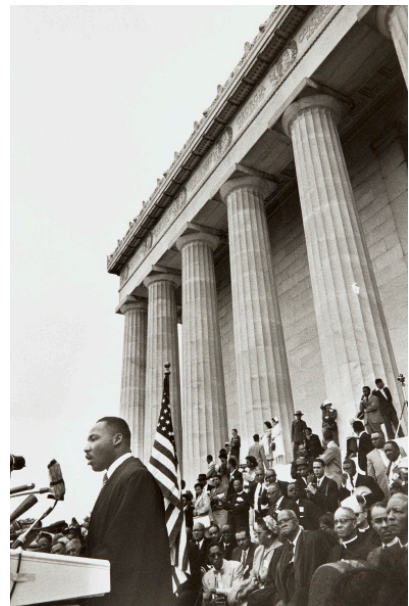


**LET US MARCH ON:
LEE FRIEDLANDER AND THE PRAYER PILGRIMAGE FOR FREEDOM**

*Early civil rights images by celebrated American photographer exhibited for the first time
January 13–July 9, 2017*

January 13, 2017, New Haven, Conn.—In commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, the Yale University Art Gallery is honored to present the first public exhibition of photographer Lee Friedlander’s images of this critical yet generally neglected moment in American civil rights history. On May 17, 1957—the third anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka*, which outlawed segregation in public schools—thousands of activists, including many leaders from religious, social, educational, labor, and political spheres, united in front of the Lincoln Memorial, in Washington, D.C. At this first large-scale gathering of African Americans on the National Mall, an event that was a forerunner of the 1963 March on Washington at which Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famed “I Have a Dream” speech, protestors called on federal authorities to enforce desegregation, support voting rights, and combat racial violence. Friedlander photographed many of the illustrious figures who attended or spoke at the march, such as King, Ella Baker, Harry Belafonte, Mahalia Jackson, and Rosa Parks, and he wove among the demonstrators on the ground to capture the energy and expressions of the day.



Lee Friedlander, *Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (at podium)*; first row: Bishop Sherman Lawrence Greene, Bishop William Jacob Walls, Roy Wilkins, and A. Philip Randolph, from the series *Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom*, 1957, printed later. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander, Hon. 2004. © Lee Friedlander, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. Photo courtesy Eakins Press Foundation

In May 1957, Friedlander was 22 years old and at the onset of his acclaimed career as a photographer. His images capture celebrities like King, who delivered his first national address, titled “Give Us the Ballot” at the Prayer Pilgrimage. However, Friedlander also centered his lens on the thousands of other freedom fighters who traveled from cities across the United States to participate in the assembly. By “working on the edge,” the artist’s term for his practice of weaving among the demonstrators and taking on-the-ground photographs, Friedlander compels viewers to acknowledge the courage of these men, women, and children, dressed in their Sunday best, who gathered in the nation’s symbolic core—then a Jim Crow space—to stand up for their civil rights. With their arms raised in praise for the speakers, the activists fostered unity and strengthened their resolve to create a better America for all citizens.

In addition to spotlighting this critical history, Friedlander’s series *Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom*—his only work specifically centered on the civil rights movement—offers a glimpse into the artist’s early career and the development of his personal style, highlighting themes that would come to characterize his later work, such as his interest in visual complexity and his focus on figural subjects. Along with showing Friedlander’s talent for revealing the human spirit, this series demonstrates his playful juxtapositions, emphasis on line and space, and careful attention to the dynamic alignment of forms.



Lee Friedlander, *Untitled*, from the series *Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom*, 1957, printed later. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander, Hon. 2004. © Lee Friedlander, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. Photo courtesy Eakins Press Foundation

Despite the wide variety and high quality of these images, Friedlander struggled to find a publisher for them. The mainstream magazine industry biases of the 1950s did not favor civil rights issues, but Friedlander would not be deterred from sharing these photographs with the public. After years of showing the series to

colleagues, he finally secured support from the Eakins Press Foundation. In 2015 Eakins Press published the full set of images as a book, titled *Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom*, which also includes reproductions of the Prayer Pilgrimage event program, a transcript of King’s “Give Us the Ballot” speech, and other archival documents.

The exhibition takes its title from a line of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”—one of the most cherished anthems of the civil rights movement—a song that was originally written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) and was featured at the Prayer Pilgrimage. *Let Us March On* speaks to the power of Friedlander’s photographs six decades later, as America continues to struggle with some of the same issues that the 1957 event addressed, including de facto segregation, voter suppression, and racial violence. Friedlander’s photographs, immortalizing a daring public demonstration of love and freedom, offer both a remembrance of our country’s past and an inspiration for the present.

In the exhibition brochure, curator La Tanya S. Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Senior Fellow in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, writes, “The Prayer Pilgrimage itself and Friedlander’s responses to the event—his unconventional visual presentation of it, his persistent advocacy of the photographs over the years, his long-awaited publication of the series, his donation of the photographs to the Yale University Art Gallery, and his collaboration on the present exhibition—have all been acts of resiliency and recognition of possibilities. Through his actions as an artist, Friedlander communicates a refusal to limit



Lee Friedlander, *Untitled*, from the series *Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom*, 1957, printed later. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Maria and Lee Friedlander, Hon. 2004. © Lee Friedlander, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. Photo courtesy Eakins Press Foundation

himself to established structures of containment, a mindset that mirrors that of the Prayer Pilgrimage protestors in organizing a courageous and unprecedented demonstration. This creative tenacity is the practice of freedom.”

Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, states, “Maria and Lee Friedlander’s gift of this singular body of work to Yale is a treasured new addition to the Gallery’s photography collection—one already distinguished by a massive holding of Friedlander’s master prints. His long career as an iconic American artist will also be stewarded by Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where the photographer’s archive will reside in perpetuity. It is a genuine thrill to be able to present this first exhibition of Friedlander’s *Prayer Pilgrimage* images and to subsequently share them with other museums and learning communities across America. After a national tour, these photographs will return home to Yale, where they will be the focus of continued study, reflection, and inspiration for generations to come.”

Exhibition Credits

Exhibition organized by La Tanya S. Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Senior Fellow, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art. Made possible by the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund and the James Maloney '72 Fund for Photography.

On View

January 13-July 9, 2017

Related Programs

Gallery Talks

Wednesday, February 1, 12:30 pm

“Questioning the Boundaries of Civil Rights Photography”

La Tanya S. Autry, the Marcia Brady Tucker Senior Fellow, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art

Wednesday, April 26, 12:30 pm

“Memory’s Reflections: Some Thoughts on the Photography of the Civil Rights Marches”

Laura Wexler, Professor of American Studies, Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Co-Chair of the Women’s Faculty Forum at Yale University

Conversations

Thursday, January 19, 5:30 pm

“The Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom: Racial Justice Activism in 1957 and Beyond”

William P. Jones, Professor of History at the University of Minnesota, La Tanya S. Autry, and others

Thursday, March 9, 5:30 pm

“Documenting the African American Liberation Struggle Today: Artists in Conversation”

Alex Defroand, La Tanya S. Autry, and others

Thursday, May 11, 5:30 pm

“A Conversation about Photographic Books with Lee Friedlander, David Goldblatt, and Richard Benson”

Film Screening and Studio Program

Friday, March 10, 1:30 pm

“*We Out Here: A Film about Race at Yale* (Alex Defroand, 2016) and Reflections on Race in New Haven”

Walking Tours

Wednesday, May 17, 12:30 and 5:30 pm

“Let Us March On!: A Tour of New Haven Sites of Protest”

La Tanya S. Autry

All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more detailed programming information, visit artgallery.yale.edu/calendar.

Related Publication

Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom

Lee Friedlander

88 pages / 9½ × 9 inches / 69 duotone illustrations / Published by Eakins Press Foundation / 2015

Yale University Art Gallery

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

General Information

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September-June); and Saturday-Sunday, 11 am-5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at artgallery.yale.edu.

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