

BOOKS

'I only ever take one picture of one thing. Literally. Never two. So then that picture is taken and then the next one is waiting somewhere else.' —William Eggleston

Photo-Op: Local Color



William Eggleston/Steidl

PHOTOGRAPHY IS a vernacular art form—perhaps the vernacular art form. A street, a landscape, a face: Anyone can capture these with a camera. When William Eggleston set out to document the American scene in the 1960s, he took the medium's democratizing even further by loading up his Leica with humble Kodachrome film, a variety more commonly associated with family snapshots than museum-quality art in those days. But Mr. Eggleston revealed the lush possibilities of color art photography by subjecting his images to a dye-transfer process borrowed from commercial printing and in 1976 became the first color photographer to have a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art. More than 350 of his images are collected in the three volumes of 'Chromes' (Steidl, 728 pages, \$345). Taken between 1969 and 1975, the photographs deepen the artistic

possibilities of the quotidian. Mr. Eggleston was preoccupied by the question of what might be made of the base materials of midcentury America: empty highways, big automobiles, roadside cafés, small-town drugstores. Faded advertisements—for Coca-Cola and 7-Up, for Gulf and Esso gas—are a recurring theme, treated not as mass-produced objects intruding on the landscape but as objects that the land domesticates: a Wonder Bread sign slowly rusting in a field, a bleached Coca-Cola ad overgrown with vines. Where Andy Warhol ironically displayed Brillo soap-pad boxes in a gallery, Mr. Eggleston captures milk cartons in their 'natural habitat'—a store shelf. The relatively few people in his pictures receive similar respect: Never sneered at, they move quietly through a country few have shown us so clearly.

—The Editors