

More than one photography : works since 1980 from the collection : the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 14-August 9, 1992

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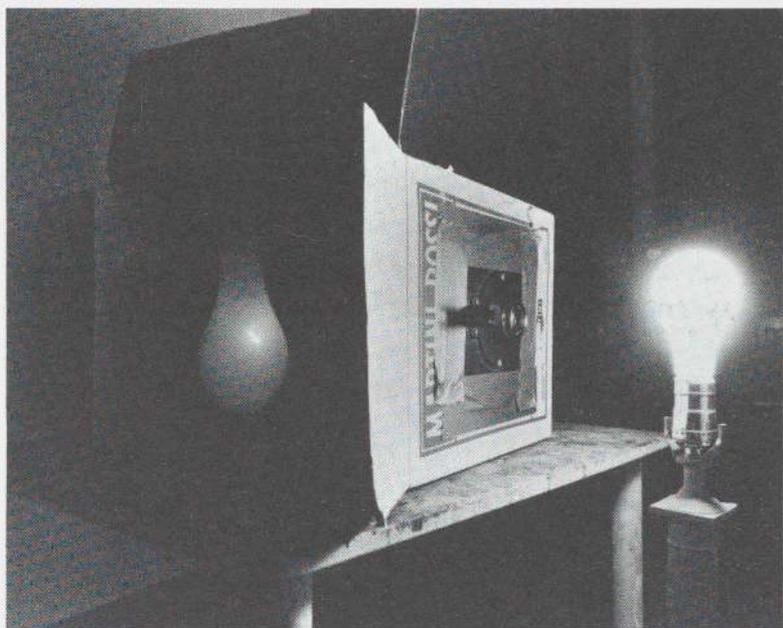
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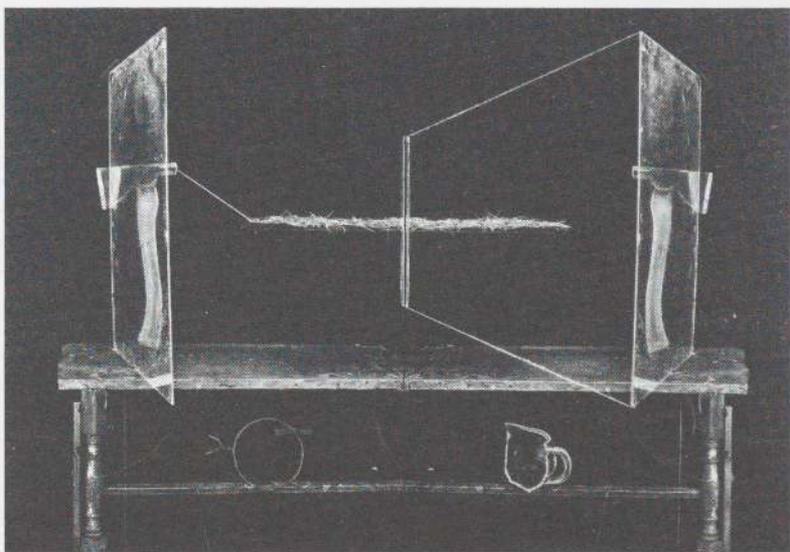
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The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.



**MORE
THAN
ONE
PHOTOGRAPHY**

Works since 1980 from the Collection



The Museum of Modern Art, New York
May 14 – August 9, 1992

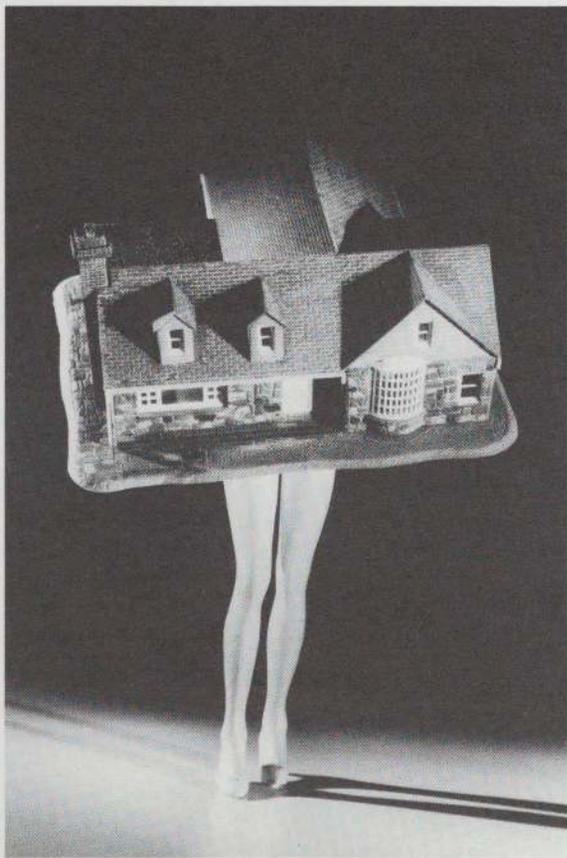
Abelardo Morell's simple and elegant demonstration of camera optics and Zeke Berman's complex and elegant meditation on the same theme are reproduced on the cover of this brochure. Each invites us to marvel at photography's magic, leaving open the question of how to use it. "More Than One Photography," an exhibition of some sixty works from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, samples the current proliferation of answers.

Although the exhibition presents only works made since 1980, the phenomenon it surveys became radically complicated three decades ago, when Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol dragged photography into the artist's studio. The pictures they used — from newspapers, magazines, and other mundane sources — carried with them the tumult and harshness of modern life, and of photography's ubiquitous presence in it. Both artists made photographs of their own (indeed, the first two works by Rauschenberg to enter the Museum's Collection, in 1952, were photographs) but their most provocative act was to open the Pandora's box of photography's unedited archive.

Since 1980 the strategies of Rauschenberg and Warhol have seemed increasingly indispensable. Artists such as John Baldessari and Barbara Kruger have assembled much of their work from photography's vast image bank without ever picking up a camera. Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman, among others, have remade and revised the seductive fictions of movies and advertising without ever leaving the studio. For all of these artists the world is the world-already-photographed, and photography's appeal is inseparable from its canny deceits.

This vein of brash, synthetic, rhetorical art may be interpreted as a repudiation of photography's presumed authenticity. But we already knew that the camera could lie. For photography, the most original implication of this work is not that it takes one side in the debate over the medium's reliability, but that it renders the debate irrelevant. Since 1980 the final erosion of photography's putative claim on *the* truth seems only to have nourished its capacity to embody a

diversity of truths, and to have multiplied the paths by which they might be reached.



Laurie Simmons

Walking House. 1989

Gelatin-silver print

83¹/₄ × 47³/₈ in.

Richard E. and Christie

Salomon Fund and

The Family of Man Fund



Barbara Kruger

Untitled (You Invest in the Divinity of the Masterpiece), 1982

Gelatin-silver print

71³/₄ × 45⁵/₈ in.

Acquired through an

Anonymous Fund, 1983

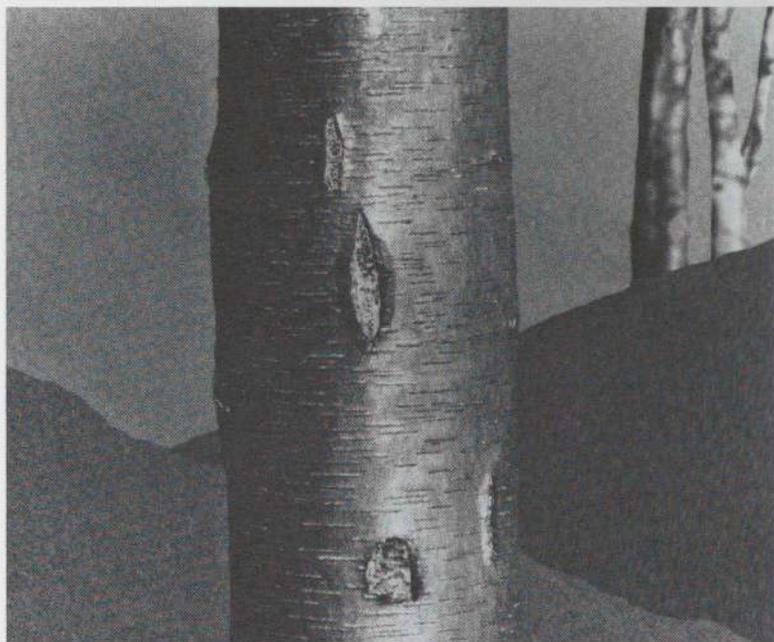
If photography is most commonly defined (first) as a tool for making pictures (or still more narrowly as a means of recording or describing), contemporary art also insists on defining it: (second) as a resource of all the photographs that already have been made, and (third) as a system for combining, assimilating, and altering graphic

material of all kinds, including, of course, photographs. To grasp the liveliness of current photographic work is not to elect one definition but to admit all three, and the interplay among them. Thus, for a few examples among many, while Simmons merges the first definition and the second (by making new pictures in the abrasively familiar vocabulary of advertising) and Kruger the second and the third (by combining a photograph of the Sistine ceiling with typography), Kiki Smith and Peter Campus merge the first and the third (by submitting their own photographs to extensive pictorial revision).

Kiki Smith

One part of the twelve-part work *Banshee Pearls*. 1991. Lithograph, 22¹/₂ × 30 in. Gift of Emily Fisher Landau





Peter Campus

Rupture. 1991. Digital photograph; gelatin-silver print, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 22 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. Purchase

Frank Gohlke

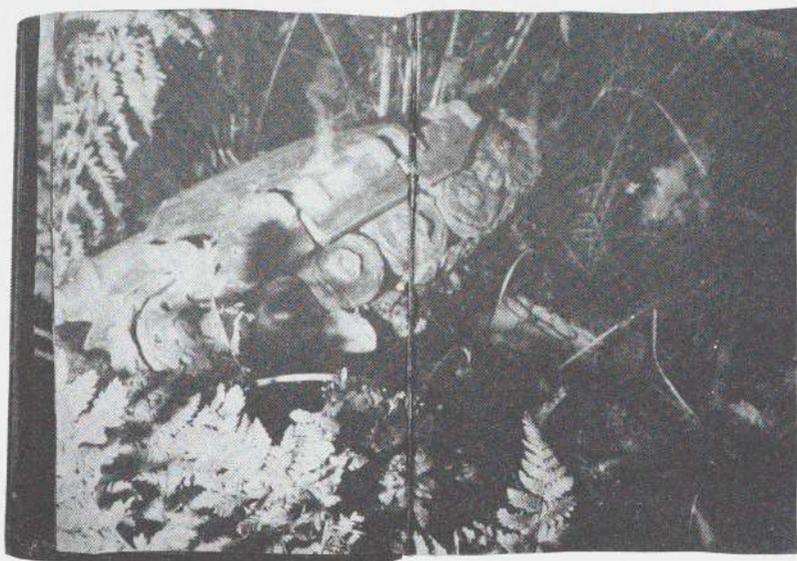
Area Clearcut Prior to 1980 Eruption, Surrounded by Downed Trees, Clearwater Creek Drainage, Nine Miles East of Mount St. Helens, Washington. 1981

Gelatin-silver print, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 22 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. Purchased with funds given by Shirley C. Burden



Comparing Smith's painterly profusion with Campus's computerized concision means recognizing the chameleon versatility of the photographic system. But it also means recognizing the medium's tenacious identity, for no matter how long it is cooked in the graphic soup, the photographic element retains the flavor of the real — the same stubborn attachment to the world outside the studio that attracted Rauschenberg and Warhol in the first place.

Or compare Campus's digitally altered photograph — half ethereal dreamscape, half ecological nightmare — with Frank Gohlke's precise, panoramic description of the aftermath of the eruption of Mount St. Helens, one disaster not caused by man. That the two are photographically incompatible is too slim a basis on which to ignore the similarity of their pictorial delicacy, or to avoid the challenge of reconciling their divergent visions of nature.



Anselm Kiefer

Midsummer Night III (Johannisnacht III), 1980

One double page from a book of twenty-three double-page gelatin-silver photographs with synthetic polymer paint and graphite mounted on cardboard, on a steel lectern designed by the artist
17³/₄ × 23³/₄ in.

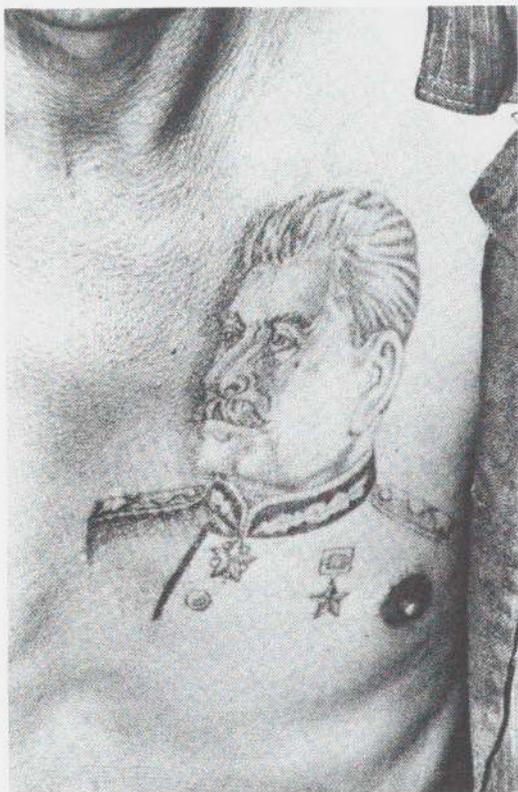
Gift of Agnes Gund, 1991

Rewarding if unresolvable relationships of this sort, which cut across photography's multiple roles in contemporary art, could be pursued indefinitely within the Museum's collection of well over one thousand photographic works made since 1980 by more than four hundred artists. "More Than One Photography," selected to stress photography's diversity, is arranged to elicit such comparisons. In this brochure there is room for just one more, whose theme is not nature but history.

On one pair of pages in a photographic book by Anselm Kiefer, a crude model of a tank lurks in a dense thicket of ferns, as if the Nazi beast had been reincarnated in a primeval landscape. On another pair of pages Kiefer reveals this ominous vignette as a puny studio set-up, thus simultaneously exploiting photography's drama and deflating its chronicle of history. Equally resonant is Tofik Shakhverdiev's photograph of the young Stalin tattooed on a not-yet-old chest, made just as the remains of Stalin's empire finally crumbled. What matters here is not the picture's veracity; we have better ways of knowing what happened, and indeed must know if we are to feel the force of the picture. What matters is its artful bluntness. Including just enough chin and shirt to make the body a person, it invokes the dizzying leap from the grand sweep of history to the life of one man.

Given the sprawling variety of photography's guises in contemporary art, it should be no surprise that photographic works have been collected by all of the Museum's six curatorial departments: by Painting and Sculpture, Drawings, Prints and Illustrated Books, and Architecture and Design, as well as by Film and by Photography. It follows that a survey of photography's diversity must draw on all six departments. "More Than One Photography" includes at least one work from each, as well as from the Library, which houses many artists' books. But just as the nine black-and-white works reproduced here can only begin to suggest the range of the exhibition, the exhibition itself can only begin to suggest the richness of the Collection, itself an imperfect, incomplete project.

— Peter Galassi



Tofik Shakhverdiev

Moscow, 1989

Gelatin-silver print,

17³/₁₆ × 11¹¹/₁₆ in.

Mr. and Mrs. Clark Winter Fund

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Thanks are due also to many members of the Museum's curatorial staff, especially Wendy Weitman in Prints and Illustrated Books, Lynn Zelevansky in Painting and Sculpture, and Edna Goldstaub in Photography.

Front cover, top: **Abelardo Morell**. *Light Bulb*. 1991. Gelatin-silver print, 18 × 22⁵/₁₆ in.

Purchased with funds given by Marian and James Cohen in memory of their son Michael Harrison Cohen.

Bottom: **Zeke Berman**. *Untitled*. 1988. Gelatin-silver print, 27³/₁₆ × 39³/₈ in. The Fellows of Photography Fund