

NEW ORLEANS ART INSIDER

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Friedlander, Roma & Warhol at the Newcomb Gallery



One of the ironies of a town notorious for taking genius for granted was that it was left to two great photographers from elsewhere—Lee Friedlander and Ralston Crawford—to document the legendary traditional New Orleans jazz musicians of the 1950s. In this JAZZ PEOPLE series, the young Friedlander's vision is at its most direct and unvarnished, yet his famously sly use of incidentals is evident in works such as his 1958 JOE JAMES AT THE WESTWEGO FIREMAN'S HALL portrait, top, in which the intense pianist is framed by Falstaff Beer graphics in the background.



Friedlander's cinematic *mise-en-scene* methodology stands in marked contrast to Andy Warhol's nearby POP SHOTS series of closely cropped Polaroid photographs, yet the stylized glitz of the Peter Pan of Pop is localized in his series of portraits of former New Orleans Museum of Art photography curator Tina Freeman, above, interspersed with the likes of Pia Zadora and other 1970s glitterati.



To casual observers, some of Thomas Roma's photographs can seem somewhat elusive at first. Like Lee Friedlander's jazz portraits in the next room, Roma's compositions can look random, so it takes a minute to realize that his views of Brooklyn and Sicily often involve a visual counterpoint as complex as a Bach fugue. Like Friedlander, Roma incorporates incidentals that most photographers avoid, but here they result in an ambient sensibility that breaks the usual rules while communicating the haphazard intimacy of the Brooklyn landscape. Even so, his most compellingly human works would have to be his COME SUNDAY photographs of worshipers in black Brooklyn churches, some of which were once synagogues, as is occasionally the case in Nola's Central City as well. Here the epiphanies of a very emotional form of religious experience are conveyed with great warmth and empathy, which makes for a striking contrast with his more circumspect Brooklyn and Sicilian vistas. In this show, many of the uncanny connections that link Brooklyn, New York, New Orleans, and even Sicily, are all on display under the same roof. ~Bookhardt



PICTURES FOR BOOKS: Photographs by Thomas Roma, JAZZ PEOPLE: New Orleans Jazz Photographs by Lee Friedlander, POP SHOTS: Polaroid portraits by Andy Warhol, Through Oct. 9, Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University, 865-5328; www.tulane.edu/~newcomb

