



In the Street: Chalk Drawings and Messages, New York City, 1938–1948

By Helen Levitt

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“All over the city on streets and walks and walls the children . . . have established ancient, essential and ephemeral forms of art, have set forth in chalk and crayon the names and images of their pride, love, preying, scorn, desire. . . . *The Lady in this House is Nuts*. . . . *Lois I have gone up the street. Don't forget to bring your skates*. . . . Ruby loves Max but Max hates Ruby. . . . And drawings, all over, of . . . ships, homes . . . western heroes . . . and monsters . . . which each strong shower effaces.”

So wrote James Agee in 1939. He shared this fascination with children's street drawings and messages with his friend Helen Levitt. Here now are over one hundred of her photographs, made in the years between 1938 and 1948. Most of these pictures have never before been published. They have been selected and arranged by the photographer and carefully reproduced.

Robert Coles has written especially for this book an essay on the imaginative live of children and of a time when “. . . children still had some visual independence, some keen-eyed interest in laying pictorial claim to the world around them. . . . I have not seen scenes such as Helen Levitt offers in my wanderings through America's city streets twenty and thirty and forty years after these were taken. They offer, then, a look backward—though they are also timeless in certain aspects. For children will never really stop being tempted by their imaginative faculties to show and tell—to let others see what they find themselves conceiving in thought and fantasy and dream.”

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- Sales Rank: #2211743 in Books
- Published on: 1987-06-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.98" h x .35" w x 9.00" l, 1.16 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 105 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“In common situations Miss Levitt finds the glint of an often bizarre beauty that most of us—including photographers—do not notice. . . . She brings to her pictures an intensity that can be almost hypnotic.”—Owen Edwards, *New York Times*

Comments on the Work of Helen Levitt

“There is no fundamental difference in the great landscapes and quiet portraits of Edward Weston and the profoundly revealing pictures of children by Helen Levitt. Both are photographic perceptions of the highest order.”—Ansel Adams

From the Back Cover

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