

UNION SQUARE



NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Philip Maier Photography

Union Square is a literal and figurative intersection of life in downtown New York City. It is the “union” of Bowery, or 4th Avenue, and Broadway. First established in 1839 - and redesigned in 1872 by Fredrick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux - it has changed from a location for theater, to aristocratic homes, to commercial establishments. The name Union has itself changed from designating a geographical point to now being associated with the labor movement. The first Labor Day rally was held there in 1882 and, later, many other such rallies. Whatever the time period, it has been a gathering place for people of all persuasions to express their passions and views, to mourn and celebrate, to join or be alone in the crowd.

The photographs in this book were taken in Union Square during the period 2001 to 2021. They show the nature and spirit of the Union Square community, and depict attitudes, emotions, trends and individual responses to various events. After September 11, 2001, Union Square was a place for people to express their mourning and remembrance for those who were lost that day. In 2008 and after people expressed their anger over the Great Recession by way of the Occupy Wall Street movement. It served as a gathering place a number of times for expression of outrage concerning racial injustice. After 2016, it has been a center for protest against Presidential excess, authoritarianism and injustice. The photographs in this book tell a story of this period.

People still went about enjoying their lives throughout these tumultuous times. Some of the photographs portray regular patrons such as chess players, musicians and the Farmers Market while others are descriptive of the location itself. The images in this collection had an impact on me. What drew me to some of them was a recognition of the importance of simply documenting these events. Others capture the emotions that people experienced while going through these times. Photography is visual literature.

To me, black and white photographs reveal more of the essence of a thing than color photos. The gradations of shade of black and white allows for more of a focus on the exhibited expression and emotion. There is a universal timeless quality which seems appropriate for the subject of this book and the feelings and events on the following pages.

The Place













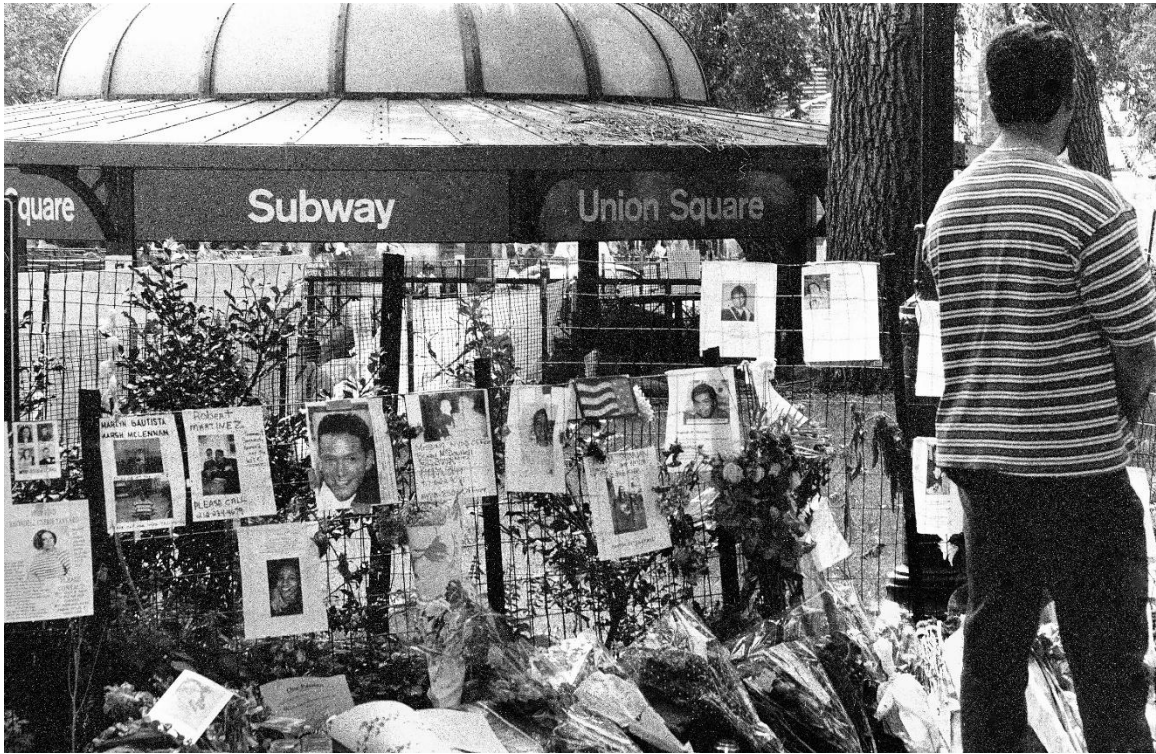






Rememberance

On the bright blue early morning of September 11, 2001 terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center. The North Tower and South Tower collapsed, resulting in the death of 2,977 people. Thousands of others were injured. Soon after, memorials went up throughout the City. These photographs were taken in the beginning of October 2001.











Chess Players

Chess players are a mainstay of Union Square. Almost every day, rain or shine, they sit near the south west corner of the Square offering a game.











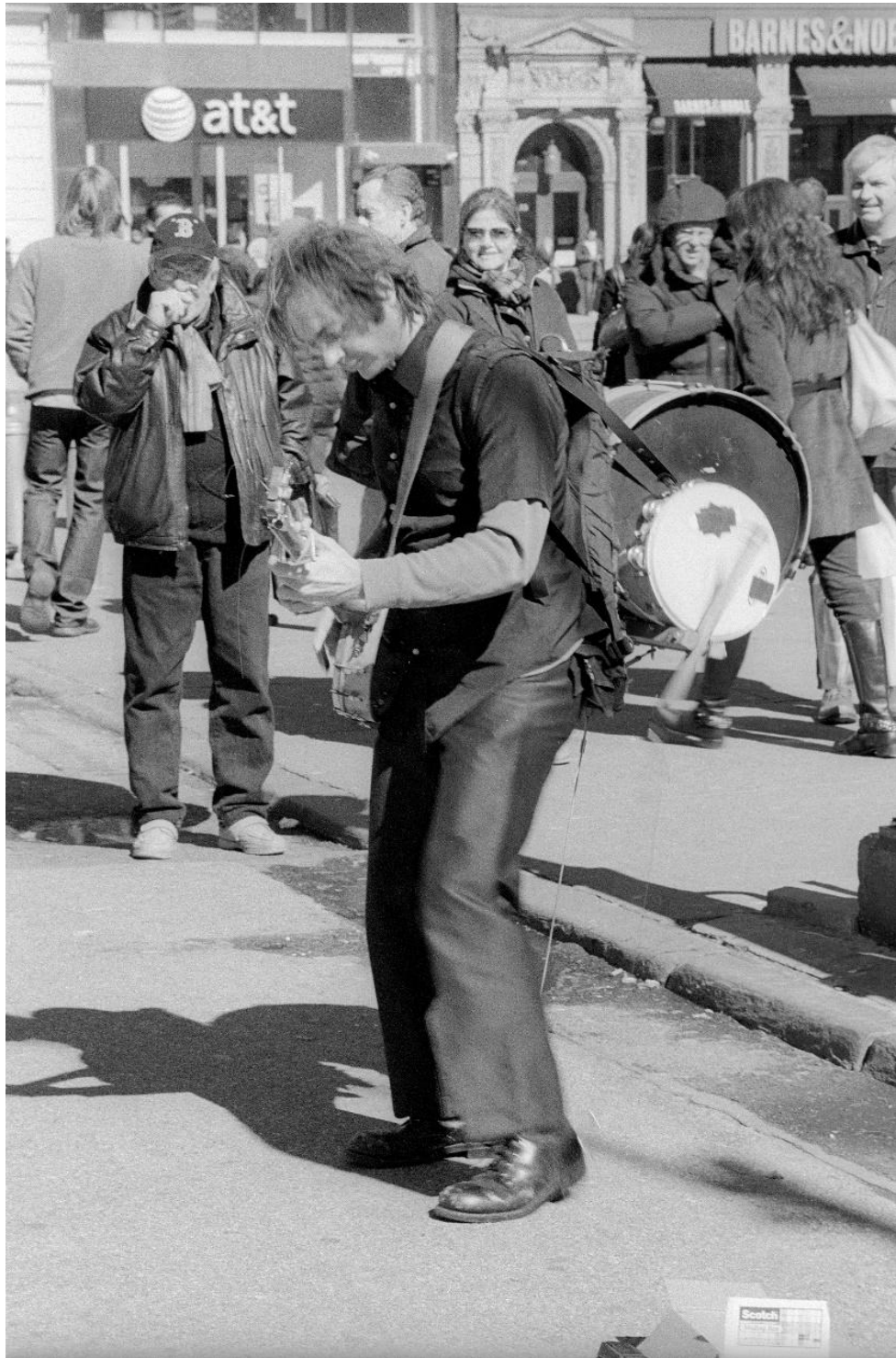
Musicians

Music is often in the air. The photographs here date back to 2006 and are only a limited sample of the types of artists that you can hear throughout the day.













People

The most interesting aspect to Union Square is the people. These photographs were taken from 2005 to the present















































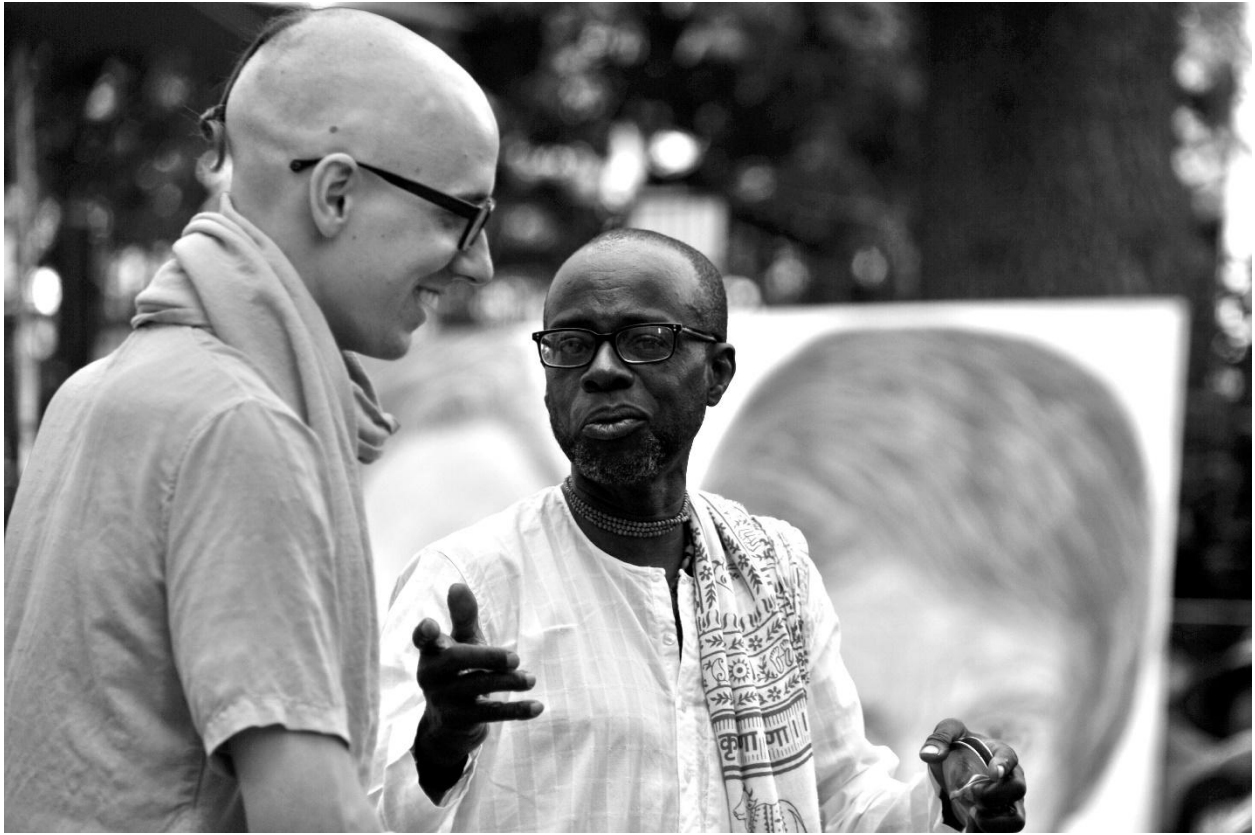


























Protest

What happens at Union Square is also a reflection of what is happening in the City and the rest of the Country. The images of the Occupy Wall Street movement and Trayvon Martin taken in 2012, hands raised symbolically in 2014, support for protesters against white supremacy in Charlottesville Virginia in 2017, reflect the Country's economic and racial tensions. Images depicting opposition to national policies, beginning with the signs in Union Square subway station, are from 2016 to 2019. The last image is of a memorial to George Floyd, John Lewis and Briana Taylor that was in Union Square during the fall of 2021.

























The Pandemic

New York City was the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. In March 2020, New York City began to lock down as a result of the virus. In April there were over 800 fatalities a day. As of the end of 2021, over 35,000 people have died. These photographs were taken during this period.

New York is recovering, will continue to do so, and will thrive. As stated in a memorial after September 11 in Washington Square Park, not too far from Union Square, New York is the Toughest City on Earth.















