

PRESS RELEASE

**SAUL LEITER**  
**In Search of Beauty**

**29 June 2018 / 21 October 2018**



Saul Leiter, *Taxi*, 1957 ©Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE

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# ‘SAUL LEITER: In Search of Beauty’

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## Foto Colectania shows the work of Saul Leiter, the surprising precursor of color photography

. With 130 color and black and white photographs, the exhibition shows all facets of Leiter, including its most iconic photographs.

. Leiter photographed the streets of New York for six decades from an intimate perspective; with his particular use of color he gets images of an almost abstract lyricism.



Saul Leiter, *Red Umbrella*, c.1955 ©Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE

**Barcelona, June 27.-** The Foto Colectania Foundation, thanks to the main collaboration of the Banco Sabadell Foundation, will inaugurate the exhibition **SAUL LEITER: In search of Beauty** on June 29. The exhibition has been organized with the Saul Leiter Foundation of New York and curated by Roger Szmulewicz.

For six decades the work of Saul Leiter (Pittsburg, 1923 - New York, 2013) fell almost into oblivion. The artist exhibited some photographs in 1953 at the MoMA in New York as part of a collective exhibition organized by Edward Steichen, but apart from his successful career in the 60s and 70s in the world of fashion, his work remained virtually unknown until very little. Several factors contributed to this oblivion, one of them Leiter's disdain for self-promotion.

Finally, in 2006, a monograph by Leiter, *Early Color*, with images from the 40s and 50s, was published, which instantly elevated him to the category of precursor and master of color photography. This was followed by other monographs and international exhibitions, including the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation in Paris, the Museum de l'Elysée in Lausanne, the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, The Photographer's Gallery in London or Bunkamura in Tokyo.

In 2013, British director Tomas Leach premiered the documentary *In No Great Hurry: 13 Lessons in Life with Saul Leiter*, which offered an in-depth look at the life and work of Leiter. "A window covered by raindrops interests me more than a photograph of a famous person," says the photographer in that documentary. The exhibition will show a fragment of this documentary, and the complete film can be seen at the Filmoteca de Catalunya on June 27 at 6.30pm.

Leiter spent his whole life photographing the streets of New York, much of the scenes of his images occur within a radius of two blocks around the apartment in the East Village where he lived since the 50s. In his photographs the protagonists are often unfocused or only partially shown, he liked to photograph behind the edges of things, his cityscapes are often seen through rain, snow or fogged windows.

### **About the exhibition**

This exhibition **has been organized specifically** for Foto Colectania with the archive of the Saul Leiter Foundation of New York. The curator, Roger Szmulewicz, is a great connoisseur of Saul Leiter's work (he organized several exhibitions with the artist at the Gallery FiftyOne) and has now made a new selection of his work with the complicity of Margit Erb, director of the Saul Leiter Foundation.

The exhibition aims to show the public all the facets of Leiter's work. On the one hand, its most iconic and recognized photographs, around 60 colour photographs that reflect Leiter's mastery and originality in the use of colour. He obtains images of a lyricism and an intense intensity, because to the immediate and spontaneous recording of life on the street, Leiter adds an unconventional use of form and a frequently abstract use of realistic colours and tones. In addition, around 30 black and white photographs of the streets of New York are included, as well as nudes and intimate portraits. These are part

of the first photographs taken by Leiter and reflect the pulse and energy of the New York streets of the 40s and 50s he knew. Finally, the exhibition also includes some of his professional works commissioned as a fashion and advertising photographer for major magazines such as *Elle*, *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar*. In all its fields, Leiter managed to print his images a special style and often dared to place the central theme out of focus, which in fashion and advertising was unprecedented. The exhibition shows vintage magazines and different objects that illustrate that part of his work.

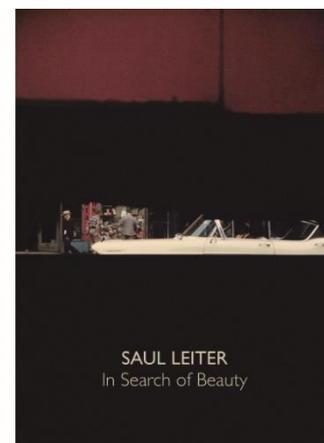
### **About Saul Leiter**

Saul Leiter was born in 1923 in Pittsburg, the son of an orthodox Jewish rabbi, and was destined to follow his father's path. But at 23 he moved to New York with the intention of becoming an artist. There he became friends with the abstract expressionist painter Richard Pousette-Dart, who experimented with the photographic language, and with the master of "Concerned Photography" (committed photography) W. Eugene Smith. Through contact with that artistic world close to photography and thanks to the fact that her mother had given her a camera as a teenager, she recognized the creative potential of photography and adopted it as part of her pictorial language.

Leiter's practice of painting and photography throughout his career can be followed through his black and white color images. The dynamic between these two media had an impact on his artistic look, creating a new visual rhythm. Its typical photographic language is that of abstraction: it compresses spatial dynamics, obstructs lines of vision and renounces a centered perspective. Leiter's pictorial sensibility is visible in the soft and desaturated contrasts inherent in his photographs. In addition, his use of reflection makes his compositions become more broken, more tangled. This is where he clearly distinguishes himself from other "Street Photographers" of the New York School such as William Klein or Robert Frank.

In the 50s he began to work with color becoming one of the pioneering photographers to use it. He applied a pictorial quality to color and achieved a polychrome symphony that mixed the brightness of the neons, the haloes of street lamps and the golden stains of New York taxis, and turned the city into a contemplative, intimate and almost abstract landscape.

Leiter combined photography and painting all his life and continued painting daily until his death in November 2013 at age 89. But the camera became the medium through which he managed to capture and interpret the life of New York City in multi-layered compositions, as well as in intimate scenes, as no one had done before.



## SAUL LEITER CHRONOLOGY

- 1923 Born December 3 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- 1930s Attends Talmudic Academy in New York City.
- 1935 Given a Detrola camera by his mother. Begins photographing sporadically.
- 1940-42 Studies at Telshe Yeshiva Rabbinical College in Cleveland for one year. Enrolls for one semester at University of Pittsburgh.
- 1945 Paintings exhibited at Outlines Gallery, Pittsburgh; Ten Thirty Gallery, Cleveland; and Gump's department store, San Francisco.
- 1946 Moves to New York City to become a painter. Resides on Perry Street in Greenwich Village. Meets Abstract Expressionist painter and teacher Richard Pousette-Dart, who influences his interest in photography.
- 1947 Visits Henri Cartier-Bresson's exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. One of his paintings is included in *Abstract and Surrealist American Art* at the Art Institute of Chicago. Befriends photographer W. Eugene Smith.
- 1948 Begins working with color slide film including Kodachrome and Anscochrome.
- 1951 *LIFE* magazine publishes his black-and-white series "The Wedding as a Funeral," in its September 3 issue. More work is featured in the *LIFE* November 26 issue ("Shoeshine Shabbiness").
- 1952 Moves to 10<sup>th</sup> Street in the East Village. Exhibits drawings in a group show at Tanager Gallery. Leiter works in studio behind gallery.
- 1953 His black-and-white photographs are included in *Always the Young Strangers* at the Museum of Modern Art and in *Contemporary Photography* at the Tokyo Museum.
- 1954 Marries Barbara Hatch (They separate in 1959).
- 1955 Gives slide presentation about his color photographs at the Club, an art space in the East Village.
- 1956 First solo painting exhibition, at Tanager Gallery, New York.
- 1957 Curator Edward Steichen includes twenty of Leiter's color photographs in his slide talk "Experimental Photography in Color" at the Museum of Modern Art. Henry Wolf, art director at *Esquire*, publishes Leiter's first fashion photographs.

- 1958 Continues to photograph for *Harper's Bazaar* when Henry Wolf becomes art director. Three color images are included in "Photographs from the Museum Collection" at the Museum of Modern Art.
- 1959 Travels to Europe on assignment for *Esquire* to photograph Gina Lollobrigida during the making of the film *Solomon and Sheba* in Madrid.
- 1960 Meets fashion model Soames Bantry, and together they reside on East 10<sup>th</sup> Street.
- 1963 Opens commercial studio at 156 Fifth Avenue.
- 1960-80s Continues working in fashion photography and is published in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, *Show*, *British Vogue*, *Queen*, and *Nova*.
- 1981 Closes commercial studio at 156 Fifth Avenue due to financial difficulties. Continues to photograph and paint at home studio on East 10<sup>th</sup> Street in relative obscurity for the next three decades.
- 1991 Fashion work included in *Appearances* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, with accompanying book by curator Martin Harrison.
- 1992 Black-and-white work included in the book *The New York School: Photographs 1936-1963* by Jane Livingston.
- 1993 Black-and-white photographs first exhibited at Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York. Receives funding from Ilford Paper Company to begin printing from color slides. Begins printing with Philippe Laumont in New York.
- 1997 First exhibition of color photographs, at Howard Greenberg Gallery.
- 2002 Gives talk at Jewish Museum, New York, for *New York Capital of Photography* exhibition. Soames Bantry dies on October 9.
- 2006 First book, *Saul Leiter: Early Color*, is published with international acclaim. First solo museum exhibition, at Milwaukee Art Museum. Photographs are acquired by major U.S. and European museums including the Whitney and the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.
- 2008 First solo museum show in Europe, at Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris.
- 2009 First painting exhibition in over three decades, at Knoedler Gallery, New York. British director Tomas Leach begins filming the documentary *Saul Leiter: In No Great Hurry*.
- 2010 Is invited to Berlin to give talk and presentation at C/O Berlin photography museum.

2012 *Saul Leiter: Retrospective* exhibition opens at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, Germany with over 350 works of photography and painting presented.

2013 Dies November 26 at home studio in New York City.



Saul Leiter, *Self-Portrait*, 1956  
© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Snow*, 1960 © Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE

## ROGER SZMULEWICZ, CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION



Roger Szmulewicz (1972, Antwerp) studied at the ERG in Brussels. After finishing his studies, he worked as an independent photographer and little by little began to show and promote the work of his fellow photographers. In 2000 he opened his first FIFTY ONE gallery in Zirkstraat, Antwerp. He has advised and curated several exhibitions for institutions inside and outside Belgium and is the founder of the City Photographer project, whose objective is to create an artistic archive of Antwerp. At the end of 2011, Roger Szmulewicz decided to expand his gallery with his second passion: the graphic arts. From then on he began to confront the work of photographers with that of graphic artists. In 2014 he opened his second gallery: FIFTY ONE TOO.

Szmulewicz has curated more than a hundred exhibitions, has published a dozen books (two with Saul Leiter, *Here is More Why Not* and *Photographs & Works on Paper*) and has supported artists such as Saul Leiter, Harry Gruyaert, Malick Sidibe or Seydou Keita. He is a member of the AIPAD (The Association of International Photography Art Dealers I).

Roger Szmulewicz is a great connoisseur of the work of Saul Leiter, author with whom he had a great complicity thanks to the several exhibitions he organized in his gallery FiftyOne.

## THE SAUL LEITER FOUNDATION



The Saul Leiter Foundation, founded in 2014 under the direction of Margit Erb, is dedicated to preserving and publicizing the art and legacy of the American photographer and painter Saul Leiter (1923-2013). The foundation maintains an archive of Leiter's works of art and activities to promote the medium of photography through educational programs, conferences, exhibitions, cataloging, books, licenses and other means. One of the main objectives is to catalog the work he left behind, which offers thousands of copies, slides, negatives and paintings. The SLF is working on the realization of a reasoned catalog that will be available to students, curators, writers and art professionals.

## EXHIBITION TEXT

### SAUL LEITER In Search of Beauty

Saul Leiter was born in Pittsburgh in 1923 and moved to New York City in 1946, intending to be a painter. Knowing at an early age that he wouldn't thrive in the religious community he was brought up in, he felt the calling of an artist's life. His mother gave him a camera when he was an adolescent, and later he realized photography could be part of his pictorial language, alongside his paintings. It was through the work of friends including Richard Pousette-Dart and W. Eugene Smith that he recognized the creative potential of photography and the instrument it could be in an alternative way of seeing. Leiter continued to paint on a daily basis until his death in November 2013 at age 89. But the camera became the device through which he captured and interpreted New York City life, in multilayered compositions as well as intimate scenes from that same megalopolis.

The dynamic between painting and photography had an impact on Leiter's artistic gaze, and he thus created a new visual rhythm. His typical photographic language is one of abstraction: he compresses spatial dynamics, obstructs sight lines, and gives up a centered perspective. Leiter's painterly sensibility is clearly visible in the soft and unsaturated contrasts in his photographs. Moreover, his use of reflection makes his compositions more shattered, more tangled. This is where he distinguishes himself from other so-called street photographers of the New York School, like William Klein or Robert Frank.

Leiter managed to retain all these elements in his work as a fashion photographer, for leading magazines such as *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Even in his commercial shoots, he often dared to leave the subject outside his central focus. Considering the aim of advertising, this approach was unprecedented.

Leiter's early black-and-white photographs capture the energetic street life of New York City in the late 1940s and '50s, reflecting his unique perspective on the places and people he encountered. Conversely, his nudes and intimate portraits reflect a more quiet sense of beauty, illuminating a close collaboration with his subjects in which they feel free to reveal their true selves.

The lyricism and intensity of Leiter's vision come into full play in the artist's eloquent handling of color. To the rapid recording of the spontaneous unfolding of life on the street, Leiter adds an unconventional sense of form and a brilliantly improvisational, and frequently abstract, use of true-to-life colors and tones. When the monograph *Early Color* was published in 2006, comprising work mostly done in the 1950s, it immediately established Leiter as a pioneer in color photography and ignited a newfound worldwide interest in his career that continues to this day with this exhibition.

## SAUL LEITER QUOTES ON THE EXHIBITION

*I have a great regard for certain notions of beauty even though to some it is an old-fashioned idea. Some photographers think that by taking pictures of human misery, they are addressing a serious problem. I do not think that misery is more profound than happiness.*

*I like it when one is not certain of what ones sees. When we do not know why we are looking at a picture, all of a sudden we discover something that we start seeing. I like this confusion.*

*I had the hope that the result would look like a photograph rather than a fashion photograph.*

*There is a tremendous advantage of being unimportant.*

*In some secret place in my being was a desire to avoid success.*

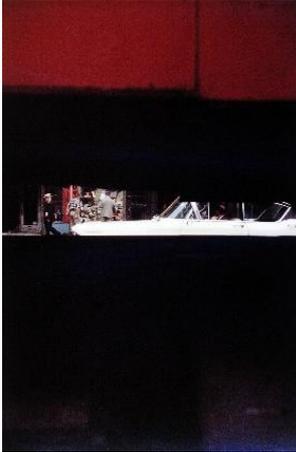
*I simply looked at the world, not really prepared for anything.*

## PRESS IMAGES

Images available here:

<http://www.mahala.es/public/SaulLeiter>

*The use of these photographs is restricted to the illustration of Foto Colectania's exhibition. Please do not omit the reference to the copyright of the images.*



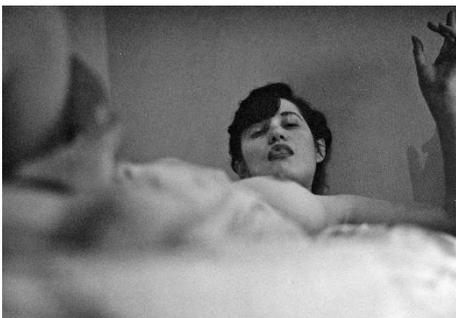
Saul Leiter, *Through Boards*, 1957

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Red Umbrella*, c.1955

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Fay Smoking*, 1946

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Taxi*, 1957

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



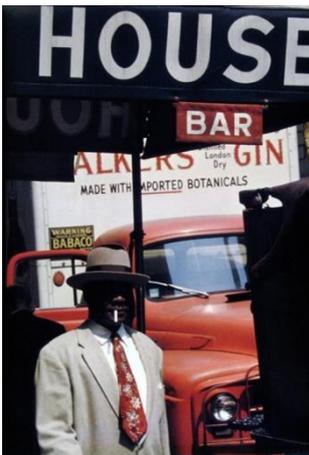
Saul Leiter, *Snow*, 1960

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Mary*, c.1947

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Harlem*, 1960

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



Saul Leiter, *Jean Pearson*, c.1948

© Saul Leiter Foundation, Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE

## BOOK 'ALL ABOUT SAUL LEITER'

Throughout the world, photography lovers receive with praise the work of Saul Leiter, which is object today of great recognition after some years of relative eclipse in the decade of the eighties.

Magnificently produced, *All about Saul Leiter*, collects two hundred works -from street photographs and fashion illustrations to nudes or paintings- that cover the entire career of Leiter from the forties. The 232 images are accompanied by quotes from the artist, that give clues to Leiter's particular vision of the world, and texts by Margit Erb, Pauline Vermare and Motoyuki Shibata, in an exquisite edition in English and Spanish by the RM publishing house. [www.editorialrem.com](http://www.editorialrem.com)

**Book published with the collaboration of Foto Colectania**

**Data sheet:**

RM + Seigensha

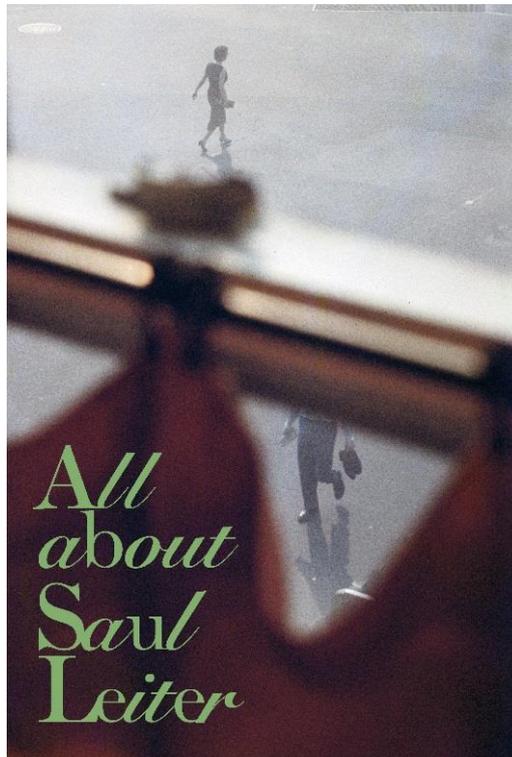
Rustic

312 pages | 232 images | 14,8 x 21 cm

Design: Osamu Ouchi

Spanish-English edition

ISBN RM Verlag: 978-84-17047-49-8



## **FOTO COLECTANIA FOUNDATION**

Foto Colectania is a non-profit organization, created in Barcelona in 2002, with the aim of disseminating photography and making it known in the social, artistic and educational field of our country. The programs that are carried out, from exhibitions to activities and publications, are based on the creation of an innovative and participative project whose main focus is thinking about the image.

Foto Colectania, with its new headquarters at number 14 Paseo Picasso, in the neighborhood of el Born, has established itself as a center of reference in the field of photography that houses a photographic archive that brings together more than 3,000 works by 80 Spanish and Portuguese authors, in addition to the archive of the photographer Francisco Gómez and other photographs from several private collectors. In addition to the exhibition space, the new headquarters has a preservation space to house its photography collection, a library and an audiovisual room.

## **BANCO SABADELL FOUNDATION**

The Banco Sabadell Foundation is the main collaborator of Foto Colectania and participates in the exhibition "Saul Leiter: In Search of Beauty". The Banco Sabadell Foundation was established as a private foundation in 1994 with the purpose of stimulating excellence and promoting knowledge and culture.

The objective of the Foundation is to promote outreach, training and research activities in the educational, scientific and cultural fields, as well as to encourage and support young talent. Throughout his career, it has helped to promote activities in these areas and has also established itself as the organizer of the prestigious Banco Sabadell Foundation Award for Biomedical Research and the Banco Sabadell Foundation Award for Economic Research.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### 'SAUL LEITER: In Search of Beauty'

From June 29 to October 21, 2018

#### Press conference

June 27, 12:00 h

#### Opening

June 28, 20:00h

#### Images available at

<http://www.mahala.org/public/SaulLeiter/>

#### Fundación Foto Colectania

Passeig Picasso 14

08003 Barcelona

[www.fotocolectania.org/](http://www.fotocolectania.org/)

#### Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday, from 11am to 8pm; Sundays from 11am to 3pm.

Closed on Mondays and bank holidays.

Admission: € 4 (Reduced: € 3. Free entrance: 1st Sunday of the month).

**Exhibition curated by Roger Szmulewicz, organized with the Saul Leiter Foundation and with the special collaboration of the Banco Sabadell Foundation.**



Colaborador Principal:

**B Sabadell**  
Fundación

Colaborador de actividades:

**Damm**  
Fundació

Patrocinadores de Foto Colectania:

**IIAVAS**  
MEDIA GROUP

**LATHAM**  
LATHAM-WATKINS

**NESPRESSO.**

**BODEGAS**  
**RODA**  
RIOJA

Con la colaboración de:

**FilmoTeca**  
de Catalunya

Generalitat de Catalunya  
Departament  
de Cultura

**BCN**

**LA VANGUARDIA**

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