

For immediate release

March 10, 2009

The Women of the Photo League

March 19 – May 2, 2009

Opening: Thursday, March 19, 6 – 8 pm

Higher Pictures announces New York's first exhibition devoted to the women of the Photo League. The show includes work by 26 photographers, from the well known Berenice Abbott, Ruth Orkin, and Helen Levitt, to the infamous Angela Calomiris, and many whose work has rarely been seen in fifty years.

From 1936 through 1951, the Photo League offered classes, exhibitions, lectures, and friendship to New Yorkers united by an interest in photography and, as Erika Stone recalled, an idealistic desire to "make the world a better place." Teachers such as Paul Strand, Aaron Siskind and Sid Grossman insisted that strong documents also had to be excellent pictures, a philosophy nurtured by lecturers Beaumont Newhall, Ansel Adams, and W. Eugene Smith. At the Photo League, professionals and amateurs alike joined to use the darkroom and enjoyed lively discussions at every gathering. Their monthly journal, *Photo Notes*, was filled with gossip and jokes along with serious criticism and reviews. The League sponsored exhibitions when no museum (including MoMA) had galleries devoted to photography.

In 1947, the Photo League appeared on a long list of organizations identified with the Communist Party. Efforts to counter the allegation included a large exhibition, *This Is the Photo League*, with photographs by members and supporters such as Rudy Burckhardt, Nancy Newhall, and Lisette Model. But in 1949, Angela Calomiris, a League member and F.B.I. informant, publicly testified that members of the organization were Communist. The League disbanded in 1951, a casualty of the Red Scare.

Rosalie Gwathmey, who served on the League's executive committee, remembered that a "real feeling of equality" prevailed between women and men at the Photo League. However, like American women in other professions in the 1950s, women who came to photography through the Photo League often returned to their homes and families. Those who remained professionals settled for second-class status and much of their work was hidden or lost.

More than five decades after the Photo League closed its doors, Higher Pictures presents an exhibition that draws upon the pioneering work of the women of the Photo League. This show offers a rich, warm, yet unsentimental view of life in New York City from the 1930s – 1950s, while presenting a fresh and controversial look at the Photo League itself.

For further information please contact Kim Bourus at 212-249-6100.