It is with a heavy heart that we share the passing of the well-respected, Puerto Rican photographer and founding member of En Foco, Roger Caban. Caban will be remembered for his social work in El Barrio, which he was a proud native of. He was a social worker for Casa Mutua and Pathways to Housing. In 1993, he became a board member of Hope Community, Inc. and helped found the organization’s annual poetry series, Poetas con Café, as well as the Ortiz-Wittenberg Art Gallery. “Soy hijo legitimo de El Barrio,” Caban would say fondly of his lifelong passion of El Barrio.

A self-taught photographer, Caban’s work have been published in numerous annuals and publications. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Caban was part of a group of young artist-activists creating community-based cultural organizations like En Foco and a writers collective, La Nueva Sangre. In collaboration with playwright Dolores Prida, he published a collection of poems and photographs titled, IRT Prayer Book, which led to a gallery exhibition. In addition, Caban worked with various Puerto Rican institutions including the National Puerto Rican Forum and ASPIRA. He was a member of the National Task Force on Hispanic Arts for the National Endowment for the Arts and a former chairman of the Special Arts Services Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts.

It is with a heavy heart that we share the passing of the well-respected, Puerto Rican photographer and founding member of En Foco, Roger Caban.
Call for Entries 2018

En Foco Photography Fellowship

En Foco, the leading arts organization serving support to photographers of color, is accepting submissions for its 2018 Photography Fellowship, designed to support photographers of color who demonstrate the highest quality of work as determined by a photography panel of peers and industry professionals.

Submission Deadline
Monday, January 15th, 2018 at 11:59pm
Fellowships will be announced in March

The Photography Fellowship Program will award ten Fellowships of a $1,000 each, participate in the 2018 Fellowship Group Exhibition, feature the Fellows in En Foco’s 2018 Nueva Luz publication, in printed and online editions, and provide Professional Development and Networking Opportunities.

For more information about the application and guidelines, please visit: enfoco.submitable.com or send us an email at: fellowship@enfoco.org.

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Nueva Luz continues to generate critical acclaim from old and new friends for its content, support from En Foco’s artist community, and continuing advocacy for equitable funding from public and private sources. To that end, you will see an advertisement for the Urban Art Cooperative, an advocacy venture for artists by and for substantially underfunded orgs, co-founded by En Foco. En Foco will always be vigilant and active in promoting the highest professional and artistic endeavors in our communities.

This Nueva Luz continues the tradition of excellence by devoting this “Mentor Issue” to an extraordinary artist, Jamel Shabazz. Of the 60+ issues, there have been only four “mentor” publications and we are proud to add Mr. Shabazz to En Foco’s roster of distinguished artists. Noelle Flores Theard, who Shabazz had a huge influence on, expertly curated the issue.

The images, jointly selected by Noelle and Jamel, represent the many stages of the development of his creative and personal perspective. Of special significance, Jamel Shabazz’s “Mentor Issue” has been published with two cover pages. The two images entitled, “Fathers and sons” and “A father introducing his son to the craft of photography” were so special and representative of Jamel’s vision that we collectively decided to make them available to Nueva Luz subscribers and Jamel Shabazz’ supporters.

As En Foco moves forward in preserving its Permanent Collection, Nueva Luz is an important part of it. Since 1985, Nueva Luz through its artists and cultural writers has not only preserved the visions of several generations as they responded to issues and challenges our communities have faced. Together, the Nueva Luz issues chronicle a history not normally found in textbooks.

I doubt cultural historians will ever adequately acknowledged, if at all, the passing this past summer of a Puerto Rican photographer and cultural activist, Roger Caban who along with Charles Biasini-Rivera and the late Phil Dante, founded En Foco in 1974 and the rest is history, gratefully. From the early days of En Foco to now, our voices and contributions remain constant and as valid as ever.

I do want to thank and acknowledge the contributors to this “Mentor issue” starting with Jamel, his genuineness and sense of humanity was a pleasure to experience and Noelle, who toiled with passion and sensitivity, organized a “collector’s issue” for all to experience. Jamel specifically requested that the late Phil Dante, founded En Foco in 1974 and the rest is history, gratefully. From the early days of En Foco to now, our voices and contributions remain constant and as valid as ever.

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Sincerely, Bill Aguado

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Jamel Shabazz
Cover image 1 A father introducing his son to the craft of photography, Honor and Dignity series. Central Park, NY.
Jamel Shabazz
Noelle Flores Theard . curator

Jamel Shabazz is a student of life and teacher of the most profound quality. Born in Brooklyn in 1960, he has spent decades photographing and mentoring scores of young men and women. His living legacy has inspired others to overcome challenges and find focus and purpose.

Shabazz’s work has been likened to a community photo album, where the memories of an entire generation are kept. He can tell a story about each one of his images: who is in the photo, what happened to them, when he saw them last, what lessons they had to teach him, and they him. He also engages his subjects beyond just photography, and understands his creative process as profoundly collaborative. Shabazz is conscientious in his practice: he gives photographs to those he photographs, he carries books of his work, and he stimulates conversations that go far beyond photography. He feels a sense of responsibility to the youth, to help raise their awareness and self-respect. He is drawn to individuals who feel good about themselves, people who are not afraid to project their power and agency onto the world. He often refers to the people in his photographs as “angels on the road to life” who crossed his path for a reason.

Mentorship has long been an aspect of Jamel’s life and practice. He acknowledges the role that mentors played in his own life, even from an early age. “There were two gang members in my adolescence who changed my life: one the stickup kid, and one the leader of a gang. They gave me direction and helped put me on a path at a stage at which I was falling victim. Practically every one of them said to give back. That’s all we want you to do: Go after the next generation, and give them what you gave us.”

“We grew up with a mantra, and it stayed with me many years, even to this very day: I want for my brothers, what I want for myself. I went out there with that passion every single day. It was my duty. I was on assignment. The camera actually became a compass to help guide me.”

Jamel entered the military at age 17 and returned to find his community in the grips of the crack epidemic. He spent twenty years working as a corrections officer, first in Rikers Island, then in the New York Supreme Court building and worked to help as many young people as he could. “Every day I went to work and looked in that pen to see who I could pull out, to see who I knew from the community. I went to work looking for a Malcolm. I went there looking for a Mandela, because I knew there were a lot of men who were incarcerated and didn’t need to be in there. I met a lot of them throughout the course of my life. I would contact lawyer friends of mine who were working and say, ‘Brother, can you help this young man out? He doesn’t have a lawyer. They would help me.’

His job as a corrections officer came with many challenges, not least of which were the perceptions of his role. “Imagine how one feels when you have a sincere heart and are determined to dervote your people, and then you have individuals who look at you only as a correction officer. You are hated based off your occupation, whereas a lot of people don’t even realize that a lot of correction officers are in fact Black and Brown – and they didn’t know my heart. So that became a part of my struggle, too.”

Jamel’s portraits are exceptional. Seeing such intimate photos of individuals who had been set up to be feared, with glimmers of love in their eyes, fundamentally challenged negative representations of Black and Latino youth. Being one among them, Jamel Shabazz was able to represent his photographic subjects as equals, understanding their core values, issues, and the challenges that they faced, and earning their trust in order to capture their spirit in the way that they themselves wanted to represent it.

Artist responsibility, collective empowerment, and Black consciousness are fundamental to Shabazz’s work, and he cites the Black Arts Movement as a major influence on his artistic and personal development. That movement insisted that Black artists give back to their communities, inspire them, and become leaders in the revolutionary struggle to reclaim the Black image. Photography, with its documentary capabilities, was seen as a powerful tool for providing the images that would serve this ideological revolution for Black self-determination. A love ethic was at its center. By internalizing these core values, Jamel Shabazz has been able to bring the legacy of the Black Arts Movement into the present.

Jamel Shabazz maintains his commitment to mentorship in the arts, and continues to make himself accessible to what he calls the generation of young visionaries that regularly comes to him for guidance and support. He has organized a number of exhibitions for emerging photographers, taught through philanthropic organizations, and is approachable despite his success.

In his words: “I might see a young brother or sister with a camera and say, ‘Are you a photographer?’ They would say, ‘I am.’ I give them my business card and I’d say, ‘Give me a ring, and whatever I can do to help you, I’m available. Let me see some of your work!’ I always tried to approach them and encourage them, because when I saw them, I saw myself.”

The idea of each one, teach one, is rooted in making the world a better place. It means that we have a duty and responsibility to inspire and educate those who we love and care about, starting with our immediate communities, then branching outward.
An Artist’s Statement

JAMEL SHABAZZ

“Many times I wondered whether my achievement was worth the loneliness I experienced, but now I realize the price was small.” Gordon Parks

I stand on the shoulders of countless men and women who aided in shaping me to be the man I am today.

It was my father, who first introduced me to the wonders of photography while I was in my preteens. He was a professional photographer and had a vast library full of books and publications centered on various aspects of photography. As a curious child, I gravitated towards so many of those books, but there was one in particular “Black in White America,” by documentary photographer Leonard Freed, that captivated me. For the first time, I was seeing photos other than my father’s that highlighted the strength and struggle within the African America community. Leonard’s stunning images allowed me to see a world outside my isolated housing complex. Hence, a seed had been planted in my mind. It was then that I became aware of the importance of photography and knew I wanted to be a photographer like my father and create work on the level of Leonard Freed.

My photography expedition would officially start during the summer of 1980, after returning back to North America upon completing a three year tour of duty in the US Army, in Germany. To my dismay, I would come home to a community that was under siege and rapidly losing its young people from senseless violence and incarceration.

The more traditional gangs were long gone, but small crews were ever growing as guns and drugs started to gain a stronger presence, escalating the already explosive situation. Seeing this dark cloud of self-destruction on the horizon, I felt an urgent need to take to the streets to get a sense of what was going on. Armed with a Canon AE1 and a genuine concern for the people, I mainly sought out the youth who were most at risk. I would find them at the local high schools, street corners, and on the buses and trains. My sole objective was to lend my voice to help to deescalate the hate and inspire unity. The language of photography allowed me to connect and communicate by simply engaging the youth and letting them know that I saw their greatness and wanted to capture their essence, all while planting a seed of love for self. To help me navigate through this difficult terrain, I would often get inspiration by listening to Marvin Gaye’s entire “What’s Going On,” album before I would embark upon my journey. His words would feed my soul and provide me with the fortitude I needed, to carry out my mission. The message that Marvin conveyed with that particular album, is what I wanted to express with my photographs. From that summer of 1980 until this very day, I am still on that mission, as the words of Marvin reverberate in my head, to remind me of the task at hand.

The images I make are not only about photography; they are in many cases mere frozen moments that serve as constant reminders of the many people I met during my travels and they also hold a special meaning for me in my visual diary. What is most important is that, I want people of the various communities I been blessed to document, to have a place in the annals of history and it is my sincere desire, to secure their legacies and inspire the next generation of visionaries.

Jamel Shabazz is best known for his iconic photographs of New York City during the 1980’s. A documentary, fashion and street photographer, he picked up his first camera nearly forty years ago. He has authored 8 monographs; Back in the days, The Last Sunday in June, A Time before Crack, Seconds of my Life, The Remix, Represent, Pieces of a Man, and Sights in the City; as well as contributing to over three dozen other photography related books. His work has been exhibited in Italy, France, Korea, Turkey Germany, Ethiopia, Brazil, and Japan and throughout the United States. Shabazz’s work is housed within the permanent collections of The Whitney Museum, The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Over the years he has worked with young students at the Studio Museum in Harlem’s “Expanding the Walls” Project, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture “Teen Curators” program and the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation. Shabazz’s goal is to contribute to the preservation of world history and culture.


Jamel Shabazz. *The Righteous Brothers, Back in the Days series, Coney Island, NY.*

Jamel Shabazz. *Young greatness, Honor and Dignity series, Chicago, IL, 2008.*


It was supposed to be a casual encounter, an evening of viewing the work of the new urban photographers at a gallery in Dumbo, Brooklyn.

My “nephew,” Joe Conzo, Jr. was exhibiting his historical imagery of the hip-hop movement; the early days in the public parks and housing projects complete with sweaty, animated faces spitting lyrics and bodies bedecked in shiny gold chains, Kangol caps and sparkling white sneakers. The images were powerful, full of hope for a new culture in America.

Ready to leave, I complimented Joey who told me to stick around and check some of the other photos on the walls. And that’s when the storm hit, a storm called Jamel Shabazz.

I stood transfixed before his photographs; I couldn’t move. It was like the first time I heard Miles and Coltrane, like the first time I heard Miles and Coltrane, like the first time I heard Miles and Coltrane, like the first time I heard Miles and Coltrane, like the first time I heard Miles and Coltrane.

I knew these people, ate neck bones and butter beans in their apartments, borrowed their baby-soft lamb leather jackets in the winter and kissed their sisters in a circle when they got married. The gentle side of his love for Puerto Ricans and their multi-occupied faces, the boyish smiles of these little jibarros, the pure joy emanating from the eyes of these Tainos, makes one forget the baggage of misery they still carry.

Shabazz sees an essence in these islands, sometimes Spanish, sometimes English-speaking Americans that is enduring and prophetic. He sees their contribution and importance in the 21st century and how important inclusion is in the building of a city, a nation.

What is truly miraculous is how Jamel introduces the fraternity of Black and Puerto Rican people in New York City. The secret that eludes even the most intelligent observers of urban life is that Brown and Black have woven a fabric of culture that is a century old on the streets of the city. Beautifull, South Carolina and Belize, Ponce, Richmond, Virginia and Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, Savannah, Georgia and Sabana Grande on the west coast of the island, we fought with and for each other until we just got tired, fell into each others arms and ended up having babies together. We still hang heavy; there’s nowhere else to go and no group we trust as much as the other. Jamel will throw a black group shot at you and right in the middle will be a ‘Rican smiling broadly. That’s family.

Much of the optical sagacity stems from Master Shabazz’ tenure in the New York City jail system. He saw them hop in defiantly and carried out on stretchers with slashes across their faces from eyebrow to jaw-line. Some inmates thrived, some died; he witnessed it all and somehow kept the love light burning for these kids.

Sometimes, when we hang, I can see the forest fire blazing in his eyes as he discusses the ones who drowned, the lost souls and the ones who murdered them. Amazingly, he harbors no hatred toward cops or correctional officers, no anger at the wars we’ve fought or the soldiers who’ve had to fight them. In fact, he respects them. They too have their role to play in this urban theatre.

Finally, the little secret is you can’t exhort subjects to pose for you, to peep into their souls on city streets, unless they really trust you, unless they feel you will not exploit their willingness to say, “Hey, look at me! Aren’t I pretty?”

Jamel Shabazz gets people to show their love every time he steps out the door.
The People’s Cultural Plan for Working Artists and Communities in New York City

Inequity in arts and culture is a persistent problem in New York City. The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs has drafted an official Cultural Plan for NYC, but a broad coalition of artists, cultural workers, and activists feel that this official plan doesn’t adequately address the dire situation for culture in our city. We have drafted an alternative People’s Cultural Plan, which addresses three main issues: real estate hyper-development and the displacement of communities of color and working artists; labor fairness for cultural workers and independent artists; and the gross inequities of funding for smaller and POC-led cultural organizations. Join with us, endorse and read the entire plan, and follow us on social media!

Eliminate 421a tax breaks for developers!
Subsidize studio space rents for artists of color!
Artists working for cultural institutions must be compensated for their labor!
Pass the Housing Not Warehousing Act (HNW)
Preserve manufacturing zones!
Increase funding to POC-led cultural organizations!

Endorse and download the PCP on our website: www.peoplesculturalplan.org

facebook.com/peoplesculturalplan/ @Cultural_Plan @peoples_culture peoplesculturalplan@gmail.com

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Blue Sky

Established in 1975 in Portland, Oregon, Blue Sky Gallery has a long history devoted to showcasing the finest in photographic vision and innovation.

We present two solo exhibitions each month by national and international artists from our 3,700 square foot gallery in the heart of the Pearl District, Portland’s largest arts neighborhood.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Submit your work for consideration for a solo exhibition at Blue Sky. All photo or video based work is eligible and there is never a fee to submit your work.

For details go to: blueskygallery.org/exhibitions/submissions/

Instagram & Facebook: @blueskygallerypdx

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Top image: Nakaya Brown, Self Portrait in Shower Cap, 2016, from her July 2017 solo show, Between Sheets and Seamless; Bottom left image: Alessandra Lavia, Pink, Yellow, White Circles (from Circle Studies), 2014, from her September 2017 solo show, Geometry of Space. Bottom right image: Blue Sky Gallery © Ferr Kuyas
Launched by
5 small community-based arts organizations:

BronxArtSpace
Dominican York Proyecto GRAFICA
En Foco, Inc.
Literary Freedom Project
PRIDA
Puerto Rican Institute for Development of the Arts

The Urban Arts Cooperative has developed a strategically localized advocacy initiative that will enhance the members organizational capacity to serve artists and grassroots cultural interests and to effectively leverage human and capital-based resources (financial and in-kind) on behalf of artists.

For more information, please visit us at urbanartscooperative.org and “like” us on Facebook!

The Urban Arts Cooperative is supported in part by The New York City Cultural Agenda Fund in The New York Community Trust, The Booth Ferris Foundation, Lambent Foundation, Starves Niarchos Foundation and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.