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Slide Show: The Color Photographs Of Helen Levitt



The Color Photographs of Helen Levitt

Slide Show



Synopsis

At least a dozen of Helen Levitt's photographs seem to me as beautiful, perceptive, satisfying, and enduring as any lyrical work that I know. In their general quality and coherence, moreover, the photographs as a whole body, as a book, seem to me to combine into a unified view of the world, an uninsistent but irrefutable manifesto of a way of seeing, and in a gently and wholly unpretentious way, a major poetic work.

James Agee World-renowned for her iconic black-and-white street photographs, New York City's visual poet laureate Helen Levitt also possessed a little-known archive of color work, which was been collected for the first time in Slide Show, her third powerHouse Books monograph. In 1959, and again in 1960, Helen Levitt received grants from the Guggenheim Foundation to photograph in color on the streets of New York, where she had photographed two decades earlier in black-and-white. But tragically, the best of these pioneering color pictures were stolen from her apartment in 1970 and she had to start over again. In 1974 the new work was shown as a continuous slide projection at New York's Museum of Modern Art—an early example of a slide show presentation by a museum and one of the first exhibitions of serious color photography anywhere in the world. Slide Show presents more than one hundred photographs—including eight surviving images from the 1959-60 series—more than half of which have never been exhibited or published before. This impressive monograph is a worthy successor to her magnum opus, Crosstown (powerHouse, 2001), which included the largest collection of her color pictures to date, and to her more intimate volume of black-and-white work, Here and There (powerHouse, 2004), which presented more than eighty unknown Levitts taken over six decades.

Book Information

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Photo Essays

Customer Reviews

I'm a big fan of Helen Levitt's work & I would love to give this book a 5 star review. Unfortunately her excellent photography is not presented well due to a poor print job. It seems that something went wrong in the scanning or pre press phase. All the photos are too light & the colours are washed out. This is not how Kodachrome should look. Some of the same images are printed in the German book titled 'Helen Levitt' & the difference is significant. The photos in the German book are much more accurate. Unfortunately this publication is no longer in print & hard to come by. I already knew that this book 'Slide Show' had poor reproductions as I had a chance to view a copy in the library. I bought it anyway because it is the only way to see some of her photos. I can't think what went wrong as Powerhouse seems to be a quality publisher & I own other photography books by them where the printing is fine.

The photos in this collection portray working people and poor people, people who are poorly dressed, people without air conditioning on hot summer days, people with ugly pets. The collection is oddly timeless; many photographs of New York can be dated to within a few years by looking at store awnings and, clothing styles, and haircuts, but not these. The people whom Levitt photographed are wearing clothing that was shapeless, ugly, and impossible to date in 1960, 1970, or 1980. With the exception of a couple of photos that show movie theater marquees in the background, nothing here can be dated. The photos are all the more remarkable because they flatter nobody. Did people give permission to be photographed, knowing how they would look? Had they given up long ago? Some of the photos give their subjects dignity, but not all. The book is sometimes cruel, sometimes funny. As an aside, I'd love to know where these photos were taken. Some look like East Harlem, but not a single photo shows a street sign, and I can't identify any of the stores.

What a remarkable treasure to have this book of Helen Levitt's color work. Pre-dating Eggleston this is inventive and wonderful to look at. While she is mostly known for her black and white photographs, this opens a new level of appreciation for her contributions to photography. Beautifully printed, this is highly recommended for fans of color photography.

Well, if you're looking at this book, you probably know who Helen Levitt is and you can probably imagine the amazing photographs that are in this book. Helen Levitt was one of the pioneers of street photography, a self taught photographer who eventually began working with Cartier-Bresson, another pioneer of street photography. Mind you, these two photographers represented REAL street photography, not the (pardon my language) crap we see today from the college kids running around with their \$6,000 Leica that Mommy or Daddy bought them. Street photography, unfortunately, has become WAYYYYYYYYYY overdone and destroyed by people with no true "eye" for it. Now we just see photo after photo of homeless people, stray animals, homeless people with stray animals, etc. etc. Anyway, sorry to get off topic a bit there. My point is, BUY THIS BOOK. This is REAL street photography where talent and hard work are demonstrated through these beautiful prints. And if you truly want to learn what real street photography is all about, this book is a great starting point.

This picture book is an icon of his time. She has captured the real life.

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