



Every great Screwdriver has a silent partner.

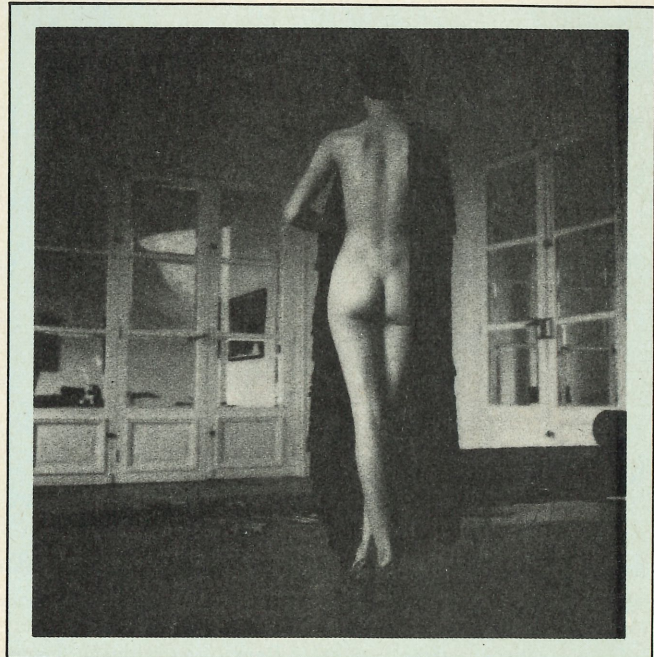
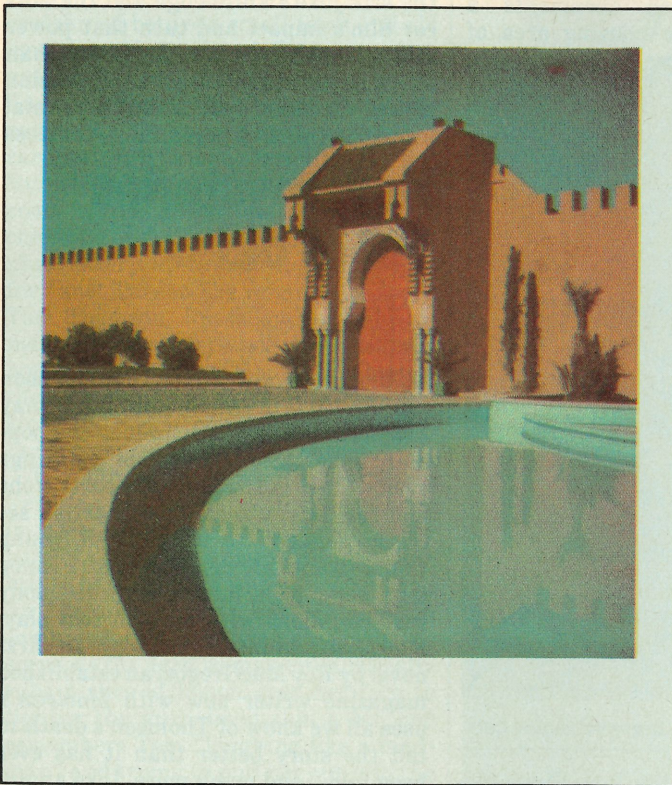
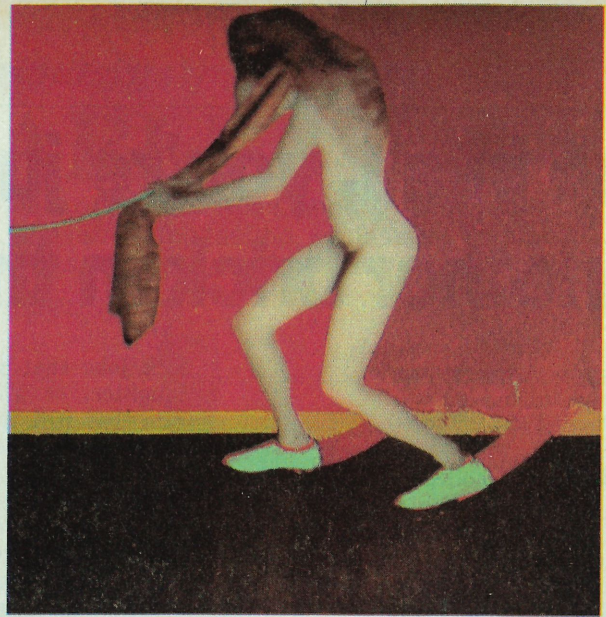
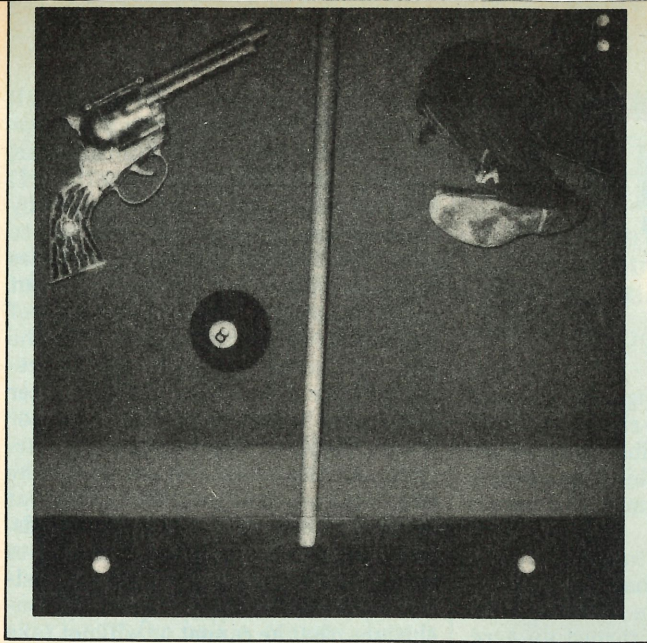
A Premium Vodka distilled in Canada by Canadian Schenley Distilleries Ltd.

Photography

Pursuing the pleasure principle

Anyone who has ever held a developing Polaroid SX-70 print and watched the picture emerge cloudily, greenish shades first, then the darker colors and finally the reds, adding their warm touch to human faces, has been captivated by the magic of the process. Presto, picture . . . from a miniature hand-held darkroom that evokes the camera's inventor Edwin Land's ideal that there be "nothing for the photographer to do except to compose and to select the instant at which he wants to go from viewing to having." You could call it the pleasure principle of photography. Land put the most sophisticated electronic, optical and chemical technologies at the service of the snapshot so that even the most amateur photographer could have instant pictures. But, since its introduction in 1972, artists got into the act, playing with the SX-70's foolproof automation as if it were a new toy. Whether they have managed to turn the common snapshot from a simple pleasure into "art" is the question posed by *SX-70 Art* (Lustrum Press/Van Nostrand Reinhold, \$26.95), a glossy white-on-white coffee-table collection of more than 100 Polaroid photographs by professional photographers. The one-of-a-kind prints from that book, recently shown in galleries in Toronto and Vancouver, are part of a worldwide travelling exhibition that will return to Canada in the fall.

The only method apparently shared by the photographers in the show seems to be a perverse disregard for the instructions that come with the camera. ("For the best results . . . get close to your subject . . . you should use flash for indoor pictures. Do not cut a picture.") Some stick the developing prints into the freezer, which produces a pastel effect like an old postcard; some pop them into toasters, which distorts the image and cracks the surface. New Yorker Lucas Samaras, among the first to tamper with the Polaroid process, mixes the exposed print's layers of dye as they develop by applying pressure with a sharp or blunt instrument. John Reuter and others actually open the print package from the



back, stripping away the chemical developers, and paint the inside or collage bits of other photographs in unreal juxtapositions so that the prints look like miniature surrealist paintings by Max Ernst or Salvador Dali. Most often this has the limited effect of a trick shot, at its worst in a picture by John Thornton that turns a woman's head into a lamp base. The conceptual photographs in the show suffer the same fate, as in the too easy humor of John Haines, who mimics the quickness of the system with his punning photograph of a Polaroid print reproducing the hand holding it.

Not all the art is achieved by interfering with the process' closed circuit. The print's innate qualities—rich color, small format and square shape—turn every photograph into a posed still life

SX-70 photos (clockwise from top left), Peter De Lory; Charlesworth's green feet; one of Helmut Newton's nudes; and Jane Tuckerman: invited to come and play, too

(these qualities have also convinced artists that the SX-70 gives them better results than other one-step cameras). For instance, Helmut Newton uses the immediacy of the camera for more traditional pursuits in a rigorously composed series of nudes—not having to send the film to the printers makes the camera perfect for plays on erotic themes. For these photographers there is no question that the erotic is part of the SX-70's appeal, and the body a more effective subject than snapshot landscapes.

For the everyday photographer, part

of the fascination of the SX-70 is the immediate matching of the hand-held print with what he saw the moment before; in these pictures the momentary appeal of the snapshot is transformed from memory to dream. Bruce Charlesworth's figures run across fluorescent backdrops, one of them wearing nothing but painted-on bright green shoes; a colored filter slipped in front of the lens turns Frank Di Perna's beach scene into the aquamarine essence of California. What is most fascinating about looking at these pictures is their playfulness and their democracy—their implied invitation to come and play, too. Combining snapshot ease and artistic licence, this new technology might be the answer to the old surrealist dream: "Everyman an artist." **Philip Monk**