

AL VANDENBERG (1932-2012)

B. 31 August 1932, Boston, Massachusetts

Artist's statement

Through the fifties and early sixties I studied art and design in Boston and New York and photography with Alexey Brodovitch, Richard Avedon and Bruce Davidson. Photography had not yet become what it is today. There were few places where, as students, we could go to see good photographs. Only at the photographic library of the Museum of Modern Art could I study the prints and images of Robert Frank, Walker Evans, Lewis Hine, Margaret Bourke-White and August Sander.

My first photographs were taken on the streets of New York going from one depressing neighbourhood to another, passing Diane Arbus and Gary Winogrand collecting images of poverty, urban low-life and ethnic minorities.

I exhibited my pictures at the Smithsonian Institute for the President's War on Poverty. I then went into a career in commercial photography – fashion, advertising, editorial and rock 'n' roll.

After about ten years I left that behind me. Neither the spying on poor people for middle-class audiences nor serving the media world gave me the kind of images that I wanted to leave to my children. My camera became more than just a way of making a living. Making a living seemed less important than living itself.

I believe that applying the same technical expertise and the same "eye" to photographing people who are happy results in the kind of images that show that, in spite of all our difficulties, the world is also a happy place.

No matter where I have taken my pictures since then, on the High Street of London or in the hill of Laos – a smile is always a smile.

Exhibitions

The Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
The Tokyo School of Design
The British Council – Poland / Italy
Somerset Gallery, Greenwich, Connecticut
The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
The Camden Arts Centre, London
15e Rencontres Internationales, Arles
Tate Britain, London

Permanent collections

The Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Musée de L'Elysee, Lausanne
The Kobal Collection
The Wagstaff Collection
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Victoria & Albert Museum, London
British Council, London
Tate Britain, London

Publications

British Journal of Photography
Zoom Magazine
Creative Camera