

GALLERY HOP IN PARIS WITH FRANCES GUERIN

Same Places, Different Views

Photographier l'Amerique, 1929-1947

Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson
2, impasse Lebourg, 75014 Paris,
France

September 10, 2008 - December 21, 2008



This small exhibition brings together two of the great photographers of the twentieth-century, and offers a rich experience of their mutually-influenced work. Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson were great admirers of each other's work and certainly, for all the differences of their approach to photographing America, the impact of the one on the other is clear from this exhibition.



The exhibition focuses on the years of the depression and World War II, and the now well-known representation of social life in the United States from the period. From early on, Evans looks at the world through perfectly composed images. And within the geometrical frames and frames within frames -- his renowned use

of doors, windows, mirrors and walls within the frame to define his subject matter -- his vision, at times his social critique, of America shines forth. The exhibition includes well-known images such as "Hale County, Alabama, 1936" in which the woman we somehow know to be ravaged by poverty, stares back at the camera in a gesture of impenetrability. Alternatively, the sparse, dilapidated walls of *A Miner's Home, West Virginia, 1935* is devastating for the poverty revealed through a corner of frayed carpet. The telling details of the hard life lived within these walls is made all the more obvious by the precision of the image -- the use of light, composition, props, and the absence of human beings -- which is so unmistakably Evans' intervention into the history of photography. In one of the exhibition's wall labels Evans is quoted for his belief in "purity, rigor, simplicity, immediacy, clarity" as the essence of his photography.

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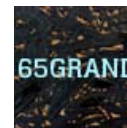
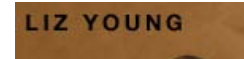
These elements of Evans' work are emphasized when it is sat next to the more dramatic images of Cartier-Bresson. Even though depictions of poverty and social critique can be the substance of Cartier-Bresson's work, the spaces, places and the people who occupy them are depicted very differently. Most noticeably, I was struck by the isolation of the human figures in these images. In an image such as *Brooklyn, NY, 1947* a woman, two men and a dog occupy spaces removed and isolated from each other by the space they occupy. In general, Cartier-Bresson gives expression to the space of the image, allowing it to speak what the figures cannot.



On a different day, and in a different exhibition, the works of the two photographers would appear in a different light. However, this juxtaposition and comparison foregrounds novel dimensions in the pair's work. It is not only the figures' interactions with the spaces that surround them, but many other attributes that I found myself comparing as I walked through the exhibition. For example, Evans' figures in general have a tendency to confront the camera, whereas Cartier-Bresson's are more reflective, turned in on themselves, shut down and shut off from the world they occupy, including the camera that perceives them. And there are many other revealing characteristics that are on display through the juxtaposition. Because while they were mutually influenced, the focus of the exhibition nevertheless encourages us to take note of the differences.

--Frances Guerin

(*Images, from top to bottom: Walker Evans, *Girl in Fulton Street, New York, 1929*, Collection MoMA, New York, © Walker Evans / The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Harlem, 1947*, © Henri Cartier-Bresson /



Magnum Photos, Collection Fondation HCB. Walker Evans, *Parked Car, Small Town MainStreet, New York*, 1932, Collection MoMA, New York, © Walker Evans / The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Brooklyn*, 1947, © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos, Collection Fondation HCB.)

Posted by [Frances Guerin](#) on 12/07

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The Universe in Light and Numbers

V≠L

Le Laboratoire

4 rue du Bouloi, 75001 Paris,

France

October 11, 2008 - January 12, 2009



In October 2007, *Le Laboratoire* set up its exhibition spaces in the one time living quarters of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642), prime minister to Louis XIII, on rue Bouloi. Conceived as a “laboratory” where scientists come together with practitioners from altogether different worlds, *Le Laboratoire* is currently exhibiting a collaboration between the installation and sonic artist, Ryoji Ikeda and Harvard mathematician, Benedict Gross.



The exhibition in three parts — *A Natural Number* (2008) *A Prime Number*, (2008) and *Spectra III* (2008) — is simultaneously baffling and fascinating. *A Natural Number* and *A Prime Number* represent two horizontal panels at knee-height, the first imprinted with seven million plus digits of a random real number determined by a computer, and the other with seven million plus digits of a prime number. The fragility of the mathematical perfection here imagined being in the recognition that to change just one single digit of the prime number, would to witness the disintegration of the whole “performance of numbers.” I have often heard mathematicians speak with ecstasy of the incomparable beauty of mathematical perfection, and it is this sublimity which appears here as the *raison d’être* of *V≠L*. Visually, the boundlessness of the sublime is echoed in the use of light. The two panels — on which the numbers are so miniscule, and indeterminate, that it is necessary to use a magnifying glass to even get a hint of what they might be — are illuminated from above so as to appear as sheets of white light in the otherwise blackened space. Surrounded by silence, the use of light here mimics the inexpressible perfection of numbers in sequence, a perfection that words cannot express.



The accompanying *Spectra III* in an adjacent room offers an experience in stark contrast. We walk into a corridor with glass walls and a ceiling of household neon lights, complete with their irritating hum. While we are pulled to move closer and closer, but never really able to see the numbers in *A Natural Number* and *A Prime Number*, *Spectra III* finds us wanting to close our eyes, and to turn away from the blinding glare of the neon-soaked space. In addition, while we are free to move around the large darkened space of the first room, there is a feeling of entrapment in the light corridor of the second. This inversion of experience seems to be the connection between the two rooms of the exhibition, the first two and the third installations.



The publicity for the *Le Laboratoire* announces that it consciously seeks to “invite the public into this analytical and intuitive, deductive and inductive creative process that is shared by artists and scientists alike.” While the dialogue between the artist and scientist in the case of $V \neq L$, is generative and unique, the audience’s role is not so apparently interactive. In keeping with the process-based, supposed openness of the installations, also on display is the email correspondence between Ikeda and Gross which documents the conception, development and realization of the installation. Gross is shown in a video giving a lecture on the mathematical logic and philosophy motivating the piece. And there are various other documents available for browsing including works by Kant, Leibniz and other philosophers who have wrestled with the question of the sublime and infinite beauty. And yet, still, all these documents do not clarify

the deeper intellectual significance of *V#L*. Indeed, as is the case with much conceptual art, there are in fact, very few points of access to this work other than those we are given—or rather assume—through our physical and sensual relationship to each installation. Thus, it was ultimately more tempting to be mesmerized by the illumination and the contrasting silence and sound of the two spaces, than to comprehend the philosophical ramifications of the works' confounding intellectual rationale.

--Frances Guerin

(*Images, from top to bottom: Ryoji Ikeda, Benedict Gross, *V#L*, October 11, 2008 - January 12, 2009; Le Laboratoire, *A Prime Number*, 2008, photo by Marc Damage. Ryoji Ikeda, Benedict Gross, *V#L*, October 11, 2008 - January 12, 2009; Le Laboratoire, installation view, photo by Marc Damage. Ryoji Ikeda, Benedict Gross, *V#L*, October 11, 2008 - January 12, 2009; Le Laboratoire, *Spectra III*, 2008, photo by Marc Damage. Ryoji Ikeda, Benedict Gross, *V#L*, October 11, 2008 - January 12, 2009; Le Laboratoire, *A Prime Number*, 2008, photo by Marc Damage.)

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Sitting Pretty



There are many places to sit in Paris, and one of the best, has to be sharing the seat with this exhausted woman outside the Hungarian Consulate (92 rue Bonaparte, Paris 75006, behind the Jardins de Luxembourg). She always wants company, and best of all, when it's raining she and her seat are under the eaves and don't get wet.



--Frances Guerin

(photos courtesy Frances Guerin.)

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