



Saul Leiter in *In No Great Hurry*.
Images courtesy of Tomas Leach

Iris Veysey talks to

TOMAS LEACH, DIRECTOR OF IN NO GREAT HURRY

In the trailer for Tomas Leach's film *In No Great Hurry*, Saul Leiter muses, *'I'm a person who likes to postpone things, I see no reason to be in a rush'*. Certainly, *'rush'* is not a word to be associated with Leiter's career. He has worked steadily since the 1940s, when he began taking street photographs in New York. Though his photographs were selected by Edward Steichen for two exhibitions at the MoMA in the 1950s, it is only in recent years that his originality has been recognised. The book *Saul Leiter: Early Colour*, published by Steidl in 2011, was particularly instrumental in cementing his reputation as a pioneer of colour photography.

In 2009 director Tomas Leach set out to make a documentary about Leiter. The result is *In No Great Hurry*. Here, Leach tells Vignette about his work and the project.

How did you begin making documentaries?

Well, I've always loved non-fiction and journalism. So when I was at film school and getting frustrated at some of the ways fiction was made there, it seemed very natural to turn to documentary. It excited me more and felt like there was much more potential in it. Almost as a reaction to what I had been doing, I made my first documentary with a friend. There was a tiny crew, no script, but there were fascinating characters in amazing places and I loved it.

What drew you to Saul Leiter as a subject?

I had a book of Saul's work (*Early Color*) and I fell in love with it. His photography is so subtle, so contemporary feeling and just so beautiful. When I tried to read a little about him I found there was almost nothing around. And the intro to the book suggested someone almost hiding away, doing their own thing in their own way. That was really intriguing and inspiring, so I set out to meet him, to see if maybe he would talk to me.

Saul received very little notice for many years and has said in the past, 'I spent a great deal of my life being ignored. I was always very happy that way. Being ignored is a great privilege'. He's certainly not being ignored now. Was he resistant to the idea of the film?

I wrote to Saul's gallery [Howard Greenberg] saying that I loved his work and was thinking that a film might be good. They replied a while later and said that they would love to do something, but that Saul would like to see some of my previous work. I sent him some



films I had made and a while later the gallery told me that he had enjoyed them. I sent him some postcards saying what I wanted to do, and how I thought the film could be fun. Eventually he said that if I was in New York, he would be happy to meet me for a coffee.

So I booked a ticket to go to New York for coffee. When I arrived at his door, he opened it to me with the words 'why do people always want something from me?' and turned back indoors, leaving me on the doorstep. I followed him in, a bit unsure and we had a chat. He grilled me about my life, my family, my career and we got on pretty well. He said he was sort of open to the idea and that I could visit again that week. Later in the week, we had lunch and he signed my copy of *Early Color* with the words 'it will happen, we will see'.

It took me a year and a half to tie him down. He got put off when I was trying to raise finance, because it would mean third parties getting involved. He didn't want anyone else filming with me, just me alone. Margit, his loyal friend and co-producer of the film, drafted a contract with me that put all this in place. All through this time, I would send him postcards and give him a call just to make him sure I wasn't going away. Finally we started filming in 2010.

You spent three years working on the film. How did your relationship with Saul develop?

Through lots of small trips, we found a routine that suited us both. One that didn't exhaust Saul and meant that filming was still progressing. We would film on alternate days. I'd arrive in the morning with coffee for us both and we'd talk until lunch. Then after lunch we'd film for a little more until it was getting too much.

Over the year and a half of filming, we developed a relationship that I am really fond of. We talk about everything. He asks me as much as I ask him. It's been a privilege having someone so wise and witty in my life. I thought to myself, midway through the filming, that even if I hadn't been making a film, I would have loved the experience of walking around New York, talking to a great photographer and a fascinating older man.

*What are your plans for *In No Great Hurry*?*

Firstly, I'm getting it into as many festivals as I can. From there, I'm not sure yet. It was self-financed so there are no obligations. I just want it to be seen by as many people as possible. There will certainly be a DVD and download available. Probably in early summer.

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