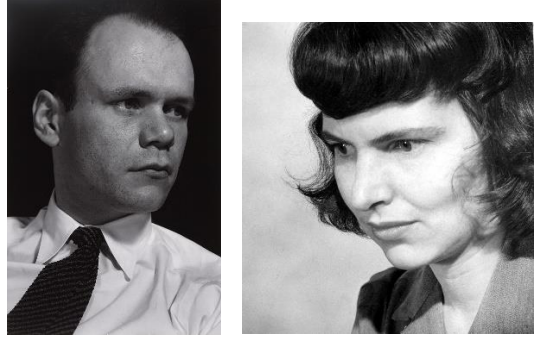


**#56 December 2020 Cameraderie
Beaumont Newhall (1908-93) and Nancy
Newhall(1908-74)**



Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, while active as photographers, were curators, critics, and educators. Their names come up in many of the articles on the photographers I have reported on in this series. For example, in #51 on Brett Weston, June 2020, from the Wikipedia article on Bett Weston:

Brett Weston was credited by photography historian Beaumont Newhall as the first photographer to make negative space the subject of a photograph.

So at last it is the Newhalls turn.

Here is the Wikipedia article on Beaumont Newhall, with quotes from it below:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont_Newhall

Newhall's career at the Museum of Modern Art began in 1935 when he became its librarian. In 1937, he was invited by Alfred Barr Jr., the director of MoMA, to develop the first comprehensive retrospective of photographic works. The exhibition that Newhall mounted was pivotal in securing photography's place within the arts [note that this was also the mission of Alfred Stieglitz (#2, Jan. 2013) and Edward Steichen (#9, Sept. 2013)]. Its accompanying catalog, *The History of Photography*, was the first account of the first 100 years of photographic history that gave equal credit to its technical virtues, as well as its value as an art form.

In 1940, Newhall became the first curator of MoMA's photography department and decisively began collecting for the Museum, starting with the work of László Moholy-Nagy [future article #57]. Newhall married Nancy Wynne, a notable photography critic who worked in his place as curator at MoMA during his service in World War II, in which his rank was First Lieutenant. He was posted to Italy and North Africa as a photo-interpreter of aerials taken over enemy territory, and then returned to America to train others.

He resigned from the Museum in 1947 after he found that Edward Steichen was to direct the Photography Department over him, while he was to [remain to] be curator [Italics mine; evidently he was ticked-off that he did not get the job].

From 1948 [he] was appointed curator of the George Eastman Museum, housed in the former residence of George Eastman, in Rochester, New York, to 1958, and was its director until 1971. While at the Eastman Museum, Newhall was responsible for amassing one of the largest photographic collections in the world. He was joined there by Minor White [#20, July 2017] who took over editorship of *Image*, the magazine Newhall issued from the Museum, which later passed on to Nathan Lyons who turned it into a respected quarterly. Newhall published books through the Museum including Edward Weston's [#1, Oct. 2012] *Daybooks*, co-published with Horizon press; *Photographers on Photography* edited by Lyons; and on Aaron Siskind. He served as an honorary trustee of the Eastman House until his death.

Throughout his career, Newhall taught the history of photography and photography at institutions including the University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology, State University of New York at Buffalo and at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies in Austria.

In his late career after retiring from the George Eastman Museum he was appointed professor at the University of New Mexico in 1972 and named Professor Emeritus in 1984.

Beaumont Newhall died in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on February 26, 1993. He was predeceased by his wife Nancy on July 7, 1974 from injuries she sustained when struck by a falling tree on the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park.

Here are some of Beaumont Newhall's images.

Beaumont Newhall, Edward Weston Looking Out of His Darkroom Window, 1940



I have not studied, nor yet shown in these articles, an image like this—a friendship shot between well-known photographers, and a good composition to boot.

Beaumont Newhall, 1981



I find this architectural shot's perspective both interesting and disturbing, with the heavy dark mass of the building in shadow placed at the top of the frame.

Here is the Wikipedia article on Nancy Newhall, with quotes from it below:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Newhall

In another [article], she argues for the centrality of photography for understanding and teaching American history Newhall became close to photographer Edward Weston during this period, championing his early work and regarding his controversial 1940s work, which juxtaposed still lifes and nudes of considerable beauty and delicacy with wartime items such as gas masks, with some anxiety.

In 1945, Newhall wrote the text for a book of photographs, *Time in New England*, by Paul Strand. The work would begin a new phase for her career, in which she became a vocal proponent and a central pioneer of the genre of oversized photography collections. The best known and most influential of these is *This Is the American Earth*, a collaboration with Ansel Adams, published in 1960. Like Adams, Newhall was involved with the Sierra Club, and wrote often about issues of conservation. Newhall was sometimes accused of political heavy-handedness on that subject—one uncharitable review of *American Earth* calls her prose "so full of Message that there is no room for poetry" (Deevey)—but her explication of the political context and motivation of Adams' work has been important for the Sierra Club and the conservation movement in general.

The Museum of Photographic Arts (MoPA) in San Diego, California's Balboa Park presented *Nancy Newhall: A Literacy of Images*, September 19, 2008 - January 25, 2009.

The following is the link to the exhibit. Please browse around the links near the bottom of the main page to see more information on the Newhalls and the great photographers of their time.

<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/8aa/8aa214.htm>

Here are two of Nancy Newhall's architectural images from her show at MoPA.

Nancy Newhall, Chimayo - The Santuario, New Mexico, 1951

Nancy Newhall, Fire Escapes, 1942



I like these two images for the daring point of view of the church sanctuary and the geometric study of the fire escapes.

Although the Newhalls were active photographers, their main work was in curation, education, and writing, as discussed above. Below, I will show you some related images, but not the usual.

Barbara Morgan, Ansel Adams and Beaumont Newhall in Barbara Morgan's Studio, 1942



I am utterly fascinated by this “playing around” image by Barbara Morgan (#55, Nov. 2020), about whom I just wrote last month. Both men are wrestling with and ensnared by photographic equipment (lights, of course, the source of all images). Beaumont Newhall is on the left, and Ansel Adams is on the right, airborne like he was in one of Phillippe Halsman’s (#40, May 2019) *Jump Book* (1959) images. But this image by Morgan preceded Halsman’s *Jump Book* by 17 years, giving her the credit for originality.

But there is more. Halsman photographed Salvador Dali in Halsman’s famous “Dali Atomicus” (1948) image, in which everything, including several cats and pails of water, was flying through the air. The link from Morgan’s image to Halsman’s is unmistakable, and again Morgan gets the credit (by six years) for the airborne concept.

I might add that in “Dali Atomicus,” absolutely nothing touches the floor or anything else, but in this image Newhall is firmly grounded with both feet on the floor—I take this to be a comment about curators vs. photographers, but perhaps I am reading too much into this (but I really don’t think I am reading too much into this).

Edward Weston, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall on Rocks, 1945



This image by Weston shows that he and the Newhalls were close friends. The image is as much a study of rock textures as it is a carefully composed snapshot of friends holding their camera equipment. Taken in 1945, when WWII was still in progress, I am reminded of the following famous quote by the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson: “The world is falling to pieces and all Adams and Weston photograph is rocks and trees”.

Ansel Adams, Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, Westport, California, 1960



And here is a snapshot of the Newhalls by Adams, showing the loving relationship between the Newhalls. Of course it's a fine architectural study as well.