

Release Date: August 4, 2006

New York City from 1938 to 1958 Revealed in Photographs by 20 Major Artists from National Gallery of Art's Collection On View September 17, 2006–January 15, 2007

—Works by Evans, Model, Levitt, Klein, Weegee, and Others—



Faurer, Louis
American, 1916 - 2001
"Champion," New York City, 1948/1949,
gelatin silver print, image: 23.2 x 33.4 cm (9 1/8 x 13 1/8 in.)
sheet: 23.3 x 33.7 cm (9 3/16 x 13 1/4 in.),
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Joshua P. Smith Collection, 2001.128.34

Washington, DC—Photographers working in New York City in the years between the publication of Walker Evans' *American Photographs* in 1938 and Robert Frank's *The Americans* in 1958 profoundly changed the course of American photography. This fertile period in art history is celebrated in the National Gallery of Art's exhibition of

some 75 photographs by twenty prominent artists. **The Streets of New York: American Photographs from the Collection, 1938–1958** is on view in the photography galleries, West Building, Ground Floor, from September 17, 2006 through January 15, 2007.

The exhibition, organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, includes key works by Evans and Frank; candid studies of children by Helen Levitt; vibrant and gritty compositions of the streets and street life by Louis Faurer and Ted Croner; evocative and lyrical views of the urban landscape by Roy DeCarava, Saul Leiter, and David Vestal; bold depictions of New York bars and nightclubs by Lisette Model; photographs of joy and alienation at Coney Island by Sid Grossman, Leon Levinstein, and Bruce Davidson; and disturbing photographs of New York's latent violence by William Klein and Weegee, among others.

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation.

"This exhibition demonstrates the strength and vitality of a very pivotal period in the history of photography in America," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are indebted to the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation for their continuing support of photographic exhibitions."

The Exhibition

The artists featured in the exhibition were not part of an organized group, although many studied with Alexey Brodovitch, art director of *Harper's Bazaar* and founder of the Design Laboratory, or Sid Grossman, who taught classes at the Photo League and in his New York apartment. However, this generation of photographers shared a common vision and objective: to record their personal responses to the vivid and often violent city surrounding them. Encouraged by the teachings of Brodovitch and Grossman, they consciously broke many of the accepted rules of photography—they used available light, allowed forms to be blurred, out of focus, and off-kilter—in order to reveal the city's energy and pace, vitality and vulgarity. Unlike their predecessors, their goal was

not simply to document the city but to recreate their experience of it. Organized by photographer, the exhibition highlights the novel techniques favored by these new artists, and their choices of subject matter and composition.

Among the photographs featured, Walker Evans' subway portraits created between 1938 and 1941, are some of the most iconic portraits of the period, and helped usher in the new era in photography. Evans created the photographs by concealing a 35mm camera under his coat—its lens protruding between his buttons and a shutter release down his sleeve. Relying entirely on chance and intuition, Evans did not raise the camera to his eye to frame the photograph, nor did he adjust the focus or exposure. This stealth allowed him to photograph subway riders without their knowledge and thus capture them in "naked repose," as Evans noted. The pictures that resulted are raw—full of energy and emotion—and marked a dramatic break from the highly composed photographs that had preceded them.

Helen Levitt studied with Evans in 1938 and 1939. Like him, she used a 35mm camera, but quickly developed her own fluid, graceful style, making tender, often witty photographs of children at play. Instead of the close-up, confrontational style favored by some of her contemporaries, Levitt preferred to frame an entire scene, giving her photographs a strong narrative appeal.

The photographer popularly known as Weegee began his career covering fires that occurred overnight when the regular photographers were off duty. Soon he was photographing the murders, fires, and accidents of the troubled city. By wiring his room to pick up signals from the police radio dispatcher, Weegee was often one of the first to arrive at scenes of violence and catastrophe, earning him his nickname (after the Ouija board) for his seemingly uncanny ability to know where disaster was going to strike. In contrast to Evans' and Levitt's photographs, Weegee's works, such as *Copkiller (Booked on Suspicion of Killing a Policeman—Anthony Esposito, Accused "Copkiller")* (1941), are often shocking and filled with a gritty immediacy.

In the mid-1940s Louis Faurer moved from his hometown of Philadelphia to New York, where he met and shared a studio with Robert Frank. Not as interested in violence as Weegee, Faurer claimed the "hypnotic dusk light led him to Times Square," where he

photographed daily, immersing himself in the culture of postwar America and reveling in the occasionally bizarre aspects of the city.

Viennese-born Lisette Model was another highly influential figure at this time. Soon after she moved to New York in 1938, she found that her direct and uncompromising photographs perfectly suited the aggressive character of the city. Alexey Brodovitch often published her photographs in *Harper's Bazaar*, but she most strongly exerted her influence on other photographers through the courses she taught at the New School for Social Research in New York. Diane Arbus, whose early work is also included in the exhibition, was one of her most well-known students.

William Klein, a native New Yorker, spent the decade after World War II in Paris studying painting with Fernand Léger and taking up photography. He returned to New York to work for *Vogue*, but also began to experiment with photography on the city streets using a wide angle lens, extreme close-ups, and harsh printing methods. A recurring theme in his work is children at play with toy guns. These photographs, such as *Boy + Gun + Girl, New York* (1955), are a startling juxtaposition of innocence and violence, humor and aggression.

The exhibition also features examples of photography books from the National Gallery of Art library. Inspired by Evans' *American Photographs* (1938), many photographers aspired to publish their own books. Unlike commercial magazines, books allowed photographers creative control over the format and content of the book. Books also provided them with a means to circulate their work widely. Books by Evans, Weegee, Klein, Roy DeCarava, and Frank are included.

Curator and Related Activities

The Streets of New York: American Photographs from the Collection, 1938–1958 is curated by Sarah Greenough, curator and head of the department of photographs, and Diane Waggoner, assistant curator in the department of photographs, National Gallery of Art.

A film series, *Noir on New York Streets*, has been developed in conjunction with the exhibition. The weekends of October 21/22 and 28/29 are devoted to a festival of films

noirs set on Manhattan's streets and avenues, gritty locations that serve as low and lurid milieu for the genre's down-on-their-luck protagonists and alienated tough guys. Such treasures as *Kiss of Death* (1947), *Side Street* (1950), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), and *The Naked City* (1948) are included in the program, concluding with *Killer's Kiss* (1955) on November 4. All films will be shown in the East Building Auditorium. For specific dates and times, visit www.nga.gov/programs/film.shtml#series (<http://www.nga.gov/programs/film.shtml#series>).

On November 4, noted scholars Andy Grundberg, Jane Livingston, and James Naremore will present illustrated lectures on the exhibition from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., in the East Building Auditorium. The lectures will be followed by a film.

Information about the exhibition and links to related resources can be found on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov/exhibitions/amerphotoinfo.shtml (<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/amerphotoinfo.shtml>).

###

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov