

Swiss photography on display

by Russ Sampson

For a three week period from November 7th through the 21st, the Students' Union Art Gallery is hosting an exhibition entitled "Swiss Photography from 1840 until Today". The exhibit is comprised of a collection of over 300 photographs taken by 117 of Switzerland's finest photographers. The display is divided into a number of general themes such as history, photojournalism and nature.

The man responsible for bringing the show to Edmonton is Dr. Walter Jungkind of the Department of Art and Design, here at the University of Alberta. Jungkind convinced the Zurich-based Swiss Foundation for Photography to send an edited version of the original exhibition over-seas for a one year Canadian tour. Because of the difficulty in shipping very large prints, and a lack of gallery space, 80 per cent of the original exhibit was deleted from the Canadian tour.

In an interview, Dr. Jungkind remarked on his initial impressions of the exhibition, which, according to him, may be the first of its kind to be viewed in Edmonton.

Jungkind said that the only exhibits seen by the people of Edmonton in the past have been artistic displays such as the photo exhibits in the Edmonton Art Gallery and commercial displays in department stores.

Writer returns

Ken Mitchell, well known western Canadian writer, will be giving a reading of his work this Wednesday, November 21, at 12 noon in AV L-3 of the Humanities Centre.

Mitchell is a dramatist, a novelist and a writer of short stories. His novels include *Wandering Rafferty* and *The Con Man*; his short stories have been collected under the title *Everybody Gets Something Here*. As a dramatist, he worked with the Dumtrucks to produce the highly successful "country opera", *Cruel Tears*. His other plays include *Davin the Politician*, currently being produced at Walterdale, and *The Boatbuilder*, which will be produced later this year at Studio Theatre.

This year, Mitchell is living in Scotland as Canada's representative in the annual exchange of writers between the two countries. He has returned to Canada specially to see the Edmonton production of *Davin*, and the Dept. of English has taken this opportunity to present him for a reading.

Dancing to international fame

Though not involved in politics, Canada's Margie Gillis may have been the most popular "ambassador" this country has ever sent to China. In July of 1979 she toured the People's Republic, teaching and performing the first Modern Dance to be introduced into that country. Currently, Margie Gillis is taking her one woman show on a cross-Canada tour, and on Wednesday and Thursday in SUB Theatre, Edmontonians will get a chance to see why she so enthralled her Chinese audiences.

Motion and athletic energy seem to have been a birthright in the Gillis family. Her parents were Olympic skiers, a brother plays hockey for the Vancouver Canucks, and a cousin has been World Champion Freestyle Skier for the last three years.

Gillis herself began to harness this energy at an early age, being trained from the age of three in ballet, theatre, mime and gymnastics. Between the ages of 12 and 18, Gillis split from the dance norm and worked on developing her own style. At 18 she resumed her formal training with dance companies in Montreal and New York.

From 1974 to 1978, Gillis performed solo shows of her own choreography around Canada and in New York. However, it was an astounding performance at the 1978 Dance in Canada Conference that launched her to the front of the Canadian dance scene. For the first time, audiences became aware of this young, anguished soul whose dancing was so intense and emotional as to be sometimes painful and embarrassingly intimate.

Gillis will be including two new dances for her Edmonton shows: "Lullaby", set to the music of Bach, and "Premonition", choreographed by Canadian choreographer Linda Rabin. These are additions to a program that includes "Waltzing Matilda" (to the music of Tom Waits), and "Mercy" (to the music of Leonard Cohen and Loggins and Messina).

Margie Gillis has been likened by some to the young Isadora Duncan, but she considers herself spiritually closer to Janis Joplin.

People will have to see for themselves. Her performances are at 8:00 p.m. and tickets are \$4.50 at SU Box Office, all BASS outlets and at the door.

The History of Swiss Photography is not a travel log or anything of the sort. To the rather casual visitor the theme of the exhibition could seem confusing. A Many of the pictures were taken in places or during events that are not obviously related to the nation of Switzerland. A student demonstration in Japan, a voyage through Mainland China or a portrait of Che Guevara may seem to have little relation to the history of Swiss photography.

Jungkind remarked that the title of the exhibition has been misunderstood and is not exclusively concerned with geographical Switzerland. Jungkind added that the title of the show would have been more appropriate as Swiss Photographers rather than its present heading.

Still uncertain about the theme, a viewer may look for a common photographic style inherent to the Swiss. The answer is far from obvious. A unique photographic style can quite easily be observed for an individual photographer, but for the photographers of an entire nation it is not a simple task.

Referring to this question Jungkind explained that today Switzerland is not a politically or socially active country and Swiss photographers must migrate to other nations to where the action is. Curiosity appears to be one of their more prominent photographic traits.

This curiosity may be born of necessity. Swiss photographers stand little chance of gaining a photographic reputation at home, so they travel to other countries where the chances of success are greater.

Jungkind added that many of the finest photographers in the U.S. and other countries are of Swiss origin, and many people don't realize this. North America seems to be suffering from a sort of tunnel vision towards American photography and doesn't realize that there is comparable work being done elsewhere.

The quality of Swiss photography is well illustrated by its emphasis of Switzerland within the written media. For instance, in the city of Zurich alone there are five daily newspapers, one weekly colour magazine and no less than twenty illustrated periodicals. For a city with a population slightly less than that of Edmonton, this is quite an achievement.

Two of the more popular publications; *Du* and *Camera*, are internationally circulated and support many of the world's best photographers by sponsoring and publishing their work. Regrettably, these publications have recently fallen victim to general inflation and the declining value of the Swiss franc.

It's quite evident that Swiss photography is much



Werner Bischof (1916-1954) : 1951 Famine in India. The publication of this reportage in "Life" induced the American Congress to send help.

more than pictures of clocks, lederhosen and ski slopes. The exhibition not only shows the history of Swiss photography, but it also illustrates to a remarkably successful degree the history of photography itself.

While North American photography suffers from past oversaturation, it is refreshing as well as relieving to see that photography is still very much alive in a country like Switzerland.



It may be too cold to dance barefoot in the park, but SUB Theatre should be warm enough for Margie Gillis.

photo Russ Sampson

photo Jack Udashkin