

"Jazz People" Documents a Generation of Musicians

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By the late 1960s, Lee Friedlander was among the most lauded photographers in America, his black-and-white images documenting the “social landscape” of urban life having been exhibited at the International Museum of Photography and the Museum of Modern Art. It was only a decade earlier that Friedlander first began honing his artistic vision through a series of photographs of New Orleans jazz musicians.



The Eureka Brass Band plays for a Young Men's Olympians Benevolent Association Funeral, Lafayette Cemetery No. 2, no date. (Photograph by Lee Friedlander, courtesy of the William Ransom Hogan Archive of New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University.)

“Jazz People: New Orleans Portraits by Lee Friedlander,” opening today (Aug. 24) at the [Newcomb Art Gallery](#), is a selection of 39 images drawn primarily from the [William Ransom Hogan Archive of New Orleans Jazz](#) at Tulane University.

“This work represents Lee Friedlander's earliest artistic project,” says [Stephen Hilger](#), Newcomb Art Department faculty member who curated the show. “He had a vision that was very complete.”

Beginning 1957, Friedlander traveled to New Orleans a number of times in order to complete the series, taking many of the photographs while accompanying scholars Richard Allen and William Russell as they conducted interviews for the jazz archive.

Friedlander once told art critic James Thrall Soby that his interest was primarily meeting the musicians, then photographing them.

“That really indicates his spirit,” Hilger says.

“Most of the portraits are taken on front porches or inside the musicians' homes,” notes Hilger. “They have allowed him into their world, and he's treating it like an everyday situation.”

Among the musicians included in the exhibit are “Sweet Emma” Barrett, Joe James, George Lewis and the Eureka Brass Band.

“Jazz People” is being shown in conjunction with two other photography exhibits: “Pop Shots: Polaroid Portraits by Andy Warhol,” which is also curated by Hilger, and “Pictures for Books: Photographs by Thomas Roma,” which is curated by Susan Kismaric.

Roma, along with Hilger, Kismaric and author Phillip Lopate, will participate in a symposium related to the exhibitions. The symposium takes place from 3:30 p.m. until 5 p.m. on Sept. 14 and will be followed by the exhibition reception from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. Open to the public, the reception also will feature jazz selections performed by students from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. Roma also will lead a gallery walk-through at 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 15.