

# Photos From 'Seasons of Life'

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

CLINTON

THE picture accompanying this review did not win a prize in the photography competition at the Hunterdon Art Center here. Nevertheless, it is itself a prize, with the Mondrianesque simplicity of its design and details like the heads of the sculptures in the windows and that of the passer-by all facing in the same direction.

Still, the photographer, whose name is Rama, does not deserve all the credit. The subject, an 1888 brownstone erected by John Duncan at the corner of Madison Avenue and 84th Street in Manhattan, is a beauty, eminently suited to the out-of-the-way 19th- and early 20th-century European art shown by the gallery within.

A scenic attraction from the early 19th century, the art center is a one-time grist mill beside a weir on the Raritan River. It is stone outside and all exposed beams and creaking floorboards inside. The show consists of 170 mainly black and white prints by American, Canadian and British photographers, selected from 500 entries.

New Jersey's own Brian Lav served as judge and, in an unusual gesture invited contributions from 19 professionals, among them George Tice, Victor Macarol and other members of the state's photographic establishment. Mr. Lav also included three of his own prints and permitted one of them to be used on the poster advertising the exhibition, though he stopped short of awarding himself a prize. That some judges are nowadays inserting what amount to "commercials" for themselves must presumably be taken as a sign of the times.

In the catalogue Mr. Lav says his primary purpose in mounting the show was to "promote photographic

awareness." Given the narcotic power wielded by the medium, particularly in the form of television, this would not be hard to do. Yet there still remain the questions of what to photograph and why, and too many of these photographers answer them in a pedestrian way.

The show's title, "Seasons of Life," is elastic enough to accommodate everything from spring blossoms to the weathered boots of Carla Escocé, but the emphasis is on youth: of the 70 pictures reproduced in the catalogue, 22 involve babies, children or adolescents and three feature pregnant women. In the show as a whole, the proportion is even greater.

One picture in this category that stopped the reviewer's eye is Kathy O'Connor's infant being spoon-fed in a highchair. Amy is her name, and what a strange little item she is, leaning with both "paws" on the tray and her eyes fixed not on the food or the hands providing it but on some point in the mid-distance. One wonders not only how this self-contained child will turn out but also how the photographer managed to make the entire image, look like a piece of sculpture. One also ponders the future of Christopher Bierne's small boys who are allowed to pelt a tethered dog with stones instead of being sentenced, to bread and water for their cruelty.

Outstanding in the relatively small animal department is the beautiful study of a dazzling black and white bull standing in a pasture under a sullen sky. Even with a lens a mile long, taking such a picture requires a lot of courage. For while the subjects appears to have been polled, he looks as if he could really move on those stubby front legs.

Mr. Macarol's young girl with long hair has a nun-like propriety about her but



A street scene in Manhattan by Rama from "Seasons of Life" exhibition in Clinton.

appears capable of holding her own with the minxes portrayed by the now hot photographer Sally Mann. Keith Carter's young teenager with artfully combed blond hair and a tattoo on his chest who poses in an aviary with a snake would also command their respect.

Ruth Orkin, who, 40 years ago, said all there was to say about the art of ogling in a grotesque picture of a pretty girl passing a crowd of Italian men, is disappointingly represented by a view of a freckle-faced boy on the ground with a Lassie look-alike. This image is undated, as is Eddie Adams's study of Louis Armstrong in evening shirtsleeves, evidently warming up for a performance.

Mr. Tice is represented by unexceptional early photographs of figures, like that of an old woman and a

youth on the porch of a cabin in Tennessee. Michael Madden, however, aspires to Mr. Tice's later style with a nocturnal scene of a snowy road running seemingly below railroad tracks. Mr. Lav is at his best in the long view of an Ellis Island passage where the walls are windows and the paint is peeling.

There are plenty of landscapes, but none more striking or ambiguous than Richard Coda's view of two trees close together in snow. The question here is whether they stand in front of a stained wall with two fine lines of molding at the top or beside a foggy landscape with telephone wires.

The show runs through next Sunday. The center is at 7 Lower Center Street. Hours are 12:30 to 4:30 P.M. Thursday and Friday and 1 to 5 P.M. Saturday and Sunday.