Photography at MoMA

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Pier 18

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1960 ——— Now

Roxana Marcoci
Sarah Hermanson Meister
Patrick Faigenbaum, in 1988; Michael Schmidt, in 1988;

Fig. 3

Fig. 4
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<td>“They Like the Real World”: Documentary Practices after The Americans</td>
<td>Noam M. Elcott</td>
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New Documents and Beyond
Deconstructing Photography
Construced Narratives
Performance for the Camera
Photography and/as Mass Media
Revisiting the Document
The Archive
Experimentation

1960
1970
1980
1990
2000
2010

Robert Adams
Diane Arbus
Louise Babb
Larry Clark
Mark Cohen
Bruce Davidson
William Eggleston
Sara Fazio
Larry Fink
Lee Friedlander
Paolo Gasparini
William Gedney
Frank Godbile
David Goldblatt
Cemal Oezdemir
Chunacyu Hare
Kibou Imasuki
Josef Kubela
Helen Levitt
Danny Lyon
Susan Meiselas
Josep Mestres
Dadi Montanya
Joanna Moussavi-Ashie
Bill Owens
Ted Papageorge
Gilles Peress
Tone Ray Jensen
Stephen Shore
Mehrdad Shibli
Rosindell Fox Solomon
Joel Sternfeld
Aitch Simmen
Henry Wessel, Jr.
Garry Winogrand
Vito Acconci
William Anastasi
John Baldessari
Bernd and Hilla Becher
Mel Bochner
Geta Brătescu
Robert Currenng
Jan-Ditze
Bruce Davidson
Ger van Elk
Tomás Valentino
Davide Gahan
Douglas Huebler
Sanya Imasvieli
Leandre Kott
On Kawara
Joseph Kosuth
Jeff Koons
David Lamelas
Sol LeWitt
Gordon Matta-Clark
Dora Maurer
Bruce Nauman
Ken Okura
Dennis Oppenheim
Liliana Porter
Martha Rosler
Allen Ruppersberg
Ed Ruscha
Allan Sekula
Stephan Shore
Richard Serra
Jiri Takanakura
Lion Thomas
Kazimir Vortoska
Ian Wallace
William Wegman
Lawrence Weiner
Nobuyoshi Araki
Matthew Barney
Tina Barney
Richard Billingham
Anna and Bernhard Blume
James Casebere
Gregory Crewdson
Philip-Lorca diCorcia
Shannon Ebner
Sharon Etern
Robert Frank
Sarah Fournier
Robert Gober
Go Fabric
Chris Burden
Gilbert & George
Lyne Hendelman
Birgit Jürgenssen
Jürgen Klauke
Yves Klein
Milton Knabb
Tayor Kuzuma
George Maciunas
Elis Larssen
Lucea Lewis
Sharron Lecture
Allan McCullum
Josephine Meckseper
Ralph Mejn
Lorraine O'Grady
Adrian Piper
William Pope Jr.
Arnulf Rainer
Charles Ray
Babette Smith
Rong Rong
Lucien Sarnes
Tomokazu Shiozawa
Badal Scharzhacker
VALUE EXPORT
Peter Weibel
Hannah Wilke
Mantha Wilson
Marina Abramović
Vito Acconci
Bar Jair Adler
Al Weisw
Dianor Antin
Lynda Bengala
Oscar Bor
Geta Brătescu
Gunter Brice
Chris Burden
Gilbert & George
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Richard Avedon
John Baldessari
Adam Brownveg and
Oliver Charatan
Sarah Charlesworth
Anna Collier
Moira Davey
Thomas Demand
Ronald Druke
Lee Friedlander
Luis Glous
Lyne Hendelman
Robert Heinecken
Here is New York
Leslie Heeitt
Sanya Imasvieli
Silvio Koilowsi
Barbara Kruger
Richard Marquis
Zwoltho Swartme
Zaevle Mcbride
Nicholas Nixon
Martin Parr
Thomas Rona
Judith Joy Ross
Thomas Ruff
Allan Sekula
Alex Soth
John Stezaker
Hank Willis Thomas
Christopher Willams
Richard Avedon
Richard Avedon
Yto Barrada
Adam Bartos
Richard Benson
John Coplans
Robert Driks
Mitch Epstein
Leifus Rudy Freedy
David Goldblatt
Paul Graham
Katy Grannan
Andre Gardy
Christy Kopp
An Mi La
San Teon Leong
Sally Mann
Boris Milisavljev
Richard Marquis
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Robert Adams
Christian Boltanski
Phil Collins
Jan De Cook
Ohmar Elssan
Hans-Peter Feldman
Harold Fletcher
Carlo Gavriccas
He Be
Rachel Harrison
Rezis Horn
Zoe Leonard
Bertan van Manen
Jonathan Monk
Takuma Nakahara
Gina Nerac
Wold Rood
Michael Schmidt
Taryn Simon
Lora Simpson
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Carrie Mae Weems
Fred Wilson
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Uta Barth
Wolfgang Buchby
Marco Breuer
Peter Campena
Bruce Conner
Liz Deschenes
Brendan Fowler
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Andreas Gursky
Robert Heinecken
Barbara Kasten
Annette Kelm
Bøt Kram
Yosi Kasten
Vera Lutter
Christian Marclay
Annette Meesager
Ray K. Metzger
Abdulkoman Mordi
Vik Muniz
Oscar Murillo
Lisa Oppenheim
Anna Ostrom
Signer Polke
Josephine Pryde
Eileen Quilton
Morris Robinson
Thomas Ruff
Lucas Samaras
Sharron Shahabi
Regina Silveira
Michael Scanoe
Mike and Doug Starn
Hilmi Ségrette
Wolfgang Tillmans
Sara VanDerBeek
James Welling
Michael Wecky
Foreword

The book you hold in your hands is the first installment of what will be a three-volume history of photography told through the unparalleled collection of The Museum of Modern Art. This current volume covers contemporary photography from 1960 to the present moment, and it will be followed by two additional volumes that move backward in time: the second will cover the modern era, from works made in the years around World War II up through the 1950s, and the third will begin in the nineteenth century, in the years following the invention of the medium.

In opening this project with the most contemporary works, the Department of Photography emphasises its ongoing commitment to living artists. The Museum’s collection is constantly evolving and developing, and, indeed, more than half the works illustrated in this book have been acquired in the last fifteen years. Although the Museum’s publications on photography have been—and continue to be—acclaimed and popular, until now we have not offered an in-depth examination of the photography collection. Given that only a fraction of the collection’s more than thirty thousand photographs can be on view at any given moment, a publication that brings more works into the ongoing conversation about photography is welcome indeed.

I am indebted to Quentin Bajac, The Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz Chief Curator of Photography, who conceived this important set of publications, and to his colleagues in the Department of Photography: Lucy Gallun, Assistant Curator; Romana Marocchi, Senior Curator; and Sarah Meister, Curator. Together they have shaped a publication that brings into focus the breadth of the Museum’s collection, as well as the multiple histories of photography that can be told through it. Their texts, along with texts by the scholars David Campany, Noam M. Elcott, Eva Rosini, and Robert Slifkin, offer a look into how various works participate in the interconnected strands of contemporary practice and how they lay the groundwork for further expression and innovation.

The ongoing growth of the Museum’s photography collection would not be possible without the support of many dedicated individuals and entities. As always, I extend my gratitude to the Museum’s Board of Trustees for their unfaltering support. I am deeply thankful to the Committee on Photography for their generous facilitation of numerous acquisitions reproduced in this book, as well as their ongoing commitment to the program of the Department of Photography. The works you see in this publication have entered the collection through the support of many funds and groups affiliated with the Museum, including The Contemporary Arts Council, The Friends of Education, the Fund for the Twenty-First Century, the Latin American and Caribbean Fund, the Photography Council, and The Modern Women’s Fund, among many others. There have also been many individuals who have supported acquisitions or who have donated works of art from their own collections, which enable us to share these important photographic works with you.

Finally, I am profoundly grateful for the generous support of Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz, whose commitment to this volume underscores their longstanding contributions to the Department of Photography and to the ambitious program that it supports. Additional major support for this volume was provided by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation and by David Dechman and Michel Mercure. Their dedication to our efforts is so greatly appreciated.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art; New York
From the opening of The Museum of Modern Art, in 1929, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., its first director, then twenty-seven years old and inspired in particular by the example of the Bauhaus, thought it might be a good idea to include photography among the techniques represented: in a draft for a brochure he envisioned that “In time the Museum would probably expand beyond the narrow limits of painting and sculpture in order to include departments devoted to drawings, prints, and photography, typography, the arts of design in commerce and industry, architecture (a collection of models and maquettes), stage designing, furniture and the decorative arts. Not the least important collection might be the "filmothèque, a library of films.” The final version of the text does not take up this multidisciplinary vision but points out more prudently that “In time the Museum would expand... to include other phases of modern art.” And yet the following year, in 1930, the first photograph entered the collection: one taken by a young Walker Evans, showing a sculpture by Willem Lehmbruck. It was the institution’s twenty-third acquisition, and it was followed in 1933 by one hundred pictures of Victorian architecture by the same photographer. Eight years later, in 1938, Evans was the first photographer to be given a solo exhibition and a publication. Finally, in December 1940, the Department of Photography was officially created and its curatorial direction conferred on Edward Steichen, who was twenty-five at the time. The decision to include photography among the techniques represented in the Museum was clearly influenced by the work of the art critic Clement Greenberg. As early as 1937, he had written in his essay “Abstraction in Painting, Architecture, and Music” that “the esthetic problems of photography can be evaluated, summed up these aims: “In short, the Department of Photography will function as [a] focal center where the aesthetic 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.” And although the first photography exhibition organized by MoMA was indeed a historical and commemorative exhibition covering the first century of photography (Photography: 1839–1937, in 1937), the exhibition programming of the first two decades—under directors with very different personalities, Beaumont Newhall (aided by his wife, Nancy), from 1940 to 1947, and the photographer Edward Steichen, from 1947 to 1962—did indeed put forward the “most recent and significant developments of photography,” three-quarters of them included living photographers and current themes. Such engagement with contemporary work and attachment to living photographers and artists extends to the present-day, in various contexts and with a variety of sensibilities, despite the gradual institutionalization of the medium and the extension of the chronological period covered: barely a century in 1940, almost double that today.

With contemporary work the Newhalls tended to highlight personal styles, favoring monographic exhibitions, including Paul Strand, in 1945; Edward Weston, in 1946; and Henri Cartier-Bresson, in 1947. Steichen, on the other hand, made the thematic exhibition the spine of his programming, in exhibitions that advanced photography as a tool of communication and of the masses, in installations and displays influenced by mass-media publications such as Life magazine. The most striking example of his approach remains The Family of Man, in 1955. Still, from time to time, he made room for exhibitions that focused on singular works, conveying his great sense of discernment: Nancy Newhalls Purchased Works by American Photographers, in 1950, and Always the Young Strangers, in 1953, both presented American “samplings from the beginnings of a new decade in photography.” Five French Photographers: Doisneau, Liss, Ronis, Bresson, Cartier-Bresson, in 1951, and Postwar European Photography, in 1953, did the same for Europe (fig. 3). At the same time, he began a series of exhibitions with the somewhat lofty title of Diagonales with a Camera, that were devoted to recent works and intended to highlight “how the art of

3. Ibid.
photography added to our knowledge of the ‘truth’ by presenting the work of (mostly) living photographers, American as well as foreign, such as the young W. Eugene Smith, Robert Frank, and Lucien Clergue.6

Succeeding him at the head of the department in July 1962 was John Szarkowski, a thirty-six-year-old photographer (with two books of his own work under his belt) who would remain there for thirty years. When the Museum expanded in 1964, it was given an exhibition gallery designated for presentations on the history of photography as told through the works in the collection (then around seven thousand images), as well as a well-appointed study center with a library intended for students and photographers. Photographers were encouraged to drop off their portfolios to be seen and considered by the department, which returned them without commentary. Szarkowski considered this system, with its lack of dialogue, “very unsatisfactory” but acknowledged that “half the exhibitions we do of younger photographers are the direct result of our looking at unsolicited portfolios.”7 As the chronological period covered by the Museum continued to grow—which might have restricted the amount of space allotted to contemporary work—and a market for historical photography began to form in the early 1970s, especially in the United States, Szarkowski nevertheless continued to engage with contemporary work, giving the majority of exhibitions to active photographers. At the same time he profoundly modified this engagement from that of his predecessors, in both its form and the type of photography he championed. He greatly reduced the number of thematic exhibitions, which he considered too didactic, and instead favored those that highlighted personal itineraries and individual signatures. His first exhibition, in 1963, was titled Five Uncollected Photographers, a subtle and symbolic way of indicating a break with his predecessor, and proposed something that would be, as he allowed, “more about photographers than about moral or philosophical position.”8 In contrast with the traditional, densely hung displays dear to Steichen, Szarkowski preferred to install photographs in the same manner as paintings and drawings—mounted in passe-partouts and framed, on white walls with more space between the images, thus asserting photography as an art rather than a medium of communication.

In another contrast with Steichen, Szarkowski was an eloquent and charismatic advocate of a conception of photography that was close to the tenets of modernism and informed by Clement Greenberg’s writings on painting. In an era of new resources and connections between photography and the other visual arts, Szarkowski undertook to define and promote a “pure” (or straight) contemporary photography that relied on its own cardinal virtues (the act of framing, the relationship to reality, the quality of light) and displayed a certain documentary transparency. This conception presages Szarkowski’s unease with large formats and reveals his predilection for black and white, though he would sometimes show contemporary work in color, by artists such as Erni Haas, in 1962; Marie Cosindas, in 1966; Helen Levitt, in 1974; and, of course, William Eggleston, in 1976.” This tradition of documentary style is anchored in the works of Eugene Atget—whose archives Szarkowski bought for the Museum from Berenice Abbott in 1968—and Evans, who died in 1975 and to whom he devoted a major retrospective in 1971. Its main heirs, Szarkowski believed, were Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand, all three of whom were featured in the exhibition New Documents in 1967 (fig. 2). Szarkowski called them “documentary photographers” and believed them motivated by “more personal ends” than those of the preceding generation, sharing “the belief that the world is worth looking at, and the courage to look at it without theorizing” (qualities that also suggest Eggleston, Joel Meyerowitz, and Nicholas Nixon, among others).9 At a time when the practice and history of photography were making their way into academia, Szarkowski stubbornly defended an antitheoretical and nonacademic approach, which he described—straying a taste for provocation—as “the easiest of the arts”: “Putting aside for today the not very mysterious mysteries of craft, a photographer finally does nothing but stand in the right place, at the right time, and decide what should fall within and without the rectangle of the frame. That is what it comes down to.”10 Throughout his career, with more than fifty contemporary exhibitions taking place under his direction, Szarkowski scarcely deviated from this concept of contemporary photography, keeping

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Footnotes:

6. Ibid.


8. Szarkowski, “Photographic paper is not beautiful. It looks like something made in a plastics factory—just a shiny surface. . . . Big photographs have no mystery to them.” (MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, N.H.), 16, no. 1 (Fall 1986).


10. Ibid., p. 61.

11. For example, Steichen’s 1955 installation at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, N.H., in his exhibition at San Francisco (2000).
himself at a remove from the experimental practices of various photographers as well as from the artistic avant-gardes of the times. Among the rare exceptions were *A European Experiment*, in 1967, featuring the (sometimes abstract) work of three French and Belgian photographers (Denis Brihat, Pierre Cordier, and Jean-Pierre Sudre), and, the same year, the Surrealist photomontages of Jerry Uelsmann. In 1978 he organized *Mirrors and Windows*, *American Photography since 1960* around the poles of photography as a window on the world, the pure and documentary vision of the medium that was dear to him (with work by Robert Heinecken, Robert Rauschenberg, and Uelsmann).

Szarkowski’s American tropism, however, should be placed in the broader context of MoMA’s general acquisition policy from the early 1960s: the institution, long accused of not granting enough room to living American artists, shifted its focus as the art market’s marginalization of their work suggested that was the case. 

The most distinctive was that of Peter C. Bunnell, a curator from 1966 to 1972, whose two principal exhibitions, *Photography and Printmaking*, in 1968, and *Photography into Sculpture*, in 1970 (fig. 3), reflected an idea about photography that was open to other artistic disciplines such as printmaking and sculpture. Exhibitions from outside the departmental orbit in the 1970s revealed other photographic sensibilities: Information, organized by Kynaston McShine in 1970, included conceptual works with a strong photographic presence, by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Victor Burgin, Douglas Huebler, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Long, and Robert Smithson. The Projects exhibitions, begun in 1971 to show “current researches and explorations in the visual arts,” included both photographers and artists using photography—a distinction that was just beginning to be made and insisted on: the series featured Pier 18, in 1971, and works by Friedlander, in 1972. Klaus Rinke, Liliana Porter, and Eleanor Antin, in 1973; Levitt, Sonia Sheridan, and Keith Smith, in 1974; the Bechers, in 1975; Ger van Elk, in 1975; Michael Snow, in 1976; Peter Campus and Allan Ruppersberg, in 1977; William Beckley and Hamish Fulton, in 1978; Louise Lawler, in 1987; Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera, in 1988; Bernhard and Anna Blume, in 1989 (fig. 4); and Lorna Simpson, in 1990. Thus the Museum’s attitude toward contemporary photography was more diverse than various histories of the department have advanced. In the 1970s, when museums interested in photography were rare, Szarkowski was on the one hand identified by the press as “the ultimate analyst, catalyst, codifier, critic, prosector, patron and protector of the medium”; on the other hand, because of his media and public exposure, he was also an object of censure.

Certainly retrospectives of non-American photographers were organized in those years, for artists including Jacques-Henri Lartigue, in 1963; André Kertész, in 1964; Brassai, in 1969; Cartier-Bresson, in 1969; Bill Brandt, in 1969; and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, in 1971, all of them still living at the time. But the goal of those exhibitions was a historical reading of their work, showing their photographs from the interwar or immediate postwar period in order to claim them a posteriori as modernists; meanwhile the exhibitions of artists of the following generation were almost completely limited to Americans. Between 1962 and the late 1980s, the exhibitions devoted to contemporary non-American photography can be counted on one hand: to *A European Experiment*, mentioned above, we can add *New Japanese Photography*, in 1974, and a small exhibition of works by Josef Koudelka, in 1975. It would not be until the end of the 1980s that international contemporary photography would begin to be shown, between 1987 and 1991, in the first exhibitions of the *New Photography* series, which presented work by Paul Graham, in 1987; Patrick Fojanovszm, in 1988; Michael Schmidt, in 1989; and Thomas Florczyk, in 1990, as well as the exhibition *British Photography from the Thatcher Years*, in 1991.

In the Department of Photography, Szarkowski’s vision was complemented during his tenure by other curatorial voices that sometimes ventured far from it. The most distinctive was that of Peter C. Bunnell, a curator from 1966 to 1972, whose two principal exhibitions, *Photography and Printmaking*, in 1968, and *Photography into Sculpture*, in 1970 (fig. 3), reflected an idea about photography that was open to other artistic disciplines such as printmaking and sculpture. Exhibitions from outside the departmental orbit in the 1970s revealed other photographic sensibilities: Information, organized by Kynaston McShine in 1970, included conceptual works with a strong photographic presence, by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Victor Burgin, Douglas Huebler, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Long, and Robert Smithson. The Projects exhibitions, begun in 1971 to show “current researches and explorations in the visual arts,” included both photographers and artists using photography—a distinction that was just beginning to be made and insisted on: the series featured Pier 18, in 1971, and works by Friedlander, in 1972. Klaus Rinke, Liliana Porter, and Eleanor Antin, in 1973; Levitt, Sonia Sheridan, and Keith Smith, in 1974; the Bechers, in 1975; Ger van Elk, in 1975; Michael Snow, in 1976; Peter Campus and Allan Ruppersberg, in 1977; William Beckley and Hamish Fulton, in 1978; Louise Lawler, in 1987; Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera, in 1988; Bernhard and Anna Blume, in 1989 (fig. 4); and Lorna Simpson, in 1990. Thus the Museum’s attitude toward contemporary photography was more diverse than various histories of the department have advanced. 

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Tagg, in his 1988 book *The Burden of Representation*, called Szarkowski’s writings and exhibitions a way of continuing “a programme for a peculiar photographic modernism.” It was partially in response to Peter Galassi’s first exhibition as the department’s new chief, in 1992, that Szarkowski was invited to write a new introduction for his *More Than One Photography* show at MoMA. Galassi had been planning for the exhibition to be a “comprehensive exhibition,” but he was also considering what “a ‘photography’ exhibition” should be. In the end, he chose the former approach, and the exhibition was titled *More Than One Photography*.

At the time, Galassi wrote, “Photography is one of the most integrated into contemporary art.”16 “At the time,” he acknowledged, “these two domains of photography were quite separate and indeed quite hostile to each other. We have done our best over the past fifteen years or so to engage both of photography’s worlds and to encourage them to get to know each other.” Galassi’s tenure also brought a more pronounced international perspective, with contemporary solo projects by non-Americans, including David Goldblatt, in 1996; Andreas Gursky, in 2001; Barry Fryddleld, in 2007; the Bechers, in 2008; Graham, in 2009; and Boris Mikhailov, in 2011. In the 1980s, as more and more institutions became interested in photography as they were in what was beginning to be referred to as “contemporary art,” the main channel for contemporary photography at MoMA was the *New Photography* exhibitions (fig. 6), made up primarily of noncollection works. Each such exhibition, organized by Szarkowski in 1983 and intended to be an annual event, featured work by Zeke Berman, Anthony Mendoza, Ross, and Michael Spano. Starkowski hoped thus to place contemporary creation at the center of the department’s programming and “New Photography will occupy twice the space of our former one-man series, and will show three or four photographers whose work—individually and collectively—seems to represent the most interesting achievements of new photography.”17 It has been a window on the Museum’s approach to photography, and it continues to be one of the very few regularly occurring contemporary series at the Museum. To date the series has presented more than a hundred artists, divided almost equally between Americans and non-Americans and covering a broad photographic range according to the different sensibilities of various curators.18 Many of the photographers and artists represented in this volume were first shown at MoMA in a *New Photography* exhibition, which also provided the occasion for their first works to be acquired by the Museum.19 The series has encompassed framed prints, images on screens, commercial books, self-published books, zines, posters, photo-based installations and videos, and site-specific works, and it will continue to present all the different forms that the photographic image can take.

A similar diversity, in both approach and artists’ nationalities, characterizes the department’s acquisitions of other photographic works over the last twenty years: from a narrative and mise-en-scène approach (the complete series of *Distilled Film Stills* by Cindy Sherman, acquired in 199517 [fig. 7]) to more documentary-style practices (more than a thousand prints by Friedlander, representing the whole of his career, purchased in 2000), as well as experimental work (forty-two images made by Sigmar Polke in the 1960s and purchased in 2001) and conceptual work (the Jan Dibbets archive, made up of 398 contact sheets, given in 2014). At the same time, thanks to the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) project, a global research initiative launched in 2009, and to the Latin American and Caribbean Fund, the representation of Eastern European and Latin American artists in the collection has greatly improved. All in all, many of the gaps and omissions in the Museum’s contemporary holdings have been filled by an acquisition policy that continues to favor living artists and photographers, in conformance to Barr’s vision in 1933 of the permanent collection “as a torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past.”20

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18 For more on contemporary photography at MoMA, see *Photography Considered Art from the Beginning of the MoMA*, June 2009, p. 90.


20 One of the very few regularly occurring contemporary series at the Museum. To date the series has presented more than a hundred artists, divided almost equally between Americans and non-Americans and covering a broad photographic range according to the different sensibilities of various curators. Many of the photographers and artists represented in this volume were first shown at MoMA in a *New Photography* exhibition, which also provided the occasion for their first works to be acquired by the Museum. The series has encompassed framed prints, images on screens, commercial books, self-published books, zines, posters, photo-based installations and videos, and site-specific works, and it will continue to present all the different forms that the photographic image can take. A similar diversity, in both approach and artists’ nationalities, characterizes the department’s acquisitions of other photographic works over the last twenty years: from a narrative and mise-en-scène approach (the complete series of *Distilled Film Stills* by Cindy Sherman, acquired in 1995 [fig. 7]) to more documentary-style practices (more than a thousand prints by Friedlander, representing the whole of his career, purchased in 2000), as well as experimental work (forty-two images made by Sigmar Polke in the 1960s and purchased in 2001) and conceptual work (the Jan Dibbets archive, made up of 398 contact sheets, given in 2014). At the same time, thanks to the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) project, a global research initiative launched in 2009, and to the Latin American and Caribbean Fund, the representation of Eastern European and Latin American artists in the collection has greatly improved. All in all, many of the gaps and omissions in the Museum’s contemporary holdings have been filled by an acquisition policy that continues to favor living artists and photographers, in conformance to Barr’s vision in 1933 of the permanent collection “as a torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past.”
New Documents and Beyond

- Robert Adams
- Diane Arbus
- Lewis Baltz
- Larry Clark
- Mark Cohen
- Bruce Davidson
- William Eggleston
- Sara Facio
- Larry Fink
- Lee Friedlander
- Paolo Gasparini
- William Gedney
- Frank Gehry
- David Goldblatt
- Emmet Gowin
- Chaimcey Hare
- Miyako Ishiuchi
- Kikuji Kawada
- Josef Koudelka
- Helen Levitt
- Denny Lyon
- Susan Meiselas
- Joel Meyerowitz
- Daidō Moriyama
- Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe
- Bill Owens
- Tod Pajlry
- Gilles Peress
- Tony Ray-Jones
- Stephen Shore
- Malick Sidibé
- Rosaleda Fox Solomon
- Joel Sternfeld
- Shōmei Tōmatsu
- Henry Wessel, Jr.
- Garry Winogrand
Commercial success was essentially unimaginable—a photograph might sell for twenty-five dollars, if it sold at all—but many of these photographs still managed to produce monographic books that featured their work as they wanted it shown, among them H12 Nupuide (1966, plate 32), by Shomei Tominuki; The Animals (1969) and Women AreBeautiful (1973, plate 4), by Wigram; SelfPortrait (1975, plate 6), by Lee Friedlander; East 100thStreet (1970, plate 17), by Bruce Davidson; Tabu (1971, plate 49), by Larry Clark; Aperture’s Diane Arbus monograph (1972, plates 1–3); Suburbia (1973, plate 42), by Bill Owens; The New West (1974, plate 15); by Robert Adams; The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California (1974), by Lewis Baltz; Gypjons (1973, plate 33), by Josef Koudelka; Humanoïde (1976, plate 34), by Sara Facio with Alice DiMico; William Eggleston’s Guide (1976, plates 20, 23); Carnival Strippers (1976, plate 30), by Susan Meiselas; and Yokosuka Story (1979, plate 48), by Miyako Ishiuchi. Others would follow. It is not hard to see the sense in which the generation that came of age artistically in the 1950s or earlier saw their work circulate first on the pages of Life, Fortune, Esquire, Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, and other magazines in Europe and the United States, younger artists largely eschewed magazine publication, both in principle (to protect their artistic integrity) and because other options for making a living were appearing.

In 1959, in the pageantry of the photographic world took place in the 1960s, with the emergence in the United States of the study of photography as an art form. The scope and seriousness of this academic framework brought a larger audience to photography and provided the possibility, for photographers, of employment contingent on the sense of the uses of photography and the meanings photographers of that generation. What unites them is not style or sensibility—each has a distinct and personal sense of the uses of photography and the meanings of the world. What they hold in common is a belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to look at it with a minimum of theorizing.  

In the nearly fifty years since New Documents, there has been a tendency to group the achievements of these three photographers, minimizing the individuality of each, although surely that was not Stieglitz’s intent. The works of Arbus, Friedlander, and Winogrand, as well as many of other artists who sought to engage with the real world through a camera’s lens, are as diverse as what they chose to photograph, how they framed the pictures to discuss them is both to acknowledge the exhibition’s influence and to newly apply its notion to the wide range of practices represented here, as well as in other chapters of this volume. This act of (in)authenticity became a central preoccupation of photographers who otherwise had little in common in the following decades. Even within the rather strict picture book format of photography—artists examining the world with a camera—the period between 1960 and 1980 was one of unprecedented vitality and heterogeneity. Artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher (plate 72), Nan Goldin (plate 92), Duane Michals (plate 145), and Nicholas Nixon (plate 210) were very much interested in the real world, whatever form that interested them might take. Most of the artists who appear in this chapter were featured in select exhibitions during Stieglitz’s tenure at MoMA. That these figures form the core of an artistic canon of the era suggests Stieglitz’s singular influence: in 1982 the art historian and curator Christopher Phillips described Stieglitz’s position as “the judgment seat of photography.” From that same year, Edward Steichen, Stieglitz’s most prominent protégé, often subsumed individual achievements into musings on the medium’s universality, epitomized in 1955 by the exhibition The Family of Man. In his essay, “The Family of Man” was determined to put forward the specificity of each photographer’s vision, to the extent of titling his first exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Five Americans. There is certainly a danger of overestimating the potency of an individual or institution to transform culture, but to pretend that MoMa and Stieglitz were not critical to understanding the 1960s and 70s is to risk a greater historical inaccuracy, especially from an American perspective. The power of an exhibition’s attentiveness to work of this sort, nor in its efforts to bring it to a broader audience. As the shifts of the 1950s were taking place, the George Eastman House, in Rochester, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, were all collecting and exhibiting photographs to varying degrees; the International Center of Photography, in New York, and the Center for Creative Photography, in Tucson, were founded in 1974 and 1975, respectively. In December 1966, curator Nathan Lyons, in his essay “Object Lessons: A New direction for Photography” in the exhibition organized for the George Eastman House, 1966, p. 7. In his essay “Object Lessons: A New direction for Photography,” in the exhibition organized for the George Eastman House, 1966, p. 7.


The primary emphasis of this essay has been on American photography, reflecting in part the specific makeup of the photographs in MoMA’s collection. The Museum’s database contains eight thousand photographs made between 1960 and 1980, and more than three-quarters of these were made by American artists, but MoMA was not blind to developments elsewhere. In 1974 Staerkowski and the Japanese critic and editor Shoji Yamagishi organized an exhibition of New Japanese Photography, which was structured, like New Documents, as a suite of fifteen solo exhibitions. Tomatsu, Daidō Moriyama (plates 56, 57), and Kikuji Kawada (plate 30) were three of the featured artists being introduced to an American audience. New Japanese Photography did not outline an overarching theme, but many of the images examined daily life in Japan in the aftermath of World War II. And although the curators embraced technical and stylistic differences, as they did in New Documents, many photographs featured rough grain, the evoking the raw grit of contemporary experience.

The market for photographs in the 1960s and ’70s was not solely American; yet Staerkowski regularly collected work made outside the United States and western Europe. He acquired the vast majority of the works in New Japanese Photography, purchased Koudelka’s photographs of Gypsies in his native Czechoslovakia in 1968, barely a year after the artist gave up engineering for photography, and a dozen works by the South African photographer David Goldblatt in 1978 (plate 35). In recent years, the Museum has made strategic efforts to collect works by artists from Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and Eastern Asia; the works by Paolo Gasparini (plate 28) and Facio represent but two of the fruits of those efforts. To begin his essay in the New Topographics catalogue, Jenkins quoted the writer Jorge Luis Borges: “I should try to tell, in a straightforward way, plain stories, so that I will try to get away from mirrors, from daggers, from tigers, because all of those things now give a bit of a bore to me. So that I will try to write a book, a book so good that nobody will think I have written it. I would write a book—I won’t say in somebody else’s style—but in the style of anybody else.” Just as Borges’s straightforward prose bears the imprimatur of its maker, the multitude of individual visions represented in this chapter—despite their shared mechanical roots—present themselves clearly to those interested in seeing.

The following month Twelve Photographers of the American Social Landscape, organized by Thomas Guter, opened at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, in Massachusetts. Guter brought together the work of four of the same photographers (Davidson, Friedlander, Lyon, Michals) with that of eight others (Frank, Ralph Gibson, Warren Hill, Rudolph Jans, Simpson Kalisher, James Marchael, Philip Perks, and Tom Zimmermann). The connection between his and Lyon’s titles is not entirely coincidental; in his acknowledgment Guter cited a 1963 interview in which Friedlander described his preoccupation with “the American social landscape and its conditions.” In his catalogue’s introduction Guter held up journalistic practices as a mirror against which contemporary activity could be understood:

This exhibition is based on things as they are. Many of the photographs are of the evanescent, events as minor in importance as they are fleeting in time. They are anti-news—or at least, non-news—things as they aver rather than things as they should be, could be or are thought to be.

These twelve photographers . . . are less concerned with explicit messages than with implicit commentary, though to call them “cool” for their seemingly noncommittal approach is inadequate. Their photographs are not visual “no-comments” but rather records of real events offered to an audience who may not always believe the events are that way.

Guter used the word “record”; Lyons chose “snapshot”; and Signac explicitly mentions Frank, whose photographs were presented in distinct groups, and fairly young Americans (Adams, Baltz [plate 16], Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke [plate 47], Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shoro [plates 22, 23], and Henry Wessel, Jr. [plate 24]) were presented alongside the German Bechers, whose association with Conceptual art practices was not as entrenched as it often seems today. Their work shows nary a human figure but evidences a keen interest in rendering the built environment with a minimum of inflection.” Their apparent neutrality and signifi cant difference between Ruscha [and the other artists] astutely observed, however, “There remains an essential mechanical roots—present themselves clearly to those interested in seeing.

What this heterogeneous group of artists fundamentally share, as do those more immediately identifiable with the legacy of Frank in the mid- to late 1960s, is an ability to inflect what appears to be a straightforward document from the real world with individual meaning.

The photography historian Jonathan Green observed in 1984 that “almost every major pictorial style and iconographical concern . . . dominate American straight photography in the late sixties and throughout the seventies can be traced back to one or more of the eighty-two [i.e., there were eighty-two] photographers in The Americans . . . Frank’s photographs . . . laid the groundwork for endless experimentation. The list of major photographers who . . . derive from Frank is considerable, however, “There remains an essential . . . difference between Ruscha [and the other artists] astutely observed, however, “There remains an essential . . . difference between Ruscha [and the other artists] astutely observed, however, “There remains an essential
Garry Winogrand
American, 1928–1984

World’s Fair, New York, 1964
Gelatin silver print, printed 1974
8 9/16 × 12 15/16 in. (21.8 × 32.8 cm)
Gift of N. Carol Lipis, 1978

Central Park Zoo, New York City, 1967
Gelatin silver print
8 1/8 × 13 1/4 in. (21.5 × 34 cm)
Purchase, 1973
Lee Friedlander
American, born 1934

From the series Letters from the People
Left to right, top to bottom:

1. New Orleans, Louisiana. 1979
Gelatin silver print
22 ⅜ × 15 ⅛ in. (56.8 × 38.5 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1995

Gelatin silver print
8 ⅝ × 12 15⁄16 in. (21.9 × 32.8 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1995

3. Akron, Ohio. 1980
Gelatin silver print
15 × 22 ⅜ in. (38.2 × 56.8 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1995

4. New York City. 1979
Gelatin silver print
12 15⁄16 × 8 ⅝ in. (32.8 × 21.9 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1995

New Documents and Beyond
Robert Adams  
American, born 1937

Colorado Springs, Colorado, from the series  
The New West. 1968
Gelatin silver print  
5 15⁄16 × 5 15⁄16 in. (15.2 × 15.2 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Lily Auchincloss, 1970

Lewis Baltz  
American, 1945–2014

Signs, Gilroy. 1967  
Gelatin silver print  
5 ⅜ × 7 ⅞ in. (13.7 × 19.9 cm)
Purchase, 1971
Bruce Davidson
American, born 1933

Untitled, from the series East 100th Street. 1967
Gelatin silver print
8 ¾ × 12 in. (22.2 × 30.5 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1973

William Gedney
American, 1932–1989

Untitled. 1967
Gelatin silver print
12 × 8 ¼ in. (30.5 × 20.9 cm)
Mr. and Mrs. John Spencer Fund, 1969

Emmet Gowin
American, born 1941

Edith, Danville, Virginia. August 1966
Gelatin silver print
5 × 6 ⅜ in. (12.7 × 16.8 cm)
Purchase, 1970
William Eggleston
American, born 1939
Greenwood, Mississippi, c. 1973
Dye transfer print
12 ⅝ × 19 ⅛ in. (32.1 × 48.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1973

Sumner, Mississippi, Cassidy Bayou in Background, c. 1969
Dye transfer print
7 ⅞ × 12 in. (19.9 × 30.5 cm)
Purchase, 1978

Memphis, c. 1969
Dye transfer print
11 ¾ × 17 15⁄16 in. (29.9 × 45.7 cm)
Purchase, 1978

Sara Facio
Argentine, born 1932
Untitled, from the series Humanario (with Alicia d’Amico [Argentine, 1933–2001]). 1966
Gelatin silver print
6 11⁄16 × 8 ⅛ in. (17 × 20.4 cm)
Committee on Photography Fund, 2015

David Goldblatt
South African, born 1930
Couple in Their House, Soweto, South Africa. 1972
Gelatin silver print
9 11⁄16 × 9 ¾ in. (24.7 × 24.8 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1978
Stephen Shore
American, born 1947

Trail’s End Restaurant, Kanab, Utah, from the series Uncommon Places. August 10, 1973
Chromogenic color print, printed 2013
16 ⅞ × 21 ¼ in. (42.8 × 54 cm)
Purchase, 2013

Beverly Boulevard and La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles, California, from the series Uncommon Places. June 21, 1975
Chromogenic color print, printed 2013
17 × 21 ⅝ in. (43.2 × 55.2 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Thomas and Susan Dunn, 2013

Josef Koudelka
Czech and French, born 1938

Kendice, from the series Gypsies. 1965
Gelatin silver print
7 ⅜ × 11 ⅜ in. (18.7 × 28.9 cm)
David H. McAlpin Fund, 1968

Kikuji Kawada
Japanese, born 1933

Photographs and Personal Effects from a Kamikaze Commando. 1960–65
Gelatin silver print
9 ¾ × 7 in. (24.8 × 17.8 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Celeste Bartos, 1974

Shōmei Tōmatsu
Japanese, 1930–2012

Man with Keloidal Scars. 1962
Gelatin silver print
12 15⁄16 × 8 13⁄16 in. (33 × 22.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1978

New Documents and Beyond
Henry Wessel, Jr.
American, born 1942
Walapai, Arizona. 1971
Gelatin silver print
7⅝ × 11⅛ in. (19.5 × 28.4 cm)
John Szarkowski Fund, 87.29

Joel Sternfeld
American, born 1944
McLean, Virginia. December 4, 1978
Dye transfer print
15 ⅛ × 19 ½ in. (38.6 × 49.5 cm)
Gift of the artist, 84.42
Joel Meyerowitz  
American, born 1938  
Paris. 1967  
Photothermographic transfer, printed 1994  
7½ × 11½ in. (19.1 × 28.8 cm)  
Gift of the artist, 1994

Mark Cohen  
American, born 1943  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. June 1975  
Gelatin silver print  
11¾ × 17¼ in. (30 × 45 cm)  
Gift of the artist, 1975
Paolo Gasparini  
Venezuelan, born Italy 1934

28  
Bello Monte, Caracas, 1968  
Gelatin silver print  
6 7/8 × 9 5/8 in. (16 × 24.5 cm)  
Latin American and Caribbean Fund through gift of Adriana Cisneros de Griff, 2010

Chauncey Hare  
American, born 1934

30  
Southern Pacific Station, Oakland, 1967  
Gelatin silver print  
7 7/8 × 9 5/8 in. (20 × 24.5 cm)  
Purchase, 1968

Susan Meiselas  
American, born 1948

29  
Lena on the Bally Box, Essex Junction, Vermont, from the series Carnival Strippers, 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
7 11/16 × 11 3/8 in. (19.5 × 29.9 cm)  
Acquired through the generosity of Anne Ehrenkranz in honor of Gayle Greenhill, 2014
Kikuji Kawada
Japanese, born 1933
Photographs and Personal Effects from a Kamikaze Commando. 1960–65
Gelatin silver print
9 ¾ × 7 in. (24.8 × 17.8 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Celeste Bartos, 1974

Shōmei Tōmatsu
Japanese, 1930–2012
Man with Keloidal Scars. 1962
Gelatin silver print
12 15⁄16 × 8 13⁄16 in. (33 × 22.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1978

Josef Koudelka
Czech and French, born 1938
Kendice, from the series Gypsies. 1965
Gelatin silver print
7 ½ × 9 in. (19.1 × 22.9 cm)
David H. McAlpin Fund, 1968

New Documents and Beyond
Sara Facio
Argentine, born 1932

Untitled, from the series Humano
(with Alicia d’Amico [Argentine, 1933–2001]). 1966
Gelatin silver print
6 11⁄16 × 8 1⁄16 in. (17 × 20.4 cm)
Committee on Photography Fund, 2015

David Goldblatt
South African, born 1930

Couple in Their House, Soweto,
South Africa. 1972
Gelatin silver print
9 11⁄16 × 9 ¾ in. (24.7 × 24.8 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1978
implications of the readymade, and linguistic strategies capabilities of its discipline, a recovery of the political confluence of photography stripped of the descriptive practices. Conceptualism thus emerged from the of language, which paved the way for Conceptual art and John Cage, as well as to games based on theories indifference that can be traced to Marcel Duchamp brand of photography is based on an "aesthetics of Buchloh has argued that Ruscha's impersonal, factualist specific photographic; a decade later Rosalind Krauss sense began to use the camera for projects that were not consider themselves photographers in the classical photograph's relationship to the discourses artist's book. It also signaled a critical change in a precise antithesis of the traditional limited-edition Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass (1967), as well as his first book in color, Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Apartments (1965), and Twenty-six Gasoline Stations taken along U.S. Route 66 during his round-trip drives between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. Like stations along U.S. Route 66 during his round-trip drives between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. Like St went to American, born 1941

Emmet Gowin
American, born 1941

36 Edith, Danville, Virginia, August 1966
Gelatin silver print
5 1/4 x 8 1/16 in. (13.3 x 20.5 cm)
Purchase, 1976

Rosalind Fox Solomon
American, born 1930

37 Untitled, 1976
Gelatin silver print
5 5/8 x 5 5/8 in. (14.2 x 14.2 cm)
Purchase, 1976

New Documents and Beyond
Malick Sidibé
Malian, born 1936
Christmas Eve, Happy Club. 1963
Gelatin silver print, printed 2003
13 ⅛ × 13 ⅜ in. (33.3 × 34 cm)
Gift of Jean Pigozzi, 2003

Larry Fink
American, born 1941
Club Cornich, New York City. February 1977
Gelatin silver print
14 ⅕ × 13 ⅝ in. (36.4 × 34.6 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1990
Daidō Moriyama
Japanese, born 1938
Gambling in the Dressing Room, Tokyo. 1966
Gelatin silver print
13 × 18 ⅝ in. (33.1 × 47.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1978

Stray Dog, Misawa. 1971
Gelatin silver print
18 ⅞ × 28 in. (48.0 × 71.2 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1977

Larry Clark
American, born 1943
Untitled, from the series Tulsa. 1971
Gelatin silver print
12 ⅜ × 8 ⅛ in. (31.4 × 20.7 cm)
Purchase, 1979

Bill Owens
American, born 1938
We really enjoy getting together with our friends to drink and dance. It’s a wild party and we’re having a great time, from the series Suburbia. 1971
Gelatin silver print
6 × 8 ⅞ in. (15.2 × 22.5 cm)
Gift of Robert Harshorn Shimshak and Marion Brenner, 2010

Tony Ray-Jones
British, 1941–1972
Picnic at Glyndebourne, England. 1967
Gelatin silver print
5 ½ × 8 ¼ in. (14 × 21 cm)

Helen Levitt
American, 1913–2009
New York, 1976
Dye transfer print, printed 1992
14 × 9 5⁄16 in. (35.6 × 23.7 cm)
Gift of Marvin Hoshino, 1994

Tony Ray-Jones
British, 1941–1972
Picnic at Glyndebourne, England. 1967
Gelatin silver print
5 ½ × 8 ¼ in. (14 × 21 cm)

Helen Levitt
American, 1913–2009
New York, 1976
Dye transfer print, printed 1992
14 × 9 5⁄16 in. (35.6 × 23.7 cm)
Gift of Marvin Hoshino, 1994
Danny Lyon
American, born 1942

MARCH ON WASHINGTON. AUGUST 28, 1963
Gelatin silver print
11 ¼ x 8 in. (28.6 x 20.3 cm)
Gift of Anne Ehrenkranz, 1997

Tod Papageorge
American, born 1940

FATHER AND SON, CENTRAL PARK. 1980
Gelatin silver print
11 ¾ x 15 ½ in. (29.8 x 39.4 cm)
Acquired with matching funds from Samuel Winter Sax and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1981
Gilles Peress

French, born 1946

Falls Road, Belfast. 1972
Gelatin silver print
23 ¾ × 35 ¼ in. (60.3 × 89.6 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1993

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe

American, born 1951

Black Man, White Woman, Johannesburg, South Africa. 1977
Gelatin silver print
13 ¼ × 8 ⅞ in. (33.7 × 22.6 cm)
Gift of Dr. Michael I. Jacobs, 2004
Frank Gohlke
American, born 1942

Building in the Shadow of a Grain Elevator, Cashion, Oklahoma. 1973–74
Gelatin silver print
8 ¼ × 8 ⅛ in. (20.9 × 20.7 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Pierre N. Leval, 1979

Miyako Ishiuchi
Japanese, born 1947

Untitled #30, from the series Yokosuka Story. 1977
Gelatin silver print, printed 1994
14 ⅜ × 19 ⅞ in. (36.5 × 49.7 cm)
E. T. Herms Foundation Fund, 1994
Larry Clark
American, born 1943

20 Untitled, from the series Tulsa. 1971
Gelatin silver print
12 1/8 x 8 1/8 in. (31.4 x 20.7 cm)
Purchase, 1979

Daidō Moriyama
Japanese, born 1938

31 Gambling in the Dressing Room, Tokyo. 1966
Gelatin silver print
13 x 18 5/8 in. (33.1 x 47.4 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1978

30 Stray Dog, Misawa. 1971
Gelatin silver print
18 5/8 x 28 in. (48 x 71.2 cm)
Gift of the artist, 1977
Deconstructing Photography

Vito Acconci
William Anastasi
John Baldessari
Bernd and Hilla Becher
Mel Bochner
Geta Brătescu
Robert Cumming
Jan Dibbets
Braco Dimitrijević
Ger van Elk
Tomás saraceno
Dan Graham
Douglas Huebler
Sanja Iveković
Leandro Katz
On Kawara
Joseph Kosuth
Jiří Kovanda
David Lamelas

Sol LeWitt
Gordon Matta-Clark
Dóra Maurer
Bruce Nauman
Ken Ohara
Denise Oppenheim
Liliana Porter
Martha Rosler
Allen Ruppersberg
Ed Ruscha
Allan Sekula
Stephen Shore
Michael Snow
Jiří Takac
Lew Thomas
Keiji Uematsu
Ian Wallace
William Wegman
Lawrence Weiner
In 1962 Ed Ruscha published Twenty-nine Gasoline Stations, a collection of black-and-white snapshots of gas stations taken along U.S. Route 66 during his round-trip drives between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. Like the string of his unsigned, self-published, mass-produced photographic books that would follow—Some Los Angeles Apartments (1967), Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966, plate 56), and Thirsty Parking Lots in Los Angeles (1967), as well as his first book in color, Nice Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass (1968)—it was a paradigm-shifting example of the artist’s book. It also signaled a critical change in the concept of artistic quality, noting in an interview, “My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter either. They are a testament to the idea that there is more like a collection of readymades.”

Early critics linked Ruscha’s banal subject matter to the concerns of the 1930s, as well as to the 1950s Beat sensibility that characterized Robert Frank’s road pictures of postwar American interiors, but in their cool, deadpan, and de-skilled approach they were radically different. Ruscha eschewed the concept of artistic quality, noting in an interview, “My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter either. They are a testament to the idea that there is more like a collection of readymades.”

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has argued that Ruscha’s impersonal, factural brand of photography is based on an “archetypal fiction,” which he traced to Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, as well as to games based on theories of landscape, which paved the way for Conceptual art when it emerged in the late 1960s. “Conceptualism thus emerged from the confluence of photography stripped of the descriptive capabilities of its discipline, a recovery of the political implications of the readymade, and linguistic strategies of self-reflectivity, which hold that art is nothing other than the artist’s idea of it.” It is no coincidence that Sol LeWitt chose Every Building on the Sunset Strip—shot with a motorized 35mm camera attached to the artist’s car and assembled like a filmstrip on a twenty-seven-foot-long accordion-fold page—to accompany his text “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” published in the summer 1967 issue of Artforum.

In the mid-1960s artists produced inexpensive photo books, slideshows, and picture postcards with a focus on mass-media distribution. These were created concurrently with the first exhibitions organized by Seth Siegelaub, an impresario of the nascent generation of Conceptual artists. In 1968 Siegelaub organized Xerox, an exhibition presented exclusively in catalogue form, with contributions by LeWitt, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner, among others. This emphasis on text was critical to Kosuth, who in 1965 made One and Three Chairs (plate 5), a photococeptual installation about the relationship between language, picture, and object that would inform his Investigation works, which are grounded in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations (1953). Second Investigation, made in 1969, was included in When Attitudes Become Form.

Hans Haacke, in turn, focused on the exhibition of Minimal and Conceptual art at Kunsthalle Bern, whose subtitle contained the directive “Between Language, Picture, and Object That Would Inform the Idea of Conceptual Art.” This idea he literally dissected buildings—in Splitting (1974, plate 60) and Circus–The Caribbean Orange (1978, plate 61) —cutting and carving them into walk-through structures that seem to defy gravity, which he then photographed and filmed. Kosuth has said that Matta-Clark used the camera like a buzz saw and the resulting photocollage and video works dovetail with the disorienting experimental quality of his architectural cuts. As did the way they were constructed: Matta-Clark cut apart strips of developed 35mm film, excising each frame with laser precision but sometimes preserving the sprocket holes along the edges; he then organized the resulting minuscule fragments into a celluloid collage fixed with colored tape; and last he magnified the photocollage on an enlarger and printed it on Chloropane paper.

Dan Graham opened a similar exhibition especially for “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” published in the January 1969 issue of 0-9. Adrian Piper has recalled that Levitt was “the moral center” of the exhibition’s New York art community, and in 1973 John Baldessari, in tribute to him, conceived Baldessari’s Songs LeWitt, a video short in which he sang each of LeWitt’s “Sentences” into the fame of popular folk and jazz songwriters.

When the gates of LeWitt held that “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art,” the formulation of the idea was the key action, and the execution of the work could be performative. In Part of Manhattan with Area between 29 W 57th St., 1210 F P 57th St., 85 E 86th St., & 308 E 79th St. Cut Out (R746 for Rosen Emson) It’s: 1978–79 (plate 57), LeWitt excised a section from a commercially made aerial image. The work is part of a series of cut-out urban landscapes that invite viewers to consider the entropic and the possible planetary extinction facing our technologically advanced postatomic society. Ideas that LeWitt had derived from J. G. Ballard’s Cold War–inspired science fiction.

Gordon Matta-Clark, a politically attuned associate of LeWitt, also used photography to communicate disquieting views about the entropic human habitat. He had trained as an architect at Cornell University, where he studied with Colin Rowe, a proponent of architectural modernism, but came to consider the practice of architecture to be too lofty an enterprise; instead he devised the concept of “anarchitecture,” an alternative use of buildings that rejects the American dream of progress and functionality. In pursuit of this idea he literally dissected buildings—in Splitting (1974, plate 60) and Circus–The Caribbean Orange (1978, plate 61) —cutting and carving them into walk-through structures that seem to defy gravity, which he then photographed and filmed. Kosuth has said that Matta-Clark used the camera like a buzz saw and the resulting photocollage and video works dovetail with the disorienting experimental quality of his architectural cuts. As did the way they were constructed: Matta-Clark cut apart strips of developed 35mm film, excising each frame with laser precision but sometimes preserving the sprocket holes along the edges; he then organized the resulting minuscule fragments into a celluloid collage fixed with colored tape; and last he magnified the photocollage on an enlarger and printed it on Chloropane paper.
Douglas Huebler, artist’s statement of things in terms of time and/or place.”10 For to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence he then maintained throughout his career: “The world
archival information.11

stipulations: the image had to be 8 by 10 inches, and it
interest made by a staΩ photographer, with two
country requesting a published photograph of local

1979, he mailed picture postcards, rubber-stamped with

thousands of date works in a series collectively titled

(plate 58), made between 1968 and

outsiders, public and private space and between
gender and power.

The piece need not be built.”13 While Weiner’s

was traveling at the time, merely sent an instruction card

escape artist Harry Houdini was recorded in a sequence

Licht at MoMA. Some works, the curator Lynne Cooke has

played dialectically” with photographic functions, such as Baldessarini’s Hands Framing New York Harbor (plate 54), in which the artist collapsed near and far in a single gesture.12 Weiner, on the other hand, who

was traveling at the time, merely sent an instruction card

reading “Done Without” (plate 84), an action refl ecting

focus on the concept of time, producing, between 1965 and his death, in 2014, thousands of date works in a series collectively titled Today. For Fot Eg. C., (plate 58), made between 1968 and

the exact time he arose, every day to two diΩerent friends

reminded the artist of the imprecision of the Occam’s

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reminded the artist of the imprecision of the Occam’s
Mel Bochner
American, born 1940
Misunderstandings (A theory of photography), from the portfolio Artists & Photographs. 1970
Eleven offset lithographs
Each: 4 ¾ × 8 in. (12.1 × 20.3 cm) 
Envelope: 5 15⁄16 × 9 in. (15.1 × 22.9 cm) 
Publisher: Multiples, Inc., New York, in association with Colorcraft, Inc. 
Gift of Kynaston McShine, 1984

Joseph Kosuth
American, born 1945
One and Three Chairs. 1965
Wooden folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of “Chair”
Chair: 32 ⅞ × 14 ⅞ × 20 ⅞ in. (83.3 × 37.8 × 53 cm) 
Text panel: 26 ⅝ × 20 ⅞ in. (67.6 × 53 cm) 
Photographs panel: 36 ⅞ × 24 in. (93.5 × 61 cm) 
Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund, 1970

Gordon Matta-Clark
American, 1943–1978
Circus–The Caribbean Orange. 1978
Silver dye bleach print
39 ½ × 29 ⅞ in. (100.3 × 75.9 cm)

Splitting. 1974
Collage of gelatin silver prints on board
40 × 30 in. (101.6 × 76.2 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Walter J. Brownstone and The Family of Man Fund, 1991

Deconstructing Photography
John Baldessari
American, born 1931

Hands Framing New York Harbor, from the project Pier 18, 1977
Photograph by Shunk-Kender (Harry Shunk [German, 1924–2006] and János Kender [Hungarian, 1937–2009])
Gelatin silver print
7 3/8 × 9 15/16 in. (18.8 × 25.2 cm)
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in honor of Jennifer Winkworth and Kynaston McShine and in memory of Harry Shunk and János Kender, 2013

Douglas Huebler
American, 1924–1997

Location Piece #6 (National), 1970
Sixteen gelatin silver prints and one chromogenic color print with captions and text
Overall: 40 × 60 in. (101.6 × 152.4 cm)
Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund, 1971

John Baldessari
American, born 1931

I Got Up . . .
1977
Ink and stamps on twenty-seven postcards
Each: 4 × 5 7/8 in. (10.2 × 15 cm)
Gift of Angela Westwater, 1991

Dan Graham
American, born 1942
Homes for America
1966–67
Gelatin silver and chromogenic color prints, paint chip, felt-tip pen, and colored pencil on two boards
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