

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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The first one-man photography exhibition ever given by the Museum of Modern Art, 14 West 49 Street, New York, will open to the public Wednesday, September 28. It will be AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALKER EVANS and will consist of more than 100 pictures selected from the many thousands taken during the past decade by a man thought by his admirers to be one of the greatest living American photographers.

Walker Evans was born in St. Louis, Mo., in 1903. He spent a year at Williams College and went to Paris, where he became much interested in the work of the great French photographer, Atget. Evans' own work, in the American idiom, might be said to parallel the photographs taken by Atget of Paris and its people. Evans returned to America, where, in 1931, his work received its first exhibition at the John Becker Gallery in New York. A year later he had a one-man show at the Julien Levy Gallery. A collection of his photographs of 19th century American houses was shown in the Museum of Modern Art in 1934. In 1935, through a grant to the Museum by the General Education Board, he made a Photographic Corpus of African Negro Art of 500 photographs for distribution to colleges and libraries.

In 1935 the Resettlement Administration called Walker Evans to Washington, where he played an important part in organizing

its highly successful Photographic Survey of the country, and in formulating the photographic approach they were to take. This survey not only presented America to Americans but has brought to light great and hitherto obscure photographic talent.

Reproductions of Mr. Evans' work have appeared in Creative Art, The Hound and Horn and Vanity Fair. In 1933 he made a portfolio of photographs which were published as a separate section in Carleton Beals' The Crime of Cuba. Last year he made an intensive trip through certain sections of the South with James Agee -- Evans making photographs and Agee gathering material for a book to be published this year.

The word modern, in its truest sense, aptly characterizes Mr. Evans' work as it is "straight" photography, so factual that it may almost be called functional. Its insistence is upon the utmost clarity and detail of the image. Combined with this technical skill is Walker Evans' genius for composition.

In commenting upon the exhibition, Mr. Thomas Mabry, Executive Director of the Museum of Modern Art, said: "Although known and admired among a small group for ten years, Evans' work has not received the recognition so far that has come to many of his contemporaries. In this exhibition the Museum hopes that a major photographic talent will be revealed to a wider public."

Coincidentally with the Exhibition of AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALKER EVANS the Museum will publish a book with 87 full page illustrations and an essay on Evans' work by Lincoln Kirstein. Mr. Kirstein writes, in part:

"The photographic eye of Walker Evans represents much that is best in photography's past and in its American present....When you see certain sights, certain relics of American civilization past or present, in the countryside or on a city street, you feel they call for his camera, since he has already uniquely recorded their cognates or parallels....

"Walker Evans is giving us the contemporary civilization of eastern America and its dependencies as Atget gave us Paris before the war and as Brady gave us the War between the States....After looking at these pictures with all their clear, hideous and beautiful detail, their open insanity and pitiful grandeur, compare this vision of a continent as it is, not as it might be or as it was, with any other coherent

vision that we have had since the war. What poet has said as much? What painter has shown as much? Only newspapers, the writers of popular music, the technicians of advertising and radio have in their blind energy accidentally, fortuitously, evoked for future historians such a powerful monument to our moment. And Evans' work has, in addition, intention, logic, continuity, climax, sense and perfection....

"Evans' eye is sympathetic to a very special aspect of a very general material....Walker Evans, photographing in New England or in Louisiana, watching a Cuban political funeral or a Mississippi flood, waiting patiently for the season of year or time of day for the right sun on weather-beaten boards, stepping cautiously so as to disturb no dust from the normal atmosphere of the average place, can be considered a kind of disembodied burrowing eye, a conspirator against time and its hammers....

"There has been no need for Evans to dramatize his material with photographic tricks, because the material is already, in itself, intensely dramatic. Even the inanimate things, bureau-drawers, pots, tires, bricks, signs, seem waiting in their own patient dignity, posing for their picture. The pictures of men and portraits of houses have only that 'expression' which the experience of their society and times has imposed on them.

"The power of Evans' work lies in the fact that he so details the effect of circumstances on familiar specimens that the single face, the single house, the single street, strikes with the strength of overwhelming numbers, the terrible cumulative force of thousands of faces, houses and streets."

The Exhibition of AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALKER EVANS will open at the Museum of Modern Art on Wednesday, September 28, 1938, together with an Exhibition of PRINTS BY ROUAULT and an Exhibition of USEFUL OBJECTS UNDER FIVE DOLLARS. All three exhibitions will remain on view through October.