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"The Theater of the Street" Explored Through Photographs by Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, and More at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, April 22–August 5, 2012



Philip-Lorca diCorcia, *Head #22*, 2001, chromogenic print
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Charina Endowment Fund
© Philip-Lorca diCorcia

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art presents ***I Spy: Photography and the Theater of the Street, 1938–2010***, on view in the West Building from April 22 through August 5, 2012. The exhibition is devoted to street photographs by some of the genre's greatest innovators: Walker Evans (1903–1975), Harry Callahan (1912–1999), Robert Frank (b. 1924), Bruce Davidson (b. 1933), Philip-Lorca diCorcia (b. 1951), and Beat Streuli (b. 1957).

"The Gallery is pleased to continue its long tradition of exhibitions devoted to the innovative ways in which photographers have captured and explored the urban environment," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "*I Spy* also

showcases the Gallery's strong holdings in this genre, featuring more than 20 works from the collection along with nine promised gifts."

Organization and Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art.

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

Tru Vue has provided in-kind support of the Optium® Acrylic Glazing for the works of art.

Exhibition

Since the invention of small hand-held cameras and faster films in the late 19th century, photographers have recorded everyday life in the urban environment. Mining the city's rich potential, they have explored its varied subject matter—people, architecture, and modes of transportation—to celebrate the cacophony and diversity of modern life, as well as its rapid pace.

The photographers represented in this exhibition have creatively pursued this genre by setting rigid parameters on how they made their works. Like children playing the game "I Spy" by looking through the narrow frame of a car window, these photographers restricted the ways they made their pictures as a means of selecting and ordering the chaos of the city. Evans hid the camera from the unsuspecting public and photographed without even looking through the lens, Frank photographed only what could be seen from the windows of a bus moving through the city, and diCorcia and Streuli placed their cameras in single spots to capture photographs of random passersby. But all these photographs and videos court chance and serendipity, and all these artists view the street as a perpetually fascinating spectacle.

Arranged both chronologically and monographically, *I Spy: Photography and the Theater of the Street, 1938–2010* explores these ideas through the presentation of nearly 90 works, including a video and a digital still sequence. Evans, Callahan, and Frank embarked on their projects as a challenge to create images in a fundamentally

different manner than they previously had; diCorcia and Streuli incorporate such devices into their regular practice. All the works address questions of voyeurism, surveillance, and privacy.

The exhibition includes photographs made by Evans between 1938 and 1941 on the New York subways with a camera concealed beneath his coat, as well as those he took standing on a street corner in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1941. Callahan is represented with an evocative group of photographs of women lost in thought on the busy Chicago streets in 1950. Frank's elegant, almost balletic suite of photographs made from the windows of a bus moving through New York City in 1958 will also be presented, as will a series of bold, aggressive color photographs by Bruce Davidson taken on the New York subways between 1980 and 1985.

Contemporary artists diCorcia and Streuli have pushed this genre still further in works made in the 1990s and into the 21st century. Mining the latent theatricality of the street, diCorcia erected scaffolding and lights in busy urban areas to create a series of monumental portraits of hapless pedestrians who chanced to pass in front of his camera.

The exhibition concludes with two works by the Swiss artist Streuli made on the streets of New York: a digital still sequence, reconfigured expressly for this show from its original display in 2002, and a video made in 2009. Using a telephoto lens to capture richly saturated scenes, Streuli reveals not only the congestion and heterogeneity of modern urban life, but also its beauty. As he transforms the ordinary into the iconic, he shows the isolation and anonymity of the individual in a crowd. In addition, his work calls into question the surveillance photography now so routinely captured by governments and corporations, and it makes us realize ever more keenly how in our daily lives we are both watching the world around us and are being scrutinized by it.

Curator

The exhibition curator is Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art.

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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.

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