

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
August 1986

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PLANS MAJOR HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Richard E. Oldenburg, director of The Museum of Modern Art, announced today that the Museum will present a major exhibition on the history of photography in 1989. The exhibition will mark the sesquicentennial of the public announcement in 1839 of the process of L.J.M. Daguerre, the first of photography's several inventors to make his work known to the world.

Mr. Oldenburg noted that the Museum has mounted more than 200 photography exhibitions in the past fifty years. Yet this will be the first loan exhibition to attempt a critical overview of photography's artistic achievement since PHOTOGRAPHY: 1839-1937, directed by Beaumont Newhall, then curator of photography at the Museum.

According to John Szarkowski, director of the Museum's Department of Photography, "Newhall's 1937 exhibition, and even more important, the book that it produced, have provided the basic structure within which all of us--all students of Newhall--have approached the study of the medium. His elegant and literate synthesis of what was before him a forest of miscellaneous facts is one of the important achievements of art history in this century."

Mr. Szarkowski, who will organize the planned exhibition, states: "In recent years much new basic research has been done and previously unknown historical work has enriched our sense of photography's past. It is, I think, not too soon to attempt a new sketch of the basic shape of photographic tradition." He says that the exhibition will be "no larger than it must be,"

- more -

hoping that it will not exceed 250 photographs. The 1937 exhibition contained more than 800 works and filled all four floors of the Museum of that time.

Mr. Szarkowski continues: "The organizing principle of the exhibition will be the relationship of pictorial form to the evolution of photographic craft. This relationship is reciprocal. Technical change is driven by conscious and intuited need, both social and individual. At the same time a technology in place exerts enormous authority over our sense of possibilities."

Mr. Szarkowski hopes to secure loans from many of the world's most important private and public collections. "In an exhibition that attempts to tell so complex a story in so compact a form," he says, "each work bears enormous weight, and only pictures of the highest quality will take the pressure."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication that will be both a catalog and an exposition of photography's history as seen from the point of view of the exhibition's conceptual principle. The book will not substitute for Newhall's essential work, but rather will attempt to provide an alternative and supplementary view of the dynamics of change in the evolution of the medium.

The exhibition is tentatively scheduled to open at The Museum of Modern Art in the fall of 1989 and will be available for a limited tour.

* * *

No. 68

For further information, contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information 212/708-9750.