

HOWARD GREENBERG
COLLECTING
PHOTOGRAPHY

A SMART MOVE
ON A
SWEET COMMODITY

STEF-ALBERT BOTHMA
DESIGNS SUPER YACHT
"TWANA"

HIGH ROLLING
MEETS HIGH LIVING
IN LAS VEGAS

PRIVATE AIR

LUXURY HOMES

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**The Legendary 80-Acre
Conyers Farm Estate**

COLLECTING PHOTOGRAPHY: A GALLERIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By: Mandy Hegarty

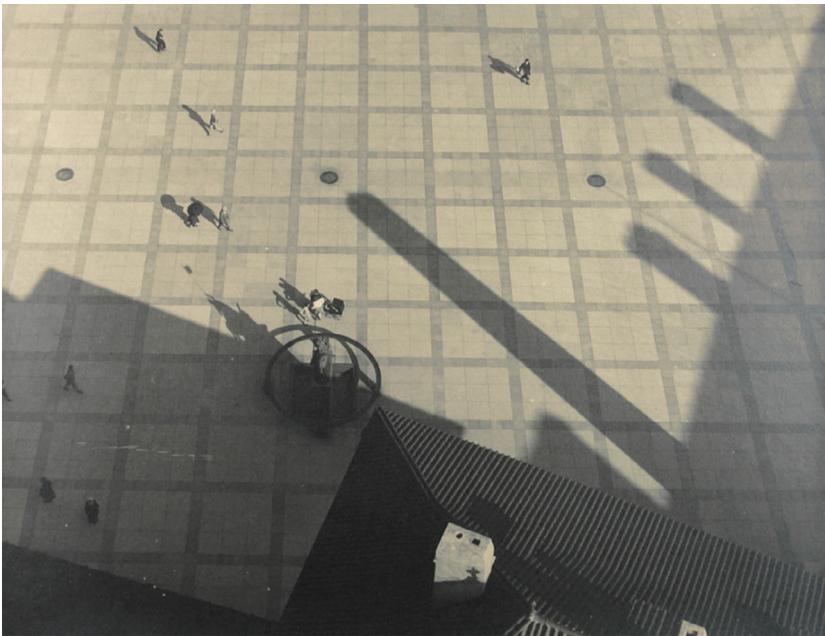
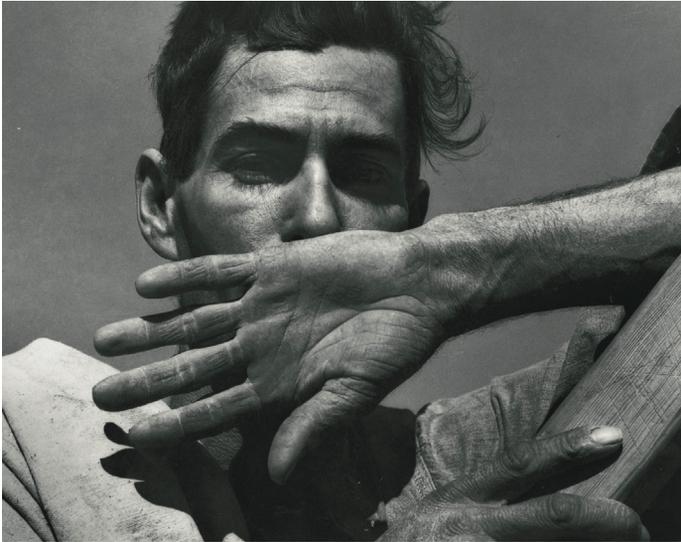


For Howard Greenberg, the owner of a successful self-titled photography gallery in Midtown Manhattan, the collector's gene manifested itself early in life. As a child growing up in Brooklyn, Greenberg hoarded baseball cards, stamps, coins and bottle caps – precursors to his photographic assemblage. “I always had that in me,” he says.

In adulthood, Greenberg pursued a career in photography, working for a newspaper before opening up his first gallery in Woodstock in 1981. He would later, in 1986, move operations to New York and would slowly amass a superb photography collection of his own. Like most in-built predilections, Greenberg's collecting was unplanned and without calculation. He chalks it up to a confluence of favorable circumstances. “My collection grew

organically without any idea that I was really collecting at all – without any theme or even vision,” he explains. “It was just those rare prints that spoke to me. And also those rare opportunities that came along at the moments when I could afford it.”

Over a period of more than 30 years as a gallerist, these moments and opportunities inevitably arose and without giving much thought to the concept of collecting in terms of objective or strategy, Greenberg became a photography collector. He estimates that his collection today numbers somewhere between 400 and 450 pieces. Iconic names of the photography world, such as Edward Steichen, Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, are represented among the collection as are lesser-known and even anonymous photographers.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, Eloy,
Arizona, 1940 © Library of Congress, courtesy
Howard Greenberg Gallery

Karl Struss, *St. Nicholas Avenue, South from 146th
Street*, c. 1910, courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery

Martin Munkácsi, *Lucile Brokaw, Piping Rock Beach,
Long Island, Harper's Bazaar*, 1933. © Lester Nafzger,
courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery.

Josef Sudek, *Old Town Square from above*, c. 1935
©Anna Farova, courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery

Though his approach was unsystematic (“It was never a textbook pursuit”), broad categories or themes are identifiable. Greenberg’s taste for mid-century street and documentary photography, which is also what his gallery is so well known for, is obvious. “I’ve always been a humanist... I’ve always been interested in that kind of work and material but it’s more than that. It’s when that style of photography intercepts with the fine print... That is when it gets me excited,” he says. A side component of Czech Modernist photography includes works by the likes of Josef Sudak, while the architecture and urban scenes of New York make up another discernable strand.

As a gallerist and a collector, Greenberg had to tread a careful line when it came to personal purchases. “I was always very keenly aware of that,” he admits. And at the beginning of my career – well it was partially a financial concern – but also I wasn’t sure if I should be collecting photographs because I thought maybe I had a moral or ethical reason to make everything available to the clients. I still believe that’s true – but not 100 percent of the time. I have learned that one of the wonderful things about being in the photography business is this: there is no shortage of great photography. I discovered over the years that there are so many wonderful, important, significant photographs that there is enough to go around. And if I pick out a few of my favorites here and there, it certainly didn’t compromise any of my clients.”

Greenberg’s private collection was, up until three years ago, very much private. It was only through a chance conversation with his friend and associate, chief curator of the Musée de l’Elysée’s Sam Stourdze, that the first exhibition ended up on show to the public in Lausanne. “I mentioned to him [Stourdze] that I had a private collection at home and he was shocked. As close as we were, as long as we had known each other – I never talked about it very much,” said Greenberg. The release of “The Howard Greenberg Book” as well as more high-profile

exhibitions in Paris, Budapest, and Amsterdam followed.

This series of exhibitions was the first time that Greenberg presented part of his collection to the public. The associated exhibition activities forced him to reflect on a lifelong relationship with photography as well as his own collecting instincts. “When I would talk about my collection to groups in the various venues, I found myself talking a lot about the magic of photography,” he recalls. “And in a certain way photography can be what I call magical, meaning it is very hard to describe in words what the human response to certain photographs, to certain prints of certain photographs. They have the potential to affect you in a very deep and emotional way – even subconsciously... And I don’t believe that you have to be sophisticated, educated, an expert, a former photographer or anything like that to get that reaction to certain photography... It’s that personal response. It is somewhat intangible, but it is very real. And for me, that’s what you look for as a collector. It’s got to hit you. Not just in your mind, but in your heart and your soul at the same time and then you know that it’s right.”

Passion has always been the driving force for Greenberg, who let his personal passions steer his purchases. “I truly never thought of it as an investment. The value of the collection didn’t even enter my mind until the last few years,” he insists. In fact, Greenberg rejects the use of the word investment at all (“I don’t like to use that word because you know it’s not really an investment – but the fact that it had value and the value might continue to appreciate.”). Rather than speculating on value, Greenberg believes it is quality that should be front of mind for buyers. “If you buy quality – and there are many ways of figuring out if what you are buying is real quality – then it will always be quality and there will always be someone who wants it after you. Great art takes on its own life and part of that life is the succession of ownerships – or sometimes just one owner – but it remains desirable... Then the future value is whatever the market will bear at the moment when one wants to sell it.” ✈