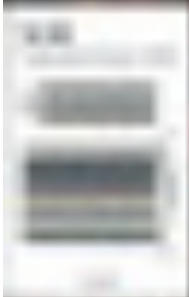


CLEARWATER • TAMPA • ST. PETERSBURG

Tampa Bay

Magazine



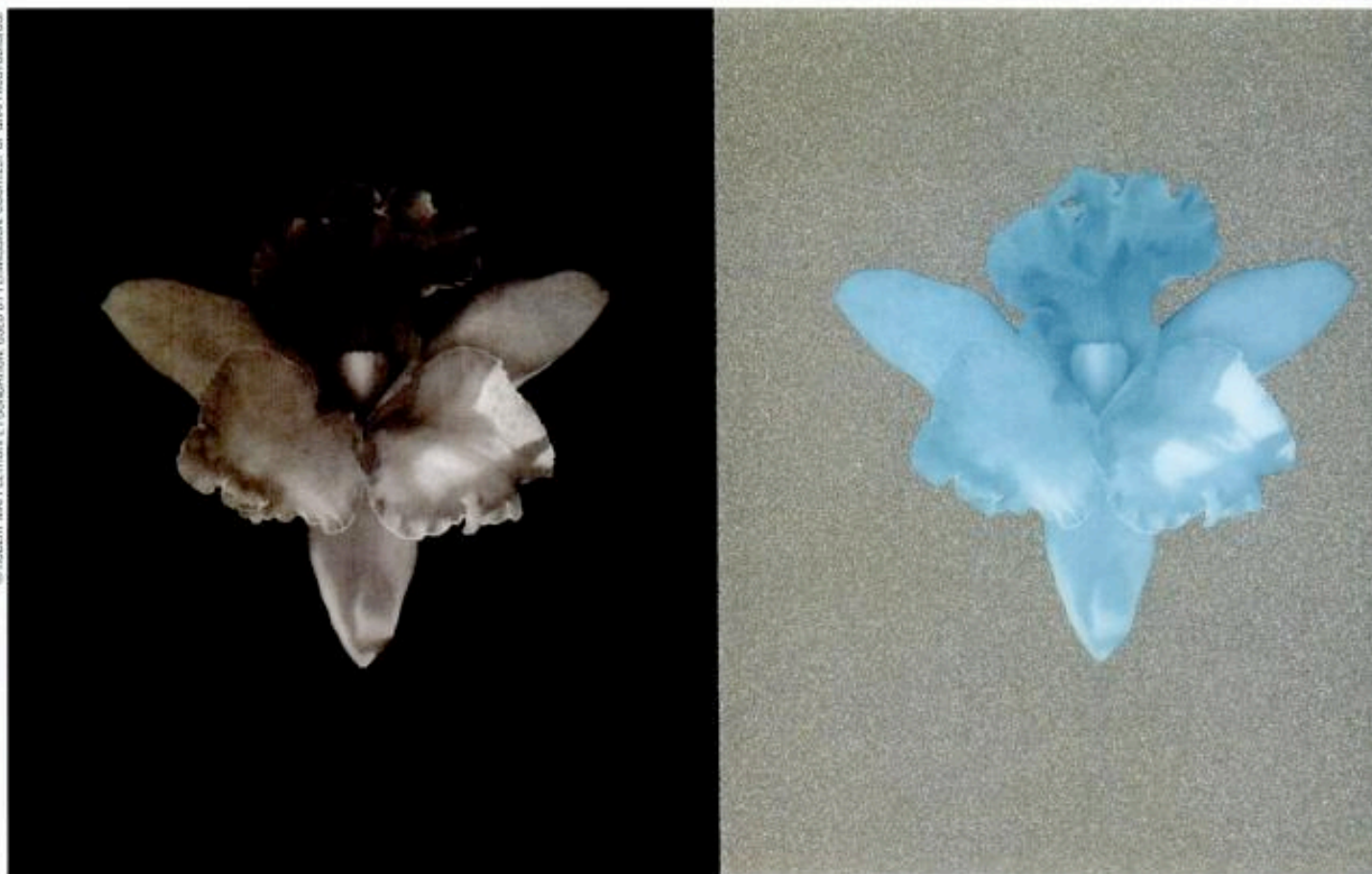
Tampa is

FLORIDA MUSEUM OF
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS

F M O P A

By Joanne Milani

© ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE FOUNDATION. USED BY PERMISSION. COURTESY OF GRAPHICSTUDIOUSE



Robert Mapplethorpe "Tampa Orchid" 1986

Picture Perfect

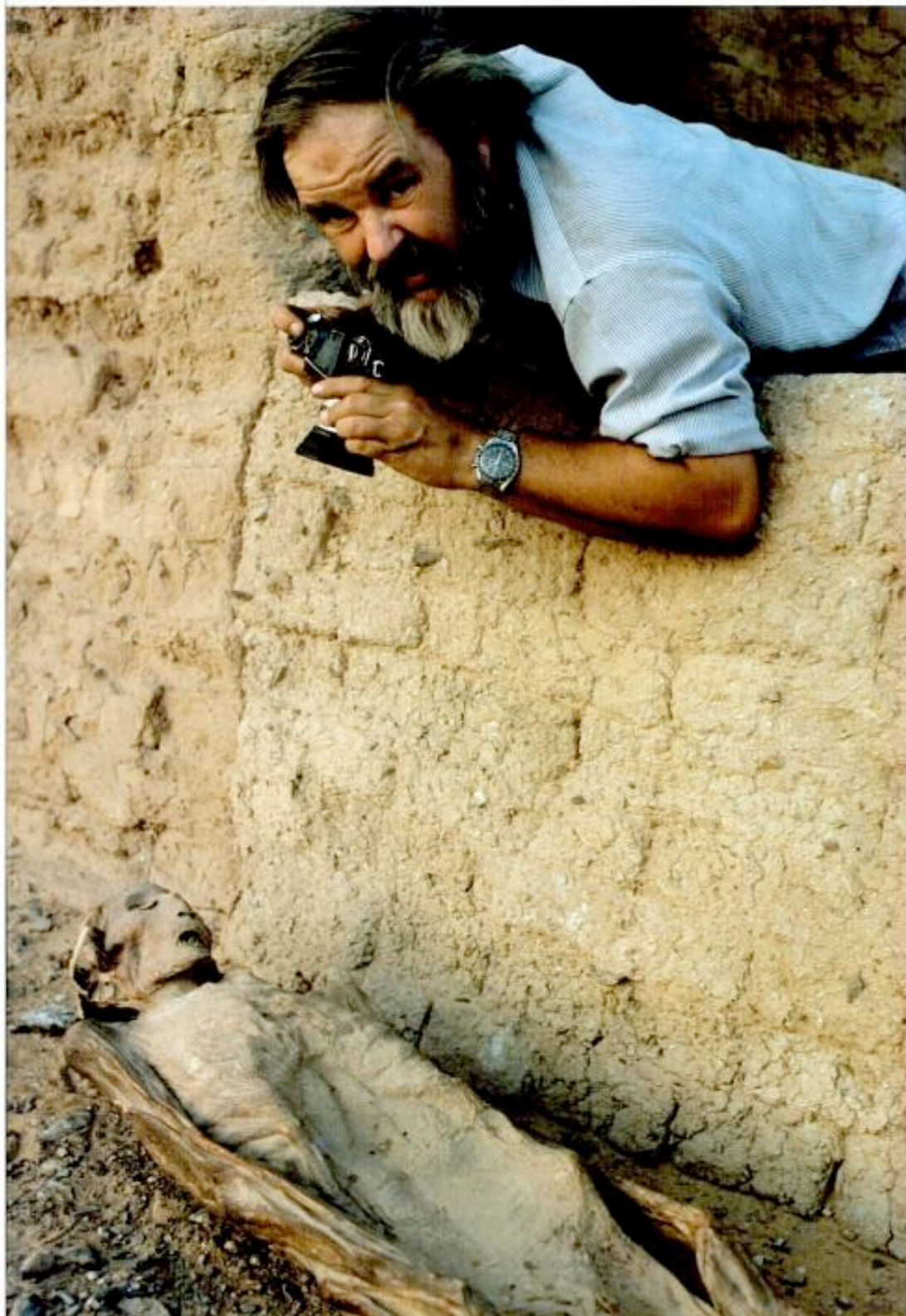


Photo by Lynn Abercrombie

It's not every day that a new art museum surfaces in downtown Tampa. So, when the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts throws open its doors on the evening of September 15th, it's bound to pull in the curious, the culturally attuned and the camera buffs for whom photography is a source of endless fascination. ▶

*Photographer
Thomas J. Abercrombie
with a Mummy.*



© BY JUDY DATER

Ena Everett 2005

Unlike painting and sculpture, photography is something most people believe they can do themselves. "Photography is accessible, hands-on, something everyone can relate to," says Charles J. Levin, the museum's board chairman and a co-founder of the nonprofit institution. "It's everywhere in our contemporary culture and lifestyle." The Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, or FMoPA as many will likely refer to it, is small but centrally located on the corner of Tampa and Jackson Streets. With its lineup of shows, talks and classes, the museum aims to be welcoming to the art and non-art crowds alike.

FMoPA's inaugural exhibition, "Aaron Siskind: Harlem Document (1932-1940)," focuses on the early works of an American master. Siskind (1903-1991) made the history books with his photographic

abstractions that paralleled the avant-garde paintings of his contemporaries, including those of his pal, Franz Kline. However, when the young Siskind first picked up a camera, he documented life in Depression-era Harlem, and these compelling images are what you can see at FMoPA through November 5th. "These are some of Siskind's most socially-conscious works, and this is an opportunity for us to help usher in a new era for the museum," says Gregory R. Haney, a board member. Haney's law firm, Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP, is one of the sponsors of the show, along with the City of Tampa. "It's equally important to Tampa and its burgeoning downtown art and social scene."

"Photography wears so many hats," says Levin, a photography collector. "It can be social documentary, fine art or photojournalism. All those avenues were explored in the early days of the museum, when it was founded as the Tampa Gallery of Photographic Arts." Levin, along with New York and Tampa art dealer Vincent Sorrentino, business owner Cynthia Flowers and a cadre of enthusiastic volunteers came together in 2001 to found the nonprofit. Levin secured a location in Old Hyde Park Village, and Sorrentino supplied extensive fine art expertise, as Flowers insisted they provide free visual literacy programs for at-risk children using photography as a means of expression.

In its first five years, the Tampa Gallery of Photographic Arts, armed only with volunteers and a nonexistent budget, has served hundreds of underprivileged children. It also mounted some stunning and popular exhibitions, including ones on Berenice Abbott, Clyde Butcher, Harold "Doc" Edgerton and on black culture in the United States.

The Tampa Gallery of Photographic Arts has now evolved into the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts with its name change underscoring its non-commercial status and its regional ambitions. Equally, the move to the downtown location places the museum at the center of a growing and maturing city scene. "We have a solid vision," says board member Nancy de Waart. "The museum fills a giant hole in Tampa. It's a no-nonsense institution."

"When cities like Houston, Charlotte and San Diego have had photography museums for 20 to 25 years, it makes sense that Tampa could have one," says Roger E. Robson, board member and a principal in the financial advisory firm CapTrust. "The Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego gets between 40,000 and 60,000 visitors a year."

Along with finding a permanent home, setting up a board of trustees and planning a research and preservation archive, FMoPA has the immediate aims of establishing its exhibition programs and, especially, its education programs. "That's integral," says James S. De Mauro, hospice administrator and board member. "If it's not for education, what's it for?" De Mauro is scheduling classes on the history of photography and lunchtime seminars on digital cameras, as well as continuing the free programs for at-risk children. For additional details, go to www.fmopa.org.