

WALKER EVANS AND HIS EARLY CIRCLE

Berenice Abbott, Helen Levitt, Peter Sekaer,
Ben Shahn and Ralph Steiner

29 October – 4 December 2004

Reception

28 October 2004, 6-8 pm



Walker Evans, Farmer's Kitchen, Hale County, Alabama, 1936

New York – Howard Greenberg Gallery is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Walker Evans and His Early Circle* featuring vintage work by Evans and selected contemporaries from the late 1920s – 1930s. The photographers included are Berenice Abbott, Helen Levitt, Peter Sekaer, Ben Shahn and Ralph Steiner. In the late 1920s Walker Evans began his self-education in the art and craft of photography; he was both lucky and wise in developing friendships with capable teachers – generous with their criticism, equipment, and techniques. In retrospect, the roster of those sharing ideas and experiences now seems long and farsighted.

Berenice Abbott, best known for her series “Changing New York”, introduced Evans to the work of the Parisian photographer Eugène Atget, which she and the famed art dealer Julien Levy had rescued. Both Evans and Abbott returned from Paris to New York in the late 20s and began to photograph the city. Although little known at the time, the work of Atget had a tremendous impact on Evans; the deceptively simple large format images by the Frenchman became the timber for construction of his personal style which he later patented as the “lyric document”.

In the 1930s in New York, the young Helen Levitt worked as a darkroom assistant to Evans and later became a close friend. In 1938 she acted as decoy while Evans captured unsuspecting passengers in the subway with a 35mm Contax concealed in his overcoat. Levitt's distinctly personal genius shows its roots in Evans' work.

(Over please)

A student of Abbott and friend of Shahn, Peter Sekaer displayed a talent and technical skill which was quickly recognized by Evans. In 1935 he hired Sekaer to assist him photographing the exhibition "African Negro Art" at The Museum of Modern Art. In 1936 he joined Evans in the rural south during his work for the Farm Security Administration. During these expeditions Sekaer would often photograph many of the same subjects as Evans.

Ben Shahn, a roommate of Evans, shared a similar fascination for stealing spontaneous images from the street with a 35mm camera, often with a deceptive right angle viewfinder. While Shahn's vision was uniquely his own, his spirit and approach to image making whether painting, printmaking or photography, was a strong influence on Evans. Conversely it is likely that with Evans' influence Shahn pursued photography with a portable, handheld 35mm camera.

Like Shahn, Ralph Steiner's influence can be seen in Evans' pursuit of vernacular subject matter. Steiner's early street photography and passion for billboards and signs was irresistible as was his British view camera, which Evans borrowed in 1930. Evans, generally reluctant to recognize the work of other photographers, cited Steiner early on.

A year after the 100th anniversary of Evans' birth, "Walker Evans and His Early Circle" will present works illustrating the now historically important common thread connecting this group of celebrated photographers.

For further information, or to request visuals for press,
contact Leila Buckjune at 212 334 0010, lbuckjune@howardgreenberg.com.
Starting October 28th, the exhibition can be viewed at www.howardgreenberg.com



UPCOMING EXHIBITION

December 10 – January 22

Sarah Moon: Circus