

MAUREEN PALEY.

press release

PETER HUJAR

Backstage

15 May – 13 June 2021

Maureen Paley is pleased to present the fourth solo exhibition of photographs by Peter Hujar at the gallery.

The exhibition presents a series of images that capture performers backstage in New York theatres and nightclubs during the 1970s and early 1980s. By presenting this exhibition at a time when many performance spaces have been shuttered worldwide, the gallery aims to provide a glimpse into the heyday of New York's bohemia and the much-celebrated underground drag culture that flourished during Peter Hujar's lifetime.

Hujar was immersed in the evolving East Village scene after renting a loft above the Eden Theatre in the early 1970s that eventually became the portrait studio where he photographed many of his peers. After inviting The Cockettes into his studio in 1971, who were in town playing at the Anderson Theatre, Hujar began to capture the drag and avant-garde performance at Baykal's Palm Casino Revue and the productions of Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company. Hujar's intimate portraits of his subjects applying make-up or in full drag document a moment of transformation and reflect on the many nuances of gender.

Susan Sontag states in her introduction to Hujar's monograph *Portraits in Life and Death*, "...Fleshed and moist-eyed friends and acquaintances stand, sit, slouch, mostly lie – and are made to appear to meditate on their own mortality... Peter Hujar knows that portraits in life are always, also, portraits in death." Hujar was at the forefront of the group of artists, musicians, writers, and performers in downtown New York who became the subjects of his work. He died of AIDS in 1987 at 53 years old leaving behind a complex and profound body of work that has become posthumously celebrated.

Born 1934, Trenton, NJ, USA, died 1987, New York, NY, USA. Hujar's photographs have been recently exhibited in the solo touring exhibition *Speed of Life*. Organised by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York and Fundación MAPFRE in Madrid, 2017, *Speed of Life* also toured to Fotomuseum, The Hague, Netherlands, 2017; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), California, USA, 2018, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio, USA, 2019 and finally at Jeu de Paume, Paris, France in 2019.

His work has also 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. 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, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and Tate, London.

Selected publications include *Peter Hujar: Speed of Life*, Aperture, 2017; *Peter Hujar: Lost Downtown*, Steidl, Göttingen 2016; *Peter Hujar: Love & Lust*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, 2014; *When Ghost Meets Ghost*, Maureen Paley, London, 2008; *Animals and Nudes*, Twin Palms, Santa Fe, 2002; *Peter Hujar: A Retrospective*, Scalo Publishers, New York, 1994; *Portraits in Life and Death*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1976.