

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION: BIG PICTURES BY CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS

DATES: April 14, 1983 - June 28, 1983
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

DIRECTORS: John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography
John Pultz, Newhall Fellow, Department of Photography

CONTENTS: BIG PICTURES BY CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS examines the ways in which contemporary photographers have confronted the special aesthetic and technical problems inherent in making extremely large photographic works. The largest of the 33 pictures on view is a piece composed of 100 individual photographs which, when hung together, measures about 8 feet by 12 feet. Although the earliest exhibited work was made in 1966, approximately half of the pictures on view date from the last 3 years. Over 30 artists, including several noted primarily for their work in other media, are represented in the exhibition.

Although the technical ability to make very large photographs has existed for over a hundred years, the artistic impulse to exploit size as an essential part of a photograph's content is new. Size and physical presence serve in these large photographic works as consciously considered formal elements. Unlike classical photographs which attempt to create the illusion of a coherent and seamless space, big photographs admit the intervention of manual alterations and critical reconsiderations of perceived reality.

The photographs in BIG PICTURES illustrate various ways of escaping the size-related constraints that are imposed by classical photographic aesthetics. One strategy, evident in the works of Ray K. Metzker and Lew Thomas among others, is to create photographic works that are synthesized from several or many optically discrete images. Another approach, practiced by Cindy Sherman, is to describe objects at an unaccustomed scale. In a third option, some photographers, among them Kathleen Agnoli, sacrifice the traditional photographic virtues of linear sharpness and seamless tonal description to create works that emphasize the tones and grain of the paper and film.

ARTISTS' TALKS: A discussion by 3 artists included in the exhibition--Nancy Hellebrand, William Wegman, and Brian Wood-- of the problems of making large photographs will be held in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2 on Thursday, May 26, 1983 at 8 p.m. For ticket information, call (212) 708-9750.

PUBLIC OPENING: Thursday, April 14, 1983