

Garry Winogrand: El Morocco, New York

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Abstract

Garry Winogrand was a seminal street photographer during his lifetime. His ability to contrast emotion with human life gives his photos extra depth and compassion. This paper focuses on analyzing the 1955 photograph, *El Morocco, New York*, held by The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met). A description of the photograph, its influence on culture and culture's influence on the photograph helps us to place it within various classification schemes. The photo's physical presence within a prominent museum collection aids us in defining the object as a piece of artwork, rather than just another photography snapshot.

Garry Winogrand: El Morocco, New York

Garry Winogrand's photograph, *El Morocco, New York*, was taken in 1955 and is still displayed in prominent museum exhibitions today. What is so alluring about this photo of a couple dancing in the 1950s at an old New York hot spot? The emotion Winogrand was able to portray in his photographs was a skillful talent that cannot be faked or emulated. As with most photographic exposures, one must be in the right place at the right time. However, one's own willingness to be in various places, whether comfortable or not, plays a crucial role in the images they will be able to obtain. Winogrand's willingness for almost anything is evident in this photo when compared to others. He could easily transition from swanky nightclubs to the streets of New York, airports, and even rodeo shows.

Artifact Description

The artifact I have chosen to analyze in this paper is the photograph *El Morocco, New York* by Garry Winogrand. This photo was taken at the El Morocco nightclub in 1955. The black and white image shows a couple dancing at the El Morocco, an old New York hotspot where the likes of Marilyn Monroe and Ethel Merman frequented. In the image, you can see the back of a man's head and a woman with eyes wide open, mouth agape. Is she terrified at something her partner said? Is she excited at the promise of what lies ahead that night? This image is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) and holds the accession number 1992.5107. In its description of the photograph online, The Met says "here the face and hands revealing a ferocious animal spirit...this photograph of a couple dancing explodes the idea of the snapshot." A digital surrogate representation of this photograph can be found in Appendix A.

My own response to this photo occurred when I saw it for the first time in the Garry Winogrand retrospective exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014. I had purchased

a postcard of this image and became enamored by it. While The Met describes the woman in the photo as having some type of “ferocious animal spirit,” which I don’t disagree with, I think the woman shows a look of pure joy. There are few moments in our lives when we can be found laughing so terribly hard, mouth open with all teeth showing, grasping our partner – having such a physical response to the current situation. We do not know the relationship between the two figures in the foreground of the image, but the look on the woman’s face makes the viewer believe that she is completely infatuated with her partner at that current moment, a second of pure enjoyment.

Representational Schemes and Classifications

The Getty, a museum and research institute in California, has created various vocabulary indexes for use in classification of cultural objects. One relevant hierarchy that we can use to describe *El Morocco, New York* is the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT)*. The terms are based off various facets including associated concepts, styles and periods, agents, activities, physical attributes, objects, and materials. Of the 131,000 terms included in *AAT*, there is an endless number of terms that could be given to classify this artwork. Some *AAT* terms which could be used as standardized metadata and classification include: black-and-white-photographs, 35mm camera, available light photography, documentary photography, journalistic photography, social documentary photography, images (object genre), and visual and verbal communication.

On its website, The Met includes a condensed classification scheme on each object’s record. See Appendix B for a screenshot of this display. Each term is considered linked data, leading the user from the object record to a larger display of related material with the same classifications. When comparing the image *El Morocco, New York* and its contact sheet, we consistently see both objects linked to the following terms (with overall number of objects

contained within each term in parentheses) – Department: Photographs (35,770); Artist/Maker/Culture: Garry Winogrand (78); Geographic Location: North and Central America (92,264), United States (87,962); Object Type/Material: Gelatin silver prints (9,491), Photographs (46,224); Date/Era: A.D. 1900-present (107,408). The contact sheet contains two additional classifications in the Object Type/Material category – Contact prints (72) and Contact sheets (71). By using these metadata and categorization schemes, The Met is able to place the object within context of similar works.

Using metadata and cataloging standards across all objects is important for user retrieval. Since this system is available publicly for users of The Met's website, it is important that terms are updated consistently and wholly. By providing access to other objects that may be of use, one is able to understand the gravity and context of the piece better. Having *El Morocco, New York* and its contact sheet available as 1 of 107,408 objects represented in the time period of 1900-present really puts into perspective the artifacts and cultures that influenced this photograph (1900-1955), as well as the cultures and artifacts that *El Morocco, New York* inspired in the future (1955-present). I cannot comment definitively whether The Met uses *AAT* to classify their objects or if they use their own classification scheme. However, the scheme that is available online via their website's object records is easy to use and provides much accessibility for casual users, whereas it may be difficult to access similar information with use of visible *AAT* data. This is not to neglect the possibility that another complex data scheme like *AAT* is used internally for the institution's own classification needs.

Authority control identifiers can be found on the bottom of Winogrand's Wikipedia page. These identifiers can be used in conjunction with various institutions and databases. The following are included on Winogrand's page, along with the organization or database where the

number can be used (with identifier in parentheses): Virtual International Authority File – VIAF (114228586), Library of Congress Control Number – LCCN (n50015322), International Standard Name Identifier – ISNI (0000 0000 8182 3535), Integrated Authority File – GND (119474123), Système universitaire de documentation – SUDOC (03219482X), Bibliothèque nationale de France – BNF (cb123272687), Union List of Artist Names – ULAN (50014550), Netherlands Institute for Art History, RKDartists – RKD (385710). These alphanumeric identifiers ensure that users can find consistent records for “Garry Winogrand” across multiple databases and institutions.

Most importantly, users can find the object record for *El Morocco, New York* simply by typing The Met’s assigned accession number of the object into the search bar of the institution’s website – 1992.5107. As defined by the Society of American Archivists, an accession number is “a number or code assigned to uniquely identify a group of records or materials acquired by a repository and used to link the materials to associated records.” Accession number, as well as a list of all accessioned works in all permanent museum collections, could be considered for addition into a subsequent list on Wikipedia, similar to its list of authority file identifiers.

Current Display and Implied Use

One could wonder if Winogrand would be impressed to see his photographs displayed in blockbuster museum retrospectives and exhibitions of other famous works. In the book, *Contemporary Photographers Toward a Social Landscape* edited by Nathan Lyons, Winogrand touches on the lack of deeper meaning behind his photos: “Winogrand in an interview with Mary Orován in *U.S. Camera* suggested, ‘For me the true business of photography is to capture a bit of reality (whatever that is) on film... if, later, the reality means something to someone else, so much the better.’” The idea of photographing just to capture life as it is happening appears to be

the driving force behind Winogrand's work. Would he have wanted his photos held in prestigious museum collections among other great artists and photographers?

Though not currently on view at the time of this writing, *El Morocco, New York* was most recently on view in the exhibition *diane arbus: in the beginning* from July 11-November 27, 2016. Winogrand's photo was displayed in a supplementary gallery among other works related to predecessors and contemporaries of Diane Arbus' street photography style. According to the press release for this exhibition, the other photographers displayed in the supplementary gallery of Arbus' exhibition included Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, William Klein, Helen Levitt, Lisette Model, and August Sander.

El Morocco, New York entered the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1992 as a purchase from The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, as noted on the object's online record. It has since been displayed publicly in three exhibitions at The Met: *Johnson Gallery, Selections from the Collection 50* (2009), *Garry Winogrand* (2014) and *diane arbus: in the beginning* (2016). This photo was loaned twice for the national touring exhibition of Winogrand's retrospective: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2013) and National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (2014). Before the photograph was purchased for The Met's collection, it was displayed in the Museum of Modern Art's *Figments from the Real World* exhibition in 1988. The times this photograph was displayed in the museum's permanent collection are not cited on the object's record, only special exhibitions it was incorporated in.

As there are conservation issues with displaying photographic prints and works on paper, it is not uncommon that this photograph has spent much of its life in collections storage. Lisa Addison, Preventive Conservator of the National Gallery of Australia mentions in an online article that "environmental factors that contribute to the deterioration of photographs include:

light, temperature, and relative humidity; dust accumulation and insect activity; poor storage and display materials; incorrect handling.” As a museum’s main goal is the care of its objects, one can conclude that it is safer to keep the photo in proper storage where there are potentially fewer environmental catastrophes, rather than permanently on display in a gallery where the object can be exposed to all the harmful factors listed in Addison’s article. A digital surrogate image can provide needed access online for viewers if they cannot see it on exhibition.

Provenance

Provenance for *El Morocco, New York* is clearly stated on its object record on The Met’s website as “Estate of Garry Winogrand.” Provenance for the corresponding [*El Morocco Contact Sheet*] is also simple, coming into the museum’s collection as a gift from Eugene Schwartz in 1992, the same year as the print. In an essay titled *How Much Freedom Can You Stand? Garry Winogrand and the Problems of Posthumous Editing* by Erin O’Toole, contained in the retrospective exhibition catalog published in 2013, the author discusses the issues of provenance and Winogrand’s photos. She states, “From the start of his career, he subverted or rejected many of the norms of modernist art photography, including the cherishing of the artist’s hand in the production of prints. Winogrand always favored the eye over the hand and printed mainly in order to see what he (or, as he would always insist, the camera) had seen” (O’Toole, 2013, p. 420). Winogrand was known to leave his printing to others, favoring the photographic process over the printing process. Having someone else do darkroom work for a photographer is not uncommon. Winogrand’s practices paralleled those of Henri Cartier-Bresson, another world-renowned photographer. Winogrand first hired Paul McDonough and then Thomas Consilvio in the 1970s when his work was becoming most popular (O’Toole, 2013, p. 420). Since *El Morocco*,

New York was taken in 1955, we can conclude that it was most likely printed by Winogrand himself and not a darkroom assistant.

Upon Winogrand's death in 1984, twenty-five hundred rolls of film were found unprocessed, with forty-one hundred rolls that were processed but hadn't been contact printed (O'Toole, 2013, p. 417). By not creating a contact print, also known as a contact sheet, it is difficult to fully see if the frames amount to anything substantial. Just creating negatives is only part of the process, with the darkroom process not fully complete until one makes a contact sheet for each roll of film, then marks the frames they think are the best and would like to enlarge into full-size prints. Since Winogrand left nearly sixty-six hundred rolls of film with no thoughts or opinions attached to them, it's difficult for even a curator or student of the photographer to definitively pick the images Winogrand would have liked. Prints could be made posthumously from these unprocessed rolls, but would Winogrand have wanted them shown? Did he even care about the end result or just relish in the process of capturing decisive moments as Cartier-Bresson did?

With the remaining sixty-six hundred rolls of films, nearly "one-third of a million" frames as *Popular Photography* magazine described it, the Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), John Szarkowski, decided to have posthumous prints made for the 1988 Winogrand retrospective exhibit at MoMA. He declared that the film had been from later in Winogrand's life and it was a matter of advertising the displayed prints as posthumous, showing the direction Winogrand's work had taken in his later years. Arguably, there would be no level of deception with this phrasing, as Szarkowski and others close to Winogrand picked frames to include within the exhibit. This choice was met with disdain by many other photographers in the field and photography critics, most notably Arthur A. Goldsmith Jr of

Photography: “By what right is anybody entitled to make creative choices for Winogrand, and is it fair to the memory of his work to posthumously edit these pictures and present them to the public?” (O’Toole, 2013, p. 418). Though provenance is clear with *El Morocco, New York*, it should be noted that later in his life, Winogrand trusted others to make decisions for the printing of his work, even posthumously.

Literature About the Artist and this Artifact

There are not many scholarly publications written about Garry Winogrand. He is included in various photo books that comprise a survey list of exhibitions and his photographs, but do not contain much about his life. Some of these include *Toward a Social Landscape: Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, Danny Lyon, Duane Michals* (1966), edited by Nathon Lyons; *Women are Beautiful* (1975) by Garry Winogrand and Helen Gary Bishop; *Stock Photographs: The Fort Worth Fat Stock Show and Rodeo* (1980) by Garry Winogrand; *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* (1988) by John Szarkowski and Garry Winogrand; *Arrival & Departures: The Airport Pictures of Garry Winogrand* (2004) by Lee Friedlander, Alex Harris, and Garry Winogrand; and *Garry Winogrand: The Animals* (2004) by John Szarkowski and Garry Winogrand. It should be noted that some of the photograph books were published posthumously by museums and other institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.

The most comprehensive book I have found to aid in my research for this paper was an exhibition catalog published in 2013 by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in association with Yale University Press, available as part of the touring retrospective of Winogrand’s work, *Garry Winogrand*. The exhibition, *Garry Winogrand*, toured venues in the United States including SFMOMA (San Francisco), the National Gallery of Art (Washington

D.C.), and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). Internationally it toured Jeu de Paume (Paris), and the Fundacion MAPFRE (Madrid).

Online articles are abundant, but provide much of the same information throughout. *El Morocco, New York*, is often included as a “glamour shot” in online articles – a photo with a lot of emotion that will grab the reader’s attention. There are no strictly biographical or autobiographical books published. An interview transcript is available from ASX in which Barbaralee Diamonstein interviewed Winogrand in 1981, just three years before his death. Winogrand is included in the scholarly essay *The New Documentary Tradition in Photography* by Lisa Hostetler and posted digitally on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. *El Morocco, New York* is specifically mentioned by Hostetler in the first paragraph of her essay, stating, “His formal acuity is undeniable in *El Morocco*, in which the photograph’s slapdash style mirrors the thrill of the moment as a woman whirls around a dance floor” (2004). The presence of this description of *El Morocco, New York*, and of Winogrand’s work in general, proves his popularity and greatness.

Reception and Perception

Winogrand was inspired by everyday people. The people who frequented places such as the El Morocco could provide endless photographic inspiration for the photographer. The intended audience for his photographs was undefined since Winogrand took photos for his own satisfaction – moments he thought to be important due to the subject’s energy. That *El Morocco, New York* has found itself in a prestigious museum’s photograph collection is somewhat captivating, as is the subject of the image. Scholars, curators, and other museum professionals, along with critics in the field know the value of this and other images and have made an active effort to acquire them for their collections. If the work of Garry Winogrand was unimportant,

then why would there have been two career retrospectives in 1988 and 2014 curated by well-respected museums to display the breadth of his work? As there was no intended audience from Winogrand's viewpoint, and since his photographs contained a myriad of subjects, the audience can be anyone and everyone. *El Morocco, New York* has created curatorial reaction as it has been included in at least six exhibitions, in comparison with other photos by Winogrand that have no visible exhibition history according to their object records on The Met's website. O'Hagan quotes Winogrand: "When I'm photographing, I see life. That's what I deal with. I don't have pictures in my head ... I don't worry about how the picture is going to look. I let that take care of itself ... It's not about making a nice picture. That anyone can do" (2010).

Winogrand was one of many prominent street photographers, making up only a small portion of documentary photographers. His style was unique and inspired many, though today there is a seemingly endless number of amateur photographers who try to emulate the style of Winogrand and other notable photographers. Some go so far as to shoot photographs with the same type of camera as a photographer they admire. Winogrand shot many photos with a 35mm Leica M4 camera. On his blog, *Camera Quest*, Stephen Gandy writes briefly about being loaned Winogrand's Leica after the photographer's death. Gandy shows images of Winogrand's Leica and discusses his admiration for the photographer, along with his ability to shoot with the same camera of his idol. Does using the same camera as Winogrand make your photos just as good? Probably not. But the aura that surrounds this object can certainly make the user more confident and comfortable as they are using something that was so valuable to their photographic hero.

At its inception, photography was always based on chemical reactions and sensitivity to light in order to capture an exposure. Winogrand's career was based on the use his 35mm Leica M4 camera, a compact model that was easy to use and carry around, ensuring that an exposure

could be made at any moment of inspiration. According to Michael Zhang, the first digital camera was made in 1975, though there is no evidence of Winogrand ever using digital technology as a photographic medium. Today, many photographers still believe in the use of film rather than digital for aesthetic and quality reasons, as well as a sense of nostalgia. Sam Cornwell, in an article titled *12 Reasons Photographers Still Choose to Shoot Film over Digital*, mentions that there is a higher dynamic range in film photography, as well as the element of surprise in your final captures. Some cite film grain and imperfections as the reasons they choose to shoot with film. The aesthetic, results, and feeling are far different from shooting with a digital camera, and is still a viable way to practice the medium today. However, the prevalence of digital technology today – digital cameras, camera phones, social media – has added to the quick spread of subpar photos available in the world from amateur photographers who are trying to emulate a well-respected photographer in the field, such as Garry Winogrand.

Street Photography as Communicational Role

Photography in general can be seen as having a communicational role, no matter how subjective – especially street and documentary photography. Winogrand's style mostly focused on snapshots of happenings that he was inspired by, whether he was in the street, airport, or nightclub like El Morocco. Though there have been many street photographers throughout history, Garry Winogrand brought a new element to the style. In an article by Sean O'Hagan, the author quotes photographer Joel Meyerowitz as having said "Winogrand set a tempo on the street so strong that it was impossible not to follow it. It was like jazz. You just had to get in the same groove" (2010). Winogrand undoubtedly had internal feeling to know when to seize a photographic moment, knowing that the image would capture emotion.

Though photography is viewed as a way for an artist to communicate with the viewer, the medium allows photographers to communicate with one another while they are out in the field. In 1955, the same year as *El Morocco, New York* was taken, Sarah Greenough discusses the photographic comradery that existed among Winogrand and other New York photographers such as Lee Friedlander, Guy Gillette, Simpson Kalisher, Jay Maisel, Ben Schultz, John Lewis Stage, and Dan Weiner (Greenough, 2013, p. 390). These photographers created bonds that allowed them to photograph together, critique each other's work, and enhance their own photographic style. Greenough also mentions that Dan Weiner introduced Winogrand to the work of Walker Evans in 1955: "...he [Winogrand] understood that Evan's 'photographs are about what is photographed, and how what is photographed is changed by being photographed and how things exist in photographs'" (Greenough, 2013, p. 391). It is clear that photographers continued to inspire each other with their own style, borrowing composition and technique from one another to develop their own practices.

Winogrand was able to capture the life and times of those who were living in the decades he was practicing photography. This leaves us with a visual representation of culture in New York. Though Winogrand may not have been able to keep up with the processing of his film because he was too busy shooting endless rolls of film, we should be thankful that he was willing to capture so many fleeting moments of ordinary people in the places they frequented, giving us a first-hand look at what life was like. Sarah Greenough summarizes the work of Winogrand in her essay *The Mystery of the Visible: Garry Winogrand and Postwar American Photography*, contained in the 2013 catalog accompanying Winogrand's retrospective: "We can now see that no other photographer expressed the madness, manners, and even the morals of the sixties as powerfully and provocatively as Winogrand. No other photographer of his time so completely

embraced the American middle class, with all its foibles and follies. No photographer before him had so thoroughly exploited the dynamic range of the 35mm camera – not merely its capacity to encapsulate the energy and movement of the photographer himself into the image but also the highly distinctive way it framed the real world and transformed it into pictures. And no other photographer merged the excesses of his time so seamlessly with his own turbulent vision” (Greenough, 2013, p. 385).

Conclusion

When describing women’s role as photographic subject, perhaps Garry Winogrand said it best, twenty years after capturing *El Morocco, New York*: “I suspect that I respond to their energies, how they stand and move their bodies and faces” (Winogrand, 1975). Though we can endlessly analyze the photographs of Winogrand or any photographer, there will always be a subjective element. Winogrand made it known that the photographic process was what he was most interested in, the capturing of fleeting moments. The rest – processing film and printing images – was just something that had to be done to see the work he had captured.

Unquestionably, Winogrand made an impact on our culture as photographers capturing everyday life and how we view emotion and energy in images. *El Morocco, New York* is just one example of many that displays the height of Winogrand’s work: engaging interaction between subjects who show an emotional response to their current situation.

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Appendix A

Digital surrogate images are included in this appendix including the image discussed in this paper, as well as the contact sheet from which *El Morocco, New York* is a part of. The contact sheet provides insight to the other happenings of the same evening that this photo was taken. Viewers can determine if *El Morocco, New York* is indeed the strongest image of the roll of film displayed in the contact sheet.



Figure 1 *El Morocco, New York* (1955) by Garry Winogrand. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 1992.5107.



Figure 2 Contact Sheet depicting El Morocco, New York in frame 25, by Garry Winogrand. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 1992.5125

Appendix B

The Metropolitan Museum of Art contains linked data classifications to relate an object's record on their website with other similar objects. We can compare the data linked to *El Morocco, New York*'s object record and the contact sheet where this image can be found in frame 25.

Department Photographs (35,770)	
Artist / Maker / Culture Garry Winogrand (78)	Object Type / Material Gelatin silver prints (9,491) Photographs (46,224)
Geographic Location North and Central America (92,264) United States (87,962)	Date / Era A.D. 1900–present (107,408)

Figure 3 Screenshot of *El Morocco, New York*'s linked data on *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*'s website.

Department Photographs (35,770)	
Artist / Maker / Culture Garry Winogrand (78)	Object Type / Material Contact prints (72) Contact sheets (71) Gelatin silver prints (9,491) Photographs (46,224)
Geographic Location North and Central America (92,264) United States (87,962)	Date / Era A.D. 1900–present (107,408)

Figure 4 Screenshot of [*El Morocco Contact Sheet*]'s linked data on *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*'s website.

Appendix C

This quote was included at the end of the introduction for Winogrand's book *Women are Beautiful*, written with Garry Winogrand and Helen Gary Bishop in 1975.

“Whenever I’ve seen an attractive woman, I’ve done my best to photograph her. I don’t know if all the women in the photographs are beautiful, but I do know that the women are beautiful in the photographs.

By the term ‘attractive woman,’ I mean a woman I react to, positively. What do I react to in a woman? I do not mean as a man getting to know a woman, but as a photographer photographing. I know it’s not just prettiness or physical dimensions. I suspect that I respond to their energies, how they stand and move their bodies and faces. In the end, the photographs are descriptions of poses or attitudes that give an idea, a hint of their energies. Not their names, work, or lives.

‘Women Are Beautiful’ is a good title for this book because they are.”

Garry Winogrand

Austin, Texas 1975