

EDITED BY COCO FUSCO AND BRIAN WALLIS

ONLY



SKIN

CHANGING VISIONS OF THE AMERICAN SELF

DEEP

This publication was produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* organized by the International Center of Photography.  
Exhibition Dates: December 12, 2003 through February 29, 2004.  
Visit the exhibition website at [www.onlyskindeep.icp.org](http://www.onlyskindeep.icp.org)

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For the International Center of Photography, Publications Staff:  
Project Manager: Karen Hansgen  
Text Editor: Marion Kocot  
Designer: Bethany Johns  
Rights and Reproductions: Erin Barnett and Nola Tully  
Research: Michelle-Lee White

For Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers:  
Project Manager: Deborah Aaronson  
Production Manager: Maria Pia Gramaglia

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Front cover:

Gordon Parks

*Emerging Man, Harlem*, 1952

Gelatin silver print

16 1/8 x 19 7/8 in. (40.9 x 50.4 cm)

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Purchased by the ICP Acquisitions Committee, 2003

Back cover:

Tseng Kwong Chi

*Statue of Liberty, New York*, from the

expeditionary series, "East Meets West," 1979

Gelatin silver print

36 x 36 in. (91.4 x 91.4 cm)

Estate of Tseng Kwong Chi /

Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Page 2:

John Gutmann

*The Artist Lives Dangerously* (detail), 1938

Gelatin silver print

7 5/8 x 10 1/4 in. (19.4 x 26 cm)

Center for Creative Photography,

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International Center of Photography  
1133 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, N.Y. 10036  
[www.icp.org](http://www.icp.org)

The long, slow turn into the new millennium has been an auspicious and revealing process for Americans, an opportunity to assess the past and a chance to imagine the future in a different way. When, in 1999, staff members from the International Center of Photography began discussions with representatives from the National Endowment for the Arts about how the agency's Millennium Initiative programs might best evaluate contemporary visual art, the issues were both challenging and self evident. One of the most striking features of American culture at this historical juncture, we all agreed, is the profound and unresolved issue of national identity. What does it mean to be an American? What are the boundaries of the nation? Who qualifies for citizenship? Who is excluded? Central to these questions is the troubling issue of race, the aspect of national identity that continues to defy explanation and to incite divisiveness. Despite the regular media claims that we have moved beyond race or that shifting demographics have made the concept irrelevant, ongoing political and social clashes attest to the contrary. If race is a myth, it remains an explosive one.

It was, therefore, with a mix of humility and ambition that we initially formulated the concept for *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*. The goal of this ambitious project is to challenge some of the central myths or preconceptions governing American identity. In particular, this book—and the exhibition and website it accompanies—aims to show how fluctuating conceptions of race, nation, and self have been fixed or transformed through the unique attributes and strategic uses of photography. What the curators propose here is, in effect, a different reading of the archive of historical and contemporary photographs, not one that accuses or valorizes but one that studies the deep and lasting social impact of photographic representations. It is entirely appropriate that the International Center of Photography, with its long history of political engagement through "concerned photography," should attempt this task. For this project is above all a political one, one that asks each reader and each viewer to question her or his own identity and the ways it is shaped by and linked to wider social ideas through photography.

Clearly, such a complex intellectual investigation could not have been possible without the advice and leadership of many individuals. First and foremost, we must express our gratitude to the coorganizers of this project, Brian Wallis, Director of Exhibitions and Chief Curator at the International Center of Photography, and Cocco Fusco, Associate Professor at Columbia University, as well as a leading artist and critic. As two key voices in the cultural debates of the last decade, Wallis and Fusco have worked together for three years to produce a thought-

## DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

**Willis E. Hartshorn**

Ehrenkranz Director

provoking book and exhibition that will surely serve as an important critical intervention for years to come.

An exhibition of this magnitude could have been realized without timely logistical and financial support. In this case, we are proud to acknowledge our partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, which awarded this project a generous Millennium Grant at a crucial early stage. The Endowment's bold leadership commitment helped to generate a number of matching grants from private donors. We gratefully acknowledge these major sponsors: the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Altria, and Corbis, with its enlightened commitment to expanding the public's awareness of the important role pictures play in our culture.

Given the national scope of this exhibition, it is significant that loans to this exhibition have come from over one hundred artists, collectors, galleries, and museums throughout the country. We offer our appreciation to those individuals and institutions that have so selflessly aided us in this undertaking; their cooperation and generosity have been invaluable. Finally, we at the International Center of Photography extend our deepest gratitude to the artists and photographers included in *Only Skin Deep*. Their ideas and images give form to this project and help us to better understand how photographs have shaped notions of national and individual identity. It is our hope that through *Only Skin Deep* their work will stimulate a widespread and lively conversation about what it means to be an American today.

## FAMILY PROGRAMS

**Family Albums** SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2003, 1:00-3:00 P.M.

Who is your family? Create your own album of loved ones with museum educator Takema Robinson. Use old photos and recent snapshots, along with Polaroids produced during this workshop, to create your own personal album. Make it a gift for the holidays.

**Hero Collages** SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2004, 1:00-3:00 P.M.

Who are your heroes—real or imagined? Where do they come from? How do they inspire you? Join ONLY SKIN DEEP artist Wangechi Mutu in this exciting mixed-media workshop. Using photographs and magazine clippings along with colored pencils and pastels, families and children will create their own hero collage. Bring your own photos (originals or photo copies).

To register for Family Programs, please call 212 857-0001 or visit [www.icp.org](http://www.icp.org).

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FRIDAY 10 TO 8, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY 10 TO 6  
CLOSED ON MONDAY

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THE AMERICAN SELF



DECEMBER 12, 2003 TO  
FEBRUARY 29, 2004

 International Center of Photography