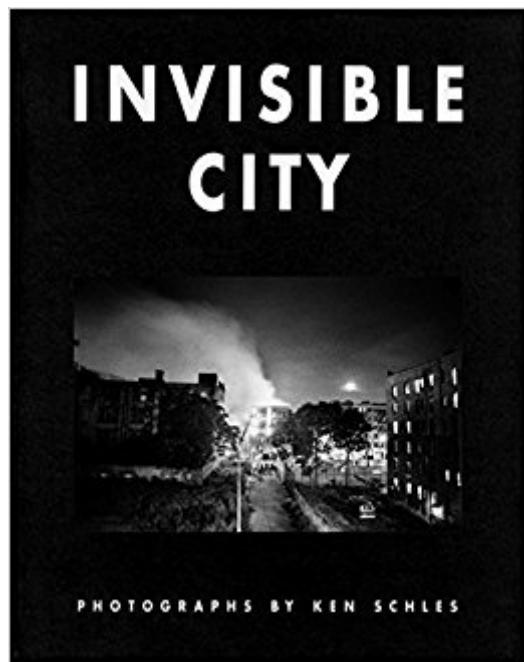


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# Ken Schles: Invisible City



## **Synopsis**

For a decade, Ken Schles watched the passing of time from his Lower East Side neighborhood. His camera fixed the instances of his observations, and these moments became the foundation of his "invisible city." Friends and architecture come under the scrutiny of his lens and, when sorted and viewed in the pages of this book, a remarkable achievement of personal vision emerges.

Twenty-five years later, *Invisible City* still has the ability to transfix the viewer. A penetrating and intimate portrayal of a world few had entrance to--or means of egress from--*Invisible City* stands alongside Brassai's *Paris de Nuit* and van der Elsken's *Love On The Left Bank* as one of the twentieth century's great depictions of nocturnal bohemian experience. Documenting his life in New York City's East Village during its heyday in the tumultuous 1980s, Schles captured its look and attitude in delirious and dark honesty. Long out of print, this "missing link" in the history of the photographic book is now once again made available. Using scans from the original negatives and Steidl's five-plate technique to bring out nuance and detail never seen before, this new edition transcends the original of this underground cult classic.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

A TIME magazine photobook of the year (2014) "The reissue of *Invisible City* is rich in texture and is every bit as intoxicating as that first visit to Schles' East Village in New York City in the eighties." *Invisible City* by Ken Schles, published by Steidl, selected by Michelle Molloy, International Photo Editor, TIME. A New York Times notable book of the Year (1st edition, 1988) *Invisible City* is

cited in volume III of the seminal Parr/Badger *The Photobook: A History*, listed in 802 Photo Books from the M + M Auer Collection, a compendium of books important to the history of photography and noted by two experts in 10x10 American Photobooks, a publication that presents significant American artists' photobooks from the last 25 years. "Perhaps one of the greatest portrayals of nocturnal urban life of the 20th Century - certainly keeping equal company with Brassai's classic *Paris de Nuit*." Eric Miles, *Photo-Eye*. "hellishly brilliant." Vince Aletti, *The New Yorker*. Both books are of enormous force. So intimate and direct, that it sometimes pains the eyes. They are marked by a lust for life out of control. (Freddie Langer *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) So intimate and direct, that it sometimes pains the eyes. They are marked by a lust for life out of control. (Freddie Langer *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) Pictures like this speak to the gut. They isolate time from itself. Bottom Line: A re-issued classic, straight outta the NYC 80s. (Jonathan Blaustein A Photo Editor) *Invisible City* has a reputation as a dark book, but that reputation seems undeserved, especially when paired with the new book. Instead, one is struck with moments of perseverance and levity, of people celebrating, drinking, or making love, despite their circumstances or living condition. The darkness hovers along the edges and occasionally creeps in, but is largely kept at bay. (Adam Bell *The Brooklyn Rail*) Photographically, both book provide copious amounts of photographic references. In *City*, for example, there is a photograph of a kid pointing a gun at you, clearly echoing William Klein's *New York* book. With their bleak and harsh black-and-white treatments, occasionally using considerable blur, the books also echo Japanese photography from around the Provoke era. Of course, many of these references have since been picked up by a younger generation of artists. (Jörg M Colberg [cphmag.com](http://cphmag.com)) "I was looking at this idea of what does the image mean, not only photographic images but also images we hold within ourselves about the world we have around us," he said. "I felt my world was falling apart. I started thinking what I consider my world is and it's really a series of images: as a father, as an American, as a New Yorker, these things they're all images." Those thoughts were also present when Schles was initially working on *Invisible City*, looking for a way to document his experience in New York that differed from those of both his father, a New York native, and also countless other artists who had created work that reflected their own experiences living there. (David Rosenberg *Slate*) What emerged was a bounty of startling black-and-white images, both bleak and ravishing, that were so starkly truthful about that time and place that their publication as *Invisible City* in 1988 would become a landmark cult title, unavailable for over two decades. Originally published by legendary Twelvetrees Press in Pasadena, the book was printed on a photogravure press, now virtually extinct. If ever there were a book that could not

be anything other than black and white, this was it. The riveting tonalities are the reality of Schlesâ™s naked netherworld. His camera managed to memorialize a now-mythic era of New York history that for him at the time was merely âœthe reality out my front door.â • (Michael Kurcfeld Los Angeles Review of Books)Coffee Table Curator: Top January releases. (Devon Ivie Interview)Ken Schlesâ™ Invisible City is an extraordinary production, printed in five inks using a special screen to mimic as closely as possible the original photogravure. An important book made available again for a new generation of photographers (and for those of us who were a bit distracted at the time). (Cian Cuatro Cuerpos)Also at the Times, a selection of photos from Ken Schles, who spent the mid 1980s living in an abandoned building in the East Village, documenting the neighborhoodâ™s goings on with his camera. The work, which resulted in two books, 1988â™s Invisible City and 2014â™s Nightwalk, expresses both âœdarknessâ• and âœexcitement,â• depending on your perspective. (Chris Pomorski New York Observer)Ken Schlesâ™ strong renderings of â™80s New York photography appear to be cinematic â“ and can be compared to Martin Scorseseâ™s early films such as Whoâ™s That Knocking at My Door, Mean Streets, and Taxi Driver. Schlesâ™ newly reissued Invisible City straightforwardly captured the ecstasy and despair which his beloved city screamed of. (Miwa Susuda Photo Book Magazine)Night Walk is an essential companion to the new, long-awaited reprint of Schles' gritty 1988 classic Invisible City. A document of life on Manhattan's Lower East Side as it went through the death throes of being a dirty, lawless pocket of the city, Invisible City and Night Walk evokes a sense of danger and fun in roaming through this veritable no man's land. The grainy black-and-white photos make you feel like you're falling through a dream. (Mark Murrmann Mother Jones)

Ken Schles has a very unique style that is showcased wonderfully in 'Invisible City.' The photographs contained in this book are raw and gritty and you're able to truly sense the feeling of the time and place each of them were taken. A true, realistic and romantic view of the Lower East Side.

This book is what I had hoped Frank's "The Americans" would be. The book is perfectly laid out and the photos are all exceptionally composed and perfectly capture the tone of the "bad old days" of eighties New York. While not sexual or graphic like Araki's work, Schles' work is reminiscent in that it captures a gritty underside of the city through a combination of portraiture, landscape and street photography. While short, this book is brilliant.

This book really inspired me to go shoot.

Gritty ( grain ) night shots of a city ,its problems, its moods and its feel. Really makes you want to go out an shoot images at 3200 taking chances with shutter speeds .good book.

really good

It is a classic. I very glad to finally have it in my collection...

I have to agree with the reviewer who said this was unimpressive and not worth its value. I was looking for photography books related to photography of New York. I bought the book based on .com recommendations and other reviews online claiming this to be a classic. The few photos I saw online seemed promising, offering a glimpse into the nitty gritty of 1980's New York. So I ignored the negative review and took a chance. I immediately found the book disappointing, turning the pages waiting to get to the "good stuff". As I browsed, I saw lots of blurry and out of focus pictures, some terribly composed, almost as if the camera may have snapped by accident. I do love textures and can appreciate blurred, long shutter speed shots with lots of blurriness, and all for experimental, more impressionistic photography, especially if they're of New York life. But I think the small size of the book kept me from appreciating these. I just kept thinking that there is a lot of bad pictures in here and that this was not a book I would ever want to revisit. Maybe blown up these pictures more impressive and beautiful. In such small format, they look pretty crappy to me... I understand that in its time this book perhaps was "revolutionary"--a lot of people online appear to be singing its praises, anyway...but, personally, for me, for the price, it's a compilation of pretty bad pictures with only a gem here and there, and, like the other negative reviewer said, I didn't find it worth the price. I got rid of my copy right away. Much better, more inspiring and bigger photography books can be had at this price range for your visual arts book shelf.

Originally published in 1988 by Twelvetrees Press, and now reissued by Steidl, these photographs capture the Lower East Side of Manhattan at the end of her life. When I say "end," I mean that the buildings are vacant, the trees are bare and stunted, the streets are empty, and the people look empty too. Schles captures them lying around in filthy apartments, hollow eyed, and depressed. One of them shows a woman on the toilet, crammed into a tiny bathroom, her dress hiked up to reveal her flabby legs. I remember the city in the Koch-Dinkins-Giuliani days; most New

Yorkers were averse to being photographed, and the subject here must have been pretty hopeless to let herself be compromised like this. Regardless, I was not turned on. In another photo, the neighborhood comes out to celebrate the fireworks, everyone's out dancing in the street. Other than that, there's no sign of happiness in this book. Everyone's just waiting for the place to die quickly so they can move on. Seen from a window on a hot summer day, weed-grown lots and empty tenements. I know it's the summer because the trees have leaves and the sky is cloudless. But even the trees look sick. There are three cars on the street, their windows intact. Is it because nobody's there to break them? Do the owners move the cars at night? One photo shows a bunch of tulips on a windowsill overlooking an alley. They say that when a tree dies, a thousand flowers bloom. Today, the Lower East Side has good things. Community gardens are well-maintained, streets are clean, kids can walk safely in the streets, and there are healthy things to do. Young people have moved in, and they proudly decorate their apartments. The neighborhood was once a dead tree, and it finally fell down. Flower bloomed in its wake. The grainy pics capture every horrible sad detail of the old Lower East Side. Some might call it poor quality, but keep in mind that not all artists are well-financed with the best equipment. The photographer may have been too poor to afford a flashbulb, or maybe he bought some past-date film. I remember when I started taking pictures in that era; I used grainy 400dx black and white film. You couldn't blow it up, but it was perfect for low light. Or a dark, unlit tenement.

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