

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 25  
FOR RELEASE:  
FEBRUARY 9, 1972

BARBARA MORGAN: PHOTOGRAPHS, a retrospective selection covering more than 30 years of photography by this versatile artist and including her important work in photomontage and her celebrated studies of the dance, will be on view in the third floor Steichen Galleries at The Museum of Modern Art from March 8 through May 31.

Directed by Peter Bunnell, Curator in the Department of Photography, the exhibition contains 48 photographs dating from 1935 to 1969 and covers varied subjects such as nature, portraits, children and light drawings in addition to dance and photomontage. The photomontages from the thirties, which have never been widely exhibited and consequently not as well known as the dance photographs made with Martha Graham and her company, are especially important considering their early date for such work in this country.

"Barbara Morgan sees the photomontage as imagination itself," notes Mr. Bunnell. "As opposed to straight photography in which the literal continuum of observation and reaction is maintained, the multiple image system of montage allows her to combine discontinuous thoughts, observations, and ideas into a visual metaphor.... These pictures reflect an urban lifestyle which lends itself to this fractured, layered structuring -- strata of people, place, mood and meaning."

The dance photographs, begun in 1935, record not so much the literal dance as the essential gestural aspect of life which the dance symbolized, says Mr. Bunnell. Working alone with her subjects not in performance but in her studio, Mrs. Morgan reconceived each dance for the camera, condensing its actions to those movements which were most eloquent and complete. The dance photographs were published in 1941 under the title Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs, a book for which she also designed the format and prepared the text. Her work has been included in several exhibitions at the Museum and she is represented in the photography collection. A one-man show of her dance photographs was held at the Museum in 1945 called

(more)

"Modern American Dance."

An artist whose creative work in painting and graphics as well as photography spans five decades, Mrs. Morgan was born in Buffalo, Kansas, in 1900 and grew up in Southern California. She attended the University of California at Los Angeles where in 1925 she joined the art faculty. In the same year, she married Willard D. Morgan, a pioneer photographer in the use of the Leica camera and later a publisher of photographic books and technical manuals. In 1935, following her move to New York and the birth of her two sons, Mrs. Morgan seriously turned her attention to photography and has been working and exhibiting in this country and abroad continuously since then. A second book on children at summer camp, titled Summer's Children, was published in 1951, and she has contributed many articles and reviews over the years to such publications as Aperture and Dance Magazine. A resident of Scarsdale, New York, she is currently working on several books and lectures frequently at colleges and independent workshops.

The body of her work, according to Mr. Bunnell, must be viewed with a sense of the parallels and perpendiculars which pervade it. Children happy and sad, a tree's delicacy and strength, man's ruins and nature's fossils are examples of the polarities from which she creates a kind of visual dynamic or, in her words, "rhythmic vitality." "In one sense," says Mr. Bunnell, "no single picture can express the completeness of her thought, for the whole of her work, the design of her books and exhibitions, the sense of her total media involvement is image working with image."

Her work in dance and photomontage is perhaps the most important photographically because it marks a change in the fabric of American photography, a bridge between the abstract and synthetic work developed abroad in the twenties and the rigorous, straightforward disciplines generally admired here and practised by her close friends Edward Weston and Charles Sheeler.

(more)

"It is also a connective between the natural environment, which for her colleagues and predecessors was the landscape, and the interest in the human world and the urban architectonic," writes Mr. Bunnell. "These latter concerns call for liberality of expression, and this is the foremost quality of Barbara Morgan's work."

\*\*\*\*\*

Additional information and photographs available from Diana Goldin, Coordinator, Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7297, -7501

\*\*\*\*\*