



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

THE FRICK ART & HISTORICAL CENTER PRESENTS

ICONS OF AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY: A CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Exhibition celebrates American photography

PITTSBURGH, PA, September 22, 2009—On October 3, 2009, *Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art* opens at The Frick Art Museum. This exhibition is composed of fifty-nine photographs from Cleveland's extraordinary collection that chronicle the evolution of photography in America from a scientific curiosity in the 1850s to one of the most potent forms of artistic expression of the twentieth century.

Icons of American Photography presents some of the best work by masters of the medium, like Mathew Brady, William Henry Jackson, Eadweard Muybridge, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank, encompassing themes of portraiture, the Western landscape, Pictorialism, documentary photography, and abstraction.

The exhibition explores the technical developments of photography, starting with outstanding examples of daguerreotypes—a sheet of copper coated with light sensitive silver. The

daguerreotype gave way to salt, albumen, and then gelatin silver prints. Technologies improved to accommodate larger sizes, easy reproduction of multiple prints from a single negative, and commercially available negative film and print papers. As we move into an increasingly digitized twenty-first century, the lure of the photographer's magic and the mysteries of making photographic images appear on paper is still strong.

Icons of American Photography presents a remarkable chronicle of American life seen through the camera's lens. The earliest days of photography saw a proliferation of portraiture—intimately personal and honest in composition. A rare multiple-exposure daguerreotype by Albert Southworth (1811–1894) and Josiah Hawes (1808–1901) presents the sitter in variety of poses and expressions, while the formal portrait of *Prosper M. Wetmore*, 1857, by Civil War-era photographer Mathew Brady (1823–1896) is more typical of early portraiture. The carefully staged daguerreotype, *Dead Child on a Sofa*, c. 1855, is an outstanding example of the postmortem portrait. The high rate of infant mortality throughout the 1800s made this variety of portraiture common, satisfying the emotional need of the parents to have a lasting memory of their loved one.

Advances in photographic processes allowed for a range of expressive qualities that were exploited by photographers with an artistic flair. In a style known as Pictorialism, works such as *Hamadryads*, 1910, by Anne Brigman (1869–1950) imitated the subject matter of painting. In Greek mythology a hamadryad is a nymph whose life begins and ends with that of a specific tree. In this work, two nudes representing wood nymphs were carefully placed among the flowing forms of an isolated tree in the High Sierra. The platinum print method used by Brigman allowed for a detailed, yet warm and evocative result. Edward Steichen's *Rodin—the Thinker*, 1902, was created from two different negatives printed together using the carbon print process. This non-silver process provided a continuous and delicate tonal range. For even greater richness, these prints were often toned, producing dense, glossy areas in either black or warm brown.

During the late nineteenth century, the U.S. Congress commissioned photographers to document the American West. Photographs by Timothy O'Sullivan (1840–1882) and William Henry Jackson (1843–1942) are the most celebrated from among this era. The exhibition includes

O'Sullivan's *East Humbolt Mountains, Utah*, 1868, and Jackson's *Mystic Lake, M.T.*, 1872, as well as *Bridal Veil, Yosemite*, c. 1866, by Carleton Watkins (1829–1916). Photographers carried large-format cameras with heavy glass negatives to precarious vantage points to create ~~their~~ sharply focused and detailed views. Decades later, Ansel Adams (1902–1984) carried on the intrepid tradition when he swerved to the side of the road and hauled his view camera to the roof of his car to make the famous image *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*, 1941.

Responding to the rapid growth of the twentieth century, many photographers shifted their attention from depictions of the natural world to the urban landscape. The power, energy, and romance of the city inspired varied approaches, from sweeping vistas to tight, close-up details and unusual camera angles. Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971) established her reputation during the late 1920s by photographing industrial subjects in Cleveland. Her *Terminal Tower*, 1928, documents what was then the second tallest building in America. Berenice Abbot's (1898–1991) *New York*, 1936, is one of many depictions of this vibrant metropolis. The human life of the city intrigued many photographers, including Helen Levitt (1913–2009) whose photographs of children are direct, unsentimental and artful; Weegee [Arthur Fellig] (1899–1968) who unflinchingly documented crime and accident scenes; and Gordon Parks (1912–2006) who chronicled the life of African Americans.

Exploiting the new medium, numerous photography projects were instituted as part of FDR's New Deal. The most legendary was that of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) run by Roy Stryker, who hired such important photographers such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Arthur Rothstein. One of the most iconic images of the New Deal was *Dust Storm, Cimarron County*, 1936, by Arthur Rothstein (1915–1985). In the spring of 1936, Rothstein made hundreds of photographs in Cimarron County in the Oklahoma panhandle, one of the worst wind-eroded areas in the United States. Out of that body of work came this gripping, unforgettable image. Dorothea Lange's (1895–1965) work chronicled the human toll wrought by hardship in *Resident, Conway, Arkansas*, 1938.

As an art form, photography kept in step with formalist modern styles and an increasing trend toward abstraction. Known for his precisionist paintings, Charles Sheeler's (1883–1965) *Bucks*

County Barn, 1915, features a geometric composition, sharp focus, and subtle tonal range. In *Black and White Lilies III*, c. 1928, Imogene Cunningham (1883–1976) combined the clarity and directness of Modernism with her long-held interest in botanical imagery. For two decades she created a remarkable group of close-up studies of plants and flowers that identified her as one of the most sophisticated and experimental photographers working in America.

Photographers such as Edward Weston (1886–1958) and Paul Strand (1890–1976) employed a straight-on clarity that highlighted the abstract design of everyday objects and the world around us. A completely abstract work by artist László Moholy-Nagy (1894–1946), *untitled*, 1939, is a photogram made by laying objects onto light-sensitive photographic paper and exposing it to light. The objects partially block the light to create an abstract design on the paper.

By 1960, photography had attained a prominent place not only among the fine arts, but in popular culture as well, ushering in a new era of image-based communication that has profoundly affected the arts as well as everyday life.

Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art is organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art. The exhibition is curated by Tom Hinson, Curator of Photography. This exhibition is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Support for the Pittsburgh presentation of *Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art* and *Children's Hospital 1951: Photographs by Esther Bubley* is provided, in part, by The Fine Foundation.

THE COLLECTION

Actively assembled since the 1980s, the Cleveland Museum of Art's photography collection comprises carefully selected holdings that chronicle the medium's fine art history and highlight major movements and important figures. A variety of individual visions, the ingenuity of technical solutions, and the photographs' superior physical condition emphasize artistic achievement. Spanning the life of analog photography from the 1840s and 1850s through the

twentieth century, the collection's strength is particularly evident in the museum's American photographs, distinguished by their chronological breadth, iconic imagery, and stunning physical condition.

THE FRICK ART MUSEUM

The Frick Art Museum at the Frick Art & Historical Center contains collections of fine and decorative arts assembled by Helen Clay Frick, daughter of Henry Clay Frick. In addition to exhibiting its permanent collection, which has strengths in Italian Renaissance and French eighteenth-century painting, the Museum has an active program of temporary exhibitions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Frick Art & Historical Center is located at 7227 Reynolds Street in Pittsburgh's Point Breeze neighborhood. Free parking is available in the Frick's off-street lot or along adjacent streets. The Frick is open 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday and closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to The Frick Art Museum, Car and Carriage Museum, Greenhouse, and Playhouse is free. Docent-led tours of *Icons of American Photography: A Century of Photographs from the Cleveland Museum of Art* are available free of charge on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 2:00 p.m. Groups of five or more and those interested in scheduling a tour of the permanent collection are requested to schedule a private tour at an alternate time. The cost for group tours of the exhibition and permanent collection is \$7 per person, and reservations must be made one to two weeks in advance. Call 412-371-0600, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00p.m., Monday—Sunday.

For additional information or images, please contact Greg Langel, Media and Marketing Manager, at 412-371-0600 ext. 524 or glangel@TheFrickPittsburgh.org.

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The Frick Art & Historical Center, a museum, historic site and cultural center, serves the public through preservation, presentation, and interpretation of the fine and decorative arts and historically significant artifacts for all residents of and visitors to Western Pennsylvania.