

★ **The Jazz Loft Project: Photographs and Tapes of W. Eugene Smith from 821 Sixth Avenue, 1957–1965.**

By Sam Stephenson.

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In 1957, the great photo-essayist W. Eugene Smith (1918–78) had abandoned his family and settled into a five-story Manhattan loft building that already hosted a couple of artists and jazz composer-arranger Hall Overton. Smith was frazzled and soon popping pills. In his restlessness, he pursued his major passions, photography and jazz, filling the building with his professional equipment and wiring it to record the wee-hours jam sessions that Overton's presence attracted and, eventually, anything else he thought might be worthwhile: conversation desultory and focused, radio and TV programs, the ambient sound of a place whose tenants were seldom out or asleep at the same time. He seems not to have had anything concretely in mind but did talk about the photos and recordings made at 821 Sixth Avenue as a potential professional project. Stephenson, who rescued Smith's never completed documentary on Pittsburgh (*Dream Street*, 2001), here does the same for his loft work. The pictures were taken mostly out Smith's street-facing windows and inside when the stars of late bop were jamming. The samples from the tapes that Stephenson had transcribed work with the photos to bring a moment in jazz to life as perhaps no work in any other medium, including documentary cinema, ever has. Absolutely magnificent. —Ray Olson

