

The Museum of Modern Art

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PICTURE PUZZLES, an exhibition of 39 photographs of arranged subject matter by Man Ray, Frederick Sommer, Clarence John Laughlin, and Robert Cumming, is on view in The Museum of Modern Art Steichen Galleries from August 14 through November 16.

The frankly manipulated pictures -- deliberate puzzles which demand engagement of the mind -- are not documents of any prior reality but only of "...the act and motivation of their construction. Rarely are photographs so radically self-contained as these....Facture and form strictly define as subject the puzzle each picture offers, a puzzle whose clues are essentially conceptual," says Peter Galassi, Intern in the Department of Photography, who directed the exhibition.

Although Man Ray is the only one of the four who was an official member of the Surrealist group, all have been decisively influenced by Dada and Surrealism. Dada's raw cerebral shock is exemplified by Man Ray's Coat Stand of 1920, a contradictory juxtaposition of a wooden form and a human body. Both Frederick Sommer and Clarence John Laughlin have made extensive use of automatism, creating pictures closely related to high Surrealism, which sought less to shock than to expand awareness by giving form to the subconscious and the irrational. Not surprisingly, many of these works concern such crucial human events as birth, sex and death, as in Sommer's Valise d'Adam and Laughlin's The Repulsive Bed. The amusing photographs by Robert Cumming are less an outgrowth of Surrealism than a reassertion of its origins, demonstrating, like Marcel Duchamp's brand of Dada, that the workings of the artist's mind can constitute the entire concern of art.

The four photographers, disregarding the canons of photography, have put traditional options of the painter to the test of photographic scrutiny. Their

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need to make pictures unquestionably conceived in and addressed to the mind forced them to seek extreme control, which they found in a method considered frivolous or heretical through much of this century. As Peter Galassi states, "Their means and their ends stand in opposition to mainstream photography," but in freeing their work from the hegemony of conventional reality, they have (perhaps ironically) contributed to the evolution of twentieth-century photography, "...helping to define its depth, direction, and possibility."

The Museum gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Future photography exhibitions in the Museum's Steichen Galleries will include EUGENE BUECHEL, S.J.: ROSEBUD AND PINE RIDGE PHOTOGRAPHS, 1922-42 (Nov 20 - Jan 25) and PROJECTS: MICHAEL SNOW (Feb 17 - Apr 28).

Biographical information on Man Ray, Frederick Sommer, Clarence John Laughlin, and Robert Cumming is attached.

 Photographs and additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7504; 7501.
