

# KAREN DAVISON

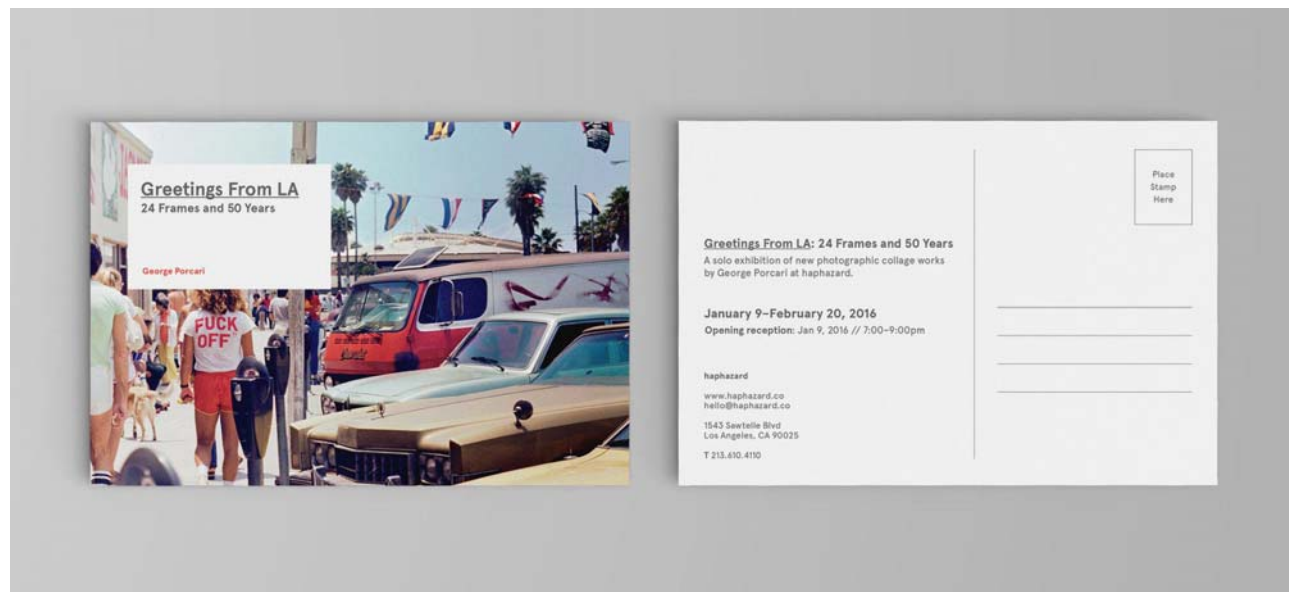
DESIGN

ILLUSTRATION

ABOUT

## Greetings From LA: 24 Frames and 50 Years

Design of the exhibition catalog and announcements for Photographer George Porcari, commemorating his solo show at haphazard gallery.





Introduction

Jorge Pardo

*The following quotations are from Walter Benjamin*

*The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. "The World Is Beautiful"—this, precisely, is its motto. In it is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endorse any soap can with comic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists..."*

*What, in the end makes advertisements superior to criticism? Not what the moving red mean says—but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt?"*

*The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."*

*In times of terror, when everyone will be something of a conspirator, everyone will be in a situation where he has to play detective."*

*The illiterate of the future will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph."*



Greetings From LA, 24 Frames and 50 Years

**"Do not wait for the last judgment—it takes place every day."**

—Albert Camus

conventions of how antiquity was supposed to look. Heaven seems to favor the Roman imperial style of architecture.

The painting is based on Raphael's *Parossius*, yet another heaven full of heavies. Raphael himself stands on the far left, hand to his heart, signifying in the language of academic painting that he is emotionally moved.

Everyone, including King Charles X who commissioned the painting, is in deep thought, posing for the official picture that was to decorate one of the ceilings of the Louvre.

The Bourbon King would be deposed in 1830, three years after the painting's completion, not because of Ingres' work but through ineptitude and the mishandling of finances due to colonial misadventures, the most expensive and deadly being the conquest of Algeria as a French colony. In the summer of 1855, Degas was staying in Dieppe with his childhood friend, Ludovic Halévy, and his family.

The artist had depicted Ludovic a number of times over the years. In the artist's black and white photograph children place some branches from nearby trees near his head of white hair. The photograph was taken by Walter Bernes, a protégé of Degas. Three women the

fact that there are three would make them muses in the language of Neo-Classicism that Degas is satirizing: hold branches, standing over the seated Degas, while two boys half-kneel by his feet. In 1855 the artist was sixty, but he looks much older and worn out, sad, impotent, and lost in thought. He is posing with his hat upside-down between his legs as if it were a basin.

Degas, very helpfully, performed a critique of his own photograph. "My three muses and my choir boys should have been grouped against a white or pale background, the costumes of the women in particular are lost. And the figures should also have been closer together."

Degas' criticism is formally sound but, being a modest man, he does not point out any of the great subtleties in the picture. The upside-down hat between the artist's legs creates an ellipse that mirrors the crown of laurels above Homer's head. The ubiquitous hat, half a century later would become an ironic moniker of faux respectability for survivors like Magritte. Degas seemed to have intuited the whimsy in the bowler hat as a prop early on.

This image is the first visible break made by an artist using photography that visibly attacks the

Photographic Adventures with Edgar Degas

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**"Degas is the perfect foil for his own satire."**

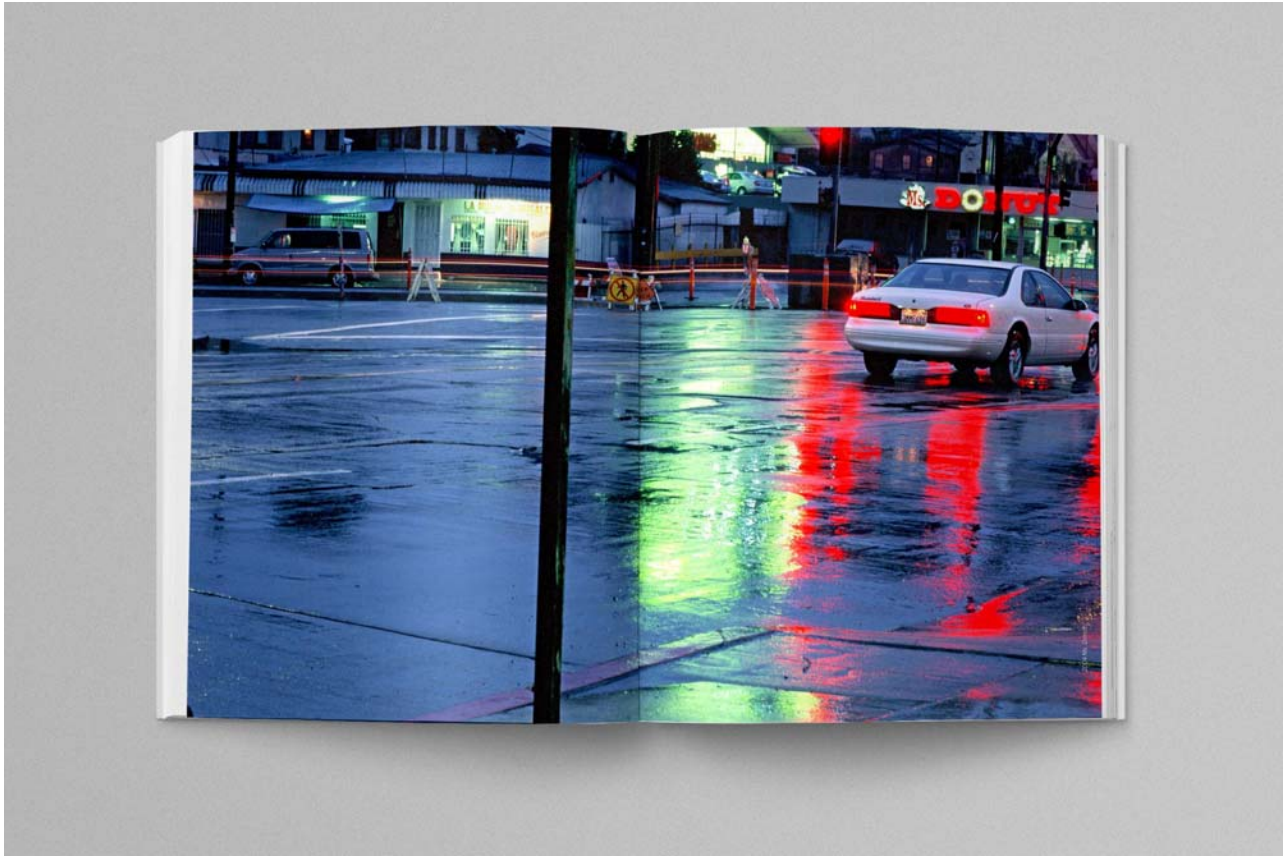
after is the love that you live out in the company of friends and family on a daily basis—a routine of love—something that cannot be extrapolated from a concept or theory, it must be physically experienced and imposed over time as a transitory experience. Photography gets the transitory. The snapshot aesthetics that Degas was experimenting with were then new and untested, but unfortunately had health and deteriorating eyesight limited Degas' future as a photographer. It is difficult to imagine what he might have achieved in this medium, but this picture gives us a hint.

Let's do a thought experiment and briefly imagine what Ingres might do if hired to illustrate love for an aristocrat's chateau—or should that be "love"? One can see the winged cupid, the suggestive Venus gloriously naked to a pose borrowed from antiquity—or perhaps Botticelli's *Primavera*—the various arcane references to classical tales of love scattered across the canvas, the perfectly sculpted bodies going through the same tedious poses that would show off their torsos (and Ingres' rendering skills), the landscape in the background borrowed from one of Titian's erotic paintings, and the narrative lines deployed like a battle plan. Do we need to ask whose "love"

this would represent? In Ingres the clear idea always supersedes the messy reality. The word apotheosis means to burn into a God and Ingres along with Charles X no doubt had ambitions in that direction. Their ticket was a big painting that linked them to Homer via Raphael.

Degas' laurel/basin/hat held between his legs is the earthbound sign of a more mundane heaven: having fun with your friends one summer afternoon and making art. The Apotheosis of Degas consciously attacks not simply one artist's silly, pompous painting but a whole tradition of art that had become an empty, bloated formula empty of reality but blighted with symbolic meaning and a vehicle for fantasy that insidiously concealed in its highly articulate, highly rendered realism, much more than it showed.







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