



Peter Hujar: Echoes

September 9 – October 28, 2023



Peter Hujar, *Daniel Schook Sucking Toe (Close-up)*, 1981. © 2023 The Peter Hujar Archive / ARS, New York

“I wanted to be discussed in hushed tones.
When people talk about me, I want them to be whispering.”
-Peter Hujar¹

New York, NY – August 17, 2023 – 125 Newbury proudly presents *Peter Hujar: Echoes*, an exhibition of photographs by the renowned American artist and downtown legend Peter Hujar. A fixture of New York City’s queer avant-garde during his lifetime, Hujar was simultaneously infamous and obscure. Presented in collaboration with the Peter Hujar Foundation and Archive, this exhibition juxtaposes the idiosyncratic classicism of Hujar’s approach to the body with works that capture the architectural and social spaces of longing and belonging that flourished in Manhattan’s West Side piers during the 1970s and ‘80s.

During his lifetime, Hujar occupied a unique crossroads between the mainstream art world and the underground scene—his ambivalence toward success, commerce, and the art world at large often led him to shun the limelight. Yet since his death from AIDS-related complications in 1987 at the age of 53, his work has received widespread acclaim. His penetrating photographs have been celebrated by subsequent generations of artists and critics, who have embraced him as a lodestar, cementing his place as one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century. Hujar’s uncompromising approach to image-making, his critical sensibility, and his singular ability to capture intimacy, vivacity, and corporeality are hallmarks of a remarkable body of work spanning the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s.

¹ As recounted by Steve Turtell, quoted in Philip Gefter, "Peter Hujar: Eros, c'est la vie" in Joel Smith, ed., *Peter Hujar: Speed of Life* (New York: Aperture/The Morgan Library; Barcelona: Fundació MAPFRE, 2017), p. 43.



The exhibition, which includes more than 30 works spanning 1966 to 1985, is organized around two distinct modes of Hujar's practice: images that he made of friends, lovers, and acquaintances who posed for him inside his loft on 12th Street in New York's East Village, and photographs that he took while cruising the dilapidated Christopher Street piers on Manhattan's far West Side. These urban ruins are sometimes populated by strangers engaged in acts of public intimacy, while at other times absent of anyone at all, save the traces of previous habitation. In addition, the exhibition includes several photographs that Hujar took in the Capuchin catacombs of Palermo in 1963 on a trip taken with his boyfriend at that time, the artist Paul Thek. The full suite of these images was included in the only book that Hujar published during his lifetime, *Portraits in Life and Death*, accompanied by an introduction penned by his friend, the writer Susan Sontag.

The smooth contours that feature in Hujar's studio images of mostly nude bodies contrast with the peeling paint and dilapidated surfaces in his photographs of the Manhattan's piers. During the 1970s, the piers were a quasi-utopian space on the margins of the city where gay men were able to seek each other out—a "cruising utopia," in the words of theorist Juan Esteban Munoz, outside the prejudicial gaze of mainstream culture. Queer intimacy flourished in these marginal spaces during the heyday of the gay liberation movement that followed the Stonewall rebellion of 1968 and preceded the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s. Hujar's images of these urban ruins, their surfaces encrusted with traces of life, are never detached documents; like his portraits, they involve themselves in the lives of those who gathered there. Like his contemporaries Diane Arbus and Robert Mapplethorpe, Hujar worked at what Joel Smith has described as the "crossroads of brutality of beauty," and yet his images have an uncanny intimacy that distinguishes them from those of his peers. Hujar's pictures are always part and parcel of the world of their subjects.

Although Hujar is best known for his portraits of New York's cultural elite, including drag performers, artists, musicians, writers, and dancers who made up his expansive milieu—and who defined New York's artistic, bohemian, and queer communities in the post-1960s era—the studio images in this exhibition emphasize a different side of his photographic vision. The exhibition features works that highlight how Hujar approached the body—in particular, the male nude—through a rigorous formalism, simultaneously celebrating and denaturing the classical ideal.

The works in the exhibition testify to Hujar's commitment to photography as more than an aesthetic medium. In his hands, the camera was simultaneously a tool for philosophical inquiry, an amplifier of erotic cathexis, and a technique of liberation. In Hujar's project, expression becomes resistance. His photographs reconfigure corporeality in ways that disrupt our assumptions about what bodies are for and what they can do. They ask us: What is a body? When do we become our bodies? When do our bodies become us? How do we inhabit the world as bodies, and how does the world inhabit us?



ABOUT PETER HUIJAR

Peter Huijar (b. 1934, Trenton, New Jersey; d. 1987, New York) photographed his subjects with penetrating sensitivity and psychological depth. Unflinching and at times dark, he captured intellectuals, luminaries, and members of New York City subculture in moments of disarmed vulnerability. Huijar embraced male sexuality unabashedly and was unafraid to examine death and dying. In her introduction to *Portraits in Life and Death*, Susan Sontag wrote, “...Fleshed and moist-eyed friends and acquaintances stand, sit, slouch, mostly lie – and are made to appear to meditate on their own mortality...Peter Huijar knows that portraits in life are always, also, portraits in death.” Huijar was at the forefront of the group of artists, musicians, writers, and performers in downtown New York in the 1970’s and early 80’s. He succumbed to AIDS in 1987, leaving behind a complex and profound body of work that has become posthumously celebrated.

Huijar’s photographs have been exhibited throughout Europe and the United States, including Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York; Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam for a retrospective in 1994. Exhibited and organized by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York and Fundación MAPFRE in Madrid starting in 2017, the exhibition *Speed of Life* made its final stop at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, France in 2019. His work remains in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

ABOUT 125 NEWBURY

125 Newbury is a project space in New York City helmed by Arne Glimcher, Founder and Chairman of Pace Gallery. Named for the original location of Pace, which Glimcher opened at 125 Newbury Street in Boston in 1960, the venture is located at 395 Broadway in Manhattan’s Tribeca neighborhood, at the corner of Walker Street. Occupying a 3,900-square-foot ground-floor space in a landmark building with 17-foot ceilings, the interior of 125 Newbury has been fully renovated by Enrico Bonetti and Dominic Kozerski of Bonetti/Kozerski Architecture.

Guided by Glimcher’s six decades of pioneering exhibition-making and steadfast commitment to close collaboration with artists, 125 Newbury presents up to five exhibitions per year, with a focus on both thematic group shows as well as solo exhibitions by emerging, established, and historical artists. The 125 Newbury team is led by directors Arne Glimcher, Kathleen McDonnell, Talia Rosen, and Oliver Shultz, who work together to develop cutting-edge and thought-provoking exhibitions that reflect a global, cross-generational perspective.



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