

Press Pack

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, Madrid presents

LEWIS HINE

11 February – 29 April 2012



- Inauguration:** 10 February 2012 5pm-9pm
- Press conference:** 9 February 2012 12pm
- Exhibition dates:** 11 February – 29 April 2012
- Location:** FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, Instituto de Cultura
Paseo de Recoletos nº 23, Madrid, SPAIN
- Chief Curator:** Alison Nordström, Curator of Photographs,
George Eastman House, Rochester
- Production:** FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE Instituto de Cultura, Madrid,
In collaboration with Fondation Henri Cartier-
Bresson, Paris and Nederlands Fotomuseum,
Rotterdam.
- Web:** www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/lewishine

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From 11 February until 29 April 2012, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE will host a major retrospective of Lewis Hine, one of the key figures of social documentary photography. The exhibition is presented in collaboration with the George Eastman House (Rochester, USA), home of the Lewis Hine archive. It is the largest and most comprehensive exhibition of Hine's work ever produced.

Lewis Hine (Wisconsin, 1874- New York, 1940) was a key figure of the social documentary movement. Best known for his images of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island and his documentation of the working conditions in the United States at that time, he worked for the National Child Labor Committee and lobbied for a bill to end child labour. He also completed assignments for the American Red Cross in Europe and in the 1930s he documented the construction of the Empire State Building. Hine's primary aim was not aesthetic; he thought of his photographs as a contribution to social progress, showing the reality of conditions of life and the rapid and chaotic effect of urban growth. It was documentary work which, with help from the National Child Labor Committee, contributed to the change of child labour laws in the USA.



Anonymous. Portrait of Lewis Hine, ca. 1917.

Composed of 170 images, mainly original prints from the period, the exhibition offers a complete view of the photographer's trajectory. It places the photographer within the artistic, political and cultural context of his era and explores Hine's career as photographer, artist, educator and social justice worker. It includes his major bodies of work on Ellis Island (1904), child labour (1903-1913), American Red Cross relief work in post World War I Europe (1918-1919), work portraits (1905-1935) and construction of the Empire State Building (1930-1931). The exhibition is accompanied by documents and publications from the era. Some of these have been recently acquired by George Eastman House and have never been seen by the public. The works show how Hine raised questions about social issues such as impoverished living spaces and the exploitation within illegal work houses.

The exhibition is fruit of collaboration between FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE (Madrid), the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson (Paris), where the exhibition was shown in autumn 2011, and the Nederlands Fotomuseum (Rotterdam), where it will be shown at the end of 2012. The exhibition was supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Lewis Wickes Hine was born in 1874 in Oshkosh (Wisconsin). At the age of 16 he abandoned his studies in order to work and look after his recently widowed mother. In 1898 he signed up to the University of Chicago. He began to rub shoulders with activists from some of the reform movements that were up rapidly

across the country at the time. On returning to his home town he began teaching Natural Sciences at the Oshkosh Normal School. He met Frank Manny, director of the Ethical Culture School of New York, who encouraged him to become a teacher, and subsequently offered him a position at his own institution. Hine began teaching Geography and Natural Sciences.

In 1904 Manny provided Hine with his first camera, so that he could document school activities. It was with this bellows camera, placed upon an unstable tripod, and equipped with a Magnesium flash, that Hine took on a year of photographic expeditions to Ellis Island, photographing immigrants who had just arrived in America. It was this experience that made him decide to dedicate his life to photography.



Jewess at Ellis Island, 1905
©Collection George Eastman House

Hine's constant focus was on the most impoverished. It was a time when hunger, epidemics and crime were increasing with the daily arrival of poor migrants. Hine began frequenting Ellis Island between 1904 and 1909. He documented the insalubrious slums in which immigrants lived, cramped together, harassed by work in factories and workshops. Hine was interested in capturing individual stories, earning the trust of his subjects and casting a benevolent gaze on them. This is what makes his images so powerful and gives them the distinctive 'feel', visible throughout his oeuvre. This sense can be felt in *Young Russian Jewess, Ellis Island, 1905*. Taken front-on, from a certain distance and height, the portrait suggests the exchange of gazes and a mutual respect

Towards the end of the 19th century, numerous philanthropic and reform societies were being founded, pushing for the improvement of social conditions. In 1908 Hine abandoned his teaching post in 1908 to become official photographer for one of these: the National Child Labor committee (NCLC), an organisation created to combat against child labour in the heavy industry sector. He declared later on that this decision was a way of concentrating on "*the visual sie of public education*".

Lewis Hine once said, "*If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't have to lug a camera*". This phrase implies that he saw his work primarily as a means of communication. This new approach became a reference point in the development of social photography, a quarter of a century before the



Boy lost arm running saw in box factory, c. 1909
©Collection George Eastman House

documentation of the *Farm Security Administration*, which brutally exposed the harsh living conditions of rural communities – particularly in the South of the USA – during the Great Depression in the early 1930s.

During his first three years as official photographer for the NCLC, Hine documented the work of children in the fields, mines and factories, picking cotton, selling newspapers or helping shelling nuts alongside their families. For each photograph Hine meticulously noted the height, age and the work history of the child in question. This allowed him to create a comparative body of work over time. His photographs of child workers caused a sensation when published in NCLC brochures and in popular magazines such as *Everybody's* and *The Survey*. In the image entitled *Boy lost arm running saw in box factory*, c. 1909 we can see how the setting, lighting, and subject are offered to us impartially, yet at the same time move us, brutally exposing to public opinion the conditions of child labour.

At the end of the First World War, the American Red Cross commissioned Hine to document the consequences of the conflict in Europe. These images, like all his previous work, have the same aim: communicating the truth. The photographs he took of migrating communities, displaced by war, allowed the Red Cross to raise funds which had previously been difficult to secure.

Returning to New York in 1919, Hine returned to the subject of workers, this time with the aim of showing how physical work can demonstrate the dignity of mankind. He visited factories, took pictures of labourers at their daily work, and, between 1930 and 1931, documented the construction of the Empire State Building. The images celebrate the traditional labour and their artisan quality within an industrial context. The pictures offer a new attention to the formal aspect, for example in the image *Mechanic at steam pump in electric power house*, c. 1920. Placed in the centre of the image, the worker appears to be the indispensable heart and soul of the machine. This new aesthetic approach as photographer is particularly visible in his publication – the only one of his work published during his lifetime – entitled *Men at Work*, 1932. This book offers a striking vision of man and machine working together.



Mechanic at steam pump in electric power house, 1920
©Collection George Eastman House

At the end of the 1930s, the world of social engagement as well as that of photography had changed. Hine was finding less and less work, and despite his early success, he spent his last years dependent on social support. His work was rejected as outmoded by the same institutions with which he had previously collaborated. At the same period, artists and art historians such as Berenice Abbott and Beaumont Newhall

began promoting a new, modern style of art photography which recognised the spiritual link between the images of Hine and those of documentary artists such as Walker Evans and Charles Sheeler.

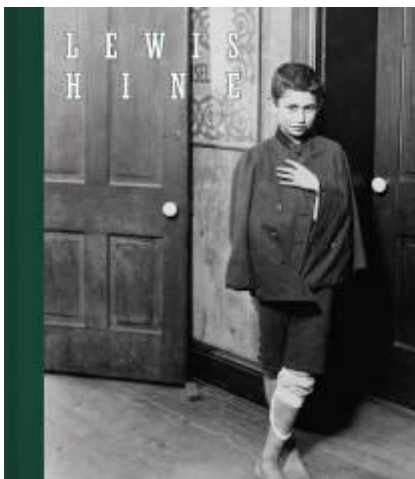
The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York refused Hine's photographic legacy. It was finally taken on by *Photo League*, a group of activist photographers. *Photo League* had many ideas in common with Hine, most importantly the idea of photography as motor of social change. Following Hine's death, the organisation attempted to keep his work alive by publishing brochures and organising conferences. When the organisation was dissolved due to political reasons the Hine archives were transferred, in 1955, to George Eastman House, at the time directed by Beaumont Newhall.

Today the collection is composed of 7,000 prints and over 4,000 negatives, as well as personal documents, brochures, catalogues and reviews. The institution has recently acquired even more archival material, bequeathed by the great-niece of the photographer.



Icarus atop Empire State Building, 1931
©Collection George Eastman House

CATALOGUE



Especially for the exhibition, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has produced a catalogue in Spanish, English and French which is a key publication on the career of Lewis Hine. In addition to the 170 works covering his full career carefully selected for the exhibition, it also includes a text by Alison Nordström, Curator of Photographs at George Eastman House, Rochester, and chief curator of the exhibition. This text places the trajectory of Hine's images within the context of their creation. It analyses at the impact of his work in the eyes of photography historians, and the lasting legacy of Hine's work as one of the great reference points of documentary photography.

The publication also reproduces a contemporary article by American writer Elizabeth McCausland, active member of Photo League and influential figure in the photographic community between 1920 and 1940. Her critical writing on documentary photography, and on Hine's work, was a determining factor in attracting the attention of historians. *Lewis Hine: Social Photographer*, written in 1938, situates Hine's production within the documentary aesthetic, which was at the time an important revelation.

This catalogue is completed with a chronology, bibliography and a facsimile reproduction of *Men at Work*, 1932, the only book on Hine's photographs published during his lifetime, and which he had an active role in producing.

WEB

In order to enrich the content of the exhibition and to make it accessible to everyone, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has created a special website, www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/lewishine.

The site gives an overview of Hine's work and artistic approach. It also offers a quick glance at Hine's most remarkable works. Visitors can take a virtual tour of the exhibition, and consult an extract of the catalogue. Practical information on visiting the exhibition, including information for handicapped visitors, is also available.

Notes to Editors

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE is a not-profit Spanish organisation. It was created in 1975 with a mission is to teach and promote culture, art and literature in Spain and South America. Since 2008 FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has been located on the Paseo del Arte, Madrid's famous art trail.

Over the years FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has taken an increasingly active role in the educational sphere, becoming one of the premier art foundations in Europe. The Institution has realised a significant programme of activities in Spain and Latin America, consolidating its dedication to international development.

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE is organised into five institutes. Founded in 1988, the **Cultural Institute** is directed by Pablo Jiménez Burillo.

Exhibitions at the Cultural Institute of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE's exhibition programme covers fine art, sculpture, photography and fashion. Taking its own permanent collection as a starting point, the FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE collaborates with leading museums and cultural organisations from Spain and round the world.

Permanent collections: drawing and photography

Since its inception, FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE has placed great emphasis on collecting and preserving **works on paper** that reflect the artist's first and truest inspiration. With over a thousand drawings, the collection includes works by artists like Pablo Picasso, Gustav Klimt, Kurt Schwitters, Henri Matisse and Egon Schiele.

In 2007 FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE began collecting artistic **photography** from the second half of the 20th-century—primarily in the documentary tradition. The initiative sought to introduce audiences to major photographers whose work had not been previously exhibited in Spain, or was not part of other Spanish collections. The FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE collection therefore acts as a counterweight to public collections that only minimally represent photography from this period. The complete Brown Sisters series by Nicholas Nixon was FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE's first major acquisition. Since then the photography collection grew significantly, with acquisitions of works by leading artists including Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Joan Colom, Walker Evans, Helen Levitt, Lisette Model ou Lee Friedlander. Recent acquisitions include 170 photographs by Graciela Iturbide and 111 by Paul Strand.

The FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE photography collection includes works by: Robert Adams (16); Diane Arbus (15); Eugene Atget (5); Harry Callahan (12); Joan Colom (16); Walker Evans (2); Robert Frank (2); Lee Friedlander (21); John Gutmann (21); Graciela Iturbide (186); Helen Levitt (12); Anna Malagrida (26); Lisette Model (19); Nicholas Nixon (36); Fazal Sheikh (31); Dayanita Singh (12); Paul Strand (111); Garry Winogrand (15).

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