

BACKSTORY

various artists

Opening: Saturday, June 25th 2016

Show: June 28th until July 30th 2016



FIFTY ONE

GALLERY FIFTY ONE is pleased to announce its summer exhibition “Backstory”: a group show about back-view portraits. Unlike the traditional, frontal portraiture where the facial expression gives away a straightforward identity; portraits shot from behind are more narrative due to its anonymity. Here, the signifiers of the frame are key players to resolve the mystery of the back and telling its story. The work of different photographers will be juxtaposed, taken over the past half century, in different continents, in studio or urban settings. It will give a glimpse of the visual and the imaginary language of the back portrait.

The work of following artists will be on display: Saul Leiter - Vivian Maier - Horst P. Horst - Malick Sidibé - Jacques Sonck - Masao Yamamoto - Harry Gruyaert - Michael Wolf - Jan Yoors - Frank Horvat - Louis Faurer - Leon Levinstein - Marvin Newman - Lisette Model - Harold Feinstein - Erwin Blumenfeld.

By turning the back to the camera, the portrait loses its personality and character. It becomes an image of an unknown person whose story needs to be told in a reverse way through its context or setting. A double gaze sets in: that of the photographer and of the depicted person. This two-sided narrative language implies different perspectives.

One of them is the recording of an unsuspecting subject, which can be seen in the “Midget Movies” of Louis Faurer, the “Freddie Tattooing” of Jan Yoors, the “Handball players” by Leon Levinstein and the sailor captured by Vivian Maier.

A more cinematic approach is captured in Cracks by Saul Leiter or in Harry Gruyaert’s *claire-obscur* portrait. Another, more voyeuristic angle is depicted in the nude striptease portrait by Frank Horvat or the hidden Paris Street View - couple by Michael Wolf.

A more poetic, dreamlike vision is created in Masao Yamamoto’s cropped composition of two boys and in Harold Feinstein’s *Flowing hair on Back*. Through visual assumptions the spectator is engaged to project its memories and emotions into the images completing the stories.

The mystery of a back is increased when the elements of its background are stripped away. This uncanny feel can be noticed in Marvin Newman’s *Sun Shadow*.

A backstory often has a sense of objectivity due to its lack of the facial uniqueness. It transcends to a universal appeal wherein particular physical idiosyncrasies are pronounced more, becoming an archetype as seen in Jacques Sonck’s work.

The physicality of the human back is very sculptural: the classical sensual back by Horst P. Horst, the monumental back of the *Circus Man* by Lisette Model and the monolithic portrait by Malick Sidibé.

“Backstory” attempts to question the visual and complex identity of back view portraits. The array of snapshots, studio portraits and documentary photographs by many different photographers gives an insight into various perceptions of this often-neglected genre of portraiture.

This summer exhibition celebrates the gallery's sixteenth birthday and is curated by Valérie Wille, a staff member of the gallery.