

Deborah Bell Photographs

Press Release

Abstract Visions & Uncommon Portraits

June 5-July 2, 2026

Gallery hours: Thursday-Saturday 11-5

Deborah Bell Photographs is pleased to present a small exhibition of 16 photographs dating from 1920 to 2021. Artists include Dag Alveng, Louis Faurer, G. P. Fieret, Lee Friedlander, Clarence John Laughlin, Alma Lavenson, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Rose Mandel, Herbert Matter, László Moholy-Nagy, August Sander & Edmund Teske.

Dag Alveng (Norwegian, b. 1953)

Dag Alveng was born in Oslo in 1953. He gave up his medical training to study photography at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham, England, under Thomas J. Cooper, Paul Hill, and Christopher Seiberling from 1975-1976. In 1977, with Tom Sandberg, Alveng founded the Fotogalleriet in Oslo, one of the first photography galleries in Scandinavia. As Alveng explains, *We wanted to bring important work to Norway, and showed people like Diane Arbus, Edward Weston, and other contemporary photography. We paid the rent ourselves and worked for free.* Alveng lives and works in Oslo. Alveng's earlier monographs include Asylum (1987), Layers of Light (1995), Summer Light (2001), This is MOST Important -- The New York Multiple Exposure Series (2003), Racing (2012), Summer Light (2013), Wilse -- The Humanist and His Lab (2015), and Still Time (2018). Alveng's photographs have been exhibited internationally in galleries and museums. They are held in numerous institutional collections worldwide.

Louis Faurer (American, 1916-2001)

A native of Philadelphia, Louis Faurer graduated from the South Philadelphia High School for Boys in 1934, after which he spent the next three summers sketching caricatures on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. In 1937 his high school friend, the photographer Ben Somoroff, introduced him to photography. Faurer then started to photograph regularly on Market Street in Philadelphia. In 1946 Faurer began commuting between Philadelphia and New York, where he assisted the photographer Ben Rose in the New York studio Rose shared with a fellow Philadelphian, the photographer Arnold Newman. Inspired by Walker Evans' 1938 exhibition *American Photographs* at The Museum of Modern Art, its accompanying catalogue became Faurer's bible. As the curator Anne Tucker observed in the catalogue essay for her superb and comprehensive retrospective of Faurer's work at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Faurer assimilated the emotional sympathy that the FSA photographers evoked for their subjects, but he never embraced the idea of using his pictures to campaign against social ills or to advocate social change.* Tucker describes Faurer as *the master of city spaces: empty streets, overlapping signs, and the illogical spaces created by reflections. The energy of his pictures is found at*

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interfaces, such as the space between approaching figures, the collision of sidewalks, and the simultaneously perceived inside and outside of a bus or a store.

In 1947 Faurer met Robert Frank, who had just arrived in New York from Switzerland, in the offices of *Harper's Bazaar*. Curator Susan Kismaric describes their lifelong bond: *The anti-establishment ethos shared by Faurer and Frank became an integral part of their friendship. ... Faurer was developing a 35mm aesthetic that described something of the darker side of the post-war American boom before Frank had completely developed his own. ... Faurer was carving out a way of working that continued one of the oldest traditions in photography, pictures of strangers made on the streets of cities, yet he was injecting it with an intimacy that had not previously been captured, by anyone. In the same period, Winogrand, Friedlander, and others were developing their 35mm aesthetic....* The qualities of "film noir" of the 1940s and 1950s are also recognized as strong components of Faurer's work. As the curator Lisa Hostetler explains, *Stylistically, both [film noir and Faurer's work] are characterized by an extensive use of shadow and darkness, a preference for unusual compositional techniques and oblique viewpoints, and a high-contrast, graphic sensibility.*

During the 1950s and 1960s, Faurer made his living by working on assignment, mainly for the editorial pages of LIFE and for fashion magazines such as *Junior Bazaar*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Charm*, *Vogue*, and *Flair*. During this period, the only gallery dedicated to exhibiting photography was Helen Gee's Limelight Gallery (1954-1960); instead, magazines were the creative forum for photography, as well as showcases for great literature, art, and theatre. Faurer often declared, "If you were published in those magazines, you were really an artist."

Faurer wrote in 1979: *1946 to 1951 were important years. I photographed almost daily and the hypnotic dusk light led me to Times Square. Several nights of photographing in that area and developing and printing in Robert Frank's dark room became a way of life. ... I was represented in Edward Steichen's IN AND OUT OF FOCUS exhibit. In 1969, I needed new places, new faces and change. I tried Europe. I returned in the mid-seventies and was overwhelmed by the change that had occurred here. I took to photographing the new New York with an enthusiasm almost equal to the beginning...and, as an unexpected bonus, the photographer had become an artist!*

Faurer's embrace in the late 1970s by the new frontier of photography galleries and collectors was mainly due to the legendary curator Walter Hopps, via the painter and actress Susan Hoffmann (later known as Viva). Hopps related in his 1979 essay, CONCERNING LOUIS FAURER: *...with shocking suddenness in 1976 I came to believe that American photography of the moment **belonged** to Louis Faurer. What occurred for me in 1976 was the wholly unexpected opportunity to see all at once the existing body of Faurer's work... This viewing arose from the bizarre, chance encounter in New York of the photographer William Eggleston and the actress and writer known as Viva. ... The keen interest of Eggleston, seeing Faurer's work for the first time as introduced by Viva, and their immediate efforts to interest others, proved crucial in*

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*reintroducing Faurer to public and professional view. ... I was surprised to recognize images...which I had seen in an issue of **Flair** (a short-lived, opulent magazine from Cowles*

*Publications). The photographs in that issue, which I acquired in 1950, immediately affected my thought about photography. ... New York City has been the major center of Faurer's work, and that city's life at mid-century, his great subject. The city is totally Faurer's natural habitat. ... I am in awe of the high point he can reach in a photograph such as **Family, Times Square**, at the center of New York in the center of our century. Perhaps no other American image stands comparison with Picasso's **Family of Saltimbanques**, on their imagined European plane in 1905. However little known or historically acknowledged, Faurer stands and lives as a master of his medium.*

Gerard (Gerrit) Petrus Fieret (Dutch, 1924-2009)

Fieret was born in 1924 in The Hague, Holland, where he died in 2009. A legendary figure in his city, where he fed the pigeons daily and played panpipes in the cafes, he was widely renowned for his fresh, innovative, informal portraits and alluring nude studies, all dating from the 1960s and 1970s. Fieret's vintage gelatin silver prints are liberally appointed with his copyright stamps and signed in a celebratory flourish of penmanship. One of Fieret's trademarks, besides the copyright stamps and swath-like signatures overlaying his imagery, is the very personal relationship he had with his subjects: they were almost always in motion, always animated, and always free to be themselves.

The robust energy and private narrative of each of Fieret's pictures make his work as fresh and relevant today as it was forty and fifty years ago. Fieret's main subjects were women and self-portraits, in which he explored chiaroscuro lighting and experimented with printing and cropping of his images. In an attempt to protect his work, which he feared would be appropriated by imitators (even Picasso), he stamped and signed his prints to graphic perfection, rendering each one unique.

Working freely in the 1960s and 1970s, when the market for photography was almost nonexistent, Fieret rarely made duplicates of any one image. His quest was "art for art's sake," and the darkroom was an exciting part of his adventure with photography. The visceral qualities of these gritty and unorthodox black-and-white prints, made from 35mm negatives, reveal that Fieret operated completely by instinct in the darkroom as well as with the camera. Although he was trained in graphic design, he intentionally dismissed perfection and consistency for innovation and experimentation -- by solarizing film and paper; sandwiching negatives; re-photographing images in another setting; cropping his compositions in surprising ways; fogging the paper; varying the contrast of papers in order to create dissonance in the image; and taking advantage of accidents in the darkroom that worked out to his great delight. The results are never repetitive or pretentious. Fieret's photographs are held in institutional collections worldwide, and in numerous private collections.

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Lee Friedlander (American, b. 1934)

Lee Friedlander, born in 1934 in Aberdeen, Washington, began photographing the American landscape in 1948. Friedlander has made humorous, dynamic, densely composed, and poignant images conveying the chaos of city life; the natural landscape; fellow artists, friends and family; and countless other subjects. Friedlander is also recognized for a group of self-portraits he began in the 1960s, reproduced in Self-Portrait, an exploration that he turned to again in the 1990s.

Friedlander's work was included in the highly influential 1967 *New Documents* exhibition, organized by John Szarkowski at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. He was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in 1960, 1962, and 1977, and received the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1972, 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1980. In 1990 Friedlander received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. In 2005, he was the subject of a major traveling retrospective and catalogue organized by Peter Galassi at The Museum of Modern Art, and was the recipient of the prestigious Hasselblad Award. Friedlander received the International Center of Photography's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006. In 2010, the Whitney Museum of American Art exhibited the entirety of his body of work, *America by Car*. In 2015, Eakins Press published Friedlander's earliest pictures of participants in the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom in Washington, DC, and in 2017 the Yale University Art Gallery exhibited a selection of these photographs in 2017. In October 2018 Friedlander received the Lucie Lifetime Achievement Award. Friedlander's work can be found in the collections of major institutions and private collections worldwide.

Clarence John Laughlin (American, 1905-1985)

Laughlin's career is eloquently described in Lee D. Witkin and Barbara London's 1979 book, The Photograph Collector's Guide:

*A fantast, a poet, and one of the most prolific and idiosyncratic of American photographers, Laughlin has tirelessly pursued his own vision with total disregard for the shifting winds of critical fashion. He once declared, "I especially want it made clear that I am an **extreme romanticist** -- and I don't want to be presented as some kind of goddamned up-to-the-minute version of a semi-abstract photographer." Born in Louisiana, Laughlin has lived most of his life in New Orleans. He was early influenced by Baudelaire and the French Symbolists. In 1934 he began to photograph and has mentioned Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Man Ray, and Eugène Atget as important to his development. ... [His work consists of] unmanipulated prints as well as negative and/or multiple imagery, including still lifes, architecture, [and] landscapes....*

Alma Lavenson (American, 1897-1989)

Never formally trained, Lavenson's earliest images date from a family trip in 1922. Although she adopted the Pictorialist style of the period, Edward Weston persuaded her to give up that soft-focus approach. Her "straight" images were included in the first Group f/64 exhibition in

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1932 at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. Lavenson credited fellow f/64 member Imogen Cunningham as "the greatest influence on anything that I have accomplished," and the two remained lifelong friends. She continued to photograph until her death at age ninety-three.

Alice Lex-Nerlinger (German, 1893-1975)

Lex-Nerlinger's life and career are aptly described in David Travis's catalogue for his 1977 exhibition of selections from The Julien Levy Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger was born in Berlin and spent her childhood there. She attended an art school (Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin), from 1911 to 1916. ... In 1919 she married Oscar Nerlinger and became a member of 'Die Zeitmässen (the Moderns), in which he was a leading figure. She made photomontages and photograms beginning, probably, in the mid-1920s and until 1933. Her photographic work was exhibited in 1929 in Stuttgart in **Film und Foto** and in Essen in **Das Lichtbild**. In 1930 she met Julien Levy, who included her work in **Modern European Photographers** in February and March of 1932. She also participated in an exhibition of revolutionary montage work held in Berlin that same year. After Hitler seized power in 1933, she was arrested several times for political reasons, removed from the list of the National Federation of German Painters and her house searched. She was forbidden to practice her political art. In 1935/36, she traveled to Italy for study. After the war, she resumed her art of a political and social matter. Since 1963, her work has been included in several retrospective exhibitions of twentieth century German artists.*

Rose Mandel (American, b. Poland, 1910-2002)

The career and photographs of Rose Mandel are only beginning to receive the attention they merit. Although Mandel is closely associated with the well-established modernist tradition in Northern California photography as represented by Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Imogen Cunningham, her nature studies and abstract landscapes also belong to the broader American landscape tradition exemplified by Minor White (Mandel's teacher and close friend), Walter Chappell, Harry Callahan, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, and others who explored complex symbolic meanings in their images of the natural world.

Born in Poland, Mandel studied art in Paris and child psychology with Jean Piaget in Switzerland. She fled Europe in 1942, arriving in Staten Island, New York after a perilous journey in steerage on a steamer carrying hundreds of émigrés, including the celebrated French artist Marcel Duchamp. Her country destroyed, family members and friends killed in the Holocaust, she made the San Francisco Bay Area her new home. An introduction to Edward Weston inspired Mandel to study photography as an art form. She began formal studies in 1946 with Ansel Adams at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) in the very first class of the photography department Adams established. Mandel said she felt that Adams had "saved her life" by showing her "a new way to see the world, through the lens of a camera."

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During this period Mandel also developed a collaborative relationship with another instructor, Minor White, who was only two years her senior. White shared Adams's reverence for the renowned photographer Alfred Stieglitz, stressing Stieglitz's theory of equivalents. As the photography historian David Travis has observed, "Adams proved to be the mentor Mandel had hoped for in Weston"; however, "Mandel's nascent ideas about photography matched White's about psychology as student and teacher encouraged each other." Mandel thus became an active participant in an exciting period in Bay Area art and photography that was largely centered around two significant educational institutions, the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) and the University of California, Berkeley, where Mandel worked from 1947 to 1967 in the art department.

From 1946 to 1948, Mandel photographed reflections in store windows, and graffitied walls, of San Francisco. It is likely that Lisette Model, another immigrant using the camera, influenced Mandel; her own photomontage-like images of pedestrians and mannequins reflected in New York store windows were exhibited in 1946 at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco. In 1948, the San Francisco Museum of Art (now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or SFMOMA) gave Mandel her first one-person exhibition, *On Walls and Behind Glass*, comprised of Mandel's sequence of twenty 4x5-inch contact prints, incorporating such reflections and graffiti. Many years later Mandel acknowledged the surrealist elements of spatial ambiguity and discord in her photographs that expressed the devastation she still felt after the war and the Holocaust.

From the mid-1960s through about 1972, Mandel moved away from the intimate contact-print format, realizing most of her 4x5-inch negatives as 8x10-inch enlargements, including works she referred to as "writing-on-water" and other minimalist images, all of which Mandel considered deeply personal metaphors for inner feelings. Mandel's last photographs were made between 1970 and 1972.

Mandel's photographs were published and exhibited in her lifetime, and her work received renewed appreciation in the 1990s; however, she rarely sold her prints. In 2013, eleven years after her death, Mandel received her first retrospective exhibition. Held at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, and organized by Guest Curator Susan Ehrens, an independent photography historian, the accompanying catalogue represents the first monograph on Mandel's work.

Herbert Matter (American, b. Switzerland, 1907-1984)

Herbert Matter was a Swiss-born photographer and graphic designer known for his pioneering use of photomontage in commercial art. Matter studied with the painters Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant in Paris, where he later assisted the graphic artist Cassandre and the architect Le Corbusier. His own international reputation was firmly established during the mid-1930s, when he made travel posters for the Swiss National Tourist Office in Zürich. These

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posters were among the earliest effective uses of photomontage, the technique of constructing a picture from parts of more than one photograph. In 1936 Matter moved to New York City to work as a freelance photographer for such fashion magazines as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, a pursuit he continued until 1946, when he became the staff photographer for Condé Nast Publishers, a position he held until 1957. His work often involved manipulating negatives or cropping and retouching images in unexpected ways, and his subjects included portraits, nudes, landscapes, and still lifes. Matter also collaborated on the design work of the Swiss and Corning Glass pavilions of the New York World's Fair of 1939 and was a design consultant for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. He was a professor of graphic arts and photography at Yale University from 1958 to 1976.

(Excerpted from Britannica)

László Moholy-Nagy (American, b. Hungary, 1895-1946)

Ever the innovator, László Moholy-Nagy counted among his artistic roles those of photographer, filmmaker, typographer, painter, sculptor, writer, graphic designer, stage designer, and teacher. He began his work with visual media during military service in World War I, creating more than four hundred drawings on military-issue postcards. Afterwards, he became active in Budapest's artistic circles, fleeing the city in 1919 amidst political upheaval. He landed in Berlin and joined the faculty of the German Bauhaus school in 1923. In 1937 Moholy-Nagy moved to Chicago to become the director of the New Bauhaus, a school which promulgated its doctrines in America. When it folded after a year, he joined other former faculty members to establish the School of Design, which in 1944 became the Institute of Design in Chicago. He died of leukemia at the age of fifty.

(Excerpted from the J. Paul Getty Museum website)

August Sander (German, 1876-1964)

August Sander was one of the greatest and most influential photographers of the 20th century. He is internationally renowned for his monumental and ambitious project of creating a typological "total picture" of German society, now known as *People of the 20th Century*. As early as 1911 Sander conceived of his intention to make what he described as "a physiognomic portrait of an age," but the National Socialists intervened in 1936 to thwart his progress by destroying the printing plates and all remaining copies of his first book, *Antlitz der Zeit* [Face of Our Time] (1929). Sander continued work on his project until his death in 1964. The intended seven-volume publication, *People of the 20th Century*, was finally realized by the August Sander Archive, Cologne, in 2002 and comprises 619 portraits.

Early in his career as a portrait photographer, Sander rejected his painterly gum-bichromate prints in favor of the clarity and honesty of the unretouched gelatin silver print. His guiding credo, to "look, observe and think," led him "to see things as they are and not as they should or might be." His direct approach to sitters resulted in unsentimental portraits, a radical approach at a time when pictorialism was still a popular aesthetic.

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August Sander's enormous impact on contemporary photography cannot be overstated. It can be seen in the work of the German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher and their students Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth, and in the photographs of Judith Joy Ross and Rineke Dijkstra, all of whom, among countless other photographers, cite Sander's influence on the direction of their work.

Edmund Teske (American, 1911-1996)

Edmund Teske credited a grammar school teacher with inspiring his interest in photography. He received his first box camera around 1920. During his adolescence he studied drawing, painting, and music; when he graduated from high school, he built his own darkroom in the basement of the family home. In 1934 Teske took a position as an assistant in a commercial photographic studio in Chicago. He went to Wisconsin two years later, where he took up the first fellowship in photography to be conducted under the guidance of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. In the late 1930s he taught at the New Bauhaus Institute of Design in Chicago, alongside László Moholy Nagy, then moved to New York, where he worked as an assistant to Berenice Abbott. In the mid-1940s, Teske relocated to Los Angeles, where he initially worked at Paramount Pictures in the photographic stills department. He continued to photograph and began to exhibit his images more frequently. His increasing experimentation led to his use of the solarization technique to reverse highlight and shadow. In 1956 he detoured briefly from photography to appear in the film biography of Vincent van Gogh, *Lust for Life*. After 1960 he frequently returned to [his] older negatives, reinterpreting them through the use of experimental printing techniques.

(Excerpted from the J. Paul Getty Museum website)

**Scans of the images in this exhibition are available to the press.
Please inquire.**