

# The New York Times

## ***ART IN REVIEW***

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

'Take the A Train'  
Howard Greenberg Gallery  
120 Wooster Street, near Prince Street SoHo  
Through Aug. 14

Behind, or beneath, every great modern city there is an extensive public transportation system, carrying people from place to place while insuring that they regularly rub shoulders with one another. Requiring grand arrangements of public spaces and feats of architectural and engineering brilliance, it conventionally defines the city's "pulse" or "life's blood."

Behind this system, in turn, lurk several generations of photographers, inspired by its daily spectacle and ready to record its social, mechanical, historical and visual manifestations in the name of art or of journalism.

Such has been the luck of New York City in the 20th century, as indicated by this exhibition of the more than 100 images by nearly 70 photographers. Beginning with Alfred Stieglitz's 1902 "Hand of Man," which takes a smoke-plumed steam engine as a metaphor for modern progress, the show spends most of its time in the years before 1965, with noteworthy images by Ralston Crawford, Arthur Leipzig, Sam Mahl, William Klein, Robert Frank and Louis Stettner.

Berenice Abbott's majestic views of the old Penn Station are de rigueur, but are contrasted with David Attie's less familiar Surrealistically distorted treatment of same. Similarly, Walker Evan's classic, surreptitiously taken subway portraits are here, but with all kinds of interesting company, including four gritty if not sinister images of sleeping men taken by Stanley Kubrick in 1947.

The photographs record a time when men and women alike wore hats, subway cars had wicker seats, bar cars had white tablecloths, and Grand Central had heavy wood benches. It was a time when the Third Avenue El could form a light-studded tunnel, suggest a Roman basilica or cast latticeworks of shadows across the pavements.

But the exhibition also includes a handful of images from the last decade by Philip-Lorca diCorsia, Thomas Roma, Jan Staller and Donna Ferrato. They demonstrate that subway photography is hardly an exhausted form. And as long as the trains are running, it probably never will be.

ROBERTA SMITH