CONVERSATIONS

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Photography from the

Bank of America Merrill Lynch Collection

MUSEO DEL NOVECENTO

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Museo del Novecento
Spazio mostre
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This exhibition is provided by the *Bank of America Merrill Lynch* Art in our Communities® Programme, and was originally curated by the *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

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CONVERSATIONS

The Museo del Novecento in Milan is building on its commitment to showcase the 20th century's myriad art forms and to embrace international cultural exchange by hosting *Conversations*: an important selection of photographs from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch collection.

This exhibition, which was originally displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, treats photography as a unique and authoritative means of expression that has earned its rightful place in the arts spectrum. It complements the Novecento's existing displays, instigating a meaningful dialogue between late nineteenth and twentieth century photographic works and offers visitors the opportunity to admire pieces by some of international photography's finest masters.

Conversations marks the first time that the Museo del Novecento has partnered with the City of Milan's Photographic Archive, thanks to the efforts of Silvia Paoli, the Archive's chief curator. The Archive, which is dedicated to the conservation and appreciation of photography and is part of the Municipal Museums, comprises approximately 850,000 photographs, with examples of many different photographic techniques dating from the beginnings of the medium in the nineteenth century through to the present day. It has a well established, national reputation as a centre for the study of photography and has undertaken projects with many international institutions. In this particular case it offered its scientific expertise to the Museo del Novecento, thereby pooling resources and consequently ensuring an outstanding result, realised in the form of this exhibition.

— CLAUDIO SALSI
Director of the Museum Sector
City of Milan

THOMAS STRUTH
Born in 1954
Audience 4 (Galleria Dell'Accademia), Florenz, 2004
C-print mounted on UV Plexiglas
185.1 x 341.6 x 6.3 cm
© Thomas Struth.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris

Continuing our long tradition of support for the arts, Bank of America Merrill Lynch is pleased to partner with the Museo del Novecento on the presentation of *Conversations*. This exhibition, drawn from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch art collection, is part of the Art in our Communities® programme, which was launched in 2009. Through it we have lent more than 50 exhibitions, free of charge, to museums around the world.

Conversations was first presented to the public at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and will travel to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, in February 2012. Featuring a mix of photographs from both well known and lesser known artists, the exhibition aims to create 'conversations' between the works, covering a wide range of themes including portraits, landscapes, street photography and abstraction. Together, these images have all helped to shape the history of the medium. Their unusual juxtaposition helps to spark a visual dialogue, creating a unique exhibition that a wide audience will enjoy.

We are pleased to work with the Museo del Novecento on this project, having undertaken a special partnership with this new museum through both our sponsorship and the offer of free admission for its opening months. In these economically-challenged times, the need for private funding for arts support becomes ever more apparent. As a company that has done business in Italy for more than 50 years, we are honoured to play a part in the continuation of Italy's unmatched cultural contributions to the world.

— RENA DE SISTO
Global Arts and Culture Executive, Bank of America Merrill Lynch

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Conversations presents a selection of photographs from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Collection, which is considered one of the most diverse corporate collections in the world. As the company has grown, this prestigious collection has been continually enriched with art from a number of legacy banks. Each has brought a particular emphasis – regional, thematic, contemporary or historical. Today, it comprises paintings, works on paper, textiles, sculptures, historical documents and includes many images by some of the world's finest international photographers.

Displayed in the Novecento's ground floor galleries, this show aims to highlight a selection of photographs from the bank's collection by placing them in "conversation" with one another, following various theme-based, historic and formal combinations. The juxtaposed categories range from 'Looking at Art' to the 'Power of the Portrait', to 'Abstraction and Experimentation' and 'Surrealism', amongst many others.

The display traces the history of photography and its evolution. The works shown are by past and present masters, such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Eugène Atget, Alfred Stieglitz, László Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Edward Weston, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, Cindy Sherman, Ed Ruscha, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Candida Hofer, Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth.

The essence and character of the Bank of America Merrill Lynch photography collection are owed to the curatorial efforts of Beaumont Newhall, a renowned scholar. Newhall was founder and director of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, between 1940 and 1947. Later, in 1967, he and his wife Nancy, who was a knowledgeable photography historian, were asked to create a photography collection for a legacy Bank of America Merrill Lynch company. Over the ensuing three years they purchased approximately 350 works that were both contemporary and international in scope, building the foundation of today's collection with impeccable vision. The quality of the collection set a standard of expertise and excellence, as espoused by future generations of the company's curators and valued by museums to the present day. The photographs in *Conversations* were collected by subsequent curators, all of whom based their choices on the very same principles established by Beaumont and Nancy Newhall.

What few people know is that Newhall held regular correspondence with the Italian art and photography historian, collector and scholar, Lamberto Vitali, who had been active in Milan since the 1930s. Between 1959 and 1970, Vitali often turned to Newhall for direction, drawing on his expertise, to organise exhibitions and projects in Milan. This was particularly true for his exhibition showcasing Helmut Gernsheim's photography collection at the XI Triennale of 1957, and for Milan's 1959 *The Family of Man* exhibition (curated by Newhall's successor at MoMA, Edward Steichen.)

Conversations offers the opportunity to see a selection of masterworks displayed in new juxtapositions, while celebrating and strengthening a history of collaboration linking Italy and America.

— SILVIA PAOLI
Curator of Conversations
at the Museo del Novecento

Since the early years of photography, artists have sought to depict historic monuments in compelling ways. Francis Frith traveled to Egypt in the 1850s, keen on making images that would convey the grandeur of the ancient sites. His undertaking was laborious, requiring a caravan and porters to transport an unwieldy camera, 16 x 20–inch glass negatives, bottles of chemicals, and a portable darkroom. On his return to Britain, the volume Frith published was the first successful commercial endeavor to reveal the wonders of the region, and set a standard for future generations.

Celebrated for his large color depictions of American deserts — his multifaceted *Desert Cantos* series features segments categorized by place, terrain, events, and weather — Richard Misrach traveled to Egypt to photograph the desert there in 1989. The images he captured focus on the contemporary tourist experience, combining sublime beauty with subtle commentary.

FRANCIS FRITH
1822–1898
The Ramesseum of El-Kurneh, Thebes, Second View, 1857–8
Albumen print

RICHARD MISRACH
Born in 1949
Ticket Booth and Pyramid, Giza, Egypt, 1989
Chromogenic print
© Richard Misrach, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles, and Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

ROBERT FRANK
Born in 1924
Trolley Car, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1955
Gelatin silver print
© Robert Frank,
from *The Americans*

HARRY CALLAHAN
1912–1999
Chicago, 1960
Gelatin silver print
© The estate of Harry Callahan
Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

The Bank of America Merrill Lynch collection is especially strong in documentary and street photography, including examples by Walker Evans, Bruce Davidson, Roy DeCarava, Robert Frank, and Harry Callahan. Swiss-born Robert Frank took to the road in 1955 to photograph the United States for a book he hoped would comprise a "visual study of civilization." Simply titled *The Americans*, Frank's book was a shock to the public, who saw in its bleak and grainy photographs an obvious critique of American postwar culture. His picture of a segregated trolley calls to mind a multi-paneled altarpiece framing the cultural black figure like a sad-eyed medieval saint.

In 1960, Harry Callahan, who taught for many years at the Institute of Design in Chicago, made a series of photographs of pedestrians on the city's busy sidewalks. He pre-focused his 35mm camera and shot quickly and intuitively, often without his subject's knowledge. Here two moving figures cross paths, perfectly expressing the lonely dislocation of the street.

Gustave Le Gray expanded the visual possibilities of photography at its inception; nearly 100 years later, Kenneth Josephson explored its conceptual implications.
Initially trained as a painter, Le Gray began taking photographs in 1847, contributing to early technological developments. In the mid-1850s he began a remarkable series of dramatic seascapes that elevated landscape photography to a new level of sophistication. Since current technology made it difficult to capture the varying tonal intensities of sea and sky in a single exposure, Le Gray addressed this challenge by working in subdued light and occasionally printing the clouds from a separate negative. The poetic grandeur of atmospheric images like this one impressed his contemporaries and were collected by Romantic painters such as Gustave Courbet.

Similarly, in New York State, Josephson focuses on an expanse of ocean. In his case, he calls into question the pristine perspective that characterizes views such as Le Gray's by holding a postcard of a cruise ship above the horizon line. The work is from Josephson's series *Images within Images*, in which the artist inserts found items into the composition to examine how photographic materials influence our conception of place. By interjecting himself into the image, Josephson wittily emphasizes the photographer's act of choosing and framing a scene.

GUSTAVE LE GRAY
1820–1882
Seascape with Yacht and Tugboat, Normandy, 1857
Albumen print

KENNETH JOSEPHSON
Born in 1932
New York State, 1970
Gelatin silver print
© Kenneth Josephson/Higher Pictures

EDWARD WESTON
1886–1958
Tina Modotti, Mexico, 1924
Platinum print
Collection Center
for Creative Photography
© 1981 Arizona Board of Regents

Capturing a sitter's psychological state, rather than simply recording the details of a face, is the goal of most modern portrait photographers, but this was beyond the capabilities of many of photography's earliest practitioners. Julia Margaret Cameron, however, began experimenting with photography in 1863, and became highly skilled at working with wet collodion glass-plate negatives that required long exposures. Despite the technical challenges, she created lifelike portraits of friends and family, as in this beautifully lit image of her niece, May.

In 1923 American photographer Edward Weston found his ideal subject in Italian-born actress Tina Modotti. Weston traveled to Mexico with Modotti, as he said, to "start life anew." During their Mexican sojourn, the photographer experimented with a range of new work including heroic portrait heads and avantgarde nudes. Weston made this boldly modern portrait of Modotti with a handheld Graflex camera in brilliant sunlight, shooting from slightly below eye level and at very close range.

JULIA MARGARET CAMERON
1815–1879
Untitled (Mary Emily "May" Prinsep), 1870
Albumen print

Alvin Langdon Coburn, active in the beginning of the 20th century, and Art Sinsabaugh, working at mid-century, both explored the artistic possibilities of the American landscape in photography — literally from different perspectives. Coburn was a major figure among the Pictorialists, whose hand-worked, softfocus prints were meant to establish the medium within the realm of fine art. In 1911 and 1912, he traveled to the American West — departing from the documentary tradition of his 19th-century predecessors — to make impressionistic views such as this one of the Grand Canyon. Here he creates a striking balance between light and dark, capturing the interplay of the velvety expanse of rock and powdery snow.

While Coburn's composition looks down into the sublime abyss of the canyon, Sinsabaugh focuses on the distant horizon line of the Midwest. Sinsabaugh produced series of pictures in different regions of the country, employing an enormous "banquet" camera to make negatives that captured the landscape's panoramic sweep. Here, rows of crops appear in a formal pattern as buildings and trees punctuate the horizon, creating a visual tension between expansiveness and detail.

ART SINSABAUGH
1924–1983
Midwest Landscape #34 from "Midwest Landscape Group,", 1961
Gelatin silver print
Art Sinsabaugh Archive, Indiana University Art Museum 300.II.1.34
© 2004, Katherine Anne Sinsabaugh and Elisabeth Sinsabaugh de la Cova

ALVIN LANGDON COBURN
1882–1966
Snow in Canyon, Grand Canyon, 1911
Platinum print

Lee Friedlander and William Eggleston photographed everyday subjects in distinctive ways. Friedlander was greatly influenced by earlier photographers of the American social landscape, including Walker Evans and Robert Frank. Friedlander's pictures imbue unremarkable subjects — like this 1960s hotel room — with a strange beauty, often with a humorous twist. The child's face on the TV screen, seemingly perched at the end of the bed, adds a wonderfully creepy aspect to the otherwise banal space.

William Eggleston, Friedlander's contemporary, was one of the pioneers of color photography during the 1970s. His pictures forced a reappraisal of the long-held belief in the superiority of black-and-white gelatin silver prints. Working primarily close to his home in Memphis, Tennessee, Eggleston recorded ordinary scenes, like this suburban street. Using a wide-angle lens placed only inches above the pavement, a child's tricycle is transformed into a looming, slightly ominous presence, leaving the viewer with a vague sense of unease.

LEE FRIEDLANDER
Born in 1934
T.V. in Hotel Room, Galax, Virginia, 1962
Gelatin silver print
© Lee Friedlander, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

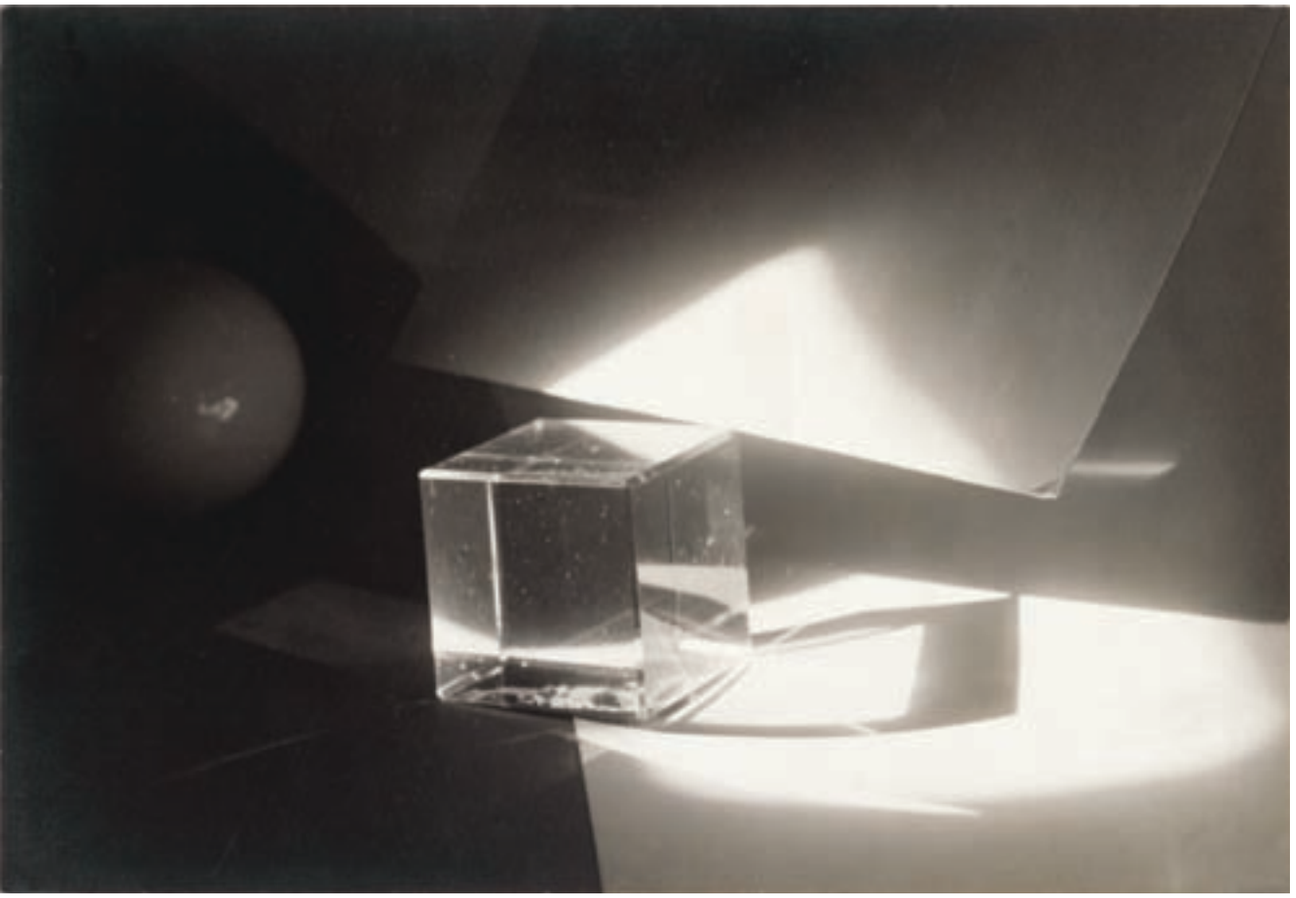
WILLIAM EGGLESTON
Born in 1939
Memphis, about 1970
Dye transfer print
© Eggleston Artistic Trust, courtesy Cheim & Read, New York

Contemporary artists Vera Lutter and Stéphane Couturier interpret the cityscape using different techniques and perspectives. Lutter, who was born in Germany and lives in New York, uses the ancient camera obscura process, exposing the outside world through a pinhole aperture directly onto an enormous sheet of photosensitized paper. Since there is no negative involved, her images are unique. Capitalizing on the reversal of tones in the process — darks becoming light and vice versa — she transforms the landscape's geometry into visions of stark, ethereal beauty.

VERA LUTTER
Born in 1960
135 LaSalle Street, Chicago, VI, 2001
Gelatin silver print
© V. Lutter by SIAE 2011

STÉPHANE COUTURIER
Born in 1957
Unter den Linden, Berlin, 1996
Cibachrome print
© Stéphane Couturier, courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York

Based in Paris, Couturier, on the other hand, photographs international construction sites, using a large-format camera and color film. His images emphasize the vertical and horizontal patterns and rich shades of these man-made structures. This photograph was taken on Unter den Linden, the famous boulevard in the center of Berlin known for its linden trees, monuments, hotels, and embassies.



Both Jaromir Funke and Thomas Ruff experimented with the effects of softfocus. Like other avant-garde modernists of the early 20th century, Funke sought to create geometric abstractions of the everyday world. He transformed still life arrangements of bottles, glasses, plates, and mirrors, into subtly tonal Cubist compositions through light, shadow, and reflection.

JAROMÍR FUNKE
1896–1945
Photographic Construction,
ca 1923
Gelatin silver print
© Miloslava Rupesóvá

THOMAS RUFF
Born in 1958
d.p.b. 08, 2000
Chromogenic print
© T. Ruff by SIAE 2011

From 1999 to 2001, Thomas Ruff recorded buildings designed by modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, titling the series *"l.m.v.d.r."* after the architect's initials. Ruff's large-scale *d.p.b.* (named after the Deutsche Pavilion in Barcelona that Mies designed for the World's Exposition of 1929–30) takes a conceptual approach. He digitally manipulated the image, blurring — and thereby fusing — the building and the landscape. Ruff commented: *"Speed in photography is always blurry, and my picture of the German Pavilion looks like a high-speed locomotive — modernity arriving at the train station of the present (albeit the present of 1929)."*

HELEN LEVITT
1913–2009
New York, about 1940
Gelatin silver print
© Estate of Helen Levitt

GARRY WINOGRAND
1924–1984
World's Fair,
New York City, 1964
Gelatin silver print
© The Estate of Garry Winogrand, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Like many photographers whose work is in the Bank of America Merrill Lynch collection, Helen Levitt and Garry Winogrand were inspired by life on busy city streets. Beginning in the 1930s, Levitt photographed subjects on the lively sidewalks of Harlem and the Lower East Side of NYC. Working with a handheld Leica camera, she was drawn to the imaginative play of children, as in this captivating image of three masked youngsters stepping out proudly on a tenement stoop.

Winogrand also photographed people prolifically, often in crowds, on the streets, in parks, at airports, rodeos, zoos, and state fairs. This photograph records his favorite subject — women of all shapes and sizes — here frozen in time on a bench at the 1964 World's Fair, inextricably linked by a mesmerizing sequence of gestures and interactions.

Some photographic portraits appear to be completely spontaneous, but often these images are meticulously staged. Between 1977 and 1980, Cindy Sherman created a provocative series of photographs that she called Untitled Film Stills. In these grainy, deadpan images, Sherman portrays herself as a kind of B-movie or film noir actress in a variety of settings and costumes. Her pictures capture an array of female "types" and comment on the power of the media in our culture.

Contemporary Dutch photographer Hellen van Meene also creates sensitively constructed portraits, but chooses girls on the verge of womanhood as her subjects. Van Meene celebrates their youthful freshness, while deftly recording their adolescent insecurities and vulnerabilities. She supplies her young sitters with clothing that enhances their natural femininity, and casts their surroundings in daylight that suggests the domestic interiors of Vermeer.

— ANNE HAVINGA
Estrellita and Yousuf Karsh Senior Curator of Photographs, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, USA
— KAREN HAAS
The Lane Collection Curator of Photographs, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, USA

CINDY SHERMAN
Born in 1954
Untitled Film Still #50, 1979
Gelatin silver print
Courtesy of the Artist
and Metro Pictures

HELLEN VAN MEENE
Born in 1972
Untitled, 1997
Chromogenic print
© Hellen van Meene,
courtesy Yancey Richardson Gallery

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cover:

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