

LOMBARD FREID GALLERY



Left: *I Was Born to a Father in an Airline Uniform*, 1958
Right: Myrta, Jane, and Robin, *Graduation Day, Breech Academy*, 1978

Lucien Samaha

The Flight Attendant Years: 1978-1986

June 6 – August 2, 2013

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 6, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

I was born to a father who wore an airline uniform. For most of my childhood, he lived and worked in another country. Each summer I would be flown from Beirut to Dhahran as an unaccompanied minor, but he always made sure he booked me on a flight where he knew at least one, if not all, of the Flight Attendants, or rather stewardesses as they were then known.

I always flew First Class, looking like Lily Tomlin's Edith Ann, a tiny kid in a huge chair. I was totally coddled, fed, and entertained by the stewardesses who took personal care of me until I was delivered either to my dad or to my aunt, when returning to Lebanon. Flight Attendants epitomized international glamour and adventure to me. Growing up, I often dreamed of becoming one, until I took my first class in photography as a junior in high school in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC.

Like most Lebanese parents, mine would have greatly preferred my becoming a doctor, a lawyer, or an architect. Although I did have an interest in medicine, I had been passionate about photography ever since I developed my first print—an abstract array of shopping carts—in a tray of Dektol. As my eighteenth birthday approached, I also realized that my airline benefits would soon come to an end. I wouldn't be able to jaunt around the world at will, for free—something I had been used to all my life.

My only solution was to follow my childhood dream and become a Flight Attendant. A few months before turning twenty, I started sending applications to Pan Am and TWA, two of the major international airlines at the time. I was hired by Trans World Airlines on my twentieth birthday, and on February 26, 1978, I reported to Breech Training Academy, the most renowned and modern flight attendant school in the industry.

-Lucien Samaha, April 2013

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Lombard Freid Gallery is pleased to present New York-based photographer Lucien Samaha's *The Flight Attendant Years: 1978-1986*, the artist's first exhibition with the gallery. Samaha has been a photographer since high school and has obsessively documented his personal and professional life for over 40 years, producing a rich, highly autobiographical body of work. This show will debut vintage color and black-and-white photographs from his time as a Flight Attendant for Trans World Airlines, giving a behind-the-scenes look at a bygone era. These striking, intimate images will be exhibited with a variety of archival objects, including Samaha's golden flight wings, personal correspondence, and TWA memos.

Samaha's photographs from the late 1970s and early '80s record a particular intimacy between Flight Attendants, pilots, and passengers that was rarely revealed at the time—and is certainly not seen in today's climate of heightened airline security. *The Flight Attendant Years* covers all aspects of daily life: training sessions, uniform fittings, in-flight fraternization, and layover breaks. Samaha's eye for detail and composition, matched with his direct access to his subject matter, allows for his documentary photography to exist within an extremely personal and aesthetic milieu. His images—Polaroid snapshots, elegant candid portraits, and group photographs—emphasize the spirit of adventure and conviviality integral to his surroundings.

Samaha has continued to be in touch with many of his former colleagues, and the gallery will serve as a portrait studio for current and former flight attendants who are being invited (through postings at airlines and hotels) to visit the gallery on Saturdays, June 8, 15, and 22, from 12:00 to 5:00 PM. The portraits will be on view in the gallery and posted to lombardfreid.com and luciensamaha.net.

Lucien Samaha (b. 1958, Beirut) is a New York-based photographer whose work has been shown internationally, including in exhibitions at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt and at the Cooley Gallery, Reed College, Portland. He was a finalist for the 2004 Nam June Paik Award. After his time at TWA, Samaha worked for Eastman Kodak Company and then as a DJ on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center, continuing to document his hours at work and his personal life.