

Raymond Jacobs (1923-1993) Biography

Raymond Jacobs is considered one of the mid 20th century's most seminal photographers. His photographs have been exhibited internationally and are included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

At the age of twelve, Jacobs began working as a mink-cutter at his father's fur business in Manhattan's Garment District. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, where he photographed the 1939 World's Fair held in Queens, New York for the student newspaper with a Brownie box camera. After graduating, Jacobs enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in the Signal Corps in Europe during World War II.



Raymond Jacobs
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In 1947, Jacobs began studying painting and drawing at the Art Students League in New York. He applied to Lisette Model's photography class at The New School in 1950. When Model reviewed his black-and-white portfolio, she asked his profession. He replied, "I am a furrier." Model said, "You are not. You are a photographer. You must become a photographer."

This began Jacobs' remarkable career as a fine art and commercial photographer. Over the next few decades, Jacobs created numerous significant bodies of work, including photographing jazz musicians in New York City, circus performers, female impersonators, migrant workers in North Carolina, and portraits in Cuba following the Cuban Revolution. Jacobs is perhaps most known for his 1950s and 1960s New York City street scenes. He also photographed celebrated personalities including Salvador Dali, Robert F. Kennedy, Louis Armstrong, Gloria Swanson, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Eartha Kitt, Sammy Davis, Jr., Billie Holiday, and others.

Jacobs' photographs were consistently published through the 1960s, including in *Fortune*, *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and the visionary erotic publication, *Eros*. His work also frequently appeared in *Photography Annual* and *Popular Photography*. Through his work with advertising agencies, Jacobs photographed campaigns for Campbell's Soup, Tareyton Cigarettes, IBM, Pan Am, Johnson & Johnson, and many others. He ultimately received more than 50 Art Directors' awards for his advertising work.

Jacobs' first one-man photography exhibition was held in 1955 at Roy DeCarava's A Photographer's Gallery in New York City. Numerous solo and group exhibitions followed, including the ground-breaking Edward Steichen-curated exhibitions "The Family of Man" (1955) and "70 Photographers Look at New York" (1957) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and at the Limelight Gallery (1961, New York), Walker Art Center (1963, Minneapolis), Washington Irving Gallery (1978, New York), Oliver Wolcott Library (1990, Litchfield, CT), National Arts Club (1990, New York), Hotchkiss School Tremaine Art Gallery (2006, Lakeville, CT), in "Lisette Model and Her Successors" (2007, Aperture Gallery, New York), the Litchfield Historical Society (2016, Litchfield, Connecticut), and in "Women on View: Aesthetics of Desire in Advertising (2018, Galerie36, Berlin).

After studying with Model, Jacobs joined a course taught by Sid Grossman in 1953. In 1960, he studied the carbon color print process with Sy Kattelson and installed color lab equipment into his darkroom.

In the 1960s, Jacobs branched out into filmmaking. He co-wrote and produced *Aroused* (1966), directed by Anton Holden. The Museum of Modern Art purchased the film for its Permanent Film Archives. Jacobs directed, co-wrote, and produced his second film, *The Minx* (1969), which starred Jan Sterling and featured an original soundtrack by The Cyrkle.

In 1953 Jacobs met Eleanor Cohen. They were married in 1955 and subsequently had two daughters, Susan in 1959 and Laura in 1962.

While traveling through Europe in 1969, the Jacobs discovered the Anne Kalsø designed “Minus-Heel” shoe in Copenhagen, Denmark and purchased the distribution rights. In 1970, Raymond and Eleanor started the Earth Shoe company in the United States, officially opening on April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day. Quickly, Earth Shoes became a popular countercultural symbol, an iconic fashion of the anti-war, back-to-nature “Flower Children.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a pair of Earth Shoes for the museum’s permanent fashion collection. The Earth Shoe company expanded to 123 shops across the United States, Canada, and Europe, before the Jacobs dissolved the company in 1977.

Jacobs returned to photography after closing the Earth Shoe company. He relocated to Litchfield, Connecticut, where he taught photography at the Forman School. In anticipation of mounting a major retrospective exhibition of his work, Jacobs began to organize his photographic archive, but fell ill in 1992 before it was completed. He died in Connecticut on March 17th, 1993.

Following his death, Eleanor Jacobs established *The Estate of Raymond Jacobs*, which continues to exhibit and publish Raymond’s photographs. In 2006, Pointed Leaf Press published *My New York*, a monograph of Jacobs’ New York City street photographs.

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