

Artist and Curator in Conversation: Jim Goldberg, Mike Mandel, and Larry Sultan with Constance Lewallen

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Constance Lewallen: *Newsroom* and *Nursing Home* were two of the most memorable shows I did during the eight years that I was the MATRIX curator. *Newsroom*, presented in 1983, was a collaboration between Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel.

Mike Mandel: Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan.

CL: Well, next time I will switch the order of names! Jim Goldberg's show...

Jim Goldberg: Goldberg Jim.

CL: You see what this is going to be like (laughter). Jim's show, *Nursing Home*, was in 1987, was 4 years after...

LS: After *us*.

CL: In those days, and I think to some extent still, the MATRIX gallery was treated as a site of experimentation, so much so that we dared not announce the opening date of a show lest it might not be ready in time. And this was never truer than in the case of the shows we are discussing today. In addition to looking back at these two shows, we are going to review some of the artists' works that preceded their MATRIX shows and also show some of their recent work. Given the ground we have to cover, I am not going to provide lengthy introductions--all three of these artists have had numerous exhibitions and are represented in collections of museums across the country and, indeed, world. I will start with Larry Sultan. Larry grew up in the San Fernando Valley. He received his undergraduate degree at UCLA before moving to San Francisco to attend San Francisco Art Institute, where he received his MFA also met Mike Mandel. Mike also grew up in the San Fernando Valley. He'd gotten his BA in philosophy at Cal State Northridge before receiving his MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute. Mike lived in Santa Cruz at the time of *Newsroom* and for many years after, but now lives in Watertown near Boston. Mike divides his time between public projects, which we will see soon, and collaborative projects that he creates with his wife, Chantal Zakari. They co-authored a book titled *The Turk and the Jew* and are now engaged in a project called *Ata-Turk*. Jim Goldberg was born in Connecticut; he received his undergraduate degree at, where was it... Washington?

JG: Western Washington University.

CL: He also received his MFA at the Art Institute and, as a student was behind the scenes helping Mike and Larry during *Newsroom*. Growing up in the Valley, Mike and Larry witnessed the transformation of the landscape from farmland to housing tracts, freeways, malls, and lots and lots of billboards. They shared an interest in vernacular photography and over a period of many years did several collaborative projects, all of which are going to be documented in a book that will be published next year. Their MATRIX show was the culmination of their interest in mass-media photography. I wanted to start by looking at their first collaborations, which were in the form of billboards. Was *Oranges on Fire* your first?

LS: It was our third.

CL: The general idea behind these was to make us more aware of the barrage of advertising we are subject to continually--to shake us out of our passive viewing.

LS: It was important to us that the billboards were anonymous, that they were like moles. They look like ads but they don't function as ads. So they weren't artists' billboards, they were just billboards that didn't make any sense.

MM: This particular one has an interesting story. We had made this image from a postcard depicting a cornucopia with oranges as well as a bathing beauty falling out of it—in other words, the myth of California. It took forever to make it, and it was covered over by an advertisement for Sunkist oranges only three days later. We got a lot of media attention, because the newspapers being in competition with billboards were really happy to cover that problem, which in turn forced the billboard company to give ten free billboards. That's when we decided to burn the oranges, just set the oranges on fire.

LS: That's Berkeley, by the way. Right on University Avenue.

CL: *Ties*.

LS: This was our first painted billboard; it was 48 feet. For whatever reason, the president of the billboard company liked what we were doing. Not only did his company give us free space, it also had the images hand painted using photographs that we would supply.

MM: It wasn't just for whatever reason, let's be perfectly frank. Billboard companies were under attack, because people hated billboards. Therefore, they liked the publicity our billboards generated since not too many artists were doing artworks on billboards. We were using them, and they were using us. We were just happy to go right along.

CL: Larry you once told me you thought *Ties* was a little too close to a real billboard.

LS: Well, it was brinkmanship--how close can the billboard look like an ad so that it functions within the language of advertising? Unfortunately, Mike and I had not really thought through what message image and text could deliver in a few seconds. We wanted to be concise, but perhaps the word "ties" is a little too concise. People thought it was an ad for a tie manufacturer. Mike and I were interested in how context influences the way we look at things. When you see a billboard, wouldn't you assume it's an ad? How can you play that assumption, how can you push it, pull it, and tease it?

Audience Question: Didn't you play with the media once they went up—you were giving interviews about the ties and how it related to art?

LS: We had press conferences in which we actually talked about Croatian independence, because ties, the cravat, actually came from Croatia.

CL: I would never...! This is *Whose News Uses You*, which I think this is one of the strongest.

MM: Yeah, I agree. Again, we got the billboard company to hand paint it. We were working off a lot of ideas, in this case, specifically from [Marshall] McLuhan who talked about how news and advertising are really one in the same. Advertising is always good news and the other kind of news is the bad news--they balance each other out. So we were talking about the billboard as a news medium. We care about the latest fashions and all the good stuff that's out there; it's all good news. It's like whose news is it, whose news is it for? Whose news uses you, or, if you read it right, whose news abuses you

CL: The billboards led to another body of work, *Evidence*, which since its publication in 1977 has obtained a legendary status. You culled photographs from the archives of government and corporate entities and put presented them in a different context, without providing any identifying information, like a caption.

LS: Briefly, this was the culmination of two years of research into mostly aerospace, state, and federal government archives--things you couldn't do now. Mike and I, through the act of selection, became authors of pictures we didn't make, because we felt we saved them from the dustbin of history. Their function was once documentary and now they were pure connotation—they no longer had their specific instrumental function. They could mean whatever we could nudge them into meaning through context and visual association. We started in '75 and the book was finished in '77. Soon after, the San Francisco Museum of Art did an exhibition that traveled throughout the country. It was very controversial, because we had claimed authorship. At that time, the word 'appropriation' hadn't been used in an art context. It came out of a Duchampian strategy of the found object, in this case the found photograph.

MM: We were trying to break out of the modernist requirement of the artist as "creator." We were recognizing the cultural functions of photographs, whether they be made by fire departments or jet propulsion labs. Now people are delving into Flickr and eBay to upload the detritus of the culture and make art out of that. That's where this kind of work has gone—into virtual space.

CL: You worked out sequencing that is a narrative in and of itself.

LS: We thought of it as a visual novel. Also, something that Mike just mentioned, we were really interested in the fetish quality of these pictures. These 8 x 10 glossy ferrotypes, if there are any photographers here, were glossed up on very thin paper and carried with them the language of the official institutions. They were hard as nails--simple, stripped down. When we showed them as simply 8 x 10s behind glass, they retained that sense of seriousness: "just the facts." Of course, the facts are crazy sometimes. They are really kind of loopy, almost like science fiction, a world gone slightly mad, so that duet between an official document and a world depicted that is out of control--that's what we were interested in.

MM: The stuff we could get access to was from a previous generation, because for anything that was made in the mid-seventies, we would have had to look at 35mm contact prints, which would have been impossible. 98% of what we looked at was in the form of 4 x 5 contact prints.

CL: You self-published the book, but it has since been republished by D.A.P. [Distributed Art Publishers].

LS: I think we sold out around 1979, 1980.

CL: These images are often hilarious, because you have no idea what's going on.

LS: It really is a book about men; I think there are two females in the book. It's what men do in nature.

CL: It's hard to say what's happening here with these two poor women.

LS: That's a good title for the reprint: *Two Poor Women*. [Laughter] It's really hard to say what they were testing.

MM: That's the "fireman's carry."

CL: That's what that is? I rather liked not knowing!

LS: You spoiled that Mike!

MM: Oh, sorry, but you got me here!

CL: Well, as I said, this project led to *Newsroom*. When you proposed the idea to me you admitted that you had already presented it to SFMOMA-- SFMA as it was then-- which

first accepted and then rejected it. So naturally you pitched it to Berkeley. [Laughter] I jumped at the chance to work with you on it--it sounded like a great project.

LS: With great relief too! [Laughter] We knew this is where we wanted to go from the very beginning, but we lost our way. For *Newsroom* we rented an AP and a UPI wire service machine, and installed them in Gallery A (rather than the traditional MATRIX gallery). The news flowed into the museum 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, just as it does in any newsroom.

CL: You responded to the raw news and rearranged it and showed how these images and stories were treated in various newspapers, comparing them, graphing various aspects of the news, running to the San Francisco Art Institute to make enlargements.

JG: I was printing them.

CL: -- running back and forth, changing the installation. It was completely spontaneous, very much a process-oriented show! You spent a lot of time, probably more time than you anticipated, in the gallery. It turned out to be the time of the Coalinga earthquake, which dominated the news for several days.

LS: I think the idea of time and labor is interesting, because usually you do your time and your labor before you have a show. The show was created in the museum, the museum as a studio. We were beholden to the world of events to generate interesting pictures. So it was a risk on all of our parts—we didn't know what was going to come over the wire. I love the idea that the museum show generates itself. The museum show is established by reserving that space and hoping something good happens.

CL: Yes, like all of your work we have seen thusfar, it was based on the idea that interpretation comes from context and presentation. That concept was explored more deeply in *Newsroom*.

MM: Each of the wire machines put out about, oh, 150 pictures a day. So we had 300 pictures a day to look at and try to figure out what to do with. Of course normally, you would see in the daily San Francisco Chronicle three of those pictures in section 1 and all the rest of them would've been thrown away. We identified the fact that were all kinds of images that would never be used as part of the news, which had all kinds of metaphorical possibilities. We made large-scale murals. Here's one of John Glenn...

LS: There is this secret service guy behind him; it's the devil or something.

MM: That was one of the key images we found. He didn't realize that the devil was behind him, controlling him, until we made him large enough to find that out. We would identify different kinds of gestures--journalistic tropes--and we would create sequential relationships with the gestures. The thousands of pictures that we collected eventually became detritus, a big island of stuff in the middle of the gallery floor that we added to day by day.

CL: When AP and UPI found out that this show might be subversive in some way they cancelled the order a very short time before the show was to open. I didn't know what to do, so I called the Journalism department on campus, which I had told about the show in order to engage students in the process. Thankfully, Dean Ben Bagdikian called the two wire service companies and said, "look, we're co-sponsoring the show and we've got to have these machines."

MM: It's worth making a note again about the technology of the moment. If you think about how this information is being communicated now, we couldn't do something like this, because we'd simply be looking at computer screens.

CL: Reviewers didn't seem to understand the show--it was a little discouraging.

LS: Well, I think what happened is they thought the thrust would be more analytic, more critical, that we would be trying to find the bias in the news. The thing that Mike and I were very clear about in all of our work is that the politics that we were dealing with were the politics of representation. We didn't want to make a politic available or too easily readable in the work itself since that would spoil the fun--it would just be a kind of didactic. So, we were castigated for not being clear enough.

MM: There was a guy that came from Channel 2 News and he actually tried to do a piece about the show but he couldn't figure out how to talk about it, he didn't have the more nuanced language of what the meaning of this work was. It had to fit into, unfortunately, what we all are having to fit into when we watch the news, this Pavlovian, lower-level discourse.

CL: But you know I think that today, people are more aware of the fact that they do not get an objective account of the news.

MM: From my point of view it's not whether or not we are getting an accurate portrayal, there is no such thing as accurate memory. We were looking at a different language, the voice of gesture, the voice of sequential relationships, the ideas of scale. We were an aesthetic voice that isn't normally seen.

CL: Here's one of the graphs.

LS: It was all fake information, to make it look important. We were doing some work here because Mike and I went to work almost every day to the museum. Who really cares about how many pictures there are in the news? Gender and the news is a little bit more interesting, but we felt beholden to keep track of something, just to give the impression that Mike and I were doing something important. This was a wall of political gestures that were culled over the period of the five weeks of the show. They haven't changed much have they?

CL: *Newsroom* was your last major collaborative project, although you continued to do collaborative work in the form of murals. Larry, your work took a more personal turn in *Pictures from Home* which document your parents' life after your father's retirement. Do you want to give us some background?

LS: First I want to say that throughout the collaborations, which began in 1973, Mike and I always did our individual work. Mike did a book on the Giants, and I was doing pictures of swimmers. In my need to speak about something more intimate in my life I had the same concerns about representation, questions about documentary photography and how one tells a story. I was looking for a protagonist in my storytelling and the first protagonist I could find was my family and myself. So this is my father, and when you go to the next one you'll see my comparison to him. [Laughter] So, there is a big story here, a lot to talk about, between my father's good looks and manliness and whatever or whoever I was. I crashed their archive using the same process that Mike and I had done, gathering a lot of information and going through all their movies and making stills from the hundreds and hundreds of feet of film—my father shot movies throughout his whole life.

MM: These are really my parents.

LS: [Laughter] Yeah, these were Mike's parents.

CL: In a sense they are all of our parents. One of the reasons that this project has become so widely known is that we can all relate to it as a story about family.

MM: Yeah, if it was just Larry's parents...y'know, but it's about the hope of a new beginning, coming out to California from New York, becoming a businessman and trying to be a success. That's why it's a great work. It's emblematic of this...

CL: ...American story.

LS: It began with a Guggenheim proposal to do a portrait of my father through time and my relationship to male notions of success. It took ten years to do this. It was very much influenced by the work that I had done with Mike on *Evidence* and all of our projects, but I could speak in a way that only I could speak, in an intimate voice, and that was really important and what was missing for me from the work that Mike and I were doing together, in some ways the idea of being an artist is to have it all—you want to try to do everything you can to exhaust all your desires and interests. This was a big step, a really scary step because I had left what was a blossoming collaboration and reputation nationally to do something that was fairly risky. Very few people were interested in this work, in the beginning. There were my parents' romantic tales through their stills and films. This is how they represented themselves, which I thought was very important because all of these are half true--photography is always made up of projections. My view of them was based on *Death of a Salesman*, what is the payoff of success, what do you get? You get isolation, you get a big house in a nice gated community. I was being critical of their life projected onto emulsion. My version of them as a kind of isolated island within a culture of suburbia. Then, to complicate it further, because I was exploiting them, obviously, taking images that were very intimate and making them public, they then entered back in with their voice to critique my view of them, undermining any claim I have to objectivity, which is important to me. I didn't want an objective voice. I wanted a tendentious voice, a voice of interest, a voice of ideology, and I wanted to expose that.

CL: This was done after your father retired as an executive at Schick?

LS: Yes, he was downsized.

CL: Your next major series is *The Valley*, begun in 1999, which again focuses on suburbia but in a very different way. House in the San Fernando Valley where you grew and Mike grew up are rented as sets for porn movies.

LS: I think it's really natural to go from your parents to pornography. [Laughter] It's like going from childhood to adolescence.

LS: It's the idea of domesticity, of the promised land. A lot of my work deals with this idea of the suburbs as the final home for a restless culture endlessly looking for home. Obviously, the nostalgia of going back to the Valley speaks to me. As you mentioned, I'm interested in how the house turns sour, gets a little strange--these are transgressive acts. We don't talk about sexuality in the home and yet that's the site of a lot of our fantasies. The porn industry was my way back into these homes. I was going back to the dream and promise of the house itself. My family would buy a new house every 7 or 8 years, always trying to replace the idea of themselves with a better version. I was taking the home as a central issue to the American ethos and trying to take that on in a way that is both very critical and very tender, because it deals with my own past.

CL: Lets look at some of your current work.

LS: This is work I started about a year ago, or two. I'm shooting up here, finally, after doing most of my work in Los Angeles for the last 15 or 20 years. I'm hiring day workers and staging tableaux of coming home, looking for home, leaving home—not necessarily

working, but occupying space. In a way I'm finding my version of childhood in the suburbs around the Bay Area.

Audience Question: How do you tell them what you want them to do?

LS: Very directly, clearly. We are acting together and I ask them about their experience, we talk about it, we stage it. I pay them a good hourly rate, I show them the pictures I've made. We do take after take after take after take—it's like a film.

CL: So in a sense it's a continuation of home and family and suburbs, just not the aspects we're accustomed to.

LS: Right. The space that I'm most interested in is the area where I grew up that was most invisible. Right to the side of the housing development is a kind of wild nature that isn't nature or culture. It's a no man's land. It's like where I went as a kid to be invisible, and it is the marginal landscape that quite often day laborers find themselves occupying. All of my work is dealing with the wonder of the banal, the magic of the ordinary. Waiting, the restlessness of hoping something will happen, daydreaming—whether it's my parents, adult [movie] sets, or day laborers. The idea that the activity isn't so important, it's kind of the transitional moment, picking up a rock, what's going to happen with the rock.

CL: How big are these pictures?

LS: They play off nineteenth century paintings so they are fairly large—about 70 inches.

CL: What's happening here?

LS: It's a Little League field near my house. It looks a little bit like Guantanamo—it's just a batting cage. [Laughter]

CL: It really does!

LS: This is Navarro.

CL: Now, as I mentioned earlier, you and Mike continued to work together on murals even after you were mostly doing your own work. The first one was a pool in Oakland.

LS: It's the deFremery pool on 18th and Poplar where the Black Panthers started. This came out of Mike and I running through the idea that temporary public art was no longer viable. It was too much work. We wanted to do something that was permanent, and how do you make a picture permanent. Barbara Jo Revelle, another artist, had worked with ceramic tile, and that inspired us propose to do a tile mosaic to the City of Oakland.

MM: Which was a nice situation because instead of the way it normally works these days, where there is some new building that's going to be built, and there's a percent for art that's devoted to the budget, whereas this was a program where artists were invited to identify a site that they were interested in. We drove around Oakland, because that's where the program was, and found this modernist style pool and thought this would be an interesting idea, to create these caryatid figures, or actually I don't know if we even knew what we were going to do at the time, but this seemed like the right place. We went swimming often at the pool and made a lot of pictures. What I think was valuable out of this piece, for me anyway, and I'm sure for Larry as well, is that these kids lived in that neighborhood, their families lived there for a good part of their lives. When the piece was completed, the neighborhood turned out, and there was a real sense of ownership, more so than anything we had done previously. Billboards were out there anonymously, but in this case we recognized how, even without knowing it, we were creating a personal connection to the neighborhood.

CL: It's more about how artists function in a community--how the work can relate to, reflect upon, and integrate into a community. In this detail so you can see that these tiles are very small.

MM: One inch.

CL: It functions like an impressionist painting in that you can't read it unless you are at a certain distance. *Waiting*, from 1999, is one we've probably all seen because it's in the international terminal at SFO.

MM: We went to the old international terminal before they tore it down, and we made portraits of people who were waiting for their loved ones to come home and got releases from them. Then we collaged them together.

CL: I'm going to put on the screen some of Mike's more recent public ceramic tile murals and have him talk a little about them because I've only seen one. This one is 6 x 39 feet, and it was made in 1986.

MM: This is downtown in Tampa, right next to the police station. There's a police car and a great old turn of the century 1892 Moorish-inspired courthouse that was torn down in 1950 and turned into an empty parking lot that stood that way until they built a parking garage for the police. The mural is where the building was. This is on the loggia wall next to the police station. I'm referring back, recognizing the courthouse as an important monument that's no longer there, also recognizing the current clients being the police and a certain ambivalence about the police and how they look, and a part of Tampa's history being connected to the cigar industry—a lot of Cuban tobacco came into Tampa. It's a little historical play about that particular site and about Tampa in general. The way it was divided up is from an architectural detail from another building in Tampa that was made by the same architect who did the courthouse. Once I moved to another part of the country, and it became harder and harder for Larry and me to work together doing on this kind of work. I also became committed to the electronic and I was excited about that. I was in Chicago in the early '90s when they were just inventing html at the University of Chicago. We were doing the first web-based art with the first web browser which was Mosaic. I didn't like teaching very much, and I decided that this would become a way for me to make a living. That's what public art is these days, it's a commission-based negotiation. You apply for projects, and there can be 350 artists who are all vying for the projects. Perhaps five of them are chosen to be finalists and given a little money. You try as best you can to get the damn project and so instead of doing something that would be based on your innermost fantasies and desires and ideas you end up with a lot of self censorship, it's just inevitable. I've been doing this now for the last 12 years or more, I guess 15 years, and I'm still committed to it, but the process kind of pisses me off. There are a few pieces I've done in the course of that period of time that are really meaningful to me, and then there are a lot where you are just almost there, it's sort of interesting, or it's just part of a deal. That's what public art is about these days.

LS: Also, when we were working together we would egg each other on to be more belligerent. Most of your work is up front; you do the design, which takes you all the time. We would do things that no one in their right mind would commission. Y'know, water conservation with hoses squirting...so, after we weren't getting these commissions I realized...

MM: [Laughter] All of my best works are the ones that I didn't get the commission for.

CL: I saw this one a couple weeks ago in Atlanta in the Federal Building downtown, actually the old downtown of Atlanta. It's quite amazing because as you can see it goes all the way up that staircase and then it curves around past the café at the end. A lot of people are always walking that corridor.

MM: What's significant about this piece is that there is this very famous moment where Martin Luther King was arrested in his hometown in Atlanta when he was asked by a college student to come back and sit-in at a lunch counter at Rich's department store. The federal building was built on the site of Rich's department store so this is exactly where he was arrested, which is why this is an important piece. There are also references to the department store as you walk down the corridor on the left. I wasn't trying to make the Rich's the villains here, I was trying to recognize the institution as an important cornerstone of Atlanta as well. It has its own convolutions about what the issues are.

CL: Inset in the tile mosaic are reproductions that were taken from the newspaper.

MM: Right, up and down the mosaics are many different porcelain enamels that provide a lot of context for what is going on in the mural. Because the mural, even though it's huge, it's 30 x 130 feet it's really pretty simple and you need lots of other little pictures to give you more information.

CL: Moving right along this is a series of images of Mike's current project, *Ata-Turk*, which he is doing in collaboration with Chantal Zakari. We have a number of images so Mike why don't you talk a little about them?

MM: You can just cycle through them, I'll just quickly describe. I'm a Jew-boy, I was brought up in the Valley, and my education had very little to do with the Ottoman Empire. [Laughter] My wife is from Turkey, she's one of the Turkish minorities because she's a Christian, not a Muslim. We decided we wanted to go back and do a piece about Ata-Turk, the great hero of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire during World War I. He was the commander at the battle of Gallipoli where 50,000 Australian, Englishman, New Zealanders and Turks died, winning the battle for the Turks by preventing the English from getting this important strait under their control. Well, they didn't finally win World War I, but Ata-Turk was a Turkish hero along the way. When the great powers--Italy, England, France, and the Greeks--wanted to split up the spoils, it was Ata-Turk who led an army that drove out the Greeks. After several battles Turks were able to achieve independence after World War I and established the Republic of Turkey. So Ata-Turk is like the Mao or the Lenin of Turkey—there are images of Ata-Turk everywhere. If you are a village you don't have to have a bust of Ata-Turk but if you want to be a town you have to have a bust of Ata-Turk to qualify as a town. There's this interesting schism between what's going on now in Turkey with the rise of Islam and the sense of one's identity as having a political statement in democracy. If you are in Turkey you do that through Islam and see yourself in opposition to the one that you always learned was a hero who was completely an antagonist of religion. He's the one that ended the Sultanate, he divided mosque and state and pretty much ended religion at all. It was illegal to wear religious clothing in public in Turkey. You've got a really wonderful, from that point of view, textured, strange, and mixed-up issue about how the Turks feel about Ata-Turk. Contemporaneously, he's a symbol for the secular revolution, for those who try to keep Turkey a secular country and for other people he's kind of the enemy. The project is about getting at the meaning of Ata-Turk.

CL: This is a photographic project? How is it going to manifest itself? Online?

MM: Well, it's a lot of things, it's looking through archives and finding images that we were looking at as well, interviews. I should also recognize that this is a collaborative piece between Chantal Zakari and myself. While we were in Ankara Muslims were marching to protest the increase in requirements for secular education. Chantal had a little framed postcard of Ata-Turk that we were using for another performance, and she held it up to the crowd. We did this kind of quickly and I made a picture, I got up on top of a pedestal and made a picture as the crowd was kind of trying to grab it away, upset with her and seeing this as a provocation. What we didn't realize is that there was a Reuters guy sitting right next to me who was making a video of this and it became a huge sensation. All of a sudden Chantal was on every major newspaper, she was the girl of the Republic, she was the brave heart, she was the one who stood up to those black robed evil demons. For a week, 10 days, everywhere we went Chantal was pursued and the media just wouldn't let go of it. There was a press conference to try to get rid of the media to explain what we were doing. It was interesting; we became what we came to study. Chantal became the daughter of Ata-Turk basically.

CL: Ok, now we are going to switch gears. We are going to talk about Jim Goldberg's MATRIX project *Nursing Home*. We are going to back it up with a few images of two series he had done before that time, starting around 1979, and with which you may be familiar as they've been very widely shown and reproduced in a book called *Rich and Poor*, although *Poor* was done before *Rich*. Jim, these were made in welfare hotels in San Francisco...

JG: In the Mission.

CL: ...in the Mission, and when you printed the photographs you returned to the subjects and asked them to respond to the photographs by writing directly on the photograph itself.

JG: I had moved to San Francisco in 1977 and I had been mostly self-taught. I took one class at Lone Mountain College with Larry. So Larry was my first real teacher. For that class I did a little book that I was interested in, because Larry was my teacher and Mike was by default since we were hanging around a lot together. I learned a lot about their methodologies and I probably applied a lot of them to my work. I came from a pretty conservative or strict documentary background but I became increasingly interested in pushing the documentary. It wasn't enough to just take the pictures of people, I wanted to somehow tell their stories, so that's what this came from.

CL: Yes, and let them be part of the project not just the object of the project.

JG: Yes and this work was made to get into graduate school at the Art Institute.

CL: Following *Poor* came *Rich* and I think you took advantage of your association with the Art Institute.

JG: I did, Steven Goldstinem the president, helped me.

CL: Helped get you into people's homes who were trustees of the Art Institute or collectors.

MM: Can you talk a little about how the text actually materialized?

JG: The truth behind it?

MM: Yes!

JG: Well, this work took eight years to do and with the *Poor* sometimes I would go in, show them photographs, and give them photographs and they would write immediately on them. With the wealthy sometimes it would take a year or two before someone would write on it, we would negotiate, I'd put things together, I'd let them read over it. It was highly edited at that point, it's just to get their views in the most accurate way and at the same time tell the stories I was interested in telling. In a sense, I was working with and using the text to go in the direction I was interested in. I didn't have any political motive, it's not like I was saying the rich are bad and poor are good or vice versa.

CL: No, I think that's very clear in the book because not only the images but also what people write on them indicate what you wouldn't necessarily expect to see. The rich often seem isolated and not all that content.

MM: I know when I show these to my students they are really taken aback by the insights that are available. I always tell them it's not as easy as that, there is this negotiation process. I think the images themselves intimate that they just wrote on the picture, but it's more than that.

JG: I was given the opportunity to understand that photography didn't always have to tell the truth. That's how I grew up. I was a real believer in that. My background is more from Robert Frank than it was from Mandel and Sultan, but then it changed, it switched.

LS: So we corrupted you.

JG: No, I'm saying that I switched Mike's name with yours!

CL: These are the Goldstines.

JG: On Jackson.

JG: I showed *Rich and Poor* the San Francisco Museum of Art. Then when the book came out, or before the book came out, I had a show at MOMA in New York and from that I got a teaching job in Boston. I moved to Boston for a year. I got a commission through the Cambridge Arts Council.

CL: And you spent many months in this nursing home?

JG: Yes, I spent about six months before I photographed anything.

CL: So, you'll see eventually an installation shot, but these are some of the residual photos and again the subjects would write on the photo. The way we installed this show was in a very casual way. I don't know if you can read this caption: "I was beautiful when I was young, now I've changed." "We look like we're friends, but I never talk to him." [Laughter] In this case, the picture is not telling the truth!

LS: I remember this show, Jim you were really trying to experiment. It seemed like it was a moment in which you could use the exhibition space as a kind of workshop in and of itself. What kind of pictures would work with what kind of installation? At the time, I remember you being very eager...

JG: A bit foolish!

LS: Well, I don't know about that...but eager to push.

JG: I also was a little overly confident. I was very young and had success with *Rich and Poor* and I thought I could do whatever I wanted with photography. What we ended up doing here was pinning pictures on the walls.

CL: And we had sound in the gallery and what Jim tried to do was create an environment that was beyond just hanging pictures on the wall. He photographed not only residents of the home but also some of the objects that they surrounded themselves with—Jesus on a cross, a watch, an envelope, or a letter.

JG: I was certainly drawing from the archive at that point and mining it. This is a Christmas card I sent someone I was particularly close to and I got the letter back; it said ‘expired’ on it. I thought instead of putting it in a box I would bring it out and my dismay or the shock of feeling her passing would then be shared.

CL: So, like Larry said, like *Newsroom*, it was a way for Jim to sort of experiment and try something a little different from what he had done. This experience led directly to *Raised by Wolves*, work in which you extended that even further.

CL: This series was shown at SFMOMA and it has toured extensively. Like *Nursing Home*, it was a piece in which Jim involved the subjects very much in the story. These are street kids in LA and San Francisco. You spent a lot of time with them over a period of years, ten years.

JG: In reference to something Mike said about how the stories came, at this point I was tired of directing people on what to write. With the street kids I would just collect their phrases and then later I manipulated them into telling the story. They were underage so I had to protect their identities, so I would move the words around in a way to tell a story so it wouldn’t identify them. If [the text on the photograph] said they were doing drugs, there wouldn’t be a way of knowing if it was that person doing the drugs necessarily. In some ways, I thought it was more poetic. I was tired of trying to direct people so much as to let them tell their stories.

CL: The show in a way was controversial because, as you’ll see as we go through, there are all kinds of props in the show. Not just photographs of props but actual bedding, clothing, and objects that the kids owned.

JG: I worked with David Ireland for the show, to build the vitrines and design the reading stations. For those of you who don’t know, *Raised by Wolves* is really the story of two kids, David and Echo, ‘Tweekey’ Dave and Echo, and you follow their lives from the beginning of the book to the end. Echo’s mom tells her story and Dave tells her story. This is a map which shows the pictures and tells the story of [Echo’s] growing up in New York and New Jersey and being molested by her stepfather, running away, becoming a prostitute, going crazy, all these things that are happening that are told right in this AAA map that I got. By the end of the book, she’s pregnant, she goes home, she has a baby, she’s fine. Whereas something else happens to Dave. Through them I met ten other kids, through those ten kids, twenty, by the time it’s over there are probably two or three-hundred kids you’ve come in contact with—at least their names. I became quite close to Dave, yet at the same time I never knew if what he was saying was the truth or not. So, in my desire to tell the truth about these kids really it was all fiction. He would tell me one thing, he would tell somebody else another thing, so you never knew. I think that’s part of what the story is about, is not being able to find that truth, and not being able to tell you what to think about homelessness.

CL: That’s true in a way about a lot of the work we’ve looked at today. That line between fact and fiction is very tenuous.

JG: Yes, I’m reinforcing that.

LS: I would say that’s germane to all of us, in Mike’s digital archiving as well the idea that we think of this stuff as documents when in fact they are stories.

JG: These are just Polaroids that they all wrote on.

CL: What is this?

JG: This is Russian roulette. The kid had woken up and he was all fucked up and he said, “ah, there’s nothing in here, there’s no bullet in here” and shot it to show me and the gun went off. So, it was kind of scary. This is an installation shot from the Corcoran. There are , a light box, Tweedy Dave’s jacket, and also inkjet prints, black and white prints, sepia prints, as well as Polaroids and text on the wall and sound and videos. Here’s some work that I don’t show for a variety of reasons, but I did in between. I’m showing you pages from a book dummy. While I was doing *Raised by Wolves* my father was dying and I was commissioned to do a body of work called *Hospice*. During that time, my daughter was being born and I actually ended up going through a divorce and then my mother died and so I was chronicling my whole life. This is a fictionalized autobiography, completely fictionalized, what you are seeing here. That is my daughter’s feet and that is my father’s feet. That’s my dad’s last shave, hospice came in and shaved him, I was asked to clean the razor, and when I cleaned it I photographed the shavings. Next.

CL: I think these take a little while to load.

JG: It might be hard to see it, but this is a drawing, a photogram where the drawing inside of what’s going on in someone’s head, a child’s head.

CL: This is the final series that we are going to talk about: Jim’s current work. Some of which was shown recently at Stephen Wirtz Gallery several months ago. It’s an ongoing series so we’re going to show some of the work that has been shown and some that hasn’t been shown yet.

JG: Yeah, I haven’t seen some of these, so... When I transitioned out of doing that personal work is when I joined Magnum. My first assignment for Magnum was to go to Greece in celebration of the upcoming Greek Olympics and do a cultural project on immigrants in Greece. I was dropped in there for three weeks and I worked my ass off to try to be as good as the other Magnum guys are. I brought every camera imaginable and have been doing that since. This is a Polaroid that I took in which I wrote the story—I had to do a book, Magnum does all these books—I had to do some writing for the book so my writing was to tell the story of what I experienced when I was there, so that’s what this is. I would leave my address at the bottom hoping that someone would write to me to give me information that I could then use, or an artifact that I could then use, these are just Polaroids and contact sheets, cut up into grids. I started collaging more and more since *Raised by Wolves*. A Polaroid, this boy is from Sudan. Watching Oprah. [Laughter] This is a building in which every floor, or parts of every floor, are divided up by ethnic groups. There are *so* many people coming in, about half of the population of Greece now, is foreigners. To get amnesty is almost impossible, maybe two people a year out of 14,000, of the people who apply.

CL: So these are immigrants?

JG: Immigrants, refugees, and traffickers. I started in Greece, I started in Athens, and I’ve branched out to outside of Athens and then I’ve moved on to other areas. This is someone who was tortured by the Taliban. Much of the people who I’m documenting who are results of conflicts around the world that we have caused. This is culled from a torture archive. I was working with various NGOs. It’s interesting to work internationally because I have to go to people I’d never think to go to. This girl was trafficked to Greece. That’s a transition on the right—at some point I decided to go to the places that people came from, so this is Ukraine. I picked Eastern Europe, and started this mini project on

slavery or trafficking. This is the diary of a little girl, a prostitute, who was about to be trafficked; she was fifteen. There are more pages to this; this is just one example. This is collage that was made for a book of just my work, images off the Internet, images that were given to me, images from an archive that I found. This is a woman who was trafficked, a schoolteacher who went crazy. This is in the far east Ukraine. This is part of the show I had at Wirtz, this is the salon wall in one of the photographs. These are the most recent pictures I have taken in India and Bangladesh.

CL: These are very recent, right?

JG: Really recent.

CL: Sometimes these trips are trips you have taken for Magnum and then you are able to do your own work at the same time. This is outside of where?

JG: This is Dacca. I'm using a 4 x 5 and a 6 x 7 and a Polaroid and a 35mm and digital.

CL: You won an award for this, well the series so far, right?

JG: We're not talking about awards! [Laughter]

CL: Ah! But they are going to be shown.

JG: I just got the Cartier-Bresson award so that will be a book, two books. That's a pimp and a whore. This woman is HIV positive. This is a detail of a grid of all the people who tested positive for AIDS and who are on ARV drugs. This is a market. This is really washed out but this is a document of someone who is in debt. Many of the objects that I'm making were created—I scanned them and then I recreate them so they look like real objects. This is a river that they're taking the rocks out of to build roads. They make a dollar a day.

CL: This may be it.

JG: That's it.

CL: Well now it's your turn, out there, to ask questions. I'm sure that our guests would be happy to answer. I may just well make the observation that if you could generalize you could say that all three of these artists have taken the idea of a documentary photograph and extended in unexpected ways. From the point of view of the MATRIX program, I'd like to think that their shows had some meaningful influence on how their work progressed from that point on. Ok, questions?

LS: Just to emphasize what you just said about working in museums and working in artists spaces. I don't know if it's as common as it was but there's something to be said about working in the Bay Area where there is a huge amount of indifference to what you do here, which give you an enormous amount of freedom. I think Lewis Baltz said it's like democracy, you can say whatever you want because no one cares! That on one hand, and then the MATRIX program which encouraged us to take these risks. Just looking at the history of the MATRIX program it's kind of an amazing situation where it fostered that in a way that was certainly indicative of artists spaces, but this is not necessarily an artists space. I think that for three of us it was exciting to not know what we were doing—to have that kind of permission. When it fell through at SFMOMA, I was kidding, but we were relieved because it was such a tight set of questions that they were asking. It was already troubled, some of the questions about how many images we were going to be putting up and such—it wouldn't have been easy to do what we did. Just to the credit of both Liz and Connie, this is a really important program, to us.

Audience Question: [indiscernible]

LS: It's interesting because I think the work that Mike and I did in the 70's around advertising, around appropriation and certainly irony became a big part of it. That became enshrined in the culture that was the cornerstone of postmodern discourse. Quite frankly, for me, after a while that position got a little tired. It wasn't as interesting and I wanted to, on a personal level, do something that Rilke says—to praise is the thing. What do we have to praise? How do we situate ourselves not outside of a particular subject or discourse, but right in the center of it? I know that in terms of my own work I didn't want to be ironic, that was too easy. In terms of the public work that Mike and I did, when it started to become permanent that raised some real questions for both of us. I remember this conversation we had that this is going to outlast both of us, potentially. What can we do that would really contribute something to that community that would be playful and maybe crazy and subversive but also deeply respectful and long lasting? Our work in advertising, or with advertising, stopped in 1983 pretty much, or 1984. It just played itself out. Do you want to add to that, in terms of irony?

MM: I don't know about that, but just another aspect of the question is whether you can do anything in public art that has that sense of personality, that kind of open-endedness. Is that what you are talking about? You really have to be lucky enough to work with some of the people in that framework who are your advocates, who are serving as a driver through the bureaucracy to allow the artist to do that kind of work. Some artists who are lucky enough and have worked hard enough to establish themselves, and I can think of half a dozen great public artists like Christo, or anyways, people who have done significant pieces, pretty much anything that they do—no one is telling them they have to commemorate this or they have to be within certain constraints. At any rate, what I'm saying is that I think it's a tough nut to crack and you have to be lucky enough to work with people that will allow you to do something that's a little bit more of who you are, that happens sometimes.

Audience Question: Jim I'd like some clarification about the text in *Rich and Poor*. I understand that you edited the text with these people and then they wrote on the photograph, is that the way it worked? Did you then photograph it so you could use it repeatedly on prints or is there only one original?

JG: I did work with them. Sometimes people would write directly on them, I'd ask them a question and they'd write their answer on the photograph. Sometimes I would interview them, I would take notes, and then we'd figure out the best thing for them to say. They wrote it. Then after I made the print there would be one original. Then I would make a [cotalif?] of the words and then I would reproduce those. There is one set of originals that is in a private collection.

Audience Question: [indiscernible]

JG: I think for the most part, well certainly for the *Poor*, they were thrilled. I remember when I had my show at the SFMOMA one of them came and sat on your lap or John Collier's lap or someone's, and it was a thrill that there was this meeting of two worlds of transient hotels, welfare hotels, and the museum world. Doing the wealthy was a little more complicated of course, they being a little more educated perhaps and more aware of issues of representation. I would try to be as sensitive and careful as possible as I knew I'd get shut down otherwise. For the most part people were happy afterwards, or embarrassed that they were a part of it and didn't know what to say because it was too late.

LS: But actually, in the photographs there is a response: “we look like friends but I don’t like this guy” or “we look so happy but we’re not.” I think ingrained into the work itself is that discrepancy between the image and what it tells and the life and what it tells.

JG: But I was aware of that as way to create that kind of doubt.

LS: I think as photographers we are endlessly trying to undermine that kind of authority that has been given to us because it’s not that interesting. What’s much more interesting is the friction created by the truth a picture seems to tell and the truth of a life lived. I think that’s a really rich territory and obviously in the history of photography in the last twenty years we’ve seen that blossom, the idea of storytelling and the staged. Whether it’s Thomas Demand taking the document, restaging it, fabricating it, in a rich, evocative space with narrative, history, and fiction. We are very mindful that that is a great territory of photography.

CL: As you say people are mining it—think of Sophie Calle. Same idea because you don’t know how much is fiction and how much is fact. How much is actually acted or lived. Jeff Wall’s photographs would be another example. Some of your recent photographs, Larry, remind me of that.

LS: They aren’t like [Gregory] Crewdson’s kind of fiction, they look like they are ordinary and real but a staging of the real.

CL: Oh, Jordan?

Jordan Kantor: On a related note I wanted to point out something that struck me when you were talking about the juxtaposition of the classified and unclassified and the possibilities of doing that today. Especially in the context of the current MATRIX show of Trevor Paglen’s working with what really isn’t permitted photographically.

LS: Right, right.

CL: That’s a good observation that the current MATRIX show by Trevor Paglen is dealing with so many of the same issues in the way of unauthorized photographs.

LS: And their very inaccessible quality, because there is no access. It engenders a kind of creativity, of making a surveillance picture yourself with certain technologies.

CL: Other comments?

Audience Question: [indiscernible]

JG: I get great pleasure out of working. Now I have an assistant who I love and who travels with me, so we make jokes, we have fun, it’s an adventure. I don’t know where the day is going to take me usually. Although I may be seeing difficult things, very very difficult things that could bring me to tears, at the same time the connection that I’m having to that moment is so wonderful and the picture may be good and I’m happy that I’m able to make it, and I’m just glad to be there. I don’t photograph all the time, I’m photographing one week, two weeks, every four months...not very much. So I’m working hard to be as present as possible. When you are present, it’s not sad, you are just there and you’re trying to make something good out of it. I don’t know if that’s the answer or not, but it’s the answer I’ve come up with now.

CL: Yes, in the back?

Audience Question: [indiscernible]

JG: I don’t, he’s dead [referring to ‘Tweekey’ Dave]. That’s in the book, that’s the whole thing, I took care of him at the end and I found out another part of his story. I do have his ashes in my house. Other kids, they call me all the time, I get letters. Echo, I’m very close with, she just named a kid after me, her fourth kid! So, yeah, I’m there with them.