

"New Perspectives on Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*"

International Symposium - 10th Anniversary - Trier Center for American Studies
TCAS, University of Trier, Germany and CNA, Dudelange, Luxembourg
July 4 and July 5, 2014

The international symposium "New Perspectives on Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*" with scholars from the United States, Canada, and Germany explores central issues in American studies in experimental fashion. The symposium connects on-site teaching and student-based research, practical didactics and innovative scholarship in new ways. The epochal photo exhibition, Edward Steichen's 1962 MoMA project *The Bitter Years*, since 2012 on permanent display at the CNA in Dudelange, Luxembourg, will be contextualized individually by different cultural studies classes on American road movies, on the American West, and on fashioning identities in the context of the American Dream. The symposium connects and merges different narratives and perspectives in order to gain new insights into the continued fascination with Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*.

Participants:

Prof. Steven Alford, PhD, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (USA)
Prof. Ann Marie Fallon, PhD, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon (USA)
Prof. Suzanne Ferriss, PhD, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (USA)
Prof. Gerd Hurm, PhD, University of Trier, Germany
Prof. Miles Orvell, PhD, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA)

Organizers:

Gerd Hurm, TCAS, Germany
Jean Back, CNA, Luxembourg
Michèle Walerich, CNA, Luxembourg

Friday, 4 July 2014

"New Perspectives on Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*"
International Symposium
14.00 – 17.45 Uhr, University of Trier, HS 9

14.00 Uhr – 14.30 Uhr
Welcome and Opening Remarks (Introducing Speakers)
Jean Back (CNA) / Gerd Hurm (TCAS)
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Port, Dean, University of Trier

"Creating Tom Joad - Photos, Films and Liberal Narratives.
The Continued Relevance of Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*"
Prof. Gerd Hurm, Ph.D, University of Trier, Germany

14.30 – 15.15 Uhr
"*The Bitter Years* in the Context of American Road Movies"
Prof. Steven Alford, PhD, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (USA)

15.15 – 16.00 Uhr

"*The Bitter Years* in the Context of the American West and Modernism"

Prof. Ann Marie Fallon, PhD, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon (USA)

16.30 – 17.15 Uhr

"*The Bitter Years* and American Dreams: Fashioning Identities"

Prof. Suzanne Ferriss, PhD, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (USA)

17.15 – 17.45 Uhr

Concluding Remarks - Round Table Discussion

Moderator Prof. Gerd Hurm, Ph.D, University of Trier, Germany

Saturday, 5 July 2014

"New Perspectives on Edward Steichen's *The Bitter Years*"

International Symposium

Watertower and Pomhouse, CNA, Dudelange, Luxembourg

11.00 – 11.15 Uhr

Welcoming Remarks

Jean Back (CNA) / Gerd Hurm (TCAS)

11.15 - 12.45 Uhr

Guided tours through exhibition for symposium participants

14.00 – 15.00 Uhr

Public Lecture

"Bittersweet: Steichen's America and the Shock of Recognition"

Prof. Miles Orvell, PhD, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA)

Edward Steichen's famous 1962 exhibition of Depression-era photographs, *The Bitter Years*, is on one level a look backward to a time of hardship and suffering that seemed unprecedented for American society. In this vein, Steichen's exhibition can be read as a narrative of isolation, hunger, and homelessness, relieved by moments of community and the will to survive, a narrative that can be applied to 1930s Europe as well. But what made these pictures seem relevant to the 1960s makes them seem even more relevant to our own times, when images of global poverty, nomadic homelessness, and acute hunger and deprivation haunt the media on a daily basis. This lecture will discuss *The Bitter Years* alongside the work of contemporary social documentary photographers like James Nachtwey, Sebastiao Salgado, and Steve McCurry. The general question addressed is: What can an aesthetic medium do in times of disaster, how can it function, to ameliorate the human condition?

The symposium is free of charge. For more information, see our website <https://www.uni-trier.de/index.php?id=14135> or contact Gerd Hurm at hurm@uni-trier.de