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Sunil Gupta: "Christopher Street" at Hales Gallery

by Thaddeus Motyka |

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photo courtesy of Hales Gallery

2 untitled photos by Sunil Gupta

The Italians certainly have a way with words. One of the most expressive and thought-provoking ones I know is "passatopresente," which means both the simultaneous co-existence of the past and present, and the bringing of the past into the present, with amplified significance.

On April 30, as I left the opening reception for Sunil Gupta's photography exhibit "Christopher Street," at the handsome Hales Gallery in West Chelsea, I was struck by both the eloquent simplicity and the timeless humanity of the images on display.

The sixteen rigorously curated photos were shot in 1976 on Christopher Street, not as part of formally set-up photo shoots, but as keenly observed passing moments. What is captured is much more than a charming memory dressed in bellbottoms. What emerges, rather, is the characteristic spirit of a culture, a coherent series of stories, which narrate the ethos of our pre-AIDS West Village; a confident self-assertive time when the only sexual stigma lay in NOT declaring yourself. The subjects embrace a broad range of ages and ethnicities, each going about what might have been an ordinary day for them, which the prism of time has metamorphosed into something quite extraordinary.

I can think of no better way to begin observing the 50th anniversary of Stonewall and celebrating World Pride in New York City than by having meditative dialogue with these images, each so alive and with so much to say.

These were people worth fighting for, and yes, still are.

Passatopresente.

Sunil Gupta's work is situated internationally, and can be seen in the USA at MOMA, the George Eastman House, Harvard, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The role of the photographer in documentation is more than mirror, it is eye; in this case an Apollonian eye. "I am the eye with which the universe beholds itself and knows itself divine," wrote Percy Bysshe Shelley in "Hymn to Apollo," Strophe Six.

The images are for sale in limited editions onsite through the Hales Gallery. This gallery is one to watch. The Chelsea location at 547 West 20th Street is the recent American initiative of a 25-year-old flagship in London, and the prospect of stimulating cultural exchange is most enticing.

Visit Sunil Gupta's website <https://sunilgupta.net> to order 50-image book "Christopher Street 1976 (Stanley Barker, 2018), in both limited and personally inscribed editions. But above all, go see this show before it closes June 1st.

Tuesday-Saturday, 11 am-6 pm

Admission: Free

Hales Gallery

547 West 20th Street NYC 10011

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