



The Art of Street Photography

Bruce Gilden

03

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“I’m definitely a bulldog.
I think, to be a good photographer,
you don’t have to be a genius.
You have to persevere, and know
who you are, and know what you
want to say, and you have to be
very critical of yourself and others.”

— Bruce Gilden

Bruce Gilden
New York City, 2001.

01 Bruce Gilden

With a unique and instantly recognizable style, Bruce Gilden has been a prolific photographer since beginning his journey with the medium in 1967. Largely self-taught, Gilden first engaged with photography after attending some evening classes at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

“In the beginning, I didn’t even know that when you looked through the viewfinder, that’s what you got. So I had fun, it was total freedom, I was doing something for myself visually, which I didn’t know if I would like, or I would be good at. But eventually, I was just hooked.”

Gilden’s images evoke the energy and claustrophobia of a frenetic city sidewalk. Through the close proximity of his subjects – faces illuminated from the crowd with a flash gun – and the dynamism of his framing, he creates graphic and arresting photographs.

“I work, obviously, very close. I don’t call it interference, I call it connection. I am connecting with that person. I want that situation to keep on going on, I don’t want to interfere, I don’t want it to stop.”

In this lesson, Gilden shares his unique insights into his life, the medium of photography and demonstrates - on the streets of New York City - some of the techniques used to produce some of the more recognizable and iconic street photographs.

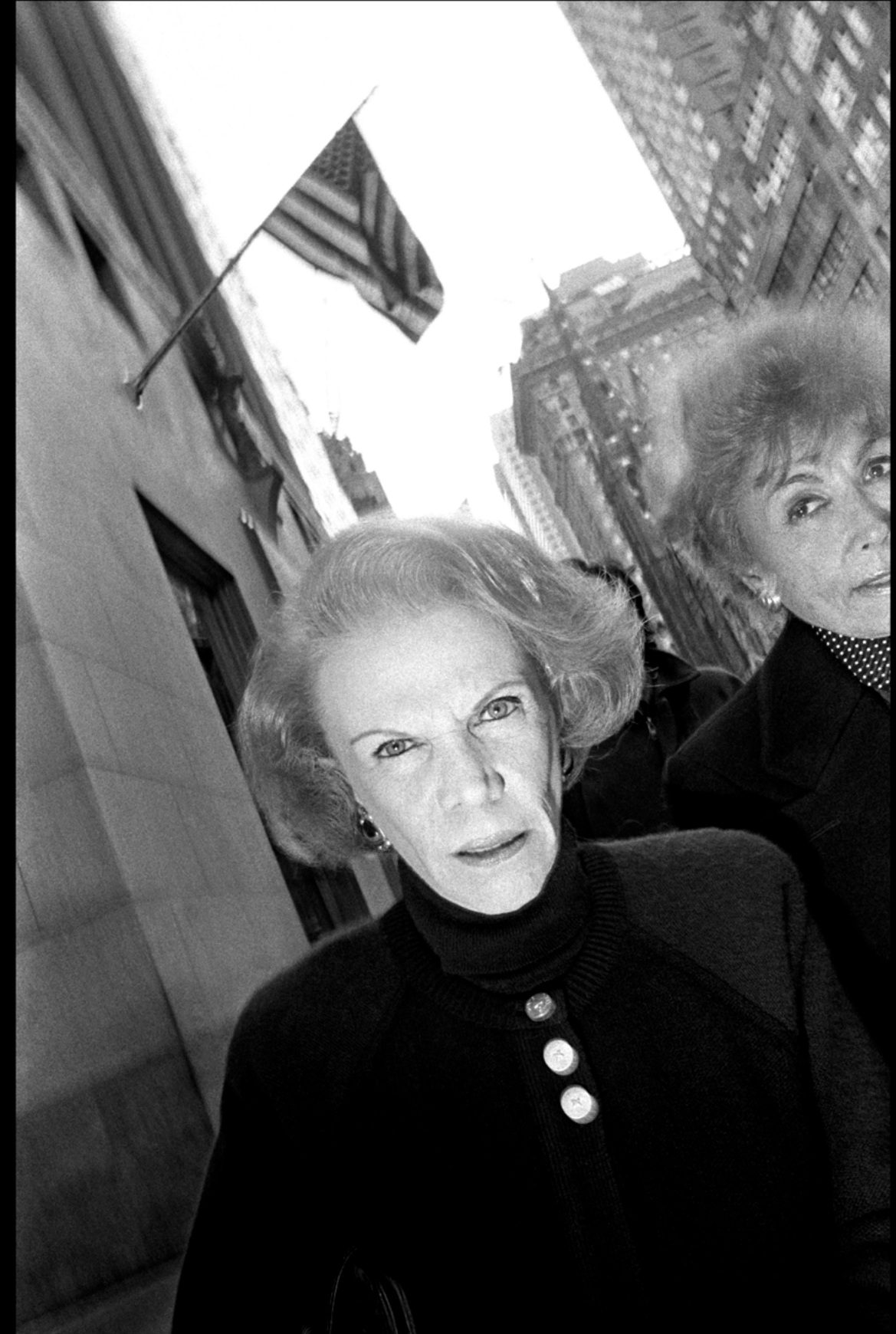
Left

Bruce Gilden
New York City, 1984.



Right

Bruce Gilden
New York City, 1992.



02 Influences

Gilden cites Lisette Model, Leon Levinstein, Shomei Tomatsu and Ed van der Elsken as some of his photographic influences, but others include his own father, a “mafia-looking figure with pinky rings, thick hair, hats [and] big cigars”. Gilden was also attracted larger-than-life characters found in wrestling such as the French Angel, and brought all of these into his art.

Another key influence was Magnum founding member Robert Capa’s now famous quote—“If your photographs aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough”—a mantra that was taken to heart by Gilden early on in his career. To this day Gilden continues to push the limits of the frame and proximity to his subjects.

“I’m known for taking pictures very close,
and the older I get, the closer I get.”

— Bruce Gilden

03 Results

Bruce Gilden spent two days working in Manhattan, New York. Here are some of his results.



Bruce Gilden
New York City, 2018.



Bruce Gilden
New York City, 2018.



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Guidance and advice from the iconic street photographer.

Bruce Gilden is one of the best examples of persistence and dedication to an artistic vision. Gilden comments that for over 33 years, from 1981 to 2014, he walked the same streets again and again. What is more remarkable is that he, in fact, began 14 years prior: experimenting, honing his skills and finding his voice as a photographer. That amounts to nearly 50 years of dedication to a life-long project; a lesson in itself.

Try. Work hard.
Do not be afraid to fail.

“You have to try. Even if you’re not feeling well, you’re 71, you’re walking 8 or 9 miles a day, you’re trudging. It is hard. You’re going in where the animals are, the smell isn’t great, the air isn’t wonderful, but you continue to do it. That’s why I’m critical because I put in the extra time. I try. Because if you fail and you try, at least you’ve tried. You have to force yourself to go out as much as you can. You can’t say, well, I’m going to see my friends, I’m going to watch the television, I’ve got something else to do, I’m lazy, I don’t feel good. You’ve got to put all the excuses behind you, and go out there and do it. I think a reason that a lot of people don’t do it is because they don’t want to challenge themselves, and they’re afraid to fail.”

Be demanding.
Be optimistic.

“You have to be demanding, and you have to work hard. But you also have to be optimistic, and when I say optimistic, you have to hope. Maybe it hasn’t gone well for two or three weeks, but soon it’s going to change. You have to have faith in yourself.”



If you love it, do it.

“My truest advice is, to somebody who’s just starting out, young or old, is if you love it, and if you want to do it, do it. Don’t let anyone derail you from doing it.”

Overcome your influences. Be yourself.

“...some people use me as an influence. That’s fine, but you’d better be strong enough to overcome my influence, otherwise, all you’re going to be is a second-rate Bruce Gilden.”

Learn from others, but then make it better.

“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.”

Photograph who you are
and what you are interested
in. Bring yourself into your art.

“Dig deep into yourself, try to see who you are, what your
interests are, and then go out and try and photograph that.
Try to express yourself through your photography.”

—**Bruce Gilden**

05 Further Reading

[Bruce Gilden's Forgotten Portrait of Syracuse, New York](#)

[Bruce Gilden's Coney Island](#)

[Field Day: Bruce Gilden's Farm Boys and Farm Girls](#)

[Bruce Gilden: Only God Can Judge Me](#)

[Woody Guthrie's Old Man Trump Apartment](#)

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