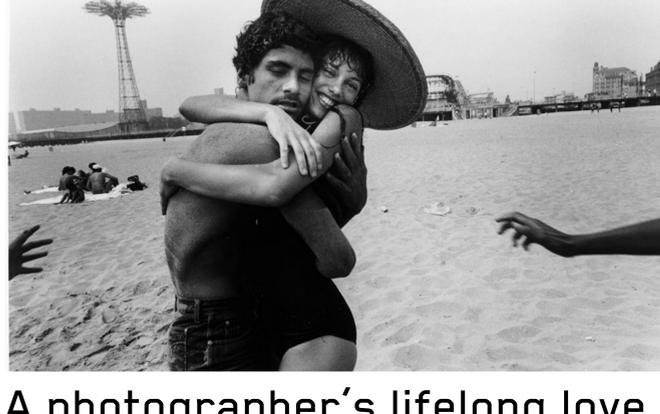


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# A photographer's lifelong love affair with Coney Island

## 'Seedy, funky, dangerous'

The New York neighbourhood has always been irresistible to street photographers – particularly Harvey Stein, who has been shooting there for over 60 decades.

Posted Tuesday 14th July, 2020

Text by Miss Rosen

Photography © Harvey Stein

Street photographer [Harvey Stein](#)'s lifelong love affair with Coney Island began the first time he entered Brooklyn's famed seaside playground. It was the late 1950s, and he was 14 years old.

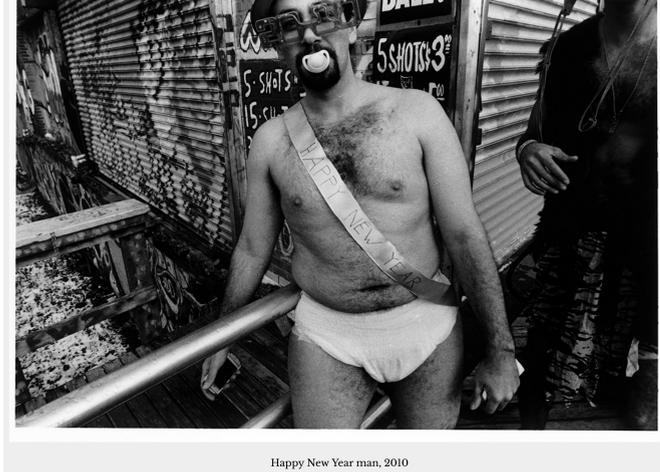
"I didn't like [New York](#), it was too big, too noisy, hot and dirty," the Pitts-burgh native remembers. "Going to Coney was a treat... As we walked the crowded boardwalk at dusk on a simmering summer day, I was mesmerized by the people. I vividly remember a fistfight between two sailors in uniforms."

Stein resolved to return to Coney Island someday, never imagining that he would do so more than a thousand times.

In 1970, Stein returned to "America's Playground" for a class assignment, and was captivated by the eclectic characters drawn to sun, sand, and surf. Over the next half a century, Stein would amass a singular archive of charming vignettes, a selection of which are now in view in the new exhibition, [Coney Island, An Eternal Romance](#).

"Coney Island is about people," he says. "It's a melting pot of all sizes, shapes, races, ages, religions, behaviours and occupations. The amuse-ments, the sea and the open-air all impart a kind of freedom of behaviour I don't see anywhere else... The happiness is palatable."

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Happy New Year man, 2010



Legs in photo booth, 1974

Because it offers the perfect blend of personalities, situations, and back-drops, Coney Island has always been catnip to street photographers like Stein. The promise of pleasure is just a mere train ride away, allowing New Yorkers of all backgrounds an escape from the harrows of everyday life.

"Every time I am there, something new occurs to photograph; whether it's a wedding, a video being shot, models being photographed, a procession, or a Hasidic community gathering. It's always surprising and exciting. The key is to be patient and spend time at Coney to understand its rhythms and pace."

Through Stein's lens, we witness a beguiling portrait of Coney Island as an ever-changing landscape that stays true to its roots despite the challenges it may face. Because it is so entrenched in the mythology of New York, the seaside amusement park and beach have survived fires, Spanish Flu, World Wars, economic depressions, [gentrification](#) and [Hurricane Sandy](#). Now it faces its latest battle with the impact of [Covid-19](#).

"When New York is doing well, Coney is doing well," says Stein, finally.

"When New York is going through a crisis, so too is Coney. When I began going, it was seedy, funky and sometimes dangerous, especially at night. It is now more family-friendly than in the past. Many of the 'characters' of Coney Island are no longer there, but it remains a fascinating place to spend the day."



New Years Day run into the ocean



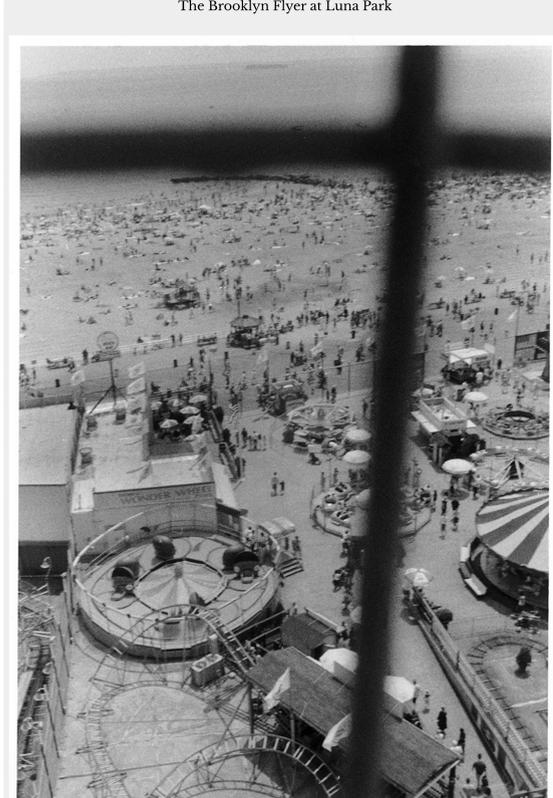
Amusement rider, 1990



Looking at the Thunderbolt



The Brooklyn Flyer at Luna Park



View from the Wonder Wheel



Coney Island sign and shadow, 2008

[Harvey Stein: Coney Island, An Eternal Romance](#) is on view online at [Sous les Etoiles Gallery](#) through July 18, 2020.

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