When Henry Luce proposed what would become LIFE, he hoped for a publication that would “edit pictures into a coherent story—to make an effective mosaic out of the fragmentary documents which pictures...are.” Using limited text, readers would learn the language of photography, come to better respect it, and be shaped by it. The magazine published photo essays about art and life, culture and experience, and current news. Though LIFE was not the first picture magazine, it achieved a level of remarkable success where being on its cover was a coveted position. Luce’s news magazine was born in 1936 when he purchased the previous humor publication exclusively for the rights to its name. The new periodical circulated to 21% of the U.S. population over the age of ten by the late 1940s; it continued weekly until 1972 and less frequently until its last issue in 2000. Though LIFE employed about 100 full-time photographers throughout its existence, the six artists featured in this exhibition were the only female photographers hired either full-time, or on a semi-permanent basis by the magazine. This exhibition features not only many of their published images, but some that remained unpublished as well.

The texts in the guide were developed by the Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

Inside left top image: Margaret Bourke-White, photograph from “Franklin Roosevelt’s Wild West,” LIFE, November 23, 1936, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Inside left bottom image: Martha Holmes, photograph from “Mr. B.,” LIFE, April 24, 1950, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Inside middle top image: Hansel Mieth, photograph from “International Ladies’ Garment Workers: How a Great Union Works Inside and Out,” LIFE, August 1, 1938, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Inside middle bottom image: Nina Leen, photograph from “American Woman’s Dilemma,” LIFE, June 16, 1947 (similar frame published), © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Inside right top image: Marie Hansen, “The exercises are designed to foster flexibility and endurance, not bulging muscles,” photograph from “The WAACs,” LIFE, September 7, 1942, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Inside right bottom image: Lisa Larsen, unpublished photograph from “Tito as Soviet Hero, How Times Have Changed!” LIFE, June 25, 1956, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

Front image: Marie Hansen, The exercises are designed to foster flexibility and endurance, not bulging muscles, photograph from The WAACs, LIFE, September 7, 1942, © LIFE Picture Collection, Meredith Corporation.

This exhibition has been organized by the New-York Historical Society.
HANSEL MIETH
“International Ladies’ Garment Workers: How a Good Union Works Inside and Out”

At the time this article was published, the majority of Americans were in favor of labor unions in general. However, they also considered them at the top of the list of American institutions in need of reform. Even a large portion of those who did support unions expressed greater sympathy for businesses than picketing strikers. They also acknowledged that sit-down strikes should be illegal, and expressed their concern with labor leadership.

As the editors wrote, “Labor unions have made a lot of news and a lot of noise but so far Americans have had little chance to find out what it is like to live in trade unions or to live with trade unions.” This article was thus intended to combat a decline in public opinion by highlighting the positive aspects of a labor union.

MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE, PORTRAIT OF MYSELF

Six so-called shack towns surfaced in the region to house the workers who relocated for the duration of the construction project. LIFE editors characterized the resulting shantytowns as untamed, supporting their claim with Bourke-White’s photos of bars, dancing, a lone law enforcement official, and Carrie’s bedsprings in ‘New Deal’ are the broken ones.” Many of the workers disliked the photo essay’s sensa-

“Those were the days of LIFE’s youth, and things were very informal... I loved the swift pace of the LIFE assignments, the exhilaration of stepping over the threshold into a new land. Everything could be conquered. Nothing was too difficult.”

Life founder Henry Luce and president of the ILGWU David Dubinsky were both known for their anti-Communist views. How do these photographs emphasize their political beliefs, and present this union as a pathway to achieving the American Dream? What do you think—were these photos effective enough to change public attitudes? Why or why not?

NINA LEEN
“American Woman’s Dilemma”

The post-WWII era provided a variety of professional opportunities not available to women a generation earlier, and the increased employment rates of women reflected that change. This LIFE article outlines a variety of ways a woman might choose to spend her time (as a housewife, working, in leisure, in the community, or a combination), emphasizing the pros and cons of each form of engagement. Though the article fails to acknowledge entire demographics of women and circumstances, it does acknowledge the double bind women are placed in. Perhaps, as the article concludes, the American woman’s dilemma was not the career decision she must make, but that “every woman finds herself classified with all women... variation is seldom considered for a woman,” and that “whatever way a woman chooses to solve her dilemma, arguments will continue to rage.”

Did you know? At the time of this article, about 50% of women ages 14 and older were nonworkers (not looking for work). 30% were employed and less than 1% of all women were unemployed and searching for a job.

Many of these photographs feature cropped spaces. Imagine taking a few steps back with the camera—what else might a wider view reveal?

LISA LARSEN
“Tito as Soviet Hero, How Times Have Changed!”

When the Yugoslavian Marshal Tito visited the Soviet Union in 1956 to meet with Nikita Khruschev, the world anxiously awaited the outcome. The USSR especially sought to boost their two countries’ recently fraught relationship, hoping to strengthen their position as a communist coun-

“We’re in the Army Now”

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LISA LARSEN
“The WAACs”

In 1942, Congress passed a bill to create the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). Though not originally part of the Army, the WAAC allowed women to contribute to the wartime efforts in ways not previously available to them, including clerical work, mess work, light transportation, and mechanics. Additionally, it enabled them to “Replace a Man for Combat,” as the WAAC slogan proclaimed.

Due to negative stereotypes of women in the Army, the first WAAC director Oveta Culp Hobby sought to build a strong reputation of WAAC women not only as hardworking, serious, and well-mannered, but also as appropriately “feminine.” Hobby also designated time for games, music, and dancing. Marie Hansen’s photos of one WAAC’s daily routines were used to convey this set of values and lifestyle. Additionally, LIFE’s article introduced eight women, outlining their reasons for joining the war effort, as well as their specific roles in the WAAC, thus empha-

SWEETHEARTS OF THE AMERICAN ARMED FORCES

For fun: Lisa Larsen was known for developing a good relationship with those she photographed. Per Tito’s direction, she was the only journalist correspondent allowed to photograph him while relaxing at the Black Sea during his visit to the USSR. Khruschev was also impressed by Larsen’s work ethic, thanking her with a bouquet of flowers.

What might one expect to see in photos of a president’s visit to a foreign country? In what ways do these images differ from or align with your expectations?