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MoMA Bulletin Dec. 1, 1933 vol. I no. 4 [p. 2]

WALKER EVANS' PHOTOGRAPHS OF VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE

By LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

Photography, the instrument of amateur sentimentalist, professional portraitist and serious historian, has been elevated by enthusiastic entrepreneurs to challenge comparison with the independent language of cut stone and oil paint. One seriously doubts whether Nicéphore Niépce, who invented the process and whose centenary France celebrated this year, or even Daguerre, Niépce's more famous follower, ever hoped for such pompous canonization as the publishers of our photographic annuals proclaim.

Photography is in essence a scientifically accurate process for the reproduction of objective appearances, a stationary magic that fixes a second from time's passage on a single plane. Its greatest service is documentary.

Walker Evans' photographs are such perfect documents that their excellence is not assertive. In his series of American Federal and Victorian architecture, taken over the last four years, he is providing illustrations for a monumental history of the American art of building in its most imaginative and impermanent period. These wooden houses disintegrate, almost, between snaps of the lens. Many shown in these photographs no longer stand.

Evans' style is based on moral virtues of patience, surgical accuracy and self-effacement. In order to force details into their firmest relief, he could only work in brilliant sunlight, and the sun had to be on the correct side of the streets. Often many trips to the same house were necessary to avoid shadows cast by trees or other houses; only the spring and fall were favorable seasons. The focus was sharpened until so precise an image was achieved, that many of the houses seem to exist in an airless atmosphere, much as they exist in the airless nostalgia for the past to which Edward Hopper in his noble canvases pays a more personal tribute.

These houses were found by searching in an automobile, with the photographic equipment in the rumble, wherever Evans chanced to be for a sufficient length of time. The districts of metropolitan Boston, the North Shore of Massachusetts, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Northampton, Mass., Greenfield, Saratoga Springs, New York, have been covered with some degree of thoroughness. Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis and Philadelphia await the tender cruelty of Evans' camera. It is a painfully haphazard method limited by time, money and insufficient information.

FILM COMMENTS

PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII (Directed by Alexander Corda)

This high-spirited character sketch of a Tudor has set a new fashion: we shall see a succession of fictionalized royal biographies on the screen during the coming year. It is the most successful movie that Great Britain has sent us, stressing entertainment instead of history or propaganda. Charles Laughton's performance is characteristically exaggerated and intelligent.

LE SANG D'UN POETE (Directed by Jean Cocteau)

Showing that a poet directs movies as awkwardly as a movie-director writes poems, and rather dull since both the moving images and the rhythms fail to convey their intended meaning.—IRIS BARRY.

BOOK COMMENT

VINCENT VAN GOGH by Julius Meier-Graefe, translated by John Holroyd-Reece. New York, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1933. 241 pages. 61 illustrations. \$3.50. Literary Guild selection for December.

This book is by the foremost German critic of 19th century art. It is one of the grand biographies of modern times, superbly written and superbly translated.

It is about a man who was at once an evangelist and a mystic, a Christian and a pantheist—and some believe the greatest Dutch artist since Rembrandt. It is above all a story of passion and spiritual agony so terrible that one wonders at the courage of the publishers who are distributing it to a public as numerous as it is unprepared.

A. H. B., JR.



From the collection of photographs of 19th century American houses by Walker Evans, the gift of Lincoln Kirstein. On view in the Architecture Room, Nov. 16 to Jan. 1.

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DECEMBER 1, 1933

VOL. I, No. 4

THE BULLETIN

PUBLISHED BY
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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The Bulletin is a membership privilege. Individual copies are not for sale.

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Eduard Hopper, retrospective exhibition, oils, watercolors and etchings, October 31st to December 5th.

Painting and Graphic Art of the School of Paris. Gifts and Loans from the collection of Mrs. Sadie A. May, November 16th to December 5th.

Photographs of 19th century American Houses by Walker Evans, gift of Lincoln Kirstein, Architecture Room, November 16th to December 20th.

Standing Youth, a large figure in artificial stone, by Wilhelm Lehmbruck, November 16 to December 7th.

FUTURE EXHIBITIONS

Painting and Sculpture from Sixteen American Cities, December 12th to January 1st. To include over a hundred paintings and some twenty works of sculpture from Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, San Francisco, Sante Fe, and Seattle.

International Exhibition of Theatre Art, January 9th to February 26th. Directed by Mr. Lee Simonson of the Theatre Guild; will include drawings and models done during the last four centuries in France, Italy, England, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, the U. S. S. R., and the United States.

Machine Art, March 6th to April 16th.

CIRCULATING EXHIBITIONS

Portrait of the Artist's Mother, by James McNeill Whistler.

Dec. 4 to Jan. 4. William Rockhill Nelson Trust, Kansas City, Mo.

International Exhibition of Modern Architecture with models.

Nov. 17 to Dec. 15. Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.

Photographic Exhibition of Modern Architecture.

Dec. 1 to Dec. 30. Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Mich.

A Brief Survey of Modern Painting in Color Reproductions.

Dec. 1 to Dec. 15. Shipley School, Bryn Mawr, Pa.
Jan. 1 to Jan. 15. Principia, St. Louis, Mo.

A NOTE ABOUT MUSIC IN MODERN BUILDINGS

By VIRGIL THOMSON

Instrumental style is determined by architecture. The resonant marble rooms at Schönbrunn and Versailles gave out a rich and brilliant sonority with a small number of instruments, provided those instruments were naturally brilliant in character, like violins and harp-ichords. The over-stuffed and over-hung rooms of the 19th century required a more strident instrumentation to compensate for their acoustical deadness. The harp-ichord sounded thin and tinkling. The piano replaced it. The string-quartet took on a sonority which Edward Macdowell compared to the taste of cold veal. Its cultivation was confined to the scholarly. Berlioz and Wagner added more and more brass to orchestras to replace a lost architectural resonance. For the sensitive but echoless concert-halls of 1900, Debussy concocted sharp and subtle sonorities by peppering even the softest string-passages with sharp noises emitted briefly from brass or reed instruments and with a great many little percussive pings, the suavity of the violins being continually varied and rendered piquant by delicate admixtures from a very large number of other instruments.

Modern houses built of hollow tiles and hard plaster pose a new acoustic problem. They are excessively resonant. The simplicity of their furnishings is small aid in damping that resonance. Hence another adjustment of instrumental style is taking place, a reducing of instrumental numbers, an achievement of delicacy and brilliance without the aid (or hindrance), of the complicated scoring which has made the music of the last 75 years so difficult of performance and so recondit a pleasure.

The harpsichord is once more audible. It is adequate both in volume and in musical character to rooms not dissimilar basically to those in which it formerly flourished—resonant rooms, brilliant in tone, stylistic in execution, delicate in finish.

The string-quartet disengaged from plush and tassels and thick carpets, has regained its ancient amplitude. Against white plaster walls, its grace is like a growing branch, its pathos resonant like horns.

The pianoforte in such rooms is a little heavy to the ear, as it is lumpy to the eye. Pianoforte music, however, sounds clear and full, when transmitted through the microphone, provided the receiving-set burns a not too large number of tubes.

Virgil Thomson's opera, "Four Saints in Three Acts," with libretto by Gertrude Stein, will be given its first public performance next February in the theatre of the new Avery Memorial of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.

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EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN HOUSES by Walker Evans

<u>NO.</u>	<u>STYLE</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
8.33	Miscellaneous	Group	Columbia Heights, Brooklyn
9.33	"		Boston, (South End), Mass.
10.33	"	Greek Influence	Northampton, Mass.
11.33	"	Valentine House, 1851	Cambridge, Mass.
20.33	"		Dorchester, Vermont
21.33	"		Brookline, Mass.
31.33	Mansard		South Boston, Mass.
32.33	"	Worcester Square, corner	South End, Boston, Mass.
33.33	"		Belmont, Mass.
37.33	Metal Work		Provincetown, Mass.
38.33	"	Detail of porches	South End, Boston, Mass.
39.33	Gingerbread		Ocean Grove, N.J.
40.33	"	Group of houses	Ocean Grove, N.J.
41.33	"	Pump house	Kennebunk, Maine
42.33	"	Doorway	Nyack, N.Y.
43.33	"		South Boston, Mass.
45.33	"	Entrance	Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Mass.
46.33	"		Nyack, N.Y.
47.33	"		Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Mass.
48.33	"		Cambridge, Mass.
49.33	"	Street view, houses	South Boston, Mass.
50.33	"	Side view	Dedham, Mass.
51.33	"	House	Kennebunk, Maine
52.33	"		Belmont, Mass.
54.33	Gothic	Chimney	New York State
55.33	"	House	Salem, Mass.
56.33	"		Cambridge, Mass.
57.33	"		Somerville, Mass.
58.33	"	Caretaker's house	Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
59.33	"	Detail	Northampton, Mass.
60.33	"		Salem, Mass.
65.33	"	Gabled facade	Nyack, N.Y.
67.33	"	Rear view (68.33)	Swampscott, Mass.
68.33	"	Front view	Swampscott, Mass.
70.33	Greek		Greenfield, Mass.
71.33	"		Salem, Mass.
72.33	"		Cambridge, Mass.
102.33	Gothic		Swampscott, Mass.
103.33	"	Shutters	Chestnut Hill, Mass.

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BY WALKER EVANS

\$10.

1934	May	New Jersey College for Women New Brunswick, N.J.
	June	Oberlin College Oberlin, O.
	Oct. 29 - Nov. 26	Albright Art Gallery Buffalo, N.Y.
	Dec. 3 - 31	Addison Gallery of American Art Andover, Mass.
1935	Feb. 3 - Mar. 8	Rochester Memorial Art Gallery Rochester, N.Y.
	Mar. 16 - Apr. 13	University of Vermont Burlington, Vt.
	Oct. 1 - 29	Albany Institute of History & Art Albany, N.Y.
	Nov. 5 - Dec. 3	Dartmouth College Hanover, N.H.
	Dec. 10 - Jan. 7	Yale University New Haven, Conn.
1936	Jan. 14 - Feb. 11	Lyman Allyn Museum New London, Conn.
	Feb. 18 - Mar. 18	Baltimore Museum of Art Baltimore, Md.
	Apr. 27 - May 18	Georgia Lingafelt (bookshop) Chicago, Ill.
	July 1 - Aug. 1	Oglebay Institute Wheeling, W. Va.
1940	May 10 - June 10	Baltimore Museum of Art Baltimore, Md.

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THE ACADEMY
Wyoming, N. Y.

Museum of Modern Art Archives

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CORSON HOUSE
118 Dryden Road
Ithaca, N. Y.

BRYANT FLEMING

ARCHITECT
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Wyoming, N. Y.

Nov. 17th. 1934.

Museum of Modern Art,
New York City.

Gentlemen,

I have recently viewed with considerable interest the collection of photographs, and engravings on architecture and may I ask you the following questions ?

Can Copies of the photographs of 19th. Cent. American Houses by Walker Evans be obtained, and if so where and at what price ?

The same of those of Frank H. Ross Jr.

Can the notations given below the illustrations of French houses of the early 18th. Century be sent me- I have most of these illustrations and would like the notations to add to them. I am told that they were worded by the Museum of Modern Art.

Thanking you for such answer as you may send me, I remain,

Yours very truly,

Bryant Fleming

Bryant Fleming.

*Walker Evans
23. Rethine St.
NYC.*

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Evans-19th C

Museum of Modern Art Archives
CEI 1/91 (5)

November 27, 1934

My dear Mr. Fleming:

Your letter of November 17th has been referred to me. I am somewhat puzzled, however, by your questions.

Our circulating exhibition of photographs of 19th century American Houses by Walker Evans has been on view at the Albright Art Gallery this last month. I assume that you saw them there. I know nothing, however, of the full contents of the Buffalo exhibition and can therefore give you no information about the photographs by Frank Ross, Jr.

I believe you can secure copies of some of the photographs by Mr. Evans. We do not keep them in stock at the Museum and I should advise you to write directly to Mr. Evans at 23 Bathurst Street, New York City.

Can you give me any fuller information about the illustrations of French houses of the early 18th Century? As far as I know, they were not sent from the Museum and I do not believe we have any record of the notes of which you speak.

I am sorry not to be able to send you more information, but I believe someone at the gallery where you viewed the photographs has mis-informed you about our contributions.

Very sincerely yours,

Assistant
Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

Bryant Fleming, Esq.
Landscape Architect
Wyoming, New York