

STREET LEVEL PHOTOWORKS

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN SCOTLAND

OSCAR MARZAROLI

EXTENDED UNTIL 20TH DECEMBER 2020

Oscar Marzaroli (1933 – 1938) is arguably Scotland's most notable documentary photographer. His photographs and films of Glasgow from the 1950s through to the 1980s are said to be the most evocative record of the city, capturing a period of enormous change with images of people going about their lives in the city, at work and at leisure.

Many of the black and white images depict children playing in the streets, and many simply capture the city in bygone days. Some of his most well known images detail Glasgow's Gorbals community in the 1960s. He was a photographer of great ability who captured the nature of the city and people with sensitivity and empathy. Whilst many of Marzaroli's photographs of Glasgow are instantly recognisable, such as 'The Castlemilk Lads' or 'The Golden Haired Lass', Marzaroli worked all over Scotland and further afield as a photographer and filmmaker. An extensive range of the subject matter is embraced across the broad themes of People and Places and The Gorbals, with sections devoted to Industry, Rural Scotland as well as some of the personalities he captured.

A South Bank Show feature with Melvyn Bragg on Oscar was broadcast on 1st January 1970. In the 1980s, his work was brought to a new audience when the band Deacon Blue used his images of the city and its people on their record covers. The cover of their debut album, Raintown, was taken by Marzaroli and depicted a rainy day over Glasgow's west end with the Finnieston Crane in the background. In 1991, Ricky Ross of Deacon Blue brought together a number of Glaswegian musicians to help compile a tribute album entitled The Tree and the Bird and the Fish and the Bell (the title is inspired by the coat of arms of the city of Glasgow). In the same year he was also the subject of an ITV documentary about the making of that album.

Speaking at the launch of the Oscar Marzaroli Collection at Glasgow Caledonian University in August 2019, Ricky Ross said:

Oscar's work is part of Scotland's social history. I got in touch with Oscar after I became fascinated with his work, and he ended up coming out with us and shooting some photographs for our first Deacon Blue album in different locations. I'd told him about the idea of Raintown and he called me one day to say there was a picture he thought suited it. It's the one of the sunshine coming through the clouds. We loved it and our music from that period has been linked to Oscar ever since.

His death in 1988, at the age of 55, left a huge body of work. The archive of more than 50,000 photographic negatives, as well as contact sheets and other photographic material was donated by the family to Glasgow Caledonian University in 2019, who will preserve, catalogue and digitise the archive in the course of the next few years, thereby providing a resource for current and future generations to enjoy. Street Level Photoworks are indebted to the family and GCU for their willing cooperation in locating the original negatives and documents which have been carefully scanned, edited and produced as a substantial exhibition. Such generosity of spirit is very much in keeping with Oscar's egalitarian outlook, and one that Street Level enthusiastically embrace.

Street Level would like to thank The Oscar Marzaroli Collection – and in particular Marie-Claire Maccabe and Nicola Hay; Martin Maccabe; and Carole McCallum at Glasgow Caledonian University. All Images in the exhibition © The Marzaroli Collection.

Oscar Marzaroli was born in Castiglione, La Spezia, Italy in 1933 and moved to Glasgow with his family in 1935. Between 1955 and 1959 he worked as a freelance photojournalist in Stockholm and London, and spent time touring Europe. Upon his return to Glasgow in 1959 he set up the photography studio Studio 59 and married Anne Connelly, with whom they had three daughters – Marie Claire, Nicola and Lisa Jane. In 1967 he co-founded Ogam Films with Mike Pavett and Allan & Martin Singleton and in the early 1970s they were commissioned by the Highlands and Islands Development Board to make over 69 high-quality short films relating to the changing face of life in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Through Films for Scotland and The Corporation of the City of Glasgow they produced a number of films looking at the social and structural changes taking place in Glasgow, including *Dear Green Place* (1968) which brought together a series of Oscar's stills taken over a ten year period, and *Glasgow 1980* (1978, edited by a Bill Forsyth) which speculated on how Glasgow would look in the 1980s after the redevelopment of the city centre traffic system and the construction of new housing developments, which were taking place at that time. Documentaries on a number of Scottish writers were also undertaken, which included Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley Maclean and many others.

In 1983 Marzaroli was a major contributor to *Noise and Smoky Breath - An Illustrated Anthology of Glasgow Poems, 1900-83* published by the Third Eye Centre, which was followed by his solo show and publication *One Man's World: Photographs 1955 – 84* at the Third Eye Centre in 1984 (the book featured essays by Edwin Morgan and Cordelia Oliver) followed by *Shades of Grey* in 1987, alongside the book of the same name, which included writing by William McIlvanney. A number of books have subsequently been published - *Shades of Scotland* (1989), *Glasgow's People* (1993) and *Waiting for the Magic* (2013).

A South Bank Show feature with Melvyn Bragg on Oscar was broadcast on 1st January 1970. In 1991, Ricky Ross of Deacon Blue brought together a number of Glaswegian musicians to help compile a tribute album entitled *The Tree and the Bird and the Fish and the Bell* (the title is inspired by the coat of arms of the city of Glasgow). An STV documentary *A Song for Oscar* was made featuring several bands paying tribute to Oscar, including The Silencers, The Big Dish, Wet Wet Wet, Eddi Reader, Love & Money, Hue & Cry and Deacon Blue. In 2014 the short film by Brian Ross *Oscar Marzaroli: Man with a Movie Camera* was broadcast.

The exhibition *Oscar Marzaroli, All the World's a Village* took place at Kelvingrove Art Gallery in 1990 and was one of several events in Glasgow's year as European City of Culture. Exhibitions have taken place since, such as the private galleries Bourne Fine Art in Edinburgh (2010) and Roger Bilcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (2017). This is the first major public exhibition of his work since 1990 and marks a new departure for The Oscar Marzaroli Collection since the archive was donated to Glasgow Caledonian University.