

William Edward Parker (1937-2009) Biography
by Catherine-Nevil Parker

William E. Parker was born January 1, 1932, in Jacksonville, Florida. He received his Bachelors of Design degree, with high honors, in 1954, and his Master of Fine Arts in 1956 from the University of Florida in Gainesville. A visual arts educator for over thirty-eight, having served such institutions as Memphis State University (Tennessee), the art school of Pratt Institute (Brooklyn, NY), and Parson's School of Design (New York, NY) as vice president, Parker was appointed in 1969 to the faculty of the Department of Art, School of Fine Arts, at the University of Connecticut (Storrs). Parker retired from the university in January 1994 and served UConn as Emeritus Professor of Art (painting, photography, and design) and the history of photography. From 1979 to 2001, when he and his wife moved to Gainesville, Florida, he was an invited lecturer, visiting artist and critic in the advanced photography programs at Rhode Island School of Design (Providence). Parker was an honorary lifetime member of the National Society for Photographic Education, where he served as chairperson of its board of directors. From its founding in 1969 through 1993, Parker was a member of the board of trustees of the Visual Studies Workshop (State University of New York graduate program, Rochester). He was also a member of the American Association of University Professors, the New York C. G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology, and the Analytical Psychology Club of New York.

As a painter and photographer, combining media in the second half of his professional career, Parker exhibited in numerous regional and national group exhibitions and twenty-seven invitational one-person shows. His work combining photography and painting was recognized by two National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist grants in the highest award categories, the first received in 1980 and the second (among awards presented to 15 U.S. photographers) in 1982–83. From 1980, forward, Parker's intermedia work concentrated on series of black and white silver prints defining male figurative subjects, hand colored with oil, aquamedia, pastel, wax crayon, colored pencil, and graphite.

Images in the series of grand-scale portraits, entitled *Der Wilde Mann: The Temperaments*, identify various aspects of male physiognomy and expression (conditions of temperament such as the choleric, melancholic, sanguine, phlegmatic, demoniac, and anguished) associated in premodern periods with ritualistic and sacred psychic states. Parker's late intermedia work—figurative portrait images of the male collectively entitled the *Green Man* series—sought to bring to contemporary renaissance images of the male associated with vegetative fertility and chthonic power evident in art since Roman and medieval periods.

Fourteen works from *Der Wilde Mann* were, in 1988, featured in a major one-person exhibition from September 15th to October 15th at the Laurence Miller Gallery in New York City. Of this exhibition, Andy Grundberg, then–photography critic for the *New York Times* (9/20/88) wrote that “Mr. Parker's deft hand with oils, watercolors, and wax crayons enhances a mood that is predominantly one of impending violence.” Noted

critic A. D. Coleman stated in a lengthy review published in the New York Observer (10/3/1988) that the exhibited suite of works “occupies a no-man’s land between painterly and photographic portraiture while also harking back to medieval iconography out of bestiaries and teratological tracts. . . . They are exuberant, manic, theatrical, comic and fearsome. . . . What results are one-of-a-kind pieces in which the painterly and the photographic, the real and the imagined weave in and out of each other. . . . The work thus bounces back and forth between a kind of tortured psychological portraiture . . . and an attempt at rendering psychological archetypes of the masculine that go well beyond the individual. . . This is an auspicious New York debut.”

From February through April 1992, six works from the Der Wilde Mann series were included in a major exhibition, PERSONA (Eight Contemporary Artists Explore Issues of Personal Identity and Maleness: Albert Chong, Chuck Close, John Coplans, Todd Gray, William Parker, Lucas Samaras, Neil Winokur, Jeffery Wolin) at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, California. In the San Diego Reader (3/19/1992), contributing art reviewer Jonathan Saville wrote, “most stunningly in the PERSONA collection, there is William Parker, who seems to drive to their greatest extremes most of the tendencies represented in the exhibit. . . The images are very large (virtually life-size), in flesh tints against black, featureless backgrounds (for this is man in the absolute, not in a specific context). . . Their faces are distorted with looks of fury. . . The mouths are wide open, the teeth are ferally bared, the eyes are wild. You would not want to encounter any of these men on a street corner—or in a mirror. But Parker’s pictures tell us that we meet such men every day, and that if those of us who are, ourselves, men were to look deeply enough into our inner nature, getting past the masks of sociability, rationality, morality, and responsibility that we habitually put on, what we would discover would be precisely these human beasts. Parker also goes further than anyone else in PERSONA in effacing the boundaries between photography and painting. . . . Categories, however, are the last thing anyone should be thinking about in looking at these stupendous pictures. . . If the hackneyed phrase ‘consciousness-raising’ is ever indispensable, it is in this case.”

Works from Der Wilde Mann were also included in other major invitational exhibitions such as Coast to Coast: Contemporary American Photography Invitational at the Houston Center of Photography (1983); Seven Photographers—The Large Print at the NEWSPACE Gallery, Manchester, Connecticut (1986); The Sacred & the Sacrilegious: Iconographic Images in Photography at the Photographic Resource Center, Boston (1986); and PORTRAIT: Faces of the 80s, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, where three of Parker’s works were exhibited alongside portraits by Lee Friedlander, Nan Goldin, Annie Leibovitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, Duane Michaels, Nicholas Nixon, Lucas Samaras, Cindy Sherman, Neal Slavin, and William Wegman, among others. In 1989, Parker’s Der Wilde Mann portraits were included in the exhibitions Fictive Strategies: Actuality and Originality in Contemporary Photography, at the Squibb Gallery, Princeton, New Jersey, and The Figurative Construct: Friedlander/Levitt/Parker/ Spano/Telberg, at the Marilyn Butler Gallery, Santa Monica. That same year, Parker’s Der Wilde Mann works also appeared in The Art of Photography, a major exhibition of

nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs from the collections of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House (Rochester, NY) and in *Contemporary Photographs: The 80s*, another significant exhibition of photographs from the collections of the Princeton Art Museum in New Jersey.

Der Wilde Mann portraits have been acquired for the permanent collections of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Princeton Art Museum, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Photographic Arts (San Diego, CA). Der Wilde Mann works were also acquired for the Eileen Cohen Collection (Great Neck, NY) and the private collections of American painter Fritz Scholder (Scottsdale, AZ) and the collector Hector Puig (Gainesville, FL).

Parker's Tattoo/Stigmata series—oil emulsion polychromed photographs of the male nude—and his Marvels of the West series—SX-70 color print multi-image assemblages of nude male subjects—are both associated with mythic and anecdotal themes surrounding masculine identity. In the late 1970s, works from Marvels of the West were shown in invitational exhibitions at the William Benton Art Museum (Storrs, CT), LIGHT Gallery (New York, New York), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, MA), the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, the Boulder Fine Arts Center in Colorado, the Visual Studies Workshop Gallery (Rochester, NY), the California Museum of Photography (Riverside), and in one-person exhibitions at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, MA), the Cummings Art Center at Connecticut College (New London), and the Tyler School of Art of Temple University (Philadelphia, PA). Tattoo/Stigmata series works were included in the *New American Nudes: Recent Trends and Attitudes* exhibition at the Creative Photography Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge (1981); the *Photographie en Amerique* exhibition at Galerie Texbraun in Paris, France (1982); and the NEA-sponsored exhibition *American Photography Today*, organized by the University of Denver in 1984. Tattoo/Stigmata images are represented in the J. Paul Getty Museum Collection (Malibu, CA) and in many private collections, including those of John and Bonnie Pfahl (Buffalo, NY), Laurence Miller (New York, NY), and Brian Swift and Yuri Imanishi (Kula, HI).

Reproductions of works from Parker's Tattoo/Stigmata series appear in *New American Nudes: Recent Trends and Attitudes* published by Morgan & Morgan (Dobbs Ferry, 1981) and *The Altered Print*, published by Temple University's School of Art (QUIVER no. 8, 1982). Works from the Der Wilde Mann series appear in the catalog *PORTRAIT: Faces of the 80s*, published by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond, 1987); *Record of the Art Museum of Princeton University* (49.1, 1989); the *PERSONA* catalog, published by the Museum of Photographic Arts, with essays by executive director Arthur Ollman (San Diego, CA, 1992); and *The Art of Seeing*, 3rd ed., by Paul Zelanski and M. P. Fisher, published by Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1994).

A one-person exhibition of works from the Tattoo/Stigmata and Der Wilde Mann series—William E. Parker: *Recent Work*—was presented from April 1st to April 30th, 1988, at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery of Syracuse, New York, accompanied by a

folio catalog with text by Jeffrey Hoone, director of LIGHT WORK. Hoone concluded his commentary on these works: "In order to reach new heights of awareness and understanding of the human condition we often must look back to examples of wisdom that have stood the test of time. We must not reinvent those ideas but look at them through the eyes of contemporary experience to allow modern moral and spiritual practices to resound with vintage wisdom. That marriage of classic wisdom and modern commentary is the essence of the powerful spirit and unique expression in William E. Parker's work."

For seventeen years, Parker served as editorial consultant to Aperture Quarterly of Photograph and Aperture publications. He published influential analytic and interpretive essays on contemporary photography, particularly the work of Jerry Uelsmann (Infinity 16.2, 1967; Aperture 13.3, 1967). The Aperture commentary, "Uelsmann's Unitary Reality" was recognized by Peter Bunnell (curator at MOMA and the Photography Collection of the Art Museum of Princeton) as the "first in-depth analysis of the body of [Uelsmann's] work." It remains to this day an important and groundbreaking analysis. As consulting and contributing editor to Aperture publications, Parker collaborated with Bunnell on multiple projects, including W. Eugene Smith: His Photographs and Notes (NY: 1969), and, with Dorothea Lange, on Mirrors Messages Manifestations: Minor White (NY: 1969) for which Parker wrote the text.

In addition to essays on Uelsmann, Parker considered the photographic work of Murray Riss in the introduction to the unpaginated portfolio, Murray Riss, produced in 1975 by the Louisville Center for Photographic Studies in Kentucky, and in "The Photography of Murray Riss" (Creative Camera no. 151, London, 1977). Parker similarly elucidated the work of Siegfried Halus, first in the introduction to the 1977 exhibition catalog Perspective: The Photographs of Siegfried Halus (New Britain [Connecticut] Museum of American Art) and, again, in the 1979 essay, "On the Recent Photography of Siegfried Halus: Fragments from a Collectanea" (Aperture no. 82). Similarly notable are his writings on the contemporary photographers Charles Traub in the essay "On the Instantaneous Commitment: The Recent Portrait Photographs of Charles Traub" (PICTURE Magazine no. 13, 1979); John Pfahl in Parker's introduction to Altered Landscapes by John Pfahl (New York: Robert Friedus Gallery, 1981); Chris Enos in the essay, "At the Edge between Beauty and Decay" (Polaroid CLOSE-UP 14.1, 1983); George Blakely in the essay, "Four Peculiar Connections: Logos Become Eros in Blakely's Forms" (George Blakely: The Florida Picture Show exhibition catalog, Tallahassee: Florida State University Museum and Gallery, 1984); and Rick McKee Hock in the essay, "The Codex Series by Rick Hock: Haunting Images/Unlimited Meanings" (Polaroid's PhotoEducation 5.3, 1988).

Parker also published introductions to special edition portfolios of work by the contemporary photographers Linda Connor, Philip Trager, and Terry Wild, as well as for photography exhibition catalogs, including The Altered Print (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1982); Between Twelve and Twenty: A Photographic Exploration of Young

People Today (Windsor, CT: Loomis Institute, 1982), and The Silver Bullet Gallery Portfolio: 1982–1983 (Providence, RI: Alan Metnick Publications, 1983).

Parker's research and writing on the regionalist photographers E. A. Scholfield (1843–1930) and George E. Tingley (1864–1958) received national attention. His "Everett E. Scholfield: A General Research Report" (Afterimage 4.1&2, 1977) was recognized in American Quarterly (29.3, 1977) and in T. J. Schlereth's "Mirrors of the Past: Historical Photography and American History" (Exposure 18.1, 1980) as being among the most important resources in the history of photography for the field of American studies. Parker also served as invited editor and wrote the introduction to Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influencers—Selected Essays by Heinrich Schwarz, initially published by the Visual Studies Workshop Press in 1985 and then reissued in a newly edited version in 1987 by the University of Chicago Press. Parker wrote an extended afterword to The Poet Exposed: Portraits by Christopher Felver, with a prologue by poet Gary Snyder and a foreword by poet Robert Creeley (New York: Alfred van der Marck Editions, 1986). In 1987, Parker's solicited essay "Considerations for Observers of Post-Darkroom-Altered Photographic Prints" appeared in the then-new national journal, Photographic INsight (1.1, 1987), published by the Bristol, Rhode Island, Workshops in Photography.

Parker excited audiences with his invitational lectures delivered at many institutions across the United States: Yale, Princeton, and Harvard universities; Boston University; Haverford College (Haverford, PA); the Memphis Academy of Art; Brown University; the University of Florida at Gainesville; the University of South Florida at Tampa; the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Cleveland Museum of Art; Sun Valley Center for the Arts and Humanities (Ketchum, ID); the Mint Museum of Art (Charlotte, NC); the International Museum of Photography in New York City; the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies; the University of California at Riverside; the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House; the Visual Studies Workshop; the Jacksonville Art Museum in Florida; the Museum of Photographic Arts (San Diego, CA); and the Neuberger Museum (Purchase, NY). Along with other invited speakers including American journalist Frances Fitzgerald, British historian June Goodfield, American writer, journalist, and historian David Halberstam, American nonviolence activist and professor, Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr., and former U.S. senator, Eugene J. McCarthy, Parker delivered the address "The Art of the Sixties" at the four-day Dilemma '78 symposium—The Sixties: Impact of an Era—sponsored by the Tennessee university, Southwestern at Memphis.

In 1979, among the noted artists and educators Carl Chiarenza, Robert Forth, Hollis Frampton, Estelle Jussim, and Beaumont Newhall, Parker presented one of six invitational lectures at the extended symposium Toward New Histories of Photography, sponsored by the Art Institute of Chicago. That same year—again, among twelve noted photographers, art historians, and critics including Vicki Goldberg, Charles Hagen, Eugenia Janis, Max Kozloff, Rosalind Krauss, and Alan Trachtenberg—Parker delivered a lecture at the national colloquium Voices in Photographic Criticism, sponsored by the

Center for Independent Study in New Haven, Connecticut. He was one of six lecturers (including John Brumfield, Bill Jay, Gary Metz, Martha Rosler, and John Szarkowski) invited to speak at the Perspectives on Photography Series: 1981, convened at the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN) in 1981 as part of the National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored program, Meanings of Modernism. At the 1987 International Congress on Photography, sponsored by the Maine Photographic Workshops, Parker was invited to deliver the keynote address, "Aspects of Jungian Psychology Relative to Photography."

In 1990, Parker was an invited speaker and panelist at the symposium *The Emperor's New Clothes: Censorship, Sexuality, and the Body*, sponsored by the Photographic Resource Center (Boston) and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities (Northampton). He also served as a panelist and speaker-respondent for the session "Photographic History, Theory, and Criticism" at the 1990 national Seminar on American Photography, Culture, and Society in the 1960s, sponsored by the University of Rochester and the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House. In April 1992, Parker was invited to lecture and serve as panelist at *A Symposium: Why Are We Still Using the Nude?*, sponsored by the Wayland Collegium for Liberal Learning and the List Art Center, both at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Throughout his career, Parker presented many lectures and workshops on the interrelationships between painting and photography, most notably at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Boston); the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and the National Endowment for the Arts forum *Painting and Photography*, sponsored by the Department of Fine Arts at the University of New Orleans. He frequently offered workshops relating to C. G. Jung's theories on psychological type (introverted / extroverted attitudes and the functions of thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition), most notably in the graduate photography program at Rhode Island School of Design and the graduate program of the Visual Studies Workshop.

Recognized for his dedicated activity as a photographic educator, Parker received the first American Photo Teacher of the Year award in 1990, announced in *American Photo* (1.3, May/June 1990).