

MY CAMERA AND I
IN THE LOOP

photographs by

RAY METZKER

December 18, 1959 • February 21, 1960

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Gallery of Photography



The 70 photographs in this exhibition were selected from a series of 119 subjects produced by Ray Metzker for a master's thesis at the Institute of Design of the Illinois Institute of Technology. They are the property of the Institute of Design and have been lent for this showing.

The story of Ray Metzker's choice of photography as a means for the expression of his originality is not unlike that of a number of artist-photographers of our time. He was born in Milwaukee in 1931 and at the age of thirteen it was the acquisition of a Kodak-Brownie developing kit which cast over him that spell from which so many have never been able to free themselves. By the time he had graduated from Beloit College, where he majored in art, he had made the usual passage through family pictures, work for the high school yearbook, college publications, news releases and six months in a small town commercial studio. Then he was inducted into the army. After being discharged, he returned to Beloit for postgraduate work and by this time had become much interested in photography as an artistic medium. It was not long before he was enrolled in the graduate school of the Institute of Design, studying with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. In these years his purposes took a definite direction and guided him to courses of personal experience, observation and thought which have resulted in the compositions of *My Camera and I in the Loop*, a surprising array of variety and invention.

The pictures were taken with two cameras: a Leica (using 35 mm., 50 mm., and 135 mm. lenses) and a Rolleiflex. In printing, the original formats of the picture areas covered by these cameras have been kept. It is interesting to observe how the photographer has chosen the heights at which he wished to present his picture and used the proper camera for his realization: the rectangular, eye level image of the 35 mm. negative and the square, almost waist level, of the Rolleiflex. Some of the rectangular subjects are seen at a novel height which gives the impression—in the case of certain humorous juxtapositions of unrelated people in the streets—of looking at a scene, at stage level, in a musical revue. On the other hand, the square area of the Rolleiflex, which has caused objections from some photographers, has been used to produce effects both of breadth and height, with brilliant results, thus proving itself to be an excellent composing ground. Mr. Metzker has left no step to others and has carried his conceptions through to their ultimate conclusions. The ideas and finding of subjects are peculiarly his, as well as

photographing, developing the film, making the prints and even mounting them for viewing. There is much admirable skill and respect for craftsmanship evident through all this and they contribute to the strong impression of integrity and consistency his work produces.

The interpretation of everyday existence and the attempt to identify himself with the contradictions and many-sidedness of modern life are undertakings which have driven many an artist to take refuge in the esoteric, so that, for his public, his work loses all association with reality and has to be interpreted only in the terms of esthetic ideas. Metzker has adopted the difficult attitude: he has chosen actuality itself as the vehicle for his statements. The first attractions of these pictures are that they show us the Loop and suggest a new identification with our environment, but after we have looked at them again and again, it is the abstract pleasure of contemplation which remains as their final distinction.

Photographers are articulate beings and have always been ready to talk about their work. Mr. Metzker has said of these prints: "I wanted to photograph and the Loop was the reason. If a statement of the Loop exists, it is of secondary importance to me. The primary value, which I have realized only through working, is to have effected a productive relationship between the camera and myself. Development of form can come only through work. All sorts of analytical discussion can at best be only conjecture. Theories can be devised to explain what has happened but they cannot reveal form. Thoughtful work is the means of understanding the tradition as well as discovering the new. To photograph is to be involved with form in its primal state. Although it took some time to find a direction, this project has been the growth of an idea. This collection of photographs is, for me, a statement of the relationship of my camera and myself."

That this has been realized cannot be denied, but now that they are presented to the public, a new existence begins for these pictures. A multiple one, it is hoped, for each spectator will see them differently and contribute his own creation by his consideration. And one need neither to have seen the Chicago Loop nor have operated a camera to look at them with insight and understanding: their honesty and refusal of compromise free them of the insecurities of art fashions and fads and somehow, in keeping their individual principles, they are able to communicate with everyone.

HUGH EDWARDS, *Curator of Photography.*