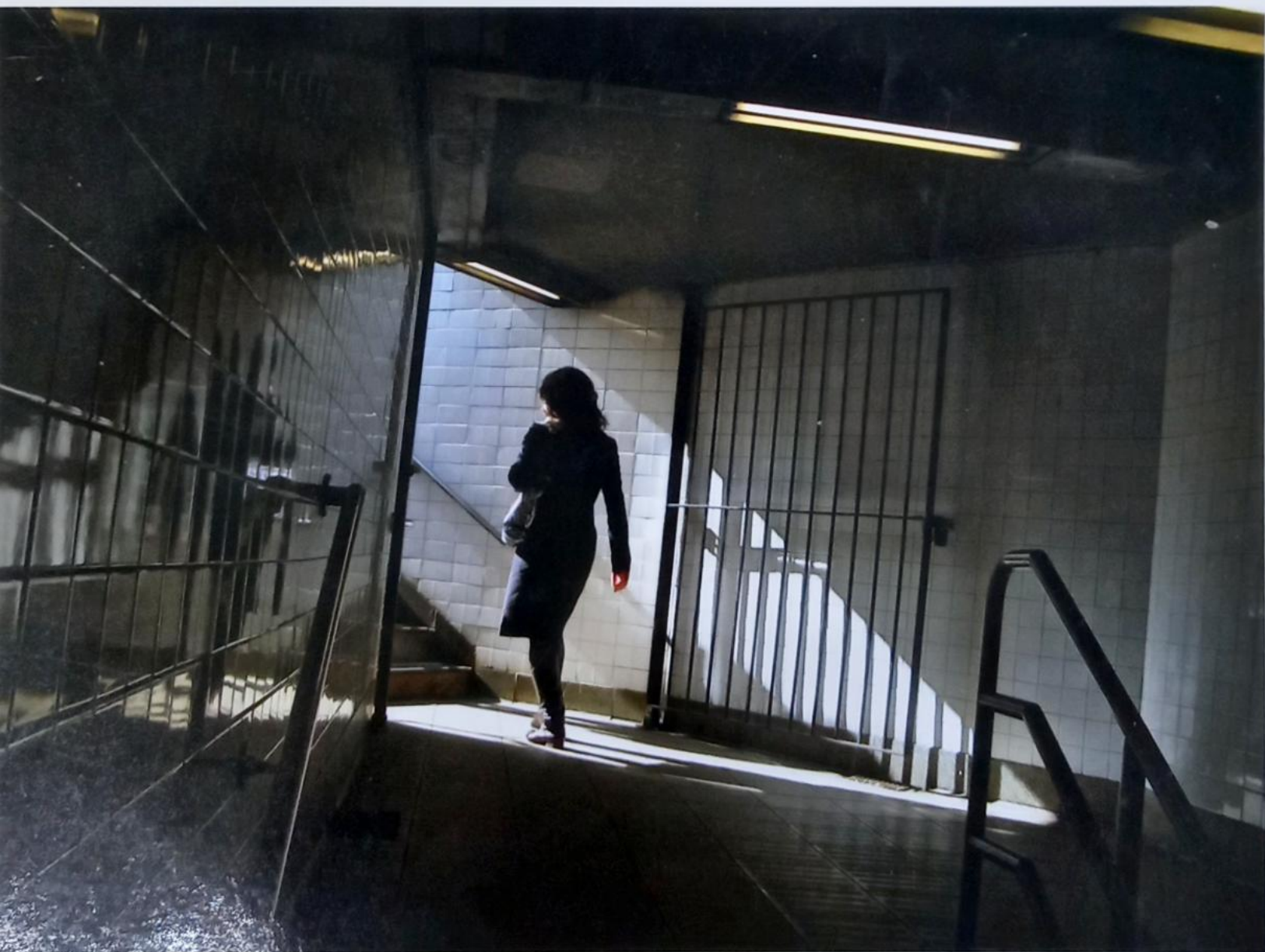


# PHOTOGRAPHY, LIFE, *and the* OPPOSITES



LEN BERNSTEIN

FOREWORD BY ROBERT COLES

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*One must always take photographs with the greatest respect for the subject and for oneself.*

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

*If it is possible; if, in fact, it is the great purpose of art to be one's self and yet give everything to the object—can we not find here the just purpose in life itself?*

ELI SIEGEL



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## FOREWORD

**H**ERE ARE photographs become an inviting, sometimes bemusing, and sometimes surprising summons to a reader's mind and heart and yes, soul. The person holding the camera graces us with his ever-ready, alert, and knowing visual energy and, too, his willingness to call upon words of sensitive observation, reflection. Len Bernstein's close study of photography's history and the revelatory work of Eli Siegel, embodied in Aesthetic Realism, reveal to us the moral and ethical behavior implicit in the technique of art. This is a remarkable book; it will delight and deeply inform a general audience, but it also belongs in any comprehensive university curriculum.

Consider for example, his photographs of children; they explore a subject that has defined my professional life: what is a child hoping for; how can their lives be most fully expressed; and what stands in the way of this outcome? Here we see the photographer's art at work with such young ones—and thanks to the accompanying sentences from Eli Siegel's illuminating text, "The Child," we have the foundation for answering these questions, and a vivid sense of what is happening to these youngsters. In one photograph, a toddler sits at his ease on the pavement in front of a café—a youthful philosopher musing about reality in the sunlight. In another, we have a discontented youth; he feels thwarted in some way, misunderstood—as have many of us.

Len Bernstein, I imagine, was already a good photographer, but his study of Aesthetic Realism, I think, has made him much more than

that—he learned from its founder, Eli Siegel, the central thing about the nature of beauty in all its manifestations. You will be mightily moved and impressed by his pictures and accompanying words. Such a gift, this book, to our eyes and to our inward, contemplating life.

*Robert Coles*

JAMES AGEE PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL ETHICS EMERITUS AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

I BEGAN photographing with a Pentax Spotmatic F, and a few years later switched to a Leica M4-2, which I use to this day with Tri-X film. For color, I used a Nikon F with Kodachrome 64, which is no longer available, but fondly remembered. With few exceptions, I use a 50mm lens when shooting film, and since 2008, my color work has been done with a Canon G9 digital camera. The portrait of my father was taken with a Mamiya C330.



PHOTOGRAPHY, LIFE, *and the* OPPOSITES is about what makes for beauty not only in Len Bernstein's chosen art, but in all the arts. And it is about life, and how art can teach us to live it. The author's critical approach is based on this historic principle stated by Eli Siegel, founder of Aesthetic Realism: "All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves." The book is illustrated with over 70 of Mr. Bernstein's photographs, many of which are in public collections in the US and abroad, as well as photographs by others. Together with the text, they are a means of asking: What does it mean to have a beautiful way of seeing; a way of seeing that will make us proud? And what stops us from having it?

"I love this book and its philosophy of photography based on the Siegel Theory of Opposites. Len Bernstein's career is an exceptional one, and within these pages you will find a master photographer and critic at work."

GEORGE HOBART, FORMER CURATOR OF DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS,  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, DC

"This is the most heartfelt and intelligent book on life, relationship, and photography that I've ever seen. With Aesthetic Realism as his personal viewfinder, the author portrays in words and his photographs, a way of seeing and relating that is honest, intimate, and kind to the myriad subjects in his camera's eye and the people in his life."

ROBERT LEVERANT, AUTHOR OF *ZEN IN THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY*

"I'm truly honored to have received this beautiful volume of photographs. I love it and wonder how the hell I was lucky enough to be sent it. Mr. Bernstein, you have introduced me to an approach to art, based on the Aesthetic Realism of Eli Siegel, that is way beyond anything I would have entertained. Thank you, thank you!"

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