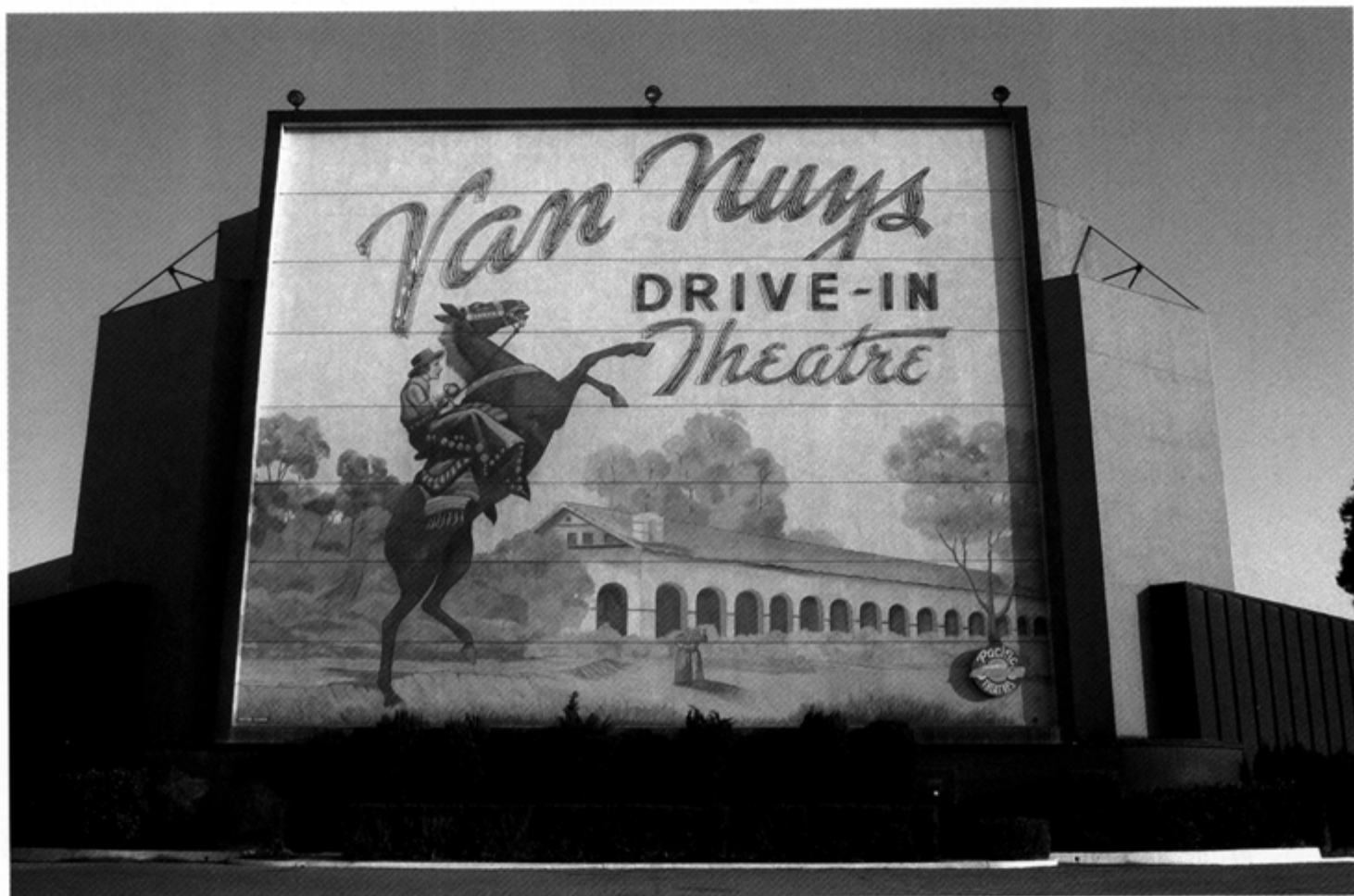


Thom Thompson



*Van Nuys Drive-in,
Van Nuys, California, 1982,
Photograph: Silver halide with Azo dyes*

Retro

A SELECTION OF WORKS FROM 1969 TO 2000

SEPTEMBER 12 - OCTOBER 21, 2000

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY STALLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

UNIVERSITY AT STONY BROOK



left: *The Day*, 1969,
16mm B&W film still

below: *The Artist*, 1976,
16mm B&W film still

Testimonials

Years and experiences have moved by so fast that neither of us finds it easy to recollect what we now refer to as “the early days.” Maybe this blur of time is the way musician/composer Herbie Hancock looks back at his days with the Miles Davis Quintet. But here is my attempt for this catalogue:



Good teachers and good mentors are essential: They inspire perpetual learning and teach us how to communicate ideas. Thom Thompson is both. In the fall of 1974, I was a recent high school graduate living on my own and working full-time stocking shelves at a grocery store in Amherst, Massachusetts. At the time, scholarships, student loans, or financial aid were not options for me: I had to work.

What I really wanted to do was to study filmmaking and screen writing, so I signed up for two evening courses at the University of Massachusetts—one in journalism and one in film production. Thom taught the film production course, and his opening statement to the class got my attention right away. He talked about the popular film genres of the time and how they could be studied independently, without his help. Instead, what he wanted to do was to introduce us to experimental, avant garde, and underground filmmaking. During the course of that semester, Thom’s guidance in the study of these lesser-known films opened up a whole different world of storytelling that made it possible for me to imagine that I, too, could approach, understand, and find interesting these alternative art forms. I was intrigued and felt welcomed to learn.

By ignoring pre-programmed models of traditional teaching, Thom provided an environment that encouraged individuals to enter at their own level of interest and to evolve intellectually at their own rate of speed. He shared with us his own evolution as an artist by showing the class his films, starting with his first, *The Day*, and then proceeding to *Space Cowboy*, *Process*, *The Artist*, and *Ladies and Gentlemen Sticc*. Each explored the genres of experimental, performance art, documentary, and collaboration.

Most important to me as a student was that here was my teacher giving us proof that he actually *knew* how to make films—he didn't just talk about films made by others. So here you are about to make your first film, and you're learning from someone who actually does it.

Over the next few years, Thom gave me the opportunity to work with him on two performance art films, and I've been working as a film/video editor ever since. We've become lifelong friends and continue to collaborate on projects. But you know what? Good teachers and good mentors are essential, and after all these years, Thom Thompson is still both.

Dan Cassano is an Emmy-Award winning freelance video/film editor. He works and resides in New York City.

***A Commentary on "Toby"
(The Object Speaks)***

*right: Toby, 1991,
Photograph: Silver
halide with Azo
dyes*



Every once in a while at home, I'll catch myself glancing up at the photograph on my wall titled "Toby," one of Thom Thompson's series of "anti-portraits." Even though I've lived with it for almost a decade, I still wonder who that *really* is in the picture.

On Tuesday, April 18, 1991, I agreed to a photo session with Thom, my colleague of many years at Stony Brook and fellow artist. With my blessing, Thom created the portrait. A make-up artist Thom had arranged for the shoot "recoiffed" my hair and "pumped up" my make-up in a way that was, to me, joltingly unfamiliar. The photograph was made, and Toby Buonagurio the subject crossed the threshold and became "Toby" the object.

I still find the process of transformation completely surprising, even though in my own ceramic self-portraits, I routinely subject myself to all manner of physical alteration for maximal effect. I know it is me in the photograph, but, at the same time, I don't recognize this person as me. There is a discrepancy between subject and object. Unlike Cindy Sherman's theatrical self-transformations, Thom's unique brand of visual metamorphosis employed in his "anti-portrait" seems less contrived and more covert to positive effect. Photographed in stark profile, against a blackened background, with dramatically controlled lighting, Thom has (re)created "Toby" as a frightening persona frozen in an intense, perpetual, other-worldly trance. I find this most disturbing and intriguing.

Toby Buonagurio is an artist and Professor of Sculpture and Drawing at Stony Brook. She resides in the Bronx, N.Y.C.



above: **The Amy Moran**, 1983,
Iris Giclée print,
Pinnacle Gold inks on Arches CP



right: **Eric**, 1996,
B&W silver print



above: **Adirondack Lodge**, 1991,
Photograph: Silver halide with Azo dyes



left: **Oil and Steel Gallery**,
Chambers St., N.Y.C., 1985,
Photograph: Silver halide with Azo dyes

right: ***Dawn on the Freshkill,***
N.Y.C. Harbor,
1982 Photograph:
Silver halide with
Azo dyes



below: ***Watch Hill, R.I.,***
2000, Photograph:
Silver halide
with Azo dyes



Thom is a cool Guy. Not cool like Fonzy, not the cliché cool. More like Lake Tahoe cool... cobalt calm on the surface, crystal clear and deep below... and cool, very cool. It's a unique character in this frenzied society. While all around him churns and vibrates, Thom is calm, still, watching, listening, absorbing, contemplating, sorting out what's real and important, shining on kernels of truth amongst the mounds of illusion and pretention. If we're lucky, he'll capture us the image, take a photograph, make a film, sharing this primary insight with us.

On the surface, the presentation may seem simplistic in its directness. But it takes real commitment to identify and revere the mundane symbols of free human spirit. The vast panorama of modern American experience is his landscape. His intuitive focus and determination is the catalyst. In his hands-off treatment, denying the interference of artistic ego, the subjects become monuments, tributes to the soul of our society. The quiet elegance of the work as a whole reminds us that there are times when an

artist's greatest contribution might just be to stay out of the way, to hang back and let art happen, and to be aware when it does. The inspiration of the experience will take care of the rest.

*James Beatman is an artist
who builds boats and makes sculpture.
He resides in St. James, New York.*



left: *Lone Star Drive-in*
Dallas, Texas 1984,
Photograph: Silver halide with Azo dyes

I was attracted to and acquired the *Carousel* photograph several years ago, as it brought back memories of my childhood and my childish, contradictory feelings of infinite and finite time and vulnerability. I was equally drawn to the drive-in photographs as Thom Thompson's "seeing-eye" camera vision unflinchingly portrayed the drive-ins crystalized in the aura of the 1950s and 60s. The stark architecture of the drive-in "portraits" contrast the angular, man-made structures with the softness and arabesque of nature. For the viewer too young to have the visceral experience of the drive-in, each carefully rendered "portrait" teases all of us by giving us a hint of the visual, tactile experience. The image new to the youthful viewer, therefore, alters the future as it has altered the visual vocabulary of the current generation. We do not see the screen or the movie but the daylight spectacle of the drive-in as if passing it or stopping on the highway. Drive-ins of the past are like the shopping malls of the present - a place of social gathering for a unified experience.

While Thompson photographs the drive-in at a distance, he photographs commercial ships close-up creating luminous, abstract compositions. Being this close creates a solitary experience. His landscapes, on the other hand, viewed from the distance panoramically, also create a sense of the solitude of the individual traveler. Like the drive-ins, the carnival photographs reflect an era present and past, current in small towns and cities. There is a sense that the viewer is the remote witness to a "landscape" devoid of humans, each mechanism portrayed at rest. This creates an air of sadness or nostalgia for that which has been temporarily abandoned as it awaits a new interaction or becomes a thing of the past.

Howardena Pindell is an artist and Professor of Painting and Drawing at Stony Brook. She resides in New York City.

right: *The Day After Thanksgiving,*
1999, Photograph:
Silver halide with
Azo dyes





*Ninja Turtles in Central Park, N.Y.C., 1994,
Photograph: Silver halide with Azo dyes*

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Most of all, I wish to thank Thom Thompson for continuing to share his work with the Stony Brook community.

*Rhonda Cooper
Gallery Director*

Although photographs in this catalogue appear as black and white, all originals are in color except: *The Day*, *The Artist*, and *Eric*.