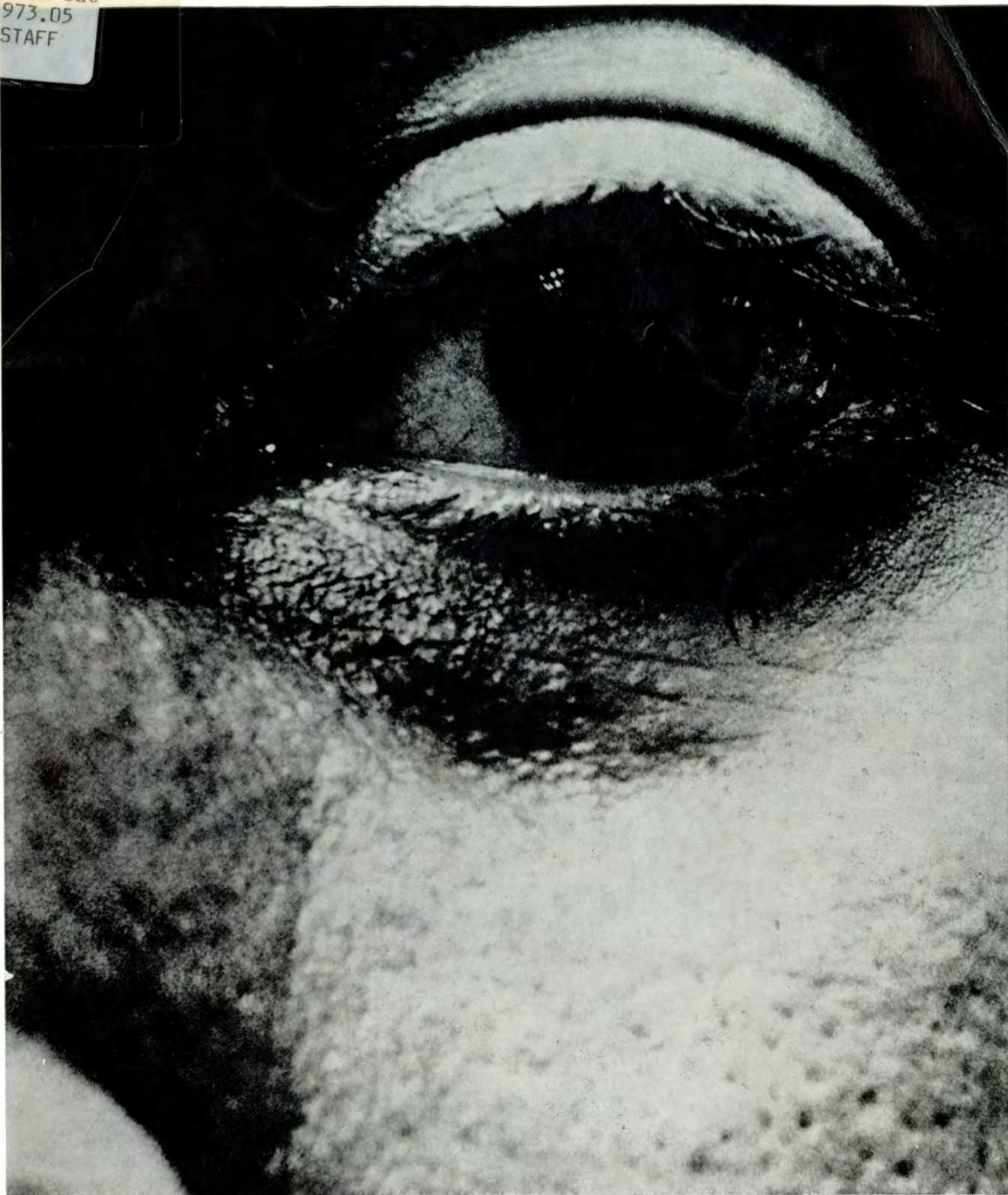


191313  
QAG Ex Cat  
1973.05  
STAFF



**Bill Brandt**

South Australia Art Gallery  
**16th November, 17th December, 1972.**

West Australian Art Gallery  
**4th January, 4th February, 1973.**

New South Wales Art Gallery  
**1st March, 1st April, 1973.**

Queensland Art Gallery  
**19th April, 20th May, 1973.**

Newcastle City Art Gallery  
**4th June, 2nd July, 1973.**

National Gallery of Victoria  
**2nd August, 2nd September, 1973.**

Canberra Arts Council of Australia  
**20th September, 21st October, 1973.**

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery  
**14th November, 16th December, 1973.**



It is correct, but only half right, to call Bill Brandt an English photographer. Both of his English parents were of Russian ancestry; he spent much of his boyhood and youth in Germany and Switzerland; in 1929, during the full force of the Surrealist revolt, he left Switzerland for Paris, where he discovered the works of Atget and the Surrealist filmmakers, and studied with the American Man Ray. When he returned to London in 1931 at the age of twenty-five he was an artist of international perspectives.

It might also be noted that by 1931 the great tradition of earlier British photography was moribund. For the most part, British photographers had chosen to concern themselves with the marginal refinement of small virtues, or with writing letters to the photographic journals. Photography in England had become a hobby—of small interest to anyone but hobbyists.

During the 1930s Brandt documented his island, its representative human types, and its social structure—which seemed then immensely and permanently formidable. He produced photographs possessed both of raw force and high sophistication, in a compound which even now seems to defy analysis. A romantic poet, compassionate and intuitive towards his subjects, Brandt was at the same time a detached observer, an outsider, able to make disciplined pictures even in the presence of his own shocking discoveries. Speaking of this prewar phase of Brandt's work, Cyril Connolly has noted correctly that "documentary" is an inadequate word to describe these pictures. He added that "Brandt . . . grasped the fact that in a class-ridden society all groups could still be happy." In the face of the photographs this is unpersuasive, and probably irrelevant. In Brandt's pictures, the wretched miners and comfortable capitalists seem to have no more to do with happiness (or unhappiness) than do the stones of Stonehenge. They seem to have to do rather with the service of role, with fate, form, and tenacity, and perhaps with heroism.

Twenty years ago, speaking of his earlier work, Brandt said, "I found *atmosphere* to be the spell that charged the commonplace with beauty. And I am still not sure what atmosphere is. I only know that it is a combination of elements . . . which reveals the subject as familiar yet strange." *Strange* is perhaps the operative word. There is in Brandt's work—excepting the late nudes—a subtle but pervasive sense of malaise, a sense of beauty or virtue distorted by the presence of sin. The ordered stability of gracious homes and aristocratic pleasures is defiled by a suggestion of decay; the bravery of the poor is shadowed by an animal dumbness; faces of intellectual force look out from rooms that have known madness. We feel in his pictures a dislocation of the rational structures of experience, a recasting of the familiar into forms that show its meanings to be unfamiliar and threatening.

An exception must be made of the nudes of the 1950s. These pictures—at first viewing, strange and contorted—reveal themselves finally as supremely posed and untroubled works. It has been said that these pictures concern the world of pure form and space, but surely they also concern the bodies of women. Not abstract but depersonalized, their content is I think after all a transcendent eroticism—a suspended, euphoric celebration of the flesh.

In photography only Edward Weston has made nudes of equal power. A comparison is instructive. The models in Weston's pictures retain a degree of their identity; they remain, in part, specific women seen in the sunlight of specific fine mornings. Brandt's late nudes in contrast seem to be no woman and all women, as anonymous and as moving as a bleached and broken sculpture, fresh from the earth.

If in most of Brandt's work there is a strong sense of the surreal, it is not the intellectually disciplined *irrationnelisme* of his teacher Man Ray, but rather a dream-ridden romanticism, closer in spirit to the mordant poetry of de Chirico. Brandt's work is in fact not really explainable in terms of the central concerns of either painting or photography during the past generation. Perhaps the photographic vacuum into which Brandt moved when he returned to England in 1931 allowed his very personal (even wilful) style to develop freely, unchallenged by the dictates of a vital tradition.

For whatever reason, Brandt's approach to the craft of photography has been consistently and casually defiant. It is conceivable that Brandt simply never learned the conventional standards of photographic quality. More probably, he has sensed that a consistently brilliant technique too often assumes for itself in time the status of a creative virtue. Brandt has in fact expressed regret at the mechanical perfection of modern cameras, and at their almost autographic ease of operation. Seeking a more refractory medium, one that would resist more strenuously his own preconceptions, he made the nude series with an ancient, cumbersome, fixed-focus stand camera, equipped with a wide-angle lens of such minute aperture that the image on the ground glass was all but invisible.

It is also true that Brandt—in spite of his admiration for Man Ray—has never pursued the conscious experimentalism in which that photographer delighted. Man Ray's experiments seem directed toward the discovery of properties inherent to photography itself, while Brandt's seek a sharpening of his sense of the subject. His attitude toward the medium is that of one who might have invented photography in secret and practiced it in isolation, shaping it without apology to the needs of his own remarkable vision.

In the early years Brandt's prints were very soft—almost muddy—describing a space as solidly tangible as that of London winters in those coal-burning years. About a decade ago his printing style changed abruptly to one depending on a harshly simple tonal scale, putting maximum emphasis on the picture's graphic structure. Few of the earlier prints survive, and Brandt now prefers his current printing style even for the older pictures. With the sole exception of *Avebury Stone Circle, Wiltshire, 1944*, the current exhibition shows earlier works as reinterpreted by new prints.

Brandt has done little theorizing about his own work. Perhaps this has helped him preserve the precedence of intuition over system, and allowed him to accept the risks of repeatedly beginning again, free of commitments to his own past. In 1948 he said this:

"The photographer must have and keep in him something of the receptiveness of the child who looks at the world for the first time . . . We are most of us too busy, too worried, too intent on proving ourselves right, too obsessed with ideas, to stand and stare. We look at a thing and think we have seen it. And yet what we see is often only what our prejudices tell us to expect to see, or what our past experiences tell us should be seen, or what our desires want to see. Very rarely are we able to free our minds of thought and emotions and just see for the simple pleasure of seeing. And so long as we fail to do this, so long will the essence of things be hidden from us."

John Szarkowski  
Director, Department of Photography  
Members Newsletter, The Museum of  
Modern Art (New York, 1969).

## Catalogue

All the works in the exhibition are lent by Bill Brandt, except those marked \* which are from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

- 1 Rainswept roofs, 1934.
- 2 Bedtime in Kilburn, 1935.
- 3 Soho bedroom, 1936.
- 4 Common lodging-house, near the Elephant and Castle, 1936. \*
- 5 Bedroom in West Ham, 1936.
- 6 Young housewife in Bethnal Green, 1937. \*
- 7 Prisoner in a cell at Wormwood Scrubs, 1939. \*
- 8 Policeman in Bermondsey, 1939.
- 9 In the public bar at Charlie Brown's, Limehouse, 1939.
- 10 East End girl dancing the Lambeth Walk, 1939.
- 11 Barmaid at the Crooked Billet, Tower Hill, 1939. \*
- 12 Customers at the Crooked Billet, Tower Hill, 1939. \*
- 13 Old lady in a Pimlico air-raid shelter, her silver-handled umbrella safely tucked away behind her, 1940.
- 14 Crowded improvised air-raid shelter in Liverpool Street tube tunnel, 1940. \*
- 15 Asleep in a sarcophagus in Christ Church, Spitalfields, 1940.
- 16 Pub in Soho, 1942.
- 17 Night-club in Soho, 1942.
- 18 In an East End pub, 1945.
- 19 In an East End pub, 1945.
- 20 Evening in Kew Gardens, 1932. \*
- 21 Parlourmaid and under-parlourmaid ready to serve dinner, 1933. \*
- 22 Coach party, Ascot, 1933.
- 23 Mayfair nursery, 1933.
- 24 In a Kensington drawing-room, after dinner, 1936.
- 25 Parlourmaid preparing a bath before dinner, 1937.
- 26 In a Surrey garden, cocktails before dinner, 1938.
- 27 Drawing-room in Mayfair, 1938. \*
- 28 Parlourmaid at a window in Kensington, 1939.
- 29 Crystal Palace garden, 1939. \*
- 30 Moonlit Regency balcony, Downshire Hill, Hampstead, 1940.
- 31 Deserted street in Bloomsbury, 1941.
- 32 Bayswater houses lit by moonlight, 1942.
- 33 West Wycombe Park, 1943. \*
- 34 The Reform Club, London, 1950. \*
- 35 Evening light in Burslem, 1937.
- 36 Coal-miners' houses without windows to the street, 1937. \*
- 37 Halifax, 1937.
- 38 A snicket in Halifax, 1937. \*
- 39 Child in Jarrow, 1937.
- 40 Pawnbroker's premises, Halifax, 1937.

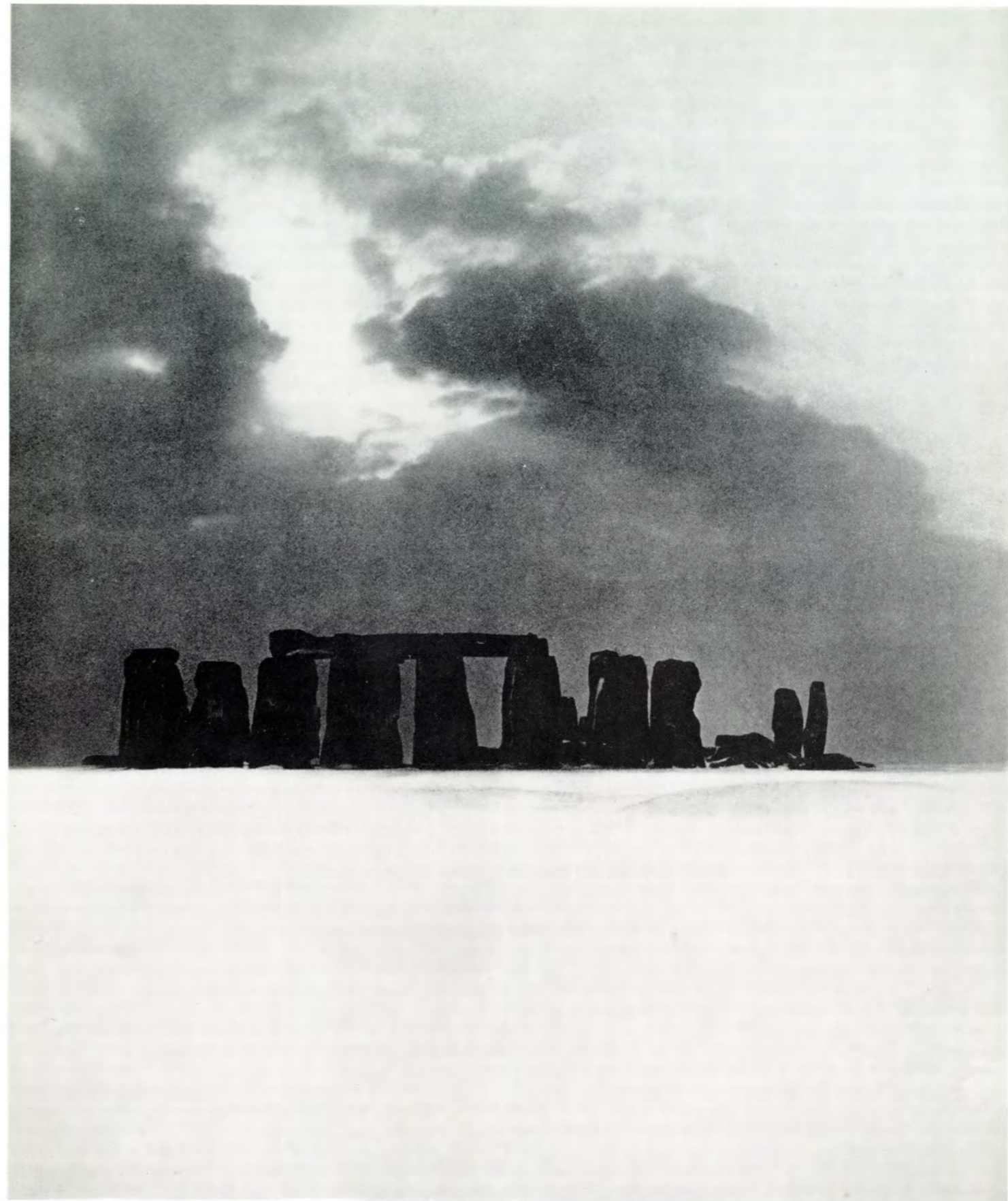
- 41 Children in Sheffield, 1937. \*
- 42 Coal-searcher going home to Jarrow, 1937. \*
- 43 Northumbrian miner at his evening meal, 1937. \*
- 44 Coal-miner's bath, Chester-le-Street, Durham, 1937.
- 45 East Durham coal-miner just home from the pit, 1937.
- 46 Flea-market, Paris, 1929.
- 47 French balloon, 1930.
- 48 Race-goers at Sandown Park, 1930. \*
- 49 Tombstone, Barcelona, 1931.
- 50 Fountain, Barcelona, 1932.
- 51 Tic-tac men at Ascot Races, 1932.
- 52 Brighton Beach, 1932. \*
- 53 Figure-head, Scilly Isles, 1934.
- 54 Battersea Bridge, 1939.
- 55 Prior Park, near Bath, 1942. \*
- 56 Avebury Stone Circle, Wiltshire, 1944. \*
- 57 Haworth Churchyard, 1944.
- 58 Top Withens, West Riding, Yorkshire, 1944. \*
- 59 Top Withens, 1945.
- 60 Giant's Causeway, 1946. \*
- 61 Connemara woman, 1946.
- 62 Stonehenge under snow, 1947. \*
- 63 Lord MacDonal's Forest, Skye, 1947.
- 64 Isle of Skye, 1947.
- 65 Gull's nest, late on mid-summer night, Isle of Skye, 1947. \*
- 66 Aldeburgh Beach, 1948.
- 67 Aldeburgh Beach, 1948.
- 68 Farm labourer in a field near St. Remy, Provence, 1948.
- 69 The Pilgrim's Way, 1950.
- 70 Col de Vence, 1962.
- 71 Vasterival, 1962.
- 72 Avebury, 1963.
- 73 An Avebury monolith, 1963.
- 74 Caligo, 1963.
- 75 Bomarzo, near Rome, 1965. \*
- 76 Bomarzo, 1965.
- 77 Flint Cottage, Box Hill, n.d.
- 78 Robert Graves in his cottage at Churston, Devon, 1941.
- 79 Dylan Thomas, London, 1941.
- 80 Dylan Thomas and his wife Caitlin, in their room, Manresa Road, Chelsea, 1944. \*
- 81 Edith and Osbert Sitwell beneath the family group by Sargent, Renishaw Hall, Yorkshire, 1945.
- 82 Norman Douglas, London, 1946.
- 83 Jack Yeats, Dublin, 1946.
- 84 E. M. Forster in his rooms at King's College, Cambridge, 1947.
- 85 Josephine Stuart, London, 1948.
- 86 Marjorie Brandt, London, 1949.
- 87 Ivy Compton-Burnett at home, Cornwall Gardens, London, 1949.
- 88 Georges Braque on the beach at Varengeville, Normandy, 1955.
- 89 Portrait of a young girl, Eaton Place, 1955. \*
- 90 Ben Nicholson in his studio at St. Ives, Cornwall, 1956. \*

- 91 Jean Arp, 1960.
- 92 Jean Dubuffet, 1960. \*
- 93 Henry Moore, 1960.
- 94 Harold Pinter, Batterssa, London, 1961.
- 95 Jean Dubuffet on the Col de Vence, Alpes-Maritimes, 1962.
- 96 Franco Zeffirelli, Ennismore Gardens, London, 1962.
- 97 Francis Bacon walking on Primrose Hill, London, 1963. \*
- 98 Peter Sellers on the film set of 'A Shot in the Dark', Elstree, 1963.
- 99 Antonio Tapies, 1964. \*
- 100 Max Ernst, Paris, 1965. \*
- 101 Nicol Williamson, Kensington, London, 1965.
- 102 Jane Hamilton, London, 1966. \*
- 103 René Magritte with his picture 'The Great War', Brussels, 1966.
- 104 Malcolm Muggeridge, Robertsbridge, Sussex, 1966.

Perspective of Nudes, 1961

- 105 Plate 10, 1950.
- 106 Plate 36, 1952. \*
- 107 Plate 26, 1953.
- 108 Plate 30, 1953.
- 109 Plate 33, 1953. \*
- 110 Plate 41, 1953.
- 111 Plate 45, 1954.
- 112 Plate 13, 1955. \*
- 113 Plate 20, 1956. \*
- 114 Plate 27, 1956. \*
- 115 Plate 43, 1957. \*
- 116 Plate 47, 1957.
- 117 Plate 59, 1957. \*
- 118 Plate 63, 1957.
- 119 Plate 77, 1958.
- 120 Plate 81, 1958.
- 121 Plate 72, 1959.
- 122 Plate 78, 1959.
- 123 Plate 87, 1959.
- 124 Plate 90, 1959.
- 125 Plate 84, 1960.

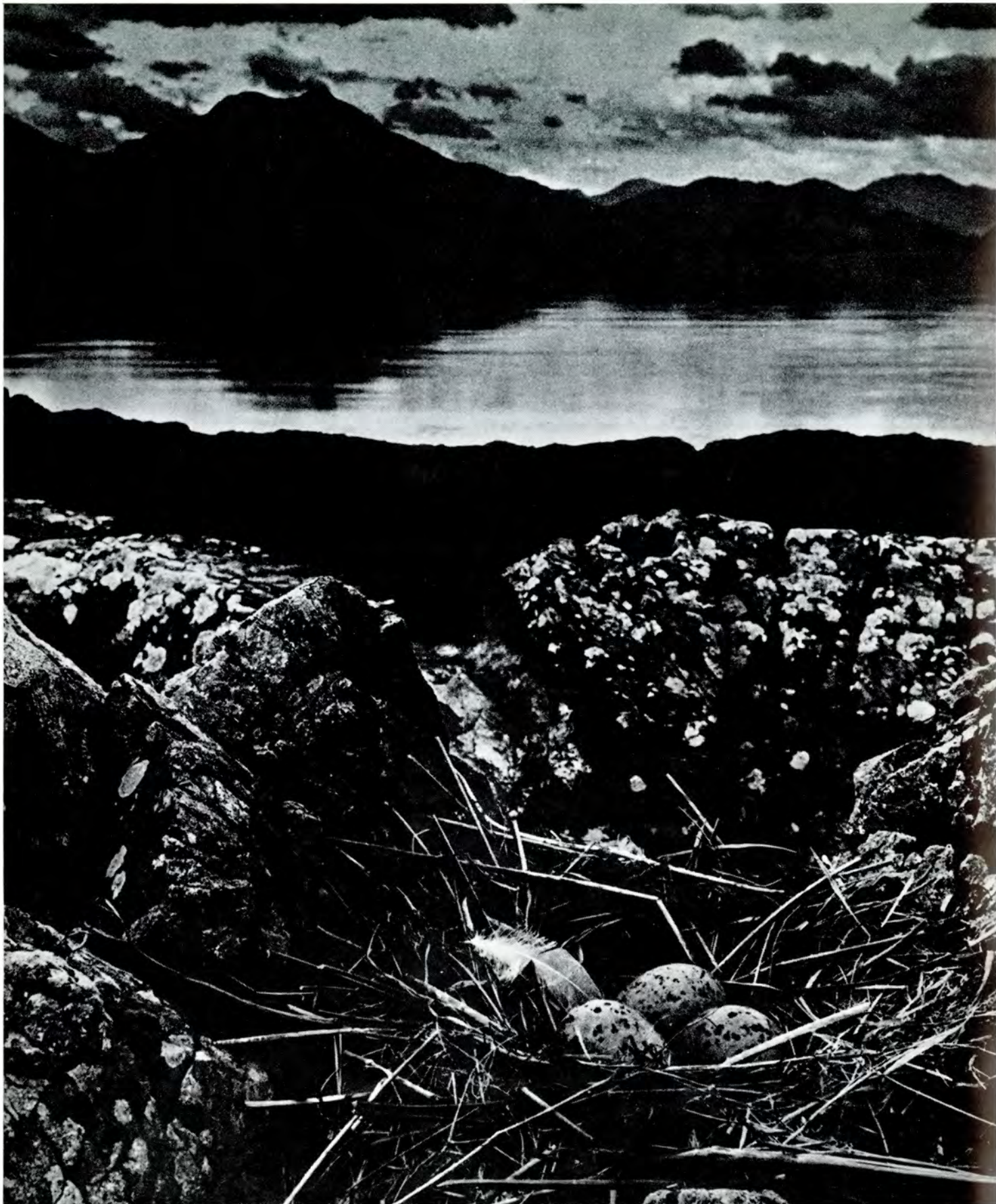




Stonehenge under Snow, 1947.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





Gulls Nest, Late on Mid-Summer Night, Isle of Skye, 1947.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**



Top Withens, West Riding, Yorkshire, 1945.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





Francis Bacon Walking on Primrose Hill, London, 1963.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**



Coal-Searcher Going Home to Jarrow, 1937.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





Parlourmaid and Under-parlourmaid Ready to Serve Dinner, 1933.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**



Northumbrian Miner at his Evening Meal, 1937.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





Drawing-room in Mayfair, 1938.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**



Barmaid at the Crooked Billet, Tower Hill, 1939.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





from "Perspective of Nudes" Series, 1956.

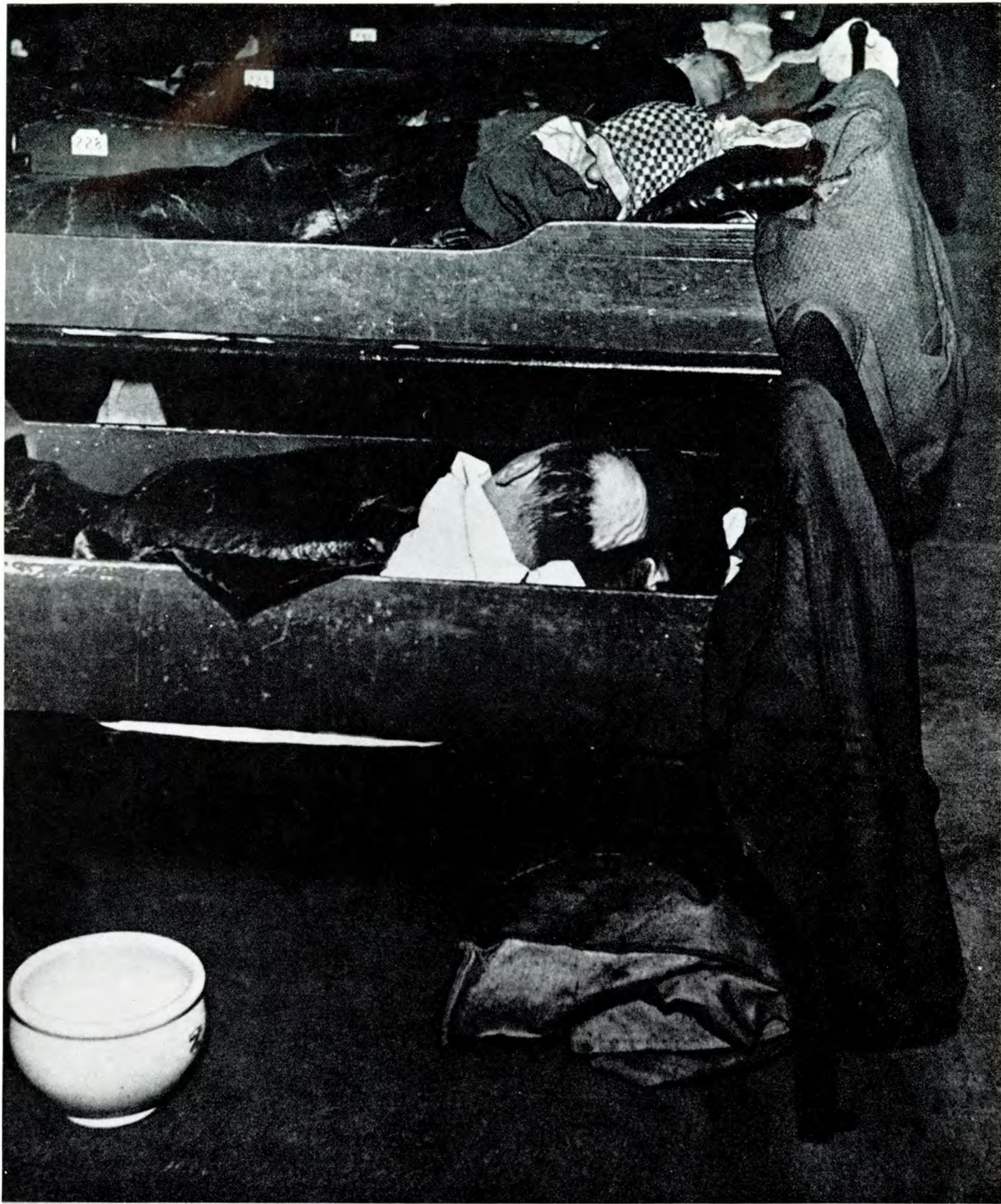
Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**



from The "Perspective of Nudes" Series, 1952-1957.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**





Common Lodging-house, near The Elephant and Castle, 1936.

Exhibition: **Bill Brandt.**  
Collection: **The Museum of Modern Art.**

AEK

“... the closing of the shutter is a death-sentence,  
a guillotining of the moment. It is best left in the  
hands of a man at peace with himself.”  
Cyril Connolly, in Bill Brandt's *Shadow of Light*.



