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Joel Meyerowitz: Retrospective



Synopsis

Alongside William Eggleston, Stephen Shore, Joel Sternfeld and Mitch Epstein, New York's "born and bred" Joel Meyerowitz is one of the most important representatives of the New Color Photography movement of the 1960s and 70s. This retrospective traces his entire oeuvre, from his street photography to his light experimentations made during "the blue hour" in Cape Cod, and includes famous series such as Cape Light, After September 11: Images from Ground Zero, Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City Parks, in addition to the artist's much-loved early work—his first trip to Europe in 1967, and his concurrent transition from black and white to color—which has been much less widely published. Though Meyerowitz admired Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank, and shares their uncanny ability to grasp a human being on the street as both an individual and a representative of a larger social context, his handling of space and composition consciously differs from that of his idols, his framing less synchronized, the moments he captures, interestingly, less perfect. This square hardback volume compiles the artist's iconic images, and is an essential addition to any photography book collection.

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Customer Reviews

This book is irritating to read. It seems that no one proofread or edited the text. The typography is bottom-notch. Hyphens are used as em dashes. Acute accents (or primes) with spacing issues are used in place of apostrophes. Quotation marks aren't contextual in multiple instances (they appear backwards). The line length is too long to be read with traditional pleasure, and it's Helvetica. The

design of the book is pretty standard and generic. Why is black text used on pages 85 and 149? It doesn't read well or look nice. And the gray of page 85 looks cheap. What ever :-). These things were minor (initially). Casually flipping through the pages, the images look pretty fine. But when I got to page 114, I could see the pixellation in the photo with the book in my lap (about a foot-and-a-half away from my eyes). I put the book up to my face and was amazed. I can't recall seeing film photographs reproduced so poorly in a serious photography book. From there I looked more closely at the image quality. Very noticeable pixellation is seen in the images on pages 144 and 145. Pixellation is especially noticeable in the high-contrast areas of images on pages 154, 155, 158, 168, 169, 177, 181 (wow - see the mechanic's arms), 183, 190, 191, and 193. Most photos look fine at a distance (and on close inspection). And I originally didn't see the poor image quality on pages 32, 38, and 45. But this is a photography book - a self-proclaimed retrospective, at that - and I don't think above-average image quality is too lofty of an expectation. I just noticed that "Massachus[e]tts" is misspelled on page 155. There are other instances of errors, though I'm not going to read through the text to find them again. Any way.

I'm ashamed to say that after 20 years in New York I hadn't heard of Joel Meyerowitz until I found this book. He is one of the founders of what we call street photography, long before it was fashionable. He was an employee of an advertising company, he saw Robert Frank's photo book, *The Americans*, and figured he'd give it a try. Using a small camera, he started documenting the people on New York City streets, following that with a year in France and Spain, experiments with color and black and white photography, returns to New York City, and stays in Mexico. This book is a retrospective, so you're going to see a little of everything here. What fascinated me the most were his pictures of New York City in the 60s, because I'm always keen to study the clothes and other norms of the time. Most of the people in his New York images look perfectly happy to be there, but then again, he wasn't taking pictures in the Lower East Side, where things were lousy. I also noticed that almost all the photos contained no children, and that, I believe, is due to the old New York life. This city has always been popular with single adults, but it was never a good place to raise children. Until around 2000, once the families started growing, they'd move out to the suburbs. New York City kids always had a reputation of being spoiled. Meyerowitz's photos include the World Trade Center Site, which I didn't find that interesting. I would rather have seen more about the people working there, and I bet they'd have stories to tell. But his photos of Mexico don't get much attention here. I bet they show a lot of sleaze. Street photography has gotten a lot of attention in the last decade.

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