

Press Release

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Mary Ellen Mark
"Twins" and "Falkland Road"
Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College Chicago
July 23 – October 5, 2004

CHICAGO- From July 17 through October 5, 2004 the Museum of Contemporary Photography will exhibit two extraordinary projects by renowned photographer Mary Ellen Mark. This exhibition will include 20 Polaroid prints from her series "Twins", made in a studio in Twinsburg, Ohio during their annual Twins Days festival. In addition, selected images from her 1978-79 series on prostitution in Bombay, India, "Falkland Road," will be on view.

Mary Ellen Mark is one of a hand full of highly respected photographers who straddle the worlds of art, documentary and journalism. For the past 35 years she has produced projects on drug culture in the U.S. and abroad, child prostitution, circuses in numerous countries, the aging in America, rodeos, American celebrities, mental health facilities--the list is long and varied. In her most recent photographic project "Twins", Mary Ellen Mark created a record of personal portraiture in the world of identical twins and compiled a collection of their stories of over a thousand pages of transcripts through telephone conversations.

In two separate visits to Ohio in August 2001 and 2002 Mary Ellen Mark and a crew of 12 took an incredible journey to move half her studio from New York to the Twins Days Festival in Ohio. Because of the light needed for the use of the 20x24 Polaroid camera, a tent had to be constructed to house her and her studio to precise specifications and the Ohio electric company had to supply 200 amps of power for the use of lights. Due to the intense light, the camera produced a confrontational image where the subject is quite aware of the cameras presence. When exhibited these highly detailed portraits amaze the viewer with human genetics and the subtle variations of the pairs of twins. "Falkland Road" documented the famous Bombay street that is lined with wooden buildings, vendors, movie houses and prostitutes. On the ground floor of Falkland road there are cage-like structures filled with girls. Above these cages the buildings rise three or four stories, and at every window there are more girls--combing their hair, sitting in clusters on the windowsills, beckoning to potential customers. These girls for hire vary in age from eleven years old to sixty five year old ex madams.

In this prolific series that started on her first visit to Bombay back in 1968, Mary Ellen Mark spent 10 years trying to win the trust of many prostitutes living and working along this street. She stated that during many of her visits “the women threw garbage and water and pinched me,” she even recalls a drunken man punching her in the face. Finally in 1978 during a six-week stay, she won the trust of a select group of women and made a personal series that captures the daily life of these prostitutes. One of the girls that she became very close with, named Asha, said she hated being a prostitute but didn’t know how else to survive and dreamt of being a servant. Out of 65 images in the series *Falkland Road*, the museum will exhibit a diverse selection of fourteen 16 X 20 prints.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography will host an opening reception on Thursday, July 22, 2004 from 5 pm until 7 pm.

This exhibition and related programs are sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs/Gallery 37; and American Airlines, the official airlines of the Museum of Contemporary Photography, and our members.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography is free and open to the public weekdays from 10 am until 5 pm (Thursdays until 8 pm) and Saturdays from noon until 5 pm. It is located at 600 S. Michigan Avenue on the corner of Harrison Street. For additional information please call 312-663-5554 or visit us at www.mocp.org.