

Brooklyn Bridge, Walker Evans

Brooklyn Bridge

Walker Evans

American, New York City,
1929

Gelatin silver print

5 13/16 x 5 9/16 in.

84.XM.956.10

Less a photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge than of the view from it, this image shows lower Manhattan just across the East River framed by crisscrossed steel suspension cables. The geometric cage of intersecting lines dissects the financial heart of the city, emphasizing the divide between the two New York City boroughs. Walker Evans's view hints at the separate and uneasy relationship between the two worlds connected by the bridge.

Built between 1869 and 1883, the Brooklyn Bridge was at the time the world's largest suspension bridge and the first to use steel as cable wire. A symbol of progress in the Industrial Age, it also became a favorite motif for modern painters and photographers.



About the Artist

Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975)

"Leaving aside the mysteries and the inequities of human talent, brains, taste, and reputations, the matter of art in photography may come down to this: it is the capture and projection of the delights of seeing; it is the defining of observation full and felt." —Walker Evans

Walker Evans began to photograph in the late 1920s, making snapshots during a European trip. Upon his return to New York, he published his first images in 1930. During the Great Depression, Evans began to photograph for the Resettlement Administration, later known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), documenting workers and architecture in the Southeastern

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states. In 1936 he traveled with the writer James Agee to illustrate an article on tenant farm families for *Fortune* magazine; the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* came out of this collaboration.

Throughout his career Evans contributed photographs to numerous publications, including three devoted solely to his work. In 1965 he left *Fortune*, where he had been a staff photographer for twenty years, to become a professor of photography and graphic design at Yale University. He remained in the position until 1974, a year before his death.

Questions for Teaching

Using as many details as possible, describe what you see in this image. (This image shows a view of a city through the cables of a suspension bridge. The foreground of this image is occupied by the intersecting cables of the bridge. The background consists of three horizontal bands: the water, the city, and the sky.)

This image is taken from the Brooklyn Bridge, which connects the island of Manhattan to Brooklyn. What reactions do you think Evans wanted to evoke with this image? (The crossbeams, which are positioned with such prominence in the image, are strongly reminiscent of cage bars. Evans may be suggesting the separation between different populations and places within the same city. Although a bridge is meant to connect two areas together, Evans is ironically pointing out that two areas can remain isolated—socially, economically—even when physically connected.)

This image expresses many strong formal qualities. Which of the elements and principles of art are most strongly represented here? (The foreground of this image consists of strong vertical and diagonal *lines*. These *lines* intersect to form diamond *shapes* and create positive and negative *space*. The vertical lines of the cables are echoed in the vertical lines of the skyscrapers in the background. There is an interesting contrast in positive and negative space between the relatively blank sky and water and the view of the city in between, which is checkered with hundreds of windows. The lines also create a *pattern* of diamond shapes and create a repetition across the image. There is also pattern and *repetition* in the rectangular-shaped windows in the distant buildings.)

