

ARTHUR M. SACKLER MUSEUM TO DISPLAY HARVARD'S SOCIAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

Exhibition of Early 20th-Century Social Documentary Photographs and Graphic Illustrations Is the First Significant Presentation of Works in More Than 30 Years



Pickle Bottling Department, H.J. Heinz Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, c. 1900. Gelatin silver print, 30.8 x 42 cm. Fogg Art Museum, Social Museum Collection, on deposit from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 3.2002.88. Photo: Photographic Services © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (December 4, 2006)—
The Harvard University Art Museums present *Classified Documents: The Social Museum of Harvard University, 1903-1931*, an exhibition featuring more than 100 original exhibition boards with photographs and graphical illustrations from the Social Museum collection, on display **from January 20 through June 10, 2007** at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum.

Established during the turbulent Progressive Era as the cornerstone of Harvard University's new Department of Social Ethics, the Social

Museum promoted a comparative study of social conditions and institutions—from health to housing, industry to government, education to crime, welfare to recreation, and race to religion—in America and abroad. The exhibition presents a compelling case study for a broader understanding of the development and use of social documentary photography, the graphic illustration of reform subjects, the techniques and strategies of exhibition display, and the role such museums played in the formation of the modern research university.

The Social Museum remained open and in use into the 1930s when the Department of Social Ethics was absorbed into the newly formed Department of Sociology. In the late 1960s, material from the Social Museum was among the historical photograph collections rescued by and placed

under the care of Harvard's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. The only significant public exhibition of works from the Social Museum collection in the past 60 years occurred in 1974 when renowned Carpenter Center curator Barbara Norfleet organized the ground-breaking exhibition *The Social Question*, which traveled to the Museum of Modern Art. It is the remarkable survival of the Social Museum photographs and graphical material affixed to the original exhibition boards and the intriguing context in which they were created that makes the collection unique.

Classified Documents: The Social Museum of Harvard University, 1903-1931 is organized by Deborah Martin Kao, Richard L. Menschel Curator of Photography, and Michelle Lamunière, Charles C. Cunningham Sr. Assistant Curator of Photography. In 2002, Kao and Lamunière prepared the photograph collections of the Carpenter Center to move to the Fogg Art Museum, where they have been placed on permanent deposit. “Among them we were surprised to find still housed in their original wooden cabinets the more than 6,000 reform-era photographs and graphical illustrations that comprise what survives of Harvard University’s Social Museum collection,” said Kao, “Seeing this time capsule motivated us to recover its historical context and interpret the use of this unique institution and remarkable collection.” Lamunière adds, “Discovering the boards in their specially designed storage and display cabinets was a particular thrill because it enabled us to experience the material in ways similar to the original visitors to the Social Museum, thus informing our own decisions about how to present these works.”

The progressive social reform movement transformed American society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Spawned by the nation’s rapid industrialization, the unprecedented growth of urban centers and the massive influx of immigrants in the decades following the Civil War, its backers sought to illuminate and improve the conditions under which the impoverished and immigrant populations lived and worked. It was during this time that Francis Greenwood Peabody, Harvard’s Plummer Professor of Christian Morals from 1886–1913, established the Social Museum at Harvard University in order to document the existing social conditions and to affect changes in industrial and social life.

Peabody touted the Social Museum as the first attempt to “collect the social experience of the world as material for university teaching.” Although open to the public, the Social Museum was established as a resource for Harvard’s Department of Social Ethics to provide specimens of social science for use in teaching and study as a means to understand “social evolution” and “social progress.” Peabody envisioned the Social Museum would function in the ways that other museums served the fields of anthropology, art history, and natural history through the rational comparison of specimens.

Nearly 4,500 photographs and 1,500 graphical illustrations and other examples of ephemera (albums, blue prints, plans, diagrams, booklets, hand-written matter, and handcrafted objects) survive from the original Social Museum collection, mounted on boards and captioned in the style of reform exhibitions of the time. The collection includes approximately 3,000 such boards, which were meticulously classified by such highly charged topics as: Charity, Crime, Defectives, Education, Family, Health, Housing, Industrial Problems, Races, Religious Agencies, Social Conditions, Social Settlements, and War.

Made by professionals and amateurs, the photographs in the Social Museum collection encompass a broad range of styles and formats, from carefully composed large-format pictures to modest snapshots and from luscious platinum prints to crude halftone reproductions. The diversity of technique and inconsistency of approach expose the expansive use of photography as a social document decades before the codification of a documentary style and collide with the institution’s obsessive system of classification and regimentation of display. This disjuncture also reveals the uncanny capability of the photographs to simultaneously index and elude their framing contexts.

Peabody’s enthusiasm for photography as an essential primary source for the Social Museum reflected the medium’s vital role in the larger progressive movement, which affected every aspect of the social program and raised issues regarding society’s obligation to the individual that still resonate today. Social activists used photographs as if they were incorruptible specimens of social problems and solutions, capitalizing on the power of the image to persuade, especially in connection with text and statistics.

“In addition to the importance of these works to the history of photography, the access they provide for students, scholars, and the public to other fields of study underscores the value of such a collection to a teaching museum,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums, “We are fortunate to have a largely intact group of primary source documents that present the opportunity for research not only in the arts, but also in the history of museums, the history of the social reform movement, and the development of the discipline of social science here at Harvard and around the country.”

Featured Works

The exhibition features compelling examples of social documentary photography, including a series of photographs from Ellis Island’s Immigrant Station that convey the threat of deportation, the requirements for admittance, and attempts at Americanization. A remarkable range of Social Settlements, as well as the educational and social activities they provided, are depicted in photographs from Chicago to Kentucky and from San Francisco to Boston. Private and state-funded institutions for the care and education of the poor, aged, sick, indigent, and mentally disabled, are documented in photographs from the Medfield Insane Asylum, the first state-operated institution for chronic cases of insanity in Massachusetts, and New York’s Institute for Feeble-minded Children, one of the largest of its kind. Historic photographs illustrate workers’ cooperative societies in Europe, among them exquisite portraits of a German cooper and stone mason by Waldemar Franz Herman Titzenthaler. The exhibition also includes large-scale prints by Lewis Wickes Hine, mounted to hand-lettered display boards from an exhibition of the 1907 Pittsburgh Survey, a pioneering sociological investigation of the living and working conditions of workers in one of America’s most industrial cities. Examples of corporate “welfare work” (employee benefits) by such model companies as the H.J. Heinz Company in Pittsburgh and National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio are on display, as well as Percy C. Byron’s related series on the employee recreation facilities established for the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company’s workers.

Credits

The Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation has provided major support for this exhibition.

Websites

In conjunction with the exhibition, an interactive website will serve as a searchable database of objects in the Social Museum Collection. The site will provide scholars and the public with access to a resource of material reflecting the international social reform movement at the turn of the 20th century. The conversion of these historical sources to electronic form will allow teachers to incorporate them into their course syllabi, and expose students to the nature of primary sources, historical analysis, and research. The website, which goes live in early 2007, is at: www.artmuseums.harvard.edu/socialmuseum

Digital access to material from the Social Museum collection is also available through the Harvard University Library Open Collections Program website, which creates comprehensive, subject-based digital resources that link Harvard's libraries, museums, and research institutes, at: <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu>

The Open Collections Program provided major support for the digitization of the Social Museum collection.

Exhibition Programming

M. Victor Leventritt Symposium

Saturday, April 21, 2007

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, lecture hall

Free admission

Presented in conjunction with *Classified Documents: The Social Museum of Harvard University, 1903-1931*, this symposium will place the Social Museum in critical context, with topics including the science and sentiment behind the founding of the Social Museum, display techniques at early 20th-century expositions and fairs, the social history of architecture and reform environments, issues of race and gender in early social reform photography, and the meaning of corporate welfare work.

Elsbeth H. Brown, Associate Professor and Interim Director, Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto

Julie K. Brown, Independent Scholar and Research Associate, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution and Associate Faculty, Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

Marta Gutman, Associate Professor of Architecture, School of Architecture, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture, City College of New York

Deborah Martin Kao, Richard L. Menschel Curator of Photography, Fogg Art Museum

Michelle Lamunière, Charles C. Cunningham Sr. Assistant Curator of Photography, Fogg Art Museum

Barbara Levy Simon, Associate Professor of Social Work, Columbia School of Social Work

Abigail A. Van Slyck, Dayton Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Architectural Studies Program, Connecticut College

Gallery Talks

Arthur M. Sackler Museum
Free admission

Saturday, February 10, 11:30 a.m.

Michelle Lamunière, Charles C. Cunningham Sr. Assistant Curator of Photography

Saturday, March 10, 11:30 a.m.

Deborah Martin Kao, Richard L. Menschel Curator of Photography

Saturday, April 7, 11:30 a.m.

Beth Pugliano, curatorial assistant, Department of Photographs, Harvard University Art Museums, and graduate student in art history at Boston University

Related Exhibition

The Human Factor: Introducing the Industrial Life Photograph Collection at the Baker Library

October 19, 2006 through March 7, 2007

Baker Library, North Lobby, Harvard Business School, Soldiers Field, Boston

Created in the years between the world wars, the Industrial Life Photograph Collection at Harvard's Baker Library reveals the colliding—and sometimes competing—messages of art and industry, education and public relations, humanity and modernization. Assembled in the 1930s by Harvard Business School colleagues Donald Davenport and Frank Ayres, the collection was intended to provide students with visual data to study “the human factor,” the interaction of worker and machine. The introductory exhibition and website include a selection from the over 2,100 images that comprise the Industrial Life Photograph Collection, featuring the work of such artists as Margaret Bourke-White and Lewis Wickes Hine.

Gallery talks are scheduled for January 18 and February 8, 2007 at 4:00 p.m.

Accompanying website: www.library.hbs.edu/hc/hf

Press release: www.hbs.edu/news/102606_human.html

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising of the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: **Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.;** closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information about these exhibitions or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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