



Brothers, South Boston Beach

Date

2003

Primary Maker

Marla Sweeney

Medium

Archival inkjet print

Description

"Although Marla Sweeney hails from Lowell, MA, the people she photographs on the beaches there are strangers. This makes the tangible connection between photographer and subject, so evident in Sweeney's Salisbury images, all the more remarkable.

'Sweeney's beach portraits feel like truth to me. Their subjects are not the self-conscious toned beauties of such places as South Beach or Santa Monica. Sweeney shoots the old, the poor, and the imperfect, yet despite the vulnerability of the half-dressed

before the gaze of a stranger, they have dignity, strength, and self-possession. An image of an old woman in a voluminous flowered bathing suit and rubber cap shows veined thighs and sagging skin, but she faces the camera with comfort and confidence. We feel that she has come to the ocean often, that she is happy by the sea, and even that she has grown wise there. Another image shows a mother and son, both sheltered under a huge umbrella, the son sheltered additionally by his mother's protective embrace around his narrow shoulders. We also see the emphasis on relationships in a photograph of two young boys. We know they are brothers by the title, but we would intuit it from their resemblance and their easy, mirroring stances. They are not conventionally appealing children. Their pale skin and hollow rib-revealing torsos suggest some level of deprivation, but they are happy and safe at the beach with their cups of slush and each other. Sweeney's image of a freckled, almost adolescent boy wrapped in a striped towel is as sweet as "Boy Elvis." Like her other subjects, the boy is willing to be photographed. He participates in the picture making with his solid stance and his red, white, and blue presence, echoed by a glimpse of an American flag flying above the otherwise fog gray environment.' — Alison Nordstrom, 2008 Light Work Annual Marla Sweeney lives and works in New Hampshire. Sweeney's work has been exhibited widely, and is included in permanent collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Musee da la Photographie, Charleroi, Belgium; and the Harry Ransom Center Collection, University of Texas, Austin. She participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence Program in May 2007." (SOURCE: Light Work, Syracuse, NY)

Dimensions

Image: 9 × 9 in. (22.9 × 22.9 cm) Sheet: 14 11/16 in. × 11 in. (37.3 × 27.9 cm)