

THE WORKING IMAGE:

A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF WOMEN AND WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Presented by the Women's Labour History Project
Curated by Sara Diamond

THE WORKING IMAGE is an historical photo collection featuring reproductions of original archival and personal photographs. These images portray the work of women (domestic & workplace), their families, unions and auxiliaries. The collection spans over 85 years (1870-1955) and covers a variety of occupations central to BC's economy and women of various ages, racial and cultural backgrounds.

The subject matter and treatment makes this exhibit appropriate for both art gallery and museum audiences. The content, women working, is revealed gradually through a blending of personal records and public documentation. The result is a unique portrayal of the social, economic and political context of women in the labour movement during World War Two.

The photos themselves are a record not only of the individuals and their working environments, but as well are a history of the evolution of the medium itself and the changing relationship between the representer and represented.

SYNOPSIS OF EXHIBITION

The curator's statement provides a general historical account of the photographers who documented the women in their work. It also describes the changing technology of photography between 1880 and World War Two, and how the growth of personal camera technology affected the professional and amateur photographers who explored their craft. The social and political context in which the images of women in work were documented is also discussed.

Throughout the period 1870-1950 women were primarily represented by male photographers. Some photos explore women's legitimate role within the workplace, others underline the solidarity between men and women, yet many sustain the image of women workers as icons of diligence and service.

1870 - 1929

The first period covered in this exhibition is women and work from 1870 to 1929. The images span a range of cultures and occupations, including native women in the

canneries and women working in urban centres. They were waitresses, domestic and laundry workers, tailoresses, bookbinders, telephone operators, nurses and teachers. The accompanying text describes the percentage of women in the labour force, wages and working conditions and some of the early union organizing activities. There is a personal account made by cannery worker Josephine Charlie describing her childhood working experience at Terra Nova canneries.

The Depression

The next period focuses on women and work in the 1930's as well as the Depression. While it is possible to identify early B.C. photographers, the authorship of Depression period photos is often difficult to establish. For the first time a tradition of self-representation by the workers' movement emerges. Out of this comes images of women working in traditional job ghettos such as laundries, restaurants, food production and domestic work. The Depression is a period of intense censorship in B.C., a fact which might have inhibited photographers from producing evidence which could be used against them and others. Radical photographers nonetheless captured Mayday demonstrations, sit-down strikes, unemployed and women's rallies, events that were a result of the difficult working conditions and high unemployment of the time.

World War Two

The next section of photographs focuses on World War Two when women were recruited to do war work. The National Selective Service had been established with the task of recruiting 200,000 Canadian women. Their participation in all sectors of wartime industries was an indication of the national desire to defeat fascism and Canada's first opportunity since the Depression to achieve economic independence. Women played a valuable role as activists, stewards, organizers and executive members throughout wartime industry. Peggy Kennedy gives a personal account as a shop steward in the Boeings aircraft plant in Vancouver. During World War Two personal and propaganda photography flourished. Camera technology invaded the home market making it affordable for workers to document the social aspects of the war industry experience. This collection of images includes women working in manufacturing, ship-yards, lumber and metal trades.

Post- War Period

The last period in this photo exhibit is of women and work in the Post-War Period. The end of the war brought pressure for women to return home and make room for industrial male workers and returned men supposedly as a means to establish post-war economic stability. Many women left the labour force but returned to the female job ghetto within a few years. The rights for married women to remain in the work force had been established during the war and remain until this day. Public sector unionism expanded after the war and although women assisted as stewards and activists, few were present on leadership bodies. This period saw increased documentation of union activities as unions institutionalized and saw a need to leave historical records.

SPECIFICATIONS OF EXHIBITION

The collection is thematically arranged in a linear direction, calculated to be hung evenly-spaced at eye level so the top edge of the photo's frames all line up, whether horizontally or vertically hung. The exhibition design incorporates minimalist style with a sense of "filmic documentation".

Contained in the exhibit are the adhesive title: THE WORKING IMAGE, 18 foamcore texts and 97 black and white, clip-framed photographs. Specifications are as follows:

- 15 6" black adhesive letters spelling title: THE WORKING IMAGE
- 18 11"x17" vertically hung foamcore sheets with dry-mount text, thematically sectioned as follows:
 - The Curators Statement
 - The Period: 1870's to 1929
 - The Depression
 - World War II
 - The Post-War Period
 - Credits & Acknowledgements
- 83 11"x14" vertically hung B&W photographs, matted and clip-framed
- 14 11"x14" vertically hung B&W photographs, matted and clip-framed
- 4 14"x22" horizontally hung B&W photographs, matted and clip-framed
- 101 adhesive labels with photograph title, historical description and donator/source. To be attached directly on wall to the lower bottom right of frame.

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BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The following information details all costs involved in travelling the photopgraphic exhibit. Prices will vary according to destination. International rates will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Exhibition Preparation

Preparator's Fee	\$400.00
Materials	200.00

Crating/Shipping (Courier Collect)

Crating	400.00
Shipping (based on Vancouver/Toronto rates)	880.00
Insurance	86.00

Installation Expenses

Curatorial Fee:	
\$750.00 - includes overseeing installation & curatorial presentation	750.00
\$550.00 - includes representative to oversee installation only	
Travel Expenses	600.00
Per Diem (\$50.00/day) X 4 days	200.00
Installation Expenses: paint, materials (installation labour to be provided by gallery and not included in this budget)	300.00

Video Screening

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING by Sara Diamond 49 minutes, 1988 (includes premiere screening and library use for duration of exhibit)	200.00
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Sara Diamond will oversee installation of the exhibit with the assistance of the gallery staff/volunteers.

Please contact the Women's Labour History Project or Sara Diamond for further details at:

2534 Cambridge St., Vancouver, B.C.
CANADA V5K 1L4 (604) 254-5210

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Vancouver, B.C.
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October 17, 1988.

THE WORKING IMAGE, curated by Sara Diamond, is an exhibition of ninety-seven black and white photographs accompanied by a series of expository text panels. Culled from archives and personal collections, the images present insights into the photographic representation of British Columbia's working women, over a hundred year period.

This exhibit was first displayed as part of the Mayworks Festival programme in Vancouver earlier this year. The Women's Labour History Project is now preparing to tour THE WORKING IMAGE to interested museums and galleries across Canada.

The information in this kit consists of a synopsis of the exhibition as well as a sheet outlining the expenses that would be involved in installing it.

So that we can effectively coordinate the tour, we would be grateful if you could let us know at your earliest convenience if you are interested in presenting this show in your gallery.

Sincerely,

Sara Diamond
Curator, THE WORKING IMAGE