

## **THE GEOMETRIC HUMANITY IN THE URBAN PHOTOGRAPHY OF CARL SHUBS**

- By Mat Gleason, Los Angeles area critic and curator

Like a detective piecing together clues, photographer Carl Shubs peruses the urban landscape for the moments when architecture ceases to be about structure and becomes an art-like experience. After taking his shot, our trusty detective then composes and heightens the magic of the moment back at the lab, or in this case, his studio - a desktop computer. To discuss it is to risk missing the elusive magic in his work that is just slippery enough that it cannot be articulated in casual artspeak.

Look at the work of Shubs as one side of a coin with Robert Doisneau on the other. While every Doisneau picture has a person or group of people in it, all of those spontaneous scenes of a warm and eternal humanity are encased within urban landscapes. We all come from the caves and yet our fine species is not at its apogee without a physical social structure. Shubs depicts that urban nest in which most of Homo Sapiens, the great naked ape, now nestles. The artist does not empty out the cityscape of people as a commentary on them, but to allow for all of us to appreciate the spaces in which we interact. An artist can be a humanist and make art free of people. Carl Shubs reveals the residue of all eight billion of us in his poetic homages to the beauty of the physical spaces that embrace and reflect our collective capacity to inspire awe.

In that regard we have to acknowledge the artist's debt to the vision of Ansel Adams as an inspiration. Simultaneously, though, we must admire that Shubs does not seek to merely parrot the master. Instead of hiking out to nature to capture the perfect moments of light, he finds in the majesty of the urban landscape a treasure trove of visionary moments to be captured on site and perfected in his studio practice. Thus, he mimicks the methods of the master Adams without ever playing copycat.

Is there poetry in every lonely step we take in urban spaces at their empty moments? Without people present, are we not supposed to see the beauty when geometry harmonizes with color? Perhaps we don't have permission to accept the sublime because these fantastic visions are not codified as officially sanctioned moments of beauty. The art of Carl Shubs gives us that permission. His photographs are dispensations to experience the ordinary as the fantastic. Where Edward Hopper needed people in his paintings to underscore the loneliness of the urban experience in the architecture, Shubs conquers any potential loneliness in an unpopulated scene by partnering the viewer up with his vision. This intimacy in the artist's poetry creates a sense of connection that populates all of the passages he photographs.