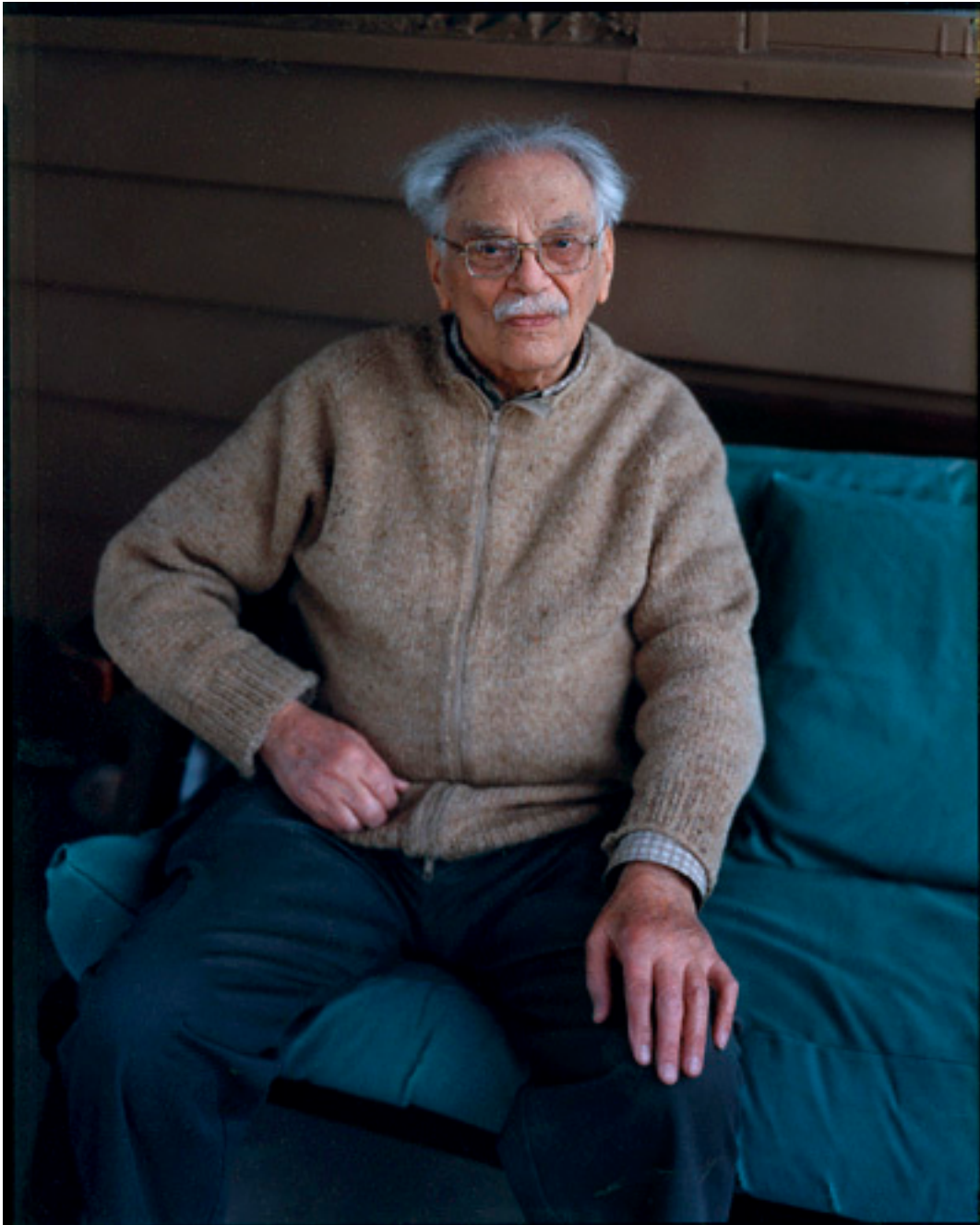


Alec Soth's Archived Blog

March 7, 2007

Milton Rogovin

Filed under: [artists](#), [photographs \(mine\)](#), [portraiture](#) — alecsothblog @ 12:58 pm



Milton Rogovin, 2004. Photograph by Alec Soth.

Milton Rogovin was just named the 2007 recipient of the [ICP Cornell Capa Award](#). Nobody is more worthy of acknowledgement. Rogovin has dedicated his life to photographing 'the forgotten ones.' His portraits are consistently made out of affection and empathy.

One of Rogovin's greatest achievements has been documenting the lives of his Buffalo neighbors. He often re-photographed the same subjects multiple times over the decades. In 2002, [Sound Portraits](#) producers Dave Isay and David Miller joined Rogovin to interview these subjects. The results were remarkable. Here is one example of Monica "Kiki" Cruz:



1972

I was three in this first picture. I remember my mom was so excited—she felt like a movie star because Milton was coming over. She hurried to get me dressed, bathed—everything! She didn't even have time to do her own hair, so she threw on that floppy old hat. Even after Milton left, she was happy that whole afternoon. And her being happy made me happy. Every time Milton came, my mother was happy, because she loved Anne and Milton. She's not here no longer [crying]...but she was a wonderful lady and she is greatly missed. Me and my mom went through trials and tribulations, but she was my best friend.



1984

That second picture was at my grandmother's house. I wasn't living at home at the time, and I just went over to visit. And my mother said, "You came in just in time, because Milton's taking another picture of us!" And I said, "For real?" And when he took that picture I was sitting there thinking, "I don't believe I'm doing this again!" Because that was the worst time in my life. My mother got with somebody that beat her, and I couldn't take it. So I started sleeping in LaSalle Park, on the benches. Then when I was fifteen I went through the court system and became an emancipated minor, so I was able to live by myself as an adult. And at the time of the picture I was running with an older crowd—much older—and got addicted to drugs. I mean badly. Cocaine. Until one day I just woke up and said, "No. This isn't me." And I never touched it again.



1992

In the third picture—I was happy there. I was working at my mom's bar, the Golden Palm. Me and my mom had a real good relationship then. As a matter of fact we were living together, right across the street from there, and she was so happy that day. My mom used to live for the days that Milton and Anne would take her picture, but a little while after that, things got bad again. My mom actually drank herself to death. Because she felt alone [crying]. She felt like she didn't have nobody, nobody loved her, nobody needed her. So she just gave up. And she died on July 10, 1998, from cirrhosis of the liver.



2001

- Listen to a few of the interviews [here](#).
- Visit Rogovin's website [here](#).

12 Comments

1. OK Alec I give in. I shall stop taking photographs of brick walls, and photograph everyone I meet for the next week.

Comment by [guybatey](#) — March 7, 2007 @ [1:07 pm](#)

2. Thanks for this story. It is inspiring to see what beauty comes of such modest subjects. Not everyone gets the opportunity to photograph Kissinger.

Comment by [Glenn](#) — March 7, 2007 @ [2:52 pm](#)

3. Speaking of portraits, yours of Rogovin is really nice.

Comment by [George LeChat](#) — March 7, 2007 @ [4:57 pm](#)

4. Guy Batey's post is awesome.

But so are his brick walls.

Comment by [zbs](#) — March 7, 2007 @ [5:45 pm](#)

5. Rogovin's re-visited portraits – reminds me of the Oxford Project – which at first I felt that the subjects (in the Oxford Project) were being taken advantage of by the photography and the writing – but after seeing / hearing the work presented by the authors / photographer – the efforts seemed sincere.

Have you seen it? (Photography by Peter Feldstein • Text by Stephen G. Bloom) – Having patience is good – you never know what it may provide.. for example: <http://www.oxfordproject.com/lindley.html> – the stuff of life that you just can make up on your own. Sometimes though, I wonder if the project would be interesting, if it didn't have such a high weirdness factor.

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [7:02 pm](#)

6. Fantastic link Matt. I wasn't familiar with the project. The question with this sort of thing (including Rogovin) is if the pictures can match the story. There is more pressure for the images to hold up in photography than in films like [Seven Up](#).

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [9:40 pm](#)

7. My impression of the portraits in the Oxford project, is that they (the photos) probably wouldn't be able to stand alone -the text between the images is condensed down from a series of interviews by the Bloom and according to Bloom his goal was to make sure his voice didn't appear in the writing – an interesting parallel to the bland / almost mug shot like photos. In my opinion, the project is stronger as a collaboration between all three parties, the photographer, writer, and the subjects. It is interesting that the both artists insisted throughout the presentation that the "this is who we are" story telling aspect, was the objective of the project. There is a weakness though that the photographs are more like illustrations of the people who seem much richer in their own words – maybe that's the poetry taking over ?

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — March 11, 2007 @ [12:52 am](#)

8. Snap shots .. just standard family snap shots. I am sure (I hope) he has done better work but lets not build these up into anything more than uninspiring bog standard snaps.

Comment by [Paul D](#) — March 13, 2007 @ [8:56 pm](#)

9. wait a second : Peter Feldstein's Oxford Project cannot nor shall be compared with Mr. Rogovin's work. Mr. Rogovin is a true artist and HERO in my humble opinion. I really admire the man and his work ethics..

Comment by [robert wiedenfeld](#) — November 28, 2007 @ [6:29 am](#)

10. Robert, my intentions were as remarked that it reminded me of another "time-lapse" look at individuals as "re-visited" portraits. I think it's an interesting thing to compare them. I think there is a difference, maybe related to more labor and a different sense of how the photographers decided to portray their subjects that I am thinking about with this example.

The Oxford project comes off as a bit more exploitative to me, and perhaps naive to the sensitivities of the hardships the Oxford subjects really endure. The Oxford pictures look like pictures between two strangers – the photographer and his subject.

Rogovin's portraits seem to me to be a bit more caring. It appears to me the Rogovin wished to share a more intimate and caring view – like the kind of portrait you might take of someone special to you.... So there is quite admittedly a difference between them!

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — December 9, 2007 @ [4:36 pm](#)

11. The prize is well deserved. Milton Rogovin is a giant.

Comment by [Hanani](#) — December 27, 2007 @ [9:51 am](#)

12. Thanks for the interesting commentary. But let me make a few comments of my own. I think some of you have misunderstood my point of view in photographing my neighbors. It was my intention to impose as little of my own point of view as possible. I realized that I live in a place that is in some ways just like every other place in the US, but on the other hand, I found my neighbors to be, for the most part, intelligent, interesting, and also somewhat unique. As I said, I tried to impose as little of my own point of view because of that uniqueness. So I intended for the "photographic style" to be deadpan; for the camera to provide a stage upon which my neighbors could act themselves out. They were not directed in any way. I trusted in them, the ability to present themselves as the unique individuals that they are. I wasn't interested in making art. I'm an artist, but more of a print-maker/painter. This was intended to be as democratic as I could possibly make it without artifice.

I have to say that I wasn't aware of Mr. Rogovin's work, though I had heard of him until Dave Isay sent me a copy of the book he was involved in and I was blown away. Incredible portraits. But I have to protest the comment that Mr. Rogovin had more of a sympathetic or empathetic attitude toward his subjects (to paraphrase some of the comments). What he did have was a different point of view toward the photographing of them.

When I made the original photographs in 1984 I really did it on a lark. I was relatively new in town. At the time, though things have changed as more people move out and are replaced by newcomers, if you weren't born in Oxford you would always be an outsider. That's certainly different now.

When I decided to re-photograph as many of the original people as I could, and thought about the possibility of a book, I asked Steve Bloom to interview them. Bloom's point of view has been very similar to mine. A long time journalist, it was never his intention to make this gotcha journalism. After we'd interview them, Steve, who takes notes and doesn't use a recorder, would transcribe his notes, edit them down to the amazing poetry directly from people's mouths, and then we'd show them to each of them and have them make their edit. The subjects had the opportunity to make any omissions or changes that they'd like.

In mid-September our book will be out and I would encourage all of you to take a look. It is being published by Welcome Books and distributed by Random House. I'd appreciate any dialog with any or all of you. My email is pfeld@southslope.net.

Comment by [Peter Feldstein](#) — March 5, 2008 @ [12:09 am](#)