

Arts

ART IN REVIEW; Paul Fusco -- 'R.F.K. Funeral Train'

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They stood by the railroad tracks one Saturday afternoon in June 1968 as the train bearing Robert F. Kennedy's body made its way from New York City to Washington. They were mostly ordinary Americans: young parents, retirees, nuns, men in suits, teenagers in shorts. Some waved happily. Others wailed in grief. Some stood quietly, hand to heart. Others snapped pictures. Some looked plainly curious. Others hoisted placards of farewell. Some brought flowers, many only themselves. Boy Scouts waved the Stars and Stripes. A woman knelt, her hands touching in prayer.

On the funeral train Paul Fusco, then a staff photographer for Look magazine, took pictures of the people waiting by the tracks. Those images are in this exhibition and an accompanying book. Like "The Americans," Robert Frank's seminal book of 1959, Mr. Fusco's pictures show Americans in an off-kilter, melancholy light. And like Mr. Frank, Mr. Fusco balances a compassionate eye with a photojournalist's lightning-quick instincts for the telling picture. There are quite a few of them here.

In a memorable image, two young men -- one of whom is shirtless, his pants, hands and face begrimed -- stand on a wooden bridge, their hands raised in salute. In another, a man and woman, she all in black, wait formally by the track. Standing beside the woman, and spaced apart with military precision, are five children in swimming togs who stand stiffly at attention.

As the funeral train went past the backyard of some modest homes, Mr. Fusco caught a most unusual tableau in the middle of a sun-dappled lawn. A woman in shorts holds a baby. At her feet is a little girl, while two other girls sit in lawn chairs. Beside and behind the girls are four older men and women who look with varying degrees of intensity at the passing train. Most eye-catching of all is a little girl in a white dress, the sun creating a halo around her blond hair, one hand raised in a salute: a poignant echo of 3-year-old John F. Kennedy Jr. saluting at the funeral of his father in 1963. MARGARETT LOKE