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## Serial Landscape Photographs by Three Legendary American Photographers on view at National Gallery of Art

October 12, 2008–March 15, 2009



Ansel Adams (American, 1902 - 1984)  
*Surf Sequence 3, San Mateo County Coast, California*, 1940  
gelatin silver print, 1982  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Virginia B. Adams

Washington, DC – Three important and beautiful series of black-and-white landscape photographs will be showcased in, **Oceans, Rivers, and Skies: Ansel Adams, Robert Adams, and Alfred Stieglitz**, on view from October 12, 2008 through March 15, 2009 (West Building Ground Floor Gallery 34). This focus exhibition features 21 works in chronological order: ten by Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), five by Ansel Adams (1902–1984), and six by Robert Adams (b. 1937). The three series have never before been exhibited together, and Stieglitz's series *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs*, was last seen in its entirety in 1923. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

"This small exhibition packs a powerful punch," says Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Many of these photographs have been on view separately, but seeing them as three series provides compelling insight into the art of some of America's most beloved photographers."

## **The Exhibition**

The series in this exhibition offer an opportunity to examine the relationship of time to photography and to explore the ways in which photographers have created extended sequences of photographs to expand the pictorial and conceptual boundaries of their work.

In 1922, Alfred Stieglitz made a series of photographs of the sky at his summer home in Lake George, New York. Exhibited the following year to great acclaim at the Andersen Galleries in New York, this series—which Stieglitz titled *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* or *Clouds in Ten Movements*—explores the possibilities of abstraction in photographs of the natural world.

In 1940, Ansel Adams paid homage to Stieglitz in his five-part series *Surf Sequence, San Mateo Coast, California*. Like his renowned mentor, Adams photographed a landscape he knew well—the coastline south of his home in San Francisco. Looking down from a high elevation, he made a sequence of photographs that recorded the rhythmic pattern of waves breaking on the shore. With each image taken from the same spot, the series reveals the temporal dynamism of nature.

More than 50 years later, Robert Adams explored the same subject in a series of six photographs, *Southwest from the South Jetty, Clatsop County, Oregon, 1990 A–F*, taken at the estuary where the Columbia River empties into the Pacific Ocean. Best known for his photographs of the collision between contemporary society and the landscape of the American West, Adams, in this series, approaches an abstract and ethereal sensibility that conveys the quiet sublimity of nature.

Stieglitz's series has an almost musical structure, as the series title indicates. Although composed of blocks of bold, abstract forms, Ansel Adams' sequence—the only one he ever made—is the most narrative of the three. Shadows from the cliff on which he

stands indicate that all the photographs were made within a few minutes. The sequence itself charts an actual progression of time. Robert Adams' series is the most tranquil. Consisting of six very similar images, the sequence has no obvious musical, literal, or narrative progression, but together they evoke a state of calm meditation.

### **Curator and the Collection of Photographs**

The exhibition was organized by Sarah Greenough, senior curator of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The National Gallery of Art's collection of approximately 8,000 photographs encompasses the history of the medium from its beginnings in 1839. Started in 1949 with a gift of over 1,200 Alfred Stieglitz photographs from Georgia O'Keeffe and the Alfred Stieglitz Estate, and augmented with a further gift from Miss O'Keeffe of more than 300 Stieglitz portraits of her, the collection has now expanded to include work representing the finest examples of the art of photography from the last 160 years. Highlights include a small but choice group of photographs by the inventor of the medium, William Henry Fox Talbot, as well as works by the pioneering Scottish photographers David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, and such celebrated Victorian practitioners as Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll. French 19th-century photography is also well represented with work by Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq, Charles Nègre, Édouard Baldus, and Nadar. Among the strengths of the collection are large and important groups of photographs by several major 20th-century American practitioners including Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Frederick Sommer, Harry Callahan, and Lee Friedlander, as well as the unparalleled Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

In 2004, the National Gallery of Art inaugurated a suite of five galleries in the West Building devoted to the exhibition of photographs and adjacent to state-of-the-art storage rooms for photographs. Photographs not on view may be seen by appointment only by calling the department of photographs at (202) 842-6144.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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