

Modern Look: Photography and the American Magazine***Verbal Descriptions*****STOP LIST**

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601. PM Magazine, Feb-Mar 1939
Cover art by Charles Egri
Robert L. Leslie and Percy Seitlin [Editors]

NARRATOR:

This is the cover of PM Magazine, from the 1939 February to March issue. The work is by artist Charles Egri. The height of the image is 7 ¾ inches and the width is 5 ½ inches, about the size of a piece of plain paper folded in half. It's displayed in a vitrine, with other magazine covers

The cover is a photo collage depicting a plane flying in front of planet Earth. The images are in deep, saturated hues of inky emerald green, burnt orange, and charcoal grey. A rounded fragment of Earth appears from the left side of the page. It takes up almost half of the background space, extending towards the right. The planet appears in grey scale and textured with tiny dots, like a photo enlarged from a newspaper clipping. In this fragment we only see the rocky terrain of North and South America.

From the top left, an orange airplane soars into space. The plane is streamlined and sleek, with a curved nose, and rounded wing tips. The orange is fiery, the color of glowing embers, and is highlighted with swaths of white, as if propelled toward the glow of the sun. Jet streams trail from its wings. It leaves behind the grey-colored earth. A few chalky clouds roll through the bottom edge of the image.

In the lower right are 2 capital letters - P and M - the name of the magazine. PM stood for "Production Manager." The graphic, blocky letters are outlined in black and shaded to create the effect of 3-dimensionality. The transparent interior of the letters reveals some earth, clouds and space upon which the letters are printed.

This magazine, along with the others in the vitrine, were started by Robert Leslie. Leslie was not a designer himself, but an obstetrician. Here is curator Mason Klein:

MASON KLEIN:

He's quite an unsung and even unlikely hero of the graphic arts industry in New York. And there he began to show the work of people illustrating, and designing, advertising arts, he would call it. And he did this with such passion and he gave almost everyone, every émigré throughout the '30s a chance to have their work seen in his gallery. And basically held the belief that art had to be melded with industry. The camaraderie and the sense of collaboration that prevailed Leslie, not only inviting everybody to show their work, but he introduced everyone. So there was this constant social life, that made these émigrés integrate and assimilate with so much more ease. His passion and involvement in the graphic arts lasted, 'til he was beyond 100 years old.

602. **Alexey Brodovitch, *Cotillion (Ballerinas Leaving Stage)***
ca. 1930s, Gelatin silver print.
print: 6 1/2 x 9 1/4 in.; mount: 19 3/4 x 14 7/8 in.

NARRATOR:

This photograph is entitled *Cotillion (Ballerinas Leaving Stage)*. It is a gelatin silver print by Alexey Brodovitch. The image measures 6 ½ inches in height and 9 ¼ inches in width. It was made in the 1930s.

This black and white photo shows a stage where the thick, dark, heavy curtains are about to close. There is an area where the curtains have not yet met, and in this space, we see light and movement. A white, gauzy piece of material hovers over the moving bodies of ballerinas as they scamper off stage. The dancers exit towards our left, their bare arms outstretched, their necks bent, their stiff, full skirts tilting like bells. The dancers are blurred because they are in motion, their limbs white dashes against the curtains. They are dwarfed by the stage setting, which feels monumental and solid. The light feels soft and warm. At the bottom of the image is a dark strip that represents the audience. The top edge of the strip has some odd shapes that might signify an audience member's head or an instrument used in the orchestra. As viewers we are placed in the audience, at a distance from the stage. The photographer has caught the moment after the performance ends, but before the final curtain is sealed.

Here's the curator, Mason Klein, on Alexey Brodovitch's innovative approach to photography:

MASON KLEIN:

He photographed over a two-year period, some ten or more ballets. He just used you know, a handheld camera; he had in certain cases, bleached the negatives; he used available light. He slowed the shutter down to about a fifth of a second. And this resulted in blurred images of the moving dancers, and in contrast, very grainy negatives. They violated almost every accepted convention of good photographic technique, which was exactly what he wanted.

- 603. Martin Munkacsi, *Lucile Brokaw, Piping Rock Beach, Long Island*
Harper's Bazaar, 1933 Germany, Gelatin silver print.
13 1/4 x 10 1/2 in.**

NARRATOR:

This photograph is entitled *Lucile Brokaw, Piping Rock Beach, Long Island*. It is a gelatin silver print by Martin Munkacsi. It was published in Harper's Bazaar in 1933. The image is framed and measures 13 ¼ inches in height and 10 ½ inches in width, the size of a large magazine or washcloth.

This black and white photo shows an athletic young woman running on the beach alongside the water. The photograph is slightly blurred, expressing exuberant motion. The woman is in profile, presenting her left side to the viewer. Her body dominates the composition; she is placed vertically almost in the center with her head near the top of the image. Her profile shows a straight nose, a smooth forehead and an open smile. Her eyes squint in the manner of one running through a breeze. She has light skin with chin length dark hair that is unruly against the back of her neck. Her arched neck emerges from a short cape that ties at the base of her throat. The loose fabric blows around her torso allowing a glimpse of shoulder while the bare flesh of her left arm rises up towards her chest. Her open right hand extends from the fluttering fabric. Beneath the short cape she wears dark shorts that cover the top of her strong thighs. Her weight is on her left leg and the image is cropped below her left knee. Her right leg is bent in the air showing a blurred white running shoe. Behind her are the rippling waves that recede until they meet the horizon line of the sky. The sky is a flat grey expanse, perhaps overcast, set off by the stark blackness of her outfit. The photographer has caught his subject in motion and conveys the joyfulness of her movement.

This photograph broke with the norms of fashion photography, typically shot in a studio. Here's the curator, Mason Klein, on the photographer's innovation: He caught her in full stride. And all of a sudden they had this image of a taut-limbed Brokaw, the model's name was Lucile Brokaw, running by the seaside, her bathing cape billowing out behind her. And it just simply demolished every convention of fashion photography, by its sheer frank athleticism and vibrancy.

**604. Lillian Bassman, (*Blowing Kiss*) Barbara Mullen
1958, Gelatin silver print.
11 x 14 in.**

NARRATOR:

Lillian Bassman's *Blowing Kiss* is a silver gelatin print from 1958. It measures 14 inches in height and 11 inches in width, the size of a tea towel.

This image is a high fashion shot, composed of crisp, dynamic lines and clear lighting. As the title states, this black and white image shows a woman blowing a kiss. The woman wears an elegant black dress typical of styles from the 1950's--a tight bodice cinched at the waist followed by a wide skirt. The way her body is positioned in the image forms a diagonal from the upper right to the lower left. Her face is in profile in the upper right, her gaze follows the diagonal line of her body. The sleeves on the dress are tight and end above her wrists. She wears black gloves and her right hand is raised in the gesture of blowing a kiss. Her left arm extends back, elbow out, hand resting below her left hip. Her back is slightly turned towards the viewer. We see the white flesh of her upper back draped in pearls. She arches her neck, juts out her chin, and opens her lips in the manner of sending a kiss. Her hair is tucked into a large, flat, black disc-shaped hat that forms a strong diagonal, reinforcing the diagonal of the model's position. The image ends on the lower left, around the hip area of her full skirt.

The model is standing in front of a reflective surface, perhaps a window or a mirror. To the left and right of the figure we see the distorted forms of reflection. The shapes are blurred and ghost-like. The ephemerality of those shapes would become characteristic of Bassman's approach. Here's curator Mason Klein:

MASON KLEIN:

But you see how already, how she was trying to meld fashion with art. She developed a very signature style, capturing a very dreamy black-and-white kind of portraiture of models. Cropping, toning, bleaching and using gauzes and tissues to dematerialize her figures that much more.

**605. Gordon Parks, *Department Store, Mobile*
1956, Archival pigment print.
28 x 28 in.**

NARRATOR:

This photograph is entitled *Department Store, Mobile, Alabama* by Gordon Parks. It is an archival pigment print from 1956. It measures 28 x 28 inches.

The image shows a young woman and a child standing on a sidewalk in a downtown area. They're dressed-up, as if attending a wedding or a special party. Both have dark brown skin. The woman is in profile and presents her right side to the viewer. She wears a 1950's style short sleeve dress with a flared skirt that comes down to mid-shin. The dress is made from light aqua lace. She wears white pumps. One white bra strap has fallen from her shoulder and is visible below her sleeve. Her arm is bent at the elbow and reaching into a white clutch bag. Her short hair is coifed, her cheeks are rouged, and she wears white button earrings. Her slender neck bends forward slightly, towards the right edge of the photograph. She raises her eyes to gaze at something or someone in the distance, outside of the photograph. Her expression and stance are both at ease and expectant.

In front of the woman, a child of about 6 or 7 stands close by. She's about as tall as the woman's stomach, and her body faces the viewer. She wears a short sleeved white frilly dress that comes to above her knees. Her hair is pulled back with a large white bow, perched on the right side of her head. Her arms hang by her side. She wears white socks with black mary janes. Her head turns slightly to the right and looks towards the same source as the woman. Her pursed lips and wide eyes make us wonder what is happening just outside the frame.

They are standing on a sidewalk beneath a large neon sign that states in big capital letters: COLORED ENTRANCE. The letters are bright red and framed by a blue arrow that points to the doors on the left that opens onto the sidewalk. The red of the sign is set off by the ice blue and white of the woman and girl's diaphanous dresses. The scene in the distance is also in shades of pale grey: a flat white sky, cement buildings, and the slate-colored sidewalk. Behind the figures, we see the receding back of a white woman in a red dress. Two big cars ramble up the road which is to the right of the woman and child. The other side of the street is slightly blurred but we can make out small buildings housing businesses that are known through their lit signage. Two phone booths and some trees also line the other side of the street. The sharpest focus is on the woman and child and the large sign above them.

This image was taken by Gordon Parks on assignment for Life Magazine. His photographs depict the everyday reality of life in a segregated South. The woman

depicted in the photo is Joanne Thornton Wilson, a schoolteacher in Mobile for more than 30 years. Her son recalled, "My mother always dressed. That was just part of her. And if you were going somewhere with her, you were going to be dressed nicely. If I asked her, 'Why are we dressing up?' She would say, 'We don't want people to think we're servants.'"

For more on Gordon Parks, please select the second audio track on this work.

**606. Frances McLaughlin-Gill, *Nan Martin, Street Scene, First Avenue*
1949, Chromogenic print.
Image: 19 1/4 x 12 3/4 in.**

NARRATOR:

This image is entitled *Nan Martin, Street Scene, First Avenue*. It was taken by Frances McLaughlin-Gill in 1949. It is a gelatin silver print. The image measures 13 ½ inches in height and 9 inches in width.

This black and white photo shows a woman reading a newspaper on a city street. The woman's back faces the viewer. She looks like a high fashion model because of what she's wearing and how she is styled. Her head is covered in a black cloche hat; its shape resembles a bell. Her hair line is visible along with a flash of white skin at the nape of her neck which is adorned in a clasped triple strand pearl necklace. She wears a cropped black and white checkered jacket that is designed to have the back of the garment look like what would typically be the front. It buttons up the back with large black buttons and comes together in a V-shape with big lapels below the back of her neck. It has elbow length, bell shaped sleeves with wide cuffs. The woman wears black gloves and her arms are outstretched as she reads the New York Times, which she holds open at its full width. The jacket is cropped above the waist and flares out over a slim belted tight black pencil skirt. The bottom of the image is cropped below her hips. The woman's figure is in the foreground and occupies almost 2 thirds of the length of the composition.

Behind her newspaper looms the recently built UN Building, a silvery grid of a modernist skyscraper that extends to the top of the image and takes up almost the whole background. The pattern of her jacket resonates with the grid-like pattern of the building. On the left is a narrow vertical strip of sky that butts up against the building and disappears into the lower left behind trees, fencing and a curb. The trees are leafless, and the sky is a flat grey. Some of the street is visible on the left and right of the woman's hips.

The photographer Frances McLaughlin-Gill, was one of few women working in her field at the time. Though this is a fashion photograph, she was well aware of the potential to embed deeper meaning in her images. Here is the photographer's daughter, Leslie Gil:

LESLIE GILL:

And you see a woman who is clearly affluent, looking at the newspaper, absorbing the world. In the backdrop of a building that actually contains much of the activity of the moment. So on one hand, this shows a woman who is worldly; on the other hand it shows her outside of the actual venue that she could potentially be participating

in. If you read deeper, there is always a commentary on who we are as a society, who we exclude, who we include, and how they absorb the information that they have, to contribute back into the world.

**607. Cover of What's New, Art by Lester Beall
1941 , Facsimile.
9 3/4 x 12 1/2 in.**

NARRATOR:

Lester Beall's cover art for What's New Magazine measures 12 ½ inches in height and 9 ¾ inches in width. It was made in 1941.

The cover is a vibrant collage of people, shapes, flowers, and text over a large image of a woman's face. The center of the composition and the background is a close-up of the face of a glamorous, smiling, young woman. Her hair is pulled back into a low bun, and she has a pert nose, long lashed eyes, and a lipsticked smile. Her entire face, however, is presented as a vivid blue, the same color as the background.

I'll now describe the elements collaged over her face, as if we were moving around a clock. At 11 o'clock and emerging from the upper left is a photo of a young white female figure skater. Her entire body is a rich orange. She leaps into space with her head thrown back and her arms in the air. The top of her skating dress resembles a marching band's uniform with its double-breasted buttons. Her short skirt flares around her legs that leap into the center of the composition and frame the eyes of the blue woman's face. The vivid blue and orange of the two women vibrate against one another.

Arching from 11 o'clock to 4 o'clock, and vertically framing the blue woman's face, are three white irregular line-like shapes. It looks as if the artist cut out the shapes and glued them onto his work. There are three small yellow strips that float down through the composition. Each strip bears the words "what's new," so from top to bottom you read, "what's new," "what's new'" "what's new."

On the bottom right, at 5 o'clock, is narrow strip of orange which also looks as though it was cut from a photograph. It brings the color orange diagonally through the composition.

At 7 o'clock, on the bottom left of the image is a large, lush, pinkish-white flower with green leaves poking through its undulating petals. The flower resembles a rose or magnolia, its petals layered and crinkling.

You may be surprised to learn that this magazine published by a company called Abbott Pharmaceuticals. Magazines like this one mark a trend from corporations after WWII, who employed innovative design to position themselves as forward-looking and optimistic. Here's curator Mason Klein.

MASON KLEIN:

So, it's remarkable to think of how innovative these figures were, to work for these pharmaceuticals whose basic reputation was invested in their being looked at as cutting-edge and futuristic and modern and positive. And so for a biomedical journal to be able to use solarized images and conceived ways of representing everything from depression to serious illness was truly extraordinary.

**608. Saul Leiter, *Canopy*
1958, Chromogenic print.
Image: 19 1/4 x 12 3/4 in.**

NARRATOR:

This photograph, by Saul Leiter, is entitled *Canopy*. The unframed image measures 25 3/4 inches in height and 19 inches in width. It was taken in 1958.

While this is a color photo, the image is dominated by a large, pitch-black shape, which starts at the top and extends down three quarters of the length of the image. Looking at the shape, we might start to recognize it as a canopy that frames so many of the entrances of New York City apartment buildings. The viewer is positioned close to the edge of the curtain, so the scalloped edges appear large and slightly out of focus.

Below the edge of the canopy is a view of a New York City street during a heavy snowstorm. The city scene occupies the bottom fourth of the image and the photographer places the viewer in the position of witnessing the action from under the protective cover of the canopy. A man in the foreground wears a black overcoat and a dark hat. He clutches something under his left arm and is slightly hunched under the biting weather. He turns his head to our left and we see his flushed face. To his right is a woman in a light gray coat that swirls around her body. She wears black gloves and grips her head with her right hand to keep her hat on. She carries a black bag and we see the tan flesh of her legs and black galoshes. Behind her a car idles at the curb; the left break light is red though it is rendered a soft pink by the snow. The car is representative of its time period; it is big and boxy. The street is covered in snow and other figures make their way through the storm. Their small hunched bodies move in different directions as they navigate the wind and snow. Across the street is a snowy sidewalk and bare trees behind a low-lying wall. The many trees signify the presence of a park.

Though this is a color photo, most of the image is rendered in tones of white, grey and black reflecting the dampening effects of snow on a bright day.

Here's the curator, Mason Klein, on Leiter's series of street photographs:

MASON KLEIN:

They create such a sense of extraordinary voyeurism; a voyeuristic quality that...I mean it's just, when I first saw his work I just thought it was so emotional, it was so affecting, it was so powerful. And you see him achieve that as well in these three final works in the show, in color. They're so complex and yet at the same time you know that he just went from step to step and he captured these. And they are so

comparable to abstract paintings that we have to see him or think of him as both a painter and a photographer.