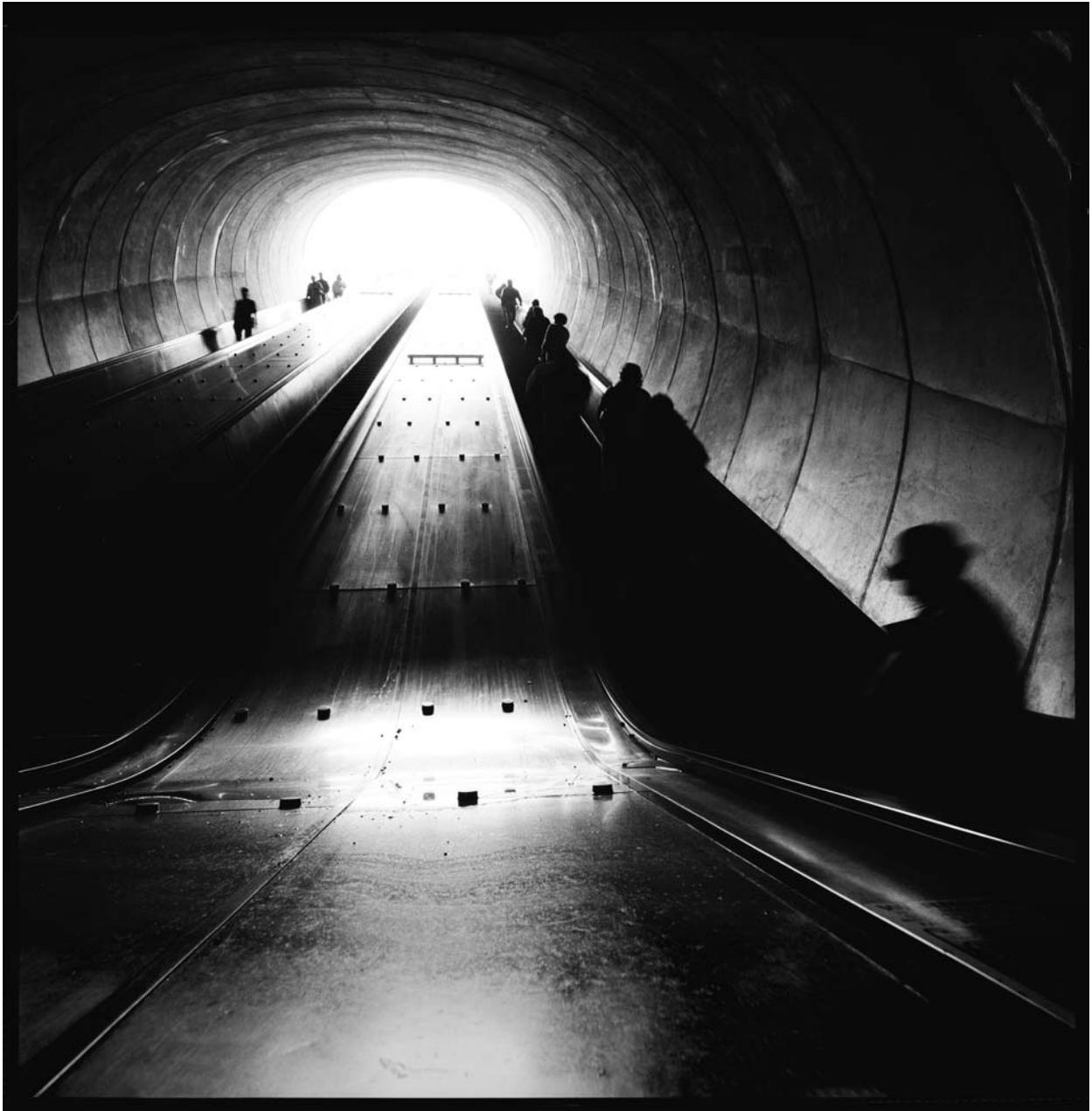


ALONE IN A CROWD



photographs by Jim Kasson

*Blackstone Winery, 800 South Alta Street, Gonzales, CA
March 30 – July 24, 2005*



Hauptbahnhof, Berne, Switzerland, 1988
108702-16

ALONE IN A CROWD

photographs by Jim Kasson

curated by Eric Bosler

Blackstone Winery, 800 South Alta Street, Gonzales, CA

March 30 – July 24, 2005, 11 am – 4 pm

Curator's Statement

The movements of strangers through cold and indifferent, yet entirely human environments, have elicited Jim Kasson's attention. From his observations he has produced a compelling poetry of urban isolation in motion. His photographs reveal hauntingly familiar images of the lonely, time-suspending experiences one can encounter while passing through the hubs of urban travel.

At times his subjects appear as if sleep walking through hyperactive environments. At other times, they are themselves isolated blurs of hyperactivity in contrastingly still surroundings. Kasson's photos might be viewed as singled out portions of this human condition which he brings to life as a mysterious blur.

As strong as this subject matter can be, it's Jim's sensibility, his timing, his eye for structure, and his ability to exploit irony that ultimately give strength to these photos. Their beauty is dependent as much on the content he creates as on Kasson's rarified aesthetics and technical virtuosity.

In the end, it is the stark beauty of those images that invites closer scrutiny... a scrutiny that draws each viewer into the extended decisive moment of Kasson's pictures.

Eric Bosler
Curator, Blackstone Gallery

Artist's Statement

Starting in the mid-80s, my job took me to Europe several times a year and I often spent my weekends doing street photography. One rainy Sunday, I wandered into the train station in Zug, Switzerland. I wasn't properly equipped for the low light levels, but I spent the afternoon there, bracing my folding Plaubel Makina against posts during the required quarter- to fifteenth-second exposures. When I developed the film, I found two images I liked, one of which is in this show. I was especially smitten with the motion blur in many of the images.

I decided to pursue this new photographic thread. Armed with more appropriate equipment, I sought out European train stations with classic nineteenth-century architectures. I found the combination of the people and the edifices exciting. I experimented with different amounts of motion blur and different relationships between the indistinct and sharp portions of the images. I developed a routine: I'd put a wide-angle lens on a medium-format camera, find a good place to set up my tripod, affix a cable release, and select a shutter speed for what I hoped would be the right amount of blur. Then I'd wait for the people to come by. Some would be nervous about the camera, and would rush by or give me a wide berth; I would accommodate them by not releasing the shutter. The longer I stood there, the more I seemed to become an uninteresting fixture ignored by almost everyone.

After several years of train stations, I realized that photographs with similar sensibility could be made in other places, and branched out to bus and tube stations, monuments, and other grand public spaces. Some places didn't permit tripods, so in the later years of this project, I experimented with fast film in a 35mm camera, bracing it against walls and pillars as I did at first. Motion blur is important in these images, and the results are not easy to predict; that became part of what I loved about making these images. I'd wonder what I was capturing on the film while I was making the exposures, and going over the contact sheets after the trip was like opening presents. I printed a small fraction of the frames I exposed, but even the throw-aways were interesting, and I learned as much from the bad images as the good ones.

The great extremes of light levels in many of the places where I exposed these images result in photographs that are difficult to print in the darkroom; even with hours of work, the results don't convey the richness of detail that it think they should. In the last few years I returned to the negatives and began to work with them digitally. I was pleased and

excited to find that I could now get a great deal of previously-unrenderable information into the prints. One of the images in this show, *Walkway, Carlisle, England*, I had considered completely unprintable, but processed digitally, it has detail everywhere but in the skylights.

A year or two into this series, I showed the burgeoning work to some people at the Art Institute in San Francisco. One of them asked me what the series was about. I'm not usually given to photographic introspection, and I hadn't thought much about it. "It's about loneliness," popped out of my mouth. I've since thought about it, and I think my subconscious, though incomplete, was accurate on several levels. Much travel involves leaving home and loved ones, being isolated from friends and relatives for a least part of the journey, and finally being reunited. Modern travel, for reasons of efficiency and cost, is usually performed in the company of others, often in the close company of many others. People deal with forced association with strangers by forming an emotional shell around themselves, so that although they are physically within the crowd they're still apart from it. There's another kind of loneliness that infuses these photographs: mine. Like many of the people in the pictures, I was a long way from home sometimes wishing that I were not. I was part of the throng, but separated from it, in my case by my role as documenter. Maybe that only comes through to me, but perhaps you can see it, too.

These images are more than a meditation on the loneliness of the traveler; if that's all I was after, I could have made the pictures in a modern airport. The spaces inhabited by the travelers are important to the images, and the spaces in these images are imposing, often have a sense of history to them, and are architecturally interesting. My favorite venues, the train stations of the mid to late nineteenth century were built to a scale far grander than their function required. The train shed of St. Pancras station in London, completed in 1868, has a span of 243 feet, a length of 700 feet and is 100 feet high, at the time of construction Europe's largest and widest undivided enclosed space. The stations were adorned with intricate decorations, many of which are preserved to this day. Seen in these images, they are impressive, sometimes beautiful, and seem to have an enduring quality. The travelers making their blurry way through the monumental spaces are evanescent, but it seems that the structures will endure. This impression is intriguing, but misleading. In fact, many stations similar to the ones depicted here have been torn down or remodeled into utilitarian, boring uniformity. I haven't kept track, but in the fifteen or so years since the negatives were made, the grimy, baroque beauty of several of the stations you see here is probably gone.

Jim Kasson

ALONE IN A CROWD



San Jose, CA, 1989
028904-6



Temple-Meads Station, Bristol, England, 1988
098807-17



Escalator, San Francisco Bus Station, 1991
109201-6



Paddington Station, London, 1988
098813-16



Bahnhof, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1988
048840-14



Gare de Lyon, Paris, 1988
098857-18



Platform, Hauptbahnhof, Lucerne, Switzerland 1987
108709-7



*Conductor, Hauptbahnhof, Lucerne, Switzerland, 1988
048813-10*



Traveler and Marlboro Man, Hauptbahnhof, Heidelberg, Germany, 1988
048817-18



Running Girl, Hauptbahnhof, Heidelberg, Germany, 1988
048818-9



Late for the 6:45, Grand Central Station, New York City, 1992

039217-7



Closing the Gate, Grand Central Station, New York City, 1992
039219-15a



Embankment Station, London Underground, 1992
059203-5



South Station, Boston, 1989
108910-18



Central Station, York, England, 1990
049039-10

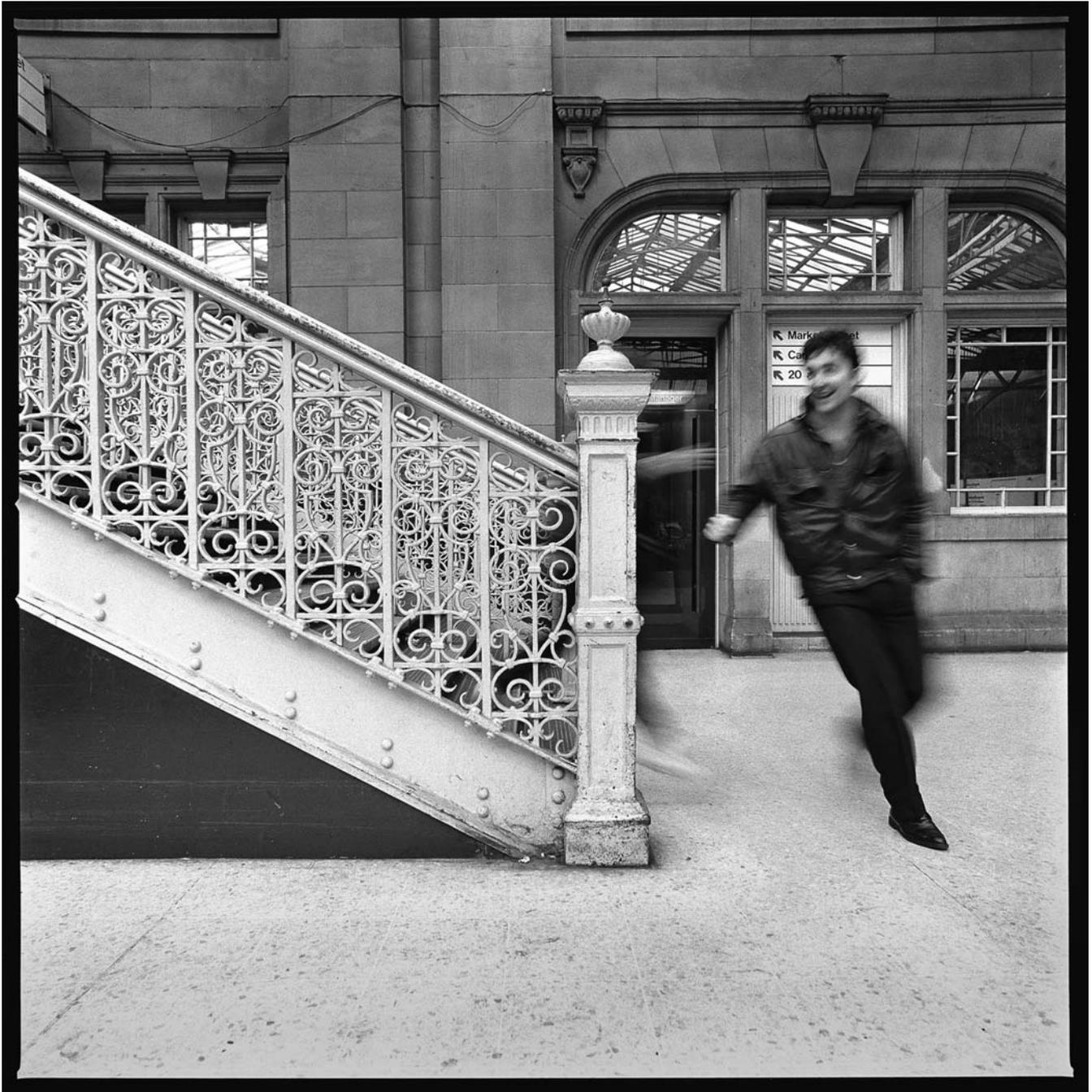


Bahnhof, Zug, Switzerland, 1987
078704-5

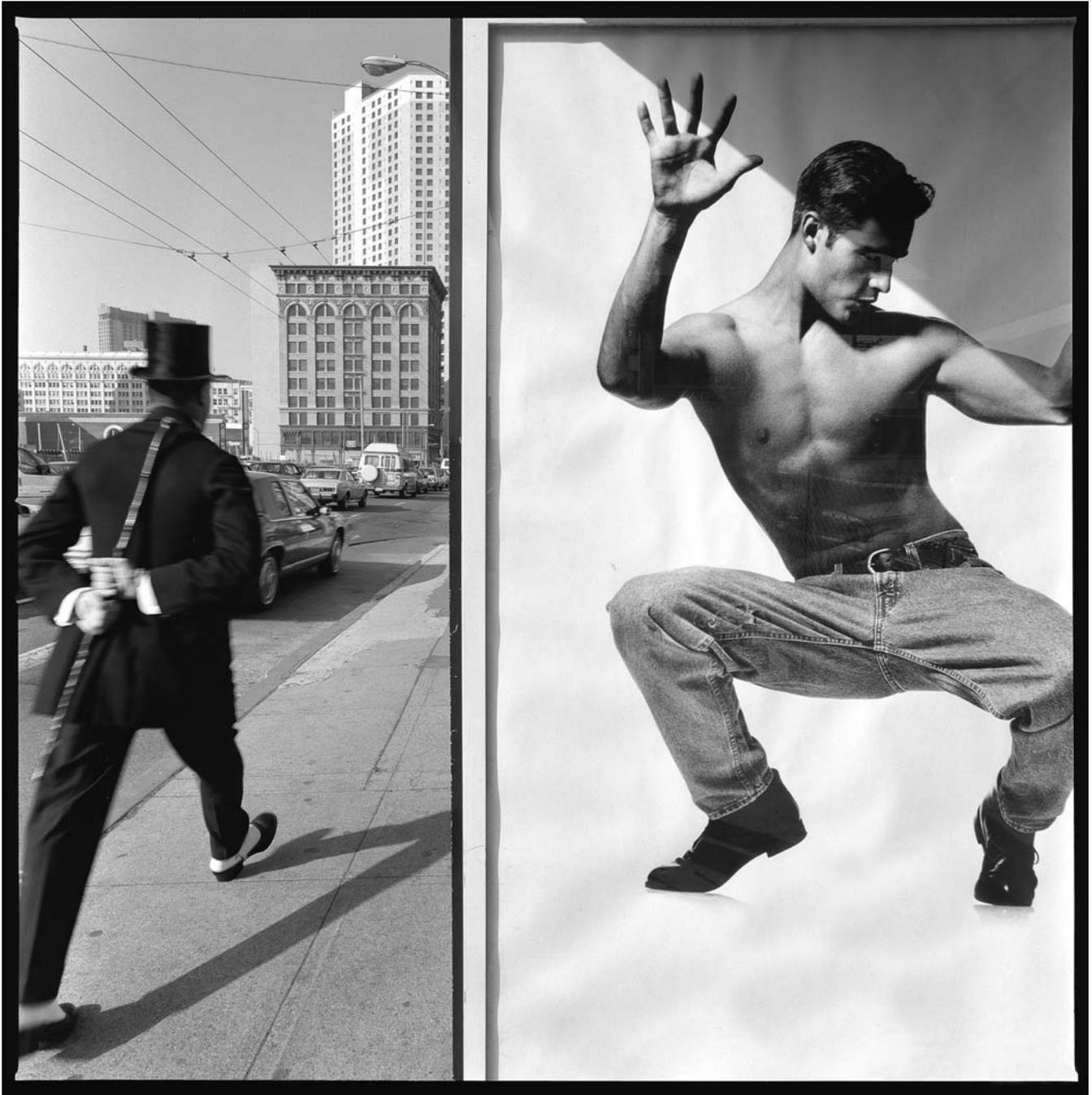


Central Station, Southampton, England, 1990
049018-20





Waverly Station, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1989
118905-2



Bus Stop, 3rd Street, San Francisco, 1992
059208-4



Walkway, Carlisle, England, 1989
118922-10



St. Pancras Station, London, 1988
098837-16



Taxi Rank, Victoria Station, London, 1988
098801-12



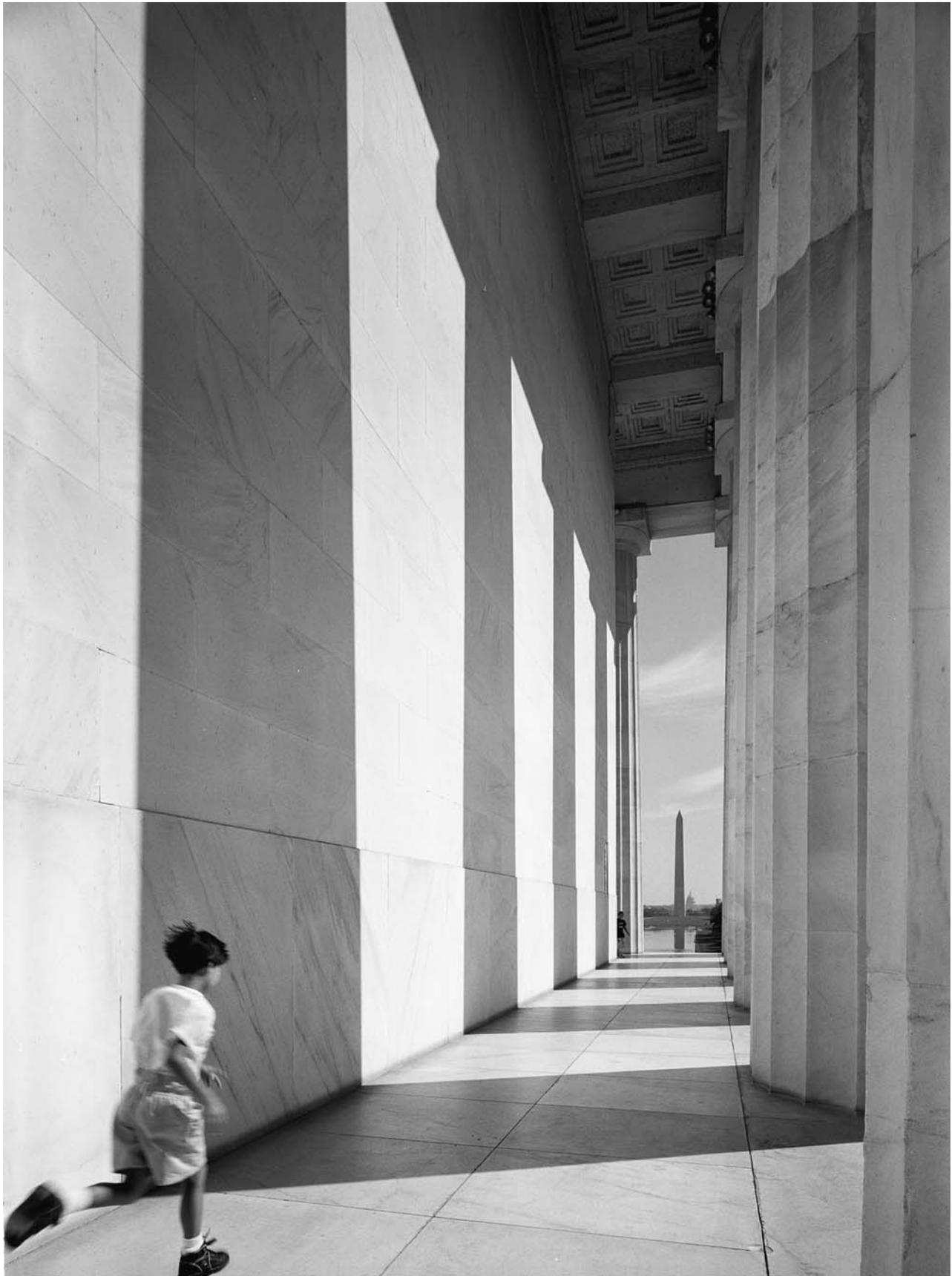
Cafeteria, Zurich Hauptbahnhof, 1988
048830-13



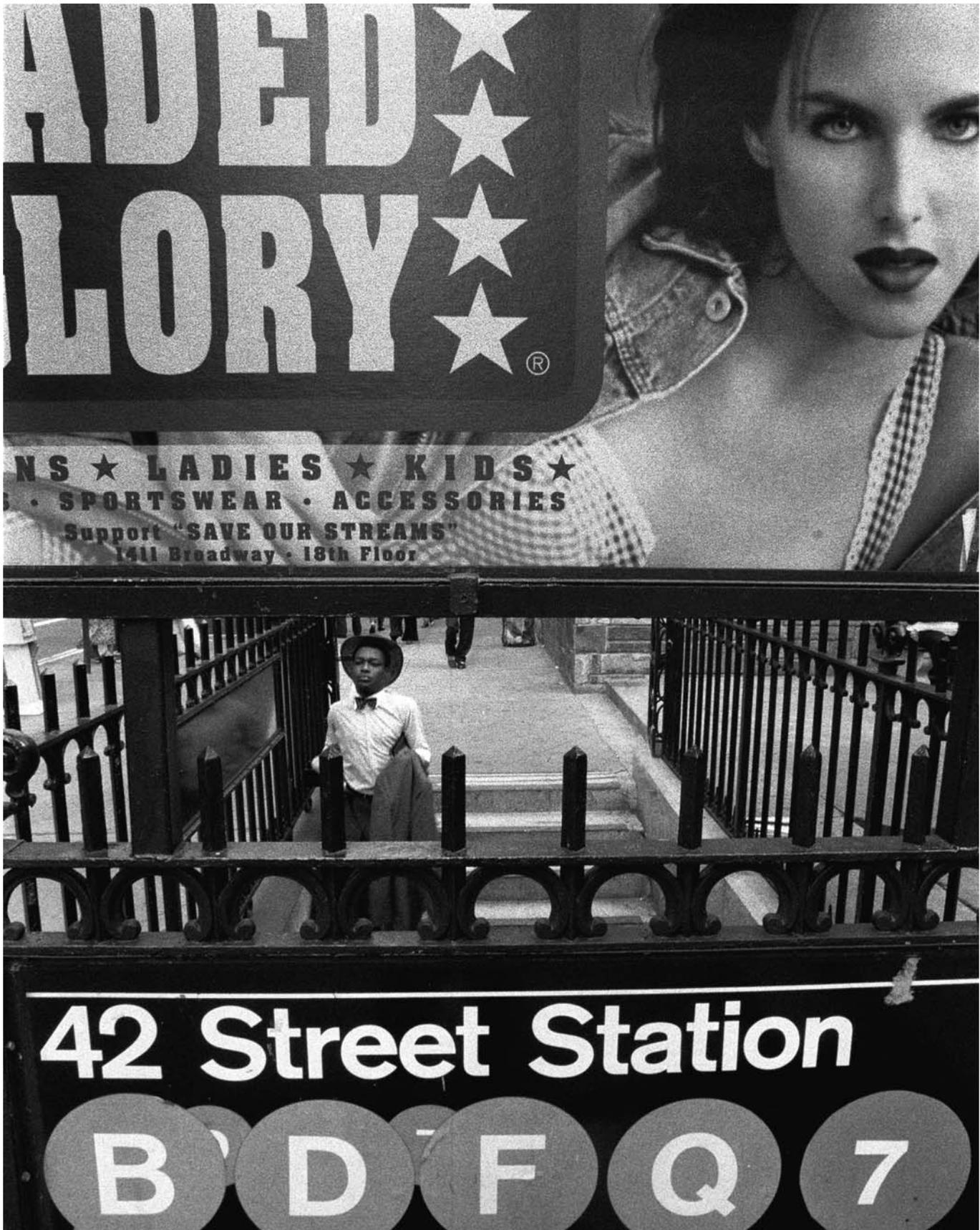
Jefferson Memorial, Washington, D.C., 1989
108916-6



Washington Monument, Washington, D.C., 1989
108917-12



Tag, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., 1990
109025-7



42nd Street Subway Station, New York City, 1988
099305-29



*Passenger Ramp, Grand Central Station, New York City 1992
039211-12a*



Berlin Underground, 1993
069308-8a

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cover photograph: *Escalator, Dupont Circle Station, Washington Metro, Washington D.C.*, 1990, negative number 109014-18
back cover photograph: *Hailstorm, National Monument (to the Napoleonic Dead), Edinburgh*, 1992, negative number 059218-32

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scanner: Imacon Precision III, printer: Epson 4000 with ColorByte ImagePrint raster image processor and printer driver
inks: Epson UltraChrome, paper: Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308 gsm

thanks to: Huntington Witherill for printing advice and general support
Huntington Witherill and Dennis High for help with the design
Stephen Johnson for advice on duotones
Donna Murphy and Rapid Printers of Monterey for prepublication assistance
Ryuijie for actually printing the catalog

