

The Museum of Modern Art

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COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS BY HELEN LEVITT

Forty color photographs of New York street life by Helen Levitt will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 26 through October 20. Shown in continuous projection, the pictures were selected from a series Levitt began in 1971. Projects: Helen Levitt in Color is one of the series of exhibitions reporting on recent developments in contemporary art.

The neighborhoods she photographed in color are similar to those she visited around 1940 to make the famous series of candid black and white pictures that established a new documentary genre for American photography.

In the color series (originally started in 1959-60), "Her object was to use color neither in a decorative nor in a purely formal way, but as a descriptive and expressive aspect of the subject, as inherent to it as gesture, shape, space, and texture," according to John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography. "The introduction of this powerful new element obviously creates a new order of priorities in photographic selection. A lavender necktie may demand our attention more forcefully than the expression on the face above it, and the photographer must accept the new realities and work within them."

Commenting on the classic black and white photographs which initiated Levitt's street series, Mr. Szarkowski has said:

Her photographs were not intended to tell a story or document a social thesis; she worked in poor neighborhoods because there were people there, and a street life that was richly sociable and visually interesting. Levitt's pictures report no unusual happenings; most of them show the games of children, the errands and conversations of the middle-aged, and the observant waiting of the old. What is remarkable about the

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photographs is that these immemorially routine acts of life, practiced everywhere and always, are revealed as being full of grace, drama, humor, pathos and surprise, and also that they are filled with the qualities of art, as though the street were a stage, and its people were all actors and actresses, mimes, orators, and dancers.

--Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures
from the Collection of The Museum of
Modern Art, p. 138.

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