

John Goodman Makes Good

by Shawn Hill

Photographer John Goodman has a roving eye. If Muhammad Ali (just one of his famous subjects) floats like a butterfly, Goodman floats more like a hummingbird. He hovers around a subject, alighting only when something catches his attention. In the

seventies, the subject of interest was the mean streets of Boston's Combat Zone, and the changing mores of a new generation. More recently, as a

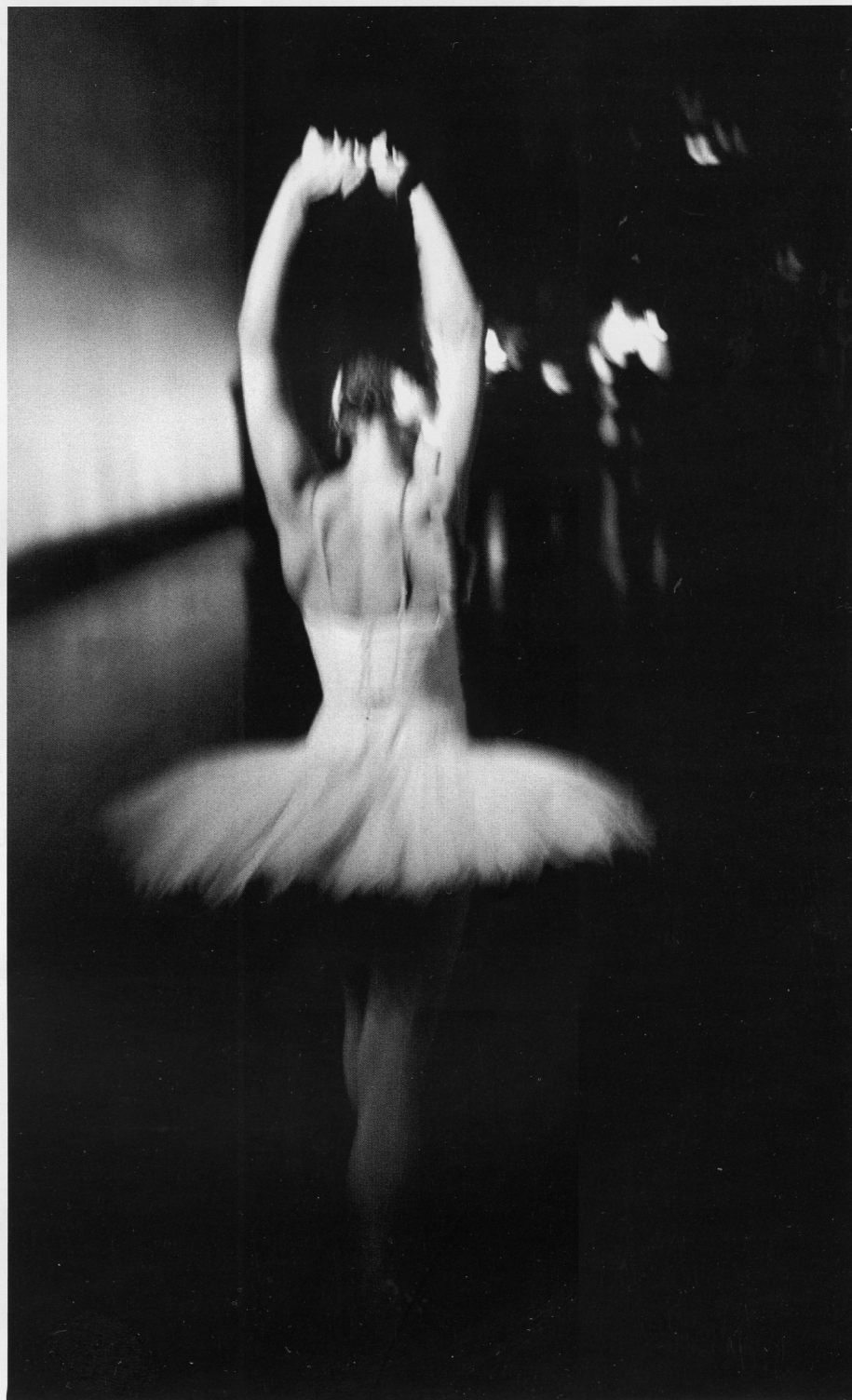
John Goodman Photographs: A Retrospective 1972 - Present
The Art Institute of Boston
700 Beacon Street, Boston
September 9 to October 31

mature artist, Goodman has explored the athletic worlds of boxing and ballet.

Goodman believes each photo is actually already out there, waiting to be taken and then transmitted to others. The earliest shots in this retrospective exhibition have a documentary zeal, finding the artist roaming city streets, capturing the cultural values of changing times. His Combat Zone shots show prostitutes before storefronts, emphasizing their wares to men in business suits and working class laborers. Hot pants and platform shoes define the time, but physical types, expressions and stances are timeless, universal.

Also striking are some portraits of young couples. Two nudists pose on their stoop on Comm. Ave., celebrating their bodies in a very brazen, un-Bostonian way. In another image two young couples make out on a causeway bridge. Smoking, surrounded by beer cans, kissing, longhaired and sweaty, they exemplify the hedonistic passions of youth.

Goodman has done fashion and celebrity photography as well. One memorable sequence is the result of collaboration between graceful model, Issaye Miyake clothing, and Goodman's own eye for composition. All three factors combine to create elegance. Her



"Flexing Swan" by John Goodman, one of the works on view at the Art Institute of Boston.



John Goodman's "Three Women."

skin is white like porcelain, creating limpid pools of light between masses of dark fabric. It drapes around her body in deep blue folds and pleats, a contrasting frame for her beauty.

Goodman's fugitive vision in his later works begins to dissolve the figure altogether. His images of boxers training at a gym are distinctive in their use of light, highlighting certain body features that seem to emerge from masses of shadow. In one image, a spectral figure shimmers at the foot of the stairs, heading in to train from the bright-lit world outside. In another, a young man arches his neck, his body draping lankily from his shoulders, only his nose and jaw capturing a ray of light in the darkness.

Goodman treats these young men (and one woman) as motive forces, agents on their own quests to busy to stop and pose.

Other shots focus on strong backs, wide shoul-

ders, heads or hands either spotlighted or blurred in motion. The figures come to resemble ancient sculpture, physically perfected types rather than portraits of individual identity.

Goodman extends this vision of coiled power and balanced weight (their moments of stillness only feints before springing into action), to his depictions of ballerinas offstage. Like the boxers, but almost in mirror image, these dancers are revealed as athletes, dedicated physical warriors who have molded their bodies to meet the demands of their craft. In one image, a central ballerina looks on from offstage. Her beautifully made-up face does not belie her expression of steely determination. In this instance her frilly, feathered tutu is not mere decoration, but armor. She's studying the arena where she must shortly prove herself, probably over and over again.

am