

## RETROSPECTIVE OF AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER ROBERT ADAMS TO TOUR INTERNATIONALLY

Organized by the Yale University Art Gallery, the multivenuue traveling exhibition, *Robert Adams: The Place We Live*, is now on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery



Robert Adams, *Colorado Springs, Colorado*, 1968. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from Saundra B. Lane, a grant from the Trellis Fund, and the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund

*Robert Adams: The Place We Live, A Retrospective Selection of Photographs* is an exhibition and accompanying publication organized by the Yale University Art Gallery that showcases the artistic legacy of the American photographer Robert Adams. Featuring nearly 300 works spanning Adams's 45-year career, the retrospective is on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery this fall and will travel to institutions throughout the United States and Europe.

Since becoming a photographer in the mid-1960s, Adams has been widely regarded as one of the most significant and influential chroniclers of the American West. He is best known for his austere, nuanced photographs of suburban development in Colorado during the late 1960s and early 1970s, images that first came to prominence through his seminal book *The New*

*West* (1974). Other major projects include *From the Missouri West*, a series of expansive views of grand landscapes scarred by human intervention; *Our Lives and Our Children*, a disarmingly tender series of portraits of ordinary people going about their lives in the shadow of a nearby nuclear processing facility; *Los Angeles Spring*, a portrayal of a once-verdant paradise choked by violence and smog; *Listening to the River*, fragmentary views of rural and suburban Colorado locales that evoke the sensory pleasures of walking; and *West from the Columbia* and *Turning Back*, two bodies of work that explore the promise and ruin of the Pacific Northwestern area that Adams now calls home.

*Robert Adams: The Place We Live* traces Adams's long engagement with American life and his pursuit of redemptive light and beauty amidst mankind's increasingly tragic relationship with the natural world. Adams's remarkable, often understated images resist simplification of subjects both ordinary and grand, precisely balancing the complexities and contradictions found in modern life. Taken as a whole, this exhibition elucidates the photographer's civic goals: to consider the privilege of the place we were given and the obligations of citizenship – not only in the western United States but also, by extension, in the wider world.

## Exhibition Overview

Featuring nearly 300 gelatin silver prints drawn from the Yale University Art Gallery's master sets of the photographer's work, *Robert Adams: The Place We Live, A Retrospective Selection of Photographs* will weave together for the first time the various aspects of Adams's four decades of work in the American landscape into a cohesive, epic narrative of the American experience in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Each of the photographer's major projects will be represented, beginning with his early pictures of quiet buildings and monuments erected by prior settlers of his native Colorado and concluding with his most recent images of forests and migratory birds in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Also included in the exhibition are texts excerpted from Adams's own articulate writings.

The reach of Adams's work has been felt primarily through his publications, which number over 30 monographs and are an indispensable element of the artist's creative practice. A selection of these books will be installed in cases and made available for viewing on reading tables in the exhibition, enabling visitors to experience Adams's masterly use of the photographic book as a poetic medium in its own right. The exhibition opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery in September 2010 and will travel to a variety of national and international venues, including the Denver Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

## Biography

Born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1937, Robert Adams moved with his family from Madison, Wisconsin, to Denver, Colorado, at the age of 15. He earned a PH.D. from the University of Southern California and, intent on pursuing an academic career, returned to Colorado in 1962 as an assistant professor of English at Colorado College. Disturbed by the rapid transformation of the Colorado Springs and Denver areas – which Jack Kerouac had likened to “the Promised Land” less than a decade earlier – Adams began photographing a glorious landscape newly replete with tract housing, highways, strip malls, and gas stations. “The pictures record what we purchased, what we paid and what we could not buy,” Adams wrote. “They document a separation from ourselves, and in turn from the natural world that we professed to love.” Adams has also written insightful and eloquent essays on the practice and goals of art, which have been collected in the volumes *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* (1981) and *Why People Photograph: Selected Essays and Reviews* (1994). Since 1997, he has lived in Oregon, the landscape of which has been the setting of his last 20 years of work.

Adams's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Denver Art Museum; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles – as well as a major midcareer retrospective organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989.



Robert Adams, *Quarried Mesa Top, Pueblo County, Colorado*, 1978. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from Sandra B. Lane, a grant from the Trellis Fund, and the Janet and Simeon Braquin Fund

Adams was also a key participant in such landmark exhibitions as *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975), organized by the International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York, and *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (1978), curated by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. An entire room was devoted to Adams's work in *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph*, a major survey organized by the Tate Modern, London, in 2003. In 2002 *What We Bought: The New World* was exhibited in its entirety at the Yale University Art Gallery. Among the artist's many awards are two Guggenheim Fellowships (1973 and 1980), two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1973 and 1978), a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (1994), the Spectrum International Prize for Photography (1995), the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2006), and the Hasselblad Award (2009).

### **Exhibition Publications**

*Robert Adams: The Place We Live, A Retrospective Selection of Photographs* is accompanied by a fully illustrated, three-volume retrospective publication of the same title, published by the Yale University Art Gallery and distributed by Yale University Press. Featuring a total of over 400 plates, the first two volumes will reflect Robert Adams's own uncompromising editing and sequencing of images and will include excerpts from his published texts. The third volume will provide a richer context with which to view Adams's work through a detailed biographical chronology, an illustrated bibliography, selections from the photographer's personal archive, and a series of scholarly and critical essays that will examine the photographs in great depth for the first time. The publication is available in the Gallery's Bookstore (\$250 three-volume hardcover).

A second publication, *What Can We Believe Where?: Photographs of the American West*, published by the Yale University Art Gallery and distributed by Yale University Press, will also be issued in conjunction with the exhibition. This compact publication presents a sequence of over 100 images culled from Robert Adams's entire body of work, as well as an introduction by the photographer and an afterword by the exhibition curators. The publication will be available in the Gallery's Bookstore (\$25 paperback).

### **Related Publications**

In addition to collaborating with the Yale University Art Gallery's curators on the touring retrospective and exhibition publications, in 2009 Robert Adams worked closely with them to revise and reprint his now-classic monographs *denver* (1977), *Summer Nights* (1985), and *What We Bought* (1995) in lucid new editions. In 2012 the Gallery will publish *Sea Stories* and *This Day*, a pair of new books that will feature pictures made in Oregon over the past ten years.

### **Exhibition Support**

*Robert Adams: The Place We Live, A Retrospective Selection of Photographs* and its accompanying publications have been organized by Joshua Chuang, Assistant Curator of Photographs, and Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, both of the Yale University Art Gallery, and have been made possible by Helen D. Buchanan; Allen K. Chasanoff, B.A. 1961; Lara Rubin Constable, B.A. 1989, and the Reed Foundation; Nathaniel W. Gibbons, B.A. 1979; Betsy and Frank Karel; Sandra B. Lane; Melanie and Rick Mayer,



Robert Adams, *Frame for a Tract House, Colorado Springs, Colorado*, 1969. Gelatin silver print. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from Sandra B. Lane, a grant from the Trellis Fund, and the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund

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### **Yale University Art Gallery**

The Yale University Art Gallery, America's oldest university art museum, was founded in 1832 when patriot-artist John Trumbull donated more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then, the Gallery's collections have grown to number more than 185,000 objects, spanning the globe and ranging in

date from ancient times to the present day. In addition to its celebrated collections of American paintings and decorative arts, the Gallery is noted for its important holdings of Greek and Roman art, early Italian paintings, later European art, Asian art, African art, art of the ancient Americas, and Impressionist, modern, and contemporary works. The Gallery's ongoing installation of works from these collections is complemented by a variety of special exhibitions and public programs. In an effort to share its resources with a broader public, the Gallery also organizes collections-based exhibitions that travel to museums nationwide.

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