

# LEE FRIEDLANDER

Retrospective

11/09/-03/12/2021



**CO** Berlin

# PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, 27 July 2021

## LEE FRIEDLANDER

Retrospective

**C/O Berlin** presents the **Lee Friedlander . Retrospective** from **Sep 11 to Dec 3, 2021**. The **public opening** takes place on **Sep 10, 2021** from **21:00–00:00** at the Amerika Haus in Hardenbergstraße 22-24, 10623 Berlin.

A motorcyclist races straight towards us, headlights on full beam, commanding our attention and carrying the smell of asphalt and gasoline from a TV screen into a non-descript hotel room. This photo is taken from Lee Friedlander's *Little Screens* series, which sees TV sets make their triumphant entry into the daily lives of Americans, as a mass means of explaining the world. Its 1963 publication in *Harper's Bazaar* paved the way for Friedlander's later success as an artist who is now hailed as one of the most influential post-1950 photographers.

Hosted by C/O Berlin, the *Lee Friedlander. Retrospective* exhibition is now celebrating its German debut, showcasing the American master's six-decade long body of work – from his beginnings as a young photographer, snapping jazz legends for record covers, to his first non-commercial projects while on extensive road trips throughout the US and Europe, through to his photographic explorations of his own self and his family. Despite their sheer number, his photographs are highly recognizable and unique in their core visual features. Friedlander, who has yet to go a day without shooting a photo, combines intuitive experimentation with an impressive (re)collection of cultural references, utilizing public spaces to depict narratives of US history, store fronts and street scenes to make social observations. In his self-portraits, he deliberately resorts to devices such as silhouettes and mirror images, revolutionizing a genre in which such methods were long shunned and dismissed as basic mistakes. Many a time Friedlander manages to shift the rigid boundaries of the medium to his benefit. By seamlessly combining stylistic devices reminiscent of his mentors Eugène Atget, Robert Frank or Walker Evans with various approaches rooted in aesthetic formalism, he creates new structures that become an integral part of his work. In terms of image composition, the much-quoted 'decisive moment' (Henri Cartier-Bresson) is less of a concern to him than 'decisive framing': the determining photographic moment yields its central role to a construction made up of multiple image layers. Single elements assembled by association creating new levels of meaning. The emotions he arouses in his viewers are as multi-faceted as his work – ranging from delight, to contemplation, right through to unsettlement.

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The *Lee Friedlander . Retrospective* exhibition offers a complete, chronological overview of his artistic endeavors. Friedlander is known for compiling his work into series, which are expanded and regularly updated over several years. Alongside the projects that produced such highly acclaimed books as *The Little Screens* (1963), *The American Monument* (1976) and *America by Car* (2010), this exhibition features a wide range of portraits, self-portraits, family photographs, nature shots and cityscapes. Over time, his images have acquired an even deeper meaning. They are currently considered some of the most iconic photographs of everyday life in the US, bearing testimony to their ongoing validity as representations of America's social landscapes. 35 years after his first exhibition at the US Information Center of the Amerika Haus in Berlin, C/O Berlin is now unveiling 350 photographs and 50 books as well as miscellaneous material providing a variety of insights into Lee Friedlander's style-defining body of work. This exhibition was curated by Carlos Gollonet, Fundación MAPFRE, in collaboration with Felix Hoffmann, C/O Berlin Foundation. Supported by C/O Berlin Friends.

**Lee Friedlander** (\*1934, USA) started shooting photographs at 14 years old and attended the Los Angeles Art Center School, studying under Edward Kaminski until 1955. He then moved to New York where he became acquainted with Diane Arbus, Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand. In 1960 and 1962, he was awarded Guggenheim Foundation fellowships, allowing him to pursue non-commercial projects. As a representative of street photography, he is known for engaging with urban spaces and situations of everyday life, while also staging intricate self-portraits. In 1967, he took part in the legendary *New Documents* show curated by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In 2005, the MoMA hosted a comprehensive retrospective of his works. Friedlander's photo books such as *Self Portrait* (1970), *The American Monument* (1976), *Nudes* (1991) and *America by Car* (2010) have long since become milestones in their field. In 2005, he received the Hasselblad Foundation Award. Friedlander's works are on display in the most prominent photographic collections throughout the world.

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Berlin, 27 July 2021

## **Lee Friedlander**

Retrospective

### **Exhibition**

Sep 11 – Dec 3, 2021

### **Press Tour**

Sep 10, 2021 . 11:00

### **Opening**

Sep 10, 2021 . 21:00–00:00

### **Opening Hours**

Daily . 11:00–20:00

### **Admission**

10 euros . reduced 6 euros

### **Organizer**

C/O Berlin Foundation

Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin

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#coberlin

#LeeFriedlander

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### **Organized by**

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# PRESS IMAGES

Lee Friedlander . Retrospective

11/09–03/12/2021



# **PRESS IMAGES**

Lee Friedlander . Retrospective

11/09/–03/12/2021

**All Images** © Lee Friedlander . Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and Luhring Augustine, New York

**01** *New Mexico*, 2001 **02** *Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin*, 1986 **03** *Montana*, 2008  
**04** *Erik, New City, New York*, 1960 **05** *Baltimore, Maryland*, 1968 **06** *Haverstraw, New York*, 1966 **07** *Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona*, 1983 **08** *Florida*, 1963 **09** *Jean Genet, Chicago, Illinois*, 1968 **10** *Baton Rouge, Louisiana*, 1998  
**11** *Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming*, 1999 **12** *New York City, New York*, 2002

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Editorial note when referring to C/O Berlin:

C/O Berlin is an exhibition space for photography and visual media. We are a non-profit foundation unconstrained by commercial concerns. As such, we would appreciate if the word "gallery" was avoided when reporting on C/O Berlin. Many thanks!

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# WALL TEXTS

Lee Friedlander . Retrospective

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## INTRODUCTION

A motorcyclist races straight towards us, headlights on full beam, commanding our attention and carrying the smell of asphalt and gasoline from a TV screen into a nondescript hotel room. This photo is taken from Lee Friedlander's *Little Screens* series, which sees TV sets make their triumphant entry into the daily lives of Americans, as a mass means of explaining the world. Its 1963 publication in *Harper's Bazaar* paved the way for Friedlander's later success as an artist who is now hailed as one of the most influential photographers post-1950. Even today, Friedlander's photographs—whether portraits, nudes, self-portraits, photographs of workers, landscapes, or shop-window mannequins—are regarded as some of the most innovative and surprising works of the twentieth century. Eschewing the dominant norms of the formal canon, the search for technical perfection or aesthetic ideals, Friedlander instead concentrated on a direct style of photography that reflected the medium's potential, obviating distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the important and the unimportant. He queried both received norms and fossilized traditions, pushing photography's boundaries in order to discover the world anew.

C/O Berlin celebrates the German premiere of the exhibition *Lee Friedlander . Retrospective*, which encapsulates six decades of the US master photographer's body of work. The show includes his early days as a novice photographer who portrayed jazz legends for album covers, his first non-commercial projects completed during leisurely road trips cross the US and Europe, and his photographic explorations of his own image and of his family. Despite the tremendous number of photographs he has taken, the visual essence of his images remains unique and unmistakable. Even now, Friedlander takes photographs every day, and his work brings together an intuitive zest for experimentation and an impressive eye for cultural references. His light touch brings to life key historic moments in US public life and offers photographic studies of social milieus through shop windows and street scenes. His self-portraits make conscious use of silhouettes and reflections, revolutionizing a genre that had hitherto taken pains to avoid such devices, which were deemed errors. Friedlander constantly succeeds in shifting fossilized boundaries within photography to his advantage. He borrowed photographic devices from such predecessors and heroes as Eugène Atget, Robert Frank, and Walker Evans, and harmonized diverse formal aesthetic approaches so that their new configuration became a definitive part of his own work. He was less interested in Henri Cartier-Bresson's oft-cited "decisive moment" than in a "decisive framing" when composing his images: that is, he constructed a number of picture planes rather than showcasing a single decisive photographic moment. Friedlander combined individual elements in an associative manner, thus opening up new levels of interconnected meanings. His works are as multifaceted as the feelings they spark in the viewer, from euphoria to a contemplative mood to disquietude.

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The exhibition *Lee Friedlander . Retrospective* offers a complete and chronological overview of his artistic work. Friedlander almost always groups his works into series to which he adds over a period of years, continuing to develop and update them, as well as record them in book form, with over fifty volumes published to date. The exhibition shows projects that culminated in highly respected books such as *The Little Screens* (1963), *The American Monument* (1976), and *America by Car* (2010), and also a number of portraits, self-portraits, family photographs, nature photography, and cityscapes. Over time, his photographs reveal new depths of meaning, showing their continued relevance in depicting America's social landscapes and achieving an iconic status among photographs of everyday US life. Thirty-five years after his first exhibition at the USn Information Center in Berlin's Amerika Haus, C/O Berlin is now showing around 350 photographs, over 50 books, as well as supplementary material from a diverse range of sources to present the style-defining oeuvre of Lee Friedlander. The exhibition has been curated by Carlos Gollonet, Fundación MAPFRE, in cooperation with Felix Hoffmann, C/O Berlin Foundation.

**Lee Friedlander** (b. 1934, US) began photographing at the age of fourteen. He completed his studies at the Art Center School Los Angeles in 1955 under Edward Kaminski. He then moved to New York, where he met Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, and Garry Winogrand. Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1960 and 1962 allowed him to pursue non-commercial projects. He considered urban space as a street photographer, photographing everyday situations and taking pictures of himself before the camera lens. He exhibited work as part of John Szarkowski's legendary exhibition *New Documents* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In 2005, MoMA showed a comprehensive retrospective of his work. Friedlander's photobooks are landmarks in the medium and include *Self Portrait* (1970), *The American Monument* (1976), *Nudes* (1991), and *America by Car* (2010). He received the Hasselblad Foundation Award in 2005. Friedlander's works are held by the world's most significant photography collections.

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In the 1960s, Lee Friedlander stirred up the small world of art photography with inventive ideas and techniques. The young artist, who had observed and assimilated the formal and conceptual innovations of photographers such as Walker Evans and Robert Frank, broke away from traditional models of representation and interpretation of reality, thus contributing to a renewal of our vision of the world.

During that decade, a remarkably creative and fruitful one for him, Friedlander started to lay the foundations for a monumental body of work that represented an intellectual renovation of photography's functions, subverting prevailing practices. His portraits fracture and overturn the very meaning of the genre. Some of his early images make use of strong blacks and tonal contrast, combined with a more conventional viewpoint that reaffirms the presence of the objects in muted settings (such as the ingenious *The Little Screens*) and making use of the ambiguity, humor, and juxtaposition of ideas that locates him in Dadaist and Surrealist traditions. It is in his street photographs, however, that we begin to discern the universe fragmented and reconstructed in the photographic images in which each element maintains its identity and fights to be considered: shop windows, reflections, truncations, obstacles, etc. This is a complex landscape, impersonal and at times chaotic, which brings the artist closer to Pop Art.

Friedlander earned a living in this period from magazine commissions, but he also started to work on personal projects as a break from the world of commercial photography. Almost all the themes on which he focused over the following decades thus emerged in parallel, and he used them as a tool to investigate photography's possibilities as a medium.

In 1963, Friedlander held his first solo exhibition at the George Eastman House (GEH) in Rochester, New York. During the next year, a Guggenheim fellowship allowed him to travel around Europe with his family, and some of the images that he took in Germany and Spain are presented here for the first time. Since then, he has actively shown his work in solo and group exhibitions, notably *Toward a Social Landscape* in 1966, also held at the GEH in Rochester, and *New Documents*, in which his work was shown alongside that of Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand at the MoMA in New York in 1967.

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By the 1970s, Lee Friedlander had already begun to lay the foundations for his future work while making use of the strategies that he would continue to develop over his lengthy career. It was in the American social landscape that he encountered the complexity, richness, and contradictions of the contemporary world. His miniature Leica camera, which allowed him to capture his subjects quickly, would become the perfect tool for engaging with his surroundings. Although these surroundings were the same ones seen by other photographers or by the public in general, he worked in a way that others did not. In Friedlander's images, the world possesses an intrinsic naturalness, but he also depicts realities that differ from those we are accustomed to seeing. His intervention is minimal, and he maintains the greatest respect for what he sees. The innovation here lies not just in the chosen subjects, but also in his way of portraying them. He gives formal meaning to the at-times desolate landscape, which is filled with disruptive elements such as overhead power lines, traffic lights, and billboards.

The pronounced tonal contrast of the images from earlier years diminishes, and what was previously dense is now lighter. Everything becomes more legible in a grayscale; a more fluid description in which the photographer's presence passes almost unnoticed. Friedlander's activities continued to evolve while he added new ones. We still find effects of collage, truncation, and obstacles, although there is now a greater flexibility and new depth in the description of the motifs. This is evident in *The American Monument*, one of the most important series within his oeuvre and within the history of photography in general. This work offers varied and unexpected viewpoints and surprising compositional structures, with more information than might be thought necessary. The 1976 publication based on this series is undoubtedly one of the greatest photography books of the twentieth century.

Friedlander is a master of his métier, and during these decades he refined his technique in the darkroom, expanding his camera's possibilities. It was in this period that he increasingly focused on his own, non-commercial work and only accepted particularly interesting commissions, for example those that led to the project *Factory Valley*, the first of his numerous books on the subject of American workers. Exhibitions, fellowships, and awards followed in large numbers, and he simultaneously founded *Haywire Press*, which published some of his early volumes, such as *Self Portrait* in 1970 and *Flowers and Trees* in 1981.

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After more than three decades using his 35mm Leica, Lee Friedlander reinvented himself in the 1990s with a new camera that would fundamentally change the way he worked: a Hasselblad Superwide with a negative four times larger than his previous camera, and a Zeiss lens. In this period, we encounter a new theme that motivated this change of equipment: the natural landscape. In the early 1990s, he began to work intensively in the Sonora desert in Arizona and the limitations of the Leica became apparent when he attempted to capture the complexity of that dense landscape's depth of field under blinding sunlight. After completing this project, *The Desert Seen* (1996), Friedlander decided to continue using the new camera, which captures motifs in both the foreground and the background with remarkable fidelity.

The American social landscape has been, and remains, the central theme of Friedlander's photography. This is particularly evident in series such as *America by Car* and *Sticks and Stones*. Here we encounter an updating of that landscape, which is also a summary of the obsessions that the artist has shared with his viewers for so many years: natural spaces, monuments, advertising slogans, metal barriers, portraits, self-portraits, etc. This has offered a constantly changing and ever more appealing terrain for the Superwide as used by Friedlander due to its ability to take full advantage of both the astonishing landscapes of America's national parks and the desolate settings found across the country: parking lots, roadside restaurants, humble buildings, and skyscrapers; even the cargo beds of pickup trucks offer interesting jumbles of different objects to investigate.

Friedlander's photography is thus a profound gauge of his country's social landscape and its often bizarre identity. This continues to be the case in his most recent work, which is the consequence of that same intelligent gaze with its ability to be surprised and to surprise us with each new image, enriching our vision of the world. As Nicholas Nixon writes in the catalogue for this exhibition: "When you squint at one of his pictures, the shapes, spaces and overall energy seem inevitable; balanced but full of force—and often joy. Everything in his frames matters. The form lifts the subject towards meaning."

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## **JAZZ**

Lee Friedlander's relationship with jazz goes beyond his love of the genre. From a very young age, he followed jazz bands across the country, traveling thousands of miles to see a performance. In his professional work, he took photographs for numerous record sleeves, particularly as commissions for Marvin Israel, the artistic director of Atlantic Records. Friedlander also photographed many of the great American jazz performers during these trips. His words recalling the first time he heard Charlie Parker aged sixteen are revealing: "I was dumbfounded. I somehow knew exactly where he was coming from. He made me understand that anything was possible." A plausible parallel has been suggested between the freedom inherent to jazz performing based on improvisation and the gestural liberty of Friedlander's photography, a trait that makes his visual style identifiable. "Anything is possible" is a starting point for the construction of a body of work which, while aware of tradition, breaks away from it with the same intelligence and intuition as Parker and which similarly took Friedlander towards new approaches of enormous significance for the history of the medium. His images, which might seem unsuccessful when compared to the norms of photographic language, can reinvent our way of seeing, taking us back to the origin of all perception in order to see the world as it is.

Most of these photographs are published in three books that pay tribute to Friedlander's passion for jazz, its musicians, and the city of New Orleans, which he visited on numerous occasions: *The Jazz People of New Orleans*, 1992; *American Musicians*, 1998; and *Playing for the Benefit of the Band*, 2013.

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## THE LITTLE SCREENS

In 1963, Lee Friedlander first published his photographs from *The Little Screens* series in *Harper's Bazaar* with a short accompanying text by Walker Evans, who defined him as “one of the most gifted and incisive of the new generation of American photographers,” describing Friedlander’s images as “deft, witty, spanking little poems of hate.” This was considerable praise for a photographer who was just starting to present work not directly produced for the commissions that were his source of income, principally for illustrated magazine and jazz albums. Friedlander had started to set aside the images that he considered interesting or “personal,” to use a term of that time. A photograph from this series, entitled *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (1961), was his first sale, bringing him twenty-five dollars and greatly surprising him that someone wished to acquire it.

In the early 1960s, the television set was only just beginning to be a standard piece of household furniture in Germany, but it was already a member of the American family; “someone” who required constant attention with its incessant, omnipresent chatter. Once accepted into the family, the television was not content to merely share the family space, but rather demanded a leading role and became the connecting link between the family and the world, and icons of popular culture, politicians, and minor celebrities now moved into the living room thanks to the new guest. It is not surprising that Friedlander made use of television screens as a subject: almost nothing in our domestic experience occupied such a prominent position as the television, and no other object obliged us to look at it as it did, even if only distractedly. As Flaubert said, it only requires an intense gaze on an object to make it interesting: what lies before us but which our eye seemingly does not perceive, takes its place in space at the moment when it is observed in an individualized manner. This sudden pre-eminence can create powerful images and give rise to interesting associations with the surrounding context of a fleetingness that only photography is capable of revealing.

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## **SELF-PORTRAITS**

Lee Friedlander published *Self Portrait* in 1970. This was his second book but his first monograph and the volume that launched Haywire Press, the publishing house that he had founded to make it possible. In the introduction he wrote: “These self-portraits span a period of six years and [ . . . ] happened as a peripheral extension of my work. They began as straight portraits but soon I was finding myself at times in the landscape of my photography. I might call myself an intruder. [ . . . ] I would see myself as a character or an element that would shift presence as my work would change in direction. At first, my presence in my photos was fascinating and disturbing. But as time passed and I was more a part of other ideas in my photos, I was able to add a giggle to those feelings. I suspect it is for one’s self interest that one looks at one’s surroundings and one’s self. This search is [ . . . ] indeed my reason and motive for making photographs. The camera is not merely a reflecting pool, and the photographs are not exactly the mirror, mirror on the wall that speaks with a twisted tongue. Witness is borne and puzzles come together at the photographic moment which is very simple and complete. The mind-finger presses the release on the silly machine and it stops time and holds what its jaws can encompass and what the light will stain. That moment when the landscape speaks to the observer.”

Through his self-portraits Friedlander has continued to investigate the possibilities of photography as a medium, and it is these images that involve the most significant break with its rules: What was viewed as a “mistake” in mainstream photography was transformed into key elements, such as the photographer’s shadow, reflections, and the overemphasis of an individual’s characteristic features. His avoidance of self-representation and self-reflection deprives the self-portrait of its usual function and meaning. Friedlander’s comprehensive body of work, one developed across his entire career, actively expands the genre and indeed reinvents it.

The large body of works of this type which span Friedlander’s career represent a challenge and a reinvention of the genre that has nothing to do with the practice of the present-day selfie, nor with the classic self-portraits of the history of painting. Alien, familiar, and surprising images are often illegible at first glance. They take a caustic and skeptical view of American culture, placing the viewer at the same distance to it as Friedlander himself. The uncompromising and bold images call role models into question and query the symbiotic relationship between the real and its representation.

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## **THE AMERICAN MONUMENT**

Published in 1976, *The American Monument* is one of the great photography projects and books of the twentieth century. This second monograph by Lee Friedlander was the one that fully revealed the scope and vitality of his work for the first time. The title sounds emphatic, serious, and transcendent, but the images as a whole—the majority taken between 1971 and 1975—go beyond the narrow margins of documentary photography and locate themselves in the field of artistic expression. Eugène Atget continued to be Friedlander's guide, but what he created were photographs, not documents. Using his own, distinctive language and rising above the trivial nature of the themes, Friedlander offered a new perspective on the already familiar iconography of American art in *The American Monument*, and his seemingly more spontaneous approach connected with art movements of the day such as Pop Art, with whose artists he shared a new way of reflecting on the visual world of commonplaces.

Friedlander dignified these simple monuments with his photographs but, as with his selfportraits, he incorporated irony, humor, and the juxtaposition of ideas and objects, strategies already inherent in this new gaze on the world. Each monument is one more element in the landscape and is treated with the same deliberate indifference, just as we would see it if we walked past it every day. The variety of compositional structures and viewpoints is surprising; in some cases, the monument is half-concealed between trees or buried in fragmentary visions between the street signs and advertisements that fill our cities.

Despite our familiarity with the American landscape due to the work of various generations of photographers, it remains slightly alien to us, at times incomprehensible and at others surprising. We appreciate these monuments not for what they commemorate, but for an irreverent and skeptical vision of American culture which we also possess, with the same distance from the theme as Friedlander. His coherence and permanent risk-taking are aimed at this renewal of earlier models which participates in the dialectic between the real and its representation.

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## **PORTRAITS**

Lee Friedlander's approach to portraiture, one of the most established artistic genres, again reveals a critical reflection on the medium of photography.

Although he produced hundreds of portraits, his activity in this genre does not reveal an interest in serial cataloguing like August Sander, nor an aestheticizing or romantic gaze. Rather, his practice is closer to the family photo album—and with the exception of a few commissions to photograph personalities from the world of jazz and a few casual street photograph—his subjects are generally friends and relatives. Friedlander's camera makes no distinction between well-known and anonymous subjects. These portraits are located in simple family settings, but they are taken using unusual viewpoints and lighting, with fleeting expressions and informal poses.

In one of his first books of portraits, *Lee Friedlander: Portraits* of 1985, unknown individuals appear alongside famous writers, musicians, and photographers such as Walker Evans, Diane Arbus, and Friedlander's close friend Garry Winogrand, to whom the book is dedicated.

Over the following decades, Friedlander's work in portraiture maintained this direction, although in the 1990s he switched from a Leica to a Hasselblad, with its impressive descriptive capacity, giving greater eloquence to the subjects' presence.

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## **FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photography in a family context represents a key chapter within Lee Friedlander's oeuvre. However, his approach to this subject is quite different to that in the other areas of his work and thus locates us in another place as viewers. As with the greatest musical performers, here Friedlander takes a back seat and abandons all artifice. The photographer starts from his own experience and does not invent or transform, but simply looks at what is there. The first photographs show the artist's wife, Maria, and are more intimate. They are followed by shots of their children, Erik and Anna, and finally of their grandchildren, Giancarlo and Ava.

While these photos look like something from a family photo album given that they capture everyday moments seen in amateur photographs all over the world, it should be noted their spontaneity and emotion distinguish them from average snapshots. The point is not to recreate ephemeral shared moments, but to question the image in both compositional and aesthetic terms.

The portraits of Maria, which recur throughout Friedlander's oeuvre, are devoid of romanticism and sentimentality, but show her in the role of mother, grandmother, wife, travel companion, the head of the household, of their finances and of their children's education, but also in an aesthetic, corporeal manner when he depicts her lying in the sun or dozing in bed. In addition to being the dedicatee of many of the artist's books and the subject of one of them of 1992, Maria is a prominent presence in two others: *Family* (2004) and *Family in the Picture 1958–2013* (2013).

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## **WORKERS**

Although he ceased working for magazines in the 1970s, Lee Friedlander undertook various commissions over the following decades, among which the projects devoted to the world of workers particularly interested him. He first approached this subject in 1979 when the Akron Art Museum invited him to photograph one of the country's most important industrial centers, the Ohio River Valley. For this project, which gave rise to the book *Factory Valleys* of 1982, Friedlander traveled to Ohio and Pennsylvania over the course of a year, photographing their suburbs, industrial plants, and workers. The latter are the true protagonists of the photographs, however impressive the partly visible machinery might be. The dense framing and use of flash isolate the figures, and their individualized treatment distances the work from social documentary photography. In contrast, the workers are oblivious to the photographer's presence.

Two projects that followed *Factory Valleys* relate to the world of computers. *Cray at Chippewa Falls*, published as a book in 1987, was commissioned by Cray Research, a manufacturer of supercomputers for large companies based in the Wisconsin countryside. The viewer moves from inside these computers to their users in front of the screens in another project, this time funded by MIT, which invited Friedlander to work on technology. The last of the five projects on the theme of work depicts employees at a telemarketing call center in Omaha.

All these projects were brought together in the book *At Work* of 2002. The almost 200 photographs, taken over sixteen years, constitute a lucid and penetrating portrait of the modern American social landscape.

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## **NUDES**

While Lee Friedlander surprises us with his portraits due to their naturalness and freedom from any convention, his attitude towards tradition is much more critical in the case of his nudes. Here the artist plays with form and framing, but his way of looking is direct and not that of a voyeur. The models' poses are also unconventional. They invite the viewer to study the composition and aesthetics of a photographic image that eschews stereotypes and dismantles our expectations of nude portraits, a genre particularly well-represented in photography.

Friedlander first turned to nudes in 1977 when a colleague at Rice University in Houston, where he was teaching a course, invited models to pose for his students. Friedlander soon realized that he preferred photographing them in the everyday setting of their homes, surrounded by fragments of their lives that added disconcerting information; hence lamps, tables, armchairs, and rugs play an important role in his construction of the image. The pose, setting, lighting, (often artificial) and perspective create strange but fascinating forms in a clear break with the tradition of the genre. Friedlander's fascination with reality dilutes all the beauty traditionally expected from a nude.

Published in 1991, *Nudes* brings together fifteen years of work on this subject. A revised edition, *The Nudes: A Second Look*, appeared in 2013.

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## **LANDSCAPES**

It was not until the 1990s that Lee Friedlander began to focus intensely on the theme of landscape, although in previous decades he had taken photographs of landscapes and nature both within the United States (some reproduced in one of his first books, *Flowers and Trees* of 1981) and abroad (flowering cherry trees in Japan). The artist had pushed the descriptive powers of his Leica to the limit over the previous decades, but he now found it insufficient for capturing the blinding landscape of the Sonora Desert. He thus reinvented himself three decades later and tried out a new camera, the Hasselblad Superwide, which had lenses of exceptional precision and depth of field.

A selection of these photographs was published in 1996 under the title *The Desert Seen*. This book includes one of Friedlander's most interesting texts about his work. It includes the following passage: "The desert from a distance is as tranquil as any other landscape, except for the light. As I get close, the place becomes wild. Everything in sight is up-tempo and jumping with a thousand branches, a million thorns shaping the edges of cholla, saguaro, and ocotillo, and mesquite and palo verde, altogether becoming a maze of order new and crazier in every turn, bathed in light that defies description. I spent almost every day out working, and my eyes would become sore from the light." Friedlander had to recalibrate his darkroom techniques to adapt to this exceptionally brilliant, almost painful light. His new camera was able to vividly transmit the complexity of the scene, and the square format was perfect for including a lot of material within the frame. He intensified the high level of luminosity by using flash on an already dazzling landscape, enhancing the details of the shadows and helping to illuminate the foreground. The result was so distinctive and positive that he continued using this camera for other subjects over the following decades.

# **WALL TEXTS**

Lee Friedlander . Retrospective  
11/09/–03/12/2021

## **AMERICA BY CAR**

*America by Car*, published in 2010, is one of Lee Friedlander's most intensive book projects in recent years. He had previously photographed from his car, and had also made use of the side-view mirror (it is present in memorable photographs from the 1960s and 1970s) but the framing is now much wider. Located in front of the plastic dashboard of a rental car, the viewer assumes the photographer's viewpoint. These images are often divided into two by the structure of the car itself: the windshield on one side and the driver's window on the other, like two frames within the framework of the photograph. The complexity of the scene is enhanced by a view that has no relation to what is in front of the lens. This simple compositional scheme is repeated in most of the photographs.

Despite the presence of the dashboard and the car's interior in these images, the viewer initially looks in the direction that the driver would be looking, and it is the framed landscape that we look at in image after image. When driving, we are either looking in the side-view mirror or through the windshield or at the dashboard, which is how we experience a portion of the surroundings. The square format and powerful lens of the Hasselblad Superwide that Friedlander was using at this time keep distortion to a minimum, and any loss of light is considerably reduced. Unlike our normal view when we are really inside a car, everything lies simultaneously before us in these photographs, with the same degree of definition.

This project simultaneously represents an updating of the American landscape in the tradition of the great twentieth-century photography books. Friedlander's surveys his oeuvre at the same time: landscapes, monuments, advertising slogans, portraits, selfportraits, etc. An inexhaustible, varied, and always fascinating overview, like a collage.

# **WALL TEXTS**

Lee Friedlander . Retrospective  
11/09/–03/12/2021

## **WESTERN LANDSCAPES**

“The West to me is where the landscape is,” Lee Friedlander wrote on the landscape of the American West where he grew up and to where he returned on numerous occasions from the 1990s onwards. The nearly 200 photographs in the *Western Landscapes* project (published as a book in 2016) not only reveal the grandeur of these landscapes, but also Friedlander’s devotion to them. Following the project of the early 1990s that took him to the Sonora Desert, where he began to experiment with a mediumformat camera, Friedlander now combined the concrete and the ethereal, the most intimate and the most expansive.

As the artist observed: “That is something I learned to do, deal with the foreground [ . . . ]. And that particular lens (38mm Biogon) was so good at it. It has great depth of field and allows you to have a real crazy foreground, which I like. Probably my addition to landscape is foreground.” Friedlander defied the aesthetic tradition which we associate with the landscapes of the American West, presenting on a single plane the famous and majestic mountains and the tangle of foreground vegetation in an incredible variety and number of planes, play of light and dark and effects of proximity and distance. Everything takes on new life. In some cases, we visually apprehend the scene in one glance, while others are complicated by intricate forms. Both the photographer and viewer locate themselves at the center of the image in order to understand the laws of perspective.

# **PRESS RELEASE**

Berlin, 27 July 2021

## **Lee Friedlander**

Retrospective

### **Exhibition**

Sep 11 – Dec 3, 2021

### **Press Tour**

Sep 10, 2021 . 11:00

### **Opening**

Sep 10, 2021 . 21:00–00:00

### **Opening Hours**

Daily . 11:00–20:00

### **Admission**

10 euros . reduced 6 euros

### **Organizer**

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