



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

THE FRICK ART & HISTORICAL CENTER PRESENTS

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL 1951: PHOTOGRAPHS BY ESTHER BUBLEY

Photographs capture life at Pittsburgh's Children's Hospital

PITTSBURGH, PA, September 22, 2009— As a complement to *Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art* The Frick Art Museum will present *Children's Hospital 1951: Photographs by Esther Bubley*, a selection of nearly 30 photographs by Esther Bubley (1921–1998), taken while on assignment at Children's Hospital. On May 2, 2009, Children's Hospital opened a new 10-acre campus in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood. This exhibition documents and celebrates Children's Hospital's long leadership in the field of child healthcare, as seen through the superb photographs of Esther Bubley.

In 1951, Bubley, a master of artistic composition and storytelling, was hired by the Pittsburgh Photographic Library to live at the hospital and take photographs of the doctors at work over a period of several weeks. Many prints from this series were chosen by Edward Steichen to be included in his groundbreaking 1952 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *Diogenes with a Camera*. Bubley's ability to capture the innate power of the candid, unguarded moment creates a frankness in her photographs that is tempered by the humanity of her point of view. Steichen also mounted and displayed her contact sheets to show how she used every frame.

Growing up in Wisconsin in the 1920s, Esther Bubley avidly pursued her dream of becoming a professional photographer in spite of being told it was not a job for a woman. She studied photography at the Minnesota School of Design in Minneapolis and worked for a time as a photo developer in Duluth. She realized that to seriously pursue her career she needed to move to the east coast and went to Washington in 1941. The next year she moved to New York, where she met Edward Steichen, who was a photo editor at *Vogue* and became an important mentor in her career. Steichen gave Bubley her first important assignment to shoot photographs of still lifes for *Vogue*.

Bubley's career in documentary photography and photojournalism was launched in 1942 when Roy Stryker hired her to work in the darkroom at the Office of War Information, where his Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographic project had been transferred. In 1944, Bubley followed Stryker to Standard Oil where he was charged with compiling a photographic library to document the oil industry and its impact on people's lives. Bubley was a freelancer for Standard Oil for the rest of the 1940s and 1950s. She simultaneously developed a thriving career separate from Stryker, working for a variety of clients—including *Life*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the Children's Bureau, Pepsi-Cola International, Pan American World Airways, and UNICEF—who sent her on assignments throughout the world.

Stryker and his photographers became known throughout the nation for their excellent work and were sought out for other projects. These included the Allegheny Conference on Community Development in Pittsburgh, who wanted to develop a photographic library to promote Pittsburgh, much as the Standard Oil project did for the oil industry. In 1950, the Allegheny Conference initiated what came to be known as the Pittsburgh Photographic Library with offices on the top floor of the Cathedral of Learning. Stryker recruited Bubley, who came to Pittsburgh in May 1950 to photograph social projects affiliated with the Irene Kauffman House for an exhibit at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

While as a woman she was often assigned “soft” subjects such as children, Bubley addressed difficult topics head on, including a photo essay on mental illness for *Ladies' Home Journal*. The combination of her compassionate gaze and her desire to unflinchingly document difficult

subject matter was a hallmark of her career as a photographer. Bubley's photographs of the doctors, young patients, parents, and nurses at Pittsburgh's Children's Hospital are direct but never sentimental. She commented that children are conditioned to stand still and smile in front of a camera, and that the problem was getting them "not to pose." She overcame this obstacle by becoming part of the daily rhythm of the hospital and disappearing into the background with her camera. One of her subjects later commented that he did not remember her being in the room and photographing him.

There is necessarily a great deal of factual documentation in these images of Children's Hospital. After all, these photographs were destined for an archive in Pittsburgh that would be drawn upon for images by major newspapers and magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, and thus needed to show the "real" Pittsburgh. Yet Bubley was often able to transcend the mundane and ordinary to make pictures that visually compelled the viewer to take interest in the workings of the hospital and its employees. Thus, she captured doctors, residents, and nurses hard at work, putting in late hours and often sleeping at the hospital, checking on patients and writing charts and perhaps most importantly, offering instruction on how best to treat patients and specific conditions. Bubley did not exaggerate the amount of work people at Children's were doing, but she was certainly hopeful that everyday people would understand and appreciate the significance of such work by seeing these pictures.

Pittsburgh photographer Clyde Hare, who also worked for Stryker on the PPL, stated, "I think the important thing to realize is that Esther was recording that human relationship that makes getting well a successful thing in a hospital. Whether you have high technology or low technology, a lot of it depends on the human relationships between doctors and patient, nurses and patient, parents and patient. It's the human relationships that are liable to make the difference between getting well and not getting well."

Although Bubley is known as one of the great documentary photographers of the mid-twentieth century, the Children's Hospital photographs received scant attention. *Life* had planned to do a piece with Bubley's shots, but cancelled when King George VI died. Instead the magazine covered Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. Bubley's photos were never published. Her prints

were boxed and stored in no particular order at Children's Hospital. They were saved from a dumpster by Norman Rabinowitz, who had been director of medical photography at Children's. He brought them to the attention of documentary filmmaker Ken Love and his wife, pediatrician Barbara McNulty. Their film, *That's Pediatrics*, was inspired by these images, and won a 2008 CINE Golden Eagle Award. *That's Pediatrics* will be shown Wednesdays at 3:00 PM in the art museum auditorium during the run of the exhibition.

Children's Hospital 1951: Photographs by Esther Bubley is organized by the Frick Art & Historical Center. Daniel Leers, the guest curator of this exhibition, is a Pittsburgh native, and currently Newhall Curatorial Fellow in the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. He holds an M.A. in art history and curatorial studies from Columbia University. Mr. Leers has authored a booklet for the exhibition, featuring a checklist of works and an essay placing the Children's Hospital project into the larger context of Bubley's career.

Support for *Children's Hospital 1951: Photographs by Esther Bubley* is provided, in part, by The Fine Foundation.

THE FRICK ART MUSEUM

The Frick Art Museum at the Frick Art & Historical Center contains collections of fine and decorative arts assembled by Helen Clay Frick, daughter of Henry Clay Frick. In addition to exhibiting its permanent collection, which has strengths in Italian Renaissance and French eighteenth-century painting, the Museum has an active program of temporary exhibitions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Frick Art & Historical Center is located at 7227 Reynolds Street in Pittsburgh's Point Breeze neighborhood. Free parking is available in the Frick's off-street lot or along adjacent streets. The Frick is open 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday and closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to The Frick Art Museum, Car and Carriage Museum, Greenhouse, and Playhouse is free. Docent-led tours of *Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art* and *Children's Hospital 1951: Photographs of Esther Bubley* are available free of charge on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Groups of five or more and those interested in scheduling a tour of the permanent collection are requested to schedule a private tour at an alternate time. The cost for group tours of the exhibition and permanent collection is \$7 per person, and reservations must be made one to two weeks in advance. Call 412-371-0600, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00p.m., Monday—Sunday.

For additional information or images, please contact Greg Langel, Media and Marketing Manager, at 412-371-0600 ext. 524 or glangel@TheFrickPittsburgh.org.

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The Frick Art & Historical Center, a museum, historic site and cultural center serves the public through preservation, presentation, and interpretation of the fine and decorative arts and historically significant artifacts for all residents of and visitors to Western Pennsylvania.