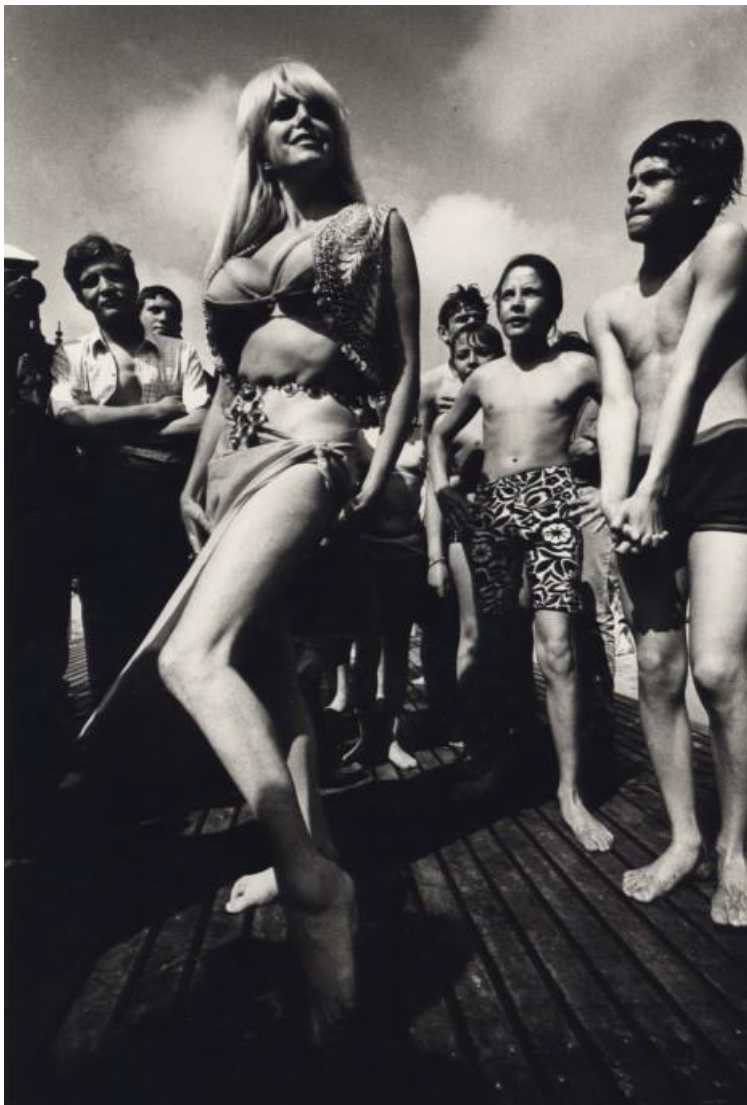


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CRAVE Exhibit | Jill Freedman: Long Stories Short

By Miss Rosen     October 9, 2015



Jill Freedman can spin a tale much like a spider's web, wrapping you in its embrace like nothing else. The moment you begin listening to her gravelly voice you are transported to another world, to a time not that long ago but so very far away, a time when people told it like it was, come what may. Born in 1939 in Pittsburgh, Freedman studied sociology and anthropology before arriving in Greenwich Village in 1964. Starting her career as a singer in nightclubs, she picked up a camera on a whim, and never looked back.

Freedman recalls, "The first time I touched a camera, I went right out into the street with it. I quit my job after they murdered Martin Luther King, Jr." In May 1968, she participated in the

Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., during which she started photographing Resurrection City, built by the protesters on the Washington Mall. Three years later, she published her first book, documenting those events, a model she was to follow throughout her life.

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A self-made photographer, Freedman never took an assignment or tried to fit into the industry. "I'm a terrible hustler. If your secretary is rude, I don't call back. Some people can do this. I can't. When I would suggest a story, they would give me to the picture editor, who would mess up my idea. I wasn't good at those things and currying favor," Freedman observes. Instead, she immersed herself in projects for years on end, emerging with a book that captured life through the lens of one of the toughest and most tender women to ever wield a camera.

For Freedman, photography has always been deep inside the marrow of her bones. She recalls being a child and going up to the attic to look at picture magazines that were among the first to publish photographs of the Holocaust. The experience moved her deeply. "I'm sure that's why I picked up a camera," Freedman reveals.

Those images also sealed within Freedman a need to speak truth to power. It was during the Vietnam War that Freedman became aware of the horrors of American foreign policy. "I saw us as the Nazis and I'm still upset about it. We lost our soul in Vietnam and have been in the toilet ever since. It really drove me crazy and gave me the motivation to go out there and photograph the things I cared about."



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Drawn to issues of personal and political importance, Freedman reveals, "I am outraged at all time. It's not easy to live with myself. Believe that." Perhaps that is why her photographs take us to the edge and back. Among her most intensive documentary works include *Firehouse* (Doubleday, 1977) and *Street Cops* (Harper & Row, 1982), in which Freedman brought herself inside the New York police and fire departments at a time when the city was at its most downtrodden and corrupt. It was an education in the horrors of life firsthand and close up. Freedman observes, "With *Firehouse*, I skipped college by getting out in the world."



And get out into the world, she did. Freedman even hooked up with the circus because, as she remembers, "I didn't have any money. I went along with the circus to its final location. The bus died in Akron, Ohio, which is where my mother was born." Freedman published *Circus Days* in 1975, another triumph in her oeuvre which includes eight monographs to date.

It is from these books that a show was born. "Jill Freedman: Long Stories Short" is the first major exhibition of the artist's work at Steven Kasher Gallery, NY, from September 17-October 24, 2015. Featuring more than 50 black and white vintage prints from the

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late 1960s to the early 1990s, the exhibition also includes a selection of unpublished works.

“Long Stories Short” is just what Freedman’s photographs do, creating an image so simple and profound that what we see is the pure essence of the moment frozen in time. For Freedman, the camera is the means by which she can engage her heart, mind, and soul in the telling of history. By dedicating herself to the craft at the expense of all else, Freedman has created a highly charged collection of utopian and dystopian moments, much like life itself.

Reflecting on her times as a jazz singer in a band, Freedman observes, “It was piano, bass, drums, sax, and me. I loved being an instrument.” Indeed, Freedman has dedicated herself to the art of photography in the same way she did to jazz. She has made herself an instrument of the form, allowing her life to expand and contract as necessary. And what remains are the photographs, a veritable visual symphony.