

Bill Parker: A Matter of Influence

Collected Works by Students, Friends, and Colleagues of William E. Parker

In a search for our show's title, Brian Swift suggested a favorite trope and oft-repeated phrase from Bill Parker's teachings, *Amor Mundi*, "love of the world," which has its roots in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and implies an obligation for people to engage with the world. This theme ran throughout Bill's lectures: From the Renaissance forward, subjectivity increased to the point where Western culture found itself, via Descartes, doubting the existence of anything outside of the knowing self. Viewed in this context, photography was born as a way of confirming the presence of the world without subjective intervention. It is the first medium in which the physics of light and the chemistry of earthly elements combine to create an image. In his lectures titled, *Ontological Aspects of the Still Photograph*, Bill emphatically asked his students to consider the implications of choosing an artistic medium in which light is the author of the image, and to humbly acknowledge that our efforts with photographic media rely heavily on chemical and physical processes that lie beyond human enterprise. He did not think of photography as simply a technology that came into being in the 1820s or 30s, but an aspect of human consciousness in evidence as early as the caves at Lascaux, a history that he traced through his lectures on the *Mimetic Tradition in Art*.

Bill Parker was also a follower of the psychology of Carl Jung. He applied the theory of archetypes to the creation and interpretation of images: his introductory lectures were a methodical and thorough explication of the differences between sign, symbol, and archetype. He applied Jung's theory of psychological types to photographic practice, offering photographers an opportunity to expand the expressive potential of their work. Part of this exhibit is organized around this unique approach.

Bill Parker taught artists-in-the-making to "cast their nets wide" in their search for meaning in art and life. The matter of his influence, as expressed in this group exhibit, is as broad as the range of his teachings.

Thank you to all of the contributors to the exhibition, the Archives of American Art for granting permission to play a video-recording of Bill discussing his artwork, Catherine Nevil Parker, Bill's daughter, whose expert editing and research skills supplied the written materials on her father's artwork and helped give shape to the website created in his memory, David DeMelim and his efforts to promote and share the photographic arts in Providence and beyond. And lastly, to my family, my world: Jacqui, Hannah, and Olivea, for their continuous love and support.

Bob Martin, May 2025