

**LES DOUCHES  
LA GALERIE**

PRESS KIT

# RAY K. METZKER

*When hands weave the light*

EXHIBITION FROM MARCH 19 TO JULY 31, 2020



© Estate of Ray K. Metzker / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

Les Douches la Galerie is pleased to present *When hands weave the light*, our second exhibition dedicated to the work of Ray K. Metzker. Composed of some fifty prints taken from various series, this exhibition highlights his sustained interest in experimentation. A virtuoso of light and absolute master of his prints, Metzker pushes the formal boundaries of the photographic medium as well as those of American urban space. These photographs, taken between 1957 and 1982, offer a unique visual journey through the streets of Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlantic City and several European cities.

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**Du mercredi au samedi**  
de 14h à 19h  
ou sur rendez-vous

# When hands weave the light

## PRESS RELEASE

In twenty-five years, Ray Metzker has produced more than a dozen series of photographs, each series radically different from the others. He has steadily sought new vision, asking, "Why does new vision matter? Do I need this? Does it increase my capacity to care? No, but it increases my capacity to think."<sup>1</sup> For Metzker, the struggle for new vision is an act against inertia and stillness and toward intensity and knowledge. (...)

Each new series of photographs begins with a change in his preoccupations about photography or with a change in what – or where – he is photographing. He opens himself to new experience and watches his ideas emerge and develop. He has said, "At that time I am scanning or simply looking. When I realize there are certain stimuli that I keep responding to, that reoccur in my perceptual field, then I can begin to identify a pattern." These new constants become what he calls his "terms", which are the contractual arrangements he makes with himself about an emerging series of pictures. The "terms" are both points of departure and the rules that discipline his work. They are both limiting and liberating, allowing him license to explore within their confines and to push until the terms are exhausted. (...)

This working process evolved during Metzker's first major project, *My Camera and I in the Loop*, 1957-1958, which was his graduate thesis at the Institute of Design in Chicago. Metzker's initial "term" for *The Loop* was the physical boundary formed by Chicago's elevated railway, which encircles downtown. As Metzker photographed, he realized that the project was also about formal limitations: the relationship between his camera and himself, and his search for significant form, which took precedence over the objects yielding the forms. Using a Leica (with 35mm, 50mm, and 135mm lenses) and a Rolleiflex, he made images that explore motion blur, depth of field, vantage point, frame, focus, and back lighting, a sampling of the in-depth explorations that later work would compass. (...)

Beginning with *The Loop*, Metzker looked to street activity for what he calls "events." "I would see those relationships developing, and I would feel something fall into place," he says. "It wasn't that I came up to something and said, isn't that a nice arrangement? It was a sense of the tension, of knowing that these things were moving, and also that they had come into a position where the tensions were right and that was it. After a while it could happen simply with light."

When Metzker traveled in Europe in 1960-1961, he mastered his skill of composing with highlights and heightened his sensitivity to lyric sweetness in human gestures. In his view, Europeans are unhurried; they converse, touch, and appear to integrate with their surroundings rather than pass through them in the preoccupied isolation that characterizes the people in the Chicago series. (...)

When Metzker moved to Philadelphia in 1962, the dual enchantment of photographing people and of composing with highlights was refined into two distinct pursuits. (...) Also like *The Loop* pictures, the Philadelphia photographs were taken in a prescribed area, within walking distance of Metzker's apartment. (...)

Not wanting to describe his downtown neighborhood, he took graphic delight in its details: signage, wrought iron façades, street lamps, and pavement markings. In these widely published images from Philadelphia, people are either excluded or seen only in silhouette. The most striking aspect of these pictures is the economy of the compositions. They reach a simplicity and directness that Metzker regards as a climax in his pursuit of minimal but evocative spaces. (...)

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<sup>1</sup> All unattributed quotations by Ray K. Metzker were made to Anne Tucker and recorded in her journals in 1983 or 1984.

# When hands weave the light

## PRESS RELEASE

Impermanence and flux are also expressed in his pictures as fragments: a face or arm disembodied in shadows, lights floating free of a building, a figure dissected by venetian blinds. Metzker acknowledges that fragmentation is a means of transforming an event to achieve a personal synthesis. "You have to break something down," he has said, "in order to have the parts to synthesize. If something's complete, there is no need to synthesize – it's complete, finished. In journalism, the photograph is of an event, whereas in my later work, the photograph is the event." <sup>2</sup>(...)

There are also ideas that Metzker carries from the studio to the street. The studio work of the mid-1970s culminated with the series *Pictus Interruptus*, 1976-1980. For *Pictus*, he fashioned objects in the studio to be included in photographs made outside. He held small objects directly in front of the camera lens, partially obscuring the scene beyond the object.

Extending the predominance of light over dark tones which began in New Mexico, the images of *Pictus* are composed of angular black occluding devices held against hard white planes or of winding white shapes on light gray fields. (...) The *Pictus* photographs are breathtaking in their originality and disjunctive associations. They are haunting and indecipherable. (...)

In Metzker's most recent series, *City Whispers*, people are isolated, fragmented, and often faceless. While his cities are neither inviting nor kind, the streets are jumpy with bright lights and movement in a lively play of highlights, shadows, and reflections that contradicts the weight of human isolation, of beings alone in a huge dark universe. The bittersweet pain in the pictures is made palpable through the elegance of its expression.

This recent work incorporates ideas and pictorial devices from previous series without establishing elaborate, technical terms. He achieves, in single-negative format, graphic events first realized in multiple-negative compositions. The spatial ambiguities created by abutting two negatives in *Double Frame* are brought about now with shadows and shafts of light. The fragmentation achieved by overlapping negatives in *Composites* is accomplished in *City Whispers* by photographing naturally overlapping shapes. As in all of his previous work, the "event" that he is photographing is light, but in *City Whispers*, he reaches new levels of synthesis and control of multilayered scenes.

Anne Wilkes Tucker

Curator emerita of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (1976 - 2015)

Excerpts from the preface by Anne Wilkes Tucker, published in 1985 in *Unknown territory: Photographs by Ray K. Metzker*, Aperture, on the occasion of the exhibition organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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<sup>2</sup> Chuck Isaacs, "Ray K. Metzker: An Interview," *Afterimage*, vol. 6, no. 4 (November 1978), p.15

# *When hands weave the light*

## **PRESS IMAGES**

### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Valencia, Spain, 1961*

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM2002004



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Chicago, 1958*

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM2002014



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Philadelphia: City Whispers, 1980*

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 11 x 14 inches

Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM1609073



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# *When hands weave the light*

## **PRESS IMAGES**

### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Philadelphia*, 1964

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM2002017



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Chicago - Loop*, 1957

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

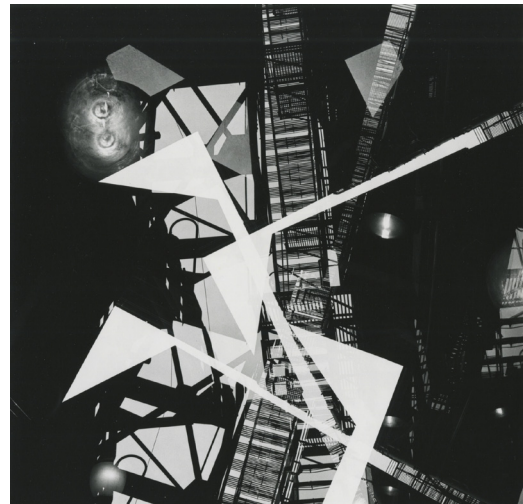
Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM1609011



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Philadelphia*, 1968

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

Annotated in pencil by the artist and RKM

Archive stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM1810020



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# *When hands weave the light*

## **PRESS IMAGES**

### **Ray K. Metzker**

*City Whispers, Philadelphia, 1980*

Gelatin silver print, printed later by the artist

Print size: 11 x 14 inches

Artist stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM1709006



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*City Whispers, Philadelphia, 1982*

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

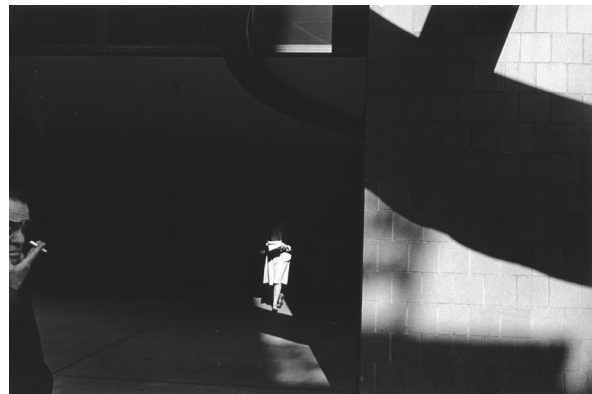
Print size: 11 x 14 inches

Artist stamp on verso

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie Paris

N° Inv. RM1709007



### **Ray K. Metzker**

*Couplets, New York, 1968*

Gelatin silver print, vintage, printed by the artist

Print size: 8 x 10 inches

Signed by the artist

© Estate of Ray K. Metzker

Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. RM1502001



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RAY K. METZKER

## BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1931 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Died in 2014 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Ray K. Metzker was born in 1931 in Milwaukee. Photography became his passion after his mother gave him his first camera when he was 12. In 1953, he graduated from Beloit College in Wisconsin with a fine art degree. He earned a Master's degree in 1959 at the Institute of Design, Chicago (which at that time was being referred to as the New Bauhaus and was considered one of the most important photography programs in the U.S.), where he studied with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. He taught for many years at the Philadelphia College of Art and also at the University of New Mexico. The Museum of Modern Art in New York gave him his first solo exhibition in 1967.

In his over-60-year career, Metzker had more than 50 solo exhibitions at major museums around the world and was the recipient of numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, and a Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal and Honorary Fellowship. His work is in the collections of more than 40 institutions and is the subject of more than 10 monographs. Among the institutions holding his work in their collections are the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, National Museum of American Art – Smithsonian, Washington D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Art Institute of Chicago; Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas City; Cleveland Museum of Art; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Musee d'Elysee, Lausanne; and Albertina, Vienna.

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# RAY K. METZKER

## C.V.

### SOLO SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2019 *Ray K. Metzker, Black and Light*, Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York
- 2017 *Ray K. Metzker, Abstractions*, Les Douches la Galerie, Paris
- 2016 *Ray K. Metzker: Stripteases + Penn Center Pieces*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York
- 2015 *Ray Metzker, The Poet of Light*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York
- 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, New York
- 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, New York
- 1988 *Earthly Delights*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York
- 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, New York  
*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, New York  
*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, New York.
- 1964-65 *Composites*, MoMa, New York
- 1959 *My camera and I in the Loop*, The Art Institute of Chicago

### GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2019 *We were five – Cinq étudiants de l'Institute of Design et la revue Aperture* Musée Réattu, Arles
- 2017 *Black Chicago*, Les Douches la Galerie, Paris  
*Autophoto*, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art contemporain, Paris
- 2016 *Lux: The radiant sea*, Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York  
*Make Light Of It*, Pace/MacGil Gallery, New York  
*Small Things Considered II*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York
- 2015 *Black & White*, Albertina Museum, Vienna  
*New York*, Les Douches la Galerie, Paris
- 2014 *Thirty Years Thirteenth-one Photographers*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York
- 2009 *Masters of Photography*, Gallery Fifty One, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2007 *Past present future I*, Laurence Miller Gallery, New York

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# RAY K. METZKER

## C.V.

- 2006 *Summer vacation: Photographs from the collection*, Philadelphia Museum of Art
- 2004 *Photography: Inaugural Installation*, MoMa, New York
- 2000 *MoMA2000: Making Choices-Seeing Double*, MoMa, New York
- 1999 *Le siècle du corps, Photographies 1900-2000*, Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne
- 1993 *Multiple Images: Photographs Since 1965 from the collection*, MoMa, New York
- 1990 *Photography until now*, MoMa, New York
- 1983 *Big pictures by Contemporary Photographers*, MoMa, New York
- 1980-81 *Absage ab das Einzelbild*, Museum Folkwang, Essen, Allemagne  
*Erweiterte Fotografie*, Wiener Secession, Autriche
- 1979 *Contemporary American Photographers: Curator's Choice Venezia '79*, Venise, Italie
- 1976 *New Exposures*, Museum of Fine Arts, Chicago
- 1973 *Landscape/Cityscape, A selection of Twentieth-Century American Photographs*, MET, New York
- 1970 *New Phtography, USA*, MoMa, New York
- 1968 *Photography as Printmaking*, MoMa, New York  
*Photography and the City*, Smithsonian Insitution, Washington DC
- 1967 *The persistence of Vision*, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York
- 1963 *Photography 63/An International Exhibition*, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York
- 1960-61 *The Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography*, MoMa, New York
- 1959 *Photography in the Fine Arts I*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
*Photographs from the Museum Collection*, MoMa, New York

## PUBLICATIONS

- 2018 *Ray K. Metzker Unknown*, Only Photography, Berlin
- 2012 *The Photographs of Ray K. Metzker*, Keith Davis, Yale University Press
- 2009 *Ray K Metzker, Automagic*, Only Photography, Berlin
- 2008 *Ray K. Metzker : Notes de lumière*, Musée de l'Élysée de Lausanne
- 2000 *Ray K. Metzker, Landscapes*, Evan Turner, New York, Aperture
- 1999 *Ray K. Metzker, City Stills*, Laurence Miller, Munich, Prestel
- 1990 *Ray K. Metzker: Composites*, New York, Laurence Miller Gallery
- 1988 *Ray K. Metzker: Earthly Delight*, New York, Laurence Miller Gallery
- 1984 *Unknow Territory: Photographs by Ray K. Metzker*, Anne Tucker, New York, Aperture/  
Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts
- 1979 *Ray K. Metzker: Sand Creatures*, Millerton, New York, Aperture, 1979.

## AWARDS

- 2000 Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal and Honorary Fellowship
- 1989 Bernheim Fellowship at the Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, Clermont, Kentucky.
- 1988 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
- 1975 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
- 1966 Guggenheim Fellowship, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

# RAY K. METZKER

## C.V.

### 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, Middletown, 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, New York  
The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky  
Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, 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, New York  
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

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