

DATE: March 9, 2012

## Review: John Cohen at L. Parker Stephenson

*John Cohen Early Work, 1954-1957*

Exhibition through April 14



John Cohen (b. 1932) East New York, 1956 Gelatin silver print, printed 2011 Signed, titled, dated with image and print dates on print verso, Courtesy of L. Parker Stephenson Gallery



John Cohen (b. 1932) Oak Street, New Haven, 1955 Gelatin silver print, printed later Signed, titled, dated in pencil on print verso, Courtesy of L. Parker Stephenson Gallery



John Cohen (b. 1932) Gypsies, Oak Street, New Haven, 1955 Gelatin silver print, printed 2011 Signed, titled, dated with image and print dates in pencil on print verso, Courtesy of L. Parker Stephenson Gallery

The exhibition at the L. Parker Stephenson gallery coincides with the Library of Congress's acquisition of John Cohen's archive. Cohen's photographs, films, and recordings are a crucial contribution to the public collection. Cohen has a rich and colorful background. Founding member of the New Lost City Ramblers, social documentarian of cultural happenings, recorder of soon-to-be-lost musicians in Appalachia, to mention a few of his pursuits. As a musicologist, photographer, and filmmaker, Cohen has used a range of media to document and preserve crucial cultural history for future generations.

*John Cohen Early Work* offers just one glimpse at moments saved by the dedication of the artist. Some of the prints have never before been seen. The exhibition includes street scenes and interiors in New Haven, CT and gospel gatherings in New York City. The frames are bold and transportative. The depicted worlds seem to open up around us, and often the work is so powerful it becomes audible.

Street scenes depict children at play. We engage their games, hear footsteps and laughter in the street. Frames of Gypsies and Boxers bring us further into a time and place we would usually not venture into or find comfort in, yet we enter with ease and again find ourselves immediately in the moment. Gypsy women captivate our interest in *Gypsies, Oak Street, New Haven, 1955* and *Oak Street, New Haven (Gypsy in Mirror)* seeming at once accessible and aloof; tension entices and we linger in the frame. The boxers, none of whom are actually shown in the ring, exude determination rather than brute force, and in one frame, *Elm City Gym, New Haven* a figure with a towel over his head seems almost angelic.

The Gospel gatherings explode with energy, passion, and emotion. This work is literally the most vocal, and the figures are absolutely charged. Songs belt from women with heads thrown back, men who harmonize before a microphone, and children who are entranced. Gest often



John Cohen (b. 1932) Elm City Gym, New Haven,  
1955 Gelatin silver print, printed 2011 Signed, titled,  
dated with image and, Courtesy of L. Parker  
Stephenson Gallery

adds to the dynamism of the shot and works to heighten the intensity of the moment, particularly in frames like *East New York* and *Harlem*.

This exhibition offers but a glimpse into the life's work of John Cohen. From here we can only imagine the richness of the artist's archive and the contribution Cohen's efforts will continue to make on to America's cultural legacy.

For more information on this exhibition please visit [L. Parker Stephenson Gallery](#)

[New Yorker Review](#)

[Wall Street Journal Review](#) (please download pdf attached)