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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

NEW YORK

11 WEST 53rd STREET
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900
CABLES: MODERNART, NEW-YORK

SARAH NEWMAYER, PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

March 4, 1943.

TO Art Editors
City Editors
Photography Editors

Dear Sirs:

You are invited to come or send a representative to

Press Preview of

BIRDS IN COLOR: Flashlight Photographs
by Eliot Porter

and

CHILDREN: Photographs by Helen Levitt

Tuesday, March 9
2 to 6 P. M.

at the Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street.

The exhibitions will open to the public Wednesday, March 10.

For further information please telephone me at Circle 5-8900.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer
Publicity Director

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART OPENS TWO EXHIBITIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Two one-man exhibitions of unusual photographs will be presented by the Museum of Modern Art on Wednesday, March 10, in Children: Photographs by Helen Levitt and Birds in Color: Flashlight Photographs by Eliot Porter. The exhibitions will be shown in the first floor galleries of the Museum and will be on view through Sunday, April 18.

Helen Levitt, born in New York, strolls quietly along the city's crowded streets, or stands at the edge of vacant lots where children play. With her Leica slung around her neck she catches them unaware in the absorbing business of their own worlds: a small boy on a tricycle attempting to ride through the frame of a broken mirror held upright by two of his pals; in the background people pass along the crowded street, a mother sits joggling her baby in its buggy, three little girls laugh and talk in a doorway, two men converse near an ice and coal sign, and an elderly woman in a slack suit strolls past, evidently straight from a beauty shop, her white hair plastered down in such sculptured ridges that she looks like a walking statue.

Another of the city pictures shows boys scrambling up and over the cornice above the boarded door of an empty house. With unconscious grace a lad playing hide-and-seek stoops behind a stone lion guarding a house in Harlem that has long since forgotten its days of magnificence. Helmeted in a tall piece of corrugated board a small boy slides down an inner support of a partially demolished house. On one stoop three little colored boys, two of them with scraps of cloth as capes, stage a triangular duel while on another front stoop three play cops and robbers or the game's modern equivalent, G-men and public enemy.

Those pictures have all been taken on the sidewalks of New York, from which the photographer has also recorded pictures in chalk drawn by children--one of them the profile of a woman with a cloud rising above her head indicating that her thoughts are all on a five-cent ice cream soda. Another of these chalk recordings is a message on the wall of a house: "Button to Secret Passage. Press."

Miss Levitt began photographing children in 1936 chiefly in Harlem where, with its mixture of races, she finds the most vivid

action. In 1941 she took her camera to Mexico. In Tacubaya, a suburb of Mexico City, she made a series of photographs of Mexican children. Selections from these pictures will also be shown in the exhibition. Her camera is usually a Leica with a right-angle sight which enables her to avoid pointing directly at her subject.

She prefers a camera of this miniature size because it can be concealed and because its short focal length lens simplifies focussing. Her photography is opposite in spirit and intent to that of the so-called "documentary" photographers who work with large-view cameras set up on tripods. She attempts to record the accidental in its brief second of high emotional impact, to seize the unforeseen and the quick. Her approach to photography was inspired by that of the Frenchman, Cartier-Bresson, now reported interned in Germany as a prisoner of war. Her technical training was received from Walker Evans, a leading American photographer whose work was shown in the Museum in a large one-man retrospective exhibition in 1938.

Both artist and scientist, Dr. Eliot Porter has taken a remarkable series of color flashlights of birds. By remote control he has been able to catch the movement and activity of birds in and around their nests, particularly the parent bird, just arrived with a luscious lizard or bug in its beak and about to pop it into the cavernous mouths of its young.

The Museum will show twenty-seven of the color flashlights and eleven in black and white, all of them gifts of the photographer to the Museum. Nancy Newhall, Acting Curator of Photography, writes of Dr. Porter in the Museum Bulletin as follows:

"In these brilliant photographs of birds, high achievements in the technical fields of natural history and color photography, Dr. Porter brings us not only living documents, but a profound insight into the beauty and diabolism of nature. From delicate nests among the palms and cacti of Arizona, the spruces of Maine, and the grasses of Illinois, the uncanny and repulsive beaks of the still-embryonic young sprout like incarnate greed. With tireless devotion the sleek, bright parents bring worms and berries glowing like jewels.

"Subtly Dr. Porter uses color to accent one particular quality, and black and white for another. The cormorants dance in black velvet; the eye of the phainopepla shines like an ember in the darkness. In a black and white photograph, the young of the meadowlark would be lost in flickering shadows. In color they wait in the grasses like winged demons. Sometimes different aspects of the same bird are thus emphasized. In harsh greys, the road runner emerging from the tortuous cactus is stony, Gothic, and menacing. In color, the bird with the pale legs of a lizard dangling from its beak is transformed into the gigantic symbol of a nightmare."

Dr. Porter, born in Winnetka, Illinois, in 1901, holds degrees

from the Harvard Engineering School and the Harvard Medical School. For several years he was engaged in teaching and in research, first in bacteriology and then in biological chemistry. His approach to photography was crystalized by the ideals and influence of Alfred Stieglitz and Ansel Adams. In 1937 he began applying these severe standards to his life-long interest in birds. He insisted on attaining three things: a clear and characteristic portrait of the bird, a technically good photograph, and an emotionally satisfying picture. By using flash, he could stop the motion of small swift birds and still retain definition in their surroundings. He developed an ingenious method for overcoming the physical and technical difficulties involved.

In 1938 a one-man exhibition of his work was held at An American Place, New York. In 1939 he decided to become a fulltime photographer. In 1940 he started photographing birds in color. He found Daylight Type Kodachrome best for field conditions, afterwards making color separation negatives and printing them by the washoff relief process. In 1941 he received a Guggenheim award to aid him in completing his project. In 1942 his work was exhibited at the Katharine Kuh Gallery in Chicago and his series on birds was shown by the New York Zoological Society. At present he is engaged in war work at the Radiation Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.