

HELEN LEVITT: IN THE STREET 15 OCT 2021 – 13 FEB 2022

The Photographers' Gallery presents a retrospective spanning fifty years of work by the landmark American street photographer, Helen Levitt (1913–2009).

Taking place over two floors of the Gallery, this retrospective of more than 130 works will survey the full breadth of Levitt's rich photographic practice, charting her journey from street reportage to documentary filmmaker and pioneer of colour photography.

One of the most influential street photographers of the 20th Century, Helen Levitt spent decades documenting local communities in her native New York, capturing everyday city life in neighbourhoods such as the Lower East Side, Bronx, and Spanish Harlem. Working from the 1930s through the 1990s, Levitt produced an extensive body of work consisting of a variety of projects and mediums, from photographs to artist books and was an early proponent of avant-garde filmmaking. From her early photographs of chalk drawings, to portraits of New York subway passengers and vivid colour photography, this retrospective brings together key works from across her lifetime.

After briefly working with a commercial portrait photographer, Levitt began to devote herself fully to photography in 1936. Inspired by a meeting with the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, she began to unobtrusively document the residents of her local neighborhoods with a 35-mm Leica camera, rendering everyday scenes into a theatrical spectacle. Strongly influenced by surrealism and silent film, Levitt also explored the uncanny elements of the everyday, often capturing people in strange poses alongside surreal juxtapositions of people, places, and things. Although much of her work documented poor communities against a backdrop of depression or war, Levitt aimed to capture the poetics of everyday life rather than providing political or social commentary.

One of the early pioneers of colour street photography, Levitt was one of the first photographers to exhibit her colour work in 1974. In 1959 after receiving a Guggenheim grant to shoot the streets of New York City, Levitt visited many of the same locations she had captured in the beginnings of her career, recreating these scenes in richly coloured dye-transfer prints. This exhibition presents a broad selection of Levitt's colour photographs, showcasing the development of a new pictorial language in her work.

The Photographers' Gallery
16–18 Ramillies Street
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Also showing as part of the exhibition is *In the Street* (1953), the experimental documentary Levitt made with filmmaker Janice Loeb and the writer James Agee which focused on street life in Spanish Harlem. The first of several film

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projects Levitt created, *In the Street* closely corresponds to her photographic work, providing a moving portrait of her still photography and is considered an essential forerunner of the cinéma vérité style emerging in the 1960s.

Whilst reportage of New York City remained at the heart of Levitt's practice, this exhibition also displays photographs she made when visiting Mexico for several months in 1941. Her only body of work taken outside of New York, these images document the inhabitants of poorer neighborhoods in Mexico City, a place on the cusp of enormous social and economic change.

Helen Levitt: In The Street is curated by Walter Moser in collaboration with TPG's Senior Curator, Anna Dannemann and co-produced by The Albertina Museum, Vienna and The Photographers' Gallery.

The exhibition opens alongside *Helen Cammock: Concrete Feathers and Porcelain Tacks*, a new film and installation project from the Turner Prize nominated artist Helen Cammock.

-ENDS-

Press Contacts

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Notes for Editors

Artist bio available on request

The Photographers' Gallery: 50 Years

2021 marks the 50th anniversary of The Photographers' Gallery. Founded in 1971 by Sue Davies, OBE, as the UK's first public gallery dedicated to the photographic medium, TPG has over the last five decades played a pivotal role in championing photography's position as a leading artistic and cultural form as well as providing an invaluable centre for the exhibition and support of photographers and photography from across the globe.

Over the course of 2021, the Gallery is staging a special series of exhibitions and events to mark this significant anniversary; reflecting on its legacy and impact over the last five decades and looking towards the future of photography in a rapidly changing world.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Great Newport Street, London, as the UK's first independent gallery devoted to photography. It was the first public gallery in the UK to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastiano Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009, the Gallery moved to 16 – 18 Ramillies Street in Soho, the first stage in its plan to create a 21st century home for photography. Following an eighteen months long redevelopment project, the Gallery reopened to the public in 2012. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture. www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor Information

(As of 2 September, please check website for latest opening information)
Mon – Closed

Tues – Sat 10.00 - 18.00

Thu 10.00 - 20.00

Sun 11.00 - 18.00

Social media

Instagram: @thephotographersgallery

Twitter: @TPGallery

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**THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS'
GALLERY**



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