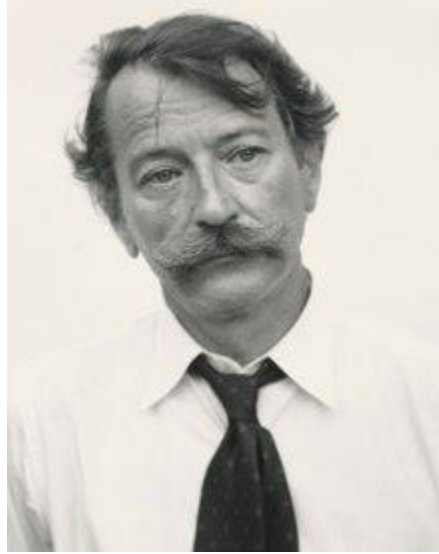


**#91 May 2024 Cameraderie**  
**John Szarkowski (1925-2007)**



John Szarkowski was director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City from 1962 to 1991. He was a photographer, yes, and I am showing some of his work below, but this article—a departure—is about his role at MOMA. He succeeded Edward Steichen (#9, Sept. 2013) in that role (remember Steichen’s curatorial masterwork, *The Family of Man* exhibit, in 1955 (#22, Sept. 2017)).

From the Wikipedia article, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Szarkowski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Szarkowski):

Szarkowski taught at Harvard, Yale, and New York University, and continued to lecture and teach. From 1983 to 1989, he was an Andrew Dickson White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University. For the 150th anniversary of the invention of photography he curated a final major exhibition before his retirement, and wrote an accompanying book: *Photography Until Now*. In 1990, U.S. News & World Report said: “Szarkowski’s thinking, whether Americans know it or not, has become our thinking about photography”.

Szarkowski’s MOMA page has a number of his images in the MOMA collection:

<https://www.moma.org/artists/8084>

Here is a partial list from the Wikipedia article of the photo exhibits and books that Szarkowski curated and wrote. I have listed mostly only exhibits/books by/about photographers I have written about in this series of articles:

- 1963: Five Unrelated Photographers: Ken Heyman. George Krause. Jerome Liebling. Minor White (#20, July 2017), and Garry Winogrand (#74, July 2022).
- 1966: Dorothea Lange (#4, Mar. 2013). Retrospective exhibition.
- 1968: Henri Cartier-Bresson (#43, Sept. 2019). Retrospective exhibition.
- 1968: Brassai (#50, May 2020). Retrospective exhibition.
- 1969/1970: Garry Winogrand. Book: *The Animals*.
- 1971: Walker Evans (#14, Oct. 2014). Retrospective exhibition.
- 1972/1973: Diane Arbus (#39, Apr. 2019). Retrospective exhibition.
- 1973: Book: *Looking at Photographs. 100 Pictures from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*.
- 1976: Book: *William Eggleston's* (#90, Apr. 2024) *Guide*.

- 1976: Book: [Harry] *Callahan* (#71, Apr. 2022).
- 1978: Book: *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*.
- 1981: Book: *American Landscapes*.
- 1982: 20th Century Photographs from the Museum of Modern Art. Exhibition at Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo. Selection by Szarkowski and Susan Kismaric, essay by Szarkowski.
- 1984: Book: *Irving Penn* (#30-34, June-Nov. 2018).
- 1988: Book: *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World*.
- 1989: Book: *Photography Until Now*. Historical survey on the occasion of photography's 150th anniversary.
- 1995: Book: *Alfred Stieglitz* [#2, Jan. 2013] *at Lake George*.
- 2001: Book with Sandra S. Phillips: *Ansel Adams* [#12, May 2014] *at 100*.

What we get from this list is the realization of the U.S. News and World Report assessment that “Szarkowski’s thinking ... has become our thinking about photography.”

Here is a selection of some of Szarkowski’s work as a photographer. Do not forget, however, that his great contribution to photography was his many decades as the quite force of being perhaps the pre-eminent photography curator in North America.

Mr. Bristol's Barn 3, c. 1991.



Mr. Bristol’s Barn 95, 1994.



Szarkowski has evidently shot an entire body of work of Mr. Bristol’s barn, a good model for us to follow when exploring a subject in detail. Note from the dates that he must have returned there to shoot over and over again.

Chicago Auditorium, Masonry, Congress Street, 1954.



This is a classic study of a huge masonry structure with a single pedestrian striding by. Obviously, the shutter speed must have been slow because the pedestrian is blurred—note that his rear foot, moving the least, is somewhat sharper. I think we can read the blur in the pedestrian not just as an artifact, but as a deliberate contrast between the fairly permanent stones and the impermanence of human life.



Prairie, Lincoln County, Minnesota, 1957-58.



I think this is much more than just a prairie shot. I see a resonance between the waves of grasses, the waves of hills in the distance, and the waves of clouds, giving this shot a lasting coherence. While it is not necessarily a great shot, it is an excellent and instructive shot.