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Power to the People: 50 Years of the Black Panthers (Photos)

By Christopher Harrity

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Steven Kasher Gallery's exhibit "Power to the People: The Black Panthers in Photographs by Stephen Shames and Graphics by Emory Douglas" coincides with the 50th anniversary of the party's founding.

The exhibiton features over 100 black-and-white photographs of the Panthers by Stephen Shames, many previously unseen. Also on view in the exhibition are 50 vintage copies of The Black Panther, the official party newspaper with front and back cover graphics by Emory Douglas. Captions to the photographs are provided by Panthers founder Bobby Seale and other Panther leaders, including Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, Emory Douglas, and Jamal Joseph, culled from interviews conducted by Shames and Seale. The exhibition launches the publication of Power to the People: The World of the Black Pathers by Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale, published by Abrams, 256 pages, with over 200 photographs by Stephen Shames.

Admired, reviled, emulated, misunderstood, the Black Panther Party was one of the most creative and influential responses to racism and economic inequality in American history. Founded in October 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Panthers preached the right of black people to self-determination, which included the right to self-defense. They advocated armed self-defense to counter police brutality, and initiated a program of patrolling the police with shotguns – and law books.

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The Black Panther Party sought to build a community through service to the people. The Panthers initiated more than 50 community survival programs including free breakfast for school children, free medical clinics, free food, clothing, and legal aid programs, sickle cell screening, and an award-winning charter school. The Panthers electrified a generation of black youth and would become emblematic of the Black Power and anti-imperialist movements that shaped the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and early 70s. The Panthers embraced the ideals of gender equality and gay liberation and sought to forge alliances with women's rights and gay rights organizations.

"Power to the People: The Black Panthers in Photographs by Stephen Shames and Graphic by Emory Douglas"

Steven Kasher Gallery

September 16 – October 29

Opening reception: September 16, 6-8 p.m

515 W. 26th St., New York, NY, 10001