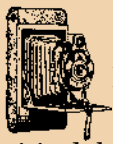


Jerome Liebling, "State Fair '64," gelatin silver print (MHS COLLECTIONS)

Fair View



LIKE HORDES OF OTHER RESIDENTS and visitors before and after him, Jerome Liebling visited the Minnesota State Fair at least once during his 20 years in the state. Educated in film and photography in New York City, Liebling had moved to Minneapolis in 1949 at the age of 25, hired to teach photography in the art department at the University of Minnesota. This fledgling department was flush with veterans studying under the GI Bill, which had enabled Liebling himself to return to college after a three-year stint in the army. (He left Minnesota in 1969 to establish a program in film and photography at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.)

Liebling's 1964 photograph of pigs waiting to be judged shows two striped porkers aligned in a stall. The black-and-white image emphasizes their shape, color,

and the patterns of bristles against the sawdust bed. The image encourages us to recall the fair as an intense experience of textures and forms that evoke smells and sounds—the commingling of city and country.

Like this one, Liebling's other photographs of the state fair (including three more in the Minnesota Historical Society's fine art photograph collection) document the beauty of crops, animals, architecture, and people. As photo historian Alan Trachtenberg wrote about Liebling, his "relentless realism" provides viewers not only with "visual facts" but also with insight into how an artist's rendition of a place helps us "better to see and know."

—COLLEEN SHEEHY

Colleen Sheehy is director of the Plains Art Museum in Fargo. Among her recent publications is Seed Queen: The Story of Crop Art and the Amazing Lillian Colton (2007).



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