

Richard Renaldi has circled around his subject--the human figure--from a variety of vantage points over the years. With each project, he moves metaphorically closer to his subjects, achieving a greater sense of intimacy, although most of his work is shot out of doors in natural light. His tools and outlook are relatively traditional--8 x 10 view camera--which dictates a slow transaction between photographer and sitter. But Renaldi finds in the photographic process the means to translate the immediacy, the ineffable, as well as the memorializing that is part of portrait photography.

His first publication, *Figure and Ground*, color portraits, celebrated a variety of characters Renaldi encountered while traveling through the United States. It's a collective snapshot of America around the millennium, evocative of August Sander's *Men of the Twentieth Century* 1920s portraits. While both artists seat their subjects in middle ground, Renaldi connects body to landscape and the spirit of the sitter to the viewer.

In his recent work, *Fall River Boys*, he visits a coastal New England town, a long faded bastion of the area's shipbuilding industry. This collection of black and white prints focuses closely on the young locals, sympathetic to each individual as well as the slightly rundown surroundings. Elegant and graceful, these images recall Lee Friedlander's *Factory Valleys* more so than then fashion-conscious trendsetters seen in earlier work.

The work appears in his newly released book, *Fall River Boys*.

As topical and immediate as are Renaldi's pictures, Vee Speers' *Birthday Party* portraits evoke the formality of a bygone era. Inspired by watching her own young children interact in interior spaces, she developed a series of single portraits of children in costume. She began shooting in black and white, and soon added layers of color digitally. Her close-in style recalls strong cinematic influences of Peter Greenaway's psychological set pieces and exquisite costuming. In Speers' case, she elicits a costume for each child, inspired by the character of each face she selects. The protagonists of her birthday party are strangely still, as children hold props and brooding looks fixed in timeless, airless atmosphere. Evoking the 19th century of daguerreotype photography, the exquisite colored details invite slow scrutiny of the personality within each small form. The learned and the untutored exist side by side in these images, mirroring the development of children in structured society. These images bring the question of Nurture versus Nature to a new level, exploring as they do how children cope with leaving innocence behind for self-knowledge.

Vee Speers' work of the series is published in her new book titled *The Birthday Party*.