

The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



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REINSTALLATION OF STEICHEN PHOTOGRAPHY CENTER AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Department of Photography of The Museum of Modern Art has completely reinstalled the works permanently on view in its third-floor Edward Steichen Photography Center. Reflecting the growth of the Museum's Collection of photographs in the past decade (the Collection now numbers close to 20,000 prints) as well as recent changes in the understanding of photographic history, this entirely new selection and installation of approximately 140 photographs has been carried out under the direction of Betsy Jablow, Newhall Fellow in the Department of Photography. As Ms. Jablow notes, "This new installation reflects not only the growth of our Collection in sheer numbers, but in breadth as well. Our acquisitions over the last twelve years (since the previous installation) have filled some of the historical gaps in our Collection, as well as extended the range of contemporary interests represented."

Among the many notable features of the new installation are a fuller representation of 19th century photographs, especially European work, and a larger number of color photographs and works made since 1945. Photographers whose work has become increasingly well-known in the past few years, including the 19th century Frenchmen Gustave Le Gray, Edouard Baldus, and Charles Aubry, are now on view. Among the earliest works to be seen are John A. Whipple's 1853 photograph of the moon, one of the first such

photographs known, Whipple's daguerreotype portrait of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and James Wallace Black's 1860 aerial view of Providence, Rhode Island, taken from a balloon. Also of note is a page from an unidentified album with a photograph by Lewis Carroll accompanied by some drawings.

"Because the permanent installation in the Steichen Center is intended to instruct Museum visitors, however briefly, in the history of the art, in this installation I have sought to illustrate some of the formal and thematic continuities that run through photographic history," Ms. Jablow observes.

The decade of the 1920s was one of photography's major periods of growth and development, and it is represented in the new installation by works of Man Ray, Rodchenko, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Paul Outerbridge among others. A 1920 photograph of one of his own sculptures by Brancusi strongly suggests, in Ms. Jablow's opinion, that "the sculptor's photographs have an intrinsic interest and value beyond the documentation of his work." Also from this period are three studies of the painter Georgia O'Keeffe by Alfred Stieglitz. The 1930s saw a fusion of the stylistic innovations of the preceding decade with an often explicitly humanistic or political content, as is evident in this installation in the work of Walker Evans, Lisette Model, Dorothea Lange and Bill Brandt, among others.

The years since World War II have witnessed a veritable explosion in the amount of serious interest and attention accorded to photography by the public, critics, collectors and museums as well as in the burgeoning number of contemporary photographers. An expanded selection of works from the past 35 years, many quite recently acquired, is one of the main

features of the new installation. One important aspect of contemporary photography is its increasing use of color. Color work by William Eggleston, Jan Groover, Stephen Shore, John Divola, and Joel Meyerowitz will be included. Moreover, because many of today's photographers are experimenting with older and historically resonant processes (such as platinum and gum printing, and hand-coloring) as well as with such newer techniques as the use of xerography and the Photo Booth machine, several works of this type are included.

Since its founding in 1929, The Museum of Modern Art has been in the forefront in claiming for photography the same status as the other visual arts. The Department of Photography was established in 1940 as an independent Department with a basic collection and a reference library. Since 1962, the Department of Photograph has been headed by John Szarkowski. The Edward Steichen Photography Center was established in 1964. In addition to its major survey exhibitions, the Department presents a continuing series of smaller exhibitions. The Museum's Collection of photographs is available for study by appointment.