

**SFMOMA TO FEATURE EXCLUSIVE U.S. PRESENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION,
*WALKER EVANS***

***Exhibition Displays Over 400 Photographs, Paintings, Graphic Ephemera and
Objects from the Artist's Personal Collection***



***Walker Evans*
September 30, 2017–February 4, 2018**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 18, 2017)—The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will be the exclusive United States venue for the retrospective exhibition *Walker Evans*, on view September 30, 2017, through February 4, 2018. As one of the preeminent photographers of the 20th century, Walker Evans' 50-year body of work documents and distills the essence of life in America, leaving a legacy that continues to influence generations of contemporary photographers and artists. The exhibition will encompass all galleries in the museum's Pritzker Center for Photography, the largest space dedicated to the exhibition, study and interpretation of photography at any art museum in the United States.

“Conceived as a complete retrospective of Evans’ work, this exhibition highlights the photographer’s fascination with American popular culture, or vernacular,” explains Clément Chéroux, senior curator of photography at SFMOMA. “Evans was intrigued by the vernacular as both a subject and a method. By elevating it to the rank of art, he created a unique body of work celebrating the beauty of everyday life.”

Using examples from Evans’ most notable photographs—including iconic images from his work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) documenting the effects of the Great Depression on American life; early visits to Cuba; street photography and portraits made on the New York City subway; layouts and portfolios from his more than 20-year collaboration with *Fortune* magazine and 1970s Polaroids—*Walker Evans* explores Evans’ passionate search for the fundamental characteristics of American vernacular culture: the familiar, quotidian street language and symbols through which a society tells its own story. Decidedly popular and more linked to the masses than the cultural elite, vernacular culture is perceived as the antithesis of fine art.

While many previous exhibitions of Evans’ work have drawn from single collections, *Walker Evans* will feature over 300 vintage prints from the 1920s to the 1970s on loan from the important collections at major museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Getty Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the National Gallery of Canada, the Musée du Quai Branly and SFMOMA’s own collection, as well as prints from private collections from around the world. More than 100 additional objects and documents, including examples of the artist’s paintings; items providing visual inspiration sourced from Evans’ personal collections of postcards, graphic arts, enameled plates, cut images and signage; as well as his personal scrapbooks and ephemera will be on display. The exhibition is curated by the museum’s new senior curator of photography, Clément Chéroux, who joined SFMOMA in 2017 from the Musée National d’Art Moderne of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, organizer of the exhibition.

While most exhibitions devoted to Walker Evans are presented chronologically, *Walker Evans*’ presentation is thematic. The show begins with an introductory gallery displaying Evans’ early modernist work whose style he quickly rejected in favor of focusing on the visual portfolio of everyday life. The exhibition then examines Evans’ captivation with the vernacular in two thematic contexts. The first half of the exhibition will focus on many of the subjects that preoccupied Evans throughout his career, including text-based images such as signage, shop windows, roadside stands, billboards and other examples of typography. Iconic images of the Great Depression, workers and stevedores, street photography made surreptitiously on New York City’s subways and avenues and classic documentary images of life in America complete this section. By presenting this work thematically, the exhibition links work separated by time and place and highlights Evans’ preoccupation with certain subjects and recurrent themes. The objects that moved him were ordinary, mass-produced and intended for everyday use. The same applied to the people he photographed—the ordinary human faces of office workers, laborers and people on the street.

“The street was an inexhaustible source of poetic finds,” describes Chéroux.

The second half of the exhibition explores Evans’ fascination with the methodology of vernacular photography, or styles of applied photography that are considered useful, domestic and popular. Examples include architecture, catalog and postcard photography as well as studio portraiture, and the exhibition juxtaposes this work with key source materials from the artist’s personal collections of

10,000 postcards, hand-painted signage and graphic ephemera (tickets, flyers, logos and brochures). Here Evans elevates vernacular photography to art, despite his disinclination to create fine art photographs. Rounding out this section are three of Evans' paintings using vernacular architecture as inspiration.

The exhibition concludes with Evans' look at photography itself, with a gallery of photographs that unite Evans' use of the vernacular as both a subject and a method.

About Walker Evans

Born in St. Louis, Walker Evans (1903–1975) was educated at East Coast boarding schools, Williams College, the Sorbonne and College de France before landing in New York in the late 1920s. Surrounded by an influential circle of artists, poets and writers, it was there that he gradually redirected his passion for writing into a career as a photographer, publishing his first photograph in the short-lived avant-garde magazine *Alhambra*. The first significant exhibition of his work was in 1938, when the Museum of Modern Art, New York presented *Walker Evans: American Photographs*, the first major solo exhibition at the museum devoted to a photographer.

In the 50 years that followed, Evans produced some of the most iconic images of his time, contributing immensely to the visibility of American culture in the 20th century and the documentary tradition in American photography. Evans' best known photographs arose from his work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), in which he documented the hardships and poverty of Depression-era America using a large-format, 8 x 10-inch camera. These photographs, along with his photojournalism projects from the 1940s and 1950s, his iconic visual cataloguing of the common American and his definition of the "documentary style," have served as a monumental influence to generations of photographers and artists.

DATES AND VENUES

Centre Pompidou, Paris	April 26–August 14, 2017
SFMOMA	September 30, 2017–February 4, 2018

ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Walker Evans is organized by the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in collaboration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 320-page catalogue featuring essays by Svetlana Alpers, Anne Bertrand, David Company, Clément Chéroux, Julie Jones, Didier Ottinger, Jeff L. Rosenheim and Jerry L. Thompson. The English edition is published by Centre Pompidou and DelMonico Books • Prestel.

HOURS AND ADMISSION

Open Friday–Tuesday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and until 9 p.m. on Thursday. Closed Wednesday.

Annual membership begins at \$100, and members enjoy free admission. Adult general admission to SFMOMA is \$25; admission for seniors 65 years and older is \$22; and admission for visitors ages 19 through 24 is \$19. Visitors aged 18 years and younger receive free admission to the museum, including special exhibitions.

Private guided tours and group discounts for *Walker Evans* are available through the SFMOMA Group Sales Department. Tours are one hour in length and are not included with museum admission. Tours must be booked at least two weeks in advance. For more information or to submit an inquiry, please visit sfmoma.org/groups.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

SFMOMA is dedicated to making the art for our time a vital and meaningful part of public life. Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, a thoroughly transformed SFMOMA, with triple the gallery space, an enhanced education center and new free public galleries, opened to the public on May 14, 2016. In its inaugural year, the expanded museum welcomed more than 1.2 million visitors.

Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

Media Contacts

Jill Lynch, jilynych@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4172
Rebecca Herman, rherman@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4174
Emma LeHocky, elehocky@sfmoma.org, 415.357.4170

Image credit:

Walker Evans, *Truck and Sign*, 1928–30; gelatin silver print; private collection; © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York