

The Museum of Modern Art

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PUBLIC LANDSCAPES AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Public Landscapes, an exhibition of 42 photographs whose subject matter centers on commercial signs and posters, is on view at The Museum of Modern Art through December 1, in the third floor Steichen Galleries.

Of all artists, photographers have shown the most consistent interest in the depiction of signs as both social and literary documents and as objects of formal design. "This interest was given new impetus in the 1920's when photographers became increasingly concerned with the expressive and symbolic potential of specific visual facts," says Marjorie Munsterberg, Intern in the Department of Photography and director of the exhibition. "This was a necessary prerequisite for the development of signs as an independent subject matter, for they are inescapably specific -- identifiable products of both a time and a place."

The specific nature of signs and posters, however, in no way limits a photographer's approach to the subject matter. This is illustrated by the work of three of the photographers represented in the exhibition: Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Eugène Atget. Lange uses signs in an almost purely literary way; one cannot understand the images without reading the messages. Walker Evans, on the other hand, was clearly attracted by the formal qualities of the signs he photographed, which he used to evoke the period, not comment on it. Eugène Atget was interested in signs formally, for their content, and for their function, but he took few photographs of signs alone. His work is not a simple documentation of Paris, aspect by aspect, but rather a rich and full description of the quality and vitality of the life of the city.

Other photographers included in the exhibition are Margaret Bourke-White, Aaron Siskind, Robert Frank, and Edward Weston. The majority of works are from the Museum Collection.

Checklist, wall label and additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019. Tel. (212) 956-7504; 7501
