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## Jerome Liebling: Brooklyn and Other Boroughs, 1946 – 1996

Exhibition: April 24<sup>th</sup> – June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Opening Reception: Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 6 – 8 PM

Steven Kasher Gallery is proud to announce *Jerome Liebling: Brooklyn and Other Boroughs, 1946 – 1996*. This is the second exhibition of Liebling's work at Steven Kasher Gallery. The show features 50 black and white and color photographs taken in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx over a five decade span. The exhibition highlights Liebling's roots in, love for, and inspired representations of his home city.

Jerome Liebling (1924-2011) was born in Harlem and grew up poor in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. In 1942, Liebling quit his first semester at Brooklyn College to enlist in World War II, serving in the notoriously deadly glider infantry. The carnage he witnessed fueled his creative impulse to "figure out where the pain was..." Liebling returned to Brooklyn College in 1946 to study art under the G.I. Bill. Ad Reinhardt's Bauhaus-influenced design classes honed his formal sensibility; documentary photographer Walter Rosenblum opened his eyes to the power of the photographic image.



In 1947, Liebling joined the Photo League, a socially minded collective of photographers who fanned across New York to document hidden corners of the city. For Liebling, children surviving the rough-and-tumble city streets became a symbol of fortitude. "Their faces could inform all that they felt, from grace, to reflective questioning, to supreme prescience," he said. "Sometimes there was a hint of defeat, but more often there was improvisation and brilliance." One Easter morning in Harlem, Liebling encountered a young child dressed in his Sunday best: broken shoe-laces, tattered trousers, a threadbare tweed coat and cap. Hands buried in his pockets, the boy spread his coat open wide, and the click of Liebling's shutter transformed him into *Butterfly Boy*. This image of a winged superhero who could soar away from his impoverished world has become a beloved icon, appearing on public posters and billboards in New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Japan and elsewhere.

In 1949 Liebling accepted a position teaching photography and filmmaking at the University of Minnesota. Twenty years later, he returned to New York to discover that the city of his childhood had vanished. "I came back, and it was a disaster," he said. Liebling's 1970s photographs of the

crumbling South Bronx depict a bleak realization: the *Butterfly Boy* may not have escaped to a better place after all. The young man in the picture *Charlotte Street* is trapped amidst ruins, in devastation as harrowing as Liebling's wartime experiences. Despite their imagery of senseless destruction, his photographs reveal the ever renewing spirit of humanity pushing up through the cracks.

In the late 1970s, Liebling rediscovered the long-lost Brooklyn of his childhood in the oceanside neighborhood known as "Little Odessa" in Brighton Beach. He spent three decades photographing there in brilliant chromogenic color as the old wave of Jewish denizens gave way to the new wave of Russian immigrants.

Liebling's daughter, filmmaker Rachel Liebling, says "There was nothing as exciting as wandering the streets of Brooklyn with my father. He found mystery and intrigue around every corner. The people on the streets – with their indefatigable energy and their human foibles – became larger-than-life through his lens. Human struggle took on mythical proportions; the perseverance and ingenuity of everyday people was heroic in his eyes."

Jerome Liebling's photographs are held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Smithsonian American Art Museum; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, among many others. He has had exhibitions at numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Corcoran Gallery of Art; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; the Walker Art Center; the Jewish Museum, New York; George Eastman House; the Currier Museum of Art; Yale Art Gallery; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; Smith College Museum of Art; and Hampshire College.

*Jerome Liebling: Brooklyn and Other Boroughs, 1946 – 1996* will be on view April 24<sup>th</sup> – June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Steven Kasher Gallery is located at 515 W. 26<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 6 PM. For more information about the exhibition and all other general inquiries, please contact Maya Piergies, 212 966 3978, [maya@stevenkasher.com](mailto:maya@stevenkasher.com).