



THE MYTHIC CITY

Photographs of New York by Samuel H. Gottscho, 1925-1940



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During the late 1920s and '30s, architectural photographer Samuel H. Gottscho created a now-classic portrait of New York as the quintessential modern metropolis. Gottscho presented a dreamlike city of towers and bridges, sleek modern architecture contrasting with the traditional and ornate. As Eugene Atget did for Paris, Gottscho photographed New York City methodically and with passion; his brilliance as a photographer was rooted in his ability to synthesize the documentary and the artistic. Photographing New York for its leading architects and builders as well as for his own pleasure, Gottscho surveyed a city that had been transformed by rising immigration, dynamic capitalism, and radical advances in transportation, communications, and building technologies.

In *The Mythic City: Photographs of New York by Samuel H. Gottscho, 1925-1940*, twenty panels containing photographic images and contextualizing narrative bring Gottscho's New York to life, exploring the city's commerce, Rockefeller center, the world's fair, the city at night, and other themes. From the vast metropolis captured in aerial views, to individual buildings and interiors, and even to items sold within its stores, we see an iconic city that is both revelatory and dreamy, familiar and new.

“IT IS BY ALL ODDS THE LOFTIEST OF CITIES. IT EVEN
MANAGED TO REACH THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE SKY AT
THE LOWEST MOMENT OF DEPRESSION.”

- E.B. WHITE

SAMUEL H. GOTTSCHO

Born in Brooklyn in 1875 to a German father and a French mother, Samuel Herman Gottso took his first photographs after purchasing a large-format box camera at age 21. Unable to support his family as a professional photographer, Gottso worked as a traveling salesman until age 50. Continuing to make images in his spare time, he began selling his work to a calendar company around 1915, followed by commissions to photograph suburban houses and gardens in Queens. By 1925 this work allowed Gottso to begin a new full-time career as a professional photographer, specializing in country estates, suburban houses, and commercial city buildings.



III.

III. Gottso-Schleisner, Inc. Samuel H. Gottso, 1955-1956. 56.32368.

IV. Gottso-Schleisner, Inc. Steuben Glass, Inc. 718 Fifth Avenue, 1937. 88.1.14875.

V. Samuel H. Gottso. 277 Park Avenue, NYC. Garden court, axis to West, 1933. 88.1.12963.



IV.



V.



VI.

CITY OF COMMERCE, CITY OF STYLE

In 1935, Gottscho documented the increasing popularity of modernism for shops, showrooms, salons, and restaurants. Streamlined forms, new industrial materials, and innovative lighting schemes were ways to attract the attention of customers and to combat falling sales in hard times. Materials such as shining porcelain panels and gleaming stainless steel appealed to the public as symbols of a bright, new future.

VI. Samuel H. Gottscho. Chrysler showroom. Chrysler Building, 1936.
88.1.14208

VII. Samuel H. Gottscho. 88.1.1895. Rex Cole [showroom]. Interior toward
windows. 1931. 88.1.1895.





SKYSCRAPERS

Revolutionary advances in building construction and technology as well as expansive corporate business practices made possible the enormous office skyscrapers that rose in early 20th-century Manhattan. Located on a dense street grid, skyscrapers created dizzying slices of space and offered dramatic perches for aerial views, while Manhattan's wide swaths of parks and its island setting allowed panoramic vistas of its famous skyline. These skyscrapers attracted the attention of avant-garde painters, filmmakers, and photographers, including Gottscho, who promoted New York's skyscrapers as the true stars of the city's drama.



IX.

VIII. Samuel H. Gottscho. Chrysler Building at dusk, 1933. 88.1.2.1965.
IX. Samuel H. Gottscho. New York City Views. Looking southeast from McGraw-Hill Building, 1948. 88.1.1.1948.



X.

WORLD'S FAIR: THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW

Gottschö's interest in New York architecture and design in the 1930s would culminate with the New York World's Fair of 1939–40, which represented the hopes and aspirations of Depression-era Americans for a better future. Gottschö visited the site 30 times, working for the pavilion sponsors and also taking pictures for his own amusement. "The whole place was fantastic," he later remembered, "extravagant, even unreal and the most magnificent use of light as display that had ever been seen..."

X. Gottschö-Schleisner, Inc. [New York] World's Fair, 1939. 88.1.5387.
XI. Samuel H. Gottschö. Trylon and Perisphere. World's Fair, 1939. 56.323.10.



ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. It engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. Founded in 1923 by Henry Collins Brown, a Scottish-born writer with a vision for a populist approach to the city, the Museum was originally housed in Gracie Mansion, the future residence of the Mayor of New York. Completed in 1932, the Museum's current home is a Georgian Colonial-Revival building constructed by Joseph H. Freedlander on land owned by the City of New York. Over the years, the Museum has amassed a considerable collection of exceptional items, approximately 750,000 objects including prints, photographs, decorative arts, costumes, paintings, sculpture, toys, and theatrical memorabilia.



XII.

XII. Samuel H. Gottscho. Times Square at night, 1932. 88.1.2441.

XIII. Hillside Housing Inc., Boston Post Road, Bronx. Kitchen with Mrs. Lenninger standing, 88.1.3739.





Front: Midtown through mist, 1932. 88.1.1.2291.
 Back: Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc. Stetson Shoe Store, Fifth Avenue and 36th Street, 1937. 88.1.1.4778.

Curator

Donald Albrecht

Number of Works

20 sintra panels, unframed

Availability

Spring 2021 – Fall 2025

Booking Period

12-weeks, can be prorated for shorter or longer exhibition

Loan Fee

Please enquire

Requirements

Standard security, approximately 25 linear feet

Shipping

Host venue covers the cost of incoming and return freight shipping to the Museum of the City of New York

Contact

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