

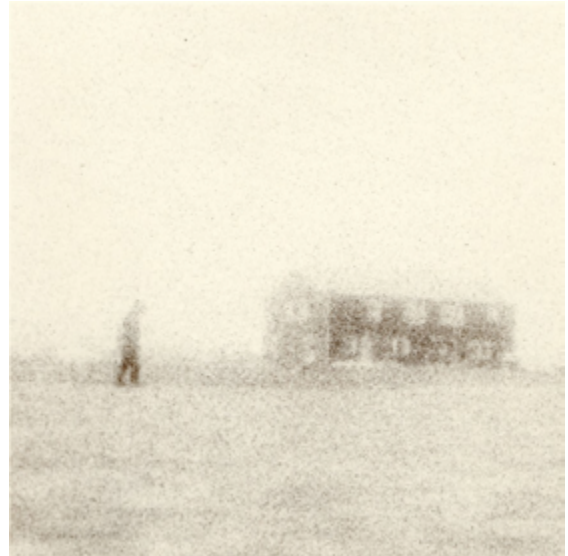
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**JOHN BRILL**

*Bad Memory*

Kent Gallery is pleased to open its fall season with *Bad Memory*, an introspective series of photographs by John Brill.

*Bad Memory* is an emotionally charged and intellectually rigorous body of work spanning forty-five years. The contemporary prints that make up this series derive from snapshots made by the artist with his first camera, a plastic box camera that he acquired for a few dollars when he was in the third grade. Beginning when he was eight years old, he made his original images between the years 1960 and 1963, inclusive.



Not merely a nostalgic look back at people when they were younger, or places when they were different, *Bad Memory* is foremost a reinvigoration of what the artist found to be magical about photography on a very primal (i.e., pre-intellectual) level--what Brill refers to as "the utterly intoxicating notion that an eight-year-old kid can manipulate space and time with a two-dollar plastic box." For Brill, the very act of photographing was transformative, conferring a mystical status on what otherwise were ordinary people, objects, and events. The nature of experience in general was fundamentally changed through the act of photographing, the camera functioning as a magic wand, anointing the mundane with an immortal glow. The resulting body of work is a poignantly reimagined view of a young boy's inner world when that world was made magical by the discovery of photography.

Significantly, the seminal collection of snapshot images that led to *Bad Memory* was not some long-lost archive, rediscovered by a mature artist late in life. Rather, it was something with which the artist remained continuously intimate, and with which he maintained an ongoing dialogue, informing his evolving sensibility, guiding his lifelong body of work, and culminating in the series *Bad Memory*. Brill says, "More than anything, [this ongoing dialogue] revealed to me a bridge between the deeply personal and the rigorously theoretical, showing these seemingly incongruous perspectives to be more like points on a continuum than fundamentally different ways to consider a photograph."

Brill's conceptual and subversive approach to the techniques and language inherent in the photographic process stands in clear contrast to current trends in photography. All of the selenium-toned silver prints in this body of work were hand-made by the artist utilizing traditional darkroom methods. Moreover, they are the products of several generations of reworking. This approach to image creation and post-exposure enhancement has conspicuous affinities with the Pictorialists of the early 20th Century who, through techniques of soft focus and darkroom manipulation, sought to further break up a picture's sharpness to create images that are more expressive than purely descriptive. In contradistinction to the largely aesthetic goals of the Pictorialists, however, the intended purpose of losing detail here is to render these images as they'd be imperfectly remembered without reference to some external objective record. Working in reverse, Brill has taken existing objective records (the original drugstore prints) and created from them an imperfect (and, ultimately, a partially fictive) subjective recollection--the exact opposite of what the creation of photographic records is normally intended to accomplish. Even the people who appear in these pictures--invariably, close family members--have been obscured to the point of functioning as interchangeable generic props in a subjective psychological landscape. Ultimately, *Bad Memory* yearns not for an accurate view of the past, but for the prevailing personal sensibility that transcends such a view. This ghostly reality inevitably becomes a deceptively powerful collaboration, as viewers unconsciously seek to impose specificity on Brill's enigmatic imagery.

Further information on the artist is available by contacting Daniel Dror at [ddror@kentgallery.com](mailto:ddror@kentgallery.com).

*Originally exhibited at Kent Gallery, 541 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001.*