

# THE TEXANS 1972-73

## Judith MacDougall

It is rare to discover an important photographer at the advanced age of 86. As a member of the American photographic tradition that included Gary Winogrand, Danny Lyon and Geoff Winningham, Judith MacDougall produced thousands of negatives in the 1970s that have remained unseen and unrecognised for over fifty years.

Now, through the efforts of her family and curators at photo access, this neglect is at last being rectified.

This exhibition presents for the first time a selection of her photographs from 1972-73, when MacDougall was at her most prolific. Brought up in the American Midwest, and a long-term resident of California, she brought a fresh eye to the lives of horse-fanciers, promoters, cowhands, diner workers, bodybuilders, conventioners and car enthusiasts in the Texas of the 1970s.

Working with a 35mm Leica M4 camera, MacDougall documented American popular culture with irony and verve and developed a dramatic style that was all her own.

*“The 1970s was an incredible time for both photography and filmmaking. New faster film and lightweight cameras changed everything. It was like suddenly finding that we could fly. Observational cinema and “street photography” were the new vocabulary. I finished a degree at UCLA in ethnographic film. From Los Angeles I went to Houston. Texas was another country. New place, new gear, and a new way of thinking was required. For the next few years, I exchanged the 16mm Éclair NPR for a Leica M4 camera.” (Judith MacDougall, 2025)*

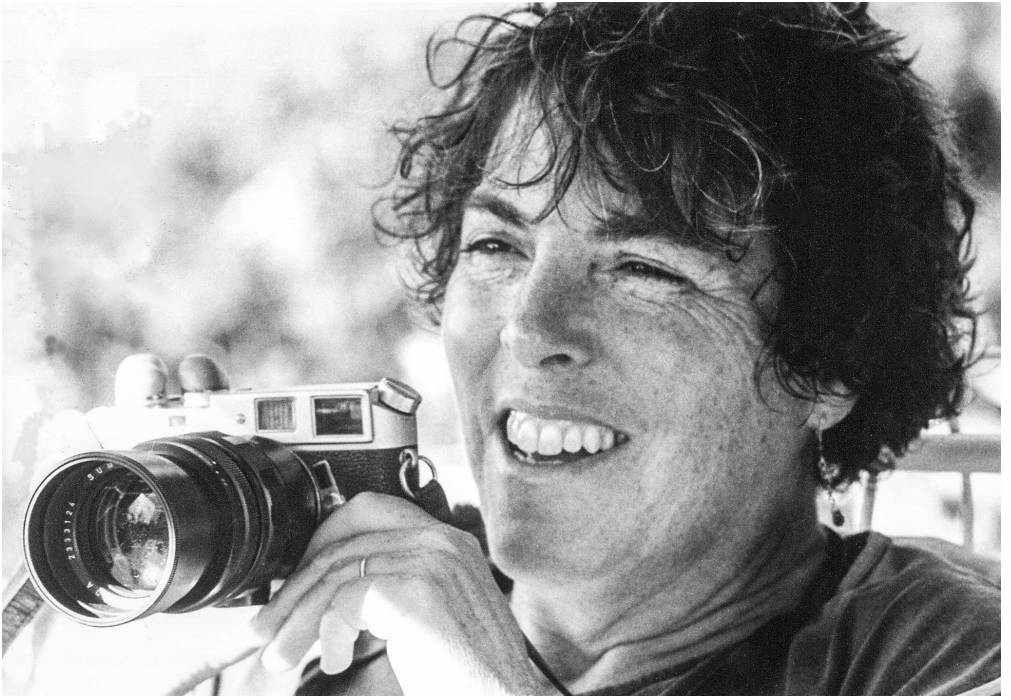
On moving to Houston with her husband and young son, MacDougall turned to still photography, encouraged by photographer and teacher Geoff Winningham at the newly established Media Center at Rice University. There she met like-minded photographers including Garry Winogrand, Eve Sonneman, Lee Friedlander and Danny Lyon.

If some of her images resemble movie stills, this is not accidental, for she was trained as an artist and filmmaker. In her photographic work there is a constant interchange between stillness and movement, between the formality of design and an inquisitive roving eye, catching the tenor of American life in its most quirky and revealing moments.

*“Making still images is very different from making a film. I have never made a film with people I didn't like. Nor would I want to. However, the people in still frames of these photographs are abstractions. Their relationship to the edge of the frame is often of more interest than their position in the context of contemporary society. They are in the present tense. Viewers take what they can from it. These public events in 1970s Texas were very mellow. People were relaxed, out to enjoy a good day shared with strangers.”* (Judith MacDougall, 2025)

Reflecting the approach she developed in her still photography, MacDougall later became one of the pioneers of the school of Observational Cinema in documentary filmmaking, based on using synchronous sound and emphasising a new informal approach to the filming of spontaneous events in people's lives. In the meantime, her earlier work in photography remained largely forgotten.

MacDougall moved to Australia in 1975 and made it her permanent home. In succeeding years, she made over 20 ethnographic documentary films in Africa, India, Australia and China, some with her husband, David MacDougall, and others independently. These films included the prize-winning 'Turkana Conversations' trilogy (1972-73), The House-Opening (1977), Photo Wallahs (1991) Diya (2001) and The Art of Regret (2007). Unsurprisingly, two of her films focused on local photographers and photography in India and China.



*Image above: Portrait of Judith MacDougall. Photo by David MacDougall*

## Image List

Judith MacDougall

*Untitled, Houston Texas, 1972*

archival inkjet print from scanned 35mm negative

24 × 36 cm — Edition of 5 — \$300

60 × 90 cm — Edition of 5 — \$600



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