

Saul Leiter

by Saul Leiter

Opening: Thursday, Nov 24th 2016

Show: Nov 25th until Jan 28th 2017

FIFTY ONE

GALLERY FIFTY ONE TOO is pleased to announce its fifth solo show by the American photographer Saul Leiter (US, 1923 - 26.11.2013). This exhibition will feature photographs that are mostly shown for the first time and that provide insight about under exposed elements of Leiters' varied oeuvre, such as his black-and-white pictures and his work for fashion magazines.

Nowadays Saul Leiter doesn't need much introduction. He is mostly known for his street photographs, taken in his beloved East Village district in New York, where he lived and worked for more than 60 years. Leiter is celebrated as an early pioneer of color photography. His photographic style was strongly influenced by his practices as a painter. His compositional approach and his painterly handling of color give away his artistic background. In his innovative photographic language Leiter rejected the centered perspective and constructed complex multilayered compositions. Often the view is obstructed or blurred by the use of reflections, condensed surfaces or the placement of insignificant elements or passers-by on the foreground.

This play of different elements is clearly illustrated in his black-and-white 'Selfportrait with Deborah' (1946). In this photograph the reflection in soft focus of Deborah's face is disrupted by an image of the young Leiter on the background. The subjects are caught in a web of bright reflections that slices the picture in different parts. Due to the use of black and white these graphical elements are more clear than in Leiters' color work.

The focus on Leiters' color pictures has been at the expense of his black-and-white work. In the latter he could experiment more with strong contrasts, like the shadow of a window frame on the body of 'Barbara' (1951), one of the numerous intimate nude pictures he took. In his nude photographs the subject demands more attention, often laying stretched-out on the bed, looking frontal in the camera. The pictures Leiter took from 'Jay' (1957) are instead again observed from a distance in a mirror reflection. This kind of indirectness provides these pictures with a familiar and melancholic atmosphere.

Leiter managed also to retain all these typical elements in his lesser known work as a fashion photographer for leading fashion magazines like Elle, Esquire and Harper's Bazaar. Even in his commissioned work, he dared to leave the subject out of central focus. In the colorful 'Mexico', a fashion picture taken for Harpers' Bazaar in 1960, the model is framed amidst leaves of palm trees, her face partly hidden behind a parasol. In another photograph for this magazine, 'Carmen' (c. 1960), a big part of the image is occupied by a white wall. Characteristic for Leiters' compositions, the subject is left a spot in a mirror reflection in the lower part of the frame. Leiters' delicate color palette and soft graduations reinforce the sense of elegance and grace of his color photographs.

Although today Leiter is renowned for this use of color, he spent a big part of his live in oblivion. In 2006 his famous monograph 'Saul Leiter: Early color' was published, which celebrated Leiter as a pioneer in color photography. From then on several other monographs and international exhibitions followed such as solo shows in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne and the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, and a group exhibition in the National Academy Museum in New York.

In 2012 British film director Tomas Leach made a documentary called 'In no great hurry. 13 lessons in life with Saul Leiter' which offered a glimpse into the private and artistic life of Leiter.

The exposition in FIFTY ONE TOO will run simultaneously with a retrospective in the FOMU in Antwerp. For the occasion the gallery will reissue it's two FIFTY ONE PUBLICATIONS 'Saul Leiter: Photographs and works on paper' (2011) and 'Saul Leiter: Here's more, why not' (2013), which will be available at the gallery and at our shop.gallery51.com.