

Helen Levitt

One of the most important figures in contemporary photography is the New Yorker Helen Levitt. For over 60 years her quiet, poetic photographs made on the streets of the city she has inhabited for most of her life have inspired and amazed generations of photographers, students, collectors, curators, and lovers of art in general. Throughout her long career, Helen Levitt's photographs have consistently reflected her poetic vision, humor, and inventiveness as much as they have honestly portrayed her subjects—men, women, and children living it out on the streets and among the tenements of New York. Now in her 95th year, Helen Levitt, though no longer making new work, is being appreciated more than ever.

Born in Brooklyn in 1913, Levitt's career began after the depression. In 1936 she bought a 35mm Leica camera like the one used by her mentor and hero, Cartier-Bresson and with an angled viewfinder she was able to discreetly photograph her fellow New Yorkers. In 1945-46 she shot and edited the film **In the Street** with Janice Loeb and James Agee, providing a moving portrait of her still photography. Levitt's first major museum exhibition was at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943, and a second solo show, of color work only, was held there in 1974. Major retrospectives of her work have been held at several museums: first in 1991, jointly at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; in 1997 at the International Center for Photography in New York; and in 2001 at the Centre National la Photographie in Paris.

More recently, Helen Levitt has been featured in three international shows: in 2007, "Helen Levitt: Un Art de l'accident poetique" at the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris; in 2008, the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany chose Ms. Levitt as the recipient for the Spectrum International Photography Prize which was accompanied by a major retrospective; and FOAM Museum Amsterdam, mounted another major retrospective in October, 2008. She is a 2008 recipient of the Francis Greenburger award for excellence in the arts.