

ART NOW

John Cohen

March 16, 2012

One of the things I long for is to be able to photograph a group of people seemingly unnoticed. To become a part of the community, and form trusting relationships with my subjects, is the stuff photographers dream off. Walking into the small gallery that housed a collection of John Cohen's photographs, I was immediately drawn to the honesty of the images. The figures don't seem to be posing. They all seem to be caught in a sincere and intense moment of emotion, completely unconcerned with the camera.

So to find out that the photographer was a white Jewish man came as a surprise. The images were so intimate, so natural, it seemed the photographer had been a part of this community his entire life. They were not the portraits of an outsider, they were intimate glimpses into the African-American subculture. This shows Cohen's uncanny ability to immerse himself into a new culture, and a new community. He later became heavily involved in the African-American music scene, and continued to be throughout his life. This is not surprising considering the visible bond he formed during this time.

The rawness of the moment, goes well with the rawness of the photograph. Cohen is not concerned with what makes a traditional, esthetically pleasing image. The film was fast, creating a high contrast and grainy image. The focus is not very sharp, and many of the images have also failed to freeze the movement, creating a visual reference to motion. Although these are not components typically associated with a successful photograph, they work well with the subject matter and the pure emotion found in the image.

-By andilake

