

The Museum of Modern Art

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LEE FRIEDLANDER: NUDES

July 25 - October 8, 1991

An exhibition of fifty-two photographs of female nudes by the American photographer Lee Friedlander opens at The Museum of Modern Art on July 25, 1991. Organized by John Szarkowski, consulting director*, Department of Photography, the exhibition has been selected from Friedlander's forthcoming book, *Nudes*. Although some of these pictures have been exhibited previously, this is the first time this body of work has been shown together.

On view through October 8, **LEE FRIEDLANDER: NUDES** presents black-and-white photographs taken over the past thirteen years, ranging from intimate portraits to abstract figure studies. Using a hand-held camera and a flash, Friedlander photographs his subjects at close range, often framing the image to focus on a torso or limbs. The models are depicted standing, seated, or reclining in domestic settings. Occasionally the subjects are photographed so closely that they appear abstract, recalling the work of several modern artists. In one, for example, a woman reclining on a sofa is so foreshortened that her legs taper off, and she appears to float, as if in a painting by Marc Chagall. In others, the extreme proximity of a hip or breast recalls the work of Jean Arp or Constantin Brancusi.

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*John Szarkowski, who has been director of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art since 1962, retired from that position on July 1, 1991. He will remain as consulting director through the summer.

Although Friedlander's nudes follow in the photographic tradition of Bill Brandt, Harry Callahan, and Edward Weston, they differ from more classical interpretations of the nude in their unflinching realism. Friedlander allows the viewer to recognize each subject as an individual by the appearance of a beauty mark, for example, or her own unique anatomy. Similarly, unlike the neutral settings favored by the earlier photographers, Friedlander's models are depicted in mundane surroundings--a worn sofa, a rumpled bedspread, a shag carpet--heightening the originality of these images.

While undeniably candid, the nudes are described with the same complexity and disinterest as Friedlander's earlier photographs of urban landscapes and American monuments. Mr. Szarkowski writes, "The qualities of generosity and openness, and the habit of continual exploration--of logical extemporization enlivened by an unassuming audacity--have produced pictures that persuade us not that the world is simpler and neater than we thought or feared, but that it is more richly and rewardingly complex. In the present remarkable case he has produced nudes which are simultaneously carnal and friendly."

Born in 1934 in Aberdeen, Washington, Lee Friedlander studied photography at the Art Center School, Los Angeles. In 1967 he was included, along with Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand, in The Museum of Modern Art's landmark exhibition, NEW DOCUMENTS. Friedlander is the recipient of numerous awards, including fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. A major retrospective of his work, LIKE A ONE-EYED CAT: PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE FRIEDLANDER 1956-1987, was organized by the Seattle Art Museum in 1989 and toured several cities.

Following its New York showing, **LEE FRIEDLANDER: NUDES** travels to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (November 1, 1991 - January 5, 1992). Additional venues are planned.

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