

COLLECTOR DAILY

Allen Frame: Whereupon @Gitterman

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / October 7, 2022

JTF (just the facts): A total of 16 black-and-white photographs, framed in white and matted, and hung against white walls in the main gallery space, the entry, and the office area. All of the works are gelatin silver prints, made between 1977 and 1992. Physical sizes range from roughly 8×12 to 12×17 inches, and no edition information was provided. (Installation shots below.)

Comments/Context: The idea that photographs can be cinematic (or painterly, for that matter) asks us to think about what happens when one medium adopts the aesthetics of another. For a photograph to encourage us to respond to it like a film still, almost by definition, it must allude to a mood or narrative style that we recognize from the movies. Of course, the photograph in question is still a photograph in form and content, but when we say such a picture feels cinematic, we're implying that it reminds us of Italian Neorealism or the French New Wave, or perhaps some scene or moment from a particular movie by Antonioni, Godard, Kurosawa, Bergman, Tarkovsky, or some other director we've come to admire. "Cinematic" is essentially linguistic code for a certain visual atmosphere, particularly when executed in black-and-white, where the storytelling is fluid, open-ended, time independent, and infused with subtle (or not so subtle) emotion or tension.

This gallery show returns to Allen Frame's photographs from the 1980s (plus a few more from the years before and after that decade), where the comings and goings of friends and lovers, in New York apartments and on the streets, take on a shadowy, cinematic sheen. Of course, Frame wasn't the first photographer to turn his camera toward the diaristic moments of young artistic lives in New York, nor will he be the last, so the question that faces us as we look back at these pictures is how (and whether) Frame found a way to imprint his own photographic voice onto these in between fragments of time; there is a natural patina of nostalgia that surrounds such images of bygone days, but longer term artistic durability ultimately resides in whether we can consistently find Frame's unique vantage point in these fleeting, largely unposed encounters.

At first glance, it's possible to miss what makes Frame's compositions successful; if we look only at the subject matter, we've seen such pictures of modest apartments and young people before. But when we look again, taking in the way the artist has arranged his compositions, the way gestures and interactions imply narratives, and the way he has used light, the understated magic in Frame's photographs starts to come forward.

Many of the strongest images in this show feature two or more people, either in direct interaction or at least occupying the same space at the same time; what Frame has done with these moments is snatch nuanced complexity out of everyday haphazardness, and in the process given us the opportunity to envision drama, warmth, or missed connection, in an overtly cinematic way. The three way interaction in "Bill, Charlie, and Butch, NYC", as an

example, creates telescoping layers of looking, with a gesture of playful female posing (her arm bent back behind her head) seen by both men from different distances, their heads like progressive links in a chain. More intimate connection is felt in the gentle tug on a nightgown in “Peter and Susan in my apartment, NYC”, and in the confusing tangle of too many legs found in “Sarah, Siobhan (legs) and Nan, NYC” (and yes, that’s Nan Goldin in the picture). And in “Kevin and Jody”, their direct interaction feels attentive and intense, a conversation in the street animated by two people really looking at each other.

Frame’s photographs of passing encounters or momentary synchronicity are similarly architected, with the artist creating frieze-like relationships and harmonies from the visual raw material of changing spatial dynamics. The gestures of smoking connect the two figures in “Butch and Frank, Berlin”, but each is lost in his or her own thoughts; the sway of her body is almost like an introspective dance. In “Donald and Dike, NYC”, two men in overcoats stand on the sidewalk, with their attention focused in opposing directions, and in “Frank and Dan, NYC”, Frame reprises the same kind of pairing, only now in a cramped kitchen, with the two figures looking away from each other, with the bends of bodies creating a kind of visual rhythm. And in “Cookie and John”, an undercurrent of attraction slips through a fleeting moment, with Frame capturing the split second when the woman walks away, and the man watches her from the darkness beyond.

Frame’s images of single figures have a slightly different mood; with no frisson of interaction, they settle into calmer zones of rest and introspection. Both “Alex, NYC” and “Kali, NYC” capture figures reclining on beds or sofas, awake but thinking or reflecting in the shadowy light, their gestures almost sculptural. “Paul, NYC” and “Laurie, NYC” feel slightly more mannered, with shirtless Paul in his sunglasses exuding a kind of cool head-tilted indifference and Laurie posing on a rooftop with a hint of awkwardness. And Frame explores doubling in two other portraits – wide-eared “John, NYC”, caught mirrored near a stairwell like a two-faced split personality, and William Burroughs and his shadow in his office, like a haunted double following the famous author.

Frame’s handling of light is his most nuanced tool for pushing his compositions toward a more cinematic mood. In general, he uses available light rather than flash, allowing the soft purity of the morning to fill the streets or to stream in through the windows, and the creeping darkness of night to surround moments in living rooms, kitchens, and stairwells; depending on the lighting conditions, Frame can turn a figure toward solitary contemplation, or add a layer of psychological tension or subtle romance to a passing encounter. In a sense, this control feels almost theatrical, with Frame orchestrating the scenes like stage sets; in practice, it was surely more improvisational than that, but the best of the moments feel elegantly synchronized, with action and atmosphere aligned in ways that support each other.

The more time I’ve spent looking at these photographs, the more I’ve become enthralled by their moods. Yes, this is a visual diary of sorts, with lives and friendships seen up close, but Frame hasn’t just made raw documentation for the sake of some misplaced adherence to authenticity and grit. Instead, he has allowed himself to infuse these pictures with serenity and longing, finding moments inside tumultuous young lives where something extremely

subtle is taking place, and then opening up those instants into something freer. In this way, he's made their spaces roomier and more unstable – cinematic, but also gently attentive to the things unspoken and only ephemerally visible.

Collector's POV: The prints in this show are priced at \$4500 or \$6000, based on size. Frame's work has little consistent secondary market history, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.