



Rudy Burckhardt: Children

By Valerie Gladstone

It would seem as if the easiest thing in the world would be to take a good picture of a child, but once you see Rudy Burckhardt's collection of 14 photographs in this illuminating exhibition, you'll realize that few photographers get anywhere near the possibilities; his talent for capturing the exuberance and tenderness of youth is truly amazing. Shot during his travels in the 1940s and '50s, the images catch children playing, thoughtful, joyful and sad, in New York City, Europe, the Caribbean and North Africa.

But they also gain their effectiveness very much through his care with composition. "Playing Ball," taken in Mexico, shows four children, each one occupied differently. A girl throws a ball against a stone wall. A little boy, clad only in underpants, grins in the doorway, while an even smaller one sits preoccupied on a stoop. Another girl, back to the camera, holds some kind of food in her hand. They are brought together by his eye and also by his understanding of children. One imagines they are either siblings or good friends, passing the day in mundane ways but alive and interested in what's around them. Far more rambunctious is the group pictured in a Naples alley, making faces, pinching one another, smiling, disconcerted and very definitely happy about being photographed. You feel their energy. Far more subdued and ladylike are the two girls in a street in Curacao. They shyly look at the camera, one simply accepting and the other sweetly curious.

In all his photographs the street matters, for that's where he found his subjects and where probably so many of them spent a lot of their time. You feel time passing, as other pedestrians look on or ignore them, their lives important for just this moment because he came upon them. They are terrifically human and humane.

Through Jan. 8, 2011, Tibor de Nagy, 724 5th Ave., 212-262-5050.