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Jill Freedman: Long Stories Short @Steven Kasher

By Loring Knoblauch October 19, 2015

JTF (just the facts): A total of 44 black and white photographs, framed in black and matted, and hung against white walls in the divided back gallery space. All of the works are vintage gelatin silver prints, made between 1966 and 1995. Physical sizes are either 8x10, 11x14, or 16x20 (or reverse). No edition information was provided.



Comments/Context: This show spanning four decades of Jill Freedman's photography is like a series of rediscovered b-sides and outtakes dug out of the archives. For the most part, these are images that weren't part of *Street Cops*, *Firehouse*, *Circus Days* or her other notable photobooks. Instead, they find her wandering the city streets of New York and traveling further afield to Washington DC and San Francisco and across the ocean to Ireland, France, and the United Kingdom, her sharp eye alert to the found eccentricities around her wherever she went. These are pictures that didn't neatly fit into any one discrete project, but still resonate with her subtly biting sense of visual humor.

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Like any accomplished street photographer, Freedman was ready for the obvious quirks the city (any city) had to throw at her: the naked man in the revolving door, the man in the trenchcoat and fake penis, the mustachioed barrel-chested ballerina in a fluffy tutu. But it is her eye for the telling momentary juxtapositions of urban environments that show off her compositional talents. The crossed arms of a man passed out in the back seat of a car are echoed by a cross on the building across the street. The bent leg of man



standing on a front stoop is balanced by the intrusion of a fancy horse rider with a similarly bent leg. And a particularly dour group of older British ladies, one blowing her nose and another taking an ungainly lick of an ice cream cone, is flanked by the wry graffiti scrawl of “CHRIST LOVED MEN ONLY”.

The show moves back and forth in mood between playful discoveries and more sarcastic combinations, often made even more archly caustic by their clever titles. She keeps things light with playing cards in flight, a cat held up with awkward pride, a Coke can arranged with saintly icons, and a kiss falling into an Irish haystack. But men passed out on the sidewalk like corpses make recurring appearances, one manning an unlikely display of painted landscapes and seascapes for sale. And many pictures move somewhere even darker and more doubtful – a lifeless go-go bar, a tired fashion shop owner with a dated window display, a weary protestor on the steps of the Capitol

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building, and a woman in shiny pants being arrested by a policeman with a prominent gun holster. Even the big laughers in Dublin have an oddball prickly edge.

It is this gritty sideways joshing that gives Freedman's images their punch. At some level, she's laughing at the strange things she's found in the streets, but that joking has an underbelly that hits harder when she lets it – a title like *Across the Dumpsters and into the Trees* is both chuckle-inducing and quietly bleak. Mixing visual humor with sharp social observation isn't easy, and these various single images are proof that Freedman was doing it consistently, even when she wasn't deeply invested in a larger project.

Collector's POV: The prints in this show are priced between \$4000 and \$10000. Freedman's work is not widely available in the secondary markets, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.