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MEDIA CONTACTS:
Rebecca Baldwin
(312) 443-3625
rbaldwin@artic.edu
Nina Litoff
(312) 443-3363
nlitoff@artic.edu

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO OPENS FIRST MUSEUM SURVEY OF WORK OF AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER JOHN GOSSAGE
‘Retrospective in a Room’ Shows Three Distinct Ways the Artist Has Approached Photography


Gossage, who was born in New York City in 1946, began his photographic career at age 14, taking pictures for the local newspaper in Staten Island, New York. Within a year he advanced to intensive studies with photographers Lisette Model and Bruce Davidson, as well as with art director Alexey Brodovitch.

His only formal education came in 1964, at the experimental Walden School in Washington, D.C. Gossage continued to live in Washington after he graduated, even though New York remained central to his development. He showed his own work there—most frequently with the Leo Castelli Gallery in Manhattan—and organized shows of work by others, including a three-part exhibition on the New York School at the Corcoran Gallery in 1992.

The Art Institute’s “retrospective in a room” brings together several decades’ worth of work to show three distinct ways, or routines, in which the artist has approached photography. One routine concentrates on his intensely productive time in Berlin in the 1980s; on display are two dozen
The second routine comes from Gossage’s recent year spent traveling the United States on a prestigious Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, making portraits of art students and capturing views in small towns, particularly in Colorado.

The third offers a “medley” (a fitting approach, as Gossage once played blues guitar professionally) of images from across his career. In addition to highlighting the various photographic methods Gossage has used throughout his career, the exhibition includes a reading table with a selection of the artist’s publications, showcasing his talents as a consummate printer and an ingenious book artist.

While Gossage plays with narrative in his works, he only partly accepts the general expectation that photographs will explain and replicate the world. Extending from Berlin in 1982 to Albuquerque, N.M., in 2014, Three Routines displays a permutating approach to creativity that suggests a reflection on individual continuity in the face of massive historical change. The grouping of so many projects illuminates how Gossage works to maintain authorial consistency while regularly challenging his habits and even questioning the value of a personal style.

John Gossage: Three Routines was organized by Matthew Witkovsky, Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator, Department of Photography, at the Art Institute. Major funding for the exhibition has been provided by the Trellis Fund. Additional support has been generously contributed by Stephen G. Stein and Edward Lenkin.

The exhibition is part of Photography Is ____________, a nine-month celebration of photography at the Art Institute that includes pop-up gallery talks, online events, and the presentation of the museum’s most treasured photographs.