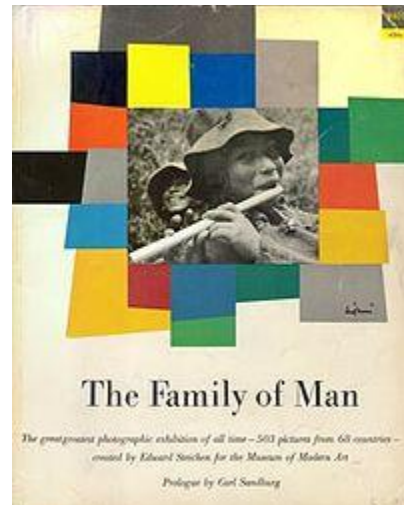


#22 September 2017 *Cameraderie* *The Family of Man* Exhibition: Steichen at MOMA

Soft cover book catalogue of *The Family of Man*, designed by Leo Lionni, (*Piper* photo by Eugene Harris, 1954). First issued for \$1.00 in 1955 by Ridge Press, 4 million have sold and it is still in print.



Who does not remember or know of *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City in 1955—its fame, its world-wide influence, the book? Please, read the Wikipedia story here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Family_of_Man.

Curated by Edward Steichen, the director of MOMA's Department of Photography, the *Exhibition* brought together 503 photos from 68 countries, the work of 273 photographers (there were 163 Americans and 70 Europeans). I have mentioned Steichen repeatedly in these articles—I devoted my article #9 in *Cameraderie*, September 2013, to him. He viewed *The Family of Man* exhibition as the culmination of his life's work.

The Family of Man, despite the gender-insensitivity of its mid-twentieth century framework, and a certain neglect of Eastern and of controversial points of view, was perhaps the greatest photo exhibition ever presented by a major museum until that time. Given that it was presented by an art museum, Steichen fulfilled Alfred Stieglitz's (#2, *Cameraderie*, January 2013) promise that photography would stand equal to painting as an art form.

Dorothea Lange, (#4, *Cameraderie*, March 2013) helped Steichen gather the photographs and Carl Sandburg wrote texts for the *Exhibition*. The *Exhibition* toured the world for many years, and was eventually permanently settled at a museum in Clervaux, Luxembourg, since Steichen was born in Luxembourg. A Clervaux press release stated that "the exhibition was meant as a manifesto for peace and the fundamental equality of mankind, expressed through the humanist photography of the post-war years."

Here is a complete list of the photo categories, in the original order in MOMA's inventory of the *Exhibition*; there was a separate room or area for each topic:

Prologue, Lovers, Marriage, Pregnancy, Childbirth, Nursing Mothers, Births, Mothers and Babies, Children 1, Family Activities, Children 2, Fathers and Sons, Family Groups, Land, Work 1, Work 2, Woman's Work, Adult Play, Classical Music, Jazz and Blues, Dance, Folk Music, Food, Ring Around the Rosy, Relationships, Learning, Death, Religious Expression, Aloneness and Compassion,

Aspirations, Hard Times, Famine, Inhumanities, Revolt, Teens, Man's Judgment, Voting, Government, Faces, Bomb, Couples, Childhood Magic.

Here are a few lines from Sandburg's many texts for the *Exhibition*:

"There is only one man in the world and his name is All Men.

There is only one woman in the world and her name is All Women.

There is only one child in the world and the child's name is All Children."

Steichen's theme was unity and commonality among all humans. In this, the *Exhibition* was a success, but it had an interesting and lasting legacy. If you read through the full Wikipedia article, you will be surprised to see much space is devoted to successor exhibitions. Many of these exhibitions proposed alternative viewpoints for such great exhibitions, focusing on differences, conflicts, and class. Basically, Steichen started a "grand conversation" that continued for many decades. (I will pick up this "grand conversation" in future articles.) Please think about what Steichen's *Exhibition* does and does not say as you look through some of its images. If you own the book, you can browse through it again. Else, go to the following websites to view some of the images and their presentation:

- Review of the *Exhibition* officially opening at Clervaux, together with several images from the *Exhibition*: <http://www.photography-now.com/exhibition/92024>.
- The museum at Clervaux, Luxembourg, showing the presentation of the entire *Exhibition*, permanently housed there: <http://www.destination-clervaux.lu/activities-art-culture/family-man/family-of-man/>.

Several of the photographs I have show in this series of articles were in the *Exhibition*. Here are some that I can remember and find images for:

Dorothea Lange (#4, *Cameraderie*, March 2013):

Migrant Mother, 1936



W. Eugene Smith (#19, *Cameraderie*, June 2017)

The Walk to Paradise Garden, 1946 (back cover image of the *Exhibition* catalog)



Here is a shot from Clervaux, showing a small area of the *Exhibition*. Visible on the upper left is Alfred Eisenstaedt's [future article] *Drum Major*, 1950.



Events like *The Family of Man* are major milestones in the history of photography, stating a point of view about the subject and meaning of photography, and spreading their influence across many ensuing years. Compare the impact of this *Exhibition* to that of the great Armory Show of modern art in 1913 (#6, *Cameraderie*, May 2013).