

STEVEN CUFFIE: *WOMEN*

OCTOBER 21 – DECEMBER 16, 2022

New York Life Gallery is pleased to announce our inaugural exhibition, *Women*, a presentation of photographs by Steven Cuffie, beginning October 21 and running through December 16, 2022.

Curated by his youngest, Marcus Cuffie, the exhibition will be the first time the work has been shown outside of Baltimore, where the photographer lived and worked for most of his life. The show focuses on a rarely-seen body of work Cuffie made in the 1970s, specifically portraits of the women in his life and the city. Some are photographs of lovers and girlfriends, women who reoccur in other images from this period, while others are subjects he approached on the street, asking for a quick photo or inviting them to sit for him.

Cuffie took the photographs in his late 20s and early 30s when he was first living on his own and coming into himself as an artist. The diverse execution of the images speaks to a youthful divergence and confluence of influences from other photographers he was looking at during the time. Considering the range of images selected for the exhibition, Marcus Cuffie notes that through the variety, they sought to extract a common thread in the informal nature of the women's gazes, at ease and intimately looking toward the viewer, towards the lens of their father. "To more closely examine the intention of my father's work, I wanted this first show to tighten its focus on one theme. These images occupy a narrow window in the 40 years my father was taking pictures, but they represent a charged period of discovery in his work."

Steven Cuffie (1949–2014) was born in North Carolina and moved to Baltimore with his family as a child. He began taking photos as a teenager, and after studying photography for three years at the University of Maryland, he dropped out to pursue a career in the field. After leaving college, Cuffie connected with a small group of Baltimore-based photographers, showing his work in a few exhibitions around the city and doing work on commission.

For the majority of his life, he worked as a photographer for the City of Baltimore, taking pictures of city events, crime scenes, water main breaks – everything mundane and extraordinary required for public record. Cuffie's day job meant most of his hours were spent taking photos and his practice extended to his time at home, where he built a darkroom in his basement and turned the laundry room into his studio. Here, he had all the necessary equipment and chemicals to develop and print his own work. By the time Cuffie's oldest daughter Morgan was born in 1982, he had stopped showing his work publicly, though he continued taking pictures, processing film, and making prints throughout his life.