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Art Reviews/Helen A. Harrison

“TIME’S WITNESS”

Like all good photojournalists, Fred Stein (1909-1967) had an eye for intriguing detail and a knack for capturing the revealing moment. But more important, he combined a documentarian’s acumen with an artist’s visual sensibility. This selection of his vintage prints concentrates on the 1930’s, when he began using a hand-held Leica to record the street life of Paris, and the 1940’s in New York, where he settled during World War II.

Stein’s story is a classic tale of Nazi persecution, displacement, mortal danger and survival, of one career derailed by tyranny and another adopted by default. Prevented from practicing law in Germany, he fled to Paris and took up photography, only to be interned as an enemy alien when war broke out. He managed to escape with his family and to gain entry to the United States, where he re-established himself as a photographer whose work was published regularly.

Despite his harrowing history, Stein seems to have retained a romantic streak that first manifested itself in his Paris pictures. An equally strong penchant for formalism prevents the intrusion of sentimentality, as in his studies of a group of scruffy children poring over a newspaper and a couple embracing under a street lamp. The dynamics of composition balance the human interest, so that each image is both a record of a fleeting incident and a studied observation of interactive shapes, tones and textures.

Several examples, including a shot of fireworks over the Seine, carefree children on a swing and a winter view of Central Park, backed by a mist-shrouded skyline, have a timeless quality that



Fred Stein Archive

A Century Almost Past

“Le Gaz” Fred Stein’s 1933 photograph of a Paris scene, is part of “Time’s Witness: Enduring Images of the 20th Century,”

transcends the momentary impression. Others, especially those showing posters, cars and other period details, are fixed in place and time. Still others, while they document such specifics, go beyond them to comment on the pleasure of noticing the visual conjunctions that enrich daily experience.

Kimberly Greer Gallery, 75 Woodbine Avenue, Northport. Through Dec. 26