

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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EXHIBITION OF RARE MASTERPIECES REVEALS

BEAUTY AND MAGIC OF PHOTOGRAPHY'S FIRST CENTURY;

AT NATIONAL GALLERY, SEPTEMBER 10 - DECEMBER 31, 1995

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Fifty-three rare masterpieces by seminal artists of photography's first century will be on view at the National Gallery of Art, West Building, September 10 through December 31, 1995. The works selected for The First Century of Photography: New Acquisitions come from one of the country's finest private collections of photographs assembled by Mary and David Robinson. The National Gallery recently acquired the collection of 165 works; twenty-seven are partial and promised gifts from the Robinsons. The Gallery's Patrons' Permanent Fund made possible the purchase of the remaining 138 photographs.

"This exhibition presents many of the gems of the magnificent collection assembled by Mary and David Robinson since 1984," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The works in the exhibition are arranged in chronological order. According to National Gallery curator of photographs

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Sarah Greenough, "The works were selected because of their beauty and importance. Collectively they speak of the photographer's joy of discovering the world through the seemingly magical new medium of photography."

When the invention of photography was announced in 1839, it was called "a bit of natural magic." The exhibition begins with Lace (1839-1844) and Oak Tree (mid-1840s) by William Henry Fox Talbot. He invented the negative-positive process, which had the potential of producing hundreds of identical prints from a single negative. With Talbot's invention the foundation for all future photography was established.

Among the show's other nineteenth-century highlights are: Thebes: Portico of the Temple of Khons (1850) by Maxime Du Camp, one of the first Europeans to photograph in the Middle East using Talbot's process; Gustave Le Gray's monumental Beech Tree, Forest of Fontainebleau (c. 1856); Julia Margaret Cameron's portrait of her niece, the mother of Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Herbert Duckworth (1867); and a mammoth-plate albumen print of Cape Horn, Columbia River (1867) by Carleton E. Watkins, who was fascinated with depicting the pristine American West as well as the interaction between man and the natural environment.

Works from the twentieth century include Eugène Atget's Corot's Pond, Ville-d'Avray (1900-1910), a unique vintage print sized with arrowroot starch; Man Ray's portrait of Pablo Picasso (1932), the first photograph by the artist to enter the Gallery's collection; Harold Edgerton's Densmore Shute Bending the Shaft (1938), depicting the movement of an object through time and space; and three of Helen Levitt's photographs of life in New

York City from 1939 to 1942.

Édouard-Denis Baldus, E.J. Bellocq, Lewis Carroll, Eugène Cuvelier, Walker Evans, Francis Frith, F. Jay Haynes, Florence Henri, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, Lewis Hine, Charles Marville, Lee Miller, Eadweard Muybridge, Félix Nadar, Charles Nègre, Auguste Salzmann, Paul Strand, Captain Linnaeus Tripe, and Edward Weston are also represented in the exhibition.

The acquisition of the Robinson collection has significantly expanded the scope of the Gallery's collection of photographs, until now limited to twentieth-century masters. The Gallery has previously acquired major holdings of photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank, with important works by such photographers as Harry Callahan, August Sander, and Frederick Sommer. Photography exhibitions organized by the Gallery in recent years include Robert Frank: Moving Out (1994), Stieglitz in the Darkroom (1992-1993), Walker Evans: Subway Photographs and Other Recent Acquisitions (1991-1992), Paul Strand (1990-1991), and On the Art of Fixing a Shadow (1989), co-organized with the Art Institute of Chicago.

The National Gallery is open free of charge, Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), (202) 842-6176, weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Gallery is located at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., in Washington D.C.

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