REINSTALLATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERIES SURVEYS THE EVOLUTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY'S MODERN TRADITIONS

Inaugural Installation Features Photographs from the 1890s to the Present, With Focused Displays of Works by Eugène Atget, Robert Frank, and Cindy Sherman

The Edward Steichen Photography Galleries, third floor
November 20, 2004—June 6, 2005

NEW YORK, November 15, 2004—A selection of outstanding works from The Museum of Modern Art's photography collection has been installed in the new Edward Steichen Photography Galleries after a five-and-a-half-year absence from public view. Located on the third floor of the renovated and expanded Museum, a suite of six galleries with higher ceilings and a more capacious and flexible layout than before offers an unprecedented opportunity for the display of the collection. Three doorways, in addition to the principal entrance, make the Steichen Galleries far more permeable than in the past, encouraging visitors to chart their own paths. The first three rooms are best suited to the relatively modest scale of earlier photography. Thereafter, the galleries grow progressively larger, culminating in the expansive Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery, capable of accommodating large contemporary works. The installation presents 218 works by 130 artists, including a substantial selection of recent acquisitions. On display for the first time are works by Marco Breuer, Eduardo Del Valle and Mirta Gómez, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Robert Frank, Andreas Gursky, Bertien van Manen, Boris Mikhailov, Jeff Wall, Andy Warhol, and Gillian Wearing, among others. This inaugural installation will be on view from November 20, 2004 through June 6, 2005.

"We certainly had time to think things over, and we have made some changes," states Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography. "The essential function of the galleries is to trace the evolution of modern photography, but henceforth each new installation will be shaped more decisively than surveys of the past. The inaugural display, for example, gives pride of place to photographic work since 1960. In the future, other periods and other artists will be emphasized."

Another aspect of the new strategy is the presentation of significant groups of works by individual photographers at appropriate points within the chronological survey. "Many of photography's great achievements are best approached not picture by picture but as extended bodies of work," explains Galassi. The inaugural installation includes three such groups: 12 photographs made by Eugène Atget between 1904 and 1926 at the Parc de Saint-Cloud near Paris (in the first gallery); 26 prints, including 15 new acquisitions, from The Americans, Robert Frank's landmark series of the mid-1950s (in the third gallery); and 25 of the 70 pictures that make up

Cindy Sherman's influential series of Untitled Film Stills, created in 1977-80 (in the fifth gallery). Smaller groupings of closely related works by Robert Adams, Breuer, diCorcia, Judith Joy Ross, Michael Schmidt, and Joel Sternfeld further enrich the display.

In order to achieve a generous exploration of work since 1960, the inaugural installation omits the first half-century of photography altogether. The first gallery presents works mostly made between 1890 and 1910, when photography witnessed a decisive schism. A pioneering motion study by Étienne-Jules Marey (1893-94), an anonymous view of an anti-war rally near Paris on the eve of World War I (1914), Edgar Degas' *Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé* (1895), and Jacques-Henri Lartigue's self-portrait at the age of ten (1904), together suggest the exploding variety of photography's applications. On the opposite side of the gallery, works by Heinrich Kühn (1900), Edward Steichen (1901), Gertrude Käsebier (1903), and others represent the birth of an international movement that rejected the sprawling profusion of the medium's worldly roles to seek a place for photography among the fine arts. Completing the gallery are Atget's photographs at Saint-Cloud. Although Atget was nominally a purveyor of straightforward documents, his mastery of photography would make his work an indispensable touchstone for the new artistic movement that was taking shape at the time of his death in 1927.

The second gallery traces the rise of photographic modernism in the 1920s and early 1930s, deploying European and American works on opposite sides of the room. Aleksandr Rodchenko's *At the Telephone* (1929) and related overhead views by László Moholy-Nagy (c. 1929) and André Kertész (1928) embody the European enthusiasm for the mobile perspectives of the hand-held camera. A parallel taste for graphic surprise is captured in Florence Henri's *Windmill Composition, No. 76* (c. 1929) and Umbo's *Self-Portrait at the Beach* (c. 1930). On the other side of the gallery, velvety platinum and palladium prints by Imogen Cunningham (1923), Tina Modotti (1924), and Edward Weston (1924) suggest the American modernists' debt to the aesthetic movement of the turn of the century. Alfred Stieglitz's *Dorothy True* (1919), Charles Sheeler's *Stairwell* (1914-17), and other closely cropped details are typical of the American passion for strict pictorial order.

Before leaving the second gallery, the visitor encounters works by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (1930), Brassaï (1932), Henri Cartier-Bresson (1934), and Walker Evans (1936), which announce the advent of a key development in advanced photography in the 1930s. Now confident of photography's ability to transform visual experience into a compelling picture, leaders of the fledgling modern movement increasingly turned their attention to the complex challenge of exploring the social world. The third gallery is devoted to this trend, whose rich elaboration over the next three decades owed a good deal to the robust growth of the photographically illustrated press. Works by independent photographers such as Bill Brandt (1937), Helen Levitt (1938), Lisette Model (1938), and Louis Faurer (1949-50) are presented together with examples of photojournalism by Weegee (1941), Robert Capa (1944), and Dan Weiner (1952). Richard Avedon's *Marian Anderson, Contralto* (1955), an elegant fashion photograph by Irving Penn

(1961), and W. Eugene Smith's close-up of battle-weary soldiers in the Pacific (1944) capture the verve and pictorial concision that magazine photographers applied to a wide range of subjects. Completing the gallery is a selection from Frank's The Americans, which remade the vocabulary of photojournalism to create an intensely personal vision of the United States.

The poetic force of Frank's celebrated series demonstrated that photography's documentary tradition had achieved a sophisticated artistic maturity, capable of nurturing a great variety of individual sensibilities. In the fourth gallery, works of the 1960s by Diane Arbus (1966), Lee Friedlander (1962), and Garry Winogrand (1964) evoke that maturity in American work, while pictures by Czech photographer Josef Koudelka (1971 and 1973), Japanese masters Daido Moriyama (1967) and Shomei Tomatsu (1969), and Malick Sidibé of Mali (1963) trace parallel developments abroad. The gallery also includes *Double Elvis*, a photographic screenprint on canvas by Warhol (1963), and *Mark*, a lithograph of 1964 by Robert Rauschenberg. For these artists and others who followed their lead, photography was not a way of describing experience. Instead it was an inexhaustible trove containing all the photographs that already existed, and a tool for replicating, combining, and manipulating them. William Wegman's *Blondes/Brunettes* (1972), a witty send-up of glamour portraiture, and Lucas Samaras's flamboyant performance for the camera in *Auto Polaroid* (1969-71) are further examples of the irreverent creativity of artists of the 1960s and 1970s who embraced photography as a fresh vernacular, unburdened by the weighty concerns of painting and full of the spark of popular culture.

These artists' indifference to photography's achievements as an art of observation fostered the growth of a new family of traditions that, ever since, have competed and interacted with the old. The final two galleries have been installed to suggest the liveliness of that debate and interplay. In the fifth gallery, for example, Ana Mendieta's *Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations)* (1972)—a caustic if comic attack upon conventions of female beauty—and Sherman's inventive catalogue of familiar female movie roles in her Untitled Film Stills (1977-80) bracket a selection of photographs by Rineke Dijkstra (1994), Thomas Roma (1991-94), Collier Schorr (1998), and others, which employ the probing vision of straightforward photography to explore similar concerns. Ross's portraits of four very different women—a teenager (1982), a soldier (1990), a congresswoman (1987), and a visitor to the Vietnam memorial (1984)—invite us to reflect upon the relationship between social roles and the unique identities of the individuals who fulfill them. On the other side of the gallery, the emergence of color photography as a major force (a potential suggested in works by William Eggleston [1970] and Stephen Shore [1973] in the previous gallery) is surveyed in works made by nine artists from the late 1970s onwards. Tina Barney's *The Landscape* (1988) subtly describes an environment of leisure, while Paul Graham's clandestine shot of the waiting room of a British social service office (1985) confronts the opposite end of the social scale.

Concluding the installation in the large Menschel Gallery are groups of works that suggest the diversity of artistic strategies and forms in contemporary photography. Pictures by Wearing,

Vik Muniz, and Carrie Mae Weems all take photography itself as their subject, each in a different way: Muniz's *Mass*, from the series Pictures of Chocolate (1997) tests the capacity of the photographic image to retain its legibility despite a radical transformation; Wearing's *Self-Portrait at 17 Years Old* (2003) highlights the medium's power as a talisman of identity; and four pictures from Weems' series From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried (1995) add text to dissect photography's historical role in imposing stereotypes upon African-Americans. Elsewhere, works by diCorcia, Gursky, Mikhailov, and Wall demonstrate the sophistication with which contemporary artists have melded photographic fact and fiction. Wall's *Milk* (1984) is a staged event, in which the sole figure executes a striking and cryptic gesture. A group of eight pictures by diCorcia (1979-1990) use seductive Hollywood techniques to dramatize private lives. For Gursky's *Tote Hosen* (2000), the animated mass of an audience at a rock concert was skillfully assembled in a computer. In an untitled work from Mikhailov's series Case History (1997-98), the troubled and dispossessed youths of his native Kharkov, in Ukraine, frankly perform for the camera. None of these works presents itself as a straightforward slice of life, but all of them use photography's formidable capacities of description to confront very concrete realities.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Comprising some 25,000 works, MoMA's photography collection spans the history of the medium. It favors the best and most original work of leading figures, which it attempts to survey in depth. It also represents the collective—and sometimes anonymous—innovations of photography in such fields as industry, commerce, journalism, and science, as well as the work of amateurs. While celebrating individual achievement, it reflects the conviction that photography as a whole is part of what made the modern world modern.

The Department of Photography was founded in 1940, and the first permanent galleries devoted to photography were established in 1964, when the collection had begun to achieve a range and depth adequate to suggest the richness of the medium's history. Ever since, the Steichen Galleries have presented both a historical survey drawn from the collection and a program of temporary exhibitions. In the summer of 2005, that program—including the fall show devoted to recent work—will resume.

The curatorial staff of the Department of Photography are Peter Galassi, Chief Curator; Susan Kismaric, Curator; Sarah Meister, Associate Curator, Research and Collections; Roxana Marcoci, Assistant Curator; Eva Respini, Assistant Curator; Dalia Azim, Curatorial Assistant; and Simon Bieling, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow.

SPONSORSHIP

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