Exhibition: Lift your Head: Bruce Davidson and the Evolution of Seeing  
Dates: October 24, 2020 – January 16, 2022  
Location: UCR ARTS: California Museum of Photography, Level 3

(Riverside, CA–October 24, 2020) UCR ARTS presents Lift your Head: Bruce Davidson and the Evolution of Seeing an exhibition of works by Bruce Davidson from the California Museum of Photography permanent collection that explores historic context and viewer response as key factors in the evolution of meaning in photographs.

Photographer Bruce Davidson (b. 1933 Oak Park, Illinois) is known for his intimate and humanist approach to documentary photography. Through remembering the historical context in which he worked and the opposing views his work provoked, this exhibition explores how understanding and “reading” documentary photography has evolved over the past half century. Davidson, a cisgender white male, never claimed to be driven by ideology or agenda; his art is born from his roving curiosity, a deep desire for human connection, and the willingness to be patient. But when it comes to documenting the world, ideologies and agendas can manifest far beyond the frame. Despite the artist’s intentions to simply immerse, observe, and share what he sees, there is always more to the picture. It is often the nuance just beyond the frame—the unique perspective of the viewer, or how and where an image is exhibited—that determines how we understand its meaning far into the future.

Though he refuses to label his work activism, Davidson more than once remarked that “even getting out of bed in the morning is political.” In many of the images here he stressed collaboration with his subjects, often taking the time to allow people to choose how they wanted to be seen. The settings were oftentimes less than civil, such as the trauma of the South during the civil rights era, or a community in East Harlem neglected by the most basic of housing regulations. These experiences sensitized Davidson to the emotional and political violence of the landscape in which he worked. His gentle approach to his subjects made the political very personal.
The exhibition prompts the visitors to view these images with their feet firmly planted in the context of today, to notice how aesthetics compete or blend with politics, and to allow themselves to ask questions.

*Lift Your Head: Bruce Davidson and the Evolution of Seeing* is curated by Sarah Bay Gachot (MA 2012, UCR). This exhibition is supported by UCR College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and the City of Riverside.

### Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition features photographs from some of Davidson’s best-known projects, including *Brooklyn Gang*, *Time of Change*, *East 100th Street*, and *Subway*. Also on view in the exhibition is one of Davidson’s films, *Isaac Singer’s Nightmare and Mrs. Pupko’s Beard*, written and directed by artist in 1972.

### About the Artist

Though he is rarely the subject of his own work, Bruce Davidson (b. 1933 Oak Park, Illinois) once remarked “all my photographs are self-portraits, because you can’t photograph someone without reflecting and echoing, like a bat sending out a signal that comes back to you.” He grew up in the Midwest the son of a single mother who worked in a torpedo factory. She helped him build his first darkroom in their basement when he was 10 and, after high school, he studied photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology and Yale. While stationed in Paris during military service, he met photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and, upon returning to the States, joined the renowned Magnum Photos agency after working as a freelance photographer for *Life* magazine. Frustrated by the arbitrary and swift nature of his assignments for *Life*, he began to seek out projects that were more in-depth and long-term. The images on view here, from the series *Brooklyn Gang*, *Time of Change*, *East 100th Street*, and *Subway*, represent some of Davidson’s best-known work from his nearly eight-decade engagement with photography.

### Related Programming


**Third Thursday Talk** (Virtual Event), November 19, 4pm PST – A conversation with curator Sarah Bay Gachot and UCR Arts Senior Curator Douglas McCulloh, with a special appearance by Bruce

**Curator-led Virtual Tour**, April 21, 12pm PST – A virtual walkthrough of the exhibition with curator Sarah Bay Gachot. Tour not recorded.

**Credit / Sponsors**

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**About UCR ARTS** UCR ARTS opened to the public in 2010, bringing together the California Museum of Photography (founded in 1973), the Jack and Marilyn Sweeney Art Gallery (1963), and the Barbara and Art Culver Center of the Arts (2010). Located three miles from UCR’s main campus, UCR ARTS is located on a single block in adjacent historical buildings downtown Riverside. UCR ARTS strives to advance the understanding and appreciation of the arts through extraordinary experiences in contemporary visual and performing art, photography and photographic technologies, past and present. From major exhibitions, artist projects, performances and community programs, independent and foreign language films, UCR ARTS engages both global and regional audiences. The extensive art, photography, and research collections of the California Museum of Photography and the Jack and Marilyn Sweeney Art Gallery make UCR ARTS an important destination for audiences as well as researchers working in a wide range of fields.

**Press contact:** Jessica Weber | jessica.weber@ucr.edu | 951-827-6049