

The Museum of Modern Art

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From the Picture Press, an exhibition of over 225 photographs selected from newspaper files of the past five decades, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from January 30 through April 29. The exhibition was directed and installed by John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, assisted by Carole Kismaric.

The exhibition and accompanying book,* made possible by the special support and assistance of the New York Daily News, is based on the premise that while the most original and compelling news photographs describe events of minor historical significance, the formal and iconographic character of these pictures has made a significant contribution to the development of the modern visual vocabulary.

In his selection and installation, Mr. Szarkowski suggests that news photography should be studied for the ways that it describes to us over and over again, with subtle but constant variations, the few simple and enduring human issues with which this medium has learned to cope--ceremonies, winners, losers, good news, alarms and conundrums, confrontations and disasters.

"It would doubtless be an exaggeration to say that each day's papers reproduce in essence the same pictures," he observes. "Nevertheless, except for the rapid obsolescence of costume, automobile design, political leaders, and other similarly transient and superficial aspects of our lives, it would probably be possible to reprint the pictures of five years ago in tomorrow's paper, with few readers being the wiser. Each day, the specific events of the past twenty-four hours are selected, processed and captioned to respond to issues which are not ephemeral but permanent: catastrophe and progress, pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, villainy and altruism."

The photographs in the show and in the book will be exhibited without their

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* From the Picture Press edited by John Szarkowski. 96 pages; 90 illustrations. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Paperbound \$3.95.

captions, which will be listed separately: Leo Durocher argues with an umpire, the Boy Scouts present a gift to their English comrades, President Coolidge opens the baseball season, Howard Hughes is honored by a ticker tape parade, Shirley Temple and her parents board the Queen of Bermuda, Marilyn Monroe plugs a new picture, firemen try to revive children overcome by smoke, Floyd Patterson rises from a knockdown, Mrs. Frank Henderson exhibits her legs at a Metropolitan Opera opening, the bereaved weep, and the victimized accuse.

By the mid 1920s, the technologies of photography, photomechanical reproduction, and phototelegraphy had advanced to the point where photographs had become a central component of the modern newspaper. Mr. Szarkowski believes that the pictures that have resulted from this new potential are radically unlike those that had documented previous eras: "They are (or seem) unimpeachably frank; they have redefined prior standards of privacy and the privilege of anonymity; they deal not with the intellectual significance of facts, but with their emotional content; they have directed journalism toward a subjective and intensely human focus. As images, the photographs are shockingly direct, and at the same time, mysteriously elliptical and fragmentary, reproducing the texture and flavor of experience without explaining its meaning. They wear the aspect of fact, prove nothing, and ask the best of questions."

From the Picture Press has been over two years in preparation. The late Diane Arbus, whose retrospective show closes at the Museum January 21 before starting a nationwide tour, contributed the preliminary research. Carole Kismaric, the picture editor for Time-Life Books, has been working with Mr. Szarkowski on the show for the past six months.

"The character of the press photographer's equipment and his technique, directed toward the one climatic shot that would describe with clarity and simplicity the central facts of a situation, have helped define the character of his pictures, and thus the content of the news itself," Mr. Szarkowski says.

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"Without reference to their meaning in narrative terms, news photographs have long fascinated modern painters--those who have been by definition most interested in the independent life of pictures: Picasso, Magritte, and Bacon are among the most conspicuous examples of painters who have been moved by, and have borrowed from news photographs. But, in a broader sense, it is difficult to believe that any modern artist, in any medium, could have failed to be impressed and startled by the millions of profoundly radical pictures that the newspapers have printed each day during the past two generations."

After the New York showing, From the Picture Press will be shown at the State University of New York Art Gallery, Albany, from August 27 to October 7, 1973; the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, from November 26 to January 2, 1974; and The William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, from January 14 to February 28, 1974.

The New York State Council on the Arts supports a portion of The Museum of Modern Art's program.

Additional information, photographs, and catalog available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, New York 10019. Tel: (212) 956-7501