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Oliver Gagliani, *73-150*. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Oliver Gagliani Estate.

True to His Art
SBMA Opens the Door to the Poetic Nature of Oliver Gagliani

On View October 13, 2007 – January 13, 2008

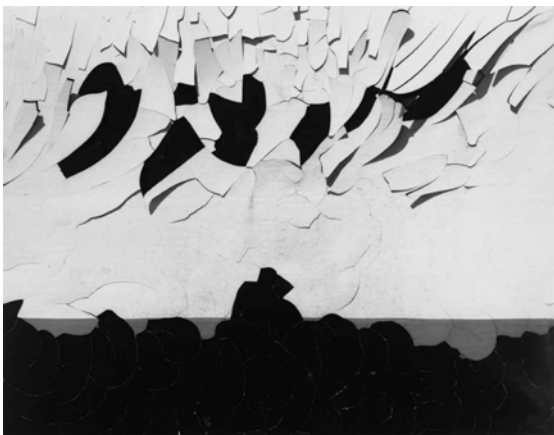
August 16, 2007 — Continuing a series of exhibitions devoted to California photographers, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art presents ***Oliver Gagliani: Sons of Abstraction*** on view October 13, 2007 through January 13, 2008. Gagliani's work has attained a legendary presence among other working artists through the decades when he both taught students and sought to create meaningful images. Known for the virtuosity of his elegant black and white prints, this exhibition of approximately 25 prints, mostly taken in Yosemite and the gold country, focuses not on the vast grandeur of the place, but rather on the intimate and abstract patterns created by such subject matter as patched and mended tents. His subject, in the end, is light which he believed "reveals the inner life of the object."

The generations of photographers born between 1915 and 1950, as Gagliani was, were in one of two camps. Either they learned photography through formal education in schools like Chicago's Institute of Design or the Rochester Institute of Technology, or they learned by doing, serving photographic internships in the military, on newspapers and magazines, in hospitals, and science labs. Gagliani was of the latter group. While initially trained as a violinist, he started photographing in the Army in 1942 and then studied under Minor White and Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Arts in 1946. He primarily worked in black and white, but he was also a pioneer in experimental color work.

During this time, creative photography received little attention and respect. Those who followed the artistic call could certainly not expect fame and fortune, but could only be satisfied to aspire to the status of a “photographer’s photographer.” This lasted until the so-called “photo boom” of the late 1960s through the middle 70s, when an intense explosion of popular interest for photography occurred. Previously obscure historical figures were resuscitated, major, older living figures at last received their due, and the likes of Ansel Adams seemed to be elevated to the status of deity.

But, when the economy began to collapse, the bottom began to be cut out of the market for mid-career artists in photography. Buyers were now looking for images that were much brasher and glitzier, something brand-new and sexy. Enter Carleton Watkins, David Hockney, and the Stern Twins; exit Gagliani and many of his peers.

Till his death in 2003, Gagliani stayed true to the poetics of the medium, which he explored in single images, most of them small and monochromatic, and made close to home as well as on countless trips to Italy. He masterfully used the range of interpretive nuance that the silver print offers, crafting a deep, rich, resonant, complex variety of imagined spaces.



Oliver Gagliani, **62-186**. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Oliver Gagliani Estate.



Oliver Gagliani, **86-62-B**. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Oliver Gagliani Estate.

Often Gagliani’s works seem to represent a theatrical stage. At others times they offer entry into a dense, tonally nuanced spirit world of indeterminate geography highlighting small fragments of the world – stains, scraps, peeling paint, and patchwork – all isolated and contemplated, then interpreted through exposure and printing. Ansel Adams once said of Gagliani’s work, “[His] photography is both thoughtful and lyrical and personally perceptive.... His work is a most refreshing reminder of the inherent beauty of the world and the continuing miracle of creative vision.”

Oliver Gagliani’s work has been displayed in exhibitions in museums, universities, and galleries around the world, including those in New York, Oakland, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara, as well as Italy and Japan. In addition, he regularly taught at the San Francisco Art Institute, California College of Arts and Crafts, and Stanford University.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net