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Langdon Clay: Cars: New York City, 1974-1976



Synopsis

From 1974 to 1976, Langdon Clay (born 1949) photographed the cars he encountered while wandering the streets of New York City and nearby Hoboken, New Jersey, at night. Shot in Kodachrome with a Leica and deftly lit with then-new sodium vapor lights, the pictures feature a distinct array of makes and models set against the gritty details of their surrounding urban and architectural environments, and occasionally the ghostly presence of people. “I experienced a conversion of sorts in making a switch from the black and white to the marvel of color, a world I was waking up to every day,” Clay writes of this work. “At the time it seemed like an obvious and natural transition. What was less obvious was how to reflect my world of New York City in color. I discovered that night was its own color and I fell for it.” Langdon Clay was born in New York City in 1949. He grew up in New Jersey and Vermont and attended school in New Hampshire and Boston. Clay moved to New York in 1971 and spent the next sixteen years photographing there, around the country and in Europe for various magazines and books. In 1987 he moved to Mississippi where he has since lived with his wife, photographer Maude Schuyler Clay, and their three children.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Langdon Clay's photographs of the New York City streets have the luminous loneliness of an Edward Hopper painting. (Allison Meier Hyperallergic) He shot [the cars]...in such a careful, observant way that 18-foot-long Chevy Impalas and tri-tone Buick Electras fit seamlessly into their

surroundings. (Bill Shapiro L'Oeil de la Photographie) Clay's book is called *Cars* but cars are only part of the story; he's created a time capsule of New York in the '70s, and a haunting reminder of just how big the night can be. (Bill Shapiro L'Oeil de la Photographie)...lush and evocative... (Albert Mobilio Bookforum) One car, one background scenes of workaday machines, neglected and decrepit, resting in a sleeping metropolis. The best of these images are collected in a new book, *Cars* New York City, 1974-1976, published by Steidl. (Road and Track)

The quality of the printing is incredibly high. A great gift for a car lover or anyone who lives new York history.

Langdon Clay was only twenty-two when he started to capture parked cars at night though the one hundred and fifteen wonderful photos in these pages took two years from 1974 to 1976. He hit on a very simple format, profiles of parked cars with a backdrop of buildings and do it all at night. The darkness creates a sort of natural frame for the compositions and throws up colors of the vehicles and frequently some dazzling effects from store windows, neon signs, entrances and lit windows. The photos are really two images cleverly combined as one, the cars as the main focal point but then the eye catches a bit of street furniture and then starts to explore the background textures and shapes of windows, doorways, vegetation and lights. Occasionally a photo captures both elements together beautifully like the dirty brown Chevrolet Impala on page fifty-six which blends wonderfully into the ochre background of a restaurant. Many of the vehicles have seen better days, frequently with dents and tape covered damage but this helps to tie them into the raw surroundings of street detritus. The usual excellent Steidl book production brings out the best in these remarkable photos, the large landscape size allows them to be 12.5 by 8.5 inches and printed with a 175 screen. I have a minor criticism though, the brief captions on two pages at the back of the book should have been printed below their relevant photos.

Splendid. Simply splendid. Each photograph is a joy to behold. The images in this book were created by a young photographer, in his mid-20s, who was already working at the top of his craft, technically and creatively. The photos were taken of Clay's own initiative -- they were not commissioned as a commercial project -- and the inspiration, self-directed dedication, and enthusiasm required to make these pictures are self-evident. (That the Kodachrome slide images were carefully preserved by Clay for more than 40 years, without the expectation or promise of

subsequent publication and recognition, is remarkable by itself.) While the conceit seems straight-forward enough ("photographs of cars at night in New York City and Hoboken"), the execution is not at all repetitive, and is in fact strongly and thoroughly engaging. Clay was not painting by numbers here, or falsely captivated by a predictable and trivial enterprise. These photos are fluid, ambitious, valuable, and important. Each image stands on its own, draws you in, and reveals a lucid determination to sustain a personal, disciplined, and high level of aesthetic commitment. Using Kodachrome slide film, a Leica 35mm camera, a tripod, and long shutter speeds, Clay captured scenes, perspectives, details, and colors which weren't available during the daylight hours, and which were taken for granted (or altogether ignored) during the nighttime hours. Each photo evokes its own atmosphere. Each car invites its own reaction and suggests its own narrative. Many of the pictures disclose a startling, and a sometimes worrying, amount of information about the owners of the cars, without allowing definitive conclusions to be drawn. The photos are luxuriously printed and serve as reminders of the plush harmony with which Kodachrome was capable of rendering saturated, jewel-like colors and content with natural, detached, three-dimensional character. This book will be happily enjoyed by anyone who loves cars ... who loves fine photography ... who recalls (or can imagine) the social identities projected by these cars within the presented contexts ... and who is able to appreciate the present-day publication of these images as an homage to the times and places depicted. Hobbyist photographers will revel in Clay's technical prowess and his reliable ability to create balanced, dreamy images from the subject matter. Extraordinary.

Langdon Clay: Cars: New York City, 1974-1976 What a beautifully illustrated hardcover full of period COLOR pictures of cars of the era, some in bondo, some pristine, some look like daily drivers/mundane. There is no text as there is no need for it (index, with page and cars towards the end.) The photography is exquisite and the layout is to be admired. I Love the Oldsmobile on the cover as there are a few more inside, Buicks, Pontiacs, Chevrolets, Many Beautiful GM cars. The Biggest treat for me personally was the two Corvettes a 73 and a 74'. although I did not like one is pictured outside a bathhouse which was rampant then. The book is a well-done travel through time of New York and Hoboken, Nj, cars parked in front landmarks, cars that look might go kaput any day, Period modifications such as Cragar wheels and lettered tires and A Mysterious dark lonely city. There is one car misidentified as a Kit car it is not, it looks to be a Jensen Interceptor Convertible. I Love this book, it is not just another Mediocre pictorial. It is A must for Gearheads and Photography lovers.

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Walker Evans meets William Eggleston in the middle of the night. Very nice. Beautiful book.

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