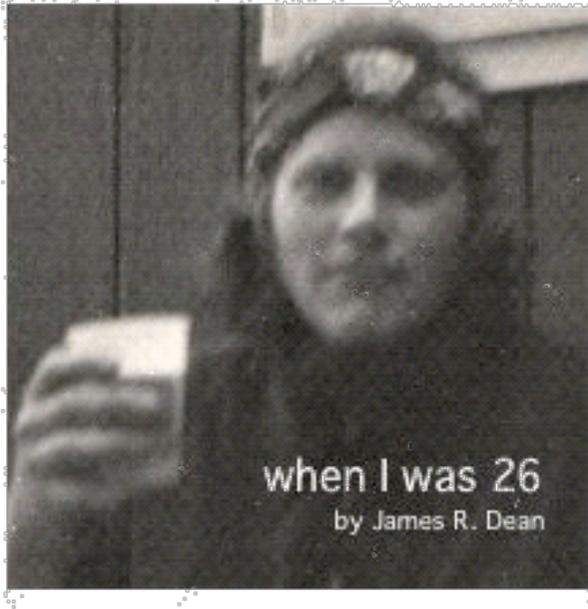


when I was 26

by James R. Dean

Three hundred sixty-six self-portraits
and world events from 1974 and 1975



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Artist's Statement

I needed a subject, so I picked myself—an apprentice architect interested in photography and living in Fargo, North Dakota.

I decided to take a picture every day for a year, an exercise that proved far more difficult—and at times tedious—than I ever could have imagined. I started on April 3, 1974, and stopped on April 3, 1975, my 26th and 27th birthdays.

At the time, I preferred using a Nikkormat FTN, but when that camera was broken, I switched to Kodak Instamatics and a Polaroid SX-70. I also searched out a photo-button guy at a local fair and a museum photographer who made tintypes, and they took two of the portraits.

I printed my photos on Kodak polycontrast-G fiber-based paper during three different sessions that stretched over a year or two. Along the way, I learned how to print and subsequently decided not to crop my negatives unless absolutely necessary. I added the dates later with a Rapidograph pen, directly onto the finished 5- by 3 1/2-inch prints.

I chose the square format based on my architectural design training and decided to present the material in a simple Rolodex with a granite base. I liked the way all 366 images were immediately accessible and could be viewed in chronological order or at random—a sort of spin-to-win approach that took away all pretension that the project was “high” art.

Over the years, I dragged the Rolodex out of its cardboard box for the amusement of family and friends. And to remember what it was like to be so young and enthusiastic about life. Then in 2006, I took a more critical look at the images and wondered what was going on in the world while I was dinking around with the self-portraits.

Google and Yahoo yielded a cacophony of historical and political events—a whirl of births, deaths, achievements, shenanigans, and disasters, both natural and manmade. I chose one for each day, without referring to the picture I had made on the same date. Then I superimposed those facts over the vintage photographs to make the images for this book.

While I worked, the same thoughts kept coming to mind:

What is time?

What is reality?

What is a photograph?

What is their relationship?

And after all was said and done, the question still remains:

Is a photograph a beginning or an end?

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