

**LES DOUCHES
LA GALERIE**

PRESS KIT

RAY K. METZKER

ABSTRACTIONS

OPENING ON MARCH 3 FROM 6 TO 9 PM

EXHIBITION FROM MARCH 4 TO MAY 27, 2017

From Wednesday to Saturday, 2-7 pm and by appointment



© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris & Laurence Miller Gallery, New York

Ray K. Metzker holds a special place in the history of American photography. A fixture in the best-known institutions, his work, consisting exclusively of black and white images, is completely representative of an entire generation of profoundly experimental photographers. Born in 1931, Metzker was deeply influenced by his studies at Chicago's Institute of Design. For over fifty years he continued to innovate, often working in his dark room with only his intuition as a guide. His work on negatives evolved slowly over the course of many years. Montages, juxtaposition, multiple exposures, double exposures... Metzker set no limits on his creativity. With the generous assistance of Laurence Miller in New York, we invite you to discover the sixty prints in our exhibit, which represent a small part of the rich, fertile work of an immense American artist.

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THE CITY IS BUILT TO MUSIC

There are a good numbers of living photographers whose careers span more than a half-century but not many whose art shows as much as vitality as that of the American photographer Ray K. Metzker. Few of his peers can match his visual acuity, and capacity of renewal. Rare is the photographer who can strike as skillful a balance between formal brilliance and a tender gender for the world; rare, too, is the rigorous formalist who can also *entertain* - as Metzker does with his visual puns, puzzles, and occasional pyrotechnics.

The photographer's subject matter is widely varied but, considered retrospectively, its diverse threads coalesce into a coherent tapestry. One of the lengthiest threads in this richly woven fabric is the modern American city, with its morose inhabitants scurrying through dark canyons stabbed by shards of light [....].

Today, looking back at the past fifty years of his photography, Metzker is struck by the centrality of "the street" in his work: first as a springboard for a successful career, then irregularly over the years as a rich mine of imagery (and is the photographer himself not another "city driller"?).¹ Metzker believes he will never exhaust its possibilities. Looking back, he is also surprised to see how often he has focused on actual street *surfaces*, with nothing other than their much - abused asphalt, paint markings, and puddles with their reflections as his subject matter. "The street is the stage for much human interaction" he notes. "First, I am looking down at it all, closely...and then I move the camera up and focus on what is moving along, the flow of men and women, appearing, disappearing, pulsating...."²

At the risk of gross oversimplification one might say than Metzker's voyage has led him from the essentially dark, punctuated with light, to the essentially light, punctuated with dark; or, from a negative to a positive world [....].

Many accomplished photographers, having achieved a mature-style, are then content to stick with the tried-and-true, at the risk of a certain staleness. What rewards the eye in Metzker's work, year after year, decade after decade, is the constant visual and conceptual refreshment. He obviously delights in pushing himself and his medium, forward [...].

Anyone familiar with American photography will feel the spirit of Harry Callahan in Metzker's work. Although the influence itself is clear, Metzker's own explanation of it is nuanced. During their time together as teacher and student at Chicago's Institute of Design, Metzker recalls, "Harry never showed any of his own photographs"³. Nor did Callahan give technical advice. It was what went unsaid that was to have a great impact on Metzker: " the idea that you could do it on your own, follow your own vision, make real "art"⁴. It's true that a number of Callahan images are remarkably similar in feel to Metzker's, but the latter insists he had not seen them at the time, and indeed, Metzker's images sometimes predate similar ones of Callahan's.

Metzker delights in darkroom experimentation. His negative is only the halfway point of the journey. It's the positive print that counts, and although the negatives that will lead the print have been taken with meticulous care, they are but raw material in the dark room. He sees the camera itself as "a

1 The term « city drillers » was suggested by the American writer Thomas Wolfe, whose books *Look Homeward Angel* and *You can't go home again* Metzker's read in those formation years, 1957-1958, while involved with the Loop in Chicago.

2 In conversation with the author, Philadelphia, March 2008

3 In conversation with Nathalie Herschdorfer, Philadelphia, January 2007

4 In conversation with Nathalie Herschdorfer, Philadelphia, January 2007

vacuum cleaner, sucking up every detail in the frame".⁵ (...) Sometimes he finds something unexpected in the image, and works to bring that out; at other times, he suppresses details. The material may "prove unwilling", or may simply not live up to the original encounter. (...) Metzker is sometimes amazed that an extraordinary picture may emerge from a negative he'd virtually written off at first glance. And then, if he is observant, "something jumps, glows, flutters... and we pluck a few threads from reality and weave them into another reality, perhaps producing a package of wonder, formed of light and silver, with poetical and mysterious charms."⁶

Metzker's open-mindedness also explains why certain works are given two widely separated dates: 1964-2007, for example. In such instances, the photographer had exposed a batch of negatives decades ago but had never gotten around to doing anything with them. This may have been either because he was simply too busy with other things, or because he didn't quite know what to do with them. So, although the "seeds" may appear to have lain dormant all these years, in fact the period has been one of slow gestation. Metzker has always been content to let things grow organically. Unlike most photographers who are driven by the here-and-now Metzker has taken the long view, and his patience has paid off. Rarely has a photographer's oeuvre achieved comparable richness and depth.

Wordsworth once wrote of « the still, sad music of humanity » - a particularly apt description of Metzker's city folk. Indeed, music is a useful metaphor for Metzker's photography (...). Many other observers have heard echoes of music in Metzker's work, not least the artist himself, who has admitted, « music is my muse »⁷.

Conversely, silence is another useful concept in dealing with Metzker's work. The dark surfaces, stabbed with light, are not necessarily about emptiness: light needs darkness, as sound needs silence; "Without silence », Metzker has said « we cannot really hear the subject that needs attention »⁸. Uncontrolled sound or noise drowns out the message and, in equivalent visual terms, overwhelms beauty. Successful form implies control, balance, and the filtering out of what the photographer disdains as 'the excessive traffic of the obvious'.

William A. Ewing

Director of Musée de l'Elysée (1996-2010)

Excerpts from the preface by William A. Ewing, published in 2008 in *Light Lines*, Steidl, on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition *Ray K. Metzker: Light Lines*, organized by the Musée de l'Elysée.

5 In conversation with Nathalie Herschdorfer, Philadelphia, January 2007

6 Anne Tucker, *Unknown Territory*, 16

7 In conversation with Nathalie Herschdorfer, Philadelphia, January 2007

8 Anne Tucker, *Unknown Territory*, 15

RAY K. METZKER

SELECTION OF WORKS

Ray K. Metzker

Atlantic City, 1966

Gelatin silver print, later print, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Chicago Loop, 1957

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Chicago, 1958

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Barcelona, Spain, 1961

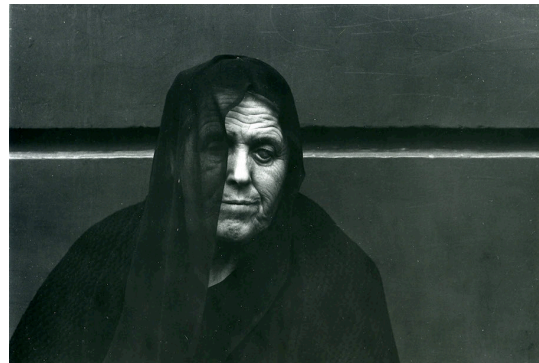
Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Almeria, Spain, 1961

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Europe, 1961

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1962

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1963

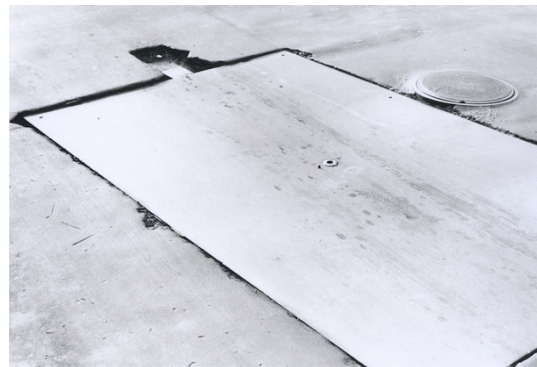
Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1963

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1963

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1963

Gelatin silver print, later print, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

City Square, Early Philadelphia, 1964

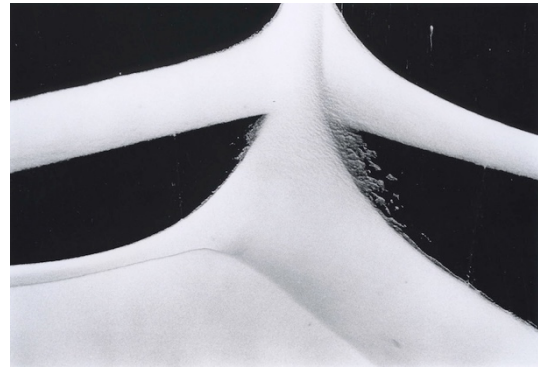
Gelatin silver print, later print, printed by the artist



Ray K. Metzker

Philadelphia, 1964

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist



RAY K. METZKER

SOLO SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2016 *Ray K. Metzker: Stripteases + Penn Center Pieces*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 2015 *Ray Metzker, The Poet of Light*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 2013 *The Photographs of Ray K. Metzker*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
- 2007 *Ray K. Metzker : Notes de lumière*, Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne
- 2006 *Ray K. Metzker*, Galerie Françoise Paviot, Paris
- 2003 *My Philadelphia!*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphie
- 2000 *Urban Shadows*, Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago
Voyage of Discovery: The landscape Photographs of Ray Metzker, Philadelphia Museum of Art
- 1997 *Ray K. Metzker*, Galerie Françoise Paviot, Paris
- 1995 *Anticipating the Composites*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 1992 Shadai Gallery, Tokyo/ Turner, Krull Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1991 *A New Leaf: Photographs by Ray Metzker*, The Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1990 *Composites*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 1988 *Earthly Delights*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 1986 *Unknow Territory*, Photographs by Ray K. Metzker, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
- 1984 *Unknown Territory*, Photographs by Ray K. Metzker, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
- 1983 *Ray K. Metzker: Photographs, Multiple means, Multiple Ends*, Carl Solway Gallery
City Whispers, Catskill Center of Photography, Woodstock, NY
Ray Metzker Photographs, Edwynn Houk Gallery, Chicago
- 1979 *Ray K. Metzker: Multiple Concerns*, Galerie Delpire, Paris
- 1978 *Ray K. Metzker: Multiple Concerns*, International Center of Photography, NY
Pictus Interruptus, Locks Gallery, Philadelphie.
- 1976 *Ray K. Metzker*, The picture Gallery, Zurich
- 1974 *New Mexico*, Dayton College of Art, Ohio
- 1968 *Ray K. Metzker and Paul Caponigro*, Photographer's Gallery, NY.
- 1964-65 *Composites*, MoMa, NY
- 1959 *My camera and I in the Loop*, The Art Institute of Chicago

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2016 *Lux: The radiant sea*, Yancey Richardson Gallery, NY
Make Light Of It, Pace/MacGil Gallery, NY
Small Things Considered II, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 2015 *Black & White*, Albertina Museum, Vienna
- 2014 *Thirtieth Anniversary Exhibition: Thirty Years Thirth-one Photographers*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 2009 *Masters of Photography*, Gallery Fifty One, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2007 *Past present future I*, Laurence Miller Gallery, NY
- 2006 *Summer vacation: Photographs from the collection*, Philadelphia museum of art
- 2004 *Photography: Inaugural Installation*, MoMa, NY
- 2000 *MoMA2000: Making Choices-Seeing Double*, MoMa, NY
- 1999 *Le siècle du corps, Photographies 1900-2000*, Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne
- 1993 *Multiple Images: Photographs Since 1965 from the collection*, MoMa, NY
- 1990 *Photography until now*, MoMa, NY
- 1983 *Big pictures by Contemporary Photographers*, MoMa, NY

- 1980-81 *Absage ab das Einzelbild*, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Allemagne
Erweiterte Fotografie, Wiener Secession, Autriche
- 1979 *Contemporary American Photographers: Curator's Choicen Venezia '79*, Venise, Italie
- 1976 *New Exposures*, Museum of Fine Arts, Chicago
- 1973 *Landscape/Cityscape, A selection of Twentieth-Century American Photographs*, MET
- 1970 *New Phtography*, USA, MoMa, NY
- 1968 *Photography as Printmaking*, MoMa, NY
Photography and the City, Smithsonian Insitution, Washington DC
- 1967 *The persistence of Vision*, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY
- 1963 *Photography 63/An International Exhibition*, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY
- 1960-61 *The Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography*, MoMa, NY
- 1959 *Photography in the Fine Arts I*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY
Photographs from the Museum Collection, MoMa, NY

PUBLICATIONS

- 2008 *Ray K. Metzker : Notes de lumière*, Musée de l'Élysée de Lausanne
- 2000 *Turner Evan, Ray K. Metzker, Landscapes*, New York, Aperture
- 1999 Miller Laurence, *Ray K. Metzker, City Stills*, Munich, Prestel
- 1990 *Ray K. Metzker: Composites*, New York, Laurence Miller Gallery
- 1988 *Ray K. Metzker: Earthly Delight*, New York, Laurence Miller Gallery
- 1984 *Tucker Anne, Unknow Territory: Photographs by Ray K. Metzker*, NY, Aperture/Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts
- 1979 *Ray K. Metzker: Sand Creatures*, Millerton, New York, Aperture, 1979.

COLLECTIONS

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts
 Allen Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio
 Allentown Art Museum, Pennsylvania
 The Art Institute of Chicago
 Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, New South Wales
 Baltimore Museum of Art
 Bank of America LaSalle Bank Photography Collection, Chicago
 Beloit College, Wisconsin
 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
 Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, Tucson
 Chrysler Museum of Art, Ohio
 Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Middeltton, Connecticut
 The Detroit Institute of Arts
 Exchange National Bank of Chicago
 Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
 Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris
 Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, The University of California, Los Angeles
 Hallmark Card Collection, Kansas City, Missouri
 High Museum of Atlanta
 International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY
 The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
 Krannert Art Museum, University of Illionois, Champaign

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Museum of Fine Arts, Saint Petersburg, Florida
The museum of Modern Art, New York
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC
Philadelphia Museum of Art
San Antonio Museum of Arts, Texas
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Shadai Gallery, Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics, Tokyo
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Saint Louis Art Museum
Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography
The Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio
University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts