

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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ADVANCE FACT SHEET

Exhibition: Ansel Adams: Classic Images

Date: October 6, 1985 - January 12, 1986

Location: West Building

Description: To honor Ansel Adams (1902-1984), the renowned twentieth-century American photographer, a museum set of seventy-five of his finest photographs, representing all aspects of his career, will go on view in this forthcoming exhibition. It is the first museum exhibition in America of the full museum set. A group of Adams' rarely seen large images, lent by Mrs. Ansel Adams, will also be on view with the museum set at the National Gallery.

Adams devoted the last five years of his life to the production of the museum sets, choosing for them those photographs which he felt were representative of the quality and range of his artistic achievement, and applying to their printing all the recent technological capabilities and a lifetime of experience and dedicated perfectionism. The museum set which will be on view at the National Gallery was recently acquired by Pacific Telesis. Several other sets are in corporate and private collections; one is owned by the Australian National Museum. Adams intended the museum sets to remain intact and eventually go to museum collections for the public to see and enjoy.

Scope: The Photographer and His Work

As a young man, Ansel Adams studied to be a concert pianist. Although he chose photography instead of music, the sensibility of a musician served him well as a photographer. Adams often compared the photographic negative to a musical score, and he likened the print to a performance. Musical influence is also reflected in his use of a metronome in the dark room (instead of a clock) to time the developing process rhythmically. Adams was committed to the perfection of his prints and to that end he worked seven days a week even after his eightieth birthday. Over a sixty-eight year period, he produced some

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40,000 negatives, which are housed today in the Ansel Adams Archive in the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. His reputation now rests on approximately 1,000 developed images.

The group of photographs which will be on view next fall includes spectacular panoramas photographed in a variety of weather conditions and seasons, at different times of the day. They represent some of Adams' best known prints such as Mount Williamson, Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar (1944), a photograph of the mountain range partially enveloped in clouds with huge, imposing boulders in the foreground; Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite National Park, California (1944); and Moonrise Hernandez, New Mexico (1941), which is his most famous image. In another well-known work, Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite Valley (1960), Adams' dramatic tonal contrasts of light and shadow depict the Half Dome's starkness against a dark sky.

Adams was also sensitive to nature on a smaller scale, as seen in the rich texture and detail of Juniper Tree Detail, Sequoia National Park (c. 1927). Adams often found beauty in seemingly insignificant subject matter, as in Rock and Grass, Moraine Lake, Sequoia National Park (c. 1932), and in the slender elegance of Aspens, Northern New Mexico (1958).

Two waterfall images demonstrate Adams' ability to photograph similar subject matter yet convey entirely different moods. For example, Vernal Fall, Yosemite Valley (c. 1948) focuses on the power of water pounding down a rocky cliff. The feeling in Bridal Veil Fall, Yosemite Valley (c. 1927), on the other hand, is gentle. The center of the composition is filled by a fine, white mist which, like a veil, obscures the waterfall.

The museum set represents the breadth of subjects and locations photographed by Ansel Adams-- from Alaska to the Appalachians, from the Maine coast to Yosemite. In addition to images of the natural world, the exhibition will include Adams' portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz.

Funding

The exhibition is made possible by a grant from Pacific Telesis, a leading telecommunications corporation based in California.

Exhibition Catalogue

Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., the Gallery's Curator of American Art, is coordinating the exhibition and is writing an essay on the museum set for the fully illustrated catalogue. James Alinder, Director, Friends of Photography (an organization founded by Ansel Adams in 1967 in Carmel, California), is also contributing an essay.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202)842-6353.