



Taka Ishii Gallery

Photography / Film

Aaron Siskind

Dates: May 26—Jun 30, 2018

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film

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Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Aaron Siskind from May 26 to June 30. This exhibition, which will be Siskind's first solo show with Taka Ishii Gallery, will feature ten works selected from images shot in the 1950s and 1960s and the series "Homage to Franz Kline" produced in the 1970s.

Aaron Siskind began making photographs in the early 1930s while he worked as an English teacher. In 1932, he joined the Film & Photo League and started producing documentary photographs. Although he left the group in 1935, he returned to it as an educator and photographer in 1936 when it became focused exclusively on photography, more strongly involved with politics in the aftermath of a global economic panic, and renamed itself the Photo League. He went on to found the subgroup Feature Group with like-minded students and produced a record of New York City citizens suffering from the effects of the depression. The Feature Group's practices were based on rigorous research, observation, and discussion and received acclaim mainly from the left. In particular, the Feature Group's "Harlem Document" (1935-40), which examined sociocultural and economic conditions in the predominantly African-American neighborhood, is recognized as a seminal work of socially focused documentary photography that exerted a formidable influence on contemporary photojournalism.

Siskind's interests in form and flatness, seen in previous works, reached fruition in "Tabernacle City" (1941) which comprised images of vernacular Pennsylvanian architecture and other later architectural works. The rigorous examinations of architectural structures and environments, as well as the forms therein, removed preconceived notions regarding their photographic subjects. While these works still demonstrated Siskind's documentary practice of making his subjects speak for themselves, they also showed him moving away from sociopolitical issues, clearly parting ways with the Photo League.

On the other hand, in the 1940s Siskind was in touch with trends in contemporary art and deepened his relations with the New York School of painters. During his stays in Martha's Vineyard and Gloucester, Massachusetts, he began photographing still-lives, found objects, graffiti and torn posters in city streets, and walls with old peeling paint. Through close-ups of these subjects, he shifted to abstract images emphasizing line, color, and texture. Recognizing that the meanings of objects were a product of their relationships to other objects (or their isolation) and his own involvement in them, he produced photographs that refused representation and were complete in themselves and found this process to be a deeply moving and personal one.

Time and again "live" forms play their little part against a backdrop of strict rectangular space—a flat, unyielding space. They cannot escape back into the depth of perspective. The four edges of the rectangle are absolute bounds. There is only the drama of the objects, and you, watching.

Aaron Siskind, 'The Drama of Objects,' *Minicam Photography*, Jun 1945 (Vol. 8, No. 9), p. 93

While remaining strictly photographic and thus in some ways objective, Siskind's works captured abstraction in reality and they were received positively by Abstract Expressionists and their gallerists. His "Homage to Franz Kline" series was inspired by his experience in 1961 in Mexico, where he encountered city walls covered in graffiti that evoked the works of his friend and leading Abstract Expressionist painter Franz Kline (1910-62). Following that trip, Siskind shot the series in six different locations between 1972 and 1975. In the resulting photographs, which include no images of Kline's paintings, the subjects are extricated from their original contexts and made to express the painter's spirit. The captured graffiti is hence brought into wholly new relations within the confines of the photographic print.

What is the subject matter of this apparently very personal world? (...) What I am conscious of and what I feel is the picture I am making, the relation of that picture to others I have made and, more generally, its relation to others I have experienced.

Aaron Siskind, Oct 20, 1950

Excerpted from the lecture record of the symposium "What is Modern Photography?" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York

Aaron Siskind (1903-91) was born in New York. He was a public school English teacher when he began shooting photographs for the first time in the early 1930s. He joined the Film & Photo League in 1932 (and left in 1935). In 1936, he returned to the Photo League on Sid Grossman's request and organized the Feature Group, which produced "Harlem Document" and other works. In 1941, he exhibited the series "Tabernacle City," which he had been working on for over a decade. That same year, he left the Photo League due to its ties with the communist party and unyielding ideology. He deepened his relations with Abstract Expressionist painters such as Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning and had multiple exhibitions as the only photographer shown in a gallery representing Abstract Expressionism. He visited Chicago in 1948, where he met the photographer Harry Callahan. In 1949 Siskind quit teaching English. In 1951, he began teaching photography at the Institute of Design (formerly The New Bauhaus Chicago) on Callahan's invitation. While there, he produced the "Louis Sullivan Project" (1952-53), which documented the famed Chicago architect Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler's steel-framed skyscrapers, and other works. In 1971, again on Callahan's invitation, Siskind began teaching at the Rhode Island School of Design. As the founding member of a non-profit photographic education association and co-editor of *Choice*, a literary and photographic magazine, he also made a formidable contribution to photographic education. Siskind's solo exhibitions include "Aaron Siskind: Photographs," Alfred University, Alfred (1958); "The Photographs of Aaron Siskind," George Eastman House, Rochester (1965); "Siskind from the Collection," The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1989). His works are included in the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Getty Center, Los Angeles; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

For further information, please contact:

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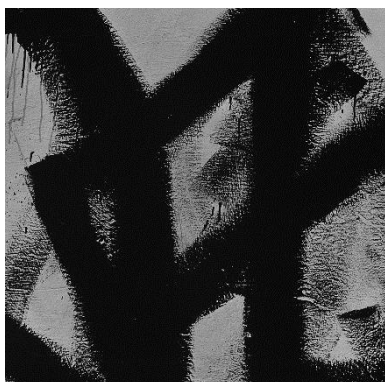
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Gallery hours: 11:00-19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National holidays



Aaron Siskind
"Chicago 45", 1960
Gelatin silver print
Image size: 49.2 x 39.7 cm
Paper size: 50.5 x 40.7 cm
© Aaron Siskind Foundation



Aaron Siskind
"Jalapa (Homage to Franz Kline) 35", 1973
Gelatin silver print
Image size: 24.7 x 24 cm
Paper size: 35.5 x 28 cm
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