For the first time ever in Paris, a big monographic exhibition is devoted to Anders Petersen at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The 330 photographs on display are not meant to be seen as a retrospective exhibition but a splendid searing journey through the work built up by the famous Swedish photographer during half a century. From the closed world of his debut to an opening up to the world, both a personal journey and the strength of an intuitive and sensual style are revealed to visitors.

In June 1974, in the wake of an acquisition, a generous donation brought 25 prints from the Café Lehmitz series to the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the first and famous series of photographs made by the young Anders Petersen. Since then, his highly personal world, already present in those pictures, has unfolded itself and expanded. Petersen has asserted his artistic approach.

“We have the privilege to present in the Mansart gallery of the BnF the works of a photographer whose talent is now worldwide acknowledged and celebrated”, says Bruno Racine, President of the BnF.

Petersen studied photography under Christer Strömholm. They share a similar vision of the world and the use of a vibrant, dynamic and sensitive photography in black and white close to snapshots. Neither roughness nor voyeurism nor complacency are allowed to taint the nature of the photographer’s encounters or his absolute sincerity towards others. The flesh of human beings and animals encountered during Petersen’s travels emerges as a flood of world objects in all their beauty and peculiarity. These street scenes, portraits and details of everyday life, insignificant or extravagant, are emphasized through an almost heretical framing practice.
« (...) It’s not really a style, for me it is an approach. I like people. There are common themes between my first pictures and what I am doing now. (...) It doesn’t work that much with anecdotes and atmospheres. It works more with light and shadows. I’m interested in a distinct, sharp attack. That is not explaining anything, that has no answers, but has many questions. And the more questions and longings I can find in one cut, the better.” says Anders Petersen.*

The exhibition aims to show the stunning plasticity of Petersen’s work. Photography is considered by the artist as a manifold medium offering a wide range of possibilities. Vintage prints stand harmoniously next to digital prints, books and contact sheets. Thanks to bold, free and adaptable layouts like installations, these photographs do not only show a vision of the visible but also a reconstruction of the visible, a way to arrange the chaos of the world.


This exhibition is a coproduction from the BnF, the Galerie VU’ and Fotografiska (Stockholm).