The series was very interesting and included portraits, mostly black and white, showing Americans from the western United States in their natural surroundings. Alongside their artistic aspect, the photographs also constitute a very interesting record of American society of the time and place. They portray a series of characters we recognize as representative of the tough underbelly of the western states. Images that imply far more than they show, produced with perfect technique.

Two photographs in the exhibition—which also featured in the diptych announcing the show—showed portraits of people with illnesses all dermatologists know well. The most striking photograph is that of a bee-keeper with alopecia areata universalis (Figure 1). He has the characteristic look of all alopecia areata sufferers, which grants him an air somewhere between the enigmatic and the aggressive. The strangeness of his appearance demonstrates the importance of hair to the human perception.
of other people, and where such baldness can lead to rejection and an impoverished quality of life.

Another photograph shows the portrait of a drifter with very serious actinic damage in the form of lentigines, actinic keratoses, and deep wrinkles on his face and the back of his hands (Figure 2). This is the sort of actinic damage we often see in our practices, and this photograph invites us to reflect on how lucky we are with the quality and universal accessibility of our public medical services, compared with the fundamentally private medical systems of the United States. Although art exhibitions are ephemeral displays, we can enjoy all the work of this artist through catalogues from shows or in the many books which have been produced. A year after his death, a foundation was established in his name (www.richardavedon.com), to preserve, study, and market his work and his books—books which can also be found in most specialist photography bookstores.

As I mentioned before, any form of art can be enjoyed when we approach it from an uninformed point of view, simply by saying whether or not we like it. I confess that I am absolutely ignorant of music, and I can only say whether or not I like such and such an opera, symphony, or song. However, with photography, my deeper knowledge grants me a different, more intelligent, approach, which I believe affords me greater intellectual satisfaction. I urge you all to take an interest in photography and to make the most of the professional knowledge you have—or should have—in order to enjoy it. While expanding your understanding of dermatology, it will also provide frequent surprises just like the one I have told you about.

References


Figure 2. Drifter with actinic damage, by Richard Avedon.