

# One Month



JAY PASTELAK

# **One Month**

Photographs from One Month  
May 3 – June 3, 2009

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# Introduction

The night before I began this project I dreamed I met Diane Arbus in the concourse of Philadelphia's Suburban Station, by the light well at the Sixteenth and Market Street exit, where she posed for photos with her arms over her head, a pose similar to Harry Callahan's photo of Eleanor except that Ms. Arbus was wearing a dark, crew-neck sweater. I recall that the sweater was gray and that she did not smile.

The afternoon following the dream I went down to South Philly to see Zoe Strauss' annual exhibit under I-95. It was the ninth year, I think, that she'd done this, over 200 photos glued to the pillars that hold up the highway. I wandered around the vast exhibit (it covers a lot of ground because the pillars aren't that close together) thinking of John Waters' film *Pecker*, in part because the work is omnivorous: it wants to ask the question, "What is not an appropriate subject for a photograph?" It all seems equally appropriate, or inappropriate, as the case may be.

I had thought to start this project a bit later in the month but thought my dream was prescient (I can't recall the last time a famous dead photographer appeared in one) and, more to the point, found myself snapping photos as I looked at the work and again, the next morning walking back from the garage where I'd left my car for repair, shooting a lot, shooting anything that came along.

This book was made for the Solo Photo Book Month in 2009. When I decided to make a book I had no idea what I would photograph and chose the title, *One Month*, randomly because I had to call it something and *One Month* seemed as good a title as anything. I recall thinking I'd shoot a photo a day or something. I'm not particularly good at engaging in "Capital P" Projects, where I focus one specific place or thing. I just walk around with the camera because, like Gary Winnogrand, I like to see what things look like

as photographs. Usually, the projects come later, after the photos have been made and I can begin arranging them into groups. Then, once I recognize what I'm doing I can focus more and look at something and think, "Oh, this belongs in That category." But it's never a project, not the Capital P kind.

Not that the project was the problem. My biggest anxiety, when I stopped to think about this book thing, was the fear of not coming up with thirty-five great photos. Or even thirty-five good photos. At first I thought I had to hit a homer every time, if not that then at least a triple. But if everything is equally appropriate, then maybe it doesn't matter. At least that's what Zoe Strauss' photos reinforced for me: it's all little stuff. Maybe I should have titled the book *Minutiae*, since that's what it felt like as I was editing. The photograph as non event.

I shot everything, although to say I simply shot anything that appeared in front of the camera without consideration is a misnomer. Decisions were made, just don't ask how. Lightroom told me I had shot 579 photos when I began editing. Of those, I found just over 100 worthwhile, and as I was initially writing this with a week to go had narrowed the choices down to 41, so clearly I use some sort of selection process. This wasn't 2,000 monkeys with cameras, but I couldn't say exactly what it was. The decisions are more intuitive than intellectual.

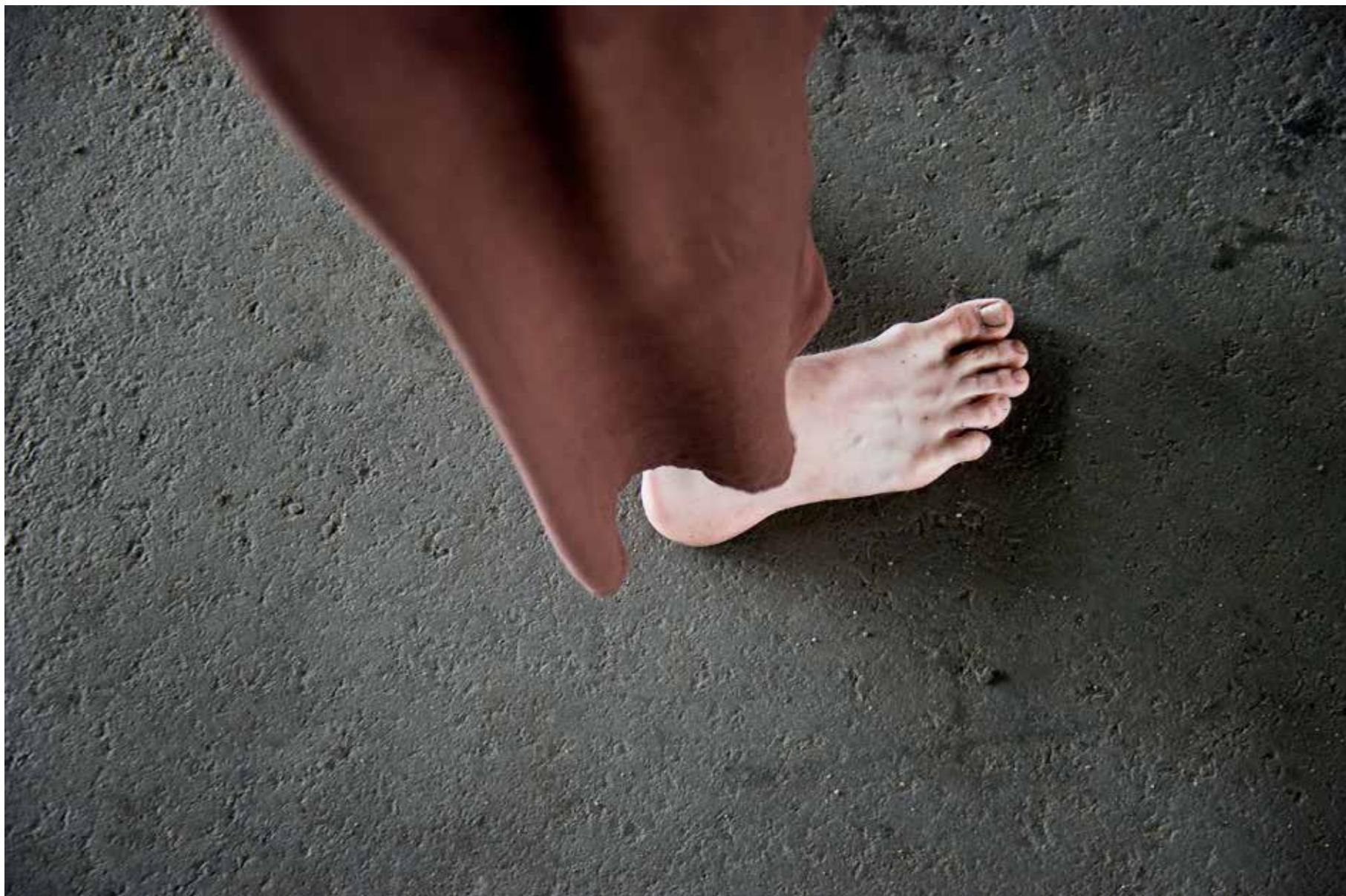
At her I-95 exhibition, Zoe Strauss sells "reproductions" for \$5.00, so I bought one, of a sign that reads "Together we make dreams come true." I thought it had something to do with Diane Arbus, plus, when I originally saw the photo thought it was a handbill pasted to the column. An uneventful photograph. It just made sense to purchase a copy.

I'm looking for a way to end this, but I don't know what the end is supposed to be, so it's a bit like walking out in the middle of the movie. I guess I just say "Bye" and "Thanks."



Zoe Strauss signing my print





Leg, South Philadelphia



"Bless Erica," Jenkintown, PA



Easter Flowers, Jenkintown





Damage, Fishtown, Philadelphia



One Way, Jenkintown



Blue Balls, Abington Township



Light and Shadows, Bryn Mawr



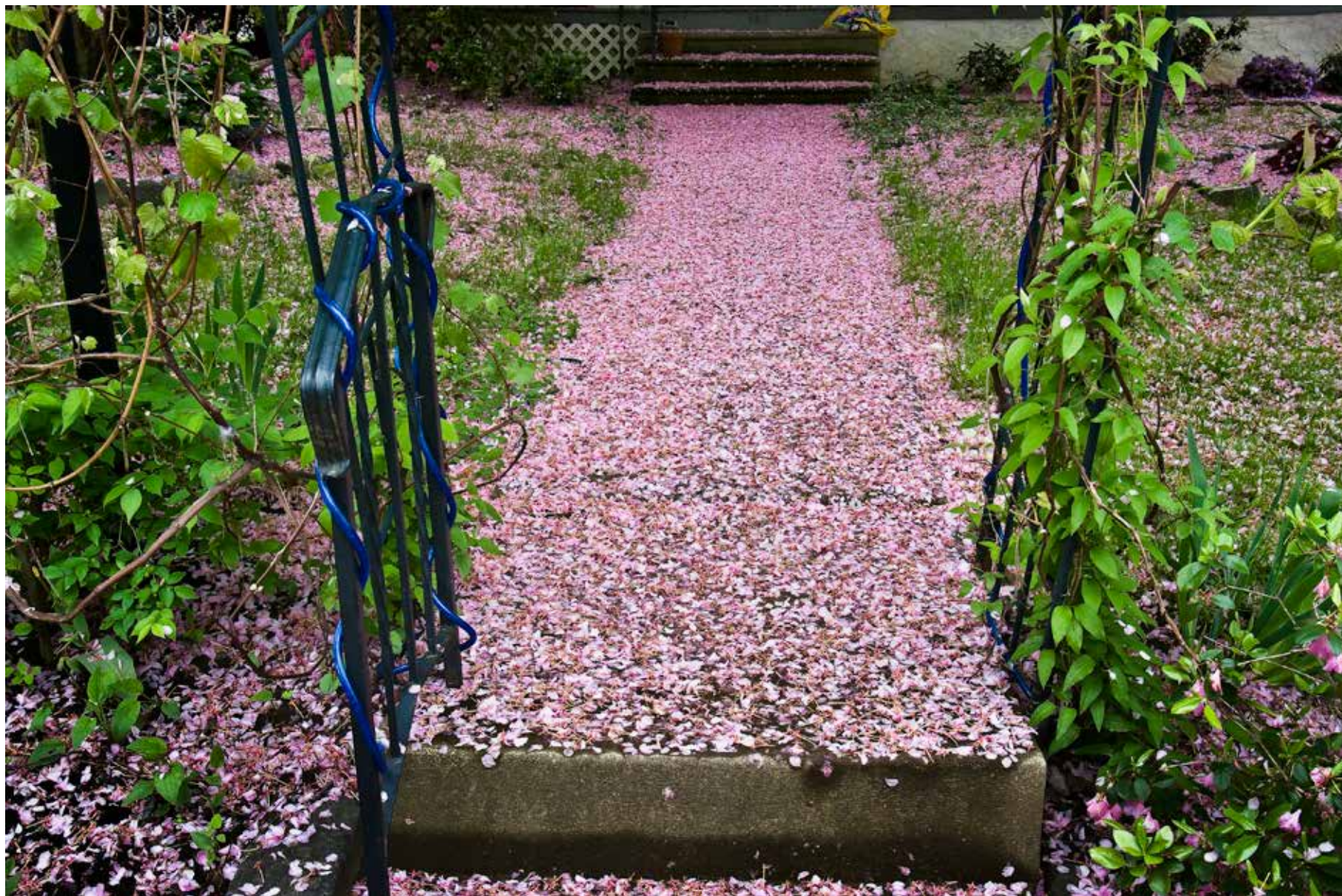
Reflector, Jenkintown



Flag, Jenkintown



Freezer, Jenkintown



Walkway, Jenkintown





House Number, Fishtown, Philadelphia



S.S. United States, South Philadelphia



Shirt for sale, Manayunk, Philadelphia



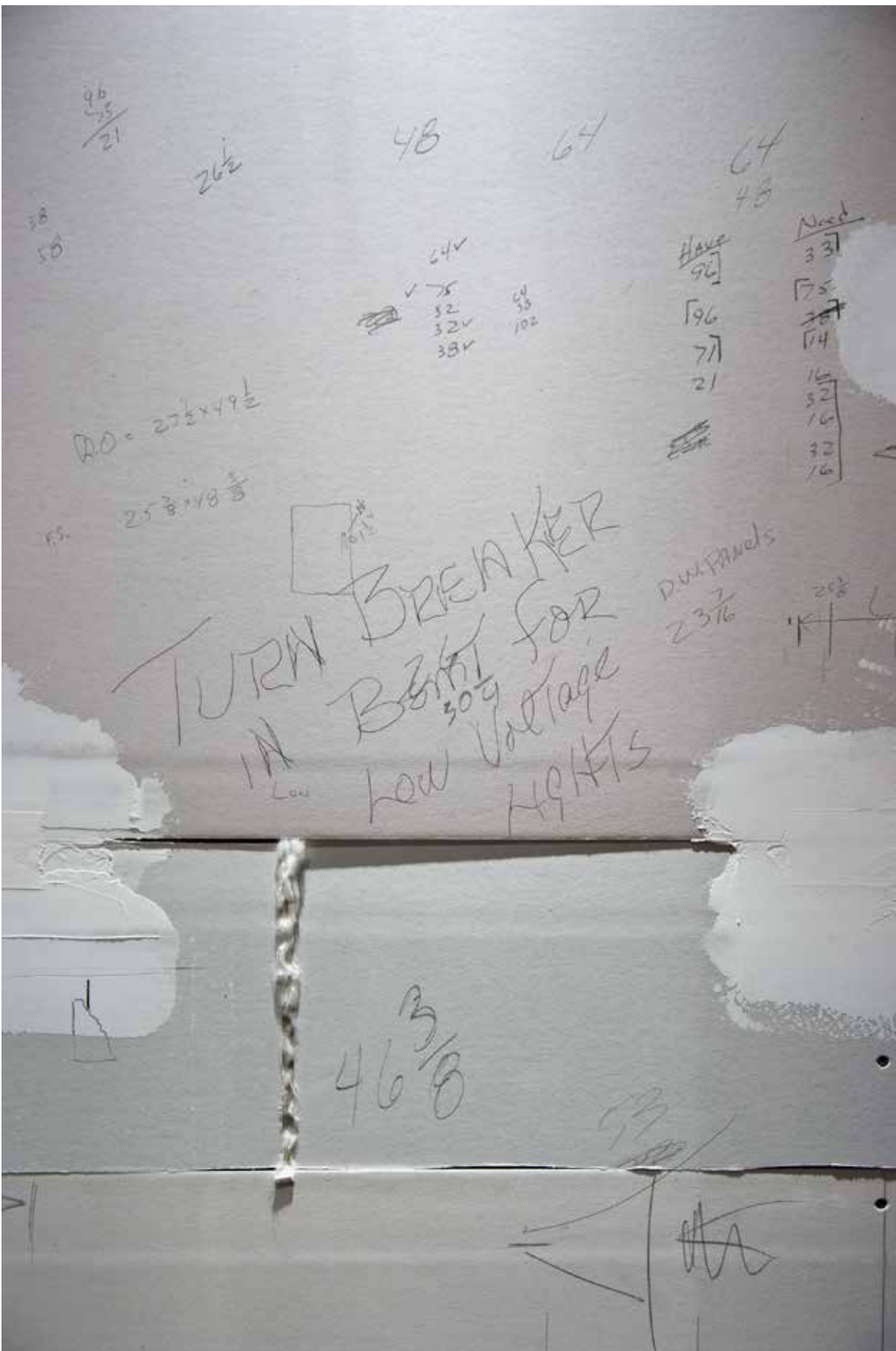
Looking Down, Fishtown, Philadelphia



Tattoo, Center City, Philadelphia



Road Runner, Jenkintown

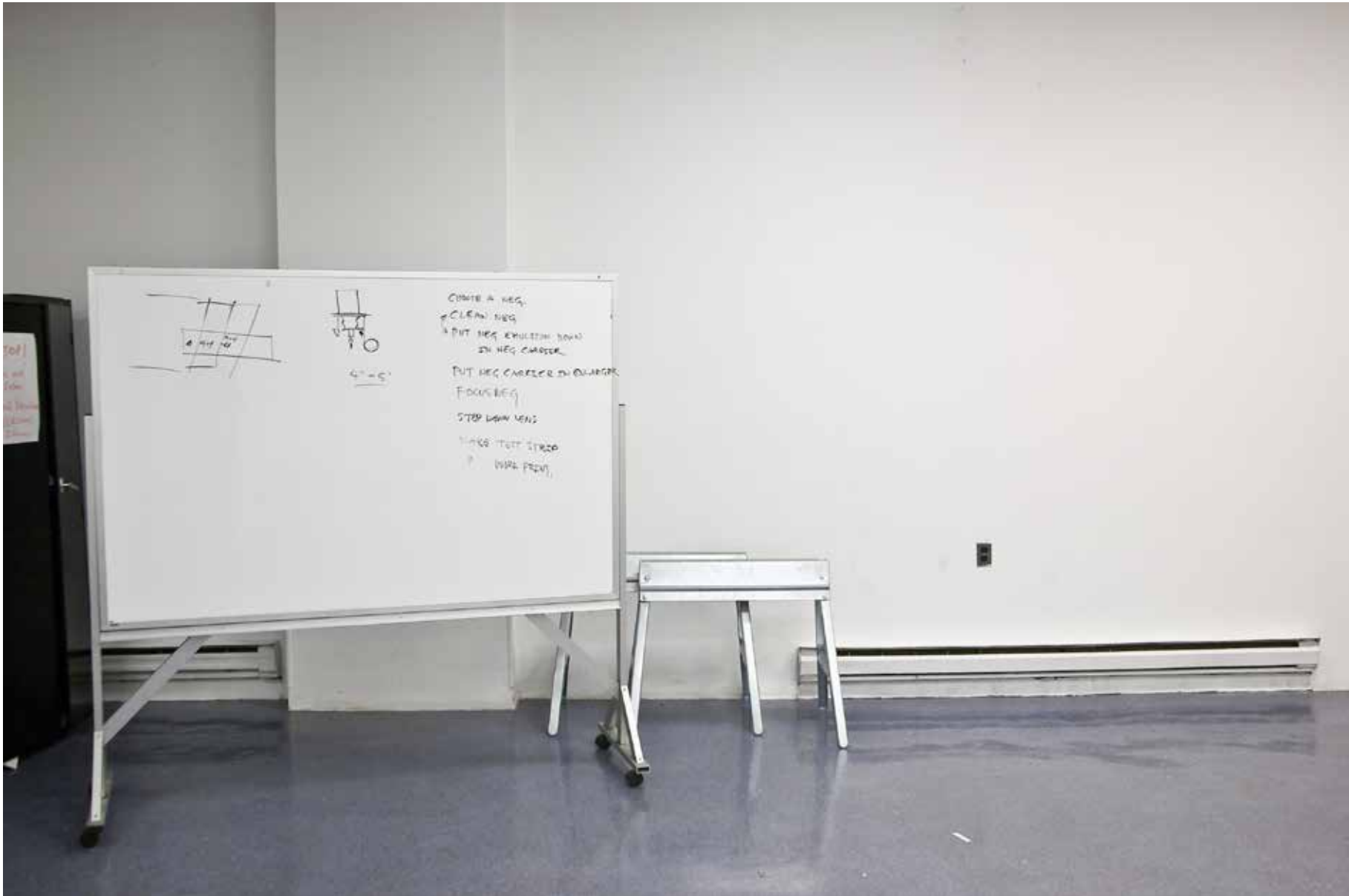


Instructions, Jenkintown



Cellar Light, Pottstown





Classroom, Center City, Philadelphia



Shower, Jenkintown



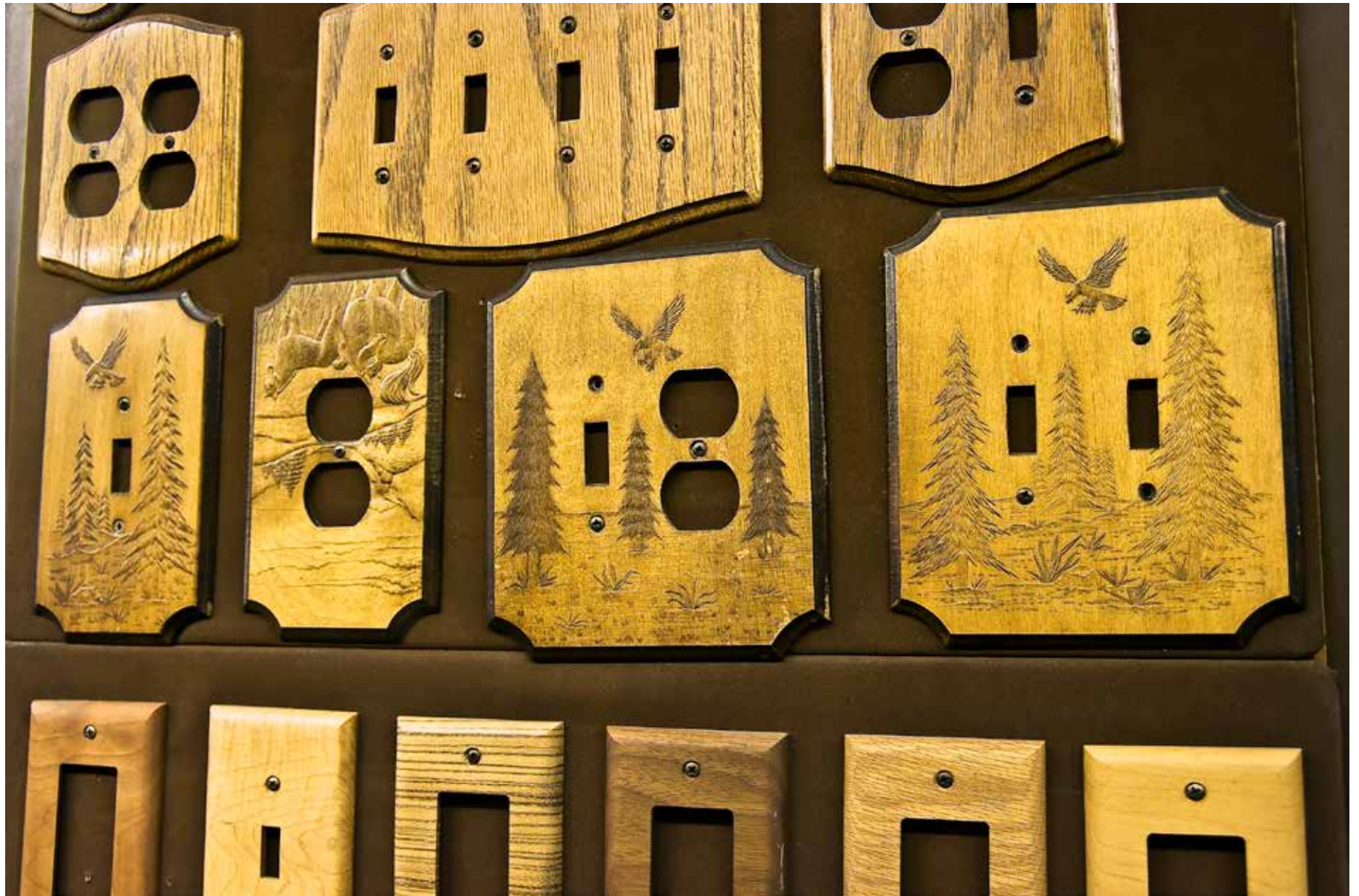
Driving, Rte. 309, Cheltenham Township



Plant, Jenkintown



"For Mail," Jenkintown



Switch Plates, NE Philadelphia



Blossoms, Jenkintown



Missing Chinese Ornaments, NE Philadelphia





Stairwell Light, Center City Philadelphia



View through Blinds, Fishtown, Philadelphia



Light and Shadows, Jenkintown



Swing, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia



Light on Blind, Fishtown, Philadelphia



Ants on Sidewalk, Jenkintown



Cheerios, Abington Township



Purple Flowers, Fishtown, Philadelphia





Hinge in Light, Bryn Mawr



Welcome, Jenkintown



Sidewalk Chalk, Jenkintown



Parking Sign, Glenside



Tulips, Flag and Van Gogh, Jenkintown



Emergency Instructions, Pottstown



Shadows on Sidewalk, Jenkintown



Rope and Chair, Pottstown





Nostalgic Window, Bryn Mawr



# Epilogue

It suddenly occurs to me that people may read the introduction and think this book is me trying to be Zoe Strauss. I'm not. Really. I've been taking photos since 1974, and I've been photographing off bits of things for that long. Before Zoe Strauss was *William Eggleston's Guide*. Ms. Strauss is a phenomenon; I've been plugging away for the better part of—I hate to admit this—forty years and increasingly over those years my interests have focused on the flotsam of my life.

In the early 1990s I bought a used Olympus Stylus and began, because I would see things that interested me visually at intersections, taking photos from the driver's window of my car. One of the first photos I took, stopped in Philadelphia, was of my reflection in the side mirror. A drunk on the sidewalk saw me take the photo and thinking I was photographing him, charged the car. The light was red; it changed as he got to me and I went through the intersection only to have the car in front of me stop to parallel park. The drunk wheeled in my direction screaming rage; he got to the back door as the parking car left me enough room to slip past. My last view of the drunk was him lunging for the car and missing.

I can relate to the drunk. I've lunged at success and missed—which was not the point of telling that story; the point was that I began to photograph from the car window in a series I named "Drive-by Shootings and Other Random Occurrences." Almost none of the photos I took from the car made the final cut; the whole portfolio wound up being just "Other Random Occurrences." The point of which is I've been making these pictures for a long time.

The thing about Zoe Strauss is that I got to see I wasn't making these pictures in a vacuum, that it was OK to do this. I don't show a lot of work to people so there's not a lot of feedback and so I never know if I'm really an undiscovered genius or something less.

Unfortunately, once someone gains a reputation for doing something, everyone else is derivative. I guess I should start looking for precedents. Like William Eggleston. I'm not trying to copy him, either.



Escaping TV, Rochester, NY c. 1979

# Biography



First Art Photo c. 1965

I guess I could say I've been involved with pictures my whole life. Sometime around 1962, my father decided I had talent and sent me to "art lessons" where I learned to paint by copying pictures from *Ideals* magazine, among others. This was in northern Chester County, on the cusp of Wyeth country, and like everyone else there my goal was to paint like Andrew Wyeth.

Actually, I had thought of a career for myself as an actor or a writer, but my father for some reason wanted me to go to art school and become a painter, and he won the argument. Photography became my act of rebellion.

It's not like I wasn't interested in photography all along. I used to wait for the annual photography issue of *Life* magazine; my parents gave me a Kodak Instamatic camera for my tenth Christmas and I took my first "art" photograph—raindrops falling into a puddle—that summer (my mother recently gave me an envelope of old negatives, and there it was, so I scanned it). I began photographing seriously in art school and once I took a photo class that was it.

Kutztown University, when I went there, had no photo major, so I graduated with a BFA in Painting, then went to Rochester Institute of Technology for an MFA in Photography. Today I teach photography and digital imaging at The Art Institute of Philadelphia. I live in the Philadelphia suburbs with my wife, our dog and, when she's not at her house in the city, our daughter.

