

Book Reviews

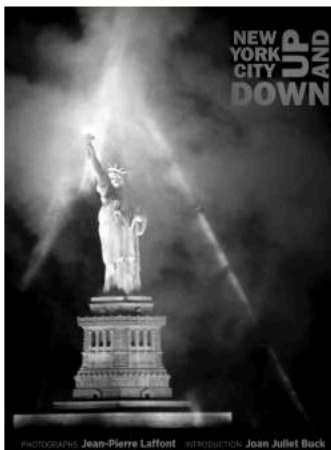
Dean Brierly

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The City that Never Sleeps

New York City Up and Down

Photographs by Jean-Pierre Laffont
(Glitterati Incorporated)
240 pages / HC / \$75



Like Brassai's book *Paris by Night* and W. Eugene Smith's *Pittsburgh Project*, Jean-Pierre Laffont's *New York City Up and Down* is an unabashed love letter to a city. The Algerian-born photojournalist worked in France in the early sixties before moving to New York City and becoming a founding member of Gamma USA and Sygma Photo News. Although he has worked all over the world, Laffont has always considered New York his favorite city, and has photographed it obsessively and with extraordinary insight for five decades. His images are among the most iconic ever made of this turbulent city.

His latest book is artfully organized into three sections: "The City Never Sleeps" evokes New York's epic scale and grandeur, its social

and physical verticality, its flash and brash, its relentless energy and nonstop movement, all of it connected and powered by its enormous, hyperventilating collective heart.

"The Movers and Shakers" features prominent personalities who have left an imprint of one kind or another on New York, including feminists and political activists Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, boxers Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, musicians Joan Baez and "Moondog," artists Peter Max and Andy Warhol; as well as anonymous but no less impactful members of women's movements, gay and lesbian communities, bodybuilders, student protesters and more.

"The Mean Streets" charts with objective clarity and heartfelt empathy the city's grittier side. Homeless people living on Ward's Island in 1983. Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood circa 1971, home to urban neglect, unemployment, crime, drugs and violence. Times Square in 1980, dark, seedy and dangerous years before its thoroughgoing gentrification. Garbage strikes and trash-filled streets. The manifest effects of deindustrialization. And everywhere people from all walks of life acting out comedy and drama on the streets.

Laffont and his camera seemed to be here, there and everywhere all at once,



Gilbert Bécaud, *Manhattan*, October 1966

capturing an indelible visual record of Balzacian dimensions. What sets his photographs apart is his eye for detail, his knack for choosing the right perspective for maximum clarity and effect, his command of moments both big and small, and his fearless yet always respectful interaction with the people in front of his camera.

The photographer's wife, Eliane, writing in the book's afterword, nails the essential character of these amazing images: "New York City is fun but can make you cry. It is organized and chaotic, gritty and sophisticated, attractive and repulsive, loud and strangely quiet, cruel and tender, dirty and too clean. You like it one day, and hate it the rest of the week. It is forever changing, yet always stays the same. It is so beautiful it takes your breath away, yet ugliness is around the corner. Everything is up and down and down and up again."

(NYCUAD is available at glitteratiincorporated.com)