

LA CRITIQUE



par Tania Brimson

Ethan Levitas, "In Advance of a Broken Arm"

Polka Galerie, Paris 10 June - 4 September, 2010

To promote and defend the narrative image - one that has something to say and tell, most often, the banned stories of forbidden areas. The founding values of Polka have rarely been realized with an exposure that reverberates as brilliantly as that which comes from under the navy blue caps and through the cunning eyes of 'In Advance of a Broken Arm': a compilation of fortuitous encounters between Ethan Levitas and police officers in the streets of New York City. For here, the Street Photography of this American - who has shot the avenues and subways of the Big Apple since the 1990s - challenges the codes of the medium of photography to the point where the photo no longer tells the story. It *is* the story, and the exhibit is a case for the rights riddled by the security psychosis inherited from September 11. By capturing the worried look that the police force bear toward cameras in the public space, Levitas freezes exactly the moment the photographer has become a "public enemy," just before being stopped, reprimanded, or even arrested. Each photograph is also accompanied by an epigraph clarifying the circumstances of the censorship, if censorship is what it is. In other words, portraits of NYPD officers, taken from reality at the moment that they react to the lens, are *the result of a photographic act*, and not vice versa - it is fear, distrust (or sometimes their own complicity) that inspires the photojournalism that creates here the photojournalistic product of the passive camera. The approach, intelligent, reveals certain paradoxes of the American national identity in the heart of a city where photography and film have formed the collective imagination. The result, alive with a rare acuity, penetrates with a documentary concern as well as a sense of palpable anxiety. And, perhaps, the cunning pleasure to have immortalized the moment when Big Brother chases his own tail.

Photo NY, Forbidden City

Since September 11, 2001, anyone who points a camera in public space in New York could be threatened with arrest. In the manner of a performance set in the streets of the city, the photographer Ethan Levitas has knowingly directed his lens back on the police, and indicated with a caption legend the sanction which incurred as a consequence (see at right: *"Photograph of the officer who will soon prohibit my next photograph, because of this photograph. Incident Report N° 47, In Advance of a Broken Arm."*) The subject of the work is itself therefore nothing less than the difficulty of documenting the city, as Walker Evans, Diane Arbus, William Klein once did ...F.C.

Ethan Levitas, jusqu'au 31 juil.
Polka Galerie, 12, rue Saint-Gilles, 3^e



Incident Report No.47 (Photo: Ethan Levitas avec l'autorisation de Polka Galerie)

Ethan Levitas

In Advance of a Broken Arm, Galerie Polka

Par Sophie De Santis

15/07/2010



Incident Report No. 129 (Photo: Ethan Levitas avec l'autorisation de Polka Galerie)

For several years, Ethan Levitas captured through his lens the daily life along the New York subway. He returns now with a documentary series on the work of the city's police, the NYPD. The approach of the photographer, 39, living in Brooklyn, is like a report that shows a city under constant control after the events of 2001. This psychosis comes at the expense of photographers who are viewed suspiciously in public space. Working in the face of such police surveillance, Levitas cleverly uses a careful design to address this delicate subject with realism and without excess. It is no coincidence that the symbol of this portraitist of the prestigious New Yorker continues to climb in private collections.

In Advance of a Broken Arm, Galerie Polka, 12, rue Saint-Gilles (IIIe).