

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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ANSEL ADAMS: CLASSIC IMAGES
TO GO ON VIEW IN OCTOBER 1985
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C. July 9, 1985. An exhibition of the museum set, seventy-five of the finest images produced by Ansel Adams (1902-1984), the renowned twentieth-century American photographer, goes on view October 6, 1985 through January 12, 1986 in the West Building Ground Floor Galleries of the National Gallery of Art.

The museum set was selected by Ansel Adams during the last five years of his life to represent the highest quality of his artistic achievement. This is the first museum exhibition in America of the full museum set. These photographs will be shown with a group of rarely seen large images, mural prints and screens, which are being loaned by Mrs. Ansel Adams and others.

Ansel Adams: Classic Images is made possible by a grant from Pacific Telesis, a leading telecommunications corporation based in California.

The museum set includes many of Ansel Adams' most famous photographs including Monolith, The Face of Half Dome (1927), Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico (1941), Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite Valley, California, (1944), Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite Valley, (1960), and Mount Williamson, Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar, (1944).

As early as 1930, Ansel Adams thought of producing a set representing his best work, and to some extent achieved this objective through his many illustrated books. However, the museum sets which he produced---there are six

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full sets of seventy-five prints and sixty smaller sets---contain the outstanding images from his prolific, sixty-eight year career. One museum set was acquired by Pacific Telesis in 1984 for exhibition purposes.

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 the images of the natural world, the exhibition includes Adams' portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz.

Having taught himself to play the piano at the age of thirteen, Ansel Adams continued to develop his talent by studying to be a concert pianist. The discipline and high standards which he set for himself as a musician proved invaluable to Adams in the dark room where he painstakingly worked to create the rich and precise tonal scale that distinguish his photographic prints. In 1941, he developed the Zone System, a tonal scale of eleven zones ranging from total black to pure white that he used to determine the desired densities of the finished print. In a musical analogy, Adams often compared the photographic negative to a musical score, and the print to a performance.

Aspens (Vertical), Northern New Mexico (1958), exemplifies Adams' dramatic handling of light. Here the three-dimensional quality is achieved by white aspens in the foreground which stand out and appear to be closer to the surface of the photograph than the darker trees in the background. Other prints included in the exhibition which demonstrate similarly striking tonal range are: Sand Dunes, Sunrise, Death Valley, California, (1948), and Winter Sunrise, Sierra Nevada, from Lone Pine, California, (1944).

Adams made great images from subjects that would be overlooked by a lesser artist. High Country Crags and Moon, Sunrise (1935), Juniper Tree Detail, Sequoia National Park (c. 1927), and Rock and Grass, Moraine Lake, Sequoia National Park (c. 1932) show Adams' sensitivity to nature on an intimate scale.

Adams first visited Yosemite National Park during a family vacation in 1916, and photographed the area with a Kodak Box Brownie camera. He continued to photograph the natural beauty of the area throughout his life. On December 13, 1984, the National Park Service officially named a mountain peak in Yosemite for Ansel Adams. Naming the mountain for him was a tribute to the role Adams' photographs played in awakening three generations of Americans to the magnificence of the American West, and the wilderness landscape. As an active member of the Sierra Club, Ansel Adams himself worked for over sixty years to preserve the beauty of the natural world.

Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., the Gallery's curator of American art, is coordinating the exhibition and has written 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), has contributed an extensive biographical essay.

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