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BORN AND RAISED

Iconic photographer Jerome Liebling show sees the photographer rediscover the lost New York of his youth...



Born in Harlem in 1924 and growing up poor in Brooklyn, Jerome Liebling had it tough. It only got tougher for the young man when, having dropped out of his first semester at Brooklyn College to enlist in World War Two, he was posted to the notorious glider infantry — as if war in itself wasn't terrifying enough. Liebling credited his experiences in the airborne infantry during the conflict as having ignited a creative impulse to “figure out where the pain was”. After the war he resumed his Brooklyn College studies under

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the G.I. Bill, and he attended Ad Reinhardt's classes on Bauhaus-influenced design, and those of documentary photographer Walter Rosenblum.

Soon after graduating, Liebling shot one of his most famous images. It was an Easter morning in Harlem when he encountered a young boy in his tattered "Sunday best". The boy had his hands in his coat pockets, and on seeing Liebling's camera he spread his arms wide and *Butterfly Boy* was born — a symbol of hope and transformation in difficult times. Liebling took up a teaching position in Minnesota, returning to his native New York 20 years later to find the city of his childhood altered beyond recognition. "It was a disaster," he reflected. Liebling did rediscover some of the New York of old in the Jewish immigrant neighbourhood of Little Odessa around Brighton Beach, where he continued his photographic work for three decades. *Jerome Liebling: Brooklyn and Other Boroughs, 1946 – 1996* is showing at Steven Kasher Gallery, New York (515 W 26th St), until 6 June.