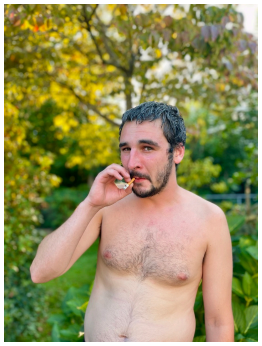
Bob Kelley



Since leaving graduate school in 1990, I have moved several times including across the country. For 30 years I have saved my "William Parker" file. It is a little over an inch thick. I saved his syllabi, assignments, references, class schedule, handwritten notes, critical analysis, bibliographies, Keegan Type Indicator materials, the Compass Points of Consciousness Diagram, and the yearly holiday card with the Parker Family yearly updates. I even saved the envelopes so I would always be able to find him if I needed advice or inspiration. My first Photoiconography assignment was called "Collectanea." I was to gather and collect subject matter from art history that found itself in my photography. Brilliant. My A grade came with three handwritten pages of critical analysis regarding my project. Bill Parker's generosity and insight was immeasurable. He could make you feel great about getting an A but also provoked you to dig deeper and unmask yourself. Ask more questions. See more. See better.

The next Photoiconography project asked the student to find references in psychoanalysis, art history, critical theory and the history of photography present in your current work. Another opportunity for the student to take a rigorous and scrutinizing look into the whys of their creative work. This project was returned to me with an A grade and once again, three pages of critical analysis, only this time it was typewritten, single-spaced, with justified margins and bold text to stress my shortcomings and suggestions for further research to provoke thought. The last page also included a handwritten note suggesting we get together for a long chat to address some of the issues in my work. We finally got that chance years later when Bill was visiting Los Angeles and I was living in San Francisco. We spent the entire day sitting in cafes and talking. I wish I had recorded our conversation, they were challenging and provocative in all the right ways. You realize very quickly when you leave the bubble of graduate school that you starve for aesthetic confrontation and critical analysis.

William E. Parker taught me how to really see photographs. Everything matters in the image. Context, foreground, background, focal point, exposure, printing process, symbolism, shape, form, all of it. I still hear Bill's voice when I'm in self-analysis mode. Bill saw the world in such a huge way. Not often we are gifted with such a generous mentor. So much knowledge about so many things and always sharing enthusiastically. Whenever I am stuck deciding whether an image is worthy of saving I ask myself: What would Bill Parker say about this picture? I am so grateful to Bob Martin for including me in this wonderful project. In memory there is life.

- Bob Kelley