

# Neighborland



## Revolutionary Color Photography and William Eggleston and Me

By Liz Chilsen, June 24, 2012 at 12:15 pm

In the 1970's, William Eggleston made a photograph in Memphis Tennessee containing the small details of a home's front door and a basketful of posies. Dappled light flitters across the surface revealing textures of paint and rust. The image stops me in my tracks. The details so revealing of social class and expectation, of design and decoration; an ordered life within. One morning walking the dog, I was seized by a reincarnation of that moment before me. And I made my own picture in homage.

In Eggleston's picture, there's a scalloped shadow at the top, an embellished mailbox, layers of paint, color patterns and accent trim... In my own picture, the door is new, the mailbox brassy and thin. Like Eggleston's door before it, this door is a common style, ubiquitously available. The elements are evidence of aspirations and expedience, and I appreciate the way Eggleston draws us to them, encapsulating in his frame a host of elements of place and time.

Wm Eggleston's picture appeared on page 17 of his ground-breaking book *William Eggleston's Guide*, published in 1979 by the Museum of Modern Art. The book cataloged MOMA's first one-person exhibition of color photography; Eggleston's photographs made around his southern 'neighborland' of Memphis.

It's nearly impossible to grasp what that exhibition meant; the deep suspicions trained upon color in photography at the time. [Read](#) a review on PhotoEye about the book. And [this post on Slate](#) by Jim Lewis. To the discussion, I add a small experience of my own. Nearly a decade after *The Guide*, the Walker Art Center organized "[On the Line: The New Color Photojournalism](#)" an exhibition that wrestled with color in photography. I visited the show with my then two-year-old niece. The presence of her young eyes beside mine as I viewed the images contextualized their questions -- questions with which we still wrestle -- about war and violence and poverty. The issue of whether these questions can be contended with in color just never came up.



*"Memphis". William Eggleston. 1970's*



*"Chicago Neighborland". Liz Chilsen. 2012*

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