

The Museum of Modern Art

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The Photographer's Eye, an exhibition of 200 photographs selected to define the unique characteristics of this art form, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from May 27 through August 23. This is one of nine summer-long shows inaugurating the new galleries and Sculpture Garden.

"The invention of photography provided a radically new picture-making process-- and a new order of picture-making problems," John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, says in his introduction to the exhibition. "The special abilities and limitations of the new system meant that traditional pictorial solutions were often useless; the photographer was forced to find new ways to make his meaning clear. The emergence of this special visual language has conditioned our sight, our language, and our imagery."

To explain "this special visual language," Szarkowski has selected from public and private collections here and abroad, pictures by more than 100 photographers. The exhibition ranges from work by such great 19th century masters as Atget and Cameron to recent work by young photographers. Many prints by unknown photographers are also included.

The exhibition is divided into five groups, each emphasizing one aspect of the photographer's special language: "The Thing Itself," "The Detail," "The Frame," "Time Exposure," and "Vantage Point."

Commenting on "The Thing Itself," the first section, Szarkowski says: "More convincingly than any other picture, a photograph evokes the tangible presence of reality....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." Among the photographs in this section are: a farmer's wife by Walker Evans; Avedon's portrait of Ezra Pound; Major General Sherman and Conspirator Payne by Brady; a gigantic coffee sign by Weston; a view of the world's largest log jam and a full complement of house servants carrying tools of their office, both by unknown 19th century photographers.

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The emphasis on the significant detail, illustrated in the next section of the show, was forced on the photographer by the limitations of the medium, Szarkowski says. Once he left the studio, it was impossible for him to copy the painter's schemata. He could not stage-manage the action, or rearrange parts of his picture. "Intuitively he sought and found the significant detail; his work, incapable of narrative, turned toward symbol." Included here is a group of photographs of hands by Russell Lee, Edward Steichen, Berenice Abbott, Eugene Smith and others; the wheel and piston of a locomotive by Charles Sheeler; the bull's horns and the matador's sword and cape by Peter Buckley; and the wooden latch of a barn door by Paul Strand.

To quote out of context, Szarkowski says introducing the section entitled "The Frame," is the essence of the photographer's craft. "His central problem is a simple one: what shall he include, what shall he reject? The line of demarcation is the picture's edge." Photographs in which the edge defines content and design shown here include a live pigeon next to a stone bird on a window sill by André Kertész, Arnold Newman's portrait of Arp and his sculpture, a Greek temple by Serge Moulinier, a pool table juxtaposed with political posters by Robert Frank, and a snapshot of Teddy Roosevelt playing with his grandchildren.

The fourth section of the exhibition entitled "Time Exposure," deals with photography's unique relationship to time. Exposures were long in early photography and, if the subject moved, its multiple image described a space-time dimension. Such pictures, which suggest the experiments of the Futurist painters, were the first to record the virtual shapes described by moving forms. Also in this section are photographs illustrating that aspect of time that Cartier-Bresson called the decisive moment: "decisive not because of the exterior event, but because in that moment the flux of changing forms and patterns were sensed to have achieved balance and clarity and order--because the image became for an instant, a picture," Szarkowski says.

Photographs here, in addition to Cartier-Bresson's famous Children Playing in Ruins, Seville, Spain, taken more than 30 years ago, include Gjon Mili's Juggler,

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Harry Callahan's Detroit, Danny Lyon's Motorcycle Riders, and Unitas Passing, photographed by Robert Riger at a pro-football game in 1959.

Szarkowski calls the concluding section of the exhibition "Vantage Point." "If the photographer could not move his subject, he could move his camera. To see the subject clearly--often to see it at all--he had to abandon a normal vantage point and shoot his picture from above or below, or from too close, or too far away, or from the back side. He discovered that his pictures could reveal not only the clarity but the obscurity of things, and that these mysterious and evasive images could also, in their own terms, seem ordered and meaningful." Photographs in this section include Penn's picture of a girl lying on a bed, a city park seen from above by Coburn, a nude by Bill Brandt, a tree's shadow by Rene Burri.

The Photographer's Eye is the first of a series of temporary exhibitions planned for the next two seasons in the Museum's new galleries. A one-man show of work by André Kertesz will be presented in the winter of 1965, and in the spring an exhibition on the photographic essay. A retrospective of work by Dorothea Lange will be shown in the winter of 1966.

In addition to these temporary shows, special exhibitions will be presented periodically in the new Edward Steichen Photography Center at the Museum named in honor of the famous photographer who is now Director Emeritus of the Museum's Department of Photography. The inaugural exhibition on view during the summer of 1964 consists of a selection of about 175 photographs from the Museum Collection, ranging from Mathew Brady to recent experiments. The Photography Collections, consisting of about 8,000 prints, can be viewed by the interested public in adjacent study rooms.

The exhibition was selected by John Szarkowski and installed by Kathleen Haven.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N. Y. CI 5-8900.