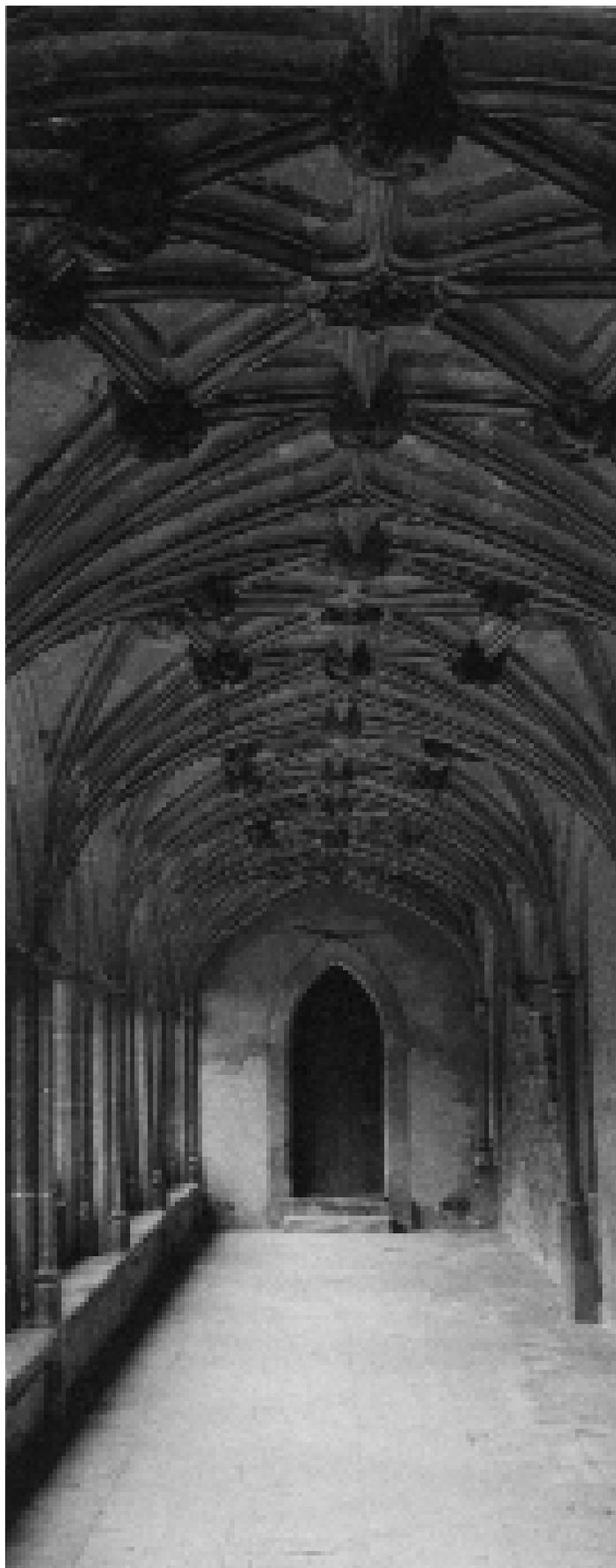
Scheinbaum's shoes of many colors are designed to break down any reservations a student or a stranger might have when meeting him. But they also suggest the diversity of the roles he continues to play in Santa Fe. His love of the f/64 still-life and landscape tradition endures. As the hip hop work shows, his values are aligned with those of socially concerned photographers who formed the New York Photo League more than 60 years ago. Any given day will find him selling prints from the gallery, advising colleagues across the world or on campus, working on a new book or portfolio, or standing next to Russek in the darkroom sloshing prints around in the tray.

In his introduction to the Miami Beach book, Beaumont Newhall wrote that "all too often the photographer brings to his vision a priori judgments of what aspects of the people and their environment to record—so that we see with his mind rather than through his eyes." Scheinbaum, he wrote, was "a compassionate yet observant and knowledgeable guide" who saw "through his eyes."

Scheinbaum has been influenced, but he never imitated. He has influenced others, especially students, but insists they finally call their own shots.

The Santa Fe photography community is a good place for a man of so many talents. Craft and content matter more than art market pressures. Photography students at the College of Santa Fe are exposed to the same ideas as those attending, say, the Rhode Island School of Design. But the commerce-driven tyrannies of style and fashion do not command the same unspoken influence that they do in the big cities. The devil may wear Prada in New York or Los Angeles, but Scheinbaum plans to wear Converse for a good long time.

■ *Before moving to Santa Fe in 2000, Michael More was director of International Public Relations for Eastman Kodak Company. He has since published more than 50 articles on photography, literature, and art. He is president of the New Mexico Council on Photography.*



LACOCK ABBEY, ENGLAND—1997



STONEHENGE, ENGLAND—1997



POMPEII, ITALY—1996



BROOKLYN BRIDGE, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK—1998