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“THIS NEW YORK GALLERY IS FEATURING EARLY IMAGES  
OF A YOUNG BOB DYLAN”

By Lise Lanot, May 10, 2017



In 1961, an independent photographer got a call from Columbia Records asking him to follow one of their newest recruits, a young folk singer who was "a bit unusual."

While the photographer, Ted Russell, wasn't a huge fan of the music, he immediately felt "something promising" about him and agreed to take photos of the singer and document him in concert a few days later.

The 20-year-old artist who was "a bit unusual" was none other than Bob Dylan, and even though Ted Russell never ended up falling under the spell of Dylan's music, that didn't stop him from taking spectacularly intimate portraits of the singer in the 1960s.

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The New York Times reports that Ted Russell was called upon again in 1963 and 1964 to photograph Dylan for Life magazine.

The black-and-white images taken in 1961 were kept more or less confidential for over thirty years, until the Sygma photo agency finally released them. Today, the images are published in a book (by Rizzoli) and are hanging in the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York as part of the "Ted Russell: Bob Dylan NYC 1961-1964" show through June 3rd.

20 years old and almost famous

The photos retrace the early stages of the Minnesota folk legend's career as he played small venues in New York, slowly making a name for himself.

The most striking of Russell's images are some of the earliest: Dylan in his Greenwich Village apartment, next to his girlfriend Suze Rotolo, or alone at his writing desk, preparing for a concert.

The photographer manages to make us feel like we are intimate friends with the composer. According to Russell, the intimate feel of the images is because "in the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson" he acted like a fly on the wall, a simple observer.

In an interview with the New York Times, he says he never really got to know Dylan:

"I want to be an observer, not a participant. I told them to pretend I'm not here, just ignore me, and that's exactly what they did. So there was virtually no conversation. [...]"

My job was to keep my mouth shut and my eyes open, which is what I did. So I can't tell you anything about him, really. If you gave me a million dollars right now, I couldn't remember one word that was between us."

Fifty years later, and now that Bob Dylan has been awarded the Nobel prize for literature, it's touching to see these images of a young, innocent man who hasn't yet tasted fame.