



A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography

John Raeburn

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During the 1930s, the world of photography was unsettled, exciting, and boisterous. John Raeburn's *A Staggering Revolution* recreates the energy of the era by surveying photography's rich variety of innovation, exploring the aesthetic and cultural achievements of its leading figures, and mapping the paths their pictures blazed public's imagination. While other studies of thirties photography have concentrated on the documentary work of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), no previous book has considered it alongside so many of the decade's other important photographic projects. *A Staggering Revolution* includes individual chapters on Edward Steichen's celebrity portraiture; Berenice Abbott's Changing New York project; the Photo League's ethnography of Harlem; and Edward Weston's western landscapes, made under the auspices of the first Guggenheim Fellowship awarded to a photographer. It also examines Margaret Bourke-White's industrial and documentary pictures, the collective undertakings by California's Group f.64, and the fashion magazine specialists, as well as the activities of the FSA and the Photo League. Raeburn's expansive study explains how the democratic atmosphere of thirties photography nourished innovation and encouraged new heights of artistic achievement. It also produced the circumstances that permitted artful photography to become such a thriving public enterprise during the decade. *A Staggering Revolution* offers an illuminating analysis of the sociology of photography's art world and its galleries and exhibitions, but also demonstrates the importance of the novel venues created by impresarios and others that proved essential to photography's extraordinary dissemination. These new channels, including camera magazines and annuals, volumes of pictures enhanced by text, and omnibus exhibitions in unconventional spaces, greatly expanded photography's cultural visibility. They also made its enthusiastic audience larger and more heterogeneous than ever before - or since.

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