

Black & White Photographers (2)

Louis Stettner (USA, 1922-)

by: **Sahar Seyedi**, SaharPers@Yahoo.com

Louis Stettner (1922-) was born and grew up in Brooklin. His father, Morris Stettner, was a skilled cabinet maker from the Ukrain, who first came to the USA in 1907.

Stettner was given a box camera at an early age, and when he was around 12 came across a feature in a photography magazine by Paul Outerbridge, jr. this described how you could use photography to interpret the world and express your feelings about life. It was the start of a lifetime's journey of using his camera to record and share with others, what Stettner was "discovering, suffering or intensely joyous about".

As a teenager and a young man, Stettner visited the metropolitan museum of art every Saturday to explore the delights of its extensive photographic print collection (and especially **Alfred Stieglitz's** great work, 'The Steerage'). Together with friends he also roamed the streets of Manhattan at length.

He had previously visited Stieglitz's gallery, but had been too scared to speak to the great man, but he sent some of the picture he took with the new camera. Stieglitz sent him a wonderfully handwritten letter of thanks. A little later, at the age of 17 or 18 he found the courage to talk his work and visit **Paul Strand**, who treated him with kindness and encouraged him to continue work. Later around 1950 the two men become friends in Paris.

Stettner describes himself as a largely self-taught photographer, but pays full credit to the influence of the **Photo League** on his work. The short part time basic photography course, there was the only formal course the attended, providing teaching "at a New York." He admired the work and ideas of **Sid Grossman** greatly, and the League taught him "to concentrate my talents on everyday working people and what was immediately around me in terms of living and environment." It also showed him that photography was the significant art from of the twentieth century through its enmeshing in social and political life.

He was well aware of the shortcomings of the League – such as its lack of any broad appreciation of the arts as a whole. More importantly he realized it placed too much emphasis on both politically acceptable content and also had an obsession with print quality (thanks to the influence of Paul Strand, and through him the ideas of Stieglitz.) Despite the teaching of Grossman, it failed to stress the need for photographer to create "original aesthetic from" and an "original inner structure for the photograph."