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English 212

Dr. Magee

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E. J. Bellocq

John Ernest Joseph Bellocq was born in the French Quarters of New Orleans to a wealthy white French creole family. Bellocq was an amateur photographer who made his professional debut taking photographs for landmarks, ships and machinery for local companies. Bellocq was an estranged man who did not have many acquaintances and developed a reputation for being unfriendly and capricious. Those who did know him saw and would describe him as a man who held personal appearance, refined language, and leisurely hobbies to be quite important. Very Little is known of Bellocq lifestyle but from acquaintances of the day it is said that he showed no interest in anything but photography. Bellocq lived his life alone till his dying days in 1949 and is buried in St. Louis Cemetery #3 in New Orleans.

Bellocq became famous after his death in 1949. Another photographer by the name of Lee Friedlander bought some of Belloqc’s glass plate negatives from a man who was showing them after he found them by ripping open a couch in Bellocq old apartment that seemed too heavy to just be wood framing. Bellocq is famous today for his photos of Storyville’s legal prostitution rings and Chinatown’s opium dens, the side of that day’s social life obscured by shadows. After Friedlander bought the glass plate negative, he proceeded to re-create prints of bellocq’s work and have them mounted by curator John Szarkowski to be shown in the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. His photographs were also published in the book, *Storyville Portraits* and again later in a more extensive edition of his work in 1996 by Susan Sontag entitled *Bellocq: Photographs of Storyville.* Bellocq work has inspired many other works of art such as the film *Pretty baby by* Louis Malle*,* and novels like *Coming Through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje and *Bellocq’s Women* by Peter Everett. He is even inspiring new generation of art through the E. J. Bellocq Gallery of Photography at Louisiana Tech University, which is named in his honor.

The Storyville photos are of all women, some nude, some clothed or masked and some posed as if to tell a story. The negatives were damaged, some intentionally, known by the scratched out faces of some of the women. It is unknown whether Bellocq’s Brother a priest who inherited the negatives once Bellocq died or if it was some other person but it is speculated that Bellocq himself did it since the damages seems to have been done while the negatives were first being processed. This feature of the negatives only adds to the mystique and awe inspiring technique of each photograph.

Interpretations of Bellocq’s work are wide spread. Some people are convinced that his work is merely to have a documented record of the notorious activities of Storyville during that time. Others believe that they were simply portraits of women he knew. The more interesting interpretation’s claim that Belloqc knowingly and purposefully took pictures of these women in the poses that they were in to show the humanity of people that most would consider less than human and unrespectable, claiming he gave these women back their dignity, but also wanted to protect their identity which is why some of the faces are scratched out, and some say that he was taking these pictures for his own collection which is why they did not see the light of day till he was dead.

Works Cited

. "E.J.Bellocq." *Wikipedia*. N.p., 18 04 2012. Web. 28 Apr 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.\_J.\_Bellocq>.