

Scenes of Sarasota and the Ringling Bros. Circus in the 1940s

Photographer Elizabeth Siegfried discovered 16mm film footage shot by her grandmother from 1927 to 1945. These scenes are now preserved forever in large-scale photographic prints. An exhibition, "CIRCUS!" will showcase these prints in November as part of Phillippi Estate Park's 100th-anniversary celebration.



Photographer Elizabeth Siegfried is known for her self-portraits, meditative landscapes and narrative sequences. Her latest photographic series captures the intersection of her family history and the legacy of the circus.

In 2006, Siegfried discovered a wooden crate that turned out to be a box of wonder. It was filled with forgotten 16mm film footage that her grandmother, Elizabeth Chapin White of Rochester, New York, had shot between 1927 and 1945. The films' appeal transcended nostalgia. Beyond offering touching glimpses of family history, the images testified to the power of her grandmother's singular artistic vision. As an amateur photographer and filmmaker, Elizabeth White had an eye for action and an instinct for the significant moment. Siegfried immediately recognized her grandmother's achievement. As they say, it takes one to know one.

The films inspired Siegfried to celebrate her grandmother's vision with a cross-generational artistic collaboration. Working from still frames in the films, Siegfried reinterpreted candid moments and enlarged them into photographic prints. These images live on in her Cards Without Words collection—a limited series of high-quality blank greeting cards.

According to Siegfried, her grandmother's artistry had informed her own work—even before she discovered the lost film footage.

"Historically, my family has been matriar-

chal," she says. "From what I've learned from personal experience, watching these 16mm films and listening to family lore, my maternal great-grandmother, grandmother and mother shared a solid sense of identity and positive strong will. I've used historical images and film footage of these women in my own work to create narratives about family, the passage of time, a sense of place, and memory. I'm constantly amazed at how similar my own photographic sensibility is to that of my grandmother."

Siegfried, who recently moved to Sarasota with her husband, the composer James Grant, was also surprised to discover the Sarasota connection behind many of these images. Her grandparents had vacationed here from the 1920s through the 1940s. Her grandmother's camera had captured the moments.

Siegfried's grandmother had taken films on the family's trips to the Ringling Brothers Circus in Rochester, NY, in 1940 and 1942. These remarkable images show scenes of equestrians balancing on backs of sturdy horses, zebras munching hay, elephants strolling the grounds with their trainers, and circus clowns cavorting for onlookers.

"I had an overwhelming feeling of wonder and excitement when I found the films," she says. "My husband and I had already fallen in love with Sarasota and had planned to move here before I discovered the film treasure. The 'coincidence' seemed entirely meant to be."

Area residents can view these extraordinary images in "CIRCUS," an exhibition presented by Phillippi Estate Park to commemorate its 100th anniversary. This exhibition, scheduled for this November, features black and white and color photographs of what early visitors to Sarasota would've seen

on the back lot of the winter home of John Ringling's circus.

"These prints provide a time capsule of an era when Americans were fascinated by exotic animals, the antics of clowns and high flying artists of the circus," says Priscilla Brown, park manager of Phillippi Estate Park. "The result is a new look at the humor and glamour of Sarasota's history with the circus. It's a natural tie-in with the Edson Keith Mansion, where the exhibition will be housed."

Brown adds that Friends of Sarasota County Parks will benefit from a portion of the sale of limited-edition images, prints, posters and cards from the anniversary exhibition. Funds will be earmarked for the renovation of the Keith Farmhouse, the original building erected on the estate.

"CIRCUS" will be at the Edson Keith Mansion in Phillippi Estate Park, 5500 South Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. The exhibition will be open to the public on **Thursday, November 10, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Friday, November 11, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Saturday, November 12, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sunday, November 13, noon-4 p.m.**

About Elizabeth Siegfried

Elizabeth Siegfried is known for her portraiture, meditative landscapes and strong narratives. Her work has been exhibited in the US, Canada, Europe, Japan and Mexico. She taught platinum printing for 12 years at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography in Toronto and has received numerous awards in the U.S. and Canada.

Siegfried's photographs have been reproduced and discussed in such publications as *Black & White Magazine*, *Shadow and Light Magazine*, *SHOTS* magazine, *Schwarzweiss*, *La Fotografia Actual*, *Camera Arts*, *Photo Life Magazine* and *ARTNews*. In 2008, she was one of the featured photographers on "Behind The Camera," a television production aired on Bravo! and Discovery HD. Her first book, *LifeLines*, was published in 2000 and includes a literary introduction by the National Book Award Winner Andrea Barrett.

Siegfried's work is represented in many private and public collections, including the Aaron Copland House in Cortlandt Manor, New York; Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts in Japan; Alliance Française de Toronto Collection, Toronto,



"Stilt Man" from Cards Without Words – Elizabeth Siegfried



"Red Head" from Cards Without Words – Elizabeth Siegfried



"Polka Dot Clown" from Cards Without Words –Elizabeth Siegfried

Ontario; the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa; and the Peter E. Palmquest Women in Photography International Archive held at the Beinicke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Siegfried also has her work in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art's Feminist Art Base at the Brooklyn Museum in Brooklyn, New York.

In recent years, Siegfried has expanded her mode of presentation of platinum prints to include archival digital prints and wet plate collodion. For more information about Elizabeth Siegfried and Cards Without Words, visit www.elizabethsiegfried.com, www.cardswithoutwords.com and www.terminaproject.com.