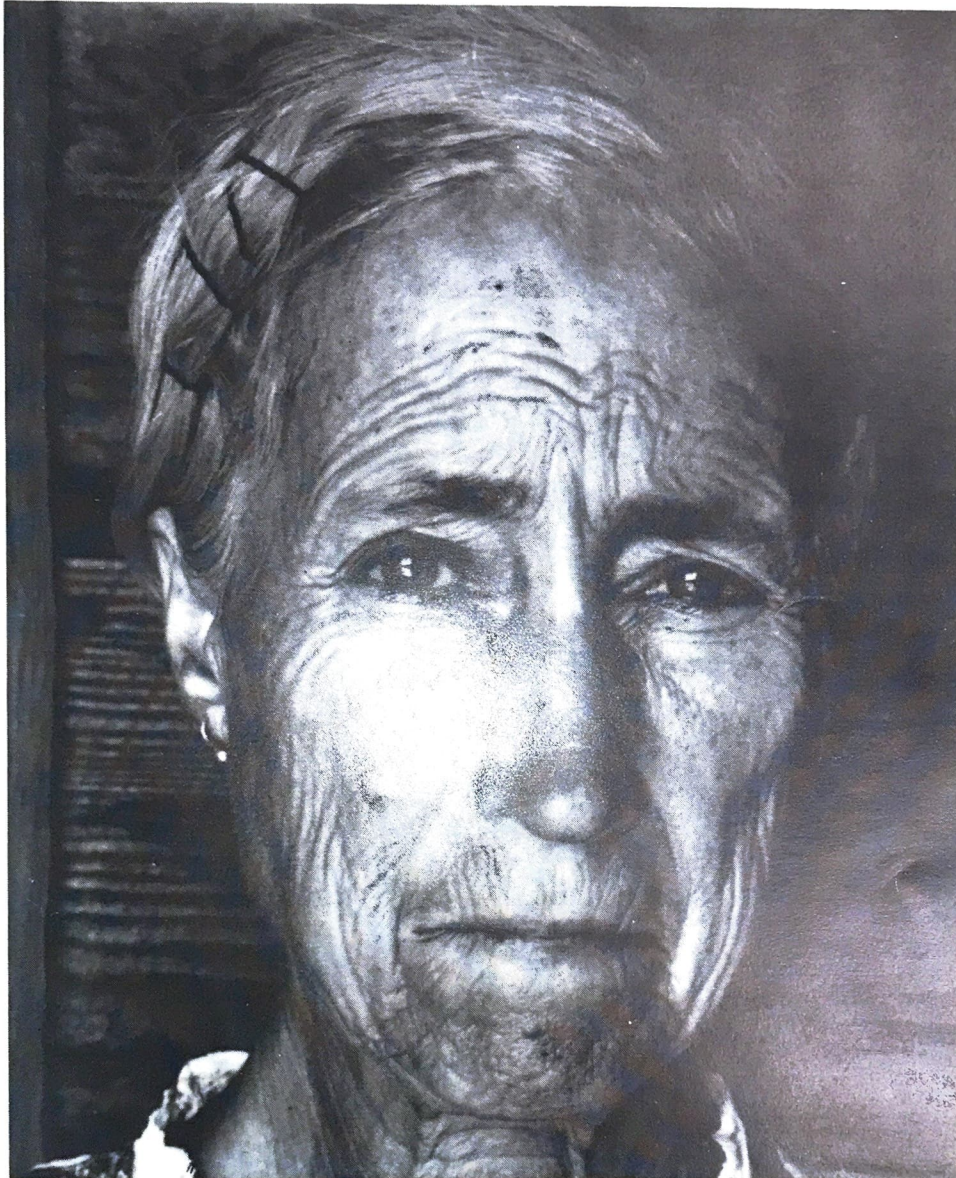


MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE



SEPTEMBER 8 · NOVEMBER 14, 1987

**THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The Art Gallery's current exhibition, "Margaret Bourke-White: The Humanitarian Vision" was organized and conceived by the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, School of Art, College of Visual and Performing Arts, Syracuse University. The works in the exhibition were chosen from the photographic collections of Time, Incorporated in New York and the George Arents Research Library for Special Collections at Syracuse University. They were chosen by cocurators Jonathan Silverman, director of foreign rights at Scott Meredith Literary Agency, and author of *For the World to See: The Life of Margaret Bourke-White* (Viking Press), and Ruth Stevens Appelhof, former curator of exhibitions for the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, Syracuse University, presently Curator of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

I want to thank Ruth Stevens Appelhof for writing the essay for this brochure, which will be available to our visitors along with the catalogue produced for the exhibition. Special thanks are also extended to the Estate of Margaret Bourke-White and to Roger White, who generously allowed us to reprint his sister's photographs in this brochure. Thanks are also due to Edward Aikens, Director, and Larry David Perkins, Registrar, of the Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, and Amy Dougherty of the George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, for their assistance with the logistics of the exhibition.

Special thanks are also extended to Michael Giangrasso for installation assistance and to members of the Fine Arts Center staff: Jennifer Curtiss, Laura Gritt, Karen Kendrick, Andrea Kwasny, and Hwany Lee, Art Gallery Assistants; Jay Strevey, Acting Technical Director, Fine Arts Center; and Mary Balduf, Gallery Secretary. I also want to thank Jeffrey Cooper for his editorial assistance in the preparation of this brochure.

The exhibition will be on view at The Fine Arts Center Art Gallery from September 8 - November 14, 1987.

Cover: Locket, Georgia, 1936

18 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

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Rhonda Cooper
Director

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MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE

One of the world's most celebrated photojournalists, Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971) proved herself to be not only a remarkably skilled photographer but a great artist and a woman of immense compassion and personal courage as well. Through her ten books (including her autobiography, *Portrait of Myself*) and numerous articles and photo-stories, Bourke-White has left an impressive legacy of literary and, above all, photographic excellence. The depth and breadth of Bourke-White's contributions are preserved in some 15,000 photographs and 20,000 negatives from which the works in the exhibition, "Margaret Bourke-White: The Humanitarian Vision," were selected.

As a freshman art major at Teachers College at Columbia University in 1921, Bourke-White was inspired by the distinguished educator Arthur Wesley Dow, then director of the Department of Fine Arts. Dow, whose teaching was widely influential during the developmental years of the American avant-garde, drew heavily upon Hegel's philosophy of art and Fenollosa's interest in the compositional theory of Japanese prints. Most notable among Bourke-White's teachers at Columbia was Clarence H. White, among whose many students were such notable documentary photographers as Doris Ulmann and Dorothea Lange. A founding member of the Photo-Secession Group, White, who was always encouraging each student to find his or her own individual way, wrote little about the aesthetics of photography. "I do not believe that the photographer should go with a preconceived idea of what he is going to get," said White. "He should be moved by his subject." Photography, he maintained, should be an "expression for an artist." (Delaware Art Museum, *Symbolism of Light: The Photographs of Clarence H. White*, Wilmington, Delaware: Delaware Art Museum, 1977, p. 30).

Max Weber, a friend and colleague of Clarence White's, was another possible influence on Bourke-White's understanding of composition. Having studied in Paris from 1905 to 1908, Weber was deeply impressed by the paintings of Matisse, Cezanne, and Picasso. While teaching at the White School of Photography (1914-1918), Weber

stressed the principles of abstract-cubist composition that White then incorporated into his own lectures.

Later, as a student at Cornell University, Margaret Bourke-White earned spending money by selling photographs of ivy-covered campus buildings to her fellow students and to the school's Alumni News magazine. After graduation, in 1927, she settled in Cleveland, Ohio, and began photographing the industrial world of smoke stacks, railroads, and steel mills that surrounded her in the Cleveland Flats. Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* magazine, was impressed by Bourke-White's work, which evoked the drama and energy of the Industrial Age. Recognizing the news value of America's industrial activity, at its peak in 1929, Luce was about to launch *Fortune* magazine. In his quest for the very best photography, Luce turned to the machine aesthetic images of Bourke-White. Her striking images of aluminum, paper, petroleum, and pharmaceutical factories unveiled great beauty in the linear patterns of the machines.

It was at this time that Bourke-White began to take a strong interest in the Soviet Union. Her first book, *Eyes on Russia*, grew out of her visit in the summer of 1930 to document the first of Stalin's five-year plans. While focusing on the machine as a symbol of progress, Bourke-White paid a great deal of attention to the Russian people as well. Among the most notable images produced on Bourke-White's third trip to Russia in 1932 was her photograph of Stalin's mother. Bourke-White succeeds in capturing the woman's quiet resignation, achieving an impression of intimacy that transcends any cultural or linguistic barriers that may have existed between the photographer and her subject.

Bourke-White's photographs began to appear extensively in museum exhibitions on both the east and west coasts early in her career. She was invited to enter a few of her works in the first photography salon at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, and two of her prints were selected in an exhibition of a hundred images at the National Alliance of Art and Industry in Washington, D.C. Lloyd La Page Rollins, director of the M.H. deYoung Memorial Museum in San Francisco, organized

forty of Bourke-White's Russian images for an exhibition in 1933 that subsequently traveled to several museums on the west coast that year.

The social consciousness that is evident in much of Bourke-White's work is clearly evolved from the social realism of the 1920s and early 1930s, which found its photographic roots in the pioneering work of Jacob A. Riis and Lewis W. Hine. Bourke-White's personal vision of photography as an expression of the human condition can be dated to 1934 when *Fortune* magazine assigned her to cover the great drought in Nebraska and the Dakotas. As she later recalled: "I was deeply moved by the suffering I saw and touched by the bewilderment of the farmers. I think this was the beginning of my awareness of people in a human, sympathetic sense as subjects for the camera and photographed against a wider canvas than I had perceived before . . . Their very desperation had jolted me into the realization that a man is more than a figure to put into the background of a photograph for scale . . . I was learning that to understand another human being you must gain some insight into the conditions which made him what he is." (Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963, p. 110, 134).

In 1936, Bourke-White began her collaboration with Erskine Caldwell on *You Have Seen Their Faces*, a study of sharecroppers in the American south. That same year, Bourke-White joined the staff of *Life*, and her photo-essay "Dam and Fort Peck, Montana" appeared as the lead article in the magazine's premier issue. The cover photograph of the towering dam recalls her interest in industrial forms, but the photographs in the essay itself reflect her powerful concern for the people of the region. The relaxed demeanor of her subjects suggest that the photographer was a welcome guest in their world.

As a photographer for *Life*, Bourke-White traveled extensively throughout America, Russia, the Arctic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, England, Rumania, Turkey, Syria, China, Italy, Germany, India, South Africa, and Korea. Her best images serve to illuminate the human dilemma: innocent people caught in a world thrust upon them. Through her photographs, the human struggle to maintain dignity in the midst of tenuous survival becomes a very real part of the viewer's own experience.

Bourke-White's insight into the human condition blossomed when she met and began photographing Mahatma Gandhi between 1946 and 1948. As she recalled: "Talking with him helped me understand. He cared not at all about reshaping the structure of society. He cared a great deal about reshaping the human heart, and calling out the best in every man." (*Portrait*, p. 295). Through her photography, Bourke-White shared her own vision of the human condition with an entire generation: her memorable images of the deep South, the liberation of helping to shape the scope and direction of public opinion in America and around the world. A woman in a field dominated by men, Bourke-White was a courageous pioneer who set the highest standards of photojournalistic excellence. Focusing on her photographs of people throughout the world, this exhibition reconfirms Margaret Bourke-White's status as a great photographer, an outstanding artist whose distinguished body of work expresses a truly humanitarian vision.

Ruth Stevens Appelhof
Birmingham, Alabama
August, 1987



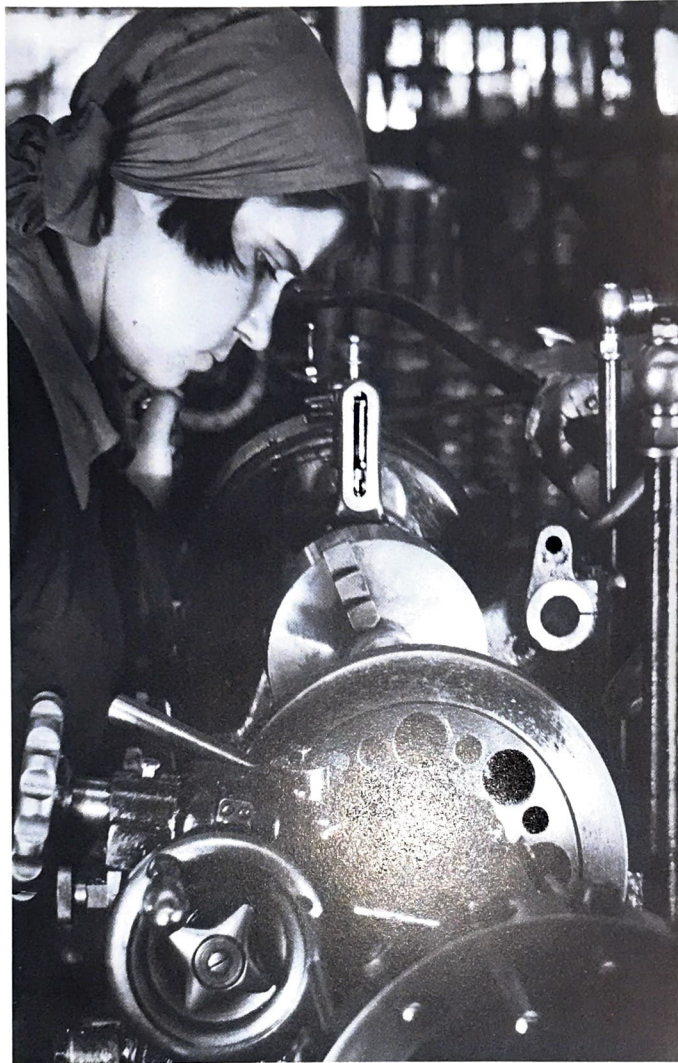
Czecho-Slovak Freeman, 1938

Pierov, Moravia

11¼ x 9¾"

© Estate of Margaret Bourke-White

Collection of George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University



Girl at Work, 1930

Tractorstroi, Stalingrad

13 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

© Estate of Margaret Bourke-White

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East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, 1936

18½ x 14"

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