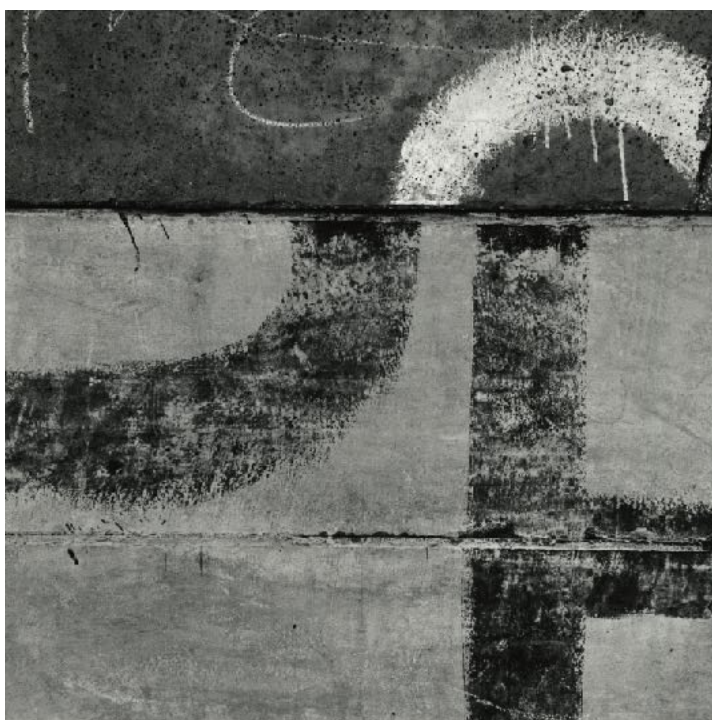


AARON SISKIND

STRIPPING DOWN

OPENING ON OCTOBER 27 FROM 2 TO 7 PM

FROM OCTOBER 27 TO DECEMBER 22, 2018



© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

Aaron Siskind (1903-1991)'s work cannot be reduced to a single photographic genre. Alongside his remarkable career as a teacher who put a stamp on several generations of photographers, this great figure in the history of American photography never ceased to surprise. From his very documentary vision with the Photo League to his much more plastic endeavours linked to abstract, expressionist painters, his approach to photography embraced different styles and ruffled numerous prejudices.

The gallery is very pleased to be able to present some forty photographs tied to his experiments, to his attention to minute things, to precarious forms, to snippets of language springing from the vestiges of time. His career was at the very least unique, with a body of work that remains exceptionally modern even today.

Les Douches la Galerie

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Du mercredi au samedi, de 14h à 19h
et sur rendez-vous

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AARON SISKIND

Aaron Siskind's towering presence in the landscape of twentieth-century American photography rises from two foundations of accomplishment and influence — his art and his teaching. Beginning in the early 1930s and continuing until his death at eighty-seven in 1991, his copious production of varied and highly creative images created a legacy of original vision which eventually obliterated whatever line might still have seemed to segregate photography and painting in the 1940s and 1950s. While he is often compared to such Abstract Expressionist painters as Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman and Franz Kline, with whom he was good friends, the records show that Siskind's photographs had as much influence on their work as theirs had on his. Siskind's manner of zooming in on visual details and fragments in ways that explored gesture and shape but that had little to do with the nominal subject matter in front of the camera clearly made him a brother in the family of Abstract Expressionists. (...)

Siskind was born on 4 December 1903 in New York into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants. (...) Finding his home life unexciting, Siskind spent much of his youth roaming the streets, responding to the intellectual and social stimulation he found there. His devotion to beauty, discovery and expression marked him as an artist from the beginning, although, at first, words were his medium. The socialist ideals of justice and equality appealed to him just as did the many sidewalk speakers espousing them from soapboxes on upper Broadway. By the age of twelve Siskind had his own soapbox and was attracting a regular audience. (...)

As a wedding present for his first marriage, Siskind was given a camera. He experimented with it during a honeymoon on Bermuda and found he enjoyed it. By 1932 he had purchased a better camera and joined the Film and Photo League in New York City, one of the most influential of the numerous camera clubs in the United States. (...) The habits of working he developed doing documentary photography — keeping everything in sharp focus and shooting from a simple point of view — never left him. 'I have remained very true to my documentary training: he recalled in a 1963 interview. By this he meant that he retained 'tremendous faith in the thing itself'. Whatever metaphoric or symbolic energy his images might release, objects in his photographs such as rocks or peeling paint, remained recognizable objects in the real world. (...)

Undeterred, Siskind continued on his own path, and in the summer of 1943 in the fishing village of Gloucester, Massachusetts he had what he called 'a picture experience' an epiphany that changed the course of his work for ever. Instead of working from a programme, as he had done on documentary projects, he devoted himself to something that he had already sensed was important — letting objects speak for themselves in their own way. (...)

In Gloucester Siskind went a step further: he began without any conscious ideas that he would then have to forget in order to photograph in this new way. Instead he substituted the discipline of a fixed working routine that had nothing to do with the things he would photograph. Each morning he walked out with twelve sheets of film, enough to make six pictures, two exposures for each. He worked within a very small area, covering no more than a single wharf or block of the village. When he printed the photographs that winter, he saw something unexpected. In an interview in 1963, he recalled those moments: 'To put it on a higher expressive plane: there was, in a sense a revelation to me. I made some pictures and these pictures revealed meaning to me, a way of making a picture which I had never dreamed of before. Well, when that happens to you, you've just got to follow.' 'I didn't push photography,' he said, 'photography, in a sense, led me.'

Siskind saw how he could move fully from the sphere of description to the plane of ideas in abstracted form. He saw in what he had done — framing organic objects within strong geometric compositions — a reflection of a basic duality he had long puzzled over. 'In the pictures you have the object,' Siskind continued in the 1963 interview, 'but you have in the object or superimposed on it, a thing I would call the "image" which contains my idea. And these things are present at one and the same time. And there's a conflict, a tension. The object is there, and yet it's not an object. It's something else. It has meaning, and the meaning is partly the object's meaning, but mostly my meaning.'

It has been argued that photography emerged as an inevitable result of the long quest in the visual arts to achieve single-point, three-dimensional perspective within the two dimensions of a flat picture plane. Iro-

nically, Siskind had discovered that his growth as an artist demanded that he discard this hallmark of photographic technology. In the 'flat, unyielding space' of the perspectiveless picture plane, as he described it in *'The Drama of Objects'*, he could represent his 'deep need for order'. Here, objects 'cannot escape back into the depth of perspective. The four edges of the rectangular [space] are absolute bounds. There is only the drama of the objects, and you, watching.'

In 1945 and for many years afterwards, Siskind's photographs seemed a radical departure from his documentary work, having more to do with painting than photography. Speaking to the History of Photography class at Columbia College in Chicago in 1982, Siskind recalled that, 'for a long time [Garry] Winogrand went around saying, "Siskind isn't a photographer — he's something else."' With a chuckle, he added, 'He's stopped doing that.' Reflecting on his place in photography's history in the 1985 videotaped interview previously mentioned, Siskind said that, 'In the course of the history of photography we were [in the 1930s and 1940s] at a period when people were emphasizing the sociological and psychological and things like that, but there was a time before when they made pictures which were metaphors, symbols.' He did not see himself as being revolutionary: 'It was just that I brought some elements of the past forward,' he said.

Aaron Siskind, James Rhem ; 55 Collection, Phaidon, 2003

L'ÉPURE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE

SELECTION OF WORKS

Aaron Siskind

Arequipa 94, 1979

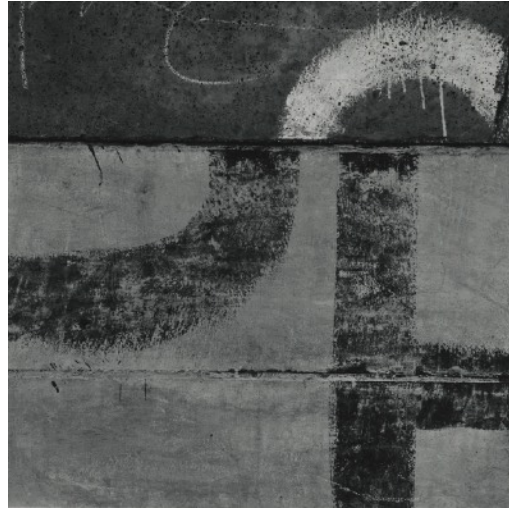
Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 24,7 x 24,8 cm

Print size: 28 x 35 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1805011



Aaron Siskind

Gloucester 3, 1945

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 24,7 x 32 cm

Print size: 28 x 35 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1712003



Aaron Siskind

Chicago 56, 1960

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 33 x 42,3 cm

Print size: 35,5 x 43 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1805027



Aaron Siskind

Puruchuco 39, 1979

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 23,7 x 24,7 cm

Print size: 28 x 35 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1805020



Aaron Siskind

Martha's Vineyard 111, 1954

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 24,5 x 32,6 cm

Print size: 28 x 35 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1805017



Aaron Siskind

Feet 119, 1957

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Image size: 27 x 34 cm

Print size: 27 x 34 cm

© Aaron Siskind / Courtesy Les Douches la
Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. AS1805005



AARON SISKIND

1903

Born December 4th, New York City.

1915-26

Educated in New York City at De Witt Clinton High School, and City College, B.S.S. in Literature.

1926-47

English instructor in New York City public school system.

1929

Married Sidonie Glatter; gets his first camera as a honeymoon gift.

1932-35

Joined the New York Film and Photo League; buys a Voigtlander Avus.

1936-41

Active in the reorganized New York Photo League. Established the Feature Group, a documentary production unit, as part of the Photo League School. Produced group and independent photo-series including: The Catholic Worker Movement; Dead End: The Bowery; The End of City Repertory Theatre; The Harlem Document; Lost Generation: The Plight of Youth Today; The Most Crowded Block in the World; Park Avenue: North and South; Sixteenth Street: A Cross-section of New York; and Tabernacle City.

1940

Published "The Feature Group" in Photo Notes.

1943-44

Created increasingly symbolic and abstract photographs based on discarded and found objects on Martha's Vineyard and in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

1945

Published "The Drama of Objects" in Minicam Photography.

Established close and enduring ties to the artists of the New York School.

1947-49

Taught photography at Trenton Junior College, Trenton, New Jersey.

1947-51

Exhibited regularly at Charles Egan Gallery. Elaine de Kooning wrote "The Photographs of Aaron Siskind" as the introduction to a 1951 exhibition of Siskind's photographs at the gallery.

1950

Wrote "Credo" as an artist's statement for the symposium What is Modern Photography? organized by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Taught with Harry Callahan during the summer at Black Mountain College.

1951-71

At the invitation of Harry Callahan, Siskind joined the faculty of the Illinois Institute of Technology Institute of Design in Chicago. He was Professor of Photography until 1959, when he became Director of the Photographic Department. He led and participated in advanced student projects including: Apartment interiors of the Mies van der Rohe Lake Shore Drive Skyscrapers, A Chicago Settlement House, The Chicago Housing Authority, The Complete Architecture of Adler and Sullivan (also called the Louis Sullivan project), Details of the Human Body, The Park System of Chicago, and The Series Form. Traveled in Greece and Rome.

1956

With Harry Callahan, published "Learning Photography at the Institute of Design," in Aperture.

1959

Horizon Press published his first book, Aaron Siskind: Photographs.

1960-70

Co-editor of Choice Magazine.

1962

Invited by Nathan Lyons to the inaugural "Invitational Teaching Conference" in Rochester, NY, which became the Society for Photographic Education.

1963-64

Served as one of the first Directors of the Society for Photographic Education. Board member, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

1965

George Eastman House published his second book, Aaron Siskind: Photographer.

1966

Recipient, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for Creative Arts – Photography.

1969

Named Bingham Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at the University of Louisville.

Received the Philadelphia College of Art Gold Star of Merit Award and the Rhode Island Governor's Prize for the Arts.

Founding member of the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester.

1971

Awarded the degree of Honorary Doctor of Arts from Columbia College in Chicago.

1971-76

Taught photography at Rhode Island School of Design.

1973

Lectured in Photography at the Carpenter Center of Harvard University.

1976

Received the National Endowment for the Arts Grant for Visual Arts in Photography.

1971-91

An established master, Siskind continues to make photographs and was published and exhibited widely.

1984

Incorporated the Aaron Siskind Foundation, charged with managing his collection of vintage photographs and supporting contemporary photography with its income.

1985

Funded the Aaron Siskind Center for Photography within the Department of Prints, Drawings and Photographs at Rhode Island College of Design.

1991

Died February 8th, in Providence RI, at 87 years old

RECENT SHOWS

2015

Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors, CALIFORNIA MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY, Riverside, California

2014

Aaron Siskind - L'Autre Réalité Photographique, PAVILLION POPULAIRE, Montpellier, France

2009

At the Crossroads of American Photography: Callahan, Siskind, Sommer, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona

2005

Lisboaphoto 2005, Museu Nacional De Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Portugal

2004

Museum Of Fine Arts, Houston

The Phillips Collection, Washington

2003

Center For Creative Photography, Tucson

Museum Of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago

Madison Art Center, Madison

The Art Museum At Princeton University, Princeton

Cleveland Museum Of Art, Cleveland

Whitney Museum Of Art, New York

Hanmi Museum Of Photography, Southern Seoul, Bangi-Dong, Korea

Studio Museum, Harlem