

The Photographs of Ray K.
Metzker
and the Institute of
Design

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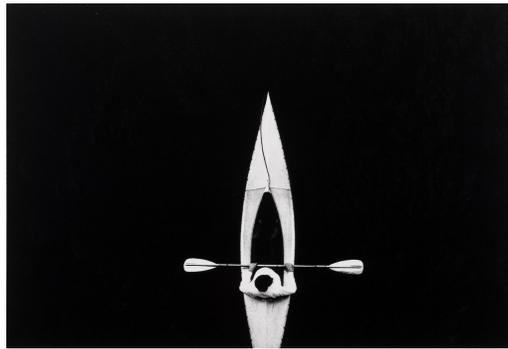
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**GETTY PRESENTS THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF
RAY K. METZKER AND THE INSTITUTE OF DESIGN**

Exhibition offers overview of Metzker's long career and includes inventive photographs by Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and others at Chicago's Institute of Design



Chicago, negative, 1959, print, 1989. Ray K. Metzker (American, born 1931). Gelatin silver print. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., 2005.27.1966. © Ray K. Metzker



Frankfurt, 1961. Ray K. Metzker (American, born 1931). Gelatin silver print. The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., 2005.27.1960. © Ray K. Metzker



City Whispers, Philadelphia, 1983. Ray K. Metzker (American, born 1931). Gelatin silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © Ray K. Metzker

The Photographs of Ray K. Metzker and the Institute of Design

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center

September 25, 2012–February 24, 2013

LOS ANGELES—Ray K. Metzker (American, born 1931) is one of the most dedicated and influential American photographers of the last half century. His photographs strike a distinctive balance between formal brilliance, optical innovation, and a deep human regard for the objective world. ***The Photographs of Ray K. Metzker and the Institute of Design***, on view at the Getty Center September 25, 2012–February 24, 2013, offers a comprehensive overview of Metzker's five-decade career, while also providing examples of work by instructors and fellow students at the Institute of Design in Chicago, where Metzker studied from 1956 to 1959.

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Organized in collaboration with Keith F. Davis, senior curator of photography at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, the exhibition is curated by Virginia Heckert, curator of photographs, and Arpad Kovacs, assistant curator of photographs, at the J. Paul Getty Museum. The exhibition features nearly 200 photographs, including approximately 80 from the holdings of The Nelson-Atkins Museum.

The Institute of Design

Revered for an energetic atmosphere of experimentation, Chicago's Institute of Design (ID) opened in the fall of 1937 under the name New Bauhaus, with avant-garde artist and educator László Moholy-Nagy at the helm. Modeled after the German Bauhaus (1919–1933), the school's program integrated art, architecture and design, with photography quickly becoming an integral component of the curriculum. The ID was noted for fostering an environment of inquisitiveness and investigation that encouraged students to develop a distinctive style under the guidance of a faculty of well-known artists and designers.

Ray K. Metzker

Dynamically composed, Metzker's luminous black-and-white photographs feature subjects ranging from urban cityscapes to nature, all demonstrating the inventive potential of the photographic process. While a student at the ID, Metzker was mentored by renowned photographers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. His curiosity led to experiments with high contrast, selective focus, and multiple images.

Metzker's thesis project for the ID, a study of Chicago's business district, or Loop, displayed many of these techniques. One image, a multiple exposure of commuters ascending a sun-bathed staircase, prefigures the novel *Composites* that he began to make in 1964. Whether documenting everyday life in an urban environment or exploring the natural landscapes, Metzker's photographs often incorporate elements of abstraction. A longtime resident of Philadelphia, Metzker taught at the Philadelphia College of Art for many years. His frequent focus on Philadelphia and other cityscapes has yielded iconic images of automobiles, commuters, streets, sidewalks, and architectural facades.

"Metzker's love of the photographic process has produced a rich body of work that suggests a vulnerability underlying the human condition," explains Virginia Heckert, curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum. "With highlights and shadows pushed to extremes

and multiple frames combined in innovative ways, his photographs create a graceful choreography of human interaction against urban settings."

Metzker titles and groups his images based on their location or technique. The exhibition features Metzker's most significant bodies of work, including *Chicago* (1956–59), *Europe* (1960–61), *Early Philadelphia* (1961–64), *Double Frames and Couplets* (1964–69), *Composites* (1964–84), *Sand Creatures* (1968–77), *Pictus Interruptus* (1971–80), *City Whispers* (1980–83), *Landscapes* (1985–96), and *Late Philadelphia* (1996–2009).

Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind

In 1946, the year of Moholy-Nagy's death, the ID introduced a new four-year photography program and welcomed instructor Harry Callahan. Callahan was instrumental in hiring Aaron Siskind in 1951, and together they became a formidable teaching duo. Their work will be featured in two galleries within the exhibition, with a focus on photographs they created while at the ID.



Eleanor, Chicago, 1952. Harry Callahan (American, 1912–1999). Gelatin silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © Estate of Harry Callahan

Harry Callahan's work benefitted greatly from the attitude of experimentation that was a hallmark of the ID, and his time at the school marked a particularly productive period in his own career. Architectural details, views of nature and intimate photographs of his wife, Eleanor and daughter, Barbara became subjects that defined his career. A central tenet of his teaching was to return to previously explored subjects, an approach that he himself practiced, as did Metzker.

Influenced by the Abstract Expressionist painters he befriended in the 1940s, Aaron Siskind's work features abstracted textures and patterns excerpted from the real world. Often calligraphic in form, the urban facades, graffiti, stains, and debris he photographed capitalize on the flatness of the picture plane. In *Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation*, his studies of male divers against a blank sky experiments with the figure-ground relationship.

"Callahan and Siskind had vastly different visual styles and interests in subject matter" said Arpad Kovacs, assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum. "However, both emphasized the expressive possibilities of the medium rather than the mechanics of producing a photograph. It was this shared interest in constantly challenging their students that came to define their influential presence at the ID."

Also featured in the exhibition is work by a number of founding ID photography instructors and those who taught in the years Metzker attended the school, including György Kepes, Nathan Lerner, Henry Holmes Smith, Arthur Siegel, Edmund Teske, Art Sinsabaugh, and Frederick Sommer. Another gallery is dedicated to the work of ID students Kenneth Josephson, Joseph Sterling, Joseph Jachna, and Charles Swedlund, all of whom, together with Metzker, were featured in a 1961 issue of *Aperture* magazine that extolled the virtues of the ID's photography program.



Buffalo, NY, about 1970. Charles Swedlund (American, born 1935). Gelatin silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Purchased in part with funds provided by an anonymous donor in memory of James N. Wood. © Charles Swedlund

The Photographs of Ray K. Metzker and the Institute of Design is organized in collaboration with The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. The J. Paul Getty Museum has added photographs from its own collection and other key loans to those on loan from The Nelson-Atkins Museum. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication about Metzker's life and work by Keith F. Davis. To access images from the exhibition, and for additional information, please visit the Getty's Press Room at news.getty.edu (must register to access images).

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