Harvey, Michelle

From: Lowry, Glenn
Sent: Monday, July 09, 2007 11:34 AM
To: ALL STAFF
Subject: John Szarkowski

It is with the greatest sadness that I write to tell you that our dear friend and former colleague, John Szarkowski, who was for many years the Director of the Department of Photography, died over the weekend at the age of 81. His obituary was in the *New York Times* this morning and we are planning to run the following death notice tomorrow.

The Trustees and staff of The Museum of Modern Art mourn the loss of our long-time friend and colleague John Szarkowski, Director Emeritus of the Museum's Department of Photography. In his 29-year career as director of the department, John's exhibitions and publications earned him broad recognition as the era's most eloquent and influential critical voice in photography. His alert eye for contemporary work led him to champion Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, whom he brought together in the exhibition *New Documents* (1967). Other landmark exhibitions and books introduced the work of Robert Adams, William Eggleston, Frank Gohlke, Josef Koudelka, Nicholas Nixon, Jacques Henri Lartigue and Henry Wessel, among others. John also devoted major retrospectives to Ansel Adams, Brassaï, Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, André Kertész, Dorothea Lange, and Irving Penn. In 1968 he secured the acquisition of the great collection of photographs by Eugène Atget that Berenice Abbott had purchased upon Atget's death and which would serve as the basis of four landmark exhibitions and books by John and Maria Morris Hambourg (1981-85). Among the other highlights of John's distinguished publishing career are *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), *Looking at Photographs* (1973), *Photography Until Now* (1990). Before John came to MoMA at the age of thirty-five, he had won two Guggenheim Fellowships for his own photographs and had published two books of them. After 1991, while continuing to write, teach, and organize exhibitions, he returned to making photographs. Both chapters of his artistic career were surveyed in the exhibition *John Szarkowski: Photographs* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which was shown at MoMA, New York, in 2006. John's intelligence, dedication, charm, and wit made him a vital figure at The Museum for more than four decades, and his lasting contributions to the institution stretch far beyond photography. We are deeply grateful and we will miss him badly. We extend our most heartfelt sympathy to his daughters Nina and Natasha and their families.

Full Frontal
Fashion

AIPAD gala

March madness continued with the AIPAD Photography Show New York gala preview benefit, held at the Park Avenue Armory.

The past two weeks in New York City have been filled with art fairs all over town, making for extra excitement in the lives of the art crowd. The fairs go on for days; the artwork goes on for miles. There's so much to see and take in — and I love it.

The AIPAD (Association of International Photography Art Dealers) evening, in the long string of events and opening parties, was a special one in honor of the John Szarkowski Fund. The Museum of Modern Art's iconic director of photography from 1962 to 1991, Szarkowski is the godfather of teaching us how to look at photos. His championing of the medium brought it the fine-art status it deserved. The good peeps at AXA Art are sponsoring the show.

AIPAD has a reputation for holding the most influential photography art fair in existence. The proceeds from the benefit will go toward the acquisition of pieces chosen for permanent residence at MoMA.

The Park Avenue Armory is the perfect setting for participating galleries, which camp out there in the most glam of ways and get a chance to mingle with one another as well as a constant flow of visitors.

But tonight, my friends, was a party, and it's fun for me to walk around and choose what I would buy if I had the money and entertaining myself with my daydream. So many extraordinary photographs — I was having a hard time deciding but settled on some of the classics, like Walker Evans and Richard Avedon, and the contemporary work of Victoria Sambunaris and Alex Prager.

I'm happy to report that the Szarkowski legacy endures today. That's what godfathers are all about. Cheers to that and to the guests attending, including MoMA curators Roxana Marcoci and Sarah Meister along with writers Vicki Goldberg and Anthony Haden-Guest.

Link to website: http://www.fullfrontalfashion.com/the-f-word/aipad/

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2001

LEISURE & ARTS

The Gallery: An Ansel Adams Centennial

A Birthday Show Avoids His Big, Later Prints in Favor of Earlier And Far More Intimate Ones

By David Littlejohn

San Francisco

THE FACT THAT HE WAS BORN in this city a century ago next February is the stated reason for "Ansel Adams at 100," an exhibition of 114 photographic prints that just opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It will proceed, after it closes here in January, on one of the grandest tours any art exhibition has been given since the treasures of King Tut: to the Art Institute in Chicago, the Hayward Gallery in London, the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

To win that sort of an itinerary one must come up with a better justification for an exhibition than a birthday, especially of an artist already so widely visible and perhaps too popular for his own good—even before his death in 1984. In fact, John Szarkowski, who put together this exhibition—as he did the 1979 Adams retrospective at MoMA—refused to mount one more show of Adams's Greatest Hits. Like many people in the contemporary art scene, he seems eager to distance himself from the "later" Ansel Adams—the burly, bearded sage of Point Lobos who all but abandoned taking pictures in favor of making large, high-contrast (and high-priced) prints of his earlier work, advising presidents on wilderness preservation, socializing, teaching, writing letters and managing his estate and his image.

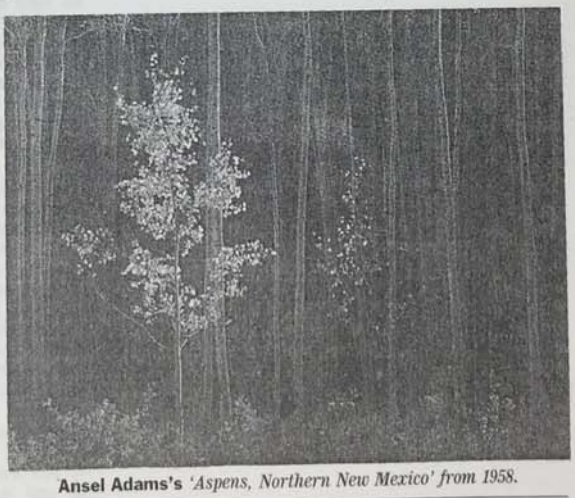
In his attempt to win Adams back to the world of serious art lovers from the peddlers and purchasers of his posters and calendars, Mr. Szarkowski has generally avoided what he regards as the oversize, overdramatized prints made by Adams and others over the last 40 years. Instead, he looked for what are called "vintage prints"—those made by the photographer soon after a picture was taken. (Adams often made these the same size as the negatives.) Only six of the 114 prints here are listed as having been made after 1970; only six of the pictures were taken after 1950.

This selective approach means that museumgoers are obliged to examine dozens of small works mounted behind glass and hung close together, in four coolly lit galleries that are likely to become very crowded. (Only about a quarter of the prints are larger than 8 by 10 inches.) To accompany the exhibition, Little, Brown has published a $150, 13-by-15-inch catalog with reproductions (most of them full-size) of such extraordinary quality that one can sometimes see more detail in the inked print on the page than the chemical print on the wall. A smaller, soft-cover version costs $50.

Adams's microscopically sharp detail—achieved by means of long exposures through tiny apertures—tempts us to want to see enlargements of his pictures, so we can gasp over the precisely etched pine needles, leaf veins and granite cracks, the fine detail of distant objects. Big posters on sale in the museum shop allow one to indulge this craving—while making clear that, even for epic panoramas, bigger is not necessarily better.

Mr. Szarkowski has included two pairs of early and later prints made from the same negatives. In a version of "Aspens, Northern New Mexico" made soon after it was shot in 1958, a palisade of slender white tree trunks is almost lost in shadow, as is the base of foliage in the front. The semitransparent, light-struck leaves of two foreground trees stand out in handsome contrast. In a 1976 print, the wall of trunks leaps forward, the foliage looks spotlit, and the foreground leaves appear to be lit by electricity rather than the sun. In a similar pair of prints of "Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake," the more popular 1978 version—which Mr. Szarkowski has called "egregiously inferior" to the 1949 version that hangs alongside it—looks almost computer-created, so aggressively unnatural are its shadows, reflections and contrasts.

But exaggerated, "unnatural" contrasts of black and white—pitch-black earth, sky or shadows set against whiter-than-white clouds, snow, spray or stone—were an essential part of Adams's aesthetic from the start. In a photograph Adams took at age 16, in 1918, of a dark, cubistic, house-size rock off Land's End in San Francisco, at once battered and caressed by ocean surf, his tastes for stark, primal contrasts of tone and minute textural detail are already evident.



Ansel Adams's *'Aspens, Northern New Mexico' from 1958.*

And those tastes never changed. If photography forced us to resee and redefine the world in black, gray and white, he would give us the blackest blacks, the whitest whites, the most dramatic range of grays—even if it meant many hours in the darkroom correcting nature's inadequate tones. Patience and technology allowed a tripod-fixed 8-by-10 view camera to capture far more detail than any human eye could see; so Adams shows every sunshot pockmark on a boulder, every wavy striation on a dead stump or mountain wall.

Adams was quite candid about his unfaithfulness to "nature," his manipulation of the subject in front of his lens, whether it was the Grand Canyon or a scattering of pine needles in a pond. He would wait hours for the precise arrangement of clouds and sunlight he needed. Sunrise and moonrise, threatening or clearing thunderstorms served him spectacularly well. Selected rays of sunlight could (if you were lucky or waited long enough) illuminate just the place you wanted, while dark clouds or skies left adjacent areas in deepest grays or blacks. You or I could go back to Yosemite for 60 consecutive years (as he did), and yet never see the thin thread of waterfall struck by light that he discovered in a valley of shadows; or the sharp prow of El Capitan illumined by the finest line of silver.

Admirers of Adams's work generally fall into one of three categories. The first and largest group are the nature lovers—people who regard inaccessibly high mountains, crashing ocean waves and very old rocks and trees as what 18th-century writers called the Sublime. Mr. Szarkowski argues that the innermost impulses behind Adams's visions of nature were not so much artistic as spiritual, in a vague, nonreligious, pantheistic way. He saw, if not the hand of God, at least evidence of the transcendental in the ancient, untrod reaches of America's Western wilderness (no human presence ever defiles his landscapes), as well as in close-up, exquisitely composed images of a dead tree stump, pine needles in a pond, wildflowers growing out of a crack in the rocks.

The second group of admirers includes serious photographers. Whatever they may think of Adams's preferred subjects and effects, they still learn a great deal about their craft from his wise, conscientious, painstaking methods. His subjects may now seem less timeless than 19th-century-romantic, his taste in contrast and detail exaggerated, even melodramatic. But no one knew better than he did where, when and how to shoot a picture, how to frame and compose, how to bend light and shadow to suit one's own ends and then bend them still further in the darkroom.

As neither a photographer nor a Sierra Club pantheist, I fall into the third and most critical category of Adams's admirers, the art lovers. In both this exhibition and its catalog, I found myself taking note of his tonal preferences and studied effects, and admiring his meticulous craft, instead of responding with the emotional complexity and inner dialogue one expects from serious art.

Other dissatisfied critics have called his works "too perfect," and in one sense they are. Their composition and detail are so finely wrought that they leave little room for any response other than stunned contemplation. After a while, the nonbeliever tires of the transcendental sublime.

Even so, I love the big catalog and found no fault whatever with 36 works taken and printed between 1935 and 1950. These include the blown-spray series of five Old Faithfuls and five Yosemite waterfalls; a tree detail and a Zen lake; a stand of aspens in Colorado; Grand Canyon from Point Sublime; a dark strut of Rainbow Bridge; two elongated, glacier-polished slabs; the famous sun-struck field of stones out of Manzanar; and "Rocks, Alabama Hills," a mysterious, otherworldly image I had never seen before.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JULY 29, 2001

ART / ARCHITECTURE

Ansel Adams, the Artist Who Preceded the Celebrity

By TESSA DeCARLO

SAN FRANCISCO

ANSEL ADAMS died 17 years ago, yet an endless stream of posters, calendars, books and computer screen savers have made his photographs of thundering crags and glittering groves seem more popular than ever. Now an exhibition commemorating Adams's 100th birthday — the first major reassessment of America's best loved photographer since his death — seeks to rescue Adams from ubiquity and reclaim him for high art.

"Ansel Adams at 100," which opens at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on Saturday, recasts Adams as an artist of private visions and modernist ambitions whose best work is less accessible but more profound than many of his better-known images. Some of the 114 photographs on display may surprise and even puzzle Adams fans, and the show's curator, John Szarkowski, acknowledges that the artist himself would probably have disagreed with many of the choices.

"It was time to do a show on Ansel that didn't use prepackaged images out of the drawer," said Mr. Szarkowski, director emeritus of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. "This show has the character and shape it does because it was done in freedom from any obligation to Ansel's own sense of what he decided he wanted to be historically." Born in San Francisco in 1902, Adams was a generous and energetic teacher, a technical innovator and proselytizer who was instrumental in starting photography departments in both the San Francisco and New York Museums of Modern Art. The show will end up at the New York Modern in the summer of 2003 after traveling to Chicago, London, Berlin and Los Angeles.

Even though Adams is this city's most famous native son, a "prepackaged" show would probably not have found a place at the San Francisco museum, whose photography department is one of the most innovative in the country. "I personally have not found much of the Ansel Adams work that you and I know to be very important or moving," said Sandra S. Phillips, the museum's senior curator of photography. Many of the pictures in the centennial show, therefore, "are unacknowledged work and largely unknown."

A popular photographer whose earlier work was profound and modernist.

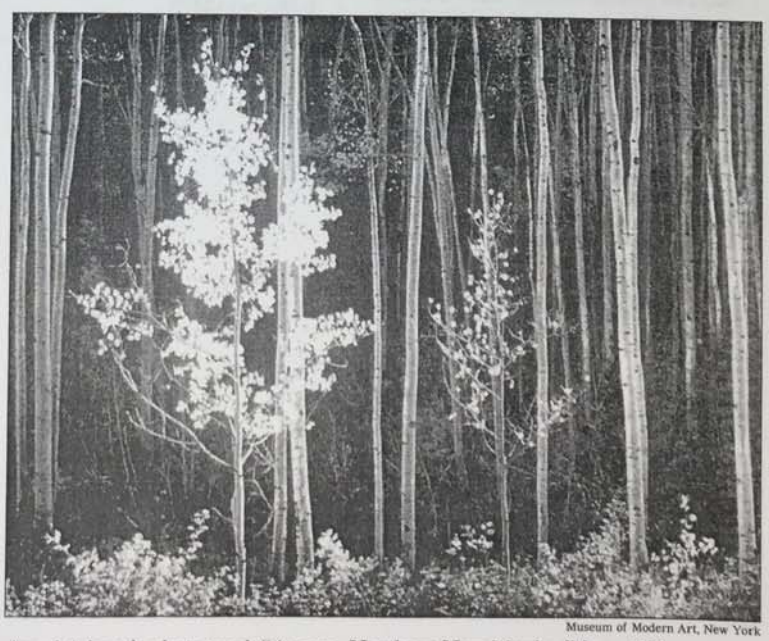
"This show tries to re-establish Adams not in the context of calendars, but as a real artist with artistic ambitions," she continued. "It's an example of the truth that you can't deal with an artist until after he's dead."

To the general public, Adams is best known as a champion of the ecology of the American West. In addition to making gorgeous photographs of Yosemite, the Southwestern deserts, the Grand Canyon and other icons of the Western wilderness, he was a tireless advocate for environmental groups and causes.

One of the goals of "Ansel Adams at 100" is to disentangle Adams the artist from the popular image of him as a kind of "green" social realist for whom a photograph's greatest significance lay in its tree-hugger message. Mr. Szarkowski argues that al-

Continued on Page 28

Tessa DeCarlo writes on the arts from Northern California.



Museum of Modern Art, New York

Ansel Adams's photograph "Aspens, Northern New Mexico," from 1958.

Ansel Adams Before He Was Famous

Continued From Page 27

though Adams's interest in wilderness preservation was lifelong, his best work was done for reasons that were deeply personal and even mystical.

"Ansel would be indignant if one accused him of religious feelings in anything even approaching a traditional sense," Mr. Szarkowski said in a telephone interview earlier this month. "And yet not only his pictures but his intimate writings, his letters, make it clear that his experience of the natural world was basically a mystical experience, and that his only really lasting, interesting artistic problem was how to make physical the evidence of this experience."

Mr. Szarkowski first met Adams in 1962 and believes that by then Adams's artistic well was running dry, even as the nation's politics were beginning to catch up with his reverence for nature. "Until about 1960," Mr. Szarkowski said, "the fact that he photographed trees and snowcapped mountain peaks was understood as a moral failing" by those who believed photography should document human suffering rather than natural beauty. "Later he became a hero for something he never intended to do when he was making his best work."

Moreover, Adams's own view of his photographs changed dramatically. Later in his life, when he had achieved financial success and even celebrity but was no longer making great work, his books and shows relied on earlier images that Adams reprinted with drastically heightened black-white contrast to increase their drama.

William Turnage, trustee of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust and a longtime collaborator with Adams on both environmental and photographic projects, describes him as a gregarious but fundamentally lonely man who relished his late-blooming popularity. "Like most artists, he had a tremendous need to be loved and appreciated," he said. "I think Ansel understood what people liked and concentrated on that in his editing, printing and publishing."

"Ansel Adams at 100" shuns these later, more familiar versions of Adams's work, offering instead quieter early prints of well-known photographs and other pictures that haven't been widely seen. The show favors studies of driftwood, grasses and rocks over heroic vistas and highlights Adams's interest in abstraction and the mysteries of light.

"Many of these images are smaller and not as available," said Ms. Phillips. "The work is a harder experience to get into, like reading T. S. Eliot or James Joyce. But it's much more rewarding, at least for me."

Just how much difference Adams's printing choices make is clear from two images — one of Mount McKinley, the other of a stand of aspens — for which the show presents early and late prints side by side. The later versions are hyperbolic and "egregiously inferior," Mr. Szarkowski says. "After a while you get a little bored, as you do with an overwrought performance of a piece of music, however exciting all those exaggerated crescendos and rubatos are at first."

But as numerous musical careers have demonstrated, there is a large and enthusiastic audience for the overwrought, and to many people the late prints' vivid lights and darks will probably remain far more attractive. How the public, which usually flocks to Adams shows, will react to Mr. Szarkowski's more austere view of the artist "is the $64,000 question," said Mr. Turnage.

"But," he speculated, "wouldn't it be a shame to have a 100th anniversary show full of things everyone was familiar with?"

Mr. Szarkowski isn't worried. "I think the photographers who see this show — the good ones — are going to say: 'Wow! I didn't know Adams was that good, that rich, that complex, that he dealt with such difficult artistic and photographic issues with such bravery.' That's why you do a show like this — not to break attendance records.

"But if people slow down a little bit," he said, "I think they'll find the pictures very beautiful and rewarding and they'll want to come back and see them again." □

A Book That's Also Art

The book accompanying the Ansel Adams centennial exhibition now in San Francisco is almost as much of an event as the show itself.

The large-format, 192-page volume, "Ansel Adams at 100," reproduces 114 images in the show and offers an elegantly written assessment of Adams's life and artistry by the show's curator, John Szarkowski. It was printed, on paper specially made in France, by a fine-art printer, Meridian, in Rhode Island, with no-expense-spared fidelity to Adams's original prints.

Each image went through three printings, one on top of the other, to capture the full range of the black-and-white photographs' rich tonalities.

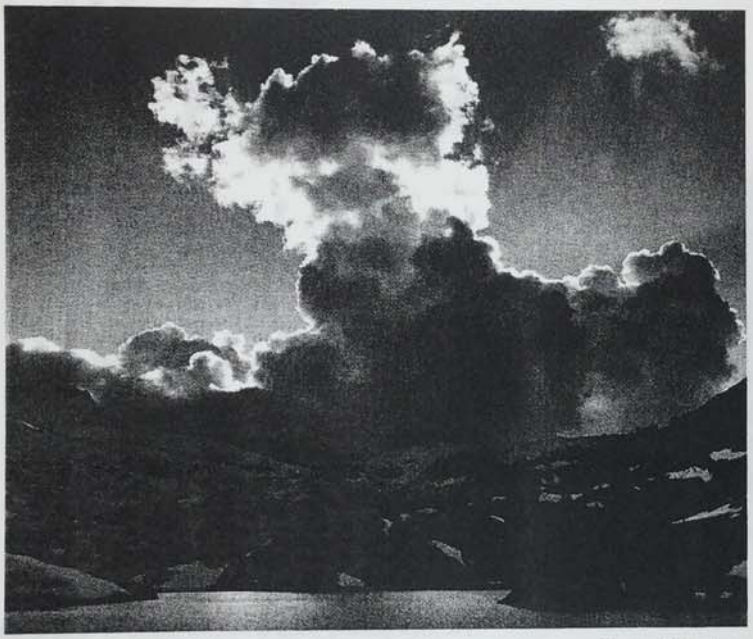
"I don't know of any commercially made book of photography as well done as this one," said Mr. Szarkowski, who is also a photographer and historian of photography.

The publisher, Little, Brown, is charging $150 for the book. Though far from a bargain, the price is actually below what the labor and materials that went into the project would normally demand. The price was made possible only because its subject's extraordinary popularity guarantees a substantial market. A whopping 60,000 copies of the book have been printed. A paperback catalog, in a slightly reduced format, is also available for $50.

TESSA DeCARLO

Photographs from the Museum of Modern Art, New York

THE TWO ADAMS IN CONTRAST
Ansel Adams took the photograph "Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake, Alaska" in 1948 and printed it in 1949 (top). In 1978 he reprinted the picture as most people now know it (below), in higher contrast and more suitable for a poster. It was a deliberate attempt by Adams to enhance his growing reputation. The two versions hang next t each other in an Adams retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco.



Ansel Adams at 100

By John Szarkowski
Little, Brown, $150

Ever affable, Ansel Adams was not an especially rigorous critic of his own work. He often showed his worst work next to his best. Documenting Sierra Club outings in the late 1920s, Adams offered members prints at a dollar apiece from any negative not wholly overexposed, allowing them to choose what they liked by sorting through massive albums of proofs.

Now, 100 years after his birth, Adams finally has the editor he deserves: John Szarkowski, former director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the curator of the recent Ansel Adams retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. For the retrospective's catalogue, Szarkowski selected over 100 prints, early and late, covering the Yosemite territory and beyond. He also contributed an introductory essay discussing not only Adams's innovations in printing but also the effect of his training as a concert pianist on his art. It's one of the first fresh views in years of the overexposed photographer's work.

And that's just the start. In keeping with the high standards of reproduction Adams helped establish six decades back (some readers still assume that he tipped original prints into his books), the publisher has used a tritone process to lay down plates rich in shade and sharp in detail on imported French paper. Adams would have been ebullient. **J.S.K.**

APRIL 2008 ART&ANTIQUES

The AIPAD Photography Show New York

April 10-13, 2008
Park Avenue Armory

More than 75 of the world's leading photography art galleries will present museum-quality work ranging from contemporary, modern and 19th century masters.

Gala Benefit Preview
April 9, 2008

The Gala Preview will benefit the John Szarkowski Fund, an endowment for photography acquisitions, at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City. For ticket information: Elizabeth Pizzo, Special Programming and Events, MoMA (212-708-9529 or specialevents@moma.org)

aipad.com

aipad

The Association of International Photography Art Dealers

The Bigger Picture

THIS YEAR'S AIPAD PHOTOGRAPHY SHOW BOASTS MORE SPACE FOR LARGE-SCALE WORKS.

NEW YORK—From April 10 to 13 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, the Association of International Photography Art Dealers (AIPAD) will present the 28th edition of its famous Photography Show, with 75 dealers on hand to sell museum-quality works to a public that, by all indications, still has a substantial appetite for art despite the shaky economy. This year AIPAD has decided to make the booths roomier to accommodate more displays of large-scale contemporary work, according to Boston dealer Robert Klein, the organization's president. The focus on new photography makes sense in light of the strong sales at AIPAD's inaugural Miami edition, which was held this past December as part of the South Florida contemporary art extravaganza.

Among the dealers bringing large-scale works are Yancey Richardson and Lawrence Miller of New York and Robert Koch of San Francisco. Minneapolis–based Martin Weinstein will show photographs by Alec Soth. Klein is excited about an elephant picture on a truly elephantine scale ($6,500) by French artist Didier Massard, who photographs from elaborate sets he constructs himself in the studio. "I'll also have vintage works by Alfred Stieglitz, Helen Levitt, Brassaï, Atget—the pantheon," says Klein; prices are from $8,000 to 150,000. New York dealer Howard Greenberg will have two walls dedicated to what he calls "mini one-person shows"—one will be dedicated to the Swiss photographer René Groebli, who created a famous body of work about trains in the 1940s entitled "Magic." The gallery will also be showing the New Documentarian–influenced color work of contemporary German photographer Peter Granser. "We love his work here and thought it would be a nice idea to try him out," says Greenberg, who will show Granser for the first time. In addition, Greenberg will bring a selection of "rare, valuable vintage prints," and notes that all his offerings will be priced at $10,000 or less.

Joel-Peter Witkin's "Night in a Small Town," 2007.

New York dealer Pace–MacGill, returning to the AIPAD show after a long hiatus, will be showing vintage and modern prints by John Szarkowski, the legendary curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, who died last July at 81. Szarkowski, in addition to almost single-handedly putting photography on the art world's map and fostering the careers of such greats as Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander, was also a creative photographer in his own right who specialized in studies of the American landscape from the 1940s on. Money raised at the fair's gala reception will benefit an acquisition fund that the museum has established in Szarkowski's honor.

Photo enthusiasts know what to expect from an AIPAD fair, and they aren't likely to be disappointed this time. The same goes for the dealers. "We're settled into the Armory at this point," says Greenberg. "There's a wee bit of anticipation in the air due to the economy, but the art business so far seems to be standing up pretty well." —JOHN DOREMAN

Thursday, January 19, 2006
Appears On Page 11,14
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NEW YORK The Sun

The Eye of Our Age

John Szarkowski discovered and championed the finest photographers of the 20th century, William Meyers writes. His taste has become our canon.

In 1991, when John Szarkowski was preparing to step down from his role as director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, U.S. News and World Report wrote, "Szarkowski's thinking, whether Americans know it or not, has become our thinking about photography."

Mr. Szarkowski "gets it in the broad sense," Phil Block, the director of education at the International Center of Photography, told me during a recent telephone conversation. The "it," of course, is photography. The "broad sense" covers Mr. Szarkowski's career as a photographer, historian of photography, theorist of photography, writer on photography, editor of photography books, curator of photographic exhibitions, teacher of photography at Harvard, Columbia, Williams, Cornell, and his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin, and his enormously productive tenure at MoMA from 1962 to 1991. (He still holds the title of director emeritus.)

We will be hearing a lot about Mr. Szarkowski this month. His exhibition of recent photographs, "Now," opens today at Pace/MacGill, and a major retrospective of his work, which covers more than half a century, opens at MoMA in two weeks. I will write about his photography at that time, but for now I will examine his reputation as a curator and scholar.

> Szarkowski seems always to have everything in mind – history, aesthetics, technology – and to be able to put it in the broad context of all he knows about art in general.

Mr. Szarkowski has a holistic grasp of the photographic medium. He seems always to have everything in mind — history, aesthetics, technology — and to be able to put it in the broad context of all he knows about art in general. Whatever he is doing at any one moment is informed by everything else he has done and knows. He is complex, but, as Mr. Block told me, he affects people "like haiku. It is amazing that a layperson can understand someone so brilliant."

Mr. Szarkowski (b. 1925) succeeded Edward Steichen, the populist, who had succeeded Beaumont Newhall, the scholar, at MoMA, the first art museum to have a department of photography. The exhibitions he curated often became inflection points

Please see SZARKOWSKI, page 14

in the history of the medium. He bought Berenice Abbott's collection of Eugene Atget's work for MoMA because, as Mr. Block explained, "he knew Atget was a key to understanding photography in the new century."

The exhibition and book Mr. Szarkowski produced established Atget's place in the canon. He rehabilitated André Kertész's reputation after he had languished unappreciated for 25 years in America. And he had a preternatural ability to recognize new talent, the most valuable asset a museum director can have. One exhibition alone, "New Documents" (1967), introduced Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand to a wider public than they had known.

Perhaps his most prescient find was William Eggleston, whom he exhibited in 1976. Mr. Block reminded me of the controversy that surrounded the Eggleston exhibition: It was described by the New York Times as "the most hated show of the year." But, Mr. Block said, "It was brilliant for Szarkowski to take this raw talent and see the originality of his work." The show permanently altered the perception of what color photography could, should, would be.

Amazon.com lists 63 books Mr. Szarkowski wrote, edited, or contributed to. One of the most influential is "Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art," a book based on an exhibition Mr. Szarkowski curated in 1973, and for which he wrote one-page essays on each picture. Mr. Block calls this book a "foundation for teaching" about photography: It has been in print since its first publication more than 30 years ago, and was revised in 1999.

"This is a picture book, and its first purpose is to provide the material for simple delectation," is Mr. Szarkowski's opening sentence. Note his "first purpose" is to provide pleasure. He wants us to enjoy these photographs; to help us do that, he tells us about the people who took them, the circumstances under which they were taken, the technical details when they are relevant, and the political or social backgrounds when they are pertinent.

The artists included in "Looking at Photographs" were mostly the great names — Julia Margaret Cameron, Lewis Hine, Edward Weston, Richard Avedon — but there were several attributed to "Photographer unknown," including two aerial reconnaissance photos from World War I. Mr. Szarkowski wanted to open the spectrum of what could be appreciated: He taught people how to see and how to talk about what they saw.

Mr. Szarkowski's genius is for simplicity. His description of Winogrand's picture of a couple in front of a wolf in a cage at the zoo, "Untitled" (c. 1962), could just as well be a description of his own prose style: "Granted that simplicity is a virtue; beyond this it is too complex a matter to generalize with impunity. One might add with reasonable confidence that simple does not mean vacuous, obvious, plain, habitual, easy, formulated, banal, or empty."

The diction is precise, the syntax straightforward, but by the end of the sentence a lot has been said. There is no jargon, nor any of the inaccessible technical gobbledygook less brilliant people use to sound profound about matters beyond their grasp.

Of "Old Faithful Geyser, Yellowstone, National Park" (1941), Mr. Szarkowski writes: "Ansel Adams attuned himself more precisely than any photographer before him to a visual understanding of the specific quality of the light that fell on a specific place at a specific moment. For Adams the natural landscape is not a fixed and solid sculpture but an insubstantial image, as transient as the light that continually redefines it. This sensibility to the specificity of light was the motive that forced Adams to develop his legendary photographic technique." Such a sophisticated

The New York Sun

analysis, so plainspoken.

By the 1980s, Mr. Szarkowski was being attacked by postmodernists, poststructuralists, deconstructionists, Marxists — people with agendas. Mr. Szarkowski's attention to the "simple delectation" of photography will outlast their meretricious grousing.

When I first called Phil Block at his office, he told me he was too busy to talk, then he went on for an hour as one thought about this extraordinary man led to another; eventually he got control of himself and told me to call back the next day. That's the hold John Szarkowski has on the affections and imaginations of those who have been fortunate enough to know him personally, and by implication the effect he has had on all who value photography.

"John Szarkowski: Now" at Pace/MacGill Gallery until February 18 (32 E. 57th Street, ninth floor, between Madison and Park Avenues, 212-759-7999).

"John Szarkowski: Photographs" at MoMA from February 1 until May 15 (11 W. 53rd Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, 212-708-9400).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP *'Young Boy in Red Sweater' (1971) by* **William Eggleston**, *whose color photographs were controversial when John Szarkowski showed them at MoMA in 1976; 'Isak Dinesen' (1958) by* **Richard Avedon**, *whose work he has sometimes criticized but whose portraits he deemed 'a coherent and challenging composite portrait of many of the mythic figures and spearcarriers of the worlds of art, style, and higher salesmanship'; 'Yosemite National Park, California' (2004) by* **Lee Friedlander** *and 'Untitled' (1962) by* **Gary Winogrand**, *who were both part of Szarkowski's 1967 landmark "New Documents" show; an aerial reconnaissance photograph taken over Lavannes during World War I, one of many works by unknown photographers Szarkowski has championed; and 'Washington Square, New York' (1954) by* **André Kertész**, *whose reputation Szarkowski helped to rehabilitate. The images by Avedon, Winogrand, and the unknown photographer and the quoted passage can be found in 'Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art' (Bulfinch Press).*

The New York Sun

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHEIM & READ, BULFINCH PRESS; COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST; BULFINCH PRESS; SWANN GALLERIES

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2005

ART

The Photographer's Curator Curates His Own

He made America's most famous lensmen, and then he became one.

By PHILIP GEFTER

AT 80 John Szarkowski is still an eager raconteur. He tells his stories in a stentorian voice, his distinct Midwestern accent wrestling his words to the ground for emphasis at every turn. Perched with a martini in hand in the clubby atmosphere of a Midtown Manhattan restaurant, he was ready to volley over any opinion or idea, from Alberti's one-point perspective to James Agee's essay on Helen Levitt. He would much rather talk about his own work as a photographer, despite being questioned about the formidable legacy he left as director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art for nearly 30 years, from 1962 to 1991. "I have a different life now," he insists.

Still, you can't consider the work of Mr. Szarkowski, the photographer, without acknowledging his role as a curator, particularly on the occasion of his first retrospective exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, organized by Sandra S. Phillips, and accompanied by a book, "John Szarkowski: Photographs," published by Bulfinch Press. (The exhibition travels around the country, arriving at the Museum of Modern Art in New York next year.)

As a curator at MoMA in the 1960's, Mr. Szarkowski was first to confer importance on the work of Diane Arbus, William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand. Their pictures were radical at the time for being as much about their experiences as about their subject, and, initially, these photographers were met with critical disapproval; the 1976 MoMA exhibition, "William Eggleston's Guide," was considered the worst show of the year. By championing the work of these photographers early on, little did Mr. Szarkowski know that he would change the course of photography.

At the same time, he virtually canonized earlier photographers, like Ansel Adams, Eugène Atget, Walker Evans and Edward Weston. Today we take for granted their status as old masters of photography, but it was Mr. Szarkowski who was responsible for their ascension. In fact, Mr. Szarkowski helped elevate photography to the precincts of art, with his curatorial vision and with his eloquence. Two of his books, "Looking at Photographs" and "The Photographer's Eye," have long been considered classics.

Enough of that, he indicates with his hand. "I'm content with what I did at the museum," he allows, finally, if only to end the discussion about his role there. "I think anybody who had been moderately competent, reasonably alert to the vitality of what was actually going on in the medium would have done the same thing I did. I mean the idea that Winogrand or Friedlander or Diane were somehow inventions of mine, I would regard, you know, as denigrating" to them.

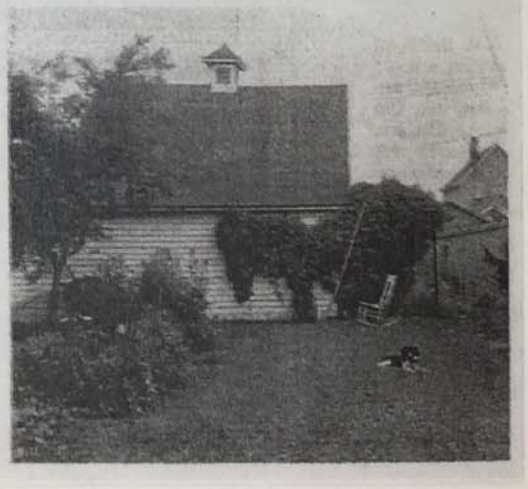
When Mr. Szarkowski arrived at the museum from Wisconsin in 1962 at 37, he was already an accomplished photographer. He had published two books, "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956) and "The Face of Minnesota" (1958). Remarkably for a photography book, the later title landed on the New York Times best-seller list for eight weeks.

In the late 1940's, when he was starting out, "most young artists, most photographers surely, if they were serious, still believed it was better to work in the context of some kind of potentially social good," he said, thinking back to what propelled him toward his early subjects. You can see the consequence of this belief in the earnestness of his pictures; they come out of an American classical tradition. When asked about his early influences, he was quick to respond, "Two people," he said, "Walker and Weston — Walker for the intelligence and Weston for the pleasure." The choices — Walker Evans and Edward Weston — are not as obvious as they sound: at the time, Evans and Weston were not yet as significant as Mr. Szarkkowski would help make them.

Mr. Szarkowski began his project on the work of Louis Sullivan in the early 1950's, attracted to the architect's ideas about form following function. Buildings had traditionally been photographed in isolation. But just as Sullivan linked the design of his buildings to the way they were used, Mr. Szarkowski photographed his buildings in their environment.

A perfect example is his picture "Farmers

'JOHN SZARKOWSKI: PHOTOGRAPHS'
The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Feb. 5 to May 15;



Authentic moments by John Szarkowski: Above, "Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, Wisc., 1954"; left, "Matthew Brady in the Backyard 1, 1952."

Photographs from "John Szarkowski: Photographs," Bulfinch Press

and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, Wisc., 1954." Aside from showing us an authentic moment in small-town America, the picture epitomizes Mr. Szarkowski's eye: first, the arches of the Sullivan bank building are central to the composition, but two larger arches are formed by the branches of the trees at the top of the picture frame. The arches are again echoed in the windows of the car. The stationary bicyclist seems propelled forward by the car's shape, as well as by the locomotion effect of the bank's arches in consecutive order. Meanwhile, the wheels of the bicycle balance out the two men sitting on the bench.

This photograph, among others, anticipates his later curatorial choices; you can see his visual affinity for the work of Friedlander and Winogrand, whose pictures also appear simple, almost off-handed, until their compositional complexity reveals itself.

One of his most romantic works, "Matthew Brady in the Backyard 1, 1952," was taken of his dog during a visit to his parents' house when he was 27. One of the few personal pictures in the exhibition, it possesses the spirit of Alfred Stieglitz before him and anticipates the apparent spontaneity of the snapshot aesthetic, a movement that emerged in the 1960's.

Here, the invisible hand of the photographer is also at play: parallel lines are everywhere, from the wood slats in the building to the vertical pole and the back of the rocking chair; a filigree of power lines props up the top right corner of the picture frame. Mr. Szarkowski was in pursuit of what he calls a discovery of the authentic, one of the most elusive characteristics to identify or contain in formal terms. In this picture, the actuality of the experience saves it from a descent into cliché, and structure emerges out of a simple, emotionally resonant backyard scene.

In his recent work, Mr. Szarkowski has returned to the backyard, in this case his own farm in upstate New York. His intimate pictures of the rural landscape show us patterns of gnarled branches, trees in front of barns, lovely country paths — in effect, his world today. They are true to his visual code, but more meditative, less engaged in the modern world. It's as if he has retreated to an interior life, where, as he has maintained all along about the photographic process, "it's not a matter of knowing what you mean and then thinking of a way to say it. It's a way of discovering in the process of trying to say something that you find what it is you mean."

He has been taking photographs again now for almost 15 years. When asked how it feels to present his work knowing it will be measured against his curatorial legacy, he became circumspect. As an artist, "you look at other people's work and figure out how it can be useful to you," he said, pointing to his pictures. "I'm content that a lot of these pictures are going to be interesting for other photographers of talent and ambition. And that's all you want."

vms

Transcript

DATE July 12, 2003
TIME 10:00-11:00 PM
NETWORK CNN
PROGRAM CNN Saturday Night

SOPHIA CHOI, anchor:

And now, from pink to black and white: the distinctive photography of Ansel Adams. A world tour of his best work has arrived in New York to mark what would've been his 100th birthday.

CNN's Michael Okwu visited the retrospective.

MICHAEL OKWU reporting:

The maze-like majesty of the Grand Canyon; a lake--a ripple smooth enough to want to touch; a thundercloud speaking a thousand words. When you think of landscape photography, you usually think of Ansel Adams. (Visuals throughout segment of Adams' photographs)

Mr. JOHN SZARKOWSKI (Curator, "Ansel Adams at 100"): Well, he did something that no photographer had done. People don't think of landscapes as moving, but they do. The image--the image moves all the time. The light changes, the clouds move. And that's what Adams' photography is really about--about the fact that nature is not permanent.

OKWU: John Szarkowski is a curator of "Ansel Adams at 100." From now to November, you can see 113 of Adams' finest photographs at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the last stop on an international tour. (Clips of people attending Adams Retrospective)

Mr. SZARKOWSKI: This is called "The Gateway," and it's basically the entrance to--to Yosemite Valley.

OKWU: On view, Adams' lifelong homage to the American West: the natural spectacle of Yosemite National Park; celestial

light high above the Sierra Nevada. This one's entitled "Moonrise: Hernandez, New Mexico." He took the shot seconds before the moonlight reflected in those crosses faded into darkness.

Sometimes, Adams would just set his camera down, and let the scenery change.

Mr. SZARKOWSKI: He basically photographed, I think, the natural world as--as an intense experience--his own intense experience.

OKWU: Adams was born in San Francisco in 1902. Ambitions to become a pianist were sidetracked after visits to Yosemite, which he first photographed with a Brownie box camera. He joined the Sierra Club, and even lobbied presidents to preserve the environment before he returned to the solitude of the country.

Unidentified Speaker: We'd walk across a meadow in Yosemite, and he would just stop and look up, and there were clouds; and he'd just look at me and say, "My God, it is so wonderful."

OKWU: Adams revisited his favorite subjects, Old Faithful, the Grand Canyon, Glacier National Park, again and again and again.

For all those portraits of sweeping vistas, he had a keen eye for details in the landscape: a weathered stump, a cascade of flowers growing over a crevice in the mountains. He conveyed a sense, Szarkowski says, that the mountains are no more miraculous than a few blades of grass floating on good water--but those mountains.

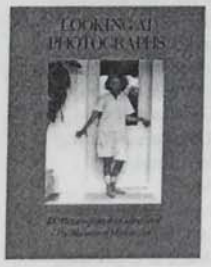
Michael Okwu, CNN New York.

# # #

John Szarkowski Is CAA Distinguished Scholar

The CAA Distinguished Scholar's Session at the 2006 Boston conference honors John Szarkowski, director emeritus of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. This special panel is chaired by Joel Snyder of the University of Chicago and includes Peter Galassi, MoMA; Michael Fried, Johns Hopkins University; and André Gunthert, professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, directeur of the Laboratoire d'histoire visuelle contemporaine; secretary of the Société française de photographie, and editor of *Études*. The session takes place Thursday, February 23, from 2:30 to 5:00 PM in Ballroom B of the Hynes Convention Center.

As director of MoMA's Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991, Szarkowski oversaw more than one hundred exhibitions, the publication of more than thirty books and catalogues, the inauguration of the museum's first photography collection galleries in 1964 and their expansion in 1984, the establishment of endowments to support the department's programs, and the continued development of the collection, which now includes more than twenty-five thousand works spanning the history of photography.



The exhibitions Szarkowski organized at the museum ranged from presentations of new work to retrospectives of major figures, and from considerations of the formal vocabulary of photography and its varied applications to broad surveys of important historical episodes. Many exhibitions were accompanied by publications edited and often written by Szarkowski. Among the most important are: *The Photographer and the American Landscape* (1963), *The Photographer's Eye* (1964; publication 1966), *New Documents* (1967), *The Animals: Photographs by Gary Winogrand* (1969), *From the Picture Press* (1973), *New Japanese Photography* (1974; with Shoji Yamagishi); *Photographs by William Eggleston* (1976), *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (1978), *Photography until Now* (1990), and *Lee Friedlander: Nudes* (1991). Retrospectives have surveyed the work of André Kertész (1964), Dorothea Lange (1966), Brassaï (1968), Henri Cartier-Bresson (1968), Bill Brandt (1969), Walker Evans (1971), Diane Arbus (1972), Harry Callahan (1976), Eugene Atget (in four parts, 1981–85; with Maria Morris Hambourg); Irving Penn (1984); and Gary Winogrand (1988). In 1985, Szarkowski inaugurated the annual *New Photography* series, which introduced the work of dozens of artists in the following fourteen years.

Photo: Rachel Cragnale

John Szarkowski

In June 2003, MoMA issued a Russian edition of Szarkowski's highly acclaimed book, *Looking at Photographs*, an introduction to the history and aesthetics of photography first published in 1973. The new edition was issued to accompany Szarkowski's exhibition based on the book, which was on view at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow in 2003. In addition to *Ansel Adams at 100*, Szarkowski's other MoMA exhibitions since 1991 have included *Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George* (1995) and *Come Sunday: Photographs by Thomas Roma* (1996).

Szarkowski holds honorary doctorates from the Philadelphia College of Art (1965), the school of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1978), the Portland School of Art (1980), Parsons School of Design (1988), Northland College (1990), the University of Wisconsin (1991), Massachusetts College of Art (1993), and Columbia College Chicago (2001). He is the recipient of the City of New York Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture (1979), the Friends of Photography Award for Distinguished Career in Photography (1988), the International Center of Photography Infinity Awards for Writing (1989) and Lifetime Achievement (1995), the Association of Independent Photography Dealers Lifetime Achievement Award (1992), the Royal Photographic Society Progress Medal (1992), and the National Arts Club Gold Medal for Photography (1998).

Szarkowski has taught at Columbia, Cornell, Florida International, Harvard, Yale, and New York Universities, the University of Wisconsin, Bennington and Williams Colleges, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, and the University of Arizona, where he was appointed the first Ansel and Virginia Adams Visiting Scholar at that school's Center for Creative Photography. Before joining MoMA, Szarkowski received two Guggenheim fellowships in photography, which he used to produce *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956; reissued in 2000 by Bulfinch Press) and to photograph the Quetico wilderness area of western Ontario. Supported by a grant from the University of Minnesota Press, he made the photographs and wrote the text for *The Face of Minnesota* (1958). During these years, his work was widely exhibited, including one-person shows at the Walker Art Center (1949, 1958), the George Eastman House (1952), and the Art Institute of Chicago (1961).

Szarkowski returned to picture making in 1991 and during the past decade has photographed throughout the United States. *Mr. Bristol's Barn*, a book of his photographs, was published in 1997. Pace/MacGill Gallery in New York has presented his work in two solo exhibitions (1995 and 1999) and in a joint exhibition with Lee Friedlander (2000).

Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wisc., in 1925 and received his bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1948. ■

THE JUDITH ROTHSCHILD FOUNDATION

For Immediate Release *News*

Contact: Elizabeth Slater
Vice President, Grant Program
Tel: (212) 831-4114 / Fax: (212) 831-6222

THE JUDITH ROTHSCHILD FOUNDATION AWARDS OVER $250,000 TO 21 PROJECTS

Now in its tenth year, this innovative grant program is dedicated to advancing the work of American visual artists who are recently deceased and under-recognized.

New York (March 8, 2004) — The Judith Rothschild Foundation announced today 21 grant awards totaling over $250,000 for the current year. The grants, which range from $7,500 to $25,000, will support and stimulate interest in the work of 39 artists. In keeping with the Foundation's unique mission, all grants are for recently deceased American visual artists who are deemed outstanding, yet under-recognized.

Grant recipients this year come from across the country including California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Utah. In the program's tenth year, these grants will contribute funding for: museum and gallery exhibitions; publications; the acquisition of works of art for public collections; and the conservation, research, and documentation of artists' work.

A selection of the grants this year will go towards museum exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues, including:

- an exhibition on painter **David Cannon Dashiell** with accompanying pamphlet, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA;
- a retrospective exhibition together with accompanying catalogue on painter **Robert Dowd**, at the Center Galleries of the College for Creative Studies, Detroit, MI;
- an exhibition and catalogue on sculptor **Peter Grippe**, at The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University, Waltham, MA;
- a traveling retrospective exhibition on artist **Conrad House** with accompanying catalogue, at the Jonson Gallery of the University Art Museums, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM;

-More-

- an exhibition and catalogue on the painter/sculptor **Reuben Kadish** at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, NY;
- a traveling exhibition on **Doug Michels** and his collaborators with accompanying catalogue, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive of the University of California, Berkeley, CA;
- a traveling exhibition together with accompanying catalogue on painter/sculptor **Lee Mullican**, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA;
- a retrospective exhibition on painter/sculptor **John David Rigsby** with accompanying catalogue, at the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver, Denver, CO;
- an exhibiton on painter **Hale Woodruff**, at the High Museum of Art in cooperation with the Atlanta Housing Authority, Atlanta, GA;
- the costs associated with hosting a traveling group exhibition that will include work by **Earl Hill, Alvin Hollingsworth, Ronald Joseph, Ellis Wilson,** and **Hale Woodruff,** at the The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC;
- a group exhibition with accompanying catalogue, which will include work by **Ruth Armer, Margaret Bruton, Elsie Drigs, Elizabeth Eyre De Lanux, Sarah McPherson, Elizabeth Olds, Margaret Rocle,** and **Margery Ryerson**, at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, UT; and
- a traveling group exhibition with accompanying catalogue, which will include work by **Gertrude Abercrombie, Otis Marion Dozier, Jared French, James Guy, Alexandre Hogue, Charles Howard, Rueben Kadish, Helen Lundeberg, George Marinko,** and **Charles Rain**, at the National Academy of Design, Museum and School of Fine Arts, New York, NY.

Other 2004 grants will support the purchase of works of art by museums across the country, including:

- a major work from painter **Carlos Almaraz's** car crash series for the National Hispanic Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM;
- work by painter **Nell Blaine** for the Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, NJ;
- *Waterloo*, a 1965 painting by **Norman Bluhm** for The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY;
- *Two Figures, Two Heads*, a 1998 painting by **Louis Finkelstein** for the Kresge Art Museum of the Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI;
- one or two major paintings by **Howard Mehring** for The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, HI; and
- *Two Reds and a Blue*, a 1961 sculpture by **George Sugarman** for the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art of the University of Texas, Austin, TX.

Additional grants awarded this year are:

- for the estate of **Esther Bubley** to produce a book on the photojournalist, published by the Aperture Foundation, New York, NY;
- in support of the photography and filming of painter **Herbert Creecy**'s work and studio, in preparation for a DVD, by The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, GA; and
- for the conservation of thirty-six works by the painter **Esphyr Slobodkina** at the Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY.

The only American grant program of its kind, The Judith Rothschild Foundation was established by the will of the noted abstract painter, Judith Rothschild, who died in 1993. The Foundation's mission focuses on encouraging interest in recently deceased American painters, sculptors, and photographers whose work is of the highest quality but lacks adequate recognition. The grant program is dedicated to ensuring that the work of under-recognized, deceased artists has meaningful opportunities for public viewing and critical reassessment.

"Since its inception in 1995, The Judith Rothschild Foundation's grant program has contributed more than two and a half million dollars toward a wide range of projects, providing well over 200 opportunities for significant re-evaluation of the work of recently deceased American artists," commented Elizabeth Slater, Vice President, Grant Program. "Through this juried process, we are committed to calling long-overdue attention to the vital, yet often little known contributions these artists have made to our culture."

Recipients are selected by the Foundation's Grants Review Committee, which is chaired by Wilder Green. Committee membership changes annually, and is comprised of noted scholars, critics, museum professionals and artists who serve anonymously during their terms. This year's Committee members were: **Arthur C. Da** philosopher and art critic, New York, NY; **Sherri Geldin**, Director, Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio University, Columbus, OH; **John Szarkowski**, photographer, East Chatham, NY; **Susan M. Taylor**, Dire Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ; and **Richard Tuttle**, artist, Abiquiu,

"Every year, the Grants Review Committee is faced with the challenge of selecting our award recipients from a large group of extremely worthy applicants, and this year was no exception. With the current awards, we were particularly pleased with the broad national scope of applications, allowing the Foundation to support the efforts of organizations across the United States," stated Wilder Green.

To receive Grant Program Guidelines, contact The Judith Rothschild Foundation, 1110 Park Avenue, New York, NY, 10128, telephone (212) 831-4114; or visit http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/rothschild.

The Judith Rothschild Foundation makes grants to present, preserve, or interpret work of the highest aesthetic merit by lesser-known American artists who have died after 1976. The primary emphasis is to promote public awareness of the scope of the artists' achievements as well as the direct aesthetic experience of their work.

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Complete descriptions of The Judith Rothschild Foundation 2004 grants are attached.

THE BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE
21 July 1991

THE ARTS IN AMERICA

A notable photo finish

MOMA's Szarkowski leaves with a flourish

By Vicki Goldberg

NEW YORK – "After I got a Guggenheim in 1954 to photograph Louis Sullivan's architecture," John Szarkowski says, "I never had a real job again – up till this very moment. Since then, it's all been just play." For the last 29 years he has been playing director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, perhaps the most prestigious position in the field.

He has mounted over 100 exhibitions; rescued photographers like Jacques Henri Lartigue and E. J. Bellocq from obscurity; made Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand the dominant figures of the day; practically enshrined Eugene Atget in the temple of Old Masters; and championed color photography by showing Marie Cosindas' photographs in 1966 and William Eggleston's in 1976, when most of the art world still thought color suitable for calendars alone. Having reached the age of 65, he stepped down from his post this month.

PHOTOS, Page A26

Vicki Goldberg's new book "The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives" will be published this October by Abbeville Press.

PHOTO / BEN BLACKWELL

tetiring New York Museum of Modern Art photography director John Szarkowski.

Photos

Continued from Page A25

Susan Kismaric, a curator in the department, goes so far as to say that in this century, no one but Alfred Stieglitz has brought as much attention to photography in so intelligent a manner as Szarkowski has; if nothing else, this remark is indicative of the extravagant praise he inspires in many who have worked with him. Szarkowski writes with great eloquence, so that his point of view has been persuasively broadcast by words as well as pictures: "Looking at Photographs" (1973) was one of the first texts to speak intelligently and feelingly about photographs to a wider audience than scholars and collectors. His conversation is almost equally articulate, vigorous and larded with wit and insight, but there the eloquence sits oddly on his flat Midwestern twang. His enthusiasm for pictures has not been dimmed one whit by time; even during interviews he leaps up repeatedly to find examples and laughs to think how wonderful they are.

The earthy school of photography

In 1962, when the Museum of Modern Art interrupted one of Szarkowski's photographic projects and brought him to New York for an interview, Rene d'Harnoncourt, the director, said, "I assume you know why you're here." Szarkowski replied that he hadn't a clue. D'Harnoncourt studied him a moment, trying to determine whether this was true (it was) or merely a skillful evasion; apparently deciding that either case would suit the job description, he offered Szarkowski the position. Szarkowski refused at first but eventually accepted, thinking that "if by any remote stretch of the imagination, I'm not canned first, under no circumstances will I stay for more than six years. I thought that a senatorial term – that's as long as anyone should stay in a job." Pause. "But it didn't work out that way."

His heart belongs to street and daily-life photography of the Arbus-Friedlander-Winogrand school, where the camera plucks earthy revelations and unexpected grace from the welter of ordinary experience, and some think him unduly devoted to this one branch of the medium at the expense of other approaches; Cornell Capa, director of the International Center of Photography in New York, once said, "He would win almost any *un*popularity contest among young photographers." From the beginning, he has adhered to the modernist argument that photography is most pure when most faithful to its own unique and peculiar character, such as its emphasis on time, motion and the relationship of elements within the composition to the picture's edge.

He himself would claim that his greatest commitment has been to photography's place in the history of picture making, a history he sees as essentially a technological evolution rather than a contest between document and art. Szarkowski has never drawn a tight line around the art end of the medium; as he put it in "Looking at Photographs," "Photography has learned about its own nature not only from its great masters, but also from the simple and radical works of photographers of modest aspiration and small renown." Photography, in fact, is bigger than photographs. Peter Galassi, a curator in the department, once remarked that

"Looking at Photographs" wasn't really about photographs but about everything else. Szarkowski replied, "And what do you think photography is about?"

During his tenure, the museum has shown not only Edward Weston and Ansel Adams and assorted contemporaries but also automatic photos of bank robberies, pictures of antiwar protests almost immediately after they were taken and, in the 1973 exhibition, "From the Picture Press," little-known news photos displayed without their captions. The utterly familiar, yet often mysterious, situations in the press pictures hinted that the news was basically a set of almost interchangeable ceremonies devised for the camera. "News," Szarkowski says, "has always been managed to make it available to the means by which it has been reported. ... Life doesn't exactly imitate art; it disciplines itself so that it can fit within the requirements of the artistic system" – and therefore will increasingly resemble TV. "Did you ever stop to think," he asks, "that it may have been photography that has driven quality out of our public life?" And he laughs.

Change and the collapse of magazines

John Szarkowski, possessor of six honorary doctorates, is the son of a postal inspector from Ashland, Wis., a town that he says looked bigger than it was. In high school, he trotted about with a camera and played second clarinet in the band. When he auditioned for a traveling orchestra, the first clarinetist got the job, so Szarkowski became a photographer.

He majored in art history at college, then went to work for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as "staff photographer and freelance all-around intellectual and spiritual leader, although they didn't know about that part." Next, he taught history of art in Buffalo, and after that worked for the "numero uno food photographer in Chicago, the Paris of food photography," spending over a month photographing milk splashing into a bowl of oatmeal. He won his first Guggenheim in 1954, published "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" and "The Face of Minnesota" (which was a best seller), won another Guggenheim in '61 and was then plucked away by MOMA.

As to changes in the medium in the last quarter century, he says the most telling was the collapse of the magazines as a vehicle for the best creative energies of photographers. The medium's fortunes rose in the art market partly in response; when photographs no longer seemd so necessary or central as everyday marketplace commodities, people became a bit more sympathetic to the notion that they might be art: "If it ain't useful, it must be beautiful." Photographs change in response to market forces. When technology made it possible to print a million copies of a picture magazine, subject and approach both shifted; when photography entered art galleries in recent years in editions of 10 or 20, the client and subject had to be redefined.

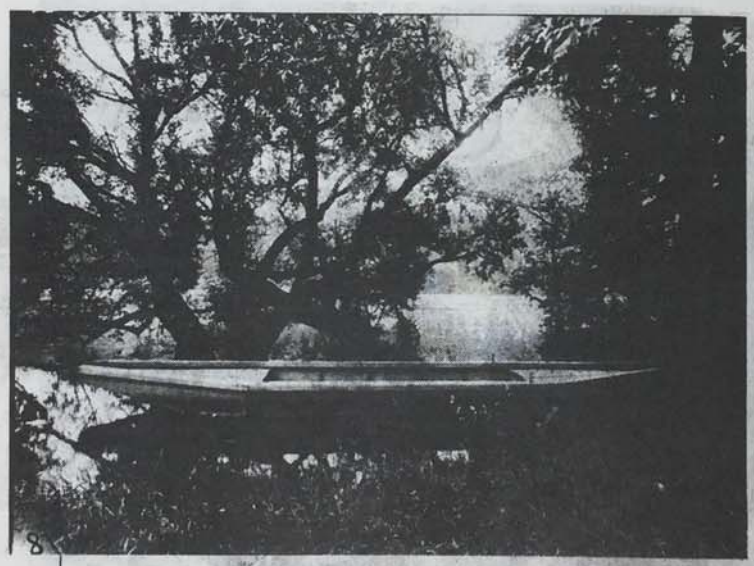
Emphasizing that he is not being ironic, Szarkowski says, "If you're going to sell photographs in art stores, necessarily they have to have a certain kind of philosophical heft to them, and they have to cost enough so that you can afford to sell in this kind of distribution." He says that today it's very difficult to be a *modest* photographer, to avoid the dangers of pretension. "Formerly, you could at least try to get by by saying, OK, maybe it isn't very good, but my intentions were good." Before it was art, he says, "it was an attempt to deal with something that's of objective importance in the outside world – 'Don't blame me, that's the way wars look.'"

Postmodernist criticism

Szarkowski the modernist has been criticized for not understanding photography in

the postmodern era. He freely admits that he's not certain what *postmodern* means, which puts him in good company, but like MOMA itself, his recognition of contemporary movements, as photography became ever more intertwined with the other arts, has been slow and limited. When Patrick Nagatani is mentioned – his darkly humorous work is fairly widely shown and reproduced – Szarkowski frowns in consternation, then laughs. "Nagatani? I've been out of town." If it is the museum's function to remain on the cutting edge, which is a matter of some debate, the criticism is justified. But it could also be argued that, like any collector or curator of note, Szarkowski has a distinctive point of view, perhaps as valuable an asset in building a collection and translating his enthusiasms for a wide public as a more malleable, grab-bag ability to keep up with the trends. As Ingrid Sischy, editor of Interview magazine and a former fellow in the photography department, puts it, "He really followed what he believed. One can't ask more of someone."

His farewell gesture at the museum is a show of nudes (July 25-Oct. 8) by Lee Friedlander, whose career and aesthetic have been identified with MOMA and Szarkowski since the landmark "New Documents" show of 1967. Some of the nudes are unusually explicit; when asked if he expects a controversy, John Szarkowski smiles his broad, dry smile and says, "One can always hope."

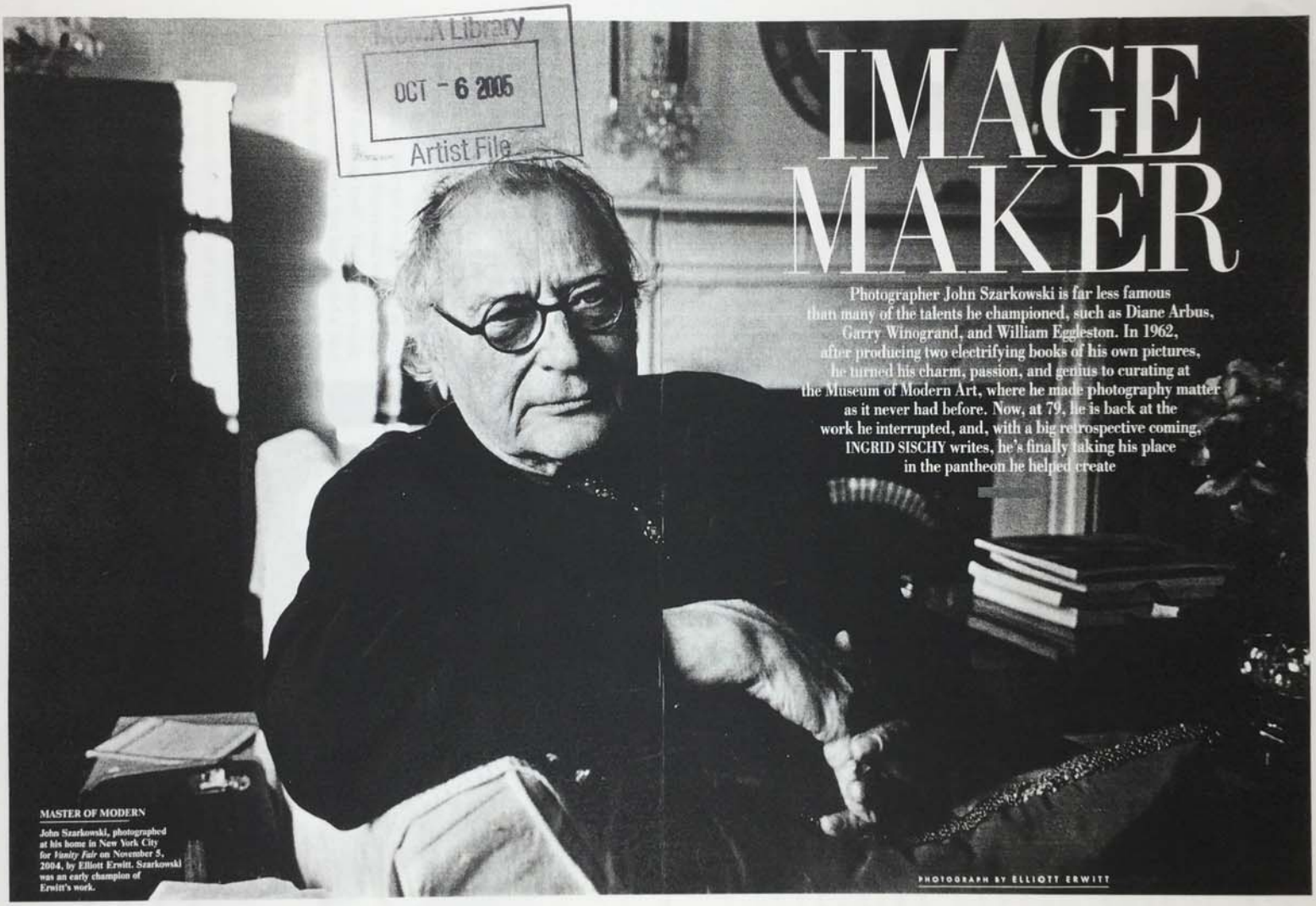


Szarkowski has practically enshrined Eugene Atget, whose 'Etang de Corot, Ville-de-Avray' appears above, in the temple of Old Masters.

John Szarkowski's farewell gesture at the museum is a show of nudes by Lee Friedlander, this one untitled. Asked if he expects a controversy, Szarkowski smiles and says, 'One can always hope.'

IMAGE MAKER

Photographer John Szarkowski is far less famous than many of the talents he championed, such as Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and William Eggleston. In 1962, after producing two electrifying books of his own pictures, he turned his charm, passion, and genius to curating at the Museum of Modern Art, where he made photography matter as it never had before. Now, at 79, he is back at the work he interrupted, and, with a big retrospective coming, INGRID SISCHY writes, he's finally taking his place in the pantheon he helped create



MASTER OF MODERN

John Szarkowski, photographed at his home in New York City for *Vanity Fair* on November 5, 2004, by Elliott Erwitt. Szarkowski was an early champion of Erwitt's work.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIOTT ERWITT

"I come from long-lived stock, and expect at least forty years after forty to practice what my education will have presumably taught me," wrote the photographer and curator John Szarkowski in a letter to a college buddy 50 years ago. "As a crusty octogenarian, I shall hobble about and point with a trembling, Elon-stained finger toward the direction in which my carrying-boy should set up the camera. And all the while chuckling quietly at the unreasonable beauty of things." At the time, Szarkowski could not have known just how prophetic his words were. All that's off about his prediction is the physical part; though he's a year shy of 80, Szarkowski remains sure-footed and still carries his own tripod and view camera. His hands, too, are steadier than Tom Cruise's in *Cocktail,* a fact that is especially noticeable when Szarkowski is mixing up and pouring one of his beloved perfect Manhattans.

At the time Szarkowski wrote that letter predicting his future, he had already begun to make his name as a photographer. He'd received his first Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and had good reason for faith in what was to come. But even before the kudos started, his writing had that sense of romance, and that feeling of destiny, that surrounds people who end up as legends. Still, even he would have never guessed that, while putting his own cameras away for almost 30 years to run the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, he would turn out to be the man who made the medium really matter. Before Szarkowski, the main line of defense for photography was that it could be as artistic as the other arts. But Szarkowski won photography respect for being itself. Other people might be flattered to hear that they had played a vital role in making photography valuable—literally, now that pictures are going for hundreds of thousands at auction. Not Szarkowski, whose interest was the medium, not the market. He says, "People threaten to give me medals for turning photography into what it's become! God, what if it's true?"

Whether he likes it or not, Szarkowski, whose tenure at MoMA lasted from 1962 to 1991, is the single most important curator that photography has ever had. He can fairly be said to have "discovered" or "legitimized" the work of Diane Arbus, William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander, Chauncey Hare, André Kertész, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Daidoh Moriyama, Garry Winogrand, and so many more. By the end of the 70s he had been responsible for a staggering array of exhibitions and books, the by-product of which was to make it clear that photography was as intellectually rich and as visually exciting as any of the other arts. That notion may not seem like such a big deal nowadays. But ever since the medium was invented in the 1830s, it had largely been viewed, despite enclaves of enlightenment, as a sort of second-class citizen of art. Not that curators at other museums hadn't put up a good fight for photography before, but they hadn't had Szarkowski's rigor and deep understanding of the medium from the inside out.

Richard Benson, a friend, fellow photographer, and dean of the Yale School of Art since 1996, sums it up this way: "John defined photography. He stated a case for a certain kind of photography that had to be intellectually responsible. He said photography is about intelligence, not warm, fuzzy feelings. He was so smart and such a forceful personality that for the duration of his time at the Modern he shut everybody else up."

Szarkowski's story is a tale that falls into three distinct chapters, culminating in his return 15 years ago to the life of a working photographer. In contrast to the fame he won as a curator, his photographs, as a body of work, are really unknown to all but the field's insiders. That will change dramatically this February when the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art opens its John Szarkowski retrospective, which will travel to the Milwaukee Art Museum and MoMA, in New York, and then on to various institutions around the country over the next few years. This show promises to be a revelation about Szarkowski, his pictures, and photography itself.

The charm that practically knocks you down when you're with the man is clearly intrinsic to his DNA. Whether he's wearing his country barn jackets or his

PICTURED AT AN EXHIBITION

This page, Szarkowski installing a show at MoMA in 1967. *Opposite,* in 1967 with Edward Steichen, his predecessor as head of the museum's photography department. Where Steichen had favored sweeping themes in his shows, including the famous "Family of Man" exhibition, Szarkowski took a more rigorous, provocative approach that rethought photography itself.

ALL BY DAN BUDNIK

worn, in-town tweeds, he is old-fashioned-movie-star beautiful, though not a pretty boy; he's as masculine as Gary Cooper—and as feminine. Or, to compound the Hollywood metaphor, imagine the slightly aristocratic air of an American Laurence Olivier blended with a Jimmy Stewart character's preference for the plain over the pretentious. Top that off with a big baritone voice and a bartender's way with a yarn and you've got a pretty good picture of Szarkowski. "It's not exactly sex appeal," says the photographer Judith Ross. "It's life appeal."

Speaking of yarns, the story of how he met Arbus is a good one, and one that tells a lot about Szarkowski. It was during the summer of 1962, his first at MoMA. Back then, part of the museum was in a town house on West 53rd Street, and the photography department was on the ballroom floor. Arbus brought in her portfolio; Szarkowski wasn't impressed. "Technically the pictures were kind of grainy and in a fairly ugly tonal scale," he recalls. "They looked halfway between Robert Frank and William Klein, but they were frontal and static. I didn't like them very much. We'd never met. But when she came to pick up the portfolio, I happened to be walking out of my office. It was the end of the day, and my assistant, Pat Walker, said, 'Oh, Mr. Szarkowski, this is Diane Arbus.' So I *had* to meet her." He laughs. "I just instantly liked her. After a few minutes she asked, 'Well, what did you think of the portfolio?' If I hadn't already decided that I liked her I probably would have said something evasive and found some way to get out of it. I don't know what words I used, but I made it clear that I hadn't liked the work very much. And she said, 'Well, why is it?' I replied, 'Well, I think the pictures don't look like what it seems to me you're interested in.'"

By the time Arbus killed herself, a lot had passed between the two of them.

Szarkowski's point—that the grab-shot look of those particular photographs didn't match their ceremonial nature—seems to have engaged Arbus. Szarkowski brought up August Sander's archetypal portraits of early-20th-century Germans, which lent gravitas to bakers and bricklayers and even artists. "I remember absolutely clearly that she said, 'Who's Sander?' That same day I showed her a lot of Sander, and I thought she was like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, she was so impressed. By this time we were buddies. Everybody else had gone home an hour ago." Not all the Arbus scholars like this anecdote, which so clearly suggests Szarkowski's influence. But Arbus did soon switch from a rectangular format, shot with a Leica, to the famous two-and-a-quarter-by-two-and-a-quarter square negatives that are now such an important part of 20th-century photographic history.

I myself first got to see Szarkowski close-up when I spent a year or so in the department in the 70s, on

LEFT, TOP, BY DAN BUDNIK; BOTTOM, BY DIANA MARA HENRY

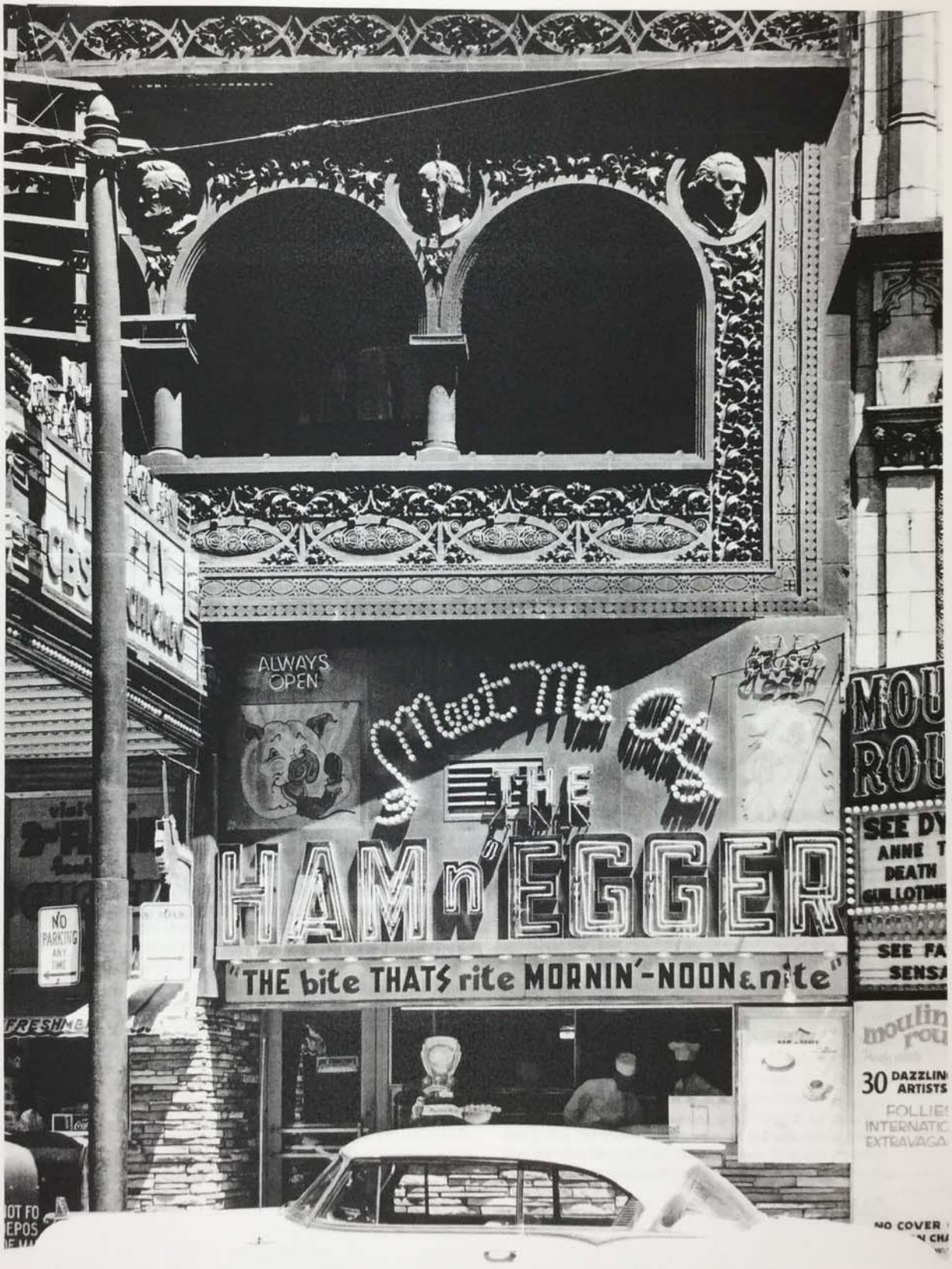
PICTURE PEOPLE

Clockwise from top left: Szarkowski lunching with his staff in the sculpture garden at MoMA, 1967; the opening party for Frank Stella's 1970 exhibition at the museum, photographed by Garry Winogrand, with Szarkowski (smoking) and his wife, Jill Anson, foreground, facing camera; Szarkowski visiting Dorothea Lange in Berkeley, 1965; with André Kertész (and exhibiting a mid-70s mustache).

a National Endowment for the Arts curatorial internship. I was 25 and had been out of college for a few years. I'd had one job that was the equivalent of working in an art-world sweatshop. I'd also made a brief appearance in the public-relations department at the Guggenheim Museum, but that ended quickly because I'd had to wear a skirt. (I ended up throwing my one gray corduroy skirt in the Hudson River and swearing that I'd never take a job again where I felt like I couldn't be myself.) In comes Szarkowski. I had sent him a letter with some examples of my writing, but I never really expected to hear from him. Instead, I got the biggest break of my life—an appointment in his office. I remember sitting down anxiously. There were a couple of 8-by-10 Ansel Adams photographs on a ledge. My immediate impression of Szarkowski himself was of a man who was doing something of consequence, something he profoundly believed in. What a relief! The truth is I have no idea what we talked about, until the end. That was when Szarkowski explained that he was counting on an N.E.A. grant that the department had had for the last few years to come through again, and that he'd like to give it to me. He said that he thought it would take about nine months and that he would telephone me as soon as it arrived so I could start work. Elated, I said I'd see him then. It all felt so unreal that by the time I got home I thought I'd imagined it. After a few days his promise seemed just like a nice dream—nothing that could actually happen. I found other work. But exactly nine months later the phone rang, and I heard Szarkowski's unmistakable boom. "Well, are you ready?" he asked. When it was time to go home after my first day at the museum, he was sitting at the big table the staff used to view portfolios and discuss them. I waved good-bye. He said, "Good night. And, by the way, welcome home." And that was how I felt: home, finally.

The atmosphere around the department was very professional, but also with its share of familial goings-on. Szarkowski had no patience with bureaucracy, and he certainly wasn't curating for the money. There was a famous meeting at the museum which had been called to figure out how to pay staff authors for their work on catalogues. After a lot of chitchat Szarkowski came up with his hilarious suggestion: that staff writers be paid a flat fee for any museum text, *minus* five cents a word. With a great sense of irony he told me his idea would strike a blow for art criticism.

During a recent conversation we talked about what it is to live one's life as a photographer. He quoted me that gut-wrenching line from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman:* "He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine." For more than three decades Szarkowski was the guy giving the smiles back when certain photographers rode into MoMA (though if he thought a portfolio was hopeless he tended to stay out of sight in his office). As the photography department's senior curator, Susan Kismaric, says, "When John got to the Modern, photographers weren't given much dignity in the world. There was Lee Friedlander in a tacky jacket. There was Garry Winogrand in those blue denim work shirts that everybody wore in the 60s, with lots of pockets, walking the streets, walking, walking, walking, and nobody



THEM APPLES

Two photographs by John Szarkowski: *Garrick Theater, Chicago,* 1954, from *The Idea of Louis Sullivan,* and *Winesap, Heavy Crop,* 2001.

had lent any dignity to them or to photography itself—unless it was Steichen's highfalutin stuff. One of the things that I've observed with John and always respected was his respect for photographers, partly because he was a photographer himself. There wasn't just understanding, but a sympathy for their trials and tribulations and all of the stuff they go through. John created a persona that gave photography that dignity. It has to do with his writing, his eloquence. I don't know who else could have done it. Steichen did it in his fashion for his era. John was perfect for his."

Szarkowski's rise to prominence is as American as can be. His parents, Rosella and Julius Henry Szarkowski, both descendants of Polish immigrants, did everything in their power to make a decent life in Sioux City, Iowa, where they were living with their two young daughters, Georgianna and Mary. Soon, Julius moved the family to Ashland, Wisconsin, to be closer to his mother. Once there, he was "retired" from his job as the town postal inspector for refusing to pander to a local congressman who had decided he was such a big shot he could break the postal rules. Julius eventually found employment again with the post office, but this time in a lesser position, as assistant postmaster; it's hard not to see this incident in terms of Szarkowski's strong moral center.

Apart from playing the clarinet and trout fishing, only one other childhood hobby counts in Szarkowski's formative years—photography, something that started up because his parents gave him a Kodak Baby Brownie camera when he was about 11. As his nephew John Henry Childs says, "If you're creating a biography of a boy who grows up to do something great, you can't do better than the stories of John building a darkroom in the cellar of the house, and of him taking his camera out there in the family canoe, striking out for days at a time, photographing and, of course, fly-fishing too."

Szarkowski's single most important learning experience while attending the University of Wisconsin occurred when a teacher advised him to pick up a copy of Walker Evans's then recently published *American Photographs.* After he got it home, Szarkowski was completely stumped. At the time, his taste was oriented toward more immediately artful pictures such as the best Steichens or Dorothea Lange's evocative 1938 photo of a woman in a funeral cortège looking out a car window—pictures he still loves. Of the Evans book, he remembers, "I couldn't make heads or tails of it. Was this guy pulling my leg? All the pictures were sharp! It was facts, just facts. But I'd paid $4 for the book, and I wasn't going to throw it away. Gradually I began to see some virtues in it."

After Szarkowski graduated in 1948, he got a job at the Walker Art Center as museum photographer—shooting whatever was needed. For Szarkowski, this was definitely the right place at the right time. Back then, the Walker, which has always been a unique American gem, was more of a family venture, attracting a dynamic staff and supporting avant-garde projects such as the *Everyday Art Quarterly,* to which Szarkowski contributed photographs of objects from Tupperware to Greek pots. The implicit idealism and the social orientation of this publication mirrored the concerns and conversations that were such a part of the dreams of the day. In fact, many of Szarkowski's views on photography—his intrinsic belief in its democratic nature, his connection to books that use the medium intelligently, his antipathy toward preciousness—can be traced to his roots in classic mid-century socialism.

"When I was young, art was regarded as something more like sex or spiritous liquors."

During this time Szarkowski, already a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright, also became intoxicated with the work of Louis Sullivan and the architect's uncompromising, truly radical, but also absolutely democratic approach to building. The obsession started when his friend Arthur Carrara introduced Szarkowski to Sullivan's most unconventional book, *Kindergarten Chats.* With its pedagogical conversations between "master" and "student," its idealism, its humor, and its strong, clear vision, the book found a perfect mate when it fell into Szarkowski's hands.

Knowing the time had come to venture out on his own, Szarkowski quit the Walker in late 1950, but not only did he have no plan for what he might do, he didn't even have any prospects. His letter home conveyed this double CONTINUED ON PAGE 146

John Szarkowski

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 135 feeling—of excitement and uncertainty. "Well I finally did it," he wrote. "As of the first of the year or so I am a free agent—free to make a million dollars, starve, do some really important photographs, or get into the baby picture racket, as the case may prove to be."

He eventually took a two-year teaching position at the Albright Art School, in Buffalo. The general point was to have a job, but an added incentive was that Buffalo was where Sullivan had built the Prudential Building (initially called the Guaranty). By the time he saw it the building was not in great shape, but at least it still existed, unlike Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building, which Szarkowski had also expected to find in Buffalo, but which had been torn down months earlier. Who knows if Szarkowski would have ended up doing his first book, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan,* a brilliant elucidation, in photographs and text, of the meaning and importance of the architect's work, if Wright's building had still been standing; but with only one game in town Szarkowski focused on the Prudential Building, photographing it repeatedly. Between that, teaching, and visits home, he was fully occupied, but he did take a small side trip to nearby Rochester, where Beaumont Newhall was curator of the George Eastman House. Newhall, who had been the first head of the photography department at MoMA, was a major force in what was then a small world. He was impressed with Szarkowski's pictures, trumpeting the news in a letter to Ansel Adams. "First photographic find in my four years here," he wrote. "A chap named Szwarkowsky [*sic*] . . . brought in twenty-three pictures—he hadn't more than shown them when Oscar and I asked him for a show—they go up week after next."

Szarkowski's next stop was Chicago. The city was home to enough buildings by Sullivan—the Garrick Theater, the Chicago Stock Exchange, the Getty Tomb—that he was able to break the back of the book he'd decided to do on the architect. Money remained an issue, but even when he was out of work or broke Szarkowski kept his humor. "I am freelancing," he wrote once when he'd gone back home to live with his folks. "Freelancing (in northern Wisconsin) is a euphemism for sleeping late and being supported by one's parents. I tell my friends among the local tradesmen (who look askance at the slothful, purposeless life) that I am working on a book. This immediately puts them on unfamiliar ground, and in self-defense they steer the conversation back to trout fishing, where it belongs."

Little by little, the Sullivan work proceeded, and after a while Szarkowski, who'd had a number of small shows by then, developed enough confidence to send his Sullivan project around to some of the period's most influential figures. He also asked some of them, including Newhall, Edward Steichen (Newhall's successor in MoMA's photography department), and Wright himself, for recommendations—not bad for a beginner!—to accompany his application for a Guggenheim grant, which he received in 1954. The sum, $3,000, allowed him to get far enough with the pictures that he started to look for a publisher for the book.

On a visit to New York he struck out with various publishers, but Szarkowski laughs at what happened the day he was walking in Midtown and, with nothing to lose, got it into his head to give Walker Evans a buzz. He recalls, "All I knew about him was that he allegedly worked at *Fortune* magazine. I phoned him from the street—this was when street telephones still had telephone books on chains, if you can imagine. A lady answered, '*Fortune*.' I said, 'Good morning. Does Walker Evans work for you?' She replied, 'Just a moment.' The telephone rang and somebody said, 'Evans here.'" The next thing they both knew they were sitting together in Evans's office. (Years later Szarkowski would find out that Evans was already aware of his work thanks to Evans's role as a Guggenheim Foundation committee member, but the older man gave no clue that day.) Szarkowski was shocked by Evans's appearance. He'd expected some version of Abraham Lincoln, but that's not what he found: "Here's this dandy little Connecticut commuter with his polished cottons and his English handmade shoes and his half-glasses." The older photographer was very complimentary about the dummy for the Louis Sullivan book that Szarkowski had brought along. Thus encouraged, Szarkowski put in a plug for future assignments. Evans answered: "This place, Time Inc., isn't the right kind of place for people like you and me."

Finally Szarkowski hit the jackpot. Helen Clapesattle, director of the University of Minnesota Press and the author of a popular book of the time, *The Doctors Mayo,* believed so wholeheartedly in the Sullivan work that she seems to have published it without diluting Szarkowski's vision. So many photography books are just ordinary exercises in getting from beginning to end, mechanical and un-thought-out—they could just as easily be a pile of papers or a PDF file on a computer. Not so here. The final product demonstrates just how electrifying a visual book can be if one understands the opportunities presented by the sequencing of images, their accumulation, and the way this can extend meaning. The underlying concept—that photography could be a type of architectural criticism—was itself new, and the pictures themselves are a tour de force of description, though, perhaps more important, Szarkowski's photographic voice is also clear and present. With visceral intelligence the pictures capture Sullivan's genius for ornament and mass, his understanding of shadows and light and space. At the same time, these images lie far outside the European tradition of photographing ruins. Szarkowski insisted on the importance of capturing the lives behind, around, and in these buildings, and did this not just through his pictures but also by mixing in a fantastic variety of texts: conversations with the architect's clients and collaborators; newspaper articles, reviews, and editorials of the period; writing by other architects, including Wright, Sullivan's most famous pupil; poetry by Walt Whitman; and fragments from Sullivan's own books, adding up to a story of inspiration, achievement, and ultimately tragedy. It's all in there—the victories against impossible odds, the struggles between art and commerce, the betrayals, and the fall into loneliness and the bottle. The end of Szarkowski's introduction is one for the annals of bitter, dissipated genius: "[Sullivan's] cutting tongue did not fail him, and this offered some comfort as he saw his life run out, and his work forgotten."

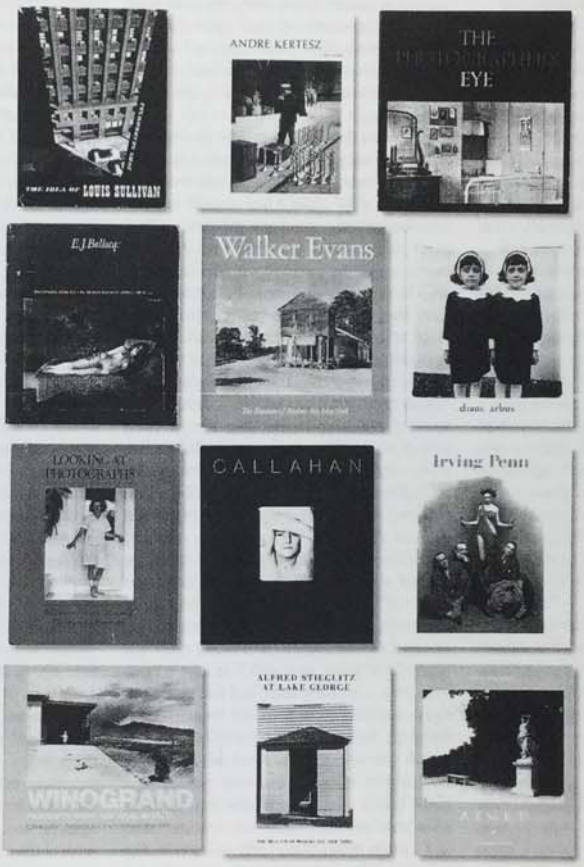
Even before the positive reviews came in, Szarkowski was up and running with his next book project, *The Face of Minnesota,* courtesy once more of Clapesattle, who proposed the idea to him one night at Harry's, a Minnesota hangout. Szarkowski's approach here was just as ambitious as it had been with Sullivan, and the result was once again unique. The printed object is a lesson in the beauty of black-and-white photography—in the gorgeousness of black tones especially. No matter how dark the images get, they are never dead. *The Face of Minnesota* is a quieter book, though, and more obviously personal than its predecessor. After all, the focus is the midwestern rural culture that Szarkowski was a part of and knew so well. Much of it is dedicated to daily community life, though the pictures never fall into clichés or empty monuments to the so-called folk. Szarkowski was not trying to create pictures with a message, as some of the Farm Security Administration photographers were when they were sent out into the heartland by the government to bring back images of the Depression—Szarkowski was well schooled in much of that body of work, but he imbued his own pictures with a sense of his personal experience, and his subjects always remain individuals. Similarly, his landscapes and views of the countryside convey intimacy rather than the grandiosity of, say, an Ansel Adams epic vista. Looking at them, one feels a sense of place and of home, rather than of awe.

Despite the time pressure he was under while making the book, Szarkowski remem-

bers, "I never had such a good time." Nobody expected news to be made with *The Face of Minnesota.* When it landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list in the summer of 1958, Szarkowski wrote to a friend that, in the words "of the Minnesota Press publicity director, [this] was a hell of a commentary on the state of the book business."

MoMA's courtship of Szarkowski began with a July 1961 missive from Monroe Wheeler, then the museum's director of exhibitions and publications, that was so courteous and so vague and so pregnant with the belief that the museum was the center of the universe, it really is a hoot. At the end of his note Wheeler wrote, "It has occurred to us that you might like to talk with us about our future and perhaps yours.... Have you any plans for coming to New York in the near future?" Szarkowski had no clue what was on their minds. Maybe they were going to offer him a show, he thought. About to plunge into a series of wilderness pictures for his next Guggenheim Foundation project, and probably not exactly flush enough to take a casual trip to New York, he wrote back an equally polite letter, explaining that unfortunately a visit to the city was not in his immediate plans, but maybe that would change in the fall. In any case, when all was said and done, and the museum had managed to declare its intentions more forthrightly, Szarkowski was anointed as the director of the department of photography. The actual changing of the guard occurred in the summer of 1962, when Steichen officially stepped down and Szarkowski seized the reins.

Szarkowski likes to tell a story that encapsulates the Modern back then: "After it was decided I should be offered the job, somebody realized that I hadn't met Alfred Barr, the director of the museum. There was a crisis. It was horrible manners for the museum to appoint somebody to a curatorial position without Alfred's at least passive knowledge of it. So it was decided that Alfred, Steichen, and I would have tea at five o'clock that day in the penthouse of the museum. Steichen and I went up and Alfred was already sitting at the table. Steichen said, 'Alfred, this is John Szarkowski.' He replied, 'How do you do?' We ordered our martinis. Nobody said anything. I thought, I'm not going to stick my nose in this, so I sat there sipping away. It seemed like five minutes. Finally Steichen put down his drink and said, 'Well, Alfred, it's a risk!' Which was brilliant. Steichen had the ability now and then to tell the straight truth at the right time. What he said was unanswerable. Of course it was a risk. Alfred kind of laughed, and that was it."



12 UNRELATED BOOKS?
Some of the landmark books and shows John Szarkowski produced at the Museum of Modern Art and, *top left, The Idea of Louis Sullivan,* his book of his own photographs of the work of the renowned architect.

But, apart from Szarkowski's risking the end of his life as a working photographer—something that he hoped would not happen—was his appointment such a risk? A genuine outsider, he was also clearly a star. His old friend Richard Benson has this take: "My theory is that Steichen felt his legacy was safe if they got some hick from the Midwest to take over the department. So he brings in this tall guy with a curlicue mustache from Wisconsin." If he's right, the irony is that the opposite happened. While Steichen took many remarkable photographs himself, his talents were not those of a visionary curator. Most of the shows he oversaw were broad, and he had a predilection for rather sweeping themes. While his most popular blockbuster exhibition, "The Family of Man," had some perfectly fine pictures in it, ultimately the sentiments behind the show were not much better than those in a parade of Hallmark cards. The exhibition's universalist thesis—that all people are the same—may have been a crowd-pleaser, but the effect was to bunch photographers together in meaningless ways.

Szarkowski's intentions were just the reverse, and he put them on the table right from the start with his first exhibition, in 1963, titled, "5 Unrelated Photographers." The show, which included the work of such disparate figures as Garry Winogrand, Jerome Liebling, Minor White, Ken Heyman, and George Krause, was actually Szarkowski's statement of purpose. Instead of creating connections among these figures, Szarkowski showed the individual ways each of them used photography as an expressive medium. He says, "I didn't mean to be rude, but I wasn't talking about a family." What he was talking about was ways in which one could think about photography. "It seemed to me that nobody had really thought about that very hard," he recalls.

Nineteen sixty-three was indeed a big year for Szarkowski: he met Jill Anson, an architect; they married in London and honeymooned in France—his first trip to Europe. (The couple eventually had three children, two girls and a boy; the son died in childhood.) The next year he unveiled one of the all-time great photography exhibitions and

John Szarkowski

books, *The Photographer's Eye*—the beginning of an unforgettable string of museum publications under Szarkowski's direction. His achievement with this project, which plumbed the breadth of photographic history, was twofold. It's astounding how many of the pictures included—Berenice Abbott's 1927 portrait of Jean Cocteau's hands, Henri Cartier-Bresson's 1953 picture of Spanish children playing in ruins, Richard Avedon's 1958 portrait of Ezra Pound—have been ingrained in our consciousness. The point, however, wasn't just to spot first-rate photographs. It was also to provide a theoretical basis for thinking about the medium, which Szarkowski did when he spelled out the choices and decisions a photographer has to make when taking a picture, whether you're Amateur Annie or Annie Leibovitz. But in addition to being one of the most sophisticated how-tos ever written, *The Photographer's Eye* conveys a visceral sense of excitement about the medium. "Like an organism," Szarkowski wrote, "photography was born whole. It is in our progressive discovery of it that its history lies."

As the decade went on, he was responsible for a series of thoughtful one-person shows focusing on a wide range of photographers, including Jacques-Henri Lartigue, André Kertész, Elliott Erwitt, Dorothea Lange, Brassaï, Harry Callahan, August Sander, Bill Brandt, Duane Michals, E. J. Bellocq, Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, and Barbara Morgan—many of them unknown then. Perhaps the most prescient show, though, the one that ultimately had the most reverberations and that only Szarkowski could have done, was "New Documents," an exhibition that he curated in 1967 and that included the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Winogrand.

No museum had given these photographers the time of day before. Szarkowski not only took their work seriously, but championed it. He recalls, "I wanted to do a show about what I thought was the most interesting, most advanced work being done. What was considered the most avant then"—showy work by people such as Robert Heinecken or Naomi Savage—"was not what I thought was the most challenging work." Not everyone agreed. To some eyes it looked as if Arbus was a loon who was taking advantage of other people's misery, Friedlander was a snore who shot boring things such as switched-on TV sets in hotel rooms, and as for Winogrand, why, he couldn't even hold the camera straight. When one considers the reputation of these photographers today, and the massive, even pervasive influence they've had, the scathing reviews that came out when the work went up at the Modern serve as a reminder not only of how far audiences have come but also of how powerful and persuasive Szarkowski was.

The show is now legendary, but at the time, other than critics' getting riled up—as Szarkowski remembers, "Lee wasn't quite so much abused, but certainly Garry and Diane were badly abused"—there doesn't seem to have been much public reaction; back then, the audience for photography was tiny. All three photographers would remain important to Szarkowski, both professionally and personally. Up until Winogrand's death, in 1984, the two men were tight; Szarkowski gave one of the eulogies at his memorial. As for Friedlander, the two have worked together often and are still very much in each other's lives. Since the late 90s, they've gone on yearly picture-taking expeditions together, accompanied by Benson and Childs. With all of their stuff packed into the biggest four-wheel-drive station wagon they can find to rent, these trips around the country sometimes sound like photography's version of *The Odd Couple*. Friedlander is big on "early to bed, early to rise"; Szarkowski is not. Friedlander wants to shoot as much as he can without thinking; Szarkowski thinks much more than he shoots.

The story of Arbus and Szarkowski doesn't have as many chapters. But by the time Arbus killed herself, in 1971, right before Szarkowski opened her one-woman show at the Modern, which they had worked on closely together, a lot had passed between the two of them. No doubt her suicide added to the seriousness and the mythology surrounding the work, but this time viewers were ready. Szarkowski recalls, "The vitriol had really died down. In the exhibition, going from picture to picture, people were so quiet it was as if they were going to Communion." Arbus had died without a cent, and with a closet full of unsold pictures. Szarkowski godfathered a deal so that Aperture published the book for the show at a higher royalty rate than the museum would have offered; that way her children could make some money, and many editions later, sales are at least at the half-million mark. The help that Szarkowski gave in this instance was not an isolated incident. Earlier, when Arbus was still alive and the two of them were planning her exhibition, he found out that she was going through a rough patch, financially and otherwise, so he offered her a research job on another upcoming exhibition, "From the Picture Press." It was a show right up her alley; in fact, the plan to do it had grown out of conversations they'd had about news photography. Arbus seized upon the chance to visit the picture morgues at places such as the *Daily News* and dig up photographs of crimes, disasters, weird happenings, political shenanigans, and other goings-on; one can imagine how absorbed she must have been.

Szarkowski says that his next triumph, the book *Looking at Photographs*, was the application of the theory he proposed in *The Photographer's Eye*, and if any publication can be said to have been pivotal in creating a general audience for photography, it is *Looking at Photographs*. The simple format—spreads juxtaposing photographs with Szarkowski's sparkling short descriptions and in-tune interpretations—was an instant winner.

But there were also rare occasions when Szarkowski lost his Midas touch. The "Mirrors and Windows" exhibition, which opened at the beginning of 1978, was one of those fascinating failures that really whipped up the art and photography communities. Szarkowski's position was overtly reductive, to say the least. Basically, he claimed that there are two kinds of photography—one being photography about photography, and the other being photography about the world.

But underneath the theorizing Szarkowski was throwing down a gauntlet. What was happening was that photography, which had almost always been relegated to its own, segregated galleries, was suddenly "in" at art galleries—not so-called straight photography but rather works where the medium was used as a basis for art, as a tool in conceptual or performance art, or even as a way to create sellable product out of otherwise ephemeral undertakings. For Szarkowski, most of this stuff was a waste of time. Plus, he was put off by its marketing; some pieces had begun to get inflated art-world prices, which offended the curator to the core. All these issues were swirling in the background of "Mirrors and Windows."

In contrast to his earlier big shows, which, though eclectic, had been powerful and convincing, half of this one was much more a grab bag. His view of photography's true purpose was so strong and evident in the "Windows" section that one pitied the pictures in the less cohesive "Mirrors" part of the show, even if some of them were standouts. The exhibition manifested just how human he was: it suggested he was far-sighted when looking at work that fit his belief system, but not always so when work didn't. There was fallout: as time went on, the Modern missed the boat on some major acquisition opportunities, such as Cindy Sherman's complete "Untitled Film Stills" series or Jeff Wall's light-box pieces, both of which the museum paid an arm and a leg for after Szarkowski left. (The Sherman series, which reportedly went for around a million in 1995, could have been had for less than $20,000 in the early 80s.)

"Mirrors and Windows" proved to be a blip, eclipsed by shows such as the Modern's humongous series of productions—including four books, which Szarkowski co-authored, and four exhibitions—devoted to the work of Eugène Atget. (In the 70s, with the help of

Berenice Abbott, Szarkowski had arranged for the museum to acquire thousands of glass plates by the largely unknown photographer, who had died in Paris in 1927 as an out-of-work actor without a centime.) And even though Atget took center stage in terms of Szarkowski's focus, the department continued to knock out one terrific show after another in the 80s, and with the 1984 Irving Penn exhibition, Szarkowski demonstrated he still had surprises up his sleeve. He hadn't exactly shown a predilection for fashion photography, so the interest in Penn's work was unexpected, but when the show went up it helped establish Penn as a photographer who counts.

That exhibition pinpoints why Szarkowski was such an interesting and powerful curator: just when plenty of critics thought they had him pegged, he showed he was still his own man. Then again, he sometimes continued to give fodder to the notion he had blinders on. Such was the case with the exhibition that was expected to be the crowning glory of his career, "Photography Until Now," which opened in 1990. By then his impending retirement was public knowledge, and though he still had a few other exhibitions on the schedule, this was supposed to be the big kahuna, the one that would sum up what he'd been about all these years.

That's not quite how things worked out. Most of the show was genius. As the century's early decades unfolded, history came alive, and the story he set up was electrifying. Szarkowski's choice of imagery was beyond reproach, and his installation was flawless, as usual. But as one veered toward the messy, complicated present, the show went bust: from the mid-70s on, the view was cloudier. It felt like Szarkowski had only grudgingly included certain photographers and artists who worked with photography, and this ambivalence showed in the weak choices of their work; again, Szarkowski's antipathy got in the way of his eye.

At the time of the show, I was the photography critic for *The New Yorker,* and I was asked to weigh in on the exhibition, and on his career in general. It was thought that I'd have a unique view as I knew the story from the inside. This was a complicated matter for me, since I felt, as I still do, that I owe him a huge debt for teaching me how to live inside a photograph, how to get in there and breathe the life that's been captured between its four edges. On the other hand, as someone who'd argued the merits of the work of people such as Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe with him on more than one occasion, I knew all about Szarkowski's strong opinions. You can just see us at lunch at his favorite restaurant, Chez Napoléon. There I am going on about the importance of looking at Sherman's work in the context of the history of images of women, and there he is telling me authoritatively that that sort of thing (feminism) has nothing to do with what makes a great photograph. Another Perfect Manhattan with an orange twist, please. I don't need to tell you what happened when I brought up the fact that I thought the Modern should buy Mapplethorpe's controversial "XYZ" portfolio, because I believed it would have enormous historic significance one day. Make that a double Perfect Manhattan, please.

TROUT FISHING IN WISCONSIN
John Szarkowski on the Namakagon River, 1966. A lifelong outdoorsman, he imbues his landscape photographs with a rare sense of the intimate rather than the epic.

So there I was, now at *The New Yorker,* trying to write a fair and honest summary of his career. Despite our different viewpoints, we still got along like a house on fire, but what stopped me wasn't the personal connection. (I had planned to write about it, as I do here.) No, what prevented me in the end from writing about Szarkowski was that I felt I had only half the story. The other half is in the photographs that he has been taking for the last 15 years. Now it can be told.

When he took over the department, in the early 60s, he had hoped he could somehow keep doing his own photography, too. "In 1969 we found this place upstate in Columbia County, and I would load up a few holders in the summer when the days were longer and take a picture or two," he says. "It just got to be less and less and finally almost nothing." In addition to being consumed by museum work, there was another reason he dropped the ball: he was conscious there were many potential conflicts of interest. As Peter Galassi, Szarkowski's successor at the Modern, says, "John was extremely honorable. He essentially took his whole identity as an artist and put it in the closet for 29 years."

It isn't surprising that, after he packed up his things at the Modern and the noise of his 30 years there started to dim, Szarkowski returned to where he'd left off: photographing the land. This round, however, it was land he knew like the back of his hand—his own. All of Szarkowski's pictures are seamless combinations of simplicity and sophistication, and those of his barn are a great place to start. At first these images seem so familiar that they appear to be nothing. Look again and they become everything: architecture, sculpture, but also fragments of an eloquent America. And it's no surprise that Szarkowski turns out to be the greatest photographer of apple trees the world has ever seen. Apples, after all, are a near-lifelong obsession of his. In the fall, after a weekend in the country, he would sometimes walk into the department and pull fresh Baldwin and Winesap and Northern Spy apples out of his pocket, and we'd all sample them. In one way or another, photographs of apples were also present in many exhibitions, and when he produced *Looking at Photographs* he included an intriguing color picture postcard with oversize apples and the caption "How do you like them Apples, Annie?" The subject would also come up in speeches that he gave. I remember one in which he likened the job of a curator to having an ability to know which apples to pick at which time. (It's interesting, by the way, that toward the end of his time at the Modern, Steichen became obsessed with delphiniums, even crossbreeding his own varieties and photographing them. For his part, Szarkowski has spent years grafting his own apple trees.)

As for the apple photographs themselves, they are testimonies to the pleasure of looking at the world, and the pleasure of looking at photographs. The more time one spends with these knotty images, the more one is rewarded: the light coming and going, the thick-

HARRY SCHNITZER

John Szarkowski

ets of leaves, the tangle of branches bearing the weight of apples, which seem to miraculously find their way through the darkness out into the open. There's a depth to these images that seems to reflect Szarkowski's working methods. He explains, "I don't have a schedule. I just take my camera outside. Some days I go to the pond and some days I don't. Some days I look at the apple trees, and some days I find other things. I love it even more now, because these are my trees. I planted them. I've walked around all 150 acres, so when I walk around again I can see what's changed. As you get older you're not so much interested in seeing things for the first time, but in seeing how they changed."

One night when we were talking about his adventures working on *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, Szarkowski said, "I think Americans were more interesting then. It makes me want to cry to say it." Looking at his photographs created over the last 50 years makes me want to weep myself. They are truly American pictures; one feels his desire to show not just what America was but what it still can be. And whether they're describing the democratic ambition of Louis Sullivan's buildings, Minnesota's communities, his barn, the Sonoran Desert in Arizona in the 1990s, or his apple trees at the beginning of the 21st century, all are riveting.

A few years ago Szarkowski wrote this in a letter about his return to being a photographer: "I will make those disrespectful middle aged friends (who say that I have locked the door after the horse is gone) eat their words. But perhaps not immediately; I may keep them in suspense for a while . . . " The suspense is over. □

FEATURES

The Photographer's Curator Curates His Own

He made America's most famous lensmen, and then he became one.

'JOHN SZARKOWSKI: PHOTOGRAPHS'
The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Feb. 5 to May 15;

By PHILIP GEFTER

AT 80 John Szarkowski is still an eager raconteur. He tells his stories in a stentorian voice, his distinct Midwestern accent wrestling his words to the ground for emphasis at every turn. Perched with a martini in hand in the clubby atmosphere of a Midtown Manhattan restaurant, he was ready to volley over any opinion or idea, from Alberti's one-point perspective to James Agee's essay on Helen Levitt. He would much rather talk about his own work as a photographer, despite being questioned about the formidable legacy he left as director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art for nearly 30 years, from 1962 to 1991. "I have a different life now," he insists.

Still, you can't consider the work of Mr. Szarkowski, the photographer, without acknowledging his role as a curator, particularly on the occasion of his first retrospective exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, organized by Sandra S. Phillips, and accompanied by a book, "John Szarkowski: Photographs," published by Bulfinch Press. (The exhibition travels around the country, arriving at the Museum of Modern Art in New York next year.)

As a curator at MoMA in the 1960's, Mr. Szarkowski was first to confer importance on the work of Diane Arbus, William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand. Their pictures were radical at the time for being as much about their experiences as about their subject, and, initially, these photographers were met with critical disapproval; the 1976 MoMA exhibition, "William Eggleston's Guide," was considered the worst show of the year. By championing the work of these photographers early on, little did Mr. Szarkowski know that he would change the course of photography.

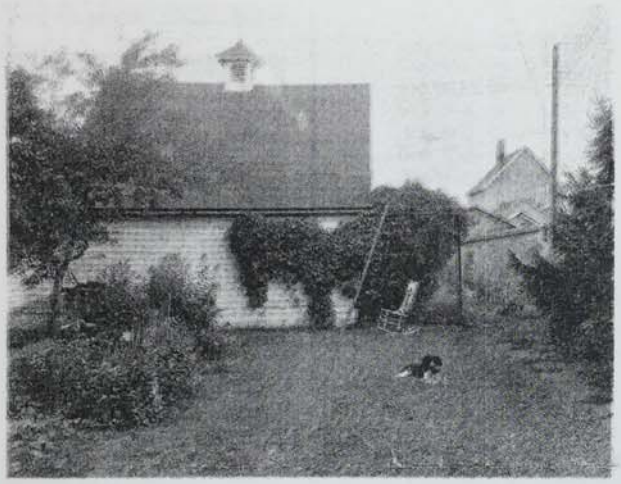
At the same time, he virtually canonized earlier photographers, like Ansel Adams, Eugène Atget, Walker Evans and Edward Weston. Today we take for granted their status as old masters of photography, but it was Mr. Szarkowski who was responsible for their ascension. In fact, Mr. Szarkowski helped elevate photography to the precincts of art, with his curatorial vision and with his eloquence. Two of his books, "Looking at Photographs" and "The Photographer's Eye," have long been considered classics.

Enough of that, he indicates with his hand. "I'm content with what I did at the museum," he allows, finally, if only to end the discussion about his role there. "I think anybody who had been moderately competent, reasonably alert to the vitality of what was actually going on in the medium would have done the same thing I did. I mean the idea that Winogrand or Friedlander or Diane were somehow inventions of mine, I would regard, you know, as denigrating" to them.

When Mr. Szarkowski arrived at the museum from Wisconsin in 1962 at 37, he was already an accomplished photographer. He had published two books, "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956) and "The Face of Minnesota" (1958). Remarkably for a photography book, the later title landed on the New York Times best-seller list for eight weeks.

In the late 1940's, when he was starting out, "most young artists, most photographers surely, if they were serious, still believed it was better to work in the context of some kind of potentially social good," he said, thinking back to what propelled him toward his early subjects. You can

Photographs from "John Szarkowski: Photographs," Bullfinch Press



Authentic moments by John Szarkowski: Above, "Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, Wisc., 1954"; left, "Matthew Brady in the Backyard 1, 1952."

see the consequence of this belief in the earnestness of his pictures; they come out of an American classical tradition. When asked about his early influences, he was quick to respond, "Two people," he said, "Walker and Weston — Walker for the intelligence and Weston for the pleasure." The choices — Walker Evans and Edward Weston — are not as obvious as they sound: at the time, Evans and Weston were not yet as significant as Mr. Szarkkowski would help make them.

Mr. Szarkowski began his project on the work of Louis Sullivan in the early 1950's, attracted to the architect's ideas about form following function. Buildings had traditionally been photographed in isolation. But just as Sullivan linked the design of his buildings to the way they were used, Mr. Szarkowski photographed his buildings in their environment.

A perfect example is his picture "Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, Wisc., 1954." Aside from showing us an authentic moment in small-town America, the picture epitomizes Mr. Szarkowski's eye: first, the arches of the Sullivan bank building are central to the composition, but two larger arches are formed by the branches of the trees at the top of the picture frame. The arches are again echoed in the windows of the car. The stationary bicyclist seems propelled forward by the car's shape, as well as by the locomotion effect of the bank's arches in consecutive order. Meanwhile, the wheels of the bicycle balance out the two men sitting on the bench.

This photograph, among others, anticipates his later curatorial choices; you can see his visual affinity for the work of Friedlander and Winogrand, whose pictures also appear simple, almost off-handed, until their compositional complexity reveals itself.

One of his most romantic works, "Matthew Brady in the Backyard 1, 1952," was taken of his dog during a visit to his parents' house when he was 27. One of the few personal pictures in the exhibition, it possesses the spirit of Alfred Stieglitz before him and anticipates the apparent spontaneity of the snapshot aesthetic, a movement that emerged in the 1960's.

Here, the invisible hand of the photographer is also at play: parallel lines are everywhere, from the wood slats in the building to the vertical pole and the back of the rocking chair; a filigree of power lines props up the top right corner of the picture frame. Mr. Szarkowski was in pursuit of what he calls a discovery of the authentic, one of the most elusive characteristics to identify or contain in formal terms. In this picture, the actuality of the experience saves it from a descent into cliché, and structure emerges out of a simple, emotionally resonant backyard scene.

In his recent work, Mr. Szarkowski has returned to the backyard, in this case his own farm in upstate New York. His intimate pictures of the rural landscape show us patterns of gnarled branches, trees in front of barns, lovely country paths — in effect, his world today. They are true to his visual code, but more meditative, less engaged in the modern world. It's as if he has retreated to an interior life, where, as he has maintained all along about the photographic process, "it's not a matter of knowing what you mean and then thinking of a way to say it. It's a way of discovering in the process of trying to say something that you find what it is you mean."

He has been taking photographs again now for almost 15 years. When asked how it feels to present his work knowing it will be measured against his curatorial legacy, he became circumspect. As an artist, "you look at other people's work and figure out how it can be useful to you," he said, pointing to his pictures. "I'm content that a lot of these pictures are going to be interesting for other photographers of talent and ambition. And that's all you want."

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ARTS QUARTERLY

1992 New Orleans Triennial: New Southern Photography

BY NANCY BARRETT
Curator of Photographs, NOMA

Maggie Taylor (American, born 1961)
***Our Guess*, 1989**
Type-C print, 16 x 20 inches

This past August photographers throughout the South received the following notice from NOMA:

"The **1992 New Orleans Triennial** *exhibition marks the 107th year of the nation's oldest continuous contemporary art exhibition series.* **The Triennial** *was begun in 1886 by the New Orleans Art Association and taken over by the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) in the Museum's inaugural year of 1911.*

The **Triennial***'s purpose is to provide artists of the twelve Southern states an opportunity to have their recent work reviewed by a recognized specialist in contemporary art and then presented in a museum context and published in an accompanying exhibition catalogue. The* **Triennial** *is not organized as a juried competition but rather as a special exhibition, assembled by a guest curator, of the contemporary art of the Southern region....*

The **1992 Triennial** *is the first to be devoted solely to the medium of photography. The decision to focus on a single medium is dictated by the reduced exhibition space available to the New Orleans Museum of Art during the current construction phase of its major expansion. The greatly enlarged Museum will reopen fully in 1993, and, in 1995, inclusion of all media in a traditional* **Triennial** *format will resume.*

The guest curator of the **1992 Triennial** *is John Szarkowski, former director (1962-1991), department of photographs, The Museum of Modern Art. During his twenty-nine-year tenure, Szarkowski organized such groundbreaking exhibitions as* **New Documents** *(1967) and* **William Eggleston's Guide** *(1976) which expanded the perimeters of contemporary art photography. In such persuasive critical writings as the seminal* **The Photographer's Eye** *(1966),* **Looking at Photographs** *(1973), and* **Photography Until Now** *(1989), he has examined the formal qualities inherent to the photographic medium—"what photographs look like, and why they look that way." The New Orleans Museum of Art looks forward to the unparalleled insight which Szarkowski will bring to the diversity and richness of the photographic artistry of our region....*

The New Orleans Museum of Art invites and encourages all artists of the twelve Southern states and working in the photographic medium to participate in the **1992 Triennial**."

An overwhelming 800 artists responded with slide submissions. Our guest curator, John Szarkowski, although undoubtedly vexed by this massive number, graciously chose not to singe the phone wires between New York and New Orleans in protest, but true professional and unparalleled "eye" that he is, set to the task, and selected sixty-four photographers from whom to view original work. In mid-January, he arrived in New Orleans to curate the show.

And what a splendid, well-balanced show Szarkowski put together. One that, as he put it, "will give the attentive viewer a good sense of what serious photography in this country is about, which is what such a show should do, I think." Included are mature artists who have already achieved

(continued on page 4)

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Editor: Wanda O'Shello
Art Director: Donna Barnet
Advertising Manager: Nancy Stathes
Assistants to the Editor: M. Dreux Van Horn II and Kurtis Overton
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MUSEUM PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

LECTURE

On Friday, May 8, at 8 p.m., John Szarkowski, guest curator of the *1992 New Orleans Triennial: New Southern Photography*, will present a lecture at the New Orleans Museum of Art on contemporary American photography. The lecture is free and open to the public, but seating is limited. The lecture is sponsored by NOMA's Laughlin Photographic Society.

Szarkowski is director emeritus, department of photographs, The Museum of Modern Art, New York City. During his twenty-nine-year tenure, he organized such ground-breaking exhibitions as *New Documents* (1967) and *William Eggleston's Guide* (1976), which expanded the perimeters of contemporary art photography. In such persuasive critical writings as the seminal *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), *Looking at Photographs* (1973) and *Photography Until Now* (1989), he has examined the formal qualities inherent to the photographic medium—"what photographs look like, and why they look that way."

MUSEUM-ON-WHEELS

"Van Go," the "Museum-on-Wheels," is part of NOMA's outreach program. Sponsored by WWL-TV/New Orleans and Latter and Blum, Inc./Realtors, Van Go serves as an educational liaison between the Greater New Orleans area and the Museum. For individuals unable to schedule on-site Museum tours, the Van Go provides an access to NOMA's permanent collection through presentations of specially selected art objects. For those planning a visit to the Museum, Van Go establishes a visual "comfort zone" for participants.

Each Van Go presentation, which includes a lecture session followed by a question-and-answer period, is conducted by a teacher or trained volunteer. Participants are invited to view art objects at close range and, in some cases, actually handle them. Post-visit activities packets with exercises geared to classroom content areas are provided to help incorporate the Museum-on-Wheels experience into future class studies.

To schedule a Van Go visit, call 488-2631.

Photo by Wanda O'Shello

John Szarkowski (right), seen here selecting works for the *1992 New Orleans Triennial*, will present a lecture on contemporary American photography on Friday, May 8.

TOURS

A docent-guided tour through NOMA's permanent collection gives you a chance to explore works of art from around the world and through the centuries. Dedicated, knowledgeable volunteers are prepared to give a variety of tours for students and adult groups. Tours last approximately forty-five minutes and are available on the permanent collection and special exhibitions.

SCHOOL GROUPS

Make plans early to visit NOMA with your class for a challenging, in-depth look at the Museum's permanent collection and special exhibitions. Docents conduct tours Tuesday through Friday at 9:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., and also Tuesday at 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. for grades one through four. Tours for grades five through eleven are conducted Monday through Friday at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Teachers may choose from a variety of tour themes intended to relate specifically to the students' curricula. For reservations and information, call 488-2631, extension 36.

ADULT TOURS

Docent-guided tours are available to the general public on special exhibitions, the Fabergé collection and NOMA's permanent collection. Tours are given Sunday at 2 p.m., Wednesday at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., and Thursday and Friday at 2 p.m.

SPECIAL GROUPS

Groups of ten or more adults or special interest youth groups may schedule a docent-guided tour of the Museum's permanent collection or special exhibitions. With advance notice, arrangements can be made for a tour in French or Spanish. Tours for the hearing impaired are also available with advance request. For information and reservations, call 488-2631, extension 36.

SOHO

John Szarkowski in focus

The Kingdom, The Power, and The Glory of Atget

ALLAN TANNENBAUM

PEPE KARMEL

JOHN Szarkowski was off photographing the forests of Ontario when he received a letter inviting him to an interview at New York's Museum of Modern Art. It was the summer of 1961, and he wasn't sure why they wanted to see him. He thought maybe they'd offer him a job, perhaps curating a show under Director of Photography Edward Steichen; Szarkowski had already organized several shows at other museums.

He was offered a job all right, but hardly one he expected. It turned out Steichen was retiring, and the job offered was his. Szarkowski thought it over for a while, took it, and the rest, you might say, is photo history.

Today, at 55, John Szarkowski is perhaps the single most powerful individual in the burgeoning world of art photography. When photographers refer to him as "Big John," it's not because of his height, although he's moderately tall. In his two decades as head of the world's leading museum photography department, Szarkowski has shown numerous important artists — Garry Winogrand, Bill Eggleston, Nick Nixon, Robert Adams — before the rest of the photography world became aware of them. And in the mounting flood of photographs, he discerned currents few others understood, or even noticed.

Throughout the photographic community, Szarkowski's curatorial accomplishments, if not his critical stance, tend to inspire admiration and respect. Janet Malcolm, the *New Yorker*'s photography writer, has frequently criticized Szarkowski's shows, but still says of him: "He's earned the power he has — it's power with so much authority behind it." And Rosalind Krauss, editor of the theoretical journal *October*, remarks that while Szarkowski is "very involved in a view of photography as fine art, about which I have a lot of questions, anyone who cares passionately about a subject has a position, has certain areas of partisanship. That's what is strong about what he does." Even Szarkowski's severest critic, the writer A.D. Coleman, pays him a backhanded tribute of sorts. In a 1978 article for *Picture* magazine, Coleman proposed the virtual dismemberment of the Modern's photography department, simply to ensure that no one would have the kind of power over contemporary photography that John Szarkowski wields.

Yet despite his power and reputation, Szarkowski has remained a little-known, even confusing figure: arrogant, modest, hyper-sophisticated, old-fashioned, in all, still a mystery man who came in from the woods. The opening this week of the long-awaited Atget show, *Old France*, is bound to bring Szarkowski into the spotlight. Szarkowski has been overseeing research into the Modern's huge Atget collection ever since the museum bought it from photographer Berenice Abbott in 1968, and *Old France* is only the first fruit of that massive labor. In the next three years, there will be three more shows devoted to Atget, the French master, who, between 1898 and 1927, obsessively documented the streets and buildings of Paris and its environs. The entire enterprise, known collectively as *The Work of Atget*, will mark a culmination — though not a conclusion — of Szarkowski's career at the Modern.

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When I first spoke to Szarkowski in his office on the Modern's fourth floor, he had just returned from a year in Provence, where he relaxed, took photographs of his family (and the countryside), and played the clarinet in the local municipal band. Szarkowski has a personal manner like an old-time country doctor: gruff, humorous, patient. Interviewers always seem to note his informality, his rich, deep voice; the way he sits in a precariously tilting swivel chair in front of his desk, instead of behind it; the "hmmms" that punctuate his slow, carefully articulated sentences. This particular afternoon he was, typically, wearing gray Brooks Brothers-style slacks, a rumpled white shirt open at the collar, a loosened red tie, scuffed brown shoes and brown socks, and a pair of round metal "granny" glasses. The moustache visible in Richard Avedon's 1975 portrait is gone, and his once-thick hair has thinned out. He fiddled with a pipe, tamping it down and relighting it, throughout our conversation.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Garden entrance by Atget, 1921

"Atget is a particularly vital source for contemporary photography," Szarkowski told me. "I'm not talking about the big camera, I'm not talking about eliminating people from the picture; I'm talking about plasticity — the subject does not precede the picture."

By way of illustration, Szarkowski turned and pointed to two Atgets he had set out on a table in his office — two fragile, purplish-brown albumen prints, taken 25 years apart, both showing the same house and street. The two pictures were taken from practically the same vantage point, but the effect of the light in each is completely different. One picture, taken at midday, is crisp and sunny; the other, taken early in the morning, is full of misty shadows. It looks like a completely different street. "It's not a matter of photographing the same thing in two different ways," says Szarkowski. "It's a matter of photographing two different things the same way."

Is this a lesson that contemporary photographers particularly need to learn? Szarkowski backs off from the assertion. "We're not doing this show to explain to photographers what they should be doing," he continued. "I don't think it's a museum's function to change the course of art. That's usurping the function of the artist.

"What I think a curator should concentrate on — in terms of current work — is to try to understand, exhibit, and collect that work that seems to be suggesting some significant extension of what the medium is for."

But isn't the Modern going to influence the course of photography, whether it wants to or not? There are quite a few critics who feel that Szarkowski and the Modern have, in fact, had all too much influence.

"Well," Szarkowski said with a laugh, "there's always the possibility that we've earned it."

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Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born on December 18, 1925, in the small town of Ashland, Wisconsin. Given a Brownie camera as a boy, he apprenticed to a couple of commercial photographers during high school. After majoring in art history at the University of Wisconsin, Szarkowski worked as a commercial photographer, taught photography, and curated several shows at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and at Buffalo's Albright Art School.

Szarkowski eventually became interested in architectural photography, and his 1956 book, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, won wide acclaim. It led to a commission for the 1958 state centennial volume, *The Face of Minnesota*. Not, you would think, a grabber of a title. But the book remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for eight solid weeks. Soon after, Szarkowski received his second

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Guggenheim grant (his first had been for the Louis Sullivan project), and he set off to document Ontario's Quetico Superior Wilderness area.

It was through applying for a Guggenheim that Szarkowski met Henry Allen Moe, who was head of the Guggenheim Foundation, and a MOMA trustee. And it was Moe, along with Steichen, who tapped Szarkowski for director of the Photography Department.

Szarkowski's impressive credentials notwithstanding, one thing that must have struck Steichen and Moe about him was his all-American wholesomeness. A newspaper photograph of the time shows Szarkowski tramping along the shore of Lake Superior in a plaid overshirt, with a view camera on his back, and his springer spaniel (named Matthew Black Brady after the Civil War photographer) trotting along ahead of him. Another depicts him standing on a modest wooden porch with his handsome, white-haired parents (his father was an assistant postmaster); another, sitting on a table in suit and tie answering a phone, while Edward Steichen, with his great shaggy beard, beams benignly at him. Szarkowski must have seemed like the perfect candidate to carry on the large-spirited, warm-hearted, humanist exhibitions — like *The Family of Man* — which Steichen had popularized with such success.

Szarkowski, however, would have a more intellectual, purely aesthetic approach to exhibitions than Steichen had had. Steichen organized shows around content, Szarkowski around form. Szarkowski's first big show at the Modern was the 1963 *The Photographer and the American Landscape*. The show dealt with the formal problems of landscape photography, but visitors didn't necessarily realize that. (One woman asked Szarkowski, "Why aren't there any pictures of Florida?")

Szarkowski's 1964 didactic show, *The Photographer's Eye*, confusingly presented amateur snapshots and commercial pictures alongside images by the photographic masters. In retrospect, Szarkowski's point was simply that art photographers worked within an idiom developed by vernacular photography, and refined that idiom in making art; at the time, it seemed to critics as if he was just dragging art photography down into the mud.

In 1967, *New Documents* signaled another frontal attack on the canons of art photography. The show featured the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, three distinctly individual photographers who had in common an ironic, aggressive approach veering between black humor and despair. As Szarkowski ironically recalls today, "*New Documents* was not exactly received with universal warmth and enthusiasm." The critics were outraged.

In 1971, Diane Arbus committed suicide, and a year later, Szarkowski mounted a retrospective of her unsettling pictures. Today, of course, Arbus has become a culture hero even outside the art-photography world. But in 1972 there was considerable resistance to her powerful portraits of New York freaks and mindless suburbanites. "Lots of publishers rejected the Arbus book," Szarkowski recalls. "Aperture agreed at the last moment." (Ironically, the Arbus book has since become one of Aperture's biggest sellers.)

In 1978, Szarkowski's mammoth show, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, was greeted with the usual chorus of criticism. By then, the typical review of a Szarkowski show began by reminding the reader what brilliant discoveries Szarkowski had made in the past, and then went on to lament that he had really blown it this time. The critics generally liked those photographers — Winogrand, Friedlander, Arbus, and their disciples — whom Szarkowski had popularized in the preceding dozen years, but they were dubious about the mass of lesser-knowns who made up the bulk of the show. As might have been predicted, these lesser-knowns — William Eggleston, Jan Groover, Nick Nixon, Robert Mapplethorpe, Frank Gohlke, Robert Heinecken, and Sheila Metzner — turned out to be the hottest new photographers of the last three years.

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Eugène Atget is the spiritual grandfather of the modern "documentary" photographers — from Walker Evans and Robert Frank to Garry Winogrand and Bill Eggleston — that Szarkowski has championed. Today, of course, Atget is universally regarded as one of the greatest photographers — maybe *the* greatest — in the history of the medium. But in 1928, when Berenice Abbott bought the huge collection now at the Modern, Atget was almost unknown.

Abbott, a talented photographer in her own right, had come to France in the mid-1920s, and was introduced to Atget's work by Man Ray in 1925. Over the next few years, she got to know Atget and bought as many of his prints as she could afford — which was not very many, even though they were extremely cheap. (Today, vintage Atgets average about $3000.) Atget died in 1927, at the age of 70. The executor of his estate, André Calmette, donated 2000 prints to the national Archives Photographiques (ironically, the Archives accepted the prints only for their documentary, not their artistic, value), but another 5000 negatives and prints still remained in his possession. Borrowing the money from collector-dealer Julian Levy, Abbott bought all 5000 images for $1000.

She returned to New York with the collection in 1929. Over the years, she kept it in good shape, drew exhibitions from it, and made new prints from Atget's negatives. She also allowed other photographers and critics to use the collection. But Abbott's own career as a photographer did not leave her the time or the energy to undertake the enormous scholarly task of cataloguing and organizing Atget's prints and negatives. Finally, in 1968, she let it be known that she was ready to sell the collection as a whole. Szarkowski went to his department's trustee committee, headed by Shirley C. Burden, and quickly raised the money to buy it. It is against MOMA policy to reveal the price paid for acquisitions, but Russell Lynes, in his history of the Modern, estimates the cost at $80,000.

Szarkowski showed a selection of prints from the collection in 1968. Another, smaller selection — of Atget's photographs of trees — went on view in 1972. No full-scale exhibition from the Atget collection was mounted again until this year. What took so long? "Well, we're lazy," Szarkowski quipped. Then he began to explain the work involved in cataloguing and organizing the 5000 Atgets.

Berenice Abbott had stored the albums of Atget's prints with care, but the paper of their pages had deteriorated badly. "Some of them were decomposing," recalls younger scholar Maria Morris Hambourg, co-author, with Szarkowski, of *Old France*. "We're talking about 50-year-old newsprint." Fortunately, most of the prints themselves were still in good shape.

Every bit of useful information had to be gleaned from Atget's ordering of the images and from his jottings on the album pages. Then the prints themselves had to be organized. Atget numbered every negative, so that he could retrieve pictures of the subjects that interested his clients (mostly architects, interior decorators, and painters). But his numbering system was monumentally inconsistent. Hambourg and Szarkowski have been working on it since 1975, and they have finally untangled it.

The four books and shows comprising *The Work of Atget — Old France*, along with *The Art of Paris*, *The Ancien Régime*, and *Modern Times* — represent the most massive art historical effort ever devoted to a single photographer. *Old France* alone contains over 125 images. Szarkowski feels that even the best of the earlier Atget books were still too small. "They're samplers," he said. "They show one of this, and one of this . . . It's a little bit like trying to understand a writer by looking up all his quotations in *Bartlett's*." Why, then, isn't he doing one huge Atget show? "I, personally, despise exhibitions that have got 500 anything in them," said Szarkowski. Even Atgets.

Framing our idea of "France": a country road by Atget, 1919

A mandarin in country-doctor's clothes, MOMA's John Szarkowski is perhaps the most powerful man in photography, and one of the most opinionated. Now he's taking on Atget, and his approach to the French master should set off flashes

Old France surveys Atget's images of the fields and towns of the Île-de-France, the countryside to the south of Paris. In France, where every inch of the soil has been meticulously cultivated for a thousand years, the landscape itself is almost a work of art, making visible the texture of everyday life. From the first images — of an orange tree, a plow, a furrowed field, apple trees along a road — the pictures in *Old France* give an incredibly immediate sense of what it must have felt like to live in the Île-de-France a century ago. Atget's photographs rise above mere record-making by capturing the contingent moment in which the photographer perceived his subject, as well as the subject itself.

Szarkowski's labors have paid off by making it possible to reassemble Atget's individual pictures into his total vision of French life. It becomes clear, for instance, that his photographs of tree trunks are not formal exercises but, rather, images that communicate the tactile sensations of peasant existence. They let the viewer know what life then and there *felt* like.

John Szarkowski's essay in *Old France* has already begun to generate controversy. He writes that Atget was working "in the service of an issue larger than self-expression," an approach quite foreign to the modernist assumption that, as Szarkowski puts it, "no subject matter except the artist's own sensibility is quite worthy of his best attention." Atget's goal, Szarkowski says, was "to explain in visual terms an issue of great richness and complexity — the spirit of his own culture."

But if Atget was trying to express the spirit of French culture, there was no one to tell him exactly what subject matter would best express that spirit. He certainly didn't photograph the monuments that would seem to the average tourist to say, "France." Szarkowski notes that Atget never photographed the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Opéra, the famous boulevards, priests, policemen, military officers, landlords, or aristocrats (though he did photograph their houses). If Atget's pictures today seem to us to capture the essence of France, that is largely because it is precisely his pictures that have helped shape our image of "France."

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Now that the work on the Atget show is over for the moment, Szarkowski has turned his attention to planning the new photography galleries that will be available when the reconstructed MOMA reopens. Szarkowski will then have almost twice as much space as he does at present in the cramped Edward Steichen Galleries on the Modern's third floor.

"The new collection space," Szarkowski told me, "is really going to be an adventure. I am determined that it will be used in a more flexible and rapidly changing way."

Finally, I came to the question that people are always asking about Szarkowski. Is he planning — like his predecessor Edward Steichen — to step down from his job as director and return to his own photographic career?

Szarkowski leaned back in his chair and paused, as if the question were as surprising as the offer of the director's post 20 years ago. "I'd like to stay for a while," he said, almost wistfully.

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Q&A

John Szarkowski

The director of photography at New York City's Museum of Modern Art talks tough about his career and the medium he's influenced.

By Erla Zwingle

Indisputably, John Szarkowski is among the most powerful of photographic opinion makers. Richard Avedon realized as much when he called Szarkowski "the first viceroy of photography." What has given Szarkowski his clout is not only his position as director of the photography department at New York's Museum of Modern Art (a job he's had since 1962, when he took over from Edward Steichen), but also his acute taste, broad vision, and incisive commentary. Called elitist and arrogant by some and intelligent and charming by others, Szarkowski has, for over 20 years, helped define photography's past and shape its future.

It's been nearly ten years since *American Photographer* profiled him in the magazine's first issue (June 1978), and since then his influence has only grown. And, in a newly expanded museum, his department has tripled in size. Recently, *American Photographer*'s Erla Zwingle visited Szarkowski at his MOMA office to get an update on the man and the museum. What emerged was a conversation with a wily subject, a curator with both common sense and savvy who knows what it takes to stay on top—and out in front of the photography world.

AP: First, let's talk about what's happening here at the museum, in terms of fine-art photography.
JS: I detest the term "fine-art photography." What would you think if somebody used the term "fine-art writing"?
AP: They call it literature, don't they?
JS: Well, that's a verdict that is assigned later. At first you just call it writing—you call it sonnets, or you call it history, or essays. But if a piece in a newspaper is an essay, when do you call it fine-art writing?
AP: When it's really, really good.
JS: Well, that's what I'd like to talk about—the distinction between photography that's judged to be really good and that which is merely good. However, it's all, in the end, photography.
AP: All right, then—tell us where you think the museum is going, or at least how it is changing. For instance, are you seeing pictures now that you haven't seen before?
JS: Yes. That's an easy question, you know, because photographs really are like snowflakes. However many billion photographs have been made, so far nobody's found two that are the same. Of course they change. But what we are more interested in than that is whether or not the photographs remain vital, whether there is some kind of energy or juice in the changes we see that might promise still more interesting change and still more interesting evolution.
AP: And is there?
JS: Well, I think so. It's more difficult to identify the nature of it because surely what now seems to me to be the most interesting photography is, and has been

John Szarkowski, himself a maker of stars, allows himself to be made over by Erwitt of Ottawa, proving that while he's serious, photography doesn't have to be.

ELLIOT ERWITT-MAGNUM

"What do I think was the most important development in photography in the past 25 years? Without doubt, television."

COURTESY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NY

"The Junior Interstate Ballroom Champions, Yonkers, N.Y., 1962," by Diane Arbus. From the 1967 "New Documents" exhibition, in which the curator effectively appointed Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand as modern-day masters.

for some years, the more personal work. I don't mean that as a positive thing. I just mean it as a quantitative statement. Somebody asked me recently what I thought was the most important development in photography in the past 25 years. I thought about it for five seconds and said, "television."

AP: How so?

JS: Television deprived photographers of a very large part of their sense of social function and left open to them an area that had much more to do with a relatively conscious exploration of the potentials of their own medium and of their relationship to it, of their sense of history and their sense of tradition, rather than allowing them to believe, rightly or wrongly, that they were part of some wonderful group movement marching, locked elbows . . .

AP: . . . into the future?

JS: Into the future, as we tended to think when I was a young photographer.

AP: Any other changes?

JS: Color. Nobody believed in color when I was a young photographer. We shot it, as one had to, but nobody had any sense that using color was what you *did* if you were a photographer.

AP: Why was that?

JS: In the beginning it had to do with what most of one's education as a photographer consisted of. The hardest part was learning to see the world in black and white and forgetting the purple necktie. That's what a good photographer *did*. He could anticipate what a scene was going to look like in monochrome and edit the world accordingly, and his pictures would come out clear, not just optically but intellectually and visually. So suddenly you put in a roll of Kodachrome and basically everything you thought you knew was no longer useful to you.

AP: So you perceived color as a turn for the worse?

JS: Not exactly. I have a high regard for color and have actively supported the work of people like Bill Eggleston, Stephen Shore, and subsequent photographers who really learned how to edit the world in color.

AP: Is there any policy at the museum in terms of the photography you're interested in looking at?

JS: Well, there's not a policy. I will tell you what we most want to see on Thursday mornings—Thursday being the day we generally review portfolios. What we want to see, quite simply, is what we don't know yet. If we could define it, that would mean we already understood it, we'd already seen it, that we could anticipate it. That's what the old photography salons were about—that's how they could divide it up into cats, sunsets, old people, still lifes. The difference between us and them is that they knew what they wanted, they knew what was good, and we don't.

AP: But you know it when you see it.

JS: Well, we have a suspicion when we see something we haven't seen before that's got some vitality in it, and hopefully some wit.

AP: So there's room for some humor in photography?

JS: Sure. There's room for wit. One might say, in fact, that all the good stuff has got wit in it—even if it's sad.

AP: Is it true, as I have heard, that there is an aversion to showing commercial and advertising work at MOMA?

JS: What is this aversion? You may quote me as saying that it does become quite tedious to be asked why we're opposed to this or that. We have in fact had exhibitions on magazine, newspaper, advertising photography. Not quite specifically on fashion photography, but we show a lot of fashion photography.

AP: It seems to me that photography is

"What we want, quite simply, is what we don't know yet. We can't understand it or anticipate it until we see it."

COURTESY MOMA, NY, FROM THE SHOW "FROM THE PICTURE PRESS"

"President Nixon and Daughter Tricia Greet Student Leaders, 1969," by UPI photographer Darryl Heikes. The picture was included in the 1973 exhibition "From the Picture Press," which advanced the notion that a photograph isolated from the flow of events can easily misrepresent reality.

often taken too seriously. Do you think so? Is the museum to blame?

JS: Well, certainly we are serious. But we don't take photography so seriously. The truth is, we love it, we have an affection and respect for it. And I think photographers understand that. Maybe it is a bit different than taking your pictures to some place that's looking for a few good cats for the calendar. But we're certainly not somber about it.

AP: Are there fewer good pictures around these days?

JS: Well, every Thursday morning we probably see 20 to 25 unsolicited portfolios, and I would say that it's a rare Thursday morning that we don't see something that's worth looking at.

AP: Well, that's encouraging.

JS: I don't know. It's encouraging in the sense that otherwise we might all go mad. I certainly think that in general there's more good photography being done in this country than all the rest of the world put together.

AP: That's a pretty brave statement.

JS: There are some good people in Japan, although they may be coming to the end of their string now, too. They sort of reinvented the medium in the 1950s, and I think maybe they've been living off the achievements of Tomatsu and a few others. Young Japanese photographers may have to now step back and consider other possibilities. I think there's now some interesting work being done in England again, finally. For years, it seemed as if there was nobody there except Bill Brandt.

AP: So, why the preeminence of American photographers?

JS: If you want me to make a guess, I can try. It's because of Stieglitz and the Museum of Modern Art, Beaumont Newhall and Moholy-Nagy in Chicago, and Minor White and Alexey Brodovitch. I don't mean Brodovitch as a graphic designer, I mean the fact that when he was art director of *Harper's Bazaar* he published Brassaï and Cartier-Bresson and Evans and Frank. And I mention MOMA because it published books by people like Evans and Strand and Weston and Cartier-Bresson and because it circulated exhibitions. People like Moholy hired public school English teachers like Aaron Siskind and a Chrysler accountant like Harry Callahan to teach at the new Bauhaus. That produced a lot of people who were interested in the creative possibilities of photography and then went on to teach it. There are by now—what?—ten, or a dozen museums in this country that take photography seriously and collect it and give exhibitions of it. The amount of work, current and past, that is available to the young photographer in this country is much richer than it is anywhere else.

AP: This brings me to another question, which is, Do you think that New York is still the premier photography location for people who want to work and learn?

JS: Well, think of the photographers now working in Minnesota; there's nothing special about New York.

AP: There used to be, though.

JS: Are you talking about the 1950s?

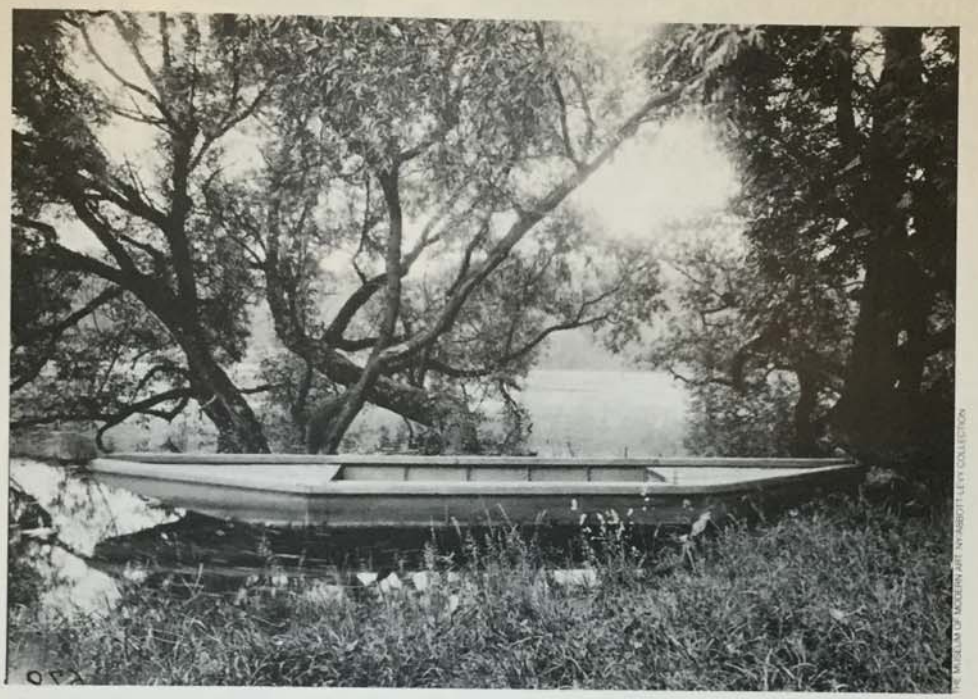
AP: Well, yes.

JS: Frank was working in New York, and Frank's confrere Louis Faurer, and Penn, and others. At the same time Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind were in Chicago, Minor White was in California. So, when you look back on the 1950s or the '60s or the '70s and take ten American photographers, New York will have no monopoly on the original work. New York has never been so important as people in New York would like to think. It's even less important now. There aren't really very many people that we know about in New York that aren't known in San Francisco, or vice versa. Airplanes are too cheap and too fast.

AP: Do you communicate with photography curators at other museums? If a photographer takes his work to San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, do the people there tell you about it?

JS: No, not necessarily. But if it's some-

"There's more good photography being done in this country than all the rest of the world put together."



"Etang de Corot, Ville-d 'Avray," by Eugene Atget. Szarkowski's four-part show "The Work of Atget" was a monumental curatorial undertaking and a stunning historical retrospective.

thing they think is good, they'll likely do something about it, and then we find out about it, and vice versa.

AP: So you're not necessarily competing with each other?

JS: Well, sure we are, in a way. I mean, everybody would like to be first, be best. Everybody would like to have a better track record than everybody else. But sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. Besides, the people who are really interested in photography—like David Travis, Anne Tucker, Ted Hartwell, Maria Hambourg, and others—are really competent, and we're not the dumbest people in the world at MOMA, either, so the notion that one of us is going to have some really radical perception that's a total mystery to everyone else is probably a little unlikely.

AP: What do you mean when you say "track record"?

JS: I'm not totally untouched by the sin of pride, so I'm glad that this museum showed Winogrand and Friedlander and Arbus and Eggleston before anybody else did.

AP: What if a photographer said, "Szarkowski doesn't get it about my work" and took his images elsewhere, and it turned out that there was something there? People you respect—your peers—might say, "He missed it."

JS: It wouldn't surprise me. Not at all. I don't think anyone in the field could aspire to a perfect batting average. Think of the great editors. The people who rejected the great writers were not dummies. They were alert to something else that day, or maybe they weren't alert at all that day. What do you expect? If you assume that anyone who's intelligent should understand everything all the time, then there's no game. There's no adventure, there's no risk.

AP: What about your personal plans?

JS: I, in a moment of weakness, agreed to do a history of photography show in the next year, and a book, in which the whole history of photography will be engraved on the head of a dime. Very small. But I'll tell you the truth, I wonder why people would be more interested in what an aging bureaucrat thinks about his job than they'd be in what a terrific young artist filled with juice and originality produces. I mean, isn't there something kinda nutty about that? It's grotesque. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY VIEW

ANDY GRUNDBERG

The New Modern Reenters the C

Unlike most of his curatorial colleagues at the newly reopened Museum of Modern Art, John Szarkowski doesn't have to worry about where "modern" begins and ends (or, indeed, whether it has ended). The director of the museum's department of photography for the last 22 years — exactly half of its 44-year existence — believes that photography is and always has been modern. It entered into the picture-making tradition as "a profoundly radical system," he said recently, "one that we are still trying to figure out how to use."

But Mr. Szarkowski is responsive to another curatorial objective, which is to identify the important traditions of the medium's fecund history of practice — traditions that might help rationalize and enrich contemporary image making. In his words, his department is simultaneously "trying to understand what is happening, what has happened, and how what is happening relates to what has happened." This preoccupation with the history of photography, with uses both artistic and vernacular, is immediately clear on walking into the handsome new rooms that comprise the expanded museum's photography galleries, at 4,800 square feet some three times their former size.

After passing through a space set aside for changing exhibitions, one encounters a chronological survey of the medium made up of pictures culled from the museum's collection of more than 15,000 photographic prints. The first room contains a daguerreotype of Longfellow, two paper prints from the 1840's and a number of other vintage treasures. The next gallery gets us as far as the late 1800's. In fact, one doesn't find what we might think of as modern photography — 20th-century American Purism and European experimentalism — until halfway through the six contiguous rooms. Since it is something of a convention to date the beginnings of Modernism in photography from Alfred Stieglitz's publication of Paul Strand's work in "Camerawork" in 1916 and 1917, it is apparent that Mr. Szarkowski's idea of what's modern is itself a profoundly radical system. It is also an attempt to overcome what he called, in an interview earlier this month, "the lack of logical coherence and self-knowledge that has existed in photography since the beginning."

While respectful of Beaumont Newhall's pioneering account of photography history (done, I should note, when Mr. Newhall was on the staff of the museum), the current selection of some 250 prints from the collection differs from that history in two significant respects. First, there is an emphasis on seemingly commonplace, garden-variety documents that apparently harbor no intentions of being art. The standard "chestnuts" — the well-known, acknowledged masterpieces of the medium — are relatively little in evidence. In a vitrine in one room, for example, one finds a page from a French portrait album, two wonderful Woodburytypes, titled "Back of Hand & Wrinkled Apple," from a 1874 book "The Moon: Considered as a Planet, A World, and a Satellite," and an unattributed photograph that serves as the frontispiece to an 1856 book about ivory sculptures. None of these pictures is known from the current crop of photography history books, and none seems destined to elevate its maker to the status of great 19th-century artist, yet each is a visual treasure, offering what to Mr. Szarkowski is the most important function of art: "a kind of higher pleasure" based on "the visceral satisfaction that a well-made anything provides."

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Countess Viviana

John Szarkowski, above, director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. At right, an untitled work (1981) by Jim Goldberg, in the "Three Americans," a show inaugurating the new photography galleries.

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The second thing to be noticed is that the version of the photographic tradition assembled by Mr. Szarkowski and his staff lacks the compelling sense of progress that one finds in Mr. Newhall's history. Whereas for Mr. Newhall the pictorial possibilities were always being enlarged by advancing technology — a standard theme in progressivist histories — implicit in Mr. Szarkowski's view of photography as an inherently modern art is the belief that its themes, subjects and formal potentials were all sketched out from the beginning. If there is a sense of progress to be discerned in assaying these galleries, it is progress at an evolutionary, if not geologic, pace. In walking from room to room one finds recurring connections being made, threads of
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PHOTOGRAPHY VIEW

ANDY GRUNDBERG

Reenters the Contemporary Arena

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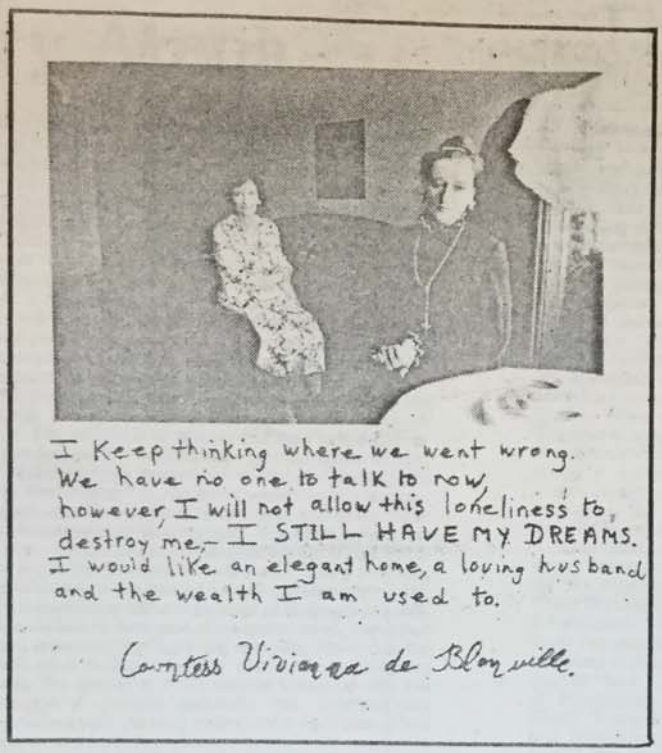

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being made, threads of pictorial preoccupations and esthetic aspirations weaving in and out through the years. Timothy O'Sullivan's forbidding "Black Canyon, Colorado River" of the 1870's finds its modern-day equivalent in Frank Gohlke's aerial view taken near the Mount St. Helens volcano; Paul Outerbridge's geometric 1923 still life "H.O. Box" is echoed by Irving Penn's "Three Steel Blocks" of 1980. These threads do not culminate, as they do for Newhall, in an apotheosis of Purist photography, but become more complex, intertwined and laden with self-consciousness.

To Mr. Szarkowski, a "coherent, self-conscious self-knowledge in the tradition" of photography is something to be cultivated, and no one in the world of art is better able than he to tend this particular garden. To critics of his department, however, this cultivation of self-consciousness amounts to a dry, airless preoccupation with formalism, and operates to the exclusion of a great deal of current photographic practice. Mr. Szarkowski, of course, denies the charge. "For every critic one can find who says that we are narrowly formalist, I think probably one can find another who thinks we have no principles, that we hop from mushroom to mushroom ... I don't think either of those things is true," he says. He is even able to profess that "our tastes here are quite catholic." Yet, despite the presence of a major Robert Heinecken piece in the concluding gallery of the current installation, and next to it a charming "found" portrait with paint added by Gary Brotmeyer, imagery that edges into painting and sculptural issues is little in evidence. Nor is anything even vaguely Post-Modern to be seen, given the absence of people like Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince, not to mention Cindy Sherman. Those looking for a radical revision of the museum's taste won't find it here.

But there are signs that the department's conception of current photography is expanding to match its square footage. For evidence of this we can turn to the gallery space for temporary exhibitions, where associate curator Susan Kismaric has assembled an 81-print show called "Three Americans." It represents, surprisingly enough, a reassertion of the museum's erstwhile role as the DEW line of contemporary photography. The three Americans of its title — Robert Adams, Jim Goldberg and Joel Sternfeld — are in the forefront of what seems to be a headlong return to social aims amongst today's photographers. Mr. Adams's seemingly offhand pictures of shoppers at a suburban mall are, in fact, part of a sophisticated, rhetorical political construct; by depicting everyday life within the shadows of a nuclear weapons plant, they attempt to reconcile the specter of a radioactive holocaust with the immanence of common humanity. Mr. Goldberg has photographed both the very poor and the very rich of San Francisco, and had his portrait subjects write comments about themselves directly on the borders of the prints; what results is a humor that dissolves quickly into horror, with an impact rare in this genre. Mr. Sternfeld's color pictures also have a gallows humor, depending on such incongruous sights as an elephant collapsed on a country road to alert us once again that the natural world, while greater than we are, is imperiled by our presence.

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These photographers — like Lee Friedlander, Lewis Baltz, Nicholas Nixon and numerous others — seem to have left behind the airless formalism attributed to the Museum of Modern Art's view of photography in order to attempt to reinvigorate the tradition of social documentary practice — to reclaim photography's power to move and to convince. As Miss Kismaric puts it, "Unlike social documentary photographs of the recent past, which were essentially journalistic reports of specific political activity or simplistic descriptions of the downtrodden, this new work ... explores the complex and subtle issues raised by the disintegration of the post-World War II American dream." To her credit, Miss Kismaric has recognized this tendency just as the notion of a "new documentary" practice is beginning to find its way into critical circles.

It is possible, of course, to see a disparity between the ambitions of these photographers and their achieve-

Continued on Page 32

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PHOTOGRAPHY VIEW

The New Modern

Continued from Page 27

ments, and to criticize the effectiveness of their social protest. (One can almost hear the Marxist critics sharpening their pencils, ready to denounce the show as yet another example of "mere" art photography.) Adams's pictures appear very much like snapshots that violate every canon of conventional composition; Goldberg's method verges on being overly conceptual and programmatic; Sternfeld's glorious prints may seem too pretty and, in the manner of Stephen Shore, a trifle too detached. Yet what is important, at this point in the medium's history, is that they are trying to restore social meaning to contemporary photography without relying on the exhausted styles of their immediate forebears.

In a considerably more understated way, "Three Americans" may be to the 80's what Mr. Szarkowski's show "New Documents" was to the 60's — a watershed in the ever-shifting dialogue between the social and artistic functions of photography. In 1967, the year of "New Documents," the work of Friedlander, Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand was outrageous and revolutionary because it challenged the givens of "concerned" photojournalism, with its pretense to sober objectivity. What Arbus, Friedlander and Winogrand achieved was the liberation of the personal eye within this context. For Mr. Szarkowski, the turn from prevailing fashion was a necessary blessing. "What had come to be called the documentary tradition," he says, "had gotten so leaden, tired, boring, dutiful, automatic and Pavlovian."

"Three Americans" represents a pendulum swing in the other direction, of course, but it also represents the museum's reentry into the arena of current photographic discourse after several years of apparent hibernation. For this we can thank both Miss Kismaric's insight and intuition and Mr. Szarkowski's continued commitment to contemporary art. There is, in short, the promise that the museum will resume its earlier role as the avatar of photography in America. The question to be faced is whether the medium now needs such a trendsetter — or whether it has expanded to the point where no one single institution, department or curator, no matter how perspicacious, can be expected to totally encompass it. ■

THE FRESH AIR FUND:
1877-1984
H32

THE NEW YORK TIMES
SUNDAY, MAY 27 1984

photography JOHN people SZARKOWSKI

Photograph by Casey Allen

MOMA's director of photography talks about his role, a museum's function, and the state of photography today

INTERVIEW BY CASEY ALLEN

CA: When you first came to The Museum of Modern Art in 1962, you had an interview with Nat Hertz of *Infinity* magazine. You said at that time that you had no idea of influencing contemporary photography. What did you mean?

JS: What I meant was that I think it's very important for a curator not to compete with the artist. It is not his job to tell the artist what to do. The curator is only a counterpuncher—he responds to what the artists do.

CA: When you first arrived at the Museum I'm sure you were aware of Steichen's influence. However, almost immediately you moved in a different direction as if you were deliberately breaking with his tradition. Were you consciously trying to do this?

JS: Well, to be honest about it, I think I would have to say it was conscious. I have an enormous respect for Steichen. Enormous respect for the exhibitions he did, for his eye, for his understanding of photography. *The Family of Man* exhibition is filled with wonderful pictures. But the value of those beautiful pictures and the meaning of the individual photographer's contribution was intentionally submerged . . . for the sake of the continui-

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SZARKOWSKI *from page 89*

ty of the whole. At that time the exhibition was a brilliant concept, extremely vital and lively. In one sense it was related to the philosophy of the picture magazines of the 1940s and '50s where the idea was to homogenize the whole for the sake of the story. But that meant that the integrity of the individual photographer was inevitably lost. It was time to change to an exhibition philosophy that concentrated on what the individual photographer meant.

CA: Have your goals in photography changed much over these last 15 years?
JS: I didn't have any fixed goals. Just tried to remain alert and responsive to what the most interesting photographers were doing, how they were using the medium. That hasn't changed. On the other hand there are terrific problems. I sometimes feel that what we used to think of as professional photography is damned near a dead issue as opposed to what I remember from my youth. In those days there were still vestigial remnants of the idea that (photography) was a specialized craft, something almost like alchemy: a photographer had brown-stained fingers, he hid under a dark cloth, did magic in the darkroom.

Everybody knows now that isn't true. It's very easy. Anybody can do it. You take a hundred-dollar camera, point it, and go "bang." The exposure is going to be pretty close, the lenses are good, and the films are terrific. I don't mean that there aren't some people who are really exquisite craftsmen: to some photographers it is very important. But basically it's not so much a matter of the craft itself now as it is the character of the photographer's mind, his insights. What does he look at, what does he see, how interesting a person is he?

CA: You said in your book, *The Face of Minnesota,* in 1958 that the print should be as good as the photographer can make it. Isn't that emphasis on the craft aspect?
JS: Not really. If I'm trying to explain something to you and I say "er," "ah," "well," "I mean," that's the wrong way to say it. I should be able to say in the fewest possible words exactly what I mean. And if I manage that, perhaps the sentence may even have a certain grace, a certain rhythm, a certain inevitable structure to it. That's the way a print should be.

The print should not say approximately what the photographer means to describe, it should say *precisely* what he means: it should be *perfect.* That's not as difficult as we pretend. And even if it's a little bit less than perfect, it's better to have somebody say an interesting thing in a slightly clumsy manner than to have them say a banal, predictable, familiar, tedious thing perfectly.

CA: What do you think of a photographer who may have something interesting to say photographically but who may not have the time or the talent to make the best print—so he has his work done by a professional printer?
JS: Well, it's—it's legitimate if it works. The point is: what does he tell the printer? The photographer has to have an image in his head about the picture he's making—Ansel Adams talks about previsualization. If you do nothing but print it darker, that changes the picture; it makes the whites go "pow"! If you print softer, harder, it's a different picture.

CA: Let me ask you about another kind of photographer, the one who says, "Don't tell me anything about the history of photography or composition or whatever. I just want to do my own thing."
JS: I think it's a stupid attitude. If they have no idea where the end of the diving board is, no knowledge of photography's achievements, then they're sentencing themselves to inventing the wheel over and over again.

CA: Speaking of history, what do you think about the place of Weston, Stieglitz, Steichen, and Strand in the evolution of photography? Do they represent a classical period of photography, an era that perhaps will not happen again?
JS: I don't think that (era) will happen again. Weston was a very great artist, an artist of his time. He was a product of his boyhood, his environment, his ideas, his experiences. No one is going to have those conditions again. No one should ever try to be Edward Weston again. It's dumb, it's silly. He did it. *He did it*! There still is a terrific vitality in his work. There are still things to steal from Weston. There's a wonderful, animal vigor in his pictures, a terrific conviction. Sensuous persuasiveness, high spirits. If a sensitive photographer today was really moved or inspired by an understanding of Weston, he wouldn't go out photographing peppers—at least we hope not.

CA: Do you think it's possible to define a good photograph?
JS: No. Okay?

CA: Is it possible to define the *purpose* of photography?
JS: Well, it's—it is to—to know sight, to love it and serve it. All right! That's only catechism.

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JOHN SZARKOWSKI

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CA: Do you try for a difference in style for each exhibit?
JS: I don't go out of my way to try and show a little of everything; I try to respond to the vitality in the work. What is there in this work that is going to be of potential use to the next photographer? What are the pictures, raw pictures, that have in them that germ of further expansion?

CA: To many people the mere fact that a photography exhibition is hung on the walls of The Museum of Modern Art means that the pictures are important, that a certain direction is implied. In fact you have been given credit . . .
JS: Or blame.

CA: Or blame for starting several trends, including the one known variously as the "snapshot syndrome" or the "emperor's-new-clothes school of photography"—a seemingly accidental, unplanned approach to picture-taking.
JS: Let me just say that is grossly exaggerated. The position is demonstrably false. If hanging a show on the Museum walls automatically makes it influential, why hasn't that been consistent for every show we've done? Over the years the Museum has done a good many exhibitions that have been stones dropped in a bottomless well: they have caused absolutely no ripples. Yet those exhibitions have gotten just as much attention from the Museum, from me, or whoever was curator at the time. They get the same kind of

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SZARKOWSKI *from page 198*

press release, the same kind of gallery space. If such exhibitions are of no interest to the photography community, to the critics, to other artists, if the exhibition was, perhaps, a mistake, then there's no influence.

CA: Possibly.
JS: In other words, it is the *work* that has the influence. If the *work* is capable of persuading other photographers that it is vital, that it is potentially nourishing and deserves study, deserves stealing from, then it has an influence.

CA: What about the Eggleston show? Many people wondered why you didn't hang some of the more established people in color photography rather than Eggleston.
JS: Why did I assign a high priority to Eggleston's work? Well, it's because I found it enormously exciting and original, and I just loved it. I still think he's a marvelous artist. I had to lean on the Museum a long time to do that show.

You know, I don't just snap my fingers and get a show. I have to fight for the space. It was not an exhibition that I could predict would be a great box-office success. I couldn't predict that the book was going to pay for itself. In any museum these days, first you fight for the space with your colleagues, then you stand in line for your turn to try and get a little help from the National Endowment. Then you stand in line to try and get some help from a corporate sponsor. Doing a book like that (to say nothing of 80 big dye-transfers) is expensive.

CA: What about the more established color photographers such as, oh, for instance, Burt Glinn, Jay Maisel, Pete Turner?
JS: I really am not going to discuss individual photographers. I don't expect to defend something I've already done.

CA: That's understandable.
JS: Well, I don't mean I don't respect those photographers. But I don't want to say I think nine guys are terrific and then leave out a couple of others.

CA: Do you think color photography has a future?
JS: Yes, I do. And I think that has been demonstrated in the last few years. I think for a long time color was a terrible problem for photographers, with very few exceptions (like) Ernst Haas and Eliot Porter. But what if you made a list of the 20 outstanding photographers in the past 50 years, then asked them to each put 10 pictures in a lead capsule to be opened by the Egyptians of the future, what would they put in?

CA: Mostly black-and-white, I'm sure
JS: I think so. The exceptions migh be Haas, Porter, and—who else?

CA: You must see hundreds and hundreds of portfolios, new photographers, old photographers. How do you determine what shows to hang?
JS: Let me start by saying how we don't determine it. It's not like awarding medals for excellence. It's not basically thought of as a way to serve the photographer you're hanging. I think that fundamentally a curator is a liason between the artists and their potential public. You're not serving the public and you're not serving the artist; you're a conduit between them. Your obligation is to that potential conversation between the public and the artist. So you try to exhibit what you think, what you feel at that point has to be seen for the sake of that dialogue. Otherwise, you'd keep exhibiting the same great all-time masters over and over again.

CA: Do you see any particular trends in photography? Do you think, for instance, that Friedlander and Winogrand represent a direction in current photography?
JS: You know, there really isn't much similarity between Winogrand and Friedlander. It would be awfully hard to mistake even a single one of their pictures for the other's work.

CA: What do you think Friedlander represents as opposed to Winogrand?
JS: Well, they represent themselves; that's probably the trend. But I think there's a larger issue which serious photographers are trying to grapple with, and that is how to proceed—by themselves—in a very lonely kind of way. The photographer over the past 10 or 15 years has found himself dumped precipitously into a circumstance where he's really on his own. He has to find his own assignments and his own standards of values; he must find what his market is, what his purpose is. In other words, the professional rubric seems largely to have vanished.

CA: What do you think is the reason?
JS: The reason is that now even art directors know how to make photographs.

CA: Yes, but not necessarily *good* photographs.
JS: They didn't always get good ones before. Hell, today a photographer, the professional photographer, executes a decision that has already in large part been decided by somebody else, usually an editorial committee. Most of the good professional photographers have had to become schizophrenic.

continued on page 227

STRIPDOWN: ME *from page 147*

blade set does its reciprocating at the end of each exposure, while the closing blade set waits for the beginning of the wind cycle. The moving slit formed by the leading edges of the two-blade sets travels from top to bottom.

Special attention was paid to the durability of the shutter in view of its being used in a motor-driven camera. Despite the generous use of high-impact plastic for certain parts in the shutter, all of which prove to be intelligent choices, the main guidance and propelling members of the shutter appear to be motor worthy.

The only doubt I have concerns the blade segments and their actuating pins. Each blade segment moves in response to the blade-actuating levers swinging through their arcs. These levers carry a pin that engages a slot at one end of the blade segment, not unlike the system seen in front shutter-blade propulsion.

Provided the anti-friction coating on the blades holds up, the blades remain free of any scum that might impede their travel, and the heat treatment of the blades and pins is correct (it appears so), all should go well. Since this is the premier appearance of this shutter, we must let some time go by before any more can be said about its durability under heavy use.

Two things prompt me to express some confidence in it at this time: it looks like it will prove durable, and my Seiko Bell-Matic watch has been on my wrist for over eight years, with only two passes through a de-magnetizer to get it back into operation each of the two times it stopped working.

Pentax has adopted the integral pentaprism and field lens construction first used by Leitz in the Leicaflex, then by Olympus in the OM-1. This saves not only space; it saves two air-glass surfaces too, thus cutting down on light lost through both reflection and scattering, so the viewscreen's image looks brighter.

The mirror box sports a simple mechanism of adequate strength, with high-impact plastic rollers absorbing the impact and pressure of heavily loaded levers to reduce shock and friction. A single foam-plastic strip cushions the impact of the rising mirror.

The inside surfaces of the mirror box are anti-flare ribbed and have a narrow strip of dead-black suede-like material at the rear edge of the bottom and both sides, but not the top (the back of the mirror panel). I'd like to see this material used to cover the entire image tunnel, not just the rear of three sides.

The bayonet lens flange is anchored with six good-size screws and its three pressure springs do a good job of securing a heavy lens. ○

JOHN SZARKOWSKI *continued from page 212*

CA: That one you'll have to explain.

JS: Okay. Eliot Erwitt a few years ago went down to South America to do a number of annual reports. Eliot is such a terrifically skilled professional that he can grind out those beautiful, slick reports as well as anybody in the business and not get ulcers from it.

He was gone a couple of months, then I happened to see him on the street. I asked him how he did in South America and he said, "I know I got two good stray dog shots and maybe three for my stray dog book." I think that illustrates what I mean.

CA: You've been here at the Museum for 15 years now. What are your plans for the next 15?

JS: That's a beaut!

CA: Just thought I'd throw it in.

JS: I don't have any. But one of the things that has a very high priority for me, personally, something I want to do before I get fired or run over by a truck, is a series of publications on our Atget collection. Not just one book: he's too good, too rich for one book. He's such a complicated, rich, and wonderful photographer; you can't stop looking at his pictures. They're like walking right into his world, his intelligence—a wonderful description of what his time and place were really about.

CA: That just about covers it. I guess the only thing we haven't talked about is how you got this job in the first place.

JS: I don't even know myself. I think it was a clerical error—they were looking for another John Szarkowski. ●

DRAGONS OF INDUSTRIALISM *continued from page 162*

gled for work have shrunk to a more comfortable perspective. She suspects something vaguely symbolic about it all. The apartment's second kitchen serves as her office. Frames are stored the oven. Props are piled in the washer. Camera bits and pieces are hed in silverware drawers and dish boards. Picture files fill spaces for- occupied by Rice Krispies and soup.

meras are Olympus OM I's. rst got them a few years ago, write thank-you notes to all e scientists who worked hey're just what 35-mm ould be—light, quiet, ibration, bright viewing anually controlled. I hate atic cameras because I want control and I don't like to carry the extra weight around."

Now that financial pressure is less, Ms. Seed is following more of her own ideas and trying to narrow her commercial assignments to the sort of work he thinks she does best, mainly illustration. But she still enjoys an unexpected assignment.

"I love the excitement of going mewhere I wouldn't have gone on my n. I learn from it. I see things I uldn't have seen, or I see differently. en I have to use new tools.

So many young photographers day look down on commercial work. t some of them have such shallow ills. If they respected commercial assignments more they'd learn and grow om them."

In her personal work, Ms. Seed is ing for ways to push beyond the ts of what can happen inside a era. Her art-school background left r vaguely dissatisfied with the rules cepted by so many photographers.

"If a painter uses a certain glaze or adds irridescent colors, the critics call it 'experimentation.' But if a photographer paints his pictures, he is accused of gimmickry. Why? Why not use every tool available?"

She has been moving increasingly in the direction of manipulating images with paint; multiple exposure, and photocopying techniques.

She started by painting her industrial pictures with photo-retouching colors when she couldn't duplicate the subtle colors of smoke and mist with color film. Though she soon dropped that idea in favor of black-and-white film printed in sepia tone to give a historic feeling, she started painting other pictures as well.

Lately, she has been traveling to far-away places and photographing her years of fantasies about them. She is not much interested in first impressions. "I really don't care about seeing things fresh. Over the years, I've blotted out certain areas around Indiana. I wait until I come to what I love to see, and then I look."

She is hoping a book will come from her industrial landscapes and is also working on an idea about a river that runs past the family home in Hobart. She may not be part of Hobart any more, but Hobart still is very much a part of her.

Nonetheless, even her pictures of Hobart are starting to look less and less like "straight" photos. For what Ms. Seed sees with her camera alone has become increasingly insufficient to her. Her attempt to get closer to the essence of the industrial landscape started her on her uncharted journey to extend what she could make of a photographic image. Despite protests from the purists, a great many viewers, including this one, are intrigued and waiting to see where she will next venture. ●

JOHN SZARKOWSKI *continued from page 212*

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JS: Okay. Eliot Erwitt a few years ago went down to South America to do a number of annual reports. Eliot is such a terrifically skilled professional that he can grind out those beautiful, slick reports as well as anybody in the business and not get ulcers from it.

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Paul Raedeke – Photo Editor

Design + Production
Adelaida Mejia
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Distribution
Vali Audet
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Amir Doorandish
Lorene Warwick

Contributing Writer
Marvin Heiferman, New York

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The February issue will feature the work of Marion Post Wolcott.

The notion that New York's photographic community could be taken by storm in one week is absurd, and we knew it. Nevertheless, we had one week this past June to begin that exploration.

JOHN SZARKOWSKI PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM KAY © 1980

From the East Village flat of "Swan" (Mary Swanson of Magnum) and Dale Stulz (auctioneer and currently with Aperture) we staged interviews and meetings with people all around town: John Szarkowski, Susan Kismaric, Peter Galassi and Jeanne Collins (Museum of Modern Art); Cornell Capa, Phil Block and Buzz Hartshorn (International Center of Photography); Sam Wagstaff (collector); André Kertész; Andy Grundberg (critic, New York Times); Anne Russell (associate editor, American Photography); Phillip Clark (Modern Photography); Marvin Heiferman (writer, curator); Carole Kismaric (editor, writer, curator). Then a quick round of galleries from Midtown to Soho and the East Village, and Gilles Peres' Magnum workshop presentation at the New School.

The impression that emerged was a kaleidoscope of activity, of individuals and organizations in energetic pursuit of their agenda. A sampling of that activity has found its way into the interviews and articles in this issue.

Paul Raedeke

SF Camerawork Auction fun and successful!

This year's auction, held to benefit the activities of Camerawork, resulted in a fun and successful event! Auctioneers Van Deren Coke (SFMMA) and Frish Brandt (Fraenkel Gallery) managed to raise $23,000 while keeping the audience interested and amused.

Photography Lectures and Films at SFMOMA.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has scheduled lectures and film showings of interest to the photo-community:

Friday, January 17 at 6:30 pm: Panel discussion on the importance of photography amongst contemporary German artists. Van Deren Coke and critic Dr. George Jappe. Green Room.

Tuesday, January 21 at 7 and 9 pm: Films *Ghosts Before Breakfast* 1928, *Anemic Cinema* 1926 and *L'Age d'Or* 1930. Opera Plaza Cinema.

Wednesday, January 22 at 7 and 9 pm: Films *Andalusian Dog* 1929, *Entr'acte* 1924 and *Blood of a Poet* 1932. Opera Plaza Cinema.

Thursday, January 23 at 7:30 pm: *L'Amour Fou* discussion with Van Deren Coke and Jane Livingston, co-curator and Associate Director of The Corcoran Gallery. Herbst Theater.

Thursday, January 30 at 7:30 pm, Joel-Peter Witkin. Discussion and book signing. Green Room.

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SZARKOWSKI
by Paul Raedeke

John Szarkowski has been director of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York for twenty-three years. His leadership in exhibitions, books and articles have placed him at the heart of numerous controversies throughout his tenure, and shaped the attitudes of a generation.

PR: The Department of Photography here at the Museum was established in 1940, considerably after the founding of the Museum itself. There had been interest in collecting photographs from the beginning...

JS: Oh yes, the department was established as an independent curatorial department in 1940, but the program goes back to the beginning of the Museum. Alfred Barr was persuaded that a genuinely modern museum must deal not only with painting, sculpture, prints and drawings, but also with industrial art, architecture, film and photography–and outlined the Museum in those terms to the board at the very earliest stage of the museum's history. Something like the thirtieth object acquired by the museum was a photograph, just six months or so after the museum opened in the Fall of '29, instantly after the crash.

PR: Was that a good time to be in the market as a buyer? [laughter]

JS: It might have been if one could find any money to buy with! The first photograph was by Walker Evans, acquired early in 1930, just a few months later.

PR: That would have been very contemporary work.

JS: Yes, it had to be–Walker had just started.

PR: Has there been a clearly stated philosophy for the Museum from the beginning? What are the goals of the MOMA and more specifically, the Photography Department? What is at the base of the acquisition and exhibition programs?

JS: I think the curator at a museum of art serves a function similar to a curator at a museum of science or of history or whatever. One's first responsibility is to try to identify the significant data, to collect it, to exhibit it, to attempt to interpret it and to make it available for others to interpret also. The purpose of this is to serve as a liaison between the artist and his potential public. Not just the artist as an individual, but the artist cumulatively, the tradition, the lifeline of the medium.

PR: When you add the adjective *modern* to the title Museum of Art, one assumes that it would indicate interest in the most current aspect of productivity...

JS: I don't assume that.

PR: No?

JS: No. Actually the thing I'm most interested in is tradition. By which I don't mean old pictures, but rather that lifeline, line, that continuity. It is difficult to imagine, to conceive of the idea of life as consisting of one instant at a time. When we talk about life we are talking about something with continuity. Specifically in the case of photography it is simply not historically true. I think, that the most recent work has always been the most vital work in terms of producing the next most interesting interpretation. Certainly if one considers the moment of 1930 in the United States, it was not the most recent movement, the Photo Secession, that seemed most vital, most lively and most available as something to feed on, revise, rediscover–not for the sake of imitating, but for the sake of refreshing and re-enlivening the photographer's sense of what the next possible open position might be. And repeatedly, certainly not just in photography but probably in all arts, the young artist leapfrogs backwards over the most recent generation to a grandfather's or great-grandfather's generation in order to discover the seeds, the ideas...

PR: Of course in photography the great-grandfather is already the limit, being the relatively new medium it is.

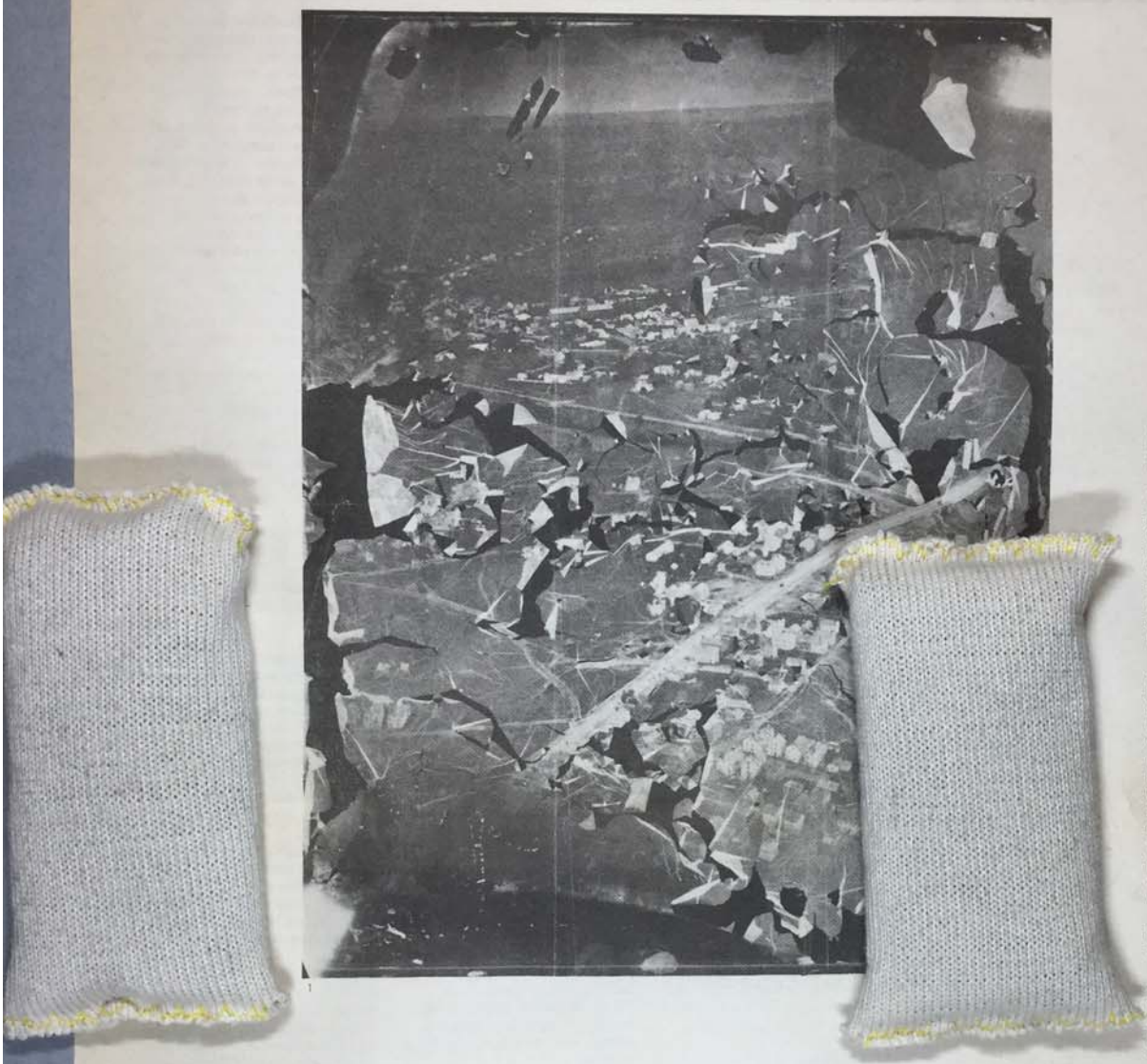
JS: It's true that when Edward Steichen was born, Bayard, one of the inventors of photography, still had quite a few years to live. It's interesting.

PR: Beaumont Newhall was the first director of the Photography Department, then Edward Steichen and finally, in 1962, you assumed that position. Do those earlier directors live on here in any sense?

JS: Yes, indeed, very strongly. One of the marvelous things about a museum is that it is the product of the ideas, tastes, efforts, prejudices, abilities and limitations of a great many people, not simply the people who were the curators in charge or even those who run the staff, but the collectors they knew, the dealers that were available. It is a very complex organism.

PR: And fortunately so, I would say. Otherwise the collection would almost inevitably be skewed in one direction or another and not be representative of anything but one person's taste–and their limitations and prejudices.

JS: I think so too. Doubtless. It is really difficult to imagine a collection which is not skewed, no matter how many people are involved. Collections are probably skewed in some sense even by the *gestalt* of the period in which the institution lives. Our capacity to imagine has perimeters, it's got ends on it. But those conceptual limits, naturally, make changes less dependent on individuals than on the entire ambiance in which an institution works. One of the wonderful things about a museum is that it is very difficult to erase older perceptions, older ideas and investments–and I don't mean investments of money, that's the least of it. There is, in the very best sense, something wonderfully conservative about the whole idea of a museum. After all, the thing that separates a museum from a *kunsthaus*, from an exhibition pavillion, is that the function of a museum is to collect and preserve things–to study them and make them available, to exhibit them, of course, but first to *preserve* things. It is indeed a kind of an attic, an attic which, blessedly, is not too easy to clean–one doesn't have yard sales on impulse. By all means they're still around here, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, Mr. Steichen–and briefly, someone who's seldom mentioned in the history of the department, Willard Morgan ▶



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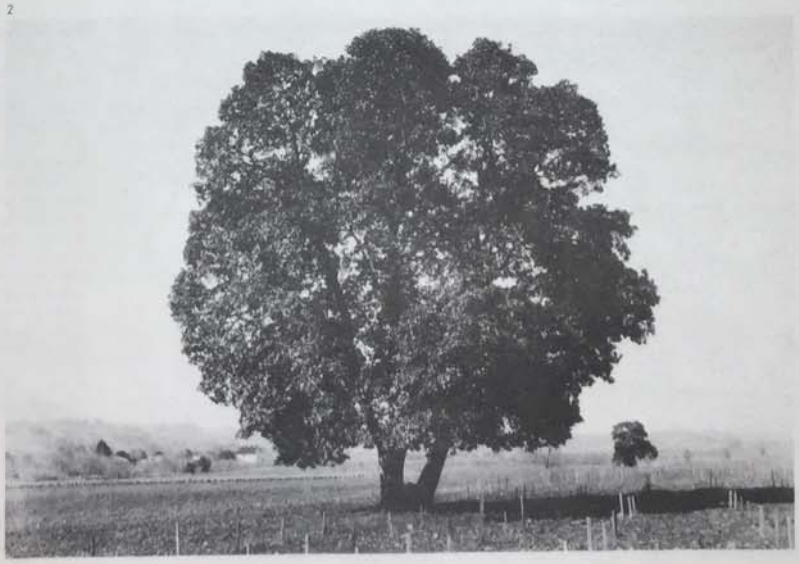

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PR: That name was unfamiliar to me as I went through the chronology.

JS: He served a very brief tenure. But it was not just those people. I think that Lincoln Kirsten, in the early days as a member of what I think was called the Junior Advisory Board, was basically responsible for the Walker Evans shows.

PR: And that was before the photo department had been established.

JS: Yes. James Thrall Sobey was also a very important man in the history of this museum and the history of modern art in general. He was very interested in the museum and in this department. He was responsible for the great mass of our Man Ray collection. And it was not just that he was a collector, but that he was actively involved in the photography program, even before there was a department. And there were many others--Dave McAlpin, of course has been of great importance.

PR: I'm curious about the structure, the organization, the procedures of the department, how things actually are decided and get done. You are the director of the department and have several curators working with you. Is there a definite division of the responsibilities and duties, the specific role that each of you play?

JS: The two associate curators, Susan Kismaric and Peter Galassi, are responsible for a great deal. I am not a good enough administrator to define precisely who is responsible for what. In a sense the department is still small enough so that the functions and duties can be widely shared and remain pretty flexible. Both Peter and Susan do everything--they do exhibitions, Susan is in charge of the study function of the department, Peter is in charge of the physical collection, its recording, preservation, physical condition.

PR: Who determines what is exhibited and acquired? Is that a shared activity?

JS: Yes, I reserve the right to say "I don't think we should do this...I think we should do that". But in practice, we are small enough and work closely enough--and we like each other well enough--so that we can fight and argue and be vocal in the definition of our own priorities and sensibilities--and still enjoy it.

PR: Where are the strengths of the collection and where would you like to beef it up?

JS: We must be quite selective and very careful that we count our money twice before we buy a picture--our first priority in collecting remains recent and contemporary work. We're very much interested in improving our historical collection, especially our nineteenth-century collection. We now have gallery space enough to try to give not only a good, coherent, interesting and hopefully reasonably balanced description of the history of the medium, but we have a large enough audience that we don't want to keep the same pictures on the wall in perpetuity and we like to keep the collections galleries rotating as best we can. There are areas where we're very strong and others where we're really pretty thin. Any collection I'm sure has got lacunae in it that the curator would like to fill. I would say that in most areas our twentieth-century collection is very strong. Our nineteenth-century collection is quite spotty and rather thin, especially, for example, in the first generation of French photography.

PR: If another museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art for example, has a strong collection in an area where you are weak, is it necessary for you to cover it as well?

JS: There are two separate functions that a collection serves, and the answer to your question is different for those two functions. In the case of the nineteenth-century, it is not our ambition to develop a collection that would fully serve the requirements of advanced, scholarly research. That is, we do not expect to have a Fenton collection or a LeGray collection or a Nadar collection, certainly not any more, since Sam Wagstaff's collection went to the Getty. [laughter] That would be the central source for people doing basic, original scholarship in the nineteenth-century. That function lies outside what we consider our primary obligation. On the other hand, for exhibition purposes and for general educational purposes, we certainly hope to have a good enough collection for the general advanced student. We want our collection to be adequate for the purposes of explaining the entire history of photography. That is a little different than the philosophy of the rest of the museum, which generally takes 1880 or something like that as the normal "cut-off date." Well, it really doesn't make much sense to take 1880 as the cut-off date when you're only cutting off forty years.

PR: You spoke of your administrative duties. The position, I assume, requires that you wear many hats. What are some of the things you have to be involved in, besides curating and overseeing the staff–is there a lot of fundraising, socializing involved in the job? What does a typical day include?

JS: Oh god, I don't know how I would define a typical day. A typical day is one after which I go home totally exhausted. [laughter] But what has gone on during the day changes enormously. Yes, there is more and more bureaucratic responsibility because the museum has gotten a great deal bigger than it was when I first came here.

PR: Even since my last trip to New York it has grown–the physical facility at any rate.

JS: The museum staff is more than twice as large as when I came here. That means the whole working machinery becomes more complicated. You spend more of your time in meetings, writing memos, answering memos or deciding not to answer memos.

PR: I guess it's an inevitable by-product of the success of the institution.

JS: At least to a degree, I suspect, it is inevitable. That doesn't keep it from being frustrating. There's a picture around here somewhere of Alfred Barr and the entire professional staff of the museum, curatorial and administrative, gathered on the front stoop of the old brownstone that used to stand in this space. Well, one can't run the museum in the same way with five hundred people that one could when it was smaller, more compact. Also we have discovered, unfortunately, that the museum is, in fact, quite poor. Nor do we expect to get rich soon. If we want to achieve the kinds of programs we have envisioned, we've got to get out and find the money to do them ▶

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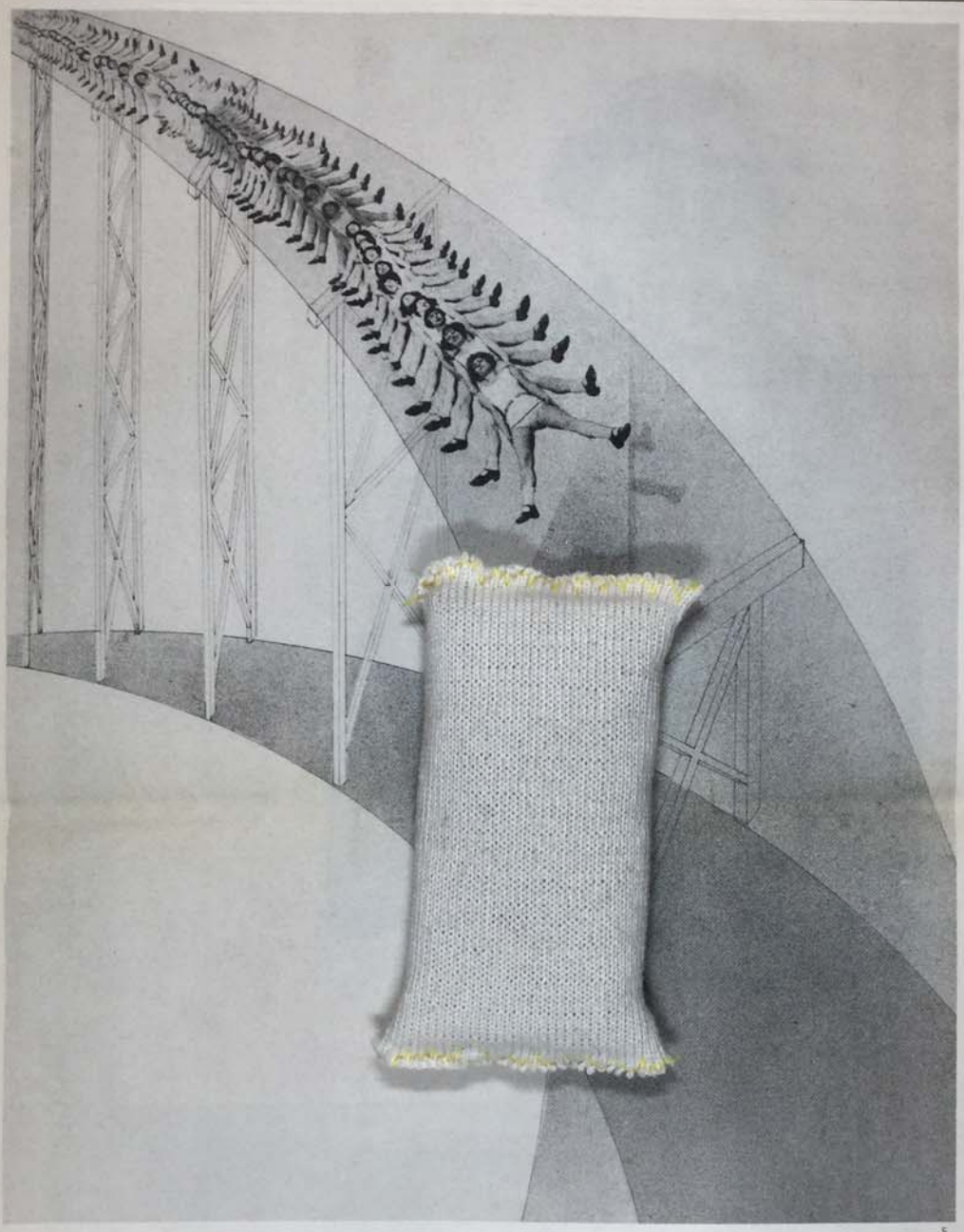
1 James Wallace Black and Samuel A. King
Untitled 1980
Gift of Warner Communications, Inc.

2 Carleton E. Watkins
Arbutus Menziesii, California 1861

3 August Sander
Member of Parliament and First Deputy of the Democratic Party 1928
Gift of the photographer

4 Paul Strand
New York 1915
Gift of the photographer



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5 László Moholy-Nagy
Chute 1923
Gift of Mrs. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy

6 André Kertész
Distortion 117 1933
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III

7 Alexander Rodchenko
Rehearsal, Belomorsk Canal 1933

PR: So some amount of fundraising and socializing with collectors, etc. is part of the job.

JS: Not just with collectors, but with corporations, publishers, journalists like yourself [laughter]...

PR: So it takes quite a variety of skills to run the program. Say I wanted to become director of the Photo Department at MOMA, what sort of skills would I be wisest to invest in? Should I get into business courses, spend a lot of time in Art History, read theories of administration...

JS: Yes. And then really learn how to read balance sheets and the various kinds of paperwork, and become a fundraiser and find out how any kind of enterprise actually operates, who does what and how much it costs. Clearly the operation and the very survival of museums depends on this kind of thing.

PR: Like publishing a magazine, in a way. We don't necessarily relish going out to chase down advertisers, but if we don't have some, we don't print, it's just that simple. A lot of that type of work falls to the overall director of the museum, but some filters down to the directors of the various programs, I assume.

JS: Yes, and not just the curatorial directors but more and more anyone with curatorial responsibility is trying to at least contribute to the solution of the problem of how the projects they want to do are going to be funded.

PR: To what extent, if any, do you feel pressures from your funding sources to deliver services, mount exhibitions and guide the acquisitions program in ways that are acceptable to those who are providing the dollars? Or do you have sufficient insulation from the money sources to be free to follow your own instincts?

JS: I think the pressure actually comes from ourselves. If you're talking about this museum, I've never been told nor has it ever been suggested to me that I should do an exhibition because it would please a potential donor or because someone knows where I might get the funds to do it. Never.

PR: What about covert or implicit pressure?

JS: I think everyone understands that if one has an ambitious project in mind, the chances of getting it done are going to be greatly diminished if one can't find some outside support. And if you can get it done once, you may find it harder to get it done the second time.

PR: Harder? I've usually found projects to be easier the second or subsequent times, at least in terms of procedures and organization.

JS: I mean if you get it done *in spite of* not finding outside money, if the institution finally is so deeply committed that it has to go ahead even though at a great financial sacrifice, it means that the next proposal will be looked at with a good deal more caution.

PR: Is there a lot of friction among directors as they vie for institutional funds or space to support their programs?

JS: Space.

PR: Space is still a major concern since the recent additions? I guess space is one of those commodities that will always be of concern.

JS: True, I don't think anybody has ever built a museum large enough to satisfy all of the ambitions of the curators who work in it. [laughter]

PR: How much of the permanent photography collection can you exhibit at one time, ten percent maybe?

JS: Not that much, I don't think we'd even want to. We're very pleased with our new collections galleries—I love the quality and the size. If they were bigger than they are, we would have a difficult time doing in them what we hope to do.

PR: They appear to be reasonably flexible. The intimate size and layout also prevent the initial overwhelming feeling that can occur when you enter a large hall and confront two or three hundred photographs at once. My response in that situation is to shudder and rush through the exhibition quickly, simply because I can see the enormity of the "task" ahead of me.

JS: In speaking of competition for space I wasn't referring to the various departments' permanent collection spaces, but rather to temporary exhibition space which is there for all departments to share.

PR: How has the photo department fared there, have you been able to get a reasonable share to promote department projects?

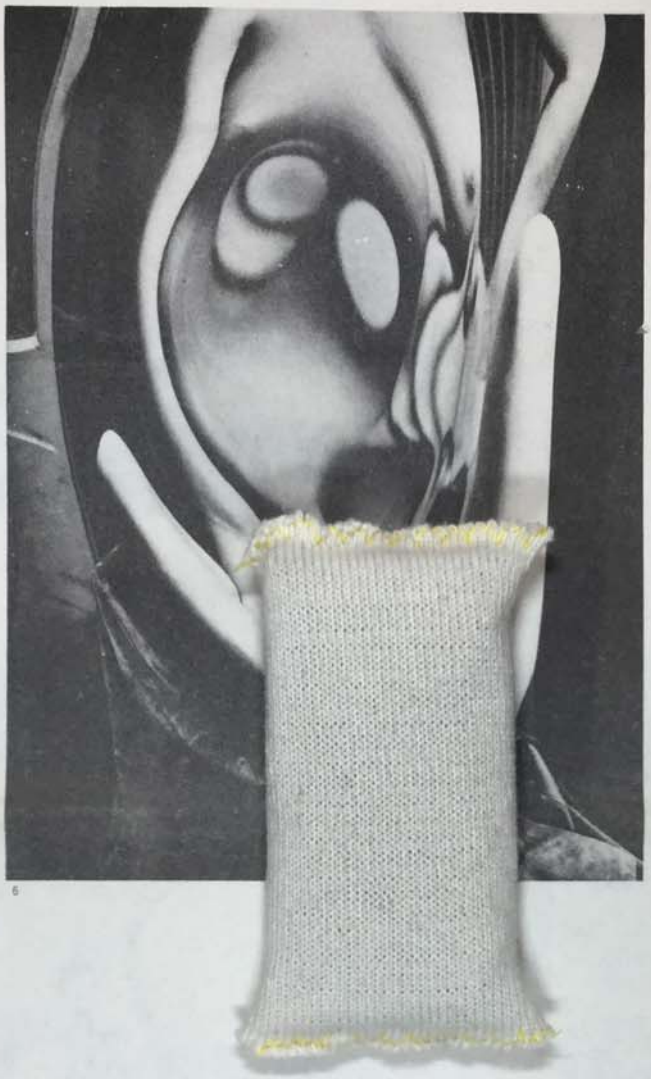
JS: In terms of my relationship with the other curatorial heads, it would be very bad tactics for me to say that I've gotten more than my fair share. [laughter] I think it would be more politic for me to say "No, we haven't gotten our fair share."

PR: It sounds like the approach one takes when doing a budget.

JS: So I think I'll avoid a direct answer to that question in case my colleagues read your magazine. Seriously, in the past twenty years, in terms of the allotment of space for the temporary exhibition program, the museum has been generous to photography.

PR: Is that dependent on the energies and personality of the director or is it pretty much built into the structure of the institution and its goals and philosophy?

JS: Of course institutions do have goals and philosophies, but they're re-interpreted every day. It depends on who's at the meeting. It's also true that during the period that I've been at this institution there has certainly been a greatly increased interest in and awareness of the artistic significance of photography. This is, to a large extent, the flowering of developments that go way back to Stieglitz ▶



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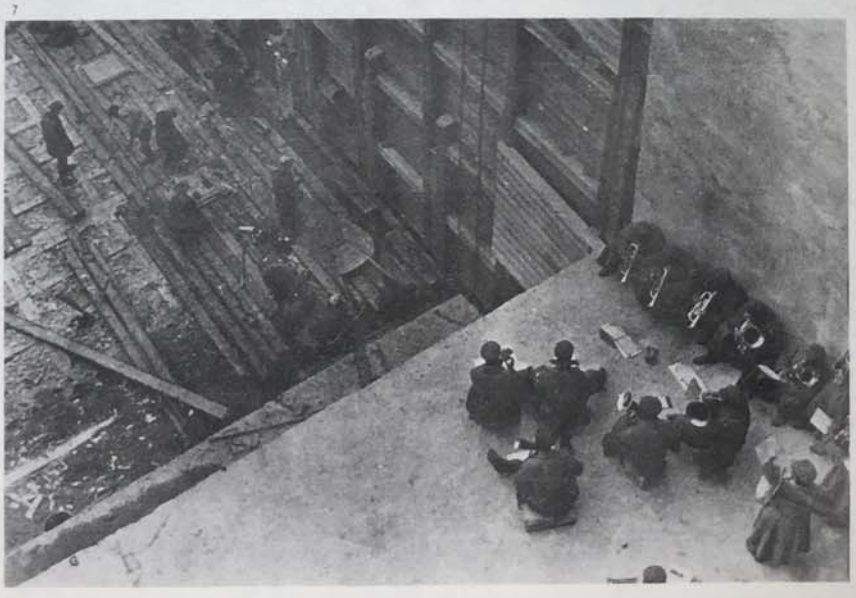

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8 Henri Cartier-Bresson
Sunday on the Banks of the Marne 1939
Gift of the photographer

9 Lisette Model
Coney Island 1941
Gift of the photographer

10 Brassaï (Gyula Halasz)
Brothel 1932
David H. McAlpin Fund

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PR: Who is your constituency? When you say that interest is growing, is that among the population at large, among museum-goers? And is there any concerted effort to broaden that base of interest?

JS: I think our constituency is very broad. Certainly since the days of Moholy [Nagy] in Chicago there has been a consistently increasing interest in photography among the young and especially among the more-or-less educated young. The people who are now middle-aged might well have studied a little photography while they were in college—a situation that did not pertain even twenty years ago.

PR: What about the so-called *man on the streets*? I rode here on the subway and everywhere I saw commuters reading their *Daily News* or their *New York Post*. Perhaps it's elitist to wish they were reading something "better," but to me that's a little depressing. I would assume the department has some interest in reaching the public on a grass-roots level. Is there much that can be done to invite the masses into the museum?

JS: I am not really very interested, I'm afraid, in proselytizing for the medium. I don't think it needs it. I have never believed that one should try to persuade people that art is good for them. I don't think it *is* necessarily good for them. It's like saying baseball is good for them. I think it is very interesting and in many ways very rewarding. But I think its audience is self-elected. If you try to assign what the audience should be interested in you're on the verge of trouble. I think as many people should enjoy art as want to and can get to it and make themselves available to it.

PR: But photography is somewhat different from other art forms in that it is a medium used by so many people and in so many ways. Even if you aren't interested in proselytizing to expand *interest* in the medium, it might be a worthy goal to attempt to increase public *understanding* of the medium.

JS: We consider ourselves educators, we try to present material, by exhibitions, publications and other secondary activities, to as broad an audience as is interested in participating in it. The truly apostolic position of going out to convert the world to love photography...

PR: ...selling some version of *The Watchtower* from door to door...

JS: ...is probably self-destructive. I have no way of knowing how many people should be more interested in photography than in surfing. [laughter] and I think it would be arrogant of me to make that determination and try to impose it on all potential art lovers and surf lovers. The function that we should serve is to make work as available as possible, as *clearly* available as possible, to provide not only access to the work but to provide what we think might be useful in terms of elucidation—and let the audience determine itself what to think ▶

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PR: Somewhere along the line, The Museum of Modern Art–and it's rather ironic in my mind–has become the "establishment" in the art world. It wields a lot of influence and power in making an artist's career. Do you attempt to avoid being taste-makers or is it an inevitable extension of the museum's function?

JS: What "important artist" do you think would not have been an important artist without the intervention of the museum?

PR: It doesn't necessarily happen in such a direct way. The Museum of Modern Art in New York occupies a pre-eminent position in the art world.

JS: Discovery is one thing–if one institution happens to recognize virtue in an artist before others, and presents that artist to the public, that's terrific, it's great fun, it's what everybody wants and hopes.

PR: But it happens in more subtle ways as well. If the word is out that MOMA is looking at color work, for instance, it filters down through the established channels to support the people who are working in color.

JS: I suppose it does have that kind of influence to some degree, not just here but in the case of any museum. It probably will be more influential with the most impressionable artists, who aren't necessarily the ones you're going to be most interested in next year. The artists likely to end up being the most interesting are probably a little more hard-nosed and are following their hard noses and spend less of their time doing market research on what people are interested in.

PR: Is it possible or desirable for the museum to be at the cutting edge–I get the impression that the museum doesn't intend to be right at the edge.

JS: The artist is at the cutting edge. When any museum starts thinking of its function in a way that puts it in competition with the artist, it is misunderstanding its role. Anything that a museum does is retrospective. When we first showed Eggleston, Arbus and Winogrand the work had already been done. It was the artist who was at the cutting edge. What we do is make a critical judgement and a priority judgement about what we would like to do next.

PR: Then artists are pretty much on their own–if the galleries are supposed to provide the support system for the production of art, we're in big trouble. At least in San Francisco, there have been a number of shut-downs recently that have narrowed an already small gallery system. The opportunities for an artist to get exposure are rather limited–and the commercial galleries tend to shy away from unproven artists and controversial work.

JS: The gallery may properly have assumed the direct responsibility to care for and feed a particular artist. That is a traditional business relationship, frequently a contractual relationship. It is absolutely proper for the gallery to support, physically and creatively, the needs of given artists. I don't think museums can properly do that. To the degree that they *try*, it seems inevitable that their priorities become increasingly retrospective, because if an artist takes reasonable care of him or herself, he or she is likely to last quite a while. [laughter] It is not part of the museum's function to serve as agent for the artist. And if it begins to think of itself in those terms it is, in my view, seriously misunderstanding what it was formed to do. My guess is that there is probably enough exhibition space throughout this country, in all the various institutions, galleries, universities, etc. to show as much *good* work as is being done. Of course it is impossible, by definition, for the artist to accept that view of things, unless he or she is currently being exhibited.

PR: I guess I would prefer to see artistic production totally free of the need to promote and sell it. However, in the real world, the opportunity to exhibit is a critical element in gaining support. The museum has put a lot of its resources into exhibitions of the work of Atget, perhaps at the expense of contemporary photographers. Can you tell us about that?

JS: What we've just finished is the most ambitious project ever done on a single photographer. It cost us an enormous percentage of our time, energies, money and available space over the last decade –more actually.

PR: Were there three or four separate exhibitions?

JS: Four. And we published four volumes on him and his work to correspond with the exhibitions.

PR: Why would you cite this as the most important project you have undertaken as director–simply because of the scope of it or do you feel that Atget and his work are incredibly seminal for modern photography?

JS: Both of those things. Obviously we wouldn't have done it if we hadn't felt he was as important as we do.

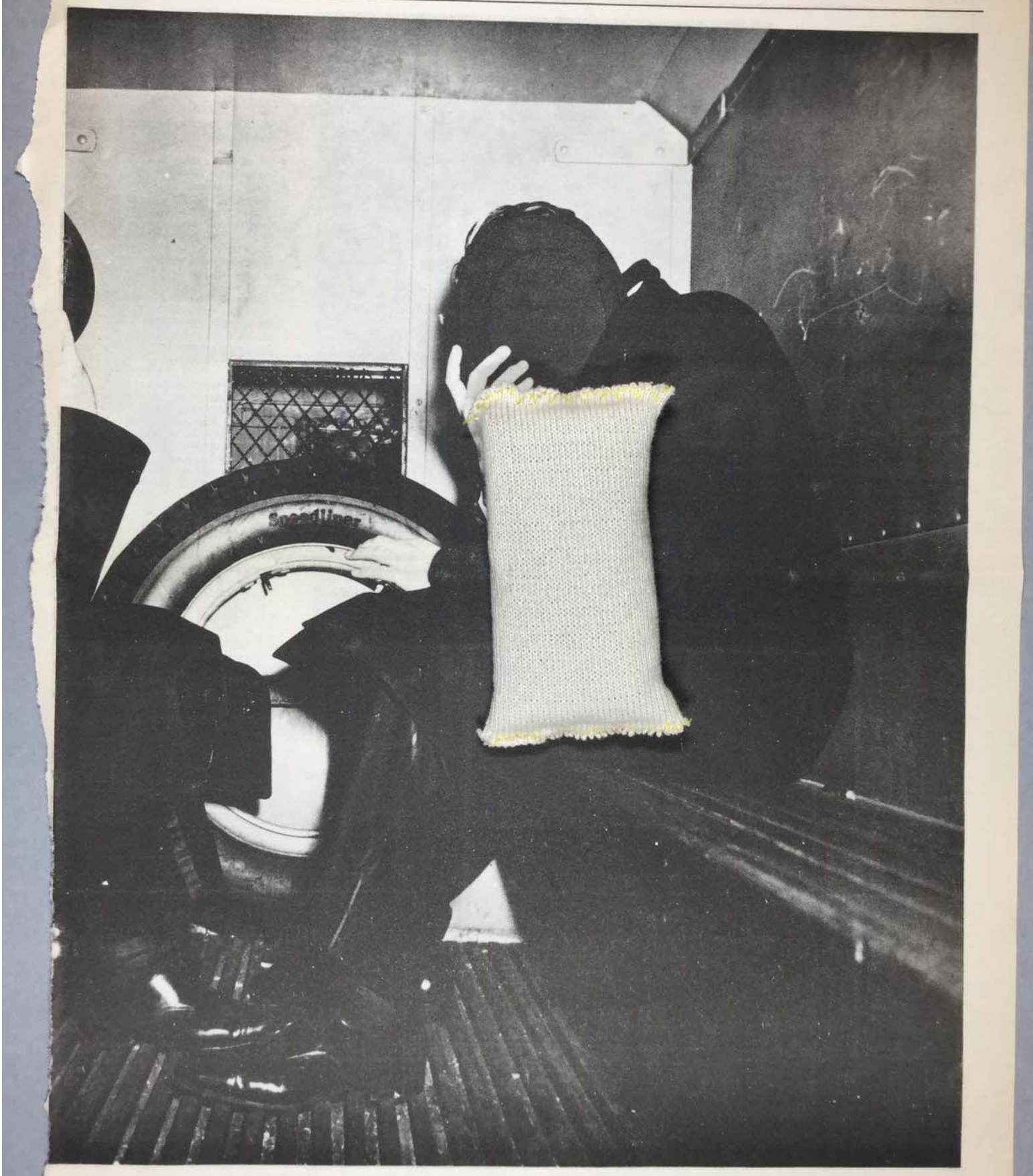
PR: Do you think in any way it was overkill? I wasn't here for the entire series, but friends here–people very involved in photography–gave me the impression they were surfeited.

JS: In some ways it might have been–the original scheme was that the exhibitions would be done one a year. We did the first two separately and then, with the million dislocations in our exhibition schedule created by the expansion, we decided to do the third and fourth together. I thought it worked very well, because the third and fourth shows were so different. The character of the work in the third show, the great gardens, are physically so beautiful, seductive, so luscious and wonderful–I just get in and swim in it. And the fourth, the modern times exhibition, was in many ways more demanding, intellectually tougher and frequently less visually seductive, but filled with the most essential ideas.

PR: Do you attempt to interweave tougher shows with easier work as you plan your exhibition schedule?

JS: We don't think of it quite in those terms. We do try to maintain a balance between new work and historic work–it's recently been somewhat skewed by the amount of time and gallery space taken up with the Atget work. We also strive for some degree of balance among the various aspects of the tradition that seem to us to be important. ▶

Weegee (Arthur H. Fellig) Untitled 1940s The Family of Man Fund

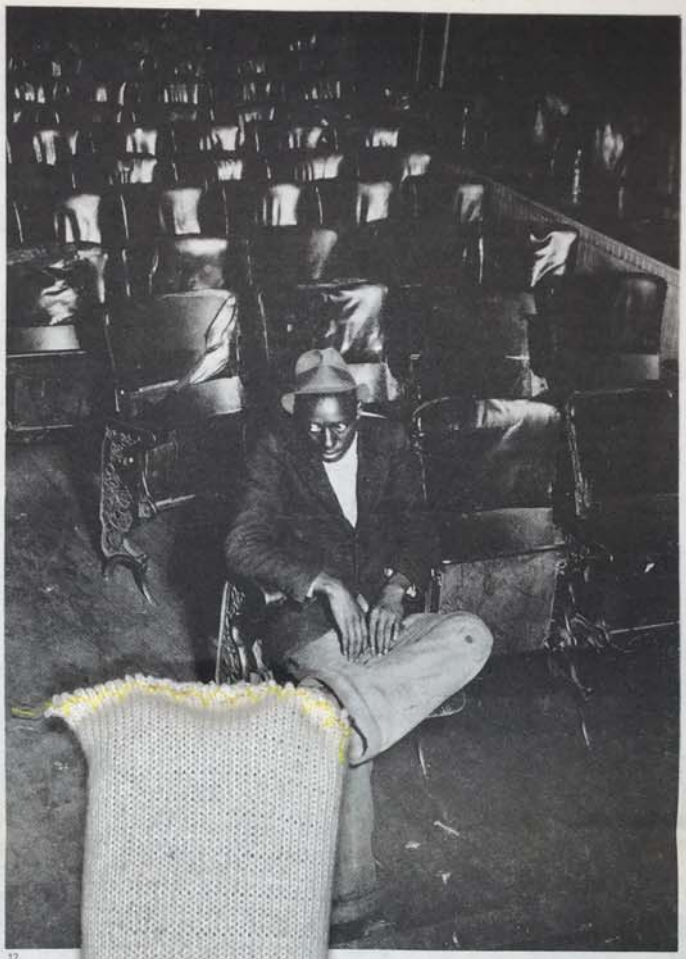


12 Louise Dahl-Wolfe
Untitled 1932
Gift of the photographer

13 Roy De Carava
Untitled 1959

14 W. Eugene Smith
Untitled 1944
Anonymous Gift

15 Josef Koudelka
Untitled (no date)
David H. McAlpin Fund



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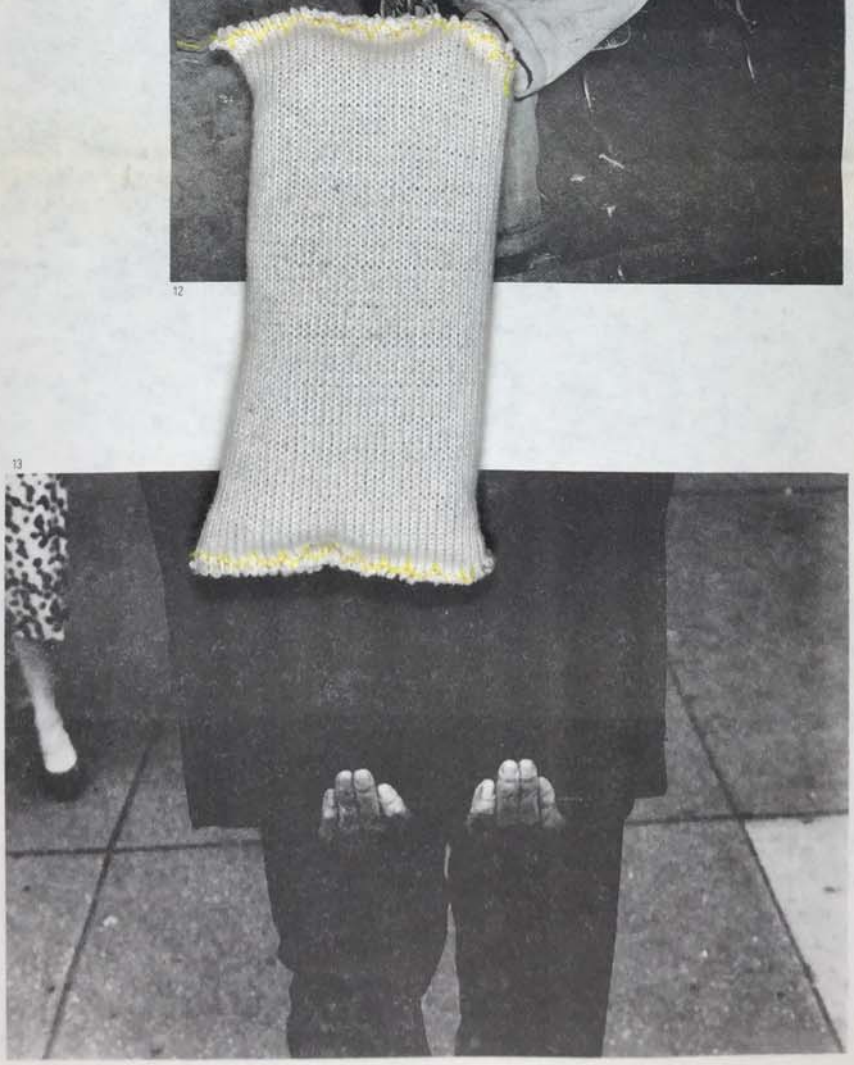

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PR: Will the new space help you resolve some of those conflicts? Will you have greater flexibility in mounting exhibitions that fit your hopes and ideals?

JS: Sure, yes indeed. Of course all of those new potentials mean more work, more money....

PR: Do you have the staff to meet the new challenges?

JS: We think so. We are delighted with our new gallery spaces and we intend to devote a larger proportion of our total energies to those galleries. The former galleries, although a giant step forward when they were opened in 1964, still basically allowed only a quick sort of Cook's tour of the great mountain peaks of the history, at least since the turn of the century, and a handful from the nineteenth-century. It was marvelous, but it was restricted as any kind of "Great Themes of Giuseppi Verdi" record might be. [laughter] It didn't allow one to deal with more complex, more sophisticated questions. There was never room for the really interesting minor work.

PR: With the new exhibition space you have the opportunity to re-assess what has been done and to continue in that tradition or chart a potentially new course for the future. You spoke of not wanting to see the exhibitions remain static. Yours is a somewhat different approach to space use than I am accustomed to in San Francisco. Here in NYC you allocate a significant portion of the space for a not-quite-permanent installation, a fairly stable exhibition of work from the permanent collection that undergoes minor variation from time to time. This is, of course, augmented by rotating temporary shows. What is the reason for this type of exhibition program--as opposed to the rapid turnover of relatively short-run exhibitions we see in San Francisco?

JS: I suppose the difference has to do, in part, with the nature of our audience--I suppose our audience is larger. Not only is the local and regional audience large, but there is a continual stream of visitors from across the country and around the world. When, on occasion, we can arrange to have a temporary show up for ten weeks--which is the shortest period we ordinarily use--we find that it's really much too short. The amount of artistic activity in the city is, as you know, enormous.

PR: Are temporary exhibitions a means of supplementing the weaker areas of the permanent collection?

JS: I was addressing the pace of exhibitions here. With six curatorial departments (painting and sculpture, prints and illustrated books, drawing, architecture and design, photography, and film—did I leave any out?), we consider our exhibition schedule to be very heavy. Before the expansion this department did six or seven temporary exhibitions a year, and we expect to continue at approximately that pace, and do shows of a somewhat larger than average size. But in reference to the collection areas, we feel that the fundamental function of the museum, especially in a city where there are so many institutions, galleries and exhibition opportunities outside of museums, is to make its collections available to be seen. In comparison with San Francisco, for example, proportionately less of our energies go to temporary exhibitions. In comparison with the Frick, on the other hand, the pace of change here would seem extremely frenetic.

PR: So your exhibition turnover rate is somewhere in the middle.

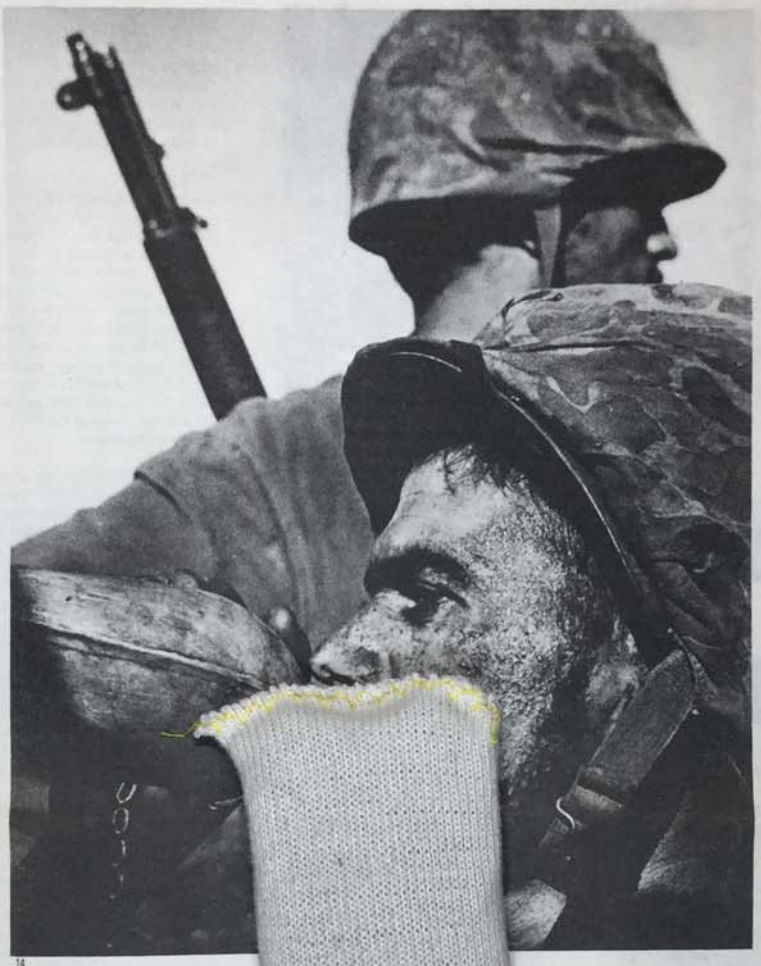
JS: I would think so, in proportional terms. Since a large portion of it is not a continually repeating group but rather occasional visitors, it is very important that they be able to come in and get as rich and full a sense as possible of what the history of photography has been about. The permanent collections galleries are very important to us in filling that need. On the other hand, we don't want to keep the same pictures on the wall constantly, because we don't want our audience who are are more-or-less regular visitors to feel "Oh goodness, those are the same pictures that I've looked at for the last two years. I don't have to go there anymore."

PR: In a changing world there's always a need to keep pace with what's going on currently.

JS: I'm not talking only about that, I'm referring to the fact that the first one hundred and fifty years are very rich, and there are simply not many photographs or photographers who have been by any means fully seen. In fact it is interesting to look at the third edition of Beaumont's history, the one from '48. If you go to the index and count the number of photographers whose work was unknown at the time—unknown to the leading historian in the field—you get some sense of why we don't consider the past of photography to be a dead issue or a closed book.

PR: I still have a disquieting feeling that the museum is—I shouldn't say not interested—but not particularly active at the leading edge of the medium. I guess I'm asking how a museum of *modern* art differs from other museums of art. I started from the assumption that adding the *modern* to the name indicates primary concern with the most current and contemporary work—not necessarily to the exclusion of older work. How does MOMA's position differ, for instance, from that of the Met?

JS: I think the easiest way to answer that question would be to go through a list of the exhibitions that we've done. The exhibitions we've done have been not only much more numerous than at the Met, but we've consistently and frequently shown the work of contemporary photographers, which the Met has not. If you mean by *modern* a particular style or philosophical commitment to an approach or look, then I think you're too narrow ▶



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16 Robert Doisneau
The Tableau in the Window of the Collector Romi 1949

17 Richard Avedon
Isak Dinesen 1958
Gift of the artist

18 Robert Frank
Political Rally, Chicago 1956

PR: Looking back over MOMA's exhibition history, which would you cite as the most influential and seminal? The "Family of Man," for instance, is frequently touted as a major achievement and landmark in the history of the medium. Recently, of course, there has been revisionist thinking as to its importance.

JS: To begin at the beginning, certainly Beaumont's big history exhibition in 1937 was of enormous importance, first for just making a huge amount of material available and for creating the framework within which the further study of the medium could proceed. It was the basis for his history and it was the first time, to my knowledge, that a large body of work selected on the basis of an art-historical approach had been gathered together and organized in a way that attempted to give a coherent history from fundamentally the point of view of the creative potential of the medium.

The early one-man shows done when Beaumont and Nancy were here were extremely important, not only in terms of their quality, but for the precedent that they set, establishing the principle that distinguished photographers deserved the serious, scholarly investigation and publication that was granted to artists in other fields. We're talking about the first Weston show, the first Strand show, the first Cartier-Bresson show. And, of course possibly the most influential book the museum has ever published in photography, "American Photographs" by Walker Evans. It's impossible to know how influential that exhibition was, but the book has continued to be enormously influential.

"Family of Man" was, of course, an enormously popular show and, as you suggest, a controversial show. Certainly it broadened the potential audience for photographs and persuaded many people that photography was something that deserved to be seen in museums as well as in magazines. Beyond that, one might regard it as the culmination of the photo-essay idea, almost a magazine idea of how photographs could be used as threads in a fabric that would be woven, not by the photographer, but by some outside, larger intelligence.

That, obviously, is an approach to the question of what a museum's function is, that is different than mine. I feel that the museum should present the work of photographers in such a way that their intention remains clear and as precisely delineated and sharply clarified as one can make it. That does not necessarily mean doing what the artist wants. [laughter] It certainly does require the imposition of a critical view. But the function of that view, that interpretation, should be to clarify the achievement of the artist, rather than to create something better [a chuckle] or larger or different. "The Family Of Man" was, in its own terms, a remarkable achievement. It might best be regarded as Steichen's last major work of art, rather than an exhibition of other peoples work.

PR: Were there others that were as important but perhaps not as well received? That was a relatively easy exhibition for the audience.

JS: There were other, earlier exhibitions done in more or less the same style—"The Road to Victory," "Power in the Pacific," etc.—but clearly "Family of Man" was the major achievement in that genre. The quality of that exhibition is attested to by the fact that a million people have tried to do the same thing since; none of them have in any way approached the success of the original. In the past twenty-three years since I've been here, there are a lot of exhibitions that I recall with a lot of pleasure and pride, that I think were very useful. I suppose among them I would especially point out "The Photographer and the American Landscape," "The Photographer's Eye,"...

PR: That was also published as a book, wasn't it?

JS: They both were. Then there was "New Documents", "Mirrors and Windows"....

PR: Much of what is done here will almost automatically be controversial, I guess it comes with the territory. Oddly enough, the controversy over "Mirrors and Windows" was not so much over the concept, as it was over who was included and who was left out. I assume that's an issue with almost every show you present.

JS: Of course it's a big issue.

PR: In this case it seemed to overshadow the concept of the exhibition.

JS: Well, the work *should* overshadow the concept of the show. That show was hung, by the way, in San Francisco. *I did not understand Van's installation.* It seemed that all the big pictures were in one room and the others in another. However, I enjoyed seeing that exhibition in San Francisco even though I didn't understand the installation. In fact I happened to see that show several times—I saw it in Milwaukee where it was very beautifully hung, and in Paris where it was well hung, considering the fact that it was in much too small a space. I hadn't seen it at that point for probably three years, so I was able to see it freshly. I liked it a lot, I thought it was a swell exhibition. [laughter] One of the facts of life in this field is, of course, by the time you get an exhibition on the wall it's very difficult to see what it looks like. You're so close to it and your mind has had to deal with so many little problems and aggravations that it's very difficult to change hats and walk in and look at it as a stranger would. Sometimes looking back at the installation photographs from old shows—five or ten years afterward—one says "God, that looks like an interesting show. I wish I could have seen that one." And, of course, you *had* seen it a hundred times! "New Japanese Photography" was a show from which I got a good deal of satisfaction. It was the first time that post-war Japanese photography had been seen in this country in any kind of depth. I had a wonderful collaborator on that show, Shoji Yamagishi. Our selection has held up very well. And most recently, the Atget shows—I don't think I'll ever do anything better than those for quality ▶

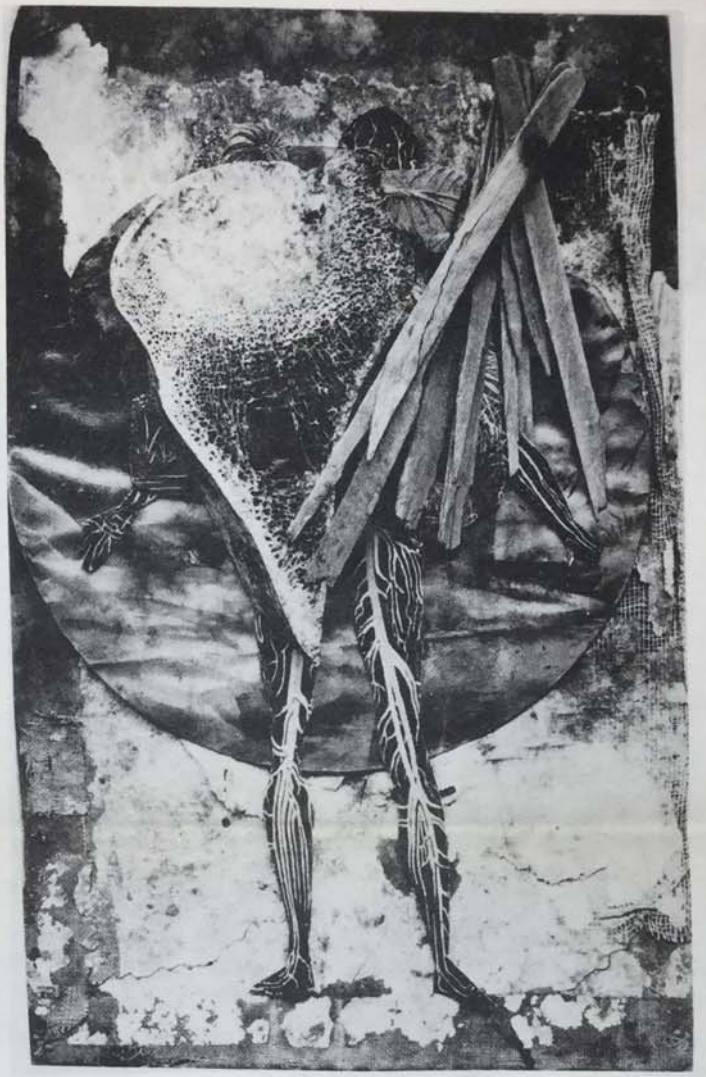
19 Frederick Sommer
The Thief Greater Than His Loot 1955

20 Josef Sudek
From the Windows of My Studio Series 1954
Gift of Harriette and Noel Levine

21 Paul Caponigro
Untitled 1957

22 Minor White
Capitol Reef, Utah 1962

23 Aaron Siskind
Uruapan, Mexico 4
John Parkinson III Fund



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PR: Do you regularly work in consort with other art institutions, like the Met, ICP, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or is there a lot of rivalry, jealousy and backstabbing?

JS: I'm not aware of it. There's rivalry, of course. Anybody with any character, anybody who's any good would like to do the best exhibitions. And properly so– if we don't feel that way we should go into some other line of work. But it's all on a perfectly proper and legitimate, gentlemanly level. I'm very fond of my colleagues in the photography field, almost without exception. They're interesting, intelligent, genuinely dedicated to the field. I enjoy their company. And I enjoy their work. There are more good photography curators in this country than in the rest of the world combined, and they're doing a large body of very good work. The field is well served, certainly much better than ever in the past.

The question of active collaboration is rather different. It's very unlikely that there would be any special advantage in collaborating with another institution in the same city. We borrow and lend all the time. On the other hand, if we were going to do an exhibition on Rumanian photography, then it would be a good idea to have a collaborator, hopefully a collaborating institution. Collaboration, of course, is not always formalized. Oftentimes an individual in another part of the country will be enormously helpful in telling you where to go, what to see, whom to talk to, how to find out what else might be going on that they're not aware of. One always tries to get as much help as one can, but not necessarily on the basis of a formal collaboration. The point is not to turn all decisions into committee decisions, but rather to try to get input from as many good minds and as many points of view as you can.

PR: How much does the museum's acquisition program depend on donation as opposed to purchase–do you have to rely on gifts to a large extent?

JS: That's hard to answer, because there's no constant proportion. But I would say probably half, on the average, over time, come to us as gifts...

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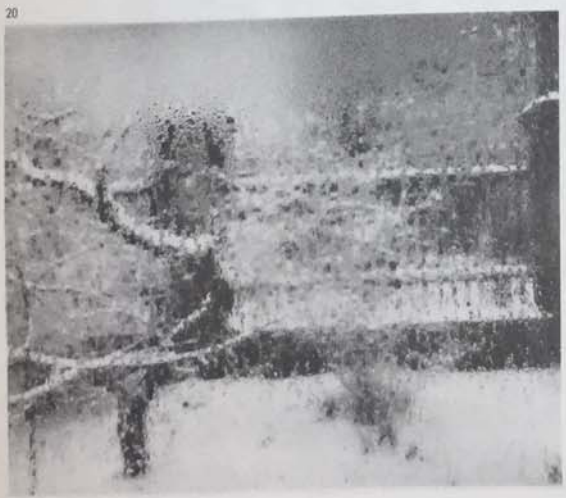

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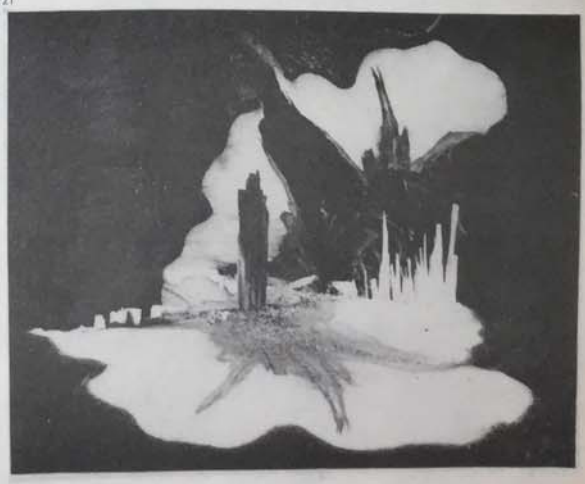

PR: . . . gifts from the artist or a corporation . . .

JS: . . . or collectors.

PR: Collectors have been active for a long time, but as of late they've been getting a lot of attention. Your current show [in June 1985], the Walter Collection, has gotten a lot of media coverage—and of course the sale of the Wagstaff collection to the Getty Museum is talked about all over town. In the introduction to the catalogue for the Walter show you suggest that a museum is actually a "collection of collections." Have private collectors begun to assume greater importance in the acquisitions programs of museums—or are we just hearing more about them?

JS: In photography it certainly is becoming very much more important because there are more interested collectors, more passionate collectors, more sophisticated collectors, many more. When I was talking about the museum being a set of collections, of course, in the other arts it has been going on forever. In fact, if you walk through any museum you'll find that the credit lines on most pieces of importance and substance are more likely to be gifts than purchases. Museums have a difficult time paying the electricity bill, the guards, and keeping the roof patched and generally do not have in their budgets, with conspicuous exceptions of course, [laughter] large sums for acquisitons. This museum has *no* acquisition funds in its operating budget.

PR: None, zero?

JS: None. There are a few tiny endowment funds scattered here and there in the departments, but they're very small.

PR: They were set up by private corporations?

JS: Most often by grants from individuals or cumulations of gifts from individuals. We have a little endowment from royalties received on the "Family of Man" book. But it produces very little money in the course of the year in terms of what an even modest acquisition budget requires. So we're out there with our hat in our hands.

PR: What do you think motivates private collectors, the "committed *amateurs*" to amass huge collections? I would hope there is a strong and sincere interest in photography as an art form. How large do you think the investment motive figures?

JS: I should rather think that people intelligent enough to put together a good collection of art of any kind are probably intelligent enough to realize that historically art is really quite a bad investment. It doesn't make anything, it doesn't produce anything. It isn't like buying a farm or a factory or machinery.

PR: Naturally there are speculative elements, but I would be surprised if there haven't at least been periods during which investments in photography have paid rather handsomely.

JS: Short periods, yes. But I once did some very rough calculations on whether it would have been a good investment to buy a Rembrandt hundred guilder print in 1640, or whenever. One was sold in the mid-sixties for what seemed at first glance to be a great deal of money. But if you compare the sale price with what you'd have in the bank if you had put that original investment into tulip bulbs or chocolate or some other Dutch specialty, [laughter] even if you assume some very modest profit, say three percent annually—a Depression-level return rate—you'd still be far ahead. Art does not produce anything. It doesn't create new income.

PR: Private collections are going to be relatively idiosyncratic, reflecting the tastes of the collector. Is it possible to take these highly uneven segments and weld them into a coherent and representative whole?

JS: Yes, of course. One doesn't take an equally covetous attitude toward every private collection. [laughter] There are private collections and private collections. Each of them will presumably reflect certain private values of taste or historical interest or cultural concerns. Nonetheless some of them are going to be better than others.

PR: From what I have observed, the Wagstaff collection is rather exceptional—he had been a curator and had acquired a broader view of the history of the medium.

JS: It's a wonderful collection. It's by no means—Sam would be very offended if anyone thought it was—historically balanced.

PR: Nor does he have any responsibility to create a balance, as would a curator.

JS: Well, Sam's collection is marvelous and certainly idiosyncratic. The wonderful thing about Wagstaff's collection—and one of his real contributions to other people's understanding of how interesting collecting could be—is that he did not start off with Beaumont's book and go through it alphabetically and say "Now let me see, I need an Abbott, an Adams, an Atget . . ." [laughter] On the contrary, he trusted his own intuitions and private interests, and bought what he liked. Of course he was an experienced curator who had developed his eye and his taste assiduously over a period of years. So when something struck Sam's fancy it was likely to be damned good even if unknown and without a pedigree.

PR: Was that collection available for exhibiton in this region? And do you see the sale as a loss to the region?

JS: Sure. But hopefully it's not going to be *lost*—after all communications and travel are possible. You can go from New York to California, and the pictures themselves I'm sure will be available for loan, once that enormously rich collection is sorted out, catalogued and taken care of in terms of whatever conservation is required ▶

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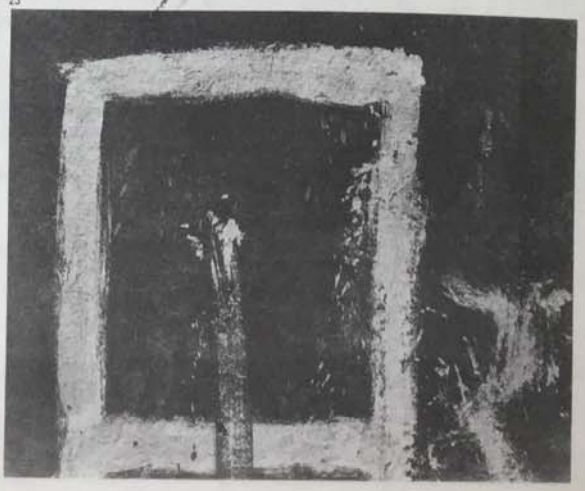

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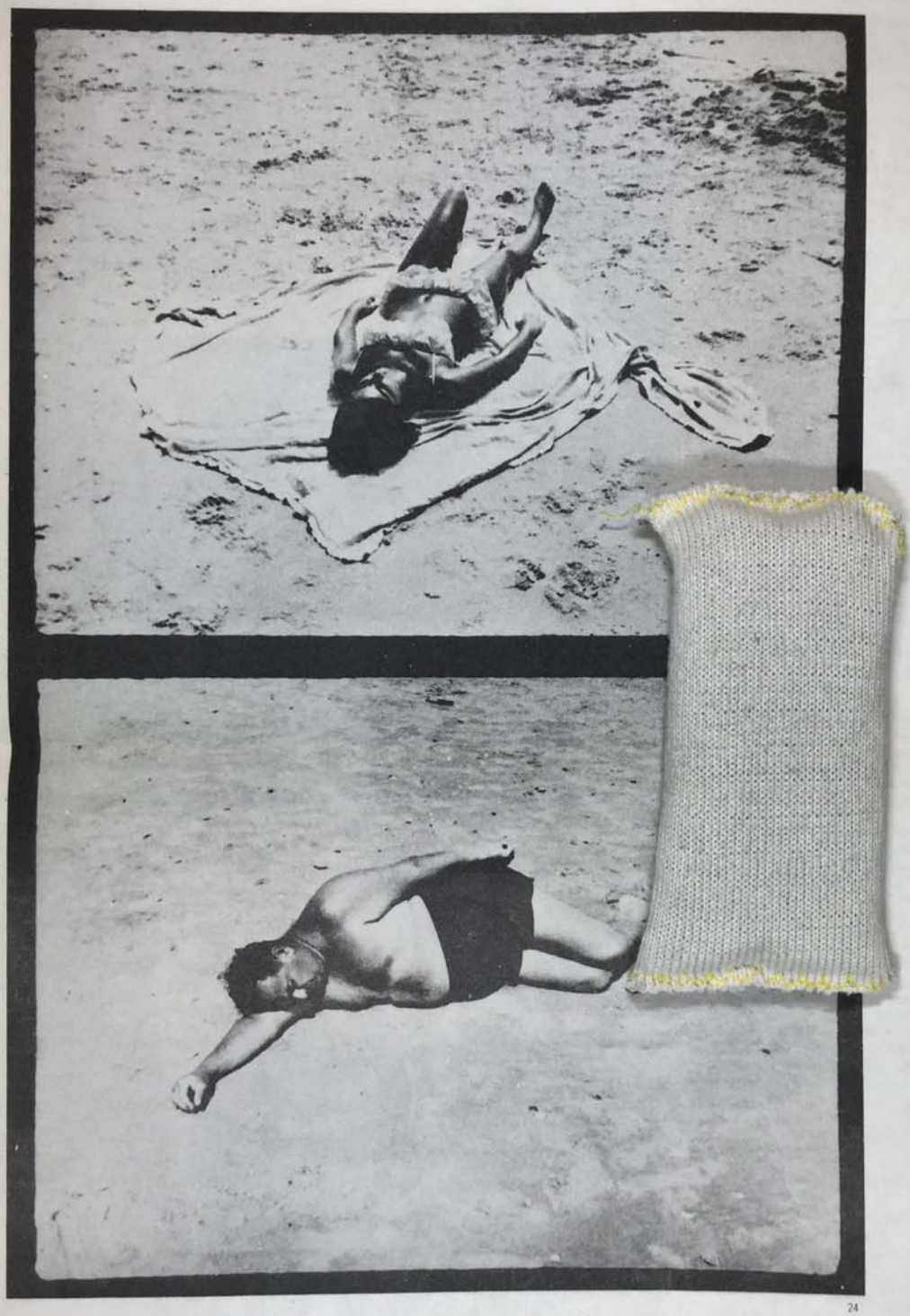

24

24 Ray K. Metzker
Untitled c. 1969
Gift of the photographer

25 Diane Arbus
Pro-War Parade 1967
Ben Schultz Memorial Collection
Gift of the artist

26 Josef Koudelka
Spain 1971
Joseph Strick Fund

PR: Is that a really unusual situation, the way the Gettys founded the museum and simply bought up wholesale lots of work? The fact that they have such awesome funding is in sharp contrast to the picture you painted of MOMA's financial foundations. Are they unique in that respect?

JS: Unique. I know of no circumstance ever, anywhere, comparable to it.

PR: Will it shift the power balance, the center of influence, in a significant way? Do you foresee a flourishing of photographic activity on the West Coast?

JS: Yes, I should think it would. It is an enormously rich and historically important resource. I don't know the contents of the collection in detail, but certainly in terms of the nineteenth-century, it's one of the best in the world–in certain areas perhaps even better than the one at George Eastman House. And it should be, in time, an enormously valuable educational resource to the world in general, but certainly especially to California.

PR: How would you define the role of the critic in the world of photography–is it something like the role you have described for MOMA, that is, being a conduit between artist and the audience?

JS: The role of critic is to explain and to judge. They're two quite different things and are both essential. Many people who are loosly called critics prefer perhaps to judge–"Six on a scale of ten!" [laughter] or "Outrageous!" or "Marvelous!" And some would appear to attempt to *explain* at enormous lengths but never place a value judgment finally on their opinion, their reading of what the ultimate value or meaning or importance of the work might be.

PR: How much power do you think they have–and do they wield it responsibly?

JS: Well, talking about critics as a group is like talking about baseball players as a group–some are better, some are worse. Some are good on some days and bad on other days. They can have a hot streak and go six for six–or they can go hitless for a week. Even Red Smith wasn't good all the time. Even Walter Lipmann wasn't good all the time.

PR: You hear about Broadway shows that are instantly closed by the force of a bad review. It's not the same in photography...

JS: It's not the same in the arts in general because the painting might be taken off the gallery wall after the month is over, but it isn't going to be burned up. It's available to be seen, whereas a work in the theater or a piece of music has got to be performed in order to have any real life. And there are in this city something like a dozen legitimate stages in operation at a given time, whereas there must be thousands of galleries ▶

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27 Zeke Berman
Still Life with Necker Cube 1979
Gift of the Estate of Vera Louise Fraser

28 Robert Heinecken
The S.S. Copyright Project
"On Photography" 1978
Partial gift of Mrs. Armand P. Bartos

29 Duane Michals
Death Comes to the Old Lady (series of five) 1959
The Parkinson Fund

27

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PR: I think I mentioned that the "gallery scene" appears to be in something of a slump in San Francisco. There weren't that many to start with, commercial galleries, alternative spaces, corporate lobbies, etc. You're saying that there is adequate opportunity for work to be exhibited here in New York? Opportunity for all the *good* work, at least.

JS: I don't think I put it quite that way, but anybody who doesn't have their work up thinks there isn't enough space. And that's a perfectly reasonable attitude. There is no way to answer the question whether or not there's enough space. There's a great deal more space available than there used to be–across the country. Clearly if the total exhibiting apparatus, if the total publishing apparatus does not serve some selective function, it doesn't serve any function at all, does it? When a gallery puts a body of work on the wall, they're saying "This is something you should see."

PR: There's another side to it, of course. They're every bit as likely to be saying "Here is something I can sell." The gallery has its overhead to consider. Is there a reasonable balance here between traditional commercial galleries and what we loosely call "alternative spaces," ones given to exhibiting work that is harder to understand or has lesser [illegible]etability?

JS: I think all of those tools are important. It's not true, however, that galleries exhibit only what they can sell. Sometimes they exhibit what they think they might be able to sell *later*. How many *people do you know who ever bought a Gary Winogrand photograph?*

PR: You could ask the same question–I know *he* does–of Bill Owens' work. His is not the kind of work one is going to buy to hang over one's couch.

JS: Some of Winogrand's pictures would do well on a wall, but basically they're better to look at like this [he picks up a book and leafs through the pages].

PR: What sort of outlet is there for that kind of work? I hear documentary photographers bemoaning the lack of commitment on the part of magazines to present large-scale photo essays. Galleries might be reluctant because of the limited sales potential. Publishing books is also a shaky proposition financially.

JS: Of course publications are tough. Thank God! What if they were easy?

PR: You're pointing to a four foot stack of "recent publications" here in your office.

JS: This pile has accumulated in just a couple of weeks. When one sees the books come in to this place, more or less by the ton, it is difficult to keep up with them, much less imagine what would happen if it were an easier industry. I can't imagine who can afford to buy them all as it is. It would be difficult to make the point that there is not a publishing opportunity available, given patience and time and energy to find the right publisher. What I started out to say was, in spite of the fact that Winogrand's work was not easy to sell to an average collector to frame and hang on a wall, nevertheless, that work was exhibited quite consistently after he became known, and in many different places. It was quite widely published.

One must grant, of course, that it is not easy at the beginning. One must grant that it is quite properly a selective process–because a photographer has an MFA and has done his time in "advanced cyanotype" does not mean he has a right to think society owes him annual exhibitions and an occasional publication. Society *doesn't* owe him that. Yet, for those who are willing to be pulled through enough knotholes, the potential for exposure is there. Art is not an easy way to survive. God, think of the poet, the composer–it's not a life that should be loosely recommended except for people who are bound and determined that they aren't going to be happy doing anything else.

PR: There's probably a fair amount of fantasy about the position you occupy and the life you lead as director of the photo department at MOMA–thoughts of dinner with Jackie Onassis, Andy Warhol and Mayor Koch.

JS: I've never had dinner with Andy Warhol or Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis or Mayor Koch. If people think curators spend their life going to fancy luncheons and dinners, no, that isn't what they do. They work at their trade, which is looking at pictures, seeking them out, trying to understand them, trying to learn about the conditions under which they are being made or were made and trying to make sound judgments about what is more vital, what has more life in it, what has a capacity for enlarging our sense of future potentials.

PR: Do you have to spend a lot of time and energy *dodging* portfolios? I would guess loads of people are scheming to somehow get you to look at their work and "discover" them.

JS: No, we don't dodge portfolios. I do spend some time dodging long conversations with photographers who want to talk about their work. That we don't have time for. We don't look at portfolios with the photographer. We look at portfolios every Thursday morning, and we look at everything and we look at it carefully and keep records of our response. We probably look at about twenty-five portfolios per week.

PR: Do you see a lot of illuminating things–is it a rewarding experience?

JS: Of course it's rewarding, because six or eight times a year you see something wonderful that you didn't know existed. And more often you see good, solid work that might develop into something–raw talent. And once in a while an Arbus will come in, or Marie Cosindas. I knew Marie's work in black-and-white, and thought it was nice, polite work. But nothing exactly earthshaking. She was bringing a portfolio up and ran into me on my way out to lunch. I was hurrying to get out before Marie would arrive with her portfolio and make me break a very hectic schedule to chat and explain why I couldn't look at the portfolio right then. But I didn't make it, and as I was leaving, Marie came in. So there was the portfolio, so I opened it up, expecting to glance at it quickly and come back to it later. I looked at the first few pictures and asked Marie to sit down, and we made arrangements for a show right then and there. I never got to the bottom of the portfolio before we decided to do an exhibition. Those were the early Polaroid color portraits–the first time anybody had made that material work. Before that the photographers' riddle was "What's black and white and green all over?" [laughter] The answer was Polacolor film. But she learned how to make it work.

PR: It's not easy to answer this and retain the appearance of modesty, but what do you think will be your legacy to the photo department and the Museum of Modern Art? Or what would you like it to be?

JS: Oh, I don't have time to worry about that, somebody else will have to do it. I certainly expect that the collection here is very much stronger and richer than it was when I came–it would be a terrible confession to think otherwise. I think that most of the exhibitions we've done have met a very real need, many of them have had and will continue to have some sort of lasting importance. The books we've done are not going to be thrown away, people will continue to read and learn from them–maybe even be excited and challenged by them. But I'm not interested in giving myself a grade. [laughter]

PR: In pursuing your responsibilities here, is there time left to continue your personal photography?

JS: No, unfortunately not. I loaded a few holders six weeks ago and shot a couple of sheets at the wrong ASA. [laughter] They'll probably sit in the holders until they're fogged. And my little darkroom in the city is gradually filling up with wine cases, vacuum cleaners, my children's trash . . . I took a sabbatical in 1980 or '81 and did quite a bit of work then, some of which was decent enough–but I haven't printed it.

PR: Do you get a chance to enjoy the culture and other exciting aspects of New York–or get out of the city to do some trout fishing?

JS: We have an old, falling-down farm about three hours north, on the New York edge of the Berkshires, and we go there almost every weekend and longer periods in the summer. But no, I do not take anything like full advantage of the cultural life available in the city–in fact I've become increasingly culturally deprived since coming to work at the Museum of Modern Art. [laughter] ■

Photographs 1 through 29 from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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New Yorker Magazine
Oct. 10, 1994

PHOTOGRAPHY

Solo Szarkowski

THE show of pictures by John Szarkowski at Pace/MacGill (32 East 57th Street; through October 22) offers a chance to see another side of one of the most intriguing and contentious figures in the medium. In 1962, Szarkowski succeeded Edward Steichen as the director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, and over time he became better known for that role than as a photographer. (As a curator, some found him inspiring, others infuriating.) During his tenure at MOMA—he retired in 1991—Szarkowski effectively put his picture-taking career on hold. This is his first one-man show in New York.

The pictures are from the late forties through the early sixties. Many of the images were shot for two books: "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956), a photo-essay about the architect's work, and "The Face of Minnesota" (1958).

Whether of landscapes, buildings, grain elevators, or everyday life, Szarkowski's photographs reflect the man's singular perspective. His vision is not about grandstanding; his choice of subjects and the way he handles scale, perspective, and detail demonstrate that grandeur isn't necessary to signify beauty and grace. Szarkowski's scenes of his dog hanging out in the back yard, for example, make paradise out of the most modest materials, and could make one give up dreams of doing something great. On the other hand, there's at least one reminder that this is the photographic big time: the dog's name is Mathew—for Mathew Brady.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON—Photographs of Paris, from 1930 to 1980, by the French master. Through Oct. 22. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)

LESLIE GILL (1908-58)—Images by a photographer best known for his work for *Harper's Bazaar*. Through Oct. 22. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St.)

JANINE NIEPCE—Black-and-white photographs of French country life, taken primarily in the fifties and sixties. Through Oct. 22. (Witkin, 415 West Broadway.)

ANDRES SERRANO—Recent photographs of Budapest. Through Oct. 26. (Cooper, 155 Wooster St.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY, 1130 Fifth Ave. at 94th St.—A retrospective of the work of Cornell Capa, featuring images from *Life* and other magazines. . . . ¶ Forty images of contemporary Russian life, by Hans-Jürgen Burkhard. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St.—"Talking Pictures," an exhibition that features images by more than fifty people not generally associated with photography—Mario Cuomo, Jesse Jackson, Diane Keaton—and taped commentaries on the work. . . . ¶ Photographs by Arthur Rothstein, who is best known for his work for *Look*. . . . ¶ More than thirty black-and-white photographs of Appalachian Kentuckians, by Shelby Lee Adams. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Goethe House, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and the Schomburg Center.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
24 January 1991

Szarkowski Of Modern Museum To Retire

By ANDY GRUNDBERG

John Szarkowski, director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department for 29 years, will retire on July 1, ending an invigorating and occasionally controversial career as one of the medium's most eloquent exponents.

A museum spokeswoman, Jeanne Collins, said on Tuesday that Mr. Szarkowski would continue to serve the museum as a consultant. A committee to appoint his successor has been formed, she added.

Mr. Szarkowski, who was 65 years old in December, is currently the department director with the longest tenure at the museum and one of the few remaining staff members who worked with Alfred H. Barr Jr., the museum's founding director. He succeeded Edward Steichen as director of photography in 1962 and almost immediately established himself as a major interpreter of the art of photography.

With exhibitions like "New Documents" (1967), "Diane Arbus" (1972) and "William Eggleston" (1976), he gave credibility to snapshot-style street photography. With shows like "The Photographer's Eye" (1966), "From the Picture Press" (1973), "Eugène Atget" (four exhibitions from 1981 to 1985) and last year's "Photography Until Now," he defined a historical tradition that reflected his tastes in contemporary imagery.

While some observers consider his views too narrow and have criticized him for underestimating the importance of the large-scale art photography of the 1980's, his ideas continue to have a broad influence on the medium and its practitioners.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Mr. Szarkowski said he planned to return to the camera and the darkroom after his retirement, resuming a career as a photographer that he abandoned when he assumed his museum post. He said he also planned to continue teaching and writing. "I feel quite invigorated," he said, "a bit like getting out of school in the spring."

Of his years at the museum, he said: "I've enjoyed, if not every single day, then every single year. It has been an adventure for me." The last exhibition conceived during his tenure will be a show of Lee Friedlander's nudes, opening in July.

art

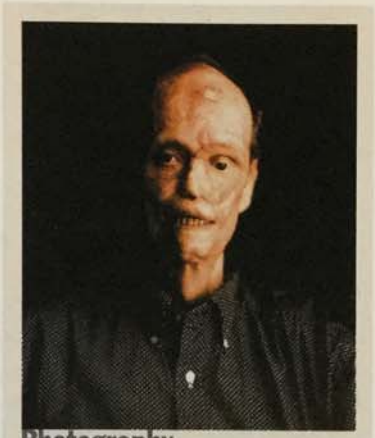
Jewish Museum—"Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's 'D'Est.'" A film-and-video installation of the Belgian film-director's feature-film documenting her journey to eastern Germany, Poland, and Russia in the early nineties; through 5/27. 1109 Fifth Ave. (423-3200); Sun., Mon., Wed., Thurs. 11–5:45, Tues. 11–8 (Tues. after 5; free); $7, $5 students and seniors.

Metropolitan Museum of Art—"Cartier: 1900–1939." A survey of the greatest achievements of the House of Cartier, including jewelry, clocks, watches, vanity cases, cigarette boxes, and other accessories, and design drawings and recently discovered original plaster casts of the finished jewels that were used as a three-dimensional record by the firm; through 8/3. . . . "The Four Seasons." Costume's variations throughout the year, including the traditional wardrobe rotations for social, seasonal, and climatic purposes; through 8/17. . . . "The Glory of Byzantium." The Second Golden Age of Byzantium (A.D. 843–1261) is the subject of this exhibition, which comprises more than 350 masterpieces in all media from the museums and church treasuries of more than twenty countries; through 7/6. . . . "Giambattista Tiepolo." America's first major retrospective of the eighteenth-century Italian master's paintings and etchings; through 4/27. . . . "Venetian Prints and Books in the Age of Tiepolo"; through 4/27. . . . "Domenico Tiepolo: Drawings, Prints, and Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Works by the son and collaborator of Giambattista Tiepolo; through 4/27. . . . "The Florene M. Schoenborn Bequest: Artists of the School of Paris"; through 5/4. . . . "The Human Figure in Transition, 1900–1945: American Sculpture From the Museum's Collection"; through 9/28. . . . "American Tonalism: Paintings, Drawings, Prints, and Photographs." Works by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, George Inness, Arthur Davies, Edward Steichen, and others that illuminate a phase of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American art that emphasized subdued poetic mood and muted coloration; through 6/1. . . . "Indian Court Painting: 16th–19th Century"; through 7/6. . . . "Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art"; through 8/31. . . . "The Art of the Renaissance Woodworker: The Gubbio Studiolo Restored." An exhibition that complements the museum's recent installation of a room of inlaid trompe-l'oeil panels that was once the *studiolo* of Duke Federico da Montefeltro; through 4/30. 1000 Fifth Ave., at 82nd St. (879-5500); Tues.–Thurs. and Sun. 9:30–5:15, Fri. and Sat. 9:30–9; $7 contribution, $3.50 children and seniors. The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park (923-3700); Tues.–Sun. 9:30–4:45 (closes at 5:15 between April and September); $8, $4 seniors and students.

Museum for African Art—"Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia"; through 8/31. . . . "To Cure and Protect: Sickness and Health in African Art"; through 8/31. 593 Broadway (966-1313); Tues.–Fri. 10:30–5:30, Sat. and Sun. 12–6; $4, $2 children, seniors, and students.

Museum of American Folk Art—"The Alternative World of Henry Darger." A retrospective of paintings by the self-taught Chicago artist (1892–1973) best known for his eccentric watercolor narratives in which little girls struggle to escape enslavement by ruthless male warriors; through 4/27. 2 Lincoln Square (595-9533), Tues.–Sun. 11:30–7:30; free.

Museum of Modern Art—"From the Grace M. Mayer Collection." Photographs and prints bequeathed to the museum by its former curator emeritus; 4/24–7/15. . . . "Projects: Architecture as Metaphor." Painting, sculpture, and photography by seven artists who use architectural motifs and imagery as a basis for their work; through 6/3. . . . "Projects: Rirkrit Tiravanija." A child-size model of an International Style glass pavilion erected in the museum's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden; through 6/3. . . . "The Photomontages of Hannah Höch." The first U.S. retrospective of the German artist's photomontages; through 5/20. . . .



Photography
Candid Camera

Previously known for images of computer-manipulated faces, Nancy Burson has now found such anomalies in nature. At once shocking and deeply moving, Burson's unenhanced Polaroid portraits compassionately depict facial abnormalities ranging from genetic disorders to severe burns to post-cancer reconstructions. At Ricco/Maresca Gallery, 152 Wooster Street; through May 17.

"Manuel Alvarez Bravo." A retrospective of photographs by the twentieth-century Mexican master; through 5/18. . . . "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." The late artist, who ceased painting in 1990, painted the 40 canvases in this exhibition between 1981 and 1987; through 4/29. . . . "American Photography 1890–1965 From the Collection"; through 7/8. . . . "The Maximal Sixties: Pop, Op, Figuration." Pop, Op, and Kinetic artworks from the museum's collection; through 4/29. . . . "A Singular Vision:" Prints From Landfall Press"; through 5/6. 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480); Sat.–Tues. 11–6, Thurs. and Fri. noon–8:30, closed Wed.; $8.50, $5.50 students and seniors (Thurs. and Fri. 5:30–8:30, pay what you wish).

Museum of the City of New York—"A Dream Well Planned: The Empire State Building." Photographs, drawings, models, and memorabilia associated with New York's most famous icon; through 1/11. . . . "We Dig New York: The Professional Archeologists of New York"; through 9/14. . . . "The Streets and Beyond: New York Photographs." Photographs of New York street life by well-known New York photographers; through 6/8. . . . "New York Toy Stories." A selection of toys from the museum's collection, ranging in date from the eighteenth century to the present; through 4/27. . . . "A Museum for a New Century: The Museum of the City of New York in the 21st Century"; through 6/29. 1220 Fifth Ave., at 103rd St. (534-1672); Wed.–Sat. 10–5, Sun. 1–5; $5, $3 students and seniors.

National Academy of Design—"Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot: A Southern Painter Abroad"; through 5/11. 1083 Fifth Ave. (369-4880); Wed.–Sun. 12–5 (Fri. until 8); $5, $3.50 seniors, students, and children under 16.

National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution— George Gustav Heye Center, 1 Bowling Green (825-6700), 10–5 daily, Thurs. to 8; free.

New Museum of Contemporary Art—"Annual Auction Exhibition." Works that will be for sale at the museum's twentieth-anniversary benefit auction on May 4; 4/25–5/11. 583 Broadway (219-1222), Wed., Thurs., Fri., and Sun. 12–6, Sat. 12 till 8 (6–8 free); $4, $3 artists, students, and seniors.

New-York Historical Society—"An Unquenchable Thirst: Springs and Wells of New York City"; through 6/1. . . . "Taking Flight: John James Audubon and the Watercolors for *Birds of America*"; through 9/7. . . . "Before Central Park: The Life and Death of Seneca Village." An exhibition of documents relating to the African-American community called Seneca Village that existed from the 1820s through the 1850s on what is now the west side of Central Park; through 8/10. 2 W. 77th St. (873-3400); Wed.–Sun. noon–5; $5, $3 seniors and children.

New York Public Library—"Wild New York: The Printmaker and the Natural Landscape From the Age of Exploration Through the Twentieth Century"; through 6/28. . . . "Let There Be Light: William Tyndale and the Making of the English Bible"; through 5/17. . . . "Richard Tuttle: Books and Prints at the New York Public Library." A survey of the artist's books and prints from 1965 to the present; through 5/31. . . . "Maiden Voyages." An exhibition of writers' first books (in the library's Berg gallery, which is closed on Mon.); through 9/20. Fifth Ave. and 42nd St. (869-8089); Mon. 10–6, Tues.–Wed. 11–6, Thurs.–Sat. 10–6; free.

P.S. 1 Clocktower—46-01 21st St., Long Island City (718 784-2084). Works by artists selected for the 1997 Studio Program; through 5/14.

Pierpont Morgan Library—"Private Histories: Four Centuries of Journal Keeping." A survey of personal journals and diaries from the seventeenth century to the twentieth; 4/24–8/31. . . . "An Eye for Beauty: The Alice Tully Collection." Drawings and watercolors by Delacroix, Raphael, Tiepolo, Turner, and others; 4/24–8/31. 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008); Tues.–Fri. 10:30–5, Sat. 10:30–6, Sun. noon–6; $5 suggested donation, $3 students and seniors.

Queens Museum—"Queens Artists: Highlights of the 20th Century." Works by Benny Andrews, Joseph Cornell, James Brooks, Alex Katz, Melissa Meyer, Isamu Noguchi, Ad Reinhardt, Art Speigelman, and other artists who have lived or worked in Queens; through 7/6. . . . "The Lamps of Tiffany: Highlights of the Egon and Hildegard Neustadt Collection." Tiffany lamps, globes, and windows ranging over the entire lifetime of production at the Tiffany Studios, from 1893 to 1938; through 11/2. New York City Building, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens (718-592-9700); Wed.–Fri. 10–5, Sat. and Sun. 12–5; $3 suggested donation, $1.50 seniors and children.

Studio Museum in Harlem—"Growing Forward: Prints, Drawings, Sculpture, and Public Art by Richard Hunt, 1986–1996." An exhibition that interprets the influences of African-American history and culture, biology, and the urban industrial environment on the artist's work; through 6/29. 144 W. 125th St. (864-4500); Wed.–Fri. 10–5, Sat. and Sun. 1–6; $5, $3 seniors and students.

Whitney Museum of American Art—"1997 Biennial Exhibition." The sixty-ninth Biennial exhibition, featuring 200 works by approximately 70 artists; through 6/1. 945 Madison Ave., at 75th St. (570-3676); Wed., Fri., Sat., Sun. 11–6, Thurs. 1–8; $8, $6 students and seniors (free Thurs. 6–8).

Auctions

Christie's—502 Park Ave. (546-1000). 4/23 and 4/24 at 10: "Japanese Paintings and Works of Art." On view from 4/19. 4/26 at 10: "Wine."

Doyle—175 E. 87th St. (427-2730). 4/23 at 10: "Fine Furniture, Decorative Arts, and Paintings." On view from 4/19.

Sotheby's—York Ave. at 72nd St. (606-7000). 4/24 at 2 and 4/25 at 10:15 and 2: "Arcade Furniture and Decorations." On view from 4/19.

Photograph courtesy of Ricco/Maresca Gallery.

OCTOBER 24, 1994 THE NEW YORK OBSERVER p. 23

Seeing and Hearing at ICP; Two Masters: Szarkowski and Capa

By A.D. Coleman

Photography

When it comes to high-tech exhibition strategy in photography, the cutting edge this season is *Talking Pictures*, at the International Center of Photography Midtown (through Dec. 4), 1133 Avenue of the Americas. Unintentionally, it's also a notable contribution to the theater of the absurd. Subtitled "People Speak About the Photographs That Speak to Them," this show—the exhibition version of a new book by Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric (Chronicle, $40 hard, $24.95 paper)—takes an oral history approach, à la Studs Terkel, to the question of why we pay attention to photographs. The book's authors, who are also the show's curators, interviewed 70 people, from several convicted felons to musician David Byrne to PBS's "Mr. Rogers," who were asked to pick a single photograph significant to them and discuss its meaning. In both book and exhibition, the images chosen are combined with edited commentary.

The result is a fascinating if informal sociology, rich with insights into what we read out of photographs and read into them. In the book, these commentaries are printed alongside the photographs, which include family-album snapshots, a scientific microphotograph, anonymous erotica and two W. Eugene Smith classics. The show offers the original images (though "original" in several cases means reproductions, if that's what the subjects of the interviews were referring to), but instead of reading the texts on the walls, we get to hear them, as recorded by the interviewees. The visitor borrows a small handset that looks a bit like a cellular phone, stands in front of the image and punches in its number; a voice recites the text.

People seem to love the idea. At the show's opening soirées in late September, crowds of folks wandered around, listening intently and looking absolutely deranged, like the B-boys, Madison Avenue suits and others who hustle along the city streets nowadays with their cells to their ears, gabbling into thin air. Personally, I find it impossible to pay attention to a photograph, or almost anything else, with someone talking into my ear, so I thought the book version worked better. But I did enjoy the shuffle-play option that the show provided: You could, for example, punch in the number that brings up Arthur L. Fry's discussion of the development of the adhesive for 3M's Post-It notes while contemplating the vintage bondage scene chosen by Mr. Byrne. I recommend such intriguing con- and disjunctions to anyone who finds listening to lengthy discourses while standing up almost as tedious as reading them on a wall.

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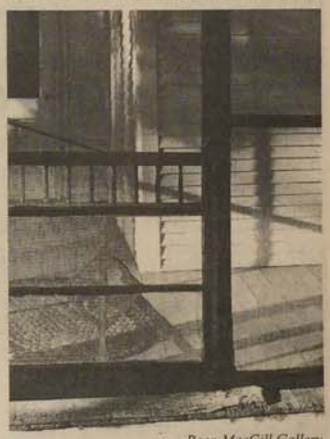
For counterpoint, the most unobtrusively labor-intensive shows I've come across this season are retrospectives from the city's two most influential orchestrators of photography-related matters over the past several decades: John Szarkowski, who retired several years ago from the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art after more than 30 years of service, and Cornell Capa, who founded the International Center of Photography 20 years ago and retired as director this past spring.

As evidenced by Mr. Szarkowski's show at Pace-MacGill Gallery (through Oct. 22), 32 East 57th Street, and Mr. Capa's at the ICP Uptown (through Nov. 27), 1130 Fifth Avenue, both men were dedicated, gifted, full-time working photographers. Mr. Szarkowski is a medium-format documentarian and architectural photographer with several substantial books to his credit, and Mr. Capa is a widely published small-camera photojournalist and member of the picture agency Magnum. Eventually, their critical, curatorial and sponsor relationships to the medium overwhelmed their creative activities and required that they set their picture making aside. But that hands-on, professional-level grounding in the practice of the medium was more the rule than the exception among those who brought photography to the public during the first two-thirds of this century; gallerist-editor-publisher Alfred Stieglitz, curator Edward Steichen (Mr. Szarkowski's immediate predecessor in the department at MoMA) and the historian Helmut Gernsheim are just a few examples.

Mr. Capa began as a staunch advocate of the form of liberal-humanist advocacy photojournalism he named "concerned photography" and practiced himself with great skill and devotion for many years. (His major projects, represented by too-brief extracts in the ICP survey, included books on a surviving Peruvian aboriginal tribe and poverty in Latin America, as well as coverage of the Six-Day War in Israel in 1967.) But though the ICP began with that emphasis, it came to embrace the entire spectrum of contemporary photographic activity, including forms and tendencies with which Mr. Capa, I suspect, is personally far from comfortable.



Pace-MacGill Gallery

John Szarkowski's *Screen Porch, Hudson, Wisconsin, 1950*.

Under Mr. Szarkowski's guidance, the department of photography at MoMA trod a much narrower path. That photographer-turned-curator and theorist conceived a formalist premise for what he saw as authentically photographic work: a trail leading from anonymous 19th-century practitioners to Eugene Atget, and from there to Walker Evans, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus and their offspring. To many critics, myself included, the department during his tenure appeared to overlook, and thereby misrepresent to the museum's public, the explosive redefinitions and questionings of the very medium of photography that commenced in the late 60's. Correctives such as the ICP's more catholic overview became imperative.

In the current small exhibit of 39 delicate, luminous gelatin silver prints Mr. Szarkowski made between 1948 and 1962—many of them from the two books that brought him to Steichen's attention, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* and *The Face of Minnesota*—one can see how his ideas and attitudes as a performer were transformed into his theoretical and curatorial tendencies. A meditative involvement in process, consistent formal rigor, a carefully honed sense of place, a deep and even metaphysical relationship to tools and materials are hallmarks of these pictures. So is a considered, unobtrusive exploration of the interpretive possibilities of photographic printmaking, an aspect of the medium that has been notably absent from Mr. Szarkowski's theorizing since he first articulated his core ideas in his classic treatise, *The Photographer's Eye*.

During his years at MoMA, Mr. Szarkowski managed to expand beyond his inclination toward the calm, the static, the deliberated, the rural and the emotionally self-contained. Though they were a far cry from his own photography, as a curator he came to cherish and champion the volatile, disturbed emotionality of Arbus, the manic and fragmented energy of Winogrand, the aleatory experiments of Mr. Friedlander, and the increasingly urban orientation of several generations of photographers. That involved no small stretching of self. But who surprised me more as an advocate for photography? Based on the early evidence contained in these two shows, the unequivocal answer is Mr. Capa.

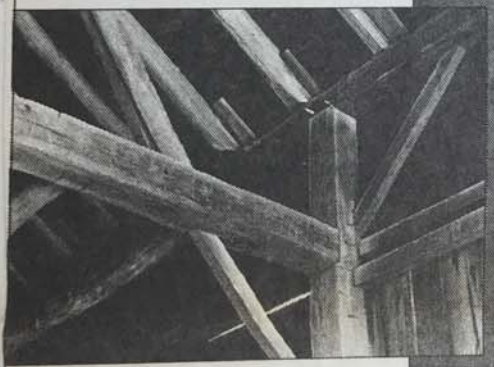
A Photography Curator Narrows His Focus

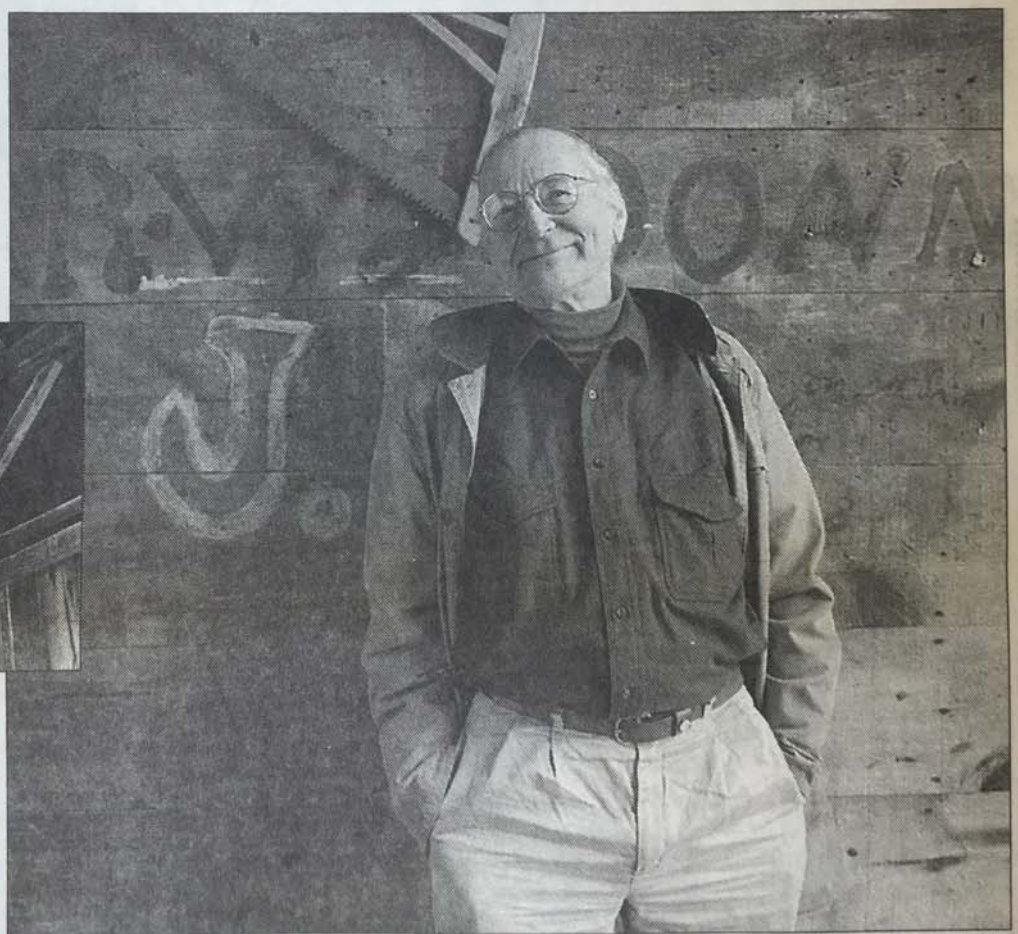
After 29 Years of Displaying Others' Work, John Szarkowski Returns to His Own

By VICKI GOLDBERG

When John Szarkowski was reminded that it was during his term as director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art that photography was recognized as a high art, he responded drily, "Is that what went wrong?" He never did seem entirely happy with new developments in the medium in the late 1970's and 80's, so perhaps the remark was not entirely ironic.

From 1962 to 1991, Mr. Szarkowski (pronounced shar-KOV-ski) presided over photography's ascent to the higher echelons of art and the upper ranks of the art market. Now a director emeritus, he was for almost three decades the most powerful curator in the field; there were not many others for a good part of his tenure.





Lionel Delevingne for The New York Times

John Szarkowski in his barn in East Chatham, N.Y. His barn pictures (left and below) fill a new book and a gallery show.

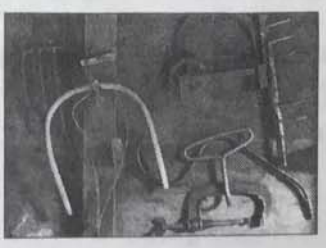
He consistently presented photography as an art form of a level of modernism and importance comparable to that of other work in the museum. His position, and his extraordinarily elegant writing, meant that he set the standards and the course of taste for a large audience that had not ventured into the area of photography before.

Before coming to New York from Wisconsin and assisting the medium onto the glory track, Mr. Szarkowski was a photographer himself, but he did not photograph much during his years at the Modern. Curators seldom do; their cameras languish while the museum calls.

So, of course, he returned to his first love as soon as he stopped answering. The result: a book called "Mr. Bristol's Barn, With Excerpts From Mr. Blinn's Diary" (Abrams). An exhibition of Mr. Szarkowski's photographs of the barn opens tomorrow and continues through May 10 at Pace Wildenstein MacGill at 32 East 57th Street in Manhattan.

Not that he spent the 29-year interim pining. "The Modern was a very demanding job, and an interesting job," he said. "I was very lucky. There were wonderful new photographers then, and wonderful old photographers nobody had seen." For starters, the museum had never before put on one-man shows of Brassai, Bill Brandt or André Kertesz.

"God, it was easy!" said the man who did.



In the late 50's, Mr. Szarkowski photographed and wrote the texts for two books: "The Idea of Louis Sullivan," an appreciation of the architect's work, in 1956, and "The Face of Minnesota," in 1958. He won two Guggenheim Fellowships; the first supported the work on the Sullivan book, the second a photographic project in the Canadian wilderness that

Continued on Page C15

liams College, Yale and Harvard.

"Florida was especially good," he said. "Those great Caribbean stu-

LAST WEEK

P.C15

A Photo Curator Narrows His Focus

Continued From First Arts Page

he never quite finished. (The place was so remote, it could be reached only by canoe, with frequent portages. Mr. Szarkowski, now 71, says he does not think he will go back.)

His more recent subject is the barn on his farm in East Chatham, N.Y., which was built by hand down to the last joint and rafter more than a century ago, when the farm was owned by Abel Bristol. The diary, written by a nearby farmer, Philo Blinn, around the time of the Civil War, makes a crackling case for the difficulty of the small farmer's life in the 19th century. On his 39th birthday, Blinn wrote that he was almost an old man, on his 40th that he had "all the while been so very busy getting ready to live, or in other words, getting something to live on, that I have never thought to improve, to value, to enjoy the present."

Mr. Szarkowski has recorded the barn's hand-hewn geometries and hand-carved graffiti with the clear, straightforward, respectful approach to nuances of fact that characterized so much 19th-century photography. That is precisely what he values most highly in the medium.

In 1958 he wrote, "I want to make pictures possessing the qualities of poise, clarity of purpose and natural beauty, as these qualities were achieved in the work of the good wet-plate photographers," like Mathew Brady, William Henry Jackson and Timothy O'Sullivan.

It is easy to understand why the Modern organized six shows of Atget's utterly clear and totally poised work under Mr. Szarkowski's aegis. Even the sardonic view of the late 20th century that he introduced in a 1967 show called "New Documents: Photographs by Arbus, Friedlander, and Winogrand" flirted with the terms poise, clarity and beauty, but gave them a new edge and precariousness.

Hunting for Images Of the Outdoors

Mr. Szarkowski retired at the museum's mandatory age but neither broke step nor slowed down. As soon as he left the Modern, he began forming a photography collection from scratch for Paine Webber on the theme of land use.

"It has proven a whole lot harder than I thought," he said. "You'd be astonished at how few good pictures that have to do with farming, fishing, mining, logging there are."

He sometimes sends students scurrying off to local historical societies or to the Federal Department of Agriculture to root out pictures of campers, wheat farming and railroad spurs. Such images, he laments, are being allowed to fall off their original glass plates because they do not fit a narrow view of art.

He is nearly finished with another book, on the photographs and writings of Liberty Hyde Bailey, the patron saint of American horticulture. He also hops about the country teaching, at the University of Arizona, Florida International University, the University of Kansas, Williams College, Yale and Harvard.

"Florida was especially good," he said. "Those great Caribbean students, they understand something that other students don't, that art is supposed to have something to do with play, with fun, with dancing. They don't make the mistake of thinking they have to think the thing out before doing it. Maybe it has something to do with the weather."

These teaching stints have convinced him that there are a lot of good young photographers out there, which is not the same as photographers who change notions of what the medium can be. Mr. Szarkowski seriously doubts that there is anyone under 40 today as good as the best photographers over 50 or 60. Maybe, he said, now that he is no longer obligated to look, he is just not looking hard enough. But having responded to the spirit that was abroad in the late 1960's and 70's, and having put it on the world map, he is singularly reluctant to give it up.

Careers Aimed At the Galleries

Students today, he said, understand that they might conceivably make their living selling pictures in art galleries, an idea that did not raise its head until quite recently. So they check out what is being sold, which generally persuades them that the big ticket is self-expression and individuality. Even if they realize that they have not lived long enough to be all that different, they do their best to invent a distinction or to inflate their limited experience to marketable proportions.

"Most of this work, I admit," Mr. Szarkowski said, "seems to me quite tedious and a little sad."

He went on, "It does seem to me that awareness of the galleries has not been altogether salutary for the young photographer." A pause. "Having said that, I would also agree that no other opportunity that has faced photographers within my memory has been altogether salutary either."

He has a solution: "The best way to be a photographer is to be rich." Stieglitz, Strand, and Cartier-Bresson all had some money. Dorothea Lange, who was married to Paul Schuster Taylor, an economics professor, used to speak jokingly of her Taylor Foundation grants.

"Maybe," Mr. Szarkowski said, "photographers should become insurance executives like Wallace Stevens and Charles Ives." Visions of W. Eugene Smith and Diane Arbus compiling actuarial tables dance through the air.

When Mr. Szarkowski began photographing, he wanted to make pictures that would be socially useful, as most people did during the Depression and World War II. After the war, people thought "this was the great opportunity for photography," he said. "This new medium, pictures and text together, proposed a new opportunity to explain life to the world."

The World Will Do As a Starting Point

In 1960, when he canoed into Canada, Mr. Szarkowski hoped to save a wilderness by photographing it, but the idea of social usefulness lost its luster for documentarians over the next few years.

Now, he said, "if you want to save something from exploitation, *don't photograph it.*" And he is convinced that "socially useful" is a decidedly inferior point from which to start out to be an artist.

For him, the world will do fine to start with, and exploring it for some new perception rather than illustrating what is already known is still the best mode of attack.

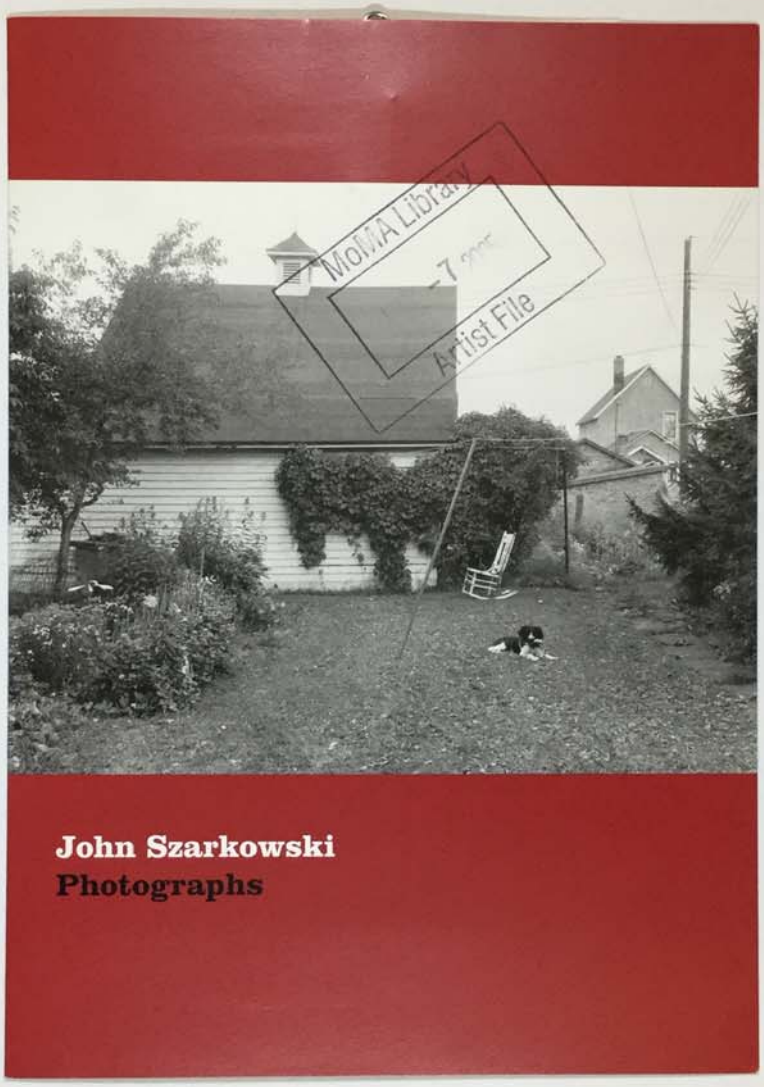
Mr. Szarkowski recalled that Garry Winogrand, the master of the quickly snatched street photograph, had no objection to people setting up pictures; if they came up with interesting images, more power to them. Winogrand said his problem was that he did not have enough imagination to think up anything half as insane as what he saw on the street all the time.

In 1989, when photography turned 150, Mr. Szarkowski paid tribute with a show and a book called "Photography Until Now." He organized the history of the medium in terms of major technical shifts like photomechanical reproduction that changed the means and often the distribution of images.

The most recent technical change, digitization, has not registered strongly on his viewfinder: "I have absolutely no interest in the fact that you can make a photograph with the Empire State Building where the Chrysler Building is. You have always been able to do that, with scissors."

Mr. Szarkowski conceded that the computer may change photographic styles, but he cannot believe it will change the fact that an individual's view of what is really interesting and important in the world is what makes a picture worth attention. For that matter, he said, "most photographs, whether they shift buildings or not, are not very interesting."

The director emeritus is still actively on the prowl for the few that are.



John Szarkowski
Photographs

OPENING DAY PROGRAM

The Lens on the Land
Saturday, February 5, 2005
2 p.m.
Phyllis Wattis Theater

Richard Benson, dean, Yale School of Art
Wes Jackson, president, The Land Institute
Geoffrey James, artist

$12 general; $8 SFMOMA members, students with ID, and seniors

BOOK SIGNING

John Szarkowski: Photographs
Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Atrium
3:30 p.m.
Free

Laurence J. Kirshbaum, CEO of Time Warner Book Group, and Neal Benezra, director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, cordially invite you to a dinner celebrating the exhibition

John Szarkowski: Photographs

and the publication of its companion book

Thursday, February 3, 2005
8 p.m.
Quince
1701 Octavia Street, San Francisco

We hope you will join us.
Please reply by Tuesday, January 25, to Elizabeth Epley at 415.357.4125 or eepley@sfmoma.org.

This invitation is nontransferable.

You are invited to a
PRIVATE RECEPTION
and **MEDIA PREVIEW**

John Szarkowski Photographs

Thursday, February 3, 2005
6-8 p.m.
The Schwab Room
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

The photographer will be present.
Entire Museum open for viewing.

OPENING DAY PROGRAM

The Lens on the Land
Saturday, February 5, 2005
2 p.m.
Phyllis Wattis Theater

Richard Benson, dean, Yale School of Art
Wes Jackson, president, The Land Institute
Geoffrey James, artist

$12 general; $8 SFMOMA members,
students with ID, and seniors

BOOK SIGNING

John Szarkowski: Photographs
Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Atrium
3:30 p.m.
Free

Laurence J. Kirshbaum, CEO of Time Warner Book Group,
and Neal Benezra, director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,
cordially invite you to a dinner celebrating the exhibition

John Szarkowski: Photographs

and the publication of its companion book

Thursday, February 3, 2005
8 p.m.
Quince
1701 Octavia Street, San Francisco

We hope you will join us.
Please reply by Tuesday, January 25, to Elizabeth Epley
at 415.357.4125 or eepley@sfmoma.org.

This invitation is nontransferable.

John Szarkowski,
Mathew Brady in the Backyard I, 1952;
Collection SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase;

SFMOMA
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 151 Third Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SZAR

Throughout the whole history of photography, including now, there are so many things that happened that are enormously mysterious and, at best, half understood, that we learn from. And our sense of the potentials of photography comes from the whole range of the photographic experiment.

BY ANDY GRUNDBERG

I interviewed John Szarkowski in New York on May 3, 1984, prior to the reopening of the expanded museum. He and his colleagues—Peter Galassi, Susan Kismaric, and Newhall Fellow John Pultz—had just finished hanging a revised and expanded installation of the permanent collection. We also previewed "Three Americans," the exhibition of recent photography conceived and assembled by Associate Curator Kismaric.

As is clear from what follows, Szarkoswki is a relaxed and discursive speaker. He obviously admires men like Alfred Barr, James Thrall Soby and Lincoln Kirstein, and in conversation, he emulates precisely those qualities he respects in them: "marveious balance and style and grace." His balance holds even when one tries to throw him off, as can be seen in our conversation about Modernism.

Both my questions and his replies have been edited slightly for clarity. Several statements from this interview appeared in *The Sunday New York Times* of May 27, 1984, in my article "The New Modern Reenters the Contemporary Arena." The transcript of this interview was prepared with the assistance of Catherine Calhoun.

Andy Grundberg: I've just seen the new installation of the permanent collection, which is basically a selective but chronologically thorough history of photography. Now everywhere else in the museum, it seems to me, there is a dialectical debate going on between what's modern and what's contemporary—a sorting out of whether "modern" is an historical period that has some finite dates, a beginning and an end. Your department, it seems, by including the whole range of photography here, is defining photography as being modern by birthright—or else you're assuming a role that is more historical than the rest of the museum's departments.

John Szarkowski: Well, I think photography *is* modern. I think it is the first and still the most basic of a whole new family of pictorial vocabularies.

Now I don't think it would have developed when it did if the basic Western pictorial tradition had not arrived at the point at which it had arrived. The thesis of Peter Galassi's show ["Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography," 1981] I think is absolutely true. Nevertheless, when it was invented, when it developed, when it came into existence it was a profoundly radical system that we are still trying to figure out how to use. Throughout the whole history of photography, including now, there are so many things that happened that are enormously mysterious and, at best, half understood, that we learn from. And our sense of the potentials of photography comes from the whole historical range of the photographic experiment.

I'm afraid that I have told many times too often the marvelous story about Brassaï getting the medal from P.H. Emerson. *The* great figure of Victorian British photography, as an old man, awards a medal to Brassaï, one of the great photographic figures of the early twentieth century, Brassaï doesn't know who he is. It seems to me that that is a marvelously symbolic statement of the lack of logical coherence and self-knowledge that has existed in photography since the beginning.

I'm beginning to work on the fourth volume of the Atget book. When Eugène Atget was first written about in the Paris papers, everyone spelled his name wrong. Nobody got it right. And he'd been dead for a year and a half. They spelled it with a *d*: "Adjet." Look at the 1964 edition of Beaumont Newhall's history, the fourth edition, and consider the names that have come into the book since 1948, the date of the third edition. It is quite astonishing that the world's great historian of the medium didn't know Jacques Henri Lartigue in '48—because *nobody* knew Lartigue. He was an absolute, total secret until the early '60s.

So I'm talking about that kind of coherence, the kind of continuous understanding that one expects in the traditional arts, where the best of the past has been preserved in the schools and in the academies and in the guilds, where significant art is continually sifted and saved and judged and sometimes demoted, but *never* thrown out. There was a sense of what had been done and who had done it and everybody knew their predecessors. When, if ever, was there a freshman in art school who did not know the great names of the past? But in photography it has not been that way.

Also, in the nature of the beast, I think, there have always been those varieties of gratuitous accidents and undeserved miracles—unearned, glorious, exceptional half-accidents, that have been one of the sources of photographers' educations. When Walker Evans became seriously interested in photography, he looked at everything he could find. He went to the public library and looked all through *Camerawork*. And he liked Paul Strand's *Blind Woman*, period. But by leaping backwards a generation and going to people like Mathew Brady's group, he found what he wanted. So it isn't always the most recent work that will excite, inspire, and catalyze the inventive photographer of the present generation.

AG: Do you think that's true now?

JS: Jerry Uelsmann is a case in point. One of his very early and very funny photographs that I'm terribly fond of, and that certainly made public his particular spitting-in-the-eye of the received truth at that moment, was a double self-portrait of himself in the bathtub, entitled *Self-portrait as Rejlander and Robinson*—the two early Victorian photographers who were probably most scorned by photographers of the preceding generation.

Of course this happens in all arts. But it happens more often and with more reason in photography than in the other arts because there is so much of the past that we don't know, so much that we haven't seen, so much that we may have seen in passing but haven't looked at, all because of this remarkable lack of coherent, self-conscious self-knowledge in the tradition.

AG: So do you think of that as being your department's mission—to rectify that lack of self-conscious tradition?

JS: No. It is part of the problem—I think of it more as a problem than a mission—of trying to understand what is happening and what has happened, and how what is happening relates to what has happened. Obviously, understanding does not necessarily automatically produce better work. It isn't going to even automatically produce good work. It can produce tedious, scholastic, dry academic exercises. On the other hand, ignorance isn't necessarily a blessing either. The fact that knowledge isn't going to necessarily produce better art will not stop people from being curious. It's a human vice we are stuck with, because it's interesting and it's fun and because it gives pleasure to try to understand. In the end, obviously, it's not going to make an artist out of a drudge. It's not going to make an art lover out of someone with a tin eye.

Let me put it this way: I think there's more good photography being done in this country than anywhere else in the world—than *everywhere* else in the world, as a matter of fact. I think it's absolutely astonishing, the amount of good work that's being done here. Now why is that true? I think, in fact, it has something to do with knowledge, something to do with understanding, something to do with the receptiveness to the achievements and the ideas of the important photography of the past.

How do you teach? You don't teach by giving people slogans, golden rules, little designs of golden sections to put on their ground glasses, formulas. You teach by showing. That's the way certainly any teaching in the arts has always worked. You can't show the work of the future. You always show the work of the past, even yesterday is already the past.

So I think what we do does have a pedagogical role. But first I think it has to do with pleasure.

AG: A role as providers of pleasure?

JS: I think art has to do with a kind of higher pleasure, first of all. Before it gets involved, before it can serve other roles well, it has to provide the kind of visceral satisfaction that anything well-made provides.

Red Smith once interviewed a famous horse trainer who had a horse that people always talked about as being extraordinarily handsome. Really a beautiful, handsome horse. And Red Smith said to this famous trainer: "How do you tell if a horse is a handsome horse?" And the man looked at him in dismay and said, "How do you tell a handsome human being?"

Some promise of fitness for its function, the sense of all the parts being in proper relationship to each other, of its being a whole that is wonderfully rich and yet, at the same time, simple—I think that's what a work of art is first. And the kind of satisfaction and the kind of hope that that kind of experience provides is what art does first. Then it can do a lot of other things.

AG: There has been a great deal of art produced in the last 15 years that has seemed to want to be difficult first, that made pleasure at least subsidiary.

JS: Well, pleasure is certainly not necessarily easy. And not everything succeeds. Even things made by the best people don't necessarily succeed. Because, obviously, once you solve a problem, you don't go back to solving that problem over and over again; the pleasure goes out of it. That sense of release that is created when the last piece of a complicated puzzle drops into place and the thing is whole, it only works once.

AG: Does the interaction of painting and photography, or the combination of those two, seem a problem to you?

JS: Goodness no.

AG: In respect to the tradition of photography?

JS: It has gone on since the beginning, so I think we should be accustomed to it by now. D.O. Hill was a painter and Louis Daguerre was a painter and Gustave Le Gray, all those students of Paul Delaroche. Perhaps a more useful way to think of it—perhaps—is that painting and photography are both parts of something that is larger than painting and photography. They are both parts of a larger puzzle, a larger concern, a larger tradition that has to do with our sense of the possibilities of the visual vocabulary and the visual tradition. It includes movies and it includes graphics and it includes cave drawings, sculpture, decoration, ornament. . . .

In this larger tradition, photography has had for quite a short time an extremely interesting, disruptive, uneven, confusing and centrifugal role, galloping off in a hundred directions simultaneously. Personally, I enjoy the confusion very much, and I certainly would not be interested in trying to eliminate the confusion at the cost of impoverishing the possibilities.

One of the most wonderful and most exciting and most nourishing things about photography, both intellectually and also in terms of the enormous contribution that it has made to the sense of the visual gene pool, is its incredible fecundity. Even if one thinks of the number of varieties of crazy mistakes—that is, violations of what we would have anticipated. It's good photographers, especially photographers who are very talented and who work very hard, who understand this and that's why they work so hard. That's what Garry Winogrand was talking about, which, needless to say, caused a great deal of confusion because of his elliptical and simple way of saying it: he talked about photographing something so he could see what it looked like photographed.

Edward Weston talked about pre-visualizing. But if he really could do it, and absolutely do it, there would have been no point in making the pictures. It was the challenge of seeing whether you could do it, the degree to which you could do it. He didn't make those pictures just to put in boxes, and he certainly didn't make them to sell. He made them to see if he could do it. So the notion of pre-visualizing, in a way, was related to what Winogrand said, but Winogrand emphasized the uncertainty and the adventure of it and Weston emphasized the goal.

AG: You said you took some enjoyment out of the confusion that photography has created in the pictorial tradition, the visual tradition. And yet you must be aware that there are critics who perceive the museum as being interested in a very narrow kind of formalist attitude toward the medium, and not receptive to the breadth of things that are going on today. Do you think that view is true?

JS: I never really understood what is meant by "what is going on today." I've never understood what that phrase means. Obviously, we exhibit and collect a very, very miniscule fragment of "what is going on today," if one means that very literally. There are five billion cat photographs made every day and we show very few of them. And it's been a very long time since we had a sunset exhibition, and it's been a long time since . . . well, you could go down whole long lists of categories.

Presumably, when people say "what is going on today," they mean some bodies of work that they consider to have some special vitality, some special interest, some potential for revising, mending, or modifying our sense of what you can do with photography and what its potential uses are. Everybody has at least a commitment to a sensibility, a commitment to a sense of the possible. My feeling is that our tastes here really are quite catholic. But, I don't recall ever exhibiting anything here because we thought we should. I don't think we've ever exhibited or collected anything that we didn't think (at least momentarily—we might have changed our minds the next month) had life, that had vitality, that there was some quality, some idea or some challenge in it, some virtue.

Obviously, there is work that we think has virtue that we don't exhibit. I assume that goes without saying. Even with twice as big a museum that will obviously continue to be true. In fact, there is a long list of photographers who have either

ANDY GRUNDBERG is a photography critic for *The New York Times* and the senior picture editor of *Modern Photography*.

RKOWSKI

Photograph of John Szarkowski (1983), by Jonathan Wenk.

had one-man shows or who we have exhibited substantially in group shows who are not represented in this particular hanging of the collection. Not because we've changed our minds about their being good, but because we cannot show everything at once.

I would suspect that for every critic that one can find who says that we are narrowly formalist, one could probably find another one somewhere who thinks we have no principles, that we hop from mushroom to mushroom, not hewing to any line, not respecting any verity, willing to pick up with any flashy new idea on the street that comes along. I don't think either of those things is true. Obviously, if I thought they were true I would change.

AG: If you fit photography into a picture-making tradition that's bigger than both photography and painting, if you see it in that way, then how do you justify or reconcile that there should be a photography department and a painting department within the museum? Or that there should be photography critics and painting critics, for that matter? Does that make any sense, or is that just the way the world exists, so we have to live with it?

JS: That's a very interesting question, and in some ways it's a rather distressing question. I think there has been an enormous amount of increased specialization, in the arts as in everywhere else in the world. And it's been enormously productive. There have been great virtues to that. We certainly know infinitely more now about the great historical painters than we knew formerly. And it's interesting, it's relevant, it's important. Nevertheless, there are less positive aspects. Hopefully someday again we will have generations of men like Alfred Barr and James Thrall Soby and Lincoln Kirstein, great men who have had sensibilities so broad and intuitions so deep and strong and such marvelous balance and style and grace that they could make wonderful contributions in a wide range of areas.

I don't think the role of the generalist is dead. The generalist will rise again. Because it's an exemplification of courage, and courage is too large a virtue to allow to die. It takes courage to talk about things that everyone else in the room knows more about than you know. But just as war is too important to be left to the generals, certainly art is too important to be left to the specialists.

AG: Actually, isn't this whole museum a specialty museum?

JS: I think not. Actually, I think in relation to other museums, the tradition of the collegiate structure in this museum, where the various curatorial departments have historically had a greater degree of independence and autonomy than they have had in more traditional museums, has meant that we talk to each other, argue with each other, fight with each other because the program of the museum, the resources of the museum, the space of the museum are not directed from above. We fight with each other until "above" decides, "All right. This is the end of the fight."

AG: So what do you do with the kinds of artists who use photography in a context that's not photographic? Somebody like Barbara Kruger, or Cindy Sherman?

JS: I think Sherman's work is very photographic. What's not photographic about it?

AG: Well, it exists in a milieu that is not photographic, and she's not interested in being defined as a photographer.

JS: Most artists try to resist being pigeon-holed anywhere, naturally. But certainly I've gotten the impression that she never thought of these pictures as anything but photographs.

AG: That's true. But, take an Anselm Kiefer painting that I saw recently as an example. He had pasted a mural-sized photograph over the canvas and then he painted over that. Is there any kind of territoriality question involved in that? Or doesn't it come up?

JS: It comes up. The painting and sculpture department here has photographs. We [the photography department] have pictures that equally logically could be housed in the drawings department or the prints department or the painting department. I don't think it makes much difference what department they're housed in, as long as one clearly labels them for what they are, in factual terms. Jan Dibbets, for example: What label he wishes to be described as is Jan Dibbets's business. The color photograph should be accurately labeled for what it is.

There have always been, since the invention of photography, remarkable artists who worked in various media, sometimes separately and sometimes together. Insofar as Moholy-Nagy's work is concerned with photography there are, on the one hand, absolutely straight, pure camera photographs and, on the other, constructions that have a slight photographic reference, in works which are basically and fundamentally collaged drawings. I don't get very exercised about finding the precise point at which the picture should move from one department to another. As long as one describes accurately what it is, it's just honesty in packaging.

And the only requirement beyond that is: Is it interesting? Does it have something to say to its potential public and to contemporary and future artists?

AG: Do you think that the exhibition that's going up now, "Three Americans," relates to your 1967 exhibition, "New Documents"? And do you think that the two shows describe a fundamental shift in photography's relation to the world?

JS: It's not that show and this show. It's that *work* and this *work*. There certainly is a clear relationship, which is easier to define perhaps than the differences. But I think that on some level, these three photographers [Robert Adams, Jim Goldberg, and Joel Sternfeld] have got a sense of social function that is more apparent, stronger, and at least different than that in Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus then. That work [in "New Documents"] was so marvelously free, free of any kind of sobering responsibilities. I don't in any way mean to suggest that it was irresponsible. What it was responsible *to* was an absolutely passionate and extremely intelligent and knowledgeable desire to try to find a way to explain one's sense of the world in a photograph and let any chip fall where it may. It was free in that sense. But it was the '60s, too.

These people [in "Three Americans"] are carrying something else, carrying some other piece of baggage. And I think that's good and I think that's maybe inevitable. You see, the thing that made the world of Winogrand, Friedlander, and Arbus possible, that made it so wonderful, like absolutely the first breath of spring air coming through this smoggy city, was that what had come to be called the documentary tradition had gotten so leaden, tired, boring, dutiful, automatic, and Pavlovian. I mean it was just doing it by the numbers. You know, very dreary. And it got to the point where it was really distasteful to look at.

AG: And it's still out there.

JS: Everything is still out there. It got to be like campaign speeches—*primary* campaign speeches, even worse. So, in part, I think people liked the photographers in "New Documents" as a reaction against all that claptrap. When somebody asked Friedlander what he was concerned about, he said "I'm concerned about supporting my family, and making a good picture." (Or some words to that effect; he probably would have used fewer words.) But he didn't mean that he wasn't concerned about the world; he meant that he wasn't going to lean on that tired old crutch anymore. That nobody was going to make him defend his work to the tune of the old gypsy violin accompaniment. Well they washed the slate clean.

I think the photographers in "Three Americans" are trying to figure out how you can do now, today, in this world, not what Dorothea Lange did—you can't do that anymore because it's done, and this isn't that world and we don't believe those things—but something that can engage that part of us that was engaged in Lange's work.

You know Friedlander's book, *Factory Valleys*? I've never thought about it in those terms, but there's maybe something in that, too, of a looking again at the possibilities and saying, "Well, is there something you can do?" Is there something photography can learn to do that can be useful in a non-artistic sense that isn't cheap, that's not claptrap, that's not sloganeering? I think these people are very serious people, certainly as artists, but also I think they share (probably in different ways) some kind of intuition of a malaise that they would like at least to be able to learn how to describe or identify or surround in photographs. So I think there is a difference.

AG: It seems an historical difference, because the work in "New Documents" was a reaction from, or reaction to, the kind of knee-jerk "concerned" photography that came before it, and what's going on now seems to be a reaction to the loss of social concern altogether. It's almost inevitable: having thrown something out, you later have to go back and reclaim whatever else got thrown out with it.

JS: You reclaim some part of the motive. When Dorothea Lange knew she was dying, she made an effort to get other people interested in establishing a new, national documentary program. She finally boiled it down to one 8-½ x 11 sheet describing her ideas only in very broad, conceptual terms. She was coming to visit here and she said, "Get in some young photographers. I want to talk to them about this project." So we did.

The young photographers were all salivating. "When do we start?" But as the conversation went on, she became a little quiet and finally a little restive. And after listening to all the photographers talk about how wonderful it would be, she said, "Well now, just a minute. I am not talking about finding a lot of money so we can do the Farm Security Administration over again." She said, "Actually, you know, we've learned how to photograph poor people. It might be really more interesting now, it would certainly be more difficult, to see if we can learn how to photograph affluence."

JOHN SZARKOWSKI'S GUIDE

VIRGINIA DELL

Because of the authority conferred by his position as director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art and through his energetic curatorial activity and writing, John Szarkowski is widely acknowledged as the most powerful individual in contemporary photography and is generally credited with a major role in the authentication of photography as art. Szarkowski's assumption of the MOMA position in 1962 placed him in the vanguard of a great surge of interest in photography as an artistic and aesthetic phenomenon.

Despite the increase in photographic activity, which need not be documented here, those who write about photography—including Szarkowski—often speak of deficiencies in critical and historical studies that would enable us to understand, discuss, and evaluate photographs and place them in context with other objects created for aesthetic perception.[1] Photography in the context of the other arts is a central theme in Szarkowski's written work. But what has his work contributed to our understanding of photography and its place among the arts?

There are two dominant motifs in Szarkowski's work: the argument for photography's acceptance as art and the argument for photography's uniqueness as a picture-making system. Neither is a new issue in the discussion about photography.

Ultimately, Szarkowski's work is disappointment to the seeker of a functional, critical perspective on photography and its location among the arts. The two major issues treated in his work result in conflicting positions, which he does not resolve. At once, Szarkowski vigorously argues for photography's acceptance among that class of objects generally defined as art, and he makes comparable efforts to define photography as radically different from the other arts, based on the way it comes into being. The latter has the effect of reinforcing photography's separation from the other arts. An examination of Szarkowski's writings will substantiate these conclusions.

On a broad theoretical level, the relationship of photography to the other arts is a major thrust of Szarkowski's work, and he relates photographs to the other arts—especially to other ways of picture making—in many ways. In placing particular photographs or bodies of work in context with the other arts, he may compare the work of a photographer to that of a painter, for example, or note a resemblance to a school or genre of painting. Sometimes he discerns evidence of the influence of other arts on photographs, or the reverse. He occasionally cites personal relationships between photographers and artists in other media, which could have influenced the photographer's work. He also notes photographers who work in another medium or who engaged in formal study of painting, sculpture, or some other area.

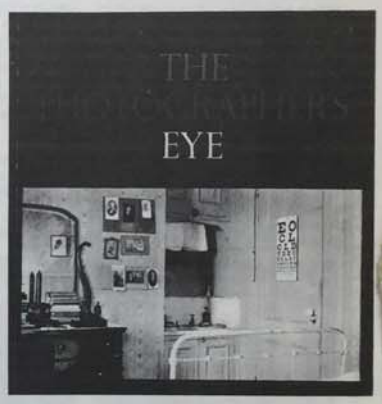
Several essays in *Looking at Photographs* compare photographs to painting. The photographs of Peter Henry Emerson are said to resemble the pictures of the naturalistic painters, especially those of J.F. Millet; photographs by Bill Brandt and Frederick Sommer are related to the surrealists; Ralph Steiner's photograph of a rocking chair and its shadows has "Cubist projections"; and Alvin Langdon Coburn is described as trying to emulate abstract painting.

The influence of painting traditions on photographs is mentioned a number of times in Szarkowski's writing. Until he was past forty, Alfred Stieglitz's photographs were strongly influenced by the aesthetic values of painting, Szarkowski tells us. But his work after 1910 changed: "in conception and execution the portraits and cityscapes of this period had a directness and immediacy that made most earlier art-motivated photography seem once-removed from real experience."[2] Szarkowski implies that the later pictures are better because they looked less like paintings.

Szarkowski speculates about the influence of photography on painting. In *The Photographer's Eye*, Szarkowski says that the sense of the picture edge as a cropping device—which he defines as a uniquely photographic characteristic—was a formal quality that greatly interested inventive painters of the later nineteenth century, but he is unable to judge how much of this may be due directly to the influence of photography. He later concludes: "The influence of photography on modern painters (and on modern writers) has been great and inestimable."[3] In *Looking at Photographs*, a plate from Eadweard Muybridge's 1887 book of motion studies, *Animal Locomotion*, is used to explain how such "unfamiliar" photographic pictures changed the way other artists saw and represented the world. In the book, *Walker Evans*, Szarkowski reports the suggestion that Walker Evans was the father of pop art of the early 1960s, but he concludes that the differences between Evans's pictures and pop paintings were more important than the similarities, although he finds it "difficult to imagine" pop coming into existence without photographic precedents. In this discussion, Szarkowski evaluates Evans's historical role within the broad context of the arts and places him among other original artists of his time.

Sometimes Szarkowski identifies common issues shared by photographs and the other arts. The photograph by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy reproduced in *Looking at Photographs* illustrates the effort to resolve the issues between illusion of space and picture plane which "has been one of the central preoccupations of twentieth century art," Szarkowski tells us. He points out that Moholy-Nagy was a painter, designer, theoretician, and educator, as well as a photographer, and identifies him as "one of the liveliest and most versatile minds to come out of the revolution in artistic thinking that occurred in Europe after the First World War."[4] A 1922 photogram by Man Ray illustrates another issue—transparency—that was of interest to artists in all media during the early part of the century, Szarkowski says. Transparency implies spatial ambiguity, he explains, and gives examples of exploration in other media—glass-walled skyscrapers, cubism, time-lapse studies by the futurists, and montages created by filmmakers. The 1928 picture by Alexandar Rodchenko would not likely have been made before the '20s, Szarkowski points out. "Certain possibilities concerning the appearance of the world first surfaced at that time, just as different possibilities had revealed themselves in previous periods, and would reveal themselves in future periods."[5] Like his contemporaries, Moholy-Nagy and Ray, Rodchenko was a painter and designer as well as a photographer. In the examples of these three artists, Szarkowski places photography in the broad context of representation making and acknowledges photography's participation in the mainstream of art through its concerns with the same issues that motivated painters, printmakers, filmmakers, and others.

Szarkowski also compares paintings and photographs by the same artists in *Looking at Photographs*. Szarkowski judges the photograph of boys on a playground by Ben Shahn "as fine a picture as he ever made, in any medium." The picture and the painting based on it are very similar, Szarkowski says. "What is remarkable is that the mechanical photograph resembles so closely the character of other Shahn paintings: the same asymmetrical, ceremonial figures, floating elegantly in the same shallow, shadowless space."[6] The photographic scene by Charles Sheeler which Szarkowski chose to reproduce is also the subject of one of his paintings. Szarkowski again notes that the photograph and the painting have much in common. "In normal black-and-white reproduction, it is not easy to know which picture is which."[7] These examples show how Shahn and Sheeler pursued their visual concerns through both painting and photography and, although Szarkowski does not comment on this, that the medium, painting or photography, did not define the issues, but each was used to explore the same issues. In some cases, the photograph became part of the process of making a painting, but afterward retained its identity as a picture as well.



In writing about individual photographers, Szarkowski occasionally mentions their association with artists who work in other media. In the monograph of Walker Evans's work, Szarkowski mentions Evans's friendships with the painter and photographer Ben Shahn, the writers Hart Crane and James Agee, and other artists and intellectuals of the '20s and '30s, but he does not draw conclusions about their influence upon his work. In *Callahan*, Szarkowski outlines Harry Callahan's friendships and working relationships with painters, sculptors, architects, designers, and other photographers, but is again unable to judge whether these relationships affected Callahan's photography. Szarkowski does report that Callahan and a friend, the photographer Todd Webb, formed their image of the artists' life by reading Somerset Maugham's fictionalized life of Gauguin, *The Moon and Sixpence*. Although specific influence of personal relationships is difficult or impossible for Szarkowski to identify in a photographer's work, these examples illustrate that the photographers were not working in isolation, but rather in the context of a community of artists who might be expected to share ideas.

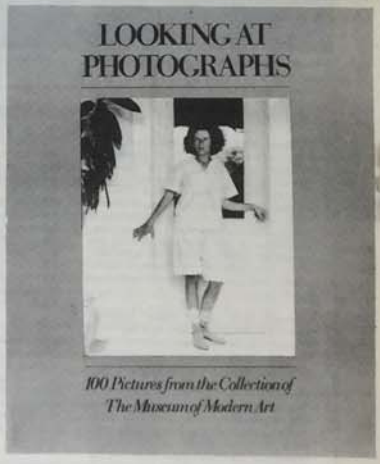
Szarkowski also notes photographers who studied in some other medium: Berenice Abbott studied sculpture; Henri Cartier-Bresson and Garry Winogrand studied painting; Atget had experience in the performing arts; Barbara Morgan was a painter; and David Octavius Hill, who painted from his photographs, was "one of the first artists to have converted good photography into bad painting."[8]

In *Mirrors and Windows*, Szarkowski notes cross-fertilization between photography and other media as a side effect of the growth of photographic studies in schools. The institutionalized proximity of painters, photographers, printmakers, and others created an ecumenical atmosphere which encouraged borrowing of techniques and images, he says, citing the influence of Moholy-Nagy on American art education as one reason for this. Szarkowski suggests that both photographers and traditional artists feel more secure in their "new university homes" through this hybridization: the photographer can answer critics of machine-made art by incorporating some hand work on photographs, and the painter and printmaker can be "modern" by using photographic techniques or imagery. Szarkowski carries the question no further, although other speculation as to why artists began combining media could be valid and useful. Changes in the way we perceive information as a result of the technological revolution; differences in the way we view the world since World Wars I and II; and a variety of other reasons could be pursued.

The foregoing examples illustrate ways in which Szarkowski relates particular photographs or bodies of work to the other arts by comparison, contrast, and identifying influences. It must be noted that throughout his written work, Szarkowski uses the word "artist" to describe photographers, and refers to photographs as "pictures," a word that also can define representations made by other means. In these ways, Szarkowski places photographs in the broad context of the arts.

Statements about "art" in general or about what an artist is or does, without specific reference to photography, frequently appear in Szarkowski's writing. It will be helpful to examine some of these statements in order to better understand how Szarkowski defines photography in the context of art. Essentially, Szarkowski reveals three aspects of his perception: (1) that art is heavily invested with magic; (2) that the point of art is form; and (3) that art comes from the private visions or private experiences of artists.

Szarkowski writes: "Critics and other nonartists do tend to think of the arts as belonging to the world of the spirit, rather than that of the flesh. The critics may even be right in this. Standing on the high, dry ground that surrounds the treacherous bogs where artists work, we may enjoy a clearer and more objective view. The worker below knows that the corporeal part is hard enough, and tends to be made nervous and testy by demands that he also be a spiritual leader. But if he is good enough, he does not have the last word. Matisse may have spoken of the problem in terms of color and line, but we remember him for his grace."[9] In *William Eggleston's Guide*, Szarkowski cites magic as a component of art in general, as well as of the photographs contained in the book. We are accustomed to believing that the meaning of an art work is due to the "imagination and legerdemain" of the artist, he tells us, and that artists sometime frustrate rational analysis of their work "as though they fear it might prove an antidote to their magic." Szarkowski uses many "magic" words in reference to art—"mysterious," "ineffable," "revelation," "wonderful."



The point of art is form, Szarkowski tells us. This message appears three times in the Eggleston book alone. Elsewhere he writes, "A change in form is a change in content. This is true in all the arts."[10]

He makes it clear that art emanates from private visions or

VIRGINIA DELL is publications editor/printing manager at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and writes about photography.

experiences of artists. The hallmark of a romantic artist is preoccupation with private experience, he notes in the Eggleston book. Szarkowski's description of the fit between the world and art reinforces the role of that artist's private vision. "I have ... visited ... places described by works of art, and have observed that the poem or picture is likely to seem a faithful document if we get to know it first and the unedited reality afterwards—whereas a new work of art that describes something we had known well is likely to seem as unfamiliar and arbitrary as our own passport photos."[11] Here, Szarkowski tells us that the artist's private vision persuasively informs our impression of reality so that we see in the unfamiliar what the artist's vision prepares us to see, but because the artist's vision is so personal, it does not match our perception of the familiar.

The connection between art and life is important in Szarkowski's definition of an artist as "a man who seeks new structures in which to order and simplify his sense of the reality of life."[12] This definition is extended in another reference to what an artist does: "The object is raw material, not art, and it is the nature of the artist's adventure to recast this material under the pressure of his own formal will, transforming it into something distinct from what it was."[13] In both of these examples, the artist's private vision is the catalyst. Although both of these statements are made in essays about photography, Szarkowski does not qualify them, and from the context, they seem intended to describe the arts in general.

Szarkowski defines photography in the same terms that he uses to refer to art in general, and there is no lack of evidence that he attributes magical qualities to photography. Throughout his writing, Szarkowski makes numerous references to photography as magical or mysterious. He has sometimes defined photography as an almost automatistic process that the photographer scarcely controls and has referred to the "miraculous descriptive power" of the camera.

In the essay accompanying a picture by Paul Caponigro in *Looking at Photographs*, Szarkowski writes, "There are times when the process of photography seems invested with magic. At these times it is as though the camera points the photographer and leads him to the place where the camera places photography firmly within the realm of the arts.

The Szarkowski literature is rich with references to photography as the private vision of the photographer, coordinate with the other arts as private experience of artists in other media. The personal vision of its maker is what characterizes art, Szarkowski tells us, and photography shares that characteristic. He writes: "Suddenly—within the past decade—a sizable portion of the sophisticated public has come to regard photographs as repositories not only of dumb facts but of personal visions. Since Michaelangelo, approximately, this is the touchstone that we have used to distinguish art from non-art."[18] In the same article, Szarkowski calls photography "the best method so far devised for the precise description of the most complex, specific, private, and ephemeral matters of visual experience."[19] Szarkowski attributed this characteristic to photography earlier in a catalogue, *The Photographer and the American Landscape*, published in 1963 for the exhibit of the same name. "Since the medium was born, the best of photographers had been artists, but they had, perhaps to their advantage, not often been told so. After the American School and the Photo-Secession, and parallel movements abroad, photography was unmasked, and shown to be not a faithful witness but an interpreter. The subject would now tend to become not the reason for the picture, but its pretext; the picture's first function was to reveal the *photographer*."[20]

The Eggleston book contains Szarkowski's strongest language about the function of the artist-photographer's experience. He refers to Eggleston's work as "consistently local and private, even insular," a "paradigm of a private view," "patterns of random fact in the service of one imagination," and showing "uncompromisingly private experience." He writes, "The ambitious photographer ... seeks those pictures that have a visceral relation to his own self and his own privileged knowledge, those that belong to him by genetic right, in which form matches not only content but intent." This dependence on the maker of the pictures "leads us away from the measurable relationships of art-historical science" in understanding them, "towards intuition, superstition, blood-knowledge, terror, and delight."[21] This brings together in one statement the three characteristics Szarkowski defines in common for the arts in general and photography—magic, formal concerns, and the private vision of the artist. Here, the vision of the artist is so individual that Szarkowski speaks of it as "genetic right." Not only form and content are inseparable, but "intent" is indistinguishable as well. And the vocabulary of magic is unmistakable in the final phrase.

"This notion suggests that an artist begins with his subject, and then *does* something to it—deforms it somehow, according to some personal sense of style. This idea, though once convenient, does not correspond to what artists actually do in any medium, but it is especially irrelevant in the case of photography, where the artists' entire effort is directed toward the problem of defining precisely what the subject *is*."[24] In a lecture given at approximately the same time, Szarkowski said, "The function of the photographer is to decide what his subject is. I mean that this is his *only* function."[25] When Szarkowski qualifies the theory that an artist changes or "deforms" a pre-existing subject by saying it "does not correspond to what artists actually do in any medium," he prevents the deforms subject/defines subject comparison from serving as a definitive contrast between painting and photography: if the theory does not apply to deforming the subject as the opposite of defining the subject, it does not tell us how painting and photography are opposite.

Many of these black/white contrasts between photography and painting appear in Szarkowski's writing. He says that traditional painting was "slow, difficult, rare, and expensive, and was therefore used only to record things of great importance." Photography was "quick, easy, ubiquitous, and cheap, and was used to record everything, most of which seemed, by painters' standards evanescent and trivial."[26] Szarkowski explains that by being photographed, trivial subjects were seen to be filled with undiscovered meaning and became elevated to part of formal history and tradition. This comparison omits from the scheme such photographs as Julia Margaret Cameron's costume tableaux of ancient myths; Nadar's portrait of Baron Isidore Taylor, who scarcely appeared evanescent; and other photographs that fall on the painting side of this subject list.

Subject is an important issue separating photography from painting for Szarkowski. "The history of photography as a radical picture-making system can be defined as the history of the definition of new subjects."[27] He explains that the new subjects may be extensions of ideas originated by exceptional photographers of the past or "genuinely primitive ideas," generated by new technology or new market demands. Here, Szarkowski suggests that these new photographic pictures are not descended from other picture-making traditions, but only from other photographs. He infers that painting does not or cannot deal with these "new subjects," perhaps because its subjects are defined by tradition.

will work its revelation." Then he quotes Caponigro, who explains how he is "moved" to make photographs at a particular time and place. Szarkowski concludes that the success of a picture is ultimately mysterious: "What it is that makes a photograph truly work is in the end a mystery, as success doubtless is in any art."[14] This example shows references to extraordinary powers with several words and phrases: "magic," "mysterious," "revelation."

Szarkowski describes pictures by particular photographers as "mysterious" (George Krause); "irreducible" (Garry Winogrand and William Eggleston); and "ineffable" (William Eggleston). "Luck" describes part of the success of some photographs, including those of Jacob Riis and Mario Giacomelli. "Muse" is also used in the narrative about Riis, and Jacques Henri Lartigue had the benefit of the "right horoscope." Photographs are referred to in *The Photographer's Eye* as "mysterious and evasive images" and the "new" pictorial vocabulary described in *William Eggleston's Guide*, includes such words as "elliptical," "ephemeral," and "provisional."

At the conclusion of the *New York Times Magazine* article, "A Different Kind of Art," Szarkowski writes, "... [Photographers] have learned that the art of photography is no more (or less) than photography done wonderfully."[15] The dictionary describes "wonderful" as something that causes wonder, or is marvelous or amazing, all qualities that point toward magic.

These statements and others in Szarkowski's writing place photography firmly within the realm of the arts. Clearly, if art is magic, photography is art.

Likewise, if form is the point of art, it is also the point of photography. Form was an integral part of Szarkowski's definition of the medium in a lecture given at Wellesley College. "Photography is a system of picture making in which subject and form are identical and indistinguishable, in which the subject and the picture are beyond argument the same thing."[16] The introduction to *William Eggleston's Guide* is one of Szarkowski's major essays relating photography to the other arts. In it, he says, "One can say then that in these photographs form and content are indistinguishable—which is to say that these pictures mean precisely what they appear to mean."[17] He repeats this statement in only slightly changed form six paragraphs later and paraphrases it in his essay in *The Work of Atget: Old France*. The issue of form, then, is another that

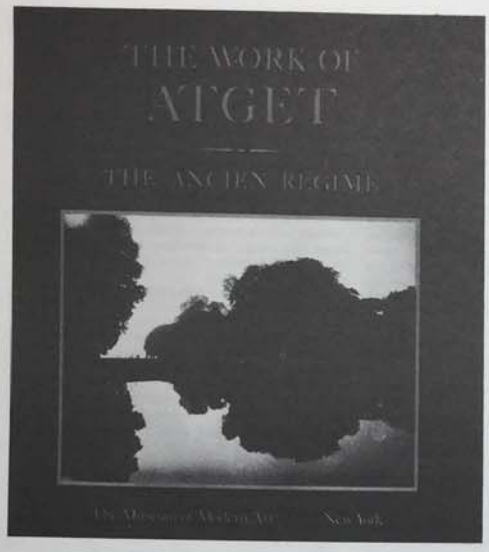
While Szarkowski consistently locates photography within the arts in the ways we have just explored, he is equally insistent on establishing differences between photography and the other arts. Szarkowski often contrasts photography and the other arts, mainly traditional painting, to show how they are different. The title of the article, "A Different Kind of Art," identifies one of Szarkowski's major efforts to set photography apart from the other arts. In it, he tells us that painters can "synthesize one picture out of a thousand discrete bits of perception, imagination, and traditional skills and schemes, [however,] the photographer's act is not synthetic but analytic, and depends fundamentally on perception." He also says that painting is difficult, while photography is easy. Further, photography is "a perfect tool for visual exploration and discovery, but a rather clumsy one for realizing the inventions of pure imagination."[22] Painting, then, is presumably the better vehicle for inventions of the imagination and a poorer one for visual exploration and discovery. Szarkowski tells us that the camera is in relation to the brush or pencil as the computer is to the abacus.

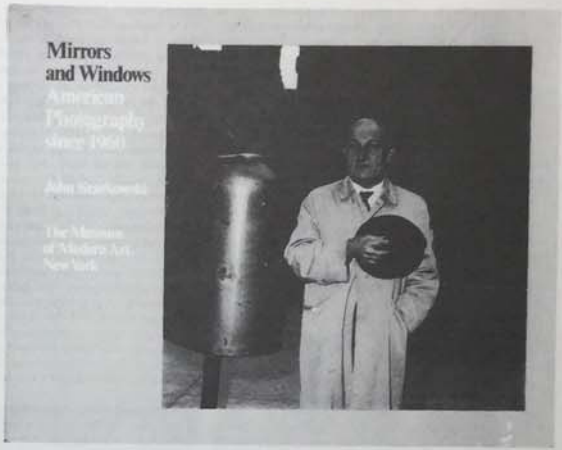
In *William Eggleston's Guide*, Szarkowski expands upon the analysis/synthesis distinction. "The photographer cannot freely redispose the elements of his subject matter, as a painter can, to construct a picture that fits his prior conception of the subject. Instead, he discovers his subject within the possibilities proposed by his medium. If the broad landscape refuses to compose itself economically within the viewfinder's rectangle, the photographer continues a different but consonant subject, composed perhaps of two trees and a rock."[23]

The analysis and synthesis contrast between photography and painting means that the relationship between artist and subject is different in painting and photography. Szarkowski says that the slowness of craft, which prevented painters from responding freely to experience, led to the concept of subjects which exist independent of, and prior to, a picture.

Painting is more "photographic" than photography in the way that it records its subjects, Szarkowski tells us in an essay in *Looking at Photographs*. "Photography has managed only infrequently and with difficulty ... to approximate the airless and precisely measured cataloguing of discrete facts that was so handsomely achieved by the painters of the fifteenth century." For a hundred years, photographers tried to make their pictures according to the pictorial conventions of the Renaissance, but rarely met those standards, he explains. "The sky was too bright, or the shadows too black; the foliage was not clean-edged and distinct, but burned out by flare and blurred by the wind; even mountains and stone monuments turned to putty if seen against a bright sky; often it was impossible to get the whole picture sharp; perhaps worst of all, the several elements of the picture were scarcely ever in proper hierarchical relation to one another."[28] The gap between most photographs and accepted pictorial standards grew with the rise of the snapshot. These new pictures were, however, "pure and unadulterated photographs [that] hinted at the existence of visual truths that had escaped all other systems of detection." Szarkowski explains that uniquely photographic characteristics, formerly avoided in order to achieve the "photographic" pictorial conventions of painting, were now seen to be new ways to "describe the look and feel of existence." In this essay, Szarkowski says that even though painting is more "photographic" than photography, photographs "hint" at "visual truths" that paintings had not revealed. Photographs are able to do this because they have unique characteristics originating in the way that they are made, he explains. Here, Szarkowski implies that those qualities which he identifies as making photography different from painting also make it better.

The point of the quickness and ease of photography (as opposed to the slowness and difficulty of painting) which permits many pictures to be made is to "work deeper into the endlessly seductive puzzle of sight: how to know the world better through our eyes," Szarkowski says.[29] In this statement, Szarkowski relies on an analogy between photography





and human vision to explain what photography does. A paper by Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen provides a useful discussion of the "visual model" to explain photography.

> The notion that a photograph shows us "what we would have seen had we been there ourselves" has to be qualified to the point of absurdity. A photograph shows us "what we would have seen" at a certain moment in time, *from* a certain vantage point *if* we kept our head immobile *and* closed one eye *and if* we saw with the equivalent of a 150mm or 24mm lens *and if* we saw things in Agfacolor or in Tri-X developed in D-76 and printed on Kodabromide #3 paper. By the time all the conditions are added up, the original position has been reversed; instead of saying that the camera shows us what our eyes would see, we are now positing the rather unilluminating proposition that, if our vision worked like photography, then we would see things the way a camera does.[30]

In linking photography with perception, Szarkowski often employs the visual model, without the qualifications of Snyder and Allen.

Szarkowski also says that the ease of photography enables the camera to "deal with great numbers of complex problems, beyond the most ambitious dreams of the hand worker." Again, this makes photography better than handmade art.

Photography has made it possible not only to make more pictures and delve deeper into complex visual issues, but it has made more subjects available as well, Szarkowski says. "The distinctive thing about photography is the terrific richness of possible choices."[31] This "richness" appears to compensate photography for one of the traits attributed to it in Szarkowski's analysis/synthesis comparison—its clumsiness as a vehicle for realizing inventions of pure imagination through synthesis. We saw earlier that the personal vision of the artist is a characteristic which Szarkowski uses to define both photography and the other arts and that he is particularly concerned with establishing photography's capability to reveal individual visions. So if photographers are unable to synthesize subject matter to create personal visions, the analytic function which Szarkowski attributes to them does permit photographers to reveal individual visions by exercising the process of exploration and discovery upon a "terrific richness of possible choices." Therefore, photographers are not less able than painters to reveal personal visions. We have already seen that Szarkowski calls photography the "best method" for describing "complex, specific, private, and ephemeral matters" of visual experience. Perhaps it is the array of choices which makes photography superior in this regard.

Szarkowski indicates that he finds photography superior to the other arts in the other characteristics—unity of form and subject, and magical qualities—which he identified as being common qualities as well.

Form and subject are even more inextricably joined in photography than in the other arts. "In photography the pursuit of form has taken an unexpected course," Szarkowski writes in the Eggleston book. "In this peculiar art, form and subject are defined simultaneously. Even more than in the traditional arts, the two are inextricably tangled. Indeed, they are probably the same thing. Or, if they are different, one might say that a photograph's subject is not its starting point, but its destination."[32] Here, Szarkowski asserts that form and subject have greater unity in photography than in the traditional arts because of the way photographs are made: form and subject are fixed simultaneously when a negative is exposed, while a painter may make formal decisions as a work progresses. This assumption takes no note of the processes required between exposed negative and finished print which may subtly or radically affect the appearance of the photograph. Szarkowski's statement about the subject as "destination" reinforces his theory that the photographer's process is one of analysis, rather than synthesis. And, we note that Szarkowski is telling us again that photographs are different from other pictures because of the way they are made.

Photography also is more "magic" than other pictures. Choices in picture making in both photography and the other arts are based on tradition and intuition, Szarkowski tells us, but adds that in photography, the premium is on intuition because of photography's ease of execution and the wealth of possibilities. "The photographer's problem is perhaps too complex to be dealt with rationally. This is why photographers prowl with such restless uncertainty about their motif, ignoring many potentially interesting records while they look for something else."[33] Here the photographer becomes a magician by behaving mysteriously and perhaps even irrationally.

The magic of photography also enables us to know experience that has been unknowable in any other way, Szarkowski says. This idea appears as part of the conclusion of "A Different Kind of Art." "Photographers of talent realize that photography can help us know, rationalize and share levels of experience that have been untouchable and uncommunicable."[34] In this statement, the photographer functions as a medium. Szarkowski expands on this theory in another reference to pictures which "concern photography's ability to know and rationalize reaches of our visual life that are so subtle, fugitive, and intuitive that until now they have been undefinable and unshareable."[35] Clearly, if these things were "untouchable," "uncommunicable," "undefinable," and "unshareable" before photography, photography is more magical than the other arts.

In the introduction to *Looking at Photographs*, Szarkowski says, "photography has remained for a century and a quarter one of the most radical, instructive, disruptive, influential, problematic, and astonishing phenomena of the modern epoch."[36] This sets photography apart, not only from the other arts, but from other phenomena. At least three passages in Szarkowski's readily available written work describe the invention of photography in such a way as to make it an astonishing phenomenon, radically different from other picture-making systems from its inception. "From the moment in 1839 when Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre unveiled his daguerreotype—the first species of photography to be made public—everyone agreed that it was marvelous, but no one, it seems, said anything enormously helpful bearing on the question of what the new system meant."[37] In *Looking at Photographs*, Szarkowski told us "[Daguerre] explained how it worked but not really what it was for."[38] Also Szarkowski writes: "It is self-evident that a truly radical invention is one that nobody knows how to use."[39] According to Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's *History of Photography*, the inventors of photography knew what they wanted to use it for. Daguerre, a painter of dioramas, initially hoped to be able to fix the image of the long-known camera obscura to save the labor of tracing; Nicéphore Niépce was a lithographer concerned with fixing the image for the printing plate; and William Henry Fox Talbot also wished to fix the image of the camera obscura, an idea that came to him out of the frustration of sketching. These inventors were all practitioners of some existing picture-making systems, undoubtedly working within contemporary pictorial conventions. So, the invention of photography was the result of a series of discoveries, building on each other, and was a process somewhat less magical than Szarkowski suggests.

In this paper we have seen how Szarkowski locates photography among the arts, while at the same time defining photography as radically different from, and even superior to, other picture-making systems.

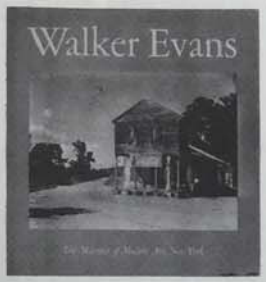
When he writes about particular photographs or bodies of work, Szarkowski often does help us to consider photography in context with the other arts through specific examples. Most helpful are discussions showing shared issues and values, as in the case of Moholy, Ray, and Rodchenko, and those placing photographers in context with their contemporaries in other fields. The essays comparing paintings and photographs by the same artists aid us in thinking about relationships between the two. Also helpful are Szarkowski's observations about the influence of painting on photographs, or the reverse, when he cites evidence for these influences in the pictures. Sometimes Szarkowski's readiness to differentiate photography from the other arts leads to statements that we may question. For example, he says that aesthetic values of contemporary painting influenced Stieglitz's work until about 1910, and after that, his photographs began to look less like paintings. This does not take into account that painting changed in the early twentieth century as well, and whether or not Stieglitz's photographs resembled the new paintings, some of the same influences were likely responsible for evolution in both. Szarkowski's observations about cross-fertilization among the arts can lead us to think about other issues raised by the blurring of distinctions between the media, but he does not discuss these issues in depth. But such particular examples do not occupy a large part of Szarkowski's work.

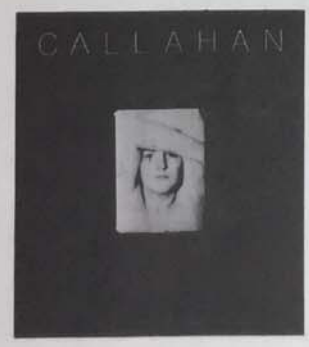
More elusive and problematic than these examples are Szarkowski's broad statements about "art" and "photography," defining both so as to clearly identify photography as art, but also attempting to establish photography as unique from other kinds of representations, particularly painting. Szarkowski's contention about the complete break between photography and painting, based on the way they are made, does not seem to be substantiated by his observations about the paintings and photographs of the same subjects by Shahn and Sheeler, which he found similar, for example. Nor are his statements about the split between the traditions of photography and the other arts supported by his application of the same labels to workers in several media—surrealist, cubist, and so on. And when he tells us how photographers approach their subjects differently and even have different subjects, we may wonder how Moholy, Ray, and Rodchenko managed to work with the same visual issues as other artists of their time, although Szarkowski showed us that they did.

We may note some inconsistency between the narrow models Szarkowski uses to differentiate photography from the other arts—painters synthesize/photographers analyze; painters invent/photographers explore; painters deform a subject/photographers discover a subject—and the definition of an artist that he formulated: "a man who seeks new structures in which to order and simplify his sense of the reality of life." This indicates that much of the creative function of an artist in any medium is to define what the subject is, although Szarkowski says this function is unique to photography.

We may also recall Szarkowski's vocabulary describing what an artist does with raw material. He says artists "recast this material ... transforming it into something distinct from what it was." This definition, although it seems to refer to all of the arts, appeared in a discussion of Aaron Siskind's photographs and suggests broader possibilities for photographers than we have seen in the comparison models. The words "recast" and "transform" hint that what photographers do may also "deform" and "invent" (terms Szarkowski applies to painters) as well as "explore" and "discover" (terms he applies to photographers).

Szarkowski's definitions of photography and painting for the purpose of contrasting them omit portions of both fields. Photographs dealing with subjects existing before its invention—portraits, allegorical scenes, still lifes, traditional landscapes—might be "unphotographic" examples of photography if the history of photography is the "history of the definition of new subjects." And in his reliance on describing photographs in terms of the visual model, in which the photographer "discovers" and records something existing in the world, pictures of objects prearranged by the photographer, such as the assemblages of Frederick Sommer, seem to be excluded as well. Paintings aimed at recording a particular





scene or person might not comfortably fit Szarkowski's definition of painting.

Szarkowski's comparisons between photography and painting fail to acknowledge much nonphotographic art since the '20s and '30s, so when he compares contemporary photography to painting, often including the word "traditional" before the word "painting," it is to painting and aesthetic standards of an earlier time. We might expect to see comparisons of the work of contemporary photographers to contemporary painters, but we do not. For example, when Szarkowski compares the issues of contemporary photography and the other arts, we might see a discussion comparing the aesthetic concerns of an artist such as Robert Irwin to concerns of some photographers working today. Yet Irwin's light modulating scrims and reflective curtains could be said to deal with the issues Szarkowski describes in the photographs of Ansel Adams. He writes: "They are concerned . . . not with the description of objects . . . but with the description of the light that they modulate, the light that justifies their relationship to each other."[40] Could we speculate that the photographs of Adams had some influence on Irwin? Might both Adams and Irwin have been influenced by Francis Bruguière, Lotte Jacobi, Moholy-Nagy, and other photographers who experimented with light modulators? Nor do we find discussions of possible connections between the pop art movement of the early 1960s and the photographs of apparently banal subjects being made at that time by photographers such as Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand. Instead, such photographs are discussed in terms of implied contrast to "traditional" art of an earlier time. Many such issues could be raised.

It is interesting that where Szarkowski discusses specific examples, he shows how photographers and other artists share concerns and issues of their particular time in history, but when he contrasts art and photography on a broader scope to differentiate the two, he writes as though their traditions are so separate that they could scarcely be shaped by the same influences. Although Szarkowski tells us about the historical evolution of pictures, saying that pictures come from other pictures, he writes about the invention of the new picture-making system in 1839 in terms that segregate it from previous kinds of representations. Photography's invention and the announcement of it are described in terms similar to a deus ex machina device in drama where some god or character unexpectedly intervenes to change the course of events.

We may also ask why Szarkowski finds it necessary to make photography better than the other arts due to unique genetic qualities and superiority in those qualities that he has assigned to both in order to locate photography among the arts. One answer might be that he tries to create a group at least equally exclusive as "the arts," whose members might still fail to admit photography, even after all of Szarkowski's efforts.

Szarkowski's prose in the service of photography is articulate and eloquent. But its contribution to our understanding of photography and its relationships to the other arts is limited by a failure to resolve the conflicts between his major themes: is photography firmly located among the arts, or is it so unique as to defy inclusion? Further, by dwelling on issues that have long been debated, instead of moving toward new perspectives that might enlarge our understanding of photography's place among the arts, Szarkowski seems to neglect opportunities to move forward the debate.

NOTES

1. In a lecture at Wellesley College, Szarkowski said "those of us who have thought about photography have not yet made a great deal of progress. Even in terms of historical matters, our knowledge is shot full of ifs and buts, erasures, illegible words, missing chapters, and dubious conjecture."
2. John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 74.
3. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), unpaged.
4. Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs*, p. 88.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
9. John Szarkowski, "Photography: A Different Kind of Art," *The New York Times Magazine* (April 13, 1975), p. 68.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
11. John Szarkowski, *William Eggleston's Guide* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 5.
12. Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, unpaged.
13. Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs*, p. 156.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
15. Szarkowski, "A Different Kind of Art," p. 68.
16. John Szarkowski, "Evening Lecture," in Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy MacNeil, eds., *Photography Within the Humanities* (Danbury, N.H.: Addison House, 1977), p. 79.
17. Szarkowski, *William Eggleston's Guide*, p. 12.
18. Szarkowski, "A Different Kind of Art," p. 16.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
20. John Szarkowski, ed., *The Photographer and the American Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963), p. 4.
21. Szarkowski, *William Eggleston's Guide*, p. 13.
22. Szarkowski, "A Different Kind of Art," p. 16.
23. Szarkowski, *William Eggleston's Guide*, p. 7.
24. Szarkowski, "A Different Kind of Art," p. 65.
25. Szarkowski, "Evening Lecture," in *Photography Within the Humanities*, p. 79.
26. Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs*, p. 58.
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AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SZAR

Throughout the whole history of photography, including now, there are so many things that happened that are enormously mysterious and, at best, half understood, that we learn from. And our sense of the potentials of photography comes from the whole range of the photographic experiment.

BY ANDY GRUNDBERG

I interviewed John Szarkowski in New York on May 3, 1984, prior to the reopening of the expanded museum. He and his colleagues—Peter Galassi, Susan Kismaric, and Newhall Fellow John Pultz—had just finished hanging a revised and expanded installation of the permanent collection. We also previewed "Three Americans," the exhibition of recent photography conceived and assembled by Associate Curator Kismaric.

As is clear from what follows, Szarkoswki is a relaxed and discursive speaker. He obviously admires men like Alfred Barr, James Thrall Soby and Lincoln Kirstein, and in conversation, he emulates precisely those qualities he respects in them: "marvelous balance and style and grace." His balance holds even when one tries to throw him off, as can be seen in our conversation about Modernism.

Both my questions and his replies have been edited slightly for clarity. Several statements from this interview appeared in *The Sunday New York Times* of May 27, 1984, in my article "The New Modern Reenters the Contemporary Arena." The transcript of this interview was prepared with the assistance of Catherine Calhoun.

Andy Grundberg: I've just seen the new installation of the permanent collection, which is basically a selective but chronologically thorough history of photography. Now everywhere else in the museum, it seems to me, there is a dialectical debate going on between what's modern and what's contemporary—a sorting out of whether "modern" is an historical period that has some finite dates, a beginning and an end. Your department, it seems, by including the whole range of photography here, is defining photography as being modern by birthright—or else you're assuming a role that is more historical than the rest of the museum's departments.

John Szarkowski: Well, I think photography *is* modern. I think it is the first and still the most basic of a whole new family of pictorial vocabularies.

Now I don't think it would have developed when it did if the basic Western pictorial tradition had not arrived at the point at which it had arrived. The thesis of Peter Galassi's show ["Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography," 1981] I think is absolutely true. Nevertheless, when it was invented, when it developed, when it came into existence it was a profoundly radical system that we are still trying to figure out how to use. Throughout the whole history of photography, including now, there are so many things that happened that are enormously mysterious and, at best, half understood, that we learn from. And our sense of the potentials of photography comes from the whole historical range of the photographic experiment.

I'm afraid that I have told many times too often the marvelous story about Brassaï getting the medal from P.H. Emerson. *The* great figure of Victorian British photography, as an old man, awards a medal to Brassaï, one of the great photographic figures of the early twentieth century. Brassaï doesn't know who he is. It seems to me that that is a marvelously symbolic statement of the lack of logical coherence and self-knowledge that has existed in photography since the beginning.

I'm beginning to work on the fourth volume of the Atget book. When Eugène Atget was first written about in the Paris papers, everyone spelled his name wrong. Nobody got it right. And he'd been dead for a year and a half. They spelled it with a *d*: "Adjet." Look at the 1964 edition of Beaumont Newhall's history, the fourth edition, and consider the names that have come into the book since 1948, the date of the third edition. It is quite astonishing that the world's great historian of the medium didn't know Jacques Henri Lartigue in '48—because *nobody* knew Lartigue. He was an absolute, total secret until the early '60s.

So I'm talking about that kind of coherence, the kind of continuous understanding that one expects in the traditional arts, where the best of the past has been preserved in the schools and in the academies and in the guilds, where significant art is continually sifted and saved and judged and sometimes demoted, but *never* thrown out. There was a sense of what had been done and who had done it and everybody knew their predecessors. When, if ever, was there a freshman in art school who did not know the great names of the past? But in photography it has not been that way.

Also, in the nature of the beast, I think, there have always been those varieties of gratuitous accidents and undeserved miracles—unearned, glorious, exceptional half-accidents, that have been one of the sources of photographers' educations. When Walker Evans became seriously interested in photography, he looked at everything he could find. He went to the public library and looked all through *Camerawork*. And he liked Paul Strand's *Blind Woman*, period. But by leaping backwards a generation and going to people like Mathew Brady's group, he found what he wanted. So it isn't always the most recent work that will excite, inspire, and catalyze the inventive photographer of the present generation.

AG: Do you think that's true now?

JS: Jerry Uelsmann is a case in point. One of his very early and very funny photographs that I'm terribly fond of, and that certainly made public his particular spitting-in-the-eye of the received truth at that moment, was a double self-portrait of himself in the bathtub, entitled *Self-portrait as Rejlander and Robinson*—the two early Victorian photographers who were probably most scorned by photographers of the preceding generation.

Of course this happens in all arts. But it happens more often and with more reason in photography than in the other arts because there is so much of the past that we don't know, so much that we haven't seen, so much that we may have seen in passing but haven't looked at, all because of this remarkable lack of coherent, self-conscious self-knowledge in the tradition.

AG: So do you think of that as being your department's mission—to rectify that lack of self-conscious tradition?

JS: No. It is part of the problem—I think of it more as a problem than a mission—of trying to understand what is happening and what has happened, and how what is happening relates to what has happened. Obviously, understanding does not necessarily automatically produce better work. It isn't going to even automatically produce good work. It can produce tedious, scholastic, dry academic exercises. On the other hand, ignorance isn't necessarily a blessing either. The fact that knowledge isn't going to necessarily produce better art will not stop people from being curious. It's a human vice we are stuck with, because it's interesting and it's fun and because it gives pleasure to try to understand. In the end, obviously, it's not going to make an artist out of a drudge. It's not going to make an art lover out of someone with a tin eye.

Let me put it this way: I think there's more good photography being done in this country than anywhere else in the world—than *everywhere* else in the world, as a matter of fact. I think it's absolutely astonishing, the amount of good work that's being done here. Now why is that true? I think, in fact, it has something to do with knowledge, something to do with understanding, something to do with the receptiveness to the achievements and the ideas of the important photography of the past.

How do you teach? You don't teach by giving people slogans, golden rules, little designs of golden sections to put on their ground glasses, formulas. You teach by showing. That's the way certainly any teaching in the arts has always worked. You can't show the work of the future. You always show the work of the past, even yesterday is already the past.

So I think what we do does have a pedagogical role. But first I think it has to do with pleasure.

AG: A role as providers of pleasure?

JS: I think art has to do with a kind of higher pleasure, first of all. Before it gets involved, before it can serve other roles well, it has to provide the kind of visceral satisfaction that anything well-made provides.

Red Smith once interviewed a famous horse trainer who had a horse that people always talked about as being extraordinarily handsome. Really a beautiful, handsome horse. And Red Smith said to this famous trainer: "How do you tell if a horse is a handsome horse?" And the man looked at him in dismay and said, "How do you tell a handsome human being?"

Some promise of fitness for its function, the sense of all the parts being in proper relationship to each other, of its being a whole that is wonderfully rich and yet, at the same time, simple—I think that's what a work of art is first. And the kind of satisfaction and the kind of hope that that kind of experience provides is what art does first. Then it can do a lot of other things.

AG: There has been a great deal of art produced in the last 15 years that has seemed to want to be difficult first, that made pleasure at least subsidiary.

JS: Well, pleasure is certainly not necessarily easy. And not everything succeeds. Even things made by the best people don't necessarily succeed. Because, obviously, once you solve a problem, you don't go back to solving that problem over and over again; the pleasure goes out of it. That sense of release that is created when the last piece of a complicated puzzle drops into place and the thing is whole, it only works once.

AG: Does the interaction of painting and photography, or the combination of those two, seem a problem to you?

JS: Goodness no.

AG: In respect to the tradition of photography?

JS: It has gone on since the beginning, so I think we should be accustomed to it by now. D.O. Hill was a painter and Louis Daguerre was a painter and Gustave Le Gray, all those students of Paul Delaroche. Perhaps a more useful way to think of it—perhaps—is that painting and photography are both parts of something that is larger than painting and photography. They are both parts of a larger puzzle, a larger concern, a larger tradition that has to do with our sense of the possibilities of the visual vocabulary and the visual tradition. It includes movies and it includes graphics and it includes cave drawings, sculpture, decoration, ornament. . . .

In this larger tradition, photography has had for quite a short time an extremely interesting, disruptive, uneven, confusing and centrifugal role, galloping off in a hundred directions simultaneously. Personally, I enjoy the confusion very much, and I certainly would not be interested in trying to eliminate the confusion at the cost of impoverishing the possibilities.

One of the most wonderful and most exciting and most nourishing things about photography, both intellectually and also in terms of the enormous contribution that it has made to the sense of the visual gene pool, is its incredible fecundity. Even if one thinks of the number of varieties of crazy mistakes—that is, violations of what we would have anticipated. It's good photographers, especially photographers who are very talented and who work very hard, who understand this and that's why they work so hard. That's what Garry Winogrand was talking about, which, needless to say, caused a great deal of confusion because of his elliptical and simple way of saying it: he talked about photographing something so he could see what it looked like photographed.

Edward Weston talked about pre-visualizing. But if he really could do it, and absolutely do it, there would have been no point in making the pictures. It was the challenge of seeing whether you could do it, the degree to which you could do it. He didn't make those pictures just to put in boxes, and he certainly didn't make them to sell. He made them to see if he could do it. So the notion of pre-visualizing, in a way, was related to what Winogrand said, but Winogrand emphasized the uncertainty and the adventure of it and Weston emphasized the goal.

AG: You said you took some enjoyment out of the confusion that photography has created in the pictorial tradition, the visual tradition. And yet you must be aware that there are critics who perceive the museum as being interested in a very narrow kind of formalist attitude toward the medium, and not receptive to the breadth of things that are going on today. Do you think that view is true?

JS: I never really understood what is meant by "what is going on today." I've never understood what that phrase means. Obviously, we exhibit and collect a very, very miniscule fragment of "what is going on today," if one means that very literally. There are five billion cat photographs made every day and we show very few of them. And it's been a very long time since we had a sunset exhibition, and it's been a long time since . . . well, you could go down whole long lists of categories.

Presumably, when people say "what is going on today," they mean some bodies of work that they consider to have some special vitality, some special interest, some potential for revising, mending, or modifying our sense of what you can do with photography and what its potential uses are. Everybody has at least a commitment to a sensibility, a commitment to a sense of the possible. My feeling is that our tastes here really are quite catholic. But, I don't recall ever exhibiting anything here because we thought we should. I don't think we've ever exhibited or collected anything that we didn't think (at least momentarily—we might have changed our minds the next month) had life, that had vitality, that there was some quality, some idea or some challenge in it, some virtue.

Obviously, there is work that we think has virtue that we don't exhibit. I assume that goes without saying. Even with twice as big a museum that will obviously continue to be true. In fact, there is a long list of photographers who have either

ANDY GRUNDBERG is a photography critic for *The New York Times* and the senior picture editor of *Modern Photography*.

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THE ARTS IN AMERICA

A notable photo finish

MOMA's Szarkowski leaves with a flourish

By Vicki Goldberg

NEW YORK – "After I got a Guggenheim in 1954 to photograph Louis Sullivan's architecture," John Szarkowski says, "I never had a real job again – up till this very moment. Since then, it's all been just play." For the last 29 years he has been playing director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, perhaps the most prestigious position in the field.

He has mounted over 100 exhibitions; rescued photographers like Jacques Henri Lartigue and E. J. Bellocq from obscurity; made Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand the dominant figures of the day; practically enshrined Eugene Atget in the temple of Old Masters; and championed color photography by showing Marie Cosindas' photographs in 1966 and William Eggleston's in 1976, when most of the art world still thought color suitable for calendars alone. Having reached the age of 65, he stepped down from his post this month.

PHOTOS, Page A26

Vicki Goldberg's new book "The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives" will be published this October by Abbeville Press.

PHOTO / BEN BLACKWELL

Retiring New York Museum of Modern Art photography director John Szarkowski.

Photos

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Susan Kismaric, a curator in the department, goes so far as to say that in this century, no one but Alfred Stieglitz has brought as much attention to photography in so intelligent a manner as Szarkowski has; if nothing else, this remark is indicative of the extravagant praise he inspires in many who have worked with him. Szarkowski writes with great eloquence, so that his point of view has been persuasively broadcast by words as well as pictures: "Looking at Photographs" (1973) was one of the first texts to speak intelligently and feelingly about photographs to a wider audience than scholars and collectors. His conversation is almost equally articulate, vigorous and larded with wit and insight, but there the eloquence sits oddly on his flat Midwestern twang. His enthusiasm for pictures has not been dimmed one whit by time; even during interviews he leaps up repeatedly to find examples and laughs to think how wonderful they are.

The earthy school of photography

In 1962, when the Museum of Modern Art interrupted one of Szarkowski's photographic projects and brought him to New York for an interview, Rene d'Harnoncourt, the director, said, "I assume you know why you're here." Szarkowski replied that he hadn't a clue. D'Harnoncourt studied him a moment, trying to determine whether this was true (it was) or merely a skillful evasion; apparently deciding that either case would suit the job description, he offered Szarkowski the position. Szarkowski refused at first but eventually accepted, thinking that "if by any remote stretch of the imagination, I'm not canned first, under no circumstances will I stay for more than six years. I thought that a senatorial term – that's as long as anyone should stay in a job." Pause. "But it didn't work out that way."

His heart belongs to street and daily-life photography of the Arbus-Friedlander-Winogrand school, where the camera plucks earthy revelations and unexpected grace from the welter of ordinary experience, and some think him unduly devoted to this one branch of the medium at the expense of other approaches; Cornell Capa, director of the International Center of Photography in New York, once said, "He would win almost any *un*popularity contest among young photographers." From the beginning, he has adhered to the modernist argument that photography is most pure when most faithful to its own unique and peculiar character, such as its emphasis on time, motion and the relationship of elements within the composition to the picture's edge.

He himself would claim that his greatest commitment has been to photography's place in the history of picture making, a history he sees as essentially a technological evolution rather than a contest between document and art. Szarkowski has never drawn a tight line around the art end of the medium; as he put it in "Looking at Photographs," "Photography has learned about its own nature not only from its great masters, but also from the simple and radical works of photographers of modest aspiration and small renown." Photography, in fact, is bigger than photographs. Peter Galassi, a curator in the department, once remarked that

"Looking at Photographs" wasn't really about photographs but about everything else. Szarkowski replied, "And what do you think photography is about?"

During his tenure, the museum has shown not only Edward Weston and Ansel Adams and assorted contemporaries but also automatic photos of bank robberies, pictures of antiwar protests almost immediately after they were taken and, in the 1973 exhibition, "From the Picture Press," little-known news photos displayed without their captions. The utterly familiar, yet often mysterious, situations in the press pictures hinted that the news was basically a set of almost interchangeable ceremonies devised for the camera. "News," Szarkowski says, "has always been managed to make it available to the means by which it has been reported. ... Life doesn't exactly imitate art; it disciplines itself so that it can fit within the requirements of the artistic system" – and therefore will increasingly resemble TV. "Did you ever stop to think," he asks, "that it may have been photography that has driven quality out of our public life?" And he laughs.

Change and the collapse of magazines

John Szarkowski, possessor of six honorary doctorates, is the son of a postal inspector from Ashland, Wis., a town that he says looked bigger than it was. In high school, he trotted about with a camera and played second clarinet in the band. When he auditioned for a traveling orchestra, the first clarinetist got the job, so Szarkowski became a photographer.

He majored in art history at college, then went to work for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as "staff photographer and freelance all-around intellectual and spiritual leader, although they didn't know about that part." Next, he taught history of art in Buffalo, and after that worked for the "numero uno food photographer in Chicago, the Paris of food photography," spending over a month photographing milk splashing into a bowl of oatmeal. He won his first Guggenheim in 1954, published "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" and "The Face of Minnesota" (which was a best seller), won another Guggenheim in '61 and was then plucked away by MOMA.

As to changes in the medium in the last quarter century, he says the most telling was the collapse of the magazines as a vehicle for the best creative energies of photographers. The medium's fortunes rose in the art market partly in response; when photographs no longer seemd so necessary or central as everyday marketplace commodities, people became a bit more sympathetic to the notion that they might be art: "If it ain't useful, it must be beautiful." Photographs change in response to market forces. When technology made it possible to print a million copies of a picture magazine, subject and approach both shifted; when photography entered art galleries in recent years in editions of 10 or 20, the client and subject had to be redefined.

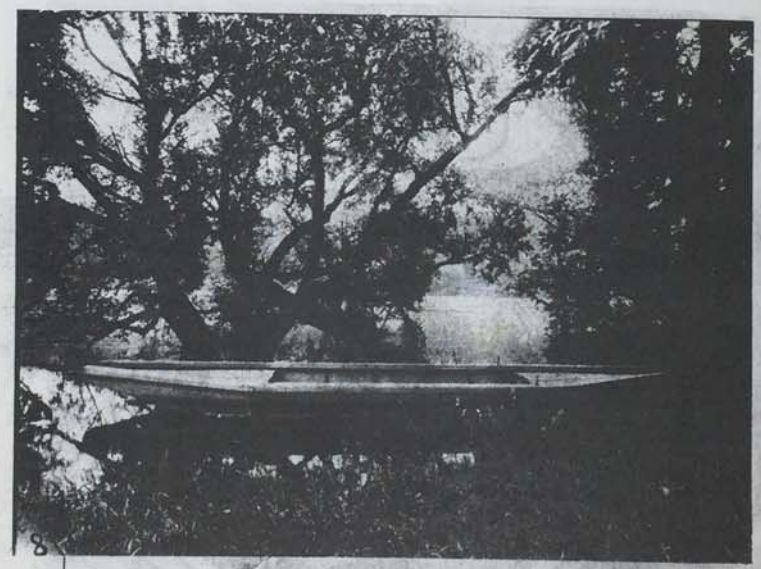
Emphasizing that he is not being ironic, Szarkowski says, "If you're going to sell photographs in art stores, necessarily they have to have a certain kind of philosophical heft to them, and they have to cost enough so that you can afford to sell in this kind of distribution." He says that today it's very difficult to be a *modest* photographer, to avoid the dangers of pretension. "Formerly, you could at least try to get by by saying, OK, maybe it isn't very good, but my intentions were good." Before it was art, he says, "it was an attempt to deal with something that's of objective importance in the outside world – 'Don't blame me, that's the way wars look.' "

Postmodernist criticism

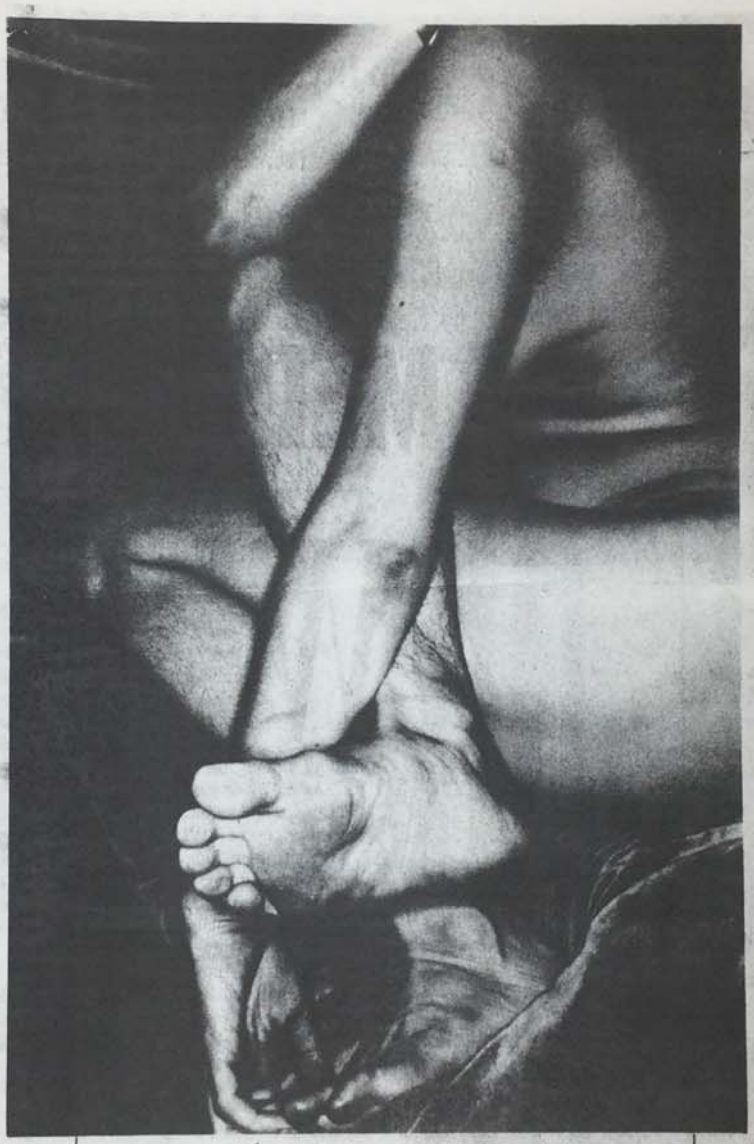
Szarkowski the modernist has been criticized for not understanding photography in

the postmodern era. He freely admits that he's not certain what *postmodern* means, which puts him in good company, but like MOMA itself, his recognition of contemporary movements, as photography became ever more intertwined with the other arts, has been slow and limited. When Patrick Nagatani is mentioned – his darkly humorous work is fairly widely shown and reproduced – Szarkowski frowns in consternation, then laughs. "Nagatani? I've been out of town." If it is the museum's function to remain on the cutting edge, which is a matter of some debate, the criticism is justified. But it could also be argued that, like any collector or curator of note, Szarkowski has a distinctive point of view, perhaps as valuable an asset in building a collection and translating his enthusiasms for a wide public as a more malleable, grab-bag ability to keep up with the trends. As Ingrid Sischy, editor of Interview magazine and a former fellow in the photography department, puts it, "He really followed what he believed. One can't ask more of someone."

His farewell gesture at the museum is a show of nudes (July 25-Oct. 8) by Lee Friedlander, whose career and aesthetic have been identified with MOMA and Szarkowski since the landmark "New Documents" show of 1967. Some of the nudes are unusually explicit; when asked if he expects a controversy, John Szarkowski smiles his broad, dry smile and says, "One can always hope."



Szarkowski has practically enshrined Eugene Atget, whose 'Etang de Corot, Ville-de-Avray' appears above, in the temple of Old Masters.



John Szarkowski's farewell gesture at the museum is a show of nudes by Lee Friedlander, this one untitled. Asked if he expects a controversy, Szarkowski smiles and says, 'One can always hope.'

John Szarkowski has given freely and generously to photography for over forty-five years. As a matter of fact, the shape of our medium's history would be very different without his ongoing and brilliant contributions as a curator, writer and friend to several generations of artists. However, like a legendary football coach who is remembered for his coaching record rather than for the All-American seasons he had as a player, Szarkowski's achievements as a photographer have been overshadowed by the other gifts he has made.

This exhibition is meant to dispel the misconception of Szarkowski's role in photography by sharing the photographs he made between 1948 and 1961, the year before he came to New York to begin his work at the Museum of Modern Art. These rigorously formal, exquisitely printed photographs are about place. They are not photographs which seek to ignore man's relationship to nature or the city but, rather, to embrace it. Szarkowski states:

> "As a photographer I think I have been most alert when working with subject matter that I believe to be, or to represent, something of value to the human enterprise - to human culture. The object is not to reproduce that subject matter, which is impossible, but to make of it a good picture - a thing with its own energy and order. If the picture is good enough it will encourage and reward attention, and may cause the viewer to consider the meanings of the subject matter itself, very little of which can be photographed."

Just as Szarkowski quietly put down his camera in 1962 when he began his job at the Museum, he picked it up when he left in 1991. He has, of late, been making pictures of his barn in Columbia County, New York. These pictures, too, are beautifully seen and depict a remarkably simple structure quietly colliding with the history of man's interaction with it. Szarkowski's work as a photographer has continued almost as if the twenty-nine year interruption had not occurred. But, luckily for us, it did, and it appears that he, like few others, will be successful at two careers.

* * *

Szarkowski published two books in the 1950's: The Idea of Louis Sullivan in 1956 and The Face of Minnesota in 1958. (The latter appeared on "The New York Times" best seller list for eight weeks.) Please feel free to read excerpts from the texts of these books which are available at the front desk.

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Just as Szarkowski quietly put down his camera in 1962 when he began his job at the Museum, he picked it up when he left in 1991. He has, of late, been making pictures of his barn in Columbia County, New York. These pictures, too, are beautifully seen and depict a remarkably simple structure quietly colliding with the history of man's interaction with it. Szarkowski's work as a photographer has continued almost as if the twenty-nine year interruption had not occurred. But, luckily for us, it did, and it appears that he, like few others, will be successful at two careers.

* * *

Szarkowski published two books in the 1950's: The Idea of Louis Sullivan in 1956 and The Face of Minnesota in 1958. (The latter appeared on "The New York Times" best seller list for eight weeks.) Please feel free to read excerpts from the texts of these books which are available at the front desk.

PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

Artist's Statement July, 1994

As a photographer I think I have been most alert when working with subject matter that I believe to be, or to represent, something of value to the human enterprise - to human culture. The object is not to reproduce that subject matter, which is impossible, but to make of it a good picture - a thing with its own energy and order. If the picture is good enough it will encourage and reward attention, and may cause the viewer to consider the meanings of the subject matter itself, very little of which can be photographed.

The meanings of a photograph are distinct from those of its subject matter, but sometimes, with luck, the two patterns of meanings seem consonant.

I am not actively interested in self-expression, since it seems to me virtually unavoidable, for better or worse.

John Szarkowski

32 EAST 57TH STREET / NEW YORK 10022 / PHONE: (212) 759-7999/FACSIMILE: (212) 759-8964

PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

The following is an excerpt from the *Preface* of the book *The Face of Minnesota*, by John Szarkowski, published by the University of Minnesota Press, 1958.

This book is about Minnesota now. But as the mature man carries on his face and in his bearing the history of his past, so does the look of a place today show *its* past - what it has been and what it has believed in.

Or consider the glaciers' scratches on the face of the rock, showing the direction from which the past came, and the direction in which it went.

I have tried to show the land and its people and their work, in such a way that the whole would fit together to give a lively and an honest sense of what the place is really like. But all the important facts could not be shown in a thousand books. It is necessary to select a few isolated images which seem to make sense together, so that one picture which is present will recall the many others which were never made, or which were made and discarded. The selected pictures are not necessarily of "important" subjects. (As when someone is trying to make you remember an old friend: he may tell you the old friend's height and weight and income and business and his wife's maiden name, but you will not remember him until you are reminded that he always looked at people over the top of his glasses.)

There are many important Minnesota images which are not in this book - Lake Minnetonka on a Sunday in July, covered with white sails; or Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, at Bemidji; or Mille Lacs in winter, covered with ice-fishing houses. But if those who know Minnesota will be reminded of these things, and if those who do not know it can imagine what these things might be like, then it is a good book.

32 EAST 57TH STREET / NEW YORK 10022 / PHONE: (212) 759-7999 / FACSIMILE: (212) 759-8964

PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

The following appeared in *The Face of Minnesota*, by John Szarkowski, published by the University of Minnesota Press, 1958:

A Technical Note

Over half of the photographs in this book were done with tripod-mounted cameras, on 4 x 5 film. These cameras were the Graphic View, with lenses of 8 1/2", 5 1/2", and 3 1/2" focal length, and the Graphlex D, used almost exclusively with a 17" lens. Of the remaining pictures, the great majority were done with the Simmon Omega 120, a few with the Automatic Rolleiflex.

The films used were, 4 x 5: Super XX, Royal X Pan, and Ektachrome; for 120: Tri-X, Verichrome Pan, Ektachrome, and Super Anscochrome. Both Tri-X and Royal X Pan were given much gentler development, and consequently exposed at much lower speed ratings, than is normal in professional use of these films. Tri-X was developed for 9 1/2 minutes in Microdol, Royal X Pan for 13 minutes in D-76. Tri-X was exposed with a Weston meter at 200 for average existing artificial light or in overcast daylight, at 320 in direct sunlight. Royal X Pan was exposed at the very low (for it) rating of 650. These negatives are flat in contrast and moderately thin in density. They possess good scale throughout the curve and seem to me extraordinarily plastic: that is, susceptible to great freedom of printing control, especially with a variable contrast paper such as Varigam.

Full exposure and gentle development are paid for in the loss of film speed. In exchange, the photographer gets a very complete image, with full rendering of form and texture: the space depicted is logical and convincing. If the photographer feels obliged to be able to photograph anything he can see, without adding light, he will standardize on a procedure favoring higher emulsion ratings.

I feel that my own picture-making failures can very seldom be blamed on inadequate film speed. I want to make pictures possessing the qualities of poise, clarity of purpose, and natural beauty, as these qualities were achieved in the work of the good wet-plate photographers. The compelling *clarity* of this early work is generally assumed to be a technical attribute, but I do not think that

continued...

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this is so. Mere sharpness will never produce clarity. Neither will a rich, complete tonality, although this is more important. Neither will academic "design principles," regardless of how long ago, or how recently, the academy was formed - for such principles (concepts) can be no stronger or truer than the percepts from which they grow. The work of men like Brady and Jackson and O'Sullivan possessed clarity because the photographers knew what they wanted - they had to know; the technique was far too unwieldy to allow shooting by whim. In contrast, today's photographic technique allows such facility that the photographer must consciously discipline his shooting if his eyes and mind are to retain (or regain) mastery over his equipment. To learn to photograph purposefully - to be less like a sponge and more like a snare - will be difficult today, when the photographer has almost no technical limitations to help him. But I think that this is his real problem. When he combines the flexibility of today's technique with the purposeful *intent* that the earlier photographers knew, then photography will become a mature and responsible language.

In photography the meaning of the word technique has been twisted by the gadgeteers until now it seems to refer only to esoteric mechanical problems. (Not only in photography: I once knew an orchestra conductor who could beat cut time with one hand and triplets with the other, simultaneously. He considered this performance part of his technique, even though it did nothing but waste his energy and confuse the musicians.) True technique is nothing but the means of achieving intent, with the greatest possible strength, clarity and ease. Because crude technique will dilute the strength of any picture, the print should be as good as the photographer can make it: each tone and texture should be exactly right, considered as parts of the whole image. Precise technique, especially in printing, is frequently deprecated by photographers themselves on the grounds that subtle differences will in any case be lost in the reproductive process. This is too often true, but standards of reproduction will improve only when photographers consistently produce work which demands and deserves it. The rarity of fine photomechanical reproduction today is perhaps due more to the decline of technical standards in photography than to any lack of ability among engravers and printers. Years ago, a shoddy musical performance was often improved by a muffled, low-fidelity recording. Much contemporary photography is similarly blessed.

PACE/MACGILL GALLERY

The following appeared in *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, by John Szarkowski, published by the University of Minnesota Press, 1956.

Photographer's Foreword

When these photographs were begun, five years ago, it was with the idea of producing an academically serviceable record of the Prudential Building in Buffalo, New York. My introduction to Louis Sullivan had come in the preceding months, not through his buildings, but through his intoxicating, inspiring writings. These writings showed a man who had demanded wholeness - total humanity - with the passion of few men before or since. So when I went to Buffalo I sought out this building - a tangible product of his thought. The building was old and dirty and largely lost among its newer, larger neighbors. Like a diamond in a pile of broken glass, it stopped few passersby. But it was there to be looked at, and with sympathy and patience it could be seen - and seen to be a masterwork, an image of greatness.

Obviously it was necessary to photograph the building immediately, before it was further defaced. As I began to work I found, to my own surprise, that I was seeing this building not with the decorous disinterest with which a photographer is supposed to approach a work of formal architecture, but as a real building, which people had worked in and maimed and ignored and perhaps loved, and which I felt was deeply important. I found myself concerned not only with the building's art-facts but with its life-facts. (Louis Sullivan had claimed they were the same.) This concern began to show in the photographs, and the idea grew.

When photographers of the nineteenth century first used their cameras to describe formal architecture, they were concerned with buildings the content of which had died, however alive the forms may have remained. The Acropolis was empty, and the pageants on the porches of Chartres were only a souvenir of the great medieval morality plays. Only the forms remained to be photographed. Such an approach became a habit, and then a virtue, until the building in the

continued...

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photograph became as isolated from life as the insect enclosed in the amber paperweight. In our day perhaps the best architectural photographs have been the casual products of the photographer-journalist, where the life that surrounds and nourishes the building is seen or felt. If to such an approach were added an understanding of architectural form, photography might become a powerful critical medium, rather than a superficially descriptive one.

This is what I have tried to do in this book. The effort has not been to compile an exhaustive documentation of Sullivan's buildings, but rather to re-enliven, by means of photography, the fundamental concepts which were born in his work. In the selection of the accompanying text, the attempt has been less to explain or evaluate than to capture the mind and the spirit of the man and the time and the place. To preserve a just balance between word and picture, and to preserve as much as possible of the writings which seemed revealing, I have been forced to cut text which I would have preferred to quote in whole. But no word or meaning has been changed, and I believe that the flavor of the original has been preserved. Rather than allow the ataxia of ellipsis marks to destroy the rhythm of the original style, I have omitted all ellipses. I hope that this text will bring new readers to their own investigation of the original sources, in all their richness.

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JOHN SZARKOWSKI

Selected chronology of exhibitions and publications for

The Museum of Modern Art

(One man shows marked by an asterisk were the first major restrospective exhibitions of the work of that artist. All exhibitions listed here were circulated nationally, and many were circulated abroad.)

1963 The Photography of Jacques Henri Lartigue. The first exhibition of this photographer's work. Accompanied by a small publication by John Szarkowski.

1963 The Photographer and the American Landscape. Accompanied by a publication by John Szarkowski.

1964 The Photographer's Eye. The exhibition attempted to define the fundamental formal issues with which photography must deal. The book was reprinted in 1980.

1964 *André Kertesz: Photographer. The accompanying book was the first critical appraisal.

1964 Opening of the Edward Steichen Galleries and Study Center.

1966 *Dorothea Lange.

1967 Once Invisible. An exhibition of scientific photography, which explored the ways in which visual understanding had been expanded by photographic technologies.

1967 New Documents. An exhibition of the work of Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus, and Garry Winogrand.

1968 *Brassai.

1968 Cartier-Bresson.

1969 Bill Brandt.

1969 The Animals. Photographs by Garry Winogrand. The accompanying publication was the first book published of this photographer's work.

1970 E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits. The first exhibition of this photographer's work.

1971 *Walker Evans. The accompanying book was reprinted for the third time in 1979.

1972 *Diane Arbus.

1973 Looking at Photographs: 100 pictures from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art. This book was an attempt to demonstrate, on the basis of a limited number of specific pictures, the ways in which a pictorial tradition is developed and articulated. The book was reprinted for the fourth time in 1980.

1973 From the Picture Press. This exhibition was an analysis of the iconography of news photographs. The accompanying publication had its third reprinting in 1980.

1974 New Japanese Photography. The first survey outside of Japan of the postwar development of photography in that country.

1976 Photographs by William Eggleston. The first exhibition of this controversial figure, whose work demonstrated a new (and subsequently highly influential) approach to the potentials of color photography. The accompanying publication, William Eggleston's Guide, was, I believe, the first monograph on a color photographer to be published by any art museum.

1976 Harry Callahan.

1978 Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960. A consideration of the distinctive new work in photography during the past two decades, and of the critical vantage points that have in part formed this work.

1979 Ansel Adams and the West. A critical investigation of Adams' contribution to the landscape tradition.

1981 The Work of Atget: Old France
1982 The Work of Atget: The Art of Old Paris
These are the first two in a series of four exhibitions devoted to the work of Eugene Atget. Each exhibition is accompanied by a volume of the four volume book, which constitutes a complete catalog of the exhibitions, with critical notes, a biography of the photographer, an investigation of his place in the history of photography, an explanation of the structure of his work in relation to his commercial practice, and a review of the previous interpretations of his work. The exhibitions and book are the product of over ten years research on the subject, and constitute the most ambitious study of any photographer undertaken to date.

During the same years many smaller one-man shows by younger photographers were also mounted, including those on Marie Consindas, Bruce Davidson, Ray Metzker, Paul Caponigro, Elliott Erwitt, Duane Michals, Bill Gedney, Robert Adams, Henry Wessel, Joel Meyerowitz, Josef Koudelka, Keith Smith and Susan Sheridan, Michael Snow, Nick Nixon, Stephen Shore, Chauncey Hare, Frank Gohlke, and Larry Fink.

1982 20th Century Photographs from the Museum of Modern Art. 150 photographs from the Collection selected by John Szarkowski and Susan Kismaric, associate curator in the Photography Department, exhibited at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo, Japan, and the University of Hawaii Art Gallery in Honolulu, which illustrated the development of the art of photography in this century.

1983 Big Pictures by Contemporary Photographers. Co-directed by John Szarkowski and John Pultz, Newhall Fellow in the Photography Department. 33 works by contemporary photographers of previously unrealizable scale.

1984 Irving Penn. The first major retrospective in more than 20 years containing 168 photographs. Irving Penn, a 216-page catalogue with 33 illustrations and an introductory essay by John Szarkowski was published by the Museum in conjunction with this exhibition.

From the Gilman Collection: Photographs Preserved in Ink. 31 photographs from the corporate collection of the Gilman Paper Company, Inc. accompanied by photo-offset reproductions made for the forthcoming album on the collection.

1985 The Work of Atget: The Ancien Régime (Atget III). The Work of Atget: Modern Times (Atget IV).

A Personal View: Photography in the Collection of Paul F. Walter. 70 photographs of this 19th and 20th century collection including landscapes, portraits, and architectural views of England, Europe, the Middle East, India and The United States. The accompanying 136-page book contains 70 reproductions and was distributed by New York Graphic Society Books/ Little, Brown and Company.

New Photography. 45 photographs on loan from the photographers and from the Collection by four contemporary photographers. Still lifes by Zeke Berman, autobiographical photographs with text by Antonio Mendoza, portraits taken at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C. by Judith Joy Ross, and a variety of technical experiments by Michael Spano.

Variants. 50 photographs from the Collection illustrating the varieties of choice that encompass the art of photography.

1986 New Photography 2. 50 photographs on loan from the photographers. Domestic scenes from middle class life with brief texts from romance novels by Mary Frey, documents of the town, mine, and power plant of Colstrip, Montana by David T. Hanson, and subtly theatrical tableaus by Philip Lorca diCorcia.

1988 The Photographs of Josef Albers: A Selection from the Collection of the Josef Albers Foundation. The first photography exhibition of the German artist includes 38 photographs, mostly dating from 1928 to 1932. The exhibition was organized by John Szarkowski for

the American Federation for the Arts. The Photographs of Josef Albers, a 56-page catalogue with 38 black and white illustrations and an essay by John Szarkowski was published by the American Federation for the Arts in conjunction with this exhibition.

Garry Winogrand. This retrospective exhibition was the first overview of the achievement of Winogrand, comprised of 190 photographs, 10 enlarged proof sheets, and a projection of slides. Garry Winogrand: Figments from the Real World, a 260-page catalogue with 208 duotone illustrations and an essay by John Szarkowski was published by the Museum in conjunction with the exhibition.

1989 Siskind from the Collection. A concise retrospective of 31 pictures drawn from the Collection, featuring the abstract images for which Siskind is best known.

1990 Photography Until Now. A survey of the history of photography celebrating the sesquicentennial of the medium. Photography Until Now, a 308-page catalogue with 158 tritone, 17 full-color plates, and 120 duotone reference illustrations, written by John Szarkowski was published by the Museum in conjunction with the exhibition.

SELECTED WRITINGS NOT RELATED TO THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PROGRAM

Forward to The New West, by Robert Adams. 1974 Colorado Associated University Press.

Introduction to The Portfolios of Ansel Adams, NYSGS 1977.

"A Different Kind of Art," The New York Times Magazine.

Photography and the Mass Media" DotZero, Spring 1967 (Reprinted in Aperture, 13:3, 1967).

JOHN SZARKOWSKI

BORIS FRMTT

John Szarkowski took his first photograph with a Baby Brownie when he was eight years old. Twenty-nine years later, at age 37, the Wisconsin-born photographer succeeded 83-year-old Edward Steichen as director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art.

Szarkowski's 17 years at MOMA have been marked by more than 75 photography exhibitions, including group surveys such as "The Photographer and the American Landscape," the recent "Mirrors and Windows" and "The Photographer's Eye," which Szarkowski regards as his department's landmark exhibition. "As far as I know, that was the first exhibition that tried to deal with the formal character of photographs," he says. Szarkowski's interest in one-man shows, stressing an individual's ideas over a group's philosophical or spiritual principles, has produced exhibitions of pictures by Dorothea Lange, Diane Arbus, Walker Evans, Harry Callahan, Marie Cosindas, Garry Winogrand and William

October 1979
Art News p.149, 157

are now approaching middle age learned to take photography seriously in college." The museum, he adds, can take part of the credit. "Back as early as the late '30s," he says, MOMA brought photography to a national audience with its circulating exhibitions. "When I was a young photographer, 80 percent of my serious library material came from this museum," he adds, citing monographs on Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Weston and Walker Evans published by MOMA.

As for the future of the museum, Szarkowski believes MOMA could benefit from emphasizing the word *modern* and broadening its definition to "deal with modern ideas, regardless of when the works were made." He cites the exhibition "Indian Art of the United States," which was organized at MOMA by Rene d'Harnoncourt in 1941, as a show that "didn't deal with modern art at all but with ideas and issues that were specifically modern." —**Terry Trucco**

Eggleston. Szarkowski is also acknowledged as a force behind the critical elevation of the "snapshot" esthetic and color photography.

As department director, Szarkowski has helped shape and oversee the museum's prodigious photography collection, which includes more than 20,000 photographic prints dating from around 1840 to the present. He views the purchase in 1969 of Berenice Abbott's archive of negatives and prints by Eugène Atget as perhaps his finest moment at the museum. "It was a pretty daring venture at the time," he says. "It wasn't a gift. We bought it." (The purchase price was said to be $80,000.) The collection consists of 5,000-odd pieces, "some of them excellent, others less memorable," he says.

Szarkowski's belief that "the curator is only a counter-puncher—he responds to what artists do" perhaps comes from his own experience as a photographer. He helped finance his education at the University of Wisconsin, where he majored in art history, by working for 75 cents an hour as a darkroom assistant. Following graduation he taught photography at the Albright Art School in Buffalo, New York, and at the University of Minnesota and was the official photographer for the Walker Art Center, where he also served as associate editor of the center's *Everyday Art Quarterly*. In 1956, with the help of a Guggenheim fellowship, Szarkowski published his first book, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, which brought him to the attention of Edward Steichen at the Modern. (Several of Szarkowski's photographs dating from the Steichen years are in MOMA's permanent collection.)

Szarkowski believes the current photography explosion came about "less rapidly than people think it has. The visible interest is what accounts for the explosion," he says. World War II was followed by "a rapid increase in art education in general; photography entered the curriculum in a way that hadn't existed before. People who are now approaching middle age learned to take photography seriously in college." The museum, he adds, can take part of the credit. "Back as early as the late '30s," he says, MOMA brought photography to a national audience with its circulating exhibitions. "When I was a young photographer, 80 percent of my serious library material came from this museum," he adds, citing monographs on Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Weston and Walker Evans published by MOMA.

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October 1979

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OF THE
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS

LEE FRIEDLANDER

A SLIDE LECTURE BY JOHN SZARKOWSKI

WEDNESDAY

NOVEMBER 6, 1991

GREEN ROOM

2ND FLOOR

401 VAN NESS AVE.

7:30 P.M.

JOHN SZARKOWSKI, former director of the department of photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, will discuss the images presented in the exhibition *Lee Friedlander: Nudes.*

Advance tickets are available by mail: $6 general admission; $5 SFMOMA members (include membership number); $4 students and seniors. Send a check with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Public Programs, Education Department, SFMOMA, 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102. Tickets may be purchased at the door as space allows.

The 1991-92 Museum Lecture Program is sponsored by the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund.

Sarah Seagrs
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ART IN AMERICA
New York
March 1991

People

John Szarkowski, director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art since 1962, has announced his retirement, effective July 1. The exhibition "Lee Friedlander Nudes," opening July 25, will be his last.

Awards

Robert Storr, curator of contemporary art at the **Museum of Modern Art**, has received the 1990 curator's grant from the **Peter Norton Family Foundation**. The $50,000 award enables curators to select works to be purchased by the foundation for their institutions.

TIMES
Gainesville, GA
25 January 1991

Modern art curator plans Brenau talk

Brenau College's Lyceum Series and Fine Arts Department have scheduled an evening lecture by Wendy Weitman, assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Pearce Auditorium. The lecture is presented as part of the Jasper Johns exhibit, which will run March 4 through April 14 at Brenau's new Visual Arts Center. Admission is free and the public is invited to attend.

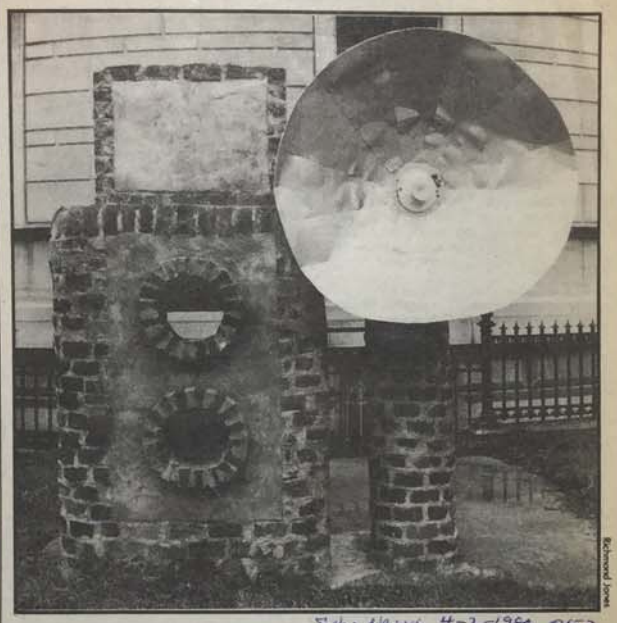
BROWN DAILY HERALD
Providence, RI
21 March 1991

▪ **"Breaking Up is Hard To Do: Elizabeth Murray and Painting Now"** Robert Storr, recently appointed curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, will give a talk on the paintings of Elizabeth Murray. This is in conjunction with the exhibition of Murray's prints at the David Winton Bell Gallery of the List Art Center. A gallery tour will follow Storr's talk.

By Linda Mahdesian

Szarkowski John

PHOTOGRAPHY



Richmond Jones

Soho News 4-2-1980 ps-2

THE GROOVES OF ACADEME

Andy Grundberg

Photographers, like most creatures, tend to band together in the interest of self-preservation — this despite the myth of photographer as independent, long-suffering artist and entrepeneur. Such tribal tendencies account for the existence of two organizations: the ASMP (American Society of Magazine Photograhers) which is based in New York (and based on commercialism), and the SPE (Society for Photographic Education), which is at home in the boondocks and the ivory tower.

The SPE was founded in 1962 by the likes of Nathan Lyons, Henry Holmes Smith and Jerry Liebling — photographic educators all — for purposes that to this day remain the organization's chief topic of discussion. Two weeks ago, the SPE held its annual convention — an upstart version of the College Art Association's or Modern Language Association's yearly gathering — at Stevensville Country Club in the Catskills.

The conference, with some 700 persons registered, including this writer, was like a circus where three acts go on simultaneously. In the main ring was the presentation of papers, mostly scholarly, bearing such titles as "Notes Toward an Esthetic of Color Photography," "Super-Realist Esthetics in Fine Art Photography," "For a Radical Theory and Practice of Photography," "Who Are You — Visual or Haptic?" and "A Good Milk Cow Is Not a Helicopter and That Is a Fact."

Off to the sides two dramas of quieter but equal import were played out. One featured the internal bickering of the SPE's board of directors, an epic saga focused on such burning issues as whether the society's magazine should be reviewing books by members of the society in less than approving terms. And the third ring — for many in attendance the main event — featured the showing of portfolios and the hunting of jobs. Jobs, preferably, with a "tenure track" attached.

•

This concentration on the seeking of teaching jobs, shows, grants and "success" as measured by the length of one's resume — what I would call the grooves of academe — is what the SPE seems mostly to be about these days, even though, to an outsider, this mission frequently seems beside the point. It has nothing to do, for example, with photographs. Instead, it tends merely to promote individual careers and foster the kind of political infighting more suitable to large corporations.

The problem that arises, as critic A.D. Coleman has pointed out, is that this trend toward resume building is part of a self-perpetuating spiral, in which students become teachers who teach students to become teachers. Of course, if and when this bubble bursts, it likely will drown the SPE.

Meantime, what prospects does today's photography-major, college graduate face? Well, he or she can go commercial and enter the ASMP's world of corrupt realism. Or he or she can get on the groove of teaching gigs, grant applications and one-person shows. Or he or she can enjoy a marginal existence in the real world, eking out a living the way painters do while forsaking the kind of organized safety that the SPE offers. Not surprisingly, this last course seems most noble to those who are not pursuing it.

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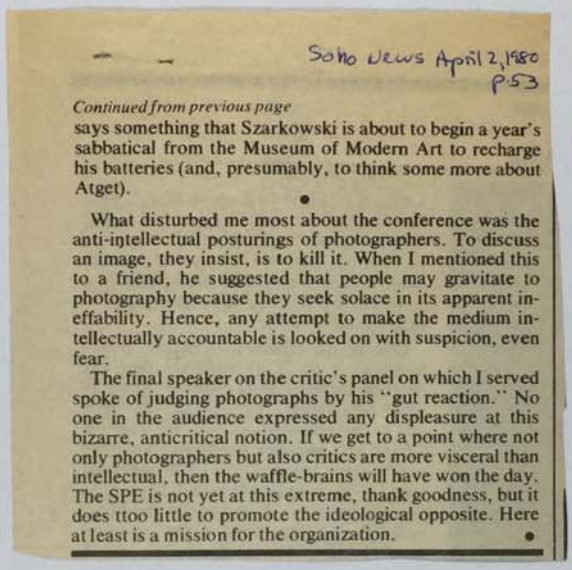
The two main speakers and honored guests at the SPE convention, MOMA curator John Szarkowski and photographer Helen Levitt, don't quite fit these molds. Szarkowski is a photographer turned curator, a critic and defender of the faith. To hear him memorialize Atget in rolling tones and swollen adjectives was to be swept away on the enthusiasms of a zealot. Yet Szarkowski is a literate, intellectual animal who follows a photograph with his mind. Levitt, by contrast, is an instinctual animal. I doubt that she could fully articulate the meaning of the gnarled human gestures that recur throughout her work, from the early black-and-whites of the '40s to the recent color slides.

The two are different in yet another way: Szarkowski has always been the golden boy egged on by the world's approval, while Levitt has suffered in relative poverty and obscurity. Perhaps it

Continued on next page



Soho News April 2, 1980
P.53

Continued from previous page

says something that Szarkowski is about to begin a year's sabbatical from the Museum of Modern Art to recharge his batteries (and, presumably, to think some more about Atget).

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What disturbed me most about the conference was the anti-intellectual posturings of photographers. To discuss an image, they insist, is to kill it. When I mentioned this to a friend, he suggested that people may gravitate to photography because they seek solace in its apparent ineffability. Hence, any attempt to make the medium intellectually accountable is looked on with suspicion, even fear.

The final speaker on the critic's panel on which I served spoke of judging photographs by his "gut reaction." No one in the audience expressed any displeasure at this bizarre, anticritical notion. If we get to a point where not only photographers but also critics are more visceral than intellectual, then the waffle-brains will have won the day. The SPE is not yet at this extreme, thank goodness, but it does ttoo little to promote the ideological opposite. Here at least is a mission for the organization. •

NYT Jan. 24, 1991, C15

Szarkowski Of Modern Museum To Retire

By ANDY GRUNDBERG

John Szarkowski, director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department for 29 years, will retire on July 1, ending an invigorating and occasionally controversial career as one of the medium's most eloquent exponents.

A museum spokeswoman, Jeanne Collins, said on Tuesday that Mr. Szarkowski would continue to serve the museum as a consultant. A committee to appoint his successor has been formed, she added.

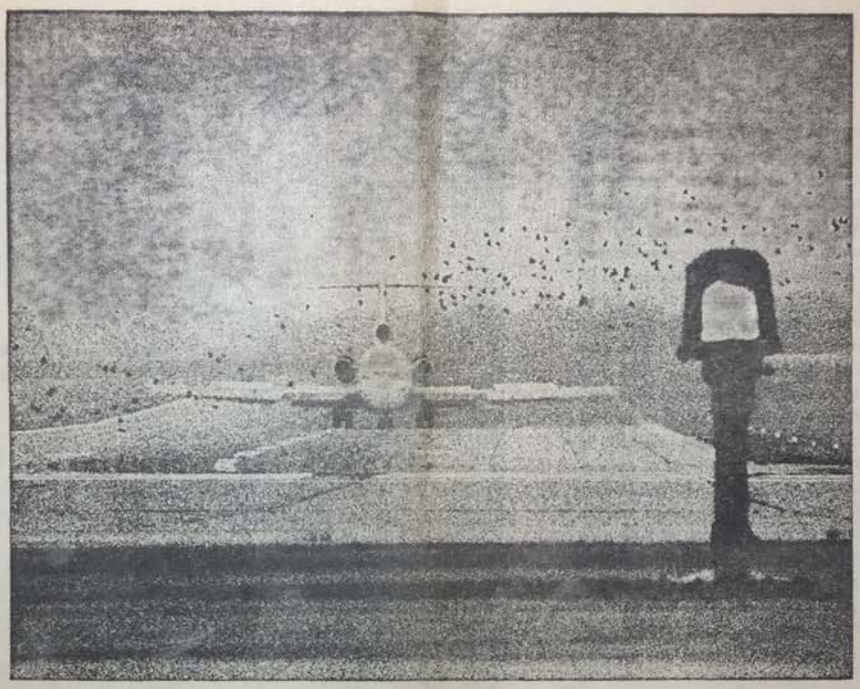
Mr. Szarkowski, who was 65 years old in December, is currently the department director with the longest tenure at the museum and one of the few remaining staff members who worked with Alfred H. Barr Jr., the museum's founding director. He succeeded Edward Steichen as director of photography in 1962 and almost immediately established himself as a major interpreter of the art of photography.

With exhibitions like "New Documents" (1967), "Diane Arbus" (1972) and "William Eggleston" (1976), he gave credibility to snapshot-style street photography. With shows like "The Photographer's Eye" (1966), "From the Picture Press" (1973), "Eugène Atget" (four exhibitions from 1981 to 1985) and last year's "Photography Until Now," he defined a historical tradition that reflected his tastes in contemporary imagery.

While some observers consider his views too narrow and have criticized him for underestimating the importance of the large-scale art photography of the 1980's, his ideas continue to have a broad influence on the medium and its practitioners.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Mr. Szarkowski said he planned to return to the camera and the darkroom after his retirement, resuming a career as a photographer that he abandoned when he assumed his museum post. He said he also planned to continue teaching and writing. "I feel quite invigorated," he said, "a bit like getting out of school in the spring."

Of his years at the museum, he said: "I've enjoyed, if not every single day, then every single year. It has been an adventure for me." The last exhibition conceived during his tenure will be a show of Lee Friedlander's nudes, opening in July.



Fifty-Seven Varieties

Fifty-seven photographers, who have little in common except that they all hail from Wisconsin, are exhibiting their works on the University of Oregon campus. The exhibit contains 85 photographs selected from 655 entries by Wisconsin photographers. It will hang through Friday at the Erb Memorial Union Art Gallery. Shown here are "Mitchell Field" (above) by Thomas Ferderbar of Milwaukee; an untitled work (left) by Philip Moughmer of Milwaukee; "Flute Player" (below left) by Arthur Ollman of Madison, and "Pine Country" (below right) by Sheri Stern of Milwaukee. The show was juried by Aaron Siskind, a Chicago, Ill., photographer and teacher, and by John Szarkowski, director of the department of photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York City. The jurors said creative photographers today seem to be "exploring the frontiers of their medium in two opposite directions: some are trying to make their pictures more satisfactory as primary physical experiences . . . others are trying to document with fresh sensibility and heightened acuity what seem the most suggestive aspects of contemporary life." The show contains examples of both approaches.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1994, p. C31

Art in Review

■ Family photos with a difference ■ Photocopies with paint ■ A curator back behind the lens ■ The discreet charm of ingenuousness.

John Szarkowski

Pace/MacGill Gallery
32 East 57th Street
Through Oct. 22

Before he became head of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in 1962, John Szarkowski was himself a photographer; among other accomplishments, he won two Guggenheim Fellowships for his work. Mr. Szarkowski retired from the Modern three years ago, having helped shape contemporary photography through his books and exhibitions. This intriguing show offers a selection of his work before he became, as a photo magazine once described him, "the pope of photography."

Included are pictures from two books of Mr. Szarkowski's photographs, "The Face of Minnesota" (1958) and "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956), as well as images from other projects. All are classically composed black-and-white images that display a strong command of photographic craft.

Landscapes and architectural views predominate. In a 1961 view, a sun-dappled lake is topped by a silvery roll of clouds; in a 1955 shot, the dark form of a pine tree can be seen through a screen of leafless branches.

A few images suggest the kinds of work that Mr. Szarkowski championed at the Modern: several of his photographs of Sullivan's buildings, in particular, have the timeless air of Eugène Atget's images. None of these pictures suggest that Mr. Szarkowski would have become a great photographer had he continued on his early path; what comes through strongly, though, is his respect for the ability of photography, when used with care and attention, to record the world in compelling detail.

CHARLES HAGEN

Szarkowski, John

ANDERSON RANCH ARTS CENTER

Photography

Judy Dater, *Nuptial, 1992*, black and white photograph, 1992

John Szarkowski, *Masonry Detail, Chicago Auditorium*, black and white photograph, 1954

DAVID LEVINTHAL AND JOHN REUTER

Tableaux and Transformations

June 26-30

Much like a painter who creates an image on a blank canvas, the photographer who works with a tableaux has complete control of and responsibility for the image. This provides a tremendous challenge and opportunity for the photographer, says Levinthal. This workshop will introduce the creative possibilities of fabricated and transformed imagery.

Work will originate in the studio, where participants will pursue individual projects guided one-on-one by Levinthal and Reuter. Each participant will be encouraged to produce new and unique work for his or her portfolio. The group will look at slides, participate in studio and technical demonstrations, and work in the studio and in the field. This is a class for experienced photographers looking for an opportunity to advance their scope of creative possibilities.

David Levinthal is an internationally known photographer whose work is in major collections around the world. A New York resident, he has received an NEA Visual Artists Fellowship and artist support grants from the Polaroid Corporation.

John Reuter teaches at the School of Visual Arts, International Center of Photography in New York. He has shown his work internationally since 1978 and now directs the Polaroid 20x24 Studio in New York.

Skill level: intermediate to advanced

Tuition: $475
Fee: none

Enrollment limited to 13
Workshop #54

JUDY DATER

Extending the Image: Portraiture and Beyond

July 3-7

Consider the portrait: "If a single picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the possibilities of two, three, or more photographs working together to convey more complex layers of meaning," proposes Dater. This workshop will explore the psychological, emotional, associative, and narrative potential of the portrait, as well as the use of multiple images to produce extended portraits.

The emphasis will be on working in black & white with natural lighting. You'll learn about scale, content, sequencing, and presentation. Participants will use themselves, each other, and individuals from the community as models. There will be assignments, critiques, illustrated lectures, and discussions.

Participants must know their camera equipment, have experience in black & white developing and printing, and bring examples of their work.

Judy Dater is one of today's leading, and most intensely personal, portrait photographers. Her recent work goes beyond the traditional definition of portrait photography, and includes the more contemporary approaches presented in this workshop. She is the recipient of grants from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation, and her work has been exhibited internationally for 25 years. Her newest book is *Judy Dater: Cycles*. An insightful and inspiring instructor, she has taught at Anderson Ranch for more than a decade.

Skill level: intermediate to advanced

Tuition: $425
Fee: $25

Enrollment limited to 12
Workshop #55

JAY MAISEL

Color

July 3-14

Explore the elements of a powerful color photograph—color, light, and gesture. An active schedule of assignments and reviews gives participants in this workshop a stimulating two-week challenge. Maisel will illustrate seminar-style talks with slides of his work, and will address both aesthetic and business concerns.

Questioning is encouraged; no subject is taboo. Maisel's energy and knowledge of commercial photography, and his appreciation of the range of approaches to the medium have made this one of the Ranch's most demanding and rewarding workshops.

The class begins with a critique of each participant's ten best slides. This introduces the crux of the workshop — to make you keenly aware of seeing, and specifically of seeing exactly what is in your own images. Assignments will be given and critiqued.

Maisel has taught at Anderson Ranch for several years. Two weeks represents a major investment for the working professional, but past participants found the experience extremely valuable. "I go much deeper in this than my usual one-week workshop," says Maisel. "I not only work on photographic skills, but on honing intuitive self-trust and the ability to think in terms of more than just one image."

Jay Maisel is one of the most honored figures in commercial photography. He began his career in 1954 after studying painting with Josef Albers at Yale. He has worked for major agencies and corporations worldwide. His resume includes a long list of exhibitions, awards, and publications.

***Note:** This course is for advanced photographers and professionals. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that will be reviewed prior to admission.*

Skill level: advanced

Tuition: $850
Fee: none

Enrollment limited to 20
Workshop #56

JOHN SZARKOWSKI

Craft and Content

July 10-14

In this workshop, Szarkowski proposes that the form and the meaning of a photograph are interdependent, and that images come from a creative combination of these elements.

The group will grapple with this key question through a week of practical experimentation based on daily assignments. You will also study the work of exemplary photographers of the past: Eugene Atget, Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and many others. Though this workshop is designed for those working in black and white, if they wish, participants may elect to work with E-6 color slide film. There are no format restrictions.

John Szarkowski is one of the most influential figures in the history of photography. Beginning his career as a photographer, he received two Guggenheim Fellowships (1956 and 1961). In 1962 Szarkowski was invited to head the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Until retiring from that position in 1991, he curated numerous landmark exhibitions and authored their associated publications, including *The Photographer's Eye, Looking at Photographs, Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* and his most recent book, *Photography Until Now.* Currently he is curating an exhibition for MOMA on Alfred Steiglitz and his work at Lake George. Recently he has returned to his work as a photographer and to teaching. He is showing work with Pace MacGill Gallery in New York.

***Note:** included is a joint session Friday evening with Richard Benson's workshop on the photographic print.*

Skill level: advanced

Tuition: $425
Fee: $25

Enrollment limited to 12
Workshop #57

RICHARD BENSON

The Photographic Print

July 14-16

Here is a weekend of lectures, discussions, and demonstrations with Richard Benson, recognized for his comprehensive knowledge of the printing process.

Benson utilizes an array of print technologies that he has refined, modified, or invented to expand the expressive potential of the medium. "This seminar is about photographic technologies," he notes. "I am not a 'techy,' but an artist who uses these technologies. I will discuss how to assemble pictures tonally — not with materials that have set tonal responses such as manufactured photographic papers, but through the desires and intentions of the photographer."

Lectures and demonstrations will cover ink systems for rendering the photograph (such as lithography, offset, gravure, mezzotints, etc.) and describe how they can produce superior images to traditional darkroom techniques. There will be plenty of interaction and a chance to ask all your questions.

Richard Benson, adjunct professor of photography at Yale, has printed portfolios for Walker Evans and Paul Strand, and for the estates of Alfred Steiglitz and Edward Weston. At his own studio in Rhode Island, he has overseen production of negatives for *The Work of Atget* series and other photographic projects. He was the first photographer to receive a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

***Note:** This workshop begins 7 p.m. Friday evening, July 14, with a joint session with John Szarkowski's workshop on Craft and Content. It concludes 4 p.m. Sunday, July 16.*

Skill level: open to all

Tuition: $215
Fee: none

Enrollment limited to 15
Workshop #58

WORKSHOPS, 1995
(ANDERSON RANCH ARTS CENTER)

Mark Klett, *Pillars, Bank Building, Rhyolite, NV*, black and white photograph, 1990

Maggie Steber, *Woman grieves at funeral for family member murdered during election violence*, black and white photograph

FIELD EXPEDITIONS

will travel through the Mojave Desert and undertake a horsepack three-day hike to Havasu Falls within the Grand Canyon of northern Arizona. The workshop will conclude near Las Vegas, Nevada. While the group is traveling, photographic sessions will be augmented by discussions about participants' experiences and observations.

***Note:** Participants will hike a few miles each day. On the hike to Havasu Falls, you will hike about 10 miles carrying camera gear, with pack animals carrying camping gear. There will be about 700 miles of personal car travel.*

Mark Klett is an influential landscape photographer who has led Anderson Ranch field workshops for the past eight years. He has explored this territory for the past 12 years. A retrospective of his work in the Southwest is published by the University of New Mexico Press in *Revealing Territory.* Many of the photographs in this book were produced during Anderson Ranch workshops. A new book titled *Desert Legends: Re-storying the Sonoran Borderlands* includes photographs by Klett and writings by ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan (from Henry Holt Company, December 1994).

Skill level:
intermediate and advanced

Tuition: $575
Fee: $325
Deposit: $250
(non-refundable)
Payment in full required by August 20, 1995

Enrollment limited to 12
Workshop #97

For specific information about schedules and services provided, request the 1995-96 Field Expeditions Program.

GEOFF WINNINGHAM

Introduction to Black & White Photography

June 5-16

When you're learning a foreign language, the best way is to travel and immerse yourself in it. And the same goes for learning a new skill like photography. Here is a chance to concentrate on the fundamentals of black & white photography (camera work, exposure theory, developing, and printing) and an opportunity to learn to use your equipment. You'll undertake a series of assignments designed to give a solid grounding in the medium.

The two weeks are busy, with field trips to photograph, slide lectures, demonstrations of lab techniques, printing, and mounting for a concluding exhibition. You will begin to develop your own sense of composition or picture organization, and explore the traditions of photograph — its history and its masterworks. Critique sessions, in which students share work-in-progress, will help you develop a critical sense of the medium. No previous knowledge of photography is required.

Winningham says, "My greatest pleasure in teaching is introductory photography. I love to guide students through the initial stages of discovery."

Geoff Winningham is professor of art at Rice University in Houston, where he has developed the introductory photography curriculum over 25 years. He has worked as a freelance photographer, filmmaker, and journalist, and has published several books and numerous photo essays and articles. His work can be found in many major collections around the country.

Skill level: open to all

Tuition: $495
Fee: $50

Enrollment limited to 15
Workshop #50

CHRIS ENOS

What's Next? Intermediate Black & White Photography

June 19-23

Most of us photograph because it makes us feel good to be creative. The subject may be beautiful or ugly or somewhere in between, depending on how we feel and what we're trying to communicate in our images.

But sometimes we get stuck and need feedback and suggestions on where to go next. This workshop will ask a lot of questions: Why photography? How to best communicate what you want to say? Who is your audience? How can you reach them? Do you need to loosen up to create more freely? Or do you need to work on technique?

Assignments, geared toward stretching your creative potential, will be based on each individual's needs. Participants should know how to use a camera, run black & white film, and print. You should bring a portfolio of your work and an open mind. "Plan to work hard and have fun," Enos adds.

Chris Enos, for the past 25 years, has been helping people reach a deeper understanding of what they want from the medium of photography and from themselves. Now teaching at the University of New Hampshire, she has wide experience that ranges from straight documentary to photojournalism to highly manipulated work.

Skill level: intermediate

Tuition: $395
Fee: $25

Enrollment limited to 12
Workshop #51

MAGGIE STEBER

Documentary Photography

June 19-23

"Photography has become easy and popular, and it is the philosophical and visual point of view that sets someone apart in their style," says Steber. This workshop tackles questions such as how to approach people as you work on a documentary project, how to prepare yourself for that approach, what you should learn or unlearn in various cultures, and the role of the photographer.

There will also be some practical insight into composition, color, working with editors, and business aspects of working as a freelance photographer.

The workshop should be most useful to people working on longterm documentary projects. Everyone will bring an idea to work on for the week (or find one here). "They must present the idea to me as though they were presenting it to a magazine editor," Steber says, "that is, present their points of view."

Assignments will be carried out in color slide film. Lectures and critiques are part of the daily class, and the group will view work designed to show a wide array of visual styles. Each participant will spend a private hour with Steber discussing problems and plans in photography.

Maggie Steber has worked as a documentary photographer since 1978, producing award-winning work that explores human dramas. She has produced major photographic projects on the war in Zimbabwe, Cuba and, since 1986, Haiti. In 1992, Aperture published her *Dancing on Fire: Photographs from Haiti.* The first woman picture editor hired by the Associated Press (1973), she is a contract photographer for *Newsweek*; her work is in many national magazines.

Skill level:
intermediate to advanced

Tuition: $350
Fee: none

Enrollment limited to 13
Workshop #52

MERIDEL RUBENSTEIN

Constructing Meaning

June 26-30

"I am interested in creating a visual language that mirrors human experience," explains Meridel Rubenstein. "It is rare that I can do this with a single image; life has too many layers. I like work that asks difficult questions. Also, I like to work with people who are committed to finding a subject that they can explore over time — as deeply as possible and with as many different materials as necessary in order to bring the subject alive. I want to help participants find the deepest and most difficult connections to their material."

This workshop begins with the premise that subject and technique can't be separated, that one informs the other. Participants will expand the content of their imagery with non-traditional techniques: extending imagery into sequences, structures, and installations. You will be challenged to conceptualize photographic "works" made out of more than one thought, material, or dimension. Each participant will then create a photographic "piece" that extends a single image or idea into multiple parts, structure, space, or time.

This workshop is for photographers who wish to explore new directions. The emphasis will be on black & white imagemaking, though you may work with color slide film if it is more appropriate for your work's direction.

Meridel Rubenstein is known for her complex narrative photoworks with steel-framed palladium prints. She has received fellowships from the NEA, the Guggenheim Foundation, and numerous awards. She teaches at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, and her work is shown regularly in museums and galleries around the world.

Skill level:
intermediate to advanced

Tuition: $395
Fee: $35

Enrollment limited to 12
Workshop #53

1/25/91

Szarkowski Of Modern Museum To Retire

By ANDY GRUNDBERG

John Szarkowski, director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department for 29 years, will retire on July 1, ending an invigorating and occasionally controversial career as one of the medium's most eloquent exponents.

A museum spokeswoman, Jeanne Collins, said on Tuesday that Mr. Szarkowski would continue to serve the museum as a consultant. A committee to appoint his successor has been formed, she added.

Mr. Szarkowski, who was 65 years old in December, is currently the department director with the longest tenure at the museum and one of the few remaining staff members who worked with Alfred H. Barr Jr., the museum's founding director. He succeeded Edward Steichen as director of photography in 1962 and almost immediately established himself as a major interpreter of the art of photography.

With exhibitions like "New Documents" (1967), "Diane Arbus" (1972) and "William Eggleston" (1976), he gave credibility to snapshot-style street photography. With shows like "The Photographer's Eye" (1966), "From the Picture Press" (1973), "Eugène Atget" (four exhibitions from 1981 to 1985) and last year's "Photography Until Now," he defined a historical tradition that reflected his tastes in contemporary imagery.

While some observers consider his views too narrow and have criticized him for underestimating the importance of the large-scale art photography of the 1980's, his ideas continue to have a broad influence on the medium and its practitioners.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Mr. Szarkowski said he planned to return to the camera and the darkroom after his retirement, resuming a career as a photographer that he abandoned when he assumed his museum post. He said he also planned to continue teaching and writing. "I feel quite invigorated," he said, "a bit like getting out of school in the spring."

Of his years at the museum, he said: "I've enjoyed, [illegible] every single [illegible] day, then every single eve[illegible] sin- [illegible] has been an adventure for a year." The last exhibition conceived during his tenure will be a show of his [illegible] Friedlander's nudes, opening in ... ly.

SAVE THE DATE!!
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LIST IN FORMATION

Los Angeles Times

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ARCHIVES PAMPHLET PAM

AN APPRECIATION

Picture of a fine curator

John Szarkowski's distinct personality and commitment to photography leave a lasting impression.

By Weston Naef
Special to The Times

When the news of John Szarkowski's death at 81 reached me on Sunday, my mind turned immediately to the first time we sat down together for a serious conversation, almost 40 years ago, and how his style of thinking and personal conduct still affect me.

I was in my 20s, still in diapers as a museum curator. Szarkowski had invited me for lunch at the Century Club of New York, a venerable private social establishment on Fifth Avenue within walking distance of his office at the Museum of Modern Art and a 15-minute bus ride from my desk at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I had lived in New York for only two or three years and was in awe that a private social club could hold on its walls paintings by some of the same artists on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum. I was nervous about what I would say to my legendary senior.

I found my way up the paneled stair to the Century Club dining room, where Szarkowski was seated with one of the famous Century gin martinis on the small round table. He welcomed me and invited me to join him in the same (a habit I regrettably picked up). He was wearing a uniform I saw him in many times — a navy blue blazer, paisley medium-width tie and gray trousers, and he was smoking a pipe. Seated around us were luminaries from the fields of publishing and advertising. I was impressed by Szarkowski's skill at telling a story peppered with juicy anecdotes, and how he could manage to achieve diplomacy and candor in the same breath.

At the time of our meeting the Diane Arbus exhibition was at MoMA, but not having anything original to say about Arbus, I told the story of the slender thread that had led me to Szarkowski, which also touched on how I had been bewitched by the art of photography as a doctoral student in the history of art at Brown University. I related how I was assigned to assist professor William Jordy in teaching his popular undergraduate course on the history of American architecture. One of my jobs was to prepare informal exhibitions drawn from the art department collection of photographs of works of architecture and secure relevant books from the library.

When it came time to prepare materials about the buildings designed by the Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, whose work I admired greatly, it turned out the strongest images of Sullivan's architecture had the name "John Szarkowski" attached to them. In 1966 his name meant nothing to me, but by 1971 I had matched Sullivan's photographer with the man at MoMA. Sitting in the Century Club, I directed the conversation to the subject of how a curator learns the skills required to do our job. His advice: "look, look, look and don't stop looking."

We communicated regularly over the decades, and Szarkowski's compelling genius forced me to put up with his often cantankerous attitude. There was much to admire, envy and regret. He could be courtly and generous one minute and the next be brutally opinionated about a trivial matter.

I respected the methods he used to teach a whole generation of people how to look at photographs and to comprehend their cultural, historical and artistic importance. I respected how he followed in the well-established tradition of the artist-savant/connoisseur, whose understanding of quality and importance in his subject stemmed from years of practicing it. I admired his commitment to mentoring newcomers about the art of photography. I admired the way he communicated personally with photographers, what he said to them about their work and how he took their advice about what was worth looking at. I will miss the chance to match with him on a point of disagreement and will especially miss his extraordinary sense of humor that inevitably brought a laugh at the most unexpected point in a story.

Weston Naef is curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Matt Black *For The Times*
CANDID: *Szarkowski in San Francisco in July 2001.*

Los Angeles Times

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MARTHA CASANAVE

LUMINARY: *John Szarkowski in 1978 smoking his signature pipe in New York at the Museum of Modern Art where he was director of photography. During his tenure, he was a valued mentor.*

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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JOHN SZARKOWSKI, 81 CURATOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographer's photographer established medium as an art form

Scholar and writer who transformed how the art form is understood also discovered Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand. His own photos revealed a purity that bordered on the poetic

BY PHILIP GEFTER NEW YORK

John Szarkowski almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the past half-century to that of a fine art, making his case in seminal writings and landmark exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In the early 1960s, when Mr. Szarkowski began his curatorial career, photography was commonly perceived as a utilitarian medium, a means to document the world. More than anyone, perhaps, it was Mr. Szarkowski who changed that perception. For him, the photograph was a form of expression as potent and meaningful as any work of art, and as director of photography at the museum for almost three decades, beginning in 1962, he was perhaps its most impassioned advocate. Two of his books, *The Photographer's Eye* (1964) and *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (1973), remain syllabus staples in art-history programs.

Mr. Szarkowski was first to confer importance on the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand in his influential exhibition "New Documents" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967. That show, considered radical at the time, identified a new direction in photography: pictures that seemed to have a casual, snapshot-like look and subject matter so apparently ordinary that it was hard to categorize.

In the wall text for the show, Mr. Szarkowski suggested that until then, the aim of documentary photography had been to show what was wrong with the world, as a way to generate interest in rectifying it. But this show signalled a change.

"In the past decade, a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends," he wrote. "Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it."

Critics were skeptical. "The observations of the photographers are noted as oddities in personality, situation, incident, movement, and the vagaries of chance," Jacob Deschin wrote in a New York Times review. Today, the work of Ms. Arbus, Mr. Friedlander and Mr. Winogrand is considered among the most decisive for the generations of photographers that followed them.

As a curator, Mr. Szarkowski loomed large, with a stentorian voice and a raconteurial style. But he was self-effacing about his role in mounting "New Documents."

"I think anybody who had been moderately competent, reasonably alert to the vitality of what was actually going on in the medium, would have done the same thing I did," he said several years ago. "I mean, the idea that Winogrand or Friedlander or Diane were somehow inventions of mine, I would regard, you know, as denigrating to them."

One might compare the art of photography to the act of pointing ... It must be true that some of us point to more interesting facts, events, circumstances, and configurations than others.
John Szarkowski

Another exhibition Mr. Szarkowski organized at MoMA, in 1976, introduced the work of William Eggleston, whose saturated colour photographs of cars, signs and individuals ran counter to the black-and-white orthodoxy of fine-art photography at the time. The show, "William Eggleston's Guide," was widely considered the worst of the year in photography.

"Mr. Szarkowski throws all caution to the winds and speaks of Mr. Eggleston's pictures as 'perfect,' " Hilton Kramer wrote in The Times. "Perfect? Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly."

Mr. Eggleston eventually came to be considered a pioneer of colour photography.

By championing the work of such artists early on, Mr. Szarkowski was helping to change the course of photography. Perhaps his most eloquent explanation of what photographers do appears in his introduction to the four-volume set *The Work of Atget*, published in conjunction with a series of exhibitions at MoMA from 1981 to 1985.

"One might compare the art of photography to the act of pointing," Mr. Szarkowski wrote. "It must be true that some of us point to more interesting facts, events, circumstances, and configurations than others."

A child of the Great Lakes, he grew up in a small-town Wisconsin, not far from Duluth, Minn., where his father

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was an assistant postmaster. Picking up a camera at 11, he made photography one of his principal pursuits throughout high school, along with trout fishing and the clarinet. He grew up to be a tall, good-looking, wirily built and naturally humorous man. He always retained his lilting Wisconsin accent and love of the land.

He attended the University of Wisconsin but interrupted his studies to serve in the U.S. Army during the Second World War. In 1947, he returned to earn a bachelor's degree with a major in art history. In college, he played second-chair clarinet for the Madison Symphony Orchestra, but maintained that he held the post only because of the wartime absence of better musicians.

From 1948 to 1951, he worked as a staff photographer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and then took up a position as instructor in photography, history of art and design at the Albright Art School in Buffalo. Along the way, he took an interest in architecture and set about photographing Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building (constructed 1894-95), which he described as "old and dirty and largely lost among its newer, larger neighbours. Like a diamond in a pile of broken glass, it stopped few passers-by.

In a 2005 interview with the Times, he said that when he was starting out, "most young artists — most photographers surely — if they were serious, still believed it was better to work in the context of some kind of potentially social good."

The consequence of this belief is evident in the earnestness of his early pictures, which come out of an American classical tradition. His early influences were Walker Evans and Edward Weston. "Walker for the intelligence and Weston for the pleasure," he said. In 1948, Evans and Weston were not yet as widely known as Mr. Szarkowski would eventually make them, through exhibitions at MoMA.

By the time Mr. Szarkowski arrived at the museum from Wisconsin in 1962, he was already an accomplished photographer. At 37, he had published two books of his own photographs, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956) and *The Face of Minnesota* (1958). Remarkably for a volume of photography, the Minnesota book landed on The New York Times bestseller list for several weeks.

When Mr. Szarkowski was offered the position of director of MoMA's photography department, he had just received a Guggenheim Fellowship to work on a new project. In a letter to Edward Steichen, curator of the department, he accepted the job, registering with his signature dry wit a reluctance to leave his lakeside home in Wisconsin: "Last week, I finally got back home for a few days, where I could think about the future and look at Lake Superior at the same time. No matter how hard I looked, the lake gave no indication of concern at the possibility of my departing from its shores, and I finally decided that if it can get along without me, I can get along without it."

A year after arriving in New York, he married Jill Anson, an architect who later became an early architectural-preservationist. Together, they had three children.

Among the many other exhibitions he organized as curator was "Mirrors and Windows," in 1978, in which he broke down photographic practice into two categories: documentary images and those that reflect a more interpretive experience of the world. And, in 1990, his final exhibition was an idiosyncratic overview called "Photography Until Now," in which he traced the technological evolution of the medium and its impact on the look of photographs.

In 2005, Mr. Szarkowski was given a retrospective exhibition of his own photographs, which opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, touring museums around the country and ending at MoMA in 2006.

His photographs of buildings, street scenes, backyards and nature possess the straightforward descriptive clarity he so often championed in the work of others, and, in their simplicity, a purity that borders on the poetic.

From his own early photographs, which might serve as a template for his later curatorial choices, it is easy to see why Mr. Szarkowski had such visual affinity for the work of Friedlander and Winogrand.

When asked how it felt to finally exhibit his own photographs, knowing they would be measured against his curatorial legacy, he became circumspect. As an artist, "you look at other people's work and figure out how it can be useful to you," he said.

"I'm content that a lot of these pictures are going to be interesting for other photographers of talent and ambition ... And that's all you want."

JOHN SZARKOWSKI

Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wis., on Dec. 18, 1925. He died in Pittsfield, Mass., on July 7, 2007. He was 81, and had recently suffered a stroke. He is survived by two daughters, Natasha Szarkowski Brown and Nina Anson Szarkowski Jones. He was predeceased by his wife Jill, who died Dec. 31, 2006, and by a son who died in 1972 at 2.

» New York Times News Service; Guardian News Service

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John Szarkowski at the Arcueil-Cachan aqueduct in France in 1981. He pursued an interest in the shape and form of structures.
DMITRI KESSEL/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

TIMESONLINE

From The Times
July 17, 2007

John Szarkowski

Influential photography museum curator who taught Americans to take a wider view of art

It was said of John Szarkowski that it was he who taught America to look at photographs. As director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1962 to 1991, he initiated and presided over a sea change in the public's appreciation of the medium. His support was also vital to establishing the reputations of photographers who have since exerted great influence over the discipline, including Diane Arbus and Jacques-Henri Lartigue.

Though commonly repeated, it would be an exaggeration to claim that by the start of the 1960s photography was still not regarded as an art. Szarkowski's two predecessors at Moma, Beaumont Newhall and Edward Steichen, had established its standing with pioneering and popular exhibitions such as The Family of Man (1955).

While there were those, such as Picasso, who clung to the belief that because anyone could take a picture none of the results could be art and thus worthy of regard, it would be truer to say that what continued to hinder photography's status was its lack of history, and so its absence from the prime engine of the art world, the market.

The first gallery in New York to spe-cialise in photographs, Lee Witkin, did not open until 1969, and photo-journalism rather than art was the only viable career for photographers. Critical writing about the subject was also rare. All this Szarkowski helped to change, largely on his own.

He was certainly fortunate that his tenure at Moma coincided with a democratisation of taste in art, not merely because this played to photography's strength, but also because it matched his own convictions. For Szarkowski, art did not have to be presented in a consciously artistic way (for instance in black and white), nor need it have a serious subject or high-minded purpose. The commonplace was just as valid.

For him, vernacular subjects were an American tradition, traceable at least as far back as Walker Evans's pictures of shopfronts in the 1930s, or even to the images of the Civil War photographer Matthew Brady (after whom he called his dog). Szarkowski's revolution, however, was to place docu-mentation at the forefront of photography by championing such contemporary practitioners of it as Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand.

In New Documents, the show he mounted in 1967 that made the trio's names, Szarkowski wrote that their aim was not so much to reform the world as merely to know it. "They like the real world, in spite of its

terrors, as a source of all wonder and fascination and value."

If all manner of subjects could qualify as art then, held Szarkowski, so could all manner of photographs: the casual snapshot could be just as interesting as the work of the professional. What was important was not how or by whom it was made, but what had been selected for recording. The only universal need be that the picture was good, and in the book for the exhibition The Photographer's Eye (1964), which showed snaps alongside work by well-known names, Szarkowski set out categories by which photographs could be compared and their merits tested.

Not everyone agreed with his theories, confidently stated though they were. For example, in 1978 he divided pictures into mirrors, which reflected the photographer's standpoint, and windows, which explored the world. Some, however, felt that many photographs could do both. Nonetheless, the stimulation of such debate, and the creation of a language in which to have it, was novel, and crucial to photography's elevation to the standing it has in the art world today.

Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born in 1925 at Ashland, on the shores of Lake Superior, Wisconsin, where his father was the assistant postmaster. All his life he retained the wry humour and folksy straightforward-ness of his small-town upbringing.

He began photographing as a boy. After wartime service in the Army, and studying art history at the University of Wisconsin, he decided to opt for a career as a photographer, although he was also an orchestra-standard clarinettist. He took a post as an instructor at the Walker Art School, Minneapo-lis, and in 1950 moved to Albright Art School, Buffalo. There he was influenced by the buildings of the architect Louis Sullivan, once grand statements but now neglected, and they formed the subject of his first book.

He followed it with a surprise best-seller, The Face of Minnesota (1958), the success of which brought him a second Guggenheim Fellowship and funding to photograph the wilderness on the Canadian border. In 1962, however, he was astonished to be approached by Steichen, himself a photographer of note, and asked to succeed him as curator at Moma.

Szarkowski showed early that he meant to make his mark. The third show that he presented was that of photographs by the then almost unknown Lartigue, consisting largely of images taken in France at the turn of the century. They are humorous and refreshingly naive, but what appalled the critics is that most were taken by him when he was a child. The spontaneity of Lartigue's vision has since become a benchmark for all photographers.

Later exhibitions included those of Dorothea Lange in 1966, and Brassaï and Cartier-Bresson in 1968. It was not so much that these were unknown artists, as that the passing of time now allowed them to be better set in context, and more fully appreciated. Szarkowski was creating a canon. In 1969 he bought for Moma much of the archive of the early French photographer Eugène Atget, creator of images that appear to show often little more than an empty park or street and are thus full of suggestive possibilities.

In 1976 Szarkowski again drew criticism by giving an exhibition to the unheralded William Eggleston. The critics jibbed at his images of the South, both because they were of banal subjects and because they were taken in colour; the show was the first at Moma not to be in black and white. Again, Szarkowski proved ahead of them in his judgment, and the exhibition of such "real life" pictures was one of the decisive turning points in the history of the medium.

In general, Szarkowski had little time for art journalists, wondering – not without reason – why many of them felt the need to pretend to know everything about everything, whatever the show. Others thought he had little sympathy for the more transgressive and experimental photographic artists, such as Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Szarkowski's riposte to this was to tell the story of Mallarmé when a fellow poet complained that he had plenty of good ideas but never seemed to write the verses to match them: "Poems aren't made from ideas: they are made from words."

On retiring from Moma, after 160 exhibitions, in 1991, Szarkowski took up photography again, and a retrospective of his own rather gentle images was shown in San Francisco in 2005 before touring widely.

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On retiring from Moma, after 160 exhibitions, in 1991, Szarkowski took up photography again, and a retrospective of his own rather gentle images was shown in San Francisco in 2005 before touring widely.

He also curated shows, including Ansel Adams at 100 (2001) which, like his important exhibition in 1970 of Bill Brandt's work, was shown in Britain at the Hayward Gallery, London. His books included Looking at Photography (1973) and Photography until Now (1990).

Szarkowski was fond of London, having married his wife Jill Anson there in 1963. She died last year, and he had been unconscious since suffering a stroke in February. Their son died in infancy, and he is survived by their two daughters.

John Szarkowski, museum curator, art historian and photographer, was born on December 18, 1925. He died on July 7, 2007, aged 81

alec soth - blog

photographica, miscellanea, etcetera

« Why all the TP?
Friday Poem »

Papageorge interview

I interviewed Tod Papageorge on July 11, 2007

Alec Soth: The day after I started writing about your work online, we all learned of the death of John Szarkowski. At first I felt awkward about continuing to dig into your work and life. But in a way Szarkowski's death makes it all the more meaningful. Your generation is so closely identified with Szarkowski. Can you talk about how he shaped you specifically?

Tod Papageorge: It's difficult to untangle the past, of course. The easiest thing would be to suggest that John showed me, and other photographers, a kind of way to go, but, in fact, we were already going there, pushing and jamming each other, riding out, most immediately, the possibilities that Robert Frank's great book had pointed to. What John really did was give the greatest imaginable sanction to all of this by throwing the weight of the most powerful art institution in the world—and his inimitable eloquence—behind us, and then expanding our sense of the possible through the remarkable shows that he put together.

Individually, his gift was to understand at some incalculable level what each of us was trying to do: just imagine, for example, this guy from the Minnesota woods tracking into Manhattan and being faced with the work, and person, of Garry Winogrand. And then through some emotional/intellectual identification—how? with what magic?—recognizing the radical brilliance and promise of Winogrand's pictures. It's still astonishing to me—and the list grows from there. In my particular case, the fact that he could look at a portfolio of my photographs and unfailingly pick out what I thought was, or might be, the most interesting or challenging, etc. of the group, thus allowing me to gather my underdeveloped thoughts to a greater focus, was a tremendous help, but this is what he did for everyone I knew who was bringing work into MoMA.

The fact, too, that he invited me to curate an exhibition, complete with catalog and essay, at MoMA was a tremendous affirmation for me. And I don't doubt that that essay was instrumental in establishing me at Yale.

I think that slightly younger photographers such as Stephen Shore or (who I imagine was your teacher) Joel Sternfeld, would have a different take regarding the arc of John's influence, in that they were just that much more distant from Frank, and therefore that much more open to the possibilities of the view camera, and then color, that John began to explore more regularly in his exhibitions of the early 70s.

AS: Recently Szarkowski began receiving attention for his photography. What is your opinion of this work?

TP: "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" is, I think, a great book, wielding text and pictures extraordinary well. Because it has cities, and shadows, all through it, it also strikes an entirely different set of chords than, say "The Face of Minnesota," or John's landscape work in general, does. In any case, because I'm

blackhearted to some degree, I respond to that darkness more than I do the beauty of John's landscapes, as gorgeous and full-hearted as they are.

AS: One of the things I recently learned about Szarkowski was his fascination with apples. Somehow this further enlarged my picture of the man. It sounds corny, but I'm wondering if you have any hobbies?

TP: Reading and listening to music: Mozart is my god, Haydn his tribune, Bach the god THEY worship, and Beethoven their sullen charge.

AS: Do you still read and write poetry?

TP: I'll occasionally look at poets I already know, and try to read "The Oddessy" every year. But I don't write any kind of poetry now.

AS: You've said that you see photography as 'at least as close to writing as the other visual arts.' Are you talking about a specific kind of writing (poetry, journalism, fiction)?

TP: Poetry, because it and photography can both be similarly condensed.

AS: Photography that aspires toward a literary experience seems to benefit from been seen in a literary context - namely, the book. I often say that there are 'wall photographers' and 'book photographers.' I've only seen one of your photographs in the flesh. It was lovely, but I'm still certain that you are a book photographer. Would you agree?

TP: Yes, I love the book—but you should have seen my recent exhibition in NY while you were there: the prints glowed (not through MY efforts, of course, but those of my printer, Sergio Purtell). After all, why bother to use a 6 x 9 cm. camera if you're not going to make beautiful prints w/it?

AS: Which photographic books stand out for you as an example of literary photography?

TP: There are only a few, but, of course, they are also the usual suspects: "American Photographs," "The Americans," and, combining pictures and text, John's "Idea of Louis Sullivan and Strand's "Time in New England," a great book.

As you've indicated here in this blog, I've tried to do something that I think is new in "Passing Through Eden," and that is to follow an established narrative through the long opening of the book, and then trace out the residual 'literary' energies of that narrative through the rest of it.

AS: Just out of curiosity, what do you think of Bruce Davidson's Central Park book?

TP: I think it reflects a commercial enterprise. (And I admire the recent Steidl book of his early work in the British Isles.)

AS: Unlike a novel, a series of photographs rarely tells a complete story. There isn't the engine of narrative suspense pushing you from beginning to middle to end. I'm wondering if this was a frustration as you began assembling your Central Park pictures.

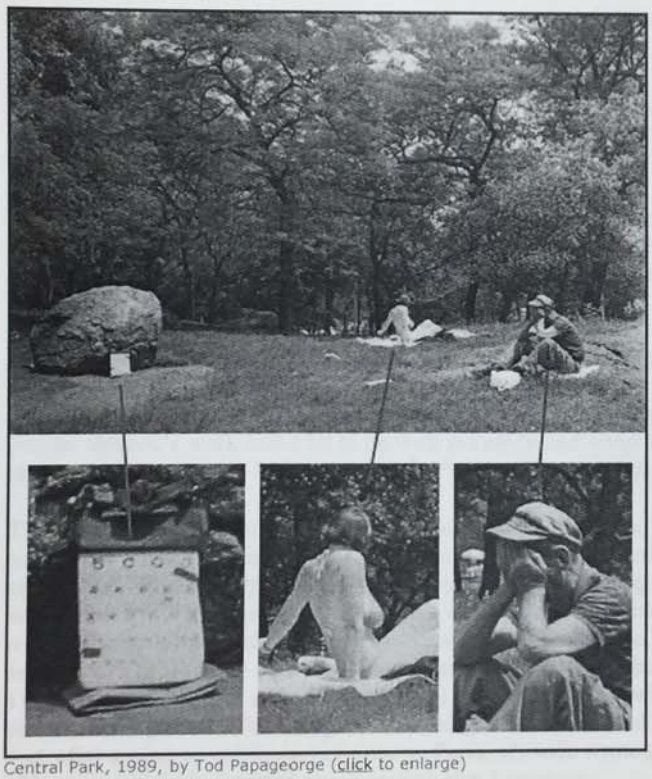
TP: No. As a reader of pictures, one wants the experience to be open-ended, I think, even in the face of some kind of narrative impulse.

AS: When was the editing complete? Did you make changes at the last minute?

TP: After months of ceaseless noodling with it on my part, Michael Mack, my editor on the book, and I got together (he was in from England) and finished it up. I'd pretty much completed the 'Biblical' section to our mutual satisfaction, and from there it was a case of clarifying a few knotty groups of pictures later in the book. It was a great, and invaluable, few hours.

AS: Now that it is in print, do you have any regrets?

TP: I WOULD change a few things in the sequence if I could, and also the small mistakes of copy editing in the text.



Central Park, 1989, by Tod Papageorge (click to enlarge)

AS: There is one specific image I wanted to ask you about. The man with the eye chart (p.20) is unbelievable. Do you remember taking the picture? Do you know what was going on?

TP: It is what you see. Who knows? It's New York, after all. I have no idea why he had the chart there.

But let me add something here apropos of some recent discussion in this blog:

I have no real argument against so-called set-up photography, at least as a process. The fact that I've had many successful students doing it in different ways I think makes my case. I also think that the reason they've felt free enough to work in this way at Yale is because I profoundly believe in—and teach—the

proposition that photography is inherently a fiction-making process. Don't speak to me of the document; I don't really believe in it, particularly now. A picture's not the world, but a new thing.

That said—too briefly—my argument against the set-up picture is that it leaves the matter of content to the IMAGINATION of the photographer, a faculty that, in my experience, is generally deficient compared to the mad swirling possibilities that our dear common world kicks up at us on a regular basis. That's all. Remember, T. S. Eliot made the clear, brutal distinction between the art that floods us with the "aura" of experience, and the art that 'presents' the experience itself. ANY artist, I feel, must contend seriously with the question of which side of that distinction he or she is going to bet on in their work. Obviously, I'm with Eliot—and Homer—in this, believing that the mind-constructed photograph almost necessarily leads to a form of illustration, the very epitome of aura-art.

All of which is to ask: what imagination, what choir of angels, what souped-up computer, could come up with that eye-chart and its desperate chartist?

AS: In 1974 you wrote, "Photography investigates no deeper relief than surfaces. It is superficial, in the first sense of the word; it studies the shape and skin of things, that which can be seen." Do you still believe this to be true?

TP: How else can the photograph begin, but there? It's this discursive descriptiveness that makes photography unique, and gives it whatever place it might have in art-heaven. We can follow all of this descriptiveness to emotionally moving places, of course, but we have to begin where and how the lens begins, literally tracing the lineaments of things.

AS: In the essay to *Passing Through Eden* you mention being particularly taken by a Brassai retrospective: "I felt the palpable presence of bodies and things." You talk about how this led you toward using a medium format camera. But I'm also wondering if it led you to a particular subject matter. Brassai's work had a lot to do with sexuality and temptation. During this time I understand you photographed at Studio 54. And certainly *Passing Through Eden* involves sexuality and temptation.

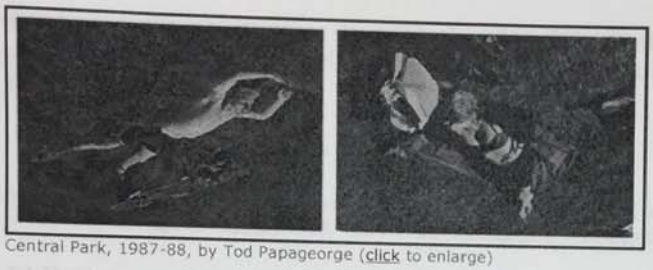
TP: In another essay somewhere, T. S. Eliot (and I haven't had occasion to mention him like this, or nearly this often, in decades) coined the phrase "the disassociation of sensibility" to describe what he understood to be the separation, or even abyss, between feeling and intellect in John Doone's poetry. What I felt I saw in Brassai's photographs was a remarkable integration of those two things; in other words, a superb intellect (read his "Conversations with Picasso," for example) unselfconsciously married to a profoundly sensuous apprehension of the world that expressed itself, in his photographs, as a perfect union of form and (dense literary) content. THAT's what captivated me about his work, not sex per se, or sex perverse, but his great-hearted/great-minded reading of the physical world. I might add that, after seeing an exhibition of mine in Paris, his wife wrote to me to say that Brassai saw in me a "fils espiritual," his spiritual son–a remark that I treasure.

Central Park, 1981, by Tod Papageorge

AS: You like to photograph beautiful women.

TP: Well, why not? Although I can't really say that I like to do it: I have to. If you accept the idea that photographers, or some of them, are actually artists, then you have to look at their work less as a document of something than as a personal vision of the world. And my imaginary world, informed by music and books, as well as photography, is one in which beauty and some notion of ravishment are central. What more eloquent 'objective correlative' (Eliot again) for me, a man, to express that than women?

I've always felt that an artist is some kind of holy fool who is willing to be misunderstood in service to the larger goal of fully investing him or herself in their work. In other words, the issue is much less woman, or attractive women, or (dread word) voyeurism, than shaping an artistic vision suggestive, in many different directions—not just women, of course—of how rich and extraordinary beautiful the world might be.



Central Park, 1987-88, by Tod Papageorge (click to enlarge)

AS: Talk about the upside down pictures. When did this idea come about? How was it received? Did you exhibit these pictures?

TP: Well, speaking of ravishment, there it is, encountered with a man, a woman, and two couples. And that's exactly what I was trying to get to, an almost-angelic transcendence coming on the heels of everything else before returning to a relatively wrung-out world.

Additionally, I wanted these pictures to 'teach' readers of the book—if they hadn't learned the lesson already—that, "yes, this whole book has been willed into shape, it's a made thing, a self-conscious artistic object where a picture might even be reversed to make a poetic point crucial to the meaning of it."

AS: How were these pictures received?

TP: Generally, people have been disconcerted by these pictures, but that's just a first reaction. I hope that, in time, they'll come to be seen as organic to the whole book.

AS: I believe that no matter who you are, most people are going to say one sentence about you. "He's the guy who photographs Weimereimers." I think your sentence used to be "He's the guy who hung around Winogrand." Now it is "He's the guy who runs the Yale program." Or maybe, "He's the prick who runs the Yale program." Do you agree? Do you care? What do you want to be your legacy?

TP: Well, of course I dislike the one-sentence sum-up, as anyone would, or should: it leaves too much out. Garry Winogrand and I were close friends, not a god and his hanger-on. Sure, I direct the Yale program, but what does that mean apart from whatever the person saying it thinks about the Yale program—which will be incomplete and uninformed if they haven't been through it? So, no, while I ultimately don't really care, I'd also point out the obvious—that "the sentence" is a pernicious and profitless way of looking at things.

As for a legacy, I hope it becomes clear with time that everything I did—in my work, my writing, and even my teaching—was done passionately, out of a love of photography, to the furthest degree I could accomplish it.

AS: I know that you have a new book coming out from Aperture. Are there another dozen books planned after that?

TP: I have a completed maquette of work I made in Paris over the years, mostly in the 90s; also a group of early pictures from New York. Then there are California pictures, and any number of other projects.

AS: Are you shooting new work?

TP: As for current work, given the exigencies of teaching, family, and life, I photograph for the most part during the summer, primarily at Lake George, Stieglitz's old stomping ground. Want to lend me your view camera?

- permanent link to this interview here

This entry was posted on Thursday, July 12th, 2007 at 2:10 am and is filed under interviews. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.

34 Responses to "Papageorge interview"

1. *pinocchio* Says:
   July 12th, 2007 at 3:11 am

   wow…its like zues came down from olympia to speak in thunderbolts…mr. soth seemed vehement while Tp stayed close to the battle.

   I think Tp is closer to the truth.

   Zues is so strong!

2. *pds* Says:
   July 12th, 2007 at 3:35 am

   i hope you continue to publish interviews you conduct ,or just interviews you think are interesting.

3. *narikin* Says:
   July 12th, 2007 at 7:44 am

   Great interview - wish it was longer. Mr. Papageorge clearly shows his depth of literate knowledge, decades of study, and profound love for the medium. His answers are in a class of their own.

   I'd love to know the root of your animosity to the Yale program - is this a Bard vs Yale thing, or what is going on?

   The Yale MFA is obviously led by someone of immense vision and insight, with an understanding that outstrips 99% of even the ultra aware readers in this forum. It's graduates are some of our leading photographic artists today, (even if we remove all the 'Brides of Crewdson' team) so - why the overt skepticism that borders on hostility, from an otherwise genial Mr Soth?

4. *zbs* Says:
   July 12th, 2007 at 8:22 am

   Terrific.

5. *Tom Leininger* Says:
   July 12th, 2007 at 8:38 am

   Great interview.

Le Monde.fr

Nécrologie

John Szarkowski, conservateur du Museum of Modern Art de New York

LE MONDE | 11.07.07 | 17h05 • Mis à jour le 11.07.07 | 17h05

Un monument de la photographie disparaît avec l'Américain John Szarkowski, mort samedi 7 juillet, à l'âge de 81 ans. Il était photographe, mais ce ne sont pas ses images qui resteront. Car cet homme à la fière allure et au jugement tranché a surtout été l'emblématique conservateur du Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) de New York pendant près de trente ans.

Le musée où il a officié, temple de l'art moderne, doit beaucoup à son influence. Mais la façon dont John Szarkowski a dirigé le département de la photographie n'a fait que hausser un peu plus le prestige du MoMA. Car c'est là, dès 1940, que s'est ouvert le premier département de photographie dans un musée.

Après des études à l'université du Wisconsin et plusieurs livres à succès, John Szarkowski succède, en 1962, au photographe Edward Steichen au MoMA. Par ses écrits fondateurs et ses expositions, il a imposé la photographie comme un art spécifique tout en l'inscrivant dans la modernité en analysant les formes d'une image. Mais il a aussi brouillé les frontières et les définitions établies, notamment en donnant ses lettres de noblesse aux photographes documentaires et en mettant au musée des auteurs anonymes.

Son exposition fondatrice, en 1967, s'intitule "New Documents". John Szarkowski y présente les travaux de trois jeunes photographes devenus des classiques : Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander et Garry Winogrand abordent la réalité de façon frontale, sans chercher à la transfigurer. Dépassant le débat entre art et document, Szarkowski fait entrer définitivement le style documentaire au musée.

"Dans la décennie qui précède, une nouvelle génération de photographes a utilisé l'approche documentaire à des fins plus personnelles, écrit-il. *Leur but n'est pas de réformer la réalité, mais de la connaître."* A l'époque, la réception est tiède. Et pourtant, leur travail se révélera décisif pour plusieurs

générations de photographes.

Le conservateur n'aura de cesse de réhabiliter le travail du photographe Eugène Atget, dans lequel il trouve les racines de ce mouvement. Il consacre au Français une somme en quatre volumes avec Maria Morris-Hambourg, qui sera publiée de 1981 à 1985.

En 1976, John Szarkowski se heurte encore à l'incompréhension lorsqu'il monte l'exposition "William Eggleston's guide" : pour la première fois, la couleur envahit les cimaises du musée, alors que cette dernière, jugée vulgaire, est jusqu'alors cantonnée à la publicité, à la mode et aux magazines.

Pour la critique, Eggleston ne montre que des photos banales et ennuyeuses de voitures, de pancartes et de parkings. Mais pour Szarkowski, l'artiste est le premier à voir à la fois *"le ciel et le bleu"*, le motif et la forme - il sera un des pionniers de la photographie couleur.

John Szarkowski a donc été un découvreur de premier ordre. Il a par exemple redécouvert Lartigue, bien avant la France. Il n'a ignoré, parmi les grands photographes de son temps, que le travail mouvementé de William Klein.

John Szarkowski a aussi contribué à écrire l'histoire de la photographie, et surtout de la photographie américaine, à travers des livres comme *The Photographer's eye* (1964). Dans *Mirror and Windows* (1960), ouvrage qui accompagne une rétrospective de la photographie américaine, le conservateur distinguait deux traditions : celle qui use de la photographie comme d'un miroir où se regarde l'artiste, celle qui en fait une fenêtre pour découvrir le monde.

Son exposition *Photography Until Now* (1990) est un manifeste qui vise à retracer l'histoire de la photographie. C'est aussi une analyse brillante, qui met en avant des répertoires formels, et condense les convictions de John Szarkowski.

Claire Guillot

Dates

18 décembre 1925
Naissance à Ashland (Wisconsin).

1962
Conservateur du MoMA à New York.

7 juillet 2007
Mort à Pittsfield (Massachusetts).

Article paru dans l'édition du 12.07.07

Talatinian, Leah

Subject: Video Monitoring Services of America, L.P. (VMS) (ny512343.1)

BROADCAST TRANSCRIPT

Video Monitoring Services of America, Inc.

(FAX)

Date July 11, 2007
Time 12:00 PM - 01:00 PM
Station NPR
Location Network
Program Day to Day

MADELEINE BRAND, co-host:

The art world is mourning the loss of photographer and curator John Szarkowski. He died Saturday at the age of 81 after suffering a stroke.

Szarkowski's art was a kind of rural realism, images of farms, countryside and working people reminiscent of Walker Evans. But perhaps his greatest impact on his medium was as a museum curator.

He was the director of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art from 1962 to 1991. And during his tenure a MOMA, Szarkowski is credited with firmly establishing photography as a form of contemporary art equal to that as painting.

And joining me now is the man who has John Szarkowski's former job at MOMA. He took over from Szarkowski.

Peter Galassi, welcome to the program.

Mr. PETER GALASSI (Director of Photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York): Thank you.

BRAND: Tell us more about John Szarkowski. I was struck by the first line in The New York Times obituary which said that he almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half-century to that of fine art.

Mr. GALASSI: I'm not sure that John himself would agree with that. Philip Gefter did a--is a great obituarian--quoted John as saying as refusing to claim credit for establishing Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand who were the three great photographers of the '60s, whose greatness he did recognize right away.

John would insist that the quality of photography was already there--of the best photography was already there and that sooner or later, people were going to recognize it.

BRAND: Right. And Winogrand, Friedlander and Arbus--they weren't well-known back when he curated this famous 1967 New Document show highlighting them.

Mr. GALASSI: No. They were young.

BRAND: Yeah. And they had a different style, a much different style than previous photographers.

Mr. GALASSI: They, themselves, had--they were three really first-class artists who had three very different photographic styles. You have to understand, this is in the context of a period when the sense of what photography could do had been dominated by the magazines. Which meant lowest common denominator of mass communication.

And these people rebelled against that.

BRAND: Szarkowski also was lambasted by a lot of critics for mounting a show in 1976 by William Eggleston.

Mr. GALASSI: Those were pictures made as 35MM slides of his own surrounding world in Tennessee.

BRAND: And also it was controversial because these were color photographs.

Mr. GALASSI: Mm-hmm.

BRAND: And that wasn't considered museum fare at the time?

Mr. GALASSI: Color had been very much associated with commercial photography and then with amateur photography. And so, this very fledgling, fragile identity of photography as an art was very much identified with black and white. And Eggleston was one of the leaders of the generation in the '70s that took the color medium as their dominant artistic form.

BRAND: What was it about John Szarkowski that enabled him to recognize these out-of-the-mainstream artists and promote them and succeed in promoting them and, in fact, changing the course of modern photography?

Mr. GALASSI: Well, he was a very intelligent man with a great eye, and he was himself an artist.

BRAND: How will you remember him?

Mr. GALASSI: He was also an extraordinary person with great charm and wit. He made life more interesting and more fun for everybody who was around him.

BRAND: Peter Galassi, thank you very much for joining us.

Mr. GALASSI: Thank you.

BRAND: Peter Galassi is director of photography at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. And he spoke with us about his predecessor, photographer and curator John Szarkowski.

# # #

Chicago Tribune

Date: Sunday, July 15, 2007
Location: CHICAGO, IL
Circulation (DMA): 940,620 (3)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (S)
Page: 6
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

DEATHS THIS WEEK

Lady Bird Johnson | Doug Marlette | Kathleen Woodiwiss | Charles Lane

Robert "Buck" Brown, 71, black artist and cartoonist who created Playboy magazine's infamously naughty "Granny" character; July 2, in Chicago, after suffering a stroke.

Rob Cole, 76, pioneering gay journalist whose efforts helped create a national readership for the Advocate, the long-running gay publication; June 30, in Los Angeles, after a long struggle with Parkinson's disease.

Pat Fordice, 72, former Mississippi first lady and champion of arts, literacy and beautification projects in that state; July 12, in Madison, Miss., of cancer.

Corbin Harney, 87, spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone who challenged the federal government – and once his own tribe — to oppose nuclear weapons on aboriginal land; July 10, outside Santa Rosa, Calif., of cancer complications.

John Hill, 83, the only person in Texas history to serve as secretary of state, attorney general and chief justice of the state Supreme Court; July 9, in Houston, of a heart condition.

Lady Bird Johnson, 94, former first lady who championed conservation and worked tenaciously for the political career of her husband, Lyndon B. Johnson; July 11, in Austin, Texas, of natural causes.

Charles Lane, 102, prolific character actor whose name was little known but whose crotchety persona and roles in hundreds of films and television shows, from "It's a Wonderful Life" to "Petticoat Junction," made him recognizable to generations of viewers; July 9, in Santa Monica, Calif.

Matilda Lisanti, 98, one-half of a mom-and-pop business that grew into the multimillion-dollar Italian food empire Lisanti Foods, a national supplier of restaurants and pizzerias; July 9, in Lincoln Park, N.J.

Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, 94, whose tenure as Colombia's president in the 1970s was marked by turbulence; July 11, in Bogota, Colombia.

Doug Marlette, 57, Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and creator of the comic strip "Kudzu" who recently turned his incisive wit toward a budding career as a novelist; July 10, in Marshall County, Miss., in a single-vehicle accident.

Kerwin Mathews, 81, swashbuckling movie actor of the 1950s who is best known for his starring role in "The 7th Voyage of Sinbad"; July 5, in San Francisco.

Dorothy Coleman Roudebush, 95, educator and women's rights activist who worked to repeal Missouri's law prohibiting married women from teaching in public schools; July 4, in Chesterfield, Mo., of congestive heart failure and dementia.

Michael Stroden, 69, oversaw the employee assistance program for the Chicago Transit Authority for several years; July 5, in Chicago, of complications from lymphoma.

* **John Szarkowski,** 81, curator who almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half-century to that of a fine art, making his case in seminal writings and landmark exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; July 7, in Pittsfield, Mass., of complications of a stroke.

Charles Tisdale, 80, fought for civil rights as owner and publisher of Mississippi's oldest black-owned newspaper; July 7, in Jackson, Miss.

Marguerite Vogt, 94, scientist who was a pioneer in the fields of polio and cancer research; July 7, in San Diego.

Kathleen Woodiwiss, 68, pioneer of the modern historical romance novel marked by strong heroines; July 6, in Princeton, Minn., of cancer.

The Charlotte Observer

Date: Saturday, July 14, 2007
Location: CHARLOTTE, NC
Circulation (DMA): 215,379 (26)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 6B
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

John Szarkowski, museum curator

PITTSFIELD, Mass. — John Szarkowski, who created a fresh vision of the art of photography during his long tenure as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, died Saturday at a rehabilitation center. He had complications from a stroke in March. He was 81.

Szarkowski (pronounced shar-KOFF-ski) came to the trendsetting New York museum in 1962 as a relatively obscure photographer from the Midwest. By the time he retired in 1991, after presenting 160 exhibitions and writing several books, he was, in the words of a 2005 Vanity Fair article, "the single most important curator that photography has ever had."

He introduced the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand and William Eggleston, secured the lasting reputations of Walker Evans, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams and Andre Kertesz, and rediscovered the forgotten French master Eugene Atget. Moreover, Szarkowski was the most influential photography critic of his time, writing several books now considered classics, including "The Photographer's Eye" (1966) and "Looking at Photographs" (1973). — WASHINGTON POST

The Record
Bergen County New Jersey

Date: Saturday, July 14, 2007
Location: HACKENSACK, NJ
Circulation (DMA): 170,406 (1)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: A9
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

John Szarkowski, 81, curator

By MATT SCHUDEL
WASHINGTON POST NEWS SERVICE

John Szarkowski, who created a fresh vision of the art of photography during his long tenure as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, died last Saturday at a rehabilitation center in Pittsfield, Mass. He had complications from a stroke in March. He was 81.

Mr. Szarkowski (pronounced shar-KOFF-ski) came to the trendsetting New York museum in 1962 as a relatively obscure photographer from the Midwest. By the time he retired in 1991, after presenting 160 exhibitions and writing several books, he was, in the words of a 2005 Vanity Fair article, "the single most important curator that photography has ever had."

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Championed art of photography

SZARKOWSKI

Moreover, Mr. Szarkowski was the most influential photography critic of his time, writing several books now considered classics, including "The Photographer's Eye" (1966) and "Looking at Photographs" (1973).

At MoMA, Mr. Szarkowski succeeded Edward Steichen, one of the leading figures in photography since the turn of the 20th century. Mr. Szarkowski brought a sharp curatorial eye to the museum, with an emphasis on the casual, spontaneous nature of photography.

"The truth is that anybody can make a photograph," he said in a 2000 interview. "The trouble is not that photographs are hard to make. The trouble is that they are hard to make intelligent and inter-

Mr. Szarkowski was always keenly aware of how changes in technology – in cameras, film, developing processes and magazines – affected photography. But he had little patience for computer imagery and manipulation, which came into vogue during his final years at MoMA and put him at odds with some younger artists. Such images might have been art, he suggested, but they weren't necessarily photography.

After he retired in 1991, Mr. Szarkowski taught at several colleges across the country. He also returned to his cameras, often photographing his farm in East Chatham, N.Y.

His wife of 44 years, architect Jill Anson, died in December 2006. A son, Alexander Szarkowski, died in 1972.

Survivors include two daughters, Natasha Brown and Nina Jones, both of New York; and two grandchildren.

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Date: Saturday, July 14, 2007
Location: PHOENIX, AZ
Circulation (DMA): 452,016 (13)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (SAT)
Page: 26
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

Influential curator J. Szarkowski dies

By Matt Schude
WASHINGTON POST

John Szarkowski, who created a fresh vision of the art of photography during his long tenure as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, died Saturday at a rehabilitation center in Pittsfield, Mass. He had complications from a stroke in March. He was 81.

Szarkowski (pronounced shar-KOFF-ski) came to the trend-setting New York museum in 1962 as a relatively obscure photographer from the Midwest. By the time he retired in 1991, after presenting 160 exhibitions and writing several books, he was, in the words of a 2005 *Vanity Fair* article, "the single most important curator that photography has ever had."

Szarkowski was the most influential photography critic of his time, writing several books now considered classics, including "The Photographer's Eye" (1966) and "Looking at Photographs" (1973).

Szarkowski brought a sharp curatorial eye to MoMA, with an emphasis on the casual, spontaneous nature of photography.

"The truth is that anybody can make a photograph," he said in a 2000 interview. "The trouble is not that photographs are hard to make. The trouble is that they are hard to make intelligent and interesting."

Szarkowski drew his authority as a curator from his experience behind the lens, from his deep knowledge of the history and mechanics of photography, and from his graceful, nuanced writing style. Szarkowski was always keenly aware of how changes in technology — in cameras, film, developing processes and magazines — affected photography. But he had little patience for computer imagery and manipulation, which came into vogue during his final years at MoMA and put him at odds with some younger artists. Such images might have been art, he suggested, but they weren't necessarily photography.

"Our faith in the truth of a photograph rests on our belief that the lens is impartial and will draw the subject as it is," he wrote in *The Photographer's Eye*.

"This faith may be naive and illusory ... but it persists. The photographer's vision convinces us to the degree that the photographer hides his hand."

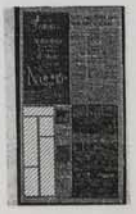
Szarkowski was born Dec. 18, 1925, in Ashland, Wis., and served in the Army in World War II. He liked to describe himself as a "dumb hick," but he played clarinet in an orchestra as a young man and graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in art history. He began taking pictures when he was 11 and named his dog after Civil War-era photographer Mathew Brady.

From 1949 to 1953, he was a photographer for a Minneapolis museum and a teacher in Buffalo. In 1956, he published a book on the buildings of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, and two years later his book of Minnesota country scenes became a surprise best seller. When he was named curator of MoMA, he put his camera aside for nearly 30 years.

After he retired in 1991, Szarkowski taught at several colleges across the country. He also returned to his cameras, often photographing his farm in East Chatham, N.Y. His reflective landscape images are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA. A retrospective of his work opened in San Francisco in 2005 and continues to tour the country.

His wife of 44 years, architect Jill Anson, died in December 2006. A son, Alexander Szarkowski, died in 1972.

Survivors include two daughters, Natasha Brown and Nina Jones, both of New York; and two grandchildren.



Obituaries

Leigh Thompson

Leigh Thompson helped build and repair Sonoma County's roads for more than 30 years. But if asked, the Occidental man probably would have said his greatest "project" was his marriage and the two children it produced.

Thompson died of congestive heart failure July 5 at a Santa Rosa hospital. He was 91.

A quiet man, Thompson lived for more than 65 years in Occidental, where he drove the shiniest car in town and volunteered for the local fire department.

After a hard day at work, he enjoyed a brandy and water at the Union Hotel. He also enjoyed deer hunting, fishing and cooking chicken for the fire department's annual barbecue.

"He didn't say much, but he was always listening," said his daughter, Jill Gregori of Sebastopol. "He loved his family and his work. He never complained."

Thompson was born in Grand Forks, N.D., on Dec. 12, 1915, and was raised there by his father after his mother's death when he was 2.

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The family moved to San Diego, and from there to Occidental, where Thompson met Pauline Gonnella. The two were married June 15, 1941, shortly before Thompson joined the Navy and was sent off to war.

Thompson nearly lost his life aboard a refueling ship when he was clinging to a pole and was knocked unconscious during a storm. Otherwise, "it was the big deep," Gregori said.

After the war, Thompson joined the Sonoma County Department of Public Works and operated heavy equipment in the construction and maintenance of roads.

After retiring in 1978, he traveled with his wife to Canada and to Alaska and several other states.

Thompson cared for his wife for 10 years after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and brought cookies to her daily after she went to live in a care facility shortly before her death in 2004.

"He kind of went with her," Gregori said.

Thompson is survived by Gregori and son Kenneth Thompson of Occidental. A funeral service is set for 11 a.m. Thursday at Pleasant Hills Memorial Park in Sebastopol.

-- Derek J. Moore

John Szarkowski, photographer

John Szarkowski, the longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York who was a dominant figure in the establishment of photography as an art form, has died. He was 81.

Szarkowski, who began his career as a photographer and returned to his camera in recent years, died Saturday in Pittsfield, Mass., said Peter MacGill of the Pace/MacGill gallery in New York. Szarkowski died of complications from a stroke he suffered in March.

"His influence on post-war American photography has been so profound as to be incalculable," critic Andy Grundberg wrote in the New York Times in 1990, the year before Szarkowski retired.

Other curators acknowledge talented photographers by giving them a museum exhibit. "Szarkowski made discoveries," said Grundberg, administrative chairman of photography at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. "When he showed the photographs of Diane Arbus, that was a discovery."

Szarkowski included Arbus in "New Documents," a 1967 exhibit that also featured Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander. All three photographers shared a common influence, documentary photography.

None of their names was well known at the time but all of them came to be considered among the leading talents of their generation.

"John was very interested in trying to understand photography as a whole, the concrete and the ephemeral aspects," said Peter Galassi, chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. "And he had a first-class mind."

Szarkowski became an emeritus curator for the Museum of Modern Art in 1991, worked on several exhibits for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Perhaps more important to Szarkowski, he returned to taking photographs. His pictures of the apple farm he owned in rural New York state were exhibited in a retrospective of his work, "John Szarkowski: Photographs," that opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2005 and traveled to other cities.

-- Los Angeles Times

THE PLAIN DEALER

Date: Friday, July 13, 2007
Location: CLEVELAND, OH
Circulation (DMA): 344,704 (17)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 5
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

John Szarkowski, 81, famed photographer

PITTSFIELD, MASS. —John Szarkowski, the longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York who was a dominant figure in the establishment of photography as an art form, died Saturday. He was 81.

Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wis. His father, a postal worker, gave him a camera when he was about 11. Szarkowski printed his own pictures in the darkroom he built in the cellar of the house.

His last major show at the Museum of Modern Art was "Photography Until Now" in 1990. It covered the history of photography from the daguerreotypes of the mid-1800s to current works.

The Washington Post

Date: Friday, July 13, 2007
Location: WASHINGTON, DC
Circulation (DMA): 699,130 (8)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: B7
Keyword: The Museum of Modern Art

John Szarkowski, 81; Cast New Light on Photography

By Matt Schudel
Washington Post Staff Writer

John Szarkowski, 81, who created a fresh vision of the art of photography during his long tenure as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, died July 7 at a rehabilitation center in Pittsfield, Mass. He had complications from a stroke in March.

Mr. Szarkowski (pronounced shar-KOFF-ski) came to the trendsetting New York museum in 1962 as a relatively obscure photographer from the Midwest. By the time he retired in 1991, after presenting 160 exhibitions and writing several books, he was, in the words of a 2005 Vanity Fair article, "the single most important curator that photography has ever had."

He introduced the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand and William Eggleston, secured the lasting reputations of Walker Evans, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams and Andre Kertesz and rediscovered the forgotten French master Eugene Atget. Moreover, Mr. Szarkowski was the most influential photography critic of his time, writing several books now considered classics, including "The Photographer's Eye" (1966) and "Looking at Photographs" (1973).

At MoMA, Mr. Szarkowski succeeded Edward Steichen, who had been one of the leading figures in photography since the turn of the 20th century. Mr. Szarkowski brought a sharp curatorial eye to the museum, with an emphasis on the casual, spontaneous nature of photography.

"The truth is that anybody can make a photograph," he said in a 2000 interview. "The trouble is not that photographs are hard to make. The trouble is that they are hard to make intelligent and interesting."

Mr. Szarkowski drew his authority as a curator from his experience behind the lens, from his deep knowledge of the history and mechanics of photography, and from his graceful, nuanced writing style. Perhaps the best summary of his views came in an essay he wrote about Helen Levitt, who chronicled the poor neighborhoods of New York. In her photographs, he wrote, "routine acts of life are revealed as being full of grace, drama, humor, pathos and surprise, and also filled with the qualities of art."

Mr. Szarkowski was always keenly aware of how changes in technology — in cameras, film, developing processes and magazines — affected photography. But he had little patience for computer imagery and manipulation, which came into vogue during his final years at MoMA and put him at odds with some younger artists. Such images might have been art, he suggested, but they weren't necessarily photography.

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"This faith may be naive and illusory . . . but it persists. The photographer's vision convinces us to the degree that the photographer hides his hand."

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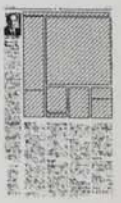
From 1949 to 1953, he was a photographer for a Minneapolis museum and a teacher in Buffalo. In 1956, he published a book on the buildings of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, and two years later his book of Minnesota country scenes became a surprise bestseller. When he was named curator of MoMA, he put his camera aside for nearly 30 years.

In 1967, Mr. Szarkowski presented the influential exhibition "New Documents," which gave Arbus, Friedlander and Winogrand their first major exposure. After a penniless Arbus committed suicide in 1971, Mr. Szarkowski arranged a publishing deal that allowed her children to profit from royalties on her work.

He mounted six exhibitions of the then-unknown Atget, the chronicler of Paris; he devoted solo shows to Brassai, Kertesz, Bill Brandt, Elliott Erwitt, Dorothea Lange, August Sander and Berenice Abbott; and he helped elevate Evans, Weston and Adams to the status of major U.S. artists of the 20th century.

As a U.S. News & World article noted in 1990, "Szarkowski's has been the dominant vision in American photography, championing new talent, resurrecting artists who had fallen into obscurity, amassing for the museum one of the world's great collections and persuading artists and mass audiences that photography is to be taken seriously."



The Washington Post

Date: Friday, July 13, 2007
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After he retired in 1991, Mr. Szarkowski taught at several colleges across the country. He also returned to his cameras, often photographing his farm in East Chatham, N.Y. His reflective landscape images are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA. A retrospective of his work opened in San Francisco in 2005 and continues to tour the country.

His wife of 44 years, architect Jill Anson, died in December 2006. A son, Alexander Szarkowski, died in 1972.

Survivors include two daughters, Natasha S. Brown and Nina S. Jones, both of New York; and two grandchildren.

Mr. Szarkowski, shown in 1973, was the most influential photography critic of his time.

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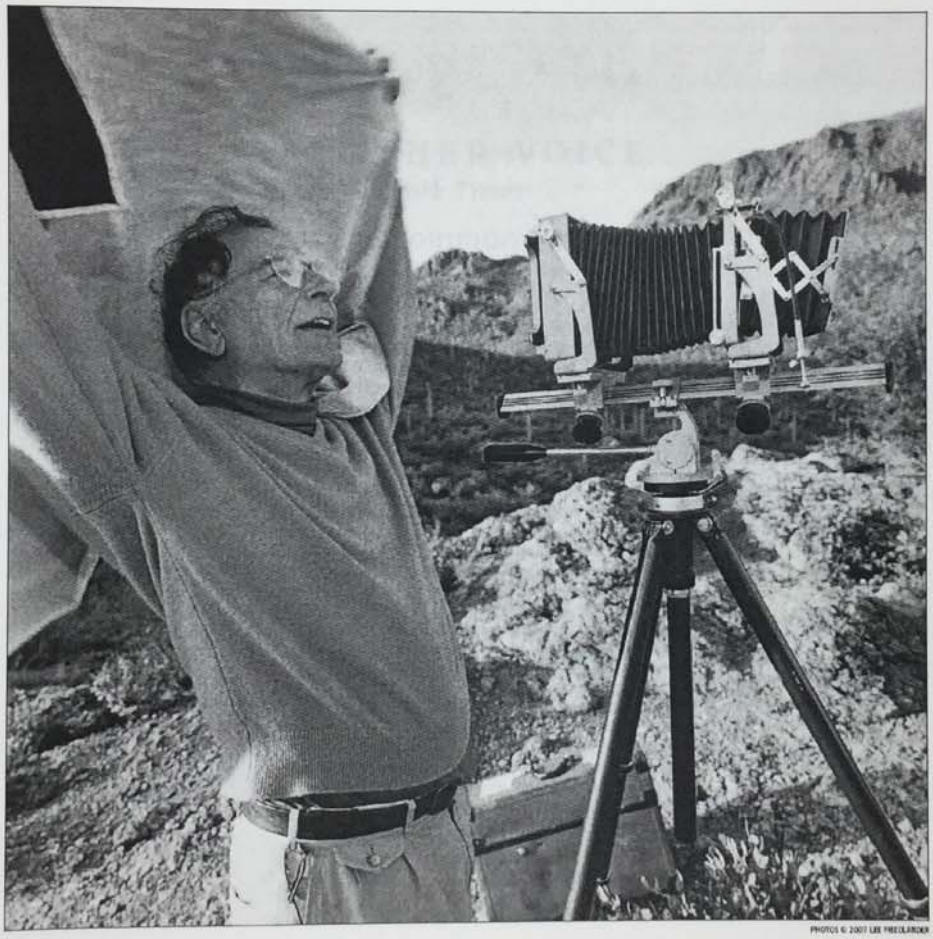

PHOTOS © 2007 LEE FRIEDLANDER

Author, curator and photographer John Szarkowski, shown in Tucson in 1992, launched and resurrected many artists' careers.

Houston Chronicle

Date: Wednesday, July 11, 2007
Location: HOUSTON, TX
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ANOTHER VOICE

The New York Times

Art and common sense

It's worth remembering how much Wisconsin there was in the voice of John Szarkowski, who died on July 7 at age 81. His reputation would almost make you doubt what you were hearing. He was, after all, the curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art for 29 years, beginning in 1962. The exhibitions he mounted and the books he wrote quite simply gave documentary photography a place in the world of art. And yet there was that broad Wisconsin in his speech, reminding his auditors that if they could hear the curatorial pulpit in his words they could also hear the sound of a very different place.

I'm struck now by the essential modesty of that other place — the common-sensical view Szarkowski took of his curatorial work and his work as a photographer. What comes to mind, especially, is one of his photographs *Mr. Anderson and Son, Near Sandstone, Minnesota, 1957.* It is the picture of a farmer and his son standing against the backdrop of an empty wooden corncrib. The picture embodies the aesthetic Szarkowski found in the photographers he championed — the aesthetic of merely noticing.

Szarkowski never pretended that photography changed because of his attention. He pretended that he was just paying attention to what should have been obvious to almost anyone.

— VERLYN KLINKENBORG

obit

John Szarkowski

The great hidden influence on photography.

By Jim Lewis

Posted Tuesday, July 10, 2007, at 3:32 PM ET

It's an open question, and an interesting one, who makes famous artists famous. Who decided that Michelangelo was more important than his contemporary Bandinelli; and when, and according to what criteria? And who decides among our contemporaries? How has the sculptor Richard Serra, to take one example, achieved the kind of renown he now enjoys, and why has the painter Robert Motherwell, to take another, experienced such a precipitous drop in reputation? Among the interests converging on contemporary art, there are collectors, critics, editors, and historians, curators, dealers, auction houses, and consultants, not to mention the general museum-going public. My own experience is that none of them matter very much. Artists' reputations are primarily determined by other artists: Painters decide who belongs in painting's canon, just as poets write poetry's history, and an homage to one director by another is worth a dozen Academy Awards. The rest of us are just tagging along.

There are exceptions, of course—tastemakers of uncommon power. Still, even they tend to be amateurs or semi-pros at the art they're evaluating: Giorgio Vasari, for example, or John Ruskin. And then there was John Szarkowski, who died last Saturday at the age of 81 and who probably had as much sway over the history of photography as anyone ever did. In recent years, anyway, Susan Sontag was photography's most famous critic, and Sam Wagstaff was the greatest collector, but Szarkowski was the curator of record, and from his post at the Museum of Modern Art, where he reigned over the Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991, he oversaw—and to some extent engineered—a revolution in the medium. It is no accident that he was himself a photographer of some talent—though not, crucially, too much. He won two Guggenheims for his own photography before he began his curatorial career, but his work was never quite as accomplished as the work he loved. In fact, he was just what one wants from a man in his position: a practitioner just good enough to know who was great.

The list of artists Szarkowski found, encouraged, and promoted to prominence reads like a roll call of postwar photography: Diane Arbus, Gary Winogrand, William Eggleston. The list of artists he championed and sustained helped define the medium's history: Walker Evans, for example, and Ansel Adams, and Eugene Atget. For a few decades there, Szarkowski had the field almost entirely to himself: There were few collectors of photographs and few galleries that showed them. Most museums were still figuring out what to do with them, and in any case MoMA was, in those days if perhaps no longer, more powerful, by an order of magnitude, than any other force in contemporary art. Szarkowski had been chosen by Edward Steichen to take over the department, and, partly through the strength of his convictions (he was, if the interviews he left behind are a fair indication, at once prickly and profoundly confident) and partly through the power of the institution behind him, he wielded a degree of influence that, I would venture to surmise, no individual has ever had over any single art. The result could easily have been much, much worse than it was.

Indeed, Szarkowski had extraordinarily good taste (by which I suppose I mean that his taste was quite similar to my own). To be sure, his interests were fantastically broad; in his 29 years at the museum, he oversaw some 160 shows. But he's best known for a few principles and a few styles. To begin with, his aesthetic was—Atget notwithstanding—deeply bound up in America, as an idea, a landscape, a streetscape, and an image. He was one of the first to find and show what became the defining style of the '60s: an approach to picture-taking that was more spontaneous, more contingent, lighter of touch than the somewhat ponderous style that preceded it—the kind of photos first produced by Robert Frank

(though, in an inexplicable lapse, Szarkowski never mounted a show of Frank's work). He was keenly aware of the degree to which photographic styles change as the result of mechanical or technical innovations: halftone printing, high-speed film, less cumbersome cameras. Then again, he was, by reputation anyway, something of a formalist, and though the term is certainly vague, it suggests an attention to the ways the elements in photographs are structured, rather than their subject matter—though I suspect he would argue, and quite rightly, that there's really no way to separate the two. Perhaps he put the matter best in an interview: "Photographs," he said, "explain very little, even of small private issues. Photographs show what things look like, at a given moment from a certain vantage point, and sometimes this knowledge proposes the most interesting and cogent questions."

Above all, he had, like one of his heroes, Walker Evans, that special American combination of democratic sensibility and a kind of natural aristocratic bearing. He believed that the best pictures were unpretentious and open-minded, but he also believed that some people were simply, even objectively, much better at taking them than everyone else (though this included some amateurs, and even some anonymous photographers), and he was perfectly dismissive of anyone who didn't meet his standards.

He had his blind spots, or perhaps he simply had his moment. In the years just before Szarkowski retired, the best of photography underwent yet another deep change, becoming integrated into the broader concerns of art in general, influenced by conceptualism, performance, painting. It is only slightly overstating matters to say that there's really no such thing as photography anymore. It simply doesn't exist, except as one of many ways to make something that counts as art; and as a result, there's hardly any need for departments of contemporary photography in museums at all. Szarkowski had little sympathy for the artists who broke down those barriers. The pioneers of the '60s, like Dan Graham, John Baldessari, and Ed Ruscha, and their successors—Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, and so on—did not believe in photography as a distinct medium requiring special skills, and, with the possible exception of Cindy Sherman, Szarkowski did not believe in them.

If nothing else, it was an unfortunate lapse, but a great curator, like a great critic, has a limited shelf life, and that's as it should be. Any aesthetic passion worth holding will eventually be superseded by history, though its effects may be felt forever. Szarkowski, as I say, had his moment—a very long moment, in fact, and more importantly, it was definitely his. He managed it far better than most curators could have, and photography owes him an inestimable debt.

Jim Lewis is the author of three novels, most recently, The King Is Dead.

Article URL: http://www.slate.com/id/2170148/

Influential Photo Curator John Szarkowski Dies

July 09, 2007

By Daryl Lang

Curator, writer and photographer **John Szarkowski**, who oversaw the Museum of Modern Art's photography department from 1962 to 1991, died Saturday at age 81.

Szarkowski was an influential advocate for photography, raising the medium's status within MoMA and in the art world in general. Many photographers credit him with advancing their careers, and his books have been studied by countless photography students.

Szarkowski died in Pittsfield, Mass., after suffering a stroke, according to **Peter MacGill** of the Pace/MacGill Gallery, a longtime friend of Szarkowski's. The MoMA confirms his death.

MORE PICTURES

© Lee Friedlander / Courtesy Museum of Modern Art

John Szarkowski, Tuscon, Arizona, 1992. Click for a slide show of Szarkowski's photographs.

In his 29 years as director of photography at the MoMA, he greatly expanded the museum's photo collections and oversaw more than 100 exhibitions, organizing major retrospectives of such photographers as **Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans** and **Henri Cartier-Bresson**.

Among his most influential shows was 1967's "New Documents," featuring the work of **Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander** and **Garry Winogrand**. Introductory exhibitions under Szarkowski helped draw attention to and cement the influence of **Robert Adams, William Eggleston, Frank Gohlke, Josef Koudelka, Nicholas Nixon, Jacques Henri Lartigue** and **Henry Wessel**.

"He was a leader. He would look at a person and encourage them to find their way, find their voice," MacGill says. "He taught us how to look at photography, how to think about photography, how to understand the world we live in by looking at photography."

Szarkowski oversaw a great expansion of the MoMA's photography collection, including a major 1968 purchase of photographs by **Eugène Atget**, and the rejuvenation of the photo department's publishing efforts.

"He left a legacy of quality," says Szarkowski's successor at MoMA, chief curator of photography **Peter Galassi**. "It set the standard for everything that's happened since then."

Szarkowski was also celebrated for his writing about photography. "He was by far the best writer on the subject, which is generally written by idiots," says photographer **Elliott Erwitt**, a self-described "drinking companion" of Szarkowski.

Szarkowski's books, which included *The Photographer's Eye* (1966) and *Looking at Photographs*

(1973), are considered classics for their plainly written insights into photography as art.

In *The Photographer's Eye*, Szarkowski wrote about the reality depicted in photographs: "Our faith in the truth of a photograph rests on our belief that the lens is impartial, and will draw the subject as it is, neither nobler nor meaner. This faith may be naive and illusory (for though the lens draws the subject, the photographer defines it) but it persists. The photographer's vision convinces us to the degree that the photographer hides his hand."

Born in Ashland, Wisc., in 1925, Szarkowski began taking photographs at age 11 with a Kodak Baby Brownie, a gift from his parents. In 1948 he graduated from the University of Wisconsin, receiving a B.S. in the History of Art.

He worked as the museum photographer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from 1948 to 1951. He continued to pursue photography and was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in 1954 and 1961.

In 1962 Szarkowski was hired as director of photography at the MoMA, succeeding legendary curator **Edward Steichen**. Szarkowski retired in 1991. After putting his own art on the shelf for so many years, he returned to photography in his retirement.

In 2005, a retrospective of Szarkowski's photographs was organized by curator **Sandra S. Phillips** of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition toured several museums, including the MoMA in New York, and was well received. "Mr. Szarkowski's photographs reiterate his voice and taste in beautiful, knowable images," wrote *New York Times* critic **Roberta Smith** in 2006.

Friends also remember Szarkowski's intelligence, humor and sense of irony, in addition to his commitment to art.

Referring to his work at MoMA, Galassi says, "There was never any question to his dedication to a very high, impersonal, artistic idea."

Links referenced within this article

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JULY 9, 2007 1:59

John Szarkowski: 1925-2007

Posted by Richard Lacayo | Comments (0) | Permalink | Trackbacks (0) | Email This

Today comes news of the death of John Szarkowski, MoMA's great former chief curator of photography, a man whose influence over the field was immense. In his 29 years at MoMA, Szarkowski put his stamp decisively on the art and taste of his time simply by pointing to a few crucial photographers and saying attention must be paid. It was Szarkowski who understood — early and profoundly — how important it was that Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander were moving the practice of documentary "towards more personal ends". He also understood that their pictures were as intricate and illuminating as any art of their time.

Szarkowski wasn't indifferent to conventional documentary photography, the kind that focuses on social reportage. But he recognized that the camera could dig out more enigmatic readings of the world. It's impossible to understate how important it was that he came to MoMA in time to promote and elucidate the work of Arbus, Friedlander and Winogrand in the New Documents Show in 1967. (Nine years later he did the same for William Eggleston.) Edward Ste Szarkowski's predecessor as MoMA's chief photo curator, had set the agenda for an generation with *The Family of Man* show, the highwater mark of what you might c humanism". Under Steichen's aesthetic photographs were expected to have clear m well constructed compositions. He could never have promoted the weirdly ambiguc of Arbus or the headlong and fractured pictures of Winogrand and Frieldlander. Ar wrote that "a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less yo Steichen would have put a gun to his head before he would say a thing like that. Sza understood it implicitly.

He had not only an eye but a voice like few others. Szarkowski's books, especially *T*

Photographer's Eye and *Looking at Photographs*, were as important his shows. He wonderfully serene writing style. Though he was in effect selling a new aesthetic the nothing of the salesman or the carnival barker in his tone. And he even put his weight behind the most understated photographer of all, Eugene Atget. Szarkowski's conviction that nothing less than four major Atget shows (and books) over a period of years would do to make plain the depth of Atget's accomplishment made people re-examine Atget with an entirely new level of seriousness.

I owe alot of my own predispositions as a critic to Szarkowski. There were limits to his taste, some of which I suppose I've inherited, too. For one thing, he never cared much for the staged photographs that arrived in the '80s under the banner of Postmodernism. But as Philip Johnson was for a while in architecture, he was that thing that every curator aims to be, a force to be reckoned with in the art of his time.

The Boston Globe

Date: Tuesday, July 10, 2007
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John Szarkowski; curator elevated art of photography

By Mary Rourke
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES — John Szarkowski, the longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and a dominant figure in the establishment of photography as an art form, has died. He was 81.

Mr. Szarkowski, who began his career as a photographer and returned to his camera in recent years, died Saturday in Pittsfield, Mass., said Peter MacGill of the Pace/MacGill gallery in New York. Mr. Szarkowski died of complications from a stroke he suffered in March.

"His influence on post-war American photography has been so profound as to be incalculable," critic Andy Grundberg wrote in the New York Times in 1990, the year before Mr. Szarkowski retired.

Other curators acknowledge talented photographers by giving them a museum exhibit. "Szarkowski made discoveries," said Grundberg, administrative chairman of photography at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. "When he showed the photographs of Diane Arbus, that was a discovery."

Mr. Szarkowski included Arbus in "New Documents," an exhibit of 1967 that also featured Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander. All three photographers shared a common influence, documentary photography.

None of their names was well known at the time but all of them came to be considered among the leading talents of their generation.

"John was very interested in trying to understand photography as a whole, the concrete and the ephemeral aspects," said Peter Galassi, chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. "And he had a first-class mind."

In the 1970s, Mr. Szarkowski's controversial show of William Eggleston's work was the museum's first major exhibit of color photographs.

Eggleston's images of landscapes, suburbs, and the people who inhabit them were "perfectly boring," Hilton Kramer wrote in a 1976 review for The New York Times. He added that Eggleston's style suggested snapshots, a growing trend in contemporary photography that "has all but derailed Mr. Szarkowski's taste."

Others saw the Eggleston exhibit as a breakthrough.

"That show announced color photography," Grundberg said.

It challenged the established idea that only black and white photography conveyed the technical skill and aesthetic depth required of an art photograph. It was one of many times when Mr. Szarkowski "stuck his neck out," Grundberg said.

Along with younger talents, Mr. Szarkowski championed the work of older masters including Ansel Adams and Walker Evans with major exhibitions of their work.

He also introduced audiences to European photographers, including Eugene Atget.

"John set the rules of connoisseurship," said Stephen White, a photography dealer and former gallery owner in Los Angeles. "He made the Museum of Modern Art a paradigm for the field. He set the standard on how to display photography, how to look at it, how to frame it."

Some people said that Mr. Szarkowski was a Formalist who liked photographs filled with straightforward information but wasn't much interested in manipulated images, radical abstractions, or avant-garde concepts.

As young photographers such as Cindy Sherman made references in their work to painting, sculpture, movie stills and posters, "John had no affection for it," Grundberg said. "He totally missed that boat."

He also resisted the homosexually explicit photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe despite what some critics saw as their historical significance.

Mr. Szarkowski's polished writing style and his ease as a lecturer attracted an ever widening audience of people curious to learn what makes certain photographs and photographers important.

Two major books he wrote during his early years at the Museum of Modern Art established his reputation.

"The Photographer's Eye," of 1966 included work by known talents, professional photographers, and amateurs.

A second book, "Looking at Photographs" of 1973, highlighted 100 photographs from the Museum of Modern Art collection through history.

Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wis., on Dec. 18, 1925. His father, a postal worker, gave him a camera when he was about 11.

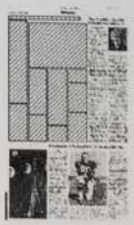
Mr. Szarkowski printed his own pictures in the darkroom he built in the cellar of the house.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1948, he worked as a staff photographer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

His book of 1958, "The Face of Minneapolis," shows views of community life, landscapes, and local people.

He left the Walker in 1950 and took a job as a photography instructor at the Albright Art School in Buffalo, N.Y., where he stayed until 1953.

He had become interested in the architecture of Louis Sullivan and was inspired by the Guaranty building, in Buffalo. His interest, aided by a Guggenheim grant, led



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to the book, "The Idea of Louis Sullivan," with photographs and text that was published 1956.

Through the early 1950s, Mr. Szarkowski had several exhibitions of his photographs, many of them images of nature or of buildings.

He was working on another book when he was invited to meet with administrators at the Museum of Modern Art. He thought the invitation might lead to an exhibit of his photographs, he later told Vanity Fair.

Instead, he moved into his office at the museum during the summer of 1962.

His predecessor was Edward Steichen, whose gauzy photographs Mr. Szarkowski had admired in his student years.

In 1963, Mr. Szarkowski met and married architect Jill Anson. The couple had three children, two girls and a boy.

Their son died in childhood. Anson died in December.

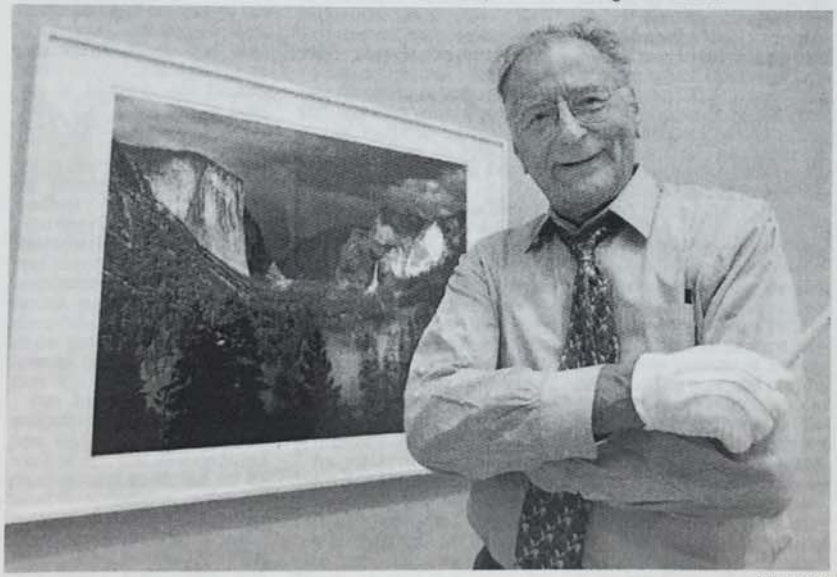
Mr. Szarkowski's last major show at the Museum of Modern Art was "Photography Until Now" in 1990. It covered the history of photography from the daguerreotypes of the mid-1800s to current works including "Tom Moran," a 1988 portrait of a man dying of AIDS by Nicholas Nixon.

Mr. Szarkowski became an emeritus curator for the Museum of Modern Art in 1991, worked on several exhibits for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and kept up his writing and his lecture schedule.

Perhaps more important to Mr. Szarkowski, he returned to taking photographs.

His pictures of the apple farm he owned in rural New York state were exhibited in a retrospective of his work, "John Szarkowski: Photographs," that opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2005 and traveled to other cities.

Mr. Szarkowski leaves his two daughters, Natasha Szarkowski Brown and Nina Anson Szarkowski Jones, both of New York; and two grandchildren.



FILE 2001/AP

John Szarkowski, with an image by Ansel Adams. Mr. Szarkowski chose 114 of Adams's photographs for an exhibit commemorating the centennial of Adams's birth.

Chicago Tribune

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John Szarkowski | 1925 ~ 2007

Elevated the status of photography as art

Longtime curator at New York's Museum of Modern Art changed perception of the medium as perhaps its most impassioned advocate

New York Times News Service

John Szarkowski, a curator who almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half-century to that of a fine art, making his case in seminal writings and landmark exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, died Saturday in Pittsfield, Mass. He was 81.

The cause of death was complications of a stroke, said Peter MacGill of Pace/MacGill Gallery.

In the early 1960s, when Mr. Szarkowski began his curatorial career, photography was commonly perceived as a utilitarian medium, a means to document the world. Perhaps more than anyone, Mr. Szarkowski changed that perception.

For him, the photograph was a form of expression as potent and meaningful as any work of art, and as director of photography at MoMA for almost three decades, beginning in 1962, he was perhaps its most impassioned advocate.

Two of his books, "The Photographer's Eye" (1964) and "Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art" (1973), remain syllabus staples in art history programs.

Mr. Szarkowski was first to confer importance on the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand in his influential exhibition "New Documents" at the museum in 1967. That show, considered radical at the time, identified a new direction in photography: pictures that seemed to have a casual, snapshot-like look and subject matter so apparently ordinary that it was hard to categorize.

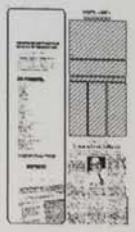
Mr. Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wis., where his father became assistant postmaster. Picking up a camera at age 11, he made photography one of his main pursuits.

He attended the University of Wisconsin, interrupted his studies to serve in the Army during World War II, then returned to earn a bachelor's degree in 1947, with a major in art history.

As an artist in the early 1950s, Mr. Szarkowski began to photograph the buildings of renowned Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. In an interview in 2005 in The New York Times, he said that when he was starting out, "most young artists, most photographers surely, if they were serious, still believed it was better to work in the context of some kind of potentially social good."

By the time Mr. Szarkowski arrived at MoMA in 1962 at age 37, he was an accomplished photographer. He had published two books of his own photographs, "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956) and "The Face of Minnesota" (1958). The Minnesota book landed on The New York Times best-seller list for several weeks, perhaps because Dave Garroway had discussed it on NBC's "Today" program.

When Mr. Szarkowski was offered the position of director of the photography department at MoMa, he had just received a Guggenheim Fellowship. In a letter to Edward Steichen, then curator of the department, he accepted the job, registering a reluctance to leave his lakeside home in Wisconsin: "Last week I finally got back home for a few days, where I could think about the future and look at Lake Superior at the same time. No matter how hard I looked, the Lake gave no indication of concern at the possibility of my departing from its shores, and I finally decided that if it can get along without me, I can get along without it."



Chicago Tribune

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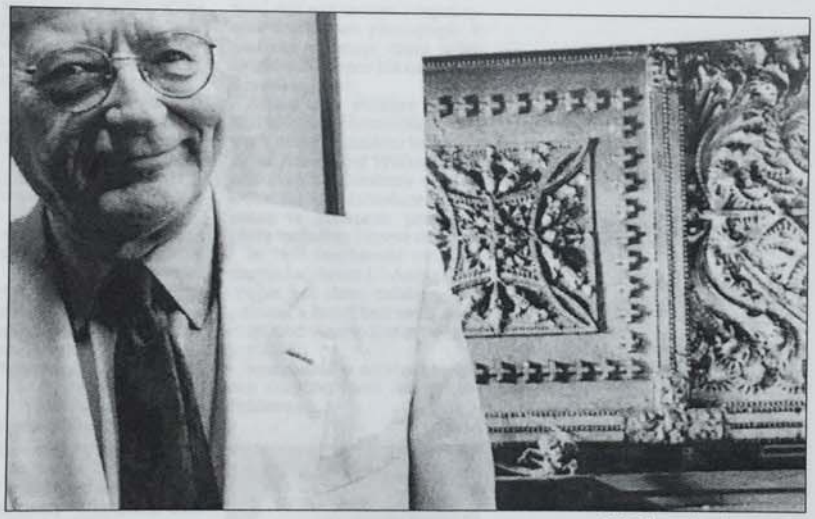

2001 Tribune photo by Alex Garcia

Wisconsin-born John Szarkowski also was an accomplished photographer in his own right.

Newsday

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NEW YORK

John Szarkowski, MoMa photo director

LOS ANGELES TIMES

John Szarkowski, the longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York who was a dominant figure in the establishment of photography as an art form, has died. He was 81.

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"John was very interested in trying to understand photography as a whole, the concrete and the ephemeral aspects," said Peter Galassi, chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. "And he had a first-class mind." In the '70s, Szarkowski's controversial show of William Eggleston's work was the museum's first major exhibit of color photographs.

Eggleston's images of landscapes, suburbs and the people who inhabit them were "perfectly boring," Hilton Kramer wrote in a 1976 review for the New York Times. He added that Eggleston's style suggested snapshots, a growing trend in contemporary photography that, "has all but derailed Mr. Szarkowski's taste." Others saw the Eggleston exhibit as a breakthrough.

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Along with younger talents, Szarkowski championed the work of older masters including Ansel Adams and Walker Evans with major exhibitions of their work. He also introduced audiences to European photographers including Eugene Atget.

In 1963 Szarkowski met and married architect Jill Anson. The couple had three children, two girls and a boy. Their son died in childhood. Anson died in December 2006.

Szarkowski is survived by his two daughters and two grandchildren.

PHOTO BY MATT BLACK FOR THE LA TIMES

John Szarkowski at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2001.

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John Szarkowski, 81; N.Y. museum curator helped establish photography as art form

By Mary Rourke
Times Staff Writer

John Szarkowski, the longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and a dominant figure in the establishment of photography as an art form, has died. He was 81.

Szarkowski, who began his career as a photographer and returned to his camera in recent years, died Saturday in Pittsfield, Mass., said Peter MacGill of the Pace/MacGill Gallery in New York. Szarkowski died of complications from a stroke he suffered in March.

"His influence on postwar American photography has been so profound as to be incalculable," critic Andy Grundberg wrote in the New York Times in 1990, the year before Szarkowski retired.

Other curators acknowledge talented photographers by giving them a museum exhibit. "Szarkowski made *discoveries*," Grundberg, administrative chairman of photography at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. "When he showed the photographs of Diane Arbus, that was a discovery."

Szarkowski included Arbus in the 1967 exhibit "New Documents," which also featured Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander. All three photographers shared a common influence — documentary photography.

None of their names were well known at the time, but all of them came to be considered among the leading talents of their generation.

"John was very interested in trying to understand photography as a whole, the concrete and the ephemeral aspects," Peter Galassi, chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, said Monday. "And he had a first-class mind."

In the 1970s, Szarkowski's controversial show of William Eggleston's work was the museum's first major exhibit of color photographs.

Eggleston's images of landscapes, suburbs and the people who inhabited them were "perfectly boring," Hilton Kramer wrote in a 1976 review for the New York Times. He said Eggleston's style suggested snapshots, a growing trend in contemporary photography that "has all but derailed Mr. Szarkowski's taste."

Others saw the Eggleston exhibit as a breakthrough.

"That show *announced* color photography," Grundberg said. It challenged the established idea that only black-and-white photography conveyed the technical skill and aesthetic depth required of an art photograph. It was one of many times when Szarkowski "stuck his neck out," Grundberg said.

In addition to younger talents, Szarkowski championed the work of older masters, including Ansel Adams and Walker Evans, with major exhibitions of their work. He also introduced audiences to European photographers, including Eugene Atget.

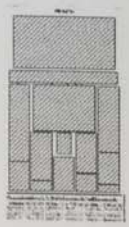
"John set the rules of connoisseurship," said Stephen White, a photography dealer and former gallery owner in Los Angeles. "He made the Museum of Modern Art a paradigm for the field. He set the standard on how to display photography, how to look at it, how to frame it."

Szarkowski did so in part because other major museums from California to Washington, D.C., were slower to commit to photography as a major part of their collections. His position at the country's premiere museum for modern art works gave him a strong platform, and few curators were as passionate about the subject.

"John wasn't the only voice, but not everyone made their opinions as strongly heard as he did," said Arthur Ollman, former director of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego.

Szarkowski's polished writing style and his ease as a lecturer attracted an ever-widening audience of people curious to learn what makes certain photographs and photographers important.

"Szarkowski was probably the most eloquent voice for photography during the greatest rise in interest in the subject," Ollman said. "He had supreme confidence in his own taste, and he was so persuasive that he



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could convince people about his opinions."

Some argued that Szarkowski was a formalist who liked photographs filled with straightforward information but wasn't much interested in manipulated images, radical abstractions or avant-garde concepts.

As young photographers including Cindy Sherman made references in their work to painting, sculpture, movie stills and posters, "John had no affection for it," Grundberg said. "He totally missed that boat."

He also resisted the homosexually explicit photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, despite what some critics saw as their historical significance.

Two major books that Szarkowski wrote during his early years at the Museum of Modern Art established his reputation.

"The Photographer's Eye" in 1966 included work by known talents, professional photographers and amateurs. In the text, Szarkowski explained the significance of photography as a relatively new art form.

"The invention of photography provided a radically new picture-making process . . . based not on synthesis but on selection," Szarkowski wrote. "The difference was a basic one. Paintings were made . . . but photographs, as the man on the street says it, were taken."

In the same book, Szarkowski identified the components he used to evaluate a photograph — "The Thing Itself," "The Detail," "The Frame," "Time" and the "Vantage Point" — and devoted sections to each one.

A second book by Szarkowski, "Looking at Photographs" in 1973, highlighted 100 photographs from the Museum of Modern Art collection through history.

The book "gave people a vocabulary and a set of tools for evaluating photographs on their own," Ollman said.

It was "like a bible for collectors in the 1970s," White said, adding that Szarkowski "widened a collector's vision of what a photograph could be."

Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born in Ashland, Wis., on Dec. 18, 1925. His father, a postal worker, gave him a camera when he was about 11. Szarkowski printed his own pictures in a darkroom he built in the cellar of the house.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1948, he went to work as a staff photographer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. His 1958 book, "The Face of Minneapolis" shows views of community life, landscapes and local people.

He left the Walker in 1950 and took a job as a photography instructor at the Albright Art School in Buffalo, N.Y., where he stayed until 1953.

Szarkowski had become interested in the architecture of Louis Sullivan and was inspired by the Guaranty building in Buffalo. His interest, aided by a Guggenheim grant, led to the 1956 book "The Idea of Louis Sullivan," with photographs and text.

Through the early 1950s, Szarkowski had several exhibitions of his photographs, many of them images of nature or of buildings.

He was working on another book, supporting himself largely on a second Guggenheim grant, when he was invited to meet with administrators at the Museum of Modern Art. He thought the invitation might lead to an exhibit of his photographs, he later told Vanity Fair.

Instead, he moved into his office at the museum in the summer of 1962. His predecessor was Edward Steichen, whose gauzy photographs Szarkowski had admired in his student years.

In 1963, Szarkowski met and married architect Jill Anson. The couple had three children, two girls and a boy. Their son died in childhood. Anson died in December. Szarkowski's survivors include his daughters and two grandchildren.

His last major show at the Museum of Modern Art was "Photography Until Now" in 1990. It covered the history of photography from the daguerreotypes of the mid-1800s to current works including "Tom Moran," a 1988 portrait of a man dying of AIDS by Nicholas Nixon.

The result was "clearly the product of a single intelligence, one that has spent decades mulling over ways to best organize and explicate the photographic tradition," Grundberg wrote in a review for the New York Times.

Other critics cited what they saw as Szarkowski's limited interest in "now." His selection of recent works "felt like Szarkowski had only grudgingly included certain photographers and artists," critic Ingrid Sischy wrote in a January 2005 article in Vanity Fair. "Szarkowski's antipathy got in the

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way of his eye."

He became an emeritus curator for the museum in 1991, worked on several exhibits for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and kept up his writing and lecture schedule.

Perhaps more important to Szarkowski, he returned to taking photographs. His pictures of the apple farm he owned in rural New York were exhibited in a retrospective of his work, "John Szarkowski: Photographs," which opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2005 and traveled to other cities.

Images of Szarkowski's barn, orchard and apple trees were simple yet sophisticated, "testimonies to the pleasure of looking at the world, and the pleasure of looking at photographs," Sischy wrote.

Szarkowski had planted most of the trees years earlier and finally had the time to photograph them. "As you get older, you're not so much interested in seeing things for the first time but in seeing how they changed," he said.

mary.rourke@latimes.com

'His influence on postwar American photography has been so profound as to be incalculable.'

Andy Grundberg, Corcoran College of Art and Design

Szarkowski had several photo exhibitions in the 1950s. At left is his 1957 photo of a farm near Caledonia, Minn. At right is Chicago's 1890s-era Garrick Theatre, photographed in 1954.

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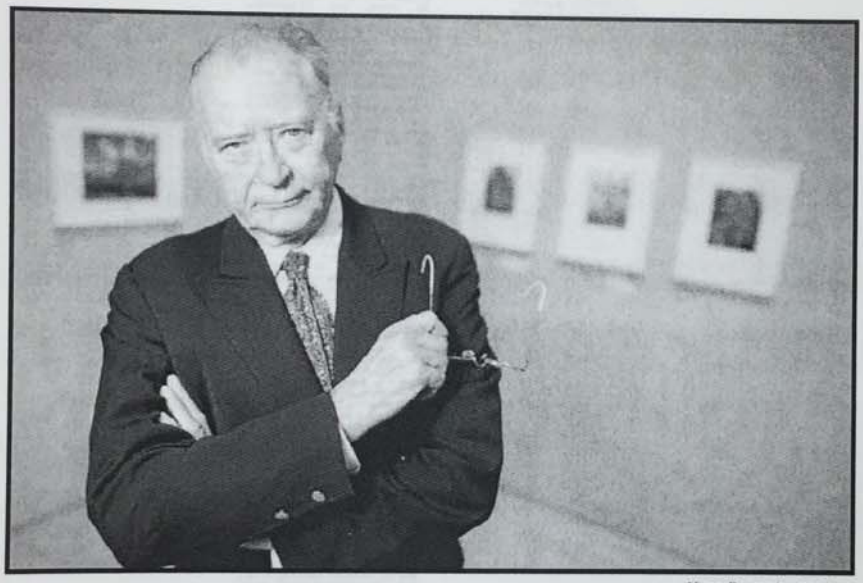

MATT BLACK *For The Times*

JOHN SZARKOWSKI

The longtime director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York not only championed the work of old masters but also of younger talents, and introduced audiences to European photographers.

The New York Times

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SZARKOWSKI—John. The Trustees and staff of The Museum of Modern Art mourn the loss of our longtime friend and colleague John Szarkowski, Director Emeritus of the Museum's Department of Photography. In his 29 year career as director of the department, John's exhibitions and publications earned him broad recognition as the era's most eloquent and influential critical voice in photography. His alert eye for contemporary work led him to champion Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, whom he brought together in the exhibition "New Documents" (1967). Other landmark exhibitions and books introduced the work of Robert Adams, William Eggleston, Frank Gohlke, Josef Koudelka, Nicholas Nixon, Jacques Henri Lartigue and Henry Wessel, among others. John also devoted major retrospectives to Ansel Adams, Brassaï, Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, Andre Kertsz, Dorothea Lange, and Irving Penn. In 1968 he secured the acquisition of the great collection of photographs by Eugene Atget that Berenice Abbott had purchased upon Atget's death and which would serve as the basis of four landmark exhibitions and books by John and Maria Morris Hambourg (1981-1985). Among the other highlights of John's distinguished publishing career are "The Photographer's Eye" (1966), "Looking at Photographs" (1973), "Photography Until Now" (1990). Before John came to MoMA at the age of 35, he had won two Guggenheim Fellowships for his own photographs and had published two books of them. After 1991, while continuing to write, teach, and organize exhibitions, he returned to making photographs. Both chapters of his artistic career were surveyed in the exhibition "John Szarkowski: Photographs" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which was shown at MoMA, New York, in 2006. John's intelligence, dedication, charm, and wit made him a vital figure at The Museum for more than four decades, and his lasting contributions to the institution stretch far beyond photography. We are deeply grateful and we will miss him badly. We extend our most heartfelt sympathy to his daughters Nina and Natasha and their families.

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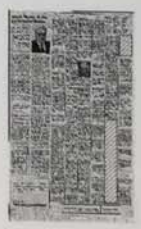
The International Council of

The Museum of Modern Art

SZARKOWSKI—John. The Trustees and staff of ICP mourn the passing of John Szarkowski, colleague and friend. His discerning eye, intelligence and ability to articulate the importance of photography contributed immeasurably to the public appreciation and understanding of the medium. Through his exhibitions and writings he set a standard, and shaped for decades the critical arguments in our field. As a photographer himself, he left a rich legacy of important images. We will miss his insightful enthusiasm and dedication to photography.

Cornell Capa,
Director Emeritus
Willis E. Hartshorn,
Ehrenkranz Director
International Center
of Photography



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John Szarkowski

APPRECIATIONS

It's worth remembering how much Wisconsin there was in the voice of John Szarkowski, who died on Saturday at age 81. His reputation would almost make you doubt what you were hearing. He was, after all, the curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art for 29 years, beginning in 1962. The exhibitions he mounted and the books he wrote quite simply gave documentary photography a place in the world of art. And yet there was that broad Wisconsin in his speech, reminding his auditors that if they could hear the curatorial pulpit in his words they could also hear the sound of a very different place.

I'm struck now by the essential modesty of that other place — the common-sensical view Szarkowski took of his curatorial work and his work as a photographer. What comes to mind, especially, is one of his photographs called "Mr. Anderson and son, near Sandstone, Minnesota, 1957." It is the picture of a farmer and his son standing against the backdrop of an empty wooden corncrib. There is in both faces a wry, inquisitive look, almost humorous in the father's face, more trusting in the son's. The picture embodies the esthetic Szarkowski found in the photographers he championed — the esthetic of merely noticing.

Szarkowski never pretended that photography changed because of his attention. He pretended that he was just paying attention to what should have been obvious to almost anyone. What he demonstrated, in fact, was the very thing that good curators are able to do. He remained himself, and yet he was changed by what he saw and showed us how to be changed, too.

VERLYN KLINKENBORG

NEW YORK SUN

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The First Rainbow

By WILLIAM MEYERS

Martin Parr is to contemporary British photography what Puck is to the characters lost in the forest in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night": a source of mischief and enchantment. His disruptive intentions were on display at the Hasted Hunt Gallery last Wednesday evening, when he moderated a program about "Colour Before Color," the gallery's current exhibition, which he curated. The gallery set up three dozen chairs for the expected audience, but about twice as many people showed up. It is testimony to the respect Mr. Parr commands in the photographic community, and to his Puckish wit, broad sympathies, and extensive knowledge, that the overflow crowd was content to stand or sit on the floor during the presentation. Typically, he let others do most of the talking.

Mr. Parr wants the world to know that European photographers were engaged with color before the landmark exhibition of color photographs by William Eggleston that John Szarkowski organized in 1976 at the Museum of Modern Art. Because of the prestige of MoMA and Mr. Szarkowski, that stunning exhibition legitimated color (the American spelling) photography as an art form in America. Mr. Parr has assembled 48 colour (the British spelling) photographs by six European photographers taken before the 1976 Eggleston exhibition to show they, too, were accomplished, even if not appreciated. He makes his point quite convincingly.

Two of the artists were with him at the Wednesday gallery talk. Peter Mitchell, an Englishman, spoke about the spectacular indifference by the art world to the pictures he took in Leeds in the 1970s. He shot formal portraits of small-business owners standing in the doorways of their little shops in this decaying industrial city. "My Zip code happens to be one of the worst in England," he said. "I'm quite proud of that." The use of muted earth tones taken on overcast days gives his pictures a valedictory feel, which is offset by the slightly humorous "carry on" attitude of his subjects.

Carlos Pérez Siquier, a Spaniard whose daughter interpreted for him, explained the political hazards he faced in the 1960s, during the dictatorship of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, for doing something the government thought of as suspiciously weird: taking art photographs in color. (In a dictatorship, the regime has a monopoly on doing weird.) His pictures, extreme close-ups of body parts of people on the beach, strike us as totally non-political. They are not unlike those Leon Levenstein took at Coney Island in black and white, except that in Mr. Siquier's, sunburned skin contrasts with fluorescent bathing suit colors. "Muñeca" (1974) studies layers of eye makeup like archaeology.

The other photographers in the exhibition are John Hinde (English), Luigi Ghirri (Italian), Ed Van Der Elsken (Dutch), and Keld Helmer-Petersen (Danish). The work of these artists is quite varied. Mr. Helmer-Petersen self-published a book titled "122 Colour Photographs" as early as 1947. His Modernist pictures isolate forms and colors into simple abstractions: a black number 6 painted on a brown and red wooden fence, a stack of sand-colored bricks, a steel plate painted battleship gray. He is clearly trying to come to grips with the new medium by reducing his images to the most basic elements.

Many of Ghirri's pictures from the 1970s are also quite simple, but the colors are more muted, and the content more complex. "Moderna" (1972) uses color with the delicate touch Saul Leiter developed; through frosted glass windows set in pale green steel doors we see two figures, one with a dim orange cast. The picture is affecting although modest, but in black and white it would hardly be a picture at all. Several of Ghirri's images are witty with color highlighting the jest. "Lido di Spina" (1972) shows a gray television set sitting on a shelf in a room with plain white walls; the cloth covering the shelf and the room's curtains are orange. The orange is a piquant fact.

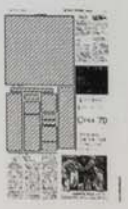
One area where color was used early on was in commercial photography. Hinde's postcard company was using color in the late 1960s, when he picked up a commission to photograph Butlin's holiday camps. It took great technological ingenuity for his staff to produce the images they did of these Disneyesque amusement parks, but no one thought of the results as art: no one until Parr. Like Puck anointing the lovers' eyelids to alter their perception, Mr. Parr insists that Hinde's somewhat gaudy, slightly surreal images be considered as art.

The deep saturated reds from the neon signs in "Butlin's Filey: Night Scene" (c. 1970), taken by Edmund Nagele, one of Mr. Hinde's photographers, are reflected and liquefied in rain puddles in the shopping center parking lot. "Butlin's Ayr: Lounge Bar and Indoor Heated Pool (Ground Level)" (c. 1970), taken by Elmar Ludwig, has vacationing families sipping sodas next to windows that look into the blue pool. Goldfish are suspended in the windows and a swimmer hovers in one like a humanoid specimen trapped in an aquarium. The picture is fun, there is lots of interesting period detail, and there are certainly pleasures to be had in looking at it, but to my sensibility it lacks the valence of art. Puck, for all his charm, made mistakes.

The question of whether or not any work qualifies as art can quickly disintegrate into a matter of druthers, or ascend to a lofty discussion of philosophy. For purposes of this review it is more important to say that Martin Parr has performed a valuable rescue operation. We are fortunate to have these neglected photographers presented for our consideration.

wmeyers@nysun.com

Until July 20 (529 W. 20th St., between Tenth and Eleventh avenues, 212-627-0006).



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COLOUR BEFORE COLOR:
Curated by Martin Parr
Hasted Hunt Gallery

European photographers were engaged with color before the landmark 1976 exhibit at MoMA.

The New York Times

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John Szarkowski, Curator of Photography, Dies at 81

Shows at MoMA that raised a medium to the realm of fine art.

By PHILIP GEFTER

John Szarkowski, a curator who almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half-century to that of a fine art, making his case in seminal writings and landmark exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, died in on Saturday in Pittsfield, Mass. He was 81.

The cause of death was complications of a stroke, said Peter MacGill of Pace/MacGill Gallery and a spokesman for the family.

In the early 1960's, when Mr. Szarkowski (pronounced Shar-COW-ski) began his curatorial career, photography was commonly perceived as a utilitarian medium, a means to document the world. Perhaps more than anyone, Mr. Szarkowski changed that perception. For him, the photograph was a form of expression as potent and meaningful as any work of art, and as director of photography at the Modern for almost three decades, beginning in 1962, he was perhaps its most impassioned advocate. Two of his books, "The Photographer's Eye," (1964) and "Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art" (1973), remain syllabus staples in art history programs.

Mr. Szarkowski was first to confer importance on the work of Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand in his influential exhibition "New Documents" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967. That show, considered radical at the time, identified a new direction in photography: pictures that seemed to have a casual, snapshot-like look and subject matter so apparently ordinary that it was hard to categorize.

In the wall text for the show, Mr. Szarkowski suggested that until then the aim of documentary photography had been to show what was wrong with the world, as a way to generate interest in rectifying it. But this show signaled a change.

"In the past decade a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends," he wrote. "Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it."

Critics were skeptical. "The observations of the photographers are noted as oddities in personality, situation, incident, movement, and the vagaries of chance," Jacob Deschin wrote in a review of the show in The New York Times. Today, the work of Ms. Arbus, Mr. Friedlander and Mr. Winogrand is considered among the most decisive for the generations of photographers that followed them.

As a curator, Mr. Szarkowski loomed large, with a stentorian voice and a raconteurial style. But he was self-effacing about his role in mounting the "New Documents" show.

"I think anybody who had been moderately competent, reasonably alert to the vitality of what was actually going on in the medium would have done the same thing I did," he said several years ago. "I mean, the idea that Winogrand or Friedlander or Diane were somehow inventions of mine, I would regard, you know, as denigrating to them."

Another exhibition Mr. Szarkowski organized at the Modern, in 1976, introduced the work of William Eggleston, whose saturated color photographs of cars, signs and individuals ran counter to the black-and-white orthodoxy of fine-art photography at the time. The show, "William Eggleston's Guide," was widely considered the worst of the year in photography.

"Mr. Szarkowski throws all caution to the winds and speaks of Mr. Eggleston's pictures as 'perfect,'" Hilton Kramer wrote in The Times. "Perfect? Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly." Mr. Eggleston would come to be considered a pioneer of color photography.

By championing the work of these artists early on, Mr. Szarkowski was helping to change the course of photography. Perhaps his most eloquent explanation of what photographers do appears in his introduction to the four-volume set "The Work of Atget," published in conjunction with a series of exhibitions at MoMA from 1981 to 1985.

"One might compare the art of photography to the act of pointing," Mr. Szarkowski wrote. "It must be true that some of us point to more interesting facts, events, circumstances, and configurations than others."

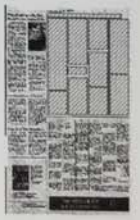
He added, "The talented practitioner of the new discipline would perform with a special grace, sense of timing, narrative sweep, and wit, thus endowing the act not merely with intelligence, but with that quality of formal rigor that identifies a work of art, so that we would be uncertain, when remembering the adventure of the tour, how much our pleasure and sense of enlargement had come from the things pointed to and how much from a pattern created by the pointer."

Thaddeus John Szarkowski was born on Dec. 18, 1925, in Ashland, Wis., where his father later became assistant postmaster. Picking up a camera at age 11, he made photography one of his principle pursuits, along with trout fishing and the clarinet, throughout high school.

He attended the University of Wisconsin, interrupted his studies to serve in the Army during World War II, then returned to earn a bachelor's degree in 1947, with a major in art history. In college, he played second-chair clarinet for the Madison Symphony Orchestra, but maintained that he held the post only because of the wartime absence of better musicians.

As a young artist in the early 1950s, Mr. Szarkowski began to photograph the buildings of the renowned Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. In an interview in 2005 in The New York Times, he said that when he was starting out, "most young artists, most photographers surely, if they were serious, still believed it was better to work in the context of some kind of potentially social good."

The consequence of this belief is evident in the earnestness of his early pictures, which come out of an



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American classical tradition. His early influences were Walker Evans and Edward Weston. "Walker for the intelligence and Weston for the pleasure," he said. In 1948, Evans and Weston were not yet as widely known as Mr. Szarkowski would eventually make them through exhibitions at MoMA.

By the time Mr. Szarkowski arrived at the museum from Wisconsin in 1962 at the age of 37, he was already an accomplished photographer. He had published two books of his own photographs, "The Idea of Louis Sullivan" (1956) and "The Face of Minnesota" (1958). Remarkably for a volume of photography, the Minnesota book landed on The New York Times best-seller list for several weeks, perhaps because Dave Garroway had discussed its publication on the "Today" program.

When Mr. Szarkowski was offered the position of director of the photography department at the Modern, he had just received a Guggenheim Fellowship to work on a new project. In a letter to Edward Steichen, then curator of the department, he accepted the job, registering with his signature dry wit a reluctance to leave his lakeside home in Wisconsin: "Last week I finally got back home for a few days, where I could think about the future and look at Lake Superior at the same time. No matter how hard I looked, the Lake gave no indication of concern at the possibility of my departing from its shores, and I finally decided that if it can get along without me, I can get along without it."

A year after arriving in New York, he married Jill Anson, an architect, who died on Dec. 31. Mr. Szarkowski is survived by two daughters, Natasha Szarkowski Brown and Nina Anson Szarkowski Jones, both of New York, and two grandchildren. A son, Alexander, died in 1972 at age 2.

Among the many other exhibitions he organized as a curator at the Modern was "Mirrors and Windows," in 1978, in which he broke down photographic practice into two categories: documentary images and those that reflect a more interpretive experience of the world. And, in 1990, his final exhibition was an idiosyncratic overview called "Photography Until Now," in which he traced the technological evolution of the medium and its impact on the look of photographs.

In 2005, Mr. Szarkowski was given a retrospective exhibition of his own photographs, which opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, touring museums around the country and ending at the Museum of Modern Art in 2006. His photographs of buildings, street scenes, backyards and nature possess the straightforward descriptive clarity he so often championed in the work of others, and, in their simplicity, a purity that borders on the poetic.

From his own early photographs, which might serve as a template for his later curatorial choices, it is easy to see why Mr. Szarkowski had such visual affinity for the work of Friedlander and Winogrand.

When asked by a reporter how it felt to exhibit his own photographs finally, knowing they would be measured against his curatorial legacy, he became circumspect. As an artist, "you look at other people's work and figure out how it can be useful to you," he said.

"I'm content that a lot of these pictures are going to be interesting for other photographers of talent and ambition," he said. "And that's all you want."

Richard Avedon/Courtesy Richard Avedon Foundation

John Szarkowski in 1975.

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TED HARTWELL 1933-2007

'A gregarious loner'

● From Minneapolis to Paris, photography curator Ted Hartwell pursued elusive images for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

By MARY ABBE • mabbe@startribune.com

The 250 friends and colleagues who gathered to remember Ted Hartwell recently in Pepin, Wis., were marking not only the passing of a photo curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, but the close of a pioneering era in American culture.

By the time Hartwell died July 10 at 73, from a heart attack the previous week, he had assembled for the Minneapolis museum more than 10,000 photographs spanning the 170-year history of the medium. Most were gifts from collectors he had courted, including longtime museum benefactor Harry Drake and gallery owner Martin Weinstein, or supporters such as former Institute board chairman Al Harrison, who endowed a gallery and provided money to buy photos.

He also left a trail of innovative exhibitions by Richard Avedon, Gilles Peress, Diane Arbus, Jerome Liebling and Werner Bischof that helped redefine photography in the museum pantheon.

Among photographers, "Ted was one of the most highly thought-of people in the country," said Liebling, the dean of American documentary photography, who lives in Amherst, Mass. "He's leaving at the Institute an absolutely superb collection, and the list of shows he's had over the years is as rich as anywhere."

Coincidentally, the museum opened last week the first of a two-part exhibit capping Hartwell's career. The shows will sample a collection of more than 600 photos recently donated by Frederick B. Scheel, a sporting-goods distributor from Fargo, N.D.

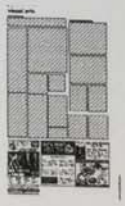
Part one of "The Search to See" offers a wide-ranging selection of 100 pristine prints, including some of the most famous and influential images by Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, Alexander Rodchenko, Andreas Feininger and Bill Brandt. (The exhibit ends Nov. 4, with part two opening Dec. 1.)

Museum director William Griswold said that Hartwell's curatorial accomplishments "are nothing short of extraordinary," but that what he will miss most is "that inimitable twinkle in his eye."

Trusted instincts

Hartwell built his legacy over 45 years, starting at a time when few museums cared about photography. Along with his colleague and friend John Szarkowski, the photo curator at the Museum of Modern Art who died July 7, Hartwell was convinced that photography was, or could be, the equal of painting, sculpture and the decorative arts that museums traditionally embraced. He had no training in art history or curatorial studies, and initially the museum had no money to lavish on a medium that many then regarded primarily as a tool for documenting wars, recording social upheaval or selling consumer goods.

Hired in 1962 as the museum's staff photographer — shooting objects in the collection and documenting exhibitions — he soon began to stage photo shows in a basement hallway. He persuaded the museum's director at the time, Tony Clarke, to let him



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take a few months off to study what were then the nation's most substantial museum collections of photography — at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y., and the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1964 he purchased the Institute's first photos, a $500 set of Alfred Stieglitz's Camera Work journals, which contained gravure images by 19th- and early 20th-century figures. Throughout his Minneapolis career Hartwell followed Stieglitz's practice of linking contemporary imagery to the medium's history, often alternating exhibitions of modern work with shows by such masters as Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Minor White and Berenice Abbott.

"Ted often referred to pictures as 'sweet.' As in, 'This is a sweet picture.' It wasn't about lust; it was about human contact, something palpable and emotionally appealing in the picture," said George Slade, artistic director of the Minnesota Center for Photography.

Americana and Paris

Hartwell loved the gritty images of small towns and Dust Bowl refugees produced during the 1930s and '40s by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and colleagues. He embraced the street photography of Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander, and championed such Minnesota talents as Tom Arndt, Frank Gohlke, Stuart Klipper, JoAnn Verburg and Alec Soth.

In 1970 he drew national attention with the first retrospective by fashion photographer Richard Avedon, including portraits of celebrities, politicians and Vietnam war protesters.

A motorcycle enthusiast, Hartwell loved and showed the biker images of Danny Lyon. Sometimes the curator would saunter into the office in biker leather, part of his "beatnik ethos," said Klipper, a longtime friend. Hartwell's son Joe remembered a more romantic image of his dad on long nighttime motorcycle rides through fog-filled Minnesota river valleys.

Hartwell adored everything about Paris, which he explored while working on shows by members of the Paris-based Magnum photography cooperative. The late Henri Cartier-Bresson, a Magnum founder, and his photographer wife, Martine Franck, became close friends.

It was in Paris that an American friend asked him to look up her sister, Carolyn, when he returned to Minneapolis. He did, and 16 years ago she became his third wife and the mother of their three children: Theron, 8, and twins Franklin and Louise, 4. His son, Joe, 38, is from his second marriage. Another son, Charles, from his first marriage, predeceased him.

End of an era

Hartwell was aptly described by his wife as a "gregarious loner," someone who welcomed drop-in visitors, would look at anyone's portfolio and was always ready with suggestions and encouragement.

"He was just a kid from Minneapolis' North Side who got a job at the museum because he was a good photographer who had learned his craft in the Marine Corps," said Evan Maurer, former director of the Minneapolis museum. "But he had a passion for photography as an art, and ambition for the museum and the collection. It was gutsy. But it's America; a kid could get a chance. This is the end of an era, for sure, because stuff like that doesn't happen anymore."

Mary Abbe • 612-673-4431

THE SEARCH TO SEE

What: Photos recently donated by sporting-goods distributor Frederick B. Scheel.
Where: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2400 3rd Av. S.
When: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. today and next Sun.; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tue.-Wed. and Fri.-Sat.; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thu. Part one ends Nov. 4. Part two opens Dec. 1.
Admission: Free.

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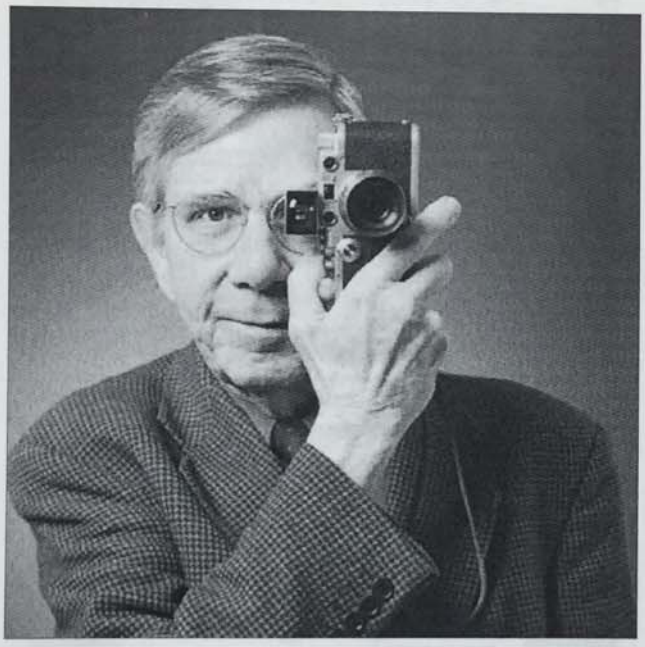

Photos provided by MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Dan Dennehy, chief photographer at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, took this portrait of his colleague Ted Hartwell in 2004. The pose cleverly alludes to Andreas Feininger's famous image "The Photojournalist," below right.

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SOME KEY HARTWELL ACQUISITIONS

Hartwell greatly admired the iconic American images of Walker Evans, who took "Roadside Stand, Vicinity Birmingham, Alabama" in 1936.

Minnesota photographer Tom Arndt took this ebullient image of "Four Coast Guard Cadets" at the Great America amusement park in Dundee, Ill., in 1981.

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Feininger's "The Photojournalist" equates the photographer with his camera.

In his 1962 portrait of Marilyn Monroe, Richard Avedon captured the actress' tragic vulnerability.

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THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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The Master departs

John Szarkowski, who has died aged 81, achieved near-mythical status as curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Sean Louth, and his peers, pay tribute

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'I still have an image of John Szarkowski in my mind,' says Bill Jay, the renowned photography historian, editor and lecturer. 'I thought I might take portraits of gallerists, curators, photography writers and the like, linking them by the way they smoked... everyone did back then. John would lean his head back and hold his cigarette between thumb and middle finger in a very singular, contemplative pose. He embodied charm and elegance, with a hint of patrician superiority. And he was immensely likeable.'

Jay, now retired and living in California, warms to his task: 'He was the curators' curator, and as head of the photography department at MOMA, he engendered enormous respect as well as widespread affection.'

The welter of obituaries and tributes for Szarkowski, and their warmth, is a sure signpost to his significance for photography in the last half of the 20thCentury.

After serving in the US army in WWII, he took a degree in art history, secured two Guggenheim fellowships and, in 1962, was personally selected by Edward Steichen to be his successor at MOMA.

To borrow a modern term, Szarkowski then rewrote his job specification. He insisted on fine art photography being viewed as just that - fine art - and he demanded that gallery visitors view afresh the work of such photographers as Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus. Later, as Philip Gefter noted in the New York Times obituary, he would say that: 'The idea that Winogrand or Friedlander or Diane were somehow inventions of mine, I would regard, you know, as denigrating to them'.

Says Jay of Szarkowski's stewardship: 'His curatorial decisions had enormous impact on the development of the photographic medium over his 30-year tenure. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Szarkowski raised issues about the medium which would be keenly debated by young photographers at the time.'

But it is the startling brilliance and clarity that Szarkowski brought to his advocacy that resounds again and again with his admirers down the years. Writing in The Guardian Mark Haworth-Booth neatly echoed the master's concision: '(Szarkowski) brought a new critical acumen and rigour to the medium.'

As a result, suggests US News and World Report in 1992: 'Szarkowski's thinking, whether Americans know it or not, is our way of thinking about photography.'

BJP contributor Gerry Badger concurs: 'John Szarkowski was a towering figure in late 20th century photography. His view of photography might have been narrow, but it was a consistent view, expressed with an infuriating certainty, but also with passion and a supreme elegance. Most importantly from my point of view, he espoused a photographic art that was about photography, not pseudo-painting.'

Says Bill Jay: 'Perhaps the best thing about John Szarkowski was the manner in which he expressed his view, and this is probably best exemplified by his introductory essay to The Photographer's Eye. The clarity with which he defined the role of photography, as he saw it, is classic.

'Szarkowski's views raised the ire of many photographers, but he had more photographic intelligence in his little finger than his fiercest critics had in their entire bodies.

'In the photographic forum of the 1960s to the 90s, he was the equivalent of Aristotle or Socrates, arguing which gods should be revered, and which deposed.'

But the last word goes to Haworth-Booth: 'On contemporary college photography course reading lists, there are many recommended readings on the theoretical approach to photography. Almost completely ignored is the work of John Szarkowski. I find that bizarre. And I find it slightly depressing.'

John Szarkowski, curator and photographer, was born on 18 December, 1925, and died on 07 July, 2007. He had suffered a catastrophic stroke in February and never regained consciousness. He was predeceased by his wife, the architect Jill Anson, in 2006. They married in 1962, and are survived by two daughters.

Portrait © Eamon McCabe of The Guardian.

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A Shocking Death, an Unexpected Departure

COMINGS & GOINGS

Who's moving where in the art world

By Jacquelyn Lewis
Published: July 23, 2007

NEW YORK—The art world seemed to have settled into the long, lazy days of summer, with comings and goings fewer and further between as June faded into July. But then, like lightning, some significant deaths and unexpected staff changes packed a considerable punch. For starters, the art world is reeling from the news that painter and video artist **Jeremy Blake** might have wandered into the ocean and drowned a week after his girlfriend, filmmaker and writer **Theresa Duncan**, committed suicide. Legendary MoMA photography curator **John Szarkowski** also died, at age 81, on July 7. And in the UK, the **Victoria & Albert Museum**'s chairman-to-be delivered some surprising news. Keep us up to date by sending the latest happenings to NewsEditors@artinfo.com.

NEW YORK— The artist Jeremy Blake might have drowned a week after his girlfriend, filmmaker and writer Theresa Duncan, committed suicide, the *New York Post* reports. Duncan overdosed on pills July 10, and on the evening of July 17, Blake was seen walking into the choppy surf off Rockaway Beach, leaving a pile of clothing and a handwritten note claiming he was "despondent" over Duncan's death, police sources told the *Post*. Police helicopters were scanning the waters off Rockaway Beach on July 21 as the art world reeled from the news. "It was kind of a double shock. They were both totally unexpected," said **Lance Kinz**, whose Chelsea gallery, **Kinz, Tillou + Feigen**, represented Blake. "This is an extraordinarily sad story. He couldn't go on without her, so he decided to be with her, so to speak."

NEW YORK—John Szarkowski, "a curator who almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half-century to that of a fine art, making his case in seminal writings and landmark exhibitions at the **Museum of Modern Art** in New York," according to *The New York Times*, died in Pittsfield, Mass. on July 7, at the age of 81.

Szarkowski was the first to recognize the artistic significance of works by photographers Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand with his 1967 MoMA show, "New Documents." The curator died from complications of a stroke, **Peter MacGill** of New York's **Pace/MacGill Gallery** told the *Times*.

LOS ANGELES—Acclaimed architect **George Yu** has died at the age of 43, of a rare form of lung cancer that afflicts nonsmokers, the *Los Angeles Times* reports. Yu, who was born in Hong Kong and grew up in British Columbia, had "a deep interest in digital design tempered by an obsession with the act of making," according to the *Times*. "Yu emerged in the last five years or so as an important link between the city's leading firms and architects in their 20s and 30s, many of whom Yu taught at the **Southern California Institute of Architecture** and elsewhere."

DALLAS, Texas—**Heritage Auction Galleries** has named **Delia E. Sullivan** its new Native American art specialist and consignment director. Sullivan joins Heritage with a master's degree in cultural anthropology from the **New School for Social Research** in New York, where she studied primitive art and shamanism. She also worked for 14 years at Christie's, seven of which were spent as head of the American Indian art department.

ROCHESTER, Minn.—**Ted Hartwell**, the founding curator of the photography department at the **Minneapolis Institute of Arts**, died at the age of 73 on July 5, the *Star Tribune* reports. Harwell, a contemporary of Szarkowski, was nationally known as a pioneering advocate for photography as an art form, and "merged down-home humanism with international

vision" during his 35-year career at the museum, according to the *Tribune*. Hartwell "was one of our heroes, a beacon," said **Weston Naef**, curator of photographs at the **J. Paul Getty Museum** in Los Angeles.

OXFORD, Miss.—Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist **Doug Marlette** died in a car accident July 10, *The New York Times* reports. He was 57. Marlette, who was known for shocking audiences with his work, created the popular syndicated strip "Kudzu," turned it into a musical, and wrote two novels. Originally from Greensboro, N.C., he had worked at *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *New York Newsday*, and *The Tulsa World*. He took home a Pulitzer in 1988 for his work at the Charlotte and Atlanta papers.

LONDON—**John Tusa** left his job as chairman of the Victoria & Albert Museum on July 18, months before he was to take over the position, *The New York Times* reports. Tusa, who was slated to begin the job in November, was named chairman in June. He said he relinquished the post because he already had agreed to become the chairman of the **University of the Arts London** and didn't want to juggle both obligations. "The possibility of confusion about where my loyalties lay risked damaging one or both institutions."

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John Szarkowski

Curator and writer who championed photography as an artistic medium

The brilliance as a curator and writer of John Szarkowski, who has died following a stroke aged 81, transformed the understanding of photography and played a major role in establishing it as the art medium it is today. He was director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, from 1962 to 1991, and championed now-familiar giants of the subject – from André Kertesz to Diane Arbus – when they were disregarded or unknown. His influence was far-reaching. For example, Szarkowski's exhibition of the work of Bill Brandt, shown at MoMA in 1969, came to the Hayward Gallery in London in 1970 and changed the climate of opinion about photography in this country. He brought a new critical acumen and rigour to the medium.

Szarkowski was born in Ashland, on the southern shores of Lake Superior in rural Wisconsin. He began photographing as a boy and considered himself a photographer from the time he decided, at about 16, that he was not going to become a professional clarinet player. He grew up to be a tall, good-looking, wirily built and naturally humorous man. He always retained his lilting Wisconsin accent and love of the land.

He attended the University of Wisconsin, interrupted his studies to serve in the army during the second world war, then returned to major in art history in 1948. From 1948 to 1951 he worked as a staff photographer at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, then took up a position as instructor in photography, history of art and design at the Albright Art School in Buffalo, New York. He set about photographing Louis Sullivan's Guaranty building (constructed 1894-95), which he described as "old and dirty and largely lost among its newer, larger neighbours. Like a diamond in a pile of broken glass, it stopped few passers-by". Szarkowski's first book, The Idea of Louis Sullivan, appeared in 1956.

His second, The Face of Minnesota (1958), ran in the New York Times bestseller list for eight weeks. Already his photographs had been acquired by MoMA and other important collections. He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961 to photograph the Quetico-Superior wilderness, an area shared between Minnesota and Ontario. His landscape photographs from there are among the most exquisitely lyrical and environmentally aware of the time. The project came to an end when Szarkowski was invited to succeed Edward Steichen in charge of MoMA's department of photography in 1962. The following year he married Jill Anson, an architect (and later architectural preservationist) as bright, charming and witty as himself. They married in London and Szarkowski always enjoyed returning to the city, sometimes calling in at Lock & Co in St James's to buy one of their brown trilby hats, which he wore with style.

Szarkowski's tenure at MoMA began with the first-ever exhibition of Jacques-Henri Lartigue, the extraordinary child-prodigy of the era of the *belle époque*. The influential show The Photographer's Eye followed in 1964. That was also the year MoMA opened the Edward Steichen Galleries and Study Center, where generations of photographers, historians, critics and fans have begun and continued their discovery of the medium. Through celebrated exhibitions such as Dorothea Lange (1966), Brassai (1968), Cartier-Bresson (1968) and Walker Evans (1971), Szarkowski built up a modernist canon.

Even more importantly, he identified the key talents of his own time. New Documents (1967) introduced the demanding photographs of Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand with these words: "Their aim has been not to reform life but to know it, not to persuade but to understand." Whereas some visitors spat at the Arbus photographs shown in 1967, the memorial retrospective of her work presented by Szarkowski in 1972 was received with reverence: the galleries were as quiet, he later recalled, as a cathedral.

In the midst of that triumph, the Szarkowskis lost their two-year old boy, Alexander, in a freak accident. The tragedy was borne stoically.

The many remarkable exhibitions and books that flowed from Szarkowski's time at MoMA include Looking at Photographs (1973), New Japanese Photography (1974), William Eggleston's Guide (1976), which revolutionised the understanding of colour photography, the monumental four-volume The Work of Atget (with Maria Morris Hambourg, 1981-85) and the magisterial Photography Until Now (1990).

In 1991 Szarkowski began photographing again. Mr Bristol's Barn: With Excerpts from Mr Blinn's Diary (1997) was a loving photographic interpretation of the barn on the Szarkowskis' farm in upstate New York. Szarkowski went on long-range photographic trips with Friedlander and other friends. He also curated remarkable exhibitions, including Ansel Adams at 100 (2001).

In 2002 he visited London to address a packed lecture theatre at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Next day, on an architectural peregrination with friends, he made light of climbing the 530 steps to the top of St Paul's Cathedral.

John Szarkowski: Photographs, superbly curated by Sandra S Phillips, was presented at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in February 2005, followed by a nationwide tour. It was accompanied by a major book and conference. A jovial 80th birthday celebration was organised by his daughters in New York in December the same year.

Jill died suddenly in December 2006 and Szarkowski, then apparently in the best of health, suffered a stroke in New York City in February. He did not regain consciousness. He is survived by his daughters Nina and Natasha, and grandchildren Harry and Anson.

Mark Haworth-Booth

John Szarkowski, photographer, curator and writer, born December 18 1925; died July 7 2007

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durrants

Through the exhibitions he curated at MoMA, Szarkowski built up a canon of modernist photography and introduced new artists to the public

FRONT PAGE

Bronze figure of Artemis and the Stag, ca. 1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.

of estimating rare objects for which are few comparable examples—not ention the current market frenzy. s expected [see "Front Page," May], an elegant Roman bronze that picts Artemis and the Stag, outper- rmed all other lots, appearing at the June 7 auction of Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Western Asian antiquities. Estimated at $5-7 million, it netted $28.6 million, the highest price ever paid for an antiquity or a sculpture of any period at auction, according to Sotheby's. It was purchased by the London dealer Giuseppe Eskenazi on behalf of a private European collector. (Prices include Sotheby's commissions: 20 percent on the first $500,000, and 12 percent above.) According to the *New York Times*, Richard M. Keresey, an antiquities specialist at Sotheby's, deemed it "the best single piece I've seen here in 37 years."

As the acquisitions fund has grown since the Albright-Knox sales were undertaken in March, it has been tapped for purchases that would previously have been beyond the reach of the strapped museum, according to director Louis Grachos. Among them are a film, three photographs and a sculpture from Matthew Barney's 2005 "Drawing Restraint" series; a 1982/2004 red yarn sculpture by Fred Sandback; and Bruce Nauman's video installation *Green Horses* (1988), a joint purchase with the Whitney Museum that is the Albright-Knox's first major piece by the artist. —*Faye Hirsch*

More Exiting Museum Directors

Guggenheim Museum director **Lisa Dennison** has announced that she will resign from the museum to join Sotheby's this month. After 29 years with the Guggenheim, including nearly two years as director, Dennison will be the auction house's vice president of North American operations.

Timothy Potts resigns as director of the Kimbell Art Museum, effective Sept. 1. Potts led the museum for almost nine years, during which time it acquired a number of important works, including examples by Donatello, Bernini and Lucas Cranach the Elder. The museum has also just embarked on an expansion, designed by Renzo Piano.

Jay Gates, director for nine years of the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., has decided to step down in 2008. During his tenure, the museum raised $30 million and completed a 30,000-square-foot expansion that doubled its size.

John R. Lane, director of the Dallas Museum of Art since 1999, will retire in May 2008. In addition to boosting the museum's endowment by $166.8 million and increasing attendance from 400,000 to 600,000 a year, he secured a bequest of more than 900 contemporary artworks from a group of local collectors. Lane will be succeeded by **Bonnie Pitman**, who has been deputy director since 2000. She has been spearheading the creation of the DMA's Center for Creative Connections, a new 12,000-square-foot educational facility opening in spring 2008.

Jessie Otto Hite, for 15 years director of the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, has announced her retirement, effective March 2008. Under her leadership, the museum constructed its new home, which opened in 2006, and added 7,000 works to its holdings, including the Michener, Suida-Manning and Leo Steinberg collections.

John Szarkowski 1925-2007

John Szarkowski, the influential director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department for nearly 30 years and a champion of the medium's potential as art, died July 7 of complications from a stroke he had suffered in February. He was 81 and lived in East Chatham, N.Y.

Szarkowski directed MOMA's photography program from 1962 to 1991, a period of transition in both the public's and the art world's relationship to photographs. In the early '60s, *Life* and other picture magazines represented the popular idea of photography's esthetic possibilities, while photographers seeking to be considered artists, such as Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Minor White, worked largely in isolation. By the '90s, picture magazines were historical artifacts, and photographs had achieved favored-medium status in galleries and museums.

Szarkowski had a crucial role in this development of photography from art orphan to star player, although in the later years of his tenure he became a conservative voice in the field. He discovered and vigorously promoted Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand, the protagonists of his "New Documents" exhibition of 1967, but he would have little to do with the "photo-based art" of the 1970s and '80s. Postmodernism left him cold; MOMA belatedly acquired Cindy Sherman's '70s "Untitled Film Stills" only in 1995, after he had retired.

When Szarkowski arrived at MOMA, the photography department was already well known. Its first director, Beaumont Newhall, is considered the father of photography's status as an art, having written the authoritative English-language text on the subject in the 1930s. After World War II Newhall was replaced by Edward Steichen, a curatorial impresario who launched sprawling shows like "The Family of Man," MOMA's 1955 blockbuster that presented photography as a universal language of human experience, from birth to death. Steichen also organized inclusive group shows of contemporary work, relying on themes like abstraction.

Szarkowski turned his back on the more or less mighty themes of Steichen and to an extent on the art-historical lineage established by Newhall. His first show, in 1963, was titled "Five Unrelated Photographers," but his first position paper was the catalogue for the 1964 exhibition "The Photographer's Eye." In it he argued that the medium's fundamental formal characteristics—detail, point of view, time, etc.—constituted its artistic potential. In spirit not far removed from the formalist esthetic applied to painting by critic Clement Greenberg, Szarkowski's approach enabled him to view vernacular, commercial and art photographs as partners in a progressive development of the medium.

One result was a preference for contemporary photographers, like William Eggleston, whose work mined the territory of the snapshot ("William Eggleston's Guide," 1976); another was in exhibitions like "From the Picture Press" (1973), which consisted of images culled largely from the archive of the New York *Daily News*. Perhaps his most illustrious curatorial achievement was a four-part exhibition of the work of Eugène Atget, which appeared in installments from 1981 to 1985. Atget was a journeyman commercial photographer in turn-of-the-century Paris, but Szarkowski portrayed him as a poet of the camera fueled by a Proustian sensibility.

***John Szarkowski. Tucson, Arizona*, 1992, by Lee Friedlander.**

As important as his exhibitions may have been, though, one could say that Szarkowski made his deepest contributions as a writer. His arguments for the importance of his discoveries, or his reconsiderations of acknowledged masters such as Henri Cartier-Bresson or Walker Evans, were always beautifully phrased and usually bold in conception. Before Rosalind Krauss, Susan Sontag, Janet Malcolm and others "outside" the tight-knit photography community began addressing photography seriously in the 1970s, he was one of the few to demonstrate that photographs were worthy of intellectual discussion.

In this sense his most memorable achievement may have been the 1973 book *Looking at Photographs*, which consisted of 100 reproductions of photographs in MOMA's collection and a single-page meditation by Szarkowski about each image. Radical in their breadth and depth then, these small essays continue to hold their power. Consider this excerpt, from his piece about a 19th-century survey image by Timothy O'Sullivan:

> His landscapes are as precisely and as economically composed as a good masonry wall. It is as though every square inch of the precious glass plate, carried so far at so great an effort, had to be justified completely.

After retiring from the museum in 1991, Szarkowski returned to what he had been doing before he became a curator: photographing. He concentrated on rural subjects near his upstate home, such as his apple orchard and a neighbor's antique barn. Selections of these pictures were shown at Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, in 2006, and in a traveling retrospective of his work organized by San Francisco MOMA in 2005. —*Andy Grundberg*

Photos: Artemis: courtesy Sotheby's, New York; Szarkowski: © 2007 Lee Friedlander, courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Szarkowski, John

guardian.co.uk

Sean O'Hagan
On photography

Was John Szarkowski the most influential person in 20th-century photography?

An insightful critic as well as a visionary curator, Szarkowski filled New York's Museum of Modern Art with the colour photography of William Eggleston, and championed the transgressive work of Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander. Everyone who cares about photography is in his debt

Sean O'Hagan
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Szarkowski championed photographers like Garry Winogrand, whose New York (1969) is currently on show at Tate Modern's Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera

It's three years to the month since John Szarkowski died: a good time to reappraise his role as a defining figure in photography, both in establishing it as an art form and in influencing the public's perception. Szarkowski was a good photographer, a great critic and an extraordinary curator. One could argue that he was the single most important force in American post-war photography.

Like all good critics and curators, Szarkowski was both visionary and catalyst. When he succeeded the esteemed photographer Edward Steichen as director of the Museum of

Modern Art in New York in 1962, he was just 36, and must have been acutely aware of the long shadow cast by his predecessor. Steichen had curated the monumental group exhibition, The Family of Man, at Moma in 1955, which he described as 'the culmination of his career". Featuring 503 images by 273 photographers, famous and unknown, it had aimed to show the universality of human experience: death, love, childhood. The show had drawn huge crowds to the gallery and then toured the world, attracting an estimated 9 million viewers.

It was, as Steichen had no doubt intended, a hard act to follow. "We were different people", Szarkowski later said, "with different talents, characters, limitations, histories, problems and axes to grind. We held the same job at very different times, which means that it was not really the same job."

More revealingly, Szarkowski also said that Steichen and his predecessor, Beaumont Newhall, "consciously or otherwise, felt more compelled than I to be advocates for photography, whereas I – largely because of their work – could assume a more analytic, less apostolic attitude." That difference in approach would prove to be a crucial one, and it underpinned a new photographic aesthetic that continues to shape our view of the world to this day.

When Szarkowski took over at Moma, there was not a single commercial gallery exhibiting photography in New York and, despite Steichen and Newhall's pioneering work, the form had still not been accepted by most curators or critics. Szarkowski changed all that. He was the right person in the right place at the right time: a forward thinker who was given control of a major art institution at a moment when his democratic vision chimed with the rapidly changing cultural tastes of the time.

John Szarkowski, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Photograph: Eamonn Mccabe ki insisted on the democracy of the image, whether it be a formally composed Ansel Adams landscape, a snatched shot that caught the frenetic cut-and-thrust of a modern city or a vernacular subject like a road sign or a parking lot. "A skillful photographer can photograph anything well," he once insisted.

In his still-challenging book, The Photographer's Eye (1964), Szarkowski included snapshots alongside images by great photographers, and argued – brilliantly – that photography differed from any other art form because its history had been "less a journey than a growth". "Its movement has not been linear and consecutive but centrifugal," he suggested. "Photography, and our understanding of it, has spread from

a centre; it has, by infusion, penetrated our consciousness. Like an organism, photography was born whole. It is in our progressive discovery of it that its history lies."

As a writer, Szarkowski was innovative; as a curator, he was revolutionary. In 1967, during the so-called Summer of Love, he curated a show called New Documents at Moma. It featured the work of three relatively unknown photographers: Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand, and was, in its visceral way, as out of step with the times as the urban, edgy, atonal music of the Velvet Underground. It caused a stir. Arbus's images were transgressive in both their form and content: harsh black and white shots of so-called freaks, outsiders and misfits. Friedlander and Winogrand, in their different ways, shot on the streets of New York, producing snatched images of the city's everyday momentum that often appeared to be casual, even random – documentary photography, but not as it was then known or understood.

In his introduction to New Documents, Szarkowski deftly defined the shift in emphasis that the work represented and the attitude that unified the three photographers. "In the past decade," he wrote, "a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it."

At Moma, Szarkowski also hosted challenging shows by pioneering European photographers like Lartigue, Brassai and Cartier-Bresson, and, in 1969, purchased most of Eugene Atget's archive for the museum. The Lartigue show, which consisted of photographs he had taken as a child, was controversial and critically lambasted. The controversy was low-key, though, compared to the tidal wave of outrage that greeted Szarkowski's showing of the work of a then-unknown photographer from Tennessee called William Eggelston, in 1976.

Entitled William Eggleston's Guide, it was the first show of colour photography at Moma, a decision that incensed the critics almost as much as the supposedly banal and vulgar subject matter. When I once asked Eggleston about the reaction to the show, he said, It didn't surprise or offend me. Didn't impinge on me at all". The loudest critical voice belonged to Hilton Kramer of the New York Times, who famously wrote: "Mr. Szarkowski throws all caution to the winds and speaks of Mr. Eggleston's pictures as 'perfect'. Perfect? Perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly."

As time has shown, Kramer was wrong and Szarkowski – not for the first time – was right. His introduction to the book of the exhibition remains one of the great pieces of writing on modern photography. In retrospect, though, Szarkowski's greatest gift was not his brilliant critical mind, nor his ability to help define what is now accepted as a canon of great photography, but his willingness to take risks with his own reputation. By the time he died, on 7 July 2007, aged 81, Szarkowski had returned to his first love, the taking of photographs. He was described by an obituary writer as "the man who taught America how to look at photographs." It still does not seem too extravagant a claim.

Now see this

Nazraeli Press specialises in producing beautiful limited edition art photography books. Retrados Pintado is no exception. The book collects images of hand-painted portraits of

Das Auge des Entdeckers

Er glaubte ans fotografische Werk wie niemand zuvor: Zum Tode des MoMA-Kurators John Szarkowski

Von Ulf Erdmann Ziegler

Irgendjemand musste die Fotografie vor Pierre Bourdieu retten, und dieser Jemand war John Szarkowski. Er war es, der früh begriff, dass Fotografien nicht aus Maschinen kommen, sondern aus den Köpfen der Leute, die sie bedienen. Gewiss war John Szarkowski der alltägliche Gebrauch der Fotografie bewusst, aber er glaubte nicht an die Analogie von Werk und Zufall. Das fotografische *Werk* war es, das ihn interessierte. Er musste die Werke nicht erfinden, sie waren schon da. Szarkowski war 34 Jahre alt, als Robert Franks „The Americans" in den USA erschien. Das war 1959. Drei Jahre später übernahm er die Fotografische Abteilung im Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Künstler, die „auch" fotografierten, waren John Szarkowski gleichgültig

Die Abteilung war Ende der 30er Jahre gegründet worden und hatte unter Edward Steichen 1955 einen monumentalen Erfolg verbucht, die Wanderausstellung „Family of Man". Die zeigte, in teils monumentalen Installationen, die ganze Welt bei Arbeit, Liebe, Sport und Krieg, aber der Katalog enthielt noch nicht einmal eine Liste mit den Namen der Fotografen. Die erschienen, wie in den großen Magazinen, als winzige Zeile am Bildrand. Mit dieser Sicht auf Fotografen als Motivlieferanten für kuratorische Themen sollte Szarkowski brechen.

Gleich im folgenden Jahr präsentierte er „The Photographer and the American Landscape". Die Auswahl der 19 Fotografen von den Government Surveys seit 1867 bis in die Gegenwart rechtfertigte er so: „Einige waren von entscheidendem Einfluss, so dass ihre Arbeit vorkommen musste; andere sind Repräsentanten umfassender Trends oder Konzepte, die man auch über Werke anderer hätte zum Ausdruck bringen können; einige sind bewusste Künstler gewesen, sich des ästhetischen Vorgangs gänzlich sicher, wissend, dass ihre Arbeit unweigerlich ein persönliches Statement war; andere, die sich als Handwerker von Intelligenz und Sensibilität an die Arbeit machten, sind vielleicht bedeutendere Künstler gewesen als ihnen selbst klar war." Damit war der Radius abgesteckt, in dem Szarkowski sich gründlich umsah. Er kümmerte sich nicht um Künstler, die „auch" fotografieren, nicht um fotografische Clubs und Vereinigungen, nicht um die wohletablierten Namen der heroischen Landschaftsfotografie. Im Gegenteil, „die Qualitäten der Fotografien", die er ankaufte und zeigte – das hat er aber erst später so ausgesprochen – waren „weniger offensichtlich künstlerisch, und ihre Schönheit weniger schön".

Sein unwiderrufliches Bekenntnis zur Gegenwart kam mit „New Documents" 1967: die schockierenden, stierenden Portraits von Diane Arbus; die scheinbar choreographierten Gesellschaftssatiren Garry Winogrands; die wie handgewebten, bis in jede Schwärze durchkonjugierten Straßenszenen Lee Friedlanders. Mit einem Schlag hatte John Szarkowski die Fotografie vom Ruch des Ältlichen, des Naseweisen, des Belehrenden befreit. Gleichzeitig legte er den Grundstein für einige Karrieren: Die drei von 1967 plus Robert Frank, William Eggleston und Nicholas Nixon wurden MoMA-Fotografen der ersten und zweiten Generation. Damals war das neu: Prints verkaufen und Stipendien bekommen. So entmachtete Szarkowski indirekt die Magazine.

Sein monumentaler Coup aber waren die elegischen, mythischen Südstaatenfotografien Egglestons, deren „Banalität" Hilton Kramer in der New York Times beklagte: weil sie in Farbe waren. Es waren keineswegs die ersten Farbfotos im „Modern", aber erst dann, 1976, war es gelungen, einen Fotografen zu finden, der die unruhige, schnüffelnde, eher ikonische als szenische Fotografie auf die Farbe hatte anwenden können. Egglestons enorme Schwäche, dass er kein Auge hatte für den Zusammenhang seines eigenen Werks, verdeckte John Szarkowski, indem er dessen Arbeit auf wenige Dutzend Motive zusammenstutzte und die Ausstellung „William Eggleston's Guide" nannte, während in der Tat niemand als Szarkowski selbst hier der Führer durch den Dschungel der Motive war.

Mit „der Stimme eines Stentors und dem Stil eines Raconteurs", wie die New York Times schrieb, sicherte sich John „Tschar-kaus-ki", aus dem Mittleren Westen kommend, seine Position in der 53sten Straße Manhattans, die er erst 1991 an Peter Galassi, einen mehr oder weniger Getreuen, übergab. Szarkowski hatte dafür etwas geopfert, nämlich seine eigene Karriere als Fotograf. Erst nach seiner Pensionierung nahm er die Fotografie wieder auf und wurde kürzlich mit einer Retro geehrt. Bereits in den 50er Jahren hatte er mit zwei eigenen Büchern Aufmerksamkeit erregt, eines über die Architektur Louis Sullivans und eines über „The Face of Minnesota".

Das Stichwort des „Dokuments" war insofern missverständlich, als der Kurator eine komplexe, deutende Fotografie suchte und fand. Über Walker Evans schrieb Szarkowski, er sei sich nicht sicher, ob der Fotograf „das Amerika meiner Kindheit dargestellt oder hervorgebracht hat".

Walker Evans, eine Generation älter als er selbst, wurde zum Mantra der Ära Szarkowski – je mehr der Kurator auf Selbstdarstellung verzichtete, desto stärker wurde Evans, der wie Szarkowski aus dem Mittleren Westen kam und sich herangewagt hatte an das amerikanische *vernacular*: an die Schuppen und Läden und Schilder und Autowracks, die bei der Erschließung des Westens zurückblieben als die andere Seite des immer wachsenden Wohlstands.

Glücklicherweise hatte Walker Evans schon 1938 im MoMA ausgestellt, so dass Szarkowskis Herleitung nicht selbstgemacht war, sondern im eigenen Garten gewachsen. Evans, mit weißem Bart voll dabei, gab den eklektischen Weisen, wie der Museumsmann später auch.

John Szarkowski konnte in New York schließlich zeigen, dass die Fotografie der radikalen Dokumentation aus Europa kam, angefangen bei Eugène Atget. Denn Atgets monumentales Werk über Paris, seine Gassen, Vororte und Gärten war über die Fotografin Berenice Abbott in fünftausend Abzügen nach New York gekommen, von Fotografen eingeatmet worden wie ein frischer Joint, und schließlich weitergereicht ans MoMA, ein Fundus, nach dem Szarkowski griff, und plötzlich war da eine ganze Tradition. Vorher hatte man nach dem Europäischen im Amerikanischen gesucht, jetzt war Atget der Urgroßvater des amerikanischen Klein-klein, nicht die Freiheitsstatue, aber deren Fackel, ein Licht, das immer größer wurde.

Selbstverständlich hat Szarkowski auf diesem Trip eine Menge verpasst, Sherman und Mapplethorpe, die Spatzen pfeifen es von den Dächern. Aber wen kümmert's, das Museum of Modern Art kauft ohnehin, was es will. Dies war ein Privileg, das John Szarkowski zu nutzen wusste, und sein Geheimnis war sein Denken, sein Schreiben, seine Systematik. Für die einen waren seine Fotografen zu roh und zu wild, für die anderen borniert und formalistisch: na und? Am Ende seiner Zeit als Kurator schrieb er den Katalog „Photography Until Now", in dem er die Erfindungsgeschichte der Technik mit den Erfindungen der Fotografen vermisst, ein großartiges Resümee, mit einer überraschenden Wendung: Bourdieu hatte ja nicht Unrecht, nur leider die Bilder nicht angeschaut.

Bei den deutschen Fotografen ist seine Tradition ganz und gar angekommen

Szarkowskis fotografische Tradition ist bei den deutschen Fotografen ganz und gar angekommen: kein Robert Lebeck, kein Dirk Reinartz, kein Michael Schmidt, keine Eva Leitolf und keine Jitka Hanzlová ohne die Bühne seiner Gedanken. Die großen Formate? Das war nicht sein Ding, nicht rückwärts, nicht vorwärts. Seine Idee war der Fotograf als Produzent: das Projekt, das Labor, die „prints", das Buch. Nicht das künstlerische Wollen war entscheidend, sondern der bildhafte Trieb.

Niemals verschwunden aus der Welt der Fotografie, starb John Szarkowski mit 81 Jahren in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Seine Schriften zur Fotografie sind in Europa noch nicht wirklich entdeckt. Jedoch: Eine bessere Quelle gibt es nicht.

John Szarkowski 1976 mit Tochter Natasha. Aus dem Band „Lee Friedlander Portraits" LEE FRIEDLANDER

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Szarkowski

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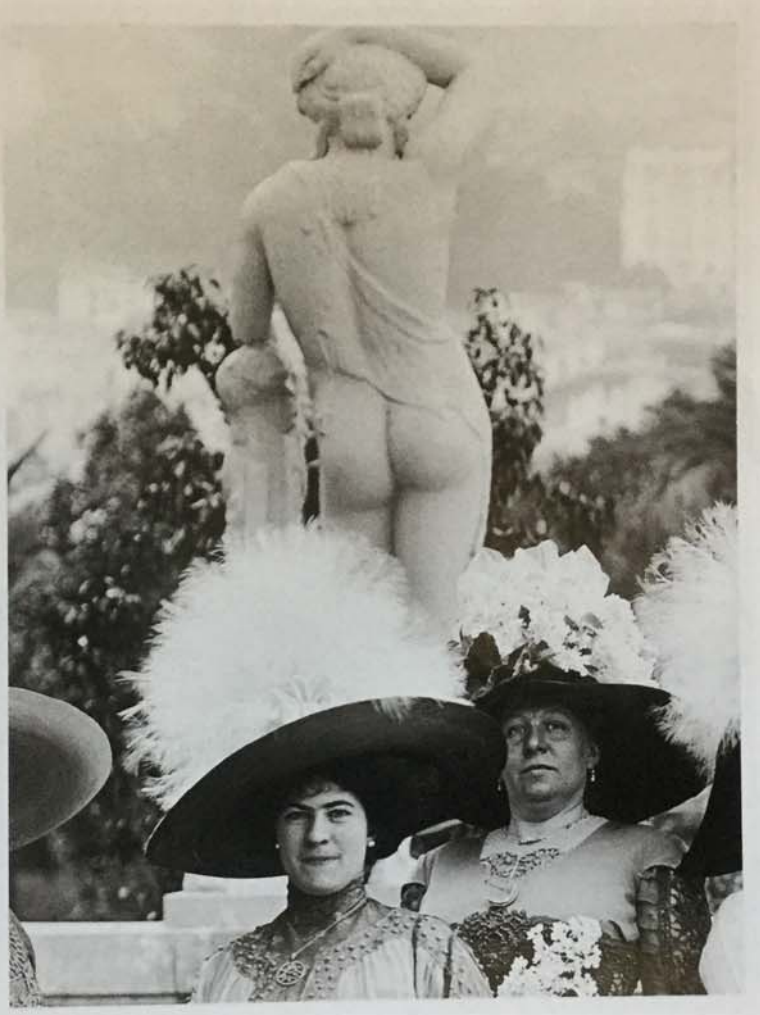
Das Leben begreifen

Zum Tod von John Szarkowski

Als John Szarkowski 1962 in der Nachfolge Edward Steichens die Fotografieabteilung des New Yorker Museum of Modern Art übernahm, war Fotografie als Kunstform kaum anerkannt. Wie kein anderer hat Szarkowski sich für diese Nobilitierung der Lichtbildnerei eingesetzt, mit dem ganzen Prestige seines Postens am MoMA, den er fast drei Jahrzehnte lang innehielt. In bahnbrechenden Ausstellungen wie „The Photographer's Eye" und „Looking at Photographs" führte er vor, wie sich zweckgebundene Dokumentationsarbeit in eine persönliche Sicht der Welt verwandelte. Mit der Schau „New Documents" half er 1967 Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander und Garry Winogrand zum Durchbruch. Eine neue Generation von Fotokünstlern, erklärte er, wolle das Leben durch Fotografie nicht mehr reformieren, sondern begreifen. Szarkowski, als Kunsthistoriker ausgebildet und selbst ein Fotograf, dessen Bilder sich durch jene Klarheit und poetische Reinheit auszeichneten, die er immer wieder einforderte, starb nun im Alter von einundachtzig Jahren in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. J.M.

photo



Œil de lynx par Penny Martin

Après lui, la photographie ne sera plus tout à fait la même. En analysant cette discipline selon ses seules qualités formelles, John Szarkowski a révolutionné son histoire. Retour sur son exposition visionnaire de 1964 au MoMA.

"*J'ai préparé pour d'Harnoncourt* [l'ex-directeur du MoMA à New York] *un mémo dressant la liste d'une demi-douzaine de projets que j'estimais que le département devrait traiter*", se souvient John Szarkowski, méditant sur sa nomination à la tête du département de photographie du même musée, en 1962. "*L'un d'entre eux était une exposition traitant du caractère formel de la photographie, qui est devenue* The Photographer's Eye", dit-il simplement, évoquant l'exposition révolutionnaire de 1964 et le livre séminal de 1966 qui devaient changer pour toujours la façon dont on regarde les images photographiques. Et le chef sortant du département, Edward Steichen, le grand photographe et commissaire de l'exposition historique de 1955, *The Family of Man*, était-il au courant du remaniement idéologique radical que Szarkowski se proposait de faire subir au département ? "*J'ai tendance à penser que d'Harnoncourt n'a probablement pas fait part*

Conspirator Payne, Mathew B. Brady –ou son équipe– (1865).

du fameux "diagramme de Barr" et toujours directeur de collections à l'époque de l'arrivée de Szarkowski. En se focalisant sur le "*vocabulaire commun*" des photographes au lieu de perpétuer le vieux débat éculé "*est-ce de l'art ?*", la posture théorique centrale de *The Photographer's Eye* permit à la photographie de devenir un sujet d'étude intellectuelle et assit enfin sa place dans le contexte muséologique.

Szarkowski fut responsable du nombre stupéfiant de cent soixante expositions de photographie sous son intendance au MoMA, qui s'étala sur quatre décennies jusqu'à ce qu'il démissionne en 1991 pour reprendre ses propres travaux de photographe. Toutefois, loin d'être un expert distant, il utilisa également sa position, lorsqu'il était en fonction, pour faire éclore des artistes vivants, et on lui attribue d'avoir "découvert", établi et défendu d'innombrables praticiens qui devinrent de grands noms, dont

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East Side Tenement Christmas, photographe inconnu (sans date).

Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand et Lee Friedlander, auxquels Szarkowski offrit leur première exposition, *New Documents*, en 1967, sans oublier William Eggleston, André Kertész, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Daido Moriyama parmi tant d'autres.

Même si Szarkowski sera toujours étroitement associé aux artistes qu'il a soutenus, lorsqu'on lui demande de désigner son photographe préféré, le commissaire répond par la fameuse boutade : "*Anonyme*." En vérité, l'aspect le plus audacieux de son héritage est d'avoir démantelé la structure hiérarchique qui donnait la priorité aux photographes d'art sur les autres types de praticiens. Défiant l'élitisme artistique traditionnel, qui honore la vie et l'œuvre des "maîtres", *The Photographer's Eye* avançait que l'imagerie vernaculaire de photographes inconnus pouvait être montrée à côté du travail d'artistes établis. Il employait cette stratégie dans le livre, avec un effet visuel saisissant, faisant se côtoyer des études de genre d'enfants à Noël réalisées par des photographes inconnus et l'imagerie iconique de la guerre civile américaine par le maître vénéré du XIXe siècle Matthew B. Brady ou des photos de mariage des années 20 et le cliché classique de Charles Nègre, *Henri Le Secq et la gargouille de Notre-Dame*, de 1851.

Bien que ce livre constitue un très bel exemple de mise en page moderniste, c'est avant tout l'intention sous-jacente au texte lyrique de Szarowski qui distingue *The Photographer's Eye* comme un essai critique toujours d'actualité. C'est vraisemblablement leur croyance dans la pérennité de sa pertinence idéologique qui ont décidé Szarkowski et le MoMA à l'imprimer pour la troisième fois. Même si ce genre de discours théorique dans le vent rebute totalement Szarkowski : "*Je ne veux pas paraître obtus, mais je ne vois pas où est la théorie dans* The Photographer's Eye*... Les cinq chapitres devraient être considérés comme des principes d'iden-*

Henri Le Secq at Notre-Dame Cathedral, Charles Nègre, Paris (1851). Calotype.

tification des problèmes, insiste-t-il patiemment, *en tant que tels, je pense qu'ils s'appliquent parfaitement au photographe qui travaille en numérique, ainsi qu'à celui qui travaille au collodion humide ou au daguerréotype, si ces procédés devaient revenir.*" Et où, dans ce cas, les jeunes photographes qui travaillent en numérique devraient-ils montrer leurs images, une fois qu'ils auraient maîtrisé les principes fondamentaux du livre ? Sûrement pas dans le contexte muséal qu'il s'est tellement battu pour établir au MoMA, conseille Szarkowski : "*J'ai bien peur que la plupart des jeunes photographes ambitieux d'aujourd'hui pensent que leur futur, s'ils en ont un, passe par le monde des galeries. Une jeune personne brillante et courageuse trouvera sûrement une meilleure idée.*"

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The Photographer's Eye sera publié pour la première fois en Français, en mai, aux éditions 5 Continents/ Le Seuil/ Volumen. www.fivecontinentseditions.com

Railroad Station, André Kertész (1937).

de ce mémo à Steichen", commente-t-il, pince-sans-rire.

L'économie de mots, l'esprit acerbe, sans parler d'une légère intolérance à l'égard des interrogations naïves, caractérisent le commissaire et le théoricien de la photographie peut-être le plus important qu'ait jamais connu ce domaine. L'impact de l'approche de Szarkowski dans la composition d'expositions est tel qu'il est presque impossible d'imaginer le monde de la photographie avant ses débuts, d'abord comme photographe de musée au Walker Art Center de Minneapolis à la fin des années 40, puis, après deux partenariats avec le Guggenheim pour créer des livres, comme jeune successeur de Steichen.

Une des clefs de cette approche a été un engagement infaillible envers le "*caractère formel de la photographie*" qui fit le sujet de *The Photographer's Eye*. Le livre, élégamment présenté et faussement simple, exposait la théorie – alors radicale – que les distinctions entre les différents secteurs de la photographie (commerciale, artistique, documentaire, journalistique) n'avaient pas de pertinence si l'on analysait les images du point de vue de leurs qualités visuelles. Les propriétés formelles du sujet, du détail, du format, de l'exposition et de l'angle de prise de vue se voyaient toutes offrir des analyses en profondeur en cinq chapitres dont les titres d'une foudroyante simplicité – "La chose elle-même", "Le détail", "Le cadre" et "Le point de vue" – donnaient à la théorie les apparences du bon sens commun élémentaire.

Vocabulaire commun. Cette façon pénétrante de comprendre l'imagerie photographique s'accordait parfaitement avec la nouvelle théorie de l'art formaliste énoncée dans les années 40 et 50 par John Kouwenhoven et Clement Greenberg, qui s'appuyaient sur le travail d'Alfred Barr, premier directeur du MoMA, architecte

A gauche : *Statue and Two Ladies*, photographe inconnu (1910). A droite : *Untitled*, Lee Friedlander, Cincinnati, Ohio (1962).

Bronze figure of Artemis and the Stag, ca. 1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.

culty of estimating rare objects for which there are few comparable examples—not to mention the current market frenzy.

As expected [see "Front Page," May '07], an elegant Roman bronze that depicts Artemis and the Stag, outperformed all other lots, appearing at the June 7 auction of Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Western Asian antiquities. Estimated at $5-7 million, it netted $28.6 million, the highest price ever paid for an antiquity or a sculpture of any period at auction, according to Sotheby's. It was purchased by the London dealer Giuseppe Eskenazi on behalf of a private European collector. (Prices include Sotheby's commissions: 20 percent on the first $500,000, and 12 percent above.) According to the *New York Times*, Richard M. Keresey, an antiquities specialist at Sotheby's, deemed it "the best single piece I've seen here in 37 years."

As the acquisitions fund has grown since the Albright-Knox sales were undertaken in March, it has been tapped for purchases that would previously have been beyond the reach of the strapped museum, according to director Louis Grachos. Among them are a film, three photographs and a sculpture from Matthew Barney's 2005 "Drawing Restraint" series; a 1982/2004 red yarn sculpture by Fred Sandback; and Bruce Nauman's video installation *Green Horses* (1988), a joint purchase with the Whitney Museum that is the Albright-Knox's first major piece by the artist. —*Faye Hirsch*

More Exiting Museum Directors

Guggenheim Museum director **Lisa Dennison** has announced that she will resign from the museum to join Sotheby's this month. After 29 years with the Guggenheim, including nearly two years as director, Dennison will be the auction house's vice president of North American operations.

FRONT PAGE

Timothy Potts resigns as director of the Kimbell Art Museum, effective Sept. 1. Potts led the museum for almost nine years, during which time it acquired a number of important works, including examples by Donatello, Bernini and Lucas Cranach the Elder. The museum has also just embarked on an expansion, designed by Renzo Piano.

Jay Gates, director for nine years of the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., has decided to step down in 2008. During his tenure, the museum raised $30 million and completed a 30,000-square-foot expansion that doubled its size.

John R. Lane, director of the Dallas Museum of Art since 1999, will retire in May 2008. In addition to boosting the museum's endowment by $166.8 million and increasing attendance from 400,000 to 600,000 a year, he secured a bequest of more than 900 contemporary artworks from a group of local collectors. Lane will be succeeded by **Bonnie Pitman**, who has been deputy director since 2000. She has been spearheading the creation of the DMA's Center for Creative Connections, a new 12,000-square-foot educational facility opening in spring 2008.

Jessie Otto Hite, for 15 years director of the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, has announced her retirement, effective March 2008. Under her leadership, the museum constructed its new home, which opened in 2006, and added 7,000 works to its holdings, including the Michener, Suida-Manning and Leo Steinberg collections.

John Szarkowski 1925-2007

John Szarkowski, the influential director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department for nearly 30 years and a champion of the medium's potential as art, died July 7 of complications from a stroke he had suffered in February. He was 81 and lived in East Chatham, N.Y.

Szarkowski directed MOMA's photography program from 1962 to 1991, a period of transition in both the public's and the art world's relationship to photographs. In the early '60s, *Life* and other picture magazines represented the popular idea of photography's esthetic possibilities, while photographers seeking to be considered artists, such as Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Minor White, worked largely in isolation. By the '90s, picture magazines were historical artifacts, and photographs had achieved favored-medium status in galleries and museums.

Szarkowski had a crucial role in this development of photography from art orphan to star player, although in the later years of his tenure he became a conservative voice in the field. He discovered and vigorously promoted Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand, the protagonists of his "New Documents" exhibition of 1967, but he would have little to do with the "photo-based art" of the 1970s and '80s. Postmodernism left him cold; MOMA belatedly acquired Cindy Sherman's '70s "Untitled Film Stills" only in 1995, after he had retired.

When Szarkowski arrived at MOMA, the photography department was already well known. Its first director, Beaumont Newhall, is considered the father of photography's status as an art, having written the authoritative English-language text on the subject in the 1930s. After World War II Newhall was replaced by Edward Steichen, a curatorial impresario who launched sprawling shows like "The Family of Man," MOMA's 1955 blockbuster that presented photography as a universal language of human experience, from birth to death. Steichen also organized inclusive group shows of contemporary work, relying on themes like abstraction.

Szarkowski turned his back on the more or less mighty themes of Steichen and to an extent on the art-historical lineage established by Newhall. His first show, in 1963, was titled "Five Unrelated Photographers," but his first position paper was the catalogue for the 1964 exhibition "The Photographer's Eye." In it he argued that the medium's fundamental formal characteristics—detail, point of view, time, etc.—constituted its artistic potential. In spirit not far removed from the formalist esthetic applied to painting by critic Clement Greenberg, Szarkowski's approach enabled him to view vernacular, commercial and art photographs as partners in a progressive development of the medium.

One result was a preference for contemporary photographers, like William Eggleston, whose work mined the territory of the snapshot ("William Eggleston's Guide," 1976); another was in exhibitions like "From the Picture Press" (1973), which consisted of images culled largely from the archive of the New York *Daily News*. Perhaps his most illustrious curatorial achievement was a four-part exhibition of the work of Eugène Atget, which appeared in installments from 1981 to 1985. Atget was a journeyman commercial photographer in turn-of-the-century Paris, but Szarkowski portrayed him as a poet of the camera fueled by a Proustian sensibility.

John Szarkowski. Tucson, Arizona, 1992, by Lee Friedlander.

As important as his exhibitions may have been, though, one could say that Szarkowski made his deepest contributions as a writer. His arguments for the importance of his discoveries, or his reconsiderations of acknowledged masters such as Henri Cartier-Bresson or Walker Evans, were always beautifully phrased and usually bold in conception. Before Rosalind Krauss, Susan Sontag, Janet Malcolm and others "outside" the tight-knit photography community began addressing photography seriously in the 1970s, he was one of the few to demonstrate that photographs were worthy of intellectual discussion.

In this sense his most memorable achievement may have been the 1973 book *Looking at Photographs*, which consisted of 100 reproductions of photographs in MOMA's collection and a single-page meditation by Szarkowski about each image. Radical in their breadth and depth then, these small essays continue to hold their power. Consider this excerpt, from his piece about a 19th-century survey image by Timothy O'Sullivan:

> His landscapes are as precisely and as economically composed as a good masonry wall. It is as though every square inch of the precious glass plate, carried so far at so great an effort, had to be justified completely.

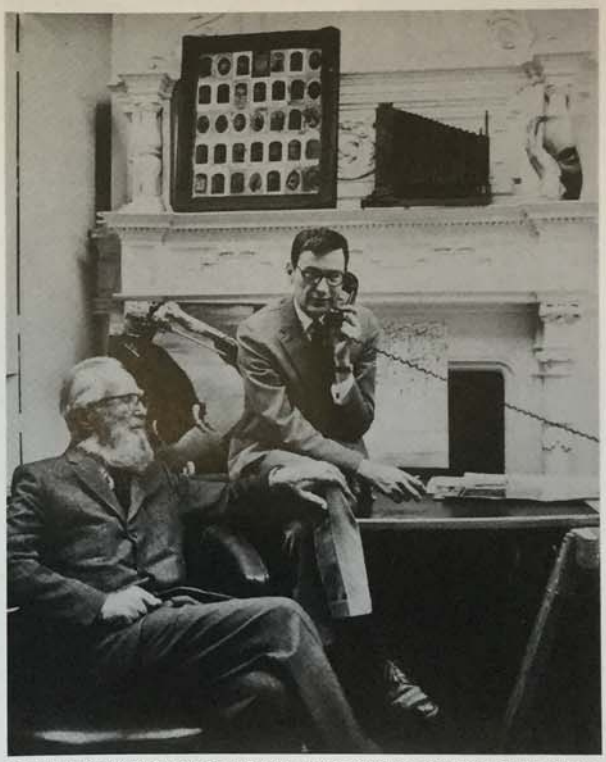
After retiring from the museum in 1991, Szarkowski returned to what he had been doing before he became a curator: photographing. He concentrated on rural subjects near his upstate home, such as his apple orchard and a neighbor's antique barn. Selections of these pictures were shown at Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, in 2006, and in a traveling retrospective of his work organized by San Francisco MOMA in 2005. —*Andy Grundberg*

Photos: Artemis: courtesy Sotheby's, New York; Szarkowski: © 2007 Lee Friedlander, courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Art Forum October 2007 Szarkowski

Master of the Medium

MARIA MORRIS HAMBOURG ON JOHN SZARKOWSKI (1925–2007)



Paul Huf, *John Szarkowski Succeeds Edward Steichen*, MOMA, ca. 1962, black-and-white photograph, 12 x 9¼".

IT IS RARE for a curator to reign with virtual sovereignty over an entire medium, but during his nearly three decades as director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (from 1962 until his retirement in 1991), John Szarkowski did. His outpouring of exhibitions and catalogues at the pulpit of modern art and photography placed him on a singular pedestal in a recurrent spotlight, but it was less these conditions than his penetrating mind, eloquence, and perspective that made his opinion matter so much. In a field dominated by journalism and almost devoid of serious critical thought, Szarkowski was a flare of intellect, a lone poet among jobbing professionals. One would be hard-pressed to name another instance in which one man's vision of an unrecognized art simultaneously created and educated its audience.

Szarkowski, who died on July 7 at the age of eighty-one, saw photography as a commodious collection of diverse species of image—studio portraits, architectural views, amateur snapshots, "nuts-and-bolts" industrial illustrations, commercial shots, photojournalism, scientific documents, and many other kinds of records. He was interested in the medium as a whole, and in his 1964 exhibition and subsequent book, *The Photographer's Eye* (1966), he illustrated how the creative issues, such as subject selection, vantage, and frame, were similar whether the camera was wielded by a journeyman, a Sunday hobbyist, or an artist. He recognized that the evolution of the mechanical and technical aspects of the medium molded the options photographers had and that their choices, in the aggregate, created the medium's history—a stream of images that, as long as it was remembered, became a valuable, usable tradition. This he richly detailed for the 150-year anniversary celebration of photography's invention in "Photography Until Now," his 1990 omnibus exhibition and book (and valedictory as director of MOMA's photography department).

While democratically delighting in the vernacular of the species, Szarkowski could not help preferring photographs that consistently revealed keen "intelligence, precise intention, and coherence"—in other words, pictures made by talented, committed artists. This elite was not likely to be found among those who labored to make their pictures look artistic, like Impressionist or Constructivist paintings, for example, nor among those who earned academic degrees in art (propositions he found faintly ludicrous). Rather, to his mind, true artists were generally autodidacts who discovered in their photographic praxis a school of experience and in their subjects the resonance of larger meanings. He had learned that neither the older arts nor the classroom afforded adequate instruction in photography; this, he felt, could only arise from the individual's vital examination of the world.

Szarkowski grew up on the shores of Lake Superior in Wisconsin and experienced an all-American, small-town youth in which family life, marching bands, baseball, farm folk, photography, music, and fishing commingled with hard work, moral decency, and public service. Threading through his formative years was a fiber of deep respect for the literal and the practical, especially when ennobled by ideas. The truths of the actual world, which this Midwesterner always revered, and photography's infinitely nuanced transparency and open field of inquiry, which challenged his eye and mind, perfectly married his proclivities and perceptions. After apprenticing in various photographic studios and museums, he wrote and made the photographs for two distinguished books, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956) and *The Face of Minnesota* (1958). In 1961, while working on a third book, exploring a tract of wilderness on the Canadian border, Szarkowski considered an invitation to become a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. He later recalled that a drinking buddy at the local bar thought this shift the equivalent of trading in his fishing license for a game warden's badge.

Szarkowski's advocacy in the 1960s of Friedlander, Arbus, Winogrand, and other photographers of the younger generation is often seen as having effected a sea change in photographic style.

The aesthetic the new curator would advocate throughout his tenure at MOMA owed much to his own photographic practice, to his study of the American photographers Edward Weston and Paul Strand, and especially to his encounter via an art history professor with Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938). Although it mystified him at first, this classic book gradually taught Szarkowski that photographs could be dense with intelligence, precise and literal in description, and rich with allusive complexity. Evans's approach eventually became Szarkowski's essential position on the medium. In 1971 he wrote, "The photographer must define his subject with an educated awareness of what it is and what it means; he must describe it with such simplicity and sureness that the result seems an unchallengeable fact, not merely the record of a photographer's opinion; yet the picture itself should possess a

Lee Friedlander, *John Szarkowski, Tucson, Arizona*, 1992, black-and-white photograph, 14⅞ x 14 15/16".

taut athletic grace, an inherent structure, that gives it a life in metaphor." He continued, "Evans at his best convinces us that we are seeing the dry bones of fact, presented without comment, almost without thought. His lesser pictures make it clear that the best ones had deceived us: what we had accepted as simple facts were precise descriptions of very personal perceptions."

If Szarkowski recognized Evans as a prophet, Evans was the first to remark the younger man's brilliance, for Evans had been the referee who recommended that Szarkowski receive Guggenheim grants in 1954 and again in 1961. That year, when Szarkowski made a trip east only to find his New York publisher less than enthusiastic about his new photographs, he ventured to see whether Evans, whom he venerated but had never met, was in his office at *Fortune*. Evans kept mum about his role in awarding the Guggenheim Fellowships and, after hearing Szarkowski's story and viewing the photographs, said something like, "Forget the publisher—those people never understand artists like you and me. Let's go have a drink." The association sealed the approval that was shortly afterward made manifest in the invitation to take over from Edward Steichen at MOMA.

Evans was Szarkowski's critical link back to the documentary tradition of the nineteenth century—to Eugène Atget and Mathew Brady—as well as a prescient scout of the best of contemporary practitioners, among them Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus, and Garry Winogrand, all protégés of Evans's whom Szarkowski presented in his watershed 1967 exhibition, "New Documents." Like Evans, these artists deftly seized the existential facts of a moment in a way that implied objectivity but actually implicated the photographer's ideas about the subject, resulting in the sort of credible fictions that qualify as photographic art. Although critics thought the images in the exhibition were unformed, uncomfortable, or artless, Evans's criteria were operational, just transmuted into a more contemporary guise. Szarkowski's advocacy of these photographs and of other photographers of the younger generation is often seen as having effected a sea change in photographic style, but, as Szarkowski modestly acknowledged, he was simply quick enough to recognize and champion the new tendency.

Throughout the 1970s Szarkowski kept working to reveal photography as a distinct and valuable art. His 1973 volume *Looking at Photographs*, with its succinct, colorful, and variously fascinating commentaries and its broad selection of photographs, demonstrated one hundred times over his astute ways of seeing into the meaning of individual images and went far toward attracting a larger audience to the medium. Szarkowski was not only educating the public, the new collectors, and the gallerists; he was also teaching photographers about the creative potential of their medium and pushing them to adopt his rigorous standards. When he produced *William Eggleston's Guide*, in 1976, focusing attention on color snapshots, he brushed a lot of fur backward but opened the door for serious consideration of that genre and for color photography in general. Because Szarkowski gave dignity to their enterprise and really understood their issues, young photographers were drawn to MOMA during his tenure, and those who were included in his inner circle and exhibitions knew they had secured a place in history. For accomplished masters of the medium such as André Kertész, Brassaï, Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Irving Penn, an exhibition organized by "the great man" promised a deeper understanding of their achievement.

Even if the state of photographic commentary had not been relatively vacuous when Szarkowski came onto the stage, his opinions would have counted. His ideas had the virtue of simplicity. Overhauling the prevailing opinion of Atget—who was still regarded as a primitive in the early '80s, when Szarkowski mounted a four-part exhibition of the French documentarian's work—he famously compared photography to pointing, arguing, "It must be true that some of us point to more interesting facts, events, circumstances, and configurations than others," an irrefutable statement clarifying Atget's mute genius. Szarkowski's genius was to test his heady ideas against his real experience as a photographer; this encouraged him to jettison any insupportable theories as "woolgathering." His broad reading, training in art history, and rhetorical abilities gave his elaboration of these ideas reference, relevance, and resonance. In addition, his measured, near-biblical rhythms, the clarity and perfect pitch of his analogies, and his playful, sardonic, and thought-provoking embellishments were captivating. At their best, his arguments were wholly persuasive and his apperceptions irresistible, and if he was occasionally irascible, garrulous, and egotistical in later years, these indulgences were more than offset by his outsize accomplishments, usual decorum, and charisma.

Although critics began to carp, Szarkowski was immovable in his stylistic preferences and secure in his position right through the '80s. He could not bear casual ignorance or open rejection of classic photographic technique, which struck him blind to the conceptual interest of many artists who began using the medium, such as Robert Smithson, Richard Long, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman. And because the new directorial mode, constructed realities, appropriated pictorial worlds, and borrowed media identities interested him not at all, during his time at MOMA the photography department ignored the work of Jeff Wall, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Robert Mapplethorpe, and many other good artists who were technically sophisticated but whose creative schemas lay beyond real life in the province of Art (which Szarkowski saw as a seductive but intellectually empty precinct compounded of artifice and attitude). This young generation perceived that the medium had creative capacities far beyond poetic documentation, but Szarkowski was unshakable in his convictions. I think he felt in his gut that his version of photography was the main stream and that he

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himself was the weir; thus, any big fish he didn't catch could only be ephemeral, inconsequential, or unreal. The irony was that the man who arguably did the most to win photography's acceptance as an art form second to none should have found so uncongenial the work of the first generation of practitioners who saw themselves not as photographers but as artists who work in the medium of photography.

After retiring from MOMA in 1991, Szarkowski continued to write about photography, but he also returned to his first love, taking pictures. On annual trips with his good friends Lee Friedlander and Richard Benson, he spent much of his time looking at potential sites without ever getting out his camera, doubtless because his long experience with, and eidetic memory for, the best photographs obviated paltry or redundant pictures. He did manage to take some good photographs of dooryards, hand-hewn barns, and apple trees, comforting elements of the agrarian past from which he and his ancestors drew their innate strength. (A traveling exhibition of his early and late photographs was organized in 2005 by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.)

In the future, Szarkowski will be remembered for his brilliant clarification of modern photography's independence from the other arts; in the present, however, all who were changed by the force of his vision are measuring the dimensions of his absence. □

MARIA MORRIS HAMBOURG COAUTHORED THE FOUR-VOLUME *WORK OF ATGET* (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 1981–85) WITH JOHN SZARKOWSKI AND WAS HEAD OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART FROM 1992 UNTIL 2004.

CAPTIONS FOR PAGES 304–305

Top row, from left: **Walter de Maria, *13*, *14*, *15 Meter Rows*, 1985,** forty-two solid stainless steel polygonal rods, each 3½ x 3½ x 39¾". **Alice Aycock, *East River Roundabout*, 1995,** aluminum. Installation view, East River Waterfront Park, New York. **Anselm Reyle, *Harmony*, 2006,** bronze, chrome, enamel varnish, and wood veneer, 88⅛ x 67 x 30⅝". **Maurizio Cattelan, *Frank and Jamie*, 2002,** wax and fabric, two parts: Jamie, 71¾ x 24¾ x 18", and Frank, 75½ x 25 x 20¾". **Rudolf Stingel, *Pian B*, 2005,** carpet. Installation view, Vanderbilt Hall, Grand Central Terminal, New York. Photo: Tom Powell. **Liz Larner, *2001*, 2001,** mixed media. Installation view, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York, 2007. Photo: Seong Kwon. **Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1969/1982,** anodized aluminum. Installation view, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1982. **Adam McEwen, *Commission #2: Friedrich (2)*, 2005,** oil on canvas, 19½ x 26¾". **Jennifer Pastor, *The Perfect Ride* (detail), 2003,** steel, aluminum, plastic, polyurethane, and line drawing animation, dimensions variable. **Philippe Parreno, *The Boy from Mars*, 2005,** neon, 58⅜ x 35½ x 16½". **Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij, *Bouquet IV* (detail), 2005,** black-and-white photograph and flower arrangement in ceramic vase, dimensions variable. **Daniel Buren, *Neuf couleurs au vent* (Nine Colors with the Wind), 1984,** aluminum and nylon. Installation view, Centre International d'Arte Contemporain de Montréal, 1996. Photo: Guy L'Heureux. Bottom row, from left: **Sylvie Fleury, *(Gold) Fountain LKW*, 2003,** gold, porcelain, fountain hardware, and lacquered wood, dimensions variable. **Arturo Herrera, *Keep in Touch (Set #3)*, 2004,** mixed media on paper, 18 x 17". **Anish Kapoor, *Cloud Gate*, 2004,** stainless steel. Installation view, Millennium Park, Chicago. Photo: Walter Mitchell. **Lee Bontecou, *Untitled*, 1968,** vacuum-formed plastic, 21 x 10 x 9". **Dave McKenzie, *There's No Place Like Home*, 2003,** fiberglass. Installation view, MetroTech Center, Brooklyn. Photo: Aaron Diskin. **Keith Edmier, *My Father, My Son*, 2004,** polyurethane, dental acrylic, and acrylic paint, 55½ x 10¼ x 5¾". **Mona Hatoum, *Hot Spot*, 2006,** stainless steel and neon. Installation view, White Cube, London. Photo: Stephen White. **Cerith Wyn Evans, *Cleave 03 (Transmission: Visions of the Sleeping Poet)*, 2003,** WWII searchlight, shutter, computer, Morse Code controlling device, and text by Ellis Wynne, dimensions variable. **Jonathan Monk, *Deadman* (detail), 2006,** wax, rubber, human hair, oil paint, and fabric, 76 x 22 x 12". **Alighiero Boetti, *Mappa*, 1983,** embroidery, 48⅛ x 70¾". **Damián Ortega, *Obelisco transportable*, 2004,** mixed media. Installation view, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York. Photo: Seong Kwon. **Jenny Holzer, *For 7 World Trade*, 2006,** mixed media. Installation view, 7 World Trade Center, New York. Photo: Andreas Keller. © Jenny Holzer 2007/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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whose work with Cerith Wyn Evans, Rachel Whiteread, Mark Wallinger, Mona Hatoum, and Darren Almond cuts across the employ of reverse engineering, rapid prototyping, casting, and 3-D scanning, arbitrating between artists and myriad advanced technologies.

In each instance, the work of Carlson & Co. or Mike Smith Studio is an approximation, a necessarily provisional version of the actual production values of industry (whether BMW or Boeing). For high precision and mass production now, ironically, go hand in hand. As Carlson project manager Mark Rossi puts it, "A mass-produced object, like an automobile, is incredibly refined. It has ninety-plus years of development and millions of hours of engineering behind it."[15] The firm's principal partner, Ed Suman, further observes that "artists often want qualities that could previously only have been attained through mass production," but that "it can be extremely expensive to produce a prototype of something that is designed to be mass-produced, to attain the perfection of mass production. When it's required, we try to push the prototype as far in that direction as possible."[16] Carlson portends a moment when there is absolutely no standardization, because everything is made to order; but this is a postindustrial dream perpetually deferred.

One could easily see the Carlson phenomenon—exemplified in the company's relationship with Koons—as fetishizing production itself, perversely collapsing the romanticization of craft with the logic of simulation. Yet the firm and its work disclose a vital truth about so-called postindustrial production: The law of industry has gone far beyond that of serial production and differential consumption; it now hyperbolically assumes the digitized fantasy of infinite customization. Fabrication becomes a projection of our late-capitalist wish for total specialization and luxury material in everyday forms and experiences—which may be precisely its allure and its undoing. In this elastic arena where artists have sought to mine the possibilities of contemporary production and design and exploit the unpredictability of such adaptations, the large-expenditure project and the casual outsource operate in simultaneity—equivalent prospects dwelling in the loopholes and diversions of our technocratic regime. This scenario of promise isn't a fabrication. But perhaps it remains hopelessly oneiric. □

MICHELLE KUO IS A BOSTON-BASED ART HISTORIAN AND CRITIC. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

NOTES

1. Dan Flavin, "Some Remarks . . . Excerpts from a Spleenish Journal," *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 27.

2. Quoted in Alfred Lubrano, "The Men of Iron Behind Great Artists," *New York Daily News*, December 10, 1989, 12.

3. Nan Rosenthal, "The Sculpture of Barnett Newman," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, ed. Melissa Ho (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005), 115–31.

4. John Lobell, "Developing Technologies for Sculptors," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 45, no. 8 (Summer 1971): 28.

5. Larry Aldrich, interview by Paul Cummins, April 25, 1972, Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

6. Roy Bongartz, "Where the Monumental Sculptors Go," *Art News*, vol. 75, no. 2 (February 1976): 34.

7. Barbara Rose, "Blowup—The Problem of Scale in Sculpture," *Art in America*, vol. 56, no. 4 (July–August 1968): 80–91.

8. Within a year, the "corporation" disbanded. The piece, vandalized and falling apart, was removed in March 1970 and sat decomposing at Lippincott until a new version was reinstated at Yale in 1974.

9. Herbert Marcuse, interview by Stuart Wrede, June 1968, *Perspecta*, vol. 12 (1969): 75. Wrede, then a graduate student at the Yale School of Architecture, was instrumental in commissioning Oldenburg's antimonument for the Yale campus.

10. Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Hard Hats and Art Strikes: Robert Morris in 1970," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 89, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 333–59.

11. Quoted in Hugh Marlais Davies, "Interview with Donald Lippincott," *Artist and Fabricator*, exh. cat. (Amherst, MA: Fine Arts Center Gallery, University of Massachusetts, 1975), 38.

12. Lippincott, quoted in "Interview with Donald Lippincott," 39; Giza, quoted in Leslie Maitland, "Factory Brings Sculptors' Massive Dreams to Fruition," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1976, 55.

13. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 8. See also Buchloh, "Richard Serra's Early Work: Sculpture between Labor and Spectacle," in *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years*, exh. cat., ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 43–60.

14. Peter Carlson, in conversation with the author, May 14, 2007.

15. Mark Rossi, in conversation with the author, May 14, 2007.

16. Ed Suman, in conversation with the author, May 14, 2007.

JONES/ELIASSON continued from page 325

NOTES

1. Olafur Eliasson, interviewed by the author in Berlin, July 6, 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from this interview.

2. Gilles Deleuze, "Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)," in *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988): 109.

3. This discussion draws on various collaborations with Peter Galison; see, for example, our "Centripetal and Centrifugal Architectures: Laboratory and Studio," in Cynthia Davidson, ed., *Anyplace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). For different but related accounts, see Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Michael Gibbons et al., *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1994); and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989).

4. For an analysis of some of the science/art parallels, see my essay with Peter Galison, "Factory, Laboratory, Studio," in Galison and Emily Thompson, eds., *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

5. Tim Berners-Lee, "Information Management: A Proposal," 1989, online at http://www.nic.funet.fi/index/FUNET/history/internet/w3c/proposal.html.

6. See in particular Goldberg and Joseph Santarromana's work *Telegarden*, 1995–2004, discussed in conjunction with other works in Ken Goldberg, ed., *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

7. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathias Copeland (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2002).

8. Anonymous user response to *Telegarden*, 1995–2004, online at http://web.archive.org/web/19981203015012/telegarden.aec.at/cgi-bin/knapsack/html/FAQ.html.

9. Olafur Eliasson, quoted in Cynthia Zarin, "Seeing Things," *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2006: 76.

10. Olafur Eliasson, "On the Relativity of Reality" (lecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, September 19, 2006).

11. Zarin, "Seeing Things."

12. Eliasson, "On the Relativity of Reality."

13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Temporality," in *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1964): 411. In addition to excerpting this passage in *Olafur Eliasson: The mediated motion* (Cologne: Walther König, 2001), Eliasson refers to it frequently in interviews; see the hilarious book by Eliasson and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *The Goose Lake Trail* (Cologne: Walther König, 2007): 58–59.

14. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

15. Eliasson asked Einar Thorsteinn to help him fabricate some structures in 1996, and their mutually influential relationship has continued. Thorsteinn was instrumental in building the first polyhedral domes for such Eliasson works as *The Drop Factory*, exhibited at Rochelle Steiner's "Wonderland" show at the St. Louis Art Museum in 2000. See Thorsteinn and Eliasson, *To the habitants of space in general and the spatial inhabitants in particular* (Vienna: Bawag Foundation, 2002). The German-language edition of Joachim Krausse's edited volume *Your Private Sky: R. Buckminster* *continued on page 402*

Obituaries

TELEPHONE: 020 7005 2012
FAX: 020 7005 2010
E-MAIL: obituaries@independent.co.uk

JOHN SZARKOWSKI

Powerful curator of photographs at the Museum of Modern Art

To say that John Szarkowski single-handedly changed the face of photography from the mid-Sixties might be an exaggeration, but nevertheless his influence on a generation of critics and photographers eager to break away from traditional mores was profound. As curator of photographs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1962 until 1991, he established rhetoric around photography which formed the taste of the new photographic groupings emerging across the United States and Europe.

Szarkowski made heroes of anti-heroes and insisted on a democratic gaze when looking at photographs. If, in so doing, he created a photographic establishment as trenchant and unbending in its views as the one which had preceded it, this in no way negates his achievements. He presented for serious consideration some of the most remarkable photographers of our time and persuaded the post-war photographic audience to look outside the academy and into the beguiling territory of the vernacular.

John Szarkowski began his career as a photographer, after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1948 with a degree in the History of Art. He was engaged by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as a museum photographer, but was determined to develop his own creative career. Beginning with a show of self-portraits at the Walker in 1949, Szarkowski was soon applying for funding which would enable him to embark on ambitious photo projects. In 1956, he published the result of his first Guggenheim Fellowships, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, followed by *The Face of Minnesota* in 1958.

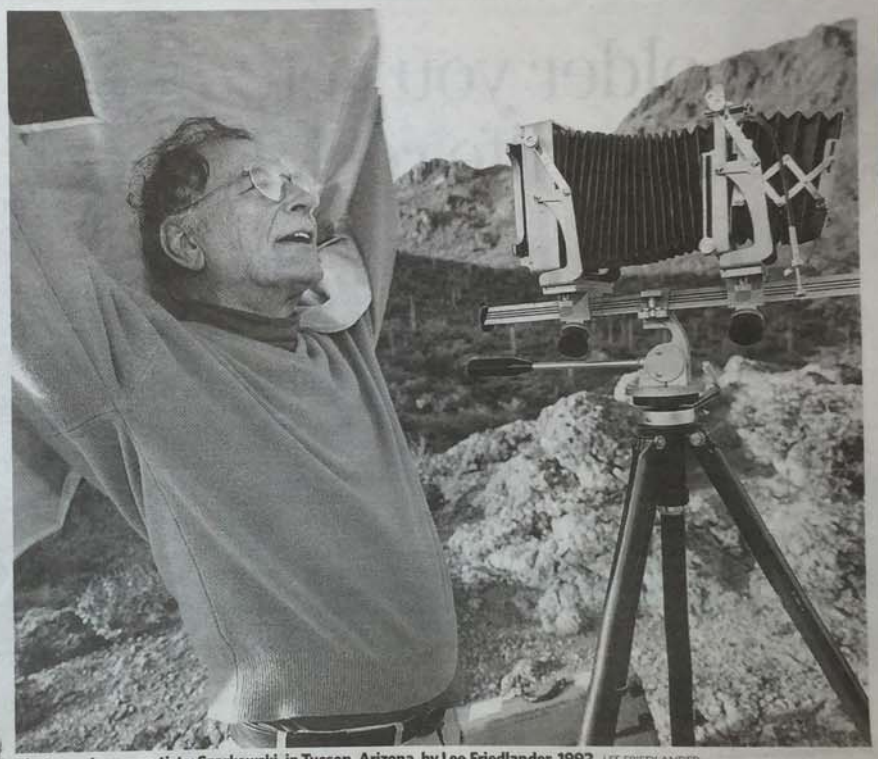
Szarkowski's photographic thoughts were shaped by the publications available in the United States in the late Forties and early Fifties. Interviewed by Kay Kenny in 2006, he remarked:

> Most of what I liked came from *US Camera Annual* . . . and *Coronet* magazine, which favoured photographers from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, ranging from Brassai and Kertesz to conventional portraitists – people fond of backlit swans, sailboats in the fog. Etc. It was some months later – perhaps the next year – before an art history professor named John Fabian Kienitz told me . . . to go to the co-op and buy a book, the name of which he wrote on a file card. I dutifully bought the book, which turned out to be *American Photographs*, by Walker Evans. It mystified me completely . . . However, since I had paid four dollars for it, I felt obligated to keep looking at it to get my money's worth, and gradually it improved. Sixty-odd years later, it is still improving.

By the early 1960s, it appeared as if Szarkowski's career would develop in much the same way as many photographers of his generation – grant-aided projects and publishing backed up with teaching, in Szarkowski's case at the Albright Art School in Buffalo, New York. But in 1962, the 36-year-old photographer from the Midwest was invited to become Curator of Photographs at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

The Photography Department at the Modern already had a distinguished record when Szarkowski joined; the curator and collector Beaumont Newhall had established the importance of photography in a museum context when he became MoMA's first curator of photographs in 1937, while Edward Steichen, who succeeded him, was a distinguished photographer and the curator of the mammoth "Family of Man" exhibition, which toured the world in the 1950s. Interviewed by Mark Durden in 2006, Szarkowski recollected:

> Newhall, Steichen and I were different people, with different talents, limitations, histories, problems and axes to grind. We held the same job at very different times, which means that it was not really the same job. Nevertheless, I think that we all held similar basic ideas about a curator's responsibilities. I'm sure that we all felt that it was our job to try to recognise what was good – what was most vital – in photography's past and present. And to bring that work, at its best and as clearly as we could, to its potential audience. Since we were different people working in different times, we interpreted that charge in somewhat different ways, but surely we all regarded ourselves as critics and teachers, not as census-takers.



Photographers as artists: Szarkowski, in Tucson, Arizona, by Lee Friedlander, 1992 LEE FRIEDLANDER

Although the United States was far ahead of Britain in the development of photographic thinking in the early Sixties, the study and exhibition of photography in America was still in an embryonic stage. Newhall had produced influential photo histories, and photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank had begun to write about their belief in photography as an independent creative medium. Photographers such as Paul Strand, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams were already seen as monumental figures. John Szarkowski, photographer turned curator, was to discover and promote a new generation of photographers who challenged the romance and serenity of Weston and Adams, and who reinforced the already influential documentary work of Walker Evans and Robert Frank.

In his support of Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus and William Eggleston, Szarkowski insisted that a new form of photography would define a new era in America's history. Winogrand, Friedlander and Arbus were grouped together by Szarkowski for the exhibition "New Documents", which opened at MoMA in 1967. As one critic remarked of the show many years later:

> These photographers questioned the old social order to expose racism and alienation in our midst, and the old aesthetic order of photography. They challenged the domination of the sharply focused print that exhibited a full range of times from white through grey to black, championed by Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. They explored oblique framing, radical cropping and the use of the natural grain of the film, extreme close-ups and subject matter that ranged from the dispossessed to the freakish to the oddly normal in American society.

But it was not only the promotion of a young, radical group of photographers which established Szarkowski's reputation as a curator who would change the existing map of photography. In 1948, Szarkowski had read John

of recent photographs, "Now," opens today at Pace/MacGill, and a major retrospective of his work, which covers

Arts+

What the residents of Harlem's most luxurious building are complaining about. Real Estate, Pages 17–22

THE NEW YORK SUN SECTION II

THURSDAY · JANUARY 19, 2006

The Eye of Our Age

John Szarkowski discovered and championed the finest photographers of the 20th century, William Meyers writes. His taste has become our canon.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP *'Young Boy in Red Sweater' (1971)* by **William Eggleston**, *whose color photographs were controversial when John Szarkowski showed them at MoMA in 1976; 'Isak Dinesen' (1958)* by **Richard Avedon**, *whose work he has sometimes criticized but whose portraits he deemed 'a coherent and challenging composite portrait of many of the mythic figures and spearcarriers of the worlds of art, style, and higher salesmanship'; 'Yosemite National Park, California' (2004)* by **Lee Friedlander** *and 'Untitled' (1962)* by **Gary Winogrand**, *who were both part of Szarkowski's 1967 landmark "New Documents" show; an aerial reconnaissance photograph taken over Lavannes during World War I, one of many works by unknown photographers Szarkowski has championed; and 'Washington Square, New York' (1954)* by **André Kertész**, *whose reputation Szarkowski helped to rehabilitate. The images by Avedon, Winogrand, and the unknown photographer and the quoted passage can be found in 'Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures From the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art' (Bulfinch Press).*

In 1991, when John Szarkowski was preparing to step down from his role as director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, U.S. News and World Report wrote, "Szarkowski's thinking, whether Americans know it or not, has become our thinking about photography."

Mr. Szarkowski "gets it in the broad sense," Phil Block, the director of education at the International Center of Photography, told me during a recent telephone conversation. The "it," of course, is photography. The "broad sense" covers Mr. Szarkowski's career as a photographer, historian of photography, theorist of photography, writer on photography, editor of photography books, curator of photographic exhibitions, teacher of photography at Harvard, Columbia, Williams, Cornell, and his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin, and his enormously productive tenure at MoMA from 1962 to 1991. (He still holds the title of director emeritus.)

We will be hearing a lot about Mr. Szarkowski this month. His exhibition of recent photographs, "Now," opens today at Pace/MacGill, and a major retrospective of his work, which covers more than half a century, opens at

> Szarkowski seems always to have everything in mind – history, aesthetics, technology – and to be able to put it in the broad context of all he knows about art in general.

MoMA in two weeks. I will write about his photography at that time, but for now I will examine his reputation as a curator and scholar.

Mr. Szarkowski has a holistic grasp of the photographic medium. He seems always to have everything in mind — history, aesthetics, technology — and to be able to put it in the broad context of all he knows about art in general. Whatever he is doing at any one moment is informed by everything else he has done and knows. He is complex, but, as Mr. Block told me, he affects people "like haiku. It is amazing that a layperson can understand someone so brilliant."

Mr. Szarkowski (b. 1925) succeeded Edward Steichen, the populist, who had succeeded Beaumont Newhall, the scholar, at MoMA, the first art museum to have a department of photography. The exhibitions he curated often became inflection points

Please see SZARKOWSKI, page 14

ALSO IN ARTS

- *Another George Washington portrait up for auction, page 16*
- *'100 Years of Juilliard Composers in Song,' page 13*

Szarkowski

9475FF (1)

John Szarkowski

Photographe, il a été surtout le conservateur du Museum of Modern Art de New York pendant près de trente ans. Par ses écrits et les expositions qu'il a montées, il a imposé la photo comme un art spécifique et fait entrer le style documentaire au musée

Un monument de la photographie disparaît avec l'Américain John Szarkowski, mort samedi 7 juillet, à l'âge de 81 ans. Il était photographe, mais ce ne sont pas ses images qui resteront. Car cet homme à la fière allure et au jugement tranché a surtout été l'emblématique conservateur du Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) de New York pendant près de trente ans.

18 décembre 1925 Naissance à Ashland (Wisconsin)
1962 conservateur du MoMA à New York
7 juillet 2007 Mort à Pittsfield (Massachusetts)

Le musée où il a officié, temple de l'art moderne, doit beaucoup à son influence. Mais la façon dont John Szarkowski a dirigé le département de la photographie n'a fait que hausser un peu plus le prestige du MoMA. Car c'est là, dès 1940, que s'est ouvert le premier département de photographie dans un musée.

Après des études à l'université du Wisconsin et plusieurs livres à succès, John Szarkowski succède, en 1962, au photographe Edward Steichen au MoMA. Par ses écrits fondateurs et ses expositions, il a imposé la photographie comme un art spécifique tout en l'inscrivant dans la modernité en analysant les formes d'une image. Mais il a aussi brouillé les frontières et les définitions établies, notamment en donnant ses lettres de noblesse aux photographes documentaires et en mettant au musée des auteurs anonymes.

Son exposition fondatrice, en 1967, s'intitule « New Documents ». John Szarkowski y présente les travaux de trois jeunes photographes devenus des classiques : Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander et Garry Winogrand abordent la réalité de façon frontale, sans chercher à la transfigurer. Dépassant le débat entre art et document, Szarkowski fait entrer définitivement le style documentaire au musée.

« Dans la décennie qui précède, une nouvelle génération de photographes a utilisé l'approche documentaire à des fins plus personnelles, écrit-il. *Leur but n'est pas de réformer la réalité, mais de la connaître. »* A l'époque, la réception est tiède. Et pourtant, leur travail se révélera décisif pour plusieurs générations de photographes.

Le conservateur n'aura de cesse de réhabiliter le travail du photographe Eugène Atget, dans lequel il trouve les racines de ce mouvement. Il consacre au Français une somme en quatre volumes avec Maria Morris-Hambourg, qui sera publiée de 1981 à 1985.

En 1976, John Szarkowski se heurte encore à l'incompréhension lorsqu'il monte l'exposition « William Eggleston's guide » : pour la première fois, la couleur envahit les cimaises du musée, alors que cette dernière, jugée vulgaire, est jusqu'alors cantonnée à la publicité, à la mode et aux magazines.

Pour la critique, Eggleston ne montre que des photos banales et ennuyeuses de voitures, de pancartes et de parkings. Mais pour Szarkowski, l'artiste est le premier à voir à la fois *« le ciel et le bleu »*, le motif et la forme – il sera un des pionniers de la photographie couleur.

John Szarkowski a donc été un découvreur de premier ordre. Il a par exemple redécouvert Lartigue, bien avant la France. Il n'a ignoré, parmi les grands photographes de son temps, que le travail mouvementé de William Klein.

John Szarkowski a aussi contribué à écrire l'histoire de la photographie, et surtout de la photographie américaine, à travers des livres comme *The Photographer's eye* (1964). Dans *Mirror and Windows* (1960), ouvrage qui accompagne une rétrospective de la photographie américaine, le conservateur distinguait deux traditions : celle qui use de la photographie comme d'un miroir où se regarde l'artiste, celle qui en fait une fenêtre pour découvrir le monde.

Son exposition *Photography Until Now* (1990) est un manifeste qui vise à retracer l'histoire de la photographie. C'est aussi une analyse brillante, qui met en avant des répertoires formels, et condense les convictions de John Szarkowski. ■

CLAIRE GUILLOT

Remembrances

JEAN DYKSTRA

The passing of curator [illegible] John Szarkowski on July 7, at the age of 81, meant the [illegible] to many in the photography community, and the loss of [illegible] influential champions of photography. "He taught us how to look at photographs, how to think about photographs, and how photographs could be written about," says Peter MacGill of Pace/MacGill Gallery. "And he did it from the world's most important platform, the Museum of Modern Art." Szarkowski was director of the photography department at MoMA for almost 30 years, and his exhibitions placed photography on a par with any other medium and also paved the way for new directions in photography, from street photographs to William Eggleston's color images.

His exhibitions, which included "New Documents," the 1967 show that featured Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, "William Eggleston's Guide" (1976), and "Mirrors and Windows" (1978), were not always embraced by critics at the time, but the photographers he presented went on to be extraordinarily influential. "When John arrived here," says Peter Galassi, Szarkowski's successor at MoMA, "the magazine aesthetic ruled. He returned the museum world to regarding photography as something that could be an extremely sophisticated personal art."

The Wisconsin native was a photographer before he was a curator and had published two books of photographs, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956) and *The Face of Minnesota* (1958), before arriving at MoMA in 1962. He also wrote about photography, simply, eloquently, and persuasively, in such books as *The Photographer's Eye*, *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, and *Photography Until Now*. Photography dealer Charles Isaacs recalls asking Szarkowski, who was also a renowned raconteur, whether he ever thought of doing a book for children about how to look at photographs: "John looked at me and said, 'Charles, who do you think I wrote *Looking at Photographs* for?'"

After retiring, Szarkowski returned to making photographs—images, according to Galassi, that were "deeply rooted in the American descriptive tradition of Strand, Evans, Weston, and Stieglitz." They were exhibited at Pace/MacGill and in a 2005 traveling exhibition organized by Sandra Phillips, senior curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. "They reflect where he came from and what he was trying to recover and memorialize," observes Phillips, adding, "He was delighted with the show. He had been so important for all these photographers, and so many of them came." □

photograph
sept/oct. 2007

MILTON ROGOVIN
BUFFALO

OCTOBER 20 – NOVEMBER 24

Johnny Lee Wines and "Zeke" Johnson, Buffalo, 1973

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Milestones

DIED THE JOB DESCRIPTION "party planner" didn't begin to do justice to the galas, extravaganzas, grand balls, fetes and blowouts that **Philip Baloun** orchestrated for the rich, famous and socially stratospheric. Baloun, who attended the American Floral Arts School in Chicago while still a teenager, moved to New York City in 1976 to be a theater director. But instead of working on Broadway, he wound up creating glittering theatrical magic for the soirée set. Baloun invented a life-size Hungarian town square for financier George Soros' 70th birthday. For a New York City welcome for Prince Charles, Baloun conjured up a forest of trees in a towering tent at Lincoln Center, complete with painted stars on the ceiling. The price tag for such rarefied celebration could reach $10 million. Baloun, 61, died from pancreatic cancer.

■ HE WAS A FARM BOY FROM the state of Uttar Pradesh in northeast India who grew up to be Prime Minister. **Chandra Shekhar** was known by both supporters and detractors as a political firebrand, an idealistic, secular nationalist who could be blunt to a fault. Indira Gandhi jailed him, along with many other of her outspoken political opponents, during a tumultuous period in the mid-1970s. Shekhar became Prime Minister in 1990, but holding only a slim majority in a fractious coalition, he served just seven months before resigning amid charges that his government was spying on political rival Rajiv Gandhi. Shekhar died at the age of 80.

■ WE THINK OF ART HISTORY as something made chiefly by artists, and it is. But sometimes there are figures from related walks of life whose impact is no less important. One of those was **John Szarkowski.** For 29 years, starting in 1962, he was chief curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In that role he turned out shows and books that powerfully influenced our understanding of what the camera could do. In particular

he championed the groundbreaking work of Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and William Eggleston, photographers who, as he wrote, had turned documentary photography "toward more personal ends." He once compared camera art simply to "the act of pointing." He pointed, too, expertly, to pictures that he knew the world should know about. He was 81.

■ MATCHBOX TOYS MAY BE MOST strongly associated with little boys, tiny cars in hand, making *vroom-vroom* racing sounds, but it was actually a girl who inspired her father, British engineer **Jack Odell,** to create this masterpiece of miniaturization after her school decreed that only toys small enough to fit inside an old-fashioned matchbox would be allowed. In addition to cars, buses, dump trucks, bulldozers and cement mixers, the Matchbox Toy empire came to embrace a few delicate designs as well, such as a miniature coronation coach made to commemorate Elizabeth II taking the throne in 1952. Odell was 87.

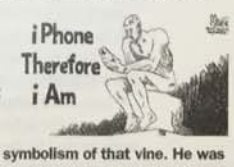
■ THE 1932 SUMMER OLYMPICS, held in Los Angeles during the worldwide Great Depression, could aptly be referred to as the hard-luck games. No other city even bid to host the Games, and fewer than half as many athletes took part in the Games as had participated in 1928. U.S. President Herbert Hoover didn't even attend the Games. That clearly didn't matter, however, to **Alice Eileen Wearne,** who ran the 100-m dash but did not earn a medal. Wearne went on to participate in the 1938 British Empire Games, which were held in her hometown of Sydney, finished third in the 220-yd. sprint and earned gold as a member of the 440-yd. relay team. Throughout her life, Wearne remained active in the Olympic movement. And at age 95, she was Australia's longest-lived Olympian.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP RIGHT: BEN BLACKWELL; COURTESY OF THE STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES; DOUG MARLETTE—TULSA WORLD; CATAWBA COUNTY LIBRARY/CHARLOTTE OBSERVER/MCT/NEWSCOM

APPRECIATION

A Southern-Fried Rebel

"Y'all oughta come to Renaissance Weekend," the anarcho-cartoonist Doug Marlette once told me. "It's the annual meeting of the Bill Moyers wing of the Southern Baptist Convention. The sociology is just gothic!" Doug's ability to offend—gracefully, brilliantly, effortlessly—went into overdrive when confronted by high-minded Dixie earnestness. One year he unveiled his version of the Clinton Memorial at a Renaissance workshop, with Hillary Clinton sitting in the front row: a statue of an unzipped zipper. Doug reveled and rebelled in his Southernness. He wrote a novel about his grandmother, a textile-union militant. He called his comic strip *Kudzu,* because he loved the twisted symbolism of that vine. He was enthralled by irony, and I wish Doug were around to reflect on the gothic ridiculousness of his own death, at age 57, on a back road in Mississippi, in a collision with a loblolly pine that was as straight and true and stubborn as he was. As Doug would say: Lord, I'm gonna miss that boy. —BY JOE KLEIN



'What Do You Think Photography Is About?'

Remembering John Szarkowski (1925–2007)

BY PETER GALASSI

John Szarkowski's second book, *The Face of Minnesota* (1958), was commissioned to celebrate the state's centennial, and it is cheering to know that the University of Minnesota Press will reissue the book next year for the sesquicentennial. John made the photographs; he also wrote the extensive text. How photographs and words could enhance each other was a big issue at the time—for photographers, at least—and John was justly proud of his creative solutions in *The Face of Minnesota*, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956), and *Mr. Bristol's Barn* (1997).

John Szarkowski, Tucson, Arizona, 1992, photographed by Lee Friedlander.

The text on page 114 of the Minnesota book begins, "Time does not consecrate that in which she has been denied, and so to make good lutfisk for Christmas Eve you have to start on December twelfth." After witty but perfectly coherent instructions for making the ancient Scandinavian dish whose name literally means "lye fish," Szarkowski concludes, "The recipe above makes sixteen large servings, which some people claim is better than a lifetime supply." As if to conspire in the affectionate barb, the color photograph on the opposite page shows a glorious holiday spread of sweet desserts—no lutfisk in sight.

John Szarkowski was 36 years old and an accomplished and recognized photographer when he came to the Museum of Modern Art as director of its department of photography in the summer of 1962. Although he honorably put his own work aside for the duration, he never planned to abandon it permanently; after he left the museum in 1991, he gleefully and quite successfully returned to making pictures.

What John had intended as a detour of six years—a senator's term—blossomed into three extraordinarily productive decades at the museum. He stayed so long mostly because he enjoyed it so much, and he enjoyed it so much because he was so good at it. And, as he was quick to point out, he was lucky. Not only was he blessed with such talented Young Turks as Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, and Josef Koudelka, but many of the great established figures of 20th-century photography were very much alive. Among them (in chronological order of their major Szarkowski exhibitions) were Lartigue, Kertész, Lange, Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, Brandt, Evans, Callahan, Adams, and Penn. For John, writing photography's history amounted in no small part to talking shop with friends.

Among the lessons that may be drawn from pages 114 and 115 of *The Face of Minnesota* are that Szarkowski was deeply interested in the potential of color photography when Eggleston was still a teenager, and that the grace, eloquence, and sly wit for which his writing is famous were fully developed well before he left the placid shores of Lake Superior for the fancy watering holes of Manhattan.

But perhaps the most valuable lesson lies in the functional clarity of the recipe for lutfisk. Years ago, as I reread John's great 1973 book *Looking at Photographs*—100 short essays paired with 100 pictures from the Modern's collection, a simple structure that is the basic unit of the Minnesota book—I was struck by its extraordinary richness and range of allusion. The next time I saw John, I remarked that the book seemed to be about everything but photography. Without skipping a beat, he responded, "What do you think photography is about?" ■

Peter Galassi succeeded John Szarkowski as head of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department in 1991.

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Scherp fotografenoog én een neus voor talent

Postuum
John Szarkowski

Conservator Szarkowski droeg met tentoonstellingen bij aan de acceptie van de fotografie als vorm van kunst.

John Szarkowski Foto Getty Images

AMSTERDAM Velen waren het vergeten. Sommigen wisten het helemaal niet. John Szarkowski (Wisconsin, 1925), de man die dertig jaar lang het hoofd van de afdeling Fotografie van het Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York was, die fotografen als Diane Arbus en William Eggleston naar voren schoof toen niemand iets van hun werk moest hebben, en die ervoor heeft gezorgd dat fotografie werd geaccepteerd als kunstvorm – die Szarkowski was zelf ook fotograaf.

In 2005 organiseerde het MoMA in San Francisco een overzicht van zijn werk. Oud werk uit het begin van zijn carrière, gecombineerd met foto's die hij had gemaakt na zijn pensionering in 1991.

Dat was bijna dapper. Natuurlijk: Szarkowski was ooit begonnen als fotograaf, en hij is het ook altijd gebleven, maar in zijn rol als criticus en tentoonstellingsmaker heeft hij vele malen meer invloed gehad. Hij kon carrières maken of breken. En nu liet die criticus zich zélf ineens van een kwetsbare kant zien.

Gelukkig waren de meeste critici het erover eens: behalve een neus voor fotografisch talent, bezat Szarkowski ook nog eens een scherp fotografenoog.

Afgelopen zaterdag overleed John Szarkowski in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, aan de gevolgen van een beroerte. Hij was 81 jaar oud.

In 1967, zes jaar nadat hij Edward Steichen had opgevolgd als conservator Fotografie bij het MoMA, stelde hij een belangrijke expositie samen. *New Documents* presenteerde het werk van Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander en Garry Winogrand, nonchalante, snapshot-achtige foto's van marginale onderwerpen. Nauwelijks iemand kon daarvoor waardering opbrengen.

Maar volgens Szarkowski luidde *New Documents* een andere benadering in van documentaire fotografie. 'De laatste tien jaar heeft een nieuwe generatie fotografen de documentaire aanpak persoonlijker gemaakt', schreef hij. 'Hun doel was niet om de wereld te veranderen, maar om haar te kennen.'

Foto's zijn geen pure registratie, vond Szarkowski. Net als beeldende kunst zijn ze een expressiemiddel. Hij hield van foto's in een stijl die Amerikanen omschrijven als *vernacular*: meestal zwart-witbeelden van anonieme alledaagse straattaferelen met een perfect uitgekiende esthetische compositie.

Zo had John Szarkowski zelf ook altijd gefotografeerd, bleek op de tentoonstelling in San Francisco. 'Eerst ben je bezig met zoeken naar referenties, overeenkomsten, en met het plaatsen van de foto's in de fotografiegeschiedenis', schreef een bezoeker. 'Maar het is uiteindelijk een beloning om ze te kunnen waarderen als echt goede foto's.'

Merel Bem

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EL PAIS
DIARIO INDEPENDIENTE DE LA MAÑANA

Fecha: 15/07/2007
Sección: VERANO
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John Szarkovski, comisario artístico

Fue director de fotografía del MoMA durante tres décadas

John Szarkovski, comisario artístico que prácticamente sin ayuda elevó la fotografía a la categoría de arte con artículos pioneros y exposiciones trascendentales en el Museum of Modern Art de Nueva York, murió la pasada semana pasado en Pittsfield (EE UU), a los 81 años

A principios de los años sesenta, cuando Szarkovski empezó su carrera como comisario, la fotografía se percibía como un soporte funcional, un medio para documentar el mundo. Quizá más que nadie, Szarkovski logró cambiar esta percepción. Para él, la fotografía era una forma de expresión tan valiosa como cualquier obra de arte, y como director de fotografía del MoMA durante casi tres décadas, desde 1962, fue tal vez su defensor más apasionado. Dos de sus libros, *The photographer's eye (El ojo del fotógrafo,* 1964) y *Looking at photographs: 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (Observar fotografías: 100 imágenes de la colección del Museo de Arte Moderno,* 1973), siguen siendo un ingrediente básico en los programas de historia del arte.

Fue el primero en dar importancia a la obra de Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander y Garry Winogrand, en su influyente exposición *New Documents (Nuevos documentos)* en el MoMA en 1967. Esa muestra, que se consideró radical en aquel entonces, señaló una nueva dirección en este arte: fotografías que parecían tener un aspecto casual, como de instantánea y un tema aparentemente tan corriente que era difícil de clasificar.

En el panel de texto para la exposición, Szarkovski insinuaba que hasta entonces el objetivo de la fotografía documental había sido mostrar lo que iba mal en el mundo, como una forma de generar interés por rectificarlo. Pero esta muestra marcaba un cambio. "En la pasada década, una nueva generación de fotógrafos ha dirigido el enfoque documental hacia fines más personales", escribía. "Su objetivo no ha sido reformar la vida, sino conocerla".

Los críticos se mostraron escépticos. "Las observaciones de los fotógrafos se perciben como rarezas de la personalidad, la situación, el incidente, el movimiento, y los caprichos de la suerte", comentaba Jacob Deschin en una reseña de la muestra para *The New York Times.* Hoy en día, la obra de Arbus, Friedlander y Winogrand se considera decisiva para las generaciones de fotógrafos que les sucedieron.

Como comisario, Szarkovski era imponente, con una voz estentórea y un estilo ingenioso y descriptivo. Pero era modesto en lo referente a su papel en el montaje de la exposición *New documents.* "Creo que cualquiera que hubiera sido moderadamente competente, y hubiera estado razonablemente atento a la vitalidad de lo que estaba sucediendo en realidad en este medio habría hecho lo mismo que yo hice", afirmaba hace varios años. "Es decir, la idea de que Winogrand, Friedlander o Diane fueron en cierto modo invenciones mías, yo la consideraría denigrante para ellos".

Otra exposición que organizó en el MoMA en 1976 presentaba la obra de William Eggleston, cuyas fotos de coches, señales e individuos saturadas de color se oponían a la ortodoxia en blanco y negro de la fotografía artística del momento. La muestra, *William Eggleston's Guide,* se consideróe la peor del año.

"Szarkovski echa toda precaución por la borda y habla de las fotografías de Eggleston como "perfectas", escribía Hilton Kramer en *The New York Times.* "¿Perfectas? Perfectamente banales, quizá. Perfectamente aburridas, seguro". Eggleston llegaría a ser considerado el pionero de la fotografía en color.

Al defender la obra de estos fotógrafos, Szarkovski contribuyó a cambiar el rumbo de la fotografía. La que tal vez sea su explicación más elocuente de lo que hacen los fotógrafos aparece en su introducción a la obra *The work of Atget* en cuatro volúmenes, publicada en conjunción con una serie de exposiciones en el MoMA desde 1981 hasta 1985. "Se podría comparar el arte de la fotografía con el acto de señalar", escribía Szarkovski. "Debe de ser cierto que algunos de nosotros señalamos hechos, acontecimientos, circunstancias y configuraciones más interesantes que otros". Y agregaba: "El practicante de esta nueva disciplina que tenga talento la desempeñará con una gracia, un sentido del tiempo, un empuje narrativo y un ingenio especiales, dotando por tanto a ese acto no sólo de inteligencia, sino de esa cualidad del rigor formal que identifica a la obra de arte; de modo que, cuando recordemos la aventura de la visita, no estaremos seguros de en qué medida nuestro placer y nuestra sensación de engrandecimiento procederían de las cosas que se señalaban o del patrón creado por el que se encargó de señalarlas".— PHILIP GEPTER (NYT)