

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

SNAPSHOTS EXHIBITED AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART AS AN IMPORTANT

AMERICAN FOLK ART

(Glossy prints for reproduction available upon request. Pictures inclusive from 1880's to 1944. Very few early pictures; most of them taken in last fifteen years.)

That Americans are a picture-minded people is due in no small measure to the fact that inventions and production in this country have made snapshot photography the medium of the millions. And from the millions upon millions of snapshots made by this multitude an authentic American folk art has grown in less than five decades. This folk art will be presented in The American Snapshot, an exhibition opening Wednesday, March 1, in the second floor galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street.

The exhibition is composed of approximately 350 snapshots taken in the United States from 1888 to 1944, most of them, however, snapped during the past fifteen years. They were selected by Willard D. Morgan, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, from thousands in the files of the Eastman Kodak Company to which they had been sent as entries in various competitions throughout the years. Although none of them won major prizes, all were awarded a nominal purchase prize by Eastman.

In addition to the galleries of snapshots, the exhibition will also include a continuous projection of forty-eight kodachromes. Perhaps of equal interest with the pictures will be a display of forty hand cameras, showing the development of the snapshotting machine from the first kodak in 1888 through the various box cameras, folding models, the Leica, the candid and miniature cameras, and the two latest models of 1941: the Brownie with synchronized flash attachment, and the "Medalist," a 2½ x 3½ miniature roll film camera taken over exclusively by the Navy.

In a small catalog of the exhibition Mr. Morgan writes:

"For some fifty years now the hand-held camera, with its instantaneous shutter, has been recording the American scene in infinite, spontaneous detail--the new baby, the family group, the home, friends, small and large adventures, discoveries. In so doing, the simple camera has become a real factor in maintaining the unity of the American family, the solidarity of the nation. Snapshots enclosed in letters to the boy in camp, the Marine in New Guinea, the soldier in Italy or Alaska, the girl in the Service or away from home in war work, serve to tie the family together more effectively than written words.

"The casual camera has done another thing. It has given the millions--all of us--a medium of graphic expression. With

our snapshot cameras we make pictures of anything that interests us--a cobweb in the morning sun, the Grand Canyon, a timberline tree, or the pattern of windows and bricks in the building across the way. The subjects are as various as our own interests; the pictures reveal, as pictures almost always do, whether our eyes are perceptive, our minds alive.

"The snapshot has become in truth, a folk art, spontaneous, almost effortless, yet deeply expressive. It is an honest art, partly because it doesn't occur to the average snaphooter to look beyond reality, partly because the natural domain of the camera is in the world of things as they are, and partly because it is simply more trouble to make an untrue than a true picture. Above all, the folk art of the camera is unselfconscious. It may well be a highly significant form of self expression, but the snaphooter doesn't think of it that way. He takes pictures merely because he likes to.

"Today it is possible for everyone to know what it means to see, to enjoy, and to capture for re-enjoyment the outward essence of a moment. The picture the snaphooter obtains may be only on the threshold of art, but in the making of it he has achieved something creative and has set in play an interchange of emotions and ideas."

As Mr. Morgan also points out in his article: "Never has the individual picture his own life and times as extensively as during the fifty years since the advent of the snapshot camera." In the exhibition this picturization of the past half-century of the common man in America covers so wide and varied a range of subjects that no categories could confine them: a dog gazing solemnly through a frost pattern on a window; the pattern of windows in the Manhattan dusk; a girl blowing into the air the fluff of a dandelion gone to seed; a bridal couple dashing through a rain of rice; a young goat peering around a barn door; harvest rhythm; beach acrobats; a young father falling asleep in the act of giving a bottle to a wide-awake baby; footprints in the sand; cat in a mirror; chopped wood; Coney Island in the early 1900's when Papa wore a modest bathing suit with a sagging jumper and long pants; an English bulldog giving the Bronx cheer from a doorway; a nostalgic night scene in a small town showing a young couple strolling through a park; two children playing fox and geese in the snow; the big bright eyes of a baby peeking over the edge of a bed; cobweb against a tree; and a decorously romping circle of shirt-waisted Gibson girls, with full and flying skirts, straw sailors miraculously balanced on their heads as they play "Ring-around-a-rosy" in the '90s.

The exhibition will be shown at the Museum from March 1 through April 30. It will then be sent on a tour of other museums and art galleries throughout the country by the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.