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Ginsberg's pics

Cool photos chronicle a beat life

BY **FRAN SCHECHTER**

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Peter Orlovsky, born 1933, meeting his family - he's called age 47 who'd lived with me in San Francisco - N.Y. 1955-61 & later, intermittent years; Katherine Orlovsky, age 78, totally deaf after bilateral mastoid/aural operation eye to ear Hospital, N.Y. circa 1930; & her 16 year sister Marie who'd lived in our home East Side apartment 1959 for baby's bossip - Second floor flat on Ledyard Road Long Island, aka "Mad Cat" & "Supermarket" & shop faraway with social service indignity. Chicks July 26, 1987.
Alan Ginsberg

ALLEN GINSBERG at University of Toronto Art Centre (15 King's College), to December 6. 416-978-1838.

See listing. Rating: **NNNN**

You may have inherited snapshots taken in the 40s and 50s like the little prints in the first room of UTAC's show. But unlike the people in your family albums, the folks posing for Allen Ginsberg's camera were living wild, drug-fuelled and openly queer lives at a time when that was unimaginable, all while pioneering new literary forms.

Of course the author of Howl (a recording of Ginsberg reading it is piped in) is not primarily known for these black-and-white photographs, which aren't technically that different from pictures anyone might take. But they're an invaluable chronicle of avant-garde life in the second half of the 20th century, from the beat generation to Naropa Institute.

Ginsberg was a shutterbug who came to employ his camera as a notebook, and U of T's Thomas Fisher Library has acquired an archive of around 8,000 of his photos. The quality of his work improved with time and better equipment - he also had help from Berenice Abbott and Robert Frank.

The images and Ginsberg's hand-written captions across the bottom, some in the incantatory run-on sentences familiar from his poetry, convey a strong sense of the all-embracing enthusiasm and unashamed sexuality of the man behind the camera. He had a Buddhist sensibility of "capturing a fleeting moment in a floating world."

Organized chronologically into five rooms, the photos depict William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady from the 50s onward; Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Timothy Leary, R.D. Laing and many others; Ginsberg's family and that of his partner, Peter Orlovsky; and pre-digital selfies. Settings range from New York, San Francisco and Tangier to Mexico, Asia and Europe.

In the poignant images in the last room, Ginsberg has documented his own and his friends' aging. This room's and the show's title come from one of his lectures: We Are Continually Exposed To The Flashbulb Of Death. They were all now celebrities, but Ginsberg continued to portray them with the same honest, unpretentious spirit.

art@nowtoronto.com

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