

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FACT SHEET ON PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION IN THE "NEW" MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art, the first museum to make the art of photography an important part of its program, is exhibiting 50 photographs in its second floor galleries, a sampling of the 2,600 prints in the permanent collection. The photographs, along with selections from other Museum collections - prints, drawings, design objects, painting and sculpture - have been installed to suggest the extensive Museum resources currently withheld from public view for lack of space.

Although 75 photography exhibitions have been presented in the Museum during the past 27 years, not a single photograph is generally on exhibit. In the "new" Museum 150 photographs will be on continuous display in a permanent gallery.

The photographs now on view, installed by Kathleen Haven, indicate the range and quality of the photography collection. Included are such early achievements as Mathew B. Brady's Ruins of Richmond (1865), Julia Margaret Cameron's Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1865), and works by Atget, Jacob A. Riis and Lewis W. Hine. Five "Equivalents" (1921-1938) illustrate Alfred Stieglitz' concept of "essential relationships." Three contemporary photographers, Richard Avedon, Alfred Eisenstaedt and Philippe Halsman, demonstrate the individuality of the artists' vision with portraits of the same subject, the Reverend Martin Cyril d'Arcy. Among other well-known names are Brassai, Walker Evans, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange, W. Eugene Smith, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn and Arnold Newman.

The Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, first included photographs in a 1932 exhibition, Murals by American Painters and Photographers. In 1940 the Department of Photography was established, according to Beaumont Newhall, the first Curator, to "function as focal center where the esthetic problems of photography can be evaluated, where the artist who has chosen the camera as his medium can find guidance by example and encouragement and where the vast amateur public can study both the classics and the most recent and significant developments of photography."

Along with one-man shows of acknowledged masters such as David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, young talent has been displayed in such exhibitions as In and Out of Focus, The Exact Instant, the Diogenes with a Camera series and Post-War European Photography. Undoubtedly the Department's greatest achievement is The Family of Man, created by Edward Steichen. Since its 1955 opening at the Museum it has been seen by 7,000,000 people in 37 countries, and is still being circulated abroad. The Family of Man was one of the outstanding successes at the Moscow Fair.

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In addition to the frequent exhibition schedule at the Museum, and circulation of fifty separate exhibitions since 1937, the Department of Photography also functions as a center of information and research for the public, press and industry. Department publications include History of Photography 1839 to the Present Day by Beaumont Newhall, and Lincoln Kirstein's Walker Evans: American Photographs.

Edward Steichen, who presented Road to Victory in 1942 and Power in the Pacific in 1944, has been Director of the Department since 1947. He states on the wall label of the current capsule exhibition: "While the Museum possess outstanding examples of some of the earliest photography, its collection is predominantly of twentieth-century prints. It contains the work of widely recognized photographers as well as experimental and exploratory work by newer talents - work marking a continuing effort to penetrate the surface appearance of reality or seeking to translate into pattern and design the magic detail of a fragment of growth or of deterioration.

The collection, which comprises 2,900 photographs for study besides the 2,600 in the permanent nucleus, represents the work of 981 photographers. The collection is formed by the approval of an Acquisitions Committee upon recommendation of the Department. Photographers may present work for consideration at any time to Miss Grace Mayer, Special Assistant to Mr. Steichen.

"Photography," the wall label continues, "has become an indispensable tool in nearly all fields of human activity. As a witness of places, times and events, it records with an exactness beyond the scope of any other visual means. Because of the magnitude and variety of these functions, its esthetic potentialities are sometimes overlooked. When practiced by the artist, photography becomes a medium capable of giving form to ideas and incisive expression to emotions."

Enlarged viewing and archive space in the "new" Museum will make photographs readily accessible for reference. These facilities, together with the permanent gallery, will bring to the public the best photographs of past and present, providing standards for current work.

November 17, 1959

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