William Eggleston

New York, November 15th, 2016
Interview William J. Simmons
William Eggleston

Untitled from The Democratic Forest, c. 1983-1986.
WS In Mr. Tambourine Man il tuo amico Bob Dylan ha detto qualcosa che mi ha fatto sorridere quando ti hai detto “Sebbene tu senta ridere, notare, dandole follemente attraverso il sole ciò non è indiziarlo a nessuno”. Le tue foto...  
WE Oh, no! Non esserlo!  
WS Beh, proprio per questa ragione, ero molto intimorito.  
WE Ho pensato a tutte queste ispirazioni, la musica, la tua famiglia soprattutto. Ma sono affascinato dalle immagini che ti ritraggo. Cosa ne pensi? Consideri la fotografia come parte di questo processo d’improvisazione?  
WS Non essendo un fotografo, mi chiedo se tu faccia ad avere questo rapporto così intenso e potente con il mondo attraverso una macchina fotografica senza qualche formazione in macchina fotografica?  
WE Credi che non sia pratica...  
WS No, non credo. Bisogna concentrarsi, osservare, continuare a guardare gli scatti, uno ad uno. È complesso poter comprendere queste fotografie, perché sono esseri umani, complessi e meravigliosi.  
WE Il miglior modo per dirlo è che, sia nella fotografia che nella musica, la composizione o funziona o non funziona.  
WS Nel saggio The Democratic Forest dell’archivista Alexander Neworne ho letto che componi musica ma non ti consideri un compositore. La consideri improvisazione e non composizione dato che non la scrivi.  
WE Molto di quello che faccio nella musica è improvvisazione.  
WS Sei d’accordo con il tuo amico Bob Dylan quando afferma che non sapevano di cosa parlerebbero e li leggi tre volte...  
WE Molto di quello che faccio nella musica è improvvisazione.  
WS Do you feel that you fully understand your own photographs?  
WE I think so. I should add, and I’ve said this before, I’ve never had any favorites. I like them all. But, of course, I study my work, you see. As I began to study them intensely, they began to mean more. Is looking as similar as intense study?  
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MUSE in conversation with William Eggleston

WS The Democrat-Forest is my essay for the Real World...  
WE That is absolutely true. I have not read practically anything.  
WS For me, as someone who is not a photographer, I wonder how you can have this lyrical and potent relationship...  
WE Well, I have never thought about it! I don’t know.  
WS It sounds like he is thinking of a photographer! Well, perhaps you want to talk about your relationship to the history of photography, but you are also very interested in music.  
WE Yes, quite.  
WS So how might you compare composition in music to the composition of a photograph?  
WE In photography and in music, they either work, or they don’t. That’s the best way to put it.  
WE I read in Alexander Nemerov’s essay for The Democratic-Forest: ‘Musica that you make music but you don’t call yourself a composer. You consider it to be improvisation and not composition, since you don’t write it down.  
WS One of the spots in the composition of a photograph?  
WE Well, I have never thought about it! I don’t know.  
WS I think so. I do record them, which is like writing them down, and I convert them into notation.  
WE Following up on this, I was watching Michael Almereyda’s documentary and I loved the shots of you just walking around. Do you thing things on the spot? Would you consider your photography to be a part of this process of improvisation?  
WE I really don’t see why not. It makes sense.  
WS I certainly does make sense, which reminds me, there is something fundamentally difficult for critics and historians to write about when it comes to music. It is the same case with your work.  
WE That is absolutely true. I have not read practically anything that made much sense about my own work. There are a few things, like John Szarkowski’s writings.  
WE Well, for that reason, I was really afraid to do this interview!  
WE We all have cameras, and I’m thinking, what a fine picture that could be.  
WE I’ve been thinking about all of these external influences — music and your family, for instance. But I am also intrigued by the photographs that you’ve done. Do you consider these self-portraits?  
WE No, not really. It’s a real deal. And, I’m fortunate to be able to say that in truth and really mean it.  
WE They are swell people to work with. We really work together...  
WE We are all people who are very interested in music. My father is the archivist. There are two million images, and he knows every single one. He’s really incredibly good at this. Yes, he’s absolutely true. I’ve said this before, I’ve never had any favorites. I like them all. But, of course, I study my work, you see. As I began to study them intensely, they began to mean more. Is looking as similar as intense study?
These photographs take a lot of work to really understand them, because they are complicated beings, just as complicated as the most serious musical compositions.

William Eggleston was born in 1939 in Memphis, Tennessee and raised in Sumner, Mississippi. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide, beginning with his 1976 show at the MoMA, New York. Since then, important solo exhibitions were held around the world from New York to London and Tokyo. Founded in 1992, the Eggleston Artistic Trust is dedicated to the representation and preservation of his work and is directed by his two sons. William works from monumental project The Democratic Forest are now on view at David Zwirner Gallery in New York until December 17th, 2016.
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