



## BOOK LOOK

### Photo book offers beautiful Shelter

review by Karl P. Kaplan

#### Shelter from the Storm: The Photographs of Kirk Gittings Kirk Gittings

(photographs), Gussie Fauntleroy (text), V.B. Price (introduction)

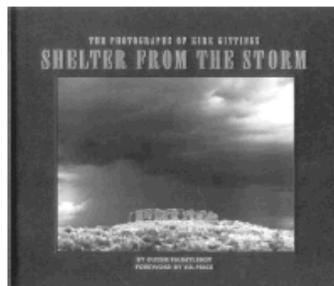
New Mexico Magazine, pp. 88, \$29.95

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Photographers often speak of trying to capture a moment with their pictures. Of course, every click of a shutter records that exact snippet of time and space, but not all photographs are created equal. In trying to appear refined or worldly, some self-appointed critics pooh-poo photography's contributions to the arts because, they argue, anyone can "point and shoot." But looking through Shelter from the Storm: The Photographs of Kirk Gittings is to understand that the eye and mind that direct the camera's lens must be attuned to their subject in order to take a photograph that transcends the snapshot.

In the text introducing a selection of Gittings' photographs of various ruins, abandoned buildings and historic structures, Gussie Fauntleroy writes, "In the 'Mythological Landscape,' as Gittings calls it, the very earth and air seem, paradoxically, both deeply quiet and vibrantly alive with the spirit of people from a long-ago past." It's that tension between the still and the animate, that potential energy, that comes across so clearly in Gittings' photographs. One almost gets the sense that a sudden exhalation would cause the visual image to break free of the confines of the photograph, and the captured moment to be lost.

V.B. Price, with whom Gittings collaborated on the book Chaco Body, ends his introduction to Shelter thusly: "Kirk's photographs show us the world as it is to itself, a continuous flow of moments that we can apprehend if our minds and hearts are open to their meaning and their splendor." Both Price and Fauntleroy mention Gittings' early years spent exploring the landscapes around him and developing an eye for seeing its wonders, both evident and hidden. The photographs in his book allow us to see through his eyes and take in the majesty of nature and ways in which human structures can act as extensions of the organic world. Photographed in black and white, mountainous clouds drift silently over Chaco Canyon rendering the great kiva at Casa Rinconada into a seemingly natural component of the larger landscape.



Gittings' photographs of more modern architectural works reveal that same attention at work, as they breathe with each location's unique sense of place. Whether the subjects are public places, such as Albuquerque's KiMo Theatre, or

private residences, Gittings' photographs are so vivid as to make each image seem familiar, even welcoming. When working with color, Gittings' eye for light allows for even more startling portraits of places and things.

A small but remarkable book, *Shelter from the Storm* offers an opportunity to see the world as a gifted artist has perceived it his whole life. It's the kind of book that one sends to friends and family who have moved away from the Land of Enchantment, so that they may peruse its pages and remind themselves of the wondrous vistas they left behind. *CW*

*A talk and slide show for Shelter from the Storm, with Gittings, Fauntleroy and Price, is at 7pm, Thursday, Sept. 15, at Bookworks, 4022 Rio Grande NW, in Albuquerque, 344-8139.*

*Kirk Gittings: Shelter from the Storm, an exhibit of photos from the book, is currently on display at the Albuquerque Museum, 2000 Mountain NW, in Albuquerque, 242-4600. The exhibit ends Dec. 4.*

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## **Fun, offbeat novel takes shots at cult of celebrity**

review by Glenda Snover

### **Colors Insulting to Nature**

Cintra Wilson

Perennial, pp. 350, \$13.95

Thirteen-year-old Liza Normal is introduced in the first chapter of *Colors Insulting to Nature* while auditioning for a part in a commercial. To the mounting horror of the judges at the audition, Liza is decked out frighteningly like a Lolita-esque lounge singer, complete with ridiculous patter culled from older and far more experienced performers, combined unfortunately with very little talent. It's merely the first of many mortifying moments in Liza's quest for stardom. Author Cintra Wilson's finely-honed talent for skewering the American obsession with celebrity is perfectly showcased in this twisted coming-of-age novel.

How Liza came to be in this situation has everything to do with her home life, which is less than ideal to say the least. Liza's mother, Penelope "Peppy" Normal, is an ex-stripper who met Liza's father, a dentist, when he caught her topless juggling act in a Reno nightclub. We learn via flashback that Peppy divorced Liza's father after discovering his multiple indiscretions with various dental hygienists. She then plunged into a series of ill-fated relationships that only added to the wild instability of the childhood experience shared by Liza and her sensitive, older brother Ned. But everything changed one fateful day when Peppy, Liza and Ned saw *Fame* — the 1980's film that spawned the television series of the same name — at their local theater. For Peppy, the movie was a revelation, her sighting of the mythical "golden stag," and she decided that what would give her life meaning would be to have Liza and the awkward, graceless Ned enrolled at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City. Peppy never stops to consider whether or not Liza and Ned may want the life she has envisioned for them, or whether they even possess the ability or talent necessary to secure a coveted spot at the "Fame" school. No, the only thing that's important is that they pursue her dream.





Eventually, Liza buys into the dream, and it becomes the tragic (and hysterically funny) flaw in her character. As molded by Peppy, Liza's appearance is garish and inappropriate, and her seemingly limitless ability to publicly, if unintentionally, humiliate herself is matched only by her determination to get back up and keep moving again.

But if Liza is the embodiment of the American drive for fame, her brother Ned is her polar opposite. A traumatic event causes him to become an agoraphobic recluse, and he takes to wearing a ski mask 24/7, living in the lighting booth of the dinner theater that is their home. Ned becomes known as an "outsider artist" because he feeds his obsessive/compulsive nature by making what he calls "light boxes," where he painstakingly constructs elaborate collages out of carefully cut fragments of colored sheets of plastic, the kind used for stage lighting. He only speaks to his mother by passing her notes, and never leaves his room, except to go to the bathroom or eat.

Wilson has a gift for language that is rare and delightful, and she has been compared to writers like David Sedaris and David Foster Wallace, but her real strengths are her scathing and extremely amusing commentaries on the American obsession with celebrity. And she does so armed with a vast knowledge of pop culture. While some reviewers have complained about her tendency to use asides to the reader — typically in boldface, separated from the narrative — as a means to explain a plot device or more often just to make a hilariously snarky comment, it's a device that has been utilized by many writers and it works in the confines of Wilson's already offbeat novel. *Colors Insulting to Nature* is one of the freshest, funniest and most original novels to come along in a long time. **CW**

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