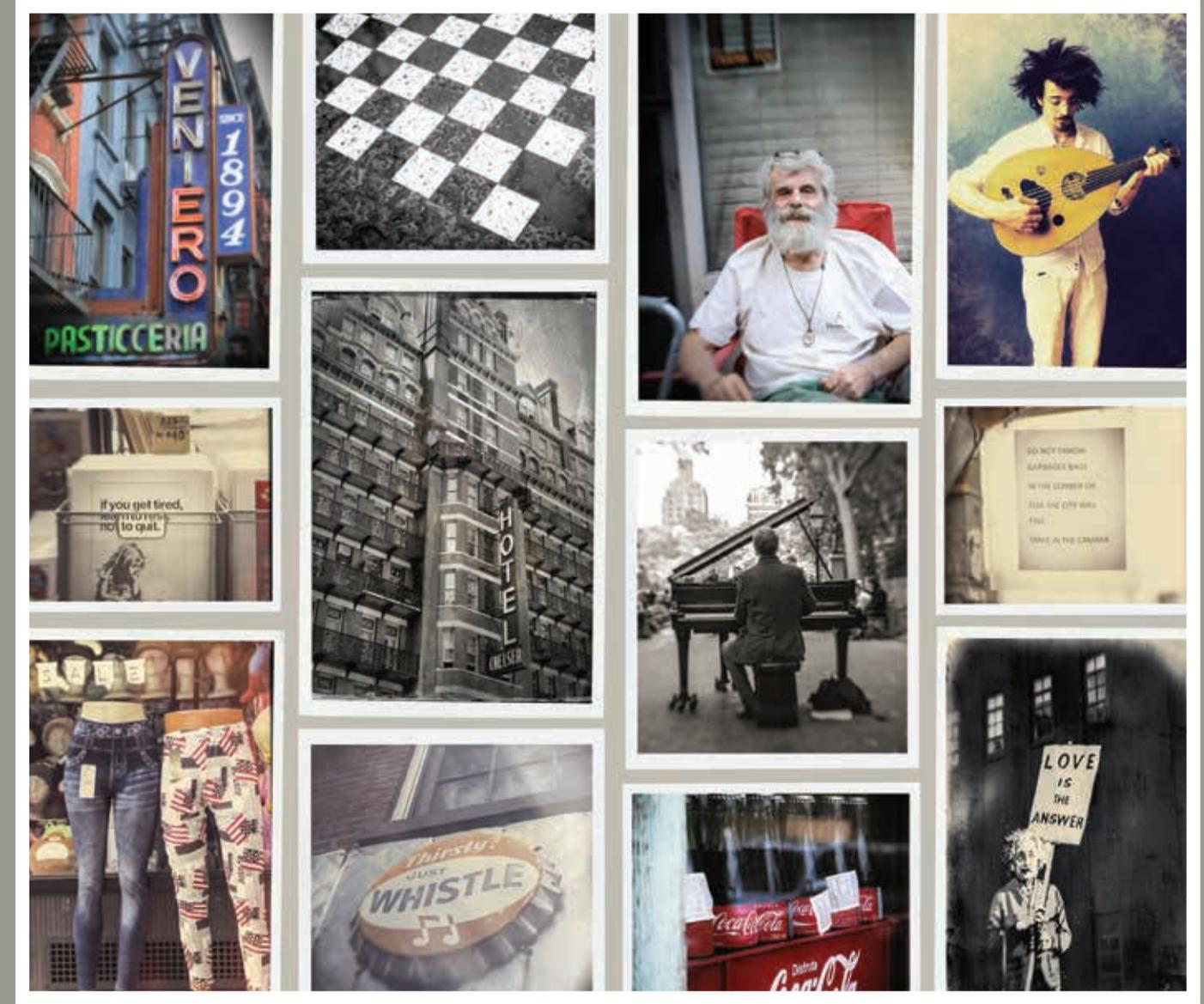


# What a Poem This Is . . .



Susan Currie

## What A Poem This Is . . .

by Susan Currie

**Manhattan . . . at every turn, in each moment there is something to be known.** I am an intruder on this island. It is a place where I do not live. Like a poem whose true meaning eludes, the city's whispers and its operas unfold in a language in which I will never be fully fluent. Yet for decades, with my camera I return, continuing the quest to translate.

Upon arrival, my "pre-game" often consists of a field trip to the fabulous New York Public Library's Photograph and Print Collections department. Among the collection's riches are American images from the 1930s and 40s, limited edition portfolios, and works by New York-based photographers working in the 1970s and 80s and beyond. Open to the public, and free for all. These excursions are my segue into the city as I commune with the works of masters such as Helen Levitt, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Jamel Shabazz and so many other photographers I meet under that roof. In his introduction to *The Americans*, Jack Kerouac praises the book's author, Robert Frank, saying, **"What a poem this is . . . the gray film that caught the actual pink juice of human kind."** A tall order for any artist to snatch that.

Always, these library hours prove to be an essential investment, well before I pick up my camera. They serve as a prelude, reminding me of the city's abundance and how to **use less in order to make more of a thing's whole.** In the presence of the work of such giants (and their processes for teasing out the soul of the city), I am lulled into a stillness and a clearer seeing. Armed with their imprints, off I then go to see for myself what I can of the city's everyday life.

In his 1949 treasure, *Here is New York*, E. B. White wrote of the city's inhabitants: **"they meet confusion and congestion with patience and grit—a sort of perpetual muddling through."** I suppose that is the through-line that most speaks to me and ultimately opens the shutter on my frames. That is the poetry, the "pink juice" that never fails in its sermon of the human predicament, never fails to stretch my mind and reinstall in me the truth of my very small figure on this planet.

Also in the pages of *Here is New York*, White advised, **"No one should come to New York to live unless he is willing to be lucky."** These visual notes and rhymes I continue to make are **my little bow to this city of dreamers and wanderers and muddlers... and a testament to the poems they make.** ✨

