

Wall Text for the exhibition:

*People, Buildings and Cars: New Chicago Photography*

Vermont Center for Photography, Brattleboro, VT

February 2-30, 2007

Written by Michael Weinstein

Art Critic, New City

Sometimes time and chance cooperate to bring together a group of young creative artists who come to share a new and common vision that they articulate in highly individualized works; in those favored moments, we can speak of a distinctive and significant style and approach. Such is the case for Mary Farmilant, Jonathan Gitelson, Jason Lazarus, Matt Siber, Greg Stimac and Brian Ulrich, all of whom studied photography together at Columbia College in Chicago, formed a mutually supportive creative community and asserted their independence from received forms.

At a time - the turn of the millennium - when postmodern play was going out of fashion and photographers were running for cover under every available traditional genre - the Columbia group struck off on its own, pioneering a fresh form of cultural criticism, defined by recurrence to the realist-based shot, employed to make unsentimental judgments - sometimes mordant, sometimes (self-)ironic, and sometimes whimsical - about the culture jungle in which we live.

Gitelson's series of shots of his car papered over with nightclub handbills occupy the sportive end of the spectrum - they are pure whimsy - and Farmilant's images of an abandoned hospital hold down the spectrum's grim side. In between, are Matt Siber's humorous yet ominous studies of roadside signs floating in thin air above the landscape, Greg Stimac's scenarios sending up the gun culture of the American west, Jason Lazarus's visual reflections on absurdity and absence, and Brian Ulrich's scathing yet poignant documents of shoppers and stores.

Look at the works of these photographers with an eye to grasping their diverse sensibilities within their shared yet humane and good-hearted skepticism about our lives in a world that threatens to cheapen and deflate our values if we do not take the critical distance that they have from it and, indeed, from ourselves.