

# THE FAMILY OF MAN REVISITED

Photography in a Global Age

Edited by

Gerd Hurm

Anke Reitz

Shamoon Zamir

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'This anthology of contemporary essays and historical sources is an important contribution to the growing field of exhibition history. Through critical reevaluation of *The Family of Man* and analyses of its international reception, the book breaks new ground with varied accounts of the show's place in postwar culture and detailed discussion of its curatorial construction and modes of presentation.'

– **Bruce Altshuler**, Director, Program in Museum Studies, New York University

'Of exhibitions of photography, *The Family of Man* is the one most deserving of renewed critical reflection and assessment. This volume offers exactly that, providing new perspectives and information in an effort to make us think again about what we imagined we already knew. Anyone interested in photography's history and creative possibilities will want to read it.'

– **Geoffrey Batches**, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

'[The exhibition] was a real shock for me ... they showed so much and they told so much these pictures, these photographs, told so much about modern life, my life.' – **Gerhard Richter**

*The Family of Man* is the most widely seen exhibition in the history of photography. First shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, the exhibition travelled throughout the United States and to forty-six countries, and was seen by over 9 million people. Edward Steichen conceived, curated and designed the exhibition. He explained its subject as 'the everydayness of life' and 'the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world'. The exhibition was a statement against war and the conflicts and divisions that threatened a common future for humanity after 1945. The popular international response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Many critics, however, have dismissed the exhibition as a form of sentimental humanism unable to address the challenges of history, politics and cultural difference.

This volume revises the critical debate about *The Family of Man*, challenging in particular the legacy of Roland Barthes's influential account of the exhibition. The expert contributors explore new contexts for understanding Steichen's work and they undertake radically new analyses of the formal dynamics of the exhibition. Also presented are documents about the exhibition never before available in English and not previously examined. Commentaries by critical theorist Max Horkheimer and novelist Wolfgang Koeppen, letters from photographer August Sander, and a poetic sequence on the images by Polish poet Witold Wirpsza enable and encourage new critical reflections. A detailed survey of audience responses in Munich from 1955 allows a rare glimpse of what visitors thought about the exhibition. Today, when armed conflict, environmental catastrophe and economic inequality continue to threaten our future, it seems timely to revisit *The Family of Man*.

**Gerd Hurm** is Professor of American Literature and Director of the Center for American Studies at the University of Trier, Germany.

**Anke Reitz** is a photography curator at the Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) in Luxembourg and is in charge of the CNA's Steichen Collections *The Family of Man* and *The Bitter Years*.

**Shamoon Zamir** is Associate Professor of Literature and Visual Studies and Director of Akkasah: Center for Photography at New York University Abu Dhabi.

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