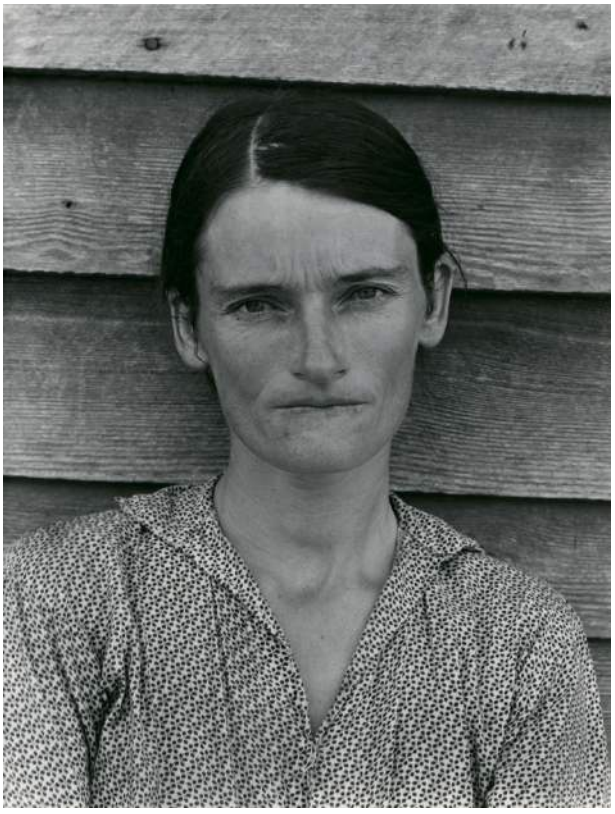
HUXLEY-PARLOUR

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The American Document: New Visions in Documentary Photography, 1931-1976

21 March - 14 April 2018



Walker Evans, *Allie Mae Burroughs*, 1936

A new exhibition at Huxley-Parlour Gallery will present over forty significant works of 20th century American documentary photography including photographs by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus. The works in the show chart the shift from socially engaged photography to a new definition of the document.

The tradition of American documentary photography of the 20th century is marked by two significant moments. The first was the socially and politically motivated 'New Deal' photography of the 1930s and 1940s, and the second developed in the 1960s and 1970s when a group of photographers shifted away from the social documentary tradition. The exhibition will use both familiar, and lesser-known photographs, to explore these markedly different approaches to the genre and to the medium of photography, as well as the shift in use of the photograph as evidence.

The exhibition includes images created under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), commissioned by the legendary Roy Stryker in the 1930s during the Great Depression. Photographers Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein and Walker Evans amongst others, employed a graphic Modernist aesthetic, inherited from painting, to frame evidence of social and economic plight throughout the US. The work of the photographers of the FSA was used to manipulate public opinion in support of New Deal relief programmes with the aim of combatting rural poverty. Works from this period to feature in the exhibition include, Walker Evans' 'Penny Picture Displays, Birmingham, Alabama' (1936), an oversized print of Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother' (1936), and Arthur Rothstein's 'Dust Storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma' (1936).

In the 1960s a new kind of documentary photography emerged, representing a radical break from tradition. Photographers including Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus, produced a new kind of documentary photography that focused on their own personal experiences within the urban environment. Their aim was to document quotidian, commonplace life with a new kind of vision, unique to the camera. The exhibition will feature some of the best-known works of the 'new documentary' photographers, including Lee Friedlander's 'New York City' (1974) and Diane Arbus' 'A Family on their lawn one Sunday in Westchester, NY' (1968).

Collectively, the photographs in The American Document illustrate the shift not only in subject matter, from rural to urban, but stylistically within the US in this period. The closely cropped, structured aesthetic of the early work on show moves towards the more informal approach of 'straight photography' to represent a seismic shift in the history of the documentary genre.

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