

PHOTOGRAPHS

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Press Release

***GEORGE W. GARDNER:
AMERICA ILLUSTRATED***

April 9 – June 30, 2010

Opening reception: Saturday, April 10, 2-5pm

Deborah Bell Photographs is pleased to announce an exhibition of photographs by George W. Gardner, his first solo exhibition in New York City in 31 years.

Titled for his 1982 monograph, **AMERICA ILLUSTRATED: PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE W. GARDNER**, the exhibition will feature early prints of images from this highly acclaimed, exquisitely printed book. The black-and-white photographs, made by Gardner with his 35mm cameras on road trips throughout the mainland United States from 1960-1980, reveal a nation of contradictions. Its people are obsessed with guns, Bibles, the Vietnam war, the cold war and partying at Mardi Gras, in a nation still beset by issues of racial segregation.

Gardner's photographs are straightforward, yet they are tinged with irony. In a New Mexico photographer's shop window Gardner spots a display of high-school graduation portraits, including one of a beaming student posed with her rifle; in a Cairo, IL home, a handgun rests atop a Bible, as if it were a carefully composed still-life; in yet another deceptively simple image, a pensive man stares at a large globe, seeming to look for answers. These are portraits of mainstream American society, delivered by Gardner plainly but with subtle wit and insight.

Born in 1940 in Albany, NY, Gardner earned a B.A. in Anthropology form the University of Missouri. Throughout the 1970s Gardner's work was championed by Hugh Edwards, the legendary curator of photographs at The Art Institute of Chicago, and it was featured regularly by the renowned photography historian and editor Jim Hughes in Camera 35, as well as in Creative Camera, Popular Photography and other important periodicals. Gardner's work was included in the 1983 revised edition of DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY in the Time-Life series. Gardner's second book, *GUN PEOPLE*, was published in 1985.

In his introduction to Gardner's book, **AMERICA ILLUSTRATED**, Jim Hughes relates his first impressions of Gardner's work: "I was seeing, clearly and possibly for the first time, middle America, which is all America: the America of Saturday afternoon high school football, concrete highways to towns named Fate, and undeclared wars featured on the six o'clock news. This was not Apple Pie America, nor Glamour America, nor Ugly America, nor Bloody America. This was America as it must be, and I was seeing it because a citizen named George Gardner was taking me there."

As Gardner himself goes on to say, as quoted by Hughes in his essay, "America is my place....I have no choice, and I have always felt that. Anyplace else, I'm just a tourist, I don't connect. In America, I feel as if I have some deep notion of what's going on. I am trying to get at what I think about America. I can *feel* this country."

Gardner's last solo exhibition in NYC took place in 1979 at the Midtown Y Gallery. Subsequent one-person exhibitions were held at the Catskill Center for Photography, Woodstock, NY, in 1980; the Douglas Kenyon Gallery, Chicago, IL, in 1982; and at the Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA, in 1983; **and are on exhibition presently at KMR Arts in Washington Depot, CT (through May 29, 2010)**. Gardner's photographs are owned by numerous institutions including The Art Institute of Chicago; DePaul University, Chicago; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Exhibition dates for **GEORGE W. GARDNER: AMERICA ILLUSTRATED** are April 9 – June 30, 2010. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, April 10 from 2-5pm.

High-res scans and further information are available upon request. Please contact us by phone at (212) 691-3883 or by email at deborahbell@rcn.com. Please also visit our website, www.deborahbellphotographs.com.

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