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Lajos Green's "Preliminary #5" is like a film still. It is one of thirty photographs on display at the Photographic Resource Center. (Photographic Resource Center)

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

## Big picture, small space Dizzily varied exhibit looks to the future

The Boston Globe

By Mark Feeney, Globe Staff | November 17, 2006

People rarely call the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University by its full name. Instead, it's just "the PRC." That's as it should be. The informality of the initials emphasizes how uninstitutional an institution the PRC is: flexible, innovative, unpredictable.

There is one problem with using "PRC," though. The pivotal word in the center's name goes unspoken. "Photographic" may be the defining word but "resource" seems more important somehow, doubly so.

It's not just that the PRC long ago became a valuable resource on the local arts scene. There's also the reminder the word carries that photography itself is a cultural resource of perhaps unrivaled utility and application.

Henry James famously described the novel as "a loose, baggy monster." Photography is a loose, baggy medium. A painting or a symphony has no effective existence beyond the aesthetic realm. Yet a photograph can simultaneously function as art, documentation, keepsake, and technological artifact.

The new show at the PRC, "POV | PRC: Photography Now and the Next 30 Years," which runs through Jan. 28, gets at both of these aspects of "resource." In celebrating the center's 30th anniversary, it offers a double demonstration: how very well the PRC carries out its mission as a local

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clearinghouse for photography and how wildly various the medium is.

The most astonishing thing about the show is how economically it does this. The PRC asked 30 individuals -- board members, former staffers, and the like -- to nominate a photography-related subject worthy of greater attention and/or likely to have an impact on the medium over the next 30 years. The beauty of such a brief is that "subject" leaves itself open to so many possibilities. The result isn't a comprehensive look at the present (and future?) photographic landscape. Not even the mightiest museum could do that. But "POV | PRC" manages to cover a lot of that ground in a very small space.

Photography begins with photographers, of course, and the show includes 20 of them. They work in a wide range of forms (photojournalism, video art, portraiture, still life) and a dizzying variety of styles. Elijah Gowin seems almost to have abandoned photography, using paper negatives and printing his work on watercolor paper. If his "Clench 1" looked any more painterly it could pass for an oil on canvas. Conversely, Tim Garrett reaches into one of the most retro-mundane recesses of photography for his work. He relies on photo booths to make his images.

Lajos Geenen is a visual storyteller. His "Preliminary #5" presents an utterly banal situation, a woman applying lipstick as she stands on a deserted daytime sidewalk. Yet through his juxtaposing of shadow and light, Geenen invests the scene with inchoate implication. It's like a still from an imaginary movie one would gladly pay real money to see. Even so, the mysteriousness of Geenen's picture pales before the overpowering mysticism of Chehalis Hegner's "Trophy."

Photography extends well beyond photographers, though, and so does "POV | PRC." The remaining third of the show includes a curator, an artists' collective, an online magazine, and a publisher. There are also places for Adobe Photoshop and eBay.

Don't laugh. Has anything had a greater impact on almost every aspect of contemporary photography than that software, or done more to affect the nature of collecting than the auction site? Their importance to photography today -- and, presumably, tomorrow -- is so fundamental it takes their inclusion in a show like this to remind us of that fact.

The impact of eBay has been twofold: democratizing the collecting of photographs and broadening our assumptions about what photographic items qualify as collectible. Looking ahead, consider the brochure that accompanies "POV | PRC." It's complimentary to visitors. But who knows what it might go for 30 years from now on eBay? If an exhibition's quality is factored in, that should be a nice piece of change.

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