

Snap Judgments

Through Oct. 9

Pictures For Books: Photographs by Thomas Roma

Jazz People: New Orleans Jazz Photographs by Lee Friedlander

Pop Shots: Polaroid portraits by Andy Warhol

Tulane University, Newcomb Art Gallery, 865-5328; www.tulane.edu/~newcomb/artindex.html



To casual observers, some of Thomas Roma's photographs can be a little elusive at first. Like Lee Friedlander, whose jazz portraits appear in the next room, Roma's approach can seem random, so it takes a minute to realize his views of Brooklyn and Sicily sometimes involve a compositional counterpoint as intricate as a Bach fugue. Like Friedlander, Roma incorporates incidentals that most photographers avoid, but here they result in an ambient sensibility that breaks the usual rules while communicating the haphazard intimacy of the Brooklyn landscape. His most compellingly human works have to be his ***Come Sunday*** photos of worshipers in black Brooklyn churches, some of which once were synagogues as is also occasionally the case in New Orleans' Central City. Here the epiphanies of a very emotional form of religious experience are conveyed with great warmth and empathy, which makes for a striking contrast with Roma's more detached Brooklyn and Sicilian vistas.

One of the ironies of a town notorious for taking genius for granted was that it was left to two great photographers from elsewhere — Friedlander and Ralston Crawford — to document New Orleans' traditional jazz musicians of the 1950s. In this series, the young Friedlander's vision is at its most direct and unvarnished, yet his sly use of incidentals is apparent in works such as his 1958 ***Joe James*** portrait (pictured), where the intense pianist is framed by Falstaff beer graphics in the background. This stands in marked contrast to the nearby ***Pop Shots*** series of Andy Warhol's Polaroid photos, yet the stylized glitz of the Peter Pan of Pop is localized in his series of portraits of former New Orleans Museum of Art photography curator Tina Freeman, interspersed with the likes of Pia Zadora and other bygone glitterati. In this show, many of the uncanny connections that link Brooklyn, New York, New Orleans and even Sicily are all on display under the same roof. — ***D. Eric Bookhardt***