

THE FAMILY OF MAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Reassessing an Epochal Exhibition



THE FAMILY OF MAN
STEICHEN COLLECTIONS

Clervaux Castle
B.P. 32 L-9701 Clervaux
Tel. : + 352 92 96 57
fom@cna.etat.lu
www.steichencollections.lu

International Conference
19-20 June 2015
Clervaux Castle, Clervaux, Luxembourg



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With more than ten million viewers across the globe and more than five million copies of its catalogue sold, "The Family of Man" is one of the most successful, influential, and written about photography exhibitions of all time. It introduced the art of photography to the general public, one critic noted, "like no other photographic event had ever done." At the same time, the meanings and impact of "The Family of Man" remain highly contested among historians and critics of photography to this day. First presented in 1955 to a record audience at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the travelling exhibition is now on permanent display as a UNESCO Memory of the World document at the CNA exhibition site in Clervaux Castle in Clervaux, Luxembourg - the native country of the show's inventor and curator, the Luxembourg-American photographer, painter, and exhibition designer Edward Steichen.

The conference wants to reassess and discuss the exhibition's appeal and message, launched against the backdrop of Cold War threat of atomic annihilation. It also wants to indicate new ways in which the exhibition, as an artistic response to a historical moment of crisis, can remain relevant in the context of 21st-century challenges. For the first time in Steichen criticism, the scholars at this interdisciplinary conference will discuss a 1958 essay on "The Family of Man" by the Frankfurt philosopher Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer's appreciative assessment of the cultural value of the exhibition in the post-war world runs forcefully against the grain of the critical dismissals that have come to dominate accounts of Steichen's project ever since the publication of Roland Barthes's well-known review from 1957. The conference will offer reconsiderations of the achievement of "The Family of Man" and it will try to reassess the potentially radical role of the exhibition in intercultural communication in the historical contexts of both the mid twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Organized by:
Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA)
University of Trier
New York University Abu Dhabi

Conference Program

FRIDAY 19.06.2015

10:00

Conference Welcome

10:15-12:00

Jean Back, Anke Reitz (CNA, Luxembourg)

Guided Tour of the Exhibition *The Family of Man*

12:00-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-14:30

**Bob Krieps (Director General
of the Ministry of Culture)**

Welcoming Remarks

Gerd Hurm (University of Trier, Germany)

Introduction to the Conference

14:30-15:15

**Shamoon Zamir (New York University
Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE)**

One World: *The Family of Man* as a Global Phenomenon

15:15-15:30 Short Coffee Break

15:30-16:15

Gerd Hurm (University of Trier, Germany)

Why Barthes Was Wrong: Reassessing the
Early Reception of *The Family of Man*

16:15-17:00

**Ariella Azoulay (Brown University,
Providence, RI, USA)**

The Body Politic

17:00-19:00 Coffee Break

19:00-20:30

Emile Eicher (Mayor, Clervaux)

Welcoming Remarks

PUBLIC LECTURE

**Werner Sollors (Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA, USA)**

Looking at the Photographs Now and
Remembering a Visit in the 1950s

SATURDAY 20.06.2015

10:00-10:45

**Kerstin Schmidt (Catholic University
of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt, Germany)**

Places of the Human Condition: Aesthetics and
Philosophy of Place in Steichen's *The Family of Man*

10:45-11:30

**Eric Sandeen (University of Wyoming,
Laramie, WY, USA)**

The Family of Man at Home

11:30-11:45 Short Coffee Break

11:45-12:30

**Miles Orvell (Temple University,
Philadelphia, PA, USA)**

Et in Arcadia Ego: Death in the Family

12:30-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-14:45

Ulrike Gehring (University of Trier, Germany)

The Family of Man and Post-War Debates
about American Art

14:45-15:30

**Winfried Fluck (Free University Berlin,
Berlin, Germany)**

The Family of Man and Challenges
of Visual Recognition

15:30-15:45 Short Coffee Break

15:45-16:30

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Gerd Hurm, Miles Orvell, Eric Sandeen (Panel)

Max Horkheimer and *The Family of Man*:
New Historical Perspectives

16:30-16:45

Anke Reitz, Shamoon Zamir

Closing Remarks