

Mirrors and Windows

American Photography since 1960

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MAJOR EXHIBITION OF RECENT AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY AT MOMA

"The changes in American photography during the past 20 years have been profound, and go to the root issue of the photographer's definition of his function," notes John Szarkowski, head of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art and director of the exhibition MIRRORS AND WINDOWS: AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1960. On view in the first-floor galleries of the Museum from July 28 through October 2, MIRRORS AND WINDOWS examines the significant changes in the photographer's place in American life and proposes a new critical framework for the appreciation of contemporary photography.

Rather than being an encyclopedic survey of the achievements of individual photographers, the exhibition shows pictures that exemplify the range of concerns of recent photography. Among those whose work can be seen in MIRRORS AND WINDOWS are Diane Arbus, Paul Caponigro, Mark Cohen, Judy Dater, Bruce Davidson, William Eggleston, Elliott Erwitt, Lee Friedlander, Ernst Haas, Robert Heinecken, Les Krims, Ray Metzker, Joel Meyerowitz, Tod Papageorge, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Stephen Shore, George Tice, Jerry Uelsmann, and Garry Winogrand.

MIRRORS AND WINDOWS, made possible by grants from Philip Morris Incorporated and the National Endowment for the Arts, is accompanied by a major publication by John Szarkowski.* Following its New York showing, the exhibition will travel to Cleveland, Minneapolis, Louisville, San Francisco, the University of Illinois at Champaign, Richmond, and Milwaukee.

*Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960. By John Szarkowski. 152 pages; 16 color plates; 120 black and white duotone illustrations. Clothbound \$22.50; Paperbound \$12.50. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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In John Szarkowski's view, the dominant motif of American photography during the past 20 years has been a movement "from public to private concerns." Unlike the generation of the 1930s and 40s, Szarkowski suggests, the generation that came to artistic maturity and public recognition after 1960 is characterized by a pursuit of highly personal visions of the world rather than by any attempt to offer a comprehensive program for social or aesthetic progress.

MIRRORS AND WINDOWS has been organized around Szarkowski's thesis that such personal visions take one of two forms. In metaphorical terms, the photograph is seen either as a *mirror*--a romantic expression of the photographer's sensibility as it projects itself on the things and sights of this world; or as a *window*--through which the exterior world is explored in all its presence and reality.

The 1950s marked the historical watershed in photography's turning away from public to private concerns for a whole complex of economic, social and technological factors including the decline of the great picture magazines (Life, Look) and the diminished commercial and, by extension, social opportunities available to the photographic professional. Two major influences in the realignment of photography's relation to the world were Minor White's magazine Aperture, which first appeared in 1952, and Robert Frank's 1959 book The Americans, a personal vision of the Eisenhower era. Between White, the prototypical "mirror," and Frank, the prototypical "window," there was defined, in Szarkowski's works, "a model for the fundamentally divergent concepts of photography's function," a model still "useful in the critical analysis of the continued evolution of American photography during the past two decades."

Among the leading practitioners of the "mirror" approach are Paul Caponigro; Jerry N. Uelsmann, whose surreal, technically stunning montages have been widely influential; Robert Heinecken; and painter Robert Rauschenberg,

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who easily and elegantly incorporates photos and photographic processes into his work in other mediums.

Foremost among the "windows" group is Garry Winogrand, who, Szarkowski feels, may well be "the central photographer of his generation. No other work of the period has insisted so clearly and uncompromisingly on exploring the uniquely prejudicial (intrinsic) qualities of photographic description." Others who have set out to explore the world through the window of photography are Lee Friedlander, with his playful references to photographers of the past, Diane Arbus, Ray Metzker, and Ed Ruscha. And no survey of photography of the past 20 years would be complete without a look at color photography in the work of William Eggleston, Stephen Shore, and Joel Meyerowitz.

Szarkowski, however, is quick to point out that the mirrors-and-windows dichotomy is not a hard and fast one. "It must be emphasized that the distinction proposed here...is not intended as a method of dividing recent photography into two discrete and unrelated bodies. On the contrary, the model suggested here is that of a continuous axis....No photographer's work could embody with perfect purity either of the two divergent motives; it is the nature of his problem to find a personally satisfactory resolution of the contesting claims of recalcitrant facts and the will to form."

What unites the photographers included in the exhibition is their common "pursuit of beauty: that formal integrity that pays homage to the dream of meaningful life." Both approaches are, in fact, part of a single if complex tradition. There has been an internal debate within that tradition almost from its beginning. A half-century ago, photography as self-expression was exemplified by Alfred Stieglitz, and the realist view by Eugene Atget. As Szarkowski notes, "in either case, what artist could want a more distinguished sponsor? The distance between them is to be measured not in terms of the relative force or originality of their work, but in terms of their

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conceptions of what a photograph is: is it a mirror, reflecting a portrait of the artist who made it, or a window, through which one might better know the world?"

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Photographs, transparencies and additional information available from Luisa Kreisberg, Director, or Bruce Wolmer, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Telephone: (212) 956-2648; 7295.
