



ORGULF TRANSPORT CO.

FOOT OF ELIZA ST. (ALGIERS)

NEW ORLEANS, LA. 70114

Baton Rouge
3-19-76

REPLY TO:
P. O. BOX 6098
NEW ORLEANS, LA. 70114
TEL: 362-8400

Dear Laura Gilpin -

I have just finished looking through The Enduring
Navaho. I've been through it many times and once again
I am struck by your portraits - how openly and directly
your subjects are looking at you, as if nothing, especially
not a camera, had ever entered the line of sight between
you, the photographer, and the photographed.

- I wonder if you find that all people in our
contemporary society look at you as directly -
or is it primarily the very young, the very old,
and those from particular cultural / economic
backgrounds who do?

When I look at the photographs you have made
and read your text I am keenly aware of your
strong admiration for the people and the land of
the Southwest.

- I wonder how essential it is for you to
admire what you photograph. What happens
when you are unable to admire the changes
which you see - do you photograph the
changes anyway, 'document' things the way
they will no longer be, or avoid recognizing
the deterioration?



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These are some of the questions I have wanted to ask you in particular during my month of photographing here in Louisiana, but I have had it on my mind since seeing your photographs at the Janus Gallery in N.Y.C. late last year to write you a letter and ask if I might interview you sometime. Suddenly it looks as though I might be able to fly to New Mexico in April before an upcoming return to Georgia (I'm working on a series of photographs of a small rural neighborhood in Washington County) and so, if it is at all possible for you to take an afternoon or morning off from the printing of the portfolio I understand you are doing, I would like to visit with you.

I should explain a little further. A year ago I left my job as an editor + photographer of a small Vermont newspaper. Even in Vermont (where I still live) working for a daily paper was extremely hectic and demanding - I missed the thoroughness of photographing or writing about subjects that mattered to me in depth. Making the transition to working solely for myself was difficult at first (it still is but I appreciate the problems as challenges to my constant development!) and I found myself wishing for some older, more experienced creative camera artist of whom I could ask my



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many questions. I was specifically aware of the fact that many of my male friends in the arts had mentors, but that none of my equally talented, educated, etc. female friends had one. Where were the women artists who were successful in their own estimations and who had several decades of experience in their mediums (it would be more interesting to talk with people who had some overview on their own development and that of their craft I decided)?

I read Cindy Nemer's Art Talk (interviews with women artists - too insistently feminist for me - I am not interested in proving that women have been cheated as compared to men, I know to an extent they have been. There are other questions to ask) and Anne Tucker's The Woman's Eye. I wanted to learn more and I suppose selfishly I wanted to ask my own questions myself. I decided to interview women and men* photographers myself, with it in mind to eventually produce a book describing my education with edited transcripts of the interviews, selections of each photographer's work, and a photograph of each photographer (this is important for two reasons: as a reader of biographies I am always fascinated by photographs of the person I am reading about - I read their faces! and, I would like to see how I photograph

* I only decided recently to include male photographers in my collection. I grew too uncomfortable with the artificiality of excluding them as I learn a great deal from the experiences of men... anyway, their exclusion calls attention to questions of sex which are not my primary questions.



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the photographer whose work I have researched and admired and who I am at last interviewing - I wonder what perspective I will choose!)

But I am telling you too much - I don't want to impose all of my thinking on you. You might like to know that among those who have accepted and those whom I will ask are Barbara Morgan, Helen Levitt, Beverice Abbott, Lilo Raymond, Patricia Simmons, Dorothy Norman, Suzye Cunningham ... I still have to catch up on my research of various men photographers (I try to study each person carefully before I prepare the interviews).

Among the questions I will ask there will be ones concerning the various stages of your own development (how important was the theme of Southwestern Indians, in your photographic development? did you or would you have ever chosen to examine your own cultural background so thoroughly?), photography as a medium (its compatibility with anthropology?), and the conditions (space, time, relationships) that you find most suitable for you to carry on ^{with} your creative work. Virginia Woolf asked years ago what milieu women found most conducive to scholarly and creative work. I believe the question needs working on for both sexes and especially in light of contemporary living and choices.



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If you think you would enjoy meeting in April (I do have some friends I could stay with in Taos) or even later on, in New York perhaps, if you visit there, I would be happy to prepare some of the questions I have for you in advance so that you could think them over a little. In ten days I shall have wended my way up the Mississippi River and back to my base camp in Cincinnati. I hope very much that you will write to me there and let me know whether or not I may interview you and what dates you would prefer. If you agree I will make arrangements to fly out (I admit to hoping you will say yes for other reasons as well - I miss the open sky and reds of the Southwest with some intensity after being away for four years - your books only arouse that wonderlust*).

My address there is Alicia Wille
% Solway Gallery
314 W. 4th St.
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

If you prefer you could call and leave a message for me - I will call you back: 513-721-8802.

I look forward to hearing from you and wish you luck in your work - Yours, with appreciation -
Alicia Wille

* a German ancestor speaking! wonderlust is not my word!