



FRANK PAULIN: UNSEEN COLOR, 1956 - 2008

Frank Paulin, Times Square, 1956

OPENING RECEPTION:

JUNE 25TH / 6PM - 8PM

EXHIBITION DATES:

JUNE 25 - AUGUST 15, 2026

Bruce Silverstein Gallery is pleased to present *Frank Paulin: Unseen Color, 1956 - 2008*, the gallery's fourth exhibition of work by Frank Paulin (1926–2016) and the first devoted exclusively to the artist's color photographs. Featuring twenty works spanning more than five decades, from 1956 to 2008, this exhibition reveals a body of work that remained virtually unknown during the artist's lifetime. Shot on color film beginning in the mid-1950s, these photographs were not printed until late in the artist's career, making this presentation a unique opportunity to reconsider the history of early color street photography in America.

Paulin is widely recognized for his black-and-white street photographs of New York City, work that earned admiring reviews in the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice* when it was first exhibited at Helen Gee's pioneering Limelight Gallery in 1957. What has remained largely hidden is that Paulin was simultaneously working in color, producing images of remarkable visual complexity on the streets of Times Square, Fifth Avenue, Central Park, and beyond. These color photographs, made two full decades before William Eggleston's landmark 1976 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that established color as a legitimate fine art medium, place Paulin among the earliest practitioners of color street photography in the United States, alongside contemporaries Saul Leiter, Ernst Haas, and Ruth Orkin.

Born in Pittsburgh in 1926, Paulin grew up in New York and Chicago. His education in the arts began at the age of sixteen as an apprentice in fashion illustration and photography at the Whitaker-Christiansen Studio in Chicago. In 1944, he joined the Army and spent two years in the Signal Corps in Europe, where he developed his documentary eye by photographing the devastation of German cities. After the war, Paulin enrolled under the GI Bill at the Institute of Design in Chicago, arriving on the same day Harry Callahan began teaching there. The Institute of

Design, the newly established American successor to the German Bauhaus, required photography of all students as part of a utopian curriculum that sought to teach students to think in new and experimental ways. Under the direction of László Moholy-Nagy, Harry Callahan, and Arthur Siegel, Paulin refined his documentary skills and absorbed the school's emphasis on experimentation with light, form, and visual structure.

By the end of the 1950s, Paulin's education also included studies at the New School under the legendary art director Alexey Brodovitch, whose Design Laboratory classes shaped an entire generation of photographers and designers, among them Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Art Kane, and Hiro. The notoriously demanding Brodovitch described Paulin's *Ferry Boat* (1957), an image of silhouetted figures flanked by the Statue of Liberty seen through geometric reflections of glass, in a single word: "Monumental."

The color photographs in this exhibition reveal the full expression of these influences. Paulin's training as a fashion illustrator gave him an instinct for style, gesture, and the urban chaos of New York City and the people that inhabit it.



Frank Paulin, *Window Reflection*, 1967

His Bauhaus education gave him the tools to see the city as a field of overlapping planes, reflections, and collisions of text and image. The result is a body of color work that operates as visual montage: shop windows become screens through which the street is layered against interior displays; neon signage bleeds into the faces of passersby; revolving doors compress the city into kaleidoscopic fragments. The *Los Angeles Times*, reviewing the first exhibition of Paulin's color photographs in 2009, described them as "vibrant work... layered assemblages of motion, reflection, and signage, the choreography of the city stilled for a brief, dynamic moment."

In images such as *5th Ave Window Reflection* (1956), pedestrians on a crowded sidewalk are superimposed against reflections of buildings and sky, creating a double exposure effect achieved entirely in the camera. *Banker Trust and Yellow Cab* (1958) compresses the urban landscape through a revolving door into a single swirling frame of glass, chrome, marble, and motion. *Window Reflection* (1967), depicting an advertisement for fever thermometers overlaid with a ghostly street scene, layers commerce, the body, and the city into a single image that reads as both documentation and abstraction. These are not snapshots colored in. They are photographs that could only exist in

color, where the orange of a balloon against an overcast Central Park sky, the red blur of a Cadillac seen through plate glass, or the yellow of a taxi dissolving into a chrome door become the structural elements of the image itself.

The exhibition also extends beyond midcentury Manhattan. *East Hampton 3 Sunz* (1997) captures a child and a sunset through layered reflections of a porch window, and *Corn Field* (2000) frames a luminous agricultural landscape at the end of a dark motel corridor, an image that belongs as much to the tradition of American color photography associated with William Eggleston and Stephen Shore as to Paulin's New York street work. The latest image in the exhibition, *Street Vender & Bunny* (2008), proves that Paulin never stopped looking at the absurd theater of the American street.

Frank Paulin's work is held in over fifty museum and institutional collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Museum of American History, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Yale University Art Gallery, Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, and Center for Creative Photography at The University of Arizona. His only monograph, *Frank Paulin: Out of the Limelight* (Silverstein Publishing, 2007), features an introduction by Max Kozloff and was designed by Massimo Vignelli.

For press inquiries and image requests, please contact: inquiries@brucesilverstein.com



Frank Paulin, *5th Ave Window Reflection*, 1956