

The Museum of Modern Art

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PHOTOGRAPHS OF WOMEN, a brief survey of some of the ideas and attitudes about women that have recurred in photography during the past 70 years, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 22 to November 30, 1971.

The exhibition consists of 43 photographs by 33 photographers, 13 of whom are women. The works are drawn predominantly from the Museum collection. "Women are as popular a subject in photography as landscape, and the photographer's interest in both dates back to the medium's earliest investigations," says Anne Tucker, Curatorial Intern in the Department of Photography who directed the exhibition. "Some photographers have consciously chosen to photograph women, and have selected subjects according to their prejudices," she says, "while other photographers have been more motivated by their love of the physical universe and their desire to render anything in it that they have found interesting or memorable."

In the case of photographers motivated by the idea of women in the abstract, the end results have had more to do with their preconceptions than with the women before their cameras. The subjects, who serve to reinforce the myth of glamour and the mystique of beauty have generally been young, attractive, nude, famous or rich. Edward Steichen's women, Miss Tucker points out, are consistently romantic; Todd Walker's are grotesque; and Richard Avedon's are glamorous.

In the works of other photographers surveyed in this exhibition, however, the fact that the central figure is a woman is no more or less notable than the details of her surroundings. Here, the fact that the subject is a woman has gained significance only as the viewer (and the photographer in retrospect) has searched for meaning.

In selecting photographs for this exhibition, Miss Tucker observed that photographers have seemingly discriminated between their masculine and feminine subjects in the kinds of photographs taken of each sex. Women are most often photographed as wives, mothers, prostitutes and strangers, and although men are often photographed in their complementary roles

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as husbands, fathers, voyeurs and strangers, they are also portrayed as artists, athletes, politicians and explorers. Women, she says, are recognized in these traditionally masculine roles only in news photographs.

Miss Tucker also found proportionately few character portraits of women such as Diane Arbus' "Veiled Woman" or Dorothea Lange's "Texas Panhandle." Conversely, there have been very few photographs made of male nudes. In her view, photography has always been a decidedly masculine field and one in which the ideas of many women photographers of merit have received little or no attention. She points, for example, to Annie Brigman, who worked at the turn of the century and is only now beginning to be rediscovered. In "The Storm Tree" (1912), for example, Miss Brigman pictures herself as the soul of a tree, exploring the affinity of women and nature from a particularly feminine point of view.

In recent years, there has been a trend toward photographing "women as women," either outside the traditional roles of wife, mother and prostitute or with a new interpretation of these roles. Though there are still very few recognized women photographers who are attempting visually to explore their existence as women, the exhibition does include the work of a few young women in their 20's who, as Miss Tucker puts it, "are beginning to explain themselves." Judy Belasco, in her "Portrait of Joan" (1970), pictures the overwhelming tedium of motherhood -- a far cry from the usual romanticized version of the subject.

There are also some men who are making photographs that depart from traditional attitudes such as Bob Heinecken, whose photos of "woman as a packaged good" satirize rather than glorify her role as sex object.

"It fascinated me that women are so popular as subjects and yet I was never satisfied with the surveys I had seen which tried to analyze how women appeared in the medium," says Miss Tucker. Consequently, she chose many photos which ordinarily might not have been deemed "appropriate" for inclusion in this type of survey, but which, from her point of view as a woman, are relevant to the subject. There are four photos in the show, for example, of men

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looking at women.

"These photographs were selected as examples of the many kinds of photographs in which women appear," says Miss Tucker. "Not all of them are about women. Some are about men. Their pertinence is that they are effective -- as photographs and as symbols which influence the people who look at them."

Additional information and photographs available from Diana Goldin, Coordinator of Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Telephone: (212) 956-7297, -7501.
