

# Reviews

Victor Wong, critic at Large and Actor April 19, 1974.

Erik Weber is a photographer. He saved money for years and finally in 1967 he took off, first to Japan and then to the Philippine Islands, but mostly he was in India and Nepal.

At first Erik had two Nikon camera bodies with five lenses and a hand held light meter. In the beginning he felt very awkward about photographing people, but his interest in people led him to attend religious services in temples and when individuals around him saw that he respected their gods they opened their hearts to him. And, when he no longer felt a stranger, he began to photograph.

Then he took more and more time to look, to visit with people. Suitcases of belongings he gave away. He stripped down to the simplest necessities in order to walk as much as possible.

Erik sold all his camera equipment, except a Nikon with a slightly wide angle lens. And, in India, Weber could only get 35mm film respooled from outdated movie reels. About 9 months into the journey Erik broke his light meter and had to adjust the camera by guessing.

Now, what was really happening to Weber was that he was beginning to photograph intuitively and for the first time in his life he was away from Western influence, away from having to compete as an ace American cameraman. He photographed the way he felt sometimes deliberately at slow speed to capture the spirit of a moment in a blurred movement.

The San Francisco Museum of Art is currently showing 51 of his prints. They are amazing pictures! Simple - some brilliantly composed - always they capture the intimate moment.

Working on a shoestring budget, he didn't have darkroom facilities, and many rolls of film, outdated to begin with, were developed 2 ½ years later. And then, when he opened the cassette the film was molded from sweaty, tropical weather. It is a tribute to his tenacity and ingenuity that he was able to make so many top grade prints.

If you are a photographer or just someone who loves to look at great pictures, don't miss this Erik Weber show at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

## The Changing Mood, the Passing Scene

# 'Portrait of a Traveling Mind'

By Thomas Albright

Erik Weber is a local photographer who spent two-and-a-half years traveling through Asia, but the pictures that he brought back with him, and are now at the San Francisco Museum of Art, are very special creations.

They do not reflect the

outsider's grandiose attempt to penetrate the impenetrable, nor are they the standard tourist's travel souvenirs. Weber titles his show "Portrait of a Traveling Mind," and his photographs concentrate essentially on the changing mood and states of his own psyche as they affect, and are affected by, the passing scene

around him.

One of the principal tools of "The Traveling Mind" is the restless eye — and hand.

Thus, his views of monks, beggars, nocturnal city streets and railroad tracks are frequently diffused in blurs and light bursts which evoke the sense of fleeting glimpses of things seen on the move; the image dissolves into the mood or atmosphere that it projects, and it is this that is preserved in Weber's photographs, as in the memory.

Weber can also be crisp, however — most often in views of figures in the countryside, immersed in a limpid, atmospheric light and projecting an intense calm.

A special portion of his exhibition is reserved for a group of "Portraits of the Heart," which project a warmth and intimate human presence that show Weber can penetrate quite deeply into other persons, or at least into the relationship that photographer and subject share, when he knows his subject well.

These are deceptively modest-looking, almost casual photographs, easy to pass too quickly. They expand and take on resonance and depth, however, when you give them the looking they deserve.

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE  
APRIL 1974

A very short statement appears on the wall at the beginning of Erik Weber's exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art. "These photographs show what went on inside me while I was travelling in parts of Asia with Loie [Weber's wife] for two and one half year. They are a symbolic map of my mind and do not necessarily reflect on the subject matter."

The simplicity of the statement belies the complex emotional content of Weber's photographs. The entire exhibition presents the world as if the viewer is looking out the window of Weber's mind and eyes. He shares an experience of feeling and mood with the viewer that I have seldom seen done so well. He does not use his camera to record specific people or lands through which he travelled. Instead, Weber's photographs are statements about the condition of his own psyche as the passing imagery and atmosphere of a strange land and people crossed his vision. His photographs are in general totally atypical of travel scenes. The viewer is drawn into the exhibit by the first image, a blurred self-portrait — the traveller on his way. Weber continues to use the technique of blurred imagery to reflect the scenes around him, often conveying a feeling of walking or driving past only glimpsing the scene. In other photographs one part is in focus, other parts blurred, as if the image in focus was the object that his mind and eye took in most fully, the setting part of a continuum.

Views of people and countries and cities at night are diffused in blurs and light. The first of a series of three prints of a railroad station reflects the train's slow movement out of the depot, the objects in the scene not quite distinguishable. In the second and third photographs the train increases speed, and only light remains as the subject, first in clear sharp orbits, then in streaks through the darkness:

In a similar series of a bicycle rickshaw, the photographs are taken from the rickshaw behind the bicyclist. As the momentum of bicycle and rickshaw increases, the body of the bicycle rider becomes increasingly blurred, but the tension in his body as he strains for speed is captured in the imagery.

The atmosphere of Weber's images reveals a man on the move, his memory storing sensations more than specific photographic images. Yet Weber also stood still and recorded people and places in a calm, unhurried manner, often using a series of images reminiscent of frames from a motion picture. One memorable sequence is of an Asian woman. She laughs with uncontrollable initial embarrassment at being Weber's subject, then tries valiently to control her emotions and finally presents the composed, serious image she presumes Weber wants. A section of Weber's exhibition is a grouping titled Portraits of the Heart. They are portraits, some crisp and sharp, some diffused, of people with whom Weber shared the trip — his wife, a friend and people he met who included beggars to more affluent members of the Asian culture. One especially fine study is titled Yagi-ji, and was taken in India. Like the other portraits, it is penetrating and warm but is especially noteworthy in composition.

The lack of detailed titles on Weber's photographs also implies intimacy. He tells you the country in which he actually travelled, but he makes no statement beyond what he might enter in a personal scrapbook. As I looked intently at the photographs, I found myself imagining Weber's voice telling me what was happening, how he felt as he experienced the situation pictured.

In one photograph, for example, a rickshaw driver appears to be waiting outside a doorway, and I sense, more than know, that it is raining. The rickshaws sit waiting in the background but are not likely to be used that day. Or are they used when it rains in India? I was carrying on a dialogue with Weber, and he wasn't there.

In another photograph a white-clad figure walks in a maze of train tracks in Ceylon and appears to glance up as the train passes. He seems to indicate no emotion or response to the passing train. Does he always walk down these tracks to his particular destination. Probably Weber too does not know the answer, since the white-clad figure continues to function for him as one of the symbols of his trip.

Weber's technique of capturing mood makes this one of the most original exhibitions I have recently seen. His ability to express his feelings about travelling in a strange land, projecting a sense of seeing from behind his eyes as well as his camera, make this an unusual show, deceptive in its simplicity, exciting and fresh in its impact.

26 Sept., 1974

Erik Weber  
c/o Michael Raab  
104 5th Ave.  
New York, N.Y. 10011

Dear Erik Weber,

Jonathan Green and I looked over your prints together and found the experience of looking at them enjoyable. We toyed with a little philosophic discussion regarding the possibility of the photographs being a mind journey. It is all relative. If each of your images was completely literal, to you at least they could be a mind journey. The same literal photographs could also be a mind journey to me. For myself the blurs don't make them any more a mind journey; they still carry something of the literal mood of the place. The text that goes with your photographs clarifies your intentions and puts the viewer on the right track, so the text is necessary. Your stressing this fact keeps disturbing me. I guess the reason is this; all my experiences of any kind of photograph are mind journeys. I think there is another reason also, and that is I think I smell certain excuses being made for pictures that don't really need excuses.

Well that's enough of my muttering to myself -- because that's obviously who I'm really talking to.

We don't like to retain photographs that we want to hold for possible use in Aperture because the holding time can run upwards of two years. So we request a favor of you : namely to provide us slides of the following numbers, 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, & 34.

We have no issue in the immediate future into which this work would fit but we would like to have the slides for a long time. No doubt something will come along which will live well with your pictures and then they can be published. I must warn you that this is a very chancy situation and that month sometimes we return things after several after having no chance to put them to work. I would appreciate it if you care to send slides to send them to my address, 203 Park Ave., Arlington, Mass. 02174. Thank you again for letting me see these photographs.

Sincerely yours,



Minor White

P.S. Jonathan's exhibition schedule at M.I.T. is filled. I don't know who else in the Boston area might be interested in an exhibition

