



# PICTURING NEW YORK

The second in a series of MoMA exhibitions hosted by the Art Gallery of Western Australia, *Picturing New York* is a photographic exhibition that charts the development of New York as a city, and photography as an art form, writes **Mitch Brook**.

Among the big cities of the world, New York has unique appeal. It's 'the big smoke', a booming centre of commerce, arts and culture, people, theatre, film and business.

In the back of nearly every person's mind there's an impression of New York City, whether garnered through films, travel or photography. It's this last art form that is celebrated through the *Picturing New York* exhibition visiting Perth from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City.

"The exhibition looks at the relationship between the rise and evolution of modern photography and the development of New York as a modern city, which was virtually unbroken through the twentieth century," says Lucy Harper, project

curator for the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA).

Photography and the city of New York go hand in hand. New York's growth was essentially recorded by the developing technology of photography from the 19th century through to the current day, and the images in this exhibition show that progress.

Lucy says of the progression of modern photography, "The exhibition covers the shift of the use of the tripod in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the advent of the hand-held camera in the late '30s and early '40s, which changed the way photographs could be made and thus what could be photographed."

One of the earliest photographs in the collection – and one of Lucy's favourites – is 'Italian Family

Looking for Lost Baggage' by Lewis Hine, taken in 1905. In those days, most immigrants to New York City entered via the Ellis Island immigrant inspection station, but not all of them made it through. Some were turned away for health or other reasons. This photograph shows a family of Italian immigrants going through that potentially traumatic experience.

"Lewis Hine's photographs of Ellis Island are an extraordinary record of the plight of these immigrants. He really understood the power of photography in bringing a human connection between the subject and viewer," Lucy says.

Since the photographic techniques used by Hine in the early 20th century, photography has continued to evolve. One of the most recent



"The exhibition looks at the relationship between the rise and evolution of modern photography and the development of New York as a modern city."



**Clockwise from opposite:** Henri Cartier-Bresson (French, 1908–2004) 'Near the Hall of Records, New York', 1947. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer. © 2012 Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum, courtesy Foundation HCB, Paris; Fairchild Aerial Surveys, Inc., 'The Mount Everest of Manhattan: The Silvered Peak of the Chrysler Building', 1930. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The New York Times Collection; Garry Winogrand (American, 1928–1984) 'New York City', 1968. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase and gift of Barbara Schwartz in memory of Eugene M. Schwartz. © The Estate of Garry Winogrand, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery; Lewis Hine (American, 1874–1940) 'Italian Family Looking for Lost Baggage, Ellis Island, New York', 1905. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase; Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946) 'City of Ambition', 1910. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2012 Estate of Alfred Stieglitz /Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Unknown Photographer, 'Brooklyn Bridge', c.1914. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The New York Times Collection.





photographs in the collection, taken by Michael Wesely, used digital technology to capture the refurbishment of the MoMA site.

"Michael Wesely is known to photograph construction sites, and when MoMA had to move from its site on 53rd Street while there were refurbishments, he was commissioned by the Department of Photography to document it," Lucy explains. "He placed several cameras around the construction site and opened the shutters. He closed them three years later. There are kind of ghostly images of MoMA being constructed, as a result of the long exposure. It really shows the technological advances and potential of photography these days."

The exhibition features 153 photographs by about 90 photographers. The artists are a mixed selection, from professional photographers to foreigners documenting the sites of New York, to aerial surveys, to everyday people reacting to their city.

"The curatorial selection was made by Sarah Meister, the curator in the Department of Photography at MoMA," says Lucy. "Sarah was interested in presenting the iconic work of many celebrated photographers working in New York City in the 20th century, with some of her personal favourites."

Among these celebrated photographers is Alfred Stieglitz, who, Lucy says, is considered to be the father of photography. "He really worked to bring photography into the consciousness of the American public and to promote it as a fine art.

"Sarah has made the selection to tell a fascinating story, and you have the likes of Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White, Walker Evans, Paul Strand, Garry Winogrand and Helen Levitt – key photographers of the 20th century – in the show."

Each photograph in the *Picturing New York* collection tells its own story while contributing to a larger story – that of New York as an evolving, contemporary city, and

the development of photography as a modern art form. ☐

Picturing New York: Photographs from The Museum of Modern Art is showing at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, until May 12, 2013. [www.momaseries.com.au](http://www.momaseries.com.au)

## MoMA SERIES

*Picturing New York* is the second of six visiting exhibitions from New York's Museum of Modern Art to be hosted exclusively by the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

The upcoming exhibitions are:

*Van Gogh, Dalí and Beyond*, Jun 22 – Dec 2, 2013  
*Contemporary Encounters*, Jan 18 – Apr 21, 2014  
*Counter Space*, May 17 – Sep 29, 2014  
*Post Impressionism*, Nov 1 – Mar 30, 2015

**Clockwise from far left:** Underwood and Underwood (American, active 1880–1934), *Above Fifth Avenue, Looking North*, 1905. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The New York Times Collection; Vivian Cherry (American, born 1920), *'Harlem, New York City'*, 1952. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Family of Man Fund. © 2012 Vivian Cherry; Cindy Sherman (American, born 1954), *'Untitled Film Still #21'*, 1978. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Horace W. Goldsmith Fund through Robert B. Mensche.