

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Bayeté Ross Smith. *Here Come The Girls*, Patricia Sweetow Gallery

Optic nerve

The Photography Issue: family albums, prom portraits, street shots, spy satellites -- a portfolio of the exceptional local scene

By Johnny Ray Huston

This is the second year that the Guardian has devoted an issue to local photographers. I'll wait until it happens a third time before deeming the project an annual endeavor. It's easy to believe in that possibility, because the range of photography in the Bay Area right now is exceptional. This great state of affairs is partly due to spaces and organizations such as SF Camerawork, RayKo Photo Center, and PhotoAlliance. It's also due to more do-it-yourself street-level groups such as Hamburger Eyes and one of this issue's 10 contributors, Cutter Photozine.

Last year's photography issue focused on portraiture, but this year I've opted for a survey approach that allows for spontaneous connections. Jessica Rosen and Sean McFarland both utilize collage, but with vastly different results. Keba Konte's collage aesthetic adds objects to imagery and links history to autobiography. Investigative work leads to political or societal exposure within Trevor Paglen's and David Maisel's photography. Adrienne Fernandez and Bayeté Ross-Smith focus on youth as they bring new twists to traditions such as the family album and the prom portrait. Dustin Aksland's portraiture also includes teenagers, sometimes plopped onto or stopped within American landscapes, while Mimi Plumb likens rural landscapes to the backs of horses.

August may be when summer winds down and a portion of SF prepares to camp elsewhere, but it's an important time for local photography. This issue coincides with PhotoAlliance's and the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery's annual exhibition of local photographers. Two of the 10 artists on the following

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pages are part of that show. American photography also will be playing a major role at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art next year, when that space presents an exhibition devoted to Robert Frank and his classic monograph *The Americans* (Steidl).

In honor of an old adage or clichéd truth, there aren't a lot of words next to the pictures that follow. But the text does include Web site information. In most cases, these photographers' sites function as another gallery of sorts, one that lacks the tactile nature and dimensions of an actual photograph but at least suggests the variety of a body of work to date. Scope them out, and scope out Pixel Vision, the Guardian's arts and culture blog, for interviews and other photography-related pieces this week. Last, before you look, some thanks are due to Glen Helfand, Chuck Mobley, and Mirissa Neff for their help in the selection process, and to Kat Renz for a last-minute idea.

NAME Bayeté Ross-Smith

TITLE Here Come the Girls

BACKGROUND This is part of a series that documents high school students in Berkeley, east Oakland, San Francisco, and Richmond as they mark their ascension from childhood to adulthood through the celebratory rite of passage known as prom. Taking a cue from traditional prom photos, the portraits allow for seriousness and playful flamboyance, depicting a vast array of budding identities.

SHOUT OUTS Walter looss, the Magnum photographers, and James Van Der Zee.

SHOW "Pomp and Circumstance: First Time to Be Adults," Sept. 4–Oct. 11. Tues.–Fri., 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.; Sat., 10:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 77 Geary (mezzanine), SF. (415) 788-5126, www.patriciasweetowgallery.com. Upcoming: "Off Color," Sept. 19–Nov. 1. RUSH Arts Gallery, New York.

WEB www.patriciasweetowgallery.com