

The New York Times

200 Vintage Photographs Acquired by the Modern

By MARGARETT LOKE
Published: February 20, 1998

The Museum of Modern Art, which was the first major museum to show Garry Winogrand's work, has acquired the largest collection of his photographs in private hands. The collection's more than 200 black-and-white vintage prints had been assembled by Eugene M. Schwartz, who died in 1995, and his wife, Barbara, avid collectors of contemporary art.

Most of the photographs date from the 1950's through the 70's, and all bear the photographer's characteristic off-kilter, gently satiric, graceful style. The collection was acquired from Mrs. Schwartz through purchase and a gift in memory of her husband, a writer, publisher and direct mail order expert who joined the Modern's committee on photography in 1993.

This acquisition more than doubles the museum's holdings of Winogrand prints and includes several dozen rarely seen images that were bought directly from Winogrand's widow, Eileen Hale. Winogrand died in 1984, at age 56. Although Winogrand made thousands of rough 11-by-14-inch work prints to get a better look at his negatives, a far smaller number of exhibition-quality prints were made by him or under his supervision. These are the vintage photographs prized by museums and collectors.

"The museum had been collecting Winogrand's work since 1963," said Peter Galassi, chief curator at the Modern's department of photography. "But partly because of the fact that he died unexpectedly at a young age, in the middle of his career, there hadn't been the sense it was time to sit down and systematically make sure that the gaps were filled. Gene and Barbara did just that."

The Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Ariz., is the repository of a huge hoard of Winogrand negatives, contact sheets and work prints that was given to the center by both Winogrand and Ms. Hale. But with the acquisition of the Schwartz collection, said the photography dealer Peter MacGill, "it is my understanding that no museum has as many fine vintage Winogrand exhibition prints as the Modern." Mr. MacGill, who knew Winogrand well and represented him in New York, was the intermediary in the Schwartz collection going to the Modern.

Among the highlights of the collection are the El Morocco pictures. In the mid-1950's, Winogrand did an exuberant series on the habitués of this Manhattan nightspot. The El Morocco exhibition prints in the Schwartz collection, said Mr. MacGill, cannot be found at the Center for Creative Photography collection. Furthermore, the Schwartzes' photographs from the beguiling "Animals" series "is the most complete extant," Mr. MacGill said. Through the end of May, 26 of the newly acquired photographs will be on view in the Museum of Modern Art's photography galleries.

Long known as passionate supporters of cutting-edge art who also gave many of their pieces to museums around the country, the Schwartzes began collecting Winogrand prints after the major retrospective of his work at the Modern in 1988.

The show, recalled Mrs. Schwartz, "struck Gene just like dynamite." Through the interest in photography of their son, Michael, the couple had built up a collection of vintage portraits in the 1970's, from Hill and Adamson through Diane Arbus, and in the 80's were collecting the post-modern work of artists like Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and the Starns.

Once smitten by Winogrand's photographs, Mr. Schwartz "read everything that Garry ever wrote and every book was notated and every picture was commented on," his wife said. With the help of the photography dealers Jeffrey Fraenkel in California and Mr. MacGill in New York, Mr. Schwartz began to amass Winogrand prints. His wife, on the other hand, wasn't sure that they should be starting another collection when they were already heavily involved in buying the new art of the 80's.

But after 75 Winogrands were ensconced in the couple's Park Avenue penthouse, said Mrs. Schwartz, who is an interior designer and art adviser, she realized that something was going on and "I'd better pay a lot of attention." When she did, she, too, got hooked.

Why did she decide to part with the collection?

"I don't have any other house," Mrs. Schwartz said. "I'm getting on. There are only so many years of being able to rotate the collection, and it's terribly expensive to rotate. In the 60's we could change the whole house like every six months because things got rolled up. But in the 80's everything got to be impossible. Everything had to be hoisted."

She continued: "Hanging photography is very costly. Hanging 20 pictures on a wall is not just putting up a nail. There's a system, a grid. Art installers are here to do it." Besides, she said, her warehouse is full, and art pieces she has bought aren't even in the apartment because there are no available walls.

"I wanted the inheritors of this collection to be MOMA," she said. "And they made it possible and I made it possible by a partial gift. My husband would be beaming. He would be so happy."