

## **A CORNER OF SPACE AND TIME Lee Nye's Eddie's Club Portraits**

is a Finalist in the 2021 High Plains Book Awards Art & Photography category.

Jean Belangie author, researcher; Benjamin Feencz, creative director; Aaron Teasdale, editor, author, showcase Lee Nye's extraordinary portraits and tell his story.

There is a bar in Missoula, Montana, more of a "joint" where in the 60's and early 70's, Lee Nye, photographer, artist, and bartender captured images of those now referred to as the Greatest Generation. These portraits reflect hard luck people who remembered the Great Depression. Some served in two world wars. They believed they had outlived their usefulness so found comfort with their own kind at Eddie's Club.

Nye had success as a commercial photographer. He bounced around between California, Louisiana and New Orleans studying photography, tending bar, finally ending up in Missoula where he attended the University of Montana and bartended at Eddies Club.

He would take Eddies' Club regulars to the alley behind the bar, drape a black cloth against the wall and get the shot. The guys trusted him, after all, Nye listened to their stories, lent them money and he was their bartender. He gave them an identity.

What struck me about the book is not only the remarkable photographs telling their story on every wizened face - no guile - but how Nye kept a running tab on changing times. Following the railroad worker old-timers, the bar was frequented by "long hair beatniks," university writers including James Welch, Richard Hugo and artists Waddell and Autio. The old-timers welcomed a new audience who would buy the beer.

The book is stunning in its simplicity. When I first opened it, I wanted narrative accompanying each photograph. But that would ruin the purity of the shots and each story is told at the back of the book. There is also an interview with Lee Nye from 1993. The Missoula Art Museum has a selection of the original photographs and when contacted replied, "This book codifies the career of photographer Lee Nye and elevates him to national importance, placing him in the broader context of great fine art photography. The recognition Nye deserves is long overdue, but this book helps correct this oversight and greatly aids our understanding and appreciation of this chapter in Missoula history." —Brandon Reintjes, senior curator at the Missoula Art Museum.

Shari Nault, chair, High Plains Book Awards, author of the novel "Buffalo Tango"