

ROBERT GIARD

(b. 1939 Hartford, USA; d. 2002, Chicago, USA)

Robert Giard was a portrait, landscape, and figure photographer who for two decades chronicled a broad survey of contemporary American gay and lesbian literary figures. Giard came relatively late to the practice of photography. He majored in English literature and received a B.A. from Yale, and M.A. in Comparative Literature from Boston University. For a time he taught intermediate grades at the New Lincoln School in New York City. By 1972, entirely self-taught, he began to photograph, concentrating on landscapes of the South Fork of Long Island, portraits of friends, many of them artists and writers in the region, and the nude figure.

In these early years, eschewing a romantic view of landscape, Robert Giard did much of his shooting during the late autumn, winter, and early spring when many of the fashionable houses of "The Hamptons" were boarded up for the season. With the region largely depopulated, the surrounding grounds assumed for him "a mysterious, even somewhat sinister air." Among many notable images are 24 photographs made at The Creeks, the estate of the artist Alfonso Ossorio.

Ultimately, it would be in the area of the portrait that Giard's career made its most indelible mark. In 1985, after seeing a performance of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* dealing with the crisis of AIDS in the gay community, Giard was moved by a sense of urgency. He decided that he would put his talents as a photographer to use to other gay men and lesbians "by recording something of note about our experience, our history, and our culture." Synthesizing his life-long interest in literature and his interest and involvement in gay issues of the 1970s and 1980s, Giard set about documenting in straightforward, unadorned, yet sometimes witty and playful portraits, a wide survey of significant literary figures, as well as brash new writers on the scene.

A selection of these portraits, culled from the five hundred examples he had already amassed, was published by MIT Press in 1997 as the anthology *Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers*, and served as the companion volume to the New York Public Library's 1998 exhibition of the same name. Broadly documenting the flowering of gay and lesbian academic writing, fiction, poetry, and playwrighting, his collection of portraits included such iconic figures such as Edward Albee, Allen Ginsberg and Adrienne Rich as well as emerging novelists making their first mark such as Sapphire, David Levitt, Shay Youngblood, and Michael Cunningham.

Robert Giard was the recipient of many grants and awards, and the published version of *Particular Voices* won a Lambda Literary Foundation Award for Best Photography/Art Book in 1997. Examples of his work are in collections of the National Portrait Gallery, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the San Francisco Public Library, and the Brooklyn Museum.

At the time of his death in July, 2002, Giard was completing work on a portrait documentation of over three hundred grant recipients around the country of The Thanks Be to Grandmother Winifred Foundation, which until 2001 supported a broad array of projects by women fifty-four years and older that benefited other women. In 2005 Cronos' Cradle Conserve Press published *The Grandmother Winifred Journals: 1996-2002* which included over 250 images of the Foundation grantees accompanied by Giard's diary entries documenting each session.

In 2004 the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University acquired the Giard Archive, including one copy of every image he produced during his lifetime, as well as, all of his papers -- correspondence, workbooks, diaries, and research materials. During the fall of 2006 "The Photography of Robert Giard: Portraits, Landscapes, Still Lifes, and Figurative Work" was on view at Jonathan Edwards College, Yale University and during the spring of 2007 the San Francisco Public Library mounted a show entitled, "Creating History: Portraits from the Robert Giard Photographic Portfolios."

For more information see www.robertgiardfoundation.org