

#71 April 2022 Cameraderie
Harry Callahan (1912-99)



Harry Callahan is the fourth of five founders of the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) at the University of Arizona that I am currently working through. Before him, I have already discussed Ansel Adams (#12, March 2014), Wynn Bullock (#66, Nov. 2021), and Aaron Siskind (#70, March 2022). Following this article, I will discuss Frederick Sommer.

I discussed the CCP at length last month in the Aaron Siskind article. The website of the CCP is here: <https://ccp.arizona.edu/>

The Callahan Wikipedia article is here:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Callahan_\(photographer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Callahan_(photographer))

From the Wikipedia article:

Callahan left almost no written records—no diaries, letters, scrapbooks or teaching notes. His technical photographic method was to go out almost every morning, walk through the city he lived in and take numerous pictures. He then spent almost every afternoon making proof prints of that day's best negatives. Yet, for all his photographic activity, Callahan, at his own estimation, produced no more than half a dozen final images a year [If the standard is at this level, fine with me if I could produce that!].

He photographed his wife and daughter and the streets, scenes and buildings of cities where he lived, showing a strong sense of line and form, and light and darkness. Even prior to birth, his daughter showed up in photographs of Eleanor's pregnancy. From 1948 to 1953 Eleanor, and sometimes Barbara, were shown out in the landscape as a tiny counterpoint to large expanses of park, skyline or water.

He also worked with multiple exposures. Callahan's work was a deeply personal response to his own life. He encouraged his students to turn their cameras on their own lives, leading by

example. Callahan photographed his wife over a period of fifteen years, as his prime subject. Eleanor was essential to his art from 1947 to 1960. He photographed her everywhere—at home, in the city streets, in the landscape; alone, with their daughter, in black and white and in color, nude and clothed, distant and close. He tried several technical experiments—double and triple exposure, blurs, large and small format film.

Callahan was one of the few innovators of modern American photography noted as much for his work in color as for his work in black and white. In 1955 Edward Steichen [#9, Sept. 2013] included his work in *The Family of Man* [#22, Sept. 2017, #69, Feb. 2022], MoMA's popular international touring exhibition.

See the site of the International Center of Photography for a biography and to view a collection of Callahan's images, especially his work in color:

<https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/harry-callahan?all/all/all/all/0>

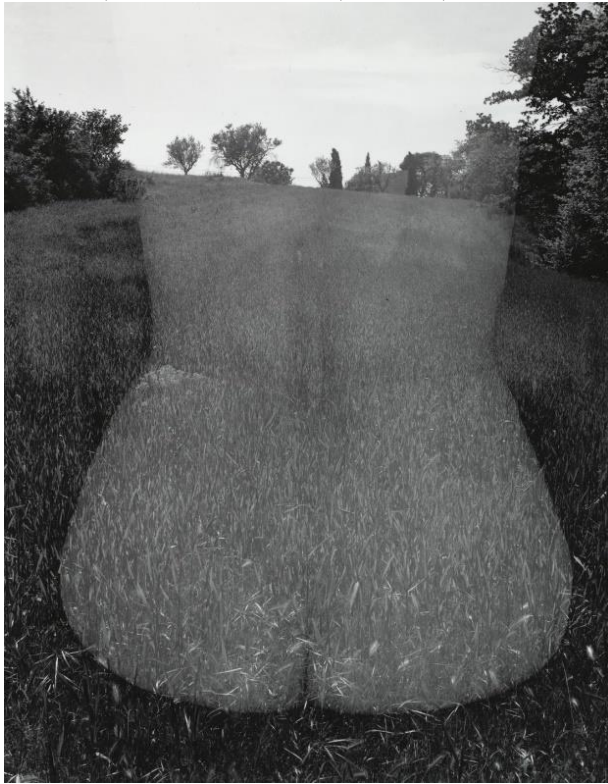
This NY Times article tells the story of Callahan's wife, Eleanor, who was his constant model, and the special attention he gave to photographing her:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/arts/design/02call.html>

As usual, Google "Harry Callahan" and select "Images" to see many of Callahan's photographs. Google "Harry Callahan nudes" and select "Images" to see many of his nude studies, entirely of his wife, Eleanor. To see his color work, Google "Harry Callahan color" and select "Images."

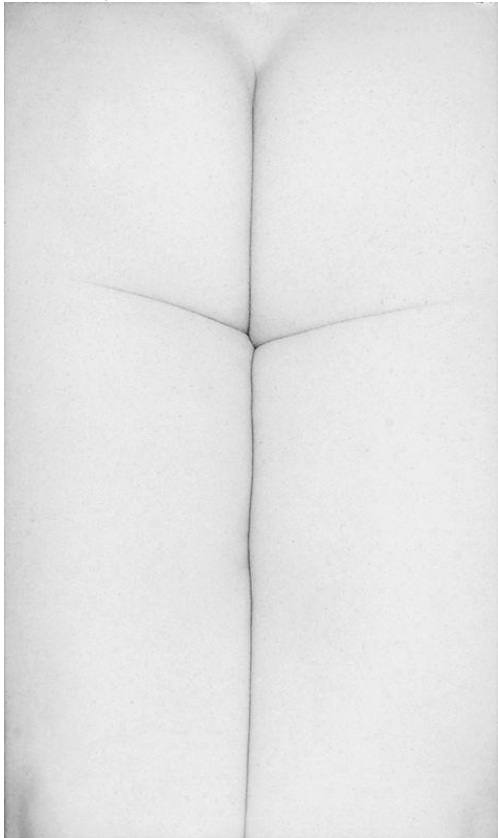
Here are some of Callahan's best-known images:

Eleanor, Aix-en-Provence, France, 1958.



Callahan experimented with double exposures. These nudes of his wife, Eleanor, commemorate a year they spent in France.

Eleanor, 1947.



Weed Against the Sky (EM97). 1947.



I have paired this nude shot of Callahan's wife, Eleanor, and one of his "Weeds in Snow" shots for obvious reasons. Callahan frequently photographed his wife nude, and he shot a great number of his "Weeds in Snow" images. I have an unverified impression that the concept of the image on the left was original to Callahan and has been often imitated.

Eleanor, 1947.



Eleanor, 1945.



These two portraits of Callahan's wife, Eleanor, are composed with great precision. On the left, of course the composition is high key, completely hiding Eleanor's dark hair, but note the inclusion of the left-hand fingertips wrapped all the way around to Eleanor's right side. On the right, the building is carefully arranged to occupy $\frac{3}{4}$ of the image.

Chicago, 1949.



A rectilinear façade with diagonal fire escapes—a classic street shot. The faux-Italian-Renaissance stonework diagonals echo the modern fire escape diagonals. I find it interesting that Callahan did not shoot this in direct sunlight, which has provided many photographers with diagonal lines on building façades. Perhaps he just had to make do on a cloudy day, or maybe he felt the shafts of sunlight were a cliché to avoid, or he preferred the fire escape lines to shafts of sunlight—not possible to know.

Providence, 1967.



I have a long personal fascination with split compositions like this. I find the double story-telling fascinating.

Ireland, 1979.



I will finish with a sample of Callahan's color work. I like this shot because it has the same split image composition as the previous one. Callahan's color work is significant; to see more, Google "Harry Callahan color" and select "Images."