



Cutout Man, New York, 1971

BY JEFF HARDER

# Take Two

IN HIS LATEST COLLECTION, A DISTINGUISHED  
WOODS HOLE PHOTOGRAPHER SEES DOUBLE.



U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., 1977

It's rare to catch Woods Hole's Mark Chester without a camera. Over the span of almost 40 years, Chester has learned that it's often best to shoot first and ask questions later, and that the best photos often come when they're least expected. Every once in a while, they come in pairs.

Chester, whose photographs appear in the permanent collections of museums throughout the country, has put together an intriguing collection of black-and-white images that spans his career, pairing outstanding pictures united by common themes and subject matter. *Twosomes*, Chester's newest book of photography, is available June 2 from The Un-Gyve Limited Group. An exhibit of the book's images goes on display at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis on June 18, preceded by a special reception and book signing at Addison Art Gallery in Orleans on June 17. Chester's work is often whimsical, often touches his audiences in contrasting ways, and always demonstrates a talent that could only be gained through many decades spent behind a lens.



Self Portrait Truck Mirror, New York, 1970

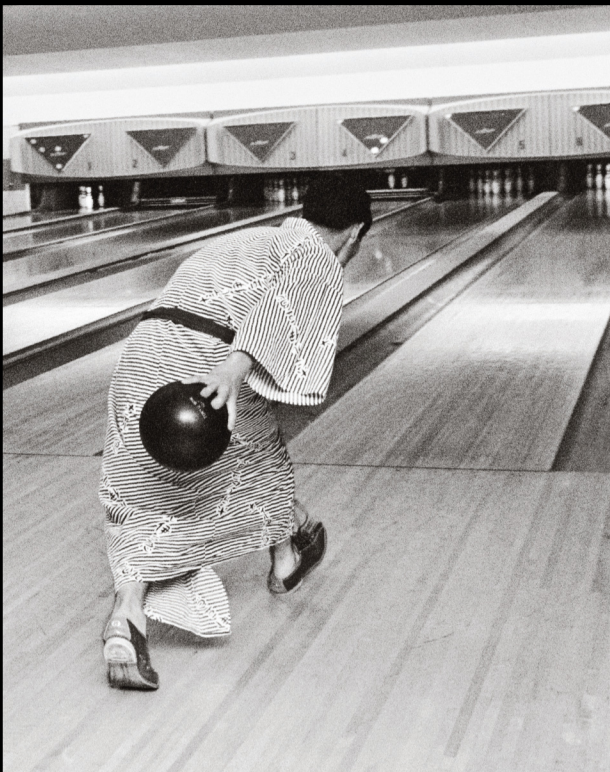
“YOU TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH  
NOT BECAUSE YOU KNOW  
WHERE TO PUT IT,” SAYS  
CHESTER. “YOU TAKE IT  
BECAUSE IT’S THAT MOMENT.”

In the living room of his Woods Hole home, Chester shuffles pages of proofs from the book across a coffee table. Many of the same images hang framed and matted in rows on the high walls around him. Chester—dressed in a plaid shirt and jeans, glasses perched on his nose—explains the origins of each photo and, in the process, traces the trajectory of his career.

As a kid in Springfield, Massachusetts, Chester took his first pictures with a Kodak Brownie camera. He didn’t get serious about photography until he joined the Peace Corps as a trainee in 1967 and bought professional camera set-up for his looming travels, which ultimately fell through. But he kept practicing his craft and studied the images in *Life* magazine, *National*



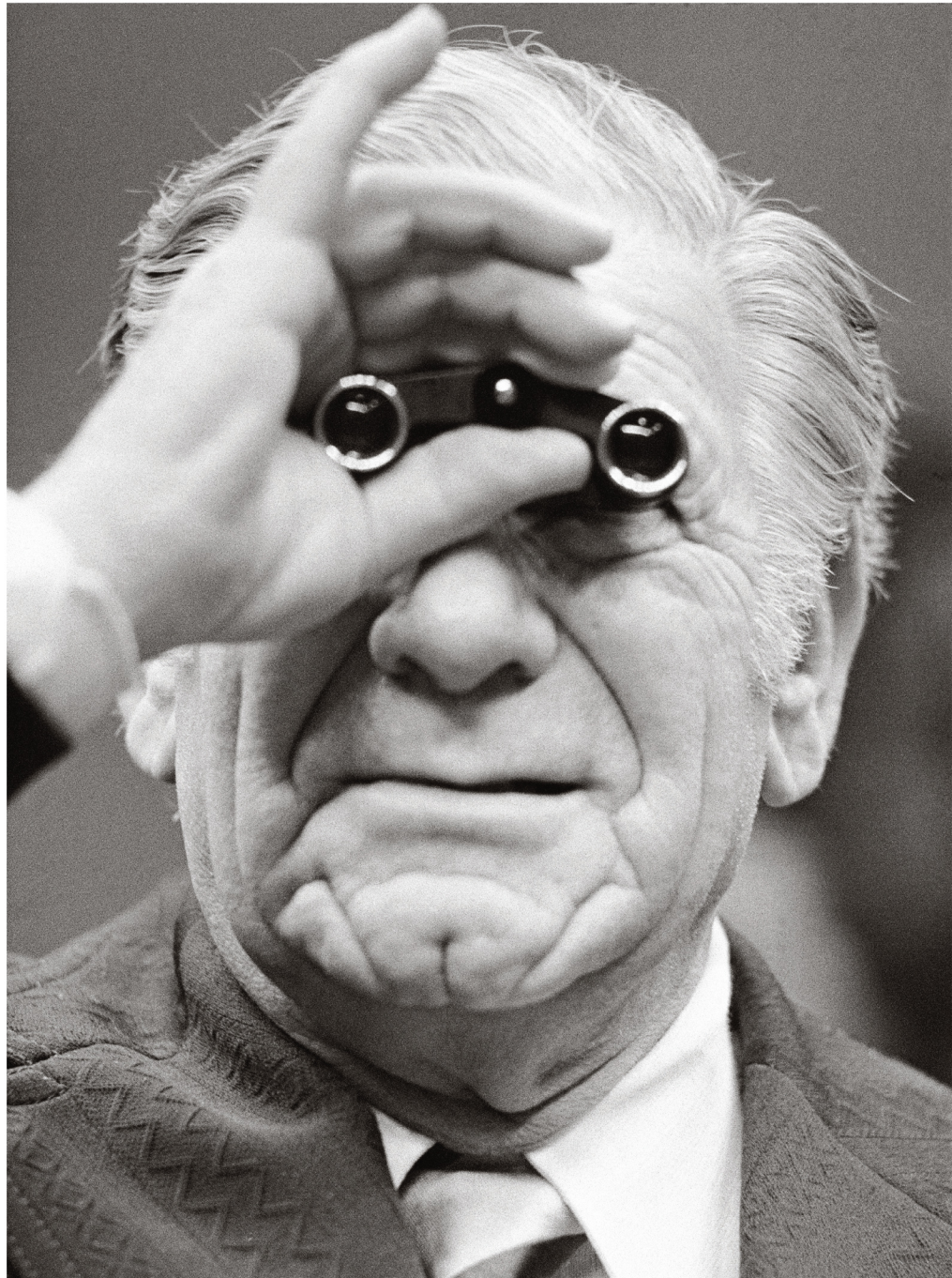
Waders, New Zealand, 1978 / Smoked Fish, Sweden, 1982



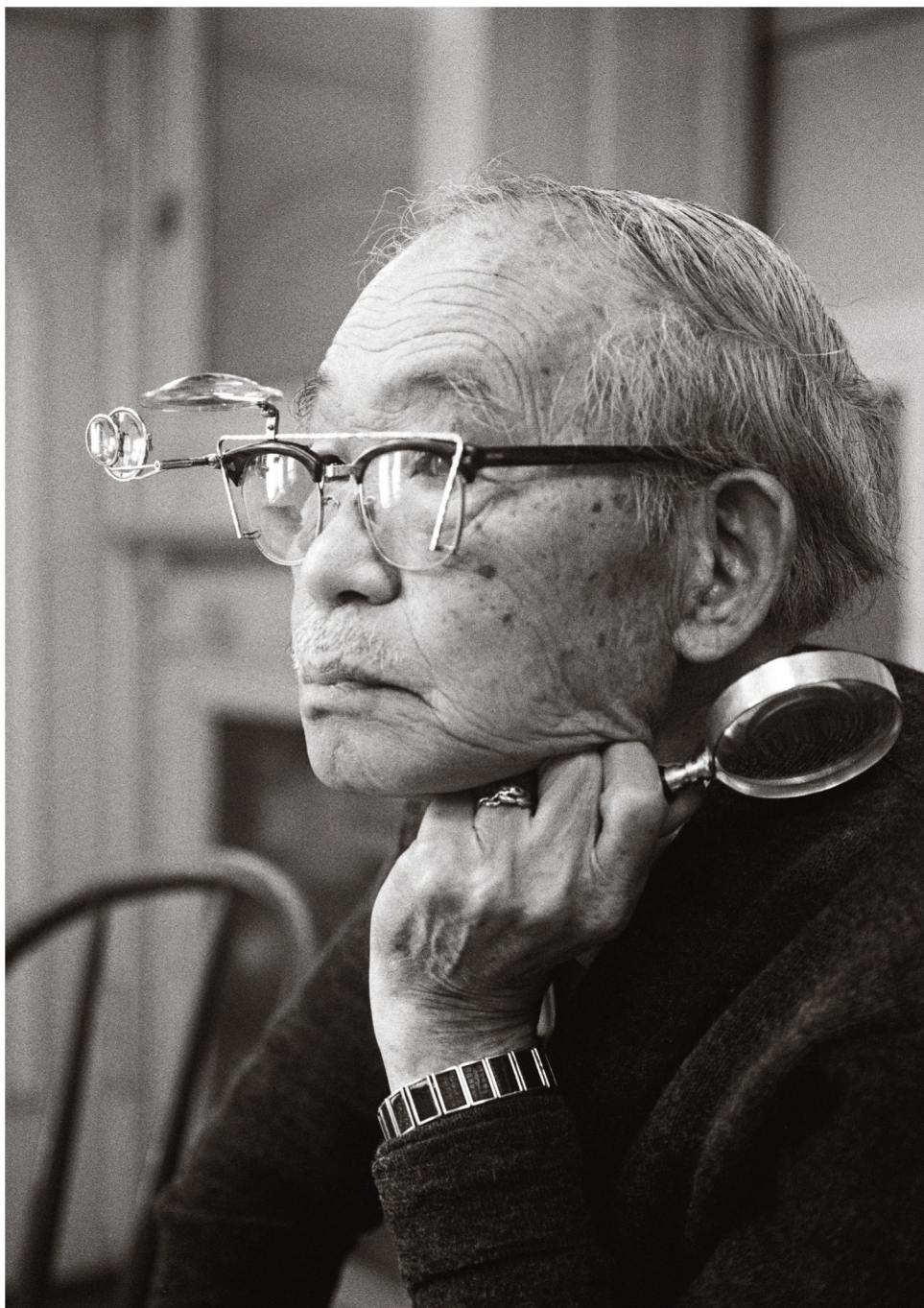
Bowler, Japan, 1978 / Pitching Horseshoes, Iowa, 1978

*Geographic*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He developed an affinity for the photography of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gordon Parks, Ken Heyman, and Walker Evans among others. And like these kindred spirits, Chester had no ambitions of staying cooped up inside a studio: he was solely interested in photojournalistic street photography.

In 1972, after a stint as Director of Photography for the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers in New York City, Chester spent the rest of his career as a freelancer for wire services, trade publications, PR agencies, and countless other outlets. He has often put words to his pictures as well, penning travel stories for *The Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and other publications. He parlayed a 1978 cross-country trip into a gig photographing *Dateline America*, a book of essays by the late CBS newscaster Charles Kuralt. In the ensuing years, he continued to photograph and document his travels, culminating in books and other projects like the “Shanghai: In Black and White” exhibition. After settling in Woods Hole in 2002, Chester began teaching courses related to photography



Man with Opera Glasses, New York, 1974



Portrait of Go Player, California, 1975

at Lesley University and Cape Cod Community College among other places. He is teaching a course at Falmouth Academy this summer.

With occasional exceptions, the tools of Chester's trade are simple: a Nikon F camera, a Canon S90 pocket digital camera, a 20-millimeter lens, and loads of black-and-white film. His expert command of composition is a compelling contrast to the lighthearted subject matter he typically conveys in his work. His reasoning is simple: "Why not take pictures of things that make you smile?" he asks.

That outlook spawned *No in America*, Chester's 1986 compendium of prohibitive signs, like one posted outside an Idaho cemetery that reads "No Plastic Flowers During Mowing Season." He traveled for six years shooting other offbeat signs for the book—signs that conveyed humor, seriousness, philosophy, and artistry. "They're kind of like yardsticks for human behavior," he says. (He's still photographing them today, as evidenced by the "No Drugs or Nuclear Weapons Allowed Inside" sign from the Hard Rock Café in Dublin that graces his online portfolio.)



Post No Bills, New York, 1973 / Couple Sitting by Posters, New York, 1982

*Twosomes* is Chester's first book in 25 years. The concept was an outgrowth of "Twosomes and Then Some," a series of low-key shows Chester held in venues in Denver and San Francisco, where he lived before moving to the Cape. He noticed a pattern: Even though they might have been captured independently of another with several decades between them, certain photographs seemed to have a natural counterpart elsewhere in his portfolio. Some of the connections were easy to draw, like the coupling of a man talking on a pay phone, his head buried under a hood, juxtaposed against a pig burrowing his head into a pail. Some are more ethereal. Ultimately, all of the 104 pairings in the book are inseparable.

Chester's work caught the attention of Michael Giaquinto, exhibitions curator for Cape Cod Museum of Art. "I think he see things with control and firmness," says Giaquinto. "He captures the instant, and then he moves on."

Giaquinto selected 24 pairings for the museum's *Twosomes* exhibit. Each image pairing is presented as a diptych of two photos secured in a single frame: Viewers see Al Sharpton's visage broadcast on a giant screen from the 2004 Democratic National Convention alongside a street performer in New York's Battery Park framing his head with the façade of a television. The images are usually quirky, but they can also be poignant, touching, or thought-provoking depending on the eye of the beholder, Chester says.

One of the photographs in the exhibit depicts a man with hard lines chiseled into his elderly face, holding a set of too-small binoculars to his eyes. He's almost indistinguishable except, perhaps, to those who know him

**Twosomes exhibits**

June 17 5:30-7:30 p.m.  
 .....  
**Addison Art Gallery**  
 43 Route 28, Orleans  
 Book Signing/Meet the  
 Photographer  
[www.addisonart.com](http://www.addisonart.com)

June 18 - July 10  
 .....  
**Cape Cod Museum of Art**  
 60 Hope Lane, Dennis  
 Artist Reception:  
 June 23, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
 Book Signing and Talk:  
 July 3, 2 p.m.  
[www.ccmoa.org](http://www.ccmoa.org)

“I THINK HE SEE THINGS WITH CONTROL AND FIRMNESS,  
HE CAPTURES THE INSTANT, AND THEN HE MOVES ON.”

MICHAEL GIAQUINTO, EXHIBITIONS CURATOR,  
CAPE COD MUSEUM OF ART



Dogs in the Window, California, 1983



Boulangerie, Switzerland, 1981





Man on Telephone, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1975 / Pig in the Pail, New York, 1970



Model A, Idaho, 1974 / Church and Car, Colorado, 1974



already. (In *Twosomes*, the image is presented alongside a photo of a man wearing several sets of eyeglasses, playing the ancient Asian board game *Go*.)

Chester noticed the man while shooting a Frank Sinatra concert on Long Island in 1974 for a wire service. “Had I not turned around to see this guy,” Chester says, “I would have missed him.” He licensed the image to a postcard publisher many years later. Some of the man’s children happened upon the postcard, and sought out a print from Chester to remember their father after his passing.

It was a scene captured in an instant that resonated for years after, and it was a scene that reflected one of Chester’s cardinal philosophies of photography. “You take a photograph not because you know where to put it,” he says. “You take it because it’s that moment.” Sometimes, those moments come in pairs. **h**

*Twosomes is an 11-by-13 hardcover book, totaling 218 pages with 202 plates. The book retails for \$75. For more information, contact The Un-Gyve Limited Group at 617-350-7884, [www.un-gyve.com](http://www.un-gyve.com), or log on to [www.markchesterphotography.com](http://www.markchesterphotography.com).*

*Jeff Harder is the managing editor of Cape Cod Life Publications.*