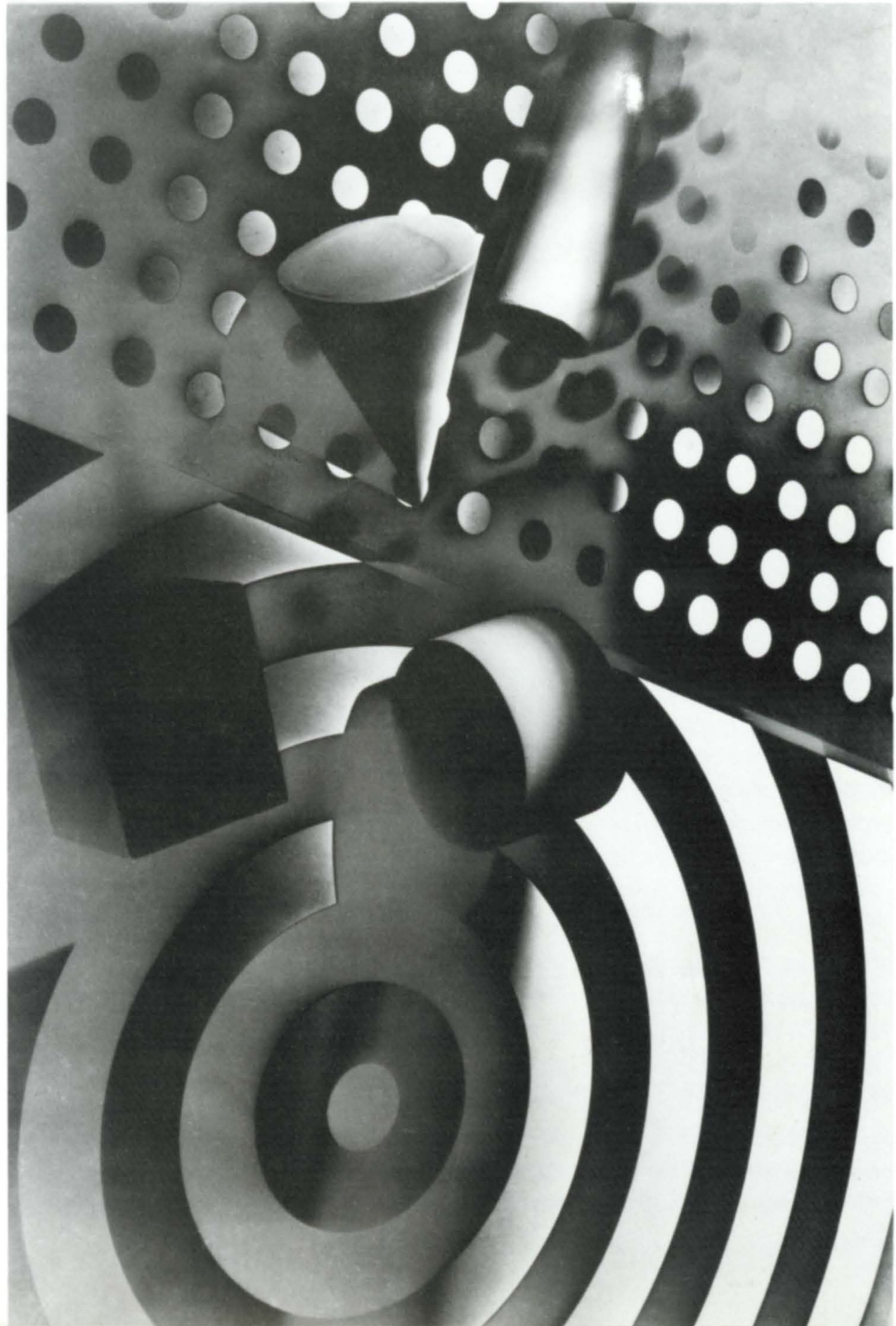


Transformations:

The Traditions of Modern Photographic
Abstraction and Experimentation

from the Hallmark Photographic Collection

Oct. 5 - Nov. 2, 1990



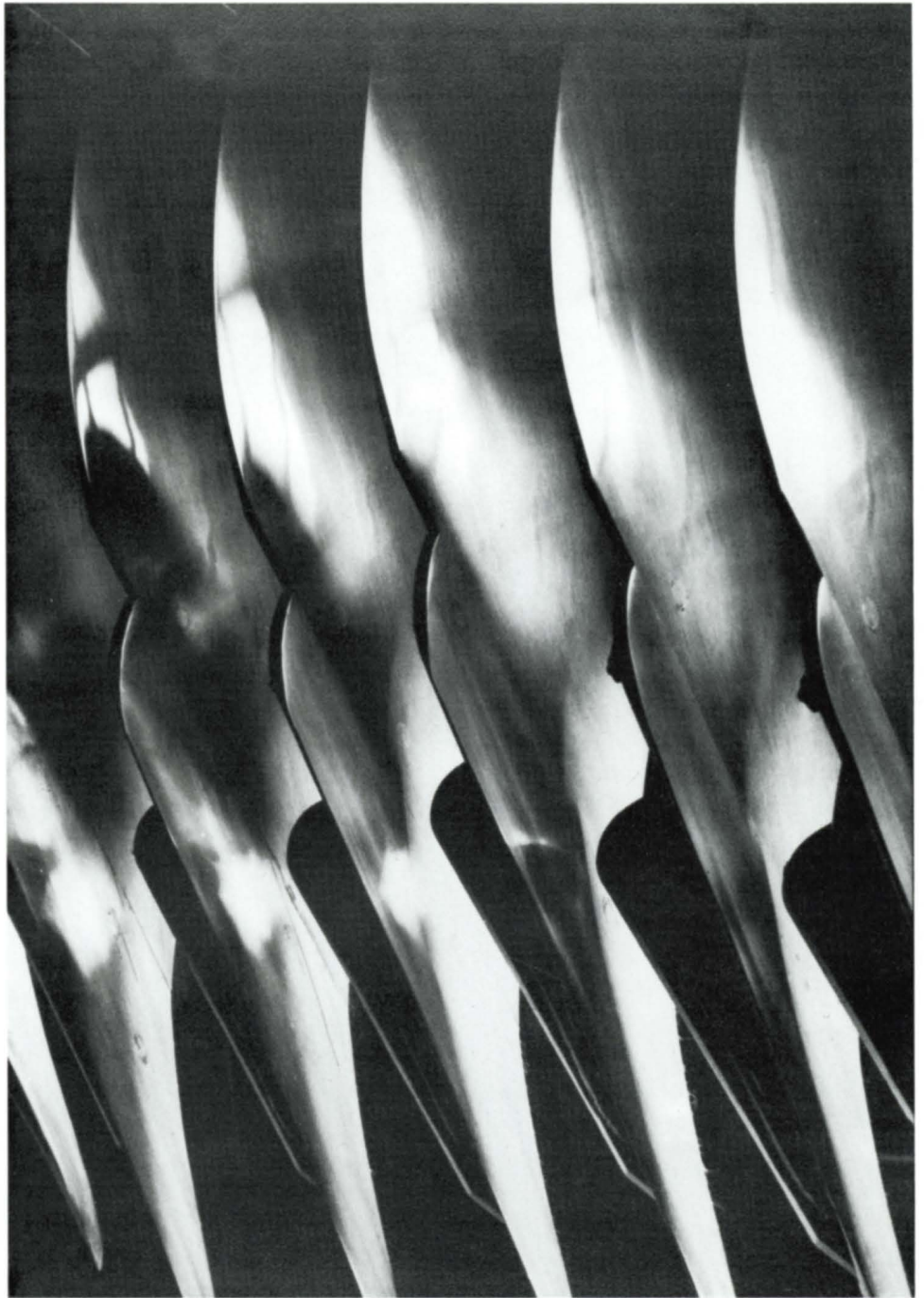
TRANSFORMATIONS:

The Traditions of Modern Photographic Abstraction and Experimentation

Throughout its 150-year history, photography has been used to both document and invent the world. These seemingly antithetical operations usually happen at the same time, and in every photograph, as a result of the interplay between the medium's inherent nature and the expressive intentions of individual photographers. These works from the Hallmark Photographic Collection survey some of the ways innovative 20th-century photographers have used light-sensitive materials in ways other than the strictly "documentary."

Photographs abstract the real world of experience in time, dimension, scale, tone and meaning. Each of these abstractions produces an object (or "copy") quite different from its subject (the "original"). We understand photographs because their abstractions are reasonably consistent – given the unchanging laws of optics, for example – and because we are familiar with the "language" of the process. Having learned this language, however, few stop to consider the ways it structures visual experience.

The conventional still photograph depicts a discrete slice of time varying in duration from less than a millionth of a second to minutes or even hours. The photograph is unique among picture-making processes in that its depicted time is always the "present." The static world of the photograph is utterly different from the dynamics of lived experience. Such images represent a world we cannot truly "see" – a world of frozen moments or durations



Margaret Bourke-White, *Plow Blades, Oliver Chilled Plow Company, 1930*
toned gelatin silver print

sliced cleanly away from life's ceaseless flow of time.

The camera transforms the experience of lived reality in a number of other ways. Photography represents the three dimensions of the world in two-dimensional form, creating new pictorial relationships through the compression of space. Photographs are rarely the same size as the objects they represent: they may be vastly larger or smaller. And, whether

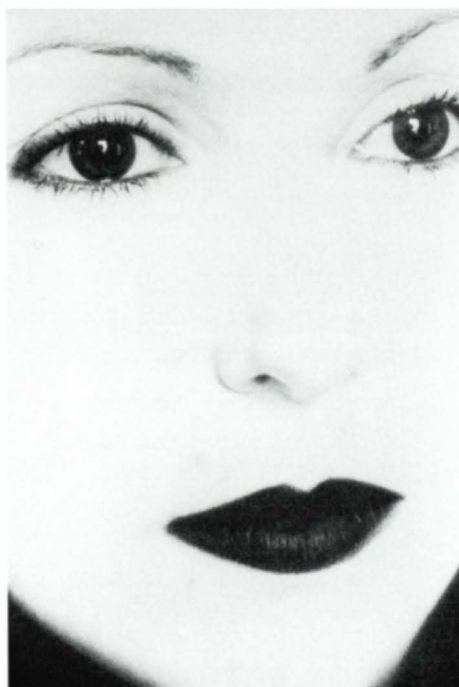
made in color or monochrome, the tonal or chromatic range of photographs is inevitably a reduction and approximation of unmediated visual experience.

Despite their descriptive precision, photographs can be very malleable "documents" because they have – on their own – no narrative ability. Narration, which can only occur through time, provides an interpretive sense of context, cause and effect,

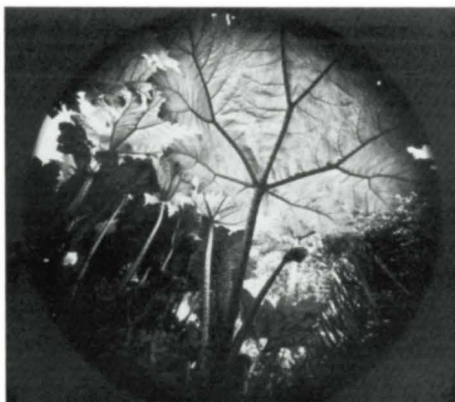
and meaning. Individual photographs faithfully describe the arrangement and appearance of objects and a specific instant, as seen from a single vantage point. They record the look of things – and objective act – but not necessarily their meaning – an unavoidably subjective act that is usually accomplished through written captions or verbal explanations. The most interesting photographs inevitably reflect aspects of each viewer's own understandings and interpretations. They are allusive rather than declamatory.

These modes of abstraction are inherent to photographic picture making. It is the best photographers – those with exceptional gifts of visual intelligence – who understand what the camera does. This knowledge (whether conscious or intuitive) gives photographers the freedom to explore the endlessly fascinating subjects on either side of the lens: the world and the imagination.

These prints, ranging in date from the early 1920s to the present, illustrate some of the ways innovative



Ralph Gibson, *Face*, 1981
gelatin silver print



Emmet Gowin, *Ireland*, 1972
gelatin silver print

photographers have sought to expand the medium's expressive potentials and have used it to transform ordinary visual experience. Many concepts or techniques are represented here: optical effect such as soft focus and the use of reflections; collage and multiple printing; unusual vantage points; photograms, or cameraless images; mechanical manipulations such as multiple exposures or the use of Widelux (panoramic) camera distortions; high contrast printing; extremely short exposures; ambiguities of scale and space; multiple, repeated, or fragmented images; hand-colored, hand-drawn and hand-painted prints; and the recording of fabricated subjects. Within this variety of "purist," "non-objective," "romantic," "precisionist," "surrealist," "painterly" and "post-modern" approaches, basic themes such as the landscape and the figure are also explored.

The methods of pictorial invention surveyed in this exhibition do not, of course, exhaust the expressive possibilities of either photographers or the medium. However, they do suggest a consistent historical use of the camera as a tool of aesthetic exploration, and a resulting continuity between the artistic work of the past and present.

Keith Davis, Chief Curator
The Hallmark Art Collection

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Transformations: The Traditions of Modern Photographic Abstraction and Experimentation is the inaugural exhibit for the Gallery of Art at Johnson County Community College. We are grateful, therefore, to Keith Davis, curator of the Hallmark Fine Arts Collection, for curating this outstanding exhibit and for providing the adjoining essay. In addition, we would like to thank Hallmark Cards Inc. for so generously lending the works included in the show.

Bruce Hartman, Director
Gallery of Art



Herbert Bayer, *Lonely Metropolitans*, 1932
gelatin silver print

The Hallmark Photographic Collection is a project of Hallmark Cards Inc., Kansas City, Mo. Begun in 1964, this museum-quality holding currently includes nearly 2,200 original prints by the leading photographers of the 20th century. In the past decade more than forty different exhibitions have been organized from this collection and presented in some 150 bookings in leading museums and university galleries throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.

(Front cover photo: Gyorgy Kepes,
Untitled, 1941, gelatin silver print)

Checklist of the Exhibition

(thematic groupings within exhibit)

Soft focus

1. Johan Hagemeyer
Castles of Today, 1922
9 5/8" x 7 3/8", gelatin silver print
2. Linda Connor
Can Pyramid, 1976
8" x 10", gelatin silver print

The figure, manipulations and reinterpretations

3. William Mortenson
Fragment of the Black Mass, 1926
7 1/4" x 5 3/4", gelatin silver print
4. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy
Nude, c. 1926
14 3/4" x 10 1/2", gelatin silver print
5. Edward Weston
Nude, 1925
6 7/8" x 8 3/8", gelatin silver print
6. Bill Brandt
Nude No. 43, 1957
13 1/2" x 11 1/2", gelatin silver print

Multiple prints/collage

7. Val Telberg
Untitled, c. 1948
10 1/2" x 9", gelatin silver print
8. Herbert Bayer
Lonely Metropolitans, 1932
5" x 3 3/4", gelatin silver print
9. Jerry Uelsmann
Apocalypse II, 1967
10 1/2" x 13 1/4", gelatin silver print

Vantage point

10. Paul Strand
Ackley Motion Picture Camera, 1923
9 1/2" x 7 3/4", gelatin silver print
11. Imogen Cunningham
Agave Design I, c. 1925
13" x 10 1/4", gelatin silver print
12. Margaret Bourke-White
Plow Blades, Oliver Chilled Plow Company, 1930
13 1/8" x 9", gelatin silver print
13. Edward Steichen
George Washington Bridge, 1931
14" x 11", gelatin silver print
14. Ralston Crawford
Third Avenue Elevated, 1948
13 1/2" x 9 1/8", gelatin silver print

Optical effects, reflections, solarization

15. Edward Quigley
Self-Portrait, c. 1932
13 3/4" x 10 3/4", gelatin silver print
16. Grancel Fitz
Glass Abstraction, 1929
10" x 8", gelatin silver print
17. Florence Henri
Composition, Nature Morte, 1929
4 1/2" x 3 3/8", gelatin silver print
18. Gyorgy Kepes
Untitled, 1941
6 3/8" x 4 1/4", gelatin silver print
19. André Kertész
Abstraction, From My Window, 1980
4" x 4", cibachrome

Photograms

20. Lotte Jacobi
Untitled, c. 1950s
9 1/2" x 7 3/4", gelatin silver print
21. Arthur Siegel
Photogram, 1937
13" x 10 1/4", gelatin silver print
22. Henry Holmes Smith
Light Study (Color), 1946-1984
13 1/8" x 10", dye transfer print
23. Adam Fuss
Untitled, 1990
23 3/4" x 19 3/4", cibacrome
Mechanical manipulation: multiple exposures, Widelux distortion
24. Harry Callahan
Multiple Exposure, Tree, Chicago, 1956
9 1/2" x 9 1/4", gelatin silver print
25. Joe Sterling
New York City, 1978
6 1/2" x 18", gelatin silver print
High contrast
26. Aaron Siskind
Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation, 1953
11" x 14", gelatin silver print
27. Ralph Gibson
Face, 1981
12 3/8" x 8 1/8", gelatin silver print
Nature as subject
28. Minor White
Easter Sunday, Stony Brook State Park, 1963
8 1/4" x 3", gelatin silver print
29. Emmet Gowin
Ireland, 1972
8" x 10", gelatin silver print
30. Frederick Sommer
Arizona Landscape, 1945
8" x 10", gelatin silver print
31. William Garnett
Erosion, Death Valley, c. 1953
13 3/8" x 10 1/2", gelatin silver print
32. Ken Josephson
Wyoming (History of Photography Series), 1971
12" x 8", gelatin silver print
33. John Pfahl
Australian Pines, Fort DeSoto, Florida, 1977
8" x 10", type C color print
Time
34. Henri Cartier-Bresson
Madrid, 1933
9 1/2" x 14 1/4", gelatin silver print
35. Harold Edgerton
Vortex at a Fan Blade Tip, 1973
14" x 9 1/4", dye transfer print
Scale ambiguities
36. Jed Devine
Horse, Daylight, c. 1980
7 1/2" x 9 1/2", palladium print
37. Ruth Thorne-Thomsen
Expeditions Series, California, 1982
5 1/4" x 4 1/4", gelatin silver print

Manipulated/reconstructed images

38. Lucas Samaras
Untitled, 1973
3 1/8" x 3 1/16", Polaroid print
39. Nancy Burson (with Richard Carling and David Kramlich)
Big Brother, 1983
12" x 14 3/4", gelatin silver print
Multiple image
40. Rick Hock
Natural History Codex, 1986
20" x 17 1/2", Polaroid print
41. Ray Metzker
Untitled, 1966
41" x 41", gelatin silver print
42. Robbert Flick
Manhattan Beach Looking North from Marine, 1982
20" x 24", gelatin silver print
43. Mark Klett
Around Toroweap Point, 1986
20" x 80", gelatin silver print
44. Michael Spano
Untitled, 1989
45 1/4" x 35 3/8", gelatin silver print
45. John Baldessari
Life's Balance (With Money), 1989-90
49" x 40 1/2", photogravure with color acquatint
Hand-colored, drawn, or painted images
46. Robert Heinecken
L is for Lemon Slices, 1971
5" x 8", gelatin silver print
47. Holly Roberts
Man Looking at His Hands, 1986
18 7/8" x 14 1/2", paint on gelatin silver print
48. Rick Dingus
Repeating the Pattern, Three Rivers, New Mexico, 1983
16" x 20", black and white print with pencil
49. Thomas F. Barrow
Rigidity Assumption, 1984
24" x 20", photogram with spray paint
50. Susan Rankaitis
Dockweiler Beach LAX 2, 1984
20" x 24", mixed media on photographic paper
The constructed subject
51. Zeke Berman
Table Study, 1982
15" x 19 1/4", gelatin silver print
52. Patrick Nagatani and Andree Tracey
Old Black Magic, 1984
29" x 22", Polaroid print
53. David Levinthal
Untitled (Western Series), 1988
24" x 20", Polaroid print
54. JoAnn Callis
View, 1989
42" x 46", gelatin silver print on linen
Conceptual
55. Duane Michals
A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality, c. 1975
8" x 10", gelatin silver print

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