

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE HAMPTON ALBUM, with an introduction by Lincoln Kirstein. 56 pages, 44 illustrations. Paperbound \$1.95; paper over boards ~~\$3.95~~. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Doubleday and Co., Inc. ²⁴2.95

A group of long-forgotten photographs recording the activities of Negro and Indian students at the Hampton Institute in Virginia at the turn of the century will be published on January ²⁴ by The Museum of Modern Art. Lincoln Kirstein has written the introduction to the book, called THE HAMPTON ALBUM.

The original platinum prints were made in 1899 and 1900 by Frances B. Johnston, one of America's first women to work as a documentary photographer. They were exhibited at the Paris Centennial Exposition in 1900, where they won a grand prize. Mr. Kirstein found the original album of 159 photographs while browsing in a Washington, D.C., bookstore during World War II. A few months ago, he gave the album to the Museum's Photography Collection. Grace Mayer, the Museum's Curator of Photography, was quick to discover the history of the photographs in the album and the album's authorship. The forty-four photographs selected for the Museum's publication are reproduced in gravure.

In his introduction, Kirstein comments on the dignity and static, majestic calm which pervades all the photographs in the album: "... her subjects, within her eyes, continue their essential lives, independent of her or our observation They stand as metaphor or parable in their sturdy dreaminess, their selfless absorption in self-improvement. It is a measure of Miss Johnston's vision that she enables us to spy upon so many anonymous, long vanished individuals, who still so vividly speak to us in public of their proper private longings for a shared social paradise." Of the esthetic quality of the photographs, Kirstein notes: "All her forms are clearly delineated in their air, separated with a defining discreteness, giving full value to their descriptive silhouettes Each interior and exterior is framed by figures looking at the essential focus of the given occupation. She combines portions of related activities in a single plate."

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Miss Johnston was commissioned to photograph the school 31 years after it had been founded by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Brevet Brigadier General in the Union Army. There were about 1,000 students in 1899, including 135 Indians, and many grandchildren of the original graduates.

The activities Miss Johnston documented range from the academic subjects of physics, geology, English and architecture to the trades of masonry, carpentry, mechanics, and, above all, agriculture. The emphasis was on study with a practical application, and a moral purpose dominated all. As Armstrong stated, "The thing to be done was clear: to train selected Negro youth who should go out and teach and lead their people, first by example, by getting land and homes; to give them not a dollar that they could earn for themselves; to teach respect for labor, to replace stupid drudgery with skilled hands; and to build up an industrial system, for the sake not only of self-support and industrial labor but also for the sake of character." In summing up the impact of the Hampton Institute in the era of Reconstruction, Kirstein states that it took steps towards "the essential, not the legal, enfranchisement of the Negro."

Among the prints are a series of before and after contrasts, showing the changes which Hampton strived to make in the condition of the Negro. The old shanty of slave days is contrasted to the sparkling white house; the old, unsanitary well is contrasted to the new, improved pump. Of these images Kirstein notes: "Her capacity for a grave if unsentimental compassion approaches pathos."

Miss Johnston was firmly in the newspaper tradition, and prided herself on not using fancy and cumbersome equipment. At Hampton, she made 140 pictures in one month, taking two shots of every pose. In the completed album, each platinum print, made from large glass plates, is printed generally one to a page, each with a descriptive caption printed on a thin protective sheet.

When Miss Johnston photographed at Hampton, she was already experienced in documentary photography. She had recorded the school system of Washington, D.C., and was an accomplished photographer of children. Born in 1864, Frances Benjamin

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Johnston studied drawing and painting in Paris and was also interested in writing before she took up photography. She first worked with commercial photographers, doing a considerable amount of architectural documentation, and, after an apprenticeship under Thomas William Smillie of the Smithsonian Institution, she opened her own studio in 1890. From the outset, she was highly successful, due in part to her social connections, including Presidents Cleveland, Harrison, McKinley, and, above all, Theodore Roosevelt and his family, whom she photographed many times, earning her the title of unofficial "Photographer to the American Court."

In 1892, for Demorest's Family Magazine, Miss Johnston made a tour of the Pennsylvania coal fields, and in the same year, she covered the construction of the Chicago World's Fair. For a news syndicate, she photographed Admiral George Dewey on the flagship U.S.S. "Olympia," and as Assistant Photographer to the United States Government, she covered the signing of the Spanish American peace protocol. After the Paris Exposition in 1900, Miss Johnston was the only woman participant at the Third International Photographic Congress, held as an adjunct to the Exposition.

Miss Johnston continued a varied and prolific career until her death in 1952 at the age of 88. For her work in architectural documentation, she was made an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects in 1944.

Lincoln Kirstein, General Director of the New York City Ballet, is the author of several books published by The Museum of Modern Art, reflecting his interest in all the arts, in addition to the dance. Among them are Gaston Lachaise (1935); Walker Evans: American Photographs (1938, reprinted 1962); The Latin-American Collection of The Museum of Modern Art (1943); an introduction to American Realists and Magic Realists (1943); an introduction to Henri Cartier-Bresson (1947); and The Sculpture of Elie Nadelman (1948). Mr. Kirstein donated to the Museum a collection of material on the dance which formed the basis of the Dance Archives, founded in 1940, now the Museum's Theater Arts Collection.

At the time the Museum's book is published, about 40 of the original platinum prints from the Hampton Album will go on view in the Edward Steichen Photography Center, on the third floor of the Museum. The exhibition will be directed by John Szarkowski, Director, Department of Photography.

 Review copies, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia Kaplan, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.