

TATANA KELLNER

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With an Essay by Eve Leoff

Women's Studio Workshop Print Center

INTIMATIONS

Collected Visions
Brighton Beach
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Biography



Mom, Dad and Nafik Watching TV, Toledo, Ohio

With love and appreciation to my parents, Ann, Eve, Barbara and the Women's Studio Workshop

Facile credo, plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate.

T. Burnet, *Archaeol. Phil.*

I readily believe that there are more invisible than visible Natures in the Universe.

Quoted by Coleridge as headnote to
"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798

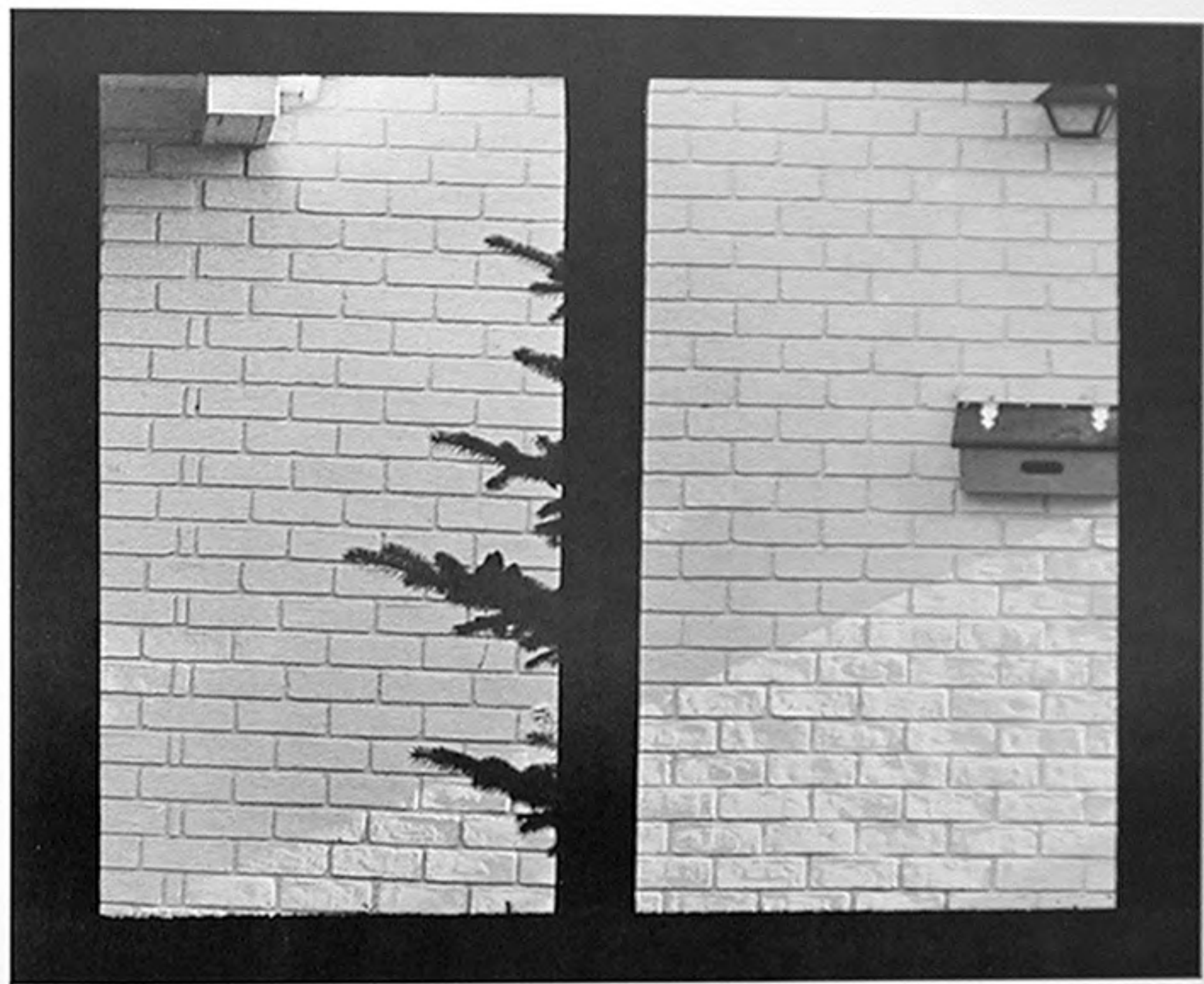
... awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

Biographia Literaria, Chapter 14
S.T. Coleridge, 1817

Collected Visions



1. Women Reading





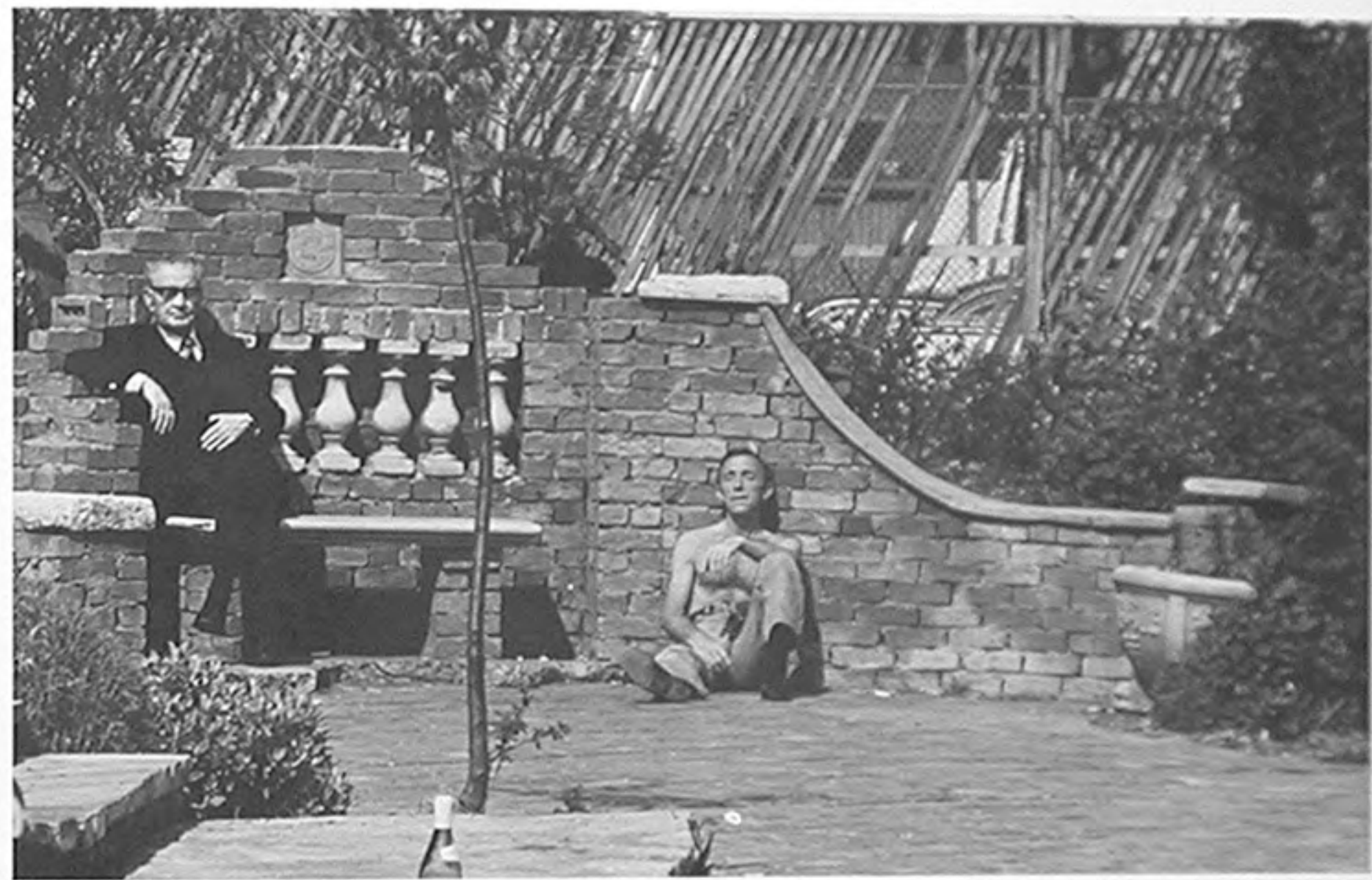
3. Overpass



4. Facade



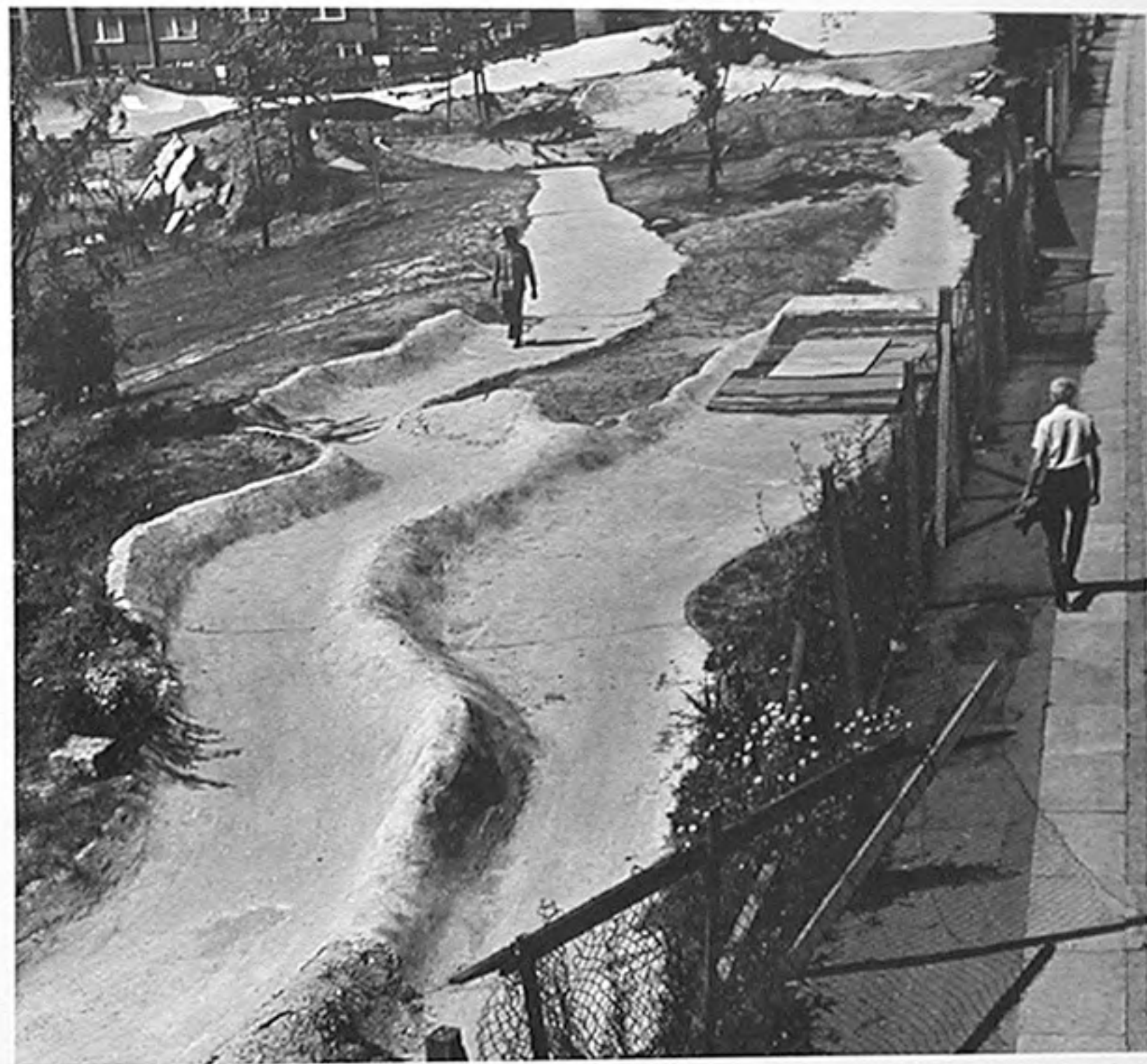
5. Ellenville Wall



6. Lunch Break



7. Embankment, Charing Cross



8. *Meauville Park*



Brighton Beach

9. Art with Heart



10. *Saucy Seat*



11. *Watching the Atlantic*



12. Women Sunbathing



13. Breakwater Deck Chairs



14. Man, Woman and Atlantic



15. *Man with Coke*



16. *Man Reading*

James Street and Other Places



17. James Street



18. 40 James Street



19. 28 James Street



20. Flag Day



21. Awn and Kamil in Ardfern



22. *Girl Feeding Pigeons*



23. *Central Park*



24. Scotch Grass



25. Dog Swimming



26. Morning Run with Pepper



27. Wild Dog



28. *Kamil in the Fields*



29. *Body is Sand*



30. *Ann in Sand*



31. Still Life with Model



32. Solo Solo

Reflections on Intimations

In "Girl Feeding Pigeons," the light gleams on her gesture as she bends to care and invite. She is a figure transfigured, the light dissolves the hard line of the image and spreads suffusing the moment, a halo enshrines her, suggesting it is her act of nourishment itself that gives off light, a rescue among photographs scored by lengthening shadows of departure and lessening light. In "James Street and Other Places," she is a rare figure in landscapes of retreating shadows and vanished inhabitants.

Immediately preceding "Girl Feeding Pigeons" is "Ann and Kamil in Ardfern, Scotland" in which not a human but an inanimate object pulls our eye towards its luminous surface. Before discussing "Ann and Kamil in Ardfern," let us view the photographs of James Street as exposition toward these surreal effects. In the pictures of houses the shadows gain dominance over the sturdy wooden edifices so coloring our perception of the ordinary domicile, that we incline to suggestions of the funereal, the abandoned, the ghostly despite the rational information that these are streets close to home. Such is the human imagination that these opposites can and do co-exist there and such also are Tatana Kellner's photographs—they show the opposites that co-exist in the mind. The poetry that also creates this fact of the imagination is Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn"

*The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the Fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!*

Kubla's temporal reign creates sensual opulence parallel to Kellner's but there is an opposition and counterforce in both realms of sensual beauty that only an art of shadows can mingle.

The haloing light gives us the gesture of the girl, rescuing from shadow. Having come through these streets of wooden houses where life lived is shadowed by "something else" the luminosity of an inanimate object must rescue from shadows cast by our life among the inanimate and obdurate: thick walls sheltering and imprisoning, doors that shut in as well as shut out, flags that lie dispirited, a formality of living which traps us before we are aware. The antidote for these is the Seance Table, the conjuration of spirit in our lives. We have when the light illuminates and draws to this target a reminder that the world is a place where things happen, a reminder that we can open a surface in ourselves and let the rhythm of the universe play. The target is exposed and revealed; the Zen archer knows, finally, that he is in contest with himself. In "Ann and Kamil in Ardfern, Scotland" the people are gathered in shadow, a part of the unbidden and unexpected annunciation of spirit, unwitting witness to the beauty that is in our world of light. The light on the wooden table alleviates the false domination of the material, arresting the false transformation of shelter into coffin.

Life as a surface for the divine play of light and human energy is nowhere clearer than at the beach. In the "Brighton Beach" series, there is a saucy seat in an immensity, and other evidences of whisk-haired men frolicking, lounging, staring and pursuing life at the edge. The artist captures our delighted slapdash, high-handed balancing act in the face of our inutterable smallness and doom: the solemnity and severity of our presence on this mighty pebbled shore must not overwhelm us! We will do, as Shakespeare's Bottom the Weaver:

*I will walk up and down here, and I will sing,
that they shall hear that I am not afraid.*

Midsummer-Night's Dream, III, i, 128-130

The great human impulse to be as we are minute though we are, frail though we are, subject to accident though we are, cannot stop us in the parade along the shore. We after all have come to enjoy ourselves. The last two photographs from "Brighton Beach" show our perfect adaptability, when accompanied by our favorite entertainments. The two gentlemen, Crab and Squid, become with radio, coke, comics, perfectly at home. On the face of the mighty globe, by the solemn edge, do we revert to our happy birth as marine creatures.

*Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us thither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.*

William Wordsworth
"Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

From the battle between "light and the forces of darkness" we turn to "Collected Visions," photographs that are composed of subjects that are in themselves composed, serene, and collected: a woman reading forms a harmonious whole, foliage, newspaper, knees. These are images that evoke moments from our own lives: the portraits of the nap of satiety after lunch in Covent Garden and bodies decking the English turf on the Embankment. These figures doze and dream against sunny walls and on the lawns of their daily passages. So we human beings no matter what the larger view take the little while to rest and refresh in contemplating these photographs.

Further and finally there is the unusual that rests, the unusual that only art provides. This is the result of the planned effect of the sand photographs. Here the senses are dazzled awake by the interface between nature and human, not the comfortable turf at all but the grainy, abrasive contact between sand and flesh. The spirit of "Body is Sand" and "Ann in Sand" where the human is made into the sculptural is carried forward in "Still Life with Model" and "Soho Solo." This refreshment is not of slumber but surprise as the human head is made into ornament, bust and mask.

"Art with Heart," the final photograph of the first section, summarizes the collection of images that are portraits of the pleasures of the human heart. This pleasure is a thread resumed in "James Street and Other Places" where the lone figure stands in the benign embrace of meadow and a horizon line but is sharply contrasted by a puppy seen as "Wild Dog." This contrast is here to remind us that our range of human feeling is from the greatest ease to its most unwished for opposite.

Wordsworth and Coleridge worked together in *Lyrical Ballads* to examine and expound the incidents and agents of the supernatural as well as subjects from ordinary life, thus

"... awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

Biographia Literaria, Chapter 14
S.T. Coleridge, 1817

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong.
Hark! now I hear them—Ding-dong, bell.*

The Tempest, I, ii, 396 ff

Kellner cannot end her volume with the benign and the serene, she must conclude with the stimulating images that suggest our only resolution: Let art make of us what it will, display us as mask or sphinx. The solution for the artist is neither our better feelings nor the random unpleasant ones. Rather beneath these she must delve to where transformations into what is rich and strange tell like a bell over a stormy sea that our energy persists past accident, past temporary flux into Art. Hence the final photographs show her resolution: a playfulness that lifts heads off bodies, rolls them in sand, plasters them on walls, displays, solarizes, anything rather than nothing, inventing, over and over, on our life.

Eve Leoff, Ph.D.
Hunter College
June 1981

List of Photographs

- cover Mountain Road, Rosendale, New York
1. Woman Reading, Hyde Park, London, England
 2. Edifice, New Paltz, New York
 3. Overpass, Rosendale, New York
 4. Facade, Newport, Rhode Island
 5. Ellenville Wall, Ellenville, New York
 6. Lunch Break, Covent Garden, London, England
 7. Embankment, Charing Cross, London, England
 8. Meanwhile Park, London, England
 9. Art with Heart, New Paltz, New York
 10. Saucy Seat, Brighton Beach, England
 11. Watching the Atlantic, London, England
 12. Woman Sunning, Brighton Beach, England
 13. Breakwater Deck Chairs, Brighton Beach, England
 14. Man, Woman and Atlantic, Brighton Beach, England
 15. Man with Coke, Brighton Beach, England
 16. Man Reading, Brighton Beach, England
 17. James Street, Rosendale, New York
 18. 40 James Street, Rosendale, New York
 19. 28 James Street, Rosendale, New York
 20. Flag Day, Rosendale, New York
 21. Ann and Kamil in Ardfern, Scotland
 22. Girl Feeding Pigeons, Hyde Park, London, England
 23. Central Park, New York City
 24. Scotch Grass, Scotland
 25. Dog Swimming, Rosendale, New York
 26. Morning Run with Pepper, Rosendale, New York
 27. Wild Dog, Rosendale, New York
 28. Kamil in the Fields, Ardfern, Scotland
 29. Body is Sand, Rhode Island
 30. Ann in Sand, Rhode Island
 31. Still Life with Model, New Paltz, New York
 32. Soho Solo, New York City

Biography

- Born 1950 Tatana Kellner, second child and first daughter of Eva and Eugene Kellner, in the Mala Strana section of Prague, Czechoslovakia near the river Moldau (Vltava) which she frequented in all seasons. Studied art privately and dreamed of becoming an artist in the grand manner of the "old masters."
- 1968 Escaped with her parents from Czechoslovakia to Rome after the Russian occupation. Spent two months in Rome studying the art of the Renaissance.
- 1969 Immigrated to the United States. Moved to Toledo, Ohio and attended the Toledo Museum of Art, studying painting and print-making. BA, 1972.
- 1972 Continued her studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology where she first started to take photographs incorporating them into complex print-collages. MFA, 1974.
- 1974 Moved to Rosendale, New York where with three colleagues established the Women's Studio Workshop, an alternative creative environment for persons interested in the visual arts. Was instrumental in establishing photography and intaglio studios and teaches both media.
- 1977-81 After three years of experimenting in non-silver processes began printing her images as silver photographs. The qualities of small town life in the midst of the Catskills became a prime subject.

Photographs from this book are available for exhibition. For information
please write to the Women's Studio Workshop, P.O. Box V, Rosendale, NY 12472 (914) 658-9133

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