

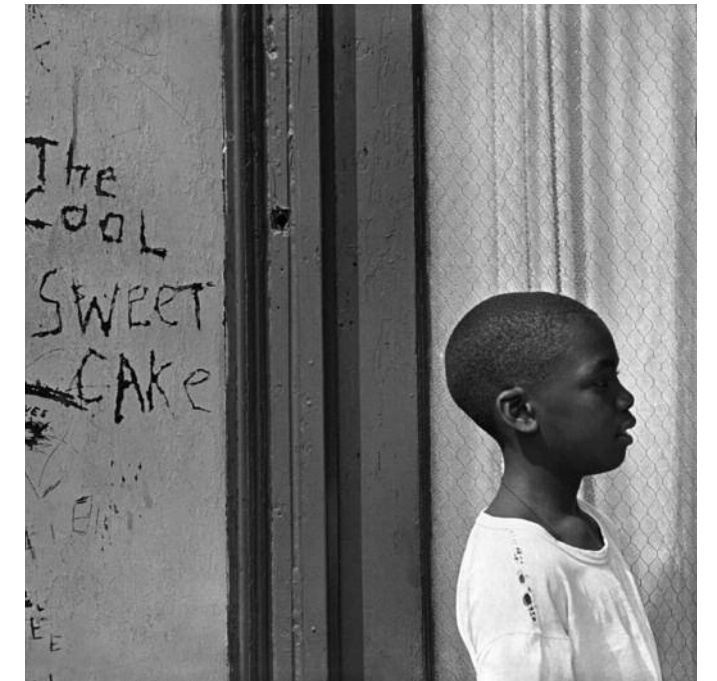
## Streets of Philadelphia: Photography 1970–1985

is an overview of street photography made in Philadelphia during an era which was critical in forging the city's contemporary identity. Capturing an era that began with jubilant preparations for the Bicentennial and ended with the tragic MOVE bombing, the exhibition reveals the city at a time that is distinctly different than today. With the continuing renewal of Center City and other Philadelphia neighborhoods, the perception of the city as gritty and dangerous has changed dramatically. The exhibition brings together the work of twenty-five widely celebrated photographers and features many excellent works that have not been shown publicly in nearly thirty years. The more than fifty images included in *Streets of Philadelphia: Photography 1970–1985* create a diverse and complicated portrait of the city.

While the photograph has been used to document life in the street since its invention, by the 1970s street photography had become a richly diverse and critically acclaimed genre of its own, with a number of recognized masters. During that decade, many photographers focused on the familiar, everyday details of the street and subject matter that seemed commonplace and unremarkable. The 1970s was also the first decade in which color photography began to receive attention as a legitimate artistic medium. There has been a recent resurgence of interest in American street photography from that time, including recent exhibitions at the New York Public Library and Art Institute of Chicago, and the aesthetic of these works continues to wield significant influence on contemporary fine art photography as well as having a pervasive presence in advertising imagery.

Many of the photographs in the exhibition depict Philadelphia as a harsh, alienating and challenging place. Ray Metzker's cityscapes, which have come to be known as masterworks, are dramatically stark, showing isolated figures moving in canyon-like spaces. Tom Gralish, a long-time staff photographer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, received a Pulitzer Prize for his harshly honest photo essay on the life of the homeless in Center City during the winter months. Other photographers in the exhibition captured the raucous exuberance of the city. William Earle Williams' views of crowds at the premiere of *Rocky III* are affectionate and riveting. Charles Isaacs' scenes of South Street show youths dressed to the nines in the latest fashions of the early 1980s. Gary Lee Boas' snapshots of visiting movie stars capture a time when celebrities were worshipped. A sense of irony and satire pervades other works, including Paul McGuirk's wryly humorous depictions of historic re-enactors in a bustling city.

James B. Abbott  
Robert Asman  
Gary Lee Boas  
Randl Bye  
Don Camp  
Jack Carnell  
Paul Cava  
Harvey Finkle  
David Graham  
Tom Gralish  
Nancy Hellebrand  
Charles Isaacs  
Julie Jensen Bryan  
George Krause  
Paul McGuirk  
Ray Metzker  
William Owens  
Stephen Perloff  
Thomas Porett  
Rosemary Ranck  
Paul Runyon  
Laurence Salzmann  
Stephen Shore  
Jack Tinney  
William Earle Williams



top left: Paul McGuirk, *South Philly*, c.1975

bottom left: Jack Carnell, *Live Aid, JFK Stadium*, 1985

above: George Krause, *Cool Sweet*, c.1970

## Streets of Philadelphia

Photography 1970–1985

September 10–November 21, 2009



“Philadelphia was one city with its aesthetic, but New York City and Los Angeles had their own qualities, and certainly Chicago had a wealth of street photographers. Each major city had photographers who responded accordingly, not to mention those that hit the road and responded to each and all of the metropolitan centers. And there were others attracted to the qualities of Philadelphia before the 70s, such as Louis Faurer in the 30s and 40s. The aesthetic is not purely home grown in that Ray Metzker is from the Midwest, schooled by Harry Callahan. What is distinctive about Philadelphia is the lack of skyscraper tunnels, elevated train tracks, and highways that bisect the central district. Instead there are wonderful rough textured stone buildings, often with elaborate architectural detail, that add darkness and literal weight to the pictures, while pedestrians clip by the elegance of past eras in distraction”

Anne Wilkes Tucker, *The Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator of Photography, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*

“It is the scene of Rocky running up the Philadelphia Museum of Art steps, not the scenes of grit and decay, that will forever be remembered in the minds of people around the world. My own sense is that the images presented here of Philadelphia at its post-industrial nadir don't define Philadelphia very much anymore in the larger imagination—they document things that most people have forgotten, if they ever knew them to begin with. I suspect, however, that images like these and the scenes they capture continue to linger in the minds of Philadelphians themselves, and that this moment in time continues to define the city for many of us. If that's true, I wonder how those memories inhibit our capacity to imagine the future of the city.”

Steven Conn, *author of Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past*

“I've always considered my images from the time of Philadelphia's Bicentennial Celebration to be a record of cultural reality, recognizing the city as an historic mecca for the fundamental precepts of how we are all going to exist together. I've never considered it with cynicism, more with irony. As the decades have progressed, there seems to be an opportunity to have a more acute awareness of these basic tenets. It looked like trouble in the making as far as I can tell.”

Paul McGuirk, *photographer*

“Photographing in Kensington literally felt like a breath of fresh air. It was before I started abstracting subject matter, and I realized that those streets were offering an ongoing theater of the human psyche. The spontaneous interactions and self-reflections of ordinary people magically unfolded in front of the camera. The scale of it all was comfortable to me, with not too much urban congestion, they were streets that were intimate, complex and full.”

Nancy Hellebrand, *photographer*



Stephen Shore, *Twenty-first and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, June 21, 1974, 1974–2002*

“There was incredible fervor in the Philadelphia photography community in the 1970s. With the first full-time photography galleries opening—and the founding of *The Photo Review*—we seemed to be inventing new ways of both presenting and accepting photography. We were a relatively tight-knit band of pioneers who knew almost everyone in the community pretty well. But the Philadelphia photography community today maintains some of the same spirit. It's much larger, but from edge to edge it may be separated by only two or three degrees of separation.”

Stephen Perloff, *photographer and editor of The Photo Review*

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Don Camp, *Chinatown Life*, 1973

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