

SAUL LEITER

PHOTOGRAPHS & WORKS ON PAPER

9 Sept – 4 Dec 2011

Fifty One Fine Art Photography is proud to present a new and our third solo show of Saul Leiter (b.1923) with unpublished photographs and for the first time in Belgium a selection of his works on paper. The influence of his paintings on his photographs is made apparent when the two are presented side by side. His gouaches, rarely exhibited, mostly explore an abstract language made of large color areas in unsaturated tonalities. To enhance the link between his paintings and photographs we published only figurative gouaches with pastel-evaporating colors. Similar compositions can be found in his early color photographic practice as well, although they are slightly altered due to the medium's nature.

As a youngster Saul Leiter was attracted to all kinds of art: French painting (Matisse, Bonnard, Picasso, Manet) and Peruvian tapestry to Japanese and Tantric arts. He began his career as a painter. From early on, he devoted himself to abstraction for which he has a special love. His gouaches hesitate between landscape and abstraction. His abstract language reminds an observer of Paul Gauguin, the *Pont-Aven's French Symbolist School* and the Parisian Nabis. He demonstrates a perfect command of composition, color choices and drawing skills. He makes his presence aware by allowing the spectator to feel the energy of the brush.

In 1948 he discovered photography thanks to a meeting with the abstract expressionist Richard Pousette-Dart. Very quickly, he combined his pictorial and photographic practices. Which is why he was eventually associated with the New York school's photographers. Soon after his encounter, photography became his livelihood, He has produced numerous fashion photographs since 1953, but he distanced himself from *Street Photography*. Often associated with Robert Frank and William Klein, he differs from them in his early use of color (dating from 1948) and his more reflective approach, rather than one of direct confrontation. Leiter's photographs are now included in major collections such as those of the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Houston, the *Art Institute of Chicago*, the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London, the *National Gallery* of Australia, the *Whitney Museum of American Art*, the *Yale University Art Gallery* and many other public and private collections. The recent interest in his work should not obscure the fact that for forty years he has remained almost unknown, despite the fact that Edward Steichen presented his work at the MoMA in 1953 in an exhibition titled "*Always the Young Stranger*".

His photographs are now introduced in some major collections such as the one of the *Museum of Fine Arts* of Houston, the *Art Institute of Chicago*, the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London, the *National Gallery* of Australia, the *Whitney Museum of American Art*, the *Yale University Art Gallery* and many other public and private collections. This recent interest in his work should not obscure the fact that for forty years the photographer has remained almost unknown, despite the fact that Edward Steichen exhibited him at the MoMA in 1953 in the show *Always the Young Stranger*. The cause of this neglect is undoubtedly the lack of self-promotion from the artist, but some missed opportunities must be added: whether a letter remained unopened during thirty years and hidden inside a book, or the fact that the *Photo League* closed its doors in 1951 just before the photographer had a chance to exhibit his work alongside with Robert Frank.

The cause of this neglect is undoubtedly the lack of self-promotion by the artist, but some missed opportunities must be added: whether a letter remained unopened during thirty years and hidden inside a book, or the fact that the *Photo League* closed its doors in 1951 just before the photographer was scheduled to exhibit his work alongside that of Robert Frank. By practicing painting in tandem with photography throughout his career Saul Leiter altered photography by his exquisite vision. First, he gives up the centered perspective. He compresses the spatial dynamic and puts *a priori* insignificant elements in the foreground that almost obstruct the sight: canopies, shutters, deep shadows, etc. An insignificant object becomes the central focus. Another characteristic of his style is the use of reflections. For example, he captures the reflections of a wall's

surface and of some bystanders in a window all-together in one composition. This unexpected marriage reveals an unexpected image. In this way, a simple detail becomes a powerful visual effect. It is the same with his use of fog, snow or rain. Through the tangle of levels, Leiter creates a new visual rhythm. He is a true director of the revitalization of the formal beauty. Furthermore, he uses a muted color palette. His unsaturated tonalities are indicative Johannes Vermeer's influence. One of his first paintings was also a copy of this painter. Obtaining these pastel-evaporating colors is made possible by the use of obsolete color film.

The talent of Saul Leiter is that he "composes" in photography in the same way he composes his gouaches. Although he claims to practice always freely in his photography, it is obvious that there is a conscious or unconscious influence of painting on his photographs. Saul Leiter lives in New York where he continues to photograph and paint. His fame continues to grow. Additional books and museum exhibitions are scheduled in the near future.

A unique selection of works on paper by Saul Leiter, comprising artist's gouaches and photographs, will be presented at *Fifty One Fine Art Photography* from Sept 9th to October 29th.

On the occasion of Saul Leiter's show in Antwerp, the gallery will publish a catalog.

For more details or high-resolution images, please contact info@gallery51.com