

Recension Konstutställningar

## Charlie Phillips, "In plain sight" Det svarta Londons fotopionjär såg miraklen

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Charlie Phillips, "Man on Westbourne Park tube station", 1967. Foto: Charlie Phillips

**In the 1960s, the London borough of Notting Hill was far from a gentrified oasis. Charlie Phillips documented life in the Caribbean immigrant neighborhoods. Today he is considered one of England's most important photographers.**

"To photograph is to hold one's breath and let all one's ability strike straight into the heart of an elusive reality," Henri Cartier-Bresson has said. Despite many differences, Charlie Phillips (born 1944) has precisely this in common with the famous Frenchman. Apart from Paris, Cartier-Bresson made the whole world his workplace. Charlie Phillips certainly worked for a while abroad as a freelance photographer. At the center of his gaze, however, was a small corner of the world.



Charlie Phillips, "At the Cue Club", undated. Photo: Charlie Phillips

**Phillips was noted** for his images of street life and events in London's western boroughs, Notting Hill and North Kensington. From the beginning of the 1960s, he documented the then run-down neighborhoods. In his photos, English working class and Caribbean immigrant communities live side by side. Their lives sometimes run parallel and sometimes intertwined. Here there is agreement between people of different origins as well as deep conflicts between immigrants and xenophobic groups.

Violence and resistance, love and hate pass in front of the camera, which tries to piece together a complex picture of reality. In the black and white photographs, there really isn't much that is either black or white.

Charlie Phillips was born in 1944 in Kingston, Jamaica. He got his first camera at 14. It was two years after the family had arrived in London. A soldier pawned his Kodak Brownie with Phillip's father to afford a taxi. The camera was never picked up. This became Charlie Phillips' first photographic equipment. The motifs were everywhere.



Charlie Phillips, "Police on Blagrove Road", 1970s Photo: Charlie Phillips

At Fullersta Gård, pictures of an important photographer who is both known and unknown at the same time are shown. The exhibition is divided into thematic sections. Charlie Phillips's camera records the everyday warmth and anti-racist demonstrations, the happy club life, the Jamaican music culture and intense funeral ceremonies with a Caribbean cultural touch. The photos are testimony to what is going on. The photographer is familiar with the people and he is well versed in the area.

Charlie Phillip's photos do not seduce. In many ways, that is their strength. It is neither about the possibilities of the photo medium nor about technical brilliance. Nevertheless, his images stick on the retina once you have seen them.

Why are people drawn to his visual world? There is at least one strong reason. Phillips seems genuinely interested in the people and events. He is never coldly aloof. However, his curiosity is not aggressive but caring, almost tender. The gaze, directed at the outside world, is not sensationalist but searching, as if the answers to existential questions could be found through the patient observation of small everyday miracles.



Charlie Phillips, "Outside the Piss House Pub, Portobello Road", 1968. Photo: Charlie Phillips

**Charlie Phillips** is receptive to another human being just as she is. His images are almost never metaphorical. They capture reality straight on, wonderful and terrible – often at the same time.

One of my favorite photos captures a couple on the street. A woman doesn't see the photographer while kissing a man who happily looks at the camera. The longer the picture is considered, the more enigmatic it becomes in its simplicity. Is the man's smile a response to the kiss or a flirtation with the recording presence of the camera? In a subtle way, the magic of the photo medium is summed up here, where aloofness and appeal are possible within the same closed picture room.

The fascinating thing about the carnival scenes from Notting Hill's multicultural street festival is that they can be seen from a double perspective. On the one hand, there are images that capture a motley collective, a mass of people who, in a group, live out a common ritual together. In part, it is about individuals. Tightly pressed together, as if clinging to each other, all the people here are individual heartbeats, individual gestures and different destinies that for a moment naturally unite in an exhilarating community. All this takes place in the same streets where, on another day, conflicts and violence take place.



"Clinton Eastwood Jones at Cassidy's funeral in Kensal Rise", 1972. Photo: Charlie Phillips

**In Charlie Phillips'** photos, the city is synonymous with the people in it. It is them he follows. Carefully and unaffectedly, he manages to capture the fleeting, seemingly insignificant moments that together become part of something bigger – an everyday odyssey where life goes on without interruption as a series of big and small events.

**Joanna Persman**

## **Charlie Phillips, "In Plain Sight"**

Photography

Where: Fullersta Gård, Fullersta Gårdsväg 18, Huddinge

Until: 12 mars 2023

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## **Closing party at Fullersta**

The Jamaican Culture Association and Dj Everlina are organizing a closing party for the exhibition "Charlie Phillips - in Plain Sight" at Fullersta Gård on Saturday, March 11 from 12-4 p.m.