

**Robert F. Kennedy
Funeral Train —
The People's View**

Rein Jelle Terpstra

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Curated by Pedro Vicente.

Fabra i Coats:
Centre d'Art
Contemporani

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



On 5 June 1968, after winning the California primary in his run for U.S. president, New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) was shot by Sirhan Bashara Sirhan, a Palestinian who was against the senator's pro-Israeli position. RFK died in hospital in Los Angeles the next day. He never became president but had managed to establish a very close connection with the American people during the tumultuous decade of the 1960s. Those were years marked by division, violence, racial tension, civil rights movements, student protests and the assassinations of figures who left an impression on an entire generation, such as his brother, President John F. Kennedy, assassinated in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King in 1968, two months before RFK.

During his brief presidential campaign, RFK visited some of the poorest regions in the U.S., supported striking farmworkers, lent his name to the flourishing movement against the war in Vietnam and even dared to defy the president of his own party, democrat Lyndon Johnson, regarding his stance on the war. One of the most intense moments of his campaign was on 4 April 1968, when civil rights leader Martin Luther King was gunned down in Memphis. RFK was, at that moment, campaigning in Indianapolis, and spontaneously stood up on the back of a lorry to give the shocking news to a mainly Afro-American crowd, saying "For those of you who are black and are tempted to fill with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling." Very few white men in the United States would have been able to transmit the same message creating the same empathy.

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, RFK became a symbol of hope for many people, black and white, capable of restoring the dream of an entire nation. He was the national leader who inspired the most respect and enthusiasm, the only white politician in the U.S. who could walk the streets of working-class neighbourhoods and be cheered by black and white people at the same time.

RFK died in the middle of his campaign for the White House, on 6 June 1968, and his funeral became an affair of state. It was decided that it would be celebrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York and that he would be buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., taking his coffin on a 21-wagon funeral train, as had been done for the funerals of presidents Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, James Garfield, William McKinley, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower.

The journey from Penn Station in New York to Union Station in Washington, D.C. took eight hours, twice as long as expected, due to an accident that occurred and to avoid others, given the crowds that gathered



William F. Wisnom Sr - Tullytown, Pennsylvania.

all along the train's route. Over a million people congregated at train stations and along the railway in a monumental and spontaneous demonstration of collective grief and mourning that would go down in history. On board this slow funeral train was photographer Paul Fusco, hired by *LOOK* magazine to document the journey. Fusco photographed the bewildered mourners as they watched the train go by, photographing and recording it with their own cameras, whilst the train itself remained outside Fusco's camera lens in most of his photographs.

Interested in his artistic work for its relationship between perception, memory and the absence of images, Rein Jelle Terpstra was fascinated with the enigma of what those people saw as the train passed by and with the images they had captured with their own cameras. Between 2014 and 2017, he carried out a thorough investigation in search of the people who had come together to bid farewell to RFK, asking them about the photos and home movies they took that day. Terpstra travelled the same railway lines numerous times, spoke to hundreds of people, visited local and state archives, historical societies, associations, town halls and historians, put adverts in local newspapers and used social networks to find the people who had taken photos that day of the passing train.

The *RFK Funeral Train — The People's View* project comprises a collection of more than 200 photographs and a dozen home movies taken on that hot summer day, 8 June 1968. In addition to reproductions of the photographs taken along the train's route, the project includes an audiovisual production of some of the videos filmed that day, testimonies gathered by

Terpstra, additional documentation and a photo-book with all the stages of the project as well as unpublished materials. Terpstra's work reverses Fusco's perspective and places the mourners in a key position, not only as protagonists of the images taken by another person, Fusco, but also as the authors, as they become photographers and filmmakers, recording and documenting in their own way and with their own cameras, this historic moment. This project, based on recollections, memories, snapshots, home movies and sounds, recorded by the many people who lined the train tracks, offers a meticulously elaborated view of a parallel story, from the inside out, created by all sorts of people, in an alternative universe to the official history, one where the spectator is witness to a story that is narrated from the other side: the people's view.

This view, this new story, reinforces the relationship between photograph and memory, where memories are recovered from photographs and where photographs build memories, thus demonstrating the role of these images in the creation of our collective memory. As a whole, these individual memories of RFK's final journey create a narrative that helps the (re)construction of a collective identity through this original and unexpected photographic vision and the photographic (re)production that Terpstra's work provides us from the people's perspective. The *RFK Funeral Train — The People's View* project not only aims to recover and save graphic documents of RFK's funeral train but also to explore forms of relationship and contextualisation of memories in the creation of a collective identity through accumulating and interrelating images.

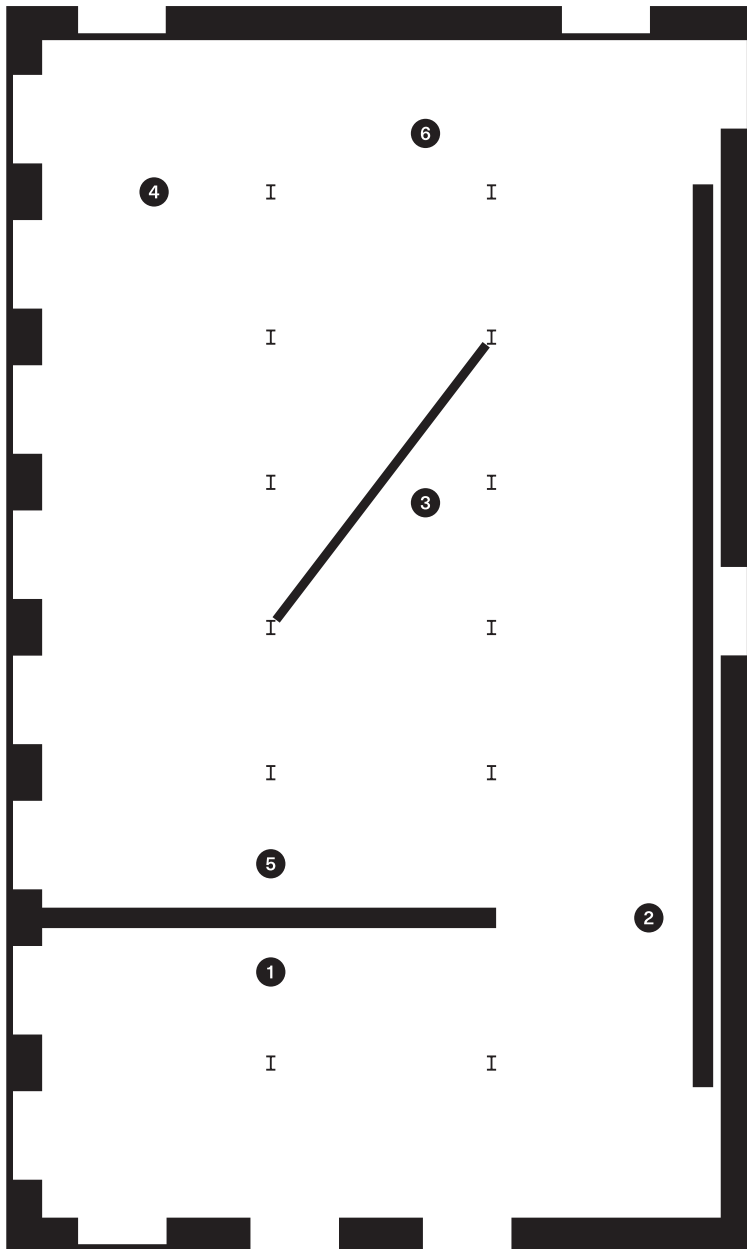
In our modern culture, the archive and recollection of memories, through the storage, collection, safeguarding and exhibition of images, plays a vital role in contemporary art, particularly in the visual arts of recent decades. Visual arts, and in particular photography, have always been associated with a note of the ephemeral, the transformation of the concept of record and its representation, with capturing the unique, fortuitous, instantaneous in the form of archive. Photographs only hold moments, we keep photographs to archive those moments, not for nothing does photography directly influence what we remember and how we remember it. The images of Terpstra's project form a structure created to protect against time and its inevitable and necessary corruption. Its main role is to recover and redeem as much as possible before it's too late and to anticipate, unnecessarily, how it will be interpreted in the future.

Rein Jelle Terpstra is like an archaeologist of memories, rescuing, recovering, restoring, creating and ultimately representing a new view of and from collective memory. His work recalls, but above all (re)generates and explores this undefined area between the past of events and the



Theodore Jack – Levittown, Pennsylvania.

present of memories, which mysteriously finds sanctuary in the construction of the future. It shows us static images and installations that lead us to contemplate, to not remain indifferent before (re)constructed memory, which reveal documents that have become monuments. This project doesn't attempt to interpret each image as valuable in itself, it doesn't interpret them as one document isolated from the rest, but by connecting them and their social and historical contexts, it creates a new value, meaning and uses. *RFK Funeral Train — The People's View* is based on archive images as a support for the memories and the memories as a support for themselves, where this confluence of data recovery generates a re-reading in a discovered time and space that invites us to re-assess the concept of collecting the materiality of memory.



GROUND FLOOR

1.

10 photographs taken by Paul Fusco on board Robert F. Kennedy's funeral train, 1968. 30×40 cm

On 8 June 1968, commissioned by *LOOK* magazine, photographer Paul Fusco boarded Robert F. Kennedy's funeral train. During the eight-hour journey, Fusco shot around 1000 slides on Kodachrome 64 and Ektachrome 400 film. When *LOOK* closed in 1971, these photographs almost ended up in the rubbish. Luckily, an employee of the magazine took the initiative and suggested donating the entire collection of slides to the United States Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

For many years, the slides were stored in the Library of Congress and were never shown publicly, until 2000, when Magnum Photos, in collaboration with Umbrage Editions, published a small collection of the photographs in a book, *RFK Funeral Train*, a retrospective of a people and an era. With the permission of Marina Fusco, daughter of Paul Fusco, and gallery owner James Danziger, ten of Fusco's images have been selected for this exhibition, ones that were the source of inspiration for this project and led to a moving photographic reconstruction of the historical train journey through a reversal of Fusco's perspective.

2.

83 reprints of snapshots and slides recreating the journey from New York to Washington D.C., 2014–2022. Varying sizes

In 2014, fascinated by Fusco's photographs and curious to know what the people who attended the funeral saw, Rein Jelle Terpstra decided to reverse Fusco's perspective and search for the images taken while the people waited or watched RFK's funeral train pass by. Terpstra travelled to the U.S. on various occasions, managing to find more than 200 photographs and slides, of which 83 are included in this exhibition. Based on these images, which were generously given to him, he reconstructed what he calls "the people's view", not the view of the professional photographer on the train but that of the anonymous witnesses, from all walks of life, presenting a photographic reconstruction of this historical journey from the perspective of the people, in contrast to Paul Fusco's collection. The photographs are arranged along a line that reproduces the route taken by the train from New York to Washington, D.C. and the place they were taken. The following are those who took these photographs, together with the place and time they were taken on that day, 8 June 1968.

#1
Rich Taylor
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.35

#2
William Botkin
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.36

#3
William Botkin
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.36

#4
Howard James Woods
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.36

#5
Howard James Woods
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.36

#6
Howard James Woods
Elizabeth, New Jersey
13.36

#7
Genevieve Tarka
Iselin, New Jersey
13.42

#8
Claire Leary
Iselin, New Jersey
13.55

#9
Claire Leary
Iselin, New Jersey
13.55

#10
Claire Leary
Iselin, New Jersey
13.55

#11
Barbara Trimblett
Iselin, New Jersey
13.55

#12
Barbara Trimblett
Iselin, New Jersey
13.55

#13
Byron Sondergart
Metuchen, New Jersey
14.15

#14
Byron Sondergart
Metuchen, New Jersey
14.15

#15
Byron Sondergart
Metuchen, New Jersey
14.15

#16
Michael Finley
Metuchen, New Jersey
14.15

#17
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#18
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#19
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#20
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#21
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#22
William F. Wisnom Sr
Tullytown, Pennsylvania
15.45

#23
Theodore Jack
Levittown, Pennsylvania
15.46

#24
Norman C. Lufkin Sr
Levittown, Pennsylvania
15.55

#25
Norman C. Lufkin Sr
Levittown, Pennsylvania
15.55

#26
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#27
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#28
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#29
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#30
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#31
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#32
Francis J. Kurfuerst
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.12

#33
Suzan Schemm
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
16.30

#34
Senta Booze
Claymont, Delaware
16.50

#35
Stan Killian
Claymont, Delaware
16.55

#36
Gary Laurenzo
Wilmington, Delaware
17.25

#37
Larry Mosuly
Wilmington, Delaware
17.30

#38
Donald Dutton
Newark, Delaware
17.35

#39
Donald Dutton
Newark, Delaware
17.35

#40
Mary Sue Newton
Newark, Delaware
17.40

#41
Mary Sue Newton
Newark, Delaware
17.40

#42
Mary Sue Newton
Newark, Delaware
17.40

#43
Terry Monjon
Newark, Delaware
17.40

#44
Annie Ingram
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#45
Annie Ingram
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#46
Annie Ingram
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#47
Annie Ingram
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#48
Milford Sprecher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#49
Milford Sprecher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#50
Milford Sprecher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#51
Milford Sprecher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#52
Al and Richard Beacher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#53
Al and Richard Beacher
Elkton, Maryland
17.55

#54
Philomena Lepore
Charlestown, Maryland
18.05

#55
Leon Whitmill
Perryville, Maryland
18.10

#56
Leon Whitmill
Perryville, Maryland
18.10

#57
Leon Whitmill
Perryville, Maryland
18.10

#58
Leon Whitmill
Perryville, Maryland
18.10

#59
Leon Whitmill
Perryville, Maryland
18.10

#60
Janie Thompson
Aberdeen, Maryland
18.30

#61
Raymond L. Klein
Gunpowder River,
Maryland
18.45

#62
Phil Marll
Middlesex, Maryland
19.00

#63
Phil Marll
Middlesex, Maryland
19.00

#64
Phil Marll
Middlesex, Maryland
19.00

#65
Phil Marll
Middlesex, Maryland
19.00

#66
Phil Marll
Middlesex, Maryland
19.00

#67
Stephanie Sansone Lang
Baltimore, Maryland
19.05

#68
Harlow Henderson
Baltimore, Maryland
19.10

#69
Harlow Henderson
Baltimore, Maryland
19.10

#70
Herbert H. Harwood Jr
Baltimore, Maryland
19.20

#71
Herbert H. Harwood Jr
Baltimore, Maryland
19.20

#72
Herbert H. Harwood Jr
Baltimore, Maryland
19.20

#73
Brenda MacDonald
Odenton, Maryland
19.50

#74
Brenda MacDonald
Odenton, Maryland
19.50

#75
Brenda MacDonald
Odenton, Maryland
19.50

#76
William E. Miller Jr
Bowie, Maryland
20.15

#77
William E. Miller Jr
Bowie, Maryland
20.15

#78
William E. Miller Jr
Bowie, Maryland
20.15

#79
William E. Miller Jr
Bowie, Maryland
20.15

#80
William E. Miller Jr
Bowie, Maryland
20.15

#81
Linda Blachly
Seabrook, Maryland
20.30

#82
Linda Blachly
Seabrook, Maryland
20.30

#83
Alan Virta
Ardwick, Maryland
20.40

3.

Video installation with 5 screens, 2014–2018. 7000×105 cm. 7 min 37 s

This installation includes some of the photographs, sound recordings and fragments of 8 mm film taken by people who went to bid farewell to RFK, which Terpstra gathered during the project.

This material includes a recording of the original sound of New Brunswick's High School Band playing alongside the train tracks. The day before the funeral, on 7 June 1968, a group of war veterans went to New Brunswick secondary school, in New Jersey, to ask if the school band could play military songs as the train carrying the coffin passed by. With almost no time to practice, the band met the following day to pay homage to RFK with their songs. Originally, they were to play for an hour but the train was delayed due to an accident in Linden and the concert lasted several hours.

When the band's conductor learnt of the delay, he told the music students to take a well-earned break. Some of the television crews that were broadcasting the funeral live across the country from the same station asked the band to keep playing to fill in the endless hours of waiting. For months after, the band received gestures of thanks, from letters to donations, from all corners of the country for their improvised television performance and for making the long and painful wait more bearable.

4.

Home movie filmed by Larry Beers, 8 June 1968. 4 min 2 s

Bidding farewell to RFK mostly involved waiting. People stood for hours on that warm muggy June day, waiting for the train to pass by and to see it, albeit for a minute. Of all the people who gave their films to Rein Jelle Terpstra for his project, Larry Beers was the only one who not only filmed the train as it passed by but also took the time to film the long wait. From an overpass, Beers filmed the empty train tracks and recorded how they slowly filled with people. This home movie isn't edited, it is exactly how Beers filmed it. His voice and his remarkable story were recorded during a conversation Terpstra had with him in 2016.

5.

Video installation screening different testimonies, 2014–2018. Varying sizes

The 8 June 1968 was a very hot day. Despite this, more than a million people spent hours waiting to bid farewell to Robert F. Kennedy. On that Saturday, one of the greatest demonstrations of pain and public grieving occurred in the recent history of the United States. People from every social class, race, religion and belief lined the train tracks to pay their

respects to RFK. They waved flags and held up homemade signs with words of condolence, they waved and held their hands to their hearts, they prayed and cried. One of those historical moments that people remember for the rest of their lives. A day that significantly changed the country's history but also altered the collective identity of a people catalysed by a spontaneous collective expression of grief. This video installation includes different testimonies about that day, recorded by Rein Jelle Terpstra during his research.

6.

Documentation materials, 2014–2018. Varying sizes

Rein Jelle Terpstra produced and collected an enormous amount of archive material and additional documentation over the years it took him to create his project *RFK Funeral Train — The People's View*. The documentation includes original announcements published in different local newspapers, promotional materials from Robert F. Kennedy's election campaign, the edition of *LOOK* magazine dedicated to his death and some of the letters received by the New Brunswick High School Band in the weeks after 8 June 1968 thanking them for their performance during the long hours waiting to see RFK's funeral train pass by.

Included here is the book *Robert F. Kennedy Funeral Train — The People's View*, published by FW:Books in 2018, in collaboration with the Magnum Foundation. In addition to Rein Jelle Terpstra's project, this photo-book includes 10 photographs taken by Paul Fusco never-before-published and two texts written by David Levi Strauss and Taco Hidde Bakker. It has won numerous awards and nominations, including the Gold Medal in 2019 in the Best Book Design from all over the World competition, organised by Stiftung Buchkunst (Leipzig).

Opening times

Tuesdays to Saturdays, 12.00 to 20.00
Sundays and Holidays, 11.00 to 15.00

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