

DLK COLLECTION

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From one collector to another: unvarnished and eclectic thoughts, comments and ideas on recent museum exhibitions, gallery shows, photography auctions, photo books, art fairs and other items of sometime interest to photography collectors large and small.

Josef Breitenbach @ Gitterman

JTF (just the facts): 33 vintage images of various sizes, virtually all from the 1930s and 1940s, displayed throughout the two floors of the gallery. (See installation shot at right.) The exhibition is concurrent with the publication of a new book, *Josef Breitenbach: Manifesto*, by Nazraeli Press.



Comments/Context: Tom Gitterman is another contestant in the long distance race to build the next generation of dominant photography galleries. Carving out a durable niche in the market isn't easy, especially with a new gallery, but Tom has been at it now for a handful of years and things seem to be going well. Beyond being a genuinely nice guy, one of the things that separates Tom from many others is his eye for unusual, high quality work, and his willingness to try and match that work with collectors who have the same affinities. So instead of sticking to the well traveled roads of iconic photography, the key for him is to build up a large enough stable of collectors to absorb all the terrific, unexpected images he can dig up.

This show of the avant-garde work of Josef Breitenbach is a perfect example of the kind of risk taking that Tom has embarked on that would never even be considered by a larger gallery. Breitenbach is not exactly a household name, and yet the work is innovative, unusual, and in some cases, quite beautiful. The images in this show explore a wide variety of non-standard photographic techniques: toning, bleaching, solarization, photograms, multiple negatives and montage; this is not even close to straight photography. And while a few of them could be called surreal, they are warmer, more human, than most surrealist images, even when they are at their most speculative. At a time when there wasn't much color in photography, Breitenbach was experimenting with bleaching and toning to get acidic yellows, oranges, reds and browns, which he used to highlight and accent his otherwise traditional gelatin silver images. The image of Annabella, *Portrait in Black and Red*, c1935 (see image at right) shows how these overlays of color were used to build up work that was new, challenging, and lovely at the same time. This exhibit forces us to rethink where Breitenbach might belong, in the context of the great works by Man Ray, Brassai, and others of the same time period.



Collector's POV: Breitenbach's work doesn't really fit that well into the vision of our particular collection. There is one print of the Eiffel Tower from 1928 (see image at right) that would fit into our city genre, working well with existing Eiffel Tower images by Krull and Bing. In general, the work is priced between \$6500 and \$18000, and several images were already sold when I saw the show. While not every image is a winner, the show is clearly worth seeing to catch a glimpse of those handful of works where Breitenbach got his unique mix of colors and imagery just right.

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