

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

photograph

In Profile by Sarah Schmerler



Photo by Mark Seliger

Most photography dealers resort to a kind of vertical thinking—sell a single photograph to a single buyer, end of story. But **Steven Kasher** prefers to take a more horizontal approach. Go to his whitewashed gallery on 23rd Street in Chelsea, and take in an exhibition of echt 1960s photojournalism from the Civil Rights era, or see the National Geographic archives laid out, Kasher-style, according to typology.

An ambitious dealer with a unique skill set (part archivist, part theorist, part artist, with a strong entrepreneurial streak) Kasher can, with a few well-chosen words, show you the gravitas of a vintage work without getting bogged down by history. And he can point out its relevance for the future without getting preachy. “Sequencing is important to me, writing captions, giving context; nine out of ten shows I do come out with a publication,” he says. “Since I was kid I’ve been interested in how pictures united with text tell a story.”

Kasher, 58, was born and bred on New York City’s Upper West Side, where he absorbed a whole lot of culture from his parents: his dad was a businessman who later produced stage shows and spy films in London; his mom was an art dealer specializing in multiples from the 1960s. From the time he was in prep school, Kasher knew he’d be an artist, and he pursued the study of traditional painting and sculpting techniques, first in Florence and later at Columbia University and the New York Studio School. He maintained a studio practice from the age of 17 until he was 37, wrote for *Artforum*, held down odd jobs. But it was in 1990, when he enrolled in the masters program at Rutgers University, that photography took over his creative focus. His thesis show was a curatorial tour-de-force: “The Art of Hitler.” An avid reader of post-structuralist theory, Kasher decided that rather than focus on the “degenerate” outtakes the Nazis had so famously plundered from history, it would be more interesting to research the Aryan vision that they, themselves, adopted.

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Kasher took a job at Black Star photo agency straight out of Rutgers, organizing shows of their vast archive that garnered critical accolades. His topic of choice: the Civil Rights Movement. In 1994 he partnered with Howard Greenberg and organized an even more extensive Civil Rights show that toured for five years and culminated in the publication of *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68* (Abbeville). Then, in 1995 Kasher set out on his own as a private dealer: “While at Black Star I realized that archives are this incredible, neglected resource of fine art photography with multiple revenue streams, so as a private dealer, I developed a business of selling whole archives, first scanning all the images for licensing rights and then selling the prints themselves to institutions and collectors.”

Since 2005 Kasher has dealt publicly, creating showcases for unknown practitioners of the past like Vivian Maier and living artists like Mark Seliger, all of them benefitting from Kasher’s uncanny sense for sussing out the timely. “One of the best comments I got on a show we did about Max’s Kansas City,” he recalls, “was, ‘This is not nostalgic at all.’”