

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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EVANS PHOTOGRAPHS GIVEN TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, DC, June 8, 1989 -- A select group of fifty-seven photographs by American photographer Walker Evans (1890-1976) has been given by Washington collectors, Dr. and Mrs. Kent Minichiello, to the National Gallery of Art, and an additional eight Evans photographs have been acquired from the Minichiellos on a partial gift, partial sale basis, director J. Carter Brown announced today. The vintage photographs, made between 1938 and 1941, are from a series of pictures Evans made on the New York city subway using a concealed camera.

Known collectively as the Subway Series, the photographs are recognized as pivotal images both in Evans' career and in the history of American photography. Reminiscent of Paul Strand's 1915-1916 photographs of the lower East Side of New York, which were also made without the subjects' knowledge, these photographs anticipated much of the most significant work in photography of the 1950s and 1960s by such artists as Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, and Lee Friedlander.

"We are grateful to Kent and Marsha Minichiello for this large, concentrated, and extremely important group of images by one of the country's most celebrated photographers," said Brown. "Their gift of Evans' Subway Series pictures makes the National Gallery of Art keeper of one of the largest groups of these photographs in the world."

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Evans' Subway Series explores subjects from all walks of life in the trancelike, suspended state that riding the subway induces. He sought to record the passengers in unguarded moments, devoid of the artifice, props, or attitudes that more self-conscious subjects project in front of the camera. The Subway prints have a dark, more somber quality, different from much of Evans' earlier work, but appropriate to convey the raw, anti-aesthetic feeling he wanted to cultivate in the images.

Including many prints made from the same negative, the Minichiello's group of Evans photographs is significant because it provides an excellent record of his method of working. Because Evans' camera was concealed beneath his coat, he could not compose images by looking through the viewfinder. Rather, he did his composing in the darkroom, cropping and extracting pictures from the larger whole.

Not well known by the public today, the Subway prints were featured in an exhibition Evans mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1966. They are also the subject of the book, Many Are Called (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1966). Two prints from the Minichiello's collection of the Subway Series are currently on display at the National Gallery in the exhibition, On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography, through July 30.