

The
College
of
Wooster
Art
Museum

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Selected Past Exhibitions



March 27 – June 5, 2000

STEEL & REAL ESTATE:

**Margaret Bourke-
White
and Corporate Culture
in Cleveland 1927-
1929**

- Burton D. Morgan Gallery
- Sussel Gallery

Guest Curator: Geraldine
Wojno Kiefer

Skyline

Margaret Bourke-White
silver gelatin print 12 3/8 x 10 3/8"
Collection of the George Arents Research Library for
Special Collections
Syracuse University Library

The Exhibit

Cleveland's early 20th Century industrial age came to life through the photography of Margaret Bourke-White, whose black and white images were featured in "Steel and Real Estate: Margaret Bourke-White and Corporate Culture in Cleveland 1927-1929" at The College of Wooster Art Museum in the Ebert Art Center from March 27 through June 5, 2000.

More than 80 photographs were displayed in the exhibition organized by The College of Wooster Art Museum and guest curator Geraldine Wojno Kiefer of Rocky River, Ohio.

The exhibit showcased a
comprehensive series of



Margaret Bourke-White at her desk

photographs that recall Cleveland's steel industry and real estate of the period. In addition to providing a nostalgic look at early industrial Cleveland, the exhibition demonstrated how that city was essentially the crucible which helped form Bourke-White's career as a pioneering photojournalist.

Born June 14, 1904, in New York City, Bourke-White attended Columbia University and the University of Michigan, where she met and married photographer Everett Chapman in 1924. The couple moved to Cleveland in 1925, and Bourke-White was hired as a teacher at The Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Bourke-White and Chapman separated that same year, and she enrolled at Cornell University, where she earned her degree two years later.

Bourke-White returned to Cleveland in 1927 and solicited commissions from the city's architectural and corporate communities. Her rise to prominence as a photographer began with her captivating images of industrial America, particularly those of Cleveland. Three aspects of her work from that city were featured in this exhibition: the estate gardens, the corporate presence as epitomized by the Terminal Tower, and Otis Steel.

Although Margaret Bourke-White is best known for her work as a photojournalist with *Life* magazine, according to Wojno Kiefer in the exhibition catalogue, ". . . there is no doubt that Bourke-White's fame was forged in industrial furnaces, but these were in the late-twenties Cleveland: literally, in the flats, where Otis Steel's iron and steel operations were located, and figuratively, in the massive office towers that Cleveland's wealthy financiers were erecting with industrial dollars, as well as in the less public but equally impressive monuments to commerce that were executives' new suburban residences."

This exhibition focused on Bourke-White's early work as she developed a portfolio of urban images and honed her skills as a marketer and entrepreneur. In the introduction of the exhibition catalogue Wojno Kiefer writes, "Albeit pictorialist in their attention to atmosphere, suffused structure, and diffused focus, those photographs investigated more modern territory, namely, the evocative potential of machinery, technology, and factory environments, and the romance of corporate hegemony."

On display at Wooster were finished portfolio-quality prints, hrs prints, prints made for and handled by magazine reproduction departments, and working prints on matte and glossy commercial papers. Some had hand-drawn borders (for reproduction) and many were torn, creased and smudged, revealing a story of high-speed production and heavy commercial use. Many of her images were produced for *Trade Winds*, the monthly Union Trust stockholder magazine and for *Fortune* magazine, which published her photo-essays. Examples of these publications were also part of this exhibition illustrating and confirming that Bourke-White was first and foremost a commercial photographer. Promotional portraits of Bourke-White in action and in the media were also displayed.

A majority of the photographs were selected from the Bourke-White archive

located in the Department of Special Collections at Syracuse University. Other lenders to the exhibition included the Cleveland Museum of Art and several Cleveland collectors.

Guest curator Geraldine Wojno Kiefer earned her Ph.D. in art history from Case Western Reserve University, and teaches art history part-time at Kent State University and The Cleveland Institute of Art.

This exhibition was supported in part by the Ohio Arts Council, a state agency that supports public programs in the arts.