

ART OF THE TWENTIES

NO. 68
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PORTRAITS OF THE TWENTIES
ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

In conjunction with its 50th Anniversary Year exhibition ART OF THE TWENTIES, The Museum of Modern Art is presenting a show of photographic portraits of the 1920s. IN THE TWENTIES: PORTRAITS FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, on view in the Museum's third-floor Edward Steichen Galleries from November 17, 1979 through January 22, 1980, includes works by a wide variety of photographers, among them Berenice Abbott, André Kertész, Man Ray, Nickolas Muray, Tina Modotti, Alexander Rodchenko, August Sander and Edward Weston. In the words of Ingrid Sischy, Curatorial Intern in the Department of Photography who is directing the exhibition, IN THE TWENTIES "seeks to examine some of the formal concerns found in the photographic portraits of the decade--lightness and darkness, tonality, tactility, line and pattern--and thus to explore some of the broader critical and cultural ideas expressed in these portraits."

The exhibition is international in scope, underscoring the common issues that, Ms. Sischy believes, confronted American, French, German, and Russian photographers during the decade. Concepts about the public and private appearance of their subjects (who were sometimes subtle collaborators with the photographer) emerged for the first time during this period. Portraiture was approached in a manner different from, but still connected to, the abstract visual work in the other arts.

(more)

The Museum of Modern Art

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50th Anniversary



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The photographers chosen are mostly of the decade's luminaries; primarily they are of other artists. Among the works on view are André Kertész's portrait of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein; Alfred Stieglitz's portraits of American modernists Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, Charles Demuth and critic Paul Rosenfeld; Man Ray's portraits of composer George Antheil, Braque, novelist Sinclair Lewis, Jean Cocteau, and the notorious model and friend of artists "Kiki of Montparnasse." Edward Weston's portrait of the Mexican painter Orozco is also on view, as is Berenice Abbott's photo of James Joyce and Edward Steichen's views of Brancusi, Garbo, and H. L. Mencken. Rodchenko's photo of the revolutionary poet Mayakovsky is featured, as are two of Edward Curtis' Indian portraits; these photographs, widely different in origin and context, may be usefully compared to emphasize Ms. Sischy's point about the underlying shared concerns of the decade.

"These portraits cover a wide range of style but they all reflect the broader artistic motive of that time--a formal definition of function," she notes. "Furthermore, we see the exploration of form and the direct use of the camera to bring us face to face with the thing itself. In many of these portraits the shape of the head unflinchingly fills the picture and the features are important patterned details like topographical information on a globe, giving a fresh vision of world.

"The collaboration, even performance, that occurs between photographer and sitter determines the extraordinary force of these pictures and it is clear evidence of the kind of heightened consciousness of that time. The photographers wanted to describe exactly what made their subjects who they were, and therefore to reveal what made that time what it was."

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