

PERFECT DOCUMENTS

WALKER EVANS AND AFRICAN ART, 1935



The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition "Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935," held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, February 1–September 3, 2000.

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Front cover: Walker Evans, American, 1903–1975, untrimmed work print, *Mask [Banda headdress]*, 1935. See page 33, figure 23.

Back cover: Page from Walker Evans's notebook, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Walker Evans Archive, 1994 (1994.250.56).

Inside front and back covers: Sculptures for "African Negro Art," displayed for customs inspection before installation, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photograph © The Museum of Modern Art, New York. See page 28, figure 20.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The collections at The Metropolitan Museum of Art are once again the source of wonderful surprises. *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* provides the occasion to celebrate and reveal one of those surprises, by presenting relatively unstudied work by a well-known and historically important American photographer.

In *Perfect Documents*, Virginia-Lee Webb, archivist of the Photograph Study Collection in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, assembles the pieces—many of them minute—of numerous puzzles in order to elucidate the history, details, and context of this formative work by Walker Evans. The project was a commissioned portfolio of photographs for educational purposes, works that were to be relevant to the overall development of Evans's style and career. *Perfect Documents* begins with the important exhibition of African art that took place in 1935 at the Museum of Modern Art. This exhibition provided the opportunity, setting, and subjects for Evans's photographs. The show also brought together (and put Evans in contact with) scholars Alfred H. Barr Jr., Thomas D. Mabry, and Dorothy Miller, all of whom supported Evans's photographic endeavors. Both the director of the exhibit, James Johnson Sweeney, and a young scholar, Robert Goldwater, were contributors to the catalogue and the descriptive "Index" listing the African art in Evans's portfolio. Years later, in 1957,

Goldwater became the first director of the Museum of Primitive Art, New York, whose collections were transferred to the Metropolitan in 1978. It is Goldwater's copy of Evans's portfolio, given to the Museum in 1961 and 1962, that inspired the research for *Perfect Documents*. Today, the portfolio continues to have a universal appeal, studied both by those interested in African art and by those investigating Evans's photography.

In order for the revelatory narrative of Evans's creation to be complete, examples of his work and writing were brought together from several departments at the Metropolitan Museum: the Photograph Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; the Department of Photographs; and the Walker Evans Archive. Many other collections and archives were consulted—notably those at the Museum of Modern Art—all of whom graciously facilitated access to information that enabled the story of this important chapter in Evans's oeuvre to be completed. The Metropolitan is grateful to all of the museums, archives, and private lenders that have shared information and their collections for this occasion.

The Museum extends its sincere appreciation to Philip Morris Companies Inc. for its support of the exhibition. The realization of the accompanying catalogue was made possible with the assistance of the Doris Duke Fund for Publications.

Philippe de Montebello
Director



PERFECT DOCUMENTS

Walker Evans and African Art, 1935

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

February 1–September 3, 2000

LECTURES

Demystifying Metaphors: Reflections on the Teaching of African Art

Z. S. Strother, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History and
Archaeology, Columbia University

Friday, February 4, 6:00

Uris Center Auditorium

**The Art of Building Power: Art and Hegemony in the Bamileke
Highlands of West Cameroon**

Dominique Malaquais, Visiting Associate Professor,
Trinity College, Hartford

Friday, February 11, 6:00

Uris Center Auditorium (Sign Language interpreted)

The Sculpture Walker Evans Photographed in Contemporary Light

Patrick McNaughton, Professor of African Art,
Department of Art History, Indiana University, Bloomington

Friday, February 18, 4:00

Uris Center Auditorium

Walker Evans and African Art

Virginia-Lee Webb, Archivist, Photograph Collection, Arts of Africa,
Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Friday, March 24, 6:00

Uris Center Auditorium

GALLERY TALKS

Meet at the Gallery Talk Sign in the Great Hall

Friday, March 3, 11:00. Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935.
Virginia-Lee Webb

Tuesday, March 7, 3:00. Perfect Documents and Their Sources: African Sculpture
through Walker Evans's Eyes. Alisa LaGamma

Thursday, March 16, 3:00. Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art,
1935. Virginia-Lee Webb

Tuesday, March 21, 11:00. Perfect Documents and Their Sources: African
Sculpture through Walker Evans's Eyes. Alisa LaGamma

Tuesday, April 4, 11:00. Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935.
Virginia-Lee Webb

**PROGRAMS FOR
TEACHERS**

**Walker Evans and African Art:
A Dialogue between Light and Surface**
Saturday, February 12, 10:00–4:00. Fee: \$60

This program is an in-depth look at the photographs and writings of one of the most influential American artists of the twentieth century. The event will focus on Evans's documentary photography of the Great Depression, experimental work of the 1920s, assignment in Havana in the 1930s, photo-essays for *Fortune* magazine in the 1940s and 50s, and SX-70 Polaroid color prints from the 1970s. It will also focus on the artist's early short stories, letters, and critical essays. Instructors: Esther M. Morales and Jeff L. Rosenheim

Preregistration is required. Call (212) 570-3985.

**OFFSITE
PROGRAMS**

We would be pleased to send a Museum lecturer to your library, college, or community organization to present a slide lecture about this exhibition. A fee will be charged. You may request a Sign Language interpreter. Call (212) 396-5170.

**SERVICES FOR
DISABLED
VISITORS**

The Museum is committed to serving all audiences. Please call us about services, including Sign Language interpreted programs, sound-enhancement systems (available in both auditoriums), the Touch Collection, and other programs. Voice: (212) 879-5500, ext. 3561
TTY: (212) 570-3828

**URIS LIBRARY
AND RESOURCE
CENTER**

All readers are welcome to explore the Uris Library and Resource Center, open during Museum hours. Visitors may consult catalogues, books, reference materials, teacher resources, and videos.

WEB SITE

Explore the Museum's Web site for information about "Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935," and the related exhibition "Walker Evans," at www.metmuseum.org

CATALOGUE

A catalogue is available in the Museum's Gift Shop.

**RELATED
EXHIBITION**

WALKER EVANS is on view on the second floor in the Drawings, Prints and Photographs galleries until May 14, 2000.

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