

Press contacts: Jessica Kloville
Phone: 310.264.8440

Mike Disfarmer

12 January – 01 March, 2008

Plucked from obscurity by a dedicated team of researchers, the humble studio portraits of Mike Disfarmer, an eccentric small town photographer from Heber Springs, Arkansas, stand as inadvertent elegies for working Americans from the Depression Era through the turbulence of World War II. At a time of great economic and personal struggles, Disfarmer captured with great eloquence and honesty, the reality of the American condition, and its effect on its small town citizens from a rural farming community. RoseGallery is pleased to present a collection of rare vintage prints originally culled by a reclamation team from family photo albums throughout Cleburne County; a selection of photographs that clearly exceed the norms typical of the commercial photographic enterprise of Disfarmer's era, and stand confidently in the ranks of trained modernist masters August Sander, Brassai, Walker Evans and Irving Penn.

Previously known exclusively from a cache of glass-plate negatives that were salvaged from the artist's studio following his death, the portraits of Mike Disfarmer are now known in their original form; as carefully rendered and wonderfully intimate 4 x 5 inch contact prints. Each photograph bears an intrinsic value that only the sitters themselves might fully grasp; coy smiles, loving embraces, and quizzical glances shared for an instant with the town photographer, and treasured privately as objects of great integrity and remembrance. While contemporary viewers must endure the great disadvantage of time past, these personal records have remarkably maintained their ability to make tangible something that is undeniably difficult to transmit - the often unspeakable bonds between people. Even in those pictures where Mike Disfarmer captured a solitary subject, an exacting voice winds its way from the sitter to those for whom they are ultimately sitting. They are filled with stories of friendships, and heartbreak, dignity, fear, hardship, harmony, devotion, and promise.

Now known as one of America's great portrait photographers, Mike Disfarmer was born in 1884 and grew up in various rural communities of the American Midwest, before settling in Heber Springs, Arkansas sometime shortly after 1910. The son of a German-born Union soldier, he remained a bachelor his entire life, and gained an outsider status in the community while remaining deeply enmeshed in the local sociology thanks to his role as the town photographer. Much prominence has been given to the self-conscious tale of the origin of the artist's surname, "Disfarmer." Born Mike Meyer, the artist legally changed his name to Mike Disfarmer in 1939 in order to disassociate himself from the farming community in which he worked, and ultimately from those who raised him. He purportedly claimed that as a baby, a tornado had carried him across Indiana's farmlands and dropped into the Meyer's yard. In spite of the attention given to these eccentric meanderings of a photographer's mind, the importance of Mike Disfarmer's legacy is firmly planted in his unparalleled prints. Exceptional examples of his work have

been reproduced in *Disfarmer, 1939-1946 Heber Springs Portraits, from the Collections of Peter Miller and Julia Scully*, Twin Palms Publishers, 2000; *Mike Disfarmer*, Steidl/Stephen Kasher Gallery, 2005; and *Disfarmer: The Vintage Prints*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, NY / PowerHouse Books, NY, 2005.

Mike Disfarmer, new works on paper, will be on view from 12 January, through 1 March, 2007. The gallery is located in the Bergamot Station Arts Center, 2525 Michigan Avenue, Gallery G-5, Santa Monica, CA 90404. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 6 PM. For more information, contact Jessica Kloville at (310) 264-8440. info@rosegallery.net