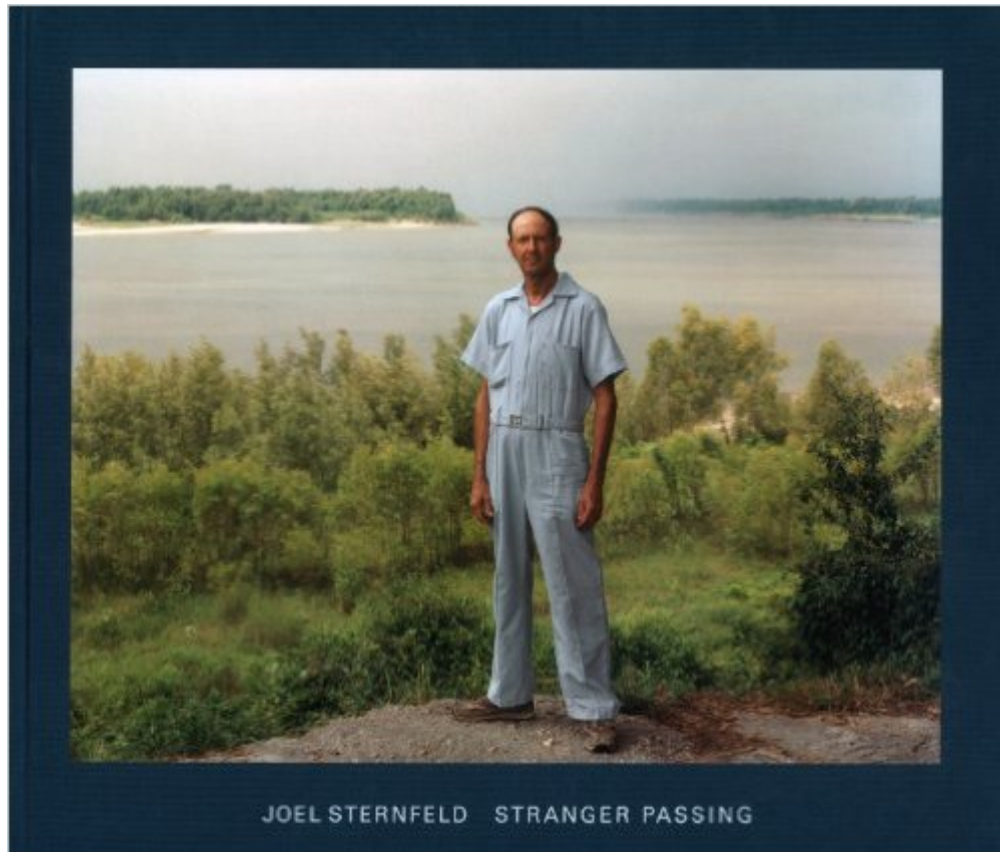


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Joel Sternfeld: Stranger Passing



Synopsis

Over a period of 15 years, Joel Sternfeld travelled across America and took portrait photographs that form, in Douglas R. Nickel's words, "an intelligent, unscientific, interpretive sampling of what Americans looked like at the century's end." Unlike historical portraits which represent significant people in staged surroundings, Sternfeld's subjects are uncannily normal: a banker having an evening meal, a teenager collecting shopping carts in a parking lot, a homeless man holding his bedding. Using August Sander's classic photograph of three peasants on their way to a dance as a starting point, Sternfeld employed a conceptual strategy that amounts to a new theory of the portrait, which might be termed The Circumstantial Portrait. What happens when we encounter the other in the midst of a circumstance? What presumptions, if any, are valid? What, if anything, can be known of the other from a photographic portrait?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"American Prospects," a landmark study of how the modern social order is revealed through landscape, published in 1988, brought brilliant photographer Joel Sternfeld to international attention. Sternfeld expanded this study with "A Stranger Passing." The sixty color portraits of ordinary Americans included in this book, and made over a fifteen year period, were first shown at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2001, and published at the same time. Although Douglas R. Nickel describes this book as a collection of portraits in his introductory essay, Joel Sternfeld's vivid images are so much more than traditional photographic portraiture. The pictures go beyond

reflecting a mere image of the subject, no matter how interesting or aesthetic. And Sternfeld's subjects are more than the people being photographed. He has captured here the very essence of our culture - Americans, depicted in the context of their daily lives, during odd moments between events. Many of the warmest images feature relationships between two people. Each photograph tell a story. The volume's cover portrait is titled "Young Man Gathering Shopping Carts." A teenager, with blond bobbed hair, open shirt, loosened tie, stands in a parking lot cluttered with pink shopping carts. The ubiquitous strip mall is the backdrop. His stance, the look of discontent on his face, and the generic locale say much more than most narratives. Sternfeld stirs the viewers imagination. One cannot help but wonder about the subjects' lives - the before and after of each picture. "A Lawyer with Laundry," New York, portrays a seemingly reluctant subject, laundry in hand, leaning against a newsstand while warily suffering the photographer's attention.

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