

ROBERT EARL WILSON

Robert Earl Wilson is a young photographer who has been living in Chicago for the last three years. He was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1936, and due to the profession of his father, a jazz musician, he attended school in several cities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. He soon became attracted to the expressive abilities of the camera (inspired in the beginning by the work of Edward Weston) and began study and work with the most rudimentary materials. For his progress he did not choose the facilitated path of friends interested in the same problems or the packaged teaching of schools. He is entirely self-taught: the discovery of his uses of the medium has been undertaken in very much the same way one would set out to live a free and independent existence.

That this way of development was not lightly assumed or carelessly taken advantage of is shown by the pictures in this exhibition, the first large showing of his work. It begins with a sequence of photographs taken in Jackson Park, Chicago, during the four seasons of the last year. Winter awakens to spring which drifts into summer, to be transformed into autumn and then to retire into winter again. It is a modern South Side Virgilian eclogue, a surprising pastoral composed in the midst of a great contemporary city. After these prints follows, to the end of our show, a longer series with all kinds of people and familiar situations as its variegated theme. What is noticeable here is the absence of what might be called - in these days - sociological parallax and distortion, and there are no false expedients or rescues by dragging in the encumbrances of symbolism.

The camera is used with a natural simplicity and skill, printing processes

are employed for the expression of direct truths, and when a color print is made, it is not finished merely for the sake of color. Through all of this work runs a kind of autobiographical statement which communicates to us that the photographer, with understanding acceptance, is living in the atmosphere of the complex and contradictory time in which he finds himself situated. From this comes that felicity of which these pictures are so representative and which Stendhal found necessary to works of human expression in order to make them bearable and convincing.

Hugh Edwards, Curator of Photography.

*This statement written by
Mrs. Wilson - July 1962.*

Robert Earl Wilson was born on July 12, 1936 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. His education was completed among Scranton, New Jersey and New York City schools due to the musical profession of his father.

Even in early youth, expression through photography was one of his greatest desires. The works of Edward Weston and Josef Karsh directed him toward the goal he still reaches for... "taking a photograph that completely belongs to me!" Bob never received any formal training and his work is the result of study and self-enlightenment through many mistakes and errors.

Three years ago, when Bob came to Chicago, his first meeting with Jackson Park netted him a great deal of pictures that did little to show the hidden beauty of Jackson Park. Not until the autumn of 1961 did this beauty become visible to his eyes. That autumn marked the beginning of the Jackson Park series unaware to the author. The fact that he would record every movement of Jackson Park was furthest removed from his head.

Winter came, in all her ferocity and the camera and personal feelings of Bob tamed her. He feels that winter is the strongest point of his series because of an emotional tranquility from within that caused the winter scenes to jump out and beckon to have their pictures taken.

When spring arrived, Bob was uncertain as to how he could record the lazy awakening of nature without giving the impression of summer. Somehow he managed.

Summer, the most difficult to portray, was shot many unsuccessful times but the pictures in the exhibit are the best taken from each attempt.

The only comment about the series that the author will share

is, "I don't like it! It doesn't show Jackson Park as truly beautiful as it is!"

One of the few of his series that Bob likes is the Maxwell Area. Though it would not receive the approval of the majority because of the intense social reform message it carries, Bob likes it because it shows life...truthfully, without pretense.

No one will admit faster than Bob himself the fact that the study of Chicago he ^{first} started was one sided. He felt that the whole of Chicago was not being portrayed; that the beauty in all people as people was being left shaded and unrecorded. A halt was called within himself and the children of Chicago were allowed to fill his head and heart with their laughing, crying, playing, caring and the universal truth that beauty exists only to those who have beauty within was proven again.

From the children he learned the adults and from the adults he learned to see the children better. He realized and was able to record that people are basically the same but every man has likes and habits peculiar to himself only.

Bob's only desire? "To make a decent photograph that is worthy of the art of photography before rigor mortis sets in."