



PHOTOGRAPHY
BOOKS
ON AMERICAN
CULTURE

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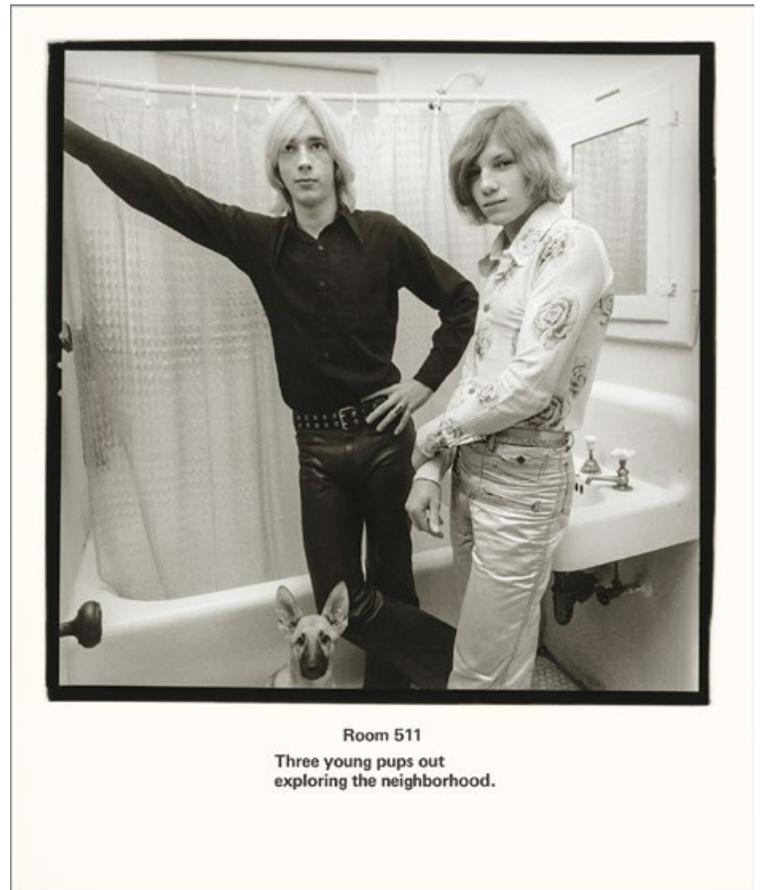
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GUEST REGISTER

by Penny Wolin

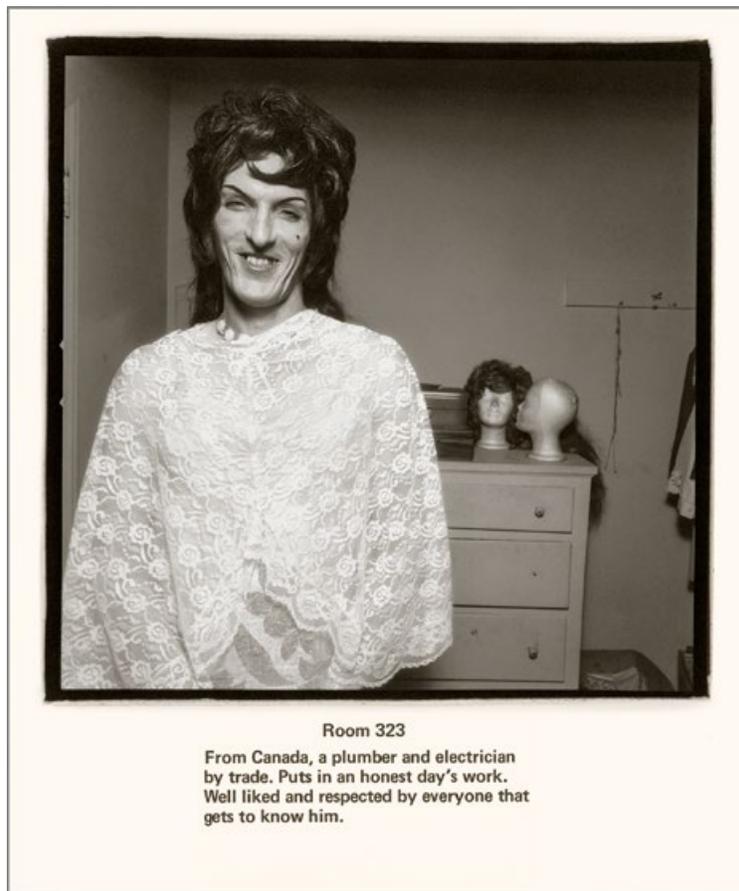
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© Penny Wolin, 2022

"Penny Wolin from Cheyenne, Wyoming, flies into Hollywood on the wings of inspiration and intuition and lands at the St. Francis Hotel. There, in three short weeks as a tenant, Penny creates a body of photographs and text comparable to those of the great documentary photographers of the 20th century, only to be hidden in the photographer's archive for nearly fifty years – until now."

– Norman Mausekopf, Photographer



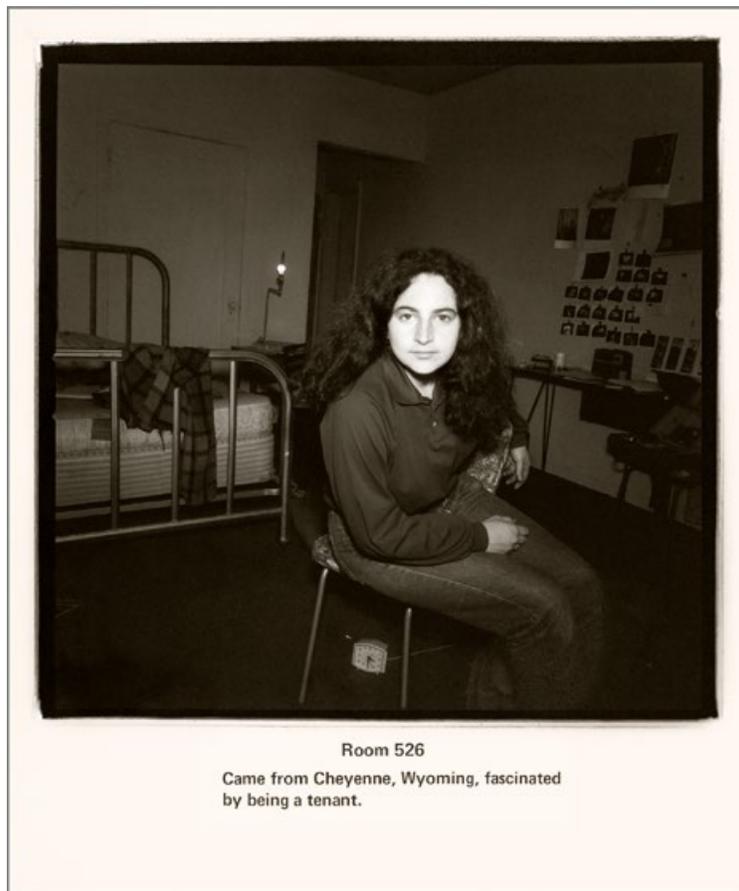
© Penny Wolin, 2022

LOS ANGELES – Crazy Woman Creek Press announces the release of the photographic monograph, ***GUEST REGISTER*** by American portrait photographer **Penny Wolin**.

The book features never-before published photographs and accompanying texts made with Wolin's neighbors, as she lived for three weeks in the pay-by-the-week St. Francis Hotel, located on a declining stretch of Hollywood Boulevard in 1975. The hotel residents can be seen as people who could not fit in elsewhere, or as Wolin, then twenty-one years old from Cheyenne, Wyoming sees them, as people whose dreams are bigger than their rooms.

In the three weeks in which she made these images, Wolin's modus operandi could not have been simpler. Using a medium-format camera and often a single strobe light, her style is transparent, direct but not overbearing, searching but not leering, celebratory yet unsentimental.

GUEST REGISTER unfolds as a tour, not of a building, but of a community with abiding dreams. It is a document of an eccentric demimonde captured with precocious assurance through a lens of fascination and detachment, humor and pathos, reportage and art. It begins with a death on the ground floor and rises to a rippled barbell enthusiast in a penthouse. Along the way, one meets the plumber in Room 323 who prefers by evening to wear lace; the elegant French-born woman in Room 333 whose companion is the former bronco rider in Room 309, and a Taekwondo master in Room 415 whose stance seems to span a quarter of his room.

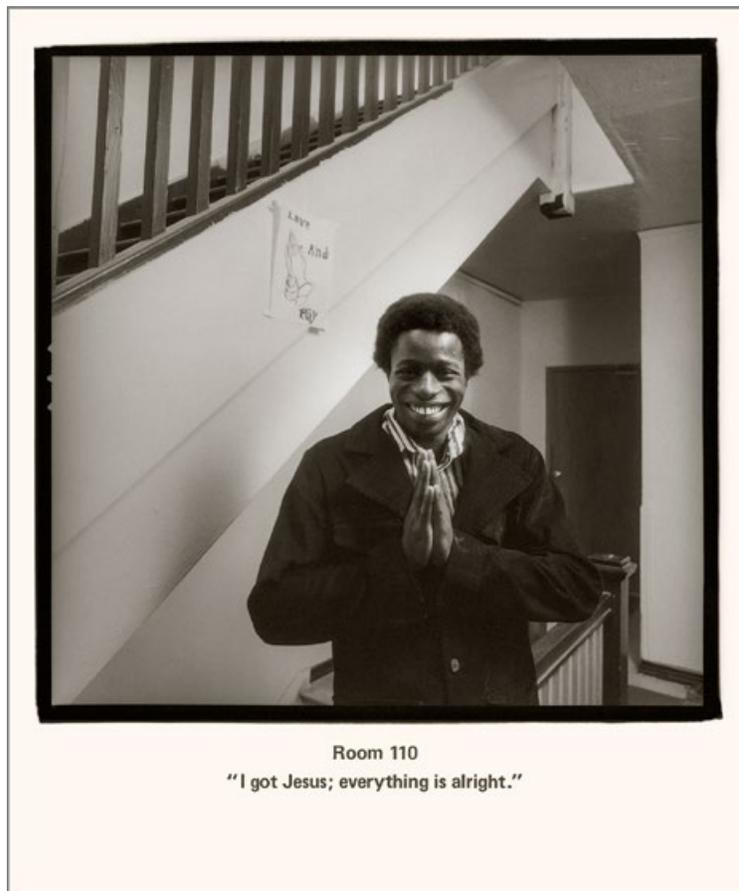


© Penny Wolin, 2022

In Room 526, Wolin's gaze is as direct as that of her camera. She leans forward as if too busy to sit for her own portrait. "I was mindful of the excesses around me but stayed focused on the individuals I encountered. Very few people turned me down. Most were curious, gracious, and willing to share their stories. They welcomed me into their rooms and by extension, into their lives. I questioned, listened, and made portraits, while leaving my judgments at the hotel entrance. Who was I to judge? At twenty-one, I knew enough to know that I didn't know. I saw the poignant traits of their humanity much more than I saw their faults or considered their misdeeds. I believed in success, theirs and mine."

Like Wolin herself, many of her subjects have left their hometowns – perhaps misunderstood there, but here they appear undiminished, their eyes alight, their rooms fully inhabited. *GUEST REGISTER* is not an inventory of transitory souls, but a benediction from them, "a permanent amulet," Wolin says, "to keep the unfeeling at bay, and dreams close at hand."

At the time, the vessel into which Wolin poured her passion was a conventional artist's portfolio with snap rings and acetate sleeves, designed for artworks 14 x 11 inches, the same size as her darkroom prints. In most ways the book is a faithful recreation of her portfolio, but in other ways it is reimagined as a family album. Inspired by the mid-century hotel register, which is covered in black textured fabric, Wolin has bound her bespoke volume in a tactile, pebbled material reminiscent of gold lamé, and trimmed with cowboy-style leather.



© Penny Wolin, 2022

Presented with one black and white photograph to a spread, each resident is identified in sequence by their room number and a short caption. Wolin draws from these faces expressions of such softness and faith that we feel as if we know them. “I came with a camera and left with a book of life lessons. I gave my neighbors their photographs and took with me the memory of their blessings,” says Wolin.

This unique document is bookended with reproductions of pages from the original hotel ledger, an essay by Wolin about her time at the St. Francis Hotel, and images, with Wolin’s commentary, from her professional work garnered in the wake of *GUEST REGISTER*. Taken together, the photographs and their accompanying captions are powerfully redolent of mid-seventies Hollywood: on the inside, hip-huggers, cigarettes, and shag carpet; on the outside, a skin that sheens.

Wolin’s photographs for *GUEST REGISTER* examine the ramifications of one facet of the American dream; self-reinvention in the West. Influenced by the ambiguous, personal, and investigative style that gained purchase in the wake of the 1967 show *New Documents* at The Museum of Modern Art with works by Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand as well as small-camera reportage led by American women practitioners, such as Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange and Mary Ellen Mark, Wolin’s practice combines her instinct for definitive one-frame statements with a roaming, behind-closed-doors feeling of intimacy.

GUEST REGISTER is both a culmination and a relaunch for an endeavor that, at its heart, is about the possibility of a second chance for all of us. The residents of a faded hotel, on the frontier edge of a continent, are not so far from us, even as they pass through time. Maybe they are members of our own family, brothers and sisters, one and all.



© Penny Wolin, 2022

BIOGRAPHY

PENNY WOLIN (b. June 5, 1953) is an American photographer, visual anthropologist and the author of three monographs of photographic portraiture: *GUEST REGISTER* (2022), *Descendants of Light: American Photographers of Jewish Ancestry* (2015), and *The Jews of Wyoming: Fringe of the Diaspora* (2000). Her photographs are in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The New York Public Library, Harvard University, and the Layton Art Collection at the Milwaukee Art Museum, among other institutions. She has exhibited solo at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Her editorial portraits—of actors, activists, thinkers, and musicians—have appeared in *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Esquire*, *Forbes*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times* and *Vanity Fair*. She was a contract photographer for *LIFE* magazine, working with journalist Anne Fadiman for *The American Dreamer* monthly feature. Wolin was awarded a directing fellowship to the American Film Institute, Center for Advanced Film & Television Studies, and was the Program Director for the Sonoma Valley Film Festival.

Based in Los Angeles, Wolin is an adjunct professor at ArtCenter College of Design, teaching visual literacy through the analysis and practice of photography and film. She is also the artist-in-residence at Meaningful Works Consultancy, Los Angeles. pennywolin.com

GUEST REGISTER

by Penny Wolin

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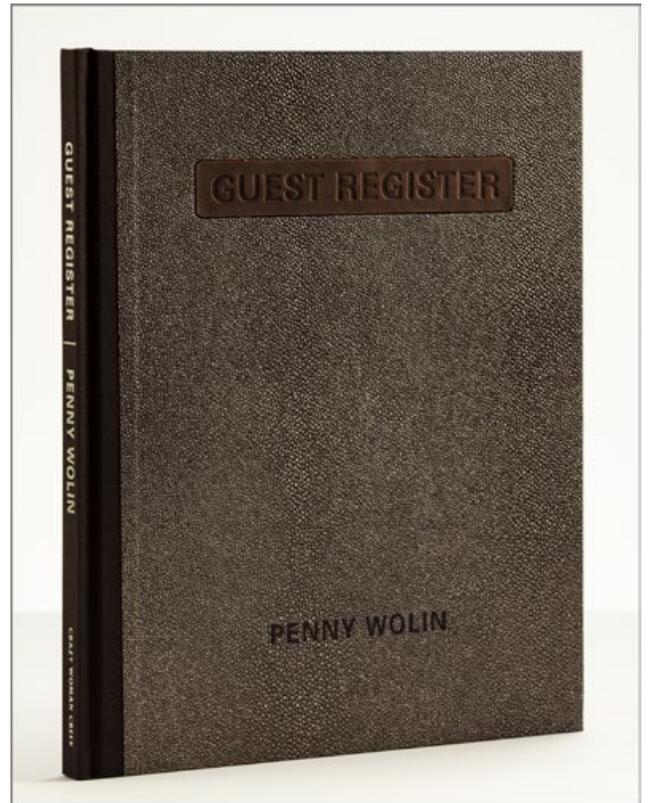
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Guest Register is
the whole Hollywood.
It's the myth. It's the dream.
And it's the reality inside.

—Penny Wolin

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