Before the Tableau Form
Large Photographic Formats in the Exhibition Signs of Life, 1976

Olivier Lugon
Traducteur : Franck Le Gac
NOTE DE L'AUTEUR

This research was made possible by a Ailsa Mellon Bruce Visiting Senior Fellowship of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. A first version was presented at the conference ‘Les Espaces de l’image / The Spaces of the Image,’ organized by Gaëlle Morel at the Canadian Centre for Architecture as part of the Mois de la photo in Montreal (October 2, 2009); at the conference ‘Exposition et médias’ at the Centre des sciences historiques de la culture at the Université de Lausanne, Switzerland (October 29, 2009); and as part of the lecture series for the European Film and Media Studies master’s programme (Université Lyon 2), at the invitation of Christian Joschke (December 4, 2009).

The author would like to thank Stephen Shore, Denise Scott Brown, and John Izenour; William Whitaker, curator of the Architectural Archives (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Renwick Gallery (Washington, DC); the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art (New York).

In 1989, in the catalogues for two consecutive major exhibitions, Une autre objectivité and Foto-Kunst, historian and critic Jean-François Chevrier launched the idea of a tableau form in photography that was to become one of the key notions in photographic theory of the late twentieth century.¹ It incorporated several defining elements of Chevrier’s thinking. He argues for the inclusion of photography in the history of art and aesthetics.² Attendant upon this is the idea of the work of art as an autonomous object, the product of a unique sensibility, of an auteur, (as opposed to montage and appropriation of found images), as well as the aspiration to an enduring work, one that is immune to the rapid consumption fostered by the cultural industry. But above all else, the tableau form asserts the primacy
of the exhibition as a vehicle for dissemination, designating photographs conceived as wall pieces, which impose their presence as much by their existence as an object as by their subject matter, as key elements in the staging of an 'experience of confrontation' with the spectator. \(^1\) Certainly, the enlargement of formats is an essential condition for this experience, and though this is implicit in Chevrier’s argument if not central to it, \(^2\) the enlarged format would henceforth be understood as inseparable from any understanding of the tableau form. One of photography’s features as it set out to conquer museum spaces and the contemporary art market, the large format was to reach its apogee in the gigantic prints of Thomas Ruff and Andreas Gursky. For the following twenty years, the increase in the size of prints would appear as a sure indication that photography and photographers were entering the field of art. \(^3\)

Actually, things began quite differently and in an almost inverse fashion as a longer history of the large format in photography reveals. For a long time, a large-scale photograph, approaching or surpassing human size, represented precisely what a painting or a work of art was not: an image intended not so much for contemplation, as for mass communication. More (in size) tended to be less (in artistic worth). And it was precisely because of this, because such works were generated by the mass media, that, in the 1970s, certain artists, photographers, and architects took an interest in them.

### The Photomural

Large-format photography developed rapidly during the interwar period. At this time, it was thought of primarily as a modern form of mural painting, as a fresco rather than an easel painting, as a picture that is part of the architecture rather than an independent, collectable object to be bought and sold. Consequently, the aim of the image was not so much to address the individual beholder, as it was to serve the more utilitarian functions of decorating public spaces or of widespread communication for the purposes of education, advertising, or for political ends. Large-format photographs found their place chiefly in trade-fair stands, in exhibitions with propagandistic aims, and displays of a nationalistic nature. Their public was not so much the isolated individual presupposed by the painting as an object, as it was the crowd at a large public event. The inflation of the image reflected the multiplied gazes that rested upon it, and this, in turn, gave it its status as a mass medium. The photomural, as it was called then in English, presented itself as an efficient image, one which, in an almost industrial sense, could improve and speed up communication, in opposition to the idea that art slows it down.

In this engineering of communication, the large format appeared as a primarily technical product, which, more than any conventional print, affirmed the mechanical nature of the photographic medium. The specialized press never failed to emphasize the technical prowess represented by these formats, the complexity of the infrastructures upon which their production depended, and the collaborative nature of the process itself, one far removed from the idea of the work as something handcrafted by an individual, as was the case with painting. \(^4\) It comes as no surprise, then, that in the 1920s, photomurals occupied a central place in exhibitions, which themselves acted as gigantic machines of communication.

The other difference between the photomural and the model of the painting lies in the fundamentally ephemeral nature of the former. On the one hand, it owes its existence to
the projection of light and the event that occasions it. It is a filmic image of sorts, one in which projection would simply have come earlier in the process, with the production of the image. And indeed, the moment when the enlargement takes place was a favorite topic in specialized periodicals. On the other hand, and most importantly, the photomural proves extremely vulnerable. Unwieldy, dependent on the mechanics of mounting and fastening, it is very fragile and only rarely survives its exhibition. One of the fundamental differences with paintings, this aspect makes it an unviable object for collection. At their inception in the nineteenth century, photographs exemplified the perfect image for collection. They were acquired in order to be preserved, given their ability to assimilate all the objects of the world into a system of generalized accumulation and comparison. But they proved difficult to exhibit: small, gray, their very surface deteriorated when exposed to the light necessary for viewing. The interwar large format reversed this situation; photographs became exhibition images, but in the process proved unsuitable for collections. Only the tableau form succeeded in combining these two qualities and turning photographs into images that could be both exhibited and collected, a double criterion conditioning access to the economic system of the fine arts.

6 Before the end of the 1970s, the hugely enlarged photograph most closely resembled the billboard poster – bound for rapid consumption and subsequent disappearance once its message had been delivered. In this paradoxical form of disposable monumentality, the very majesty of the image was at odds with its permanence. The most famous example of gigantic prints in postwar America, Kodak’s Coloramas, had a life expectancy of three weeks. Succeeding one another in the hall of Grand Central Station in New York from 1950 to 1990, these backlit color panoramas epitomized, for more than two generations, the monumentality of images subjected to the law of material obsolescence and short-lived trends.7

7 Under these conditions, and following MoMA’s lead, the first market for art photography established in the early 1970s, principally in New York, concentrated on the small photograph. It was onto these modestly scaled images that the fetishization of the ‘beautiful print’ and of the precious object was transferred, as though a near one-to-one ratio with the negative ensured a more intimate relation with the matrix from which it originated, a greater closeness to the creative act that would serve as guarantee of something approaching the ‘original’ in photography. In that regard, the larger format could never be but an industrial, clearly debased reproduction, as is evidenced by the often ferocious commentary by specialists. The discredit was all the stronger since, as a result of improvements in color, larger photographs began to conquer the home decoration market as well as becoming pervasive in the advertising and corporate domain, and in such public spaces as restaurants. But it is precisely because they represented a media image without artistic legitimacy, a kind of ‘other’ in terms of art photography and museum photography, that some – in particular in North America – developed an interest in these immense images.8

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Stephen Shore

8 I would like to illustrate this by way of a single example, which while it cannot claim the status of a general demonstration, still constitutes, in my opinion, a significant instance, since it involves the collaboration between one of the major photographers of his
generation, Stephen Shore, and the most famous apologists of mass culture and of the everyday environment, one defined by commerce and advertising, architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The collaboration took place on the occasion of a thematic exhibition organized by the firm Venturi and Scott Brown (then Venturi and Rauch) on the ordinary urban and suburban environment of the United States. *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City* was held at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC, across from the White House, from February 26 to September 30 of 1976; it was commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution to celebrate the American bicentennial. This is significant in that the anniversary marked the institutional recognition of aesthetic forms and positions, which, until then, had tended to take their inspiration from extra-artistic models and popular culture. Suddenly, they had become vehicles for national representation and bore an official stamp. This concerned photography, with Lee Friedlander’s large project *The American Monument,* but held even more true of architecture with this commission of a highly controversial architectural firm. These assailants of ‘good taste’ in modern architecture – and more particularly contemporary public and government buildings – were now in charge of the official celebration of the nation’s built landscape.

Four years earlier, in 1972, Venturi and Scott Brown, along with their collaborator Steven Izenour (who was to be the mainspring of *Signs of Life*), had published *Learning from Las Vegas,* a polemic in the form of academic research on the urban planning of the gambling city. Using Las Vegas as its model, the book served as a reminder that, beyond the abstract categories of space and function privileged by modernism, architecture was also a matter of images, symbols, and communication. Venturi and Scott Brown also advocated what they called a ‘permissive’ attitude towards the real. In their view, the role of architecture was not, as in the modernist position of the tabula rasa, to transform or eradicate by any means that which existed. Rather, architects should learn to look at their environment with a neutral eye so as to accentuate its qualities, including the most ordinary and mundane: gas stations, drive-in restaurants, billboards.

As a consequence of both these precepts – of architecture as image and the appeal to observing rather than doing away with – photography, creator of a ‘permissive’ image if ever there were one, played a major role in their project and in the book *Learning from Las Vegas.* In photography as in architecture, Venturi and Scott Brown’s taste tended toward the most banal forms of practice. Ed Ruscha’s ‘unremarkable’ documentation was an explicit model for the Las Vegas project; and Venturi and Scott Brown used color, and all the more liberally as it was still not thought of well in architectural circles. The book attracted the attention of the photography world. In the 1970s, Venturi and Scott Brown were often mentioned in texts on the photographers associated with the New Topographics movement, and, significantly, a publisher specializing in photography, Aperture, secured the contract to produce the catalogue for *Signs of Life.*

The exhibition expanded the study of ordinary space to the whole of American urban and suburban space, whether commercial or residential, and, once again, photography played a prominent role. Several thousand images (figures range from 4,000 to 7,000) filled the Renwick Gallery, a profusion meant to express the wealth of symbolic forms beyond the control of professional architects, and to embody the attitude of permissiveness about them, the refusal of any *a priori* aesthetic or moral judgment. To the very large number of images accumulated over the years by the firm, Venturi and Scott Brown added a selection of works commissioned from a twenty-nine-year-old photographer, Stephen Shore.
Shore. Steven Izenour had discovered his work at the Light Gallery in New York and had immediately recognized an affinity of interests and attitudes in Shore's taste for roadside environments as well as in the apparent neutrality of his approach. Contracted in the spring of 1975 to produce a series of photographs for the exhibition, Shore crossed the country during the course of that summer and completed the work. Some of his most famous images were made on that journey and could be read as elements of architectural theory as much as autonomous photographic works.

The exhibition gave them pride of place. One of the photographs appeared on the invitation card, another on the poster, and they were featured at several points in the exhibition, put into play in a variety of ways. At the entrance, in a prologue of sorts to Signs of Life proper, a rather conventional display of fifteen or so medium-sized prints made up a kind of solo exhibition, the first of such prominence for the photographer, and a few months before the one-man show at MoMA that was to launch his career. (The MoMA exhibition included seven of Shore's images from Signs of Life.) Beyond this conventional art-photography hanging of his work, Shore allowed his prints to be subjected to forms of exhibition unknown in the fine arts tradition, tapping instead into commercial or advertising practices. Aside from his own decision to work exclusively in color – a personal choice – he agreed to the use of backlit prints and vast enlargements, the very forms which, once in the museum, soon accompanied the triumphal entrance of photography into the art world.

The exhibition itself was divided into three parts – ‘The Home,’ ‘The Strip,’ ‘The Street’ – each of which involved a specific form of large-format photography. ‘The Strip’ privileged backlit images. The room was crammed with gigantic ads and neon signs, and running down the center was a large, double-sided luminous board displaying documentary, textual, and photographic material. The structure appeared as a caricature of American roadside billboards, whose traits it both reprised and exaggerated: the imitation painting frame, the lattice work of common garden trellis below, as well as the illuminated images. According to Venturi and Scott Brown, the idea was to cross the models of the billboard (an image made for the distant, fleeting, and distracted attention of the driver) and the newspaper (a density ‘teeming with’ information). The art museum was invaded by two different yet mutually supportive systems of media efficiency; that of the principle of the brief and distracting presentation of the billboard and that of the newspaper's extreme concentration of information, two models equally at variance with aesthetic contemplation, if only because of the distance demanded of the spectator to the image, too great in one case and too near in the other.

**Dioramas of the Ordinary**

Stephen Shore’s images, however, received the greatest attention in the section entitled ‘The Home,’ on which most of the very heated debates provoked by the exhibition were focused. In this instance, the play between ordinary environment and art museum was slightly different. The idea was not to use visual devices specific to commercial space, but conversely to confront everyday objects to the most traditional conventions of museum displays as codified since the nineteenth century, particularly the reconstruction of the period room and the painted diorama.

Concretely, the idea was to reconstitute three typical, utterly banal contemporary interiors as they might be found in a working-class row-house, a middle-class suburban
home, and an upper-class private house. In each case, the public faced a fully furnished living room with the television turned on, a simulacrum disrupted only by the presence of giant comic-book style speech bubbles, which provided the stylistic origin of the furniture and other elements on display. As the exhibition would have it, spectators would find in the museum the very environment they had left behind in their homes. Yet this transfer suddenly subjected the environment to the curiosity, wonder, or defamiliarization which period rooms aspired to in relation to historical rooms and places of importance. The ordinary was simultaneously reproduced in all its triteness and exhibited as an object worthy of interest.

The installation did not fail to incite violent discussion as to the intentions of the architects. Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour insisted on their own neutrality, their desire to simply show objects that usually elicited contempt, suspending any value judgment so that they could be understood on their own terms. Many commentators, however, considered the installation as an attempt to celebrate lower middle class taste and consumer society, in a spineless approval of cultural alienation and political status quo. Others still, denounced it as an elitist, mocking, or condescending perspective on daily life. This criticism was so often quoted in the press that one of the suppliers of furniture for the rooms threatened to withdraw its support of what became to be perceived as a denigrating endeavor.

In the same section, this fundamental uncertainty between neutral citation, glorification, and sarcasm coincided with the use of the large photographic format. A booth supplemented each living room, reconstructing what would be the exterior of the house in a similar presentation of imitation and trompe l’oeil, but now by way of a two-dimensional image. The exhibition shifted from the tradition of period rooms to that of painted dioramas, with the difference that the diorama was now photographic. Stephen Shore provided all the subjects: each booth featured one or two frontal views of the façade, coupled with a perspective of the street, and the space as a whole oscillated between a coherent illusionistic creation and independent individual images.

The exterior views also featured speech bubbles, and Shore accepted this contrivance without any hesitation, even helping to set them up. He expressed his support for the exhibition in an interview with The New Yorker, emphasizing particularly his enthusiasm for the large formats – which he had never used before – and for the new technique that made such high-quality enlargements possible. The technique was a Japanese process dubbed NECO (Nippon Enlarging Colour Inc.), which the company 3M had just begun distributing in the United States under the name Architectural Paintings. The extremely costly system (it was the second highest budget item of the exhibition) involved scanning a slide and processing it with a computer controlling, not an inkjet, but a paintjet printer. It could produce very subtle nuances, with unrivaled stability and sharpness: no grain was visible, and the major commercial argument, relayed by Shore and Izenour, was that sharpness even increased with the size. The process had been developed particularly for trade-fair stands and expositions as well as for very large urban surfaces; in Japan, it was already used to cover entire buildings. In the United States, however, 3M also targeted the emerging market for the decoration of commercial spaces, offices, restaurants, and shops. Beyond the illusionistic possibilities of the technique, it was gaining a foothold in the realm of everyday decoration – giant billboards, restaurants, or corporate lobbies – and this further aroused Izenour’s interest. As with the rest of the exhibition, the issue...
was to introduce main street into the museum through a lowbrow image that represented decorative ordinariness and popular taste in its very technique.

Signs of Life was, in effect, the first inroad made by Architectural Paintings into museums and into the field of culture, a shift that was to trigger strong reactions. On the one hand, some denounced what they saw as the kitschy dimension of the technique: that was the case in Washington and a few weeks later in New York, the criticism was even more virulent as Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour once again used the 3M technique, again in collaboration with Stephen Shore, but this time as a backdrop to some of the sculptures in the large Whitney Museum retrospective, 200 Years of American Sculpture, another bicentennial exhibition whose installation they also designed. Some members of the press took offense at what one critic condemned as ‘unbelievable vulgarity.’ But the outrage was certainly anticipated by the exhibition designers themselves: they knew full well that ‘to the modern architect, scenic wallpaper and Rocky Mountain-genre photomurals have always been for the birds,’ as another commentator noted about Signs of Life.

On the other hand, however, the inclusion of these enormous images in the space of the museum had to turn them into objects of wonder. The same commentator of Signs of Life did take care to add: ‘But design snobs may change their views, as it were, when they see what can be done with Architectural Paintings.’ The quote encapsulates the paradox of these programmed clashes between popular culture and the museum, which ended up turning the element that was meant to call into question the criteria of cultural legitimacy and its hierarchies into an honorable object. And this is precisely what happened. Many visitors expressed their admiration for the quality of Shore’s murals, and Izenour himself underscored the unprecedented impression made by these images: ‘We’ve never done anything so dramatic before, … with such scope and impact.’

For 3M, the Washington exhibition was seen as a crowning achievement and was immediately turned to good account by infiltrating a hitherto unexpected market: museums, art, and culture. Absent until this moment from the company’s advertising, the field of art and design suddenly became the target of a press campaign in which Izenour agreed to take part. On behalf of 3M, he gave lectures on the use, by Venturi and Rauch, of large photographic formats in museums. He also collaborated in the writing of a press release specifically aimed at art, architecture, and design periodicals, in which he praised the artistic qualities of the enlargements – quite a paradox given the original intentions of Signs of Life. In the document, Izenour affirmed that by achieving these large dimensions without any loss of quality, photography could, from now on, compete with painting on its own turf. More specifically, with the Whitney Museum installation in mind, he explained: ‘When you do something on that scale and in that kind of environment, you are really creating a new work of art.’ The two terms invoked – the large scale and the museum environment – are crucial to this position: only their combination can ensure the conversion of the photograph into art.

In the end, Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour found that large-format photography could be claimed, in the same breath, as issuing from the street, belonging in a popular or media culture flourishing in spite of the self-sufficiency of the fine arts and established architectural culture, while still gaining the artistic recognition which it initially meant to attack. Large-format photography could, without any apparent contradiction, produce more ordinariness and more art, be simultaneously both wallpaper and monumental work, both billboard and tableau form.
The tableau was precisely the final application of the NECO process in Signs of Life. A half-dozen Architectural Paintings were featured in the third part of the exhibition, ‘The Street,’ devoted to the traditional main street, but these images were now presented as independent objects arranged in tight rows on the walls as though in a nineteenth-century salon. In this section, mimicking a hanging of academic paintings, one of Stephen Shore’s enlargements was hung at a great height, dominating the wall, much as a history painting would have done in another era. In passing from its first through to its last section, Signs of Life effected the transfiguration of the billboard into a tableau.

In the months and years that followed, other artists and photographers adopted the large format in their work. A series of group exhibitions took place in New York in 1977-1981, celebrating the return of American art to the image and turning its confrontation with the media into a theme, with artists who were soon to move to producing large-format prints (Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, or Richard Prince, among others).21 In 1978, Jeff Wall exhibited his first large-format work in the window of a Vancouver art gallery, in an explicit reference to the luminous billboards of the city.22 In each of these cases, the gesture was reminiscent, to some extent, of the initiative of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour: it involved both quoting and appropriating the techniques of advertising, commercial images, and the media to confront an art world whose autonomy was being called into question. It was also quite close to the principle of the ready-made – picking up a common object off the street and transforming it into a work of art simply by placing it within an artistic framework. Yet it was now an inverse ready-made, which, because it involved images from the start, upturned Duchamp’s anti-pictorial gesture and ended by reconstructing the tableau form from its opposite.23

The movement from advertising to art has been, from this time forward, central to the course photography has taken. The triumph of the Düsseldorf school in the late 1980s repeated a process quite similar to that of the NECO technique ten years earlier. This time it involved the Diasec, a technique also developed in the early 1970s for facemounting a print onto Plexiglas. Even though it had been developed for advertising and trade fairs, it was suddenly discovered by ambitious photographers, who now directed it toward the unexpected market of contemporary art. Yet here again, it can be argued, their monumental tableaux, bright as glass, contained in the history of their technique and their very materiality what fundamentally threatened their status: media communication and advertising.

NOTES


2. As he reflects on painting (tableau) in Photo-Kunst, Jean-François Chevrier turns to Charles Baudelaire, who wrote in his Salon de 1846: ‘A painting is only what he [the artist] wants it to be; there is no other way of looking at it than in its own light. Painting has only one point of view; it is exclusive and despotic.’ Charles BAUDELAIRE, Salon de 1846, quoted in Jean-François CHEVRIER, ‘Les aventures’ (note 1), 49. The English translation appears in Alex POTTS, The Sculptural Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 62–63.


4. In Another Objectivity, he even makes a point of mentioning that the growth in the size of formats should not amount to ‘an opportunistic adaptation made for the hierarchical demands of the market or the spaces of the contemporary museum.’ Jean-François CHEVRIER and James LINGWOOD, Une autre objectivité/Another Objectivity (note 1), 35.

5. In his most recent book, Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008), Michael Fried revives the idea of the tableau form, granting a much more important role to the question of the increase in size as a decisive trait in the definition of a specifically artistic photography.

6. While a precise definition of large format in photography is difficult to give – what size constitutes a large format? – the shift from a print that can be done by the photographers themselves to a collective production involving outside interventions is an important line of division.


8. The determinations in the development of large format in the 1970s were multiple, and a distinction should be made between the United States and Europe, where the model of the monumental painting seems to have played a more important role, with the mass media remaining in the background. I am thinking more particularly of Katharina Sieverding’s or Astrid Klein’s first very large prints in Germany.

9. Another large-scale photographic project related to the bicentennial was the colossal work of documenting county courthouses, launched by Phyllis Lambert and Richard Pare, and underwritten by Seagram, in which Stephen Shore also took part along with twenty other photographers such as Lewis Baltz, Frank Gohlke, and Nicholas Nixon. All of them, Shore included, were featured in the famous exhibition New Topographics at the George Eastman House in Rochester in late 1975.

10. On the importance of photography – but also of graphic design and cinema – in the project Learning from Las Vegas, see the work of Martino Stierli: Hilar STADLER and Martino STIERLI, Las Vegas Studio. Images from the Archive of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, exhibition catalogue (Museum Bellpark, Kriens, Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2008); M. STIERLI, Las Vegas im Rückspiegel. Zum Stadtbegriff von Robert Venturi und Denise Scott Brown (Zurich: gta-Verlag, 2010); see also Michael GOLEC, ‘“Doing it Deadpan.” Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour’s Learning from Las Vegas,’ Visible Language 37, no. 3 (special issue ‘Instruction and Provocation,
11. Michael Hoffman, head of the publishing house and periodical Aperture, approached Venturi and Scott Brown in 1974, initially with the idea of asking them to supervise an issue of the periodical on photography and architecture in the spirit of Learning from Las Vegas. The large book project Signs of Life, which was to result from the process and would have reproduced more than two hundred photographs, never came to fruition. The ‘catalogue’ for the exhibition was reduced to a booklet of about twenty pages, published both as an independent brochure and as part of issue 77 of Aperture. Stephen Shore’s images dominated the set, which also included images by John Baeder, Deborah Marum, and Venturi and Rauch. All were laid out as they would be in any other portfolio of the periodical. The same document could thus serve – with no transformation whatsoever – both as an architectural manifesto and as a photography monograph.

12. It is not clear whether Izenour discovered Shore through his first color series, American Surfaces – which replicated the characteristics of amateur photography down to the way it was exhibited (with Kodak booth prints pinned to the wall), or later via the first more elaborate works in what was to become Uncommon Places (made with a view camera), in which the aesthetic of the ordinary is combined with a formal rigor characteristic of painting in the tradition of Edward Hopper.


18. KRON, ‘Photo Finishes’ (note 17), 56.


Schaulager/Göttingen: Steidl, 2005). Wall relates different systems in terms of size and luminosity, from the billboard to the cinema to television and art. In his more recent texts, he discusses more and more his move to large formats in reference to great Western painting and the debates around minimal art. See for instance Jeff Wall, ‘Frames of Reference’ (2003), in Jeff Wall, ed. Theodora Vischer and Heidi Naeff (note 22), 443–7.

23. In the late 1980s, Jean-François Chevrier repudiated neo-pop games of ironic appropriation of media – whose interest was, in his opinion, circumstantial, limited, and even dubious – to the benefit of a full and unconditional acceptance of the regime of the tableau. See Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, Une autre objectivité/Another Objectivity (note 1), 30; Jean-François Chevrier, ‘Les aventures’ (note 1), 52–53 and 78–79; Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David, ‘Actualité de l’image’ (note 1), 17–18.

RÉSUMÉS

Since the 1980s, larger photographic formats have been closely associated with the artistic recognition of photography and have been equated with a contemporary form of the painting, or ‘tableau.’ This identification of large sizes with additional artistic value is paradoxical. For a half-century, oversize prints had epitomized the antithesis of art – an image designed for mass communication, as ephemeral as it was instantaneous, less the work of an author than a collective production without commercial or symbolic value of its own. It was still as outgrowths of the mass media, advertising, or commercial decoration that some artists, photographers, or architects took new interest in them in the late 1970s, before the introduction of these media-related forms into the field of art translated their characteristics into attributes of the painting. The exhibition Signs of Life, held in Washington in 1976, organized collaboratively by the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, and the photographer Stephen Shore, provides a significant example of this shift.

AUTEURS

OLIVIER LUGON

Olivier Lugon is an art historian and a professor at the Université de Lausanne (Department of Film History and Aesthetics, Centre des sciences historiques de la culture). His publications include La Photographie en Allemagne. Anthologie de textes, 1919-1939 (Paris: Chambon, 1997) and Le Style documentaire. D’August Sander à Walker Evans, 1920-1945 (Paris: Macula, 2001). He co-edited and directed (with Laurent Guido) the collective publication Fixe/animé. Croisements de la photographie et du cinéma au XXe siècle (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 2010). He is currently coordinating the research project “L’exposition moderne de la photographie, 1920-1970.”