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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

### MTA Arts for Transit Brings Marilyn Monroe to 42nd Street

#### *New Photography Exhibit, "Marilyn in New York" Features Works by Sam Shaw*

The image of Marilyn Monroe stepping over a subway grate as a gust of wind sends her skirt twirling is the very definition of the phrase "iconic image." The MTA is giving new life to the photo and other rarely seen photographs taken by the same photographer at a new exhibit at two locations on 42nd Street featuring the work of photographer and filmmaker Sam Shaw.

The iconic image was shot above the Lexington Avenue Subway in 1954 by Shaw, who had an early and long-time association with Monroe. In 1957, the two spent a day wandering around Manhattan, taking photos in Central Park, along Fifth Avenue, and elsewhere. These images are showcased in an MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design Lightbox Exhibition in two locations.

Eight photographs from the day-long photo shoot can be seen in the 42 St-Bryant Park BDFM7 subway station. A supersized version of the iconic subway grate photograph is on view at 42 nd Street and Broadway, just outside of the entrance to the Times Square subway complex.

Together, the installation offers New Yorkers a view of rarely seen photographs of the actress in unguarded, playful poses, captured by her friend and longtime photographer. Capped by the iconic photo at the subway, but in a print that offers a different perspective, Marilyn meets her public in the highly visible venue of Times Square, a place appropriate to her fame. The pairing of Hollywood icon with the teeming crowds at Times Square and the 42nd Street subway riders introduces Marilyn to new generations of New Yorkers and visitors from around the globe.

"The New York City Subway made Marilyn Monroe's most iconic image possible through its serendipitous updrafts from our sidewalk ventilation grates," said Lester Burg, MTA Arts for Transit's manager who handles the lightbox program. "And now the image is returning home through the MTA's program to enliven the subway with engaging photos by New York photographers. Matching the mass transit setting with a pop culture figure beloved by the masses seemed like a great fit."

The exhibit pays tribute to Marilyn Monroe on the 50th anniversary of her death and is part of the Sam Shaw centennial.

Shaw is best known for the famous Marilyn image on the subway grate. Shaw photographed the image as a publicity still for the film "The Seven Year Itch" in 1954, on Lexington Avenue in front of the then Trans-Lux Theatre between 51 st and 52 nd Streets. The film script has Monroe's character walking over a subway grate and remarking on the cool breeze.

"These photos, which Sam took during a day in Manhattan, show Marilyn as she really was – playful and sweet," said Melissa Stevens, Sam Shaw's granddaughter, who coordinated the exhibit with the MTA. "Marilyn and Sam shared a mutual appreciation for the arts and each called New York home. They would be thrilled that these photos are now on display in the subway for the public to see and enjoy."

Sam Shaw, a lifelong New Yorker, was born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1912. He was a photojournalist in the 1940s, and by the 1950s his photographs appeared frequently on the cover of *Life*, *Look* and other major publications. He photographed films and stars and in 1961, produced his first film, "Paris Blues," starring Paul Newman. He also produced many of John Cassavetes' groundbreaking independent films, including the award-winning "Gloria," "Opening Night," and "A Woman Under the Influence." Today, Sam Shaw's work is preserved and promoted by the Shaw Family Archives. For more information, visit [www.shawfamilyarchives.com](http://www.shawfamilyarchives.com).

MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design worked closely with sponsor Duggal Visual Solutions, who met the challenge of enlarging vintage negatives and printing the photographs in the large format transparencies. "Marilyn in New York" will be on view for one year.

MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design enhances the transit environment throughout the MTA system with permanent art, music performances, poetry and posters, and the Lightbox Project, which features the work of photographers in four key locations – Grand Central Dining Concourse, 42 St-Bryant Park, Atlantic Av-Barclays Center and Bowling Green. Visit [www.mta.info/art](http://www.mta.info/art) or download the Meridian app to learn more about these programs and projects.



Stevens explained how the idea for the iconic photo came about: "In 1941, Sam photographed a young woman playing on a ride in Coney Island with her skirt blowing from the wind. The photo made the cover of *Friday*, a popular magazine. It was a big success and the magazine sold out. Years later, when Sam read the script for the 'The Seven Year Itch', he remembered the Coney Island shoot, and used the same concept to create the iconic image of Marilyn with her white dress blowing up from the Lexington Line subway passing underneath. Sam's photograph was so popular it became known as 'the shot seen round the world'."



All photos courtesy Sam Shaw Archives.