



Indepth Arts News:
"Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther
Collection"

June 6 – August 27, 2000
Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, NY, USA



IMAGE: Photograph by unknown photographer.
America, 1930s-40s. Promised Gift of Thomas Walther.

Photographs by anonymous amateurs whose "happy accidents" and "successful failures" resulted in surprising and tantalizing works of art are the subject of Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection, opening at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on June 6, 2000. Dating from the 1910s through the 1960s — a period that saw the camera's emergence as a nearly ubiquitous and easy-to-use accessory of modern life — these photographs reflect the spirit of their time in refreshingly honest and often unexpected ways. Although never intended for public display — most of the approximately 90 photographs on view were discovered at flea markets, in shoeboxes, or in family albums — these found images often bring to mind the

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work of such master photographers as Walker Evans, Man Ray, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Diane Arbus.

The exhibition is drawn exclusively from the Thomas Walther Collection, one of the finest private collections of photographs in the world, and reflects Mr. Walther's longstanding interest in the most innovative avant-garde art of the period — whether by established masters or unknown amateurs. Other Pictures remains on view through August 27, 2000.

In 1909 Alfred Stieglitz, the dean of American art photography, warned amateur photographers not to take themselves too seriously: "Don't believe you became an artist the instant you received a gift Kodak on Christmas morning," he cautioned. Other Pictures challenges and broadens traditional assumptions about what constitutes a photographic work of art and celebrates some of its unknown yet decidedly gifted practitioners.

Mia Fineman, co-curator of the exhibition and Research Assistant in the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Photographs, stated: "These photographs are truly the 'crème-de-la-snapshot.' Each one is a little lure for the imagination, an enticement, a revelation. The exhibition, the first of its kind at the Metropolitan Museum, sheds new light on one of the most prolific and eccentric artists of our century: 'Photographer Unknown.'"

Many of the works on view might be described as "happy accidents" or "successful failures" — fortuitous moments when the camera's lens captured aspects of character or images of beauty that the operator may not have intended. Among these is a double exposure in which a main street trolley appears to trundle across an anonymous hotel room bed. In another, an old wooden house is consumed in a flash of light that seems to emanate from the window of a nearby car. A blurry, underexposed image of a woman posed before a fireplace fails as a literal likeness, yet succeeds as an accidental emblem of feminine mystique.

<http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2000/06/19/27090.html>