

CHICAGO SUPPORT

ACTION OR STATE OF SOMETHING OR SOMEONE BEARING THE WEIGHT

PART I

Hugh Edwards Remembered

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Excerpts

When I was an undergraduate, second year student at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, my etching teacher, Vera Berdich, took me up to the Glore Print Room to meet Hugh. He was marvelous. We became good friends. I would go to the print room often just to talk to him, and often he would show me work from the collection. He always wanted to see what I was doing, and would ask to look at my work.

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Hugh went to films often and would take a different faculty member or friend each time to see his current favorite film. Hugh took me to see Steve McQueen in the 1966 film, *The Sand Pebbles*. He took me to see *Grand Prix*, a 1966 film about car racing with James Garner and Yves Montand. I think he said I was the ninth person he had taken to the theater to see that film. Hugh took me to see *2001, A Space Odyssey*, 1968. I could tell cars, dance, rockets, multiple exposure photo prints—anything to do with movement was especially close to his heart.

Another aspect of his being on crutches, Hugh would say how he hated “those little ole women” who would politely hold the door open for him. Hugh could take care of himself and was fiercely independent, despite being on crutches with leg braces. Shortly after he told me how it infuriated him when people held the heavy, glass double doors to the Glore Print Room open for him, I made the mistake of leaving the print room ahead of, instead of behind Hugh, who was also exiting immediately behind me.

As I neared the doors, I thought, “Oh my, what should I do? Hold the door open for him and risk his ire?” I did not want to insult him, so I went through the door and let it fly back at him. He had to grab the swinging door to keep from being hit, then open it for himself. He made no remark as we walked down the hall together, but continued our conversation. So, I think it was the correct decision, but I hated that I felt I had to let the door slam against him.

Hugh would often talk about his love of music and dance, but almost never about

his youth or family. Hugh rarely spoke of his father, who was a steamboat captain on the Ohio River. He did say his father committed suicide with a shotgun.

The first time he invited me to his apartment was a special occasion. He had talked so much about his elaborate stereo set-up in his apartment in Hyde Park. I was amazed with the latest, most expensive turn table, which was a Bang & Olufsen™.

Instead of a large arcing arm holding the needle, there was a pencil-thin armature, only five inches in length. It did not arc across the playing LP, but went straight across the radius of the record. His amplifier was a MacIntosh™, because he wanted the best amp which still used tubes rather than transistors. He said the sound is superior.

Hugh gave me a tour of his pre-amplifier, reel to reel tape machine, tuner, speakers and all elements of his fantastic sound system. I could not wait until I was no longer a student, employed, and could build up a sound system of my own.

Hugh said every time he would play music, his neighbor upstairs would come down, pound on his door. Only the day before she had come downstairs to complain. Hugh said he asked her if, instead, she would mind if he read a book?

Hugh's apartment was amazing for a student like me, growing up in poverty, to see an individualistic manner of living. Just inside the door sat a mint condition, elaborately exquisite pair of cowboy boots—a fantasy for this man shackled with crutches. Nearby on the wall was a Etienne-Jules Marey photograph of flying birds. Movement was a theme and his dream. Next to it on the wall was a Corvette hubcap. I asked about it. He said he struck up a conversation with a good looking young Mexican-American in his neighborhood.

They became friends. Hugh said the young man, Armando, was trying to find a job. Hugh recommended him to a friend of his who owned a restaurant in the loop. Armando was hired, and quickly moved up to head waiter. He apparently had more going for him than his good looks and friendliness to strangers. He saved his money and bought a new Corvette and took Hugh for a ride. Hugh told me he so enjoyed it. In appreciation for Hugh's help, Armando bought him that hubcap as a momento of his ride in a Corvette convertible with the top down on an unsummery day.

Next in the apartment, Hugh opened a closet for some reason, and I saw about three dozen matted and framed prints stacked around the edge of the closet. I asked Hugh who made the prints? "Rudolph Janu," he said. Hugh had given him a one person show the year before. After the exhibit, Janu generously gave Hugh the entire show—for him, personally, not for the collection. I expect after Hugh's death, all those prints went to The Art Institute of Chicago.

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The book case in Hugh's apartment had a large set of hand bound books from France. They were of French writers. Hugh read poetry in French! One of the books was poems by Jean Genet, which also contained tipped-in etchings or drypoints of erotic male nudes by Jean Cocteau. Hugh showed me all of those illustrations. Other books in the series had tipped in prints by other famous artists. What a marvelous set of books. Perhaps it also ended up in The Art Institute of Chicago... in the Ryerson Library, or, the Glore Print Room?

Hugh was paid a very meager salary. I remember that conversation. Then he told me he went to an auction the previous weekend. The museum had not given him a budget to buy, but he saw a heliogravure by Hippolyte Bayard for \$75, and he purchased it with his own money for the collection. Hugh showed me the approximately 4 x 5 inch print; it was so lovely. The price now seems nothing, but, at that time, that was twice the monthly rent for my apartment. I could not have afforded to buy it, even if I had been in New York at the auction.

Hugh had many good friends in Manhattan, and would go there often to see Lincoln Kirstein, Leonard Bernstein and other of his friends, such as the director, Kenneth Anger, who in 1964 made that amazing film, *Scorpio Rising*. Hugh would tell me about them. He met a young author on one trip to Manhattan—John Rechy, a young, muscular, handsome Chicano, who in 1963 published the novel *City of Night*.

Later, in 1967, my final year as an undergraduate, Rechy published *Numbers*. His novels were about his wild gay life in Manhattan, and sex in Central Park at night. Hugh would tell me of Rechy's adventures, as well as about the novels, as Hugh knew I do not read. It was exciting to be friends with this lovely man, who lived in his fantasies—much as I have spent my life. My art reflects that.

In 1967, Vera and I were both in the print room and she told Hugh he should have an exhibit of my work. Hugh agreed. I would never have asked. My first one-person exhibit was at The Art Institute of Chicago, 15 March – 1 June 1968. I had finished my under graduate work at The School of the Art Institute and now was a graduate student at the Institute of Design. I received my Masters after one year, of a two year program, as Mr. Siskind had borrowed a scholarship from SAIC, so I could be his student. He could only get the scholarship for one year. ID had no scholarships.

Immediately after my exhibit opened, photo students of the under graduate and graduate programs of SAIC, ID and Columbia College would inundate Hugh with requests and almost demands that he exhibit their work, as well. He would say that he did not show student work, and they would come back with why then was he showing my work? Hugh said he almost wish he had never shown my work!

I understood.

Later, when I became friends with Robert Frank, he said Hugh gave him his first one-person show in the USA, when others in New York City would not touch his work. Robert listed all the photographers that Hugh had given them their first one-person show. It was a long list. Besides Robert and me, I can remember now only Rudolph Janu, Danny Lyon and Marie Cosindas. I said to Robert, Hugh has an eye. Robert said that he also had the guts to show new approaches. Robert said when I published my first book, I should dedicate it to Hugh Logan Edwards. I did. Most of my books are hand bound, one-of-a-kind, but in 1977 I published my Book Number 68, *When I Was Two*.

I gave copies to Robert and to Hugh, two of my finest friends and early supporters of my work, and, this curator was one-of-a-kind!

When Edward Steichen left MoMA in 1962, Hugh confided in me MoMA offered the job to him. Hugh declined. He felt he had so much to do to get the Chicago collection up to where he wanted it to be.

Hugh Edwards agreed to teach the first course in the History of Photography at the school. It was an evening course, so that those outside the school could sign up, as well. Ken Josephson and I took the course, and took it again the following year, and learned a great deal each time, rather than duplication of facts. Other teachers and photographers took it as well. Joel Snyder and Joe Jachna took Hugh's course, and I believe Danny Lyon, did as well.

I would meet Hugh in the Glore Print Room that evening each week and carry a stack of the museum's original prints for him. We would take the elevator to the museum basement, walk through the galleries to the door leading to the school. At that time, the school was a separate "building", consisting of a basement only, entered though the museum or through the Goodman Theater entrance. The above ground building opened in 1976, I believe. (That is a tale in itself, but not for this letter.) The museum guard would recognize Hugh, and permit me in, as well, with that week's prints since I accompanied Hugh. As Hugh lectured, he would have me pass around those valuable prints so each member of the class could see them up close.

On one evening, he was excessively late in leaving, always chatting with various members of the class. He told me to take the prints back to the Glore Print Room, as the museum would be closing soon. I went to the door, and the guard on the museum side would not permit me in the museum with "that stuff". I explained that these belonged to the museum, and he had been on duty when we took them from there into the school. But he refused my entry. I couldn't give back the museum's art to them! I took the prints back to the classroom, so Hugh had to cut his conversing short to go with me before the museum closed for the night.

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Those times with Hugh, and many more are strong in my memory, over fifty years later. Hugh Edwards was a close friend, mentor and a forward looking curator, confident in recognizing new work, and not just a keeper of work gone by.