



Acquisitions

Photography 2013-14

• MATTIE BOOM, HINDE HAEST AND HANS ROOSEBOOM •

- 1 KARL STRUSS (New York 1886-1981 Santa Monica, CA)
Snow-Covered Dock, 1911
Platinum print on original board, photograph 112 x 92 mm
Recto, lower right on the photograph in pencil: 1911; signature
© Erven Struss
-

Karl Struss is best known as the director of photography who in 1927-28 won an Academy Award for Best Cinematography and was then nominated for it three more times. Less familiar is his role in photography around 1910, when he was one of the first to 'convert' to Modernism. Many of his photographs from that time show him introducing a new idiom in photography, some years before Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler and Alvin Langdon Coburn. When Modernism finally took off in the 1920s, Struss was working primarily as a cameraman and director of photography. His photographic work was only rediscovered fifty years later, in the mid-1970s, when the first books about him were published and he gained a permanent place in the history of photography.

The Rijksmuseum recently bought *Snow-Covered Dock* dating from 1911, which convincingly marks Struss's transition from Pictorialism to Modernism. On the one hand we can still see the tried and tested, by then generally accepted pictorial elements like steam and blurred focus. These two 'ingredients' heightened the mood, by far the most important means by which a whole generation of photographers ('pictorialists') around 1900 attempted to elevate their medium to an art. On the other hand the photograph is

clearly constructed from a number of separate elements that stand out as black silhouettes against the greyish background of sky, water and a snow-covered dock. The photograph is first and foremost a study of form without a narrative, composed of just two shades – black and grey. This reinforces the impression that we are looking at a flat surface instead of into the distance. Playing with depth, shallowness and perspective was to become an important motif in Modernist photography, particularly in the 1920s.

HR

LITERATURE:

- S. and J. Harvith, *Karl Struss, Man with a Camera: The Artist-Photographer in New York and Hollywood*, Bloomfield Hills (Cranbrook Academy of Art/Museum) 1976
B. McCandless et al., *New York to Hollywood: The Photography of Karl Struss*, Fort Worth, TX (Amon Carter Museum) 1995

PROVENANCE:

- Lee Gallery, Winchester, MA; purchased with the support of Baker & McKenzie Amsterdam N.V., 2014
(inv. no. RP-F-2014-20).

2 W. EUGENE SMITH (Wichita, KS 1918-1978 Tucson, AZ)

Railway Lines, Pittsburgh, 1955

Gelatin silver print on original brown board, photograph 340 x 230 mm, board 510 x 405 mm

Verso: stamp *This photograph may not be reproduced without written consent of W. Eugene Smith;*stamp *Credit & copyright W. Eugene Smith, 821 Ave. of the Americas, New York, N.Y., TEL. 212 LA4-6935*

© Kevin Eugene Smith

W. Eugene Smith took this elegant photograph as the sun set over U.S. Steel's railroad yard by the Monongahela River just outside Pittsburgh. In 1955 he was asked by Stefan Lorant to take a hundred photographs of 'Steel City', for a publication to mark the city's bicentennial. The series was never published in the form and on the scale that the photographer had envisaged, and eventually went down as a heroic failure.

What ought to have been a three-week job turned into a largely self-financed project that took two years and yielded some 17,000 negatives and 6,000 prints. A grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation alleviated Smith's debts somewhat, but proved no more than a drop in the ocean in his personal odyssey to make the most poetic and all-embracing portrait of the city he could.

Although the growing popularity of illustrated magazines like *Life*, *Look* and *Picture Post* provided a platform for photographers like Smith, photo editing was the arena in which the photographer had to fight for his integrity. In 1954 Smith quit *Life* because he was given too little say in the way his photographs were published. He joined the Magnum Photos agency which had been founded in 1947.

In spite of the independence this gave him, Smith's ambitions made his work that much more difficult and so things usually ended in disappointment. The tenacity with which Smith guarded his work is symptomatic of both the success and the downfall of the Pittsburgh project. Magazines like *Life* and *Look* negotiated about publishing part of the mammoth project, but Smith demanded total control over the text and design.

In 1959 *Photography Annual* finally agreed and published a pendant to this photograph in a thirty-eight-page photo-essay. The photograph that the Rijksmuseum acquired was not published until the 1962 *Photography Annual*, seven years after the picture was taken, with a warning: 'These tracks remain a personal favorite from the huge Pittsburgh essay – yet, I have refrained from

allowing it to be published. Now, I allow it, burning hopeful incense to protector gods that all who handle it may also care as to craftsman quality – for it is a photograph which offers nothing if demeaned of technical virtuosity' (p. 81).

HH

LITERATURE:

W. Eugene Smith, 'Pittsburgh: W. Eugene Smith's Monumental Poem to a City', in B. Downes (ed.), *Photography Annual*, New York 1959, pp. 96-133

W. Eugene Smith, '12 Unpublished Pictures', in B. Downes (ed.), *Photography Annual*, New York 1962, pp. 76-87

W. Johnson (ed.), *W. Eugene Smith: Master of the Photographic Essay*, New York 1981

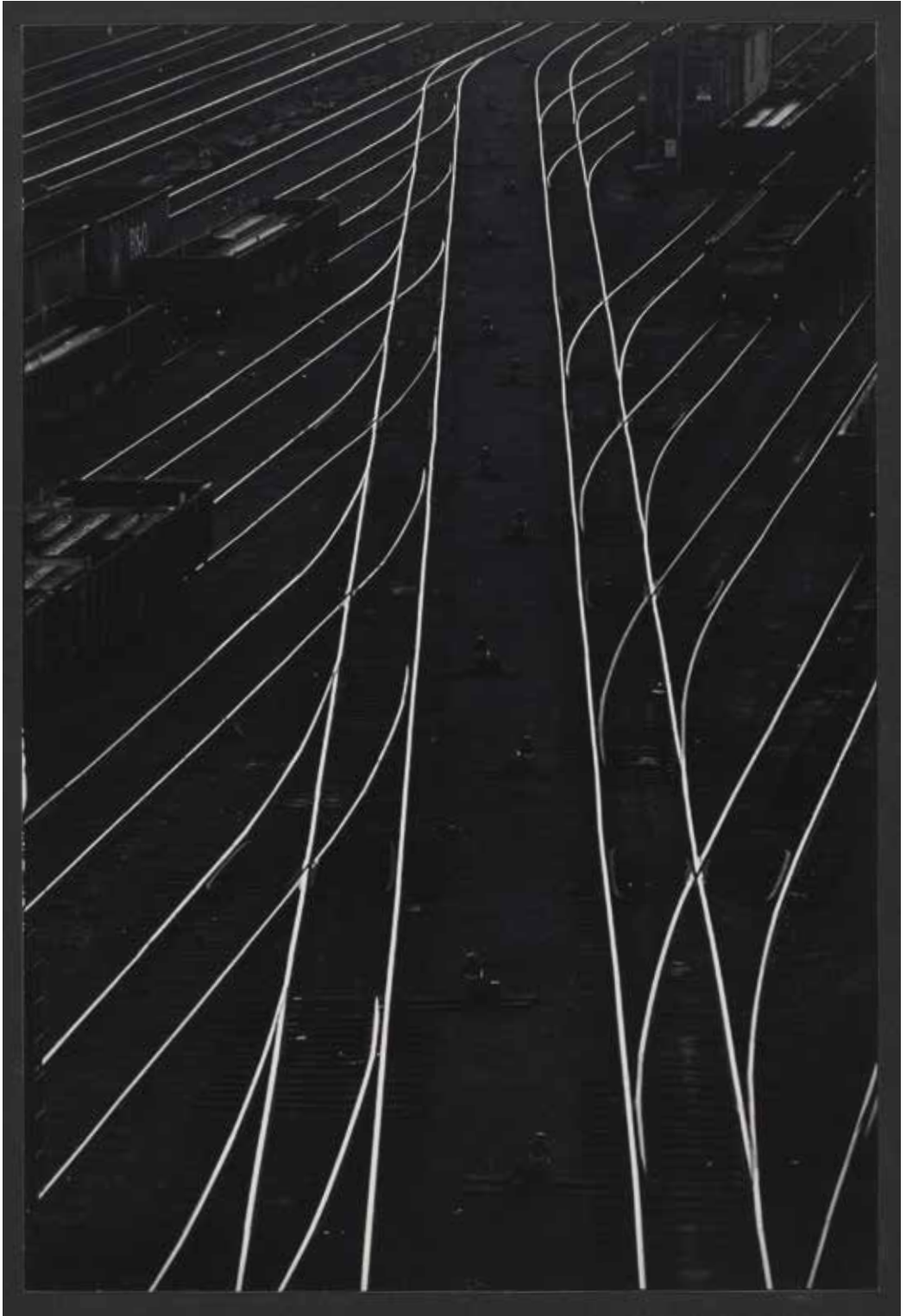
J. Hughes, *W. Eugene Smith: Shadow & Substance. The Life and Work of an American Photographer*, New York 1989

S. Stephenson (ed.), *Dream Street: W. Eugene Smith's Pittsburgh Project*, New York 2001

PROVENANCE:

Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York; purchased with the support of Baker & McKenzie Amsterdam N.V., 2013

(inv. no. RP-F-2013-124).



3 JOEL MEYEROWITZ (New York 1938)

Man and Woman Watching the Launch of Apollo 11, Florida, Cape Canaveral, 1969

Gelatin silver print, photograph 280 x 355 mm, sheet 281 x 355 mm

Verso, in pencil: *Florida, Cape Canaveral First Moon Launch 1969 Joel Meyerowitz 1969*

© Joel Meyerowitz

In 1969 and 1970 Joel Meyerowitz travelled through America on a Guggenheim Fellowship, seeking to portray the Americans and their leisure activities. Their carefree existence was in stark contrast to the horrors of the Vietnam War, and so absurdity and irony dominate his photographs from that time. He captured this young couple at one of the most momentous moments in the twentieth century. They are watching the launch of Apollo 11 on 16 July 1969, when three American astronauts left the earth. Five days later Neil Armstrong was the first man to set foot on the moon.

This photograph marks a turning point when Meyerowitz began to experiment with photography's powers of expression beyond the fleeting moment. Although he was influenced by the methods of his great hero Robert Frank, Meyerowitz distanced himself from the decisive moment that had become the norm. In contrast to Frank's 'deep, dark poem about America', as Meyerowitz called it, he used humour and irony as weapons: while NASA and the Soviet Union were racing to be first on the moon, a man in his socks sat in a camping chair on the roof of a Plymouth Satellite to witness it with his own eyes.

As well as capturing a historic moment, Meyerowitz's photograph acts as a parody of the spectacle of the Space Race from the sidelines. Meyerowitz remarked. 'I walked around the day and night before the event, gathering images of those who, like me, had come long distances to be in Florida for this historic moment. Someone sitting on top of their car – hours before the event – seemed worthy of a photograph. It was as if they were in their living room and they were sitting down for the show' (e-mail Meyerowitz, 2014).

HH

LITERATURE:

C. Westerbeck, *Joel Meyerowitz*, London 2005J. Meyerowitz, *Out of the Ordinary 1970-1980*, Rotterdam 2007J. Meyerowitz, *Taking My Time*, London 2012, p. 203

PROVENANCE:

Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York; purchased with the support of Baker & McKenzie Amsterdam N.V., 2013

(inv. no. RP-F-2013-30).



4 WILLIAM EGGLESTON (Memphis 1939)

Untitled, from the series *The Louisiana Project*, 1980

Dye Transfer print, photograph 300 x 450 mm, sheet 405 x 505 mm

Recto: 6

Verso, in ink: signature

© William Eggleston

Colour photography as a collectors' field is controversial. Many collectors do not venture into it because the preservation life is problematic. The photographs in an average family album are convincing proof of this. The discolouration and the Instagram effect it causes are permanent: faded and deprived of the intensity colour can have. Well-preserved colour photographs like this early Dye Transfer print by Eggleston are rare and, compared to black-and-white photographs, significantly under-represented in collections. Because of this we still know far too little about the real trend in colour photography in the twentieth century. It seems that it was not until the 1970s and 80s that photographers started to choose colour more often for artistic reasons and discovered its specific qualities. Colour photography had an individual character, unlike black-and-white photography that tells stories in shades of grey (sometimes compellingly). Colour 'reads' differently, not least because the result corresponds more closely to the real world as we constantly see it around us. Then it is about what the photographer has chosen from it.

The first time this became the focus of attention and criticism in America was at an exhibition of works in colour by Eggleston, who seemed to have a penchant for the most banal subjects: a light bulb on a red ceiling or the crooked lid of a car

boot. He took photographs of everything he encountered and was ridiculed for it. His exhibition *Color Photographs* in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1976 was 'the most hated show of the year'. But how little it took him to paint America in a few striking images: composing clearly and surely in colour. By comparison with the committed subjects of photojournalism in black and white, this scene is more like a still: a poignant characterization of a random situation as the photographer encountered it. In this art, making the print was the important second step. The rich 'saturated' colours of the extremely complicated Dye Transfer process do their job: how intense yellow, green and grey can be.

MB

LITERATURE:

M. Holborn (intr.), *William Eggleston: Ancient and Modern*, New York 1992, p. 74E. Sussman and T. Weski, *William Eggleston: Democratic Camera: Photographs and Video, 1961-2008*, cat. New York (Whitney Museum of American Art)/Munich (Haus der Kunst) 2008

PROVENANCE:

Private collection; Rose Gallery, Los Angeles; purchased with the support of Baker & McKenzie, Amsterdam N.V., 2013 (inv. no. RP-F-2013-44).



5 MARCEL VAN DER VLUGT (Naaldwijk 1957)

Hook of Holland #4, 10 PM, 1981

Chromogenic print on Kodak Ektacolor 78N paper, photograph 202 x 252 mm, sheet 231 x 292 mm

© Marcel van der Vlugt

In the last few years the Rijksmuseum has acquired a number of American colour photographs from around 1980 – works by Helen Levitt, William Eggleston, Bruce Wrighton, Joel Meyerowitz, Aaron Siskind and Steve Fitch. The power of colour comes to the fore in these street scenes and portraits in unexpected, striking impressions and observations. Some Dutch landscapes from the same period have now been added.

Marcel van der Vlugt graduated from the MTS School of Photography in The Hague in 1979 with a series of photographs of buildings on the beach in Belgium. After two years working as an assistant and travelling all over the world, in the summer of 1981 he picked up his mechanical Sinar 8 x 10 inch camera and returned to an earlier project: this time close to home on the South Holland coast, where he often went as a child. He photographed in the Hook of Holland, Ter Heijde, Kijkduin, Katwijk and Noordwijk. He wanted to visit these familiar, uninteresting places again, at unusual moments. Above all he captured colours in empty landscapes: the pink and yellow of the twilight or the evening with a couple of points of light in the blue, and a green accent in the centre. The Rijksmuseum acquired five photographs from the series *Dutch Dunes*.

Van der Vlugt was brought up surrounded by photography. His father had a well-equipped

photographic studio in Naaldwijk not far from The Hague. This had the great advantage that he had access to his own colour laboratory and developing equipment. He printed these colour photographs himself. At home there were more than twenty Dutch and foreign photographic magazines which he looked at as a fledgling photographer. For this series he was certainly inspired by what he saw by the Americans in magazines like the Swiss-published *Camera*. He liked Stephen Shore with his eye for the unremarkable and Meyerowitz, too, who shortly before had likewise found inspiration on the coast in his Cape Cod series and published the book *Cape Light* (1979).

MB

LITERATURE:

W. van Sinderen (ed.), *Fotografen in Nederland. Een anthologie 1852-2002*, Amsterdam et al. 2002, pp. 408-09.

PROVENANCE:

Purchased from the photographer, 2014, and gift of M. van der Vlugt, Amsterdam, 2014

(inv. nos. RP-F-2014-1 t/m 3 and RP-F-2014-4, 5).











6 VIVIANE SASSEN (Amsterdam 1972)

Giallo, from the series *Pikin Slee*, 2013

Chromogenic print, photograph 300 x 450 mm, white frame 464 x 313 mm

Verso, on frame: signature on 'Certificate of Authenticity'

© Viviane Sassen

Having first found her subjects mainly in Africa – where she lived for some years when she was a child – Viviane Sassen went to Suriname for the first time in 2012. In the remote village of Pikin Slee, situated on the Upper Suriname River, she was struck by the mixture of traditional ways of life and the arrival of objects that symbolize modern life, like mobile phones and plastic utensils. These modern elements appear incidentally in a number of her photographs. The presence of modern objects and materials is never explicitly the subject of the photographs that Sassen took in Pikin Slee. They are more to do with beauty and alienation.

What also struck Sassen was the realization that she had found in this South American country – a former Dutch colony – a society that links the Netherlands to Africa, the same connection that the photographer herself conveys. Pikin Slee is inhabited chiefly by some 4,000 members of the Saramacca tribe, descendants of Africans who were transported to Suriname as slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, escaped and went to live in the jungle.

Sassen's style is characterized by her recognizable use of colour, the combination of beauty and alienation, and the staging that she allows into her work. Struck by 'the beauty of the everyday',

which was to be found everywhere in Pikin Slee, she decided to stage-manage less than she usually did and used both colour and black and white.

In the last few years the Rijksmuseum has acquired various photographs that show the history of Suriname. Among them there are two daguerreotypes from the 1840s of the country house of a plantation owner (RP-F-2012-103, 104), an album of photographs that Théodore van Lelyveld, the adjutant to the governor of Suriname, took shortly before 1900 (RP-F-2009-282) and a series by Willem Diepraam on the occasion of Suriname's independence in 1975 (RP-F-BR-2011-1). *Pikin Slee* is a splendid jewel in the Suriname section of the Rijksmuseum's collections, given that it was not the photographer's primary aim to report what she saw.

HR

LITERATURE:

V. Sassen, *Pikin Slee*, Munich 2014

PROVENANCE:

Stevenson, Cape Town, South Africa; purchased with the support of Familie W. Cordia/Rijksmuseum Fonds, 2013, and gift of V. Sassen, Amsterdam, 2013

(inv. nos. RP-F-2013-91-6 t/m 10 and RP-F-2013-92-1, 2).



