

One Man's View Of Cut-Up Vegetables

By SUZANNE SLESIN

His mother was a model, his father a well-known still-life photographer, and by the time Michael Somoroff was 19, he had already opened his own studio.

One day last year, he went to Balducci's, the fruit and produce shop in Greenwich Village, and bought \$500 worth of vegetables.

"It was pretty crazy," he said. His friends and business associates agreed. Undaunted, Mr. Somoroff cancelled bookings for a month, laid out three huge tables in his studio, sharpened a lot of cutting knives and built a simple shooting set.

The following Monday, he said, "I came into work and started cutting up raw onions, peas, cabbage, scallions, radishes, turnips, garlic, endive, lettuce, spinach, all sorts of beans, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, cucumbers, beets, and herbs like thyme, sage and parsley." He cut them up in simple shapes and laid them down in compositions.

"I always thought they were beautiful," said the 23-year-old Mr. Somoroff of his organic subjects. Where did his interest come from? Even he is bemused. "I was a short order cook during the summer," he said. "I guess the vegetables stayed with me."

So began a work pattern that was to continue for more than 10 months. "I almost became obsessive about it,"

Mr. Somoroff said. In composing the photographs, he says, "Mondrian and Kandinsky were big influences," and he would periodically go to the Museum of Modern Art to look at works by Picasso and Klee. At the end, Mr. Somoroff was composing shots and shooting straight down without even looking into the camera. He worked quickly, using 8-by-10-inch film.

As the project continued, Mr. Somoroff tried to "integrate movement into the still lifes."

"I felt that if I could create the illusion of a third dimension," he said, "that the vegetables would no longer be seen as vegetables." During one session, he said, a bottle of red ink was spilled on the set. "I couldn't wipe it up," he recalled, "but the ink looked so great that I started using the technique for other backgrounds."

"I believe that it's important for a photographer to look at new ways of doing things and I guess that what I was trying to do was to get people to see what they were looking at," Mr. Somoroff said.

Twenty color photographs in the Vegetable Series will be shown at the International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Avenue, from Tuesday to Nov. 15. A portfolio in a limited edition of 200 copies of eight 8-by-10-inch prints is \$850. The photographs will also be sold separately, in five sizes, from 8-by-10-inch to 16-by-20-inch prints, which will cost from \$150 to \$325 apiece.



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