

The Museum of Modern Art

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THREE AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHERS FEATURED AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

THREE AMERICANS. Photographs by Robert Adams, Jim Goldberg and Joel Sternfeld will open in the Edward Steichen Photography Center in the newly expanded Museum of Modern Art on May 17, 1984. The exhibition, which will be on view through July, consists of approximately 75 photographs which exemplify a renewed interest by an increasing number of American photographers in taking as their subject this country's social and political condition.

Social documentary photographs of the recent past were essentially journalistic reports of specific political activity or simplistic descriptions of the downtrodden. In contrast, this new work by Adams, Sternfeld and Goldberg "explores the complex and subtle issues raised by the disintegration of the post-World War II American dream," writes Susan Kismaric, Associate Curator, Department of Photography, who directed the exhibition. "Each man's work is characterized by an individual intuition of subject and method of picture-making."

Robert Adams, who is known as a landscape photographer, worked from 1978 to 1981 on the project Our Lives and Our Children. Pictures Taken Near the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant. THREE AMERICANS will contain a selection of pictures from this series which shows the people of Rocky Flats, Colorado as they pursue the ordinary activities of life--shopping for food, relaxing in parks, conversing on the street. In the shadow of the past

and potential dangers of the nearby plant (more than 200 fires have occurred there, and there are growing levels of air, water and soil contamination in the surrounding area), they "achieve, in a moment of reflection or joy or compassion, a kind of heroism," in Adams's words. The series, which begins with photographs of people in small groups or alone, ends with pictures of the faces of individuals that disclose fear, anxiety, and alienation, as a kind of presage of disaster. "For Adams, who has rarely photographed people, this work is a new direction, courageous in its artistic ambition," says Kismaric.

Jim Goldberg has photographed residents of welfare hotels and the middle and upper classes of San Francisco. After photographing the people in their homes, Goldberg returns to them with a print and asks them to write their response to it beneath the picture. As viewers, we are presented with the sitter as he presents himself to the camera, the photographer's interpretation of the subject, and finally, the subject's interpretation of both. As documents, they are a fascinating integration of words and pictures which, according to Goldberg, "hint at the actual struggles people are engaged in."

The landscape of rural and suburban America is the subject of Joel Sternfeld's work. His color photographs, made with an 8 x 10 view camera, describe the environment as it has been altered by man, creating profound contradictions between past and present. "The simple clarity of his work verges on that of calendar photographs," writes Kismaric, "yet it is rescued from banality by its often ironic subject matter." The landscape of Sternfeld's America is ripe with decay. Towns and industrial plants which have outlived their usefulness and new housing tracts, incredible in their plastic perfection, are described in exquisite and impartial detail.

THREE AMERICANS will occupy an area for temporary exhibitions in the Department of Photography's new galleries on the second floor of the renovated North Wing. The Edward Steichen Photography Center, named for the Department's director from 1947 to 1962, will include a historical survey of the medium with selections drawn from the Museum's Permanent Collection.

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