

Site: National Gallery of Ireland

Project: Moment in Time: A Legacy of Photographs

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2. Arthur Siegel (American, 1913–1978)

Sportscar

n.d.

Dye-transfer print

Narrator:

You're looking at one of very few *colour* photographs in the Bank of America's collection: a close-up detail of a canary-yellow car and gleaming horn. It was taken by Arthur Siegel, a Chicago-based photographer who often abstracted his subjects and explored the expressive potential of colour. This image is less about the car itself than its formal qualities: the sinuous lines and pop of colour.

Siegel took this photograph during the 1960s when he was in his seventies. By then he'd enjoyed a long career as a photojournalist with the New York Times *and* as a teacher at Chicago's School - later Institute - of Design. The School had been founded in 1937 by the Hungarian artist and photographer Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, and was based on the same principles as the famous Bauhaus school in Germany, where he'd been a teacher. Moholy-Nagy placed a special emphasis on photography, which he saw as the artform of the future: '*It is not the person ignorant of writing*', he wrote, '*but the one ignorant of photography who will be the illiterate of the future*'.

Photographers who studied and taught at the School of Design, like Arthur Siegel, are well represented in the Bank of America's collection. This reflects the fact that both the school and the bank that formed the collection – the Exchange National Bank of Chicago - were based in the same city.

228 WORDS

3. Edward Steichen (American, b. Luxembourg, 1879–1973)

Brooklyn Bridge

1903

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

This is Brooklyn Bridge, which spans the East River in New York between Manhattan and Brooklyn. When it was completed in 1883, it was the longest suspension bridge in the world – a monument to modern engineering.

Twenty years later, in 1903, the bridge caught the attention of a key figure of early 20th-century photography, Edward Steichen. Born in Luxembourg, Steichen moved to America in 1881 when he was two years old – a couple of years before the Brooklyn Bridge opened. His photographs of the bridge became his best-known works. In this one, the low perspective accentuates the wide span of this vast structure, while the inky black suggests its weight, and the hazy effect imbues it with a moody atmosphere.

Steichen was a leading proponent of Pictorialism in America, along with Alfred Stieglitz, who we'll be coming across later. Pictorialism was all about creating beautiful images, rather than just documenting a scene, and often entailed manipulating images by hand during the photographic process. Pictorialists were eager to show that photography was capable of achieving the same effects - of mood, tonality and composition - as painting. Here, for example, Steichen's picture evokes Whistler's paintings of London's Battersea Bridge, painted some twenty-five years earlier.

In his later years, Steichen became the first Director of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art – but more on that later.

225 WORDS

4. Beaumont Newhall (American, 1908–1993)

Portrait of Nancy

1946

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

This photograph goes to the heart of Bank of America's photography collection because it was taken by the man responsible for building it, the curator and photographer Beaumont Newhall. His subject is his wife Nancy, who also played a key role in forming the collection. She's captured here aged 38, on a side street in New York, her sunlit face set within a composition made up of the overlooked elements of urban life – a brick wall, cast-iron pillar and trashcan. It creates order out of disorder.

Nancy and Beaumont shared a passion for photography, and worked hard to raise its status as an art form. Beaumont was the first curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, and was later Director of the George Eastman Museum both in New York. And Nancy was a prolific author and critic of photography, writing in particular on Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and Paul Strand.

So when Beaumont Newhall was approached by the President of the Exchange National Bank of Chicago, Samuel William Sax, in the late 60s, and invited to form a corporate photography collection, he nominated Nancy to oversee this project. She doubled both the number of acquisitions and available budget within just a year. One of the aims of the collection was to display art in the workplace *and* to share it with a wider audience – a very new idea at the time.

229 WORDS

1. William Henry Fox Talbot (British, 1800–1877)

Detail of Orléans Cathedral

1843

Calotype

Narrator:

Photography was invented some 180 years ago, and you're looking at a very early example, taken in 1843 by the pioneer of photography, Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot. Although the focus of Bank of America's collection is twentieth-century photography, it also includes some earlier works, like this one, which illustrates the origins of the art form.

We see the upper part of a tower at Orléans Cathedral, south of Paris. The intricate Gothic carvings are captured more precisely than they could be in most drawings. And *that* was exactly Fox Talbot's goal. Ten years earlier, on his honeymoon at Lake Como, he'd tried – and failed - to accurately draw a view using a pencil, paper and *camera lucida*, and he'd vowed to – in his own words: '*cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably*'.

What followed in 1840 was the invention of the 'calotype', which comes from the Greek words for 'beautiful impression'. Put simply, a calotype captured a negative image through the interaction of light on chemically treated paper. This differed from the Daguerreotype, introduced just a year earlier in France, which captured images on small metal plates, polished to a mirror finish.

After patenting his invention, Fox Talbot travelled to Paris in 1843 to sell the rights to the patent there; he took this picture en route. But his negotiations were unsuccessful, and the French continued to make Daguerreotypes for another decade.

230 WORDS

Room 7: People

5. Brassai (Gyula Halász) (French, b. Hungary, 1899–1984)

Couple au bal musette des Quatre-Saisons, Rue de Lappe

1932

Gelatin silver print

[Music: *Bal Musette*-type music at the beginning and end]

Narrator:

In a Parisian night club, a couple pull each other closer. With their drinks on the table, the woman drapes her arm on the man's shoulder, while he hooks his hand under her elbow. Their faces are close, and her smile is wide – captured for a second time in the mirror behind. This is an intimate split-second moment captured during a busy night out.

The candid nature and high viewpoint of this work suggest that we're just passing by. This, coupled with the Parisian subjects, are all features that are associated with Brassai, who took this picture. His real name was Gyula Halász, but in adult life he was known by the name derived from his birthplace, Brassó, in Hungary. Brassai settled in Paris as a young man – during the 1920s, when the city was a magnet for artists and writers from all over Europe. Swapping journalism for photography, he went on to use his camera to - in his own words: '*capture the beauty of streets and gardens in the rain and fog, and to capture Paris by night*'.

And *Paris by Night* was the name he gave his first photobook, in 1933. It presented Parisian night-life at all levels: from the opera and ballet loved by high society to the more commonplace bars and dance halls and gritty street life. These photographs made his reputation, and also earned him the nickname: 'the eye of Paris'.

225 WORDS

6. Julia Margaret Cameron (British, 1815–1879)

Untitled (May Prinsep)

1870

Albumen silver print

Narrator:

The close-up view, soft focus, and poetic, dreamy atmosphere are all typical features of the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, who took this photograph. Cameron was a cultured and well-read woman, with a strong interest in Italian Renaissance art, which comes through in her work. Her images always possess an ethereal beauty, which wasn't accidental: as she herself said: *'Beauty you're under arrest. I have a camera and I'm not afraid to use it'*.

Cameron produced some of the most evocative portraits of the Victorian age. She was also the first female member of the London Photographic Society. But she didn't own a camera until she was 48. It was a Christmas present from her daughter and son-in-law, and photography soon turned into a true vocation for her. As she herself said: *'From that first moment, I handled my lens with a tender ardour, and it has become to me as a living thing, with voice and memory and creative vigour'*.

Like many early photographers, Cameron was from an affluent background; she didn't work commercially but invited friends and family to pose for her, among them Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Her model here was her niece, May Prinsep, who often posed for her, as did a young Irish girl called Mary Ryan. To hear Mary's fascinating story, select the next track.

226 WORDS

601 LAYER Mary Ryan

Narrator:

Julia Margaret Cameron first came across Mary Ryan, a poor Irish girl, and her mother when they were begging on a street in Putney, and took them into her home - the mother as a maid, and ten-year old Mary as – almost - an adopted daughter. Mary was educated alongside Cameron's sons, and regularly served as her model. She appears in many of Cameron's photographs. When she was eighteen, a friend of the family, Henry Cotton, fell for her after seeing her in Cameron's photos. They got married and moved to India – where Julia Margaret Cameron herself had grown up – and Mary Ryan ended her days as Lady Cotton!

You can see one of Cameron's photographs of Mary Ryan in the 'View of Ireland' exhibition in the Hugh Lane Room upstairs.

131 WORDS

Room 8: Documentary

8. Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965)

One Nation Indivisible

1942 negative, printed in 1967

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

A group of young children pledge allegiance to the American flag. At the centre, a Japanese American girl is captured with a solemn expression. This photograph was taken in April 1942, at a primary school in San Paradiso, just days later children like her were sent to internment camps across California. Pearl Harbour had been bombed by the Japanese five months earlier, and Japanese Americans were moved to camps, where they stayed – often in very difficult and spartan conditions - until the end of the Second World War.

The photograph was taken by Dorothea Lange, who saw her camera as an instrument of social change. She often focused on the hardships of ordinary people and on issues of social justice. Her most famous work, which you may well know, shows an impoverished mother during the Great Depression of the 1930s, her face weather-worn, her clothes tattered, and two small children nestling around her. Like that photograph, this one was taken as part of a government campaign – in this case, to document the relocation of Japanese Americans. But Lange chose to also portray their lives before and after internment, to capture *their* humanity and the inhumanity of their war-time experience.

The inclusion of this work in Bank of America's collection reflects the fact that it was formed during the 1960s, when social and equal rights became key political concerns.

228 WORDS

7. Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908–2004)

Seville, Spain

1933 negative, printed before 1968

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

This photograph takes us from the artistic, Pictorialist images we've looked at so far towards a more documentary approach. Henri Cartier-Bresson, who took this photograph, was a key figure in the development of twentieth-century photojournalism.

He took this picture in Seville in southern Spain in 1933. In the early 1930s, he travelled widely with his portable Leica camera, and arrived in Spain three years before the Spanish Civil War – though this dilapidated street is strangely prophetic. Despite the ravaged surroundings, the children - glimpsed through a hole in a demolished wall – are all playing with joyful abandon. There's laughter, boisterousness and maybe even some play-acting for the camera – a split-second of hilarity and fun!

Cartier-Bresson was famous for his gift for capturing crucial moments, and for retaining the spontaneity of that moment in his pictures. He called this 'the decisive moment': in his own words, '*the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which gave that event its proper expression*'.

176 WORDS

9. Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

The Steerage

1907

Photogravure

Narrator:

This photograph has been hailed as one of the greatest of the twentieth century. It's called *The Steerage*, and was taken in 1907 by Alfred Stieglitz on a transatlantic crossing from the United States to Europe. In it, we're offered a glimpse into the lower levels of the ship, where the lower-class passengers travelled.

Stieglitz himself was travelling on the upper decks with his first wife and daughter; his family were quite wealthy. He was born in New Jersey in 1867 to German-Jewish immigrants, but returned to Germany for schooling. By 1907, when he took this photograph, he was back in New York, and already a leading photographer. He was also a founder of the Photo-Secession group, which worked to raise photography in America to the level of fine art.

In this image, he captures a particular moment in history, when the numbers of immigrants entering America was high, but it also works on a formal level, in terms of the composition and angle at which the photograph was taken. This was how Stieglitz described the scene:

Actor:

On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a young man with a straw hat... A round straw hat; the funnel leaning left; the stairway leaning right; the white drawbridge with its railing made of circular chains...I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes, and underlying that, the feeling I had about life."

230 WORDS

10. Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975)

Barber Shop, Alabama

1936

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

Outside a barber shop in the southern state of Alabama, a group of men sit in the sunshine - waiting for a shave or simply passing the time of day. All but one seem unaware they're being observed. They're captured in their everyday environment – a scruffy roadside bench surrounded by adverts for gum, cigarettes and Coca Cola. This is life, just as it is.

Walker Evans, who took this photograph, was a pioneer of documentary photography. His subjects were mundane and gritty, but his crisp images always gave them a poetic resonance. Evans was born into a well-heeled family in Saint Louis, but chose to document the lives of ordinary people – on farms or in factories, usually capturing them unawares. Later in his career he snapped people on the New York Subway using a hidden camera, which he concealed by painting the shiny chrome parts black. He wrote, 'People's faces are in naked repose down in the subway' – more so than in their bedrooms!

Evans took this photograph in 1936 while working for two federal government agencies documenting the effects of the Great Depression on struggling families. In 1938, these seminal photographs were shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the first photographic exhibition ever held at the museum, called *Walker Evans: American Photography*, making Evans and his photographs famous.

227 WORDS

Room 9: Urban

11. Brett Weston (American, 1911–1993)

Broken Window, San Francisco

1960

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

It takes a moment to make sense of this image: a close-up shot of a broken window. It's by the American photographer Brett Weston, who was less interested in the subject itself than in its formal qualities: in this case, the repetition of rectangles and extreme contrast of light and dark.

Weston's name is often associated with close-up abstracted details like this one. He had grown up – literally from childhood – with a camera in his hand, because his father was the renowned photographer Edward Weston. As a teenager, Brett Weston spent time in Mexico surrounded by a community of Surrealist artists and writers, which included Frida Kahlo. While there, he took photographs with his father and his father's lover Tina Modotti – both of whom often focused on beautifully lit close-up details.

Weston was almost fifty when he took this photograph, in 1960. By then, he was very engaged with the idea of layered space. You'll notice here that the eye shifts back and forth: from the flat white glass, to the black space seen through the broken panes, and the grey stairs and buildings glimpsed through them. These different levels of depth play with space, and with our eyes – in the same way that the Abstract Expressionists had been doing in painting over the previous two decades.

215 WORDS

Room 10: Nature

13. Wynn Bullock (American, 1902–1975)

Child in Forest

1951

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

This is an image that stops us in our tracks. It's called *Child in Forest*, and was taken by American photographer Wynn Bullock in 1951.

In an overgrown forest, lush groundplants form a beautifully dense, soft carpet. But our vision of this untouched, virgin nature is interrupted by the brightly lit body of a naked child. It's unexpected and unsettling, and throws up questions: who is she? How did she get there? Is she asleep? Or is she dead?

This mysterious scene evokes fairy tales, horror films, and surrealist images in equal measure. But what interested Bullock wasn't the implied narrative but the juxtaposition of the naked figure with the natural setting. He often photographed female nudes in landscapes, following an age-old tradition in sculpture and painting of conflating woman and nature.

His model for this photograph was his daughter Barbara, then five or six years old, who often posed for him. You can read her recollection of posing for this picture in the label next to this work.

The photograph became one of Bullock's best known works after it was shown in a seminal photography exhibition curated by Edward Steichen in 1955. The show was called *The Family of Man*, and opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York before touring widely and being seen by hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

This brings us to the end of our tour. To hear a conclusion, select the next track.

228 WORDS

12. Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984)

The Sierra Nevada, Winter Evening, from the Owens Valley, California

1962, printed in 1963

Gelatin silver print

Narrator:

'Landscape photography is the supreme test of the photographer, [pause] and often the supreme disappointment'. So said the great master of landscape photography, Ansel Adams, whose work you're looking at. His name is synonymous with his large-scale, crystal-clear images of the Sierra Nevada range in California, and in particular, Yosemite National Park.

In this one, the portrait format accentuates the vastness of the sky, while the sweeping cloud formation leads the eye downward to the mountains: these enormous mountains are dwarfed in this image by the immense sky. Beneath, their outline is reflected in a lake: an ephemeral effect that is here permanently etched into the waters, conveying the perpetuity of nature.

Adams started out as a Pictorialist – he manipulated his images in the dark room for artistic effect – but from 1930 he adopted what's known as 'straight' photography, capturing nature as it was. For him, nature **WAS** the art, and just required the right techniques to capture it, which wasn't without its challenges. But he succeeded.

His pictures record nature at its most majestic, and are embedded in his deep love of nature. He was an avid conservationist, who once said: *'Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children. Once destroyed, nature's beauty cannot be repurchased at any price'*. Prophetic words that also translated into results, because his Californian landscapes were instrumental in helping to designate these areas as protected National Parks.

231 WORDS

14. Conclusion

Narrator:

The artists in this last space, and indeed throughout this exhibition, played a vital role in elevating the status of photography as an art form – an aim that was shared by the creators of the Bank of America photography collection. *They* hoped that through *their* efforts and through the innovations of the artists they worked with, the collection would secure the appreciation of photography among much wider audiences. This desire is shown in this exhibition, *Moment in Time*, *and* in the selection of the Gallery's own photographs currently on display upstairs in the Hugh Lane Room.

I hope you've enjoyed the exhibition and tour. As you leave, please remember to leave your player at the exit.

115 WORDS