

A Journey Towards Comprehension

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Photography is commonly linked with architecture in abstraction and poetic narrative; it likewise transforms ideas into phenomena through simple subjects in the physical world. This nonlinear and nonlinguistic transforming process becomes a journey in which we comprehend the world and ourselves.

In 1955, Robert Frank, a Swiss-born photographer, started his journey across the United States of America on a Guggenheim Fellowship. His seminal photography book, *The Americans*, was realized from this two-year travel. For a European who had traveled around the world, this particular road trip across America with a camera in hand was “a visual study of civilization born here and spread elsewhere.”¹

When Lee Friedlander traveled through America, he photographed portraits of himself in hotel rooms, on the street and elsewhere. He often snapped shots of his own reflection or

shadow cast on nearby surfaces. These highly self-reflexive images include the surrounding context, using the world to comprehend his place in it.

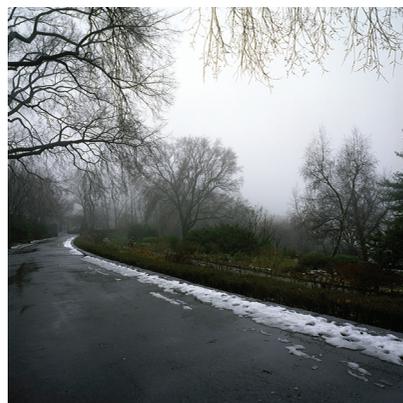
William Eggleston explored seemingly common subject matters of daily life as well. He was “transforming the ordinary into a thing of wonder and myster—utterly simple, yet endlessly complex.”² Mr. Eggleston is considered a pioneer of color photography in America and delivered a strong message, that image making filtered his personal experience of daily life through imagination.³

Many of Mr. Eggleston’s photos were taken from the driver’s seat of a car, a perspective evoking the notion of a travelogue. The notion of journey as self-discovery is “conveyed subliminally and serves as metaphor of social change.”⁴

I take photos to study this world and myself. Having suffered from cultural

impact and language barriers upon my arrival to the United States in 2000, I sought an alternative to speech. This was not only necessary to express myself, but more importantly to create an opportunity for dialog. Photography became this alternative. Through the process of photography, experiencing framed space, and relying on specific physical subjects, the limitation by this reliance was diminished. Although my objective was not to seek total independence from the object, comprehension became more than recognition, revealing the birth of reinterpretation.

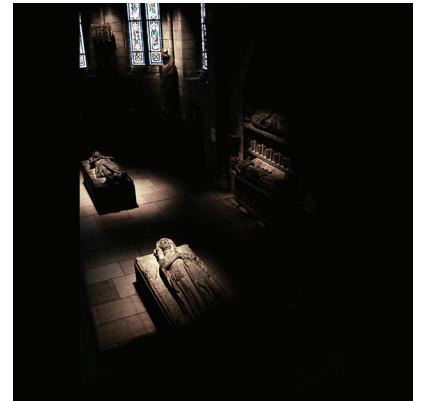
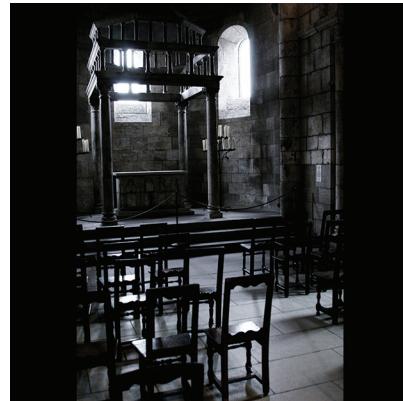
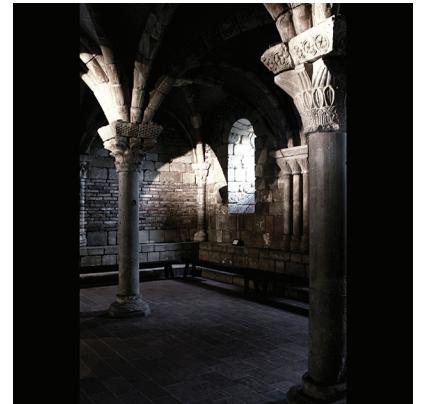
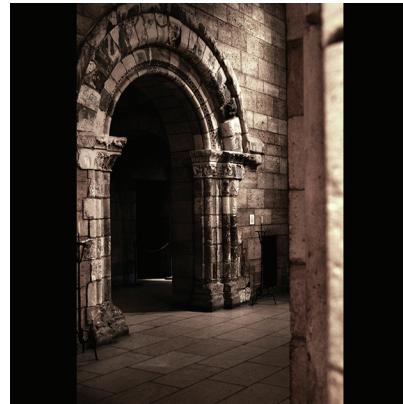
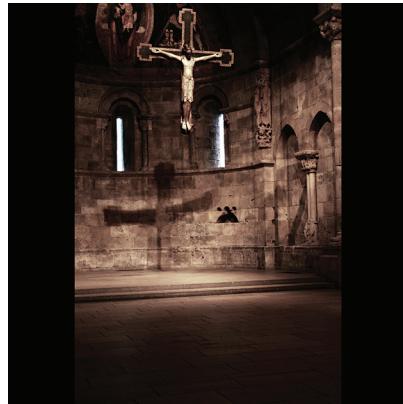
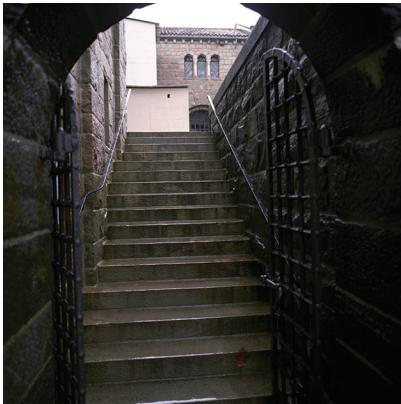
Here this evolution from recognition to realization is demonstrated in a series of photographs. The images were taken at the Cloisters Museum and Fort Tryon Park in New York City. The Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was assembled from medieval European architectural elements—a strong setting with its own identity and almost stereotypical reputation. However, the





Wednesday, February 13, 2008; 3:30 P.M.; Cloudy

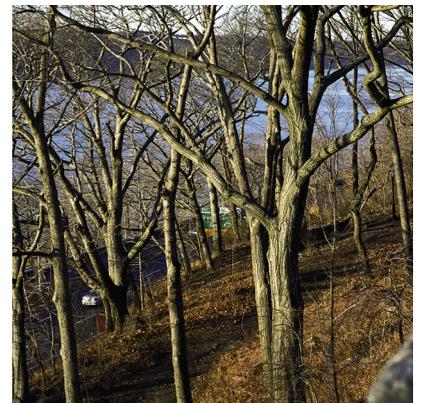
I brought two cameras with me—a Mamiya 6, square-format film camera with a wide-angle lens and a Canon 30D digital camera with a 24–105mm zoom lens. It was cold and foggy by the Hudson River. Some snow was still there from the storm two days before. I was immediately attracted by the spectacular views in Fort Tryon Park en route to the museum. Through the wide-angle lens and the zoom lens, the images showed a wondering, yet typical trip to a museum with dramatic space and exhibition. The physical presence of the museum's architecture captured my full attention. The impression of the museum exactly matched my perception from the published books.





Saturday, February 16, 2008; 4:30 P.M.; Sunny

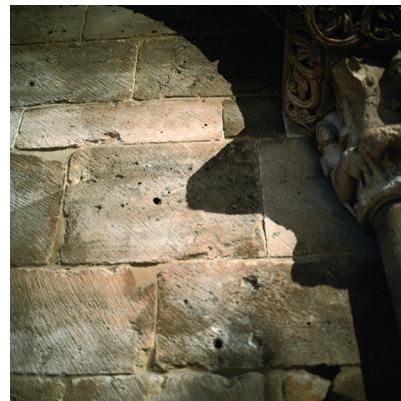
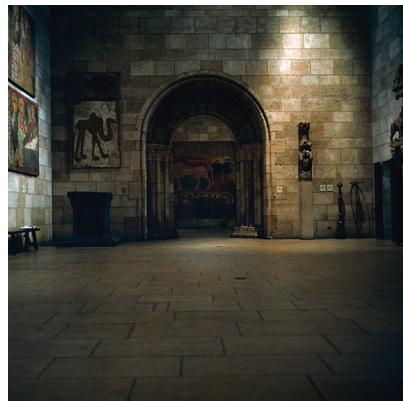
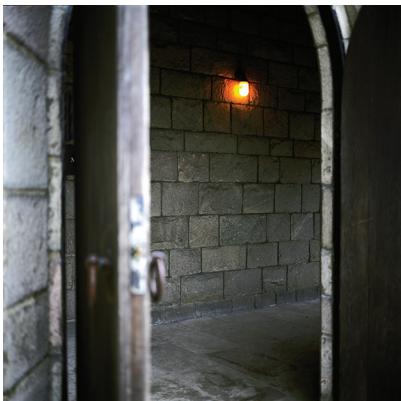
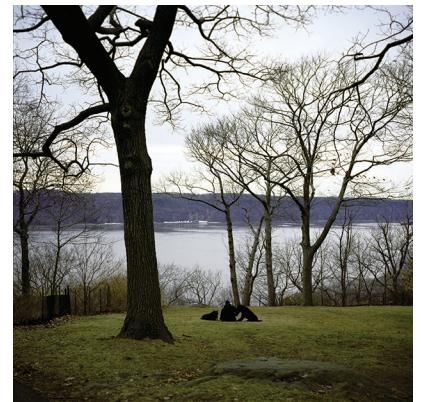
Only one camera was brought for this visit. With the same Mamiya 6 film camera, I changed the lens to a 150mm telephoto. Due to the delay of the subway, the museum was closed upon my arrival. Hence, my attention was drawn to the exterior of the museum. On this clear, cold day, the Cloisters could be seen through the bare tree branches. The north side of upper Manhattan, the Bronx, could be easily seen from the park overlook.

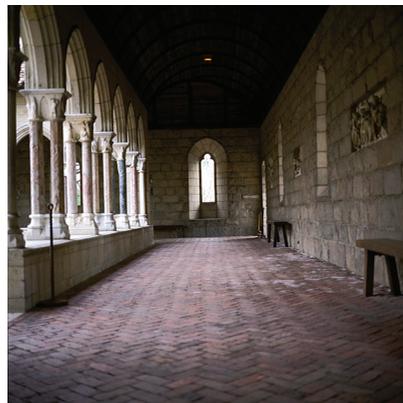
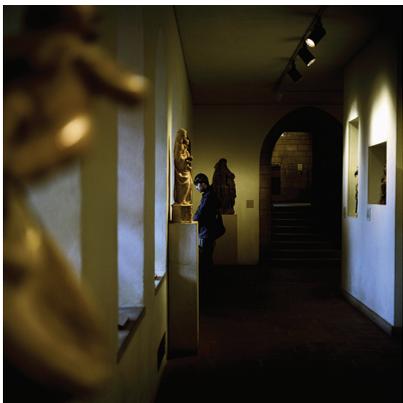
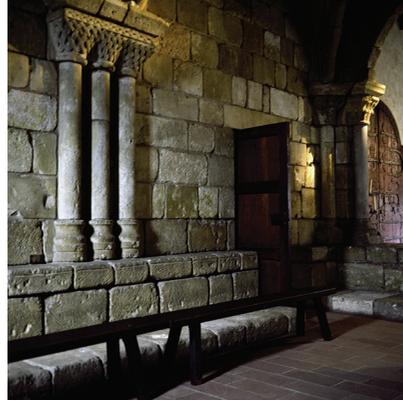


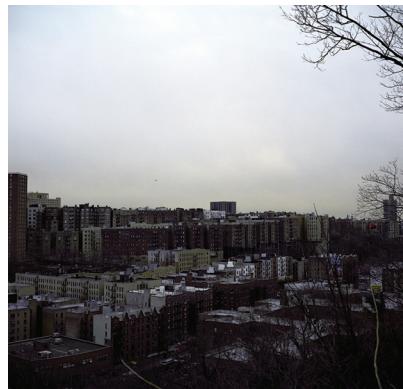
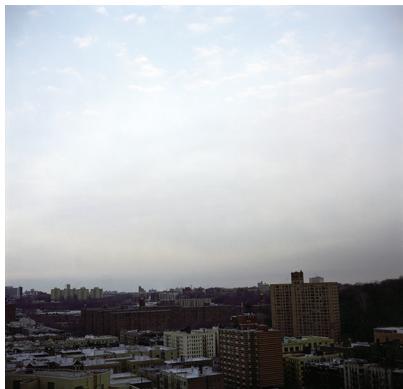
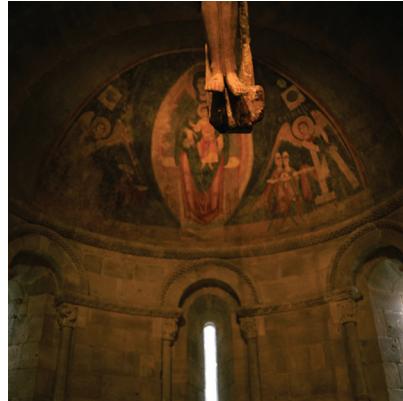


Wednesday, February 20, 2008; 4:00 P.M.; Cloudy

My third visit to the museum. Only one camera was brought with a 75mm standard lens. The images showed my continued interest in observation of the space and the recent discovery of the northern overlook from the park. However, the emotional perspectives offered by the architecture emerged in the blends of the photographs. The 75mm lens framed the space to capture typical, human perspectival views.

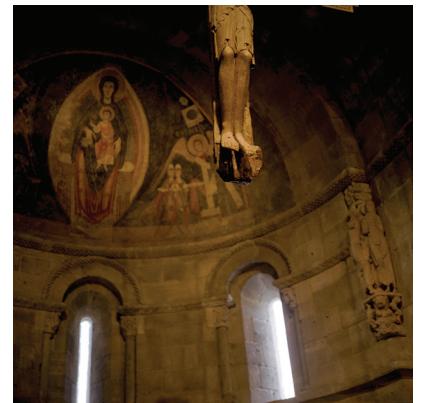
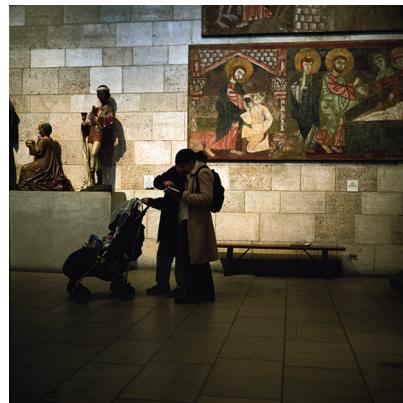
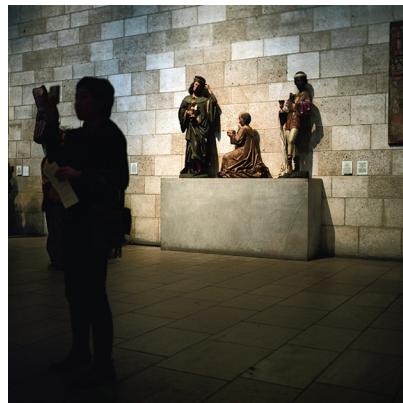
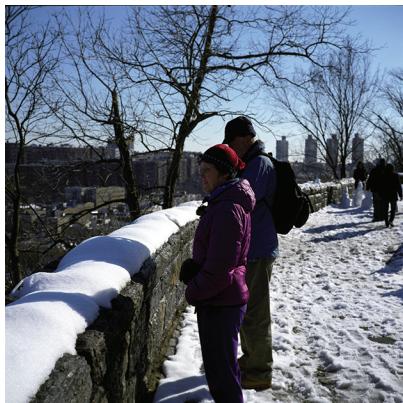


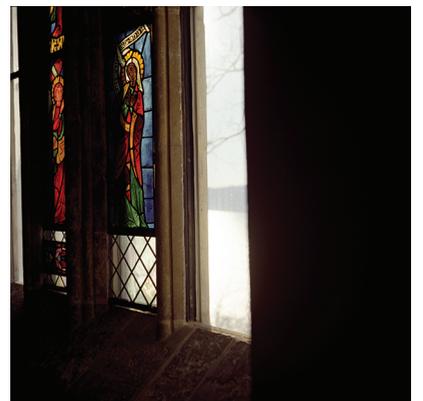
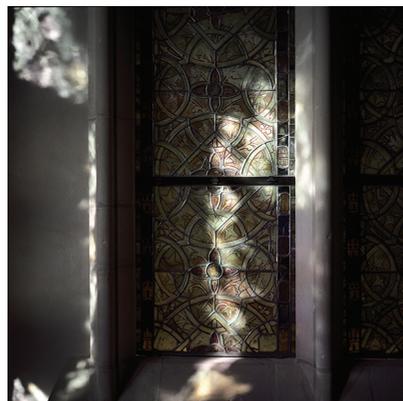
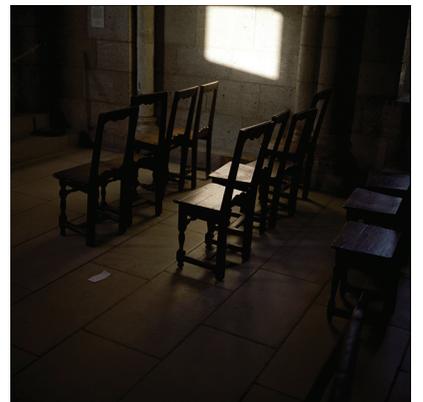
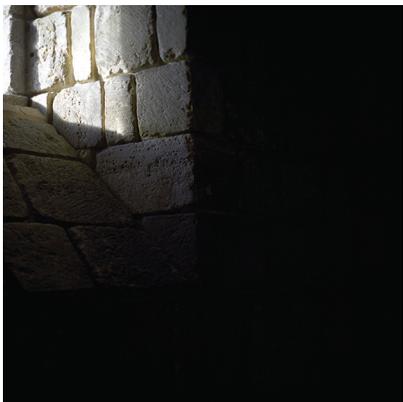
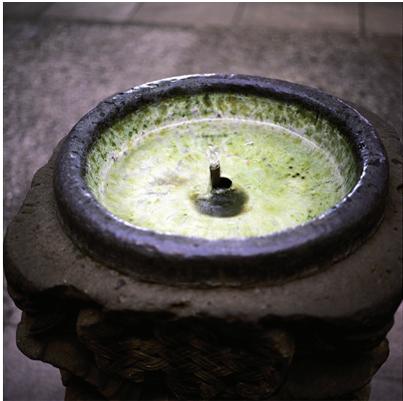


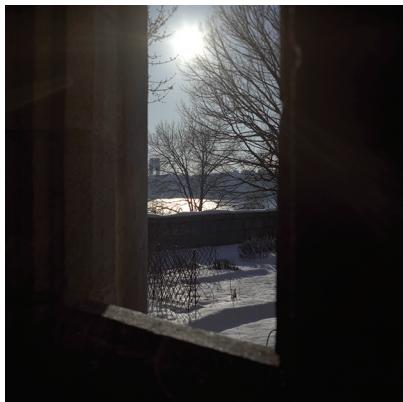


Sunday, February 24, 2008; 3:00 P.M.; Sunny

The same camera and lens were brought with me on the third visit to the museum. Stronger and more personal interpretations of space and objects emerged. While more visitors appeared in the photographs, their specific setting reflected particular architectural meanings of space and emotions beyond description of the museum and exhibition.







four visits with my camera enabled me to craft my own comprehension of the space.

The first group of curious, tentative images were basically the objective reproduction of the physical appearance of the museum from which my own version of the Cloisters emerged in the following sessions. My visits were transformed from one-way observation to dialog engaged with space and architecture.

If we think the word comprehension means something beyond the recognition of the physical existence, I think this “something” is the capacity to reinterpret what we see, hear, sense and imagine. Not only photography, but also architecture and other arts are the journey towards this comprehension. Upon viewing the images, most people immediately recognize the Cloisters in the first group of images. The following groups, especially the last, reveal spaces and situations

that transcend stereotypical notions of the museum, capturing senses of powerful spatial relationships and sentiments. When my images reach this point, I know they are becoming more than simple reproductions, they are authentic creations.

Notes

¹<http://www.corcoran.org>.

²Gregory Crewdson, “In A Lonely Place,” *Aperture* (Spring 2008): 190.

³Ibid.

⁴Thomas Weski, “The Tender-Cruel Camera,” <http://www.egglestontrust.com/>.