

# Steve Lawrence's Newspaper

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Art Books

## An alternative exhibition space for photographers whose work was not being shown in galleries or museums

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Steve Lawrence, Peter Hujar, and Andrew Ullrick

Edited by Marcelo Gabriel Yáñez

*Newspaper*

(Primary Information, 2023)

In 1968, Steve Lawrence, with the help of his then-partner Peter Hujar, began to publish *Newspaper* out of the photographer's studio in the East Village. Dubbing itself the "NO WORD NEWSPAPER" on its first official cover, *Newspaper* was an image-only publication. With contributions by the network of downtown New York artists associated with Lawrence and Hujar, *Newspaper's* pages displayed contemporary art and photography alongside appropriated images lifted from the pages of magazines like *Life* or the pornographic periodicals one could purchase in Times Square. Like much of the artwork it featured, *Newspaper* summarized contemporary experience through the disjunctive visual relationships between images.

At the time of its publication, *Newspaper's* readership was formed through the community of queer-leaning artists in downtown New York and in the smokey bar room at Max's Kansas City where the publication was distributed. All fourteen issues of *Newspaper* (1968-1971) are now available in a large tabloid-sized volume published by Primary Information. Presented matter-of-factly with a single black page separating each issue, the book maintains the integrity of its source. At the back, an extensively researched image key and timeline is offered as a prompt for contemporary readers and scholars to dig further into the periodical's history, much of which was lost when, as its editor Marcelo Gabriel Yáñez notes, "most of its leadership, audience, and contributors died in the 1980s and '90s as a result of the AIDS crisis."

As a notable example of a primarily photographic artist periodical, *Newspaper* was an alternative exhibition space for photographers whose work was not being shown in galleries or museums. To look at Hujar's contributions to *Newspaper*, art and advertisement bleed into one another. His photographs of Iggy Pop in tight pants printed as an advertisement for the forthcoming album *The Stooges* display the same sensual care as any of his other portraits. It was this disregard for the functional separation of photography and pop culture that

brought Hujar's photographs into MoMA for the first time in 1970, when the curator Kynaston McShine displayed an entire issue of *Newspaper* in a floor-to-ceiling grid within his seminal exhibition of conceptual art *Information*.

The kind of seeing *Newspaper* proposes distills our essentially disjointed experience of images today. Within the surprising jolt between a portrait of one of Warhol's lonesome cowboys and a photograph of rhinoceroses having sex (June 1969 issue) is the simultaneous anxiety and reverie that characterizes our contemporary consumption of media. No longer slowed to the turning of a page, now, an algorithmically designed infinite scroll presents us images of newly opened exhibitions alongside a clip from the Kardashians or drone-bombed Ukraine. I do not mean to suggest that social media replicates the editorial sensibility of *Newspaper*. Far from it. But perhaps Lawrence and Hujar already demonstrated how to deal with a communication world where visual information, likewise, seemed beyond the scope of comprehension: simply create your own.

While *Newspaper* reproduced countless images that were distributed by mass media systems for passive consumption, its pages are structured by intimacy as an active state of being. If we were to analyze the rhythm of *Newspaper's* language, the inherent syncopation of its imagery, we'd often find the juxtaposition of shock and desire, as if these base impulses are the most productive conduit of non-verbal communication. This editorial philosophy is made explicit in Lawrence's contribution to each issue, in which pornographic, popular, and bizarre photographs are composed into loosely-gridded "environments," as he labeled them. In a two-page environment from the second issue, for example, Lawrence's appropriated photographs form a kind of poetry, where a sleeping man lying face down offering his naked flesh to our gaze begins to rhyme with the adjacent photograph of a chest-bare Robert F. Kennedy in the immediate aftermath of his assassination. In Lawrence's amalgamation of found imagery, this image of national tragedy is no longer newsworthy but rather a part of a personal, relational vision.

The cuts, crops, additions, and even new contexts of display within *Newspaper's* pages are all part of a dialogue between making and consuming. Once the periodical arrived in a reader's hands, this process of transformation continued. It's easy to imagine subscribers ripping out pages and pasting them to their wall to construct intimate exhibition spaces of their favorite artists or their preferred splayed open body. For as readers of *Newspaper* may have learned, to experience reverence is not so far from desire. And with this reissue, you can do the same.