# PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO'VE CAPTURED CONEY ISLAND, FROM YOUNG LOVE TO NATHAN'S HOT DOGS

By Claire Voon, July 2, 2018



For over a century, Coney Island has provided New Yorkers with an escape from the bustle of the city—be that a glittering 19th-century resort or a gritty beachside amusement park. From the boardwalk and iconic rides like the Cyclone and the parachute jump to Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs, Coney Island is a place of endless possibility—located, conveniently, a subway ride away for most New Yorkers.

Coney Island's diverse crowd and myriad traditions, from sideshow acts to the Mermaid Parade, make it a fascinating site like no other. So it's only natural that photographers have continuously flocked to the beach—not to play, but to work. The following eight artists have produced images that illustrate the many approaches taken to capture the ever-changing spirit of this enigmatic place.

MING SMITH: None of the images we typically associate with Coney Island—the sun, the rides, the crowds, the food— appear in Ming Smith's photographs. Shadowy and atmospheric, her black-and-white scenes instead hone in on the private moments of beachgoers, from a girl caught drinking water to a father raising his child in the air.

Smith is concerned with making visible those who are often ignored or seen as invisible; while she's photographed African-American icons such as James Baldwin, Muhammad Ali, and Grace Jones, she's also spent years capturing street scenes of black life. In the early 1970s, Smith became the first female member of the Harlem-based collective Kamoinge, which formed in an effort to boost the work of black photographers in the mainstream art world, and to challenge stereotypical representations of black culture. (She also became the first black female photographer to have work acquired by the Museum of Modern Art.)

Smith's Coney Island photographs from 1972 are dark—gloomy, even—yet they are alive with motion. Smith endows her subjects with an assertive presence, even as shadows often veil their faces.