



Contact: Katrina Carl
805.884.6430
kcarl@sbma.net



Joe Schwartz, *Two's a Team I*, 1940s. Gelatin silver print.
Collection of Joe Schwartz.

A Black and White View

SBMA Exhibition of Santa Barbara County Resident's Photography Reveals Urban Souls

November 21, 2006 – Opening *January 13, 2007* at SBMA, the exhibition *An Unobserved Life: Folk Photography by Joe Schwartz* is comprised of thirty black-and-white photographs candidly revealing the urban soul of such cities as New York and Los Angeles ranging from the 1930s through the 1970s. Joe Schwartz, a self-described “folk photographer,” depicts the everyday lives of the ordinary and economically dispossessed people wherever he has encountered them—at bus stops, beaches, sidewalks, and playgrounds. With many of the images focusing on racially integrated groups and neighborhoods, this exhibition, on view through April 1st, also acts as a timely tribute to Black History Month in February.

A current resident of Atascadero, California, Schwartz was born in Brooklyn in 1913 and grew up in the Kingsboro housing project. He was schooled in photography on the streets of Depression-era New York and shot his work from the perspective of the economically dispossessed “folks” who would figure prominently in his life’s work. Schwartz’s sensitivity to intolerance was heightened when his family relocated to Los Angeles. As a Jew and a New Yorker, Schwartz was ostracized by many of his Southern California schoolmates. This further moved him to identify with other “outsiders” and minorities and to explore how racially distinct communities come together to make up a city’s urban landscape.

As a young man, in the mid-1930s, Schwartz discovered the power of photography to increase public awareness of economic inequities. Through his participation in the newly formed Photo League—a group of influential photographers that included Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Weegee and Alfred Eisenstadt—Schwartz sought to establish an innovative style of socially-minded documentary photography. This compassionate approach to his subjects has been the hallmark of Schwartz's career as an artist.

Although societal norms during this time may have dictated otherwise, a majority of Schwartz' work depicts the camaraderie between children and adults, working and playing harmoniously together. At a time when racial segregation, from schools, to restaurants, to public restrooms, was enforced, Schwartz was witness to scenes where skin color is upstaged by a true accepting exchange.

An especially poignant example is represented in the image *Two's A Team*, 1940s (above), seeming to capture the moments immediately after the conversation between two boys, "Do you like baseball?" "Yeah!" "Me too!" A few, simple words may have been all that was needed for these boys to become fast friends.



Similarly, the image *Like Iwo Flag Raising* 1940s depicts several men, both black and white, raising a tree in the Kingsboro Housing Projects in Brooklyn, New York. While the image dramatically echoes the famous *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* photograph taken by Joe Rosenthal in 1945, it also illustrates a harmonious relationship among diversity at work.

Image: Joe Schwartz, *Like Iwo Flag Raising* 1940s. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Joe Schwartz.

Popular success came late for Schwartz. In fact, he never made a living as a photographer but rather as a lithographer in New York and Los Angeles. Though well-known within the photographic community, Schwartz wasn't "discovered" until the release of his book, *Folk Photography: Poems I've Never Written* in 2000.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net