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CRAVE Exhibit | PM New York Daily: 1940-48

By Miss Rosen

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From 1940-48, PM was New York City's leading left-wing newspaper. Published by Ralph Ingersoll and financed by Chicago millionaire Marshall Field III, PM made its mission clear in its first issue: "PM is against people who push other people around. PM accepts no advertising. PM belongs to no political party. PM is absolutely free and uncensored. PM's sole source of income is its readers—to whom it alone is responsible. PM is one newspaper that can and dares to tell the truth."

Committed to the belief that photography was an instrument for communicating truth, PM Daily and its Sunday version PM Weekly became platforms for cutting-edge work by some of the greatest masters of the era including Weegee, Helen Levitt, Morris Engel, Margaret Bourke-White, Mary Morris, Irving Haberman, and Arthur Leipzig, among others. The paper was richly illustrated with photographs exploring contemporary issues on the local, national, and international scenes, with a special focus on war, politics, labor, crime, and everyday life. Inspired by the great photo magazines of the time, PM sought to emulate their visual power and appeal, using the most expensive printing and paper ever used for a daily tabloid.

In honor of the paper's commitment to photography, Steven Kasher Gallery, New York, presents "PM New York Daily: 1940-1948", on view January 14-February 20, 2016, the

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first exhibition of work from PM. Featuring over 75 black-and-white vintage photographs as well as pages from the paper itself, the exhibition provides an insightful look at the way in which photography is used to shape and inform the public's perception of the news of the day.

Anais Feyeux, curator, observes, "PM wanted to position photography and drawings at the same time. The photograph was not enough to explain an event, which was totally the opposite of what other magazines were doing at the same time. Magazines like LIFE wanted photography to replace the subjectivity of the drawings that had been used during the nineteenth century, but PM never saw the photograph as something objective. They ran articles about photographs in the newspaper, which was very unusual at the time. They ran photographs from the Nazis and explained how they did not tell the truth."



Feyeux speaks of a series of 12 photographs by Max Peter Haas documenting a shoot-out in Manhattan in January 1941. Haas had been in the office when he heard shooting on the street below; he grabbed his Leica and went down to document the scene as it unfolded. He sold the photographs to other magazines, and PM was forced to run the story with other photographs that showed nothing. In April 1941, PM did a double-page feature on the shoot out, this time using Haas's photographs. Feyeux observes, "I really like this series because you can see everything happening. The photographs are not perfectly composed. They were taken in a rush. The photographer doesn't know what happened. It's kind of a mess and you can feel it. "

It was in this manner that PM used photography to communicate truth, evoking the chaos and the confusion that occurs during the commission of a crime and its aftermath. Although the story was technically "old news" by the time it had run, the series of

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photographs allowed readers to revisit the scene, to offer a deeper level of understanding.

At a time when most New York publications were conservative, PM was “a fighting liberal crusader”, dedicating six pages of news to the American labor front in every issue, fighting for the rights of labor unions, and taking a stand against racial and religious discrimination. The paper was a general success in its first year, but never managed to sell the 225,000 issues needed to break even. The paper continued to lose money, and published its final issue on June 22, 1948.

“PM New York Daily: 1940-1948” revisits some of the highlights of the paper’s archive, featuring images that have become some of the most iconic photographs of the twentieth century including Morris Engel’s “Coney Island Embrace” (1938), Weegee’s “The Critic, Opening Night at the Metropolitan Opera” (November 22, 1943), and Helen Levitt’s “Third Ave., Upper East Side, Offers no Trees or Cliffs for Kids to Climb, but Porch of Abandoned Building is Excellent Substitute” (July-August 1940).

