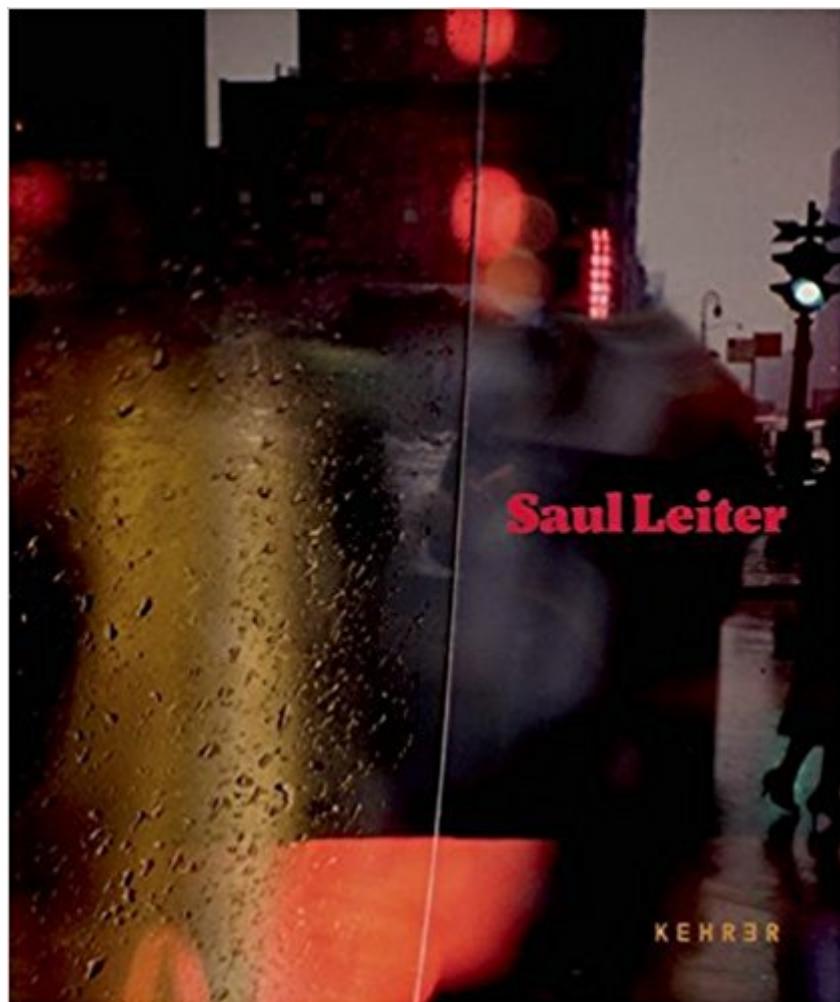


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# Saul Leiter



## Synopsis

Saul Leiter (b. 1923 in Pittsburgh) has only in recent years received his due as one of the great pioneers of color photography. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that Leiter saw himself for a long time mainly as a painter. After coming to New York in 1946, he exhibited alongside abstract expressionists like Willem de Kooning before beginning in the late 1940s to take photographs. Like Robert Frank or Helen Levitt, he found his motifs on the streets of New York, but at the same time was visibly interested in abstraction. Edward Steichen was one of the first to discover Leiter's photography, showing it in the 1950s in two important exhibitions at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Back then color photography was regarded as "low art," fit only for advertising. Leiter accordingly worked primarily as a fashion photographer, for magazines such as Esquire and Harper's Bazaar. Nearly forty years would go by before his extraordinary artistic color photography was rediscovered. This book, published to mark the first major retrospective of Leiter's work anywhere in the world, features for the first time, in addition to his early black and white and color images, his fashion photography, the overpainted nudes, as well as his paintings and sketchbooks.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Brigitte Woischnik is owner of the agency Foto Factory in Munich, Germany. She has co-curated important photo exhibitions like "Lillian Bassman and Paul Himmel" for the Museum Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany. Ingo Taubhorn is photographer and since 2006 curator at the House of Photography at Museum Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany. Saul Leiter (born 1923 in Pittsburgh, PA)

is an American photographer and painter whose early work in the 1940s and 1950s was an important contribution to what came to be recognized as The New York School of photographers. Vince Aletti (born 1945) is an American music journalist and photography critic. He was the art editor of the Village Voice from 1994 to 2005 and the paper's photo critic for twenty years. Today he reviews photography exhibitions for The New Yorker's "Goings on About Town" section. Adam Harrison Levy is a writer and freelance documentary film producer and director. For the past 15 years, he has worked on a wide range of historical and arts films, primarily for the BBC. He teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Why, oh why did it have to take so long? Had the Post-War Baby Boomer Generation been aware of Leiter in the sixties and seventies, when so many of us caught the fire, selected and clung to our photo-heros for decades, and started shooting, the history of photography would likely have looked rather different. The Steidl-published "Early Color" is a teaser compared to this, but a necessary volume, nonetheless. This magnificent volume, beautifully done, is comprehensive, covering Leiter's color and B&W photography and his painting art. Often the manner of Leiter's seeing in B&W and color and his use of color remind me of my number one photo-hero, Ernst Haas, but Leiter's way of seeing is also very different. Both created virtual oeuvres of modernist, expressionist abstracts with their cameras, but this reviewer's impression is that SL played with unfocus much more aggressively than EH, whose abstracts are either focused or smoothed using movement and slow shutter speeds. Both pioneered new ways of using the small format camera in the earliest days of 35mm color film. In their color work, both are or were colorists, and both used a lot of black in their private work. I wonder how much each knew of the other and each other's work. SL's use of color and tonal masses, often in the foreground, and of unexpected framing opportunities caught with exquisite timing are his alone but have come to be among the compositional staples of such as Costa Manos and Alex Webb now. The several essays summarize information from and about SL and his painting and photography and place him among the so-called "New York School" of photographers from the 30s to the 60s and, in some cases, until today. Thankfully, SL is still with us today. There is a "look" to both the painting and the photography apparent in masters' work from that era, even though each practitioner has/had their own contributions, that ties them to what was going on in the world of art in the early half of the century. The number of masters was finite enough that our generation could pick some favorites and follow their careers to the present day, in continuing work or posthumous publication and exhibition. It is a shame and a huge lost opportunity that our generation did not know much, if anything, about Saul Leiter. Had SL's work been in the books and

photographic magazines of the 60s and 70s, there is no doubt IMHO that he would have had major influences on people's taking up photography, informed how they began to see, and become one of the revered pioneers in modern monochrome and color photography. The exposure to examples of his painting art is also delightful, and reminds one of Cartier-Bresson's links of the drawing arts to his photography. All this reviewer can say is, "Late is at least better than never." Thank you, Saul Leiter, for finally allowing us to know something of the range of your work, and thank you, the publishers, for finally giving us a worthy introduction to his work.

My initial impression of the book was mixed. The images of his photos and his paintings are well done and offer a further glimpse into the artist's work. Much of the accompanying articles are in German - which was a bit disappointing, only because it was not mentioned in the book description on and I don't speak the language. However, delving just a bit deeper, reveals that English translations are included in the back of the book and make for a very fascinating read. Saul Leiter is one of my favorite photographers of the modern era and this book offers a great insight into the man as an artist, with his unique photographic compositions and lovely use of bold color, both photographically and in his paintings. The images are well presented for the most part, with reasonable quality for a book of this sort. There are some painting images inserted as smaller pieces in the middle of the book, which are interesting, but a bit close to the binding for my taste. One of the most interesting articles is the one by Margit Erb, who I believe may have known him better than many, having spent several years with Saul, organizing and cataloging his body of work. If you've seen any of the documentary film "In No Great Hurry" or any of the other videos of Saul, you've seen that his fondness for Margit was mutual. Her story adds further to the understanding of Saul as an artist, a man of great intellectual curiosity and knowledge of the visual arts. He will be missed, but his work can be celebrated by owning books such as this one. Very Highly recommended.

Like most of us, I discovered Saul Leiter very recently, via the documentary "In No Great Hurry" when it was first shown in the UK on BBC4 in April. I was initially wholly charmed by the man, and then I saw his photographs. The first serious use of color in fine art photography is attributed mostly to three other photographers, none of them Saul Leiter; the canon must be rewritten. Like much truly great photography, Leiter's work is both understated and bursting, and looking at it you can't be bothered by captious questions about whether photography is art. These photographs have such a draw, such presence and aura (to use Walter Benjamin's terms), and are so much like both cake &

meat that the pleasure of viewing them is all that matters, for the moment. Many, most, are abstractions of a sort, but all always firmly grounded in the pictorial. Lower Manhattan in the 1950's is most of that ground, and as with Albert Kahn's photographers' Autochromes of Europe & elsewhere ca. 1908-1930, Leiter's transparencies are an intoxicating and luminous revelation of an otherwise monochrome moment in place (even to those who lived it in color). The colors are so exceptional, so extraordinary and particular they must be called 'Leiter-colors,' & description deferred to experience. They (colors, form, whole) are also nearly tactile, and for all their plane-geometry many photographs have a sense of depth that will envelop you. I have only twice or three times in my life been this excited, as startled by a photographer. These photographs hold my gaze for a long time. This catalogue raisonnee from Kehrer is a beautiful & thoroughgoing book. Reproduction is excellent & most images are printed here larger than elsewhere. The book treats of his whole oeuvre, not just photography, & while some of the paintings stand up right next to New York contemporaries like Rothko, Still, & Newman, and the essays are good reads & informative, I wish there were more space given to camera art. It is of interest, as you become familiar with Leiter's style & approach to picture-taking, to examine his magazine work, especially the Harper's Bazaar covers. They show a very strong affinity with his private work, & though he was never as successful as Avedon (not by half, or even half of half), I think I see a Leiter influence on later cover photography in fashion magazines. Lastly, while advertised as a bi-lingual edition, nearly half of the texts are in German only. I have found no translations available anywhere. A minor quibble for such a fine photobook, but be aware of this. One other minor quibble, about the production: very nice full cloth binding & in place of a dust jacket is a cardstock sleeve. The sleeve is open at both ends & can slide around (or off) & is easily creased or torn. It was intended, I think, as an inexpensive type of slip-case, but it is the weakest point of an otherwise superior book, inside or out. Highly recommended without reservation to anyone with an interest in "fine-art photography" (whatever that is), [early] color photography, history of photography, New York in the 40's through 60's (though there's work here from as late as 2011), abstract expressionism, neglected masters; oh, just get the book! Saul died two days before Thanksgiving 2013 just as his documentary profile ("In No Great Hurry") debuted in NY. This eponymous book is out of stock everywhere, as are ALL the other titles. Grab it when Kehrer inevitably re-prints it sometime early in 2014. There are other worthy Leiter books, but if you have just one, this should be it. Though interest in Saul is high now (with his death, film debut, and several NYT and magazine articles published in the last 6 weeks), the next printing will almost certainly be the last (as is the fate of most photobooks). New collections may follow, but posthumous edits are never as desirable, are they? So get it, how you can, when you can.

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