



Walker Evans

By Jeff L. Rosenheim, Maria Morris Hambourg, Douglas Eklund, Mia Fineman

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A tenant farmer's deprivation-lined face. Antebellum homes that have seen better days. The display windows of small-town main streets. The early subway commuter. Billboards. The images made by photographer Walker Evans (1903-1975) are icons of national identity that have shaped Americans' views of themselves and directly influenced important currents of modern art. This major catalogue--published to accompany a retrospective exhibition originating at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and traveling to San Francisco and Houston--presents the full range of Evans's work, from his 1920s black-and-white street scenes of anonymous urban dwellers to the color photographs of signs and letter forms from his final years.

Soon after he returned from Paris to New York City in 1927, Evans began contributing to the development of American photography. He captured the substance of people and buildings with a spare elegance that is utterly unpretentious. His gaze is serious but often amused as well, direct yet never simple. During the 1930s, Evans traveled throughout the South to chronicle the effects of economic hardship. The time that he and writer James Agee spent with Alabama sharecropper families yielded an evocative, honest record of the Great Depression, which was published in book form as *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). Evans then turned his lens back on New Yorkers, photographing subway riders with a camera hidden in his coat. He continued to influence American self-perception as staff photographer for Fortune from 1945 until he accepted a professorship at Yale in 1965.

Evans--who always chose art over what he criticized as artiness--wrote, in *Photography* (1969), "Whether he is an artist or not, the photographer is a joyous sensualist, for the simple reason that the eye traffics in feelings, not in thoughts. This man is in effect a voyeur by nature; he is also reporter, tinkerer, and spy."

Although his work has received many awards, been enshrined in the best museums, and been exhibited on several continents, Evans's total corpus is only now being fully examined. This important book revises our appreciation of Evans by presenting previously unknown material in an accessible context. Essays by Maria Morris Hambourg, Jeff L. Rosenheim, Doug Eklund, and Mia Fineman offer novel insights into the sources and legacy of Evans's work. The result is a superb exploration of what was achieved by one of our finest, mostly deeply American artists.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In 1926 Walker Evans dropped out of Williams College and arrived in Paris to launch his career as a writer. Though his life there revolved around the renowned Shakespeare and Company bookstore, a mixture of introversion and disdain for American culture kept him at a remove from the now famous expatriate circle of the era, the Fitzgeralds, Hemingway, the Murphys, and Joyce among them. He spent most of his time abroad alone and picked up his camera from time to time to document his immediate world, making images of his boarding room and his own shadow against a wall. When he returned to the States, Evans began to dedicate more time to his hobby, and by the end of his long career had established himself as one of the most important modernist photographers. *Walker Evans*, the catalog to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's retrospective of Evans's work (exhibiting February to May 2000, then moving on to other venues), is proof that his choice to abandon writing for photography left the cultural world richer. It is also arguably the best book available on the photographer and his images.

The Metropolitan possesses the bulk of Evans's archive of prints, negatives, diaries, working notes, letters, and other writings. In the process of planning the show, its curators discovered hundreds of previously unknown negatives stored at the Library of Congress. From this vast source, they constructed the show and its companion book. The catalog's introductory essays by such writers as Maria Morris Hambourg, head of photography for the Met, sketch the biographical details of Evans's life and explore works like his New York subway portraits in depth. But the real treat is to browse the nearly 200 plates, each reproduced from vintage prints in the museum's archive and private collections. Evans's early work focused on New York City--the proverbial bright lights of Broadway, the carnival atmosphere of Coney Island, the clutter of workers and shoppers and cars and advertisements in its streets. Soon he fanned out, photographing main drags and battered buildings in upstate New York and Pennsylvania. He also explored the people of Havana, Cuba, and the rural American South in some of his best-known work. By the mid-1970s, Evans was working in color, but his imagery remained consistent: signs, architecture, and seemingly inconsequential details like a Peg-Board full of kitchen utensils dominate. Arriving at the close of this book, readers can only thank the fates that Evans gave up his ambitions as a writer to devote himself wholly to his "left-handed hobby" of photography. --*Jordana Moskowitz*

From Library Journal

Walker Evans, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's catalog to its current major retrospective, is a rock-solid work providing biographical, historical, and visual accounts of the artist's life and work. Hambourg, an assistant curator in the museum's Department of Photography, edited this big book with the straightforward approach that Evans employed in his art. Careful reproduction of well-known black-and-white and little-known color photographs by Evans forms the heart of the volume. There are quality essays here as well, biographical and analytical writing that effectively places Evans's visual efforts in social and territorial context. From the self-portrait on the cover to the notebook entries to the many photographs clustered along the way, *Unclassified: A Walker Evans Anthology* quickly broadens the popular view of the photographer as a chronicler of 1930s America with black-and-white film in his camera. Gathered from many files in the large and varied Evans Archive at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, these collected writings, photos, and ephemera give us a socially concerned writer, artist, and meticulous keeper of his life's work along with his opinions and his collections of postcards. This version of Evans shakes him free of any narrow channel in which we placed him. He led a robust life, and the stillness that comes from his Depression-era work is shaken up by this energized look at the photographer. Walker Evans pointed a camera at his world and let the

documentary result speak as his art. Chief curator in the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography, Galassi has taken that objective eye as his theme. Gathering over 300 works from several media by 100 artists, Galassi gives us a volume of reportorial art, showing people, places, and things in "as is" condition. Evans touched people with his photographs because he merged his images with their "real lives." The question of whether other artists using other means were influenced by Evans's work or simply liberated to offer a visual vernacular landscape is incidental here. Galassi's book succeeds because his choices match his theme so well and play off the many examples of Evans's work that unite these pages. Though the Metropolitan catalog is the first choice for purchase, all three books are well recommended for all types of libraries and essential for serious art collections. DDavid Bryant, New Canaan Lib., CT
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From [The New Yorker](#)

All photographs capture light; Evans managed to seal and store it so securely that, like a day remembered as endless, it may never run out.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Julian Loredo:

The book Walker Evans has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of benefit. The book was compiled by the very famous author. Tom makes some research previous to write this book. This book very easy to read you can obtain the point easily after reading this book.

Douglas Quintanar:

The book untitled Walker Evans contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains your ex idea with easy approach. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was compiled by famous author. The author gives you in the new period of time of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can read more your smart phone, or program, so you can read the book in anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice learn.

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