

PRESS COVERAGE



## The Furtive Gaze

May 8 - July 12, 2003

1. Camera Work, Vol 30
2. Chicago Journal, 5. 8. 2003
3. Chicago Reader, 6. 27. 2003
4. Chicago Sun Times, 5. 9. 2003
5. Columbia Chronicle, May, 2003

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## The Furtive Gaze

The Museum of Contemporary  
Photography, Columbia College  
of Chicago

MAY 8 – JULY 12, 2003

by MARGARET HAWKINS

**T**he act of taking a picture has always contained the potential for secrecy and stolen images, and this potential has only grown as the science of the art has become more sophisticated. Early on, primitive peoples intuited the dangers of the medium; more recently, paparazzi-plagued celebrities and unwitting surveillance subjects routinely experience them.

The photographer can snap a picture across a room or through a window without the subject ever knowing he was seen, let alone captured on film. And the speed and accuracy of the camera provides unique opportunities for stealing a subject's image in a way that would never be possible for an artist working in a slower, less precise medium. Add to this ease of execution the disproportionate authority assigned to the photograph, the lingering idea that the camera doesn't lie, and you have a potentially powerful technology in the hands of just about everyone.

So the photographer-as-spy is a natural subject for the artist. *The Furtive Gaze*, last summer's exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, explored this notion of the camera as a hidden, stealthy eye. The show presented work by five photographers, Shizuka Yokomizo, Chris Verene, Melanie Manchot, Merry Alpern, and Sophie Calle, who use secrecy, deception, or indirection, with most of their subjects not knowing they are being photographed.

Interestingly, some of the best work in the show is the least invasive. The large-format portraits by Yokomizo feature subjects who do in fact know they are being photographed but who do not know and cannot see their photographer. Calling

her series *Dear Stranger* (1998–2000), Yokomizo contacted potential subjects by anonymous letter and, if they agreed to be photographed, asked them to stand in their apartment window at night with the lights on.

The collaborative nature of this process makes for some very interesting images. Each subject wears a look of engagement and curiosity. Their expressions recall the intensity and focus of traditional portraits, but there is also a hint of the lonely introspection that can sometimes be captured in an anonymous shot on a late night train. These people are both alone and not alone, and Yokomizo's ability to show both states at once is a canny and subtle accomplishment.

Verene's series *Camera Club* (1995–97) relies on a different level of secrecy, based as it is on deceit. He joins camera clubs—those organizations wherein men pose as fashion photographers to get attractive young women to pose for them in sexy outfits—and then uses his insider status to focus on the men instead of the girls.

Verene sets up his camera so that he manages to capture both the girls and the guys ogling them. It's a creepy scenario any way you look at it, and, as underhanded as it may seem for Verene to pose as a participant to catch these men in their sweaty moments of Peeping Tomism, we forgive his deceit since it exposes the equal or greater deceit of his subjects.

But the possibility of deceit goes full circle. If the photographer is tricking his or her subject, he could be tricking us, too. He pretends to his fellow camera clubbers that he's one of them, there to

ogle sexy girls, while winking at us, the viewer, to say he's really a documentarian, there to record the naughty exploits of the cameramen. The viewer who stays with these photos long enough, though, will eventually see it's not so simple. Verene is every bit as much a voyeur as the men he observes, maybe more. And what about us, standing there safely in a museum looking at Verene looking at the men looking at the girls? Perhaps the point of the show is this: we who enjoy photographs are all voyeurs, taking pleasure in the opportunity to spy on the vulnerabilities of others without being exposed ourselves.

Manchot's video *For a Moment Between Strangers* (2001) uses a hidden camera to explore some of the same territory, as she records herself inviting strangers on the street to kiss her. Some do so enthusiastically, while others are embarrassed or disgusted. None realize that this intimate encounter has been recorded in a hypnotically monotonous video loop of query, kiss, query, kiss.

One aspect of this kind of photography that doesn't get discussed very much is ethics. Is it fair to take pictures of people who don't agree to be photographed? And if it generally is, are there circumstances in which it is not? What about the right to privacy, especially concerning the body? Is it okay to photograph people without their knowing it as long as they have their clothes on? What about children?

A few years ago this same museum took this ethical issue to the very edge of tolerance with *The Bathhouse* (1997), a series of photographs taken by Katarzyna Kozyra using a concealed camera in a





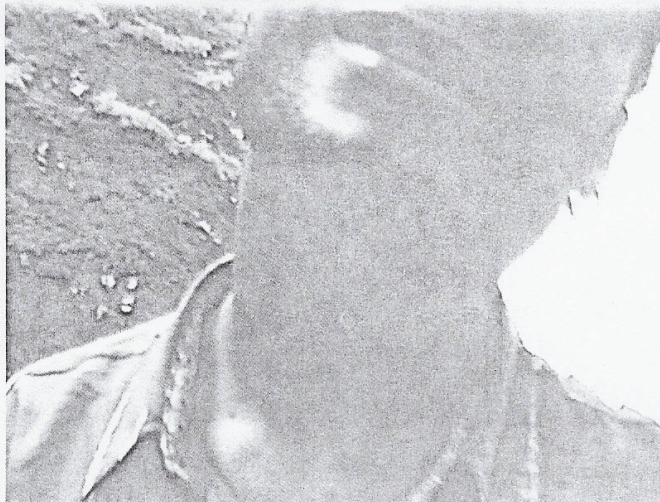
Budapest bathhouse. Here the subjects were not only unaware of being photographed, but they were naked, many of a physique or an age that might lead us to believe that for reasons of modesty or tradition they would have been unwilling to be photographed had they been asked.

The show was delicious, a guilty pleasure. The women were presented considerately, even lovingly. We saw them drying their feet, resting their weary bones on benches, showering. There was nothing incriminating in the photos—but still. It hardly seemed fair to invade the privacy of elderly Old World women bathing themselves in what they believed to be the relative privacy of their community bath. On the other hand, the photos were about the beauty of the unself-conscious body. They made us love these naked old women, while Verene's make us despise his sneaky, horny men.

I felt the same queasiness about the hidden camera Alpern smuggled into high-end department store dressing rooms to catch views of women squeezing the cellulite on their thighs in her *Shopping* series (1997–99). It is when she violates the privacy of the body, especially around the sensitive issue of women's vanity and self-image, that her photos are at their most invasive, but also when they are most interesting and revealing.

Calle thoughtfully turns the issue of spying upside down in two series of photos. One is *Suite vénitienne* (1980), the series she made after secretly following a stranger to Venice and then basically stalking him until he caught her. Shown alongside is *La Filature* (The Shadow, 1981), shot not by her but of her by a private detective she engaged her own mother to hire to track her. In this series Calle puts herself in the shoes of the spied-upon subject, though with the distinct advantage of knowing she is being followed. Here we get flat Joe Friday descriptions of her comings and goings paired with murky shots of her visiting a cemetery and meeting a friend for coffee. As mundane as her activities are, the grainy romantic photos unintentionally lend an aura of drama to what was in fact an ordinary day. In this way Calle illustrates how presentation colors facts more than we like to admit and how, whether true or illusory, often it is the image that lingers long after the last word is spoken. •

Margaret Hawkins is a writer and critic who covers art for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and serves as Chicago correspondent for *ARTnews*.

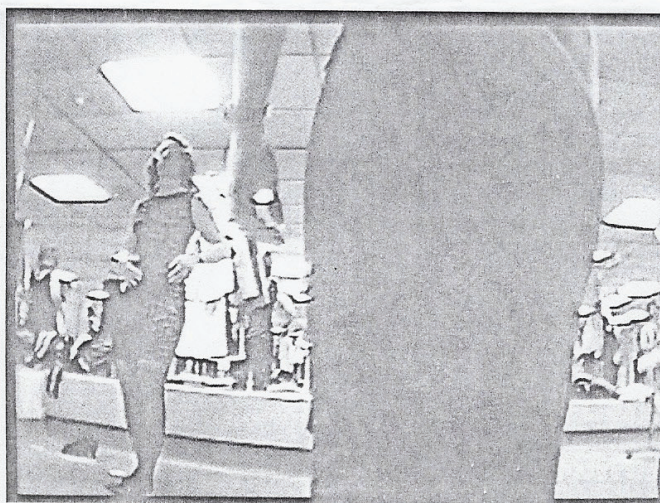


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FACING PAGE: Shizuka Yokomizo, *Stranger (1)*, c-print, 1999. Courtesy of Cohan Leslie and Browne, New York.

LEFT: Melanie Manchot, *For a Moment Between Strangers*, video still, 2001. Courtesy of Rhodes + Mann Gallery, London.

BELOW: Sophie Calle, *The Shadow (La Filature)*, gelatin silver print, typed bond paper, metal frame, 7 photomontages, 2 black and white photographs, one ektachrome print, 11 texts on bond paper, one enlarged text, 1981. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



LEFT: Merry Alpern, *Shopping*, c-print, 1999.



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## Exhibits

**Columbia College Chicago** presents

***The Furtive Gaze***, Thursday 5/8

through Saturday 7/12, with an opening reception Friday 5/9 from 6 to 10 p.m.,

gallery talks Friday 5/9 at 7 p.m. and

Thursday 5/22 at noon, and a film

screening of *Rear Window* Monday 5/12

at 6 p.m. (1104 S. Wabash Ave.) at The

Museum of Contemporary

Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave.

(312/344-7104); ***The Clear Valley***

***Incident, 1615-2003***, a photographic

installation by **Despina Meimaroglou**,

through Friday 5/16 at A+D 11th Street

Gallery, 72 E. 11th St. (312/344-6156); and

***Trace Elements***, the first of two inter-

disciplinary graduate thesis shows,

through Thursday 5/22 at the Center

for Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S.

Wabash Ave., 2nd floor (312/344-6630).



**THE FURTIVE GAZE**  
at the Museum of Contemporary  
Photography, through July 12

By Bill Stamets

**THEY LIKE TO WATCH**

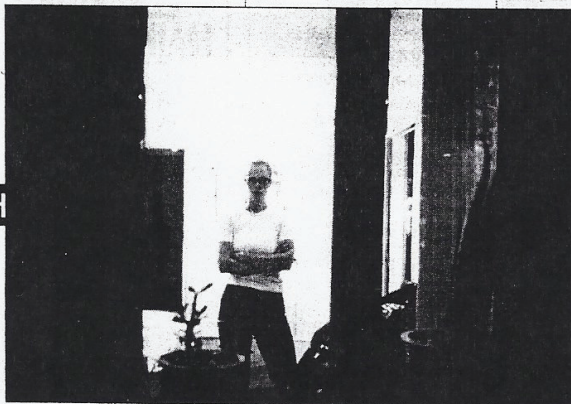
When I heard yelling, I looked out my window and saw a woman across the street pleading with a man to keep their relationship a secret from a relative. Then I noticed someone leaning out a window with a camcorder aimed down at the pair. They didn't notice him, and he didn't notice me. I wish I'd videotaped him in the act of videotaping them. I wonder if he ever sits in the dark of his apartment and aims his lens through my window.

Then last week on a bus I looked up and noticed a passenger wearing big silver headphones that made him appear focused on his music. He also had a 35-millimeter camera strapped around his right wrist. The bag he carried had plenty of room to hold a camera, but his steady regard of other passengers and less-than-offhand positioning of the camera on his lap and at his side made me think he was taking pictures. I transferred to the el. So did he. There were empty seats, but he stood holding on to a pole, where he could alter his stance and aim at various passengers.

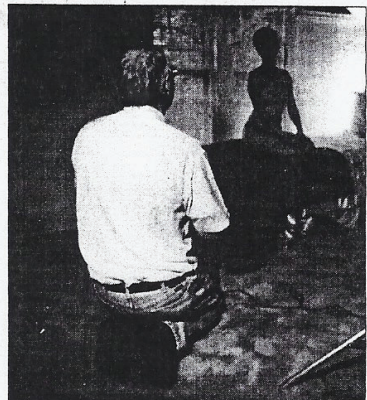
I was carrying a camera too, but it was in my shoulder bag. I also had in there a spare copy of the brochure for "The Furtive Gaze," an exhibition of work by four photographers and one videographer at the Museum of Contemporary Photography that's all about voyeurs and strangers. The passenger I took for a photographer got off the el before I could hand him the brochure. Maybe I should have taken his picture.

For "The Furtive Gaze," MCP associate curator Karen Irvine selected five artists who turn strangers into subjects, usually without their knowledge or consent. Merry Alpern shot women shoppers in department store dressing rooms with a hidden video camera. Sophie Calle stalked a man with her camera in Venice. Melanie Manchof asked strangers on the street for a kiss while wearing a hidden video camera; Chris Verene shot other male photographers in the act of shooting nude female models; and Shizuka Yokomizo wrote letters to strangers asking them to pose for her on a specified night at their windows with all the lights on. As Irvine comments, "The voyeur's position is also our own, implicating our illicit interest in the scene." This exhibition is unusually deft at making viewers think about the ethics of viewing. Are photographs more truthful for spectators when the photographer in effect lies to subjects? Also, each artist in "The Furtive Gaze" asks us to believe a back story about how the imagery was created, which might be said to give the photographs greater authenticity. But by revealing the artists' duplicity, they make us wonder if the stories themselves are true.

Calle's *Suite venitienne* (1980) is a dossierlike array of 82 framed pho-



FROM SHIZUKA YOKOMIZO'S "STRANGER" SERIES



FROM CHRIS VERENE'S "CAMERA CLUB" SERIES

# photography



FROM SOPHIE CALLE'S "LA FILATURE" SERIES

tographs, texts, and other items, including two proof sheets and two maps. She claims these document her covert observation of "Henri B.," a man she met at a party in Paris and followed to Venice the next morning. Her undistinguished black-and-white photographs of him at various locales in the city—sometimes accompanied by a woman, he takes photos at tourist sites—mainly serve to illustrate her own far richer narrative, as she tracks him for nearly two weeks. One entry on February 16 at 4 PM places Calle on a bench at Piazza San Marco: "I watch a little boy with a feathered headdress who's tirelessly chasing pigeons with a knife. I'd like to see him kill one." The violence parallels the latent hostility of her own stalking. Calle's diary recalls Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd," first published in 1840. Poe's narrator spots an odd old man in the throngs of a London street: "I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go." All night and into the next day he follows him, hoping to divine what keeps him on foot, immersed in crowds. Like Poe, Calle pens a curious tale that reveals more about the teller than the quarry.

In a companion piece—*La filature* ("The Shadow"), made the following year—Calle displays 29 photos and 13 texts testifying to the fact that "my mother Rachel S." retained the services of Dulue detective agency at

Calle's request to track the artist's activities for a day. The detective's blurry snapshots and terse observations contrast with Calle's narcissistic musings: "I've become a part of the life of X, private detective. I structured his day. Thus, the 16th of April, in much the same way that he has influenced mine." Essentially Calle pays for the detective's voyeurism in this daylong two-person performance. His last entry reads: "At 8:00 p.m. the subject returns to her house. We conclude the surveillance." As she drifts off to sleep, Calle writes: "Before closing my eyes I think of 'him.' I wonder if he liked me. Will he think of me tomorrow?"

Irvine claims that Calle's contrasting of her diary with the detective's paid report "tests both the truthfulness of photography itself, and the honesty of our public selves." But I wonder how deep Irvine's doubt goes. We can ask how truthful Calle's photographs are in *Suite venitienne* and *La filature* and how honest her reports are. Whether or not Henri B. and private detective X. are real, however, may not matter to Calle's fantasies of following a strange man and being followed by another. In Venice she entices us to share her frisson by looking over her shoulder, while in Paris she looks over her own shoulder to spot her follower.

Verene's 12 chromogenic prints from his 1997 series "Camera Club" draw the viewer into a clearly erotic

scene. Shot both indoors and outside, they picture men who've placed newspaper ads soliciting women to model nude, "pretending to be professional fashion photographers," as Irvine's wall text puts it. Verene in turn pretends to be one of them, shooting from behind their backs to capture them in the act of shooting the women, who appear in Verene's backgrounds. Whether working as a documentary photographer who's deconstructing the male gaze or merely impersonating one to shoot nudes, Verene can be seen as a sort of backstabber. Humiliating his fellow shooters, he frames their backsides and usually omits their faces. The most telling contrast between the men and the women is an untitled shot showing the elbow of a photographer cocked at the same angle as the arm of his model: while he operates the camera, she places her hand behind her head in a classic cheesecake pose.

Manchof's *For a Moment Between Strangers* (2001) documents more transitory intimate incidents. Her uninteresting video records a succession of strangers in various cities responding to the artist's invitation to kiss her—a tiny hidden video camera fastened to the strap of her shoulder bag records the face, then neck of the kisser as he leans toward her. Alpern also employs a video camera, hidden in her purse, to little effect in her "Shopping" series (1997-'99). Ugly color stills, taken from tape shot in department stores, reveal little other than the unseemly self-loathing of image shoppers. These look like outrages from a television news investigation but capture petty indecencies like a woman's chunky bare thigh in a changing room; Alpern's most arresting shot frames a ruby red shoe as a garish fetish. She proved a more powerful voyeur in an earlier, black-and-white study of people urinating, having sex, and taking drugs in a Wall Street bathroom, shooting them through a dirty window. Here she comes off as an arsy shoplifter rather than a sociologist of shopping.

The strongest images in "The Furtive Gaze" have the most intriguing back story yet the least need of one. Yokomizo wrote letters, addressed "Dear Stranger" and signed "Artist," asking people in London, Berlin, New York, and Tokyo to pose on particular evenings for ten minutes with their lights on and facing their window so she could photograph them. The nine color prints in her "Stranger" series (1998-2000) capture gazes and postures expressing unusually affecting states of ambivalence, wariness, and vulnerability. In one print, a Japanese woman in her stocking feet stands with her hands clasped, awkwardly peering at the viewer with a look that's both rapt and lost. Yokomizo's back story—her subjects couldn't see her outside in the dark but were fully aware of her presence—is the most fascinating in this exhibit. The trust between artist and subject has a strange poignancy that makes the other artists' tactics seem feints or stunts. And unlike the other projects in "The Furtive Gaze," Yokomizo informs the final look of her photographs.

As a grace note to the exhibit, the museum has installed in a side gallery eight black-and-white prints by Walker Evans borrowed from the Art Institute of Chicago. In the winter of 1938 and the spring of 1941, he hid a camera under his overcoat to shoot portraits of passengers on the Lexington Avenue and Seventh Avenue lines of the New York subway. It's been done since by other photographers, including Luc Delahaye, who shot a series between 1995 and 1997 in the Paris metro titled "L'autre" ("The Other"). The photographer I saw on the el might have been following Evans's example. Indeed, Evans's historic photographs could be said to lend an aura of integrity to what Irvine termed our "illicit interest in the scene."

The place of explanatory text in this exhibit is complicated by an introduction James Agee wrote to Evans's book of surreptitious photos, *Many Are Called* (1966), not quoted in Irvine's brochure or wall text. After a few perfunctory sentences stating where, when, and how Evans took the pictures, Agee observes: "To anyone who understands what a photograph can contain, not even that information is necessary, and any further words can only vitiate the record itself." Agee writes nothing more about

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# Museums

*Continued from Page 28*

mother to hire a private detective to shadow her. "This work turns the tables on the concept of photographer as voyeur. Here, the artist assumes the role of the observed person," said Irvine.

The exhibit begins with some historical works, such as Walker Evans' 1930 subway portraits and Garry Winogrand's "Women Are Beautiful" portfolio. Melanie Manchot walked through streets of cities asking random strangers to give her a kiss. Their responses ranged from disgust to playful consent.

"The camera has proven itself the perfect tool for the delicious pleasure of witnessing someone caught off guard," said Irvine. "Cameras [over the years] have been built into purses, walking sticks, pocket watches, men's ties, and in one noticeably twisted case, molded into the shape of a revolver."

An opening reception will be held from 5 to 8 p.m. tonight. The museum is at 600 S. Michigan. The exhibit will run through July 12. Admission is free. Call (312) 344-7104.

**Cutting-edge art:** Two exhibits, prints by Whitney Bradshaw and paintings by William Alexander, will open today at the International Museum of

Surgical Science.

Bradshaw, in **Scars**, explores the body's surface utilizing a close-up camera lens. The unexpected scale of the work becomes unsettling as one realizes the subject is a scar.

Alexander's **Madman Series** focuses on the human face to convey torment and anguish.

A free reception will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. today. The museum is at 1524 N. Lake Shore. The exhibits will run through Aug. 25. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors. Admission is free on Tuesdays. Call (312) 642-6502.

**Rare sky show:** The Adler Planetarium will host free **telescope viewing of a total lunar eclipse** from 9 p.m. to midnight Thursday. Astronomers will be on hand to answer questions. Inside the museum, the details of the eclipse will be explained in Sky Theater presentations (\$5 each).

A total lunar eclipse occurs when the full moon passes into the shadow of the Earth. The moon doesn't disappear completely when it enters the dark shadow of the Earth. The atmosphere bends some sunlight around the edge of the Earth, so the moon seems to change color as it moves into the shadow. The color of a lunar eclipse depends on how much dust and pollution is in the atmosphere at that time. The moon may appear dark brown, deep red or bright orange.

The museum is at 1300 S. Lake Shore. Call (312) 922-STAR.



# Special Mayfest Edition

Special Edition Published by the  
**COLUMBIA CHRONICLE**

May 2003

Special Supplement 13

## 'Gaze' exhibit artists get behind the lens

○ **Voyeuristic photographs have human-interest appeal, says associate curator**

An exhibition featuring five contemporary artists who recorded voyeuristic glimpses into the lives of strangers, is being hosted by The Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave. The exhibit, titled "The Furtive Gaze," opened to the public on May 8, and will run until July 12.

David Carroll, manager of development and marketing of the museum, described the May 9 debut of "The Furtive Gaze" as a success.

"The opening went very well.

Over 350 people attended and it brought dealers from all over the world that were interested," Carroll said.

Works on display resemble the use of a hidden surveillance camera. One focus was privacy boundaries; as the five artists—Merry Alpern, Sophie Calle, Melanie Manchat, Chris Verene and Shizuka Yokomizo—hid their photography tools to a certain extent. Whether it was concealing cameras, using false motivations or concealing their identity.

Karen Irvine, associate curator at the museum, said that voyeuristic photographs have a human-interest appeal.

"This has been the purpose of photography," she said. "Artists

who use their cameras to deceive."

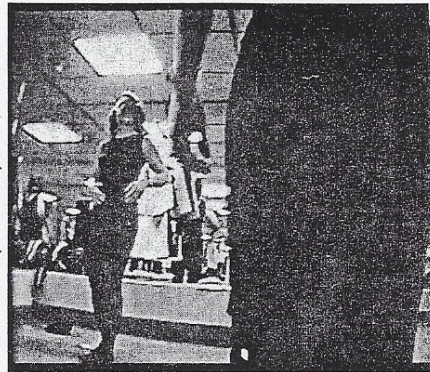
Such deception included Verene's work, "Camera Club," which is highlighted in the exhibit. Verne took on the subject of young women lured into nude or semi-nude modeling by groups of men pretending to be professional fashion photographers. He posed as one of the "camera club"

photographers and used his camera to capture the expressions of those creating the false motivations.

In preparation for her series, "Stranger," Yokomizo, sent an anonymous letter to her subjects. The letter asked the participants to stand outside their front window at a specific time and date. Yokomizo then arrived to photograph for a few minutes and then left. The subjects never met the photographer or knew the activity they were participating in.

Vanity and consumerism ideals were caught on still videotape with Alpern's "Shopping" photographs. A plastic shopping bag held a concealed video camera as Alpern visited luxury department stores. Visuals of women absorbed in their shopping activities were attained and printed as video stills.

French artist Sophie Calle turned the tables in her piece included in the exhibit. A private detective was hired to report Calle's daily



activities and surroundings. She became the object of observation for the voyeuristic photography series, "The Shadow (La Filature)."

And Manchat explored an intimate interaction with strangers as she walked through streets throughout the world asking random people for a kiss. A hidden lens on the shoulder strap of a bag taped their responses. "For a Moment Between Strangers," displays the range of disgust, dismissal and good-humored compliance to Manchat's request.

"All of the artists were really excited and willing to participate when asked to do this," Irvine said.

The work displayed at the museum is for sale through the galleries, which represent the artists.

The museum is free and open to the public Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday until 8 p.m., and Saturdays from noon to 5 p.m.



Two of the photographs on display at 'The Furtive Gaze' exhibition in the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave. (Above) Photography by Shizuka Yokomizo. (Above right) Photography by Merry Alpern.