

Evelyn Hofer 23 June – 24 September 2023

Evelyn Hofer at The Photographers' Gallery is the first UK solo exhibition of the German-American photographer. Featuring over 110 black and white and colour images, as well as ephemera and books, the major retrospective spans 45 years of image-making.

New York Times art critic Hilton Kramer described Hofer as 'the most famous unknown photographer in America'. A description that still rings true today. Hofer said of her way of working 'I don't like to spy on people...I respect them and I want them to respect what we are doing together.' With a keen sense of class structure, her sympathetic portraits give equal measure to her subjects; from a waitress at the Garrick Club in London and gravediggers in Dublin, to the uniformed Joint Chiefs in Washington's corridors of power.

Hofer's work – imbued with a sense of timelessness and a contemplative approach – contrasted with the 'shoot-from-the-hip' style of contemporaries such as Robert Frank and William Klein. On display are Hofer's characteristically considered, large-format portraits, landscapes, cityscapes, still lifes and domestic interiors, many of which demonstrate her preference for the complex colour dye transfer process. From black and white portraits in London and Wales to the vibrant colour of street and park life in New York and Washington, Hofer shot in colour and black and white throughout her career, depending on which she thought right for her subjects.

New York was a great source of inspiration. Hofer's move to the city in 1946 set her career on a trajectory which saw her working on editorial commissions at Harper's Bazaar and other high-profile magazines. Hofer mixed in New York's dynamic artistic circles with other émigrés, such as Saul Steinberg and Richard Lindner, who would become life-long friends, and sometimes subjects in her work. Her artist portraits and studio still lifes feature, amongst others, Andy Warhol, Yayoi Kusama, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner.

In the mid-1950s Hofer collaborated with the novelist and political activist Mary McCarthy on the book 'The Stones of Florence'. Hofer went on to work on a number of other 'travel books', featuring authors including British writer V.S Pritchett, many of which are on display in the exhibition. These projects provided an invaluable opportunity to develop her own intimate style: melding cityscapes, portraits and architectural observations, and lead to substantial bodies of work from Paris, Washington, Dublin and London, as well as Spain and Italy.

It was this opportunity to work for longer periods in a specific place that became Hofer's *modus operandi* and led to some of her most powerful images of cities and everyday lives. She spent prolonged periods walking around, getting to know people and locations, and returned later to photograph with meticulous attention to detail, capturing the everyday through people and places with equal attention. Richard Lindner noted, "... she portrays everything; be it a tree, a human being, or be it a chair. It is always a portrait."

Other projects on show include 'Just Married' (1974), a series of joyful colour portraits of young couples taken one morning in a New York registry office, and by stark contrast 'Life inside British prisons' in the same year, where Hofer was granted access to Parkhurst, Kingston and Wakefield.

Hofer adopted the dye transfer process in mid 1970s, a complex technique which few art photographers used, lending her colour works a tonality and depth which would go on to influence many contemporary photographers including Thomas Struth, Joel Sternfeld,

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Rineke Dijkstra, Judith Joy Ross and Alex Soth.

The exhibition also draws upon Hofer's final project – shot between 1996-1997 and focused solely on her love of still life – a series of painterly and metaphorical works heavily influenced by the 17th century Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán. Taken in her New York studio, these compositions, such as 'Oaxaca Jar with Cherries' and 'Mexican Still Life with Saint', hark back to her early years in Mexico and pre-empt her return there in the final years of her life.

Later in life, Hofer was asked how she felt about being described as the '*most famous unknown photographer in America*'. She said she liked it – to her it was always the work that mattered, not fame.

Evelyn Hofer is produced in collaboration with Galerie m, Bochum, Germany and the Estate of Evelyn Hofer.

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For general information and enquiries about The Photographers' Gallery, including the archive, Print Sales Gallery or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk

Notes for Editors

Evelyn Hofer

Born in Marburg, Germany, in 1922, Hofer's family fled Germany in 1933 to escape Nazism. They moved to Switzerland, then Spain, and finally settled in Mexico in the early 1940s, leaving Europe after Franco's accession to power.

Hofer's early training included an induction in photographic theories and techniques with the German-born Swiss photographer Hans Finsler. Finsler was a pioneer of the 'New Objectivity' – a movement in German art that arose during the 1920s as a reaction against expressionism. This was a formative influence on her future practice – she learned about modernist theories of aesthetics as well as technical and chemical processes – and absorbed a tradition which didn't distinguish between applied and fine art photography.

Hofer died in Mexico in 2009.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery (TPG) champions photography for everyone. Located in the heart of central London and home to an international community of photographers, the Gallery explores photography in all its forms, with a diverse and critically acclaimed programme of exhibitions, events and courses. Over the past five decades TPG has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and celebrating its place at the heart of visual culture.

Visitor information – The Photographers' Gallery

Mon – Weds 10am – 6pm

Thurs & Fri 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 5pm)

Sat 10am – 6pm

Sun 11am- 6pm

**Tickets: £8 / £5 concessions (members go free) – ticket cover all exhibitions on day of visit
Advance online booking: £6.50 / £4 concessions**

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