

STEVEN RIFKIN

OVERTIME

OPENING ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 20 FROM 2 TO 7 PM

EXHIBITION FROM JANUARY 20 TO MARCH 3, 2018

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



© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

I first discovered Steven Rifkin's own photographs as I was perusing the collection of photographic prints that he has been assembling for over thirty years. Almost by chance, at his vast studio in Mount Vernon, in the suburbs of New York City, I came across a body of small, remarkable prints signed Steven Rifkin. I was amazed since he had never told me about his own photographs before. But in fact, after the first moments of astonishment had passed, I was not all that surprised for Rifkin is one of those reserved people who is always ready to listen but rarely reveals anything about themselves. I very soon decided to put his photographs on display at the gallery. Rather than documenting the world, they talk of his emotions, his own life. I am very pleased to be able to take this particular byway; I am extremely happy that Steven Rifkin has chosen Les Douches to unveil his work.

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STEVEN RIFKIN OR THE GENTLENESS OF LIFE

It is perhaps wrong to imagine Steven Rifkin as a calm, almost happy man, of extreme elegance and refinement. But this is obviously how we imagine him in light of his work. The title of this exhibit could easily have been *The Gentleness of Life*.

Rifkin takes us on a tour of a day-to-day America that changes almost in real-time, one that we have rarely seen. From the 1970s to the present day, Rifkin shows us an America of astounding purity. His inhabitants are photographed as so many actors in a silent musical, filmed in black and white. When they come in pairs, they are like the positive side of Diane Arbus's characters. Rifkin does not belong to any tradition; he is his own tradition. As such, he tells us the story of his own America, a peaceful America where Kennedy and Martin Luther King were never assassinated, an America that never experienced Vietnam, an America where Donald Trump never became president.

Yet this appearance of supreme gentleness owes as much to the quality of his prints as to their subjects. It is impossible to imagine Rifkin's photos printed by anyone other than himself. They have the softness and mystery of sketches, so much so that one wonders whether they are prints or drawings. So it is hardly surprising to learn that Rifkin is also the official printer for a number of major photographers. And among these great photographers is Rifkin himself.

Olivier Beer

Scriptwriter

In 1965, when I was 11, my Uncle Abe visited my family in St. Paul, Minnesota from Johannesburg, South Africa. He brought gifts for the family. What he gave me changed my life: a Kodak Instamatic Camera. It was a wonderful gift. The profound impact of the camera had everything to do with the time that I spent taking and looking at pictures with my Uncle.

My Uncle took me for a walk around my neighborhood. He encouraged me to take photographs of whatever I was interested in. I remember taking a picture of the side of a small angled hill with a bush sticking out, a bit of sidewalk receding on the right side, treetops, boulevards, driveways, rooftops and powerlines.

After exposing a couple rolls of film we walked to the neighborhood drugstore to drop off the film for processing and printing. A couple days later we went back. Once back home, Uncle Abe laid out the little square prints on a table, looked at and talked to me about them. He seemed very interested in the photos. He pointed out the hill with the bush and spoke about the space of the image and the sense of loneliness that he felt looking at it. He talked about the roof shingles and the line of the roof intersecting the valley of the roof. He asked me what I thought, which pictures I liked and how they made me feel.

This was the first time that an adult treated me like a peer. It made a powerful impact for a very young person.

What I didn't know until years later was that my Uncle owned the largest group of photo stores in Johannesburg. He sold equipment to all of the major photographers who lived or worked there. When he found out that I had moved to New York to pursue photography he asked me if I wanted to meet his old friend Alfred Eisenstadt. Uncle Abe was thrilled that I found my life's work in Photography.

I have continued my interest in taking pictures of whatever strikes me visually. What I see now is different from how I saw the world yesterday. The visual journey has morphed and progressed throughout time.

Attending art school was helpful. The education exposed me to art, artists and some of the technical issues in photography. Going on to graduate school provided the missing links to my education. Studying with Reginald Heron and Henry Holmes Smith demonstrated what teaching is about. Reg's astonishing answers to my questions pushed me to the library for days of research to understand. Assisting Henry gave me the gift of seeing how an artist thinks and works. It was Henry who first asked me to work for him in the darkroom. The career paths that I was looking at, teaching, artist and commercial photographer, all had my interest but I felt most at peace when I worked in the darkroom. Henry's ask became my life's work.

The course of my career has allowed me to make black & white prints for many of the contemporary masters of photography. Tom Arndt, Edie Baskin, Peter Beard, Robert Bergman, Werner Bischof, Robert Buck, Tseng Kwong Chi, Larry Clark, Mariana Cook, Petah Coyne, Bruce Davidson, Lynn Davis, Patrick Demarchelier, Louis Faurer, Sandi Fellman, Richard Fleischner, Adam Fuss, David Goldes, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Sharon Harper, Elizabeth Heyert, William Hillman, Chip Hooper, Richard Learoyd, Vera Lutter, Vivian Maier / John Maloof, Robert Mapplethorpe, Diana Michener, Lisette Model, Jean Pagliuso, Shana & Robert ParkeHarrison, Victor Skrebneski, Philip Trager, Arthur Tress, Katherine Turczan, James Van Der Zee and Wang Wusheng, to name a few. Every one of these artists speaks about their pictures in different terms. I have witnessed their visual vocabulary change throughout their lives. Some view their work in relation to how they fit into the history of the medium, some speak of music, while all want what is in their mind's eye to be realized in their prints.

As my world has evolved my pictures have also. The images have become a bit more abstract and freer of structure easily identified from our day to day world. The snippets of street scenes and people have evolved into an interest in a more conceptual approach focused on structure and the spacial relationships between objects and angles of view. A metaphor for how I see the world: a world of confusion. One that wakes me in the morning feeling disassociated by politics, self centered clamor, and a void of love between the world's people, evidenced by their lack of hope. The hypocrisy of religious love thy neighbor but kill whomever is not like you. My pictures have always offered me an escape to a simpler place, where my mind can run free. A place that leaves me feeling timeless and safe. A setting that I can run away to and think about when nothing is making sense.

Welcome to my private world.

Steven Rikfin

OVERTIME

SELECTION OF WORKS

Steven Rifkin
Untitled, Farm Auction, MN, 1989
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris



Steven Rifkin
Untitled, Lattoya, CA, n.d
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris



Steven Rifkin
Untitled, St Paul, MN, 1976
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris



Steven Rifkin
Untitled, Kansas City, MO, 1976
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris



Steven Rifkin
Untitled, Kansas City, MO, 1975
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
© Steven Rifkin / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris



Steven Rifkin
Untitled, Kansas City, MO, 1975
Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist in 2017
Edition 1/5
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EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

2002

Zen and the Art of Photography, Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York, NY

2001

Emerging Artist's Summer Exhibition, Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York, NY

1999

Weinstein Gallery Summer Exhibition, Minneapolis, MN

1998

Exhibition Benefit for Hetrick-Martin Institute, Paul Morris Gallery, New York, NY

1994

Rocks: Photographs from the Quetico, Carolyn J. Roy Gallery, New York, NY

1992

Landscapes of Hennipen County, Hennipen Historical Society, Minneapolis, MN

1989

Parsons College of Art, New York, NY

1988

The Floyd Segal Collection, Milwaukee Museum of Art, Milwaukee, WI

1986

Figures in the Night, E.M Donahue Gallery, New York, NY

1981

Photographs of New York City, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

1977

The Goshen College of Art, Goshen, IN

1976

Corlee Award Show, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO

1974

Quiefs and Other Pigs, Portland School of Art, Portland, ME

COLLECTIONS

Milwaukee Museum of Art, Milwaukee, WI

Hennipen Historical Society, Minneapolis, MN

EDUCATION

Master of Fine Arts-Photography, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

Bachelor of Fine Arts- Photography, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO