PHOTOGRAPHS BEFORE SURREALISM, an exhibition of about 40 works, many by unknown photographers, from the 1860's through the first two decades of the 20th century, will be on view in the Edward Steichen Photography Center of The Museum of Modern Art from April 6 through June.

"Images provide vocabulary for the dialogue between reality and the logicless realm of the subconscious," states Bruce K. MacDonald, Curatorial Intern in the Department of Photography and Director of the exhibition. "The Surrealists used dreams, trances, and automatic writing to expand insight into this hidden area of the mind. Photographs provided a related opportunity by preserving instantaneous fragments of vision -- reflections of reality -- which could thereafter be slowly digested by the viewer's expanding awareness."

The documentary photographer freezes and crystallizes the juxtapositions of the real world at a precise instant. His images are created without intervention of the extended rational processes which underlie the manually rendered images of other artistic media. "Before automatic techniques of rendering were developed by the Surrealists, the slow processes of drawing and painting caused art's images to be filtered through the defensive fabric of reason. Tradition often guided the pen or brush. By such art the jagged edges of reality were rubbed smooth. But photographs -- especially 'artless' photographs -- exposed the subliminal implications of images taken directly from reality."

The juxtapositions captured by documentary photography can give rise to varied implications and associations -- of sex, violence, or humor, for example. The Surrealists were receptive to these subliminal implications, which they exploited in their imagery. Photographs like the ones exhibited here were reproduced in the early Surrealist periodical La Rêvolution Surréaliste, first published in 1924.

(more)
In Joseph Byron's *Incubator, Sloane Maternity Hospital* (1899) the associations are obvious. The baby in the incubator is "fed" by a long "umbilical" cord attached to the wall, the mechanical mother. This "artless" depiction of objective reality rewards further contemplation. In George Barnard's *Federal Cavalry at Sudley Ford, Bull Run, Va.* (c. 1865), the implications are more subtle. A group of children sits by a river while a row of cavalry pauses in its advance on the far bank. This moment, frozen in time, is at once factual and mysterious, tranquil and sinister.

The viewer brings the same psychological defenses to photographic imagery as to the ephemeral images of reality. But these defenses are less effective against the implications rising from the factual images immobilized by photography. "The photographs in this exhibition were chosen to exemplify this challenge to insight as it existed in photographs before Surrealism."

*PHOTOGRAPHS BEFORE SURREALISM* includes important loans from The Library of Congress and The Museum of the City of New York.

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Images provide vocabulary for the dialogue between reality and the logicless realm of the subconscious. The Surrealists used dreams, trances, and automatic writing to expand insight into this hidden area of the mind. Photographs provided a related opportunity. They did so by preserving instantaneous fragments of vision which could thereafter be slowly digested by the viewer's expanding awareness. This exhibition consists of photographs drawn from many facets of the medium's development previous to the first articulation of Surrealist principles. They are rich in those aspects of reality which can be more quickly seen than comprehended.

Before automatic techniques of rendering were developed by the Surrealists, the slow processes of drawing and painting caused art's images to be filtered through the defensive fabric of reason. Tradition often guided the pen or brush. By such art the jagged edges of reality were rubbed smooth. But photographs—especially "artless" photographs—exposed the subliminal implications of images taken directly from reality. Many photographs of this nature were published in the early Surrealist publication, *La Révolution Surréaliste*. The viewer brought the same defenses to photographic imagery as to the ephemeral images of reality. But these defenses were less effective against implications rising from factual images immobilized by photography. The photographs in this exhibition were chosen to exemplify this challenge to insight as it existed in photographs before Surrealism.

Bruce K. MacDonald
PHOTOGRAPHS BEFORE SURREALISM
April 6 - June, 1968

Checklist

ATGET, Eugène

1. Saint Cloud. c. 1910

2. Saint Cloud. c. 1910


BARNARD, George N.


5. Pettit’s Battery in Fort Richardson, Fair Oaks Station, Va. 1862.

BARNARD, George N. ?


BELLOCQ

   Lent by Lee Friedlander.

BENNETT, H. H.


BONE, E. H.

   Lent by The Library of Congress (C) 60796.

(more)
BRADY, Mathew B.


BYRON COMPANY

Lent by the Museum of the City of New York. (Neg. no. 1526).

12. "Bob" Fitzsimmons at Dr. Woodbury's. 1895.
Lent by the Museum of the City of New York. (Neg. no. 967).

Lent by the Museum of the City of New York. (Neg. no. 19749).

Lent by the Museum of the City of New York. (Neg. no. 8512).

15. Richard Hall Painting Portrait of Mrs. Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt. 1903.
Lent by the Museum of the City of New York. (Neg. no. 15435).

DAVEY, Frank

Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)77471.

DUNLAP, O. E.

Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)42999.

GIVENS, J. D.

Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)49100.

KERTÉSZ, André


KINSEY, Darius

20. Cedar Tree with 20' Diameter. c. 1906.
21. Felling a Fir Tree with 51" Circumference. c. 1906. 
   Study Collection.

LARTIGUE, Jacques Henri.

22. Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. c. 1911. 


MUYBRIDGE, Eadweard

   Gift of the City of Philadelphia, Department of Commerce. The Museum of 
   Modern Art. Study Collection.

O'SULLIVAN, T. H.

25. Historic Spanish Record of the Conquest, South Side of Inscription Rock, 
   New Mexico. 1873. 
   Made for the Wheeler Expedition. Gift of Ansel Adams in Memory of Albert M. 

"F. H. P."


PELHAM, E. S.

27. Electrocution Chair and Chamber, Sing Sing Prison. Copyright 1892. 
   Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)20925xl.

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

28. Automobile. c. 1905. 
   Courtesy of The Library of Congress. The Museum of Modern Art. Study 
   Collection.

   Art, New York. Study Collection.

30. Dollmaker. Copyright 1918. 
   Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)Cl.J231561.

31. 15 in. Gun and Mounting. c. 1864. 
   Art, New York. Study Collection.

(more)


34. *Signal Station on the Ogeechee at Fort McAllister, Georgia*, 1864.


36. *Vallecitas Leopards, No. 87*, Copyright 1906.
Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)74413.

RIIS, Jacob A.


ROSENTHAL, Arthur

Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)41529.

ROTHENGATTER and DILLON

40. *Astarte*, 1889.
Lent by The Library of Congress. (C)1677842.

TOMLINSON, J. H.

41. *Board of Rubber Stamps*, 1891.
Lent by The Library of Congress.

VAN SCHAICK, Charles J.

42. *Special Car of Traveling Minstrel Show*, c. 1905.

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