



Maine Sunday Telegram/ Sunday, December 5, 2004

## PHILIP ISAACSON IN THE ARTS

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### Reveling in structure, detail

Maine has a facility for turning out polymaths. Perhaps it's something in the water. From the days of Parson Jonathan Fisher (1768-1847) down to the present, there have been small-town Leonardos who have possessed multiple artistic energies and the insight to develop them. The combinations vary, but they include such talents as writer, poet, painter, photographer, surveyor and sculptor. I think Michael Alpert of Bangor's name must be added to the roster.

A typographer, designer, master printer and writer, Mr. Alpert, as I now discover, is also an accomplished landscape photographer. This revelation comes from "A Maine Portfolio," a show of his work at Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport. As a printer and book designer, Mr. Alpert interprets classic principles of structure and detail, and I find similar feelings in his photographs. His images are in the contemporary modernist tradition with occasional bows to the romantic. The term "modernist," in his case, cuts a pretty wide swath. Some of his images are intentionally blunt and unemotional. They allow the facts – which may in themselves be

emotional – to speak for themselves. Others are assisted through various strategies in achieving the photographer's goals. Those goals often appear to be a revealing of underlying geometries that exist in the world around us and, in that sense, they rub up against abstraction.

Although much of the work is frontal, the façade of a building for example, there is no attempt to present the structure as two-dimensional, but the volumes are carefully organized for their graphic virtues apart from their service as components of a building. We find this in "Hydro-electric Dam, Lewiston" and "Textile Industry Building, Lewiston" and in "Abandoned Sardine Cannery, Robbinston," among others.

Something of this is carried over into more three-dimensional images such as "Railroad Bridge, Grindstone" and – my favorite – "Roadside Building, Houlton." In the latter Alpert gives an abandoned concrete building the Cubist equivalency of a work by LeCorbusier.

This show is accompanied by a beautifully presented book bearing the same title.