

PROFILE: KATHLEEN EWING

By Jean Dykstra

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Washington, D.C., can be a tough town for an art dealer. It's a city of politicians, lobbyists, and lawyers, and as longtime photography dealer **Kathleen Ewing** points out, few of those folks are art collectors. And yet Ewing has not only stuck with it since opening a gallery in the nation's capital in 1976, she has grown her stable of photographers, expanded her gallery's space off Dupont Circle, and become one of the most respected photo dealers around, running her gallery as well as heading the **Association of International Photography Art Dealers** (AIPAD) — as executive director since 1991, and before that, as president. "I'm in it for the long haul," she says, sounding quite happy about it.

A D.C. native, Ewing studied art history and painting at Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, then went to work at the National Gallery of Art. But after five years, she realized the museum world wasn't for her. "They had little interest in photography at the time," she says. "They had the Stieglitz collection, but they didn't do much with it." So she quit, to become what was then a rare thing—a photography dealer. The influential dealer and collector Harry Lunn, whom Ewing calls "an extremely important mentor," was showing the masters — Weston, Atget, Abbott — in D.C., but nobody was working with contemporary photography. "I thought because I loved the photographs I was looking at, everyone would," says Ewing, who began by showing local photographers. Like most people who got into the photography market when there wasn't yet much you could call a photography market, Ewing recalls the 1970s fondly. "There was really a family feeling to everything," she says. "I was struggling. The photographers were struggling. But it was very exciting because you could do what you wanted to do." Ewing quickly branched out, showing

contemporary photographers from all over the country, and today her stable is nothing if not wide-ranging, including Pictorialist **A. Aubrey Bodine** and August Sander, as well as contemporary photographers showing color work, such as **Christopher Burkett**, and even the photo-based sculpture of **Janos Enyedi**. One advantage of being based in Washington, Ewing concedes, is that there are so few photography dealers there that there's not a pressing need to specialize in order to compete in a crowded market. Ewing says the prices for work in her gallery range from \$300 to \$15,000 with most of the sales in the \$1,200 to \$2,000 range — "because that's the nature of the market in Washington."

Ewing is not from the cold, intimidating school of dealers, and her gallery is not a sterile white cube. You might guess as much if you dropped by on any given Saturday between noon and 3, to find it filled with cats and dogs — real ones — wandering about, trying to look adoptable. Ewing is on the board of the **Washington Animal Rescue League**, and every Saturday, she hosts adoption day in her gallery space. "It adds to the atmosphere," she says. Besides, she adds, "It's a cool organization: we keep all adoptable animals until they're adopted." Ewing owns only two dogs herself, but admits to a huge collection of dog photographs. And also sheep photographs ("But sometimes they're goat photographs, because you can't always tell a sheep from a goat," she adds.)

Ewing has branched out in various ways in the last few years: more than two years ago, when she doubled the space of the gallery, she began having the occasional show of non-photographic work — a furniture show, for example, and an exhibition of abstract painting. She also opened a small space, open by appointment only, outside Aspen, Colorado, where she has a second home. "I'm not giving up on Washington," she says. "I just needed to do something a little different, to experiment."

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Ewing's Aspen outpost is one sign of the growth of the photography market, something she has witnessed as well as a founding member of AIPAD. When the organization began in 1979, she says, "we felt that it could help the fine art photography world grow in a controlled and professional way." The organization has certainly grown in numbers — there were 30 members in 1979, and today there are 127 members, with 75 dealers exhibiting in this year's Photography Show at the New York Hilton. But other things have changed as well: "We have tightened professional standards," says Ewing. "We have a serious code of ethics, and we stand for the highest quality of material. In order to qualify for membership, you have to have been in business for five years, and you need to be supported by five members. But what's also important is the Photography Show is the only show in the world where you have to be a member of AIPAD to participate. By that very nature it sets a higher level of quality."

The annual Photography Show began as a tabletop fair at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York (which Ewing recalls as an awful place for the show), and then, from the early '80s until 1993, traveled around the country. In 1993, the organization made the decision to return to New York, and it has been at the New York Hilton ever since. Though there have been complaints about the space and the layout, Ewing says that "at this point, I think we've done as much as we can:" improving the lighting, creating higher walls, and organizing free lectures, among other things. "Now, the burden is on the exhibitors to put their best foot forward," she says, "and to make a presentation that is stunning."

Ewing herself is bringing work that reflects the eclectic nature of the gallery: sculptural pieces by Janos Enyedi, photographs by **Anderson & Low**, images from **Rosamond Purcell's** "Dice" series, work by Christopher Burkett, and photographs by A. Aubrey Bodine and **August Sander**. "Part of the problem is that it's hard for me to narrow my sights," Ewing says cheerfully, "I just love everything."

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