

DAVID H. WELLS: LIGHT STUDIES



Gail Cahalan Gallery
200 Allens Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island

October 15 through November 8

Where does the journalistic nature of photography end and art begin? Photographer David H. Wells seeks answers to that longstanding question. As a freelance photojournalist, Wells' work has appeared in major publications like the *Philadelphia Inquirer Sunday Magazine*, *Time Magazine* and *National Geographic*. Independently, he produces photo essays documenting the impact of globalization on India and other developing nations, funding his extensive travels through grants and fellowships. Clearly, the shutter is his third eye onto a dynamic world.

In between the thousands of frame sets, another visual reality has captured the artist's imagination. As both a compliment to and departure from his prolific "political" work, Wells has concurrently compiled his more poetic series of "Light Studies," a small selection of which are to be shown at the Gail Cahalan Gallery in his home base of Providence. Shot alongside his project work, these images feel more through depicting less.

"The work being shown is arguably the most personal, immediate and aesthetically important to me," noted Wells, speaking with *artscope* via an Internet café in India. "It is neither filtered through the eyes of or distorted by the mission of a paying client, nor altered by going through the framework of one of the more political projects that I usually do. It is not particularly positive or negative as much as it is different in a very satisfying way."

Part and parcel of the life of a photojournalist is a submersion into outside situations and cultures, with the camera acting as an intermediary. In this work, Wells acknowledges his inherent alienation as an observer, while celebrating the visceral experiences of movement and light so readily accessible to the synergistic pairing of camera and operator.

In "Light Studies," Wells' human subjects are captured in a moment of silhouette, movement or shadow, effectively obscuring features to deny what we think of as a traditional portrait. With faces, personalities and human specifics removed from the equation, the viewer can appreciate the beauty of a fleeting atmospheric condition, a jewel-tone reflection, the blur and whirl of humans and headlights on a rapidly evolving street.

The trappings of urban sprawl, corrugated and sheeted planes of plastic, filter Wells' worldview alongside the flash of neon lights on windshields. Side by side with these street visions appear timeless images of anonymous people interacting with nature, although, their specific activities remain unclear due to Wells' deliberate veiling of specifics.

"A few different things are happening in these pieces," Wells explained. "One is that I am simply trying to capture and convey to others the immediate, visceral reaction that I have to something I see [or] encounter. The trigger is usually a shape, form, silhouette, abstraction, etc., that I catch a glimpse of, sometimes out of the corner of my eye. My eyes see these things often; but, recognizing them, then finding the situation and organizing it into an image is another step, altogether. Often the person that I initially saw is gone, but the frame/location/beam of light that I was attracted to still is there, so I wait for others to come along."

For all of the beauty captured in these photographs, there is a sinister undertone to their shadowy denizens. Is it the confusion of unfamiliar situations or the anxiety of a shifting power dynamic in the global economy? By creating multiple planes of information for the viewer, Wells offers us a chance to come to our own conclusions.

| Meredith Cutler



ABOVE LEFT: *Rain on Window*, Havana, Cuba, 2000, film capture.
TOP: *Man in Fountain*, Mysore, India, 2005, digital capture.
MIDDLE: *Pilgrims at Twilight*, Rameshwaram, India, 2002, film capture.
BELOW: *Street Lights*, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2002, film capture.

