

## Exhibition of vintage photographs of Lower Manhattan by Bevan Davies opens at Deborah Bell Photographs



15 Greene Street, New York, 1975. Vintage ferrotyped gelatin silver print paper, 16 x 20" (40.6 x 25.8 cm) signed, titled & dated in pencil on verso.

**JANUARY 8, 2016 NEW YORK, NY.-** [Deborah Bell](#)

[Photographs](#) announces its new exhibition, Bevan Davies / Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77. The exhibition opened on Thursday, January 7 and will continue through Saturday, February 27, 2016.

Bevan Davies / Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77 will present Davies' luminous and highly detailed, large-format black-and-white architectural views from 1975-77, along with a selection of his architectural photographs taken in Los Angeles in 1976.

Bevan Davies (American, b. 1941 in Chicago) studied humanities at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s. While living in Chicago, Davies met Hugh Edwards, the renowned curator of photography at the Art Institute of Chicago. They had many conversations about photography

and the work that Edwards was exhibiting. Edwards' approach to art left a lasting impression on Davies. In the 1970s Davies took a seminar course from Bruce Davidson in his New York studio, where he met Mary Ellen Mark, Ralph Gibson, Danny Lyon and the South African photographer Ernest Cole. He was also influenced greatly by his friendship with Diane Arbus. After a period of photographing people on the street, especially those at odds with society, in both daylight and evening hours with a hand-held camera, Davies changed his working methodology to describe the physical character of the city: the building façades, and the alleys and streets, with a tripod-mounted 5 x 7-inch view camera.

This change in subject and approach resulted in Davies' most celebrated work. When created in the mid-1970s, Bevan Davies' architectural photographs situated themselves wholly within the dictum laid forth by William Jenkins as "New Topographics," the title of the legendary exhibition Jenkins organized in 1975 at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. Davies himself writes of his own approach as "an effort being made to let the camera almost see by itself." This notion was carried further by the late photographer Lewis Baltz who, in 1976, referred to Davies' photographs as "rigorously contemporary, while acknowledging a use of the camera which dates from the inception of the medium." The images of New York façades, photographed in the early morning hours and devoid of people, describe spaces and shapes defined by light and shadow. They depict a specific time and place, as evidenced by the window dressings and signage, and they portray a formal grace among the buildings' details that are included within Davies' ground glass. The resulting 16 x 20-inch prints, with their glossy, ferrotyped surfaces and brilliant definition, are at once objective images and seductive objects.

Davies' photographs can be found in the collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the George Eastman Museum, Rochester; the Corcoran Gallery of Art (now incorporated into the collection of the National Gallery of Art), Washington, DC; the Harry Ransom Center, Austin; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Seattle Art Museum; the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, Ohio; the International Center of Photography, New York; and numerous private collections. A solo exhibition of Davies' work was held at Sonnabend in their SoHo gallery in 1976. Davies received a National Endowment for the Arts Photographer's Fellowship in 1978.

In 2014 Nazraeli Press released *Los Angeles, 1976*, a monograph on Davies' photographs from that region and era. The photographs depict the residential architecture and neighborhoods through nuanced arrangement and clarity. A forthcoming volume on Davies' New York photographs is scheduled for publication in 2017.

This exhibition is held in cooperation with Joseph Bellows Gallery, La Jolla, CA.



January 21st, 2016

## 5 Exhibitions to See in January

With the new season in full swing, Aperture's editors select five must-see photography exhibitions on view or opening soon in New York City.



Bevan Davies, 480 Broadway, New York, 1975. Courtesy Deborah Bell Photographs, New York

### [Bevan Davies / Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77](#)

Deborah Bell Photographs, 16 East 71st Street, New York  
Through February 27, 2016

Without the Landmarks Preservation Commission of 1973, which protected the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District from destruction, Bevan Davies's mid-'70s photographs of the fabled neighborhood would be like the images of Atget's Paris: relics of a lost time. Still, while the distinctive layered arcades and soaring warehouse windows of Lower Manhattan are largely in tact, the once-vacant streetscapes of West Broadway, Mercer, and Grand have today been replaced by the stylish bustle of luxury boutiques. Davies studied photography with Bruce Davidson at his studio, where he met legends such as Mary Ellen Mark, Danny Lyon, and Ernest Cole. As he swept through SoHo with tripod-mounted view cameras, Davies produced a methodical architectural survey, anticipating the sober "New Topographics" style that would define American landscape photography for a generation.

# CRAVE

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## BEVAN DAVIES – LOWER MANHATTAN: VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHS 1975-77

BY MISS ROSEN    JANUARY 22, 2016



1975 marked the turning point in American landscape photography with the exhibition “**New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape**”. Reduced to their essential topographic state, the photographs stripped away aesthetic mystique and forced people to confront the cold, hard facts of urban and suburban reality, while offering an either objective or critical perspective of the subject in the work. The exhibition had an incredible effect on photography as a whole, influencing generations of artists in both the United States and Europe.

At the same time, Bevan Davies had been working in New York, taking large-format black-and-white architectural views of downtown New York. Davies, who had studied photography with Bruce Davidson at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, went on to be mentored by none other than Diane Arbus later in the decade. After a period of work as a street photographer, documenting the odd and unusual misfits who roamed the city’s streets heavily in those days, Davies turned his eye to the buildings themselves.

Like many artists of the time, Davies was drawn to the industrial buildings of Soho and Tribeca. As manufacturing was on the wane, these ones vibrant buildings began to fade away, leaving open the possibility for a new world to emerge. It was at this juncture in New York City history that Davies took his photographs, working to describe the physical character of the city through the building façades, alleys, and streets, using a tripod mounted 5 x 7-inch view camera to take these quietly majestic photographs. A selection of work from this period is now on view at “Bevan Davies / Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77” , now through February 27, 2016, at Deborah Bell Photographs, New York.

In Davies’ New York, we return to a city that was on the verge of bankruptcy. Abandoned by the federal government, the Big Apple had been pitted to the core. Photographing in the early morning hours, Davies shows us a barren New York, devoid of people and stripped down to its barest self. We are forced to look at the city as it really was, a slumping giant, bearing down on itself.

Here, we see a New York that no longer exists, a place of transformation made possible by extreme economic decline. There is a stately sense of grace in Davies’ photographs, as the buildings testify to the steel grid that lies within. At the time, no one could imagine that these buildings would become multi-million dollar properties for commercial and residential use. Rather, they were simply remnants of a time that was, while simultaneously showing the unvarnished face of what the city had become.

*“Bevan Davies / Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77” is on view now through February 27, 2016, at Deborah Bell Photographs, New York. Photos © Bevan Davies/Courtesy Deborah Bell Photographs & Joseph Bellows Gallery.*

## Bevan Davies, Lower Manhattan: Vintage Photographs 1975-77 @Deborah Bell

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / February 10, 2016



**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 21 black and white photographs, framed in black and matted, and hung against white walls in the single room gallery space and the entry hallway. All of the works are vintage ferrotyped gelatin silver prints, made between 1975 and 1977. Each of the prints is sized 20×16 (or reverse), and no edition information was provided. (Installation shots below.)

**Comments/Context:** While basic mastery of craft has generally been a requirement for most serious photographers since the birth of the medium, something special happens when photographic meticulousness is taken to a radical extreme. With each succeeding layer of structure and rigor applied to the process of making photographs, it's as if a kind of

otherworldly purity is drawn out, this visual and conceptual sharpness emerging from a brand of intense pressure not unlike the one that turns carbon into diamonds. When photography becomes this painstakingly controlled, it feels both entirely lacking in style, as though all emotion and humanity has been drained away, and surprisingly mannered, like the photographer has been executing the fastidious steps of an invisible dance. It's almost as if an elusive, heightened form of elemental seeing only emerges when this conscious stripping away goes far enough.

Bevan Davies' mid-1970s images of the buildings of Lower Manhattan revel in this alchemy of purposeful clarity. Taken in the early morning when the streets were empty of activity and executed with various large format cameras, his portraits of overlooked doorways, buildings, and architectural details shimmer with deafeningly crisp silence, the lusciousness of their subtle tonal variations muted by the strictness of the surrounding geometries.

If this kind of reductionist approach sounds familiar, it should. We can travel all the way back to the mid-1850s to find Edouard Baldus applying the same kinds of squared-off, frontal techniques to the ornate architectural constructions of Paris, and we can jump forward to the 1960s and 1970s (effectively concurrent with Davies) to track Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lewis Baltz, and many of the other photographers categorized under the umbrella of the *New Topographics* looking with astonishing intensity at the more modern structures and forms of water towers, coal mines, suburban office parks, and sprawling housing developments. In each case, across more than a century of artistic effort, the clarity of vision being applied to the subjects dominates the compositions, creating photographs that distill the architecture down to its bare-bones essence, where its truths are encouraged to come forth.

At his narrowest, Davies takes us in close to the surroundings of a single door or entrance, where we steep in the details of the fluting and capitals of the columns, the linear arrangements of moldings, and the rectangular positioning of glass panels and flanking windows. Each image is a tight exercise in controlled framing, where horizontals and verticals are brought into tenuous equilibrium, as if managed by an invisible grid.

Davies then takes a handful of steps back and takes in a selection of adjacent doorways along the same patch of quiet sidewalk. These pictures add a layer of architectural dissonance to his compositions, where competing geometries from side-by-side motifs struggle to find balance. Cornices elbow nearby striations, doorways of different sizes and shapes jostle with each other, and fire escapes slash across facades and cast shadows that interrupt the lines; even when Davies opts for views that linger in the same shades of grey, these pictures deliver more complex visual harmonies than his single doorways.

And a few of Davies' images cross the street and take in the entire bulk of a multi-story building, allowing the repetitive patterns of windows and the bolder contrasts of dark and light to take over. While a few of these edge toward a Berenice Abbott-style drama, where sidelong angles create a kind of urban romance, most search for a feeling of completeness, where a single building shows us everything it has to offer and we can celebrate its unadorned moments of energy and grace without distraction.

When Davies' photographs find the severe magic of well-seen simplicity, they jump from being documents of overlooked architecture from decades gone by to something more powerfully universal – it's as if they pass through some kind of force field and start to tingle with contemporary resonance. Like the best of Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind's images of facades from the 1940s and 1950s, their composition pinpoints something timeless, like the elemental rhythms that pulse through our cities, only visible to those who listen (and look) with the utmost of care.

**Collector's POV:** The prints in this show are priced at \$7500 each. Davies' work has little secondary market history, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.