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media release



Christer Strömholm, *Jacky*, 1961. © Christer Strömholm/Strömholm Estate.

Christer Strömholm: Les Amies de Place Blanche

On view from
May 18, 2012
through
September 2, 2012

Media Preview
May 17, 2012
11:30 am–1:30 pm

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Raising profound issues about identity, sexuality, and gender, *Christer Strömholm: Les Amies de Place Blanche*, on view at the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) May 18–September 2, 2012, presents 40 photographs, historical publications, and ephemera documenting young transgender males in the heart of Paris’ red-light district in the 1960s.

Arriving in Paris in the late 1950s, Christer Strömholm (Stockholm, 1918–2002) settled in Place Blanche, home of the famous Moulin Rouge. There, he befriended and photographed young transsexuals—“ladies of the night”—struggling to live as women and to raise money for sex-change operations. In General Charles de Gaulle’s ultra-conservative France, transvestites were outlaws, regularly abused and arrested by the police for being “men dressed as women outside the period of carnival.” Some of these women had tragic fates. Others, like “Nana” and “Jacky,” eventually fulfilled their destiny and led happy lives as women. Living alongside them for 10 years, Strömholm photographed his subjects in their hotel rooms, in bars, and in the streets of Paris.

“These intimate portraits and Brassäi-like lush night scenes form a magnificent, dark, and moving photo album, a vibrant tribute to these girls,” said ICP Curatorial Assistant Pauline Vermare, who organized the exhibition. These photographs were first published in Sweden in 1983, and the book *Vännerna från Place Blanche* (“The Girlfriends of Place Blanche”)—which will be reissued this year in French and English—quickly sold out, becoming a cult classic and solidifying Strömholm as one of the great photographers of the 20th century. The work for this exhibition is provided by the Strömholm Estate in Stockholm, the Marvelli Gallery in New York, and from the collection of Alice Zimet.

(more)

As Strömholm wrote in 1983: “These are images of people whose lives I shared and whom I think I understood. These are images of women—biologically born as men—that we call ‘transsexuals.’ As for me, I call them ‘my friends of Place Blanche.’ It was then—and still is—about obtaining the freedom to choose one’s own life and identity.”

Christer Strömholm is a lesser known artist, but may well be the father figure of Scandinavian photography. A prominent artist and winner of the prestigious Hasselblad Award in 1997, he was also an influential teacher and the mentor to some of today’s leading Swedish photographers including J.H. Engström, Anders Petersen, and Lars Tunbjörk. Highly revered in his native Sweden since the 1980s, he is still little known outside of Europe. This exhibition is the first presentation of Strömholm’s work in an American museum, and features his most powerful and acclaimed body of work.

This exhibition was made possible with support from Peggy and Keith Anderson and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. *W* magazine is the official media partner for this presentation.



About ICP

The International Center of Photography (ICP) was founded in 1974 by Cornell Capa (1918-2008) as an institution dedicated to photography that occupies a vital and central place in contemporary culture as it reflects and influences social change. Through our museum, school and community programs, we embrace photography’s ability to open new opportunities for personal and aesthetic expression, transform popular culture, and continually evolve to incorporate new technologies. ICP has presented more than 500 exhibitions, bringing the work of more than 3,000 photographers and other artists to the public in one-person and group exhibitions and provided thousands of classes and workshops that have enriched tens of thousands of students. Visit www.icp.org for more information.

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