



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART BULLETIN / SPRING 1988



P H O T O G R A P H Y

B E T W E E N T H E W A R S

S E L E C T I O N S F R O M T H E

F O R D M O T O R C O M P A N Y

C O L L E C T I O N

MARIA MORRIS HAMBURG

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The photographs are to be credited as follows: Ford Motor Company Collection, Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell, 1987.

THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART
BULLETIN

Spring 1988

Volume XLV, Number 4
(ISSN 0026-1521)

Published quarterly © 1988 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and Additional Mailing Offices. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* is provided as a benefit to Museum members and available by subscription. Subscriptions \$18.00 a year. Single copies \$4.75. Four weeks' notice required for change of address. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Back issues available on microfilm, from University Microfilms, 313 N. First Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Volumes I-XXVIII (1905-1942) available as a clothbound reprint set or as individual yearly volumes from The Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 99 Main Street, Salem, N.H., 03079, or from the Museum, Box 700, Middle Village, N.Y. 11379. General Manager of Publications: John P. O'Neill. Editor in Chief of the *Bulletin*: Joan Holt. Assistant Editor: Robert McD. Parker. Design: Betty Binns and David Skolkin.

Separations for the tritone illustrations by Richard Benson, Newport, Rhode Island. Printed by Acme Printing Company, Inc., Wilmington, Mass.

A DECADE AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Department of Prints in the fall of 1916, the Metropolitan Museum began to collect photographs. The keystone of our holdings is the work of Alfred Stieglitz and a matchless collection of photographs by his most talented contemporaries that he gave to the Metropolitan in 1933. Stieglitz and his fellow Photo-Secessionists, working in soft-focus painterly techniques, won for the medium a large measure of respectability in the two decades before the First World War. After the war a new generation of photographers turned away from painterly styles and took radically different directions. Some of these young artists espoused the aesthetic principles of current avant-garde movements—Dadaism, Futurism, Surrealism, Constructivism; others were unaligned. But they all shared the belief that photography provided the appropriate technology and methods to record new forms of modern life. Indeed, much of the most progressive art of the 1920s and 30s owes a great debt to their photographic visions.

Until last year this crucial period between the two World Wars was not well represented at the Metropolitan. Original photographs from this period are rare: very few were printed and most of the best are closely held by a small group of prescient collectors. Therefore the acquisition in 1987 of John C. Waddell's magnificent collection of some five hundred European and American works made between the wars is a major event. Mr. Waddell's sure eye and historical knowledge, his assiduity and stringent standards of authenticity and print quality, have shaped this collection into a remarkable conspectus of modern photography's period of greatest invention and expansion.

The Metropolitan acquired the collection through the generosity of Mr. Waddell, who donated approximately one-third of its value, and through the good offices of Robert A. Taub, Vice-President of the Ford Motor Company, who is himself a collector of photographs. Mr. Taub's enlightened view of corporate philanthropy provided the Museum with an unprecedented grant, which is, as far as we know, the largest corporate gift made to a museum for an acquisition. In this age of escalating costs for works of art of all kinds, Ford's grant is most heartening and, we hope, precedent setting.

The initiative for procuring this collection for the Metropolitan, where it is known as the Ford Motor Company Collection of Photography, originated with Maria Morris Hambourg, Associate Curator of Prints and Photographs, who is also author of this *Bulletin*. Her text serves as a striking introduction to the larger selection of works that will constitute "The New Vision," an exhibition scheduled to open at the Museum in September 1989. The exhibition and its catalog have also been underwritten by the Ford Motor Company.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

INTRODUCTION

THE EXPLOSIVE DEVELOPMENT of photography as a medium of untold expressive power and as a primary vehicle of modern consciousness occurred during the two decades immediately following the Great War. In the aftermath of this first total, mechanized conflict, avant-garde artists, commercial illustrators, and journalists turned to photography as if seeking to discover through its mechanisms and materials something of the soul of contemporary industrial society. Photographers did not follow their particular vocations separately as is often done today, nor were they segregated by their allegiances to American, French, or German, Dadaist, Constructivist, or Surrealist factions. Such conceptual divisions would facilitate the telling of this story, but they would be inaccurate. In actual practice photography was seldom isolated in precincts; it flowed over the boundaries defining schools and movements. Existing at the nexus of art, life, and communication, this truly international and interdisciplinary medium could no longer be limited to any set of applications nor circumscribed by a single style. Its potential was as large and flexible as the culture it reflected was volatile; neither could maintain a constant form.

Since its invention in 1839 photography has performed various functions, but it has conventionally been regarded in art as a servant of painting or a lesser partner of printmaking. Although groups of photographers periodically attempted to elevate the status of the medium—particularly in the 1850s and again around 1900—it was not until the years between the wars that a radical shift of attitudes led artists of diverse persuasions to conscript photography to give form to their visions, form that no other medium could so convincingly convey.

Photography became a favored arena for artistic exploration in this period for just the reason it had long been relegated to the periphery: it was thought to be uncontaminated by the aesthetic aims and conventions of High Art. The revolt against the sanctity of painting that occurred during the First World War encouraged engagement with the content of actual existence. Photography was a perfect vehicle for such an aim since it was believed to provide both an artistic tabula rasa and a direct link to the real world.

This rediscovery of photography as a particularly modern art was encouraged by two associated attitudes. The first celebrated its impersonal, machinelike qualities. The speed and scientific precision of the camera seemed entirely appropriate to a world transformed by instant communication, industrial production, and mass transportation.

The second delighted in the surrealism of photography's straightforward report and its chameleonlike mutability. The camera confirmed the strangeness of the modern world by pointing right at its mysteries or by evoking them through technical conjuration.

These avant-garde perceptions of photography were supplemented by the modernist position that turned to account the medium's intrinsic language of light and shadow, chemical and technical responses, and formal properties. Photographers explored the ways the camera inscribes the objective world on film and on paper, and they embraced not only "accurate" description of a normative sort but also novel vantage points and other characteristically photographic modifications of conventional vision.

These approaches were rarely practiced discretely or exclusively; they overlapped within individuals and were shared between groups through a constant mingling of ideas and images in studios, cafés, and international exhibitions, as well as through myriad small magazines and publications. The intense and vital experimentation in photography was further cross-fertilized by association with film, advertising, and the picture press. By the Second World War photography's resources had been so thoroughly diversified and enlarged that it had become the twentieth century's most ubiquitous form of art and visual communication.

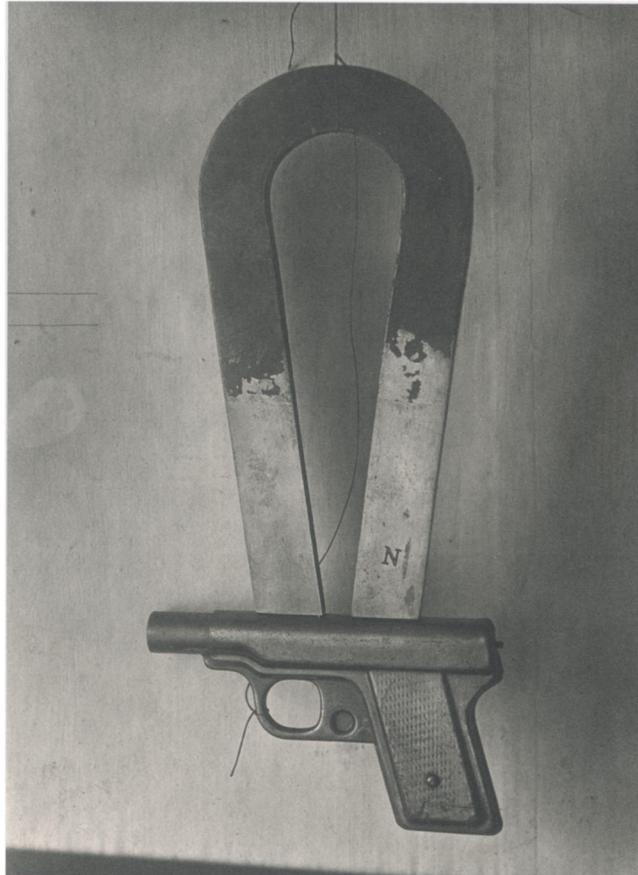
The synoptic view of these many developments offered by the Ford Motor Company Collection cannot be demonstrated within the limits of this publication. The selection of photographs reproduced here can provide only an abbreviated introduction to the leading practitioners of the new photography and to the revolutionary ideas implicit in their visions.

MAN RAY

Compass, 1920

Gelatin silver print

4⁵/₈ x 3³/₈ inches



1987.1100.40

MAN RAY
AMERICAN
1890–1976

PAGE 5

JUST BEFORE WORLD WAR I the French artists Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia introduced an artistic revolution, later called Dada, to New York. In America the political edge of this iconoclastic attitude was turned to a witty and irreverent questioning of traditional artistic goals. Duchamp's mock-serious presentations of banal manufactured objects and Picabia's dysfunctional machine drawings seemed outrageous to a public whose firsthand knowledge of contemporary European art was limited to exhibitions at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291 and the Armory Show of 1913.

Following the example of Duchamp and Picabia, Man Ray began making Dada constructions. The inventions were droll but the artist did not intend only to be funny; he wanted to confront the viewer with creations that questioned the authority of logic and science over the imagination.

Compass is such a work: a magnet and pistol are proposed as an instrument of orientation. If we accept it as such, our fates are as arbitrary as in a game of Russian roulette. Yet Man Ray's contraption does not work; it hangs against a wall and cannot revolve like the free-floating needle of a normal compass. It functions, rather, as a sign. As magnets respond to invisible physical forces and guns to personal compulsions, so *Compass* points to the mysterious predictability of our deepest urges. This menacing note is only ironic, however, for the pistol is but a child's toy and the oddly quiescent still-life presentation is as benign as the elegant tones and surface of this small, finely finished print.

Thus *Compass* not only rejects painting for a combination of objects that disturb and delight us, it also proposes that we consider this photograph, and not the original assemblage, as art. This subversive notion was natural to those who valued artistic gestures more than definitive art objects, and, in fact, Man Ray uncoupled the magnet and pistol for use in later works. This unique print, then, is but the memory of a provocative idea, and as such is a quintessential Dada invention: "purely cerebral yet material" (as Man Ray said of Duchamp's *Large Glass*), whimsical yet deadly earnest.

RAOUL HAUSMANN
FRENCH,
BORN IN AUSTRIA
1886–1971

PAGE 7

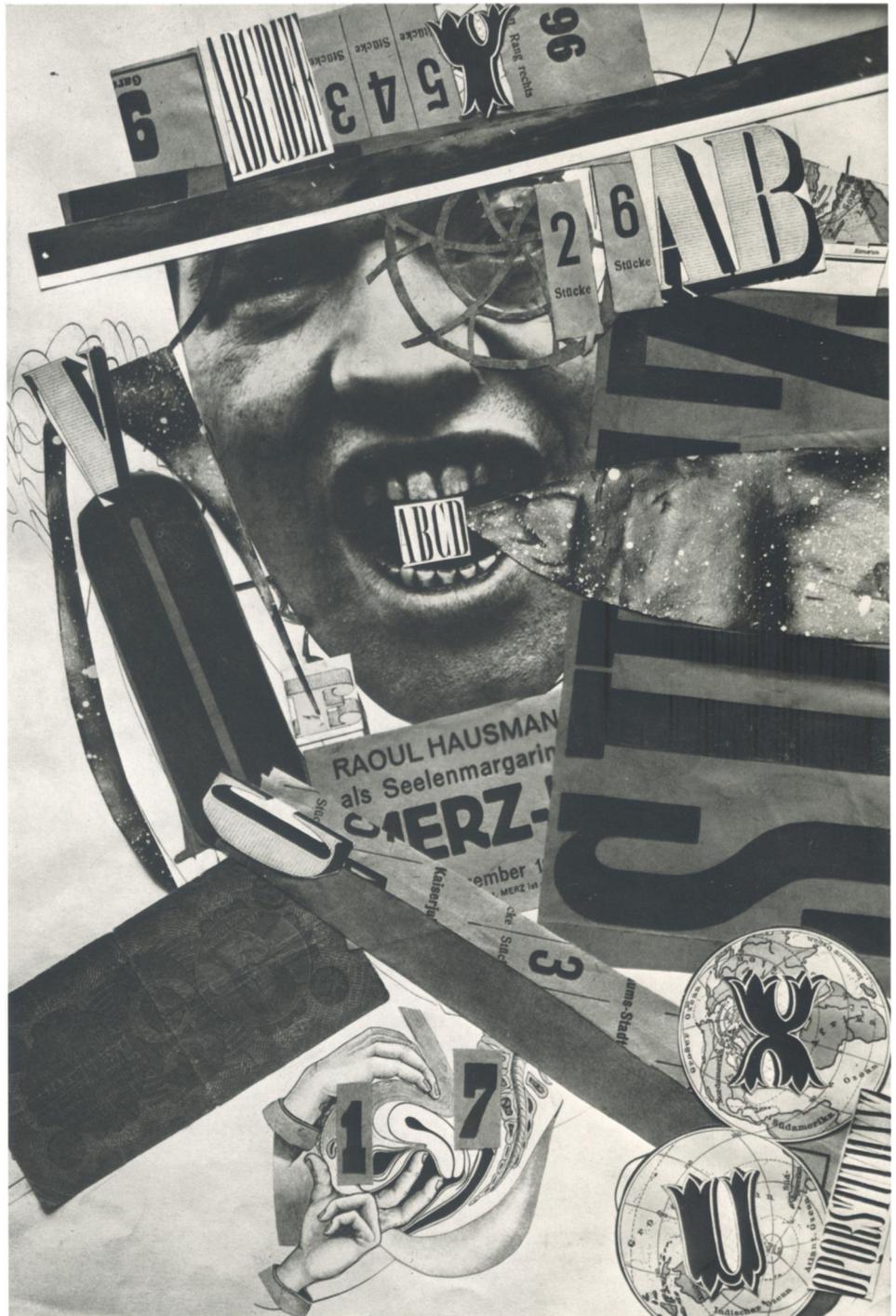
WHILE MAN RAY PLAYED ironically with notions of violence and disorientation in New York, these states were expressed forcefully by the Berlin Dadaists, who had more closely experienced the insanity and carnage of war. Raoul Hausmann, one of the founders of the Berlin group in 1918, was a brilliant tactician and theorist for the movement. Immersed in the technological world of machines and mass communication, he

RAOUL HAUSMANN

ABCD, 1924 or later

Gelatin silver print

5¹⁵/₁₆ x 3¹⁵/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.58

composed phonetic poems, devised a machine to link hue and musical tone, and made both abstract and figurative collages. Hausmann's search for new and appropriately modern materials led him to use clippings, posters, photographs, and other scraps, which were not only the detritus of the actual world but also symbolic, if shattered, representations of it. Cut and pasted together in explosive centrifugal patterns, these bits of word and image formed a new kind of picture full of conflicting viewpoints and whirling energy.

ABCD is an exceptionally dense and personal work of this kind. In the center is a photograph of Hausmann (c. 1918); below it, a flyer announcing his performance of a phonetic poem ("The Soul of Margarine") at one of Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* ("Junk") evenings in Hanover in 1923. Where Hausmann's right ear should be are the letters VOICE ("voice") inside an earlike ellipse of the star-spangled heavens; the letters ABCD, a prototypical Dada poem, are projected toward galaxies of stars. Hausmann's monocle is overlaid with a web of lines that alludes to the mechanical revolution in modern vision and recalls the Mercator lines on the two global maps below. That the imagination knows no boundaries is further suggested by another map, locating Rimbaud's travels in North Africa, and by a Czech banknote, a reminder of Hausmann's visits to Prague for Dada soirées in 1920 and 1921. The tickets to the *Kaiserjubilée* indicate the oppressive social milieu in which the artist functions, and the intentionally shocking diagram of an obstetrical examination, the organic necessity of his creative acts.

ABCD thus gives voice to a revolution in seeing, to the creation from inmost necessity of a vital, disruptive, and more realistic art for an altered and violent world. In the guise of a condensed artistic history of its maker, it is a paradigm for the radical renewal of vision through Dada.

PAUL STRAND
AMERICAN
1890–1976

PAGE 10

CERTAIN WORKS OF ART crystallize in their form and precipitate in their reception the concerns of an epoch. This photograph of striated shadows falling through a porch railing onto a tipped-over table is such a work. It is among the first virtual abstractions made intentionally with a camera.

In 1915 Picabia's machine-part paintings at 291 and the Cubist exhibition at the Modern Gallery were the talk of the New York avant-garde. Paul Strand, who had initially

photographed in the soft-focus pictorial mode, found such works puzzling but stimulating. “I had a feeling something very important was happening,” he said, “and I wanted to find out more about it.” During that summer and the next he made still-life arrangements to learn “how you build a picture, what a picture consists of, how spaces are related to each other, how spaces are filled, how the whole thing must have a kind of unity.”

When Strand brought his summer’s harvest to 291 and opened his portfolio, Stieglitz immediately recognized Strand’s momentous accomplishment. Before him was an extended series of carefully wrought abstractions and semi-abstractions composed of shadows, shapes, and forms, many of them scarcely recognizable as tables, bowls, or other objects. Here were photographs that all but dispensed with the theretofore essential prerequisite of realistic description.

Having almost despaired of educating the current generation of photographers to modern artistic trends, Stieglitz suddenly discovered in the work of this talented disciple the achievements of a master. He accordingly dedicated the last two issues of his journal *Camera Work* (1917) to Strand’s photographs, which he praised as informed, intelligent, pure to the point of brutality, “the direct expression of today.”

**MORTON
SCHAMBERG
AMERICAN
1881–1918**

PAGE 11

THE MARKED EARLY PROMISE of Morton Schamberg’s precocious machine paintings and semi-abstract urban photographs suggests that he could have become one of the great American artists of his generation had he not died of influenza in 1918. Until his death he shared a studio with Charles Sheeler, a fellow student in the classes of William Merritt Chase. Working in tandem, the two artists progressively updated their academic training, garnering more recent ideas in Europe on a trip in 1909, and thereafter, in New York. In 1912 they took up photography to earn a living: Sheeler worked for architects; Schamberg took society portraits. Within two years they had become acquainted with Stieglitz and were beginning to use the camera for noncommercial ends.

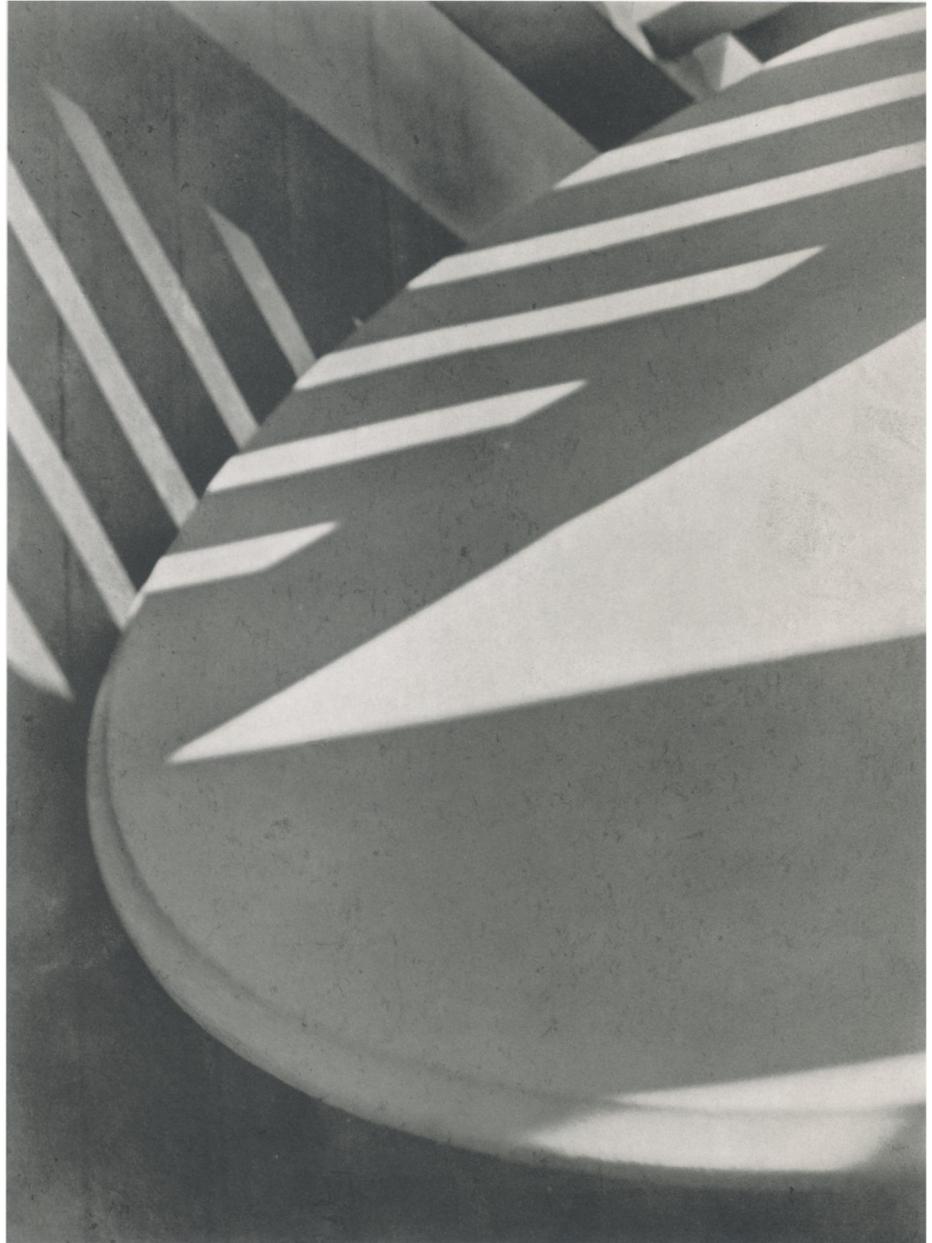
In 1917 Schamberg took four views of industrial buildings that demonstrated his fluent manipulation of the latest artistic idioms. He probably knew both A.L. Coburn’s photographs of New York (1912) and Stieglitz’s views from the window of 291 (1915); these relied upon flattened perspective, vertiginous height, or atmospheric conditions

PAUL STRAND

*Abstraction, Twin Lakes,
Connecticut, 1916*

Silver and platinum print

13 x 9⁵/₈ inches



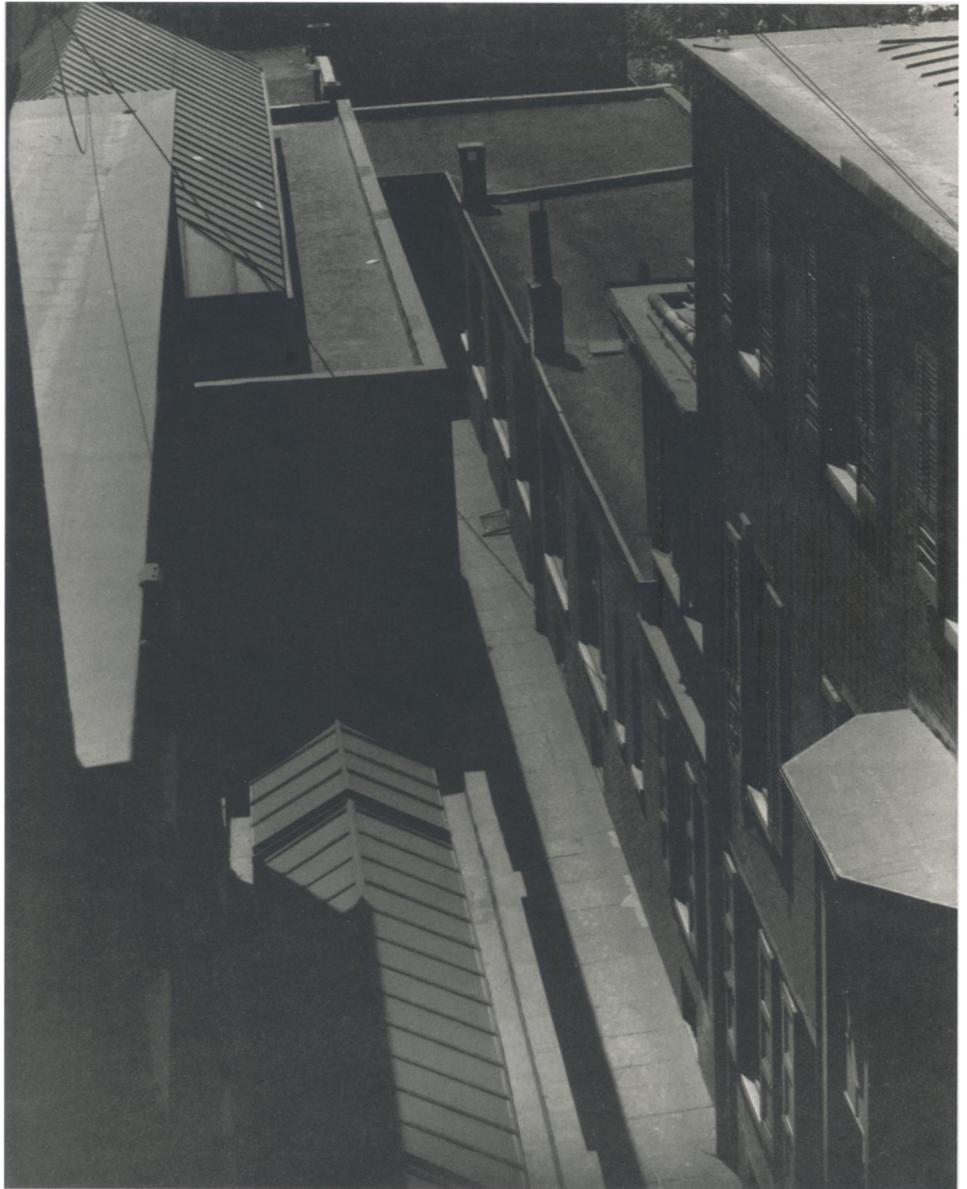
1987.1100.10

MORTON SCHAMBERG

Untitled, 1917

Gelatin silver print

9³/₈ x 7¹/₂ inches



1987.1100.116

LEWIS HINE
AMERICAN
1874–1940

PAGE 14

for their effects. Schamberg's photographs were constructed differently—from bold clean-edged blocks of tone relieved by various textures and patterns and quick telegraphic jots of emphasis. The articulation of the pictures is at once linear, like blueprints, and volumetric, like axonometric drawings. That this photograph is perceived as continually shifting between flat design and believable space is a lesson learned from Cubism, while the slicing angle and jagged edges are more characteristic of Italian Futurism. The simplification of tonal structure to produce abstraction was widely practiced, perhaps closest to home by Paul Strand, Marius De Zayas, and Arthur Dove, all of whom were part of the 291 circle.

While the sources for Schamberg's vision can be enumerated, they cannot account for the photograph's success. The man-made world is handled with such exquisite precision that it is hardly surprising to learn that this unique print belonged to Sheeler and surely influenced his great *Church Street El* of 1920.

MACHINE TECHNOLOGY WAS SO PERVASIVE and integral a part of daily life in the first quarter of this century that it became a major theme and preoccupation of two generations of artists. Attitudes toward the machine were inconsistent and even within the same individuals, frequently ambivalent. While structural integrity, clean lines, and efficiency were generally construed as positive values, they did not make the crowded inhumane conditions or frenetic pace of mechanized life any less problematic.

Lewis Hine saw both sides of the issue. For a decade he documented the conditions of life and work in mills, mines, and sweatshops for the National Child Labor Committee. From this experience he knew the degradation and misery of mechanization without regulation. After the war Hine could no longer support himself solely with work from social agencies but also had to take assignments from industrial enterprises. He became understandably self-conscious about the concerns his photographs were made to serve and began to promote his skills as interpretive not documentary.

Steamfitter reflects Hine's ambivalent situation. Like a good machine, the picture is carefully constructed and its parts work together. Variants of the picture show the mechanic more bowed and subjected to the machine, but this version, depicting him

with flexed arms, legible features, and in a more upright posture of coiled energy, is the noblest. Revealing the mechanic's deep involvement with his task and his muscular application to it, this print—which is large and very rich—seems to illustrate Hine's conviction that “the more machines we use, the more do we need real men to make and direct them.”

For all his straining sinew, however, the mechanic's attitude only *seems* realistic. It is in fact as generic, deliberate, and conceptually stylized as the would-be walking posture of an Archaic Greek kouros. It is precisely this dichotomy between realistic report and symbolically effective artifice that makes *Steamfitter* a classic icon of the machine age.

PAUL OUTERBRIDGE
AMERICAN
1891–1959

PAGE 15

FOR PAUL OUTERBRIDGE exquisite taste and its perfect embodiment constituted life's principal interest and occupation. Unswerving pursuit of these ideals earns such individuals a place in the circle of true aesthetes, but whether or not we admire their effort has little to do with their success; our opinion depends almost entirely upon the coalescence of their idea of beauty and our own.

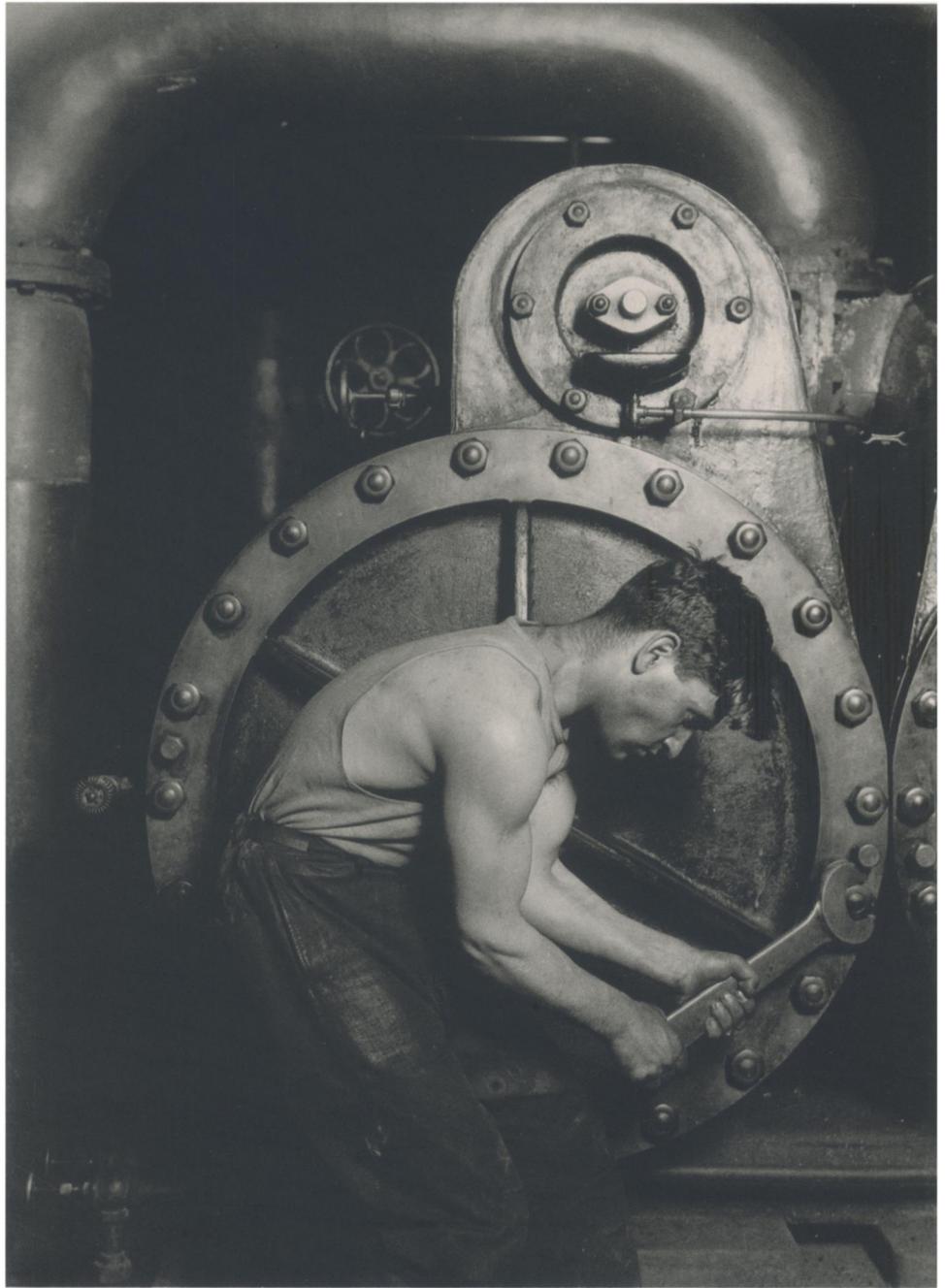
Outerbridge has escaped such ordinary judgment because his work is split between two antipodal tendencies difficult to reconcile and altogether admire, or to ignore. On the one hand, in the 1930s, he made portraits, still lifes, and nudes with the painstaking carbonyl color process. These resplendent, stylized works are swanky and baroque, consciously artificial and icily erotic. When they fall short, which is often, they are like Hollywood failures of the period—mannered, coy, and patently false—but when they work, they are luscious. On the other hand, early in his career, Outerbridge made black and white studies of neat, small things—a glass of wine, a bowl of eggs, a tin cracker box. He contact-printed the negatives on platinum paper in order to achieve the finest detail, rendered in a rich range of silky-smooth tonal gradations. *Marmon Crankshaft*, presumably made on assignment for the manufacturer of the Marmon automobile, is one of the best pictures of this kind. Concisely seen and carefully lit, these superbly crafted miniatures seem not to represent mundane things with specific functions (a detachable collar, a crankshaft) but nameless constructs—irreducible, enigmatic, and seductive.

LEWIS HINE

Steamfitter, 1921

Gelatin silver print

16½ x 12 inches



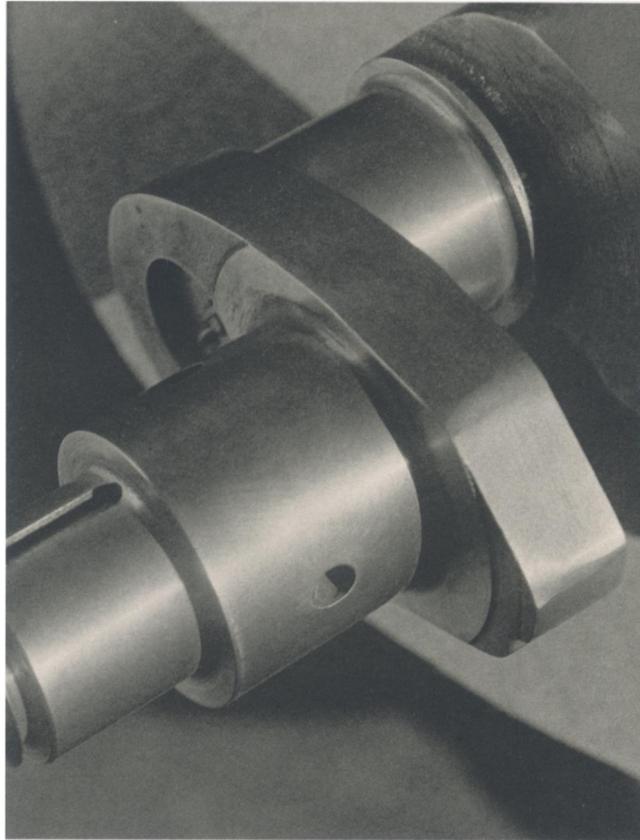
1987.1100.146

PAUL OUTERBRIDGE

Marmon Crankshaft, 1923

Platinum print

4⁷/₁₆ × 3³/₈ inches



1987.1100.292

MARTIN MUNKACSI
AMERICAN,
BORN IN HUNGARY
1896–1963

PAGE 18

MARTIN MUNKACSI IS BEST KNOWN in the United States for his spontaneous action-filled fashion photographs published in *Harper's Bazaar* in the thirties. Bringing fashion out of the studio and injecting it with athletic movement was an innovation at the time, but for this photographer it was also a return to the source of his art.

Munkacsi arrived in Budapest from a small town in Transylvania at the age of sixteen, with poems in his pocket and a will to succeed. Within two years he was working as a reporter and columnist for the daily paper, and before long, as writer, editor, and photographer for a weekly sports supplement. In the latter capacity, he made unprecedented stop-action pictures of skiers, soccer players, and motorcyclists that had sensational impact on the printed page. Their surprising effect was like that of slow-motion film but more confounding, for the beginning and end of the action were missing. These pictures of movement were utterly still. With perfect timing Munkacsi had released the shutter to record a split second otherwise invisible to the human eye.

In 1927 Munkacsi moved to Berlin, bringing with him photographs such as *Motorcyclist, Budapest* that secured him a three-year contract with the House of Ullstein, publishers of the enormously popular illustrated newspaper *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. The concision, imagination, and verve of the photographs he took for Ullstein during the next seven years earned him deserved fame throughout Europe. The young Henri Cartier-Bresson was one of those who learned from Munkacsi's single-shot approach how to condense the essentials of an action into a terse and elegant epigram.

ERICH SALOMON
GERMAN
1886–1944

PAGE 18

IF THE FIRST STYLISTIC INNOVATIONS in press photography came from sports coverage, the second depended upon German advances in camera technology: the miniature (35mm) camera and the rapid lens, both introduced in 1924. The lens made it possible to take instantaneous photographs indoors in normal light. There was one drawback: this lens was mounted on a plate camera, which meant that photographers could not snap away like modern reporters with motorized equipment but had to wait for a single opportune instant. The technology required the photographer to be patient, inconspicuous, and a shrewd judge of human behavior.

The first person to meet these conditions professionally was Erich Salomon, a well-bred Berliner trained as a lawyer and working for Ullstein. By virtue of his proper demeanor and relatively discreet equipment, Salomon managed to gain entrance to political conferences, where he photographed dignitaries in unguarded moments. When the Rumanian delegate to the League of Nations was speaking in 1928, Salomon caught her in the midst of an impassioned appeal for peace. Reeling with emotion, the poetess is riveting; but what gives the photograph its peculiar torque is the contrast between her abandoned delivery and the partially obscured, impassive faces behind her. It was for photographs such as this, and for Salomon's contribution in particular, that the phrase "candid camera" was coined.

ANONYMOUS

PAGE 19

IN ART FOR CENTURIES the sky was heavenly. Its radiance implied a positive spiritual presence and only very infrequently, in the form of comet or eclipse, an omen. Today a ball of fire in the sky is no longer a rare portent but the archetypal symbol of human folly and failure. Our familiarity with images of atomic bombs and exploding planes and rockets makes it difficult to recapture the horror of first seeing the sky aflame.

If contemporary viewers are more drawn to this photograph for its dramatic beauty than repelled by its devastating report, this is only partly due to lost innocence: the spectacularly luminous plume of gas momentarily blinds us to the passengers' fates, which the black silhouettes on the mooring rig pointedly recall.

The explosion of the Hindenburg in 1937 was one of the earliest airborne cataclysms known to the world with hallucinatory immediacy. Previously, the experience of being instantly present at a remote disaster was limited to verbal reports transmitted by wireless. This was the case, for example, upon the sinking of the Titanic in 1912.

Only twenty-five years later rapid advances in rotogravure illustration and international news services sped the awful experience around the globe and with no need of translation. The universal language conveying the spectacle was, of course, photography.

MARTIN MUNKACSI

Motorcyclist, Budapest,
c. 1923

Gelatin silver print

11½ x 9¾ inches



1987.1100.6

ERICH SALOMON

Madame Elena Văcărescu,
1928

Gelatin silver print

4¹⁵/₁₆ x 6¹⁵/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.61



1987.1100.32

ANONYMOUS

*Explosion
of the Hindenburg,
Lakehurst, New Jersey,
May 6, 1937*

*Gelatin silver print
10¹⁵/₁₆ × 13³/₄ inches*

CHARLES SHEELER
AMERICAN
1883–1965

PAGE 22

THIS PICTURE IS THE KEY image in a group of some three dozen photographs taken in Detroit in 1927 for the Ford Motor Company. Although the request was made through the N. W. Ayer advertising agency, the assignment was editorially unrestricted and not aimed at a specific marketing campaign. It was, exceptionally, envisioned as a handsomely paid opportunity for artistic documentation.

On the recommendation of Edward Steichen, who turned down the project because of an exclusive contract with another agency, the job was offered to Charles Sheeler, who was well known for his paintings and photographs of American vernacular art and architecture. Sheeler believed that “forms created for the best realization of their practical use” were analogous in their individual economy and in the “efficient working of the parts toward the consummation of the whole” to his artistic strategies for constructing pictures. This vision endowed the man-made world with a rational harmony that seemed, deceptively, to lie entirely within it.

The precise and just relation of parts in *Crisscrossed Conveyors* produces rhythms as ordered and harmonious in their complexity as a miracle of nature seen under a microscope. The picture’s remarkable organic coherence and upward-springing energy caused the Swiss photographer Robert Frank to comment that Sheeler’s image of Ford’s plant in fact depicted *God’s* factory. Indeed, there is no greater illustration of technological utopia.

ALFRED STIEGLITZ
AMERICAN
1864–1946

PAGE 23

THE ACUTE AWARENESS of change characteristic of the modern age occupied the artist’s eye and imagination in various ways. Skyscrapers and factories were salient symbols of this concern and, like the machine, seemed appropriate pictorial subjects because the basic condition for their existence was the dynamic transformation of daily life.

Although tall buildings first appeared in downtown New York at the turn of the century, skyscrapers did not take root in midtown until the late 1920s. The new forest of art deco towers fascinated Alfred Stieglitz, who witnessed its growth from the windows of his apartment at Lexington Avenue and 49th Street and from his gallery at 509 Madison Avenue. In 1932, when he took the photograph reproduced here, he could see Rockefeller Center under construction; and in the previous two years he had seen the erection of the Empire State, Chrysler, and McGraw-Hill buildings, the Barbizon Plaza, St. Moritz, and Waldorf Astoria hotels, and the RCA tower (now the General Electric building, which fills the right side of the photograph). Thus we

should not be surprised if the sequence of pictures he made of the midtown skyline celebrated its astonishing growth and change.

While Stieglitz's skyscrapers do express an optimistic spirit of constructive enterprise, they impress us more as the manifest, constituent forms of a new American landscape. In *Looking Northwest from the Shelton*, for example, Stieglitz did not describe vertiginous canyons and pinnacles, but a terrain as balanced, measured, and easy of access as any painted by Claude Lorrain. Although the format is vertical, and thus untraditional for a landscape, the picture works in a traditional manner, establishing a remarkably controlled incremental diminution of scale toward the distance and a stepped lightening of mass from bottom to top. By centering his camera just below the horizon and waiting for precisely the right slant of light, Stieglitz built an image of tectonic permanence and stability as awesome in its authoritative conviction as the fabled monuments of the ancients. If we could but trust the image to the exclusion of all others, we would believe that the tiered ziggurats of this civilization would stand for all time.

**ALEXANDER
RODCHENKO
RUSSIAN
1891–1956**

PAGE 24

LIKE MANY ARTISTS IN RUSSIA after the Revolution, the Constructivist painter and photographer Alexander Rodchenko believed it possible to elevate the populace to the Revolutionary cause through visual education. He recognized that most photography, like most representational painting, was mired in the conventions of earlier ages. Images in both media were composed according to Renaissance rules of perspective that projected views upon the picture plane, straight-on and statically. With the camera this effect was produced by photographing in the banal, usual way—as Rodchenko said, “from the navel.” Rejecting that traditional mode, the artist worked to surprise his comrades with unusual views taken from above, below, or on the diagonal.

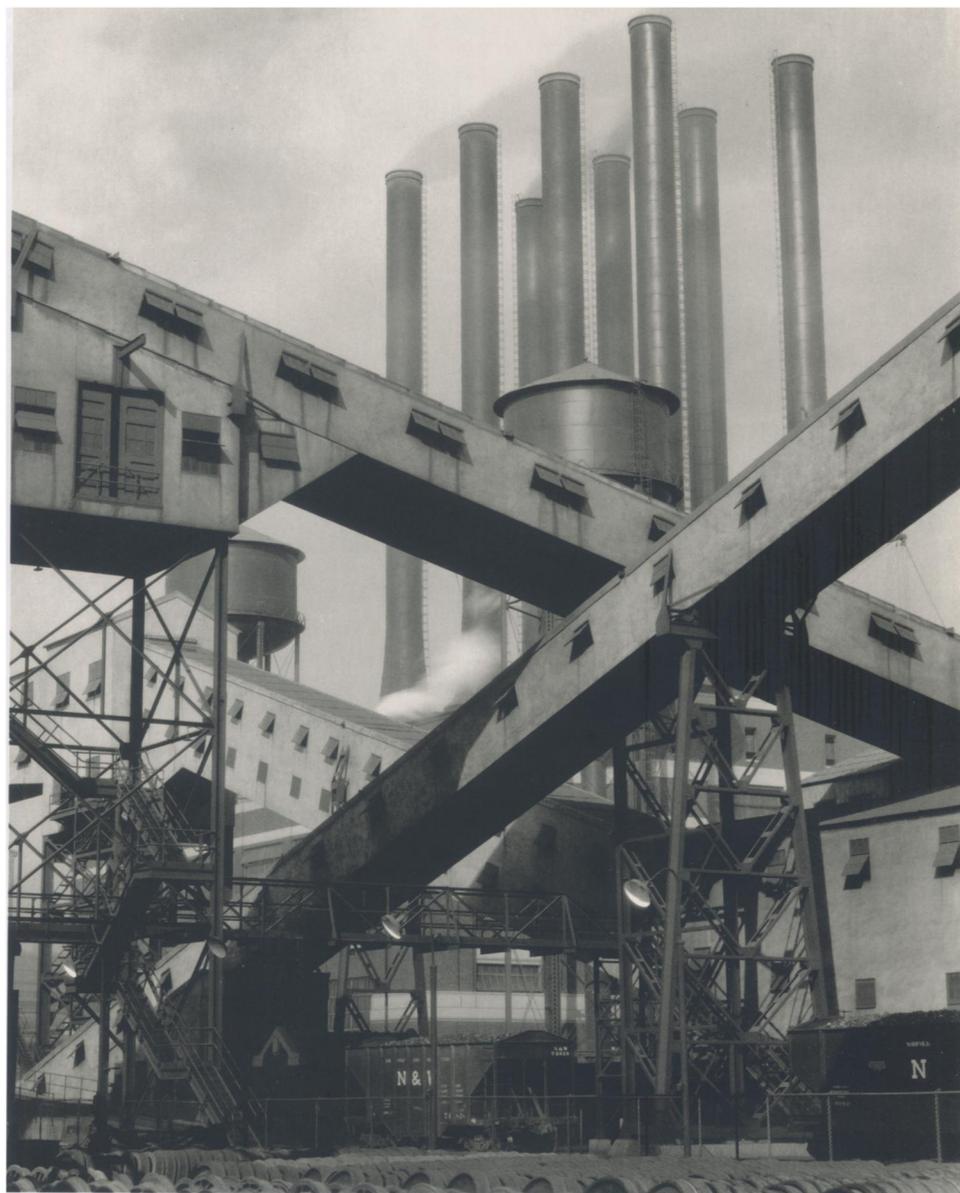
Landscape presented a special problem for the avant-garde of this period, because the very notion of landscape is conditioned by the normative view and its pastoral and sublime associations were irrelevant to the modern metropolitan spirit. Indeed, Rodchenko found the pictorial prospects of the natural setting of his country house downright boring until he hit upon the idea of viewing the surrounding trees as if they were factory smokestacks or telephone poles towering above him in the city. His raking shot from below *is* revolutionary, for it proposes vertigo instead of sylvan calm, the component part instead of the ensemble, and contingent truth instead of familiar homilies.

CHARLES SHEELER

*Crisscrossed Conveyors,
Ford Plant, 1927*

Gelatin silver print

9⁵/₁₆ x 7⁷/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.1

ALFRED STIEGLITZ

*Looking Northwest
from the Shelton, 1932*

Gelatin silver print

9½ x 7½ inches



1987.1100.11

**ALEXANDER
RODCHENKO**

*Pine Trees in Pushkin
Park, 1927 or before*

Gelatin silver print

11½ x 9¾ inches



1987.1100.5

**ALBERT
RENGER-PATZSCH
GERMAN
1897–1966**

PAGE 26

ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH WAS A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER who used the camera not to interpret or transform but to catalog. The making of photographs did not lead him to invent, experiment, or seek beyond the evident; the process was more like the systematic collection of scattered pieces of a mosaic. His inventory of the material world, a sort of “alphabet,” he said, was to be called *Things* but instead was published in 1928 as *The World Is Beautiful*. The 100 images in the book emphasize form and structure, are grouped in categories (plants, materials, architecture, industry, and so forth), and effectively suggest that natural and man-made things are of equal and similar visual interest. In this context it is clear that (in photographic terms at least) the shape, surfaces, and arrangement of a stack of aluminum pots are as beautiful as the foxglove’s cascade of freckled blossoms.

Although Renger-Patzsch’s approach was an effort to purge photography of painterly contamination by artists and amateurs, the book was hailed immediately as a parallel to a neo-realist movement in German painting called New Objectivity. In fact, its importance was much more general and far-reaching. Renger-Patzsch’s insistence on restricting his means to the medium’s inherent qualities (which he saw as descriptive and realistic) and his reductive equation of aestheticized, impersonal objects with content are classic tenets of the modernist position in photography.

**EDWARD WESTON
AMERICAN
1886–1958**

PAGE 28

BY WORKING THROUGH SOFT-FOCUS PICTORIALISM to the straight approach of Strand, Stieglitz, and Sheeler, Edward Weston arrived at a theoretical position easily mistaken for that of Renger-Patzsch. The influence of Stieglitz was especially critical. It furnished Weston not only with an example of acute attention to pictorial structure and sharp-focus technique, but also with a theory of immanence, which provided that the photographer invest the objects he depicted with the exaltation their contemplation induced. The meaningful link between the photographer’s subject and his spiritual state, which Stieglitz termed “equivalence,” became for Weston “the intuitive understanding and recognition relating obvious reality to the esoteric.”

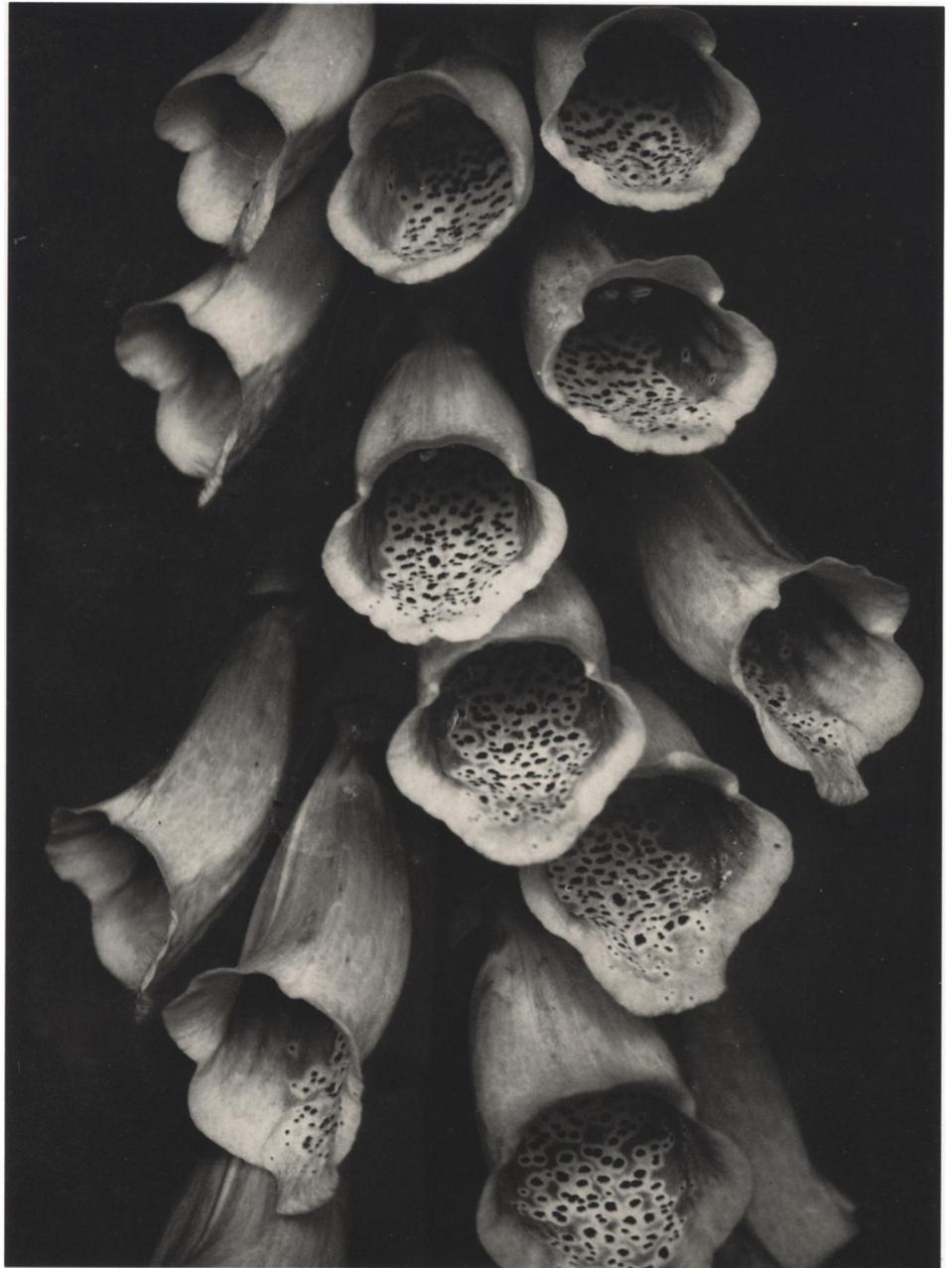
If it could be said that Renger-Patzsch was a sort of nominalist, who understood beauty as the unique properties of each individual thing, then Weston was more of a

**ALBERT
RENGER-PATZSCH**

Digitalis, 1928

Gelatin silver print

9 1/16 x 6 3/4 inches



1987.1100.205

Neoplatonist who construed beauty as the universal essence immanent in the particular. Hence the foxglove (p.26) remains itself, a specific example of the genus digitalis, whereas Weston's bedpan bears little comparison with other examples on the shelf. The picture, which Weston nicknamed "form follows function," is more prepossessing than the object's utilitarian function might initially suggest; the bedpan has become modern sculpture—"of stately, aloof dignity," Weston wrote, perhaps with tongue in cheek. The glorification of its phallic form was in fact directly inspired by Brancusi's sculptures, which Weston had long admired in reproduction and which he finally saw at the home of the collector Walter Arensberg a few days before the photograph was made.

AUGUST SANDER
GERMAN
1876–1964

PAGE 29

THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS INTENDED as a representative image of a type of modern man. Incisive and graceful in its own right, it acquires deeper significance when seen in the context of the thousands of other photographs of German citizens that August Sander took for his monumental portrait survey, *The Face of Our Time*. Had the Nazis allowed its publication, this book would have documented all levels of German society between the wars.

Using a large stand camera and a slow lens, Sander elicited from his subjects the fixed intensity and self-conscious presence characteristic of much nineteenth-century portraiture. When photographing farmers and tradesmen, he could fall back upon traditional popular imagery for a model, but industrialists, cashiers, secretaries, and radio announcers belonged to a new urban society that had, as yet, no characteristic mode of self-representation. Sander generally posed these modern metropolitan citizens in their place of work or against a white wall in his studio.

In this studio photograph of a high school student, it seems that the photographer imposed nothing on the youth, but rather inveigled him to disclose himself as he wished ideally to be seen. If the picture recalls the preening nonchalance of high school seniors in their yearbooks, this is a testimony to Sander's remarkable ability to extract the typical from the specific; and if the fashions now seem outdated, this is a point for the student's sense of current style. Only Sander himself, or perhaps an historian of costume, could tell us whether the young man's sartorial efforts were as successful as he evidently thought they were.

EDWARD WESTON

Bedpan, January 30, 1930

Gelatin silver print

9⁵/₈ x 6 inches



1987.1100.134

AUGUST SANDER

*High School Student,
Cologne, 1926*

Gelatin silver print

9³/₈ x 5¹/₂ inches



1987.1100.82

MAN RAY
AMERICAN
1890–1976

PAGE 32

THE DIAGNOSTIC SPIRIT that informed Sander's undertaking was precisely the kind of rational mind-set the Dadaists and Surrealists meant to escape. As André Breton wrote in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), "Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable."

After moving to Paris in 1921, Man Ray discovered a way to deal with reality that did not analyze, assess, or classify it, but displaced it to an ambiguous free-floating realm of mysterious associations. In this realm the world was no longer depicted as a calculable, definite place but as a dimensionless dark dream space. To achieve this Man Ray practiced a technique that was an inventive cross between photography and the idea of collage but did not involve the camera. In the darkroom he carefully placed objects directly on the photographic paper in patterns governed by his intuitive sense of poetic juxtaposition and abstract composition; he then exposed the paper to light. Instead of recording reflected light from the surface of objects as camera images do, the photogram, or "rayograph" as it was dubbed, reveals the contours and densities of objects by the degree of light they absorb or displace.

Those who would soon become Surrealists immediately recognized that this astonishing manner of registering light freed the objective world from the regimen of realistic representation. "The mechanical deformation, precise, unique, and right, was fixed, smoothed, and filtered like hair through a comb of light," wrote Tristan Tzara in the introduction to *Les Champs délicieux* (1922), a portfolio of Man Ray's earliest rayographs, including this one.

MAURICE TABARD
FRENCH
1897–1984

PAGE 33

THE PHOTOMONTAGE AND THE PHOTOGRAM were more than novel alternatives to the straight approach, they opened photography to unprecedented experimentation. While they may be described as discrete techniques, in practice they were unrestricted creative strategies that invited permutation through variation and combination.

Maurice Tabard, who created this image, brought to it his knowledge of Man Ray's work as well as his own diverse experience as a professional portraitist, advertising photographer, and X-ray technician. He assembled the picture in the darkroom, printing through several more or less transparent sheets, at least two of which were negatives—one made from a photogram of a pair of gloves and the other of a nude

leaning on a stool in front of a reflector lamp in Tabard's studio. The conflation of space that occurred in the printing prevents the nude from altogether inhabiting any one space, except that of the imagination. There she uncannily partakes of Pygmalion's statue and Botticelli's *Venus*, all the while remaining a Parisian model, vintage 1929, who just took off her stockings.

Her simultaneous existence on several planes is reminiscent of Paul Eluard's poem *The Beloved* (1924):

She is standing on my eyelids	Her eyes always opened
and her hair is inside mine,	She never lets me sleep
She is the shape of my hand,	Her dreams in broad daylight
She is the color of my eyes,	Make sunlight evaporate,
She is surrounded by my shadows	Make me laugh, cry and laugh,
Like a rock by the sky.	Speak without a thing to say.

UMBO
(OTTO UMBEHR)
GERMAN
1902–1980
PAGE 34

WHEN UMBO WAS STUDYING at the Bauhaus (1921–23), the de Stijl painter, architect, and theoretician Theo van Doesburg briefly lived and taught in Weimar, where he exercised considerable influence on Bauhaus ideology. Although van Doesburg had been allied with Piet Mondrian in adherence to the orthogonal grid, during this period he began to adopt the more dynamic diagonal principles of abstraction favored by El Lissitzky and the Russian Constructivists.

The essential design of *Mysterium der Strasse* is clearly based upon the Constructivist ideals introduced by van Doesburg and adopted by the Bauhaus upon László Moholy-Nagy's appointment in 1923; however, the photograph represents much more than a successful rendering of abstract principles. This image of a Berlin street may be paved with Constructivist form, but it is overlaid with a dark Surrealist figuration of the unfettered imagination.

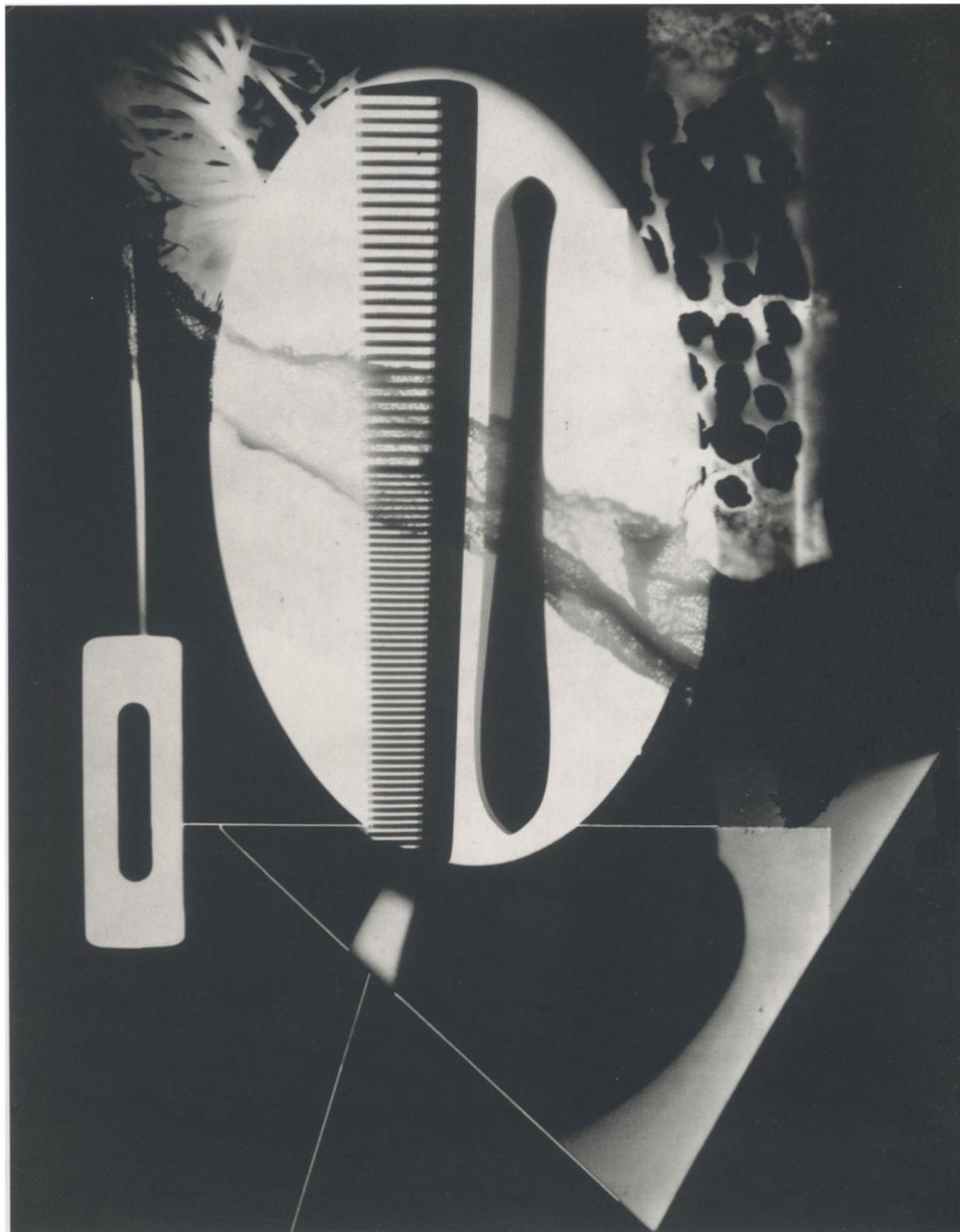
Umbo presents us with an eerie diagram of an urban netherworld roamed by doppelgängers. This is not what he saw when he looked out his window, but what he discovered when he took an overhead view of the street and turned it upside down. Through this delightfully simple yet inspired inversion, the photographer discloses another, more subjective, angle of the camera's seemingly objective report.

MAN RAY

Rayograph, 1922

Gelatin silver print

8¹³/₁₆ x 6⁷/₈ inches



1987.1100.294

MAURICE TABARD

Composition, 1929

Gelatin silver print

9 x 6⁷/₈ inches



1987.1100.141



1987.1100.49

UMBO (OTTO UMBEHR)

Mysterium der Strasse,
1928

Gelatin silver print

11³/₈ x 9¹/₄ inches

**LÁSZLÓ
MOHOLY-NAGY
AMERICAN,
BORN IN HUNGARY
1895–1946**

PAGE 36

LUCIA AND LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY'S PRESENCE at the Bauhaus from 1923 to 1928 encouraged student interest in photography but, surprisingly, no workshop was established in this medium until after their departure. Early Bauhaus photography was an artistic sideline taken up by masters and students for personal enjoyment and for documenting school activities and productions. The unstructured nature of this pursuit helped to generate a spontaneous, experimental creativity, which Moholy-Nagy endorsed in his book *Painting Photography Film* (1925).

One technique he championed was the *fotoplastik*, a picture assembled from cutout photographs connected by hand-drawn geometric schemas. The disposition of the picture parts was neither as random as Dada collages, nor as rigorously formal as Constructivist abstractions; it was suggestive but nonnarrative like most Surrealist imagery.

While fotoplastiks were much used in advertising, most of Moholy-Nagy's works in this genre sprang from inner need and expressed deeply personal and political concerns. *In the Name of the Law* sells no product and tells no story. It is a piercing—but politically inexplicit and thus uncensorable—presentation of the excruciating tensions of life in fascist Germany, and of the vulnerability of all targets of absolute power.

**EL LISSITZKY
RUSSIAN
1890–1941**

PAGE 38

THE NOTION THAT SPACE is not fixed nor matter discrete, and that both are pliable dimensions relative to time and personal subjectivity is fundamental to modern consciousness. In the interwar period many artists independently recognized or deliberately pursued imagery that illustrated this new perception. One artist especially attuned to these novel concepts was El Lissitzky, a Russian painter and graphic designer.

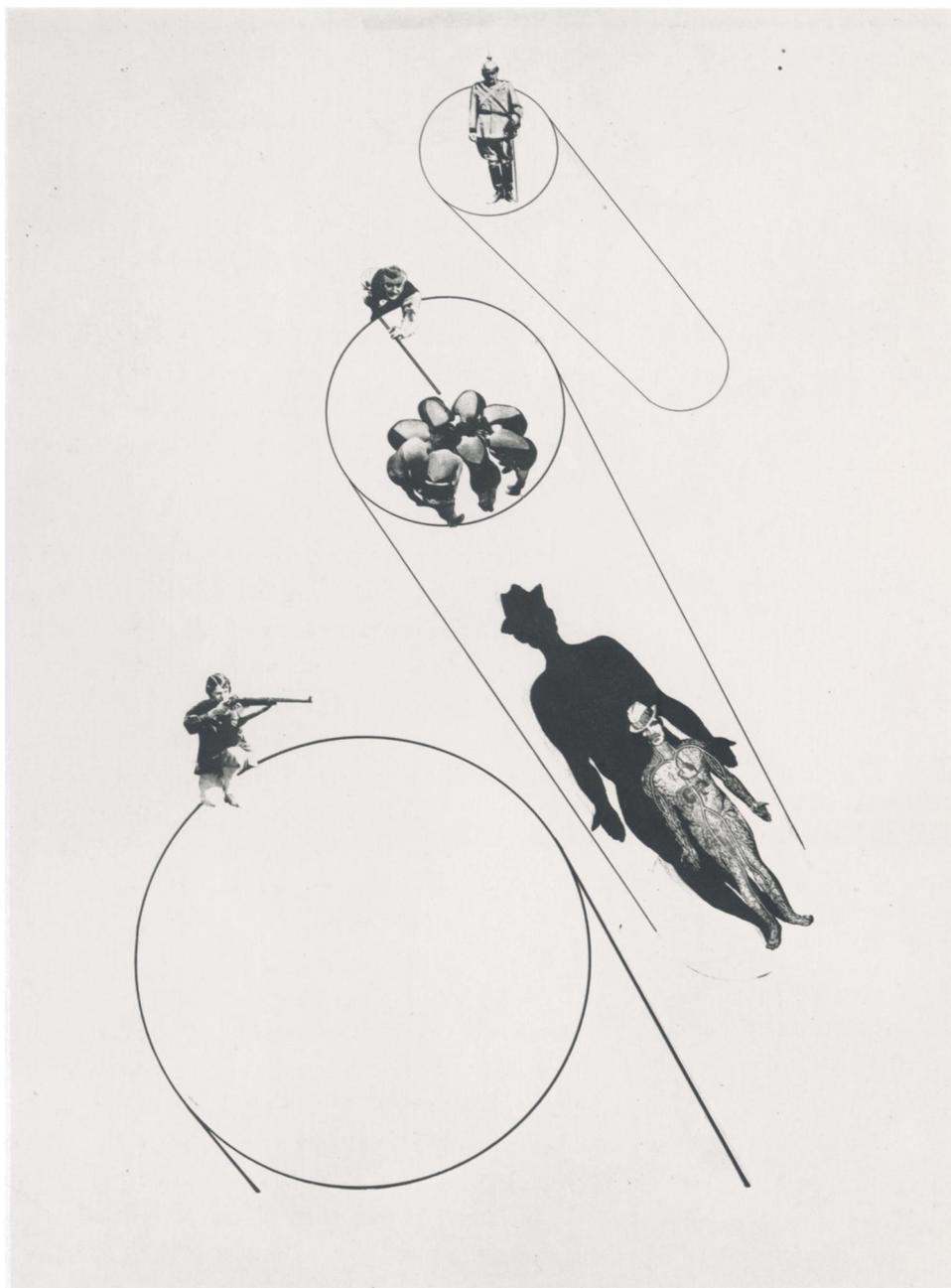
A bohemian tossed salad of high spirits and shared ideas, *In the Studio* represents Lissitzky himself (at the bottom of the photograph), his wife-to-be, Sophie Küppers (on her side directly above him), and other friends. Although everyone in the picture was photographed separately—sitting in chairs, on steps, or lying down on the studio floor—their bodies interlace and interpenetrate in a swirling, conceptual space. Lissitzky accomplished this by progressively rotating his camera while calculating the still invisible position of each figure on his negative. The result of his highly imaginative, somersaulting multiple exposure is a particularly apt expression of the artist's vision of a "world floating in space."

**LÁSZLÓ
MOHOLY-NAGY**

*In the Name of the Law,
1927*

Gelatin silver print

9 3/8 x 7 3/16 inches



1987.1100.230

EUGÈNE ATGET
FRENCH
1857–1927

PAGE 38

WHEREAS EL LISSITZKY WAS KEEN to articulate new concepts of space and time, Eugène Atget was largely impervious to the aims and methods of modern art and devoted most of his long career to interpreting the past. However, in the years after the First World War, his interest in vernacular art led him to explore certain manifestations of contemporary life as part of his intensive documentation of historic French culture. He may have been interested in mannequins, for example, for the material evidence they provided of societal convictions and aspirations. For him these contemporary artifacts seemed perhaps as telling in their fashion as the garden statuary at Versailles.

The face value of *Avenue des Gobelins* is its report on the art of commercial display and the style of men's clothing in Paris in 1925. The incongruous reflection on the window denies this common coin; it not only muddles the report, but it also invites the company of well-dressed mannequins to leave their rarified vitrine world and hold audience with us in the street. While the documentary terms of Atget's art admitted only that the picture described what he had seen, others understood that the way he had seen was as radical and unnerving as any intentionally avant-garde provocation. Indeed, the picture's transparent lamination of real and artificial, outdoor and indoor, fluid and static, shimmer and substance dissolves the traditional boundaries between fact and imagination and makes them one.

CLARENCE JOHN
LAUGHLIN
AMERICAN
1905–1985

PAGE 39

MONOCHROMATIC AND TWO DIMENSIONAL, black and white photographs are by their very nature abstractions of reality. Since the earliest days of the medium some photographers have chosen to explore this condition artistically, but the penchant for outright play, for juggling with the medium's abstract tendencies, became commonplace only during the years between the wars. Contemporary painting, film, and set design marked the direction, but the perceptual games characteristic of photography in this period also grew from an increased awareness of the peculiar ways the camera describes the world.

One could say of this picture by Clarence John Laughlin that Cubism established the parameters of the playing field. However, the Cubist grid that Laughlin wielded did not evolve gradually from the structured relations of the picture's forms, it was an existing screen he preempted for the game. His strategies were exact framing and selective focus; these make the mesh fence vibrate and in places disappear. Thus Laughlin's

EL LISSITZKY

In the Studio, 1923

Gelatin silver print

4 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches



1987.1100.62

EUGÈNE ATGET

Avenue des Gobelins, 1925

Gold-toned albumen print

8 11/16 x 6 13/16 inches



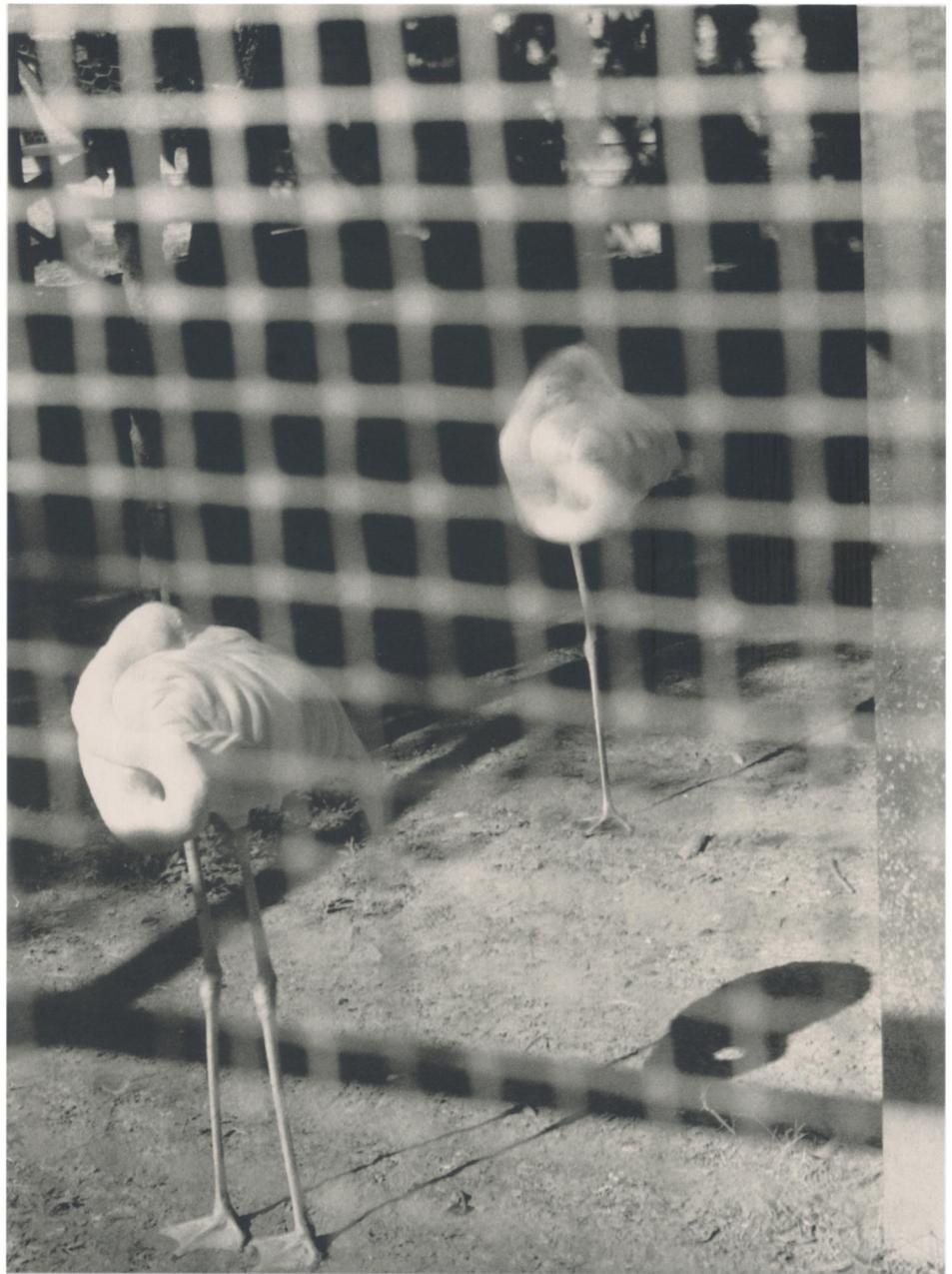
1987.1100.113

**CLARENCE JOHN
LAUGHLIN**

Birds Inside and Out,
1935

Gelatin silver print

13½ x 10⅞ inches



1987.1100.78

picture teases the viewer with questions it delights in evading: if the birds are not inside or out but inside *and* out, isn't the relation of the picture to reality skewed and untrustworthy? Or to put it another way, does the photographer let the birds loose and still net his prey?

**ELLEN AUERBACH
AND GRETE STERN**
GERMAN
b. 1906; b. 1904

PAGE 42

ANDRÉ BRETON POINTED OUT in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* that the power the mannequin exercised upon the modern imagination was as strong as that of ruins upon the minds of the Romantics. This fascination, which Freud recognized as a confusion of the animate and inanimate, lies at the heart of many photographs made between the wars.

**JAMES N.
DOOLITTLE**
AMERICAN
**active 1920s
and 30s**

PAGE 43

Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern, operating as the commercial team of Ringl & Pit, exploited just this ambiguity in their advertisement for a popular hair tonic. The kohl-rimmed eyes, cupid's-bow mouth, and porcelain skin of the mannequin are patently artificial, yet the coiffure and eyebrows are of human hair. When we ultimately recognize that the hand holding the bottle of Pétrole Hahn is also real—in fact living—we momentarily vacillate between knowing it impossible and wondering whether this sloe-eyed doll might not be alive after all.

A similar effect is produced by James Doolittle's photograph. The airbrushed skin, painted lips, plucked brows, and curled eyelashes and hair are as artfully contrived as the hat, fur, and gloves. Without hesitation, we know this face to be Marlene Dietrich's, but the icy, mannered perfection of the movie star's persona mingles so thoroughly with the photographer's service to its image that we are not altogether certain he did not create this persuasive piece of idolatry from a wax figurine.

Because photography plays so freely with the boundaries of the actual and the artificial, it frequently functions, like trompe-l'oeil painting, in an intermediate realm where appearances pretend to be real but have only fictive truth. Whether the object of desire in these pictures is realistic artifice or idealized reality is thus at once immaterial and precisely the point.

HANS BELLMER
FRENCH,
BORN IN SILESIA
1902–1975

PAGE 42

FOR SURREALISTS THE FEMALE BODY represented the ideal resolution of the antinomy between inner and external reality, between disembodied desire and physical form. Their treatment of this theme ranged from mystical lyricism to morbid obsession. In the latter genre, Hans Bellmer's incessant construction, reconstitution, and photographic presentation of his dolls was surely the most exhaustive manipulation of feminine imagery of the period.

This photograph was first published in the magazine *Minotaure* in 1934. It is still the most frequently reproduced of Bellmer's pictures, in part because it is not as explicit as most of his later hand-colored photographs. Its attraction also derives from the doll's expression, which hovers insidiously between provocative pout and paranoia. The question remains: is Bellmer's completely artificial construction, which simultaneously arouses and repels the viewer, more engaging and thus perceptibly more animate than either of the two accompanying photographs?

LISETTE MODEL
AMERICAN,
BORN IN AUSTRIA
1906–1983

PAGE 44

BORN TO COMFORT AND CULTURE in Vienna, Lisette Model was trained as an artist and as a musician by Arnold Schönberg. She continued her studies in Paris after 1921 and became a photographer only in 1937, when she borrowed a friend's camera. Her first pictures, taken that year, were of people on the beachfront promenade in Nice. Astonishingly confident for a beginner, these early images presage most of the artistic questions Model would pose in America during the next forty years.

Model was in search of the individuals spawned by modern urban culture who were at home nowhere but in that element and who only indirectly or perversely observed traditional codes of social etiquette. Her photographs are not judgments but detections of that peculiar fauna in its natural habitat. This photograph of a gambler drowsing eyes half-open like a cat in the sun tells as much about his cunning at the tables as it does of his custom of whiling away the afternoons alone in the company of others equally alone.

**ELLEN AUERBACH
AND GRETE STERN**

Pétrole Hahn, 1931

Gelatin silver print

9⁷/₁₆ × 11¹/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.100

HANS BELLMER

La Poupée, 1933–34

Gelatin silver print

8⁷/₁₆ × 12¹/₈ inches

OPPOSITE

JAMES N. DOOLITTLE

Marlene Dietrich, c. 1931

Gelatin silver print

16¹/₈ × 12³/₄ inches



1987.1100.261



1987.1100.26



1987.1100.87

LISETTE MODEL

*Gambler,
Promenade des Anglais, Nice, 1937*

Gelatin silver print

11¼ x 9⅛ inches

BRASSAÏ
(GYULA HALÁSZ)
FRENCH,
BORN IN
TRANSYLVANIA
1899–1984

PAGE 46

THE SURREALIST DESIRE TO REMOVE artistic activity from the precincts of the conscious mind and relocate it in the unconscious led not only to the exploration of new artistic strategies but also to the exploration of certain fields of subject matter. One such terrain of appropriate imagery was the city at night—an illicit region of mystery and shadow, prostitutes and thugs, libido and crime.

Brassaï made his name as chronicler of the night. He survived as a penurious immigrant artist in Paris by reporting for foreign newspapers and occasionally by illustrating his articles with photographs. In 1930 he began photographing Paris by night, not for a particular article but to capture in permanent form the magic of his nocturnal ramblings in the company of the writers Léon-Paul Fargue, Henry Miller, Raymond Queneau, and other *noctambules*. In 1932 Charles Peignot published sixty-two of his photographs as a book, *Paris de nuit*. This survey of the activities and topography of the capital after dark maintained an editorial balance of high and low life, and while it touched on the underbelly of the city, it did so demurely.

For obvious reasons the seamy side of the Paris night had never been properly photographed. It required the irrepressible spirit and sure eye of this bohemian who moved comfortably in any company to infiltrate the Parisian underworld and stage the incontrovertibly right forms for these roles. A measure of Brassaï's resounding success is that the members of Big Albert's Gang, "la môme Bijou," and all the others are not just examples of a picturesque genre but classic prototypes. As such, they have become the unconscious models for scores of aspiring night crawlers of the twentieth-century stage and screen.

BILL BRANDT
BRITISH,
BORN IN GERMANY
1904–1983

PAGE 47

RAISED IN AN ENGLISH-GERMAN HOUSEHOLD in Germany, Bill Brandt began his photographic career in Man Ray's studio in Paris after a contemplative spell of recuperation in a Swiss sanatorium and some psychoanalytical investigation in Freud's Vienna. When he settled permanently in London around 1930, he shed his Continental past and quickly became the preeminent English photographer of his generation. His portraits are among the most striking of the period, and his extended meditation on the nude is more richly inventive than any comparable group of contemporary works. Despite these achievements, Brandt remains best known for his early work, which records his impressions of his adopted country.

BRASSAI
(GYULA HALÁSZ)

Big Albert's Gang,
Place d'Italie, c.1932

Gelatin silver print

9¼ x 6½ inches



1987.1100.151 © Gilberte Brassai

BILL BRANDT

Soho Bedroom, 1936

Gelatin silver print

9 1/8 x 7 3/4 inches



1987.1100.77

“Impression” is perhaps the wrong word, for the connotation is fleeting and variable, whereas many of Brandt’s photographs of the thirties were reenactments of images he had carried in his mind’s eye since childhood. Characteristically stark and economical, Brandt’s graphic style as well as his choice of subject were informed by the illustrations in British books and by the British and German poster art he very much appreciated as a youth.

When Brandt recognized an event, character, site, or scene as a peculiarly accurate realization of his vision of English life, he asked either the original “performers” or members of his family to reenact the tableau before his camera. There was nothing arch or self-conscious in this recycling of notions absorbed as a child; the photographer’s method was more indirect and stealthy. The power of Brandt’s imagery is rooted in his uncanny aptitude for framing only the essentials of a given scene, in much the way we retain a single resonant image from the tangled skein of a significant dream.

Soho Bedroom is hard to improve upon. The composition, with its central corner splice of black and white, could not be simpler. The light is just sufficient to pick out the lovers and the bed, and the only thing we might think superfluous—the spray of flowers—is in fact precisely the glancing detail that catches in our mind.

BERENICE ABBOTT

AMERICAN

b. 1898

PAGE 49

THE SEEMINGLY RANDOM MOVEMENT of human beings in the city—their unitary positions in the ceaseless round of life—is deftly evoked in Berenice Abbott’s photograph from an elevated New York subway platform. It gives the atomization of social activity a visual form as apt and casually devastating as Tristan Tzara’s contemporary poem “Approximate Man,” in which these lines appear: “we leave with those leaving arrive with those arriving/leave with those arriving arrive when the others leave.”

Abbott knew Tzara and others of the European avant-garde, for she had lived briefly in Berlin prior to moving to Paris, where she worked closely with Man Ray before establishing herself as an independent and successful portrait photographer. When Abbott returned to the United States on the *Mauretania* in 1929, it was as an American expatriate steeped in European visions. One of these was, of course, that New York was the most energized, quintessentially modern city in the world.



1987.1100.156

BERENICE ABBOTT

*The El at Columbus Avenue
and Broadway, 1929*

Gelatin silver print

5 7/8 x 8 inches

This photograph represents the moment of transition when the photographer, fresh off the boat, saw New York through European eyes. The angled overhead view with its spatial incongruities and the search for meaning in chance relationships were abandoned by Abbott soon thereafter. In the thirties she proceeded to photograph New York architecture in the straightforward plain style characteristic of (and necessary to) documentary pursuits. It is with this important work and the humane and historical vision it embodies that the photographer is usually identified.

Like her extraordinary Parisian portraits and her later scientific photographs, *The El at Columbus Avenue and Broadway* proves that its maker is inordinately equipped to interpret diverse aspects of the modern world with a camera. That she elected not to pursue the range of interests manifest in this stylish and intellectually pregnant picture was certainly related to the American attitudes toward photography she met upon her homecoming on the eve of the Depression.

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ
AMERICAN,
BORN IN HUNGARY
1894–1985

PAGE 51

IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE a world without the jingles, blurbs, and glosses that furnish our existence as ineluctably as motel-room decor. Yet it was only in the last half of the nineteenth century that visual advertising began to approach the ubiquity of today, and only in the early years of this century that artists frequently found advertisements useful for their purposes. “Prospectuses posters catalogues,” Guillaume Apollinaire wrote in 1913, “sing poetry for today.”

The effect of *Dubo, Dubon, Dubonnet* depends in large part upon André Kertész’s sensitivity to the poetry available in the advertisements papered on a boulevard wall and attached to a sidewalk bench. A.M. Cassandre’s famous poster for the aperitif plays alliteratively upon the breakdown of the product’s name: Dubo (*du beau*, “beautiful”), Dubon (*du bon*, “good”), Dubonnet. This blithe patter appears in a bold collage across the top of the picture, providing a jaunty refrain for the solitary woman seated below. Absorbed in her thoughts, she is as oblivious to this cheery message as to the inviting smile of the top-hatted gigolo at her shoulder. Kertész saw these ironies and in the same instant knew that the pedestrian departing the poignant scene should not be allowed to make his getaway.

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ

Dubo, Dubon, Dubonnet,
1934

Gelatin silver print

9³/₈ x 7¹/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.7

**HENRI
CARTIER-BRESSON**

*Barrio Chino, Barcelona,
1933*

Gelatin silver print

13⁹/₁₆ x 9¹/₄ inches



1987.1100.125

**HENRI
CARTIER-BRESSON**

FRENCH

b. 1908

PAGE 52

IN PHOTOGRAPHY, as in any skill or art, there may come a moment when, after much application and training, the individual finally hits his stride. Then, like a runner whose effort seems ecstasy, the photographer is possessed of limitless resources. With luck and vigilance this state of grace may continue for some time. Yet for Henri Cartier-Bresson the momentous transition into greater knowledge and sureness occurred almost at the outset, after little application and less training. What is more, he had three extraordinary years of grace—1932, 1933, and 1934—when it seemed that no subject matter was too dull or farfetched for his sharp pictorial query to probe its inmost ambiguities and larger consequences.

The relation of the sleeping fruit vendor to the graffito on the wall in *Barrio Chino, Barcelona* is a visual conundrum with several possible interpretations. Whatever private speculations Cartier-Bresson had about its meaning, he saw at once that the resemblance of the drawn head to the real one was remarkable and that in his picture their juxtaposition would remain endlessly enigmatic.

WALKER EVANS

AMERICAN

1903–1975

PAGE 54

WALKER EVANS SET OUT TO BE A WRITER on the model of Gustave Flaubert. He brought to photography the same intention, which was to create content in a plausible reality composed of selected revelatory details concisely described. His analytical method aimed not at scientific but human truths, and his mature pictures are dissembling in the subtlest way. His classic, plain style would have us believe that the meaning he found in the precise identification of his subject would have been there without his picture of it.

This photograph is one of the earliest in which Evans succeeded at his task. It is not as resolved in its structure as the pictures he would soon produce, but its message is essentially clear. Cradled in the warmth of a day at an amusement park and described in the specifics of wristwatches, suspenders, and other fashionable accoutrements of the time, the content lies *within* what we are given to see. The true crux of Evans's picture, like the focus of the couple's attention, is private—and probably as sensual and embracing as the effect of the cooling breeze.

WALKER EVANS

Coney Island, 1928

Gelatin silver print

8 x 5¹³/₁₆ inches



1987.1100.110



1987.1100.75

HELEN LEVITT

Three Kids on a Stoop,
1940

Gelatin silver print

6⁵/₁₆ x 9 inches

HELEN LEVITT
AMERICAN

PAGE 55

LIKE HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON, Helen Levitt practiced photography with a small hand camera in the street. She made tender depictions of ordinary people talking, playing, and otherwise going about the routine business of life in New York. What makes the photographs exceptional is that they reveal to those who will look the timeless and profound human meanings of commonplace attitudes and situations. Her photography is metaphorical, but it is so intuitive and light-handed as to seem positively artless.

Levitt's photographs and the way of seeing they embody are the subject of an eloquent essay by her friend James Agee. Although he hesitated to discuss individual pictures for fear of curtailing future interpretations, his prose is in fact a perfect accompaniment to Levitt's pictures, and hardly clips their imaginative wings. His acute insights only inspire further looking. He had this to say about *Three Kids on a Stoop*: "In their relative postures, and attitudes toward their masks, the three children are a definitive embodiment of the first walk into the world's first morning."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author warmly thanks Ellen Handy, Joan Holt, Colta Ives, Christopher Phillips, Joel Snyder, and John Waddell for their critical readings of the text. Christopher Phillips also generously shared his factual knowledge, in particular the unpublished research that informs the note on Charles Sheeler.

We are grateful to the William H. Lane Foundation for permission to reproduce the image on page 22, and to Gilberte Brassai for the image on page 46.

In the interest of direct communication we have spared the general reader notes and bibliographical references. Those who seek further information may consult *The New Vision*, to be published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1989.

This publication is dedicated to John Waddell, who so well understands the value of the insights these pictures proffer.

M.M.H.

FRONT COVER Upper left: Florence Henri, French, born in America, 1895–1982. *Femme aux cartes*, 1930. 11 × 8¹/₆ inches. 1987.1100.85. Upper right: Lucia Moholy, British, born in Czechoslovakia, 1899, or László Moholy-Nagy. *Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy*, 1925–26. 10 × 7¹/₈ inches. 1987.1100.69. Lower left: Lucia Moholy, *Portrait of Franz Roh*, 1926. 4⁷/₁₆ × 3¹/₈ inches. 1987.1100.105. Lower right: Wanda Wulz, Italian, b. 1903. *Io + Gatto [I and Cat]*, 1932. 11¹/₆ × 9¹/₈ inches. 1987.1100.123. Gelatin silver prints

INSIDE FRONT COVER (detail) Anonymus. *Two Minute Silence, Armistice Day [London]*, November 11, 1918. 1987.1100.124. INSIDE BACK COVER (detail) Leni Riefenstahl, German, b. 1902. *Calisthenics, 1936 Olympic Games, Berlin*. 1987.1100.94. Gelatin silver prints