



Press Information

Ralph Gibson receives the Leica Hall of Fame Award

Wetzlar, 4th November 2021. On November 4, 2021, within the framework of Leica Camera AG's Celebration of Photography event, the renowned American photographer Ralph Gibson will receive the Leica Hall of Fame Award for his life achievements. He will also be honoured with a comprehensive exhibition, which will run from November 5 until the end of February 2022, at the Leica Gallery in Wetzlar. His imagery is both individual and timeless; his style is unmistakable. Over more than six decades, Ralph Gibson created a multifaceted body of work – one that is also directly associated with Leica. Immediately, at the start of his career, he acquired his first Leica – an M2. Paid for by instalment, any followed by numerous other models, the camera was to play a decisive role in turning Gibson's photographic vision into reality.

Gibson first gained a solid foundation in photography in the US Navy, and then at the San Francisco Art Institute. Later, from 1961 to 1962, he assisted Dorothea Lange, and, from 1967 to 1968, Robert Frank. Right from the beginning, his style was firmly defined by graphic compositions with strong black and white contrasts, which even back then had less of an applied effect than an artistic one. By 1966, after he had worked for a few months on a trial basis for the renowned Magnum Photos Agency in New York, he decided against a career as a commercial photographer or commercially applied photojournalist. He was far more interested in seeking out self-determined content, and discovering his own autonomous visual language. Consequently, his oeuvre is a perfect example of the transformation of American photography in the seventies, which was pointing in a noticeably more individualistic, and less photo-journalistic and documentary direction, resulting in photography gaining evident acknowledgement as an artistic medium.

“Throughout my entire career when the occasional award arrived, I noticed that it releases tremendous creative energy in me. It encourages me to try harder, push further and make greater efforts. And that happens to suit my state of mind at this period in my life. So, and to my previous colleagues who’ve won it, I rendered them homage. I’m pleased to be included among them,” says Ralph Gibson, winner of the Leica Hall of Fame Award 2021.

Gibson remained a defender of analogue photo technology for a long time, but the use of a Leica Monochrom, in 2013, changed his attitude. It only took a few shots for him to recognise the potential of digital technology, allowing him to make a smooth transition from the dark room to a digital workflow. His vision, however, remained constant. Many of his motifs have long since become icons of photography. His clear and graphically perfect compositions, often photographed very close to the motif, are always immediately recognisable.

While appearing abstract, Gibson’s pictures never completely give up their reference to reality. In addition to precise studies, seemingly surreal compositions, and apparently spontaneous street scenes, exquisite nude photos also have a not insignificant place in Gibson’s unmistakable repertoire. “Whether mysteriously emotional or clearly recognizable; analogue or digital; black and white or, more rarely, colour – there is no doubt that Ralph Gibson has produced a multilayered and moving life’s work. For this, we are delighted to induct him into the ranks of our Leica Hall of Fame winners,” Karin Rehn-Kaufmann, Art Director and General Representative Leica Galleries International, explains.

Ralph Gibson was born in Los Angeles on January 16, 1939. He learned photography in the US Navy, and then studied at the San Francisco Art Institute from 1960 to 1962. He worked as an assistant to both Dorothea Lange and Robert Frank. Gibson also made photography history with Verlag Lustrum Press, which he founded in 1969. The company published 40 monographs, as well as numerous compendiums and important works by other photographers. Gibson is represented in the most important private and museum collections. His work has been published internationally, and he is the recipient of multiple awards, including the Leica Medal of Excellence in 1988, and the French National Order of the Legion of Honour. He lives in New York.

Leica Hall of Fame

Pictures that have touched the world; moments that remain unforgotten. Leica Camera AG has been inducting photographers into the Leica Hall of Fame since 2011 – photographers whose ways of seeing the world have moved something, have changed something. The iconic images that testify to their creativity are anchored in our collective memory, illustrating the *conditio humana* in a touching and timeless manner. Steve McCurry was the first photographer honoured with the Leica Hall of Fame Award, in 2011. He was followed by Barbara Klemm, Nick Út, René Burri, Thomas Hoepker and Ara Güler. In 2017, Gianni Berengo Gardin and Joel Meyerowitz were inducted, followed by Bruce Davidson and Jürgen Schadeberg in 2018, and Walter Vogel in 2019.

Leica Camera – A Partner for Photography

Leica Camera AG is an international, premium manufacturer of cameras and sports optics. The legendary reputation of the Leica brand is based on a long tradition of excellent quality, German craftsmanship and German industrial design, combined with innovative technologies. An integral part of the brand's culture is the diversity of activities the company undertakes for the advancement of photography. In addition to the Leica Galleries and Leica Akademies spread around the world, there are the Leica Hall of Fame Award and, in particular, the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (LOBA), which is considered one of the most innovative sponsorship awards existing today. Furthermore, Leica Camera AG, with its headquarters in Wetzlar, Hesse, and a second production site in Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal, has a worldwide network of its own national organisations and Leica Retail Stores.