

1000 Word essay



Bernice Abbott born 1898 was an American photographer who visited New York in early 1929 and saw its photographic potential, she recalled “when I saw New York again and stood in dirty sludge, I felt that here was the thing I had been wanting to do my whole life”. She created a collection of photos over the next decade and named it ‘Changing New York’, which consisted of pictures from around New York documenting the changes that were happening as all the buildings were starting to be modernized and change e.g. the empire state building was opened in 1931 which was the tallest building in the world until the world trade center opened in 1972. Abbott’s focus was on what was happening in the city rather than the people who lived in it. Other images from the time captured what was happening in society with the stock market crashing and unemployment rates rising, so she was not like any other photographers at the time. The image is Canyon, Broadway and exchange place, Manhattan. Taken July 16th 1936. The image captures a corporate New York skyscraper. It’s a photo that helps to represent the change in the buildings from how they used to be to how they are now. They reflect on how much society has changed and how architecture shows it. The content of the image does not hold any other underlying meanings other than the buildings of a town represents society’s problems and its progress into the future. The picture itself shows the edge of the building as leading lines which makes us look up and properly see all the building and not just the bottom of it that we would usually see. And with the buildings in the front of frame they are in focus so we can see the different textures that show the difference in materials used when constructing the buildings, it’s also showing the similarities in the buildings. With a dark color scheme, it highlights the features of the building, the elements of light and dark have equal significance in the

photograph. The overall feel of the image is that everything is dull and boring. There aren't any other colors than black, grey's, and beiges. So even-though the image holds some significance to show the change in society, nothing makes the buildings stand out in the image. As the viewer of the image, it does not make us feel any particular way, but it does make us think about how much things have changed such as architecture and how whatever happening in society at a certain point in time. Abbott was known to have used a hand held camera to create her changing New York photo collection. A 8x10 century universal camera was what she started off with to get high quality detailed image. She later moved on to use a super sight camera which was a specialized camera that Bernice devolved herself for photographic scientific subjects. But for photographing moving images she used Stroboscopic lights to freeze the moving objects, this can be seen in "Rayo grams in motion".



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Seventh avenue looking south
35th street Manhattan,
December 1935. It fits in with all
other work done by Abbott at
time. Capturing New York as it

was in the moment before the world changed and therefore the change of the city that never sleeps. Bernice took a lot of inspiration from Eugene Atget and his collection of photos from Paris. He took the time to photograph every street in Paris, not just the photo worthy ones but every little backstreet and alley. He did this to create a physical documentation of Paris before it also became modernized. Over time every city will

change because society is forever evolving and the architecture around us will change with it. The image itself captures a street in Manhattan, seventh avenue looking south from 35th street. It shows us what the buildings looked like but also what the streets were like. It's a direct observation of looking down at the street from on top of another building. The road and street in the image help to create leading lines which as a viewer guides our eyes to look up and down at the whole picture that her than just focusing on what's at the front of the image. By looking up the lines we can see the buildings in the background that haven't yet been transformed into skyscrapers and are still the small buildings on the street. It's a relatively balanced photo as one side does not out weight the other because the street creates a center line and then it's just rows of buildings on either side. The image looks to have all natural light as it was taken outside and any shadows have been naturally created from the sun rather than being edited in. The image capture the mood of a busy New York street because we see the road full of cars and people. It's shows us that the city is full of life. As the viewer it shows us that in a city even through everyone lives there lives completely differently they all appear to be doing the same thing, no matter how much society changes the people in it still stay the same. Bernice Abbotts work is inspired from Eugene Atgets Paris collection. Again it was made with a hand held camera .

Eugene Atget was a French photographer and a pioneer of documentary photography. He is known for his work in Paris photographing the streets and architecture before they were lost in the modernization of the city. He moved to Paris in 1878 in hopes of attending drama school but ultimately that didn't work out for him. In 1890 he became a professional photographer. He documented "old Paris" extensively so that there would



be a focus on Paris architecture and environments prior to the French Revolution, he framed the streets to show historic buildings in context rather than making frontal architectural elevations. He photographed Paris with a rapid rectilinear lens, it was a fairly new instrument when he started using it, and when hand held cameras became more efficient he still continued to use the rectilinear lens. In many of his photos there is vignetting from him repositioning the lens relative to the plate of the camera. The image itself shows a street that is bending round the corner. Within the street there are many buildings that have been captured one of which we can see is a hotel from the sign that is hanging above it. But looking at the actual buildings it shows the different ways they have been built and also different materials used for the buildings. The image shows a leading line that is the pavement and the roads which makes us look around and explore the whole picture and not just what's at the front. It's a black and white image so there isn't any prominent colors other than one building being lighter than the others so our eyes aren't immediately drawn to one thing. Looking at this image can make us feel quite dull because there is no bright colors or anything.

Society is forever changing, and will continue to change forever. Nothing ever stays the same. Bernice Abbott and Eugene Atget explore the importance of using photography as a form of documentation. They both photographed architecture from different points in time. This helps us understand how changes in society can affect the buildings we live in, it also helps us to understand how buildings gain their historical value and become a part of history. Having a picture means that we have a visual account of how things used to look instead of relying on descriptions so we know what the world truly looked like.

In conclusion, we can see how these photographers helped to contribute to the historical documentation of the world. We can see how important it is to have architectural photographers because they help us to understand history better with a visual account of the world around us. They help to create historical maps of all places we see on a daily basis and can't imagine looking any different,

