

Good Times

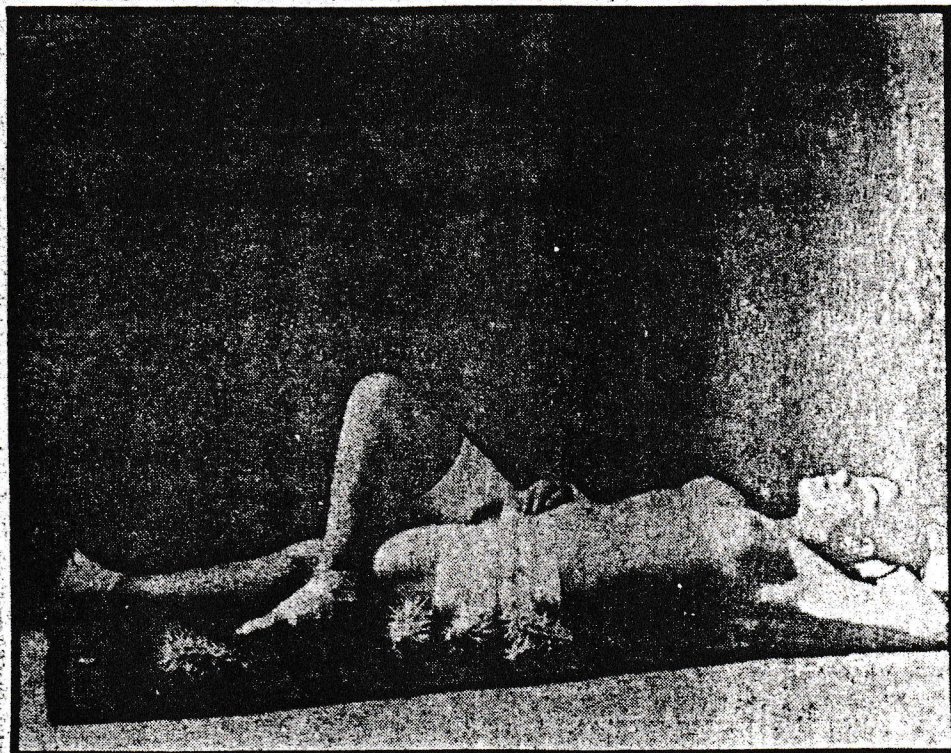
This week's fun at a glance. Where to go & what to see around town.

Artbeat:

Two Photographers

When Manuel Alvarez Bravo was asked how he happened to get involved with photography, he replied, "Who knows why one does what one does... that's like asking me why I happen to eat." The response is reflective of the very personal nature of his work. Bravo's views of his native Mexico are perceptive revelations of his relationship to that country. There is a 50-year retrospective of 150 of his black and white and color prints at the Long Beach Museum of Art until March 9th. The imagery is bittersweet and bemused, gingerly walking the ironic edge between the magic of Mexico and the reality. From the early abstract photographs of paper sculptures, reminiscent of Man Ray, to the frank social and political concerns of mid-career or the ongoing attention to the unavoidable surrealist qualities of Mexico, Bravo's photography has evolved with the years. It rages and rambles, takes chances and sometimes fails. It is interesting in comparison to the recent retrospective of that other living master, Ansel Adams. Although the Yosemite landscapes are grandiloquent, Adams seems to have been working by formula for the last 30 years. Bravo and his works, on the other hand, have matured together naturally. They serve as wonderful historical documentation, without losing their primary function as works of art.

The aesthetic concerns of photography are not of such interest to Don Farber, however. His exhibition, "Refuge in L.A.," documents the Vietnamese Buddhist community's attempts to maintain their traditional methods of worship here. At the Museum of Science and Industry to March 10th, the show is very powerful, indeed. But the power



Bravo's "Good Reputation Sleeping," 1938

comes from the inherent emotional charge of the subject matter, not from the photographs themselves.

Predictable contrasts are drawn between East and West; the saffron-robed monks and the westernized Buddhist youth groups in their jeans and t-shirts, the community elders comforted by the new-found temples in a country they don't understand, one young couple being married first in a Buddhist ceremony and then changing to standard dark suit and white lace dress. But it's all a little too sloppy. The black and white images fight with the color, the captions are dull and self-evident.

As a photo-journalist, Farber seems to have concentrated on the educational aspect of his work to the detriment of the aesthetic. Which is too bad, since the concept is poignant, noteworthy and deserving of better treatment.

— Hunter Drohojowska