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# Briefly Seen: New York Street Life



## Synopsis

Walking down the street in the heart of New York City is an experience that can't be duplicated anywhere else in the country, perhaps even the world. One merges into the impromptu flow and is carried along by the ongoing current of migratory souls. Harvey Stein documents the iconic areas of Midtown and Downtown Manhattan in 172 beautiful black-and-white photographs taken over 41 years, from 1974 through 2014. The photographs are intimate and personal. They document the close encounter between the photographer and his subjects while showing the mutuality between people. The black-and-white images enhance the sense of the past. To heighten the feeling of movement, anxiety, and vigor, blur, grain, low-angle flash, skewed perspectives, tight cropping, and wide-angle views are employed. The images sweep the viewer into the experience and feel of walking the streets of New York City.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Harvey Stein is a photographer, teacher, lecturer, curator, and author of six books of photographs. He has had 79 one-person exhibits and has participated in more than 160 group shows in the US and Europe.

I bought this because Harvey Stein is an icon, a real street-photographer's street photographer. Unfortunately, this book is basically only somewhat better than average, with maybe a dozen amazing shots included. Layered on top of it, almost every shot looks underexposed, and not in an

artsy-way - just too dark. Overall, disappointing. If I had seen this in a store and had been able to flip through it, I would have passed.

Delving into this book came interestingly enough after seeing an exhibition on photographer Vivian Maier's work. The precision and cleanliness of Maier's work makes for a stark contrast to Stein's distracted, dark, and chaotic scenes. Two views of the same city, one photographer shot mostly during the day and one shot mostly at night, one shot natural light and the other often with flash, one natural and one with artifice, and one observational while the other very in-your-face. Both provide compelling evidence that photography is indeed an art and not merely a random click of a shutter. In Stein's New York, shot over a 30 year period but from nearly the same two or so locations in midtown Manhattan, we have a New York that is bustling, crowded, and very dark. To provide artistic license, Stein employs blur, reflections, harsh flash, blocked shadows, grain, and a variety of conceits in this collection of black and white images. Because he shoots very wide angle (21mm and 35mm) and nearly every shoot is wall to wall people, the images are almost manic in their intensity - harsh, with odd angles, and a lack of regard to compositional rules or elements. It's a free for all, the equivalent of throwing paint at a canvas while turning around 10 times and after a 5 martini lunch. As such, one finds pinpoint glimpses of interest among throngs of suited backsides, cut off heads, umbrellas coming out of noses, skyscrapers floating out of heads, decapitated arms, blurred features, shots up noses, crazy reflections, and a surprising amount of breasts and male crotch shots. You'll have to be patient - sometimes it takes awhile to figure out what prompted the interest within the image. What *Briefly Seen* represents to me is the fulmination of the 1960s/1970s photography world, responding to the common feeling that photography was not considered an art at that time. As such, this is the epitomal expression of 'photojournalism' that became so rampant in those decades and in college/university photography degrees. It differs so greatly from photography on the streets today, which is so often about form, function, precision, beauty, and impact: heavily planned and the antithesis of what Stein is doing in this book with spontaneity. Whether you enjoy Stein's works will likely depend on which photograph era/discipline you prefer. Those doing formal portraiture may find the crazy comps and randomness of so much of the photographs in this book daunting and perhaps frustrating. Those looking for a pure expression of the 1970s photojournalism as art movement will likely fall absolutely in love with Stein's images. But as with the discussions of preferring a Picasso or a Rembrandt, it all comes down to art. For those curious about what may be contained inside this book, the cover image is perfectly representative of the images inside.

Reviewed from an advance reader copy provided by the publisher.

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