

Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins

A stylized graphic of a camera shutter, represented by two dark grey rectangular blades meeting at a point. Above the blades are three small black dots arranged in a slight arc.

Harold Feinstein



Press kit

La roue des merveilles :
Harold Feinstein

1st.07. –
8.10.
2023

Curators:

François Cheval
and Yasmine Chemali

Opening
on Friday 30.06.
2023
19:00

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The Mougins Center of Photography is an institution dedicated to still and moving images, tasked with promoting and exhibiting the many trends in contemporary photography. Open to all forms of photographic modernity, the Center, as a municipal institution, boosts the cultural and tourism sector of the town of Mougins, seeking to enhance the region and foster international communication. From its opening on July 3rd 2021, its mission is to support the creation and experimentations of artists of all profiles: from France or overseas, up-and-coming or established. This support takes various forms including producing, exhibiting, publishing and residencies. Other local authorities in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region (PACA), including those of Marseille and Nice, are already demonstrating a dynamic approach to photography by way of varied exhibitions or thanks to proactive publishing houses and diverse residency programs. The Mougins Center of Photography will complement these activities by providing a similar service for contemporary photography.

The Wonder Wheel

Harold Feinstein cannot be reduced to a single series. Nevertheless, for this native of Coney Island, this 'land without shadows' remains first and foremost the field of his photographic practice and above all the perfect illustration of a certain vision of American society.

Born in 1931, Harold Feinstein's sole ambition was to become a photographer. His biography is well documented. It is known that he joined the Photo League at the age of 17 and, in Sid Grossman's entourage, he learned to empathise with the common folk of New York, those excluded from 'prosperity'. In this post-war America, despite it not being a good idea to show sympathy for this group of resolutely committed artists, Harold Feinstein saw no other possible path for his photographic practice than to remain as close as possible to the senses and the living. This is why Coney Island is more than a theme. For sixty years, the photographer regularly returns to this subject, to the origin of things. The perfect combination of a biography and a community.

Coney Island, an area of Brooklyn and a former island, the westernmost tip of Long Island, has seen the development of activities linked to the major waterfront since the beginning of the 20th century. For New Yorkers, Coney Island offers the possibility of escaping the heavy summer heat. Until the 1950s, the use of the beach was inseparable from the use of the many amusement parks. It is home to the largest concentration of attractions in the United States. Several million visitors a year flock to The Wonder Wheel, The Cyclone or The Parachute Jump. New Yorkers of all backgrounds, whether Italian, Jewish, Puerto Rican or Black, attend the Mermaid Parade, have their palms read and leave the fairgrounds delighted and satisfied. This is not a catalogue of entertainment, nor is it a collection of portraits or a restrained melancholia. The set of images produced over time forms the backdrop of a work that is characterised by its desire to write a series of short

In partnership
with The Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust.

This exhibition takes part
of the Rencontres d'Arles
program as part
of the Grand Arles Express
manifestation.

stories from day to day. The narrative dimension remains the fundamental contribution of photography that eliminates all negative tension in favour of a collective dimension, of an experience shared by an entire population. Behaviour hardly differs from one class to another, from one community to another. The beach, the Riegelmann promenade and the attractions form a common way of being. The mode of appropriation of the place is collective and unifying. Harold Feinstein's Coney Island is a photographic transcription of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue: 'Music should express people's thoughts and aspirations, as well as their era. I am a man without tradition, my people are Americans and my time is today. I have the modest claim to contribute to the great American songbook. That's all.' There is no 'pure' contemplation in these images, it is above all an ethical disposition, an aesthetic of the ordinary. There is nothing important in these series of small moments. Nevertheless, it is these moments, these gestures and stances, these strange encounters, that structure and ensure the continuity of a community. All of this ultimately composes an ensemble, a great songbook in the midst of the upheavals of American society, with the Great Depression, the exacerbation of racial tensions, McCarthyism, etc.

In contrast to the images of Diane Arbus, there is no anxiety here; everyone is together and in communion around the same practices. These simple events are the foundations of the nation as Harold Feinstein envisions them, a fusion of races, communities and age groups. 'What's remarkable and nourishing about Harold's black and white work is that he addresses a really gritty, stressful, difficult environment – an archetypal city like New York, which many people have shown as dark, dangerous, gloomy, isolated, inhumane – and consistently finds in it the moments of charm, pleasure, human tenderness, generosity – even the spiritual – that is there.'¹

It was then, in 1952, that the young Harold Feinstein, drafted by the army, found himself in the American expeditionary force in Korea. Denied a position as an official photographer, he served his time in uniform like any other conscript: 'I was assigned to the infantry. In retrospect, this was a great boon, because I was able to carry my camera everywhere and simply capture the day-to-day life of a draftee and not the official handshakes and medal ceremonies I would've been required to shoot as an official photographer.'

1.
A.D. Coleman in Todd Weinstein
and Peter Norrman
(production T. Weinstein),
Uninterrupted Seeing:
A Short Film about Harold
Feinstein, 2010,
See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kG54PGsUSH4>

His photography documents the stages that accompany the life of each draftee from conscription to military operations in an original way. 'I was 21 in 1952 when I got called up to go to war. I had recently been married. I remember being in a room at Camp Kilmer with hundreds of other young men around my age, stripping down for the physical, walking through the inoculation "assembly line" and then getting transported to Fort Dix for sixteen weeks of basic training before being shipped to Korea.'

The format that Harold Feinstein experiments with in the Korean narrative brings together the every day and the art of the blues. He invents a narrative full of shades of grey and delicate contrasts. The slow rhythm and muted tones all provide extreme consistency to a series made up of sensitive appropriation and abandonment of the subject to the photographer's desire.

Upon his return to the United States, Harold Feinstein established himself in the Jazz Loft, New York, where he met the musicians Hall Overton and Dick Cary. This was the period in which he began his collaboration with the Blue Note Records label. Crucially, he also met W. Eugene Smith, with whom he collaborated on the layout of the Pittsburgh Project. His career took off once again when he exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1954 and at the Limelight Gallery in 1955.

It is this vision of the world, of photography committed to the benefit of a united humanity, that the photographer seeks to convey. The other passion of Harold Feinstein is teaching. He obtained his first teaching fellowship at the age of 29 at the Annenberg School for Communication (Philadelphia), followed by a post at the Maryland Institute College of Art (Baltimore), then at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art and finally at the New York School of Visual Arts. His approach is in some ways close to 'street photography'. His images taken in the underground or the streets of New York, captured with all their details, form a singular perspective. Narrative worlds unfold yet the work remains a unified whole. Harold Feinstein introduces a singular tension into the narrative aesthetic between accidents and mirror effects; the work is an entity that imposes itself as an immediate sentiment, held together by its style rather than its subject matter.

François Cheval

Boardwalk Sheet
Music Montage
1952
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
50,8 × 40,6 cm / 20 × 16 in
CI-251

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



Blanket Toss
1955
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
40,6 × 50,8 cm / 16 × 20 in
CI-008h



Coney Island Teenagers
1949
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
40,6 × 50,8 cm / 16 × 20 in
CI-023

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



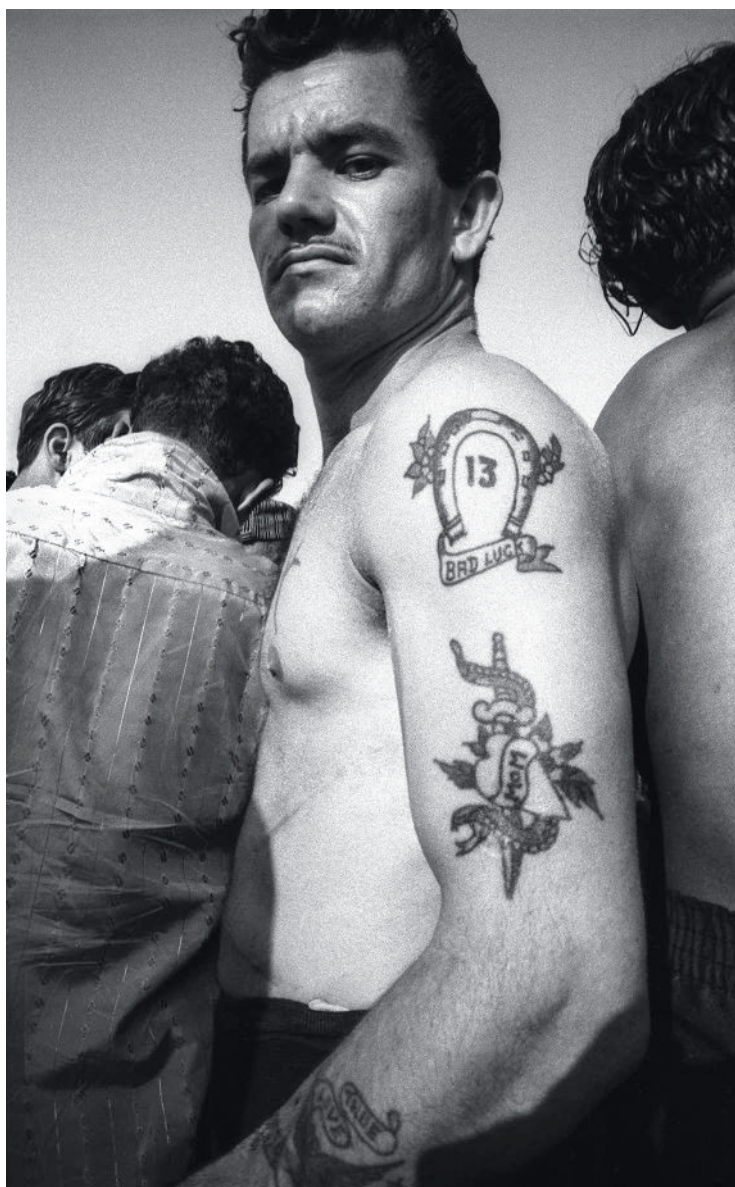
Viva Puerto Rico
1978
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
50,8 × 40,6 cm / 20 × 16 in
CI-049

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



Bad Luck Tattoo
1957
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
50,8 × 40,6 cm / 20 × 16 in
CI-004

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



Biography

Harold Feinstein

1931-2015

Born in 1931 on Coney Island in the state of New York, to Jewish immigrant parents, Harold Feinstein began taking photographs in 1946, aged 15 and armed with a Rolleiflex. At 16 he quit school and the following year, in 1948, he became the youngest member of the Photo League, alongside Sid Grossman. His work was soon acquired by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, New York), entering the permanent collection under the direction of Edward Steichen. From 1954 he began showing his work both in collective exhibitions (Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA) and individually (George Eastman House, Limelight Gallery). Recognised as an important figure of the New York avant-garde for his street photography, Harold Feinstein was enlisted for the Korean War in 1952. On his return, he settled at the Jazz Loft, designed record sleeves for the Blue Note and Signal record labels and met W. Eugene Smith, with whom he collaborated on the Pittsburgh Project.

Harold Feinstein's body of work stretches over six decades, focusing on Coney Island, portraying a diverse, people-centred and joyful America. He also taught – notably in the Annenberg School for Communication in Philadelphia. His pedagogy and philosophy, in the service of artistic vision rather than technique, left its mark on a generation. His photographs are held in prestigious private collections and the collections of major American museums (MoMA, International Center of Photography, New York City Museum, The Jewish Museum, etc.).

The exhibition is comprised of 101 prints including 85 original and a few exhibition prints and enlargements from contact sheets spanning over 45 years of photographic production.

Take Your Own Photos
1978
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
40,6 × 50,8 cm / 16 × 20 in
CI-008h

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



Series

In 1952, Harold Feinstein covered the Korean conflict, not as one might have assumed as a war photographer, but as a mere GI. His photographs, therefore, have a special status. Harold Feinstein did not produce a reportage, he gave us his own daily account of a life shared with his fellow soldiers. It is far from David Douglas Duncan's *This is War!* or Margaret Bourke-White's reportage. War photography typically feeds on anguished faces. Before victory, it is necessary to show the doubt or the determination of the combatants. The fighting is glorified. Here, there is nothing of the sort, except for the conventional and bureaucratic scenes of a medical examination at Camp Kilmer. We witness the embarking and transport of troops; last kisses as though seen in the cinema. These are images that have been seen before, of course, and at first glance have nothing to offer except the black and white rhetoric of a single entity, the fusion of a generation.

Draftee in Photo Booth
1952
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
50,8 × 40,6 cm / 20 × 16 in
AD-004

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



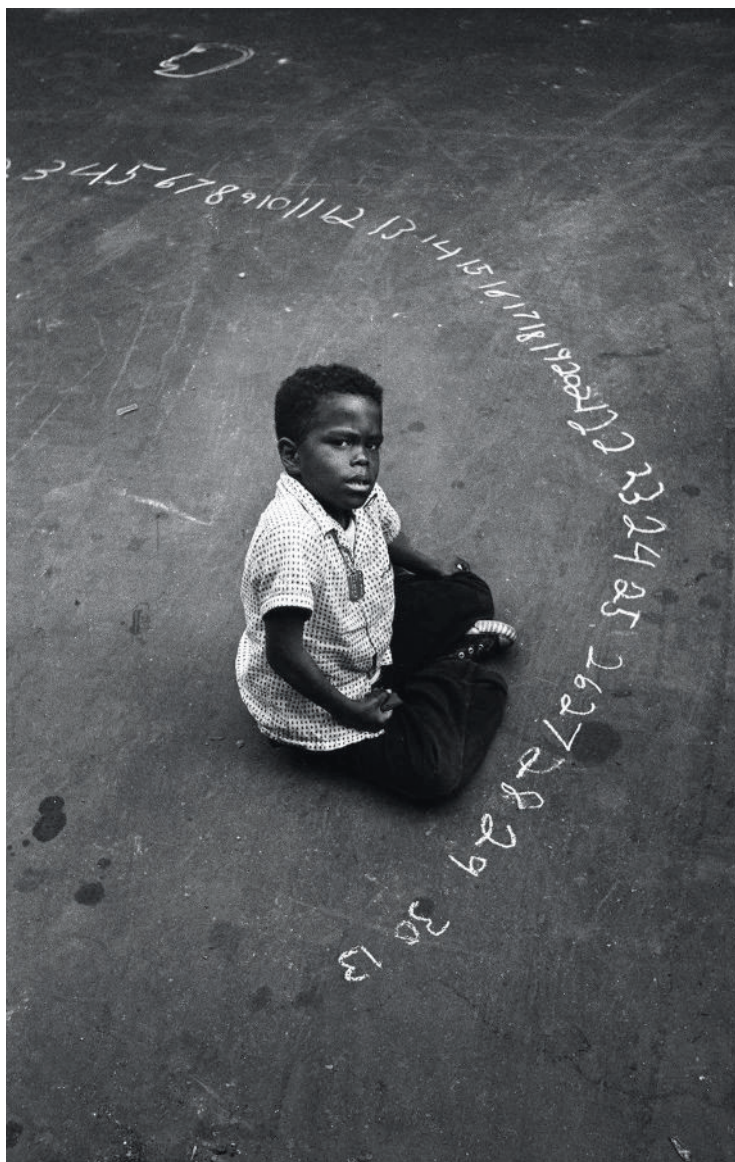
Series

For a New York photographer, photography has, among other things, the benefit of discovering one's city or reinventing it, offering an intimate and personal representation of it. For Harold Feinstein, New York was Coney Island and Brooklyn. To live there, in the middle of carnivals, gay pride events, hearing all these languages, in harmony with these colours and diverse complexions, remains fascinating for the native of Coney Island. The city is meant to be walked through; it can be constantly revisited. The metropolis, luminous, horizontal, so tall that one almost forgets the skyscrapers, is the essence of energy, a subject in itself. While retaining his 'humanist' foundations, Harold Feinstein gravitated towards a distorted, unbalanced and fragile style of imagery. The photograph is a noise, a chaos of diverse, muddled and contradictory sounds, which play with reflections. The city is a single entity, yet it is made up of a multitude of fragments. To seize the moment, no more and no less, because the living is stronger than the dead. Without any irony, yet always adhering to this moral, he affirms that the beauty of New York lies entirely in its inhabitants.

Window Washer
1968
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
40,6 × 50,8 cm / 16 × 20 in
CL-092

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust





Boy With Chalk Numbers
1955
Tirage
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
50,8 × 40,6 cm / 20 × 16 in
CL-007

Beauty Parlor Window
1964
Tirage (vintage)
au gélatino-bromure d'argent
27,9 × 35,6 cm / 11 × 14 in
CL-004

Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust



Cahiers #6

La roue des merveilles : Harold Feinstein

Authors:

François Cheval
Alexis Tadié
Ya'ara Gil-Glazer
Yasmine Chemali

Publishing:

June 2023
Bilingual French/English
192 pages
29 €
Isbn : 979-10-90698-55-0

On sale

in the Mougins
Center of Photography
store.



The Cahiers #6 of the Mougins Center of Photography are akin to the essence of Harold Feinstein – multifaceted and manifold. They bring together a scholarly contribution that delves into the legacy of the New York Photo League, compelling writings on the Jazz Loft, the photographer's collaborations with iconic jazz labels like Blue Note and Signal, as well as his relationship with W. Eugene Smith (Pittsburgh Project). Additionally, there is a text on Coney Island, an enduring leitmotiv of the seventh art since the early 20th century, with its amusement park and nocturnal luminosity. The Cahiers #6 also encompass Harold Feinstein's involvement as a GI in the Korean War, allowing us to witness the dedication of the photographer, educator and mentor, all while harmonizing with the melodies of Duke Jordan, Lee Morgan and Gigi Gryce.

Public programme

Guided tour

by **Judith Thompson**,
director and founder
of the Harold Feinstein
Photography Trust

Saturday 1st.07

15:00

Screening and Q&A

with **Andy Dunn**, film director
Last Stop Coney Island.

*The Life and Photography
of Harold Feinstein*

by Andy Dunn

[USA, 2018, documentary,
88', VOSTFR]

Sunday 2.07

19:00

Free admission

Visites contées

Click! Click!

Lily's making a photo report
on New York! She discovers
all the secrets of the so-called
Big Apple, from the 5th Avenue
to Coney Island's Luna Park,
passing by the Jazz-clubs
of the 54th Avenue.

Duration: 45'

Saturday 8.07

11:00

Wednesday 19.07

16:00

Wednesday 9.08

16:00

Saturday 26.08

11:00

Price: 4 € / -18

From 4 years old

European Heritage Days

Saturday 16.09

and **Sunday 17.09**

Free admission

Full programme

on the website

Conference

*Harold Feinstein and
the American 'experience'*

by **Jean Kempf**, emeritus

professor of American
history and civilization

at the Université Lumière-Lyon 2

and at the CNRS Triangle
laboratory.

Wednesday 27.09

18:00 → 20:00

Free admission

in French

Screening and discussion

Little Fugitive

by **Raymond Abrashkin,**

Ruth Orkin and Morris Engel

[USA, 1953,

comedy-drama,

75', VOSTFR]

Sunday 8.10

18:30 → 21:30

Free admission

Contacts

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de Mougins**

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Informations

Open

1st.07. → 30.09
11:00 → 19:00
Closed on Tuesdays

1st.10. → 8.10
13:00 → 18:00
Closed on Mondays
and Tuesdays

Admission

Adult → 6 €
Student → 3 €
Group (10 or +) → 4 € / pers
Guided tours → 10 € / pers

Free admission
1st Sunday of every month
Under 18 years old,
job seekers,
disabled visitor and
one accompanying person,
ICOM members,
Friends of the Center,
teachers,
school groups,
press,
guide-lecturers.

Guided tours (express)
every Wednesday
and Saturday
→ 15:00

**Book your
guided tour + workshop
for schools, groups
and associations:**

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