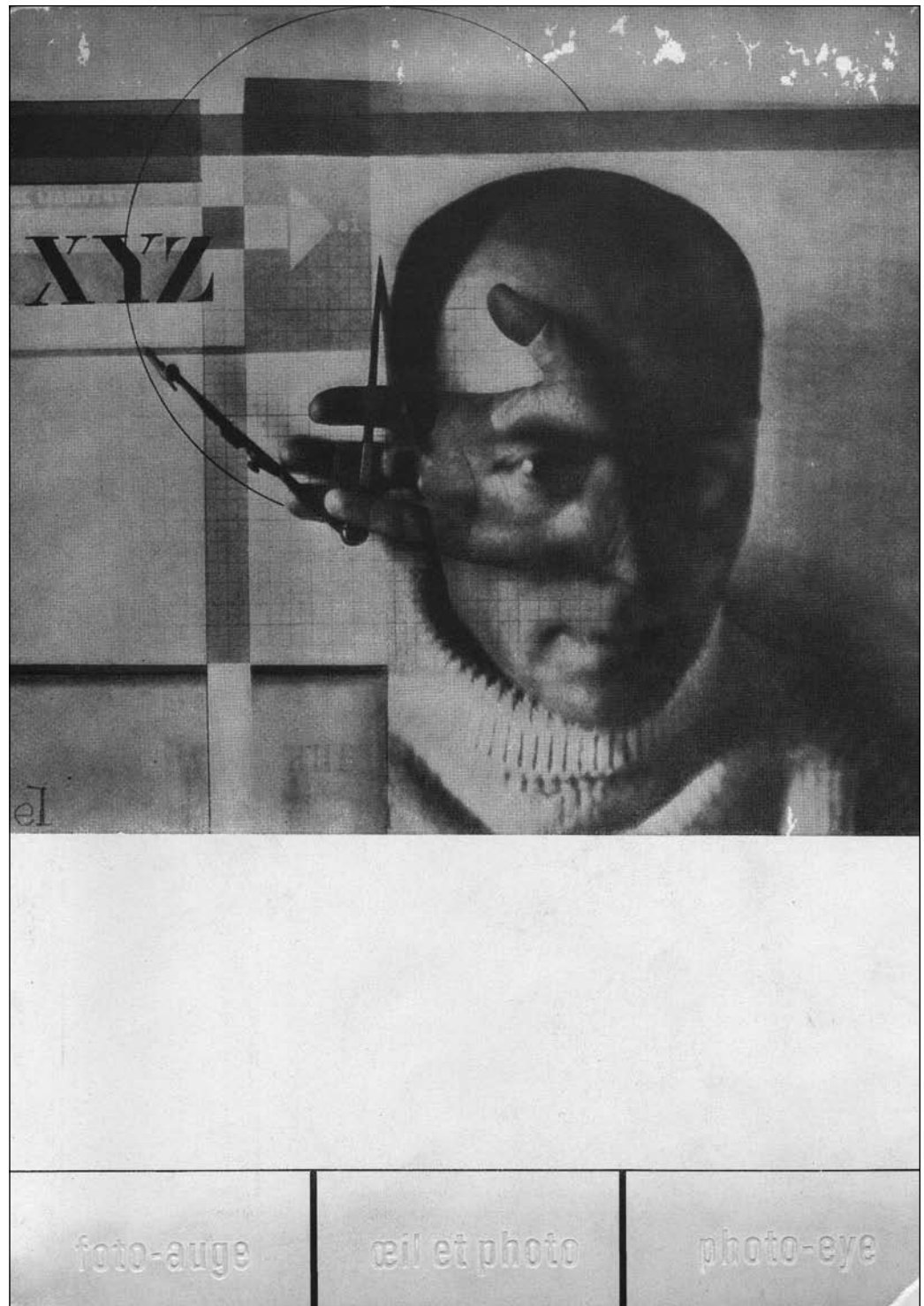


READING THE MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

National Gallery of Art / January 18–April 26, 2009



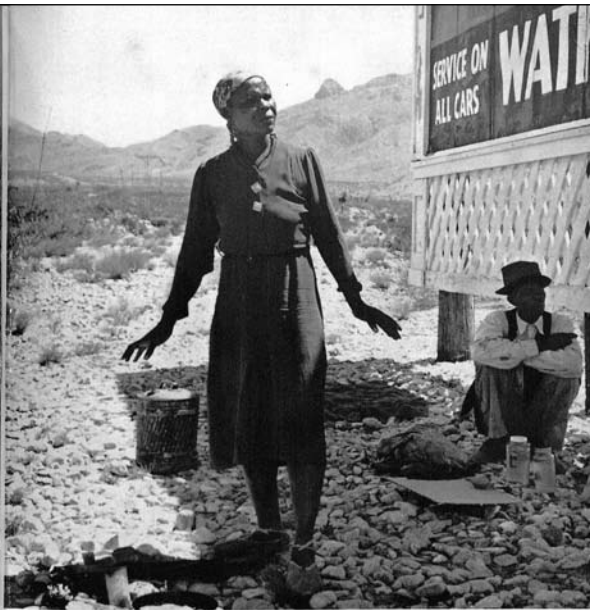


MORE MEN THAN JOBS AT THE BRIDGEHEAD LABOR MARKET

"They come off the plantations 'cause they ain't got nothin' to do. . . . They come to town and they still got nothin' to do."

Memphis, Tennessee, June 1938

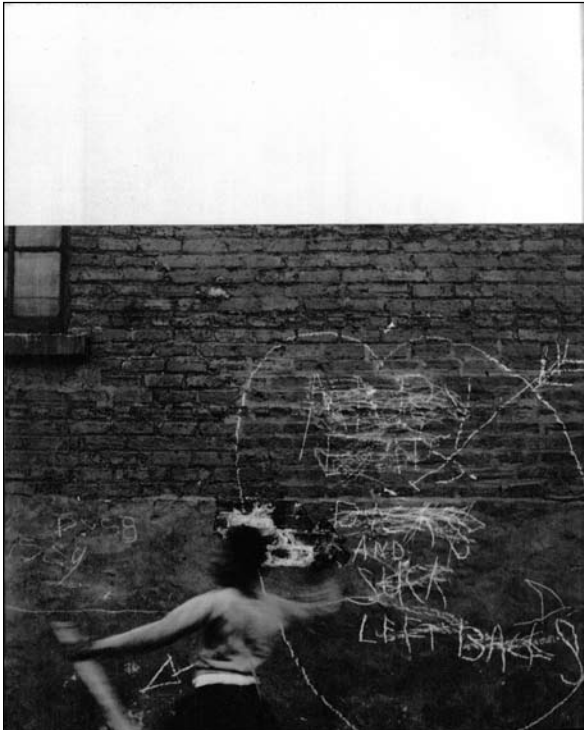
34



"The country's in an uproar now—it's in bad shape. The people's all leaving the farm. You can't get anything for your work, and everything you buy costs high. Do you reckon I'd be out on the highway if I had it good at home?"

On US 80 near El Paso, June 1938

35



top Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939). David K. E. Bruce Fund; **bottom** Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Aruhi Arutokoro* (Some-day, Somewhere), preface by Tsutomu Watanabe, design by Ryuichi Yamashiro (Tokyo: Geibi Shuppan, 1958). David K. E. Bruce Fund

READING THE MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

The modern photography book, more than simply a book containing photographs, is a publication composed by the careful sequencing and editing of photographic material. Often produced by a photographer, these books present visual narratives through creative page design that frequently integrates photographs with text and graphic elements. Popular across the political spectrum, photography books have been published both as art objects and as documentary records. Through their organization they foster a critical examination of the visual world, and as works of historical witness they have helped to construct cultural memories. Photography books have been a primary format for the arrangement and display of photographs, making them a vital but commonly overlooked component of the history of photography. Today they continue to provide an important forum for photographers to convey their work to a wide public audience.

Photographs have appeared in book format since their inception. For example, William Henry Fox Talbot's commercially published *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) was one of the earliest explorations of photography's narrative capabilities. Like all early photography books, Talbot's photographs were printed separately from the letterpress text. It was not until the 1880s, with the development of the halftone plate and printing process, that mass-produced newspapers, magazines, and books regularly featured photographs. This invention, which allowed type and photographic images to be mechanically reproduced on the same press, dramatically changed the means by which the general public viewed and had access to photographs. By the 1920s the number of photographically illustrated publications had increased exponentially, and photographs regularly recounted events without explanatory text. As people began to see more and more photographs on a daily basis, they became far more visually literate. Set within this context, the modern mass-produced photography book challenged not only traditional narrative structures but also popular habits of reading and seeing.

I. NEW VISIONS

1

Helmar Lerski, *Köpfe des Alltags: Unbekannte Menschen* (Everyday Heads: Unknown People), introduction by Curt Glaser (Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1931). David K.E. Bruce Fund

Lerski, who worked in the German film industry, took expressionistic “headshots” of ordinary people in his studio, where he could mold the sitters’ character through dramatic light effects. The extreme close-ups produced striking, stylized images, which Lerski created not as heroic portraits but as emblematic representations of resilience in uncertain times.

2

Werner Gräff, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (Here Comes the New Photographer!) (Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929). David K.E. Bruce Fund

Published in conjunction with the influential Deutscher Werkbund exhibition *Film und Foto*, held in Stuttgart, Germany, this “how to” manual urges photographers to experiment with the medium and create unusual images using techniques such as bird’s-eye views and montage.

3

L. Moholy-Nagy *60 Fotos*, edited and with an introduction by Franz Roh, cover design by Jan Tschichold, Fototek 1 (Berlin: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1930). David K.E. Bruce Fund

Defunct after only two volumes, the Fototek series was intended to examine a wide variety of modern photographic approaches, including montage as well as sports and police photography. The first volume features László Moholy-Nagy, who promoted a New Vision aesthetic consisting of unexpected points of view and nontraditional compositions that challenged readers to see photographs in a new way.

4

foto-auge (photo-eye), edited and with an introduction by Franz Roh, cover design by Jan Tschichold (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1929). David K.E. Bruce Fund

Also produced in conjunction with *Film und Foto*, this book showcases a wide variety of photographic practices as a way of examining the social importance of the medium’s ability to construct visual knowledge.

5

Paul Éluard and Man Ray, *Facile* (Paris: Éditions GLM, 1935). David K.E. Bruce Fund

In this experimental integration of text and photographs, love poems written by French poet Paul Éluard to his wife, Nusch, intertwine with rich gravure prints taken of her by Man Ray. The photographs—including solarized, superimposed, double-exposed, and negative images—float around the text, evoking Nusch’s role as muse to both artists.

6

Karl Blossfeldt, *Wundergarten der Natur* (Marvelous Gardens of Nature) (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1932). David K.E. Bruce Fund

Following Blossfeldt’s popular 1928 *Urformen der Kunst* (Archetypal Forms of Art), this study continues the examination of links between natural forms and artistic designs that Blossfeldt began in the 1890s. His macroscopic photographs of plants, inspired by nineteenth-century natural philosophy, produced surprising images that appealed to modern sensibilities.

II. DOCUMENTED REALITIES

7

André Kertész, *Paris vu par André Kertész*, introduction by Pierre Mac-Orlan (Paris: Éditions d'Histoire et d'Art, 1934). David K. E. Bruce Fund

Compared with a tourist guidebook, this book leads readers on a private journey through the marginal spaces of Paris. Kertész's photographs, taken between 1925 and 1934, capture the complexity and ambivalence of the modern urban experience. Set within a constructivist layout, they interact dynamically with short titles and descriptive captions.

8

Paul Morland and Brassai (Gyula Halasz), *Paris de Nuit* (Paris by Night) (Paris: Éditions Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1933). David K. E. Bruce Fund

Acting as an urban flâneur rather than a social reformer, Brassai documented the environs of Paris—both its lively nightlife and its eerily abandoned streets—over the course of a night. Printed as full bleeds in deep, rich gravure, Brassai's sensuous photographs have a dreamlike quality that blurs the line between the romantic and the reportorial.

9

Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939). David K. E. Bruce Fund

This collaborative project examines the underlying causes and actual experiences of the mass migration of rural farmers from the Southern Plains states to the West Coast during the Depression. Taylor's interviews with migrant laborers, statistical analysis, and newspaper clippings work in tandem with Lange's photographs of people and their surroundings.

10

Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, in collaboration with Éditions Verve, Paris, 1952). Gift of Paul Mellon

An important presentation of Cartier-Bresson's photographs from the 1930s and 1940s, this large-format book helped to popularize his work, in which a distinctive documentary approach transforms ordinary moments into remarkable photographic visions.

11

Metropolis: An American City in Photographs, assembled by Agnes Rogers with commentary by Frederick Lewis Allen and photographs by Edward M. Weyer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934). Gift of Lessing J. Rosenwald

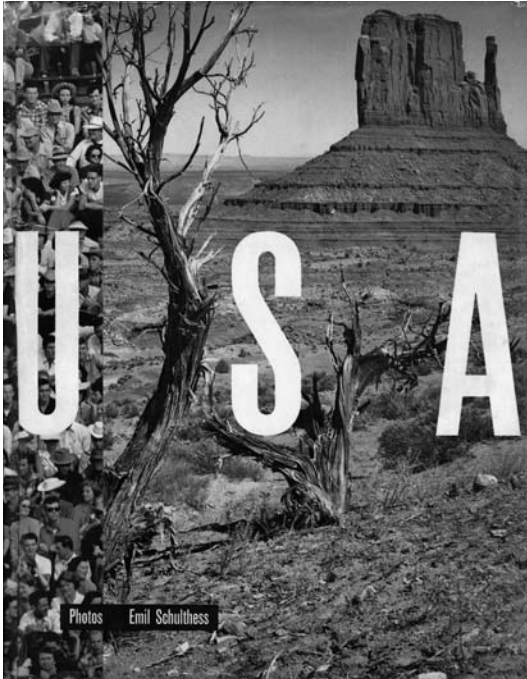
Organized as a day in the life of New York City, this photojournalistic book combines photographs with fictionalized commentary as a means of capturing the everyday urban experience that so often characterized modernity.

12

A Mi Életünkben: A Munka Elso Fotókönyve (From Our Lives: The Work Circle Photobook), photographs by Munka Kör (Work Circle), introduction and design by Lajos Kassák (Budapest: Hungária Hirlapnyomda, 1932). David K. E. Bruce Fund

From Our Lives, featuring work by eight photographers who participated in a controversial exhibition of the same name, is a compelling example of 1930s socialist photography in Hungary. The Work Circle's approach, emphasized by Kassák's layout, melded documentary and experimental techniques.

III. POSTWAR SCENES



13

Emil Schulthess, *USA* (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 1955).
David K. E. Bruce Fund

Art director and photographer for the Swiss cultural magazine *Du*, Schulthess constructed his first photography book from black-and-white and color images he took during a five-month road trip across the United States in 1953. *USA* is organized into five themes, including zoos, national parks, and New York City.

14

William Klein, *Life Is Good & Good For You in New York: Trance Witness Revels* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, Album Petite Planet I, 1956). David K. E. Bruce Fund

Klein was both the photographer and the designer for this book, which vividly, and at times aggressively, images the 1950s social scene in New York. Using a Photostat machine, Klein experimented with strategies such as full double-page bleeds and photographic montage, creating an energetic sequence of pages in which no two spreads are alike.

15

Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955).
David K. E. Bruce Fund

This photography book questions documentary practices that aim to elicit pity and charity rather than solidarity and change. DeCarava's images, taken in the early 1950s as part of a Guggenheim fellowship, emphasize the normalcy of life in Harlem. His collaboration with writer Langston Hughes produced an expressive photographic novel, with an energetic layout influenced by film.

16

Israël, photographs by Izis, introduction and text selection by André Malraux (Lausanne: La Guilde du Livres and Éditions Clairefontaine, 1955). Gift of Mrs. Sterling Cole

Lithuanian-born Izis (Israel Bidermanas) was part of a wave of artists, including Brassai and Kertész, who emigrated from Eastern Europe to Paris before World War II. Rarely leaving the confines of Paris, Izis traveled to Israel in the early 1950s to photograph in the newly formed Jewish state. Renowned French author and statesman André Malraux added excerpts from texts relating to Jewish cultural and religious history.

17

Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Aruhi Arutokoro* (Someday, Somewhere), preface by Tsutomu Watanabe, design by Ryuuichi Yamashiro (Tokyo: Geibi Shuppan, 1958).
David K. E. Bruce Fund

This engaging publication juxtaposes photographs taken by Ishimoto in Chicago and Tokyo. Born in the United States, Ishimoto spent his childhood in Japan and later returned to the U.S. to attend school at the Institute of Design in Chicago. Finally settling in Tokyo, he influenced a new generation of postwar Japanese photographers interested in producing books.

IV. CONCEPTUAL PRACTICES

18

Edward Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (Los Angeles: Edward Ruscha, 1966). Gift of the Circle of the National Gallery of Art

With a motorized Nikon mounted on the back of a pickup, Ruscha photographed every building on the Sunset Strip as he drove up and down the street. He printed the results across the top and bottom of a scroll of paper, then bound it simply as an accordion fold. The twenty-seven-foot-long panoramic “strip” is the fourth of sixteen photography books that Ruscha has produced depicting ordinary objects and the banality of urban experience in a deadpan manner.

19

Milan Knížák, *Stone Ceremony* (self-produced, handmade book, 1971). David K. E. Bruce Fund

Both an art object and a documentation of Knížák’s stone ceremony performance, this book consists of mounted photographs and hand-stenciled texts on individually cut pieces of heavy paperboard secured with two rawhide straps. Knížák, who preferred to call his Fluxus performances “ceremonies” because of their ritual aspects, created an assemblage of small rocks cemented in a circle on the cover, a material symbol of an ephemeral event that took place in an abandoned rock quarry in the Czech Republic.

20

Bernar Venet, *Exploited Subjects, 1966–1969* (New York: Multiples, Inc., 1970). David K. E. Bruce Fund

A component of Marian Goodman’s *Artists and Photographs* portfolio, this book contains a series of documentary photographs of performances, as well as project notes and a pullout diagram on graph paper, all relating to Venet’s artistic collaborations with scientists from Columbia University. The pages have been hole-punched and bound by notebook rings.



21

Andy Warhol, *Andy Warhol’s Index (Book)*, with the assistance of Stephen Shore, Paul Morrissey, Ondine, Nico, Christopher Cerf, Alan Rinzler, Gerald Harrison, Akihito Shirakawa, and particularly David Paul; photographs by Nate Finkelstein; Factory Fotos by Billy Name (New York: Random House, A Black Star Book, 1967). David K. E. Bruce Fund

This interactive, pop-art photography book includes not only photographs but interviews, full-color pop-ups and foldouts, a playable flexi-disc, and other objects that serve as instant memorabilia of Warhol’s Factory days.

Checklist of the exhibition *Reading the Modern Photography Book: Changing Perceptions* held in conjunction with *Looking In: Robert Frank's "The Americans,"* National Gallery of Art, January 18–April 26, 2009.

Written by Andrea Nelson, department of photographs, and produced by the library and the publishing office. Copyright © 2009 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The Gallery's Web site features highlights from the exhibition and links to exhibition-related activities at www.nga.gov/exhibitions/frankinfo.shtm#photobook

General Information

Hours: Monday–Saturday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm, Sunday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm. Gallery Web site: www.nga.gov.

For information about accessibility to galleries and public areas, assistive-listening devices, sign-language interpretation, and other services and programs, inquire at the Information Desks, consult the Web site, or call 202.842.6690 (TDD line 202.842.6176).

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

cover

foto-auge (photo-eye), edited and with an introduction by Franz Roh, cover design by Jan Tschichold (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1929).

David K. E. Bruce Fund