

Ernest Cole: House of Bondage 14 June – 22 September 2024

This summer, The Photographers' Gallery presents *Ernest Cole: House of Bondage*, on show from 14 June – 22 September 2024. This substantial exhibition revisits Cole's ground-breaking project *House of Bondage*.

South African photographer Ernest Cole (1940–1990) is considered one of the most important chroniclers of the brutal reality of apartheid in South Africa. Through his work, Cole revealed the violence and injustice of apartheid to the world.

Born in a township in Transvaal in 1940, as a young Black man Cole experienced the daily humiliations of the system from the inside: "Three-hundred years of white supremacy in South Africa have placed us in bondage, stripped us of our dignity, robbed us of our self-esteem and surrounded us with hate." (Ernest Cole)

One of the first Black freelance photographers in South Africa, which was only possible due to his reclassification from 'Black' to 'Coloured' under apartheid, he documented everyday life with assignments for *Drum* magazine and *The New York Times*, amongst others. Cole photographed the precarious living conditions of Black South Africans, from mine labourers to domestic workers in white households, as well as the state of the transport and health sectors. He paid particularly close attention to children and young people who were denied a proper education under the Bantu Education Act, which was introduced while Cole was still in high school and caused him to leave in protest.

In 1966, Cole fled South Africa and smuggled out his photographs, travelling through the UK before settling in New York. His book *House of Bondage* was published in 1967 and showed the countless forms of violence and repression of the apartheid system to the outside world. Its publication resulted in him being banned in his home country. *House of Bondage* is considered one of the most significant photobooks of the twentieth century.

In more than 100 photographs, the exhibition covers all 15 thematic chapters into which Cole divided the *House of Bondage* book, and also includes works from the chapter 'Black Ingenuity', which was not published in the original edition. The exhibition will also feature early original prints, personal documents, original editions, ephemera and filmed interviews with Cole.

Ernest Cole: House of Bondage is realised in collaboration with Magnum Photos. Curated by Anne-Marie Beckmann and Andrea Holzherr and adapted for The Photographers' Gallery by Karen McQuaid, Senior Curator. This exhibition is supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a donor-advised fund held at The London Community Foundation.

In 2022, *House of Bondage* was re-released by Aperture with an additional chapter. The book is available to buy in [the Gallery shop](#).

Also in London: Ernest Cole's work documenting New York City during the height of the American civil rights movement is on show for the first time in [Ernest Cole: A Lens in Exile](#) at Autograph, London. 13 June - 12 October 2024. [autograph.org.uk](#)

Press Contacts

For further press information and image requests please contact:

Alex Finch alex@margaretlondon.com

For general information and enquiries about The Photographers' Gallery, including the archive, Print Sales Gallery or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk

The Photographers' Gallery
16–18 Ramillies Street
London W1F 7LW

+44(0)20 7087 9300
info@tpg.org.uk
tpg.org.uk

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Notes for Editors

Ernest Cole (1940–1990)

Ernest Cole was born in South Africa's Transvaal in 1940 and died in New York City in 1990. During his life he was known for only one book: *House of Bondage* – published in 1967. In 2011, the Hasselblad Foundation produced a follow-up: *Ernest Cole: Photographer*.

Cole's early work chronicled the horrors of apartheid for *Drum* magazine and *The New York Times* among numerous other publications, and in 1966, he fled the Republic of South Africa. In 1968, the apartheid regime banned him in perpetuity, stripping him of his South African passport. He was briefly associated with Magnum Photos and received funding from the Ford Foundation and Time-Life. In North America, he concentrated on street photography in primarily urban settings.

Between 1969 and 1971, Cole spent an extensive amount of time on regular visits to Sweden where he became involved with the Tiofoto collective and exhibited his work. From 1972, Cole's life fell into disarray and he ceased to work as a photographer, losing control of his archive and negatives. Having experienced periods of homelessness, Cole died aged 49 of pancreatic cancer in 1990. In 2017, more than 60,000 of Cole's negatives missing for more than 40 years were discovered in a Stockholm bank vault. This work is now being examined and catalogued.

In 2022, *House of Bondage* was re-released by Aperture with an additional chapter, and for the first time, Cole's photographs depicting Black lives in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s was published in 2024's *The True America*.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, talks, workshops and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and cafe – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter.

Find out more at: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor information – The Photographers' Gallery

Mon – Weds 10am – 6pm

Thurs & Fri 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 5pm)

Sat 10am – 6pm

Sun 11am- 6pm

Also on show at The Photographers' Gallery from 14 June - 22 September 2024:

[*Graciela Iturbide: Shadowlines*](#)

Tickets - your ticket covers entry to all exhibitions on the day of your visit

£8 / £5 concessions (members go free)

Advance online booking: £6.50 / £4 concessions

16-18 Ramillies Street, London, W1F 7LW

Nearest London Underground Station: Oxford Circus

T: + 44 (0)20 7087 9300

E: info@tpg.org.uk

W: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

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