

#70 March 2022 Cameraderie
Aaron Siskind (1903-91)



Aaron Siskind was one of the five master photographers whose archives initiated the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) at the University of Arizona in 1975. I have already discussed Ansel Adams (#12, March 2014) and Wynn Bullock (#66, Nov. 2021), and with this and the next two articles, I will discuss the remaining three: Aaron Siskind, Harry Callahan, and Frederick Sommer. This article is about both Siskind and the CCP.

The Wikipedia article on Siskind is here:

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Siskind

Google “Aaron Siskind” and select “Images” to see many of Siskind’s images.

The website of the CCP is here: <https://ccp.arizona.edu/>

From the Wikipedia article:

Siskind used subject material from the real world: close-up details of painted walls and graffiti, tar repair on asphalt pavement, rocks, lava flows, dappled shadows on an old horse, Olmec stone heads, ancient statuary and the Arch of Constantine in Rome, and a series of nudes (“Louise”).

From the “About CCP” page on the CCP Website:

The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, is recognized as one of the world's finest academic art museums and study centers for the history of photography. The Center opened in 1975, following a meeting between the University President John Schaefer and Ansel Adams. Beginning with the archives of five living master photographers—Ansel Adams, Wynn Bullock, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, and Frederick Sommer—the collection has grown to include 270 archival collections. Among these are some of the most recognizable names in 20th century North American photography: W. Eugene Smith, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Edward Weston, and Garry Winogrand. Altogether there are over eight million archival objects in the Center's collection including negatives, work prints, contact sheets, albums, scrapbooks, correspondence, writings, audiovisual materials and memorabilia. In addition to whole archival collections the Center also actively acquires individual photographs by modern and contemporary photographers. There are currently more than 110,000 works by over 2,200 photographers. A library of books, journals, and exhibition and auction catalogs including

many rare publications plus an extensive oral history collection complements the archival and fine print collections. The combined art, archival, and research collections at the Center provide an unparalleled resource for research, exhibitions, loans, and traveling exhibitions.

Excerpt from the John P. Schaefer (President Emeritus of the University of Arizona) article in the book, Original Sources: Art and Archives at the Center For Creative Photography:

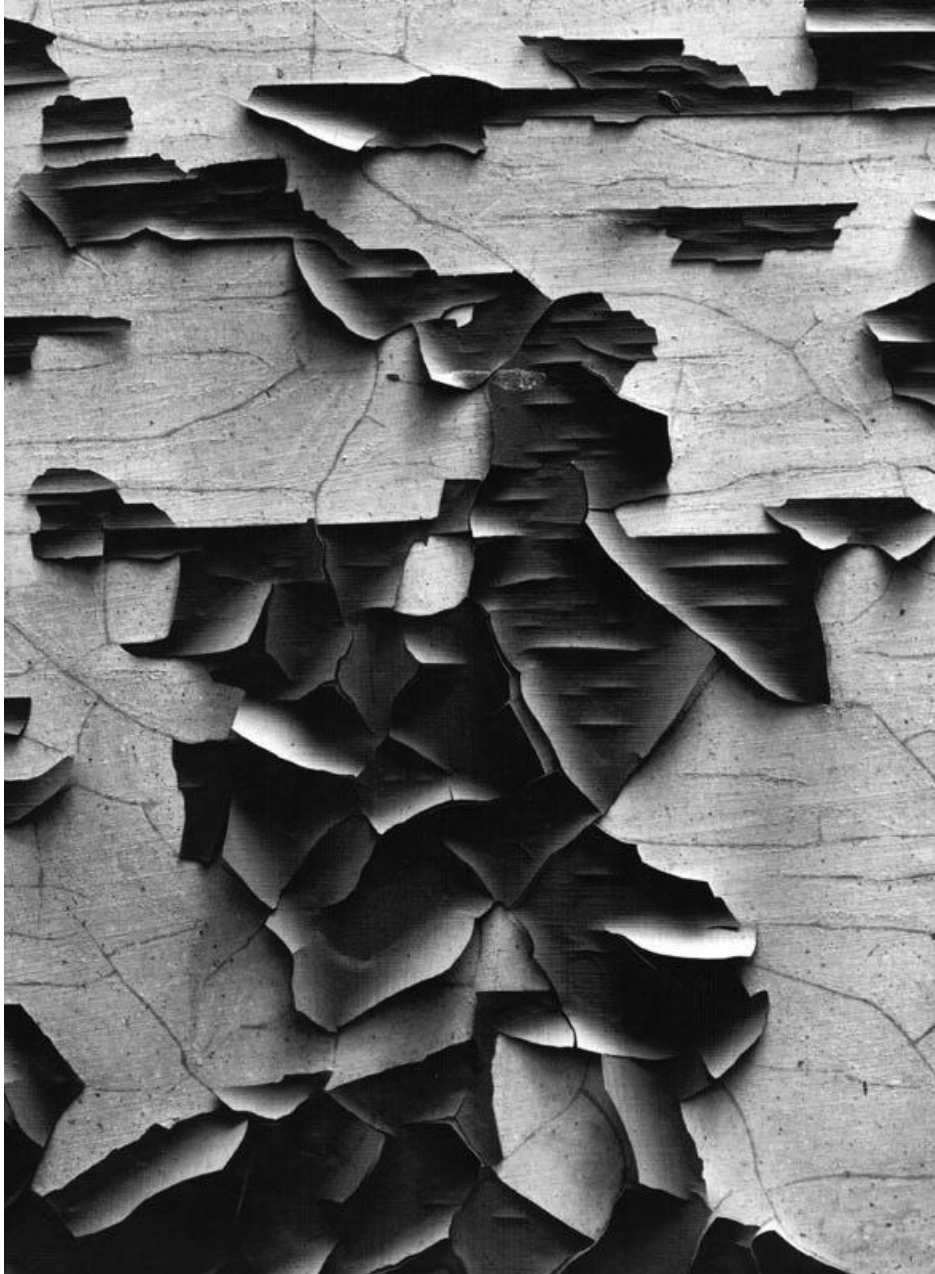
"The Center for Creative Photography is the product of the vision of one of the medium's greatest masters, Ansel Adams, ... and my conviction as university president that photography is a key element of the art and literature of our times. During the opening of a one-man exhibition of Ansel's photographs at the University of Arizona's Museum of Art, I ventured to ask him if he would be interested in placing the archives of his work at the University. Ansel, though somewhat surprised by the direct nature of my suggestion, responded by saying that he was not interested in having his work stand as an isolated collection. If, however, the University were willing to think in broader terms and include the works of many other photographers, he would be interested in exploring the possibilities. What followed was an invitation to visit him at his home in Carmel.

Conversations with Ansel in December 1974 were a revelation as he shared his own history in photography, in conservation, in writing and teaching with me. I, in turn, put forth ideas about what I believed the University was and could become, and why photography deserved the serious attention of students and scholars alike. We spoke of archives, teaching programs, seminars, visiting scholars, and collecting and preservation, publication, the creation of exhibitions; over the course of days the concept of the Center for Creative Photography was born... Harry Callahan, Wynn Bullock, Frederick Sommer, and Aaron Siskind joined with Ansel to found the first archives of the Center. W. Eugene Smith soon joined the University's faculty. Paul Strand contributed much of his work, and the archive of Edward Weston was later added to the growing collections.

Within a year the Center became an international presence in the field of photography. It remains an active 'work in progress,' awaiting the next photograph, a key letter, significant memorabilia, a run of magazines, a rare book—all of which are vital to a living and growing archive."

Here are some of Siskind's notable photographs:

Jerome, Arizona, 1949.



This image is prominent among Siskind's explorations of peeling paint and other surface effects. As far as I know, he was the first to explore this now-popular genre.

Pleasures and Terror of Levitation series, 1953.



This highly original group of images are often show individually, most often the ones on the top middle and the very center. Siskind made many explorations of this general concept. They can be found by Goggling “Aaron Siskind” and selecting “Images.”

Gloucester 1H (Glove), 1944.



So many layers to this image! The glove appears raised in appeal. To whom? What is it asking for? Does the fact that it is empty imply that its appeal is insincere, or if sincere, can never be satisfied? On the other hand (intentional usage), it's just a glove, so why are we (human viewers) reading all this stuff into this? Just what are we, to have all these thoughts about a glove; why has a creative artist endeavored to shoot this and start us on this rambling internal discussion with ourselves? Why? Why? Why? Etc.

Louise 30.

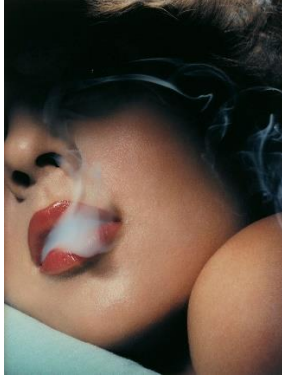


This is from Siskind's "Louise" series of nudes. I believe the complicated and ambiguous view and lighting are the point.

Footnote Article—A few extra words about Exhaling Smoke
#67 December 2021 *Cameraderie*
Hiro (1930-2021)

In my obituary article on Hiro, I included this photograph, and some discussion about Hiro directing his model to breath out the smoke very gently so it would linger on her lips:

Maria Beadeux, New York, negative 1974; print 2011.



The Washington Post Magazine of Jan. 16, 2022 featured the following photograph by Marvin Joseph on its “Wide Angle” photo page.



Trying to pinpoint his creative process, I wrote to Mr. Joseph to ask him if his image was original or if he was working in a tradition set by other photographers. I received no answer from him, so I cannot tell you if Mr. Joseph innovated his image independently, or if he took up a well-known concept and presented his own interpretation.