

National Museum of Women in the Arts

Mary Ellen Mark: Girlhood

March 3–July 11, 2021

View the works counterclockwise from the exhibition introduction wall text.

Singing on the Beach, Wildwood, New Jersey, 1991

(printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Chris Hughes

Top:

Two Little Girls by a Carousel, Coney Island, New York, 1974

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern

Bottom:

South Bronx H.E.L.P Shelter, New York, 1993 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Frieder K. Hofmann

Batman and Little Barbies at the Toys “R” Us Holiday Parade, New York, 2002 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Susan and Earl Cohen

Top:

J’Lisa Looks Through the Blinds, Streetwise Revisited, 2014 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Frieder K. Hofmann

Mark often took personal interest in those she met and photographed, and in some instances she formed lasting connections with her subjects. Mark's involvement with Erin Blackwell (nicknamed "Tiny") began in 1983 while filming the Streetwise (1984) documentary, when the girl was just thirteen. Over the next thirty-two years, Mark documented Tiny's transition from teen runaway to sex worker, to drug addict, to mother of ten. In this image, Tiny's daughter J'Lisa peers out of a window, her expression brimming with anticipation and skepticism.

Bottom:

Runaway Girls on Pike Street, Seattle, Washington,
1983

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and Kathi Steinke

In 1983, Mark traveled to Seattle to document runaway and abandoned youths living on the streets for Life magazine. That assignment became the basis for Streetwise, a photographic series and film documenting the challenges, complexities, and occasional joys in the lives of these children and teenagers. Many of the youths Mark photographed in Seattle fled violent homes or were forced to the streets by poverty. In this image, two girls rest against a graffitied wall on Pike Street, a popular gathering place for the city's homeless youth.

**Child Acrobat with Two Children in Peacock
Costumes, Great Royal Circus, Himmatnagar, India,
1989 (printed later)**

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and
Jeffrey Stern

In 1968, during her first visit to India, Mark encountered the Indian circus. The spectacle captivated her, and on each subsequent visit, she sought out circuses around the country. Her photographs hint at strange and wondrous sights—including this fantastically costumed trio—but focus on the performers in their down time. Mark said, “I wanted to document the lives of the people when they weren’t performing. . . . If I had photographed from the audience’s point of view, I would have just been a spectator.”

Emine Dressed Up for Republic Day, Trabzon, Turkey,
1965 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Frieder K.
Hofmann

In 1965, Mark was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to photograph in Turkey. She took this portrait in the

courtyard of Emine's home. Mark gave minimal direction, encouraging the girl to pose herself. With a hand on her hip, Emine mimics an older teen, but her unbuckled, dirt-stained shoes and hair loosening from its bow reveal markers of childhood. Calling this "the first strong photograph I made," Mark captured a young girl's eagerness to grow up.

Laurie in the Bathtub, Ward 81, Oregon State Hospital, Salem, Oregon, 1976 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Susan and Earl Cohen

Mark approached her subjects with sensitivity and compassion. While photographing on the set of the film One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), shot at the Oregon State Hospital, Mark encountered young women living in a high-security ward for patients considered

dangerous to themselves or others. Interested in getting to know the residents, Mark gained temporary permission to live in an adjacent ward. Laurie's open expression in this portrait reveals little of the institutional environment, as Mark strove to capture the women's inner selves beyond their diagnoses.

Girl Jumping over a Wall, Central Park, New York City, 1967 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern

Top:

Girl with Jewelry Holding a Sleeping Baby on the Beach, India, 1974

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Susan and Earl Cohen

Bottom:

Child in a Stroller with a Chimp, India, 1974

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jean
Rossall

Top:

Girls Preparing a Grave, Mexico, 1965

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Shaun
Lucas

Bottom:

Women and Children in a Doorway, Mexico, 1965

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and
Jeffrey Stern

Jeanette and Victor, Brooklyn, New York, 1979

(printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Shaun

Lucas

This portrait of Jeanette and her boyfriend, Victor, captures the tenderness of young love. Mark met fifteen-year-old Jeanette when she was five months pregnant. Several times a week for the remainder of the teen's pregnancy, Mark visited and photographed the couple and their families in Brooklyn, eventually documenting the birth of their daughter. "Photographing Jeanette was a great learning experience for me," Mark said. "I learned that you can capture more intimate moments by blending into the background."

Top:

Girl and Old Woman Sitting in a Cart, India, 1974

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Saul and Maria Roque-Lopes

Bottom:

Falkland Road, Mumbai, India, 1978

Dye transfer print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jean Rossall

Mark spent three months photographing the brothels that line Falkland Road in Mumbai, India. Though she typically worked in black and white, for this project she used color film. The vibrant saturation of the jewel-toned walls, curtains, and clothing heightens the intensity of this somber scene in which a teenage sex worker is made up for a client. Mark portrayed each of her subjects with

dignity and empathy. Her photographs called international attention to the injustices faced by these overlooked young women.

Back of title wall

Ursula Phillips and Gregg Whitlock Jr., Malcolm X Shabazz Prom, 2006

Polaroid

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Frieder K.
Hofmann

From 2006 to 2009, Mark traveled the United States documenting high school proms. A rite of passage for American teens, the prom symbolizes an impending transition to adulthood. Mark's subjects exhibit a range of reactions; some pose seriously with their dates, while others affect more playful mannerisms. Mark used a six-foot-high, 240-pound Polaroid 20 x 24 Land Camera for

these portraits. As with the smaller, more familiar Polaroid instant cameras, each shot produces just one unique print with no negative.

**Lucas Nathan and Grace Bush-Vineberg, Palisades
Charter High School Prom, Los Angeles, California,
2008**

Polaroid

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and
Kathi Steinke

Niche

Top:

**Breann Benedict, Government Flood Housing, Grand
Forks, North Dakota, 1997**

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and
Kathi Steinke

Bottom:

Lakeisha, South Dallas, 1988 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and Kathi Steinke

Classroom, Kiev, Ukraine, 1987 (printed later)

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and Kathi Steinke

Idesha and Mikayla Preston, 8 Years Old, Idesha Older by 10 Minutes, Twinsburg, Ohio, 2002

Polaroid

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern

Mark photographed attendees of the annual Twins Days Festival in Twinsburg, Ohio, in 1998 and 2002. In this

portrait of Idesha and Mikayla Preston, Mark sought to capture each girl's individual character, despite their physical similarities. Idesha's intense, direct stare dominates this image, while Mikayla, the younger twin, stands more passively by her side. The large-format Polaroid print allows viewers to consider each girl in turn, contemplating their expressions and dynamic as sisters.

**Tashara and Tanesha Reese, Twins Days Festival,
Twinsburg, Ohio, 1998 (printed later)**

Gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Robert and Kathi Steinke

**Girl Pulling on a Cigarette Behind a Hanging Towel,
Mexico, 1968**

Vintage gelatin silver print

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern