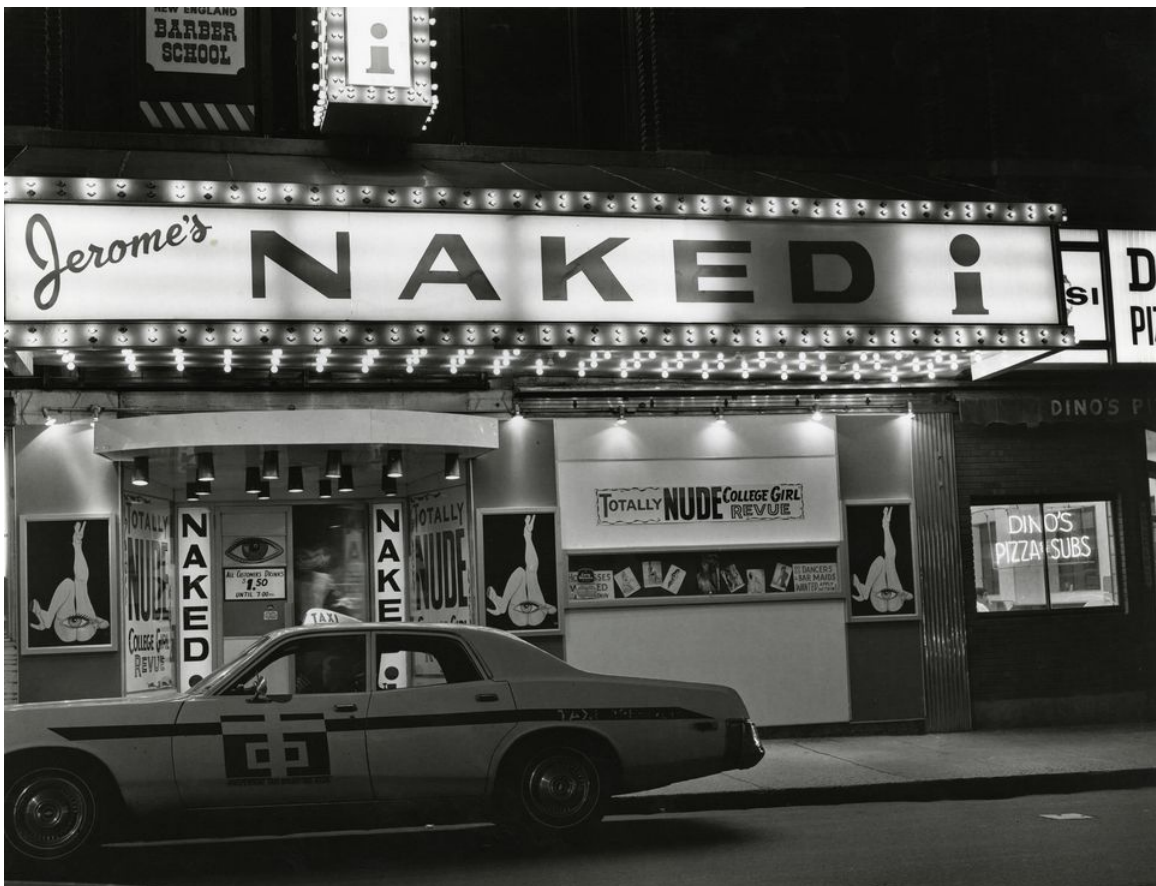


# The Boston Globe

## Roswell Angier, whose Combat Zone photos captured part of Boston history, dies at 82

By Mark Feeney Globe Staff, June 17, 2023



Roswell Angier, "Washington St.," 1977. COURTESY GITTERMAN GALLERY

Roswell Angier, whose photographs of the Combat Zone adult entertainment district during the 1970s indelibly captured a place and time in Boston history, died May 23 at a hospice in Amherst. He was 82.

The death of Mr. Angier, who also had taught photography for many years at Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, was confirmed by his gallery owner, Tom Gitterman. The cause of death was congestive heart failure. He lived in Northampton.



Roswell Angier. SUSAN HAWLEY

“My way of working is to never ask if I can take a shot,” Mr. Angier said in [an interview](#) last month with the British newspaper The Guardian. “I talk to the people around me and then from time to time I raise my Leica to my eye, pause to see if there are any objections, then snap a few pictures.”

The key words are “talk” and “objections.” The former relates to Mr. Angier’s alertness to the verbal as well as the visual. An English major in college, he was also a poet. In his images it’s easy to find a literary aspect, a sense of unspoken stories being glimpsed through a lens. Or as a former Tufts colleague, the photographer Jim Dow, recently said, “In so many ways his pictures are almost literary stills, not literal but evocative.”

“Objections” speaks to the consistent human sympathy evident throughout Mr. Angier’s work. He never lost sight of the fact that the two-dimensional figures captured within a frame belong to three-dimensional people living in a real world. Writing in The New Yorker of a 2007 exhibition of Mr. Angier’s work at the Gitterman Gallery, in New York, Vince Aletti noted that “there’s no sense of hit-and-run exploitation . . . just a mixture of tenderness, concern, and righteous anger.”



Roswell Angier, "Gallup, New Mexico," 1982. COURTESY GITTERMAN GALLERY

The photographs in that exhibition are in a book published this month by MIT Press, [“Gallup.”](#) A collaboration with Mr. Angier’s wife, Susan Hawley, the book looks at Navajo communities in the Southwest. The title refers to the New Mexico town on Route 66. Originating in visits there between 1978 and 1982, “Gallup” consists of Mr. Angier’s photographs, Hawley’s watercolors, and journal entries written by both.

“It was an in-between place,” Mr. Angier said of Gallup in that Guardian interview, “where people from different cultures collided with each other, often struggling to maintain their identities and not be overwhelmed by other people’s assumptions about who they were.”

That description could apply to another marginalized and disregarded place, the Combat Zone. A grim mix of strip clubs, peep shows, X-rated theaters, and sex shops, the Zone was on Washington Street, between Boylston and Kneeland streets. Mr. Angier started photographing there in 1973.

He was not the only photographer to document the Zone. Along with Mr. Angier, John Goodman and the late Jerry Berendt had work in a memorable 2010 show at Howard Yezerski Gallery, “Boston Combat Zone: 1969-1978.”

As its subtitle suggests, Mr. Angier’s book “‘A Kind of Life’: Conversations in the Combat Zone” (1976) was as much textual as visual. It includes lengthy excerpts from conversations Mr. Angier had with his photographic subjects: strippers, patrons, and other habitués of the Zone.

In an e-mail, the photographer Karl Baden praised “A Kind of Life.” “I think it rivals Susan Meiselas’ ‘Carnival Strippers’ as a document of that culture at that time.”

Speaking by telephone, Gitterman emphasized the book’s humanity. “Traditional male voyeuristic images of women are not what you see when you open the book. It’s people. And he includes the voices of those being photographed, so there’s this transparency, this honesty, this integrity, about the view we get. He’s *meeting* these people. It’s not just standing with a long lens and gaping at them.”

Roswell Parker Angier III was born on Dec. 2, 1940, in New Haven. His father, Roswell Angier II, was a metallurgist. His mother, Viola (Buell) Angier, was a homemaker. Mr. Angier grew up in New York and attended Phillips Academy Andover.

After graduating from Harvard University, he earned a master’s degree at the University of California Berkeley in comparative literature. He also worked for the National Farmworkers’ Association and met Hawley, his future wife. A previous marriage, to Lisa Commager, ended in divorce.

Mr. Angier took up photography at Berkeley — “with the help of the darkroom in the student union,” he told The Guardian. He cited the work of several celebrated photographers as having helped shape his sensibility: Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, and William Klein. Yet Mr. Angier cited as “deeper influences” on his photography the poets William Carlos Williams and Charles Baudelaire.

Mr. Angier returned East in 1968 to teach at Boston University and edit the Boston-based rock magazine Fusion. He held the latter position until 1972. He taught photography at the Art Institute of Boston, now part of Lesley University, and the University of Massachusetts Boston. He began teaching at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1990 and would head the photography program at Tufts until 2015, when he retired. The two schools merged in 2016.

In 1982, Mr. Angier joined the Archive Pictures photography cooperative. Over the next two decades, his work appeared in Forbes, US News & World Report, The New York Times, and other publications.

In addition to “A Kind of Life” and “Gallup,” Mr. Angier was the author of “City Limits” (1987), about Boston neighborhoods, and “Train Your Gaze: A Practical and Theoretical Introduction to Portrait Photography” (2006).

Museums with Mr. Angier’s photographs in their permanent collection include the Addison Gallery of American Art, Harvard Art Museums, the Museum of Fine Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

In 2016, after he had retired from teaching, Mr. Angier and his wife moved to Northampton. In addition to his wife, Mr. Angier leaves a stepdaughter, Emily Kocken, of the Netherlands. A memorial service will be held at a future date.

Asked in the Guardian interview for a “top tip,” Mr. Angier turned to literature.

“When I was young and didn’t know what to do with myself, my father used to say: ‘Go read a good book.’ One time I asked him to be more precise and he just growled: ‘Moby-Dick.’ It was really good advice.”