

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION

Fifty-nine photographs, chosen to indicate the range and quality of the photography collection of the Museum of Modern Art, have been newly installed in the Museum's second floor galleries. A sampling of the 2,600 prints in the collection, each work on view is by a different photographer. The photographs, along with selections from other Museum collections - prints, drawings, design objects, painting and sculpture - suggest the Museum resources currently withheld from public view for lack of space.

Although the Museum of Modern Art, the first museum to make the art of photography an important part of its program, has presented 77 photography exhibitions during the past 28 years, not a single print is generally on view. In the planned "new" Museum, 150 photographs will be on continuous rotating display in a permanent gallery.

Included in the current exhibition, installed by Grace Mayer, are such early achievements as a Civil War document (1865) by T. H. O'Sullivan, Mountain of the Holy Cross (1873), by William Henry Jackson, an Analysis of Motion series (1883-1887), by Eadweard Muybridge, and Arnold Genthe's San Francisco Fire (1906). The Photo-Secessionist movement is represented by Gertrude Kasebier's Clarence H. White and His Family (1912). Abstractions on view, by Christian Schad (a 1918 shadowgraph), Francis Bruguière, and Konrad Cramer, are followed by a current color study of bridges by the film-maker, Francis Thompson. Among established photographers are Berenice Abbott, Cornell and Robert Capa, Imogen Cunningham, David Douglas Duncan, Gjon Mili, Edward Steichen, and Weegee. Younger artists are Claudia H. Andujar, Bruce L. Davidson, Arthur Freed, Ann Parker, and Steven Trefonides. The photographers are Americans of various national origins, and Austrian, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Swedish.

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.

In addition to the frequent exhibition schedule at the Museum, and circulation of fifty-one 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 possesses 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 1,000 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.

Photographs and further information available from Herbert Bronstein, Associate Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York. CI 5-8900.