The Aspen Photographic Conference

A year ago last October I attended the photographic conference held at Aspen, Colorado under the auspices of the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies. From the point of view of most of the small group of photographers who went, including myself, it was a great success. Just what happened there to make it a success is not so easy to say. It may have had something to do with the champaign air at eight thousand feet or the more potent liquors served in the Hotel Jerome Bar where some of the most exciting discussions took place in the evenings after the formal conferences were over for the day. But for me it was much more than this. Many of the photographers who came were well known people from widely separated parts of the United States; they came from the West and East, from the Middlewest and Southwest. I met many of them for the first time. We got to know each other well. We talked constantly, not about the mechanics of photography, but about ideas and pionts of view. We made our different ways of thinking about photography known to one another, and often they were new and exciting but the important thing was that they were all stimulating and in my case, at least, led to a new insight into my work from which grew a new approach that I had only tentatively explored before.

Some photographers, mostly those who did not attend, have suggested that future conferences be held in the larger centers of the East or West where more people could go. They miss one essential point for having the meeting at a small town like Aspen where those gathered together must depend on themselves, where they cannot disperse through a big city after each meeting and so

lose the thread and sense of the conference. In Aspen we could not escape one another from breakfast until bedtime and hence our ideas had a chance to crystallize before they were dissolved away by the distractions and demands of big city life.