

One of the pleasures of following an artist's career over time is seeing that artist adapt and change. The photographs in Bill Jacobson's latest book, *A Series of Human Decisions* (Decode), are a radical departure from his signature work since the early 1990s. No longer shooting in dreamy, allusive soft focus, Jacobson has also moved away from images of the human face or figure (except where they appear as pictures within pictures). His new subjects—mostly interiors and tightly circumscribed landscapes, all in color—might at first seem a rejection of the intensely empathetic engagement that characterized the earlier work. But the intensity remains; Jacobson's attention is never glancing, it's absorbed and absorbing. He examines these spaces (including a number of artists' studios and analysts' offices) as if looking for clues—not just to their absent inhabitants but to his own compulsion to observe and record. Jacobson's hunger for visual stimulation is far from indiscriminate; there's nothing random about his pictures of a quilted mattress, a graffiti-covered wall, or a series of curtained windows, because every image reveals an unerring eye for the perfectly unbalanced composition. If the work still feels a bit transitional, that's OK. It's heading in the right direction, full speed ahead.

Roger Ballen's *Boarding House* (Phaidon) represents a more gradual but just as important change in his work. The Johannesburg-based photographer was never a conventional documentarian, but his earliest portraits of poor, marginalized South Africans could pass for reportage. No longer. If people appear in Ballen's new pictures, they're usually in fragments—as disembodied hands, legs, or feet in what appear to be dilapidated sculptural installations. There's no pretense to realism, dirty or otherwise. "I'm looking into my own psyche," Ballen says, and what he finds there is not without liberal doses of black humor, but it's also nightmarish and alarming. Working with the squatters in an abandoned warehouse outside of town, he creates and photographs bizarre environments with animals, old dolls, grimy upholstery, and childish, crude wall drawings, many of his own making. With Dubuffet as his muse and Meatyard on his mind, Ballen goes to some deep, dark places and dares us to follow his lead.

And make room on your shelves for: Kehinde Wiley's *Black Light* (powerHouse), the painter's first book of photographs, which follows the formula he developed for his photo-realist canvases. Dressed in full hip-hop gear and showered with stylized flowers, young black men pose for their portraits in the exquisitely mannered style of Bellini and Ingres. Wiley, who shares Pierre et Gilles's taste for over-the-top artifice, celebrates and wittily subverts black masculinity by casting it in the most foppish art-historical terms. Richard Renaldi's *Fall River Boys* (Charles Lane Press) provides another, more somber view of American masculinity in a series of portraits of the young residents of a fading mill town in Massachusetts. August Sander is the model here, but Renaldi's black-and-white photographs are not just carefully observed, they're soulful, and, like Wiley's, tempered with brotherly respect for their subjects. Joel Grey's *Images From My Phone* (powerHouse) is probably not the last book of cell phone photographs you'll see, but it's likely to be the most elegant and unexpected. Although Grey, the actor and aesthete, has mastered the quick take, his pictures never feel tossed off; the best recall Walker Evans's Polaroids. Sam Shahid's clever design preserves the work's small format and modest intentions. □