

A4

by Jack Pierson & Richard McCann

For 20 years, David Armstrong has maintained ties with Provincetown while he has moved around the world, taking pictures. I first met him here in 1980, and even then he was a legend, in both Provincetown and downtown New York. For the past 10 years, I've had the pleasure of seeing his work evolve and gain the recognition it deserves. Most recently, his photographs appear with those of Nan Goldin in *A Double Life*, a collection which evidences the intersections of their lives and work over a period of years. Nearly everyone who sees David's work falls in love with both it and its subjects. The photos which appear here were taken in Provincetown in the late 1970s. On May 7, 1994, my friend Richard McCann and I had the following conversation as we looked through them.

—JACK PIERSON

PROVINCETOWN, LATE '70S: DAVID ARMSTRONG'S PHOTOGRAPHS



GEORGE AT THE BOATSLIP

imagined he'd stop by; I imagined he was straight. But there he was an hour later, standing at my door on Pearl Street, holding a quart of beer. I was so shy I kept talking until 3:00 a.m. I thought I'd have to get to know his whole life story. Finally he asked if he could take a shower. When I picture him, he's still wearing the body he wore then, like a uniform. *Young B., from Canada, I think. First man I ever...* Of course a photograph is more than a pretext for some memory. What I admire is what resists me. JACK: Yeah—well, anyway, that's all fine, except this picture isn't B. It's that guy who works downtown. I'm all about the wallpaper myself. You can always find young boys in P'town, but that wallpaper—you just can't find it



EMILY

RICHARD: Was that one's youth? Waiting to be photographed? As if one imagined one should be still for a moment—while one was still young, I mean. JACK: One? Geez, I hope I get old enough to start referring to myself as "one." One what? One reader of Ronald Firbank? One dowager matron? RICHARD: Oneself, of course: one respectable middle-aged homosexual gentleman. Waiting. Longing. Isn't this what these photos refer to? As if one had time on one's hands. The blond hair on a boy's forearm. Blond hair on a boy's chest. Isn't this B.? You know, B. He lived for a while on Johnson Street with that guy who got hepatitis. I met him at the library while I was searching for some books. I said, "Here's my address. Stop by." Of course I never



JEFFREY



JENNY AT CAFE POYANT



PAULA AND ROB AT HERRING COVE

anymore. Look at this one. Can you believe those cheap satin shorts? Isn't that you in the background? That must be you, the way you're sucking up that drink. Thank God I never hung out at The Boatslip—*much*. RICHARD: I lacked the courage. Men. Sex. I hung out with girls, browsing the gift shops on Commercial Street, wearing an Indian kurta. That was my "homosexual fate." JACK: You got off easy then, I'd say.

RICHARD: I got tattooed after I saw this girl's face. People ask me: *Were you in the Navy? Did you get those when you were drunk?* But I wanted to be marked, like this girl, in a way I could never disown. She is the most private person in this photograph, even though her face is all tattooed. JACK: You want this coupon? 40 cents off. RICHARD: No,



CAROLINE AT LANDS END INN PARTY

it's already used. I only paid \$2.10. JACK: I still see that tattooed girl at the A & P. She's around. RICHARD: Do you have the urge to lie when you look at these photos? I do. I want to say that I knew so-and-so, that so-and-so was my friend. As if that might explain my sadness, because the person is possibly dead. No, not *him*—not the guy with the hairy legs, not the guy whose dick is sheathed, like it will never die. And not that guy either, not the guy with the sunglasses hanging from his shirt. JACK: That's Max.

RICHARD: He's not what I'd call *inconsolable*. Some of the others, maybe, but not him, showing off his belly. JACK: What a genius look, right? I worshipped Max. So did everybody though. He had this gorgeous way of speaking to every-



RICKI AT THE BOATSLIP

one exactly the same way. It didn't matter whether you were a tranny hooker or a chief justice. Max would still say, "Hey, girleen"—I wish I could be more like that. He was also the butchiest fag I ever met and the first person I knew who was HIV-positive, even before you knew to say "HIV." It was like: *Oh, this guy has got AIDS*. I never knew he looked this cheap though. You can see David in the reflection in his sunglasses, the way David looked back then. RICHARD: Photography—"the world's saddest medium." JACK: "The only one that saves a homosexual's life." ■



PHILIPPE



MAX

RICHARD: Photography—"the world's saddest medium." JACK: "The only one that saves a homosexual's life."

Provincetown

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Photographs"

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