

SIRKKA-LIISA KONTTINEN

STEP BY STEP

February 24 – April 29, 2017



*Mothers and Daughters
at Terminus Club, 1981*



Emma Dowds, 1982



Presentation of Certificates, 1981

L. Parker Stephenson Photographs is pleased to present *Step by Step*, its third solo exhibition of photographs by documentarian **Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen** (b. 1948). This series follows daughters and mothers at a small dancing school in coastal northeastern England during the early 1980s. The gelatin silver prints on view were made by the photographer this year for this presentation and mark the first time this work has been available for sale.

Step by Step is the second chapter in Konttinen's 50 year career dedicated to celebrating the working class. The first, *Byker* - now on view at the Tate Modern Switch House - depicts a vibrant multi-generational neighborhood prior to the demolition of its estate housing. In *Step by Step* the community's avocational activities and conversations are explored within the challenges of an industrial and post-industrial environment. The maternal bonding, self-expression and confidence provided by this joyful outlet nurture the girls and women when few other options for advancement or escape are available.

Konttinen's photographs of the Connell-Brown Dancing School have served as fodder for two films. One, *Keeping Time*, made in 1983 by the Amber Collective (co-founded by Konttinen) is an experimental drama. The other is the award winning feature film *Billy Elliot* inspired by Emma Dowds jumping on her bed on the cover of Konttinen's *Step by Step* book (1989). Lee Hall, the film's writer and a schoolmate of one of the dancers, gave the book to the art directors and all those working on the production as a guide for making the film. Signed copies of the book are available at the Gallery.

Konttinen's photographs are in the permanent collections of the Tate Modern and the Victoria and Albert museums in London, the New York Public Library, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Finnish Museum of Photography, as well as the AmberSide Collection Trust in Newcastle. In 2011, UNESCO inscribed Konttinen's photographs and Amber's films in its Memory of the World Register as being of "outstanding national value and importance to the United Kingdom." There is a bronze plaque dedicated to her along Newcastle's Walk of Fame.