

connection American

All pictures © Gita Lenz



Past in focus

Pictures shot in the 1950s by Gita Lenz have recently been re-discovered and are catching attention stateside. **Susan Burnstine** reports

At the heart of every good Christmas story is a lesson about the kindness of the human spirit triumphing against the odds. It's unusual to find this sort of tale in the world of fine art photography, but I

happened upon something that has all the essentials of a classic holiday story.

Gordon Stettinius has been making photographs for nearly 25 years and has been a commercial and fine art photographer since the early 1990s. During an exhibition of his

work at Robin Rice Gallery in New York City in 2002, his friend Timothy Bartling introduced him to a woman named Gita Lenz.

Gita was 92 years old, wheelchair bound and had just moved into a nursing home. Despite her faltering physical condition, Stettinius says she had a captivating energy, was mentally active and seemed happy to be at the exhibition. She expressed a genuine appreciation for his work and said she was once a photographer.

Before moving into the nursing home, Gita lived in the same apartment in the West Village since 1940. She had been twice married,

never had children and was no longer in contact with her family.

Viewing her archive, Stettinius appreciated the quality and depth of Gita's photography. In 2006 he began organising and preserving her work with help from friends and interns at Virginia Commonwealth University.

He was then introduced to Tom Gitterman, of Gitterman Gallery in New York, who felt her work had historical importance. Stettinius began organising her collection, reading through paperwork, documenting facts, interviewing her and preserving her prints.

Due to Gita's faltering memory



ALL PICTURES: **Although her work enjoyed acclaim in the 1950s, Gita Lenz fell into obscurity until 2006 when Gordon Stettinius, himself a photographer, began organising her archive and bringing it to the attention of the art world**

and limited records, there's not a lot of information about her photography career beyond pay stubs, correspondence, published articles, rolls of undeveloped film and tear sheets. What has been established is that she became a professional fine art and commercial photographer

in the early 1950s, her work was exhibited in several important exhibitions including two shows at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951 and 1955, she had a three person show at the Brooklyn Museum in 1952 and was published in several photo magazines.

During the 1960s she worked as a copywriter, proofreader and editorial assistant to support herself but aspired to revitalise her photo career. Sadly, she did not continue beyond the mid-1960s as she had to work full-time to support herself,

but she did become a published poet.

After Gitterman Gallery agreed to feature Gita's work in an exhibition during the autumn of 2010, Stettinius considered producing a catalogue for the show, but instead: 'Got romantic about the idea of this as a testament to her life and work so we then started to get more ambitious about what we wanted to see published for her.'

The final result is a stunning monograph entitled *Gita Lenz*, which Stettinius published through his newly established company Candela Books.

He said, 'I think that visiting her

Exhibitions USA

NEW YORK CITY

Hasted Hunt Kraeutler

Nathan Harger

Until January 29, 2011

hastedhuntkraeutler.com

ANDREA MEISLIN GALLERY

Daniel Bauer

Until January 8, 2011

andreameislin.com

CHICAGO

Catherine Edelman Gallery

Lori Nix: The City

Featuring works from Charles Aubry, Jo Ann Callis, Man Ray, Paul Strand and more

January 7 – February 26, 2011

edelmangallery.com

SAN FRANCISCO

Scott Nichols Gallery

An Illustrated View of Yosemite

Featuring Ansel Adams, Alan Ross, Carleton Watkins and Earl Brooks

Until December 31

scottnicholsgallery.com

LOS ANGELES

The Getty

Photography From the New China

Until April 3, 2011

getty.edu

BOSTON

Panopticon Gallery

Neal Rantoul: Twenty-Five Year

Until January 4, 2011

panopticongallery.com

and bringing about this modest appreciation, which is so delayed in coming, is the most gratifying aspect. It has been a winding course getting here and I have a lot of work yet to do but Gita's name and her beautiful photography will be etched a little deeper in the photo cultural history. I do feel that books are one of the most durable legacies a photographer can leave in their wake.'

candalabooks.com
gitalenz.blogspot.com