

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK, ORGANIZES MAJOR EXHIBITION OF AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY FOR EUROPEAN TOUR

Photographs from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art circulated
to seven European cities from April 1995 through January 1997

A major survey of seventy-five years of American photography, drawn from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, has been organized by the Museum for a seven-city European tour. Opening at the Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany, on April 24, 1995, **AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY 1890-1965 FROM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK** covers the exceptionally rich period from the turn of the century through the mid-1960s, exploring one of the most inventive traditions in the history of the medium. Organized by Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography, the exhibition of 183 works is touring under the auspices of The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

After its opening in Berlin, where it remains on view through June 11, 1995, the exhibition travels to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (July 3 - September 1, 1995); the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (October 5 - November 26, 1995); the Hasselblad Center, Göteborg, Sweden (January 6 - February 25, 1996); the Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (March 15 - May 31, 1996); IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia (June 22 - September 15, 1996); and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (November 14, 1996 - January 26, 1997).

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Commenting on the tour, Glenn D. Lowry, Director of The Museum of Modern Art, stated, "Interest in photography has grown rapidly in Europe over the past two decades, thanks in part to the efforts of the museums that are participating in this tour. This exhibition is designed to share a vital aspect of our collection with a large European public." The Museum of Modern Art was the first art museum to create a department devoted to the art of photography, in 1940. It was also the first to collect and exhibit the work of dozens of leading American photographers, including Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Walker Evans, Harry Callahan, Irving Penn, and Diane Arbus. As a result, the Museum's comprehensive photography collection is particularly strong in modern American work.

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY 1890-1965 includes landmark pictures by all of the central figures of modern American photography, among them Strand, Weston, Evans, Callahan, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Dorothea Lange, and Robert Frank. Generous selections of work by these and other leading photographers, together with many remarkable but unfamiliar pictures, contribute to a lively panorama representing more than 100 photographers in all (complete list of photographers attached).

"The scale of the exhibition and the range of the collection have allowed us not merely to represent the achievements of the key innovators but also to provide a coherent view of the tradition as a whole," remarks Mr. Galassi. "There are many famous pictures here, but the exhibition is much more than an assembly of masterpieces."

The exhibition takes as its starting point the final decade of the nineteenth century, when photographs were becoming radically easier to make and reproduce. The result was a vast new range of audiences and applications for photography. The introduction of the first Kodak snapshot camera, in

1888, is only the most famous expression of a pictorial revolution in which photographs at last could be made anywhere, of anything, by anyone. From untutored amateur to specialized professional, the swelling ranks of photographers produced a sprawling diversity of new pictures, which recorded -- and helped to create -- modern America. In the exhibition, this explosion of vernacular photography is evoked by pictures made to promote tourism in Wisconsin (Henry Hamilton Bennett), to record the logging industry in the Pacific northwest (Darius Kinsey), to advance social reform (Jacob Riis, Frances Benjamin Johnston, and Lewis W. Hine), and to celebrate summer vacations (Charles Norman Sladen), among others.

At the same time, there arose an elite movement that withdrew from the bustle of the modern world and the undisciplined variety of vernacular photography, in order to claim for the young medium a place among the traditional fine arts. Led by Stieglitz and his Photo-Secession group -- represented in the exhibition by Steichen, Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence H. White, and others -- the movement produced romantic landscapes and Symbolist allegories that could not be mistaken for anything but works of art.

The Photo-Secession movement initiated a powerful tradition of artistic photography, and it opened a cultural divide between self-conscious aesthetic ambition and photography's myriad vernacular applications. The exhibition is organized in alternating groups of pictures, which follow the rapid pace of pictorial dialogue between these two extremes.

By the 1920s, the cloistered symbolism of the Photo-Secession had evolved into a vigorous and formally inventive modernism, in Stieglitz's own work and in the work of his younger contemporaries. The mood of withdrawal and the pursuit of absolute aesthetic purity remained hallmarks of the tradition, but from Strand, Weston, Tina Modotti, and Charles Sheeler in the

1920s and 1930s to Callahan, Aaron Siskind, and Minor White in the 1940s and 1950s, the American modernist tradition accommodated an impressive roster of distinctive talents.

The vernacular tradition was enlivened in the same period by the rise of photographically illustrated magazines. In 1923 Steichen abandoned Stieglitz's elite circle to become chief photographer at *Vanity Fair*. His celebrity portraits and fashion plates, along with the advertising pictures of Paul Outerbridge and Grancel Fitz, inaugurated a new tradition of American photography whose vitality extended unabated through the work of Irving Penn and Richard Avedon. With the founding of *Life* in 1936, the pages of the magazines also brought to millions of readers a new brand of picture journalism, whose style was defined by such photographers as Margaret Bourke-White and W. Eugene Smith.

The growth of photojournalism in the United States coincided with the Great Depression, whose devastating effects on rural America were reported by the photographic unit of the government's Farm Security Administration (FSA). Evans and Lange were only the most outstanding among several excellent photographers who worked for the FSA. Their pictures of down-and-out life in the Depression, together with the new magazine photography, created a lasting link between social concern and the plain descriptiveness of the documentary style in American photography.

Evans was as much a self-conscious artist as Stieglitz. But while Stieglitz had rejected what he regarded as the banality of vernacular work in order to establish photography as an art, Evans embraced the plainspoken vernacular as a model, using it as a resource for artistic photography, thus creating a durable alternative to the hermetic authority of Stieglitz and his school.

Like Stieglitz, Weston, and Sheeler, Evans favored a large camera, mounted on a tripod. In the heyday of the magazines in the period following World War II, both professional photojournalists (such as Smith) and independent artists (such as Robert Frank, Louis Faurer, and Roy DeCarava) preferred the small, hand-held camera. Photography's vernacular applications and its aesthetic ambitions again drew together, sharing the pictorial vocabulary of the photograph caught on the run. The most original and influential body of work to emerge from this convergence of traditions was Frank's book *The Americans* (1959), a heartfelt vision that recognized an essential America in its overlooked, ordinary details.

By the mid-1960s, thanks in part to the rise of television, the vitality of the vernacular tradition began to wane. At the same time, newcomers such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, who owed little to prior photographic art, were turning to the newspapers and magazines as a source of raw material and to photography as a tool for replicating and recombining the images they found there. Together these two developments opened a new chapter, closing three quarters of a century of American photography in which the professional, the amateur, and the artist collectively had created an abundantly inventive tradition -- popular, austere, powerful, surprising, beautiful, and moving.

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AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY 1890-1965 is accompanied by a richly illustrated book, including essays by Peter Galassi and by New York critic and cultural historian Luc Sante. The first part of Mr. Galassi's essay provides a concise outline of modern American photography, describing the evolution of a creative artistic tradition in opposition to an equally inventive tradition of photography's practical, worldly functions. This central opposition is set forth as well in the carefully ordered sequence of plates. The second part of

the essay traces the development of the pioneering photography program at the Museum, in which Ansel Adams, Edward Steichen, and other prominent photographers played significant roles. Mr. Sante's essay places photography at the center of a wide-ranging reconsideration of modern American culture. "The American temperament," he writes, "headstrong and hell-bent, has always tacked toward one bank and been forcibly redirected toward the other, veering at intervals between the raw and the cooked, the sacred and the profane, the high and the low."

Published by The Museum of Modern Art, *American Photography 1890 - 1965 from The Museum of Modern Art, New York* is a 256-page volume containing 18 duotone illustrations and 5 color and 178 tritone full-page plates of the 183 works in the exhibition. The book will also appear in foreign-language editions to accompany the European tour of the exhibition: in German, with Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, Munich; in Spanish, with the IVAM Centre Julio González, Valencia; and in French, with the Musée National d'Art Moderne--Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. The hardbound (\$60.00, distributed in the U.S. and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and overseas by Thames and Hudson, Ltd., London) and the paperbound (\$29.95) editions are both available beginning June 1995 in The MoMA Book Store.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.

Artists in the Exhibition

Berenice Abbott	Helen Levitt
Ansel Adams	Jerome Liebling
Diane Arbus	Edwin Hale Lincoln
Richard Avedon	O. Winston Link
Ralph Bartholomew	George Platt Lynes
Ernest J. Bellocq	Gjon Mili
Henry Hamilton Bennett	Lisette Model
Margaret Bourke-White	Tina Modotti
John G. Bullock	Arthur S. Mole and John D. Thomas
Rudy Burckhardt	Charles Moore
Harry Callahan	Barbara Morgan
Paul Caponigro	Wright Morris
Walter Chappell	Nickolas Muray
Alvin Langdon Coburn	Arnold Newman
Ted Croner	Paul Outerbridge
Imogen Cunningham	Gordon Parks
Charles H. Currier	Irving Penn
Edward Curtis	Eliot Porter
Louise Dahl-Wolfe	William B. Post
Bruce Davidson	William H. Rau
Roy DeCarava	Robert Rauschenberg
Baron Adolf De Meyer	James Bartlett Rich
David Douglas Duncan	Jacob Riis
Harold Edgerton	George H. Seeley
Philip Elliott	Charles Sheeler
Elliott Erwitt	Aaron Siskind
Walker Evans	Charles Norman Sladen
Louis Faurer	Erwin Smith
Grancel Fitz	W. Eugene Smith
Robert Frank	Frederick Sommer
Lee Friedlander	Edward Steichen
William A. Garnett	Ralph Steiner
Arnold Genthe	Alfred Stieglitz
Laura Gilpin	Paul Strand
L.S. Glover	John Swope
John Gutmann	John Szarkowski
Charles Harbutt	Doris Ulmann
Lewis W. Hine	U.S. Army Signal Corps
Charles Hoff	U.S. Navy
Clifton Johnson	James Van Der Zee
Frances Benjamin Johnston	Adam Clark Vroman
Simpson Kalisher	Weegee (Arthur Fellig)
Gertrude Käsebier	Dan Weiner
André Kertész	Edward Weston
Darius Kinsey	Clarence H. White
Irwin Klein	Minor White
William Klein	Garry Winogrand
Dorothea Lange	Willard Worden
Clarence John Laughlin	and three unidentified photographers
Russell Lee	
Leon Levinstein	