George Tice is New Jersey's photo laureate. Or he would be, if states had photo laureates. New Jersey is celebrating his 75th birthday and his 60th year as a photographer with exhibitions at the Newark Museum and William Paterson University, two public institutions that he has long been involved with. The exhibition at the Newark Museum is unusual in that of the 31 pictures on display, Mr. Tice took only six of them. Nine pictures taken by others were printed by him, and demonstrate his proficiency in the darkroom; the rest are pictures that were taken by students, such as Sally Mann, or came from his private collection. It is a very heterogeneous exhibition.

George Tice was born in Newark on Oct. 13, 1938. The museum will celebrate Oct. 13 with a cake and the premiere showing of "George Tice: Seeing Beyond the Moment," a full-length documentary. Tices go way back in New Jersey; the first Tice in America landed in New Amsterdam in 1663, but in 1709 a Tice bought 500 acres in Morris County, N.J., and an area in the center of the state was once known as Ticetown. George had a troubled youth; his father left the family when he was a child, and his mother was a "Traveler," one of a subculture of itinerants, who made a meager living selling paper flowers in the Newark exurbs. When he was 14, at the suggestion of a high-school teacher, he joined the Carteret Camera Club, and a future opened up for him.

Mr. Tice left school at 16 to work as a darkroom assistant for a Newark portrait studio, and joined the Navy the following year. While serving as a photographer's mate he took a picture of an explosion aboard the USS Wasp that Edward Steichen bought for the Museum of Modern Art. After his release from service, Mr. Tice worked as a home portrait photographer, lugging a backdrop from house to house to make the pictures look professional.

By the 1970s he was able to devote time to personal projects, eventually having his photographs exhibited and collected by museums around the world, and publishing 17 photo books. Among the latter are essays on the Amish in Pennsylvania, the seacoast of Maine, and the moors of Yorkshire, England, but it is those connected to New Jersey—"Patterson," "Patterson II," "Ticetown," "George Tice: Urban Landscapes"—with which he is most identified. His latest book, "Seldom Seen," is being released in connection with the current exhibitions.

Since 1980, Mr. Tice has donated a total of 150 photographs to the Newark Museum, an important part of their collection. On display now are works by William Fox Talbot, Lewis Hine, John Paul Caponigro, Jerry Uelsmann and others, showing Mr. Tice's catholic interests. Of the six pictures in the exhibition that he took, five are of New Jersey, and include his classics "Pettit's Mobil Station, Cherry Hill, NJ" (1974) and "White Castle, Route #1, Rahway, New Jersey" (1973). Prints of those two celebrated images are included in the exhibitions at William Paterson University and at New York's Naiyla Alexander Gallery and San Francisco's Scott Nichols Gallery as well, and all three of those venues also have prints of "Telephone Booth, 3 A.M., Rahway, NJ" (1974). The gas station, the crenelated fast-food outlet and the isolated phone booth—each structure shot dramatically at night, and with no one about—are critical components of Mr. Tice's reputation.

"Most of my pictures are about place," Mr. Tice explained to Mr. Caponigro in a 1997 interview. The 36 prints at the University Galleries at William Paterson University in Wayne are all about places, New Jersey places, nine of them scenes of nature such as "Oak Tree, Holmdel, NJ" (1970) or "The Passaic Falls" (1971), and most of the rest scenes of urban decline. The neon used to illuminate "USED CARS" in the "Riverside Auto Sales" (1971) sign is missing. The paint is peeling from the "Cott Beverage Sign" (1969). There is trash on the sidewalk at the foot of the stairs in "Hamilton Avenue, Paterson, NJ" (1971). The boarded-up "Factory Windows" (1970) are emblematic of industrial collapse. These places are not slums, but they have lost their middle-class gentility and are shabby. Mr. Tice is not reproachful; he accepts things as they are.

If Mr. Tice has an agenda, it is existential, not political. "The great difficulty of what I attempt," he said in the preface to "Urban Landscapes" (2002), "is seeing beyond the moment; the everydayness of life gets in the way of the eternal." Most of his pictures are taken with an 8-by-10-inch view camera that captures tiny details, and his meticulous darkroom technique ensures they will be visible in the final print. Several of his pictures, including "Pettit's Mobil," "White Castle" and "Telephone Booth," have been made into platinum/palladium prints with delicate gradations of tone even in the shadows. His carefully selected points of view seem straightforward, but always manage to put the elements of his pictures into significant juxtapositions. Nothing superfluous is included. People are rarely prominent in his cityscapes, so the scenes are like stage sets waiting for the cast to appear.

William Paterson University awarded Mr. Tice an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, in 2003. In the 10 years since, Mr. Tice has had exhibitions there, has lectured there, and made donations to the library. Stephen Hahn, associate provost and professor of English at the university, wrote a perceptive paper in 2008 comparing Mr. Tice and William Carlos Williams, the author of an epic poem about Paterson; in his paper, Prof. Hahn quotes the photographer on Paterson's "sad beauty." That the city was sad was there for all to see; it took the photographer's eye to find the beauty.

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