

# **BILL OWENS:**

## **Suburbanites and Socialites**

January 21-March 15, 2015  
Mills College Art Museum



This catalogue is published on the occasion of *Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites*, an exhibition of thirty-three photographs from the Mills College Art Museum Collection. The exhibition is organized by members of the Fall 2014 course Museum Studies Workshop taught by Dr. Stephanie Hanor: Meghan Adkins, Melissa Mize, Sadie Padial, Clare Schneider, Sophie Sterling, and Veronica Sutter.

The exhibition was presented at the Mills College Art Museum, January 21 through March 15, 2015.

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The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. As a teaching museum at a dynamic liberal arts college for undergraduate women and co-ed graduate studies, the museum is dedicated to engaging and inspiring the intellectual and creative life of Mills students through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections.

COVER: Bill Owens, *Untitled [Baton Practice]*

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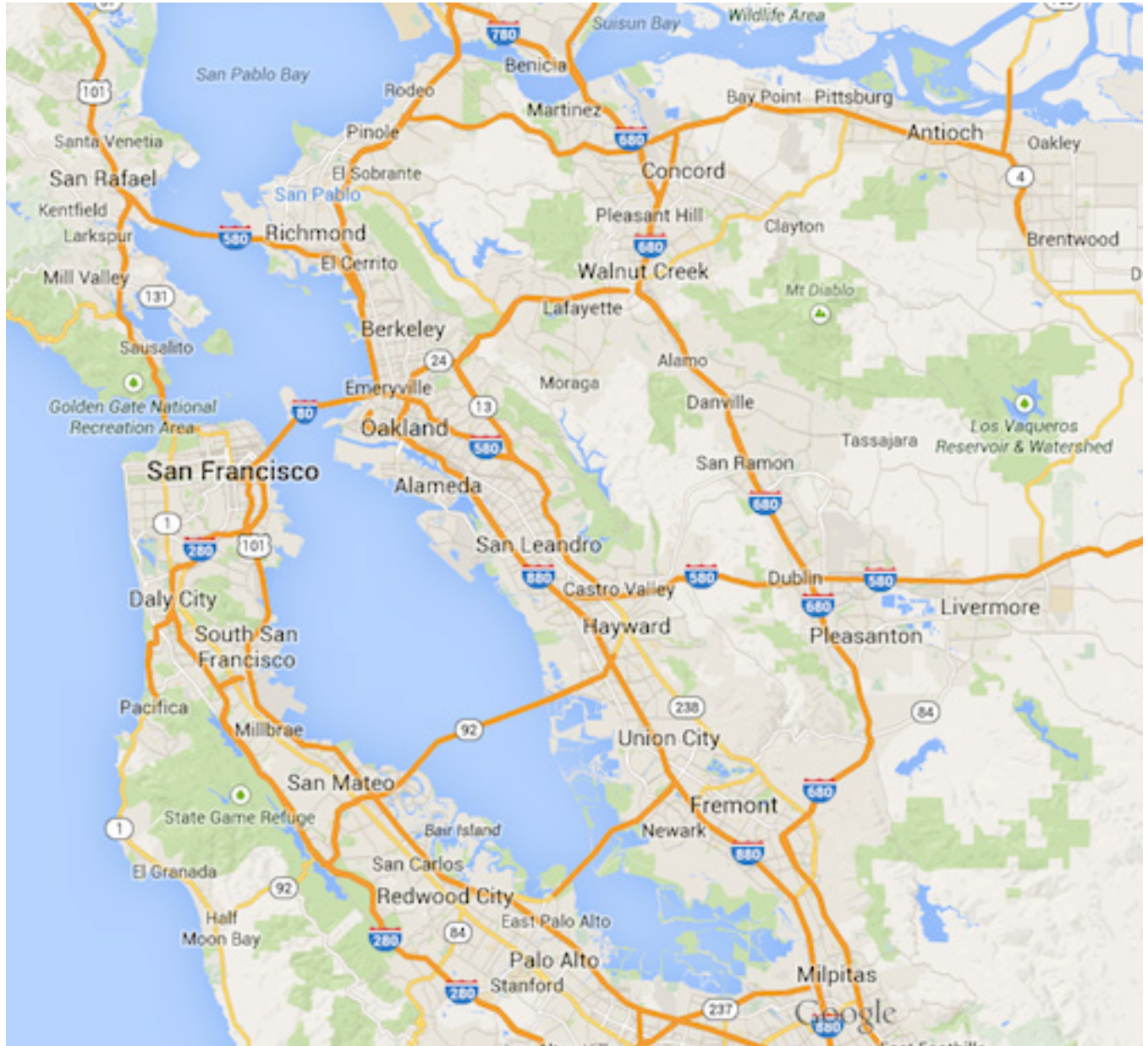






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## Demographic Comparisons

<b>1970 Census</b>	<b>Livermore</b>	<b>Bay Area</b>
Population	37,703	4,628,199
Persons under 5 years	10.5%	7.9%
Persons 5 to 19 years	32.9%	27.5%
Persons 20 to 64 years	51.4%	55.8%
Persons 65 years and over	5.1%	8.8%
Females	50.4%	50.9%
Males	49.6%	49.1%
White	97.1%	86.4%
Black or African American	0.5%	7.9%
Asian	4.8%	4.4%
Hispanic or Latino	2.4%	8.2%
High School Graduate or higher	n/a	n/a
Bachelor's Degree or higher	n/a	n/a
Homeownership rate	n/a	n/a
Median household income	\$11,600	n/a
Persons below poverty level	6%	n/a
<b>2010 census</b>		
Population	81,000	7,150,739
Persons under 5 years	6.6%	6.3%
Persons 5 to 19 years	18.9%	16%
Persons 20 to 64 years	64.2%	65.5%
Persons 65 years and over	10.3%	12.3%
Females	50.4%	50.4%
Males	49.6%	49.6%
White	74.6%	52.5%
Black or African American	2.1%	6.7%
Asian	8.4%	23.3%
Hispanic or Latino	20.9%	23.5%
High School Graduate or higher	91.9%	18.3%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	37.5%	25.2%
Homeownership rate	71.2%	56.2%
Median household income	\$97,379	\$90,220
Persons below poverty level	5.6%	9.7%



Bill Owens, *Untitled [Haunted House]*



## INTRODUCTION

Dr. Stephanie Hanor

*Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites* features a group of 33 photographs by Bay Area-based photographer Bill Owens. Internationally recognized for his depictions of Northern California suburban life in the 1970s, this remarkable group of images demonstrates Owens' keen interest in documenting the everyday lives of middle-class girls and women.

The photographs are a recent gift to the Mills College Art Museum from local collectors Robert Harshorn Shimshak and Marion Brenner. MCAM has an important collection of late 19th and 20th century photography, with a strong focus on California photographers. Bob and Marion's generous and thoughtful selection of works by Owens is a wonderful complement to the museum's holdings and the subject of the photographs is of particular relevance to Mills students.

The exhibition is curated by members of the Fall 2014 Museum Studies Workshop: Meghan Adkins, Melissa Mize, Sadie Padial, Clare Schneider, Sophie Sterling, and Veronica Sutter. Together, they conceived, planned, and realized all aspects of the exhibition from establishing underlying themes, designing the layout to effectively convey connections between images, as well as researching the works on view to contribute their own analysis in this accompanying exhibition catalogue.

The photographs initiated an interesting series of conversations about the role of women in the early 1970s, the importance of community organizations, and the cultural differences between suburban and urban parts of the greater Bay Area during that time period. The students' essays reflect their interests and questions about these photographs from the vantage point of women in the 21st century.





# WOMEN'S WORK: PERFORMING FEMALE IDENTITY IN 1970s' SUBURBIA

Meghan Adkins

In 1973, Richard Nixon was elected to his second term in office. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the Equal Rights Amendment, the United States Supreme Court overturned state bans on abortion in *Roe v. Wade*, Nixon announced a peace accord had been reached in Vietnam, and Bill Owens was working as a photographer for the Livermore Independent Newspaper. As Owens told it, "daily routine took me into the homes of hundreds of families and into contact with the social life of three suburban communities. The people I met enjoy the life-style of the suburbs. They have realized the American Dream. They are proud to be home owners and to have achieved material success."<sup>1</sup>

The moments depicted in Owens' photos capture the height of the American Dream just before it began its rapid and steep decline. Nixon would be impeached in August of 1974 for his part in the Watergate Scandal, the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War wouldn't happen for another two years and the Equal Rights Amendment is still being ratified and voted on by states such as Virginia as recently as February of 2014.

In 1970s' Livermore, you could buy a house for \$2000 with \$99 down. It likely came with a swimming pool and a two car garage, as well as a washer and dryer. The people Owens documented were friendly and open to being photographed. They invited him into their homes, their Rotary Club parties, their PTA meetings and their churches. He caught fleeting glimpses of the community as it moved through the day; luncheons, dinners, potlucks and parties.

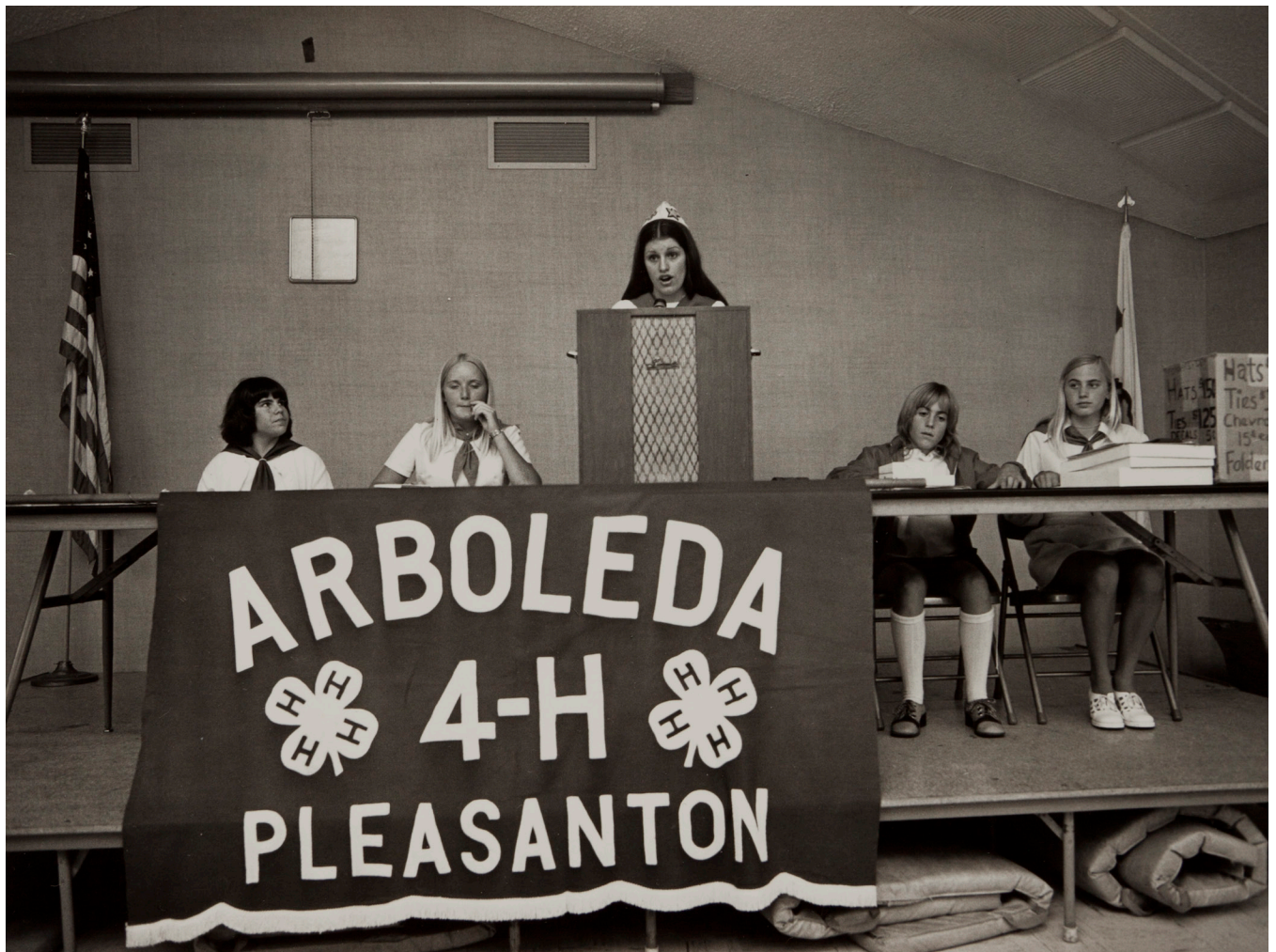
In these photographs, Owens has opened the door to a world many of us will never see; the polite, non-political, generic world of the suburbs in the 70s. Just 40 minutes away in Oakland, California, was the center of Black Panther activity, at the time described by J. Edgar Hoover as, "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."<sup>2</sup> San Francisco was also undergoing a radical moment, the Castro became a mecca for the city's urban gay population and the city's downtown was experiencing a huge boom in the development of skyscrapers including

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Party, Fur, Feather and Big Sunglasses]*

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, Straight Arrow Press, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> *Hoover and the F.B.I.*, Luna Ray Films, LLC. [pbs.org](http://pbs.org).



Bill Owens, *Untitled [Arboleda 4-H Pleasanton Meeting]*



the TransAmerica building in 1972. Owens chose instead to document the comparatively innocuous and amenable communities of Livermore and nearby Pleasanton.

What comes across in this group of 33 photographs is the existence of a genuine community coming together to participate in actual events. The events themselves are never completely obvious to the observer. While each photo seems to demonstrate moments that are immediately recognizable, it may require several views to understand what is taking place. Most of the photos feature white women as the main subjects, or white girls in the act of maturing. Some are in uniforms, some are in ball gowns. Each photo represents a moment in the life of a woman partaking in the promise of community.

This is, however, enough ambiguity to permit the viewer an opportunity to imagine their own scenario, allowing a shadowy undercurrent to emerge. What goes on in suburbia? Are we seeing something real or are we looking at scripted lives? There are enough empty spaces here that the viewer may find themselves reflecting on what we currently know about the 1970s middle-class versions of the American Dream; it now seems too good to be true.

Additionally, Bill Owens was not out to photograph women, he was collecting stories about his community using a form of visual anthropology. These specific images have been separated from his body of work and isolated in an attempt to make visible what is often hardest to see; moments of transitional history, personal movements toward a whole, the ways communities function when participation is mandatory, how humans congregate, the passage of time, and the importance of what we do with our lives.

These women, these particular women, are representatives of a chapter in history. This interval in time, where the dream was alive and well and made sense, motivated and moved people to behave in what can look like precious or calculated ways. Were we all hoping to make a difference in 1973? Did we all send our children to school in those uniforms? Was there only one black person in our community? There is an innocence to Owens' photographs that almost hurts to ponder, as if looking back we can see the cultural transformations lurking a few years down the road.

And what exactly did it mean to be a woman in 1973, to be a mother or a teenage girl? The two women in *Party, Fur, Feather and Big Sunglasses* seem to be having a great time being women in Livermore. Are they tending bar? Or is it a fundraiser at the local movie theater? Have they volunteered their Saturday night to serve drinks at the Elks Club where their husbands are speaking that night about the problem of trash in the streets of Livermore? They seem unconcerned, cavalier, dishy. The angle of the exposed breast and the dark sunglasses on the woman in back suggest there was more to Livermore's night life than we might expect. Owens' approach causes them to smile and laugh. Might they go home and take their shoes off, walk across shag carpets and smoke in bed?

*Arboleda 4H Pleasanton Meeting* asks us to really consider the topic at that day's gathering. Are they talking about the likelihood of the Black Panthers taking over the whole of the East Bay or are they talking about raising funds via a bake sale to support the troops? What exactly is expected of them as young women in 1973? Did they participate in protests in San Francisco behind their parents' backs? Were they on the pill? These are young women doing their best to appear interested, involved, a valuable part of their community. Being photographed onstage would confirm these roles.

In *Two Women, One at a Lectern* we can imagine those young girls from the 4H meeting rearranging the tables to accommodate the PTA meeting (notice the lectern is the same one). Are these women the Principal and Vice Principal at the local high school? What roles were they allowed to fulfill at the time, other than wife and mother? Were their husbands supportive? Were they married? Were there single women in Livermore? Was that allowed? It's a simple frame but one showing the interest and intent on the face of the woman listening to her cohort speak; it says, "What we do here is important." We can do it without frills and mirrored balls, without distractions and platters of food, we do it because we matter.

The women in these photographs are anonymous. We are free to project our ideas about that place and time onto them. They are almost without personalities. Instead they become archetypal, representing the myth of a time in history when life had meaning, was accessible and enjoyable and all you had to do was follow the rules, take your place in the neighborhood, offer yourself up for the good of the community, do your job, be a woman.

While we continue to view women in our society through lenses that codify their behavior as acceptable, unacceptable, desirable, objectionable and admirable or unattractive, time can shift and warp old ideologies and leaves remnants of what was once the "Right Way to Be." If we expose those attitudes to current mores, do they stand up?

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Two Women, One at Lectern]*







Bill Owens, *Untitled [Alisal Patrol Girls]*

## THAT TYPE OF GIRL

Melissa Mize

Having grown up in the suburbs, it is with bittersweet emotions that I view the photographs from Bill Owens' collection, *Suburbia*. The imagery fuels in me a conflicting mix of nostalgia, embarrassment, and relief. While shot in California, *Suburbia* depicts the scenes and personalities present in suburbs across the United States. Small indicators suggest a Western setting, namely the casual warm weather clothing and tract homes on lots with sparse grass and trees. However, the social settings and the designated roles that its residents inhabit represent most suburban neighborhoods beginning with the creation of Levittown, after World War II, and continuing to resonate today.

These suburban neighborhoods were built as a refuge from the high stress and crime of the neighboring big cities, like New York and Philadelphia. One could afford to buy a house with a modest yard in the suburbs (albeit nearly identical to the one next to it) in which the owners could host social gatherings, such as barbeques and Tupperware parties. Neighbors not only said hello to each other, but spent time together at Elks Club meetings and pancake breakfasts. Living in one of these neighborhoods, the individual formed part of a community where the concept of participation and fulfilling one's role was essential. By participating in this manner, it was likely that the individual would become part of the group, thus enjoying the safety and security that went with it. However, some conditional considerations also applied, in that "belonging" hinged on the likeness of the individual to the others in the neighborhood. Namely, that nothing in their dress or comportment should set them apart, and the majority of the residents were likely middle class and white.

An interesting aspect of Owens' photos is that these suburbs exist in the San Francisco Bay Area, a hotbed for social unrest and revolution, especially during the time he published his work in 1973. By this time, the Summer of Love had occurred in San Francisco, students had staged wild





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Cheerleaders]*



protests against the Vietnam War in Berkeley, and in Oakland, the formation of the Black Panther Party thrust the issue of racial inequality and police brutality into the spotlight. The feminist movement had taken hold, and its leaders were often white, middle-class young women. The subjects of Owen's photos lived an insulated existence, seemingly cut off from the turbulent world around them. This begs the question: Did they exchange anything for this security?

A member of the Livermore community, Owens was a photographer for the *Livermore Independent* in 1972. He had also recently taken a course on visual anthropology at San Francisco State University.<sup>1</sup> This confluence of factors could have led to the production of photos that show us a "type" of person, not necessarily the uniqueness of the individual. The exhibition, *Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites* focuses primarily on the photos he took of girls and women in Livermore and the surrounding towns. Four of these images in particular aroused my interest.

Three of the photographs could be exhibited to show the progression of the different chapters of a woman's life in Livermore or Pleasanton at that time. The fourth photo stands apart with an entirely different depiction. The first, *Alisal Patrol Girls*, is a portrait of four girls, around ten years old, lined up shoulder to shoulder. Three of them wear t-shirts with ALISAL PATROL printed on the front, and one wears a badge. They stare into the camera with varying degrees of self-confidence. Two of them wear skirts and one a flowered shirt, which along with their slightly disheveled longer hair narrowly prevent them from being mistaken for little boys. Their uniform suggests that they have a job to do. Student patrols existed in Pleasanton, California, where Alisal Elementary is located, from the 1940s through the 1960s. Considered a great honor, only boys were typically allowed to serve as patrol officers; helping the younger students cross the street safely after school.<sup>2</sup>

Seeing these four earnest faces brought back memories of wanting nothing more than to be a good daughter, student, and friend. Our bodies had yet to go through any confusing changes, we were still allowed to play and get dirty, and we had yet to worry about romantic relationships or fashion sense. We had simple, honest friendships with girls who shared our interests. These little girls stand close together as if to suggest that they are a unified front and find safety in each other.

The second photograph, *Cheerleaders*, could potentially be the next phase of life for our Alisal Patrol girls. Four teenage girls in cheerleading uniforms stand holding a trophy. Unlike most of the other photographs in the collection, the subjects are shot from enough distance for the viewer to see them in their entirety. Like the patrollers, these girls fulfill a duty,

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1 Lang, Doug. "Photographer, Brew Master, Publisher: Bill Owens Comes Full Circle." artagogo.com. n.d. <http://www.artagogo.com/interview/owensinterview/owensinterview.htm> (accessed October 17, 2014).

2 Long, Jerry Pantages. "School Safety Patrol." pleasantonweekly.com. September 8, 2006. (accessed 17 2014, October).

of sorts. In suburban towns, the cheerleader has an almost mythological connotation. Generally pretty and popular, they are often both admired and envied. These girls are well coiffed and stand confidently. Born into the middle-class, their beautiful smiles reveal access to good nutrition and orthodontics, if necessary. The trophy signifies that they also excel at what they do. But while cheerleading requires a great deal of athleticism and skill, do these talents play second fiddle to the accomplishments of the boys they cheer for? This image serves as a reminder of the priority shift that happens for so many girls during high school. We begin to absorb messages about what is expected of us as young women in society. We stop climbing trees and start obsessing about the way we look. Many of us learn to be passive. Somehow we come to understand that it is more acceptable to let boys answer questions in class, and giggling at boy's jokes instead of making our own. This is the age at which many young women get the message that our aspirations do not count as much. This was especially so in 1973, when second-wave feminism was in its infancy, but still persists forty years later.

The third photograph is a portrait that looks as if it were taken from the society pages of a local paper. The image *Crown and Fur*, shows four women at a social event, dressed up for a big night out. The clothing is amusingly outdated to our modern eyes. The viewer's gaze is drawn to a crown or tiara that one woman is wearing and to a fur stole that is dramatically thrown across one of the subject's shoulders. The lighting on the figures stands in sharp contrast to the dark background. Do these women smile because they are feeling celebratory or because that is what is expected from them in a social situation such as this? The viewer can only guess at what event was taking place. It could have been a pageant or just one of the many social occasions that Owens documented in his work. For me, something about this image struck a familiar chord as another role of the suburban woman: that of socialite. I am reminded of the neighborhood in Dallas where I grew up, and the numerous charity events that my friends' mothers participated in during the 1990's; those in which my friends participate today.

The fourth photograph, *Four Women in Native American Dress*, stands apart from the others in *Suburbanites and Socialites*. This image is also of four women, but unlike the others I have discussed, it is not a portrait. The women are not Caucasian and don Native American regalia. Some of their dress teeters on looking like a costume, such as the beaded headbands and the buckskin fringe, while other aspects of the clothing appear authentic. They sit in wooden chairs, and one of the women leans on a partition in front of which sits a leather chair. The structure that we see of the room gives the impression of a courthouse or town hall. The women are intently studying a document which the viewer cannot identify.

This work resonated with me in a different way than the others, as I am a citizen of the Osage Nation and the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma. With blonde hair and blue eyes, I have admittedly benefitted from all that white privilege affords. However, my entire life, I have heard stories from

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Crown and Fur]*





my father and grandfather about their experiences living in the suburbs of Southern California as Native Americans with dark skin and black hair.

I was surprised to learn that Livermore has a very large community center for Native Americans which was founded in 1974, one year after the publication of this series of photos. Four years before the publication of *Suburbia*, members of the American Indian Movement took over Alcatraz. Meanwhile, Hippies adopted Native dress and religious practices. My father was always amused by the fact that he was often shunned as a child, but that people sought out his friendship after the Summer of Love, because it was “cool to know an Indian.” There was a very large Native population in the Bay Area consisting of the local tribes as well as those who moved to Oakland as part of the Indian Relocation Act of 1956. This was an attempt by the U.S. government to move Native people off of reservations, give them low-level job training, and assimilate them into large cities.

I believe that Bill Owens captured these women attempting to recapture a piece of their culture. They may be reading a script that accompanies a public presentation, looking over legal documents, or engaging in some level of pro-native activism. Whatever they are doing, it is difficult not to wonder what their day to day existence was like living in a community in which they would always be considered outsiders, knowing that the ideal of the American Dream that their neighbors pursue is largely responsible for the decimation of their people and culture.

These four photographs show girls and women fulfilling familiar roles in suburban society. Viewing them forces us to consider how much we as individuals can relate to them in our own experience. For me, they are all too familiar.

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Four Women in Native American Dress]*









## FITTING IN: THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE COMMUNITY

Sadie Padial

A woman can define herself in many ways. She can make this statement through what she wears, what she does, or who she spends her time with. These photographs by Bill Owens give us a glimpse into a suburban culture where women do just that. These images of women are taken from the much larger body of work by Owens, who gained acclaim for his photographs of suburban life in California's East Bay after publishing *Suburbia* in 1972. He built relationships with his subjects, who invited him into their lives as both a participant and a documenter: "I would go to houses in the East Bay where sometimes there was just no picture," said Owens, "I thought of those as 'friend stops.'"<sup>1</sup> Owens was one of the first photographers to document everyday life without political intentions: these images aren't "news;" instead they capture the aspirations and realities of suburbanites without condescension. Community is a key part of these women's identities, both as members of this greater community and as outsiders. Owens documented them beautifully. Whether they were young girls at a Bluebirds meeting or seniors at a women's group potluck, Owens shows us a suburban society where finding a niche and fitting in seems paramount for women: the process is started early and lasts a lifetime.

*Pleasanton Parade* shows us a group of young girls, arms linked, strolling through downtown Pleasanton, California, at the time a newly established suburban dreamscape. Most of the girls are in uniform, maybe for school, while a few girls leading the parade are in costume. One wears a veil, another, a long dress and a floral hat. The costume choice is interesting: they are in costume as "women," both experimenting with what femininity means for them and putting on a female performance for those watching the parade. This photo, like many others in the collection, focuses on organized activity. The emphasis is on planned rather than

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Pleasanton Parade]*

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, Owen. "Shooting the American Dream in Suburbia" *Smithsonian Magazine* October 2010. Web.



spontaneous activities. This focus extends to all ages, as we see in images like *Alisal Patrol Girls*, *Mother Daughter Banquet*, and *Women's Group*. The importance of belonging is made clear by how social interaction is not left up to chance.

In *School Assembly 50's Day*, young women are similarly brought together by their dress and actions. Like *Pleasanton Parade*, this photograph focuses on a seemingly mandatory school event. In *School Assembly*, a group of teenage girls dressed in lettermen jackets, checkered dresses, cuffed jeans, and saddle shoes lead the pledge of allegiance. This photograph speaks to participation: both the participation of the women dressed in costume and that of the student body behind them, all standing and following along with the pledge. The image speaks to the nature of the event being held: an assembly serves to build a specific community, just as a parade seeks to celebrate it. The similarity between this photograph and *Pleasanton Parade* is interesting: both groups of girls seem equally engaged, despite their age difference. The girls in *School Assembly* don't seem jaded, but eager to dress up and present themselves as their younger counterparts are. These groups of girls are both performing to the same end: to rally and inspire their communities while bonding

Bill Owens, *Untitled [School Assembly 50's Day]*





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Baton Practice]*



them.

Eagerness almost radiates from *Baton Practice*. Here, we see three girls walking in line holding batons, practicing a routine. The girls' faces show how seriously they approach the task. The trophies lining the back wall allude to the importance of future success—perhaps if they do well enough they can become like the older girls in *Cheerleaders*, an image that amplifies the suburban lore of the cheerleader as the ultimate teenage figure of power and beauty. For me, *Baton Practice* is one of the most complex of the exhibition. It seems to be about practicing more than a baton routine, the girls are experimenting with femininity and womanhood, like the young girls in *Pleasanton Parade*. These photographs show us the variety of communities young girls can join, like the Bluebird troop or the Alisal Patrol. And while these groups are more practical, this image of baton practice seems to me the most serious. Maybe this is because I feel that these girls, more than any of the others, are in a hurry to grow up. Unlike *Pleasanton Parade*, the girls of *Baton Practice* aren't in costume for a day. Rather, they are rehearsing their femininity in earnest after making a decision about which community they want to belong to. While Owens' other images of young girls are carefree and blithe, these three children seem to be marching toward adolescence. Another interesting element of this photograph is the girl observing them from a bench against the wall. Her posture and downcast gaze suggest disinterest, and maybe judgment. I was surprised not to encounter her blasé, jaded attitude in *School Assembly*. Like us, she is a spectator.

*Party* gives us a glimpse into the social activity of adults in suburbia. This is one of the few images with men, and the two male figures feature prominently. Three women surround a man, laughing and talking. He has his arms around them and smiles at the woman who is speaking. A second man sits against the wall, also smiling and observing the scene. This image speaks to performance in a different way than the other images. These aren't young girls trying on female identities but grown women performing their own femininity for an eager male audience, and for each other. While not in uniform, their dresses and hair are similar, suggesting that they share a social standing. By entertaining each other fashionably, they are casting themselves as true socialites. While this image conveys a great sense of joy, it also projects a certain tension. The composition of this photograph is far less grounded than that of the others: the figures twist and lean. The body language hints at an unbalanced power relationship: the central male figure, the tallest in the photograph, confidently puts his arm around the woman to his left, and though she is smiling, her body pulls away. The man against the wall looks right at her, grinning. While a power unbalance between men and women would not have been unusual in 1970s suburbia, the dynamics here seem complex, even precarious, and make me uneasy.

*Women Making Meatballs*, on the other hand, conveys all the joy and none of the stress of *Party*. A group of older women are making meatballs together in a kitchen, laughing and smiling. Again, there is uniformity: most of them wear similar clothing and have similar hairstyles.

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Party]*



The joy in this photo is palpable: the most prominently featured woman laughs so hard that her eyes are closed. A sense of community not only abounds, but the sheer amount of meatballs they are making implies community—they must be for a large gathering. Perhaps this photograph lacks the tension of *Party* because the women are older and more relaxed, or maybe it is because men, and the task of performing for men, are out of the equation. My favorite element of this photograph, and perhaps the one that speaks most to community, is the young girl in the bottom left of the picture frame. She looks up at these women, listening, observing, and learning. I identify with this girl. Like the girl in *Baton Practice*, she is watching a ritual play out before her. The familiar memory of being in a busy kitchen, shared by so many of us, is taking shape for her in this moment. She is recognizing the importance of community, and will no doubt soon join a group of her own, if she hasn't done so already.

Owens shows us a society where finding a niche that lasts a lifetime is paramount. We see a world of organized groups and activities. Girls join groups at a young age and transition to adolescent, adult, and senior communities as they get older. Owens flips traditional adolescent narratives upside down: with the element of chance and the possibility of falling into a social group taken away, it seems harder to be an outsider in suburbia than it is to fit in.

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Women Making Meatballs]*







Bill Owens, *Untitled [Christmas Concert]*



## EVERYDAY PERFORMANCE: WOMEN IN SUBURBIA

Clare Schneider

An auction or a talent show are not particularly remarkable or noteworthy events except to those directly involved in them. Miraculously, Bill Owens' images of suburban domesticity depict these exact events while engaging a larger audience. Owens' work portrays many different aspects of suburban living in the 1970s but the images chosen for the exhibition *Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites* focus particularly on women's domestic lives. It is important to note that these photographs show only a part of Owens' larger body of work. Today, photographs of everyday moments and images of intimate scenes within peoples' homes are expected, even common. However, Owens was one of the first photographers to capture mundane events. Many of the images shown in *Suburbanites and Socialites* deal with or speak to ideas around performance, particularly women in performance and how women are perceived. All five images discussed in this essay relate to performance, the role of the audience, and how women's identities are defined by the roles they play.

*Christmas Concert* depicts a literal performance, showing a thin, young woman facing an audience of mostly children and some adults. It is unclear what exactly she is performing; however the woman directly behind her appears to be playing the piano, so presumably she is singing. Whatever the performance, the performer clearly has her audience captivated; the faces of the audience members are all visible and facing her. The performer's face is not visible to the viewer but noticeably, the face of the man next to her is fully visible, and his gaze is directed at her. Although the photograph focuses on the woman on stage, the viewer cannot see her face because of the angle of the photograph, implying that the audience's reaction to her is more important than the performer herself.

*Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds* depicts a form of performance as well, although it is not a literal performance like *Christmas Concert*. The photograph is of eight pre-adolescent girls posing in a living room. Some of the girls are dressed in a uniform, perhaps a Girl Scouts uniform. Most of the girls wear face paint and a large display of makeup and face paint lies in front of them. The girls in the photograph appear to be content and at a time in their lives when dress-up and play are most important. All of the girls are posed and facing the photographer. Al-





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds]*

though it is not a formal performance, the girls are dressing up and altering their appearances to appear different than they usually look.

The photographer himself is present as an implied audience. Similar to *Christmas Concert*, this image depicts a performer-audience relationship but in a less formal setting. Here, the girls play with make-up to alter and control their physical appearance. Owens witnesses and documents this performance and thus is an audience member, and his presence in *Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds* makes what the subjects are doing a performance.

*Women Seated in Living Room by Fireplace* is set in an even more informal setting than *Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds*. Here, the photograph shows three women seated in someone's home and engaged in a social gathering. All of the women are wearing badges, perhaps a nametag or a sign for a formal event. The nametags make the setting more formal, implying that this scene is not just depicting three women socializing in their home. The women are facing each other, turned away from the camera. Unlike *Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds*, these women appear to be unaware of the photographer because they are engaged in conversation with each other. Similar to the two images discussed previously, this photograph focuses on physical appearance. All three women look well groomed and put together, their hair is done, and they wear clothing that is similar in style. Here, their clothing functions as an informal uniform, a way to identify who they are and their roles in the community.

The role of performer and audience member shift as the three women interact. The two women on the right are watching the woman on the left, thus engaging in an informal performance setting. Although their performance is informal and most likely unacknowledged, they are engaging in a social performance of sorts. Here, no sense of play exists like in *Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds*; the women are not playing with face-paint or altering their physical appearance. The photograph suggests that the women's identities have been solidified and they are able to carry out their roles in more informal social settings.

Multiple, simultaneous performances take place in *Women's Group with Gown and Cookies*. The image depicts a large group of women seated in a community center. They face away from the photographer and towards a woman who stands, holding up a dress in the corner of the room. No men are visible in the audience, implying this is a female dominated event. In the foreground of the picture stands a table filled with baked goods, most likely made by the women in the photograph. Here, the woman standing with the dress preforms while the women seated act as the audience members. The social part of the event is also a performance; the women attending took the time to bake treats, showing their investment in the event. Like *Women Seated in Living Room by Fireplace*, Owens is not the main audience member of the performance taking place. The angle of the photograph implies he is an outsider in this case, simply witnessing the performance at hand. The faces of the women seated are hidden, however one can see they all have similar haircuts and





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Women Seated in Living Room by Fireplace]*





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Women's Group with Gown and Cookies]*

clothing. This photograph, like the other three photographs, emphasizes the women's clothing and appearances. Their clothing works as an informal uniform, placing them in certain roles within their community. The social setting of this image is important. People are often placed in roles based on who they socialize with or what events they attend. Here, the women's identities and how the larger community perceives them are tied to their attendance.

Unlike any of the other images discussed, which were taken inside of a house or a communal space, *Four Women in Mexican Dress Outside Steak House* depicts four women outdoors. The women in the photo are standing outside of a family steak house restaurant; all of them wear similar long dresses and shawls, which Owens titled, "Mexican dress." Their similar outfits imply that they are going to, or coming from, a formal performance or an organized event. The signage shown in this image is particularly pertinent to one's understanding of the photograph. The women are physically outside of the "family" restaurant, implying that they are separate from the family, larger community, or at the very least, are not the restaurant's desired customers. The sign in the window reads, "Yes, We're Open;" however these women do not appear to have any intention of entering the establishment. The four other photographs are all taken inside of buildings, in intimate spaces such as living rooms or community centers. In *Four Women in Mexican Dress Outside Steak House* the setting of the photograph implies that these women are viewed as outsiders by their community. Here, the women are not shown in a space that they are comfortable in. Like the subjects in the other photographs, all of these women are dressed alike, however they are dressed very differently than any women in the other photographs. Their informal uniforms, who they are with, and where they physically are, help others to identify them and thus place them in the larger context of the community.

At first glance, some of Bill Owens' photographs may appear to be of just ordinary events in ordinary people's lives. However, upon deeper inspection, one can see that Owens' work deals with much more than the everyday. Many of his images address questions of identity and the role one plays within their larger community. In particular, in this body of work, Owens addresses women and their role in the larger, suburban community of Livermore. The explicit and implicit performances in Owens' photographs emphasize how structured women's lives were in this suburban community. Owens' work appears casual, even nonchalant, but there is something deeply posed and formal about the content and subjects of his photographs. Although all five images depict women in everyday settings, with nothing exceptional occurring, there is something very proper and meticulous about his subjects. The juxtaposition between the casualness of the photos and the structure of the events depicted within the photos, make his images complicated and not easy to dismiss yet still approachable.





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Four Women in Mexican Dress Outside Steak House]*





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Girls Collecting Specimens in Water]*

## EVERYDAY MOMENTS IN LIVERMORE, 1973

Sophie Sterling

Northern California photographer Bill Owens' career kicked off with *Suburbia*, a non-political documentary project cataloging what can best be summarized as the "American Dream" made real. The exhibition *Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites* presents a selection of photographs from this series focusing on the lives of women and girls in early 1970s Livermore, California, specifically dealing with questions of sexuality, restraint, boredom, and tradition. Livermore's women lived in a bubble, sheltered and sheltering their precious femininity through prescribed activities and tightly monitored, seemingly mandatory, community participation. There is a startling absence of intimacy in these photographs, to the extent that each woman seems interchangeable with the last.

I see these images as being somewhat claustrophobic and critical, but Owens himself fully understood and appreciated the appeal of suburbia: "Everyone was moving to the suburbs, you could buy a house for \$2,000, with only \$99 down. A two car garage, a swimming pool, and a Kenmore washer and dryer . . . all of the things that come with the good life."<sup>1</sup> The thirty-three photos in this exhibition are taken from a larger body of work dealing with suburban life at large, thus one must keep in mind that Owens did not focus exclusively on women and girls in his work. Assigning any intentions to his work is impossible; much of the darkness I read into them is the result of a contemporary student's perspective.

Livermore's population was, and remains, overwhelmingly white and blue-collar; in 1970, over 97% of the area's 37,703 inhabitants were Caucasian. Thus, these photographs can be read as being as much about race and class as about gender. Most people lived a good measure above the poverty line, making participation in the community events depicted in these photographs possible.<sup>2</sup> These structured leisure and recreational activities feature so heavily because *Suburbia* was shot exclusively on Saturdays, over a period of 52 weeks.<sup>3</sup>

Of great interest to me is the prevalence of "uniforms" in these

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1 Lang, Doug. "Photographer, Brew Master, Publisher: Bill Owens Comes Full Circle." Art a GoGo, 2000. <http://www.artagogo.com/interview/owensinterview/owensinterview.html>.

2 "Bay Area Census -- City of Livermore -- 1970-1990 Census Data." Accessed November 2, 2014. <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Livermore70.htm>.

3 Morrill, Cynthia. "Suburbia Essay," 2000. <http://138.23.124.165/exhibitions/suburbia/essay.html>.





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Kids Making Pancakes on a Griddle Outside]*



photographs. While those in *Sea Explorers, SSS Endeavour #601* are official, the long party dresses worn in *Mother/ Daughter Banquet* and *Women's Group* have the same function, unifying and homogenizing Livermore's women. Restrictions, and a need for conformity, increase as a girl ages; this tendency is quite easy to chart across the photographs in this selection. The children in *Girls Collecting Specimens in Water* are free to muck about as they please, relatively unconstrained, probably cold, and quite genuinely happy in their wellington boots and shorts. This photo has an especially candid quality, with the girls so absorbed in their hunt that none acknowledge the potential viewer. *Kids Making Pancakes on a Griddle Outside* ties in well to the overarching motifs of community and recreation, but this co-ed crowd is still somewhat unencumbered by the role and ritual of their adult neighbors and relatives. Silhouetted against a community center, these teens slouch casually around the griddle, a self-contained and equally informal unit. Their clothes are not explicitly gendered, and they do not seem to lack intent as so many other figures in Bill Owen's *Suburbia* series do.

*Mother/Daughter Banquet* provides a transitional image of sorts. Within the context of a community event, a mother and her two daughters are singled out and posed, unintentionally providing a diagram of the formation of the suburban woman. The youngest daughter is clearly bored, clutching a carnation at her side and mustering a disinterested, vague simper. Her older sister poses more deliberately, holding her carnation in front of her in a common visual conceit suggestive of femininity and romance; she is far more schooled in her womanly role and presentably feminine. The girls' mother encompasses them both in her prim, knee-length dress, her smile no more engaging than that of her youngest. These women are not unhappy, but they are not thrilled either. Suburbia awards its inhabitants a banal contentment, safer but less exciting than city life, easier and more entertaining than a rural existence.

*Carnival Dancers Entertain a School Assembly* throws a spanner into the works. These girls are overtly sexual, the only ones appearing as such in the entire selection of photographs. It's hard to think of them as community members, given how conservatively girls and grannies are dressed in the rest of the images. They're young, pretty, and heavily made-up, making for a charged image that bristles against the mental image we have formed of Livermore. Where do these sleazy, shiny girls fit into this middle-class land of ankle-length dresses and neighborhood barbecues? Beauty is a commodity, certainly, in Livermore as anywhere else, but the aggressive sexuality of these young women stands at stark contrast to the guarded femininity of the similarly-aged girl in *Mother/Daughter Banquet*. The girls in this image also do not engage with the viewer on the other side of the camera, but they are consciously on display, the most "consumable" of the women in these thirty-three photographs.

*Women's Group with Cake* brings the progression of gendered community participation and female performance to its obvious solution. Livermore's elderly women gather at communal, cafeteria-style tables



Bill Owens, *Untitled [Mother/Daughter Banquet]*





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Carnival Dancers  
Entertain School Assembly]*



to wear their pearls and eat cake in a dingy and generic assembly room. The central figure looms large in the picture plane, looking directly at the camera. She does not seem posed, however; given the bent of her body, she seems to have been captured in the motion of lifting the titular cake. There is something a little sad about the image, a certain hollowness to their activity. The 20,000 or so women in this community do too much on Saturdays; they are too booked, too regulated, and too involved to seem independent. Moreover, there is something almost infantilizing about their past-times, which have changed little since their girlhood and must be performed in numbers, lest they have no one to correct their behaviors and chaperone them.

These photographs seem an anonymous and superficial portrait of Americana to me, but to Bill Owens, they are a study of his friends and family, a look at the “sociology of a community.”<sup>4</sup> With youth comes candor and freedom, and with age resignation, self-consciousness, and an awareness of propriety permanently entrenched within a woman’s psyche. The community within these photos does not seem inclusive and encompassing to me; rather these women’s lives are stifling, frighteningly so.

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<sup>4</sup> Hirsch, Robert. Robert Hirsch with Bill Owens-Photographing the Suburban Soul, 2005. [http:// www.americansuburbx.com/2012/04/theory-interview-bill-owens.html](http://www.americansuburbx.com/2012/04/theory-interview-bill-owens.html).

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Women Making Meatballs]*







Bill Owens, *Untitled [Three Crowned Women, Job's Daughters]*



## THE PRESENCE OF MEN

Veronica Sutter

This exhibit is a collection of photographs by Bill Owens taken during the 1970s in Livermore, California, located about an hour's drive from Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco. Although this period was a time of civil disobedience and change, these ideals that came in the form of marches and rallies did not make it over the hills to Livermore. Through Owens' lens we can see what life was like in the suburbs during this time of the traditional pursuit of the 'American Dream.' In this exhibit, we have focused on the activities of women in suburban life. The images discussed in this essay are all of women of various ages involved in an array of social meetings, while men observe from the background. One is of a kindergarten graduation, the other of a softball game; in another, a volunteer nurse is at a hospital or nursing home, and one is of a choir singing. Although the activity is being performed by women, there are men overseeing the activity in each image. This patriarchal presence is to ensure that the women are behaving correctly, serving as a chaperone of sorts over the women.

All four photographs, like all the images in the show, capture a moment in suburban life. In these sets of pictures we see women in the act of work, worship, and performance. Since these pictures were taken in the moment and are not staged, we can get a glimpse of what kind of social outlets were available to women living here. Even though the meetings are meant for women, there was still the presence of men.

The first picture, *Three Crowned Women, Job's Daughters* show a group of eight young women that appear to be in their teens. They are dressed in long white robes with their hands coming together in prayer and standing in a religious setting. Above them is a huge sign that reads "How Great Thou Art," and to their right is a statue of a white dove, looking as if it is about to take off flight. Even with these tokens of worship, they seem to be posing for the male photographer who stands before them to take their picture. There are empty chairs strewn around the room and a small pergola is stuffed in the corner, while more young women sit in the corner waiting for their turn to be in the picture. Although women are the focus of the picture, they do not orchestrate it. The photographer is the one who commands the scene, by placing the women in that frame and pose to show what good young Christian girls



they are. These are the kind of girls who will grow up to be women that a husband can trust to be alone and act properly.

The next picture, *Graduation Celebration*, depicts a kindergarten graduation. Here is another causal shot of a community event. The children are in the bottom left hand side, in a pattern of boy/girl, with their graduation caps on. The attendees of the event are almost all women, with one man standing at the side observing. Because it is a classroom this event most likely took place during the week, while the men were probably at work. The women are the teachers and the mothers of the graduates, while the one man, most likely the principal of the school, stands to the right, overseeing the festivities.

The third photograph, *Softball Game*, is of women playing softball. The ladies look to have just finished a huddle at the pitcher's mound. The pitcher is looking down, and is dusting off the pitcher's mound with her foot, the catcher looks forward and walks back to home plate, and the second and third basewomen show only the back halves of their bodies as they return to their bases. One woman sits, just watching the game. Standing in the far background is the umpire, who is a man. In softball, the

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Graduation Celebration]*





Bill Owens, *Untitled [Softball Game]*



umpire is the overseer of the game, the one who determines who is safe and who is out. Here the male umpire watches the female players to make sure they are playing the game correctly.

The final image, *The Military Order of the Louse, Cootiette*, shows a woman in white skirt and blouse. She is wearing a highly decorated cape and vest. She is a member of the Cootiette Club number 27. The Cootiette Club is a women's club, but you have to be the wife of a veteran to join. There are Cootiette Club organizations that still exist today across the nation, and they participate in community events that benefit veterans. Here our Cootiette Club member is volunteering in what is most likely a veterans' home. This photograph seems to differ from the rest of the images in that she seems to be the authority figure here. Holding a clipboard, she is the only figure standing in the photo. Two men sit to the side, one in a wheelchair, while the other stares disapprovingly at her.

The presence of the men in the images highlight the patriarchal community of suburbia that existed even though it was in close proximity to San Francisco, Berkeley and Oakland. Each photo highlights community activities for women that all seem to prepare the current generation for their next step in servitude. The young choir girls, are in the service of God, and the importance of service to their husbands and providing children. At this time, the 1970s, the female marriage vow of 'serving and obeying her husband' was still prominent in matrimonial unions. The teachers pictured with their boss, the principal, teach, serve and control children as part of their occupation, something they will likely be doing later on in life when they have own. The principal is analogous to the role of a husband, perhaps not there for most of what goes on in the kids' lives and traditionally playing the role of the disciplinarian. Then there is the Cootiette, volunteering to take care of men. Even after a life of servitude, women still volunteer to serve, as if there are few other outlets for women in suburbia. Patriarchy exists in play as well. The women playing softball (a 'feminine' version of baseball where the baseball is larger, calling it a softball.) They are involved in a leisure activity, with the man stepping in as the umpire, the rule caller and gamekeeper of the sport.

Each one of these photographs is also from the viewpoint of a male, the gaze of the photographer Bill Owens. Although he may not be setting the scene, he picks which event he will shoot, he chooses the frame that will become the final photograph, and it is through his eye and point of view that we see this community. It also brings into question: Would a female photographer have been as accepted to work on this project with the community? Would she have been given the same kind of access? Would her gaze be the same or different from Owens' as an outside observer?

All of these photographs are moments captured in time; nothing is staged for the benefit of Owens. His photographs capture a moment of American life in the suburbs in the 1970s. From these, we can try to learn what life was like for individuals during this time period. In this exhibit, we see the different roles women portrayed in this community. They performed in religious ceremonies, worked as teachers and moth-

Bill Owens, *Untitled [The Military Order of the Louse, Cootiette]*



ers, played games with each other, and volunteered to help others in their community. In all of these activities, although they are women partaking them, men still existed as patriarchal figures watching over these activities as photographers, bosses, umpires, or just as part of the community that these women support through their activities.



## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works in *Bill Owens: Suburbanites and Socialites* are from the collection of the Mills College Art Museum.

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Lace Dresses and White Gloves]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.1

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Girl with Cow, 4H]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.2

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Graduation Celebration]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.3

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Christmas Concert]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.4

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Pleasanton Parade]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.5

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [The Military Order of the Louse, Cootiette]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.6

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Women's Group]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.7

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Crown and Fur]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.8

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Women's Group with Cake]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.9

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Women's Group with Gown and Cookies]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.10

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Sea Explorers, SSS Endeavor #601]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.11

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Party]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.12

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Lace Dresses and White Gloves]*







Bill Owens, *Untitled [Two Women and Young Girl on Sidewalk, Jehovah's Witnesses]*

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Softball Game]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.13

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Women Seated in Living Room by Fireplace]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.14

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Women Making Meatballs]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.15

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Four Women in Mexican Dress Outside Steak House]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.16

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Party, Fur, Feather and Big Sunglasses]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.17

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Cheerleaders]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.18

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Arboleda 4-H Pleasanton Meeting]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.19

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Carnival Dancers Entertain School Assembly]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.20

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [School Assembly 50's Day]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.21

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Haunted House]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.22

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Kids Making Pancakes on Griddle Outside]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.23

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Mother/Daughter Banquet]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.24

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Baton Practice]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.25

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Uniformed Girls with Decorated Faces, Bluebirds]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.26

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Alisal Patrol Girls]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.27

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Leslie Stahl Reporting from 1976 Republican National Convention]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.28

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Girls Collecting Specimen in Water]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.29



Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Four Women in Native  
American Dress]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert  
Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.30

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Two Women, One at  
Lectern]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Gift of Marion Brenner and Robert  
Harshorn Shimshak, 2012.14.31

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Two Women and Young  
Girl on Sidewalk, Jehovah's  
Witnesses]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
10 in. x 7 7/8 in.  
Museum Purchase, Mrs. John C.  
Sigourney [Mary Singleton], B.A.  
1949, Fund, 2012.14.32

Bill Owens  
*Untitled [Three Crowned Women,  
Job's Daughters]*, ca. 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 in. x 10 in.  
Museum Purchase, Mrs. John C.  
Sigourney [Mary Singleton], B.A.  
1949, Fund, 2012.14.33

Bill Owens, *Untitled [Leslie Stahl Reporting  
from 1976 Republican National Convention]*







## ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Bill Owens was born in San Jose, California in 1938. The recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship in 1976 and two National Endowment for the Arts grants, he is best known for his photographs of suburban domestic scenes taken in the East Bay and published in the book *Suburbia* in 1973. His photographs have been exhibited internationally and are held in numerous museum collections including: The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Berkeley Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Owens founded Buffalo Bill's Brewery in Hayward, California in 1983, one of the first brewpubs to open in the state since prohibition.

