

The Bus Show

There will be an exhibition of photographs in 500 New York City public buses in May of 1975. The purpose of the show is to present excellent photographs in a public space. All prints will appear with the photographer's name and the picture's title.

Photographs accepted for the exhibition will become part of the permanent collection of the Library of Congress. Send duplicate prints of each photograph you wish to submit; one print will go on a bus, the other to the Library of Congress. You must state what rights you grant to the Library of Congress with each photograph: loan, reproduction, or neither without your specific approval.

You may submit photographs to be considered for one person shows or as part of the group exhibit. Since the photographs will be placed in the interior advertising space of the buses there are certain size requirements, and in the case of one person shows, a specific number of photographs are needed to fill the available spaces. If you are submitting for group exhibition, send us any number of photographs in any of the size categories. For one person shows, you must submit the exact number of photographs needed to fill a bus, in each of the size categories. The size requirements and number of photographs for each bus is as follows: 14 photographs with an image height of 9 inches; one horizontal photograph with an image height of 13 inches; two verticals with an image height of 16 inches. Photographs not accepted for one person shows will automatically be juried as part of the group exhibition.

All work must be unmounted and untrimmed. Remember to submit duplicate prints of each photograph. Work not accepted will be returned if postage is included. On the back of each print write your name, the picture's title, and the rights you grant to the Library of Congress. Enclose a 3" x 5" file card with your name, address, and phone number. Mail prints to: Bus Show, Photography Department, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York 11205. For information call (212) 636-3573. The deadline for submission is March 1, 1975.

This exhibition is made possible with support from the New York State Council on the Arts. Poster © 1975 by Pratt Institute. Photograph by Bill Arnold.

THE BUS SHOW

BILL ARNOLD & KATE CARLSON

IN FEBRUARY OF 1975, Bill Arnold, with help from colleagues at Pratt Institute and friends, mailed copies of this poster to over 1200 addresses in the United States and Canada. It began: "There will be an exhibit of photographs in 500 New York City buses in May, 1975. The purpose of the show is to present excellent photographs in a public space..." The text explained that work could be submitted for consideration as one-person shows or as part of the group exhibit. Size requirements were specified since the prints would be mounted in the panels usually occupied by advertisements. Finally, the poster said that pending the consent of the photographers involved, their duplicate prints would become part of the permanent collection of the Library of Congress.

In the months that followed thousands of prints arrived at the Bus Show office space at Pratt where Bill and a small staff reviewed, sorted, dry-mounted, alphabetized, and shaped them into coherent, individual shows. Besides being in abundance, they were beautiful photographs, and they described an intricate and infinite variety of people and scenes. There were ballet dancers and drive-ins, black and white glossies and color prints, New Mexico and New York, prostitutes and conceptual pieces, designs and Minamata, Hasidim and snow. Confronting the rich and conscientious perspective of these 262 photographers made the staff feel as if they were tending an eager and full garden. Very few of the prints submitted were rejected. People who responded to the poster seemed to grasp immediately the meaning of the Bus Show, and sent in imagery which was accessible, personal, and vivid. Most contributors realized that exhibiting on buses was not going to advance their careers significantly because the show was literally outside of the art world. They sent pictures they liked and wanted to see on a bus. Most submitted 15-20 prints and probably spent about \$50.00 on materials and postage. In effect, they were sending gifts to the people of New York.

The show actually opened on November 1, 1975, and ran for two months. Four hundred buses in Manhattan and all of the boroughs carried the 5,000 prints. One bus in every ten was a show. None were marked on the outside, making it impossible for riders to know if they were about to step into a gallery until the bus was close enough to see inside. Passengers could then begin to notice

Bill Arnold & Kate Carlson

that the bands of competing ads had been replaced by quiet groupings of images which seemed to enlarge the interior space, which asked nothing, and which invited as much, or, as little participation as riders wished to grant. Once inside, people often changed seats to get a better view, began talking to one another about the pictures, and many drivers became enthusiastic gallery directors.

New York was the second mass transit exhibit that Bill Arnold had imagined and brought into being. The first one opened three years earlier on a snowy February afternoon in Boston's Copley Square. Forty-four buses had become gallery space for over 1,000 of his own prints. (The New York show was funded by The N.Y. State Council on the Arts. The Boston show was partially funded by The Institute of Contemporary Art.) Since then the Bus Show idea had developed its own momentum and eventually reached its vast New York proportions, but the central motive behind placing original prints on city buses was fundamentally unchanged. In one of the early grant proposals for the Boston show Arnold explained: "People who ride city buses are in an advertising term 'locked in.' Their ride lasts an average of forty-three minutes. During that time advertisements offer the primary source of visual material on which they can focus. I would like to put personal and unpresuming photographs into the normally commercial space inside city buses. . . . I believe that the primary value of the photographic image lies in its ability to communicate and be understood instantly, by anyone. Everyone has taken a picture, so everyone can understand photographs. By exhibiting photographs inside city buses a large segment of the population will be able to view the work. The value of this kind of exposure seems to me to be in the potential for the photograph to humanize or soften the tension of urban life. . . ."

Approximately 1.6 million people in New York rode on Bus Show buses and thousands saw the Boston exhibits. In both cases, passengers were invited to register their responses via an address listed on every bus. The Boston show also had a phone number, and over 100 people called in. The tapes of those phone calls convey much of what the Bus Show meant to riders . . . The voices are energized, congratulatory, warm.

Some of the people who wrote or called were worried about how the pictures would be protected from graffiti and theft. But the show was meant to be vulnerable. It was assumed that the photographs would be taken down by the bus riders and eventually they were. In both the Boston and New York Bus Shows there was very little graffiti, or none at all.

Martha Hodes
175 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10016
December 1, 1975

Bus Show
Box 1747
General Post Office
New York, NY 10001

Dear Sir or Madam,

Ah, the wonder! As I entered the bus I tripped on my own umbrella, my boots squelched and I felt just plain wet and miserable on this just plain wet and miserable Thursday evening. And then! Rather than being bombarded with numerous condescending, obscene or otherwise disturbing advertisements, I saw many beautiful photographs that allowed for peaceful contemplation.

My rush-hour growls ceased and when I exited the bus, although the rain was still coming down, my spirits had risen tremendously. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Martha Hodes
Martha Hodes

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF MARY
225 EAST 45TH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

December 3, 1975

The Bus Show
G.P.O. Box 1747
NYC 10001

Dear People:

Thank you very much for the lovely photo show now going on in the busses, in Manhattan at least. Not only is it a fantastic change from the usual ads, but it is really inspiring art.

All the artists deserve congratulations - Boxer, Belgrade, Tait and others I cannot remember.

If I had to name one I most enjoyed, I think it would be the remarkable Belgrade photo of the black guy wearing the "Blue Boy" shirt.

Best wishes to you all - I am a Catholic Sister and have no money to contribute but am grateful to whoever paid for this show and am sure that thousands who may not write in are also appreciating it.

Sincerely,

Constance
Sr. Constance Peck

2/21/73

Dear Mr. Arnold,

I just rode in to work on a bus which displayed your pictures. It made a special event out of the usual routine. It gave it dignity & serenity; & it made me look outside the bus with a different attitude - how much beauty is going by which I just fail to see?

Your pictures are beautiful. Displaying them in public transportation is a superb idea - I wish it could be permanently done.

Thank you.

MRS. P. ROBECK
73 VIRGINIA RD
LINCOLN, MASS 01773

Janie Robeck

Mr. Richard Parks
4 Morton St., Apt. No. 1
New York, New York 10014

The Bus Show
P.O. Box 1747
General Post Office
New York, New York 10001

November 19, 1975

To The Creative People of The Bus Show:

What a pleasant surprise! I have had the pleasure of seeing two buses with your photography show and I look forward to seeing more.

I am so tired of looking at "stuffed nasal passage" advertisements in both subways and buses. It really is unfortunate that more people in New York City do not have your creativity in bringing enjoyment to people. I only wish your show could spread to the subways.

This is the type of intelligent creativity that makes New York City such a wonderful place. My only suggestion is that you do more of this exhibit.

Very truly yours,

Rick Parks.

Rick Parks

April 11, 1973

Dear Mr. Arnold,

I'm thirteen, and I ride to and from school everyday on the M.B.T.A. I think the photographs you take are really interesting. Besides, they are much nicer to look at than bank, and several home advertisements. It's nice to look up and see pictures of people in the U.S.A. I really hope these photographs will be on all the buses in the near future. Thank you.

Yours Very Truly,
Stephanie
Newburgh

THE CITY COLLEGE
OF
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10031

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

December 11, 1975

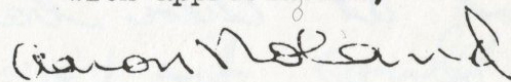
Dear Mr. Arnold:

I just rode on the 14th Street Crosstown bus and saw the photography exhibition displayed on it. What a marvelous idea, and what a boost to the spirit! There is so much that is ugly and depressing in the city right now, with the garbage strike and all; and seeing the photos posted in the bus just hit the spot, making me feel good and expansive.

You are a good public servant, and I want to thank you for reminding me that imagination and resourcefulness are possible in a large bureaucracy.

Do keep up the fine work.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Aaron Noland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Aaron" and last name "Noland" clearly distinguishable.

Aaron Noland