

TexasMonthly

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Mr. Preston F. Kirk
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Dear Preston:

Thank you very much for the additional information on the Gentling Twins, all of which I have passed on to Gregory Curtis. You should hear from him after he's perused it.

Thanks again for your interest in the magazine.

Sincerely,

John

John Broders
Assistant to the Editor

/jb

PHOTOGRAPHY

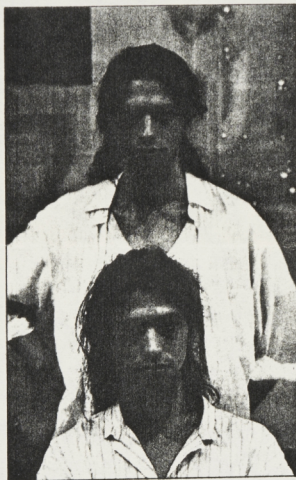
The Art of Double Exposure

The Starn Twins work as one photographer

On a steamy Friday afternoon in New York, people are crowding into a small Soho gallery. The one-person photography show is a smash: everything on display—even pricey \$16,000 pieces, up 400 percent since January—has been sold. Three of the six people who have just signed the visitors' book represent major American museums. In the last year the young photographer has quietly acquired a critical following. There is a lengthy waiting list of collectors eager to buy his work; a book is in progress. Art-world heavies know what everyone else is about to find out: The Starn Twins are *hot*.

There's no misprint here: the "one person" show is the work of two. Mike and Doug Starn, 26, are identical twins who operate as a unit, fused into a single sensibility. Collaborative artists, though rare, are not unheard of (there is even another set of twins at work, painters Scott and Stuart Gentling). But the concept of collaborative photographers is new, anomalous, puzzling. Does one fret over composition and the other concentrate on light? Who actually takes the picture? In the case of the Starns, the questions are almost irrelevant, since the bulk of their creative effort (as they acknowledge) comes in the darkroom, where the mechanics of working together are simpler. Though some gallery hoppers may be attracted to the Starns' photographs as others are fascinated by freak shows, what holds them is not curiosity but the work itself.

The Starns work exclusively in black and white, often adding toner for color effects. Their subjects are ordinary, homey, familiar: an old pair of boots, a statue, a cat, a chair—their presentation is anything but. The Starns are pioneers, pushing the boundaries of their art. They scratch, tear, crumple and otherwise damage the paper; they make smudges and leave fingerprints and shadows on their prints. Their most exciting, even revolutionary, pictures are large-scale images constructed, collagelike, from any number of pieces of photographic paper, occasionally incorporating a piece of film, held



BERNARD GOTTFRYD-NEWSWEEK

Two artists, one sensibility: *The Starns*



COURTESY STUX GALLERY

"We get tired of the roles of photography": *'Boots'*

together with Scotch tape and framed or fixed to the wall with pushpins.

The results are sculptural and moving. The work, despite what some consider punk trappings, has a remarkable welcoming quality. The Starns love symbolism and contrast, juxtaposing large, raw works with small, delicate ones; they play with our ideas of space and time. Most haunting is their series of 79 photographs—made from one negative—of two horses' heads, seen as a pair or in groups, upside down, backward, as if caught in a mirror. In some the animals seem to float; in others they have a frenzied quality. The Starns are not always as effective, particularly in their minimalist, monochrome collages; and they also do beautiful "pure" photography. "It's scary to break through the paper barrier," Mike says. "But the way to make paper bigger was to tape it together." Adds Doug: "We get tired of the roles of photography. We're not against 'regular' photographs; we're against that as the only way."

Fine-arts quality: The Starns grew up in suburban New Jersey. They say they inherited their talent from their father, a co-owner of a supermarket chain who had an artistic bent. In junior high they discovered an interest in photography—and in each other. "We had everything in common," Mike says. "If you're not a twin you have to find something in common with your friends." After high school, they decided they were too close and spent some time apart before enrolling in Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts. They paint and sculpt (as a team), so it's not surprising that their camera work has a fine-arts quality:

the Starns' list of influences includes Alfred Stieglitz, Sol LeWitt, David Salle and Julian Schnabel.

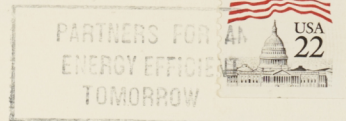
Low-key, diffident but amiable, they have no desire to leave Boston for the frenetic New York art scene. They live together because it's cheaper—though now that they're making money they'll split up. What the Starns can't conceive of is working independently. "We even forget who took what picture," Doug says. "We have the same ideas about how things work and it just flows." But they do regret having chosen to sign themselves The Starn Twins: "It was a marketing decision," Mike admits. "When you're in a group show with a million other people," Doug adds, "you're fighting for your life. It was a way of having people remember us." They needn't have bothered. The work stands alone.

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