

Wall Street Journal, Greater New York

Saturday/Sunday, July 12-13, 2014

ON PHOTOGRAPHY | BY WILLIAM MEYERS

[Alex Harsley: A Visual History of the Lower East Side/East Village](#)

June Kelly Gallery

166 Mercer St.

(212) 226-1660

Through Aug. 1

The Kelly exhibition space is bracketed with a large-format sepia portrait of Quentin Crisp at its west end and a similar one of Jean-Michel Basquiat at its east end. The north wall features "Billboard Mural (4th St between Bowery and 2nd Ave)" (c. 2009), composed of five images and more than 20 feet wide. But the real focus of this exhibition is the 89 13-inch-by-19-inch prints hung edge to edge in 12 groups; the snapshotlike pictures taken between 1970 and 2012 on the Lower East Side have the sense of history of a family photo album, and much the same sense of nostalgia.

The pictures in each group have a unifying theme, so that Group A is mainly about photography. There is "The Black Photographers and Geno Rodriguez at the Alternative Museum" (c. 1979), and a group portrait that includes the curator, writer and teacher Deborah Willis as well as the noted portrait photographer Dawoud Bey.

But photographers turn up in other groups as well: "Bleecker Street, Home of Robert Frank" (c. 1970) is in Group B; Mr. Bey and Chester Higgins are in Group C; and Robert Frank himself is in Group D.

Group L is mostly celebrities like Ellen Stewart, Nina Simone and John Lee Hooker.

A major theme is the demolition of old buildings (and one instance of a building that collapsed) as the neighborhood was transformed from a bastion of bohemia to a center of upscale galleries and condos. The recurring Fillmore East is a leitmotif.

Mr. Meyers writes on photography for The Wall Street Journal. His photo book "Outer Boroughs: New York Beyond Manhattan" will be published by Damiani in February 2015.