

PRESS RELEASE

**William Eggleston**

**Opening reception: 6-8:00pm Wednesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1999**  
January 13<sup>th</sup> – February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999

*"There are four simple words for the matter, which must be whispered: color photography is vulgar"*

Walker Evans 1969

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of the first color efforts of William Eggleston. Taken in the years 1966-1971, these photographs have never previously been shown.

In 1976, The Museum of Modern Art in New York shocked the entire established photo art world with an exhibition of 75 color photos by William Eggleston, who in 1976 (the year after Evans's death) had been the butt of scornful criticism from almost all quarters. Since then, Eggleston's consistent and subtle work with the aesthetic of the snapshot has influenced contemporary photography at least as much as Walker Evans, whose tradition Eggleston has actually promoted by focusing on the qualities of the trivial. Evans was among the first to acclaim Eggleston's photography, when he came to New York in the early 1970's to present his comprehensive Mississippi and Tennessee work to famous colleagues—and to John Szarkowski at the MoMA.

Actually, Evans completely revised his view of color photography before he died. This may or may not have been due to Eggleston, but it is amazing that no more than 15 years ago color photography was actually scorned so much by the photo art world as the strong negative reactions indicate. The reactions were especially provoked by what the critics saw as an outright anti-formalism in Eggleston's work, which seemed to jeopardize the ranking of photography as an artistic medium with galleries and contemporary critics in the early '70's. What had been canonized was the reliable, black-and-white "fine print" in the Weston-Evans-Siskind- Friedlander tradition; photographic quality was almost automatically equated with black-and-white expression as opposed to the obtrusive pop and media culture: the color excess of film and advertising.

Indirectly the criticism was also engendered by Eggleston's focusing on things as trivial as dilapidated interiors, oil tankers, ovens, suburban "architecture", unheroic landscapes, and the rest of the photographer's home town iconography. In contrast to the negative reception of Robert Frank's *The Americans* in the late 1950's, the criticism this time did not focus on the contents, ideology or implicit irony in Eggleston's lovingly critical attitude. It was directed at the form, or the lack of form, and raged and fumed because there was so little difference between Eggleston's pictures and those in a family album.

(From *William Eggleston*, by Henning Hansen, published by The Louisiana Museum, Netherlands 1992.)

Taken with a 2 ¼ camera these large 23 x 23 inch photographs suggest approaches more recently seen in the work of such artists as Jack Pierson and Nan Goldin.

The portfolio CADILLAC, consisting of twelve 24 x 30 inch plates, has been published on the occasion of the exhibition.