

Barbara Morgan: exhibition of photography

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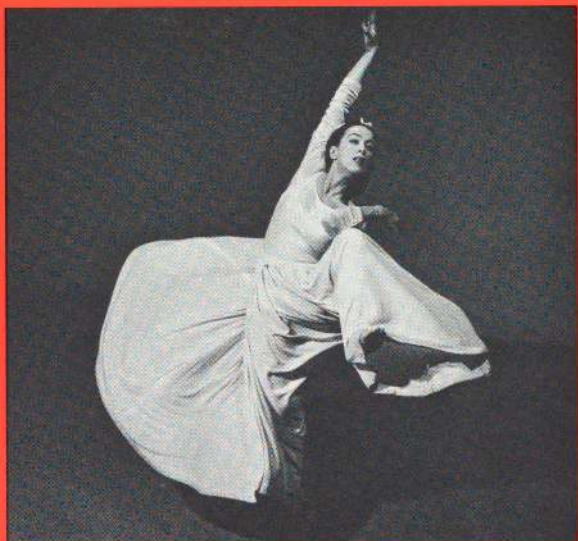
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BARBARA MORGAN

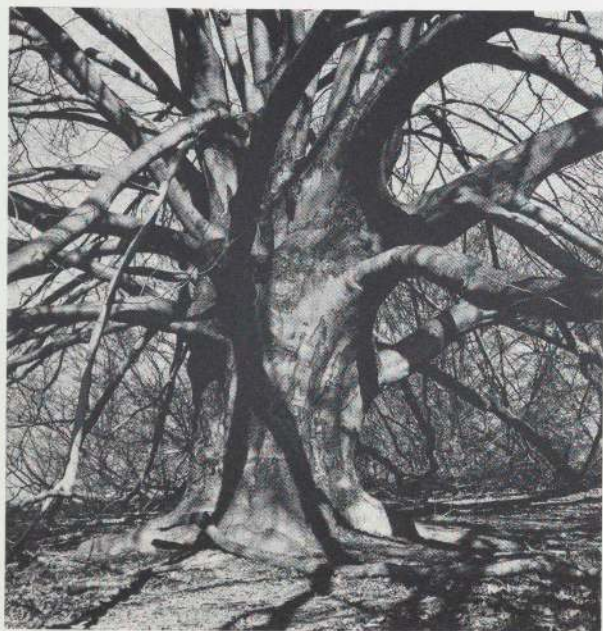
Exhibition of Photography
March 8 - May 31, 1972

The Museum of Modern Art,
New York

Introduction

To see **Barbara Morgan's** photographs is to experience the work of a versatile artist whose creative life spans five decades. Her photographs, like her paintings and graphics, display an energy of both physical and psychic dimensions which clearly echoes every aspect of her spirit. The richness and scale of these photographs compel us to delve into their deepest recesses and to become a participant in their vitality. For Barbara Morgan it is the gesture of largesse which speaks.

The subjects and techniques in her work are varied: nature, portraits, children, dance, light drawings, and photomontage. The dance photographs, begun in 1935 with Martha Graham and her company, are justifiably celebrated. They were made with a deep understanding of the sources and dramatic schema of the dances, of kinetics, and with an assuredness in the technical complexities of the photographic medium. Working alone with her subjects, not in performance but in her studio, and fundamentally out of her own creative needs, she recorded not so much the literal dance as the essential gestural aspect of life which the dance symbolized. Each dance was reconceived for the camera and its actions were condensed to those movements which were the most eloquent, and the most complete.

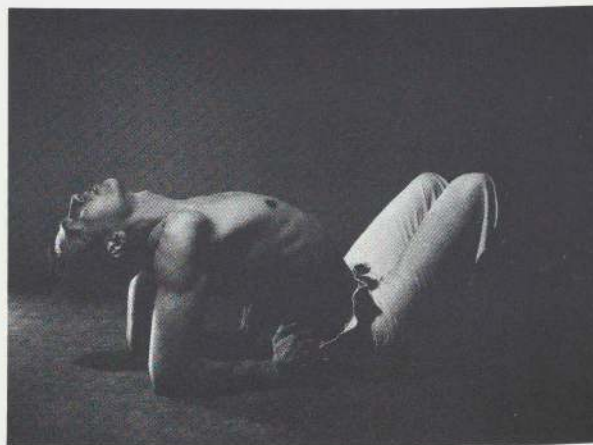


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Barbara Morgan sees the photomontage as imagination itself. As opposed to straight photography in which the literal continuum of observation and reaction is maintained, the multiple image system of montage allows her to combine discontinuous thoughts, observations, and ideas into a visual metaphor. These photomontages have not been widely exhibited and they are especially important because of their early date for such work in this country. These pictures reflect an urban lifestyle which lends itself to this fractured, layered structuring—strata of people, place, mood, and meaning.

Barbara Morgan speaks of "rhythmic vitality" with regard to all of her work. By this she means the translation of literal interpretations such as light and dark, love and hate, natural and man made, all polarities of sorts, into a kind of visual dynamic. The body of her work must be viewed with this sense of parallels and perpendiculars; of children happy and sad, of a tree's delicacy and strength, of man's ruins and nature's fossils. In one sense 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



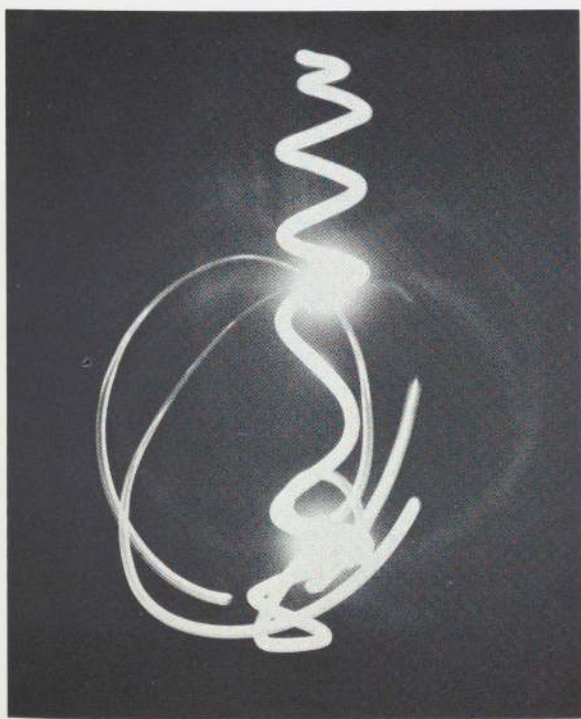
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most important photographically because it marks a change in the fabric of American photography. It bridges the abstract and synthetic work developed in Germany and elsewhere in the twenties and the rigorous straightforward disciplines generally admired in this country and practiced by two of her close friends, Edward Weston and Charles Sheeler. 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. These later concerns call for liberality of expression, and this is the foremost quality of Barbara Morgan's work.

Peter C. Bunnell
Curator of Photography

Chronology

Barbara Morgan was born in Buffalo, Kansas in 1900 and grew up in southern California; an environment rich in the influences of the Spanish, Oriental, and American Indian cultures. She attended the University of California at Los Angeles and in 1925 joined the art faculty there. During the next decade she was exposed to an enormously varied activity of painting, theater, dance, exhibiting, puppetry, and music. In 1930, five years after her marriage to Willard D. Morgan, a pioneer

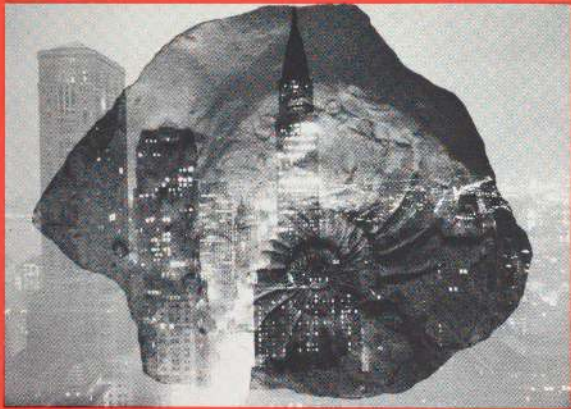


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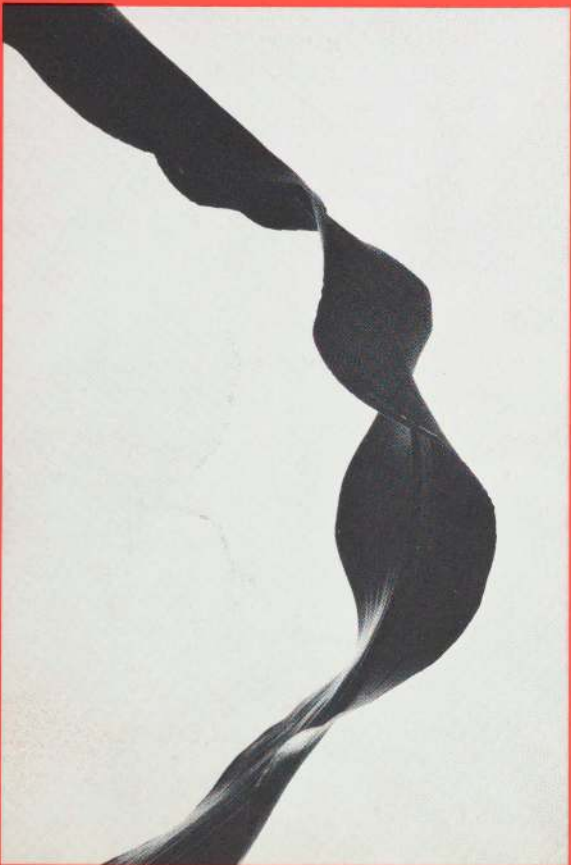
photographer in the use of the Leica camera and later a publisher of photographic books and technical manuals, she moved to New York. Following the birth of her two sons she seriously took up photography in 1935. In 1941 she published **Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs**, a book for which she had made the photographs, designed the format, and prepared the text. The book identified her as one of this country's outstanding and innovative photographers. In 1951 she produced the book **Summer's Children: A Photographic Cycle of Life at Camp** and for many years she has contributed articles and reviews to various publications including **Aperture**, **Dance Magazine**, **General Semantics Bulletin**, **Image**, and the **Magazine of Art**. A monograph of her work, with full bibliography and chronology, was published by **Aperture** in 1964. Her photographs have been shown in several exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, including "Action Photography," "Art in Progress," "The Family of Man," "In and Out of Focus," "The Sense of Abstraction in Contemporary Photography," and in her one-man exhibition "Modern American Dance." Since 1935 she has been continuously exhibiting her photographs, paintings, and graphics in this country and abroad. Today she maintains her home and studio in Scarsdale, New York where she continues to photograph. She is currently working on several books, and also lectures frequently at colleges and independent workshops.



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Catalog of the Exhibition

1. CITY SHELL, 1938. *Photomontage*
2. SPRING ON MADISON SQUARE, 1938. *Photomontage*
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
3. USE LITTER BASKET, 1943. *Photomontage*
4. IKONS IN TIME STREAM, 1963. *Photomontage*
5. FOSSIL IN FORMATION, 1965. *Photomontage*
6. BRAINWASHED, 1966-69. *Photomontage*
7. CADENZA, 1940. *Light Drawing*
8. SERPENT LIGHT, 1940. *Light Drawing*
9. EMANATION I, 1940. *Light Drawing*
10. PURE ENERGY AND NEUROTIC MAN, 1945.
Light Drawing and Photomontage
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
- *11. Martha Graham, EXTASIS (*Torso*), 1935
- *12. Martha Graham, FRONTIER, 1935
- *13. Martha Graham, LAMENTATION, 1935
- *14. Martha Graham, AMERICAN DOCUMENT
("Puritan Love Duet" with Hawkins), 1938
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
- *15. Martha Graham, EL PENITENTE
(Erick Hawkins Solo, "El Flagellante"), 1940
- *16. Martha Graham, LETTER TO THE WORLD,
(*Kick*), 1940
- *17. Martha Graham, LETTER TO THE WORLD
(*Swirl*), 1940
18. Doris Humphrey, WITH MY RED FIRES
("Matriarch"), 1938
19. Charles Weidman, LYNCHTOWN (Seckler Solo), 1938
20. Charles Weidman, LYNCHTOWN
(Humphrey-Weidman Group), 1938
21. José Limón, MEXICAN SUITE ("Peon"), 1944
22. Valerie Bettis, DESPERATE HEART,
1944. *Photomontage*
23. Merce Cunningham, ROOT OF THE UNFOCUS,
1944. *Photomontage*
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
24. Merce Cunningham, TOTEM ANCESTOR, 1942
- †25. BOY AND HAMSTER, Camp Treetops, 1948
- †26. THREE BUDDIES, Camp Treetops, 1946
- †27. GOING OUT TO PASTURE, Camp Treetops, 1946
28. GIRL AND RING OF WATER, Camp Treetops, 1948
- †29. GIRLS DANCING BY LAKE, Camp Treetops, 1945
30. SAND BUILDERS, Camp Treetops, 1945
31. LLOYD'S HEAD, 1944
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
32. NANCY NEWHALL, 1942
33. GERALD HEARD, 1954
34. CRADLED, 1940
35. WILLARD'S FOOT, 1945
36. CHARLES SHEELER AND HIS FAVORITE
BEECH TREE, 1945
37. BEECH TREE I, 1945
38. BEECH TREE IV, 1945
39. BEECH TREE XII, 1945
40. BEECH TREE LIMB, 1945
41. CORN LEAF RHYTHM, 1945
42. CORN STALK, 1945. *Solarized*
43. SAETA, Ice on Window, 1945
44. SOLSTICE, 1942
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art
45. BATTERED TIN CAN, 1942
46. TRAJECTORY, 1946
47. RESURRECTION IN THE JUNKYARD, 1947

* Photograph from the book: MARTHA GRAHAM: Sixteen Dances in photographs

† Photograph from the book: SUMMER'S CHILDREN: A photographic Cycle of Life at Camp