

# The New York Times

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2008



ETHAN LEVITAS, COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Untitled/This is just to say, #32," part of the exhibition "Eminent Domain."

## Library Looks at Photography and the City

By SEWELL CHAN

In 2005, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority considered, then backed away from, a proposal to ban photography on subways and buses (unless a permit was obtained). In 2007, the Bloomberg administration faced a firestorm from photographers and filmmakers over a plan to restrict video recording on streets and in other public spaces.

Stephen C. Pinson, the curator of photography at the New York Public Library, sees the debates as examples of the fine line between public and private, a line that has always been an issue in photography.

In a short book accompanying "Eminent Domain: Contemporary Photography and the City," a new exhibition at the library, Mr. Pinson writes:

"Indeed, issues of privacy and image rights have troubled photography throughout its history; with the shift to digital media and the increasing regulation of public space (both literal and virtual), these issues are becoming even more complex. A photograph, after all, is a transaction

between private and public that is negotiated through the taking of an image — a kind of eminent domain of the visual realm."

The exhibition, in which all of the images have been captured since the mid-1990s, represents a significant investment. The acquisitions were made possible through a \$900,000 gift from the estate of Leroy A. Moses.

The library has a trove of some 30,000 photographs that it commissioned from the 1920s to the 1940s from the photographer Percy Loomis Sperr. Those images, now digitized and available online, were a critical component of the library's early photography collection.

"From the '60s on, we didn't have the same amount of photographs," said Dr. Pinson, who, since joining the library's staff in 2005, has acquired more recent photographs. In 2006, he organized an exhibition of New York street photography featuring the works of Diane Arbus, Joel Meyerowitz and Garry Winogrand. The current exhibition, which opened on May 2, is the fifth he has organized for the library.

The five photographers exhib-



ited in "Eminent Domain" reflect a variety of subject matter and technique.

Thomas Holton's project "The Lams of Ludlow Street" documents the lives of a working-class Chinese immigrant family in Chinatown between 2003 and 2005. Dr. Pinson encountered Mr. Holton's work on the Web site of the School of Visual Arts, where Mr. Holton studied.

Bettina Johae's "borough edges, nyc" has images that the artist shot from 2004 to 2007 while exploring the perimeters of the five boroughs. Dr. Pinson said he encountered Ms. Johae's work in 2005 at the Smack Mellon gallery in Dumbo, Brooklyn.

"Her idea was to travel along

the five boroughs and their edges," he said.

Reiner Leist's "Window" is a project that began in March 1995, when the artist began taking one photograph every 24 hours from the south-facing window of his apartment in a commercial building on Eighth Avenue.

Dr. Pinson called the project "particularly poignant," saying, "Only coincidentally, it also documents the loss of the World Trade Center towers."

Zoe Leonard's "Analogue," produced from 1998 to 2007, records images of vanishing New York — from black-and-white televisions to chairs and shoes. "That project has, very consciously, an older tradition in mind, as even the title of course points out. Partially, it's also in a way her swan song to analog photography."

The final work is Ethan Levitas's "Untitled/This is just to say," a collection of images of subway cars, shot outdoors between 2004 and 2007. "As New Yorkers, we're so used to the subway car that we almost don't pay attention to it. This project, in a way, points that out."