



Le Sphinx, with Yvette, Paris, France, 1956

THE PICTURE | THE STORY

For me, French photographer Frank Horvat's images embody the classic tradition of straight photography, capturing the most revealing moments. His clear-eyed approach immediately engages the viewer and ultimately tells a deeper story.

In 1956, Frank Horvat was approached by an American men's magazine to photograph "Paris by Night". Although the assignment sounded slightly disreputable, Horvat was not in a position to turn down work at the time. Horvat's story below summarizes his accounting of photographing at the infamous Parisian strip club, Le Sphynx.

Our Frank Horvat exhibition, ***Please Don't Smile***, is on view until Saturday, July 9th.

David Fahey
Fahey/Klein Gallery

On the pavements of *Place Pigalle*, the uniformed doormen offered me a kind of ceremonious welcome, that turned very swiftly to disdain, as soon as I told them that I wanted to photograph the performers in their dressing rooms. At two o'clock in the morning, having suffered rejection from everywhere on the Place and in the surrounding alleyways, I decided to bring out the big guns. I slipped the doorman of 'Le Sphynx' a five thousand franc note (1950's francs, mind). Even though the neon lights were a little dim and the man's uniform somewhat outworn. It might have been these shortcomings that persuaded him to pocket the money and, without further ado, open the door to me.

The girls made me feel pretty welcome, possibly because there was such a dismal audience, that night, that they were pleased to have a lone paparazzo paying them some attention. For my part, I fired off as many shots I could, as if I already knew that my luck wouldn't hold. And, in fact, after I had done four or five rolls, one of them called out 'What d'you pay?' It wasn't an unreasonable request, but I had no way of satisfying it. So I pretended not to hear and beat a hasty retreat, before the others could join in.

The next day, looking through my contact sheets, I realized that 'I had a story' and decided to go back to 'Le Sphynx', encouraged by the fact that I had fallen for one of the performers, which may have been because of her unlikely combination of tiny breasts and large hips, which made me think of Baudelaire's poem: "I thought I saw, brought together by some new design, Antiope's hip and the tits of a beardless youth. So much did her waist draw attention to her haunches..." Or possibly just because of her name, Yvette, which now strikes me as common but which, at the time, summed up for me all the charms of France.

Sadly, the postman never rings twice. That evening, at the entrance of 'Le Sphynx', I found a new Cerberus, who must have been given orders not to let in any photographers and who spurned any attempt at corruption."



Le Sphynx, (Self-Portrait with Stripper), Paris, France (c), 1956



Le Sphynx, Rue Pigalle, Paris, France (g), 1956



Le Sphinx, Paris, France, (e), 1956



Le Sphinx, Paris, France, (h), 1956

All photographs from "Le Sphinx" are available as:

Archival Pigment Print

Signed, numbered recto; Signed, titled, dated verso

32 x 47 inches, Edition of 12

16 ½ x 23 ¼ inches, Edition of 30