

APRIL 1995

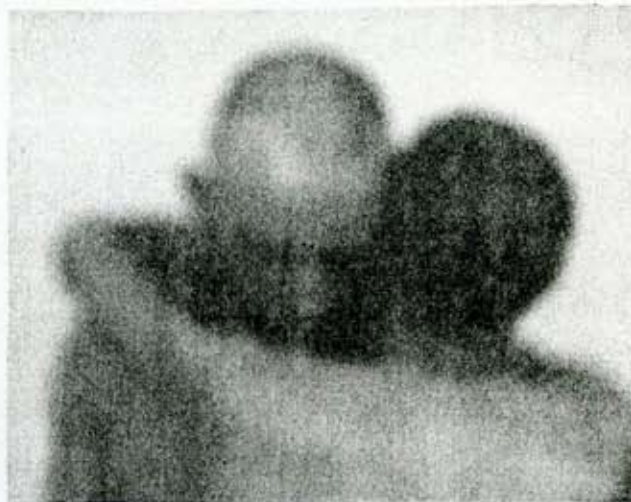
LONDON

BILL JACOBSON

PHOTOGRAPHER'S
GALLERY

A New York-based photographer, Bill Jacobson has exhibited selections from his ongoing project "Interim Photographs" for several years, most memorably at the Grey Art Gallery in New York in 1993, when a room full of his ghostly, shadowy portraits stood in sharp contrast to the adjacent retrospective of George Platt Lynes. The work of Platt Lynes stands foursquare in the mainstream of American Formalist art photography, however much it also exceeds and escapes many of the restrictions of the "school" that begins with Alfred Stieglitz, through Albert Weston, to Lee Freidlander, Robert Mapplethorpe, and so on. But whereas Platt Lynes took the minutely representational potential of photography for granted, Jacobson places little faith in its precision or exactitude. What is at stake here is our faith in the image itself. Jacobson writes briefly of this work as "a statement about personal desire and collective loss, a drawing on feelings around the tentativeness and vulnerability of life in the age of AIDS By printing black and white negatives onto color paper, the prints achieve a slight sepia tone which suggests flesh while also recalling the tones of early photographs. Through this process, I hope to create floating, fragile objects that evoke ghosts and spirits of a rapidly disappearing segment of the population."

These, then, are fugitive, faint images, as if seen from a great distance, or from distant memory. One of the most curious effects of the epidemic among those who have experienced multiple bereavements is the sense survivors have of being much older than their years. The years "before" AIDS seem unimaginably faraway. This is the type of visual experience to which Jacobson turns his camera. While documentary photography may produce instructive and often harrowing depictions of some aspects of the epidemic, especially the physical deterioration of individual faces, such photography cannot register the issues of forgetting explored so evocatively by



Bill Jacobson, *Interim Couple #1164*, 1994, silver print, ca. 16 x 20".

Jacobson: faces and bodies that have all but faded away, or that are fading now, or likely to fade only too soon.

Jacobson is that rare thing, an artist whose form perfectly conveys his subject matter; the quality of the print is entirely coterminous with the significance of the image. These are slow pictures, as slow as the epidemic.

—Simon Watney