Preparatory sketch, 1974

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TRY:
1) NOT EVERYONE STANDING
2) EVERYONE SITTING

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.
Color photography is so widely used and enjoyed by the general public that it often comes as a surprise to realize that until very recently it has been considered an illegitimate branch of serious still photography. Working towards perfection with color film is expensive and technically complicated. Visually it represents a different language for the photographer. While a number of leading photographers have had brief dalliances with color, almost all return shortly to black and white. Furthermore, there is something of a tradition among professional photographers to use color expertly in commercial assignments but to honor black and white, considered hermetic and pure, when doing their "own" work.

The remarkable technical advances in the field in recent decades when coupled with the lavish use of color in painting over the same period of time (as in the work of Mark Rothko, Ellsworth Kelly, Morris Louis and Andy Warhol) make photographers' resistance to the use of color all the more curious.

Only this year did The Museum of Modern Art offer its first one-person exhibition of color photography when it presented the work of William Eggleston. In large part because of this resistance within the profession itself color photography has been scarcely explored as a medium for serious artistic expression. It is possible that the 1970s will be seen in retrospect as the decade during which color photography emerged in its own right. If this is the case, Neal Slavin will be credited as one of those artists most responsible for this development.

Slavin was already a well-respected photographer working in black and white in 1972 when he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to explore color photography. His first major work in color is an ambitious body of more than 150 group portraits, forty of which have been published in a book, When Two Or More Are Gathered

Together. Slavin turned to color photography "because it was necessary." Color gives additional and important information about the subject. Says Slavin, "There is a vast difference between a silver trophy and a gold trophy."

Slavin was interested in documenting the uniquely American proclivity for joining together in clubs and fraternities, organizations and societies. For nearly four years he travelled around the country with an assistant and full lighting equipment. Although he made his appointments in advance he was moving about much in the tradition of the itinerant group photographer. Well within tradition is the format of people sitting or standing and facing the camera. The groups were encouraged to select the accessories and the settings which would best represent their association. Often they took responsibility for arranging themselves in the photograph. What resulted was a collaborative effort between the subjects and the photographer.

Few groups are photographed actually doing the activity that brings them together. Rather they are all photographed having their photograph taken by Neal Slavin. With this deceptively simple leveller Slavin eloquently deals straight across the board with a wide variety of subjects. The Sabrett vendors are equal in stature to the second floor staff at Cartier. In addition to his inclination to delineate commonality, Slavin is also concerned with presenting issues larger than the specific photograph. He speaks of the "evocations and provocations of the photograph."

Neal Slavin has always chosen people as his subject matter. His earlier work as a "street photographer" in the South during the middle Sixties and then in Portugal reflects more casual encounters, with an emphasis on the individuals caught uncomfortably in the aftermath of
major social change. Although these formal group portraits on exhibition in MATRIX are artifi-
cial situations created and manip-
ulated by the photographer, Slavin's incisive social commen-
tary prevails. The degree to which
individuality is sustained in the
group context is unexpected.
Despite his subjects' energetic
efforts to "join up", the whole
is revealed to be less than the
sum of its parts.

Slavin's photographs are beauti-
fully composed. He has a clas-
sical sense of balance and is able
to use symmetry within the format
of a rectangle repeatedly without
boredom or cliché. Given their
familiar red and white stripped
carts, Slavin turns the photo-
graph of the Sabrett vendors
into an ode to the elegance of
horizontals and verticals. He
refreshes our appreciation of the
Statue of Liberty by abstracting
the landmark and animating the
scene with the people who work
there.

Neal Slavin was born in New York
City in 1941. After receiving a
BA in graphic design from The
Cooper Union in 1961, he studied
Renaissance painting and sculpture
at Oxford University. In 1968 he
travelled to Portugal on a
Fulbright Fellowship and in 1971
published a book of photographs,
Portugal. Slavin lives in New York
City where he is also well-known
as a commercial photographer and
is represented by Light Gallery.

AMK

Works in MATRIX:
Preparatory sketches for photo-
graph of staff of New York
Public Library, 1974, 16" x 20".

Preparatory Polaroid color photo-
graphs, New York Public Library,
1974, 16" x 20".

When Two Or More Are Gathered
Together, Farrar, Straus and
Giroux (NYC), 1976.

Lithuanian Scouts Association,
Inc. (Rancho Palos Verde, CA),
1973, color photograph,
11" x 14".

New York City Transit Authority
(Brooklyn, NY), 1973, color
photograph, 11" x 14".

Lady Dorothy Circle #1460, The
Companions of the Forest of New
York (Jamaica, NY), 1973, color
photograph, 16" x 20".

International Twins Association
(Muncie, IN), 1973, color photo-
graph, 16" x 20".

Gary Owens Society of Girders
(Hollywood, CA), 1973, color
photograph, 16" x 20".

The Star Trek Convention
(Brooklyn, NY), 1974, color
photograph, 11" x 14".

Cemetery Workers and Greens
Attendants Union, Local 365
S.E.I.U., A.F.L.-C.I.O. (Ridge-
wood, NY), 1974, color photo-
graph, 11" x 14".

Cartier, Inc. (NYC), 1974, color
photograph, 11" x 14".

World Body Building Guild
(Brooklyn, NY), 1974, color
photograph, 11" x 14".

The Harrowgate String Band, Inc.,
Philadelphia Mummers and New
Year's Shooters Association
(Hulmeville, PA), 1974, color
photograph, 11" x 14".

Bachrach Studios (NYC), 1974,
color photograph, 11" x 14".

The Wheelmen (Swarthmore, PA),
1974, color photograph,
16" x 20".

Grand Canyon National Park,
National Park Service (Grand
Canyon, AZ), 1974, color photo-
graph, 16" x 20".

International Society of Bible
Collectors (El Cajon, CA), 1974,
color photograph, 16" x 20".
Statue of Liberty (Liberty Island, NY), 1974, color photograph, 16" x 20".

Bingo Club of the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard and Duplicate Bridge Club (St. Petersburg, FL), 1974, color photograph, 16" x 20".

Electrolux, A Consolidated Food Company (Stamford, CT), 1974, color photograph, 16" x 20".

The New York Public Library (NYC), 1974, color photograph, 16" x 20".

Lloyd Rod and Gun Club (Highland, NY), 1975, color photograph, 16" x 20".

K & P Distributors, Inc., Sabrett Food Products Corporation (NYC), 1975, color photograph, 16" x 20".

The Troc Theatre (Philadelphia), 1975, color photograph, 16" x 20".

All works in this exhibition are courtesy of Light Gallery, New York City.

Selected one-man exhibitions:
The Underground Gallery, NYC '67 (first), '71; The National Museum of Ancient Art, Lisbon, Portugal '68; Museo de Cominbriga, Portugal '69; Museo Nacional de Machado de Castro, Coimbra, Portugal '70; Focus Gallery, San Francisco '72; 831 Photograph Gallery, Birmingham, MI '72; University of Maryland, Baltimore '75; Light Gallery, NYC '76; The Oakland Museum '76.

Selected group exhibitions:
Neikrug Gallery, NYC The Concerned Photographer '72; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington Collector's Opportunity '76; Vision Gallery, Boston '76; University of California at Los Angeles Art Galleries Contemporary American Photographs '76; Art Lending Service, Museum of Modern Art, NYC Rooms '76.

Selected bibliography by Slavin:
Portugal, Lustrum Press, (New York City) '71.
"Typewriters...and Other Irrelevancies," Camera 35, January-February '73, p. 30+.
When Two Or More Are Gathered Together, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (New York City) '76.

Selected bibliography about Slavin:
"Amerika 76," Du, January '76. Entire issue devoted to the work of Neal Slavin, with essays by Dominik Keller and Calvin Trillin.
Murray, Joan. "Neal Slavin - Looking at Groups, Defining America," Artweek, October 9, '76, p. 11.

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