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City from Within: A Perspective on African-American Life in Milwaukee

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This version of the gallery guide is identical to the original version.

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a perspective on

African-American Life

in Milwaukee

February 17 - April 2, 1994

Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty
Museum of Art

Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"The City From Within" represents significant community cooperation from a broad range of people and institutions. Tom Sharrard and Beverly Greenberg of Warner Cable, the principal sponsor of *"Songs of My People"* in Milwaukee, provided extraordinary effort and leadership to generate the involvement of the Milwaukee Journal, Marquette University, Marquette Electronics, American Airlines and others. The Milwaukee Arts Board and the National Endowment for the Arts provided funding for *"The City From Within"* and the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design offered facilities for the project. The Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University conceived and organized the project.

Marcia Eidel, assistant director for administration at the Haggerty Museum served as coordinator and liason for the project. Larry Chatman of MIAD helped develop the project, and Carl May served as instructor and printed the images for the students in the project; David Beckes, instructor in graphic design at MIAD, and the students of Visual Resources, MIAD's honors graphic design program, prepared designs for the catalogue; Brad Killam, assisted by John Vanderwerf installed the exhibition which was curated by Curtis L. Carter, Director of the Haggerty Museum.

The City from Within

"The City From Within: A Perspective on African-American Life in Milwaukee" was conceived by the Haggerty Museum, with the cooperation of the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, as a means to involve talented Milwaukee urban youth in a deeper experience of the possibilities for their creative energies. This project involved up to 10 students who were willing to commit ten Saturdays to study the techniques of photography in a special class at MIAD under the guidance of a professional artist/photojournalist.

"The City From Within" was organized in conjunction with the showing of *"Songs of My People: African Americans; A Self Portrait"*, which was presented at the Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University September 17 - November 7, 1993. *"The City From Within"* offers a look at Milwaukee urban life as seen through the eyes and lenses of these young photographers ranging from ages 12 to 18.

The photographers selected for participation in this project met with celebrated African-American photojournalist and filmmaker Gordon Parks during his visit to the Haggerty Museum for the opening of *"Songs of My People."* They were encouraged to study the many fine examples of award winning works by the 50 African-American photojournalists represented in that exhibition. Their technical and artistic studies in photography for the ten-week project were under the direction of Carl May, a professional photographer brought to the project through the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design.

Looking at the images that are represented here, what can we see? First the photographs focus on the lives of the photographers and

their friends. Not unexpectedly they consist of scenes from the homes, libraries and streets of Milwaukee where the photographers live and attend school. For the most part, their images are fresh rather than imitative, even though the structure of the project might have risked encouraging the young photographers to emulate the established artists shown in *"Songs of My People."* It is to the credit of the photographers in *"The City From Within"* that they chose to work with their own experiences and to use the camera as a creative means to explore their own environments. As a result, they succeed in communicating a sense of life as they have encountered it.

Given that images of violence dominate media portrayals of contemporary urban life, one might expect to see the same reflected in the photographs of these young residents of inner city Milwaukee. In contrast to the violent media images to which we have become accustomed, there is little violence shown in the works created for this project. Perhaps these photographers address another, that is interior, level of urban living, one that distances them from the violence shown in media images.

In any event, the photographs demonstrate the keen eyes and perceptive minds of those who may well become the artists of the future. Their images show caring people interacting with each other and their environments, and involved in life affirming acts of learning, play and family interaction. The exhibition thus offers an alternative, if limited, perspective on the urban experience of youth living in Milwaukee in 1994.

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