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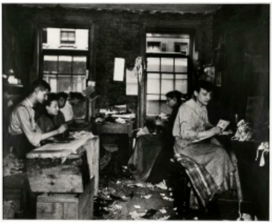
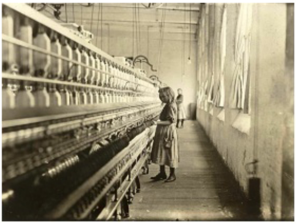
Select Contemporary and Vintage Photography

Labor

In celebration of our Labor Day holiday this weekend we devote today's History of Photography newsletter to three photographers who focused their cameras on labor. They are certainly not the only three but Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, and Sebastião Salgado devoted their photographic efforts to not just photograph but to completely give their energies to help bring about both awareness and change for the lives of workers. Their photographs and publications helped significantly to bring about changes in everything from child labor, wages, health and safety regulations, and most importantly, legislation.



Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)
Making neckties, Division Street , circa 1888



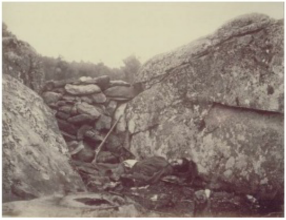
Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Sadie Pfeifer, a Cotton Mill Spinner, Lancaster, South Carolina, 1908

Soon after of the inventions of photography were made public, and as the process was disseminated throughout the world, many photographers began to utilize the camera to document and report on the lives and environs of people. We began to see images of life in small villages and towns, introducing us to new and different cultures: how people lived, dressed, and looked. Monuments and historic sites were photographed. Never before seen were images of conflict and war. The camera is well suited to record these subjects. Of course, many of these subjects had been seen and made by painters and printmakers. The camera images were considered more factual, able to record the smallest detail**.

Maxime Du Camp (1822 - 1894)
Égypte Moyeene, Pyramide de Chéphren, 1850

Roger Fenton (1819 - 1869)
The Valley of the Shadow of Death, 1855

As you are aware, today the camera has been “weaponized” in its use to document many of the events we are facing in our world, whether it be actions by the police or military, or world climatic events. Would we know, would we “believe” the footage we view daily on our social media or news sites if we didn’t have photographic proof? But this is not a new use of photography; imagery has helped bring attention to a myriad of issues throughout history and has stirred the public psyche as it does today. AND, thank goodness for that! I applaud those with the wherewithal to photograph/document scenes of abuse to help us all to recognize the inequities that plague our country and culture. These bold image-makers are in good historical company and ride on the shoulders of the photographers we discuss today.



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FIVE DOLLARS
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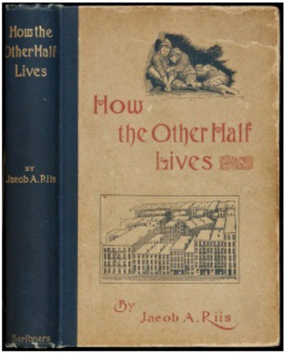
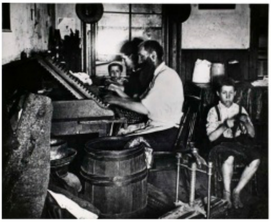
Alexander Gardner (1821 - 1882)
Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg,
1863

** I would be remiss, and you naïve, to believe that the photographic image is always “factual”. As many History of Photography students and scholars have turned their attention to photography we have sadly been shown that many of our “iconic” photographs are not “actual” and, in fact, have either been staged or manipulated. If you are like me, my heart skips a beat each time I read an article bringing some of our favorite images into question. Those of you who have taken my “Ethics and Image” class have heard me talk about this ad nauseam. Images, like the ones above, we now know were staged and manipulated. Other favorites such as Robert Capa’s *Fallen Soldier*, Joe Rosenthal’s *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*, Arthur Rothstein’s *Cow Skull*, and Edward Curtis’ North American Indian photographs have all come under scrutiny by historians. And only yesterday, I read an article (which I posted on our Facebook page) regarding the Roger Fenton image above of *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*, offering solid proof that he or one of his assistants manipulated the cannonballs strewn throughout the scene. So please, always check the source and the facts. Know the “source” and “maker” of an image or video and their reputation for honesty before you believe what you see. In our digital times, seeing in not always believing! Just look at the five-dollar bill in your pocket to see that Lincoln’s head is on someone else’s body! Google this and the others, or wait - maybe one day I’ll do a newsletter on Ethics.

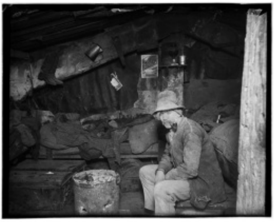
Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)



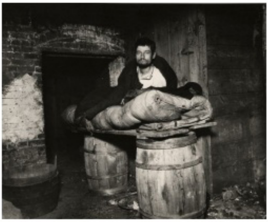
Jacob Riis immigrated to America in 1870 from Denmark. His interest and writing skills prepared him for a life in journalism and soon he secured a contract with the New York Tribune as a police reporter. It was working on these newspaper assignments that Riis began his personal campaign to expose the misery of the underprivileged living conditions in the crime-infested slums of the Lower East Side. He quickly found that the printed word was not sufficiently convincing, which led him to photography.



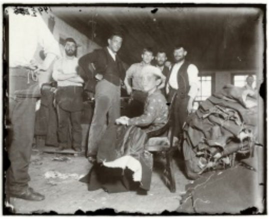
Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)
Bohemian cigarmakers at work, circa 1889



Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)
An Italian Home under a dump, circa 1890



Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)
"Slept in that Cellar Four Years," circa 1890



Jacob Riis (1849 - 1914)
In a Sweat Shop. "12 year old boy at work pulling threads. Had sworn certificate he was 16 -- owned under cross-examination to being 12. His teeth corresponded with that age," circa 1890

He began to offer public speaking engagements throughout the city, sharing with the audience his experiences and describing the deplorable conditions and abuses facing many of the newly arrived immigrants and their daily lives. Hoping to raise funds and awareness, he relentlessly fought for his cause. Much of what he described to his audience was hard for people to understand and in many cases to believe. He had an interest in photography and two amateur photographers, Henry Piffard and Richard Hoe Lawrence, initially joined him and began to accompany him to the slums to make images that would be used to illustrate his talks.

He was very aware of the power of the photograph, but much of what he was trying to describe regarding the people and their conditions were hard and in most cases impossible to photograph. So many lived in the squalor of basements, many in rooms with no windows or natural light. Where there was light it was often from a candle. The equipment used in the late 1800s was not yet designed to be able to record images under such severe low light conditions. Fortunately, Riis and his companions were among the first photographers in America to utilize a new German invention. Adolf Miethe and Johannes Gaedicke had developed a "Flashlight Powder." This somewhat dangerous invention of using a chemical mixture of powders poured into a metal tray and ignited, then created a small explosion thus illuminating an area in a burst of light. Riis and his companions perfected the use of flash powder, enabling them to make photographs under conditions they were not able to do before. These images proved to shock the people who viewed them, when paired with Riis' writing he produced the powerful volume "*How The Other Half Lives,*" published in 1890. This book, with the help of Theodore Roosevelt, who at the time was the New York's Police Commissioner, helped bring about many changes to the living and working conditions of the residents of the Lower East Side.

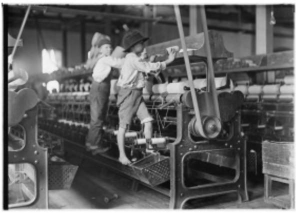
Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)

Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Young Russian Jewess, Ellis Island, New York , 1905

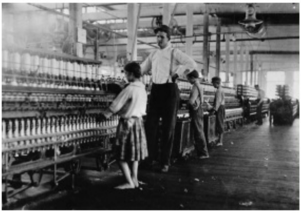
Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Italian Family Seeking Lost Baggage, Ellis Island,1905

Lewis Hine was an American sociologist and photographer who used his camera as a tool to help bring about social reform. His photographs were instrumental in changing child labor laws in the United States.

Hine studied sociology at University, and after graduation secured a teaching position at New York City's Ethical Culture School. He taught and encouraged his students to utilize photography as an educational medium. Hine would bring his students to Ellis Island in New York Harbor. It was during that time, from 1904 to 1909 that he began to photograph the newly arriving immigrants. Hine was greatly concerned with the welfare of the underprivileged and it was during the period of making the Ellis Island photographs that he realized photography was the perfect tool for use in bringing about social change and reform.



Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Many children worked at mills. These boys here at the Bibb Mill in Macon, Georgia, were so small they had to climb the spinning frame just to mend the broken threads and put back the empty bobbins, 1909



Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Overseer supervising a girl (about 13 years old) operating a bobbin-winding machine in the Yazoo City Yarn Mills, Mississippi, 1911

Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Many newsies stayed out late at night to try and sell their extras. The youngest boy in this group is 9 years-old. Washington, D.C., 1912

Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Young boys working in the coal mines were often referred to as Breaker Boys. This large group of children worked for the Ewen Breaker in Pittston, Pennsylvania, 1911

Lewis Hine followed the newly arrived immigrants to the deplorable and unsavory tenements that became their homes in slums of New York's Lower East Side. He then brought his camera into the sweatshops where they found work. In 1908 he became the photographer for the National Child Labor Committee leaving his teaching position and devoting the next decade to documenting labor with a focus on Child Labor. Making his photographs in factories was often dangerous. Factory foremen frequently threatened him with violence and death threats.

Child Labor was a subject that was "hidden" from the public and it was Lewis Hine's photographs that exposed this practice and ultimately helped bring about an end to the abuses of thousands of children. Thanks to his work and the National Child Labor Committee, in 1912 the Children's Bureau was created which exposed many of the child labor practices and abuses. Finally, in 1938 The Fair Labor Act was passed which brought child labor to an end in the United States.

Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Atop Empire State- in construction; Chrysler Bldg & [Daily] News in middle foreground, 1931

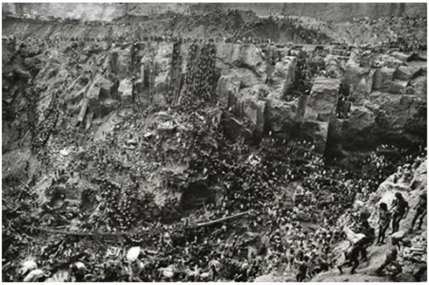
Lewis Wickes Hine (1874 - 1940)
Icarus, high up on Empire State (variant) , 1931

In 1930 Hine was commissioned to document the construction of the Empire State Building. He photographed workers in precarious and dangerous positions bringing attention to the many risks that workers endured. To make the photographs Hine experienced many of the same dangers, hanging from cables or balancing on beams high above Fifth Ave. These photographs helped to bring attention to the many unsafe practices that existed in the construction industry. We have Lewis Hine to thank for helping to make that industry safer for its workers.

Vox
DARKROOM

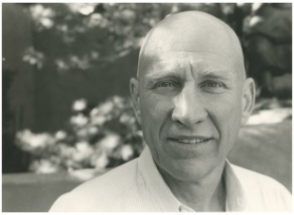
Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)

I very much like to work on long-term projects...There is time for the photographer and the people in front of the camera to understand each other. There is time to go to a place and understand what is happening there. ...When you spend more time on a project, you learn to understand your subjects. There comes a time when it is not you who is taking the pictures. Something special happens between the photographer and the people he is photographing. He realizes that they are giving the pictures to him - Sebastião Salgado



Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)
Serra Pelada, State of Para, Brazil , 1986

Sebastião Salgado's powerful and heart-rendering images have become icons of the human condition: dignity, beauty, eternal hope and survival, suffering, ignoble exploitation, and degradation. It is difficult to look at his images and remain unaffected. Once seen, you are shocked into a new perception of reality. His photographs are brutally frank; images of hunger in the Sahel region of Africa and Ethiopia; remarkable documentation of Brazil's Serra Pelada gold mine where 50,000 men reduced a mountain to a 600-foot deep crater searching the earth for nuggets of gold; poignant images of peasant life in remote areas of Central and South America that tell of marginal existence and at the same time portray a vision of dignity and resiliency in the soul of mankind.



David Scheinbaum (b. 1951)
Sebastiáo Salgado, Santa Fe , 2001

Sebastião Salgado holds a doctorate in economics. While working in Africa for the International Coffee Organization, he discovered that his clinical work as a social scientist paled to the time he spent working with people directly. He borrowed his wife Lélia's camera and was at once amazed at what he could capture in the viewfinder, and how it affected him. This instant was the beginning of his work as a documentary photographer.

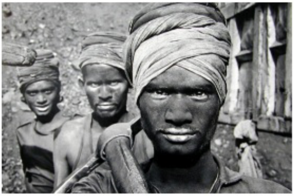
In 1977 he began a seven-year self-initiated project photographing in small villages in South America which culminated in his first book *Autres Ameriques (Other Americas*). During l984 - l985 he worked with the French relief group *Medecins sans Frontieres* (Doctors Without Borders) in the Sahel region of Africa, where severe drought had created another famine of monumental proportions. His extraordinary images, dignified and empathetic, were published in France as *L'Homme Detresse (Man In Distress)* and in Spain as *El Fin del Camino (The End of the Road).*

In the 1990s Sebastiao's work concentrated on his photographic project entitled, *Workers*. *Workers* served as an elegy for the passing of traditional methods of labor and production. Yet the ultimate message was one of endurance and hope. Salgado gave us a visual global epic that transcends mere image-making and becomes an affirmation of the enduring spirit of all people.

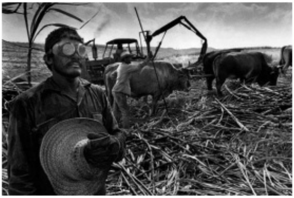
On the eve of the millennium, Salgado dedicated his energies to another multi-year project entitled, *Migrations*. *Migrations* documented the world-altering phenomenon of mass migration. Salgado's images collectively serve as a metaphor for the hundreds of millions of people who, in an elemental struggle of survival, had ruptured their ties with their homelands and traditions in a flight towards other destinies.

Sebastião Salgado's most recent epic project is entitled, *Genesis*. *Genesis* is a quest for the world as it was, as it was formed, as it evolved, as it existed for millennia before modern life accelerated and began distancing us from the very essence of being. Salgado wrote of Genesis,

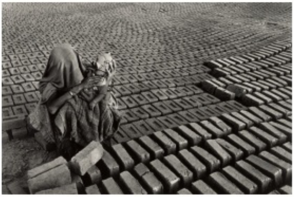
"*I wanted to recount the dignity and beauty of life in all its forms and show how we all share the same origins…"*



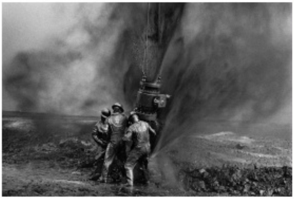
Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)
Coal Mining, Dhanbad, Bihar, India , 1989



Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)
Sugar Cane Cutters, Cuba , 1988



Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)
Rajasthan canal works, India , 1989

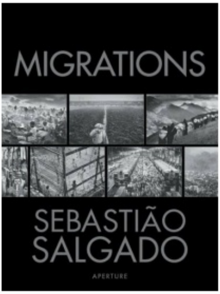


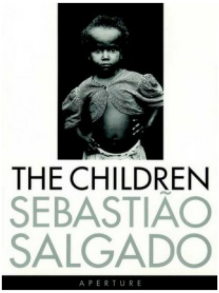
Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944)
Workers Struggle to Remove Bolts, Oil Wells, Kuwait, 1991

In 2001 Janet and I received funding from Santa Fe's Lannan Foundation to bring the exhibition *Migrations* to Santa Fe. Initially, the plan was to exhibit these works at the College of Santa Fe. After reviewing the hundred or more images we realized that it would be detrimental to the body of work to edit the exhibit to fit that one space. With Lannan's assistance, both financially and intellectually, we embarked on an unprecedented project for Santa Fe. We created a network between the College of Santa Fe, The Museum of Fine Arts (now Museum of Art), and the Lannan Foundation to divide the exhibit and display the works in three locations. In the process of managing this task, with the help of the Salgados, Lélia and Sebastião, we also included a concurrent body of work that Sebastião had done along with *Migrations* entitled "*The Children*" which we arranged to exhibit at the Santa Fe Children's Museum. This monumental undertaking was complicated by the horrific events of 9/11. The exhibition, curated by Lélia and produced by Aperture, was to be shipped to Santa Fe that week. Of course, New York City was in lockdown with no vehicles being let in or out of the city. By the time the work arrived in town we had less than a week to mount the exhibit in all four locations. With the help of the incredible staff people at all institutions, and a number of students, and volunteers we made the opening deadline. This was important in many ways. As a nation, everything had stopped. Opening this exhibition was a sign that we could continue living and move through the trauma of 9/11. The poignancy of these images, especially at this time, created a space for dialogue and healing within our community.

Lannan's funding included bringing Sebastião and Lélia to Santa Fe for the opening and a number of speaking engagements and dialogs at the Lensic, The Museum of Art, and the College of Santa Fe. It was a great honor for Janet and me to not only introduce Santa Fe to the photographs of Sebastião's but to meet and interact with him and Lélia.

Both Santa Fe and the Salgados were mutually enamored with each other and that initial meeting led to a number of other events in the coming years, including a memorable dialog arranged by Lannan between Sebastião Salgado and Eduardo Galeano, an interview with Amy Goodman for Democracy Now.

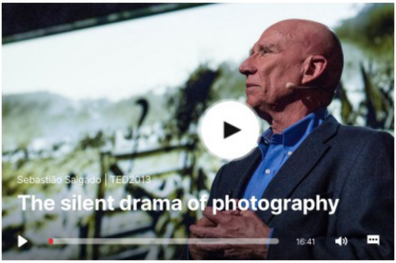




The week also included a residency with the photography students at the College of Santa Fe. It was during that week there were many meetings and discussions between Sebastião and my students. After each day Sebastião and I either went to lunch or dinner. During those times we both continued to be intrigued and surprised that the students' interest was more concentrated on "how do you do this work?" Their interest was not in the technical details of photography, but rather from a personal point of view. How do you prepare? What do you need to know about the people and their countries? Do you speak the language? How do you decide where to go? What should we be studying in school besides photography?

We both realized a comprehensive program of study that included all the photographic essentials to be a documentary photographer but also included, Political Science, Environmental Science, Language, International Business and Economics, Technical and Creative Writing, and more, did not exist. Again, with the financial support from the Lannan Foundation and friends in the photo world. Sebastião and I crafted what would later become the Documentary Studies Program at the College of Santa Fe. This course of study included spending a semester in Brazil at the Salgado's Instituto Terra, www.institutoterra.org, and putting together a staff and faculty at both the College and in Brazil. As you can imagine this was an amazing opportunity for the students who participated in this collaboration and much of its success should be attributed to two of our local Santa Fe luminaries, photographer Tony O'brien and writer Bill DeBuys, who did much to formalize the curriculum and administrative duties.

Working with the Salgados, both in Santa Fe and in Brazil, remains one of the highlights of my teaching and gallery career. He is, in many ways, his work. The passion and sensitivity he brings to his work is the same passion he brings to his life and friendships. He gives a voice to the voiceless with both knowledge and respect. Indeed, for him, "pictures are given, not taken."



DW
Meet
Sebastião Salgado

We again want to thank you for the feedback. Your emails and calls mean the world to us and continue to motivate. We have had some wonderful responses.

Many of you have also asked about accessing our previous emails. We have added a new page on our website entitled "History of Photography". All our past and future weekly mailings will be located there for viewing. Please feel free to share them and encourage interested parties to join our mailing list under "contact".

Thank you, please stay safe, healthy, productive, and involved.

Please visit our website **www.photographydealers.com** to view our current inventory.