

STEVEN
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GALLERY

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LEON LEVINSTEIN

By WILLIAM MEYERS

Steven Kasher Gallery
Through Dec. 22

It isn't that Leon Levinstein (1910-1988) wasn't recognized in his lifetime—he was. It's that he wasn't recognized enough. Despite his inclusion in group shows at the Museum of Modern Art and in photography magazines, he wasn't the presence that others in the so-called New York School were. He never worked on assignment, never published a book, and had a loner personality that alienated potential allies. But in the past few years solo shows at the Howard Greenberg Gallery, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now this grand show at Kasher have made it possible for his unique vision to be appreciated.

Mr. Levinstein worked as a graphic designer in Times Square and prowled the increasingly sleazy 42nd Street neighborhood on his lunch breaks with his Rolleiflex, shooting the human flotsam: hookers, pimps, johns, pushers and users, disoriented tourists, revivalists, whomever. His is the art of the glance, the quick take that catches his subjects when they are unconsciously exposed. He was a master at capturing meaningful gestures, often just including the relevant body parts. A series of three pictures shows three men from the neck down: one with his foot on a fire hydrant, one with his foot on a railing and one with his foot on the base of a streetlamp. Although he maintained his distance from people socially, with his camera he got in close. Mr. Levinstein's faces frequently fill the frame, making them portraits of intimate strangers.

Mr. Meyers writes on photography for The Wall Street Journal. See his work at <http://www.williammeyersphotography.com>.

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