the village VOICE

Copyright © 1977 The Village Voice Inc. VOL. XXII No. 12 THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF NEW YORK MON. MARCH 21, 1977 60¢

WHO OWNS SOHO?

by Richard Goldstein (P. 22)

TriBeCa: Exploring the Artists' New Frontier (P. 56)

BILL BERNSTEIN

LEWIS HINE / COLLECTION OF NAOMI AND WALTER ROSENBLUM

PHOTOGRAPHER OF OUR GRANDPARENTS BY DAVID KUTZ (P. 42)

Loan Sharks: New Bankers to the Middle Class

By Michael Daly (P. 11)

SCENES Visits On-Site Sex Club

By Smith & Van der Horst (P. 3

True Story Behind Liberian Tankers

The Greasy Pole (P. 34)

A SWEET LIFE THAT KILLS

John & Karen Hess on the Banning

VOICE ARTS

Since Lewis Hine could not speak to his subjects in their native languages, he had to mime them into a steadfast composition.

By David Kutz

"I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated," said Lewis Hine. By the end of his life Hine had done just that.

The Brooklyn Museum's first major photography exhibition, on view through May 15, is a comprehensive retrospective of **LEWIS WICKES HINE**. Hine spoke little about himself, and much of his personal history is therefore lost. It took Naomi and Walter Rosenblum three years to research the show for which they are guest curators. Working closely with museum director Michael Botwinick and assistant curator Barbara Millstein, they have produced an emotionally charged, photographically significant chronicle of Hine's development as a man, a social activist, and an American master.

The child of a lower-middle-class family in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where he had worked for seven years as a laborer, Hine came to New York City in 1900. He taught at the progressive Ethical Culture School and with a push from the principal, Frank Manny, began to photograph. Following Manny's suggestion, he used the medium to record and to teach. He studied the new field of sociology at New York University, receiving a Master's degree in education in 1905. Hine was a clever, articulate, and humorous man who was sensitive to the working man's plight in the growing industrial age.

His first major photographic endeavor is also one of the most important pieces of social documentation. At the turn of the century, waves of Eastern European immigrants were arriving daily at Ellis Island. Hine began to photograph these people and followed them off the island into the tenements and factories. Earlier, Jacob Riis had photographed the denigration of the Lower East Side slums, but Hine projected images that disclosed the dignity of this humanity streaming to our land of opportunity.

The work at Ellis Island formalized Hine's technique. He worked with a large 5-by-7-inch view camera, magnesium flash powder, and a shaky tripod. Amid the onslaught of arriving immigrants Hine would locate and isolate his subjects. Since he could not speak to them in their native languages, he had to mime them into a steadfast composition. The pictures poignantly reveal the hopes and fears of those who would soon make up more than one third of New York City's population.

Lewis Hine became the visual spokesman for the social-welfare movement when he began to photograph for the National Child Labor Committee in 1907. Soon he was to leave his teaching position at what he now called the "ethical infirmary" in order to dedicate his life to "social photography." Under the guise of a Bible salesman, a fire inspector, or a postcard vendor, he fast-talked his way onto the work sites, where he captured the deplorable conditions under which the masses labored. Expressing his concern, Hine wrote, "For years I have followed the procession of child workers winding through a thousand industrial communities, from the canneries of Maine to the fields of Texas. I have heard their tragic stories, watched their cramped lives, and seen their fruitless struggles in the industrial game, where the odds are all against them."

As he worked Hine compiled statistical information about the children. He recorded their age, the number of hours they worked, the years of their labor, and—using his coat buttons for a measuring stick—their height. His pictures, which appeared in numerous reform and socialist magazines, on leaflets and on posters, were effective publicity. Though Hine was often physically threatened by management, he courageously continued to sharpen the consciousness of the U.S. government and its citizenry.

While employed by the NCLC Hine created an Exhibition

Powerhouse mechanic, 1920

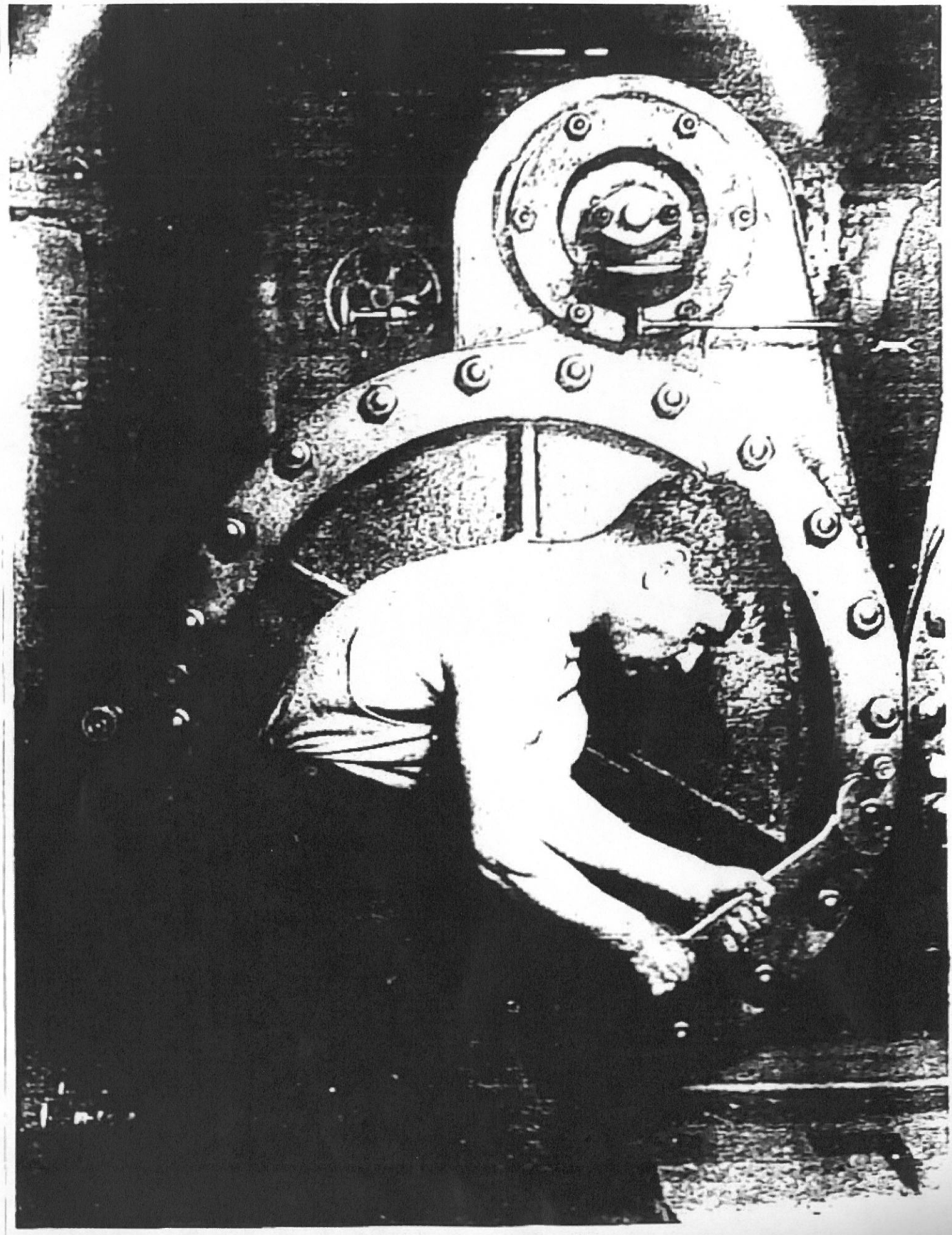
Department and gave illustrated lectures on illegal and inhuman working conditions. "Child labor, illiteracy, industrial inefficiency, low wages, long hours, low standards of living, bad housing, poor food, unemployment, intemperance, disease, poverty, child labor, illiteracy, industrial inefficiency, low wages, but we are repeating;" wrote Hine. His records and his photographs generated enormous public response and were used as evidence in Congress to generate child-labor legislation.

In 1918, Hine left the NCLC over a salary dispute. He joined the American Red Cross to document its activities in war-torn Europe, returning a year later to work as an independent photographer. A significant shift in emphasis took place at this time—Hine now called himself an "interpretive photographer"—for he turned his attention away from the negative aspects of the human condition and focused upon the integrity, intelligence, and strength of the new industrial craftsman. His final cohesive body of work documents the construction of the Empire State Building. "Cities do not build themselves," he wrote. "In the Machine Age, the more machines we use, the more do we need real men to make and direct them. . . . Work itself has ever been one of the deepest satisfactions that come to the restless human soul."

With the completion of the Empire State Building in 1932 Hine found little work. He was not hired under the Farm Security Act, which had allowed Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and others to chronicle the Great Depression. Roy Stryker, director of the FSA group, claimed that the gentle Hine was difficult to work with and past his prime. Hine's own circumstances took a tragic turn as he joined welfare lines in order to support his family. In 1939, the photographic community organized a major retrospective for him, but it served little financial purpose. Hine died one year later, impoverished.

After his death Hine's work was given to the Photo League by his son Corydon. The league tried to give his negatives and prints to the Museum of Modern Art but they refused the gift. In 1952, the work of one of America's finest humanitarians and greatest photographic artists was placed in the collection of the Eastman House in Rochester, New York.

The present Brooklyn Museum show is well designed and installed and offers an excellent catalogue plus a series of 16 gravure prints produced in conjunction with the retrospective. Hine's photographs—and the museum's excellent presentation of them—celebrate the integrity and fortitude of America's working people.



Powerhouse mechanic, 1939