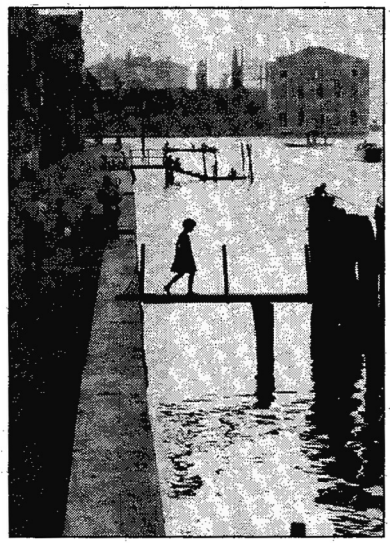
Washington City Paper ,May 20, 2005

TO MAY 28

Reflections of France



If all you knew about Willy Ronis was his cheerful photograph of a boy carrying a long baguette—an image posted prominently in at least one local Au Bon Pain—you'd be tempted to dismiss him as hopelessly nostalgic. But Ronis, though not as well-known, has done work equalling that of Atget, Brassai, Kertesz, Cartier-Bresson, and Doisneau. The Kathleen Ewing Gallery's 46-work exhibition features numerous borderline-precious evocations of cobblestone streets, tender kisses, charming architecture, and recreational getaways throughout Europe, but Ronis is at his finest when teasing out multilayered narratives from split-second street scenes. (*Fondamente Nuove, Venice, 1959* is pictured) In *Venise, 1959*, for instance, a boy stands in the foreground on a sidewalk, flanked on one side by a door that opens into a bar filled with men and on the other by two vivacious women ambling down the street; no one is aware of the others. Other times, Ronis masterfully captures action (two figures smoothly diving into the water in front of an anchored ship) and controlled chaos (a bevy of busy cooks photographed, unbeknownst to them, through a skylight). The gallery has cleverly paired an image of three hooded children walking down a rural road with another featuring three circus penguins doing much the same. Perhaps the show's finest work is *Bruges, le Beguinage, 1952*, which documents a group of more than 20 nuns in habits walking in a straight line through an idyllic wood with gently leaning trees—the quintessential Ronis mix of order and unexpectedness. Also on view: Vintage albumen prints of Paris and nighttime photographs by Lynn Saville. The show is on view from noon to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, through Saturday, May 28, at the Kathleen Ewing Gallery, 1609 Connecticut Ave. NW. Free. (202) 328-0955. (Louis Jacobson)