



The Art of Street Photography

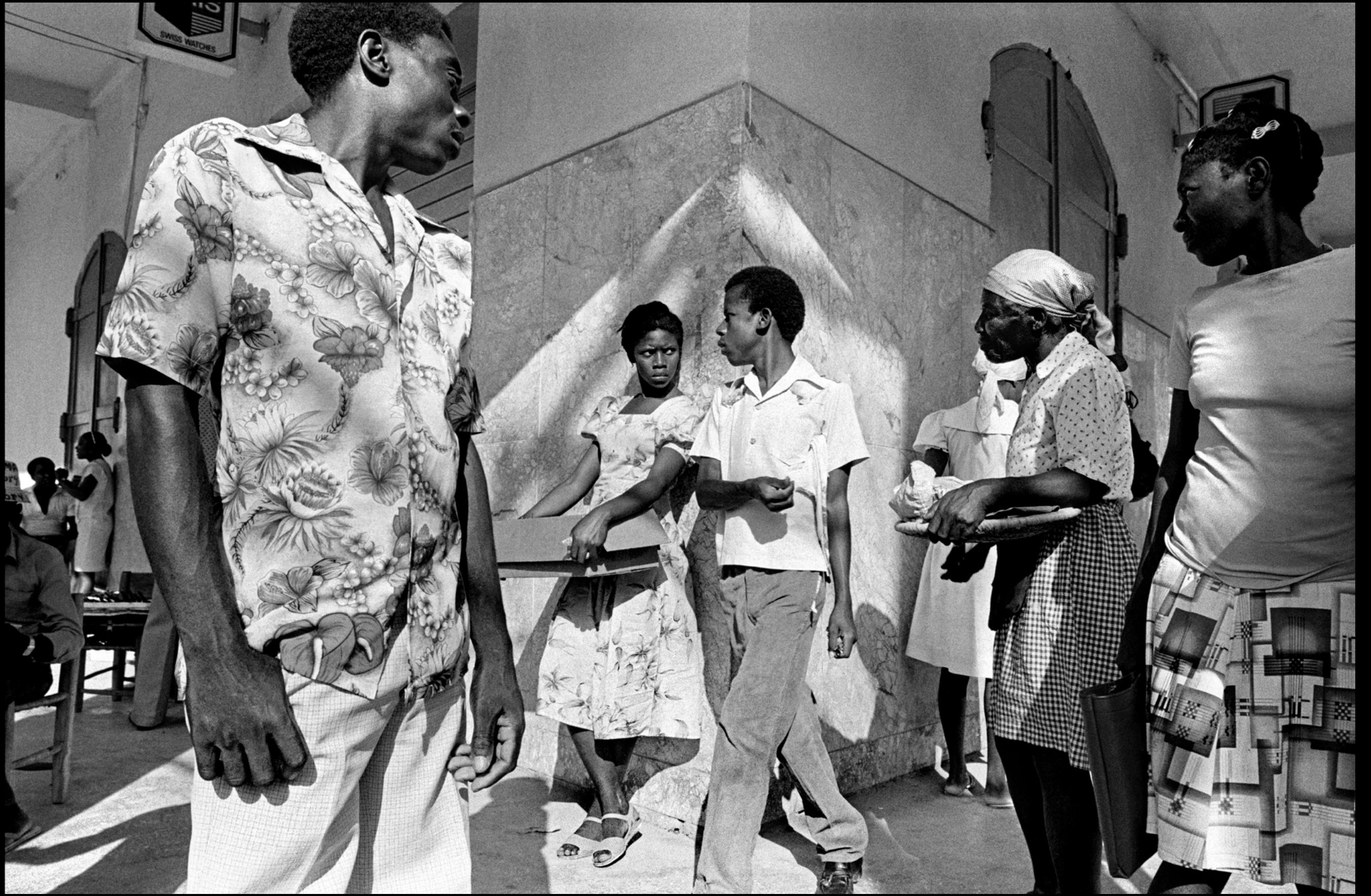
Hitting the Streets

02

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Bruce Gilden
Haiti, 1985.



01

How to Approach the Street

This lesson provides a short introduction to a variety of practical aspects and issues that surround street photography which should be worthy considerations when approaching or actively working within the public realm, from understanding local laws on photography to more complex issues of photographic representation. These are designed to be prompts for your own research, rather than acting as a comprehensive guide. Your tutors also provide essential tips and advice on gear, preparation and the mindset required to be successful as a street photographer.

02 Laws and Rights

It is vital to know the laws of where you are working, and your rights as a photographer.

Many photographers grapple with uncertainty when it comes to laws related to photography and the rights of the photographer. Most photographers will, at one time or another, have to deal with an objection to their presence or actions when working. It comes with the territory, and it has become increasingly important to know exactly where you stand when it comes to your rights, which can differ depending on where you are working.

Every country has its own laws, and these can vary widely. It is up to you, and you alone, to do your due diligence and research the local laws and restrictions of where you are working to arm yourself with the knowledge required in order to confidently defend your rights, should the need arise. This can aid you in feeling uninhibited and more secure when working in the public realm, and often guidance and information can easily be found online.

Other considerations include private vs. public property, and landmarks. It's also important to be culturally aware when working in foreign countries. Be sensitive and do your research.

03 Representation

Photography brings with it significant questions surrounding representation, a topic that has become increasingly prominent in recent years. It is important to understand the role of the photograph and your role as the photographer; this is especially true when your primary subject is people. It is worthwhile asking yourself: how am I representing this place or person? How have they, or this place, been represented in the past, and is that mode of representation problematic? How is this person's experience different from mine? It is important to recognize your own experience and be conscious of your position, particularly if it is a privileged one, when photographing the lives of others.

Ultimately, every photographer must develop their own sensibilities and principles to abide by, but drawing from the history of photography and the writings that explore these issues is always recommended.

“As photographers, we all bear a responsibility to be thoughtful about the world around us. It’s okay to be brutal with your work, it’s okay to be cutting with it, it’s okay to be provocative... But you should really have a frame of reference for what the key issues might be to consider in the process.

It’s difficult enough in photography to represent oneself and one’s own community and the things one is most familiar with from one’s own life. Think about photography as a medium. You are trying to say something that has value, that has resonance, that maybe is profound or is beautiful of a tiny little rectangle or maybe a little square in maybe 1/250 of a second. That is fundamentally a very limited means of understanding.

So what, for example, if you take those notions and the limitations of what you’re working with and bring them into a place and a culture you’re entirely unfamiliar with?

And then what if you add onto that a history of people looking at that place and at that culture in ways that seems to highlight the differences between the two places and not look at the commonalities. And that’s where you get to begin, that’s where you begin to have the difficulties and the questions that are raised in representation in photography, and I would really urge anyone who’s trying to become a photographer and wants

to photograph people outside of their own experience to look into all the scholarship and thinking and writing that’s been done about it. It’s widely available and very important to look at. The classic starting place for many people has been Susan Sontag over the years.”

– **Peter van Agtmael**

“It’s very important to think about the ethics of photography when you are a photographer, and especially on the street taking photos of the lives of the others. And I think the core question, has to be the sincerity [and integrity] of your intent, and as long as you are clear with yourself that you are respecting your subjects and that it will show in your work”

– **Pauline Vermare**

Further Reading

- [David Bate, Photography: The Key Concepts](#)
- [Susan Sontag, On Photography](#)
- [Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others](#)
- [Power and the Camera: Gregory Halpern on Intuition, Reflection and Representation](#)
- [On Female Representation](#)

04 Research: The Starting Points

Get to know the history of photography, and what is going on today

“I wonder how many [people] really know the history of photography? What you should try to achieve is to add to what’s been done before. Make it better, make it unique, make it yours. That, I think, is the key.”

—**Bruce Gilden**

The history of photography is a great source of inspiration and learning. Knowing what has come before and what is being produced today can help inform your own work. As Bruce Gilden says, you should want to add to what has been done and make it yours.

“I put my vest on, I put the camera in the bag, and I go.” – Bruce Gilden

Look beyond photography

Henri Cartier-Bresson drew inspiration from many other art forms, namely painting and literature. He would spend hours in the Louvre Museum in Paris studying the work of great painters, examining their use of space and form, which contributed to his natural instinct for composition and geometry. Looking beyond photography can be equally inspiring and refreshing, and open you up to new approaches and new ideas.

“You have to read, you have to look at sculpture, paintings. That’s how you build...talent.”

—**Agnès Sire**

“One thing that I find really helpful is to kind of step back from my own work and look outside for inspiration. So, literature, film, poetry, painting... pull ideas from the outside! A lot of times, those really inspire me to move forward.”

—**Carolyn Drake**

Walk out of your front door

You can discover so much about a place through the simple act of walking, getting out of your front door and engaging with the world. When it comes to photography, actively exploring your environment with camera in-hand is the best place to start; from finding the hotspots where interactions may occur to discovering what time the light shifts to transform a specific street corner. This all happens by being present, by having your feet on the ground and your mind and eye curious as to what is around you.

“I think a street photographer should be a walker because that’s how thoughts come. [It’s] how you become a little bit more aware of what is around you, and street photography is all about being aware and curious and open to the world.”

—**Pauline Vermare**

Here are some suggested locations to get started or hone your skills

- Street corners/intersections
- Pedestrian crossings
- Bustling streets/hubs i.e. Fifth Avenue, New York or Oxford Street, London
- End of working hours in certain locations or districts, where you can find mass exits
- Keep an eye on the light in cities: at times it can become very dramatic/transformational
- Busy public events

Bruce Gilden
New York City, 1993.



05 Gear & Preparation

What gear do you need? It depends completely on your preference, as demonstrated by the myriad setups utilized by your tutors, from the Leica rangefinder that is so synonymous with street photography to the slow, static, large-format view camera. As Mark Power describes in this lesson, it is about finding the right tools to make the work you want, and the right tools to enable you to speak with your own voice. You can make compelling work with what you have available, as long as you have something to say.

“It doesn’t really matter if [you] don’t have expensive camera equipment...I think if you have something interesting to say, and you say it with passion, and with clarity, and with honesty, then it doesn’t matter what kind of camera equipment you’re using.”

—**Mark Power**

“Changing formats [can be a] great thing. Changing a format or a lens forces you to relate to subjects differently, and space differently.”

—**Susan Meiselas**

Using Flash

A number of your tutors utilize different flash techniques in their work. Bruce Gilden's signature use of flash is seen across this course. His typical equipment on the street includes a handheld flashgun tethered to his camera, which he uses to isolate and illuminate his subject within the foreground. Martin Parr describes his frequent use of flash as both an aesthetic choice, bringing with it a slightly surreal effect to his photographs, and a technical necessity, utilizing it to kill the shadows when working in bright sunlight or to complement the ambient light when working indoors.



Bruce Gilden
New York City, 1995.



Martin Parr
England, 1985.

Some of your tutors share their setups, from the past and present

“Why a 35mm? Well, first of all, the stuff you get used to when you start out often stays with you, and I happened to have a 35mm lens when I started taking pictures. For one thing, it allows me to get in very close to people, and I like that, but also, when you’re using a fixed lens you know where the walls are. And it allows you to have, to my mind, more modeling, more use of form than, say, a 50[mm] would. That’s personal, you know, everyone sees things in a different way.”

—Richard Kalvar

“I keep it pretty simple. I usually just bring a full frame camera with either a 28–70mm kit lens... and/or a 28mm or 35mm lens. I’ll usually bring a small flash unit, an extra battery of course, an extra memory card just in case you’re having a particularly good day. You always want to be prepared for any eventuality. Check the weather forecast before you go out because sometimes rain moves in real quick and you don’t want to get that expensive equipment soaked through.”

—Peter van Agtmael

“For 15 years, I used a large format 5x4 camera. Before that, I was using medium format cameras, before that, I was using 35mm cameras. These days I’m using a digital medium format, technical camera.”

—Mark Power

Top Right
Martin Parr
England. 1985.



Middle Left
Martin Parr.
England. 1975.



Middle Right
Martin Parr
England. 1999.



Bottom Left
Martin Parr.
Ireland. 1981.



Bottom Right
Martin Parr
Argentina. 2014.



“I started off photography in the 70s and back in those days if you were a serious photographer, you were almost obliged to work in black and white. Color was the domain of snapshot photography and commercial photography. And then in the late 70s, we began to see color photography emerge from places like America where photographers like [William] Eggleston and Stephen Shore. In the 80s [Makina] had launched this [6x7] medium format camera called a Paulbel and I decided to buy one of these and at the same time, I just moved to Liverpool. Just down the road was New Brighton, so it gave me the opportunity to explore this rather shabby rundown resort with this new format and suddenly I was hooked [on] color. I’ve been a color photographer ever since.

My technique [evolved] and gone further by using things like [a] macro lens with a ring flash and more recently, [exploring] what’s possible with a [24-70mm] telephoto lens because, within the documentary world, it’s a lens that’s rather frowned upon. Funnily enough, I used to really dislike the notion of a zoom lens and now that’s basically all I use because it means I don’t have to carry lots of lenses. So it gives me more bounce in my step to keep going the full day.”

—Martin Parr

Preparation: Get 'in the zone' by building momentum

“When you go out to make images, you don't always have to already know what you're looking for. [...] One of the things that I really like about photography is it's this other form of nonverbal expression that taps into something that's beyond words. I think that makes it something that's really complicated to teach. People have to find that for themselves.”

—**Carolyn Drake**

You can't expect to walk out of your door and be 'in the zone' immediately. Take your time to build the right momentum, align your body and eye and get the technical elements right. When you reach an equilibrium, you'll have the best chance to make your best photographs.



Carolyn Drake
Uzbekistan, 2010.

06 Mindset

What mindset do you need to succeed as a street photographer?

Photographers need sharp senses, innate curiosity, and an openness to the world when working in the street. Street photography is about acting on impulse, listening to your intuition and being spontaneous. You have to expect the unexpected. And above all else, you will need drive, dedication, patience, and perseverance; to put in the hours of hard work, to put the failures behind you and to keep pushing forward.

“I think the mindset you require is stamina, discipline, and just sheer hard work. There are basically very few shortcuts. You’ve either got that ability to apply yourself to a given situation or a given idea and explore it and resolve it, or you haven’t. Most people are just lazy. The danger with photography is that it looks very easy but in fact, it’s a very difficult medium to really excel well in because basically, people don’t work hard enough – they’re lazy. Don’t be lazy!”

—**Martin Parr**

“Patience is probably one of the most important qualities to have as a photographer and I think none of us have enough of it. But it’s not just about the patience to stay long enough to make sure you get a picture, but patience with your career, patience with not knowing, even a couple of years into the work you’re doing, really how to define what it is”

—**Carolyn Drake**

07

Assignment: Study a Space

For this assignment, Susan Meiselas would like you to study one location over an extended period, looking closely as it evolves over time.

“It could be a corner with no people, and just the light changing. It could be a corner where people are moving across it. It could be a place that has a dynamic from day to evening. Just to experience time in a place, to really develop [your] observational skill. To see the subtlety of movements, of dynamic interrelationships, to understand space, and those who inhabit it.”

Share your pictures from this assignment using the hashtags:

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#hittingthestreet

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