

Gillian Laub's Provocative 'Southern Rights' Exhibition Begins Tour This Fall

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contemporary art photography



Gillian Laub, *Seniors arriving at the first integrated prom, Lyons, Georgia, 2010.* © Gillian Laub, Courtesy of Benrubi Gallery



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([ArtfixDaily.com](https://www.artfixdaily.com)) Powerful Photography Exhibition Examines Legacy of Racism in America

The International Center of Photography (ICP) proudly announces details about its traveling exhibition, *Southern Rites*, featuring work by American photographer and filmmaker, and ICP alumna, Gillian Laub. The show will be on view in the Lamont Gallery at Phillips Exeter Academy (Exeter, NH) from October 26 through December 15, 2018; the Chazen Museum of Art at University of Wisconsin (Madison, WI) will follow from January 25 through May 12, 2019; and the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education (Portland, OR) from February 5 through May 24, 2020. *Southern Rites* is available to travel through 2023.

Organized by the International Center of Photography and ICP Consulting Curator Maya Benton, *Southern Rites* is a provocative and timely visual study of one community's struggle to confront longstanding issues of race and inequality. The project began as an exploration of racially segregated proms and homecoming rituals in one community in rural Georgia. Laub continued to photograph its residents for more than a decade, recording their experiences—in their own words—as she created a portrait of an American town. In the process, she investigated the racial tensions that scar much of American history.

In 2009, Laub's photographs of Montgomery County, Georgia, were published in the *New York Times Magazine*, bringing national attention to the town for the first time. The following year, the power of those photographs served as a catalyst for the integration of the town's proms. For a moment, progress seemed inevitable.

Then, in 2011, the murder of an unarmed young black man by an older white man in Montgomery County seemed to confirm every assumption about the legacy of inequality and prejudice that the community was struggling to relinquish. Laub recognized that a larger story needed to be told, and she began to film as well as photograph the changes taking place in the town—including the murder trial. Her project, which began as an exploration of segregated high school rituals evolved into a decade-long mandate to confront painful, deeply rooted national realities.

Laub has spent the past two decades investigating political conflicts, exploring complex family and community relationships, and challenging assumptions about cultural identity through her photography and filmmaking. *Southern Rites* is the culmination of that work, underscoring the hope that by examining history, future generations will liberate themselves from a harrowing and traumatic past to create a different future.

"In *Southern Rites*, Gillian engages her tremendous skills as a photographer, filmmaker, and visual activist to examine the realities of racism and raise questions that are simultaneously painful and essential to understanding the American consciousness," says Benton. "Through her lens and the voices of her subjects we encounter that which some of us do not want to witness, but what is vital for us to see. Gillian's work explores how a generation of African American youth are grappling with the legacy of segregation and racially motivated violence, and provides an inspiring example of how concerned photography can affect social change."

In May 2009, the *New York Times Magazine* published a photo essay by Gillian Laub titled, "A Prom Divided," which documented Georgia's Montgomery County High School's racially segregated homecoming and prom rituals. Laub's photographs ignited a firestorm of national outrage and led the community to finally integrate. One year later, the murder of a young black man—portrayed in Laub's prom series—by a white town patriarch reopened old wounds. Through her intimate portraits and first-hand testimony, Laub reveals in vivid color the horror and humanity of these complex, intertwined narratives. The photographer's inimitable sensibility—that it is the essence and emotional truth of the singular person in front of her lens that matters most—ensures that, however elevated the ideas and themes may be, her pictures remain studies of individuals, a chronicle of their courage in the face of injustice, of their suffering and redemption, possessing an unsettling power.

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, heralded as one the best photobooks of the year by *Time*, *Vogue*, *Smithsonian*, *American Photo*, and *LensCulture*. Laub's HBO film—praised by the *New York Times* film review as “Riveting...In a calm, understated tone, *Southern Rites* digs deep to expose the roots that have made segregated proms and other affronts possible. *Southern Rites* is a portrait of the inequities that lead to disaster on the streets of cities like Baltimore and Ferguson”—also accompanies the exhibition, which has been screened in prisons, churches, synagogues, museums, high schools, and universities.

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