



Rancher, Montana

Date

c. 1938

Primary Maker

Arthur Rothstein

Medium

Gelatin silver print

Description

Arthur Rothstein initially dabbled in photography as a hobby while attending Columbia University, where he served as photography editor of the college yearbook and founded the Camera Club. Upon graduating in 1935, his former economics professor, Roy Stryker, hired him as one of the first photographers on the staff of the Resettlement Administration (renamed the Farm Security Administration in 1937)—an office created under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to assist families in urban and rural areas affected by the Great Depression, industrialization, and environmental crises. Rothstein and ten other photographers, including Walker Evans (see cat. no. 75), traveled across the United States documenting the conditions of poverty and hardship under which many people were living, particularly in the middle of

the country, which had become known as the Dust Bowl after years of drought and soil erosion caused frequent dust storms. Stryker intended the photographs to be visual evidence of the need for and accomplishments of the agency. Over eight years, the FSA photographers exposed more than 200,000 negatives. Rothstein worked for Stryker for five years, from 1935 to 1940, and spoke of a “missionary sense of dedication to this project, of making the world a better place to live in.” Rancher, Montana is fairly typical of the portraits that came out of the FSA, although they did vary compositionally and in emotional tone. Here, Rothstein captured at close range a proud-looking but weather-beaten rancher standing before a clapboard structure and squinting toward the photographer. Rothstein was able to artfully record the varying textures of corduroy, chambray, and furrowed skin. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Image: 13 1/2 × 10 5/8 in. (34.3 × 27 cm) Sheet: 13 15/16 × 11 1/16 in. (35.4 × 28.1 cm)