

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER NOMINATION PROPOSAL

## PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

### 1. Summary

*The Family of Man* is an exhibition of photos mounted by Edward J. Steichen in 1955 for the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). While offering infinitely diverse images of human beings living in the 1950s, it nevertheless emphatically reminds visitors that they all belong to the same big family. The 32 themes, arranged chronologically, reflect the subjects' joys and sadnesses, their satisfactions and their unhappinesses, and their longing for peace, but also the reality of bloody conflict. They emphasize the role of democratic structures and, in the exhibition's conclusion, the United Nations' role as the only body capable of saving the world from the "scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and [of reaffirming] faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" (**Charter of the United Nations**).

Regarded as the "greatest photographic enterprise ever undertaken", it consists of 503 photographs taken by 273 photographers, both professional and amateur, famous and unknown, from 68 countries. A huge undertaking, with unique cultural and artistic dimensions, it had a considerable influence on other exhibition organizers, stirred public interest in photography and its tremendous ability to communicate, and conveyed a personal, humanist message that was both courageous and provocative.

Although the Family of Man has become a legend in the history of photography, it went far beyond the traditional view of what an exhibition should be. It may be regarded as the memory of an entire era, that of the Cold War and McCarthyism, in which the hopes and aspirations of millions of men and women throughout the world were focused on peace.

There are many reasons why the exhibition should be added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register:

- The Family of Man may be seen as the epitome of post-war humanist photography, with its powerful and original use of the medium.
- Steichen's undertaking is still unique of its kind. Several photographic exhibitions were more or less clearly inspired by it, for example *The Family of Children* and *The Family of Women* by Jerry Mason, and the *First World Photography Exhibition* organized by Karl Pawek in the 1960s for *Stern* magazine, but none of them matched the visual dimension or the artistic coherence of the original American exhibition.

The very personal approach of Steichen arouses interest and exercises minds to this day:

- There was a new surge of interest in the exhibition following the opening of the Clervaux museum. The work of restoration carried out by the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA – National Audiovisual Centre) (a tremendous undertaking at all levels) had already been widely commented on in professional circles in Luxembourg and other countries. Since June 1994 the museum has attracted over 163,000 visitors from all over the world, not counting the 50,000 who went to see the restored collection in Toulouse, Tokyo and Hiroshima in 1992 and in the winter of 1993-1994, 38 years after the first tour. This was

the final “round-the-world” trip by the exhibition before it was permanently installed in the museum.

- Most of the thousands of comments in the visitors’ books are as enthusiastic as ever. The criticism concerns more or less the same aspects as the first time around.
- The book entitled *Témoignages et documents*, the first published on the exhibition when it was installed at the Château de Clervaux, was followed by other publications and other exhibitions and colloquia, taking up Steichen’s theme and expanding upon it with contemporary views and discussions on the unifying theme of the Great Family of Man.

### Conclusion:

We can choose to disagree with Steichen’s view; we can find his ideas romantic and naïve; we can reject his visual arguments, underlined by quotations from world literature, or criticize his way of handling the photographs by the artists taking part; we can even endorse the criticism by Roland Barthes; but we must admire the legendary achievement of this extraordinary American artist for its profound sincerity and the “passionate spirit of devoted love and faith in man” in which it was created (**Edward Steichen in the preface to the catalogue containing photos of the exhibition**).

The reactions and comments recorded in the new publications and in the context of the projects that emerged after the opening of the museum demonstrate that this monumental work continues to “cause a stir” and thus to keep alive its personal, humanist message. This, we believe, is its greatest merit and greatest contribution to human enlightenment. The Clervaux collection therefore deserves, in our opinion, to be considered by UNESCO and entered on its Memory of the World Register.

## **2. Nominator**

**2.1 Mr Jean Back**, Director of the Centre National de l’Audiovisuel (CNA), in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research, and the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO.

**2.2** Originator of the plan to restore the photographs and to build the new museum to safeguard the last version of the travelling exhibition *The Family of Man*.

**2.3** Jean Back

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## **3. Identity and description of the documentary heritage**

### **3.1 Name and details regarding the identity of the proposed elements**

*The Family of Man* exhibition housed at the Château de Clervaux is the “European” travelling version of the exhibition. The images vary in size from a few decimetres to over 12m<sup>2</sup>. This version of the exhibition was shown in 1956, in a format identical to that of the original presentation, with a few exceptions (see below) using the more solid Masonite mounts for travelling.

**Annex 1** lists all the photos in the exhibition, and gives the country where the photograph was taken, the name of the photographer, the name of his or her agency where appropriate, and the size of the photo hanging in the Clervaux museum.

The original catalogue (**Annex 2**) has been regularly reprinted since 1955 (eighth edition published in 2000). Originally issued in a deluxe edition which reproduced only a few photographs from the collection, it has been available all over the world since 1956 in a cheaper paperback version which contains almost all the photographs shown in the exhibition, the few exceptions being due to slight differences between the American and European versions. The latter, on permanent display at Clervaux, comprises alterations devised by Steichen himself to give a more European dimension to the travelling version to be shown in the capitals of the Old Continent. Other more significant changes may give pause: in the description of the exhibition at the MoMA (before it opened?) there are two photographs illustrating violence: a black man who had been lynched and chained to a tree trunk, and a photo showing a mass execution. These two images were not featured in the travelling version now installed in Clervaux, or in the catalogue.

### 3.2 Description

**The authenticity and provenance of the collection** are established in a letter dated 23 November 1964 which was sent by Mr William R. Rivkin, American Ambassador to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, to Mr Grégoire, Minister of Culture. This letter and the correspondence from Mr Grégoire to the Musée National d’Histoire et d’Art (National Art and History Museum) (**Annex 3**) constitute a formal offer by the American Government to donate the travelling version of the exhibition to Luxembourg.

The collection was thus entrusted to the Musée National d’Histoire et d’Art which presented it on its premises for the first time in 1965, and then showed a selection from it when Steichen came in 1966.

Half of the panels were hung in the Château de Clervaux in 1975, not in chronological order. The other half were stored in a school attic in the same area, in not very favourable conditions. All the works were moved to the new Centre National de l’Audiovisuel in 1986 and were stored there in suitable conditions until restoration began (**Annex 4**).

**The physical condition** of the documents was very significantly improved by the restoration work undertaken by the CNA. Following its preparation in 1985, the 2,000-hour restoration work was carried out in 1990 and 1991 under the direction of the Italian restorer, Silvia Berselli, and her team, and with the assistance of Anne Cartier-Bresson, director of the photograph restoration workshops of the Ville de Paris, who monitored the process at regular intervals.

The Château de Clervaux rooms were upgraded to ensure the best possible conditions for the collection, following the indications and instructions given by Anne Cartier-Bresson in her expert evaluation: the light intensity in the exhibition rooms does not exceed 100 lux, and the temperature is kept between 18° and 20°C and relative air humidity normally between 45% and 50%. These conditions are strictly controlled and recorded by four monitors installed in the exhibition rooms.

The most interesting **visual documents** on the collection at the Clervaux museum are the photographs of the rooms, the virtual visit (**Annex 5**), the published plan indicating the chronology of the themes (**Annex 6**), and the film *Edward J. Steichen* by Samsa-film (**Annex 7**), shown for the first time in Luxembourg in 1995, and **distributed** on video in Luxembourg under the label *Films made in Luxembourg*. It was issued in the United States by MoMA and “KULTUR”.

**Four publications** bear witness to the importance of this collection:

- The original catalogue (**Annex 2**);
- The book *Témoignages et documents* (out of print, but full version in **Annex 8**);
- The book by Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an exhibition, The Family of Man and 1950s America*, University of New Mexico Press, 1995 (**Annex 9**);
- Time-Life: *The Joy of Photography*: article on “A memorable exhibition” (**Annex 10**).

Other contemporary publications devoted specifically to the exhibition are:

- *The Nineties, a Family of Man?*, image of mankind in contemporary art, published by Casino Luxembourg in cooperation with Café Crème and Galerie Nei Liicht, 1995, at the exhibition in the Casino Luxembourg (**Annex 11**);
- *Family Nation, tribe community shift, zeitgenössische, künstlerische Konzepte, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst*, 1996 (**Annex 12**);

as well as hundreds of texts and articles published in magazines all over the world from the time of the original exhibition until the present (**Annex 13, currently being prepared for dispatch to UNESCO**).

A new scientific publication is currently being produced (**manuscript in Annex 14**) which contains the comments made by journalists, historians and photographers at an international colloquium held in Trier in 2000, which was organized by the University in cooperation with CNA. The new catalogue, to be published under the title *The Family of Man, une révision de la légendaire exposition de photographie d'Edward Steichen*, examines the topical nature of Steichen's message and makes very contemporary contributions to the idea of the Great Family of Man.

The following names will give some idea of the importance of the documents involved:

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#### **4. Justification for inclusion/assessment against criteria**

##### **4.1 Is the authenticity of the document established?**

The authenticity and provenance of the collection are established in a letter sent in 1964 by Mr Rivkin, American Ambassador to the Grand Duchy, to Mr Grégoire, Luxembourg Minister of Culture. Also the considerations outlined above leave no room for doubt about the authenticity of the collection.

##### **4.2 Have the world significance and unique and irreplaceable nature of the collection been established?**

Steichen's work is still a courageous example of an individual adopting a personal position at a difficult time in history. It took courage to describe humanity as one big family in the midst of the Cold War and, while this American-inspired image was indeed criticized, it was nevertheless received with enthusiasm and admiration throughout the world and, astonishingly, it has managed to stand the test of the succeeding decades, as can be seen from the thousands of comments that have filled 21 visitors' books since the museum was opened in June 1994 (**Annex 15**).

The Clervaux collection is the only one currently in existence in this form: the original MoMA collection, placed on less solid mounts since it was not going to travel, is probably in the MoMA's storerooms, not ready to be exhibited again in its entirety. (The installation of the travelling collection at Clervaux in fact attracted the interest of officials at MoMA in New York, as can be seen from the reactions and quotations in their various publications.) (**Annex 16**). The other versions have either been divided up, destroyed or lost forever. Some individual panels which formed part of one or other of the versions which went on tour after 1956 are still featured in museum collections. A smaller version (for consultation and research) is currently held at the

Folkwang Museum in Essen. Despite the research carried out in the United States by museum assistant Wayne Miller, in Japan by G.I.P (Goro International Press) and in Europe by CNA, and although the Clervaux museum is now generally visited by people from all over the world, and several international meetings of historians and photographic journalists have been organized on the theme of the exhibition, no information on the existence of another travelling collection of the same size has come to the attention of CNA.

It is impossible to reprint the entire collection using the original negatives because they were returned to their owners at the time, and are not all available now. In any case this operation would not be advisable, in our view, given the historic nature of the collection and its roots in a particular period of history.

It can be stated with virtual certainty that the Clervaux collection is the only one of its kind in the world. In any case, it is highly unlikely that any other example that is so complete exists elsewhere. Therefore the unique (in every meaning of the word) nature of this collection cannot be seriously doubted.

The disappearance of the collection from Clervaux would make it impossible ever again to see a travelling version of the legendary original exhibition, a cultural instrument produced at a particular point in time to convey a particular message. It has been distributed in the new museum spaces in such a way as to echo the original installation, which is essential if visitors are to rediscover all the dimensions of Steichen's humanist message in this unique landmark in the history of photography. It has now been restored in its entirety in the place which Steichen himself, during his brief visit to his native country in 1966, identified as his choice for a permanent home for the exhibition.

#### **4.3 Are one or more of the following criteria fulfilled: (a) time, (b) place, (c) people, (d) subject and theme, and (e) form and style?**

##### **Background**

###### **(a)**

After years of preparation, the exhibition was organized by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955. Stemming from a profound personal conviction of the ability of photography to communicate ideas and to explain mankind to itself, and also from the experiences of the famous American photographer in two world wars, the exhibition was "the most important undertaking of his career". As director of the photography department of MoMA, he assembled four million photographs to illustrate his idea of *The Family of Man*, taking the title from a speech by Abraham Lincoln. The incredible size of the collection assembled was the result of the indefatigable efforts of Wayne Miller and Steichen himself who travelled the world visiting photographers, photograph agencies, galleries, magazine archives and museums.

The photographs selected by Steichen and his team from among the huge number sent in, the ingenious and highly spectacular staging (quite revolutionary at the time), and, finally, the fact that the general public readily identified with the 32 themes, arranged in such a way as to promote Steichen's humane and peace-loving message in the middle of the Cold War, marked *The Family of Man* out, from its opening in January 1955, as the most important photographic exhibition of all time. It was the one most commented on, the one which drew most visitors to the Museum of Modern Art (236,000 from January to May 1955) and the one which drew the largest crowds throughout the world. For the organizers produced several travelling versions (of different sizes and on a variety of mounts) so that, with the support of the United States Information Agency and Coca-

Cola, it toured 38 countries (91 locations outside the United States), attracting over nine million visitors. Enthusiastically received by the general public from the time it opened because of its original and assertive response to the weariness engendered by images of war, and very well received both by the press in general and by photography specialists, *The Family of Man* was nevertheless roundly criticized by the intelligentsia, who complained of its naïve sentimentality, its tendency towards American cultural propaganda, its lack of a critical approach to the human cause and its failure to take into account the individual photographer's own intentions. However, it is also true that, apart from two well-known exceptions (Ansel Adams and Robert Frank), the photographers concerned generally appreciated the way in which Steichen had handled their work in the context of his gigantic undertaking.

**(b) (d) (e)**

Steichen himself, assisted by his friends Wayne and Joan Miller, selected the photographs. The selected photographs were enlarged using intermediate negatives produced from the originals, to sizes varying from a few decimetres to over 12m<sup>2</sup>. Using both surfaces and space, the exhibition on the second floor of MoMA was based on photographic exhibitions which Steichen had previously organized at the museum for propaganda purposes (*Roads to Victory, Power in the Pacific*) in order to raise morale and support the American cause in the war years. Ten years after the end of the Second World War, *The Family of Man* was created to illustrate every form and facet of the life of mankind, irrespective of geography, nationality or race. Human beings are part of a large family, and their fundamental needs, behaviour, desires and everyday concerns are similar, despite their infinite diversity. Visitors were conducted from theme to theme through the “grand canyon of humanity”, confronted by a multitude of photographic installations which illustrated this view of humanity in various ways: images of pregnancy and of birth recalling the womb from which we all emerge, photographs of happy children dancing in rings, which were arranged in circles, photographs hanging from the ceiling or placed on the floor, images set against huge photographic backgrounds, which underlined the theme and involved visitors even more deeply in the visual installation, to remind them continually that they too belonged to the great family of humankind.

**(c)**

Steichen did not take up this huge challenge alone. He was assisted by a whole team of friends (including Wayne and Joan Miller, plus Homer Page and Carl Sandburg), and supported by Museum colleagues. Finally, the setting for the selected photos was devised by Paul Rudolph, a talented young architect. Sequencing and the choice of the best possible place for each key image were assisted by use of a 1:10 scale model.

**Clervaux Museum in Luxembourg (form and style, as of 1994)**

The last travelling version of *The Family of Man* (the same size as that shown at MoMA) was donated in 1964 to Luxembourg, the country where Steichen was born. The collection was restored in 1990-1991 by the Luxembourg Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA).

The travelling version restored by Luxembourg is the one which toured Europe at the end of the 1950s/beginning of the 1960s. Steichen was in favour of his native country, Luxembourg, and in particular the Château in the Ardennes district of Clervaux, housing “**the most important work of his life**” on a permanent basis. During his trip to the Grand Duchy in 1966 he expressed a preference for the Château (“it would be a nice place”).

His wish was granted 25 years later when the Luxembourg Government, under Prime Minister Jacques Santer, decided to build a permanent museum for this collection, at the request of CNA and in line with installation plans it had drawn up on the basis of the historic New York layout and the hanging instructions set down in a note circulated by MoMA photography department to the organizers of all the travelling versions. While the **arrangement** of the photographs on surfaces follows the original layout to the last millimetre, the **arrangement of those hanging in space** (with the exception of a few very unusual structures) was adapted to fit the rooms of the Château de Clervaux. The same kind of leeway had been granted in the past to curators who had shown the touring exhibition in their museums.

#### **4.4 Do the rarity, integrity, threat and management aspects apply to this nomination proposal?**

**Rarity:** since this is a collection of photographs, prints can in principle be produced as required by using the original negatives. Thus the individual photographs are not in themselves rare. Many were in fact published before and after *The Family of Man* exhibition, and are still being distributed by press agencies today, sometimes even by the photographers themselves.

The rarity relates rather to the staging devised by Steichen, which is still unique in the history of photography. The exclusive initiative of the Château de Clervaux museum, taken on the basis of Steichen's own wishes, also qualifies as a rarity, as no other project of this kind has been undertaken to date. *See above also: unique nature of the travelling version.*

#### **Integrity**

The collection on display at the Château de Clervaux comprises 483 panels instead of 503 and differs slightly from the original in some other respects. Eighteen photos were in fact lost before arrival in Luxembourg, while some other photos were deliberately replaced by Steichen himself in order to adapt the travelling versions to the places in which they were to be shown (see also the comment under 3.1). One photo (Wynn Bullock's "And God said let there be light") was printed in its original size (2.5 x 3 m) in the PICTO laboratories in Paris from the original negative held by the Tucson Center for Creative Photography, with the permission of Elena Bullock, the photographer's widow. This was done because the photo (made up of several panels) in the travelling version was incomplete. Studies are still being conducted on two other photos from the travelling version in order to determine how to hang them: the spatial arrangement at Clervaux does not yet allow them to be shown to maximum advantage.

#### **Threat**

The conditions in which the collection is now being held are optimal: in addition to the strict control of temperature and relative humidity, kept at a particular level by a device which regulates the humidity of the air and the temperature, there is maximum security. Monitored by cameras and connected to an alarm system, the collection has been very well protected since 1994.

#### **The management plan**

The management and promotion plan implemented by CNA ensures the circulation of information on this exhibition, which forms part of the world's photography heritage.

The museum comes under the direct authority of the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA), which staffs it with one professional, two housekeepers and a number of students and trainees, ensuring optimal reception of visitors. Publicity (advertisements in the international and national press, hosting of journalists from all over the world and of students wishing to write theses on *The*

*Family of Man*, etc.) is handled exclusively by CNA, which has the necessary skilled staff. Press reactions, the entries in the 21 visitors' books (see annexes above), the many requests for guided tours (56 in 2002) and the statistics (**Annex 17**) gathered on site enable CNA to obtain constant feedback concerning the project's impact.

Since the Clervaux museum opened to visitors in June 1994 it has been visited by 163,000 people from all backgrounds, and the number of visitors has constantly increased in the past three years.

Information on the museum will be posted shortly on CNA's website, <http://www.cna.lu/>.

## **5. Legal information**

### **5.1 Ownership of the documentary heritage**

State of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg  
Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research  
L-2912 Luxembourg

### **5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage**

Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research  
Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA)  
BP 105  
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(Following the written agreement with the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art in Luxembourg.) (**Annex 3**)

### **5.3 Legal status**

- (a) The photographs are the property of the State of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.
- (b) The public has access to the collection in the museum installed in the Château de Clervaux, the aim being to ensure its permanent safeguarding.
- (c) Copyright belongs exclusively to the photographers involved, their successors and their respective agencies.
- (d) Responsible administration:  
  
Centre National de l'Audiovisuel (CNA)

### **Consultation:**

The nomination proposal was drawn up jointly by CNA and the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO.

**PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

- 8. Assessment of risk (see under “Threat”)**
- 9. Assessment of preservation (see under “Physical condition”)**

**PART C – LODGEMENT**

See supporting letter.