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# Joel Sternfeld: First Pictures



## Synopsis

This is the first book of Joel Sternfeld's largely unseen early color photographs. In 1969 Sternfeld began working with a 35-mm camera and Kodachrome film, and *First Pictures* contains works from this time until 1980. Here Sternfeld develops traits that appear in his mature work: irony, a politicized view of America, concern for the social condition. But there are also pictures that bear little relation to his later work: color arrangements that parallel those of Eggleston, as well as street photography which Sternfeld ceased making in 1976. The photographs in *First Pictures* were made at a time when color photography was struggling to assert itself against the authoritative black-and-white tradition, making this book a revelation both in Sternfeld's oeuvre and in the history of contemporary photography. A major figure in the photography world, Joel Sternfeld was born in New York City in 1944. He has received numerous awards including two Guggenheim fellowships, a Prix de Rome and the Citibank Photography Award. Sternfeld's books published by Steidl include *American Prospects* (2003), *Sweet Earth* (2006) and *Oxbow Archive* (2008).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I thought the 140 photos here provided a satisfying look back at Sternfeld's work between 1971 and 1980. The book is divided into four sections and with one exception (Rush hour) I can see how he perfected his creative vision for these significant photo essays: 'American prospects' 1987; 'On this site' 1996; 'Sweet earth' 2006. The four sections are 'Happy Anniversary sweetie face!' with forty-eight photos taken across the country between 1971 and 1980. Revealing interior and

exteriors, commonplace street scenes and portraits. The section heading is from a 1978 wedding anniversary billboard. Jessica May's back-book essays mentions Sternfeld's choice of non-primary hues for his work during these years as he felt it reflected the decade, as DayGlo color is associated with the Sixties. 'Nags Head' has forty photos all taken in June and August 1976 in the North Carolina beach resort. The story here is people on the beach and enjoying their company after dark, with plenty of interiors shots. 'Rush hour' has thirty-two photos, taken in 1976, of people movement mostly in New York and Chicago. By their nature these seem to me not much more than street quickies with several distinctly odd shots. Rather than show masses of people on the move Sternfeld has concentrated on close-ups of parts of bodies and nearly all of them taken at dusk so that the travelers merge into the darkness of the environment. Certainly the weakest section of the four in my view. The last section 'At the mall' taken during June 1980 has thirty-four shots and here I felt Sternfeld has developed the idea of a visual narrative that works so well in his later books. He visited a series of New Jersey malls and asked shoppers to show him what they bought.

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