

M + B

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

“Minor Cropping May Occur”

by Roberta Smith

March 10, 2011

Lombard-Freid Projects
518 West 19th Street
Chelsea
Through March 19

In this exhibition of astounding, insistent photographs, the hurly-burly of everyday life often seems inches away from the lens. Organized by Lea Freid, a partner in Lombard-Freid Projects, and the photographer Nick Haymes (whose work is included), it features images by 13 photographers born over a period of nearly 50 years who work in the United States, Europe or Japan. Most operate in the gap between traditional street photography and postmodern set-up photography. Their subjects are drawn from real life, and most are captured on the fly, yet with a degree of intimacy — and occasionally staging — that creates its own intense artifice.

The éminences grises here are Walter Pfeiffer of Switzerland, Carl Johan De Geer of Sweden and especially Keizo Kitajima of Japan, all of whom are represented by black-and-white photographs from the 1970s that document various bohemian or clubgoing subcultures. In his photographs of Bangkok the young Danish photographer Jacob Aue Sobol visibly carries forth Mr. Kitajima’s ink contrasts and gritty textures. Janine Gordon’s rough-and-tumble images of the bicycle jousting contests known as bike kills extend the subculture tradition, as do Mike Brodie’s oddly wistful atmospheric Polaroids, dated 2005, of youths who, like him, continue the American tradition of riding the rails.

The family home itself functions as a kind of overcrowded, often-chaotic stage in the large, candid color images from both the British photographer Nick Waplington’s well-known “Living Room Series,” of the late 1980s, and those taken last year by Motoyuki Daifu, a young Japanese photographer whose work is seen here for the first time in this country. Things are less claustrophobic but no less bizarre in Mr. Haymes’s images of his extended family (taken over a period of nine years), or Rona Yefman’s of her gorgeous cross-dressing brother.

The Swedish photographer J H Engstrom records his relationship with his wife, focusing on her pregnancy and the birth of their squirming twins with diaristic immediacy worthy of a feature film, while Takashi Homma steps back, with airy images of a young Japanese girl whom he identifies as his daughter, but is not. A similar airiness informs the dreamy sun-shot self-portraits of Hiromix, a Japanese photographer and fashion model with a cultlike following in Japan.

This memorable show’s most valuable lesson is, surprisingly, a formal one: If looked at hard and honestly enough, life can sustain a tremendous range of visual styles as well as emotional sonorities.