



Press release Fotomuseum Winterthur, July 2020

Street. Life. Photography Seven Decades of Street Photography

12.09.2020.–10.01.2021

Fotomuseum Winterthur

Fleeting encounters in the streets of international metropolises, calm suburban scenes, thriving thoroughfares, quirky everyday settings – street photography presents the diversity of our urban spaces and the people who live in them. The exhibition *Street. Life. Photography* offers a range of very different perspectives on city life and ways of photographing the street.

Street photography depicts public life in metropolitan centres. It shows everyday scenes and escapades, commerce and individuality, comedy and tragedy, political engagement and social change. It portrays single people who seem to merge into the crowds, creating a sense of both proximity and distance. The diversity of urban spaces and their inherent dynamism have always offered countless opportunities for photographers to capture the city's spectacle and drama.

The exhibition *Street. Life. Photography. Seven Decades of Street Photography* presents around 220 works by thirty-seven international photographers made over the last seventy years. These works present a variety of different perspectives on urban life, while also showcasing the art of taking photographs on the street and in the city. How have photographers viewed the city and its inhabitants both now and in the past? To what extent is our understanding of public and private space and our relationship to our urban environment reflected in their works? How have views of the city – and thus also the genre of street photography – changed over the course of time?

In this exhibition, international contemporary photographers like Maciej Dakowicz, Loredana Nemes, Jenny Odell and Harri Pälviranta are contrasted with historical positions such as those of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, William Klein, Harry Callahan and Lisette Model. This comparison of historical and contemporary works enables visitors to appreciate key trends and important technical, conceptual and aesthetic developments.

The exhibition is divided into five kaleidoscopically arranged sections with different thematic approaches. The specific focuses on **Street Life**, **Crashes**, **Public Transfer**, **Anonymity** and **Alienation** highlight surprising and sometimes strange connections. The



Street Life section zeroes in on individual passers-by or groups. The street can be seen here as a stage and urban space as a backdrop – the people who appear there as protagonists become part of the theatre enacted in these photographs. The works range from fleeting snapshots to in-depth studies. The section on **Crashes** contextualises photographs that address accidents, acts of violence, conflicts and social change or disorder. Here, the borders between fiction and apparent reality blur: What is real and what is enacted? The section entitled **Public Transfer** looks at the spaces of public transportation as a tense liminal field of human behaviour, where a large portion of urban life plays out between the private and the public sphere. The facelessness of big-city structures and the loss of social proximity are tackled in the section on **Anonymity**. Here, various works explore the phenomenon of anonymity with regard not only to the people photographed but also to the role of the photographers. The **Alienation** section compares and contrasts different approaches that look at the themes of dissociation and distance in urban spaces.

The accompanying programme of events explores public space and the numerous, often unintended encounters that take place there. Guided tours geared to dialogue with the participants and conversations with the artists and experts provide insight into the diversity and complexity of street photography, while also highlighting the hindrances that street photography can face.

“Documenting public space poses complex questions. Who is observing whom, and how voyeuristic are our actions? What do the mechanisms of surveillance in urban space signify? What statements – intended or involuntary – are manifested in these pictures? We explore these questions – in the exhibition space and in our programme of events.”

Nadine Wietlisbach, director of Fotomuseum Winterthur

Street. Life. Photography. Seven Decades of Street Photography. An exhibition by Haus der Photographie / Deichtorhallen Hamburg with works from the F. C. Gundlach Collection, Hamburg, hosted at Fotomuseum Winterthur. The exhibition was curated by Dr Sabine Schnakenberg (Deichtorhallen Hamburg). Nadine Wietlisbach and her team added additional elements to stimulate further reflection. The exhibition is complemented by a catalogue (Kehrer Verlag) with texts by Sabine Schnakenberg and Christoph Schaden.

Selected Artists

In his series *Coming Soon* (2008–14), **Natan Dvir** (b. 1972, ISR) moves around the urban landscapes of New York, where enormous glitzy advertising surfaces have long been a fixture. While some tourists stand and marvel at them, most of the city’s inhabitants pay no attention to them. Dvir explores our visual perception within this heavily commercial environment. He captures real and spontaneous street scenes against the backdrop of these perfectly designed advertising hoardings. The photographs create stages on which



passers-by suddenly and involuntarily become part of a larger image in a commercialised panorama.

Photographer **Melanie Einzig** (b. 1967, USA) takes small single pictures that capture fleeting moments in everyday New York. Her interest is in the people who live in the city, and she observes them from some distance in their immediate urban environments, whether on footpaths, crossing the street, in restaurants or on the underground. While she wishes her work to be clearly distinguished from staged photography, the miniature scenes from everyday life that she creates rely on a precise selection of motifs and colour schemes as well as other design techniques used to defamiliarize situations. In this respect, her photos, which were made between 1999 and 2009, seem in some ways to be timeless.

William Klein's (b. 1928, USA) photographs from the 1950s can be seen as innovative counter-designs to the existing repertoire of street photography. During his forays through New York, Klein deliberately used his camera conspicuously, confronting passers-by with unsparing intensity. He attempted to find formal and stylistic means to capture in photos both the inexorable movement of the masses and isolated fleeting faces. As we view the images, we seem to be moving right along next to the photographer as he passes through the crowds. The use of wide-angled lenses makes some of these partly out-of-focus close-ups seem claustrophobic.

Lisette Model (1901–1983, AUT/USA) began in the mid-1930s to portray passers-by in various positions and poses in large prints. She observes people on the street from some distance and with the utmost fervency and patience. These pictures, taken in New York, San Francisco and Nice, have an open, direct quality, showing the details of facial expressions and gestures and the quirks and characteristics of the people portrayed. Her subjects fill almost the entire frame, so that their urban environments fade into the background. Model's enactments both conceal and yet also subtly emphasise her own acts of observation.

Loredana Nemes's (b. 1972, ROU) series *Under Ground* (2005–2006) was made in the underground rail networks and metros of Moscow, New York, Paris, London and Bucharest. Using a twin-lens Rolleiflex medium-format camera, which she hung around her neck, she discretely deployed an almost silent shutter-release mechanism to portray people who were sitting directly opposite her. *Under Ground* is a collection of clear, composed portraits imbued with a strange sense of timelessness. These pictures are mainly taken outside of the rush hour, when the day is coming to an end and a very special atmosphere descends on the city and its people.

For his series *The Last Resort* (1983–1985), **Martin Parr** (b. 1952, GBR) photographed day trippers from Liverpool and environs spending a hot summer's day in the rundown yet still lively urban seaside town of New Brighton. Parr observes people trying to enjoy their leisure time between overflowing rubbish bins and the shabby concrete-covered promenade. In the process, he shifts between a dispassionate and voyeuristic gaze, between social critique and entertainment. His bitter satire of Thatcher's Britain reveals a number of controversial aspects inherent in photography itself. A critical view of consumerist society and its many excesses is a key theme in the work of this British photographer.



In **Stephen Shore's** (b. 1947, USA) works, which explore perception in (urban) space, lines and signs from various street scenes are combined into constructivist units. He works with vanishing points, horizontal lines as compositional guides and billboards reduced to the function of optical markers. The telephone poles, cables, traffic-light masts and advertising surfaces all bear witness to changes in human environments in the USA from the 1960s on. Shore critically investigates spaces influenced by human activity and the increasing isolation and fragmentation of the original landscapes of the American West.

Information on the Museum

Fotomuseum Winterthur is at the forefront of presenting and discussing photography and visual culture. As part of its repertoire of temporary exhibitions devoted to individual artists and group shows, the museum displays works by young photographers as well as those with an established reputation. In addition, it examines photographic phenomena in the context of new technologies and digital media, exposing them to critical scrutiny. A broad range of artistic, applied and cultural forms of photography are explored, with a primary focus on dialogue and the exchange of ideas. The institution is committed to the considered, autonomous and creative use of media. Its collection (which dates back to 1960) has helped to shape the history and narratives of photography as well as our understanding of it as a medium in all its different forms.

Fotomuseum Winterthur was founded in 1993. In 2002, it combined with Fotostiftung Schweiz to create the Fotozentrum – Switzerland's foremost centre for photographic expertise.

Contact

Julia Sumi
Press and Communications
sumi@fotomuseum.ch
T +41 52 234 10 74