

VASA 2023 E-CATALOG



VASA EXHIBITION
JOURNAL on IMAGES and CULTURE
VIDEO / FILM SERIES

VASA : center for media studies

ABOUT VASA



This publication, provided free to an international audience, was made possible by VASA staff and supporters.

The e-catalog is designed as an interactive internet based publication. The content of this publication is linked to the exhibitions, essays, interviews, and video/film series on the VASA site (<http://vasa-project.com>). All images and texts are under © of the author / artist / VASA.

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VASA is an online center for media studies. The VASA mission is to provide an internet platform for disseminating the work of theorist and image makers on a global scale. The VASA community shares an interest in media studies, photography, film/video and sound.

To meet its mission, VASA supports online curated exhibitions; film/video screenings; the Journal on Images and Culture (VJIC); On Photography conversations and other programs.

VASA was founded in July of 2009 and is directed by its founder Roberto Muffoletto.

VASA curators, editors, design and production team and contributors are all volunteers. VASA hosts no ads, is not supported by grants or sells anything.

VASA is a non-profit making organization. VASA Membership is free.

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Photography

Lead Curators

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 Rui Goncalves Cepeda
 (Portugal/UK)
 Igor Manko (Ukraine/Germany)
 Sandeep Biswas (India)
 Stefanie Zorzi (Italy/Austria)
 Małgorzata Wakuluk (Poland)

Invited Curators

Lara Ciarabellini (Italy/Brazil)
 Andrea Motta (Greece)
 Sinyagur (Ukraine)
 Paula Scamparini (Brazil)
 Larry Chatman (USA)
 Kyunghee Lee (South Korea)
 Ximena Echague (Belgium)
 Michaela Bosakova (Slovakia)
 Judith Rodriguez (Argentina)
 Sabine Kutt (USA)

Video/Film Series (invited)

Miha Colner (Slovenia)
 Carla Della Beffa (Italy)
 Christian Gold-Kurz (Austria)

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The *VASA Exhibitions* program presents the work of established and emerging artists in photography, video, digital media, and sound arts.

The *Journal on Images and Culture* publishes occasional papers that develop a theme or position. Papers draw from theoretical and research manuscripts, visual dialogs, video and sound works that offer significant perspectives.

The *Video/Film Series* is designed to stream an artist(s) work or to explore a theme. All film/videos are archived when possible.

The *Artist and Author Index* provides a list of all artists with links to their individual projects in this publication.

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The illustrations are linked to the artists' online exhibitions. The catalog also provides excerpts from the essays and screen grabs of video pages linked to the corresponding online essay and video/film.

VASA EXHIBITIONS



VASA ONLINE EXHIBITION PROGRAM
hosts the work of established and emerging artists
in sound, photography, and the digital media arts

VASA : center for media studies

Graziano Bartolini*Italy***Ethnographies of Complex Societies***Curator: Stefania Zorzi*

“I was a fish, a field of strawberries, fruit to be placed in baskets for sale in supermarkets, the keyboard of a piano. Then I was also the pliers of a blacksmith, the proscenium of a theatre and the drill of a dentist. The dough of a pizza, the paint of a painter, the trowel of a bricklayer, the leather of a pair of shoes. I was all these things and more, or I just identified with them, while the women and men who told me their stories a little bit at a time didn’t pay any attention to me. And from those moments, from an element of disturbance, I felt myself transformed into a visual instrument able to find complicity in those eyes that sometimes looked at me in passing and sometimes tried to ignore me. I was there, intrusive, maybe a little. It surely touched me to hear stories of lives, linked by a common thread, that are here now, are part of us, of our present, and will be part of our future. Then, only then, I began to photograph, to look at them through that rectangle where, in my opinion, we need to be able to find the right balance between what is inside and what we decide to leave out. I also told them about my life, maybe luckier because I don’t travel the world, forced, like them, to look for a little work to feed my daughters. But maybe, exactly as I felt inside myself during this experience about life and photography, to continue to have the certainty that meeting and knowing what we think is different from ourselves, makes us more aware, respectful and tolerant. Even richer. Of priceless wealth. That fills the heart, first of all.”

Iwony Suszyckiej*Poland***Histerium***Curator: Małgorzata Wakuluk*

In modern medicine, hysteria is classified as neurotic disorder. It is characterized by, among others, increased emotionality, aberration or personality changes. Increasingly, it is called dissociation or conversion. Hysteria has been perceived as a burdensome female disease since the beginning of time. Often called the “wandering uterus or madness of the uterus”, it was supposed to make the patient’s normal functioning unappealable and unequivocal. The negative connotation of the term “You hysteric “ is invariably an invective in our society to this day.

The presented material undermines these negative connotations of the changeability of the female psyche. The author puts out a hypothesis, that it is this innate psychodynamics that enables women to face the challenges of the modern world. The sensitivity of feminine nature often perfectly matches the expectations put on modern woman. Nowadays, a woman is forced to juggle the roles of mother, wife, caretaker of our dwellings fire , and often also, plays a the role of a pawn on the chessboard of the modern labor market. This latter, in particular, very easily feeds on hysterical predispositions. Where the “theatricality” of hysteria, described by Hippocrates, enables women to take up roles and positions previously reserved only for the opposite sex.

Gian Luca Groppi*Italy***Tributo All'Inespresso***Curator: Stefania Zorzi*

“**My life** was enriched and accompanied by writers, thinkers, who had a strong influence on my growth.

I have long felt the need to pay homage to those who, among them, put an end to their existence ahead of time. So the need arose in me to research, collect, archive and transform, through meticulous research work, their history and their thoughts, creating new images for the present and the future.

Thus was born a series of symbolic portraits, suggestions of lives and emotions, now lost, which are inspired by parts of their works, biographies or, even, from the very moment of death.

The reflection, however, stops not so much on this final act, but, rather, on the twofold thought of how, on the one hand, this extreme gesture has deprived us of their still “unspoken” work, making us orphans, and, on the other, how much instead, they felt they had nothing more to say, letting their intelligence and talent be overwhelmed.

Work still in progress.”

Anna Tomaka*Poland***Don't Deaf-y Me***Curator: Małgorzata Wakuluk*

We, who live in a world full of sounds on a daily basis, often cannot even imagine that for many people this world is inaccessible and their everyday life is a series of difficulties and misunderstandings.

Anna Tomaka decided to tell us about it. In her photographic project, under the rather significant title “Don’t call me deaf”, she brings us to the world of the heroes of her story with great tenderness and attention. But not only theirs. Also her own. Ania was born with profound bilateral hearing loss. From the age of two, she wore hearing aids, so who but she could tell us about the everyday life of deaf people. Her story is the quintessence of the truth about their lives and an act of great courage that she was able to open up to us a world that I have the impression that we cannot fully understand.

The heroines and heroes of this story also showed great courage. And not only when they decided on a difficult cochlear implant surgery, which is always associated with even more complicated rehabilitation. We also find their courage in the fact that they decided to open up to us and show a fragment of their real life, thus giving us a chance to better understand the problem that so often goes unnoticed by us in our daily rush.

Thus, they were also a great strength for the author of the exhibition, so that she could talk about it publicly. Without the shame that often accompanies it.

Małgorzata Wakuluk*Poland***Touch Untouchables***Curator: Roberto Muffoletto*

“Caste discrimination can be described as ‘discrimination based on work and descent’, meaning that because of the occupation or the family a person is born into, they are socially excluded, economically deprived and subject to violence and abuse. This is a socially constructed system, but unlike class discrimination where there is some potential for mobility, this is fixed by birth and perpetuated through many generations. (...)

Until the adoption of the constitution of independent India, the untouchables were subjected to various types of harassment, the severity of which increased depending on the region as you moved from north to south of the country. For example, the untouchables were allowed to live only in separate places (city suburbs), they were forbidden to enter temples, schools and use wells used by members of higher castes. Touching them was considered impure and therefore required a cleansing ritual. An Untouchable can not ascend to a higher caste within his lifetime; Untouchables have to marry fellow Untouchables and can not eat in the same room or drink from the same well as a higher caste member.”

Bruce Jackson

USA

El Paso*Curator: Roberto Muffoletto*

Public murals are very much in fashion in the northern U.S. these days. Mural Arts Philadelphia has produced more than 4,000 murals to cover graffiti and decorate blank walls. Town councils and public organizations commission them, as do neighborhood associations and art galleries. But the murals in Secundo Barrio have deeper roots than any murals I've seen in the north. They're not current public art fashion. They are grounded in a deep Mexican mural tradition: think Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The tradition is much older than that: it existed in Olmec Mexico, well before the Christian Era. Some of the El Paso murals are as bright and sharp as the day they were completed; others show the effects of time and weather and the mischief of graffiti taggers. Whatever their condition, the murals in Secundo Barrio feel embedded; the murals elsewhere in the U.S. seem applied.

Whatever their condition, the murals in Secundo Barrio feel embedded; the murals elsewhere in the U.S. seem applied.

Sarah Jabbari*Iran***The Forgotten Empire***Curator: Sandeep Biswas*

Iran (also called Persia) is an ancient land with no independence day, as it has existed for thousands of years throughout history as a country with political borders. The Zoroastrian Iran gradually turned Islamic after the collapse of the Sassanian Empire to the Arab Muslims in the 7th A.D. However, despite the change of religion, Iranians held on to their cultural elements rooted in Zoroastrianism. The Persian language, Persian literature, Persian calendar, Persian art and architecture, and Persian Sufism are some of the famous Iranian heritage which has kept its deep-rooted Zoroastrian essence.

However, the seizure of power by the Islamists in 1979 led to the collapse of a 2500-year-old monarchy, brought Iran into a new scene. The Islamic law's imposition on the nation led to national celebrations as a form of protest against the Islamic government. This is while more and more Iranians lose their interest and belief in Islam, seek their Iranian identity, and shout the slogan "The Iranian Republic" instead of the "Islamic Republic" in their protests. This transformation has created more sensitivity towards Iranian identity for the Islamists and made a visible Islam-Iran dichotomy.

Anna Majewska*Poland***We Are Waiting***Curator: Małgorzata Wakuluk*

We live with a subjective feeling that the processes of aging, passing away and leaving in this world, are not and will never actually will be ours. We tend to lie about the course of events and turn our heads away from that topic. As if it didn't concern us nor our relatives.

Nor, the progress of medicine (thanks to which, starting from the end of the 19th century, the average human life expectancy has been systematically increasing, - according WHO - the population of pour 85 year olds will soon triple in numbers), this does not change the fact that the last straight of our lives is a happy one. We tend to conjure fate and feed ourselves on the world of music videos and advertisements, in which mostly fulfilled and happy life is promoted, and where old age, illness and death practically do not occur. Ultimately, we cannot escape the fundamental .. truth. That is why it is so important not to distort the image of old age, which in reality is often full of loneliness, depression, dementia, infirmity, fear of the inevitably approaching end, and finally - last but not least - poverty, exclusion, humiliation and huge lack of respect or at least a little dignity. I think this needs to be talked about. But one needs to know, who to do it best. This inescapable truth should be handled with sensitivity and great respect. With elusiveness, empathy and an open heart.

Alena Grom, Igor Manko*Ukraine***Inscriptions / Writings On The Wall***Curator: Roberto Muffoletto*

© Alena Grom

Igor Manko photographed images of light reflections before February 24, 2022.

They were too good not to take pictures of, but looked incomprehensible like Arabic script. And sinister, too.

“Their ominous meaning transpired only with the beginning of a full-fledged Russian invasion. Still, they needed interpretation. They could be translations of what I thought were just weird whims of light.”

Alena Grom documented war atrocities in the de-occupied territories near Kyiv.

Some of her photos show the inscriptions left on walls, doors, and fences — by both civilians and combatants. Warnings (“Shooting if restricted area crossed”), hope (“Never give up”), or simply information (“Mines not cleared”).

Different but similar in nature. Igor’s work focuses on light reflections as a possible language waiting for a voice, while Alena’s work has a focus on voices full of warnings and hope. Their similarities may be seen in light of language. While their dis-similarities are found in intention. Igor refers to the reflections as an incomprehensible language with no known intention, whereas Grom’s images are clearly a language looking for a reader to speak the voice of the authors.

JOURNAL ON IMAGES AND CULTURE



The JOURNAL's aim is to publish outstanding theoretical and research manuscripts, visual dialogs, video and sound works that offer significant contributions to current scholarship and creative efforts

VASA : center for media studies

Alexandra Guerman*Australia*

The initial conversations with VASA presented a unique opportunity to speak to an international audience on the topic of Australian photography. There could have been many ways to approach this broad subject, but to me personally, it felt fitting to introduce the voice of First Nations artists and their unique perspectives as rightful owners of this land. I believe, knowledge and understanding of Indigenous contemporary art, with decolonial and sovereignty focus, outside of Australia is very limited. Therefore, I chose to present contemporary artists that address Australian history and the ongoing effect of colonialism, using both personal and political approach. In the following entries I will be discussing works by Brenda L. Croft, Archie Moore and Daniel Boyd, who use historical archives to interrogate postcolonial discourses. By changing the context of already existing photographs, these artists fundamentally alter the purpose and meaning of these images.

In order to appreciate the meaning of contemporary works and the changed context it is important to understand the original intent of the archival images. To do that, this journal theme will start at the beginning of colonisation period in Australia, presenting long established myths together with more recent discoveries of hidden facts. The archives made by colonial ethnographers at the beginning of twentieth century, the time when overwhelming consensus was that Aboriginal people of Australia were a dying race, and photography was one way of preserving and documenting their image before the inevitable extinction.

*Colonial to Contemporary Photography in Australia (A Thematic Thread)***The Making and Breaking of Image**

Throughout the threads I will be using terms such as First Nations people, Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people interchangeably to refer to original owners of this land. In saying that, there are over 500 different Aboriginal nations in Australia, each with their own distinctive name, language and territory.

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When people who are not familiar with Australia and its politics get asked about this country, the conversation is often skewed towards the description of

its people as white anglicized nation of very athletic yet laid back larrikins. It is often coupled with images of vast empty spaces as well as flora and fauna that is out to get you at every possible turn. It is also perceived as multicultural society that prides itself on welcoming people from all walks of life. However, not many can explain the reason why the images of white Australians spring to mind so readily. One can argue, it is due to 70 plus years of “White Australia” immigration policy, which was aimed to forbid people of non-European ethnic origin from immigrating to Australia.

The other reason lies in the hidden away, and the dispossessed original owners of this land that were considered by the colonising governments to be only equal to flora and fauna until 1967. Since the invasion and white occupation, there has never been a treaty, unlike in other colonial countries such as Canada and New Zealand, nor is there an existence of First Nations voice in Australian constitution. Later this year, Australians will vote in a referendum to decide whether to include Aboriginal people in the constitution of their own country! Aboriginal people are not currently recognised or included in the constitution. The Citizenship Act of 1949 gave all Australians citizenship, but laws of specific Australian states (...) superseded these rights. Only a small fraction of the Aboriginal people were granted voting rights, but these were often linked to whether they had employment, if they were literate and could sign a waiver stating that they wouldn't teach their children Aboriginal culture or language.



© Daniel Boyd, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here*, 2006

Alexandra Guerman

Australia

“In knowing we control and in controlling we know” Foucault’s critical theory power-knowledge has been instrumental in the construction of knowledge through classification and scientific study of humans, which was inextricably linked with colonialism and colonial dominance over the ‘other’. The scientific method developed by Anthropological discipline known as Ethnography, enabled to study and classify people that were different to the Western form.

In the early twentieth century Polish-born Bronislaw Malinowski developed a way of explaining social structure of ‘others’ by systemic observation, claiming it can only achieve scientific value if it is “candid and above board.” However, the father of modern anthropology Malinowski did not separate himself from inherent European ethnocentrism as evidenced by his published diary, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Routledge 1967). Ethnographers thereafter faced the same shortcomings, as they failed to neutralise their own connection to colonial powers, making their findings less than objective, and easier to feed back into the pre-existing assumption and stereotypes of the “Primitive Culture”, strengthening colonial agenda and justifying the expansion of colonial powers.

The camera became instrumental during this period aiding the process of classification and observation. “Everything was a subject to scientific scrutiny including the study of human beings.” There were different types of photographers operating in the new colony at the time, ranging from amateur “week-end” anthropologists, professional ethnographers

Photography as Classification and Creation of Indigenous ‘Other’

Colonial to Contemporary Photography in Australia (A Thematic Thread)



© Daniel Boyd, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here*, 2006

working in the field and salon portraiture in the style of cart de viste. All of whom felt the urgency to document the “dying race” before its finite extinction. The general belief that the dying race was a natural process, was predominantly based on social Darwinism notion of “survival of the fittest.” Central to this, was the theory of evolution that regarded non-European races as infantile and at the beginning of their development along the lineal historic axis. They were at a starting point, whilst the Europeans waited patiently at the pinnacle of their intellectual, moral and physical development, having gone through their

prehistoric and proto historic periods, and come out as superior race. These beliefs and attitude justified the techniques used to document and photograph the Indigenous peoples as scientific specimens.

“On the one hand, the reality of the photograph is considered largely unproblematic, allowing “transparent” access to subject-matter; on the other, the language of the image is regarded as conventional, highly constructed, its understanding determined by Western culture.”

The photographers employed the Huxley and Lamprey methods in which the subject is photographed next to measuring devices demonstrating the subject’s anatomical measurements. Subjects were photographed from all angles, their clothes stripped off, analysed, and prodded for scientific research. “The Aboriginal subjects had no advantage to gain through this scientific research and it only served to put them into a subservient relationship with the observers.” They were identified in generic terms of their age, race and gender, their personal information omitted from the caption. When identified, it was by allocated European names such as the photographs of a young Australian Aboriginal woman titled “Ellen.”

A major historical survey exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), *Photograph and Australia 2015*, presented key moments of photographic medium through history in Australia from colonial period to present. It examines the way the photograph has been used to build and question national identity.

Robert Hirsch

USA

On the night of July 22-23, 1944, Red Army soldiers came upon the Majdanek concentration camp, much to the relief of the inmates. Captured virtually intact, soldiers liberated just under 500 prisoners and occupied the nearby Polish city of Lublin on July 24, 1944. Soviet officials invited journalists to inspect the camp for evidence of the atrocities that had occurred there. What Soviet and Polish researchers uncovered and documented was quickly reinforced by the investigative work conducted by others outside of the USSR, definitively shaping our understanding of the Nazi genocide. While still largely unfamiliar to most Americans, the liberation of Majdanek was one of the most significant moments in the history of World War II and the Holocaust. Even within the SS, Majdanek's personnel were known for their savagery. Historian Doris Bergen describes Majdanek's SS contingent as "sadists who enjoyed killing children in front of their mothers and forcing the prisoners to engage in deadly 'sports.'" In 1943, following resistance in the Treblinka and Sobibor camps as well as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the SS decided to murder all Jews located in the Majdanek area. On November 3, 1943 over 18,000 Jews were assembled and then shot dead outside the camp. Throughout the massacre, the camp's loudspeakers played music to drown out the sounds of the slaughter. The camp had some 227 structures in all, including seven gas chambers and two wooden gallows, placing it among the largest of Nazi concentration camps. It is estimated that between 95,000 and 130,000 people were murdered there. The camp's capture, before

Jewish Photographic Perspectives: Liberation*Thoughts on Photography (A Thematic Thread)*

© Arnold E. Samuelson. Liberated prisoners at Ebensee, May 7, 1945

the Germans could destroy it, provided devastating verification of the Nazi's extermination system and amplified the call for justice in the cemetery that was Europe. Majdanek remains the best preserved evidence of the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps.

This belated information was critical as major figures in the American leadership, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and key cabinet members, agreed that maintaining public support of the

war effort required downplaying any thoughts that war was about the Jews. No Allied bombers were sent to Auschwitz even though Allied raids were targeting the German chemical plant IG Farben, which was located just 4 miles (6 kilometers) from the death camp and relied on Auschwitz prisoners for slave labor. Excuses included imprecise bombing techniques and the killing of inmates. However, the underlying reason can be traced to widespread antisemitism in the U.S. and the U.K., which was fanned by Nazi propaganda that argued that Jews were controlling the Allied war effort.

Leading up to US involvement in World War II, American antisemites, such as Father Charles Coughlin and the American Christian Front, along with congressional leaders and celebrities like Charles Lindbergh, followed the Nazi example by advocating for the boycott of Jewish businesses by spreading lies that Jewish business people were forcing Christians out of business, and advocating violence against Jews. Today, antisemites urge boycotting Israel as a first step to eradicating Israel's existence and making the Mideast Jew-Free.

(...) After being liberated by the Soviets from Lichtewerden in Czechoslovakia, Bela Braver recalled:

"The Russians entered and we were in such a condition (bones without flesh) that no one moved, no one went out. We did not laugh, we were not happy, we were apathetic – and the Russians came. A general came in, he was Jewish. He told us that he was delighted, as this was the first camp in which he had found people still alive"

Robert Hirsch

USA

The Holocaust did not end in 1945 with the liberation of Europe. After fighting their way into Nazi-occupied territory, Allied and Soviet forces discovered and liberated concentration camps, freeing more than two million Europeans, including 250,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors. However, it was apparent that the loose alliance of the Allies and the Soviets would collapse as their economic and political systems were incompatible and in competition. The Allies were immediately concerned with how to govern, rehabilitate, and to bring some form of justice to the defeated Axis powers in Europe and Japan as well as forming a postwar alliance against Communism. Plus, both sides were recruiting Nazi scientists to work for them. Therefore, Jewish concerns took a back seat even though life for many European Jews was a crime scene within a massive graveyard, often with no place to call a protected home as their entire world had been completely destroyed.

Postwar Nuremberg Trials

The Allies and Soviets were confronted with what to do with the 8.5 million members of National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) and their millions of collaborators who participated in robbing, torturing, and murdering two out of every three European Jews, wiping out entire centuries-old communities. The Nazis killed so many Jews that the global Jewish population is still demographically lower today than it was in 1939. To address the issue of justice, international, domestic, and military courts conducted trials of tens of thousands of accused war criminals.

The most well-known of the war crimes trials is that of 22 leading German officials before the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg Germany. This trial began on November 20, 1945. The IMT delivered its verdict on October 1, 1946, convicting 19 of the defendants and acquitting three. Of those convicted, 12 were sentenced to death, including Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, Hans Frank, General Alfred Jodl, Alfred Rosenberg, Julius Streicher, and Joachim von Ribbentrop. The IMT sentenced three defendants to life imprisonment and four to prison terms ranging from ten to 20 years. In addition to the Nuremberg IMT, the Allied powers established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo in 1946, which tried leading Japanese officials. Holland set up a special court where more than 65,000 accused collaborators stood trial that stripped some of certain civil rights, sent some to prison, and condemned others to death.



© Henri Cartier-Bresson. Gestapo Informer Recognized by a Woman She Had Denounced, 1945

Jewish Photographic Perspectives: The Nuremberg Trials

Photography and the Holocaust: Then and Now (A Thematic Thread)

Chief Nuremberg prosecutor, Justice Robert Jackson has been tragically prophetic when he wrote that the Nuremberg defendants were “living symbols of racial hatred, terrorism, and violence, and of the arrogance and cruelty of power.” These continue to be the consistent tribulations that we confront today. As Russian dictator Vladimir Putin’s invasion of the Ukraine makes abundantly clear, the world has not changed as much as those who conducted the Nuremberg trials would have hoped for.

Although efforts to bring to justice to the perpetrators of Nazi-era crimes continued into the twenty-first century, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators were never tried or punished. Often, those who were convicted received light sentences that were later reduced. The post-war German government and bureaucracy was filled with former Nazis. Nevertheless, the postwar trials did set important legal precedents. Today, international and domestic tribunals seek to uphold the principle that those who commit wartime atrocities should be brought to justice. Nevertheless, what was still absent was the ability of Jews to present and represent themselves on the world stage as the images utilized in the Nuremberg Trials were made by those outside of the tribe.

The prosecutors set out to prove Nazi Germany’s crimes through the Germans’ own words and testimony. For example, Eugen Stähle (...0 stated: “The fifth commandment: Thou shalt not kill, is no commandment of God but a Jewish invention.” The foundation of their case was based on thousands of such German documents the Allies seized.

Robert Hirsch

USA

Jewish Photographic Perspectives: Displaced Persons camps, Immigration and Emigration*Photography and the Holocaust: Then and Now (A Thematic Thread)*

After Germany capitulated in May 1945, there were more than eight million “displaced” persons forced to leave their home country. To address the refugee problem generated by World War II, the Allies established Displaced Persons (DP) camps in the Allied-occupied zones of Austria, Germany, and Italy. The first occupants of these camps were concentration camp survivors who had been liberated by the Allies on German soil. Initially, conditions in these camps were extremely harsh as many of the DP camps were former concentration camps and German army camps. Survivors continued to find themselves locked behind barbed wire, subsisting on inadequate amounts of food and suffering from shortages of clothing, medicine, and supplies. Often, Jewish survivors suffered additional trauma because they were held in the same camps as German civilians and/or Nazi perpetrators. In the summer of 1945, President Harry Truman asked former U.S. immigration commissioner Earl Harrison to tour the DP camps. Harrison was shocked by what he found and informed Truman: “We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis had treated them, except that we do not exterminate them.” Based on Harrison’s report, the United States established separate camps for Jewish DPs.

By the end of 1946, there were approximately 250,000 Jews living in DP camps. Although the Jewish refugees regarded the camps as a temporary arrangement, and despite the filthy and wretched physical conditions, the enduring survivors took it as a call to action and transformed the DP camps into cul-

tural centers of education, social activity, and renewal. The Jewish DPs set up educational institutions, published more than 70 Jewish newspapers, initiated commemoration projects, and even established theaters and orchestras. It was a first step in coming back to life, a place where Jews could restructure themselves emotionally, politically, and spiritually and find a way forward. Nevertheless, despair persisted. Survivors suffered from the effects of the Holocaust for their entire lives and often passed on their existential angst to the next generations, now known as transgenerational trauma.



Unknown photographer. Prisoners Awaiting Evacuation to a Field Hospital, Wöbbelin, Germany, 1945

Shoah photographs, like those of the FSA Great Depression collection, are not nostalgic or sentimental—they recall traumatic experiences that have been passed on to others. The power and authenticity of Holocaust photographs is in their numbers – over two million Shoah photographs are known to have been collected and identified to some extent. Their communal whole reflects a demented German society that sought to determine Germanness and who gets to claim it. This reflects the phrase the nineteenth-century German nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke popularized: “The Jews are our misfortune,” which was later adopted by the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*.

This is why we save photographs, even of people we do not know, because in the end we share the same fate – dust motes – and photographs act as memorials. That said, viewing these images of the past allows us to recognize the present it produced, and to question the present, therefore, is to question the past. Ashes, bones, ruins, and trauma can be seized as an opening for change, thus turning the past into something that will improve the present.

As William Faulkner wrote in *Requiem for a Nun* (1950): “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Every moment of a person’s past makes up who that individual is—the past lives on within each of us. (...) This is evident in the Shoah photographs that can take one back in time, acting as a lightning bolt, firing up the brain and retrieving feelings and memories, for better and worse, making a case for how past experiences persist and influence the present.

Bruce Jackson

USA

Paul Strand, the greatest of the modernist photographers, was born in New York City in 1890; he died in Orgeval, France, in 1976. His work had profound influence on, among others, Georgia O’Keeffe, Walker Evans, Ansel Adams (who thought he might become a piano player until he met Strand), and Edward Hopper. Strand, Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston were the three photographers most responsible for getting photography accepted as an art form in the United States.

During a two-year stint in Mexico (1933 and 1934), Strand’s aesthetic vision and sense of mission made a critical pivot. It would take him several years to know what to do with it.

He is best known for some of his single images: “Wall Street” (1915) “White Fence” (1916), “Blind Woman” (1916), and “A Family” (1953). They are great images. But they’re not what he, finally, thought his work was really about.

Finding Focus

Louis Hine, one of the first people to use photography to effect social change, was Strand’s first photography teacher, and it was he who introduced Strand to Alfred Stieglitz. In 1907, Hine took his Ethical Culture High School class to Steiglitz’s 291 Gallery, where Strand saw what the best current photographers were up to — on the same walls as Picasso, Braque and others of the European avant-garde. Photography was not only interesting, but it existed in what poet Robert Creeley would later call, that “company”: people who were speaking the same language and discovering that fact when something brought them together and

they heard not cacophony, but harmony or concert. In a 1974 *New Yorker* interview, Strand told Calvin Thomas that the 1913 New York Armory show—1300 works by 300 avant-garde artists—gave him a new understanding of “what a picture consists of, how shapes are related to each other, how spaces are filled, how the whole must have a kind of unity.” Speaking of a photographing trip to Nova



© Paul Strand. Wall Street

Scotia: “I couldn’t have done the rocks without having seen Braque, Picasso, Brancusi. I used a sharper lens. I never went back to soft-focus.” That perception would inform his work for the rest of his life.

“...In 1915,” Strand said, “I really became a photographer. I had been photographing seriously for eight years, and suddenly there came that strange leap into greater knowledge and sureness. I brought a group of my things in to show Stieglitz, and when I opened

“All my books”: Paul Strand’s Arc

On Photography: Paul Strand (A Thematic Thread)

up my portfolio, he was very surprised. I remember he called to Edward Steichen, who was in the back room at ‘291,’ and had him come out and look, too. Stieglitz said, ‘I’d like to show these.’ He also told me that from then on I should think of ‘291’ as my home, and come there whenever I wanted. It was like having the world handed to you on a platter. It was a very great day for me, matching, in a sense, the day that Hine took us to Photo-Secession and I saw the work of those other photographers for the first time.” Stieglitz would give him his first one-man show in 1916 and would devote the final issue of his influential magazine, *Camera Work*, entirely to Strand a year later. (...)

He photographed carefully and deliberately, but he refused to be victim to his negatives. They were starting points. “I’ve always felt you can do anything you want in photography if you can get away with it....” he told Tomkins. “There was one group of three people that should really have been two people. I took the third person out. Retouched him out in the darkroom. I had no great feeling of guilt over that. Of course, I don’t agree with this method of just shooting and shooting and hoping to find something later in the darkroom. I’ve done all sorts of retouching when there’s been a functional reason for doing it, and I crop negatives in the enlarger all the time. In general, I agree with Cartier-Bresson, who says he always used the whole negative. That’s the best way to work. It’s only when you know how to work that way that you have the right to crop. But it’s not a great issue...”

Bruce Jackson

USA

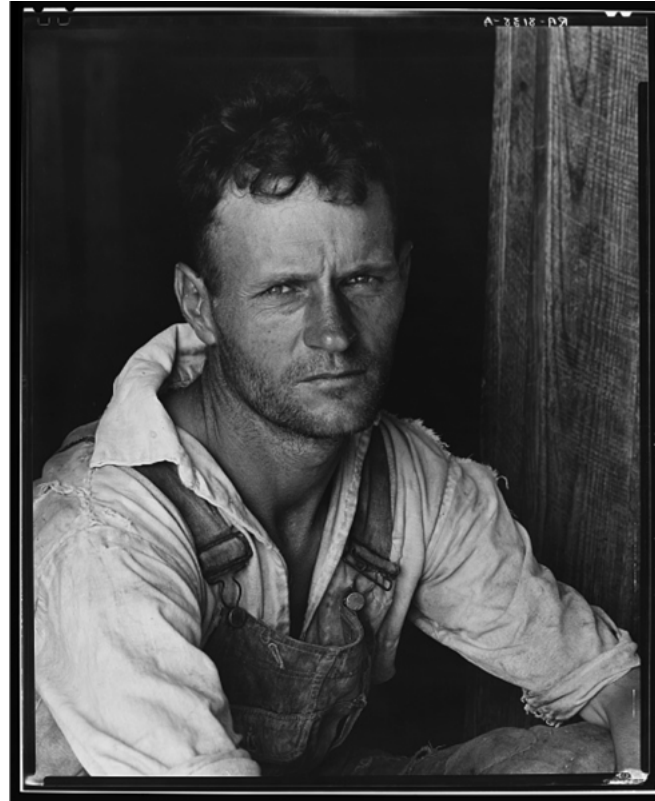
Walker Evans was perhaps the most influential American photographer of the Twentieth century. The work of Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, David Plowden and Diane Arbus is inconceivable without his photographs and vision. “When I first looked at Walker Evans’s photographs,” Robert Frank said, “I thought of something Malraux wrote: ‘To transform destiny into awareness.’ One is embarrassed to want so much for oneself. But, how else are you going to justify your failure and your effort?”

The influence is not limited to photographers. At the opening of the Museum of Modern Art’s 1971 Walker Evans retrospective, Robert Penn Warren spoke of the first time he had seen Evans’s work: “...Staring at the pictures, I knew that my familiar world was a world I had never known. The veil of familiarity prevented my seeing it. Then, thirty years ago, Walker tore aside that veil; he woke me from the torpor of the accustomed.”

I suspect that we all see much of the time in that “torpor of the accustomed,” and that the work of our best artists both energizes and instructs us so we can see our worlds anew. MoMA curator of photography John Szarkowski wrote in his introduction to the 1971 retrospective, “Evans’s pictures have enlarged our sense of the usable visual tradition and have affected the way that we now see not only other photographs, but billboards, junkyards, postcards, gas stations, colloquial architecture, Main Streets, and the walls of rooms.”

“It is difficult to know now with certainty whether Evans recorded the America of his youth, or invent-

ed it,” Szarkowski continued. “Beyond doubt, the accepted myth of our recent past is in some measure the creation of this photographer, whose work has persuaded us of the validity of a new set of clues and symbols bearing on the question of who we are. Whether that work and its judgment was fact or artifice, or half of each, it is now part of our history.” Evans bristled when the word “documentary” was applied to him or his work. “My thought is that



© Walker Evans. Floyd Burroughs, cotton sharecropper. Hale County, Alabama

Walker Evans: Public photographs 1935-1937*On Photography (A Thematic Thread)*

the term ‘documentary’ is inexact, vague, and even grammatically weak, as used to describe a style in photography which happens to be my style,” he told a Yale audience in 1964. He told Leslie Katz that “documentary” was “a very sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear. You have to have a sophisticated ear to receive that word. The item should be documentary style. An example of a literal document would be a police photograph of a murder scene. You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless. Therefore art is never a document, though it certainly can adopt that style.”

Evans frequently said that the major influences on his thought were Flaubert, Baudelaire and Joyce—writers, not painters or photographers. (...) He frequented Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare & Co. bookshop, where Beach offered to introduce him to Joyce. “But I was scared to death to meet him. I wouldn’t do it. He came in, and I left the shop. He was my god. That, too, prevented me from writing. I wanted to write like that or not at all.”

“...I know now that Flaubert’s esthetic is absolutely mine,” he told Leslie Katz. “Flaubert’s method I think I incorporated almost unconsciously, but anyway used in two ways: his realism and naturalism both, and his objectivity of treatment; the non-appearance of author, the non-subjectivity. That is literally applicable to the way I want to use a camera and do. But spiritually, however, it is Baudelaire who is the influence on me.... I consider him the father of modern literature, the whole modern movement, such as it is. Baudelaire influenced me and everybody else too.”

VASA VIDEO / FILM SERIES



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VASA : center for media studies

Alan Teller, Jerri Zbiral

USA

Following the Box

Curator: Roberto Muffoletto

Still from *Following the Box* © Alan Teller, Jerri Zbiral

Almost seventy years ago, towards the end of World War II, a U.S. soldier stationed in rural West Bengal grabbed his Speed Graphic 4x5” press camera, hopped into a jeep and went off into the countryside to photograph. Who was he? Why did he leave his airbase to do that? We have no idea. What we do know is that he created remarkable images—sensitive portraits of villagers, respectful views of temples, documents of everyday life, a few military scenes. And how did a shoe-box full of his beautiful negatives and prints made in India in 1945 end up at an estate sale in suburban Chicago?

Following the Box, initially funded through a Fulbright award, is a mystery story, explored through an art exhibit and a documentary film. The film features interviews with twelve contemporary artists, 10 Indian and two American, who created work specifically inspired by this chance purchase of old photographs half a world away. Their artistic response will be seen in a new exhibit, opening this February in Kolkata, then traveling throughout India and the U.S. The exhibit and film illustrate the point that photographs are both windows to another time and place and mirrors of ourselves and our culture. It is a fascinating cross-cultural exploration, a celebration of the power of art—a visual dialogue between Americans and Indians over time.

time: 37:57 min/sec

Lenore Rinder

USA

People of the Wild Tiger, Monkey Eden, Kagaraj

Curator: Roberto Muffoletto



Still from *People of the Wild Tiger* © Lenore Rinder

My fascination with human/animal conflict over the past ten years has included five filmmaking expeditions to India. As “ground zero” for nature activism; the country inspires me to produce video journals. With each visit, my guide introduces me to an array of people who are grappling with solutions to our species’ myriad of ecological blows against the natural world. We travel deep into forests where only fifty years ago, indigenous villagers lived “cheek to jowl” with tigers and elephants. I gather stories from forest guards, elders, priests, and tribal forest dwellers. The ex-poacher/hunters trust me, and allow me into their lives when they learn I have a deep interest in sharing stories of their struggle to survive. (of course, the large “baksheesh, or bribe, I pay them is helpful, too.) My newest project, *Monkey Eden*, features the endless cycle of these unemployed hunters engaged in the risky business of capturing dangerous, urban monkeys. Recent experimentation with digital, animated cut-outs to compliment the field footage allows me to express my own personal fears, visions and feelings about serious issues. I employ this hybrid form of documentary filmmaking, mixed with graphic imagery, to engage audiences to see and think in new ways. As an artist who values a painterly, personal voice, I desire to create more than purely ethnographic films. Inspired by the dark visions of Surrealists Frida Kahlo and director Guillermo Del Toro, I now create experimental, digital, animated video documentaries, mixed with rare field footage.

time: People of the Wild Tiger 15.00 min/sec

Monkey Eden 12.45 min/sec

Kagaraj 12.45 min/sec

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