

PORTFOLIO  
Vincent David Feldman



Lynnewood Hall, Philadelphia, 1995  
*selenium-sulfide toned gelatin silver print*  
25" x 35"

**W**hen he's not brewing up an espresso for a customer at 1521, the Spruce Street cafe gallery that he co-founded, Vincent Feldman can often be found printing poster-sized black-and-white photographs in his basement darkroom beneath the cafe's kitchen. For Feldman, who will soon earn a master's degree in photography from Tyler School of Art, the last few years have been a journey of discovery of his own hometown.

After an absence of several years — when he was earning his B.F.A. from George Washington University and traveling in Europe — Feldman returned to Philadelphia in 1990 and saw the city anew. Having taken up architectural photography in Paris and the Netherlands,

Feldman admits to wondering what he would shoot when he came back: "I was used to Versailles, you know." He needn't have worried. "I found that for what I'm interested in — anthropological fine-art photography — there's no better place. Unless maybe if I went to East Berlin...." Feldman was — and continues to be — captivated by the city's embarrassing abundance of civic buildings that have suffered abandonment or neglect. "Being in Europe and seeing how they take care of their buildings over there," Feldman remarks, "I was struck by this rich museum of a city that sort of doesn't have any curating."

His subject matter — which has included Eastern State Penitentiary, Germantown Hall, South Street's Royal



Theater and since-demolished buildings on Market Street — appeals for both aesthetic and historical reasons. Though he balks at being pigeonholed as a photographer of buildings that will soon disappear, he admits to being excited that he is preserving their heritage by capturing them on film. Individual buildings arouse his interest, but he also works in series — school buildings, theaters, railway stations, fire houses. On occasion, he even embarks on his own sleuthing to track down the history of an old building that hasn't made it into the guidebooks: Poring over 50-year-old Fairmount Park trolley maps gave him clues about a mysterious train platform he'd come across while walking in the park.

"I struggle between being dedicated to a documentary project," confesses Feldman, "and also being interested in the love of the medium itself, and actually being put off by a lot of documentary photography that I see." Permeating Feldman's work is a melancholy beauty and a sense of the surreal that recalls Eugène Atget and other French photographers of the last century. Like them, Feldman uses a large-format camera. He also experiments with the color naturally present in photographic paper and bleaches out or redevelops parts of the image to get warmer and cooler tones. Feldman uses a technical film that provides a phenomenal level of detail. "The wonders of this film," he explains, "are that it copies the object better than you witnessed it when you were taking the photograph. The film sees four times better than my eyes can see. It changes the original scale when you're looking at it in this detail. It becomes a dreamscape with a new context that exists on its own."

The resulting images also allow the viewer a level of contemplation that would be impossible onsite, where the commotion of traffic and pedestrians, as well as the anxiety a strange neighborhood can inspire, keep the spectator alarmingly in the here and now.

Feldman's exhibit this month lets visitors savor these evocative images in the serene setting of his cafe gallery over a creamy cappuccino or a bowl of ravioli.

— Judith West

Vincent David Feldman's photographs can be seen April 8 through May 18 at 1521 Cafe Gallery, 1521 Spruce Street, Philadelphia. For more information, call 546-1521.

# New Jersey

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

## A Show Where Many Share in the Limelight

By FRED B. ADELSON

**G**RIFF counseling won't be necessary. Despite concerns over digital technology, the darkroom has not yet become obsolete. In its 20th season, the Juried exhibition here at the Perkins Center for the Arts celebrates the aesthetic vitality of film-based photography and the talented community of artists from the greater Delaware Valley.

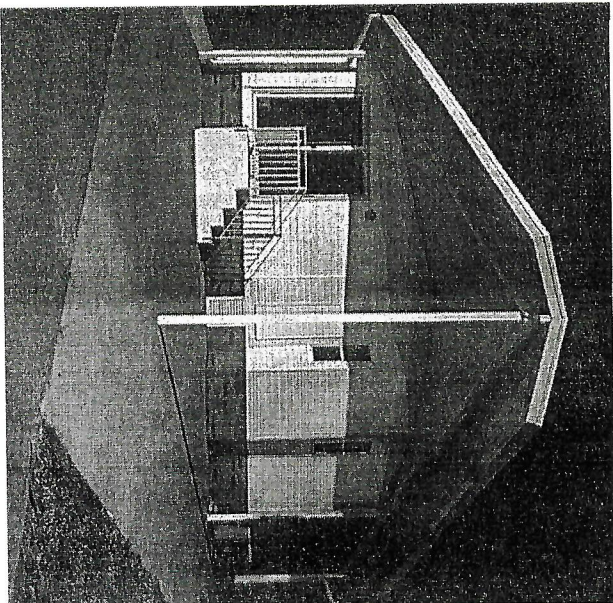
With purchase prizes offered by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington and Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick, "Photography 20" continues to be the principal showcase for regional photography. This year's annual received an unprecedented number of submissions: 1,260 works by 321 artists, coming from as far away as Greenwich, Conn., and the District of Columbia. All photographs are directly judged from the original prints that are hand-delivered to the center, guaranteeing the show's regional focus.

This year's guest juror was Katherine Ware, the recently appointed curator of photographs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Ms. Ware

came from the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, where she had been assistant curator in the department of photography for nine years. Because the Getty Museum primarily collects vintage prints documenting the history of photography, she said that it is "exciting to work with living photographers."

"At the Getty," Ms. Ware said, "I worked only with the dead." Ms. Ware brought a curatorial perspective to this year's selection process. She chose 82 prints by 77 photographers; 5 of the juror's award winners are represented by a second image. She deliberately wanted to be inclusive, even selecting the maximum of 10 photographers for awards of artistic excellence. Unlike past years, there is a more diverse range of processes, which also includes a significant representation of work in color along with a subtle digital presence. "If the work is good," Ms. Ware said, "why not show the broader view? Why have a few take the limelight? The exhibit should support and encourage as many as possible rather than single out."

For the art museum, purchase prize, Ms. Ware selected "Cuba, de lunes a Viernes: la lucha (Monday to Friday: The Struggle)" by Laurence Salzman. This exquisite black-and-



"Mobile Home No. 2," a photograph by Judy Gelles.

white print depicts a group of muscular youths at a wrestling academy that is part of a voluntary after-school sports training program in Santiago de Cuba. The young men appear both heroic and vulnerable, as they seem to have been casually caught by the artist's eye through the camera lens. The photograph in-

mediately brings to mind works by Kertész and Cartier-Bresson, dating from the 1920's and 30's. Though Cuba has lately become a magnet for several area photographers, Mr. Salzman has had an enduring fascination for the island and its people. Vincent Feldman's "Rainbow," which will be going to the Smithsonian

an American Art Museum, is an impressively large silver print that may look like a manipulated image but is a straightforward architectural scene. The picture represents the upper floors of a building in Philadelphia's downtown business district; he documents the urban environment of what had been and what is now. Mr. Feldman contrasts the original brickwork, its terracotta details, and the projection of the bay window with the unornamented flat stucco surface that obliterates all the lower architectural elements, except the sign. The altered reality creates a picture that appears to be more like a fictive arrangement of two opposing subjects.

Ms. Ware chose a number of works in which artists fabricated the finished image to create a more personalized object, like the forest scene printed on handmade paper, the grid of individually varnished pictures of an elderly father and his son, or several variations of photographic collages. Michelle Corbman's "Fresh Meats and Fish" is a sensitively hand-colored silver print that incorporates real objects, such as the Ishlbe and hooks; it nostalgically evokes the turn of the 20th century. On the other hand, "Coney Island" by Hyung Bo Shin, who also received a juror's award, is a distorted view of amusement rides. Mr. Shin achieves his striking visual effects by taking the single negative and splashing it with bleach or vinegar to achieve what looks like a superimposed or time-lapsed image. In any juried show, it is easy to quibble over the choices for awards and purchases. However, Judy Gelles's "Mobile Home No. 2" definitely deserves recognition. This is a nighttime photograph taken at an adult mobile home community in Melbourne Beach, Fla. It is a seemingly vacant world. The artist states that she works "after 8:30 p.m. when all of the residents are in their homes, either watching television or sleeping." Ms. Gelles photographs the stillness and quiet. She says, "These are mobile homes, but they perpetuate only the fantasy of mobility." Her lighting enhances the eerie mood of its almost stage-like setting, while the subject's geometric forms have been accentuated. The processed negative is digitized, and the artist is able to adjust the color and make some corrections. Thus, the computer is used as a helpful aid to enhance the real scene. The result is processed to achieve a beautifully crisp color print of a place that looks hermetically sealed.

"Photography 20" brings together an impressive group of photographers by artists who may be seasoned players with well-established exhibition records or newcomers beginning their careers. Ms. Ware emphasized, "Selections are based exclusively on the strength of the image." This show represents an admirable standard of excellence.

### PHOTOGRAPHY 20

Perkins Center for the Arts, 359 Kings Highway, Moorestown.  
Through Feb. 25, Thursdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 4 p.m.  
(856) 235-6488.



*Above: Spring Garden Train Station, Philadelphia, 1993 toned gelatin silver print, 17" x 21"*



*Left: Sears Roebuck and Co., Philadelphia, 1994 toned gelatin silver print, 33" x 26 1/2"*

*Opposite: City Blue, Philadelphia, 1995, toned gelatin silver print, 39" x 13 1/2"*

# Art

**The spooky, eroding city.** "Fin de Siècle," an exhibition of photography at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, offers an interesting look at the idea of historical transition.

It creates a retrospective mood in two ways, through its subject matter and also through aesthetic attitudes and antique effects. But it's a contemporary show in the way it reconsiders history rather than simply documenting it.

Three photographers are involved, using markedly contrasting methods. Vincent David Feldman is the most literal. He makes sharp view-camera images of old Philadelphia buildings that have seen better times. Feldman is the closest of the three to a neutral observer; he lets the buildings speak for themselves.

One of these is a decrepit YMCA on North Broad Street, its door sealed with concrete blocks. Another is a recreation center in the Kingsessing neighborhood whose blocked-up windows make it look like a prison. Feldman doesn't try to romanticize urban decay, he only calls attention to what is being lost.

Ron Tarver is more of a narrative poet; he views the residential city at night through an Edward Hopperish lens.

Tarver (an Inquirer staff photographer) transforms what he sees into blurry, mildly gothic visions of the city that can be spooky. Venting steam, deep shadows and a general mood of desolation describe a city that might have appealed to Edgar Allan Poe.

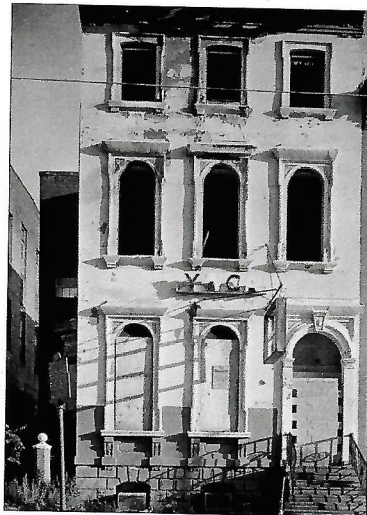
Linda Adelstein is more romantic yet; her layered, hand-tinted pictures are the most evocative of time passing and a city eroding.

For Adelstein, the city's architecture is not so much subject as raw material. She takes the city apart, then reconstructs it as montaged, sepia-tinted allegories of ruin. Hand-coloring softens the mood of entropy, but only enough to make it seem like a desirable outcome.

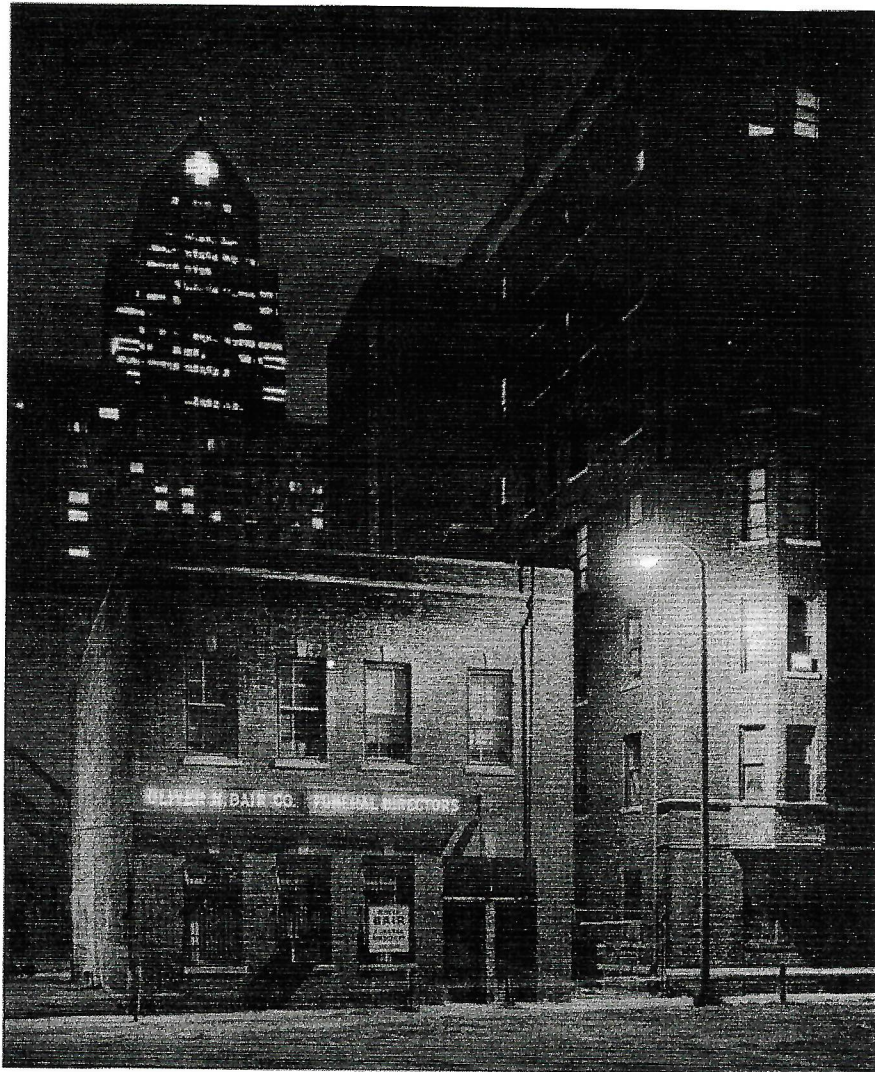
Each of the three visions of the city is true in part, yet each is an idiosyncratic interpretation that reveals only the tiniest sliver of a multifaceted landscape.

Philadelphia Art Alliance, 251 S. 18th St. Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays. Through Sept. 3. A closing reception will be held Aug. 30 from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Phone: 215-545-4302.

Edward J. Sozanski's e-mail address is [esozanski@phillynews.com](mailto:esozanski@phillynews.com)



**Vincent David Feldman's** photo of a former YMCA on North Broad Street is included in "Fin de Siècle," at the Phila. Art Alliance.



# URBAN LANDSCAPES

## FIRST PRIZE

Vincent Feldman,  
*Oliver Bair Funeral Home, Sept. 1997,*  
gelatin silver print.

**F**or photographers, capturing a moment in the life of a city requires perfect timing, technical assurance and a preternaturally sharp eye.

The prizewinners in *City Paper's* second photography contest, themed "Urban Landscapes," demonstrate all these qualities and more. Our team of judges

— Harris Fogel, chairperson of the media arts department at the University of the Arts; Sarah McEneaney, Pew Fellow in painting; Fran Duszak, co-owner of LockJaw Gallery; and Todd Swimmer, a faculty member at Friends Central School and the winner of CP's first photography contest in 1998 — picked them from a field of 539 entries.

Duszak summed up the judges' opinions of the winners: "Technically, they kicked butt." But none kicked harder than first-prize winner Vince Feldman's haunting, astonishingly detailed night-

time shot of the Oliver Bair Funeral Home, as seen from the 1900 block of Walnut Street.

"In a street where the light is fairly stark, to have this exquisite range" in such a large (16x20) print showed an extraordinary commitment, said Swimmer. He also liked the little touch of sarcasm in the shot — the much-maligned Blue Cross sign shining in the skyline.

"Ugly skyscraper kills beautiful building," summed up McEneaney, who admired the photo's tension. >

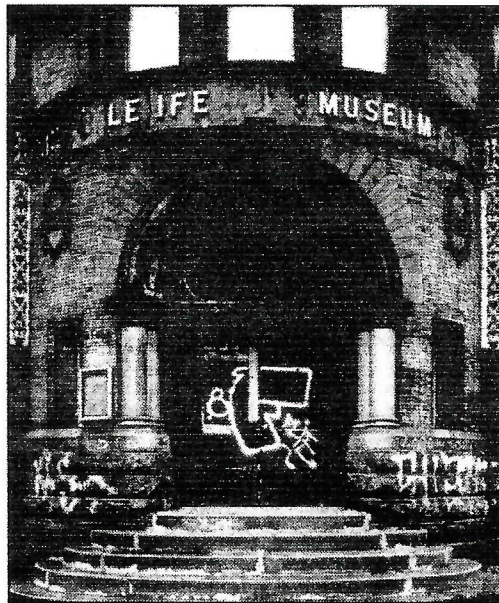
Feldman has been working on urban landscape photography since 1993, with a particular interest in Philadelphia's abandoned civic architecture. His photo of the funeral home grew out of a typically urban visual phenomenon: the new vista that appears after the demolition of a building (in this case, the Eric Rittenhouse theater and its neighbors, lost to fire).

"When all that stuff cleared out and there was that lot there, it made that funeral home visible. That illuminated sign just really glowed.... It looked ominous. I passed it many times and thought, 'I'd better shoot that, I'd better shoot that.'"

Finally, in late 1997, he did, taking a 15-minute exposure with an old Calumet 4x5 view camera.

"It wasn't long after that they put up the fence," he says, "and the sign came down."

Feldman co-founded the 1521 Gallery Cafe in 1992, a venue that has hosted a number of photography shows. Though he's no longer involved in running the business (he left to get a master's from Tyler), his family is. When *City Paper* called the cafe to get the word to him that he'd won, Feldman's aunt Olivia (she's co-owner and head baker) answered the phone. "I'm his aunt. I'm not surprised."

EIGHT DAYS A WEEK**Downtown**

To see **Vincent David Feldman's *A City Abandoned***, currently on display at 1521 Cafe Gallery, is to see the state of urban America; that is, an America that decided it didn't really want to go downtown anymore. His black-and-white photographs of "Philadelphia's public places and municipal buildings no longer in use" say as much about the rest of the country as they do about our own fair city. Why? As Feldman says in his artistic statement, "There are too many reasons and theories for the current condition in which we find this city today." Instead, these contemplative, lonely studies serve as a reminder of the glory

urban architecture once was. This is because of two things: first, Feldman's eye for even the most miniscule of details—every brick of every building seems to be rendered with an equal amount of clarity—and second, his warts-and-all approach that shows old beauties with particularly modern blemishes. *Thru May 18, 1521 Cafe Gallery, 1521 Spruce St. 215.546.1521.* —J.S.

PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOGRAPHY

Philadelphia CityPaper, April 18th, 1997

**City of Lost Buildings**

As much a social statement as an artistic one, photographer Vincent David Feldman's exhibit *A City Abandoned* is a study of properties in Philadelphia and vicinity that have been left for dead. Capturing the haunting beauty and emptiness of these structures, Feldman's lens also conveys a sense of loss. The unmistakable sign that adorns the long-empty Met building on North Broad speaks of neighborhood decay; the shot of the old Fairmount Park Water Works suggests technology's Sherman-like march forward. Feldman's work has been inspired by extensive travel in Europe, through communities that made productive use of buildings vacated by government and industry. Not all of the properties in *A City Abandoned* are striking architecturally, nor are all of them truly abandoned, but they offer a unique view of Philadelphia's selective appreciation of its rich architectural heritage.

*Sunken Gardens, Lynnewood Hall, 1995.*

*Through May 18, 1521 Café Gallery, 1521 Spruce St., 546-1521.*

—**Brian Howard**

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1998

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**VINCENT FELDMAN: RELICS OF THE CIVIC PAST**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD MISRACH**



Vincent Feldman





Vincent Feldman: *Memento Mori, Edinburgh*; gelatin silver print, 1995.

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Cover photograph: Vincent Feldman: *York Minster*; gold-toned gelatin silver print, 1995.

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## Galleries Goodbye, old architectural friends

by Andrew Mangravite

Vincent David Feldman is a photographer in the Atget mold, in that he seems to regard his works less as lofty exercises in art and more as "documents"—in Feldman's case, social documents. Feldman has taken it upon himself to be the chronicler of a melancholy tale. That he titles this exhibition of his photographs "Philadelphia, Portraits in Decadence," must surely tip his hand to us.

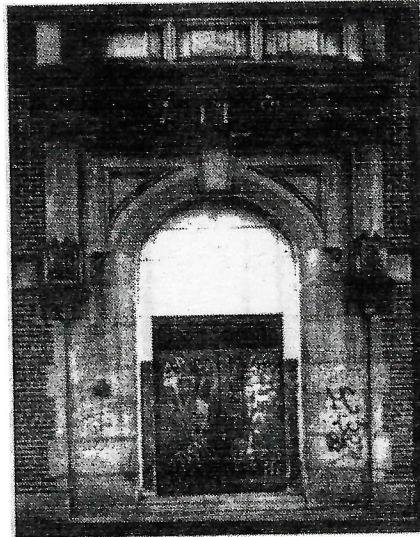
He recognizes that he has chosen to immortalize the already half-dead. Who knows how many of the places his camera has fixed for us will survive into the next century? Certainly, a few seem tenuous in the extreme. Had Feldman come to us trembling in rage over the squandering of an irreplaceable cultural heritage, his work would not be more effective than his chosen mood of gentle melancholy has made it.

He is like a more matter-of-fact Clarence John Laughlin. And just as one saw that Laughlin felt in his own heart the death of every last plantation house and ante-bellum mansion whose ruins he photographed, so one feels that Feldman himself is hurt by the decay and the neglect that he sees.

Another point in common with Laughlin: Just as Laughlin strove to capture the very essence of each of the mansions he photographed, so Feldman tries to render a formal portrait of each of the buildings he visits. (Though in a few cases, he seizes upon a single architectural detail—a doorway, a grating—to signify the qualities of the unphotographed whole.) Of the 14 photographs on display, about six are "formal" portraits, while the rest are studies of details.

Even in their decrepitude, these "noble piles" haven't lost the power to charm and move us. First and foremost is the aptly named "Victory Building," once the jewel of Chestnut Street—the sort of building that would have impressed Walt Whitman strolling by at Christmas time and made him proud to call himself American. She still maintains the demeanor of a queen—a queen who can't quite fathom why her court has vanished, and no man bows to her.

On the other hand, the "Naval Asylum" hides behind a row of thinning trees, peeking through them like a shy



child. "North Philadelphia Station" stands like an owl in the daylight. Feldman has almost caught it mid-blink. It too wonders where the days of its useful life have gone.

"13th and Sansom" and "The Willis Hale Building" celebrate another aspect of our city—the fact that our rooftops are frequently more intriguing than our retrofitted first and second floors. In each of these photographs, the upper stories serve us as a sort of time-machine, transporting us back to the height of the Gilded Age when Philadelphia was a manufacturing powerhouse.

The pair of photographs taken of interiors at "Eastern State Penitentiary" are perhaps the saddest of all, in that the hand of man is most evident there. To destroy in the belief that one is improving, as the retrofitters did, is one thing, but here we see destruction for the sheer joy of vandalism.

All of these sites have survived a lot through the years. They may or may not be able to survive much more. At any rate, we'll have them with us a while longer, and we'll have photographs of them, by Feldman and others, to remind us when they're gone.

**Philadelphia, Portraits in Decadence:**  
Through Mar. 20, at 1521 Cafe Gallery, 1521 Spruce St. 546-1521. ■



From Hopper's Places

## Hopper's Places

Gail Levin

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## Ansel Adams and the American Landscape

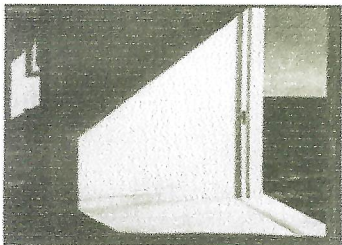
A Biography

Jonathan Spaulding

"Spaulding, in this first major biography of Adams, aims to put the photographer in context: as a craftsman in a new field, a master of a maturing art, a pioneer in environmental activism. . . . An impressive and thoughtful biography."

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In 1993, I began to experiment with Photographer's Formulary TD-3 developer for Kodak Technical Pan film, which produces normal and low contrast negatives with this film.

Around the same time that I was beginning to control the difficult Tech-Pan emulsion, I discovered the reemergence of Luminos Photo Company and began using its Charcoal R mural paper. After a couple of years refining these materials, I was able to produce 30x40-inch prints that could fool many an alternative-process photographer into thinking they were platinum/palladium prints. What was great about working with gelatin silver prints, however, was not being limited in scale and the fact that I was able to achieve a remarkable range of color through toning and bleaching and redeveloping.

The black-and-white images *Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia* and *Sears, Roebuck, and Co., Philadelphia* were printed on Luminos Charcoal R mural paper between 1994 and 1997. These architectural images are exam-

ples of a grand project I have been working on for more than five years. This project consists of large-scale prints (up to 50 inches) of architecturally significant abandoned buildings in Philadelphia.

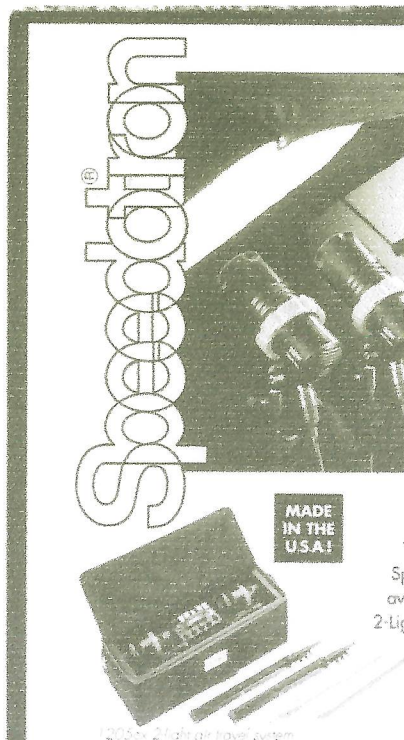
The subjects are primarily of historical or social significance, buildings whose value has been lost or forgotten. My approach in this work, in part, has an archaeological motivation, as well as an aesthetic desire to reveal certain structures' "character." I wanted to produce a photographically unique perspective of buildings you and I might have come in contact with or visited in the past. With these pictures, I am interested in resurrecting the ghosts of these buildings, uncovering the details of their past and current states with high resolution, and collecting the evidence of the past civilization that built and maintained these halls. This large print series is part of my Philadelphia portfolio, which consists of more than 150 images of abandoned historical properties.

*York Minster, Blackfriars, London,*

*Black Church Detail, Edinburgh, and Memento Mori, Edinburgh* are 40-inch to 50-inch prints on Luminos Charcoal R paper, however, my intention here more loosely involves detail and the suppression of context. With these images, I take a freer approach to the printing.

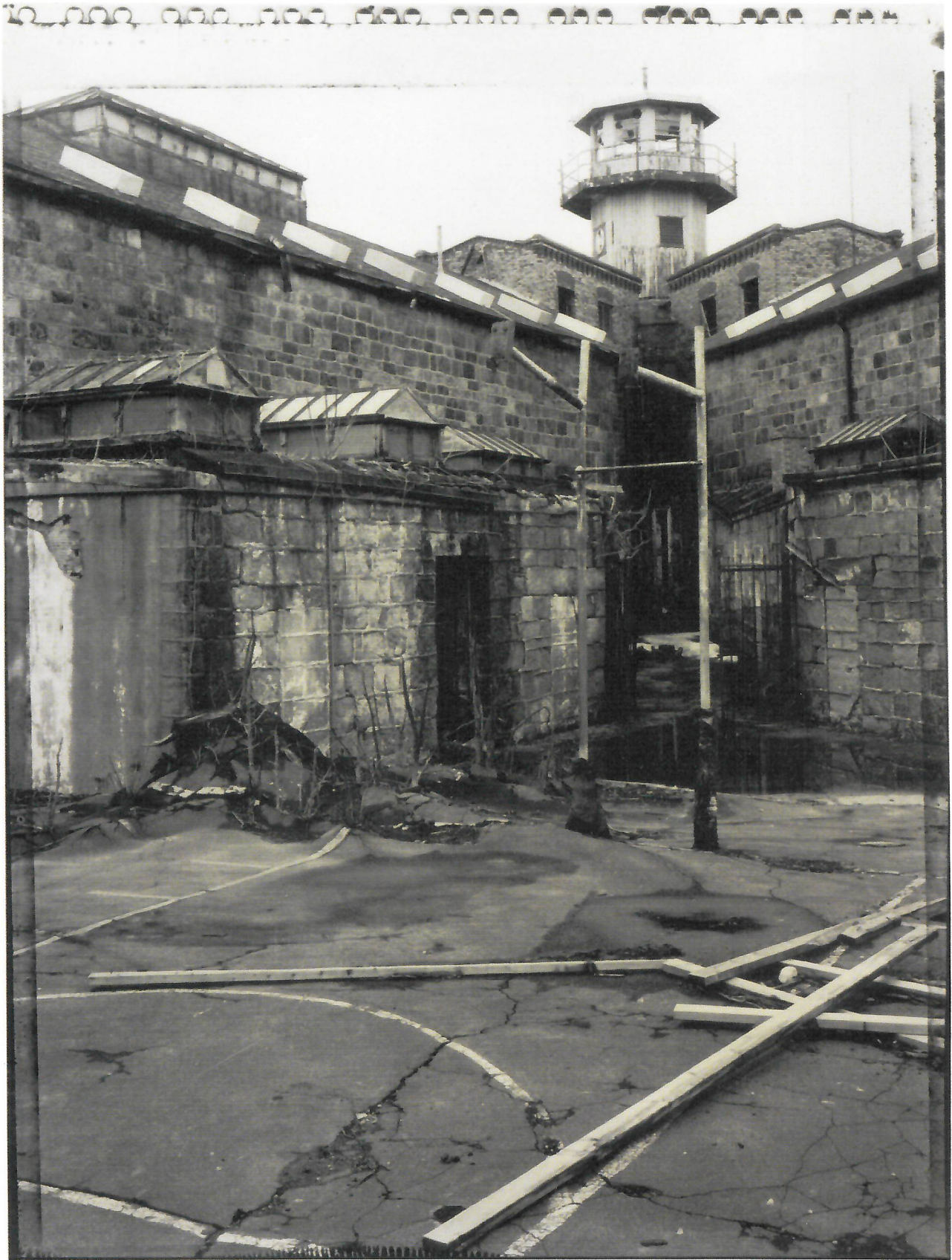
*Memento Mori, Edinburgh* and *Black Church Detail, Edinburgh* are examples of bleaching and redeveloping, and are not technically toned. The colors are achieved after giving normal processing to slightly overexposed prints. The image is then stripped with a high concentration of potassium ferricyanide and then carefully washed. The image is then "brought back" on a large wet table, by applying varying dilutions of developer selectively.

Developer additives such as benzotriazole can be used to increase the color range and slow the speed of the redeveloper. The prints are then archivally selenium-toned and washed and later buffed with an archival wax to dull the shine of the gelatin surface and to enrich the shadows. ▲



**Black Line Professional Lighting Systems**

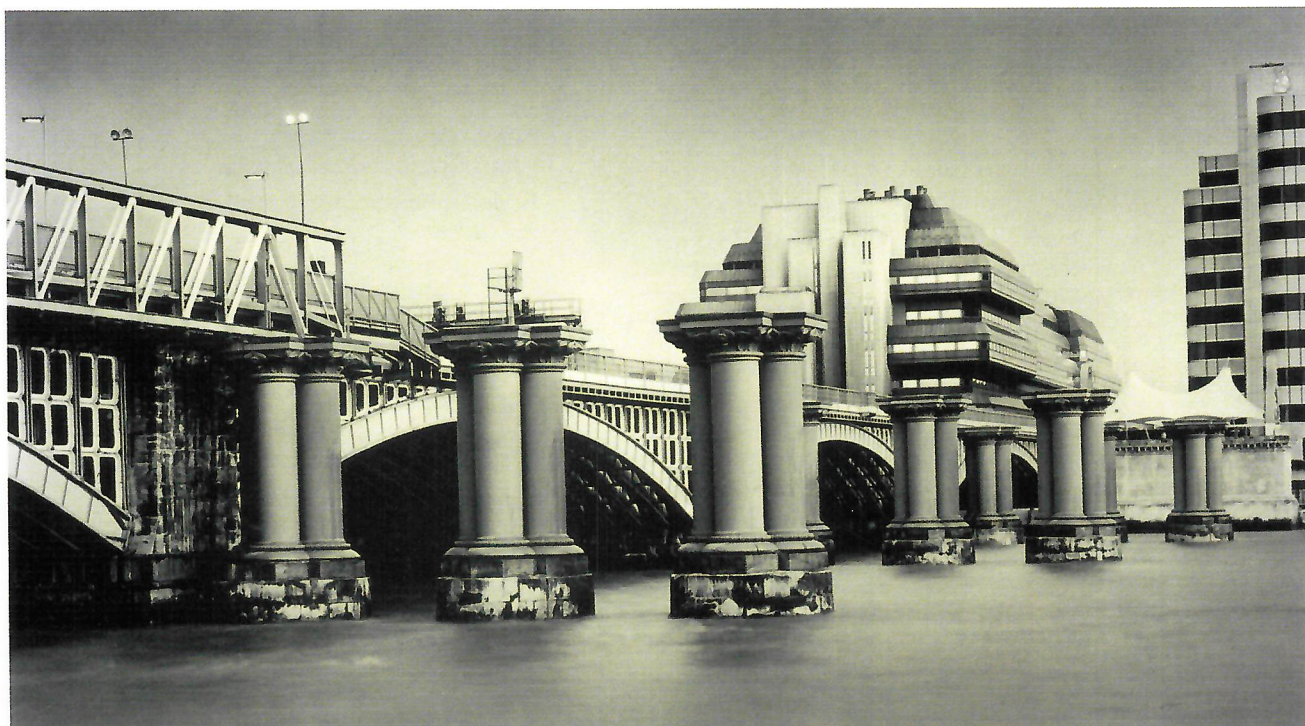
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Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia. 1994

# RELIQS OF THE CIVIC PAST

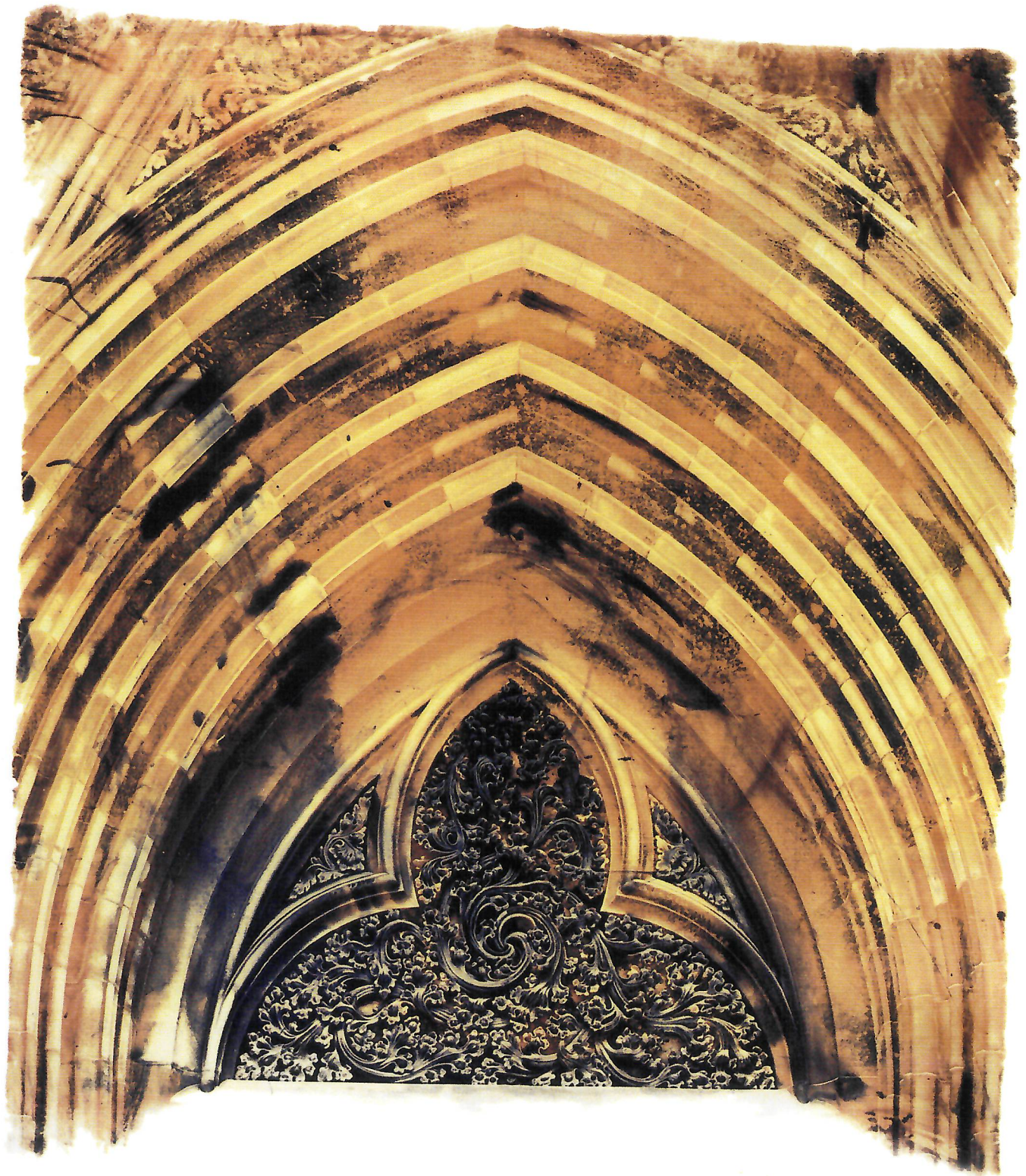
V I N C E N T F E L D M A N



**Blackfriars, London. 1995**

A MAJOR INCENTIVE IN MY TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT has been to break the barrier of enlargement in photography. I have always been greatly impressed with the beauty and detail of the contact print, particularly those made using the platinum/palladium process. However, the subject and issues I work with, socially significant architecture and architectural detail, have always seemed to me to deserve a grander presentation.

I began to work with "Tech-Pan" in the late '80s, using it with a direct-positive kit to make extremely rich transparencies. From some of these I was able to produce 20x24 contact negatives for platinum/palladium printing.



**Black Church Detail, Edinburgh. 1995**