Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Streets of New York

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, October 4th, 2017

After moving to the U.S. in late December 1971, I always returned to Italy to visit my family at Christmas time. I did that every year in 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975. Then in June 1976 an important election was taking place in my country, and I wanted to go there to check out the political situation. I intended to vote for the Communist Party (PCI), that was on the verge of obtaining a majority in parliament, but once I got there and spoke with my friends, I learned of a better choice, the Radical Party, that supported the rights of women and gays, and fought to legalize abortion.

I stopped in New York for a couple days, to visit my friends Linda and Stuart, and, inspired by the work of Henri Cartier Bresson, I spent most of my time walking the streets taking pictures with my Nikon camera loaded with B&W film.

I had been living in Los Angeles since 1973, where everyone drives everywhere and there are very few streets with some foot traffic, so I was fascinated by the different kinds of people, who walk around or sit on the sidewalk as if they were in their living rooms, and realized what a true melting pot this city is.



Around the world Manhattan is considered a symbol of all America, and for good reason, because it's one of the oldest cities, along with Boston, and reminds us immigrants of our cities in Europe, with their busy street life.

During that trip I continued taking photographs of people in the streets of Modena and Rome, where I was covering the elections. I wrote an article about the Radical Party, and about witnessing a clandestine abortion performed in a kitchen.

You may read these 2 articles and see some of my photos of Rome at this link, and my photos of Modena at this link, included in the Elisa Leonelli, Photojournalist Collection of Claremont Colleges Digital Library.

Abortion was eventually legalized in Italy in 1978, for the first 12 weeks, but with the escape clause that Catholic doctors could refuse to perform it.

Despite the Supreme Court victory of Rowe vs Wade in 1973, the religious right in America continues to pass state legislation to limit access to abortion.

I have always maintained that this normal medical procedure should be made available for free in every hospital, and every gynecologist should be trained to perform it. Currently it is relegated to small clinics that are vulnerable to attacks by religious fanatics. I would say to them, "If you believe abortion is a sin, don't do it, but don't interfere with the right of women to have control over their own bodies."

This week the Republican controlled Congress, emboldened by the Trump Presidency, passed a bill that would ban abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

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