

JOSEPH
SZABO

You either love them or hate them," says Joseph Szabo commenting on the subjects of his wonderfully observed tribute to American teenagers. Referring specifically to the omnipresent cigarette that dangles with snarling defiance from the lips of many of his models, Szabo admits that his portraits are unique to their place and time, and perhaps a bit disquieting to those caught up in the current climate of conformity and correctness.

"My way of working in photography is intuitive. I try to let my feelings guide me," Szabo explains. "I'm interested in creating strong images. My pictures capture the spirit and nature of adolescents. They reflect the toughness that comes from believing nothing is too much or too difficult. Many of the kids I photographed were quite often smoking, and that became a whole thematic thing, kids smoking and how they looked when they smoked. The look of defiance seen in so many of the images is just reflecting the nature of being a teenager."

A wide selection of Szabo's work, which was made primarily in the 1970s, is currently on view at the Gitterman Gallery in New York City. Titled *Teenage*, the show features 29 vintage images that were part of a book of the same name published in 2003 by Greybull Press. The work was also exhibited earlier this year in Paris and London, where the response from collectors was quite positive.

"The 1970s and 1980s are gone forever, and you can't get those kinds of images today," says the artist. "They are very unique to



their time period, and that was what I was going after, the uniqueness of the individual as she or he related to teenage life. This was a virtually unexplored subject at the time. I photographed it in depth in a way few others have done."

Of the fact that he tended to photograph girls more often than boys, Szabo explains that this preference grew out of the girls' responses to the camera.

"I found that girls were more open emotionally, whether they were aware of being photographed or not," he points out.

It was during his years of art studies at the Pratt Institute in the mid-1960s that Szabo decided to embrace photography as his primary form of artistic expression.

"I immediately felt comfortable with photography," he recalls. "It was a natural extension of the way I viewed things, and I found it to be more than a journalistic thing. Photography became a way to express the thoughts and feelings of both myself and my subjects."

"After deciding on photogra-

phy, the next hurdle was what kind of photography I was going to do," Szabo adds. "Coming from Ohio, I gravitated toward New York City—it was such a fascinating thing to be out on the streets of Manhattan."

Eventually settling in to teach fine art and black and white photography at Malverne high school, where he taught for more than two decades, Szabo photographed his students and created an ever-expanding portfolio.

In addition, Szabo also taught photography at the International Center for Photography from 1979 to 2000 and exhibited many of his teenage photographs at this famed photography venue.

A selection of Szabo's work was first published in 1978 in the book *Almost Grown*, which combined images of his students at Malverne high school with poetry written by New York-area teens.

Szabo's photographs are found in the permanent collections of New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In addition to being the subject of Szabo's books mentioned above, his work has been published as part of the *TimeLife* series on photography in a volume on photographing children.

Besides showing his photographs at the ICP, Szabo's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1975, as well as in a traveling group show organized by Aperture on the theme of mothers and daughters.

In addition to being represented by the Gitterman Gallery in New York City, Szabo is also repre-

sented in London by the Michael Hoppen Gallery.

Szabo continues to teach on an occasional basis, and to photograph and print new work. In a sense, he has come full circle in his creative life. Where he once concentrated on portraits of teenagers, a project that is ongoing, he is now also working on a series of portraits taken at Christa House, a hospice-like home providing care for the dying poor, where he volunteers one day a week.

"I wanted to do something for other people by working in the hospice," he explains, noting how positive the response has been from patients to his request to take photographs of them.

"It's amazing how so many of the residents there respond to the camera," he notes. "They love the attention, but another part of it is the idea of leaving something behind in a picture. The experience gives one perspective on living and dying and trying to help other people." —Richard Pitnick

■ PRINT INFORMATION

Vintage and early prints in sizes 11x14 and 16x20 inches range in price from \$1,500 to \$4,500. Modern prints, in editions limited to 75 of each image, are also being offered. The price range for 16x20-inch prints is \$1,000 to \$1,500.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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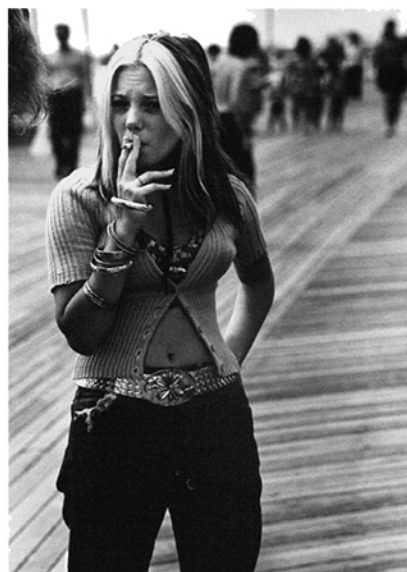
B&W



Priscilla, 1969



Hurt, 1972



Boardwalk Blond, Jones Beach, 1969



Kim, 1984



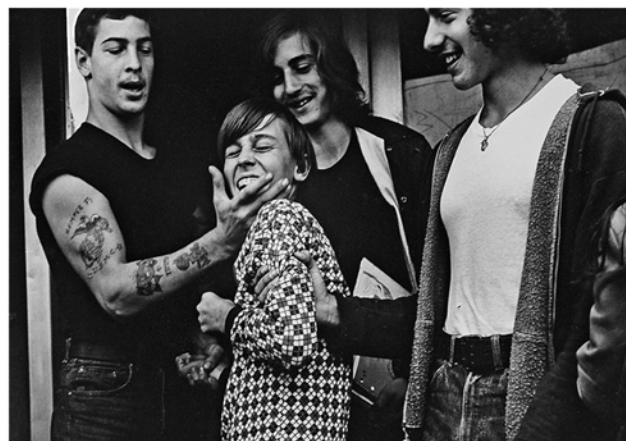
Lori, 1973



Charlie, Jones Beach, 1976



Jones Beach Disco, 1980



Caught, 1975