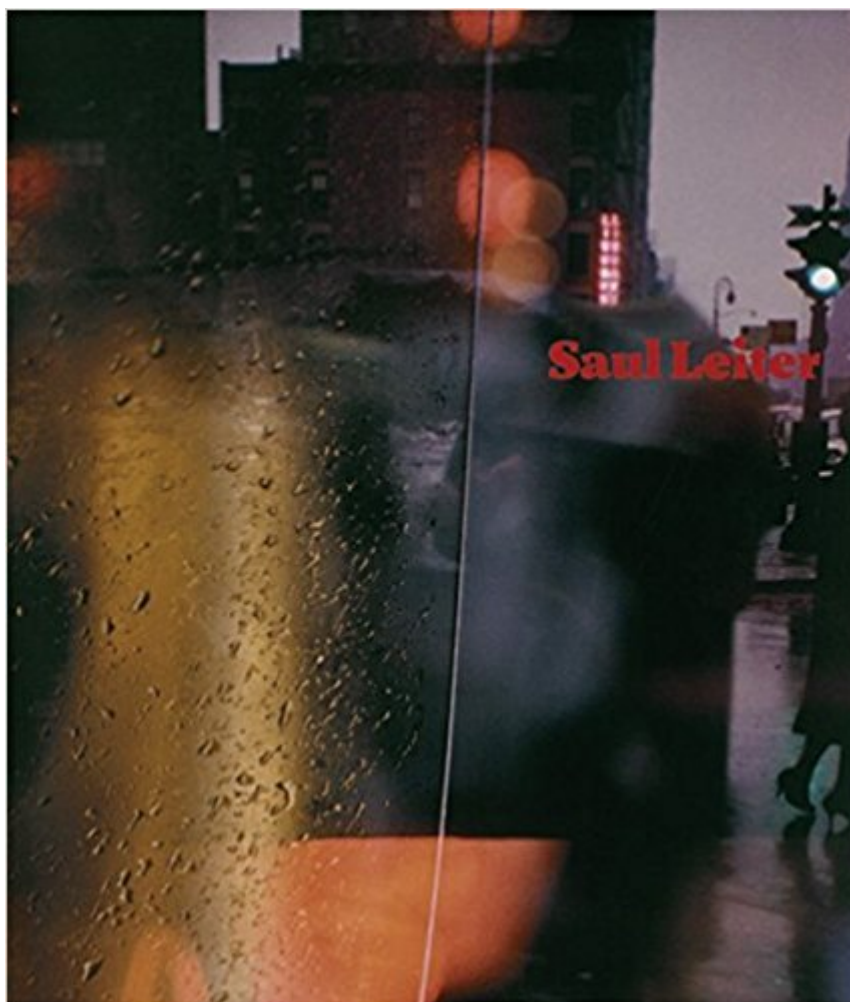


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# Saul Leiter



## 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

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.

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.

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