

The Museum of Modern Art

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Photo Eye of the 20s, an exhibition of more than 150 photographs that surveys a critical period when the functions of all artistic media were being redefined by artists and critics alike, will open at The Museum of Modern Art on June 4. Organized and selected by Beaumont Newhall, Director of the George Eastman House in Rochester, which is collaborating with the Modern on the show, Photo Eye of the 20s will remain in New York through September 8. The exhibition will be accompanied by Kino Eye of the 20s: Films from the Archives of The Museum of Modern Art and George Eastman House, a program of 43 films selected from the archives of both institutions. After its second showing at Eastman House this fall the exhibition will tour the country.

Two major directions of the twenties will be explored. First, the camera as a precise image maker as seen in work by such artists as Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Eugene Atget, and August Sander. Second, photography as a plastic medium as practiced primarily by artists in Europe including Man Ray, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Francis Bruguiere, Herbert Bayer, Christian Schad, and Florence Henri. Among the material seldom or never before shown in this country are photographs by Walter Peterhans, Lux Feininger, Francis Bruguiere, Helmar Lerski, Tina Modotti, Florence Henri, Herbert Bayer, and the Russian Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko.

The "new photography" of the 20s was highly respected by the art world, and was reproduced in avant garde magazines and books. A selection of these, such as Photo-Eye, Bauhaus Bücher, and Es Kommt Der Neue Fotograf!, is represented in the exhibition by slides projected on a daylight screen. The originals of many of the photographs appearing in these publications were lost in the turmoil of World War II and exist only in published form.

In the six page illustrated folder accompanying the exhibition, Mr. Newhall

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points out that when the decade of the twenties opened, important new trends had already been established: the direct use of the camera to bring us face to face with the thing itself in all its substance and texture; and the exploration of a fresh vision of the world, conforming neither to tradition nor convention but creating abstract, even autonomous, images unrelated to realism.

In the early years of the decade the American, Edward Weston, represented in the exhibition by six rare platinum prints, turned from Whistlerian asymmetry and flatness of field, discarded his soft-focus lenses, and reveled in the camera's power to record "more than the eye can see." In similar spirit Albert Renger-Patzsch was photographing in Germany; he titled a collection of his photographs "The World is Beautiful."

"At the same time others were exploring cameraless photography. In 1918 Christian Schad, a member of the Zurich Dada group, produced abstractions photographically without a camera. He laid cutout paper and translucent objects on light-sensitive paper which, upon exposure to light, recorded designs that closely resemble cubist collages. The technique was independently rediscovered by Man Ray and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in 1922; their "Rayographs" and "photograms" were rich, often enigmatic lightplays. Moholy-Nagy used the camera as a visual tool, discovering beauty after the exposure had been made. He delighted in forms found in photographs taken for utilitarian purposes through telescopes, microscopes, from airplanes, and with invisible radiation. The accidental juxtaposition of disparate visual elements also led to a new medium: photomontage," Mr. Newhall states. The exhibition will include four unique examples by Moholy-Nagy.

" Along with the discovery of form through the camera came the delight in how it can catch, in a fraction of a second, the unexpected and seemingly irrational," he continues. André Kertész, who moved from Hungary to Paris in 1925, photographed everyday life on the streets; in America Walker Evans and Ralph Steiner found the Spirit of the day in homely details of torn street-posters, automobiles,

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and humble interiors.

Alfred Stieglitz linked the two directions by creating photographs both realistic and abstract. "His 'Equivalents' - photographs of clouds put in sequences - show that beyond subject matter, beyond form, lies an inner message," Mr. Newhall says.

In no other decade, Mr. Newhall points out, were photography and film more closely related. As an integral part of the exhibition a selection of films of the twenties will be screened, ranging from such classics as Sergei Eisenstein's Potemkin, Carl Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc, and Erich von Stroheim's Greed to such little known films as Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera, Ralph Steiner's H₂O, and Joris Ivens' The Bridge. Short films will be shown Wednesdays at noon beginning June 24; feature films will be presented as part of the Museum's regular daily screenings from July 23 through August 26.

Although the majority of works are from the collections of The Museum of Modern Art and George Eastman House, loans of rare and important work have been received from such institutions as: the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie, Cologne, Germany; Folkwangschule, Essen, Germany; the Exchange National Bank Collection, Chicago; the Museum of New Mexico; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Lane Foundation, Lunenburg, Massachusetts. Loans have also been made by artists and collectors: Arnold H. Crane, Ansel Adams, Herbert Bayer, Florence Henri, David H. McAlpin, Grace M. Mayer, Mrs. B. E. Peterhans, and Brett Weston.

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