

The Museum of Modern Art

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BILL BRANDT'S PHOTOGRAPHS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first major one-man exhibition in this country of work by the British photographer Bill Brandt will be shown at The Museum of Modern Art from September 16 through November 30. 123 photographs made during the past three decades by the 63 year-old artist have been selected by John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography. The exhibition will travel later throughout this country and Britain.

Brandt spent much of his boyhood and youth in Europe where he studied with Man Ray and was influenced by Atget and the surrealist film-makers. In 1931, at the age of 25 he returned to London. During the nineteen-thirties he documented his island, its representative human types and its social structure -- which seemed then immensely and permanently formidable. "In Brandt's pictures," Mr. Szarkowski says, "the wretched miners and the comfortable capitalists seem to have no more to do with happiness (or unhappiness) than do the stones of Stonehenge. They seem to have to do rather with the service of role, with fate, form, and tenacity and perhaps with heroism."

Commenting further, Mr. Szarkowski says, "Strange is perhaps the operative word. There is in Brandt's work -- excepting the late nudes -- a subtle but pervasive sense of malaise, a sense of beauty or virtue distorted by the presence of sin. The ordered stability of gracious homes and aristocratic pleasures is defiled by the suggestion of decay; the bravery of the poor is shadowed by an animal dumbness; faces of intellectual force look out from rooms that have known madness. We feel in his pictures a dislocation of the rational structures of experience, a recasting of the familiar into forms which show its meaning to be unfamiliar and threatening."

In addition to photographs of Mayfair drawing rooms and coal miners, which are followed by pictures of black out nights in wartime London, the exhibition includes a selection from the series of nudes Brandt made during the 50's. These pictures, which at first viewing seem strange and contorted, contain a transcendent eroticism -- a suspended, euphoric celebration of the flesh, Mr. Szarkowski says. He contrasts them to Edward Westons's (more)

Equally powerful nudes, which retain a degree of their identity while Brandt's late nudes seem to be "no woman and all women, as anonymous and as moving as a bleached and broken sculpture, fresh from the earth."

Brandt has photographed many well-known artists and writers in London. Among those whose portraits are in the exhibition are Edith and Osbert Sitwell, Dylan and Caitlin Thomas, E.M. Forster, Robert Graves, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Harold Pinter, Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore, Rene Magritte and Francis Bacon. The exhibition also includes closeups of eyes of Dubuffet, Arp, Ernst and Tapies.

Mr. Szarkowski points out that Brandt's approach to the craft of photography has been consistently and casually defiant. In revolt against the mechanical perfection of modern cameras, for example, he made the nude series with an ancient, cumbersome, fixed-focus camera, equipped with a wide-angle lens of such minute aperture that the image on the ground glass was all but invisible.

Brandt's early prints were very soft, but about a decade ago his printing style changed to one depending on a harshly simple gray scale, putting maximum emphasis on the picture's graphic structure. The current exhibition -- with the sole exception of Avery Stone Circle, Wiltshire, 1944 -- shows earlier work as reinterpreted by new prints, all of which Brandt made himself.

Forty of the prints in the exhibition have been acquired for the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. Prints by Brandt are also in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; and the George Eastman House, Rochester.

The exhibition will travel in this country and abroad. The overseas showing will be under the sponsorship of the International Council of the Museum and the British Arts Council. It will be shown at the Hayward Gallery in London in April, 1970.

EUGENE ATGET (Nov. 25-Jan. 25)

The next large photography exhibitions scheduled for the 1969-70 season are/PHOTOGRAPHY: NEW IN THE TWENTIES (June 1970) and a show devoted to topographic photography (May 1970).

In addition to showing a selection from its own photography collection continuously in the third floor Edward Steichen Galleries, the Department of Photography of The Museum of Modern Art presents a series of small loan shows throughout the year. The current exhibition is PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY.

During the course of the Brandt exhibition the book Shadow of Light, a collection of Brandt's pictures, with an introduction by Cyril Connolly, published by the Viking Press in 1966, will be on sale in the Museum bookstore.

 Checklist, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Public Information, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 956-7501,4