

## NOTE

1 See P.J. Gibbons, 'A Note on Writing, Identity, and Colonisation in Aotearoa', *Sites*, 13 (1986), pp.32–38; Peter Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36, 1 (2002), pp.8–17; Peter Gibbons, 'Non-fiction', in Terry Sturm, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, 2nd edn., Auckland, 1998, pp.31–118.

*Marti Friedlander*. By Leonard Bell. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2009. 240pp. NZ price: \$75. ISBN: 978-1-86940-444-4.

WE ARE CURRENTLY BESIEGED with images. People's computer screens glow with multiple photographs that dissolve and resolve in a few seconds. What greater pleasure, then, to be holding a book in which the images are fixed and where we are invited to take a long and considered look. Every Marti Friedlander image we ponder repays careful contemplation. Leonard Bell's chapters help us to think about the art of photography and about the way Marti Friedlander has enriched our understandings of New Zealand and the wider world. She confided in her journal in the late 1970s: 'I probably would never have become a professional photographer if I had not shifted here.' Displacement from London to Auckland's semi-rural Henderson allowed her, in Bell's words, 'to remake herself' (p.151). In doing so Marti Friedlander captured elements of New Zealand that continue to engage us.

Bell has successfully shaped a lifetime's work around seven themes. 'Looking Closely' details the development of Friedlander's preoccupation with art in London, her immigration to New Zealand and the range of her work. The second chapter deals with portraits and discusses the emotional involvement with people, which is central to Friedlander's art. Here we come across one of the founders of this journal, Keith Sinclair, looking as Bell notes, almost like a 'matinée idol' in photographs for his 1969 election campaign pamphlet. The portraits of couples have some very moving things to say about relationships. And the 2008 colour plate of Margaret Mahy captures both the effacement of the author in her stories and the humour that has endeared her to generations of New Zealanders.

Bell discusses Friedlander's photographs of Parihaka and of kuia with moko as a witness to loss in 'First New Zealanders'. The portraits for *Moko*, he suggests, are enriched by the photographer's rapport with her subjects. These women might never have been formally photographed before, but they responded to Friedlander's emotional engagement. The continuing popularity of *Moko* is testament to Friedlander's arresting images and the dignity of her subjects.

The New Zealand that Friedlander has investigated, the subject of chapter four, reminds us how 1974's *Larks in a Paradise: New Zealand Portraits* unsettled those accustomed to celebratory uses of photography. Plate 56, *Arrowtown, South Island*, has that mountain skyline as a backdrop to the camping ground laundry flapping in the breeze: the way generations of New Zealanders saw it. The plates in this chapter show the range of work that employed Friedlander's images: a sociological text; an in-house publication for Alliance Freezing Works in Southland (resulting in a great shot of action in the workroom, p.94); a text documenting a village for the aged in Auckland; portraits of high-achieving women for Virginia Myers's *Head and Shoulders*; a photo essay on deaf people and sign language. An image from the latter, reproduced on p.96, captures a group of women in animated conversation — we would love to know what it is about.

This sense of opening up questions is Friedlander's gift; her photographs do not present answers, but open up possibilities. Whether 'On the street, or at the Beach', the title of the fifth chapter, we always want to know more. Bell's text, therefore, provides welcome

explication of the context and the art of photography. We see political debate, assembling riot police, purposeful netball players on their way to a game, children bemused and at play, couples conversing, and ocean meeting sand. One image sums up the fraught feminist politics of a decade: Plate 79 of the 1979 United Women's Convention. An ascetic-looking nun reads a bible apparently towering over a young, confident woman confronting the camera with her 'killer dyke' badge. The young woman's elbow draws us to a third woman sitting, hands on either side of her face, looking bemused.

The sense of being an outsider is part of Friedlander's Jewish heritage, which has drawn her back to Israel a number of times and created a bank of lasting images. Some of these appear in chapter six, 'Displacement, Migration, Travel'. Friedlander has never aimed to please but to observe. The Tel Aviv Municipality hired her to make a photo essay of that city but did not publish the resulting work as it lacked the triumphalist tone for which they had hoped. In her attentiveness to human difference, Friedlander makes us see the complexities of simple notions such as a singular Israeli national identity as in plate 97, in which two ultra-orthodox men study a liturgical artifact while a cloth-capped workman is oblivious to their devotional intensity. The photographs from offshore include Tokelau and Fiji where they capture, without romanticising, aspects of everyday life.

Work for New Zealand's quarterly *Wine Review* brought Friedlander into contact with immigrants from the wine-making countries of Europe, contact she relished. The wonderful photograph of Italian immigrant Antonio Zame (p.156) shows him caught in a moment between the inside world of the stored barrels and the outside world of the vineyard. The outside light captures the side of his face, the rough sacking texture of his apron and the grain of the wooden barrels. This photograph is suggestive of hard work, while images of a Connoisseurs' Club outdoor gathering show dancing and celebration, including the energetic legs of cancan dancers with a band playing behind them.

Bell's title for the final chapter is a phrase taken from Friedlander's observation: 'I'm afraid of many things, revealing the sadness that exists in me, the loneliness, preferring to present to the world a competent mistress of life' (p.203). Perhaps life begun in an orphanage equipped her well to be an observer of others. Leonard Bell suggests that her photographs provide her autobiography, and he has organised them well for us to see different parts of her life. The honeymoon album Friedlander created of the 1957 trip she and her husband Gerrard made to New Zealand suggests an adventurous spirit. The Prague street scene in which a crowd contemplates the young couple's Lambretta suggests the novelty of their adventure (p.199). That sense of adventure allowed Friedlander to uncover layers of New Zealand and to leave an indelible mark on our national consciousness.

This is a book that tells us much about our history. Marti Friedlander managed to make herself a professional photographer in a thinly populated country with a miniscule art world. Leonard Bell has done a superb job of both introducing us to aspects of her work and asking us to look closely. The excellent production by Auckland University Press allows us to see the images clearly. That we want to see the images is due to Marti Friedlander's remarkable talent.

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