

GARRY WINOGRAND

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MAJOR GARRY WINOGRAND RETROSPECTIVE OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A retrospective of the photography of Garry Winogrand (1928-1984) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on May 15, 1988. Organized by John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography, GARRY WINOGRAND is the first overview of the remarkable achievement of this photographer. Winogrand remained a controversial figure throughout most of his career, and only in recent years has there been a general acceptance of his importance. Mr. Szarkowski writes,

Garry Winogrand is, in my view, the central photographer of his generation. Winogrand's pictures realize a conception of photography that is richer, more complex, and more problematic than any other since the Second World War. They also provide a picture of America during those years--of the flavor and texture of our life since Truman--that seems to me so true, clear, and tangible that it almost persuades me that I stood where he stood.*

GARRY WINOGRAND and its accompanying publication are part of the Springs Industries Series on the Art of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art and are generously supported by a grant from Springs Industries, Inc. Additional support for the exhibition has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The exhibition presents more than 200 images, including ten enlarged contact sheets, each six by six feet. The images are organized into nine segments which represent, in a roughly chronological sequence, the stages of Winogrand's career and the settings and subject matter

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that fascinated him: Eisenhower Years; The Street; Women; The Zoo; On the Road; The Sixties, Etc.; The Fort Worth Fat Stock Show and Rodeo; Airport; and Unfinished Work.

The exhibition's organization reflects the development of Winogrand's conception of photography and underlines the breadth and diversity of his response to the American scene over three decades. The last section of the exhibition consists of approximately twenty-five prints and forty slides from the vast body of work--more than a third of a million exposures--left unfinished at the time of his death. An emergency grant from Springs Industries, Inc., allowed the processing of more than 2500 rolls of film, rapidly approaching deterioration, that Winogrand had left unprocessed at the time of his death.

Garry Winogrand was born in 1928 in the Bronx, New York. After two years in the army, he began his studies at City College of New York. In 1948 he enrolled at Columbia University to study painting, but was soon introduced to photography by a fellow student. In 1949 he studied with Alexey Brodovitch at The New School for Social Research. He became a stringer in the early 1950s for the Pix agency in New York and, by the mid-1950s, his photographs were appearing in such publications as Collier's, Redbook, and, in its first years, Sports Illustrated. In 1955, two of Winogrand's works were included in The Museum of Modern Art's THE FAMILY OF MAN exhibition.

Winogrand's early work was done at a time when photography was being redefined by a new generation of photographers who considered photojournalism the arena of greatest opportunity. Impatient with

technical niceties, they aimed more for authenticity than clarity. Szarkowski writes, "If their pictures seemed gratuitously casual even by the relatively permissive standards of photojournalism, they also seemed to be lifted directly and spontaneously from the flow of real life; they seemed formed not by rules and calculation, but by intuition and strong feeling." The best of Winogrand's work during the Eisenhower years "describes a world," according to Szarkowski, "that is full of visceral energy and a smoldering beauty that lies close to violence."

In 1955, Winogrand was introduced to the work of Walker Evans and took his first photographic trip across the United States. By the late fifties the demand for photo-stories had dwindled, and Winogrand faced a professional crisis. He later said that he began to be a serious photographer around 1960, and it was about then that he began to photograph women on the street, a major preoccupation for him during the 1960s. A selection of these pictures, which are distinguished by the "electric character of their drawing," according to Szarkowski, and the "almost kinetic nature of their pictorial structure," was published in 1975 as Women Are Beautiful. Winogrand also photographed at the Central Park Zoo, publishing forty-six of the pictures in The Animals (1969).

In his street pictures of the early sixties, Winogrand began to develop the unexplored possibilities of the wide-angle lens. He learned to use it to include what he wanted from a closer vantage point--an entire pedestrian, for example, from a distance at which one would normally focus on a face. To gain more control over the exaggerated

effects sometimes produced by the wide-angle lens, he experimented with tilting the frame and discovered a new freedom of composition.

The Museum first exhibited a substantial body of Winogrand's work in 1962 in FIVE UNRELATED PHOTOGRAPHERS. This was followed by the influential NEW DOCUMENTS (1967), which also included work of Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus; THE ANIMALS (1969-70), Winogrand's first one-man show; and PUBLIC RELATIONS (1977), which generated an exceptional range of critical opinion. He received three John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship grants: in 1964, to make photographic studies of American life; in 1969, to study the effect of the media on events; and in 1978, to photograph in California.

Winogrand said that if he saw a familiar picture in his viewfinder, he "would do something to change it," something to present him with a problem to solve. During the 1970s, he challenged himself by attempting pictures of increasing complexity, such as the photograph of a play, during a 1974 University of Texas football game, in which all twenty-two players are seen in motion. John Szarkowski finds in sports an analogy to photography as Winogrand practiced it:

Most of Winogrand's best pictures--let us say all of his best pictures--involve luck of a different order than that of minimal, survivor's luck on which any human achievement depends. It is luck of an order that can perhaps be compared to the luck of an athlete, for whom the game is devised to make failure the rule and conspicuous success never wholly in the hands of the hero.... As Winogrand grew older and his ambition grew more demanding, the role of luck in his work grew larger. As his motifs became more complex, and more unpredictable in their development, the chances of success in a given frame became smaller.

The prodigious amount of unfinished work produced during Winogrand's last years, spent mostly in California, presents an extraordinary curatorial problem. Szarkowski writes, "If Winogrand's work of the last years is deeply flawed, it must be added that to see it is to be struck hard by the uncompromising restlessness of it, and by the compulsive gambler's curiosity that allowed Winogrand to entrust the meaning of his life to progressively unequal contests with the laws of chance." His ambition, Szarkowski concludes, "was not to make good pictures, but through photography to know life." Winogrand died of cancer in Mexico on March 19, 1984.

After its New York showing, GARRY WINOGRAND travels to the Art Institute of Chicago (September 17 - November 13, 1988); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (December 1988 - February 1989); the Carnegie Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh (February 25 - April 16, 1989); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 13 - August 13, 1989); the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas, Austin (September 7 - October 22, 1989); and the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson (November 1989 - January 1990). An international tour will follow.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.