

Sidewalk

"Private faces in public places are wiser and nicer than public faces in private places." W.H. Auden, The Orators.

The New Yorkers depicted in these pictures are not aware that they are being seen, much less photographed. This series arises from a deep skepticism about the art of portraiture.

I am not interested in the self that a person deliberately projects to the world, the self necessarily on display in formal portraits. What a person unintentionally -- or inadvertently, as Arbus suggests -- discloses in these frozen moments, when they are lost to the world though steeped in the sea of humanity, is more fertile ground.

Photographers have, of course, long mined this vein. A periodic re-evaluation is nonetheless worthwhile. Something may be learned by comparing the New Yorkers whom Strand photographed in 1916 in lower Manhattan with those that Evans surreptitiously captured underground in the 1930s. And perhaps something more can be gleaned by seeing these long-dead personages alongside their contemporary counterparts.