



ALAN SEKULA, *Portraits of Victor Clothing Workers* by John Valadez, 2001. Left panel of Cibachrome diptych, 35 x 62 inches.

## LOS ANGELES

ALAN SEKULA

CHRISTOPHER GRIMES

Alan Sekula's small but smart exhibition of cibachrome prints at Christopher Grimes makes the artist extraordinarily accessible. Much of what has been written about Sekula has been so archly academic it may have made him somewhat unapproachable to a larger audience. However, the works at Grimes, dating from 1993 to present, reveal a relentless critical realist whose pictorial content harkens to an established European literary, narrative tradition. *Coffin Factory* is a startling, iconic image that uncannily summarizes border life in the twilight corridor between "first" and "third" world countries. A newly made coffin fills the foreground, presented as a "sculptural" object, connoting mortality and its rituals. Behind and above the coffin are dozens of pin ups of partially clothed women. The juxtaposition of death and objectified sexual imagery adorning the factory walls is a sharp reminder of our tenuous hold on life. The work brings to mind two Northern Irish photographers, Willie Dougherty and Paul Seagrave, with whom Sekula shares a deep devotion to place, memory, and social commentary. All of them combine the anonymous with the specific in a seamless and disturbing but beautiful manner.

*Victor Clothing Pictures: Portraits of Victor Clothing Workers* by John Valadez and *Paymaster* is a great work of art. The diptych shows the assembled portraits (recently purchased by the collector Peter Norton) of Mexican garment workers who are slowly being laid off their jobs as changing demographics bring the old-time Los Angeles Victor Clothing factory to a close. There is a world of anecdote in Sekula's compassionate humanism, a sensibility more "available" these days to North Americans as world events alter institutional relationships to art and content.

Clayton Campbell