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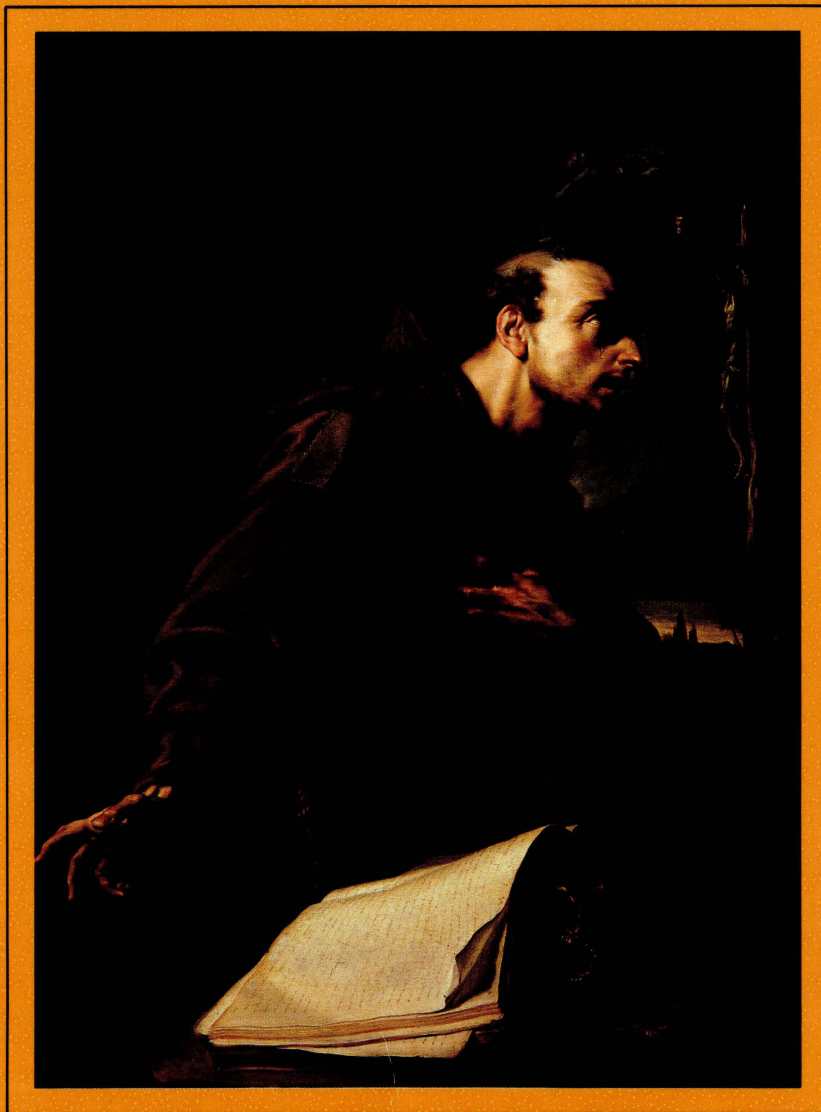
The Barbara Morgan Collection of Photographs

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Published version. "The Barbara Morgan Collection of Photographs" in *Selected Works: Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University*. Eds. Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art. New York, N.Y.: Pelion Press (1984): 148-151. © 1984 Haggerty Art Museum, Marquette University. Used with Permission.

SELECTED WORKS



Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty

Museum of Art

Marquette University

THE BARBARA MORGAN COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

American-born photographer Barbara Morgan (1900-) resolved to become an artist when she discovered painting as a child.¹ Her studies at the University of California at Los Angeles (1919-1923), which included realist and abstract approaches to art, prepared her for a career in painting. She was introduced to photography by her late husband, Willard, a photographer and writer, whom she married in 1925. As a young instructor in art at U.C.L.A. in 1926, Morgan assisted Edward Weston in hanging an exhibition of his photographs and became a friend of Weston. Her own first realization that photography could be art came as a result of her husband's urgings and this experience with Weston's photographs. As an abstract painter Morgan experienced difficulty accepting the realism of photography as a legitimate art form. But she saw in Weston's realist photographs the potential for abstract symbolism.

In 1930 Morgan moved to New York; there she continued to paint, and in 1935 she established a photography studio and gradually moved into her work as an artist-photographer. In 1941 she moved her studio and home from New York City to Scarsdale, New York.

Morgan's photographic subjects include modern dance, photomontage, light drawings, people, nature, "junk," photograms, and miscellaneous experiments. Her work in all of these categories has been widely published in a series of books: *Martha Graham*, 1941; *Prestini's Art in Wood*, 1950; *Summer's Children*, 1951; *Barbara Morgan*, 1972, and *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, 1980, as well as in many articles and books throughout the world.

Barbara Morgan is best known for her photographs of modern dancers taken primarily between 1935 and 1945, especially the photographs of Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Doris Humphrey, José Limón, Charles Weidman, and Valerie Bettis. The dance photographs were initially inspired by Morgan's having experienced Southwest Hopi and Navajo Indian ceremonial rituals during summer vacation periods between 1925 and 1930 with her husband Willard. The Indians' use of dance to unify their people in accordance with the fundamental "life forces of rhythm and motion," and not merely as entertainment, was a major influence. Morgan saw in Martha Graham's dances a similar interest in the Southwest Indian experiences.² This mutual interest between Morgan and Graham eventually led to collaboration on Morgan's first book of photographs: *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*. Morgan's unique insight into the dances of Graham reveals their common interest in philosophical as well as movement aspects of dance. Morgan sees Graham first as a philosopher who "dances because philosophically this is the way she sees life or

wants to interpret life."³ The dance photographs can be appreciated for their high artistic merit as well as for their documentation of this important period of American dance.

Photomontage (combining two or more images through combination printing, sandwiching negatives together, pre-planned double exposure, re-photographing of collaged photographs, and/or a combination of these according to a visual concept) provided the vehicle for Morgan's initial transition from abstract painting to artistic photography. Again her interest in photomontage comes basically from a philosophical interest in metaphoric comparisons, showing for instance a fossil or a shell against the forms of a city as in *Fossil in Formation*, 1965, and *City Shell*, 1938. Photomontage allowed Morgan to express the complexities of the world, often juxtaposing nature, made environments, and people to convey whimsical or playful or sharply critical or ironic social commentary, as in the photographs, *Brainwashed*, 1966 and *Nuclear Fossilization*, 1979.

Morgan's experiments with light drawings derive from Oriental ink drawings that she encountered as a student and teacher, and from her childhood experiences of "making pictures" by manipulating sun rays through the holes of a sun hat. Her photographic light drawings are images of light patterns created with a flashlight tied to the moving wrist and projected on a black cloth. Varying the rhythmic patterns and speeds of the wrist motion created lines of different widths and shapes.

In photographing people, Morgan thinks of them in relation to the world and not merely as individuals. Her photographs of people express a concern with human values in a mechanical world and sometimes reveal ironic comparisons. Her interest in the universal themes of human behavior is expressed in photographs showing a vast cross-section of the emotional, philosophical, and practical dimensions of life in so many different stages: youth and age, the fearful and the joyous, the emotive and the contemplative. Instead of emphasizing physiognomy, Morgan tries to create "visual representations of the inner activities of the human mind."⁴ The photographs of children as represented in the book *Summer's Children*, 1951, are primarily from a period of her own life when her children Douglas (1932-) and Lloyd (1935-) were growing up. Several were photographed at Camp Treetops near Lake Placid, New York, "where children of varied backgrounds were in touch with nature."⁵

Many of Morgan's nature photographs reveal a strong sense of organic rhythmic form and motion. She sees her photographs of nature as "metaphors of cosmic dances: the corn leaf, for example, exhibits in rhythmic metre nature's life force."⁶

"Junk," as in *Broken Light Bulb*, 1934 or *Battered Tin Can*, 1942, represents the inevitable metabolism of life as it is seen through Morgan's eyes.

The remaining corpus of Morgan's photographs falls into the miscellaneous categories of photographs (silhouette photographs made by placing objects directly upon sensitized paper and exposing it to light), "Southwest" pictures taken primarily between 1925 and 1930 before Morgan had decided to pursue photography as an art, and "experiments." Her works in all of the categories discussed here represent "a search for the invisible energies of life." She tries to express these inner life forces through the exterior visual forms of photography.

Morgan used many cameras to produce these photographs, but the principal ones were the 4 x 5 Speed Graphic, used in the dance photographs, and the Leica, used for photographing children. "The Speed Graphic is my choice when the pictures are to be built with light as are the dance photographs for my book, *Martha Graham*, and other work in that field."⁷ (Morgan's husband Willard wrote the first Leica manual and was instrumental in promoting its use.)

Morgan's photographs have been exhibited in major museums across the world and are represented in such collections as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the International Museum of Photography, Rochester; the collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; the Lincoln Center Library and Museum of Performing Arts, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; and in many other museum, university, and private collections.

A retrospective exhibition of 113 Barbara Morgan photographs constituted the President's Exhibition at Marquette University, October 2-30, 1977. Morgan was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Marquette University in 1978. In 1983 a collection of approximately 400 vintage prints was acquired by an anonymous patron, intended for donation to the art museum at Marquette. When the transfer is completed the Marquette collection will represent the major existing assemblage of Morgan's vintage works.

In addition to the promised gift mentioned above the collection at Marquette presently includes a limited edition dance portfolio given by Mr. and Mrs. John Ogden (discussed below) and forty miscellaneous prints of dance, photomontage, and people given by Douglas and Lloyd Morgan.

At age eighty-four Morgan maintains an active schedule of exhibitions, lectures, and archival printing as she prepares her book, *Dynamics of Composition*.

Barbara Morgan Dance Photographs, 1935-1944 (78.1.1-10)

Limited edition portfolio of ten photographs, published by Morgan and Morgan, Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1977; portfolio size: 17 3/8 x 21 7/8 x 1 3/4 in (44.1 x 55.6 x 4.4 cm); archivally printed; individually signed.

Martha Graham— Frontier, 1935 (78.1.1)

10 5/8 x 13 9/16 in. (27 x 34.5 cm). Signed in pencil l.r.: "Barbara Morgan 1935"; l.l.: "Martha Graham Frontier."

Martha Graham— Lamentation (Oblique), 1935 (78.1.2)

13 1/8 x 10 7/16 in. (33.3 x 26.5 cm). Signed in pencil l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1935"; l.l.: "Martha Graham Lamentation."

Martha Graham— Letter to the World (Kick), 1940 (78.1.3)

10 1/4 x 13 1/4 in. (26 x 33.7 cm). Signed in pencil l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1940"; l.l.: "Martha Graham—Letter to the World."

Martha Graham— Letter to the World (Duet with Merce Cunningham "Dear March Come In"), 1940 (78.1.4)

10 3/16 x 13 3/8 in. (25.9 x 34 cm). Signed in pencil l.r.: "Barbara Morgan 1940"; l.l.: "Martha Graham—Letter to the World (Duet with Cunningham—'Dear March Come In')."



Martha Graham—*Letter to the World (Kick)*, Barbara Morgan, photograph

Martha Graham—
Ekstasis (Torso), 1938 (78.1.5)

13 1/4 x 10 1/8 in. (33.7 x 25.7 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1938"; l.l.: "Martha Graham—
Ekstasis."

Martha Graham—
*El Penitente (Solo—Erick
Hawkins—El Flagellante)*,
1940 (78.1.6)

13 3/8 x 10 3/8 in. (34 x 26.4 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan 1940"; l.l.: "Martha Graham—
El Penitente—(Solo—Hawkins—El Flagellante)."

Charles Weidman—Lynchtown
(Humphrey-Weidman Group),
1938 (78.1.7)

9 3/4 x 13 1/2 in. (24.8 x 34.3 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1938"; l.l.: "Charles Weidman—
Lynchtown (Humphrey-Weidman Group)."

José Limón—Mexican Suite
(Peon), 1944 (78.1.8)

10 3/16 x 13 1/2 in. (25.9 x 34.3 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1944"; l.l.: "José Limón—
Mexican Suite—Peon."

Pearl Primus—Speak to Me
of Rivers, 1944 (78.1.9)

10 3/8 x 13 1/2 in. (26.4 x 34.3 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan 1944"; l.l.: "Pearl Primus—
Speak to Me of Rivers."

Doris Humphrey—
Passacaglia, 1938 (78.1.10)

13 1/4 x 10 1/2 in. (33.7 x 26.7 cm). Signed in pencil
l.r.: "Barbara Morgan—1938"; l.l.: "Doris Humphrey—
Passacaglia."

Provenance: Purchased from the artist by Mr. and Mrs. John Ogden;
their gift to the University, 1978.

References:

Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*
(1941; reprint, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1980), ill. 21, 34, 125, 120, 41, 91.

Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan* (Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.,
1972), ill. 42, 48, 54, 35.

The portfolio consists of a limited selection of Morgan's dance photographs executed between 1935 and 1944. Martha Graham's dances are represented in six of the ten images, with the dances of Charles Weidman, José Limón, Pearl Primus, and Doris Humphrey occupying the remaining four prints. Two of Morgan's most famous photographs, *Letter to the World (Kick)*, 1940 and *Lamentation (Oblique)*, 1935, are included. Morgan's photographs as represented here constitute a major record of American dance during the 1930s and 1940s. Her photographs capture the moods, expression, and philosophical ideas incorporated into the dances as well as their rhythmic and other movement aspects.

None of the photographs was taken during public performances; they were conceived and lighted by Morgan and produced entirely in Morgan's studio or in a theater at Columbia University. "Before I would ever photograph, I would get Martha Graham to tell me her inspiration for the dance. Then I would be invited by Martha to see the dances in small and large theaters." These experiences enabled Morgan to select from a dance of twenty or thirty minutes the crucial moments and gestures to express the emotional, philosophical, and aesthetic aspects of the dances. These selected moments were photographed as the dancers performed privately before Morgan's camera and were done in a spirit of mutual artistic collaboration, particularly in the relationship of Morgan and Graham.

This limited edition portfolio is the only such project that Morgan has assembled in her entire career. Apparently she has little interest in such projects, preferring instead to concentrate on the artistic and conceptual aspects of her work. The selection of photographs for the portfolio was made in consultation with Martha Graham and other members of the dance community, curators of photography, and family members.

C. L. C.

Notes:

1. Much of the information presented here is taken directly from personal interviews between 1975 and 1984 by the author. Other principal sources include Morgan's books and articles (see References and the bibliographies of included items), and articles about Barbara Morgan from 1938 to the present (see bibliographies listed in works contained in the References here). Sources of particular relevance are: Leonard N. Amico and Stephen Ross Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, catalogue of an exhibition at Williams College Museum of Art (Williamstown, Mass., 1978); Doris Hering, "Barbara Morgan: One of America's Great Dance Photographers Reflects on a Decade of Dance 1935-1945," *Dance Magazine* (July 1971):43-56; Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* (New York, 1949), 158-159; *Encyclopedia of Photography* (New York, 1964), 13:2373-2375; Curtis L. Carter, *Barbara Morgan: Exhibition of Photographs*, catalogue of an exhibition at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis. (Milwaukee, 1977).
2. Carter, *Barbara Morgan: Exhibition of Photographs*, 2.
3. Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 7.
4. *Ibid.*, 6.
5. Barbara Morgan, "Working Thoughts," *Barbara Morgan* (Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 1972), 155.
6. Carter, *Barbara Morgan: Exhibition of Photographs*, 2.
7. Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 15.
8. Conversation with Barbara Morgan, June 24, 1984.



Martha Graham—*Lamentation (oblique)*, Barbara Morgan, photograph