



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Telfair Museum of Art presents

Helen Levitt: A Photographer's Legacy

Commemorative exhibition celebrates the work of revered street photographer

[Savannah, Georgia] — This spring, the Telfair Museum of Art presents *Helen Levitt: A Photographer's Legacy*, on view from May 15 – July 26, 2009, at the Telfair's Jepson Center for the Arts. Drawn from the Telfair's holdings as well as a local private collection, the exhibition includes a selection of both black-and-white and color images by the late Helen Levitt, a major figure in twentieth-century photography.

"With Levitt's passing on March 29, the world of photography lost one of the greatest practitioners of its craft," said the Telfair's chief curator of fine arts and exhibitions, Holly Koons McCullough. "The museum is honored to celebrate the artistic legacy of this distinguished photographer, and the Telfair's cherished collection of her work, with this solo exhibition."

Born in Brooklyn in 1913, Helen Levitt used her camera to capture fleeting moments of everyday life on the streets of New York for more than seventy years. In the early 1930s, Levitt dropped out of high school and went to work as a darkroom assistant for a commercial portrait photographer in the Bronx. Soon she began taking photographs of her own, armed with an unobtrusive, secondhand Leica—which allowed her to document the drama of the street virtually unnoticed.

Levitt's insightful, intimate, and often witty images imbue the ordinary with a poetic and timeless quality. Rendered first in black-and-white and later in color, they depict children at play, community matriarchs perched on their front stoops, and pedestrians negotiating busy sidewalks in urban New York neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side and Spanish Harlem. People of every age, race, and class are depicted; yet the artist, unlike many of her contemporaries, avoided overt social commentary. Trips to New Hampshire, Mexico, and even Savannah added variety to Levitt's body of work, but New York always remained at its heart.

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Often referred to as a “photographer’s photographer,” Levitt was relatively unknown in the public realm for the majority of her life. Yet she remained a highly respected and enduring presence in the art world throughout her career, garnering significant professional acclaim and establishing friendships with luminaries such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, James Agee, and Luis Buñuel.

In 1940, only a few years after Levitt took up photography, her work was included in the inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art’s photography department. Subsequently, she was honored with a rare and coveted solo exhibition at the MoMA in 1943, and a second solo show, featuring only color work, was held there in 1974. However, it was not until the 1990s—when the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized a nationally-touring retrospective of her work—that the artist gained widespread public recognition.

Levitt’s photographs were first reproduced in *Fortune* magazine in 1939 and have since been featured in numerous publications and books. These include *A Way of Seeing* (Duke University Press, 1965), which includes an essay by Agee; *In the Street: Chalk Drawings and Messages, New York City, 1938-48* (Duke University Press, 1987); *Here and There* (PowerHouse Books, 2004), previously unpublished black-and-white images ; and *Slide Show* (PowerHouse Books,2005), showcasing the artist’s color work.

Images available upon request.

About the Telfair

Located in the heart of Savannah’s historic district, the Telfair Museum of Art is the oldest public art museum in the South. It is comprised of two National Historic Landmark Buildings—the Telfair Academy and the Owens-Thomas House—and the contemporary Jepson Center for the Arts. With three unique buildings housing three distinct collections, the Telfair bridges three centuries of art and architecture.

For more information, visit www.telfair.org.

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The Telfair Museum of Art is supported by its members, with partial support of the annual operating fund provided by the City of Savannah and by the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly.

The Telfair Academy is located on Telfair Square at 121 Barnard Street, Savannah, GA. The Jepson Center is also located on Telfair Square, just steps from the Academy building, at 207 W. York Street. The Telfair’s Owens-Thomas House is located at 124 Abercorn Street on Oglethorpe Square. General admission (which includes a one-time visit to each of the Telfair’s three sites) is \$15 for adults; \$12 for seniors, military personnel, and AAA members; \$5 for K-12 students; children under 5 are free. Members are always admitted free.

The Telfair’s Jepson Center for the Arts and Telfair Academy are open Sunday 12-5 pm, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 10 am-5 pm, Tuesday-Closed, and Thursday 10 am-8 pm. Call 912.790.8880 for Owens-Thomas House hours or visit www.telfair.org. Museum sites are closed some holidays.

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