

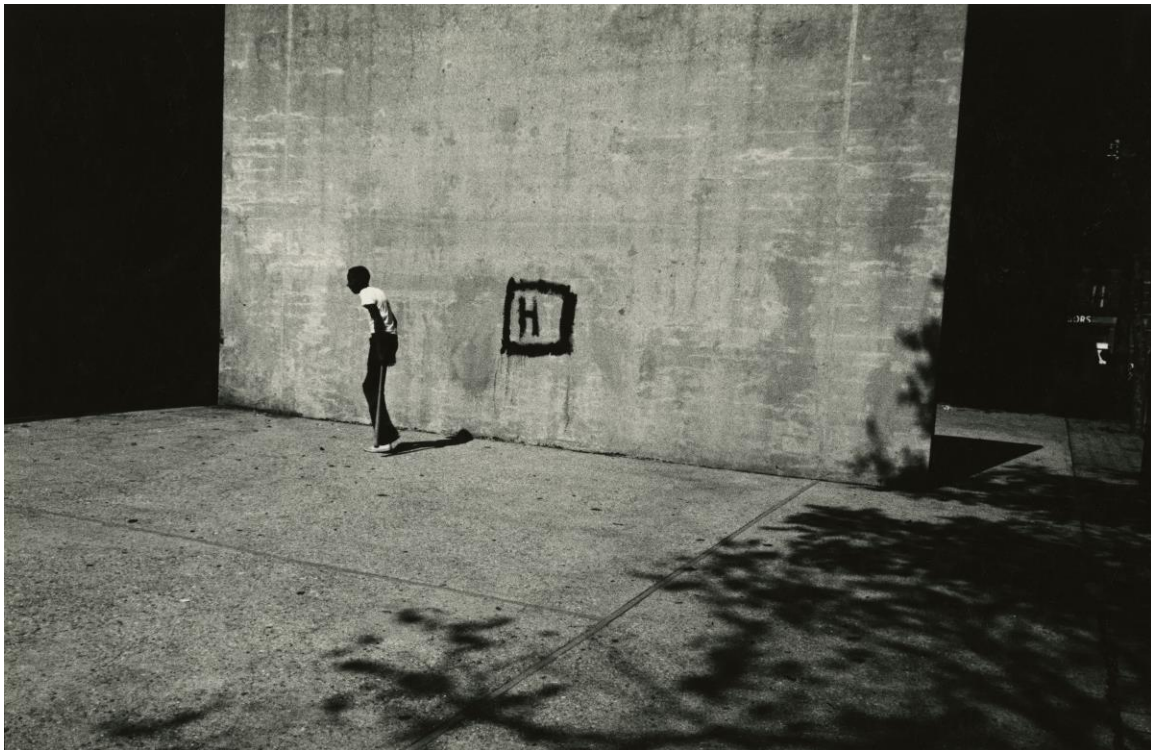
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Louis Draper: Photographing Black Lives Matter for 50 Years

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Meet the man who showed the world that Black Lives Matter with a camera, film and a tripod long before the battle cry was etched onto posters, printed on T-shirts, and shouted from the lips of young people shutting down highways. Master photographer Louis H. Draper's impetus is similar to that of so many Black artists past and present: to honor, capture and pay homage to the spirit of Black life in America in ways that illuminate spots of beauty often overlooked by the mainstream hegemonic gaze.

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In this way, Draper's depictions speak to the humanity and uniqueness of Black culture at a time when Black lives are habitually undervalued, speaking volumes as the fight for Black life wages on. Draper describes his work as a method of "engaged resistance," and his work's intent remains salient today even after being dismissed for nearly 50 years.

Far too often, brilliant Black artists only get the respect they deserve long after death. In curatorial spaces dominated by whiteness, Black talent is consistently marginalized and shelved—Draper, unfortunately, was one of those artists. Only now, decades after his death, is he finally getting the respect he deserves.

Closing February 20, Manhattan's Steven Kasher Gallery is currently presenting the first ever solo exhibition of Louis Draper's work, spanning the photographer's entire career. One can only hope this exhibit will usher in a new era of shows celebrating the brilliance of so many other Black artists who still haven't gotten their time to shine.

"Draper's work is a celebration of street life without sugarcoating it," gallery owner Steve Kasher tells EBONY.com, an interesting description of the show considering the reciprocal relationship between street life and revolutions in Black America. Draper was friends with the likes of Langston Hughes, photographed greats like Miles Davis and Malcolm X, and worked to advance movements for people of color both here and abroad with his work. This exhibit pays homage to those relationships, while speaking to the current crisis in Black America and shouting through black and white images that Black lives do matter (and always have).