POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY

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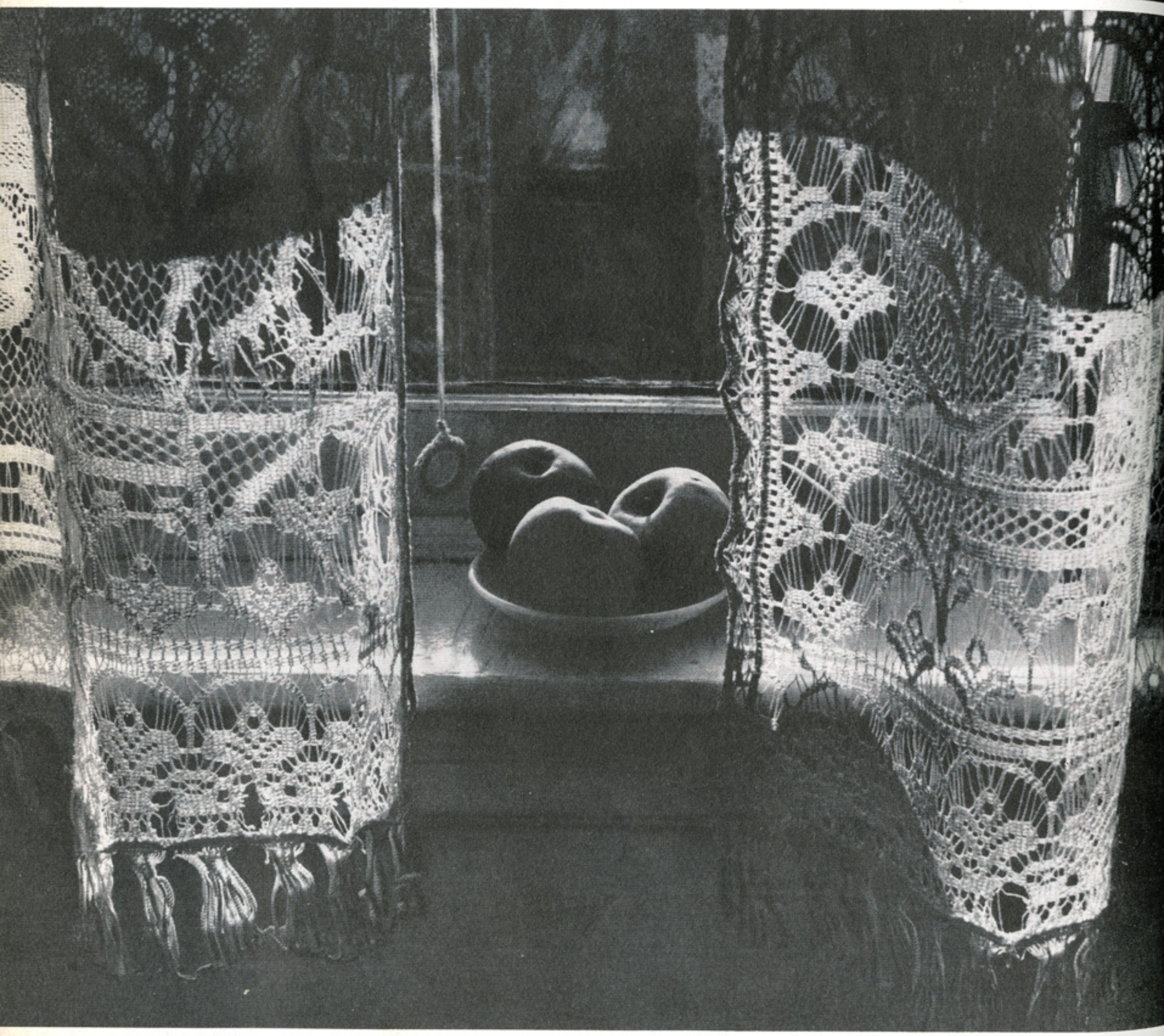
CRITIC'S CHOICE



Beginning with this issue, each month POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY will invite an authoritative critic to evaluate an important photograph of his own choice, from either past or present.

Photograph by HAROLD FEINSTEIN
Selected and discussed by JACOB DESCHIN

'Supreme contentment and peace...'

During the decade or so that has elapsed since I first saw Harold Feinstein's window picture in a five-man show, its power to move me has never waned. Is there any better test of a good photograph, especially when I have been looking at this one almost daily for the past six years, and at frequent intervals before that? It hangs in my home.

My original impression, of a deeply felt human experience shared spontaneously and completely with the observer, persists to this day. Spelled out, it is a complex of emotional and nostalgic qualities in which each observer may find reflections of himself and his own life experience.

For me, the picture's most affecting aspect is its atmosphere of supreme contentment and peace, its dominating feature the Biblical note expressed in the pattern and folds of the heavy lace curtains. The suggestion of iconography woven into the design lures the eye as it stirs ones sympathies.

Moved by sentiment and esthetic responsiveness, study of the picture's details is an adventure in visual caress. No sooner does one note that the softly lighted apples on the simple saucer are in dead center, than other factors are seen to come into play to offset this familiar objection of the purist. On the right, the decorative edge of the curtain cutting gently through an apple, and on the left, the ring of the shade string suspended nicely in space, create a beautiful balance of elements that constitute almost a picture in themselves.

Obviously, the most compelling images in the print are the sunlit curtains, transilluminated with bright sunshine and shaped and weighted by shadows and folds. These are the essential parts of a composition to which, as in any really effective picture, all the others are closely and inextricably related, elaborating in a few touches the homely sentiment of the whole. The worn window sill and frame softly but unobtrusively highlighted, the dark reflections *continued on page 122*

haps one ought to commend Szarkowski's thoroughness rather than complain of repetition.

More serious is the provincialism of the exhibition. Except for Kosti Ruohomaa's lyrical Maine scenes and the Wisconsin Dells, all the true landscapes are Western. ("True" is meant to exclude the close-up detail pictures that might have been made anywhere.) There is nothing of the Great Smokies or the Alleghenies, of the Everglades or the Mississippi Delta or the cornlands or the Ozarks or the Tidewater or the Great Lakes or . . . any of a score of other American landscapes.

This is not meant to be a catalog of omissions, but a suggestion of misplaced emphasis. A romantic or sentimental attachment to the West has been permitted ponderously to overbalance a show whose title leads one to expect *all* "the American Landscape." It is hard to believe that fine pictures from other regions do not exist.

On balance, Szarkowski's first show must be saluted for its scope and presentation, and for the thought and diligence with which it was obviously prepared. The Museum's Department of Photography is in good hands, indeed.—*H. M. Kinzer*

"The Photographer and the American Landscape" will be seen subsequently in other U.S. cities; no bookings had yet been made at publication time. Institutions and organizations may request information from Department of Circulating Exhibitions, Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St., New York 19, N.Y.

Critic's Choice: Feinstein

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in the glass, the general interplay of brightness and shadow—all contribute their important share.

But this kind of dissection hardly begins to explain the picture's magical charm. Photographed in a moment of overwhelming awareness and discovery, caught instinctively at the peak of recognition and an artist's intuition, the picture is a summary of many personal things subject to appreciation and interpretation on varying levels but universal in their total appeal as warm human document.

It is a song of domesticity, an affirmation of close family ties, reminiscence of a Sabbath ceremonial, the quiet of a sunny afternoon indoors. One can find in it the mood of sadness or of happiness, of regret perhaps, or of resignation. Indeed, it is this many-sidedness that gives the picture its principal value as evocative image and that is certain to insure its permanence in the library of contemporary photography.

The picture bears neither title nor caption; either would have been redundant, if not presumptuous. And maybe this fact also is a mark of the good picture—that it is in itself so eloquent, so communicative, that what it has to say is all in the picture, for all to read who will.—