MEXICO THROUGH THE LENS OF A 20th CENTURY MASTER

Edward Weston: Mexico Explores Pivotal Period of Photographer's Life and Legacy

“...the ultimate end, the print, is but a duplication of all that I saw and felt through my camera.” – Edward Weston

PHOENIX (July 28, 2008) – Full of striking compositions, dramatic still lifes and exquisitely beautiful landscapes, Phoenix Art Museum presents an artistic exploration of Mexico seen through the lens of one of the twentieth century’s most influential photographers, Edward Weston. Opening on August 9, Edward Weston: Mexico examines a variety of Weston’s early and rare photographs revealing his devotion to the ideals of art, his progression toward the modernist style and his passion for love and life.

This stunning collection of 60 photographs displays the local culture and scenery of Mexico in the 1920s – a rich period for the arts known as the Mexican Renaissance. Weston used a large camera to create technically accomplished black-and-white photos rich in detail and markedly abstract. Mexico allowed him to experiment with new subject matter, such as still lifes and landscapes, making this period one of the most pivotal of his career.

“Weston spent roughly three-years in Mexico with his lover, Italian-born actress Tina Modotti. The powerful photographs in this collection visually tell the tale of his passion for both Modotti and his new environment,” commented Becky Senf, Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography, Phoenix Art Museum. “The exhibition also includes archival materials – letters, journals and personal snapshots – drawn from the Center for Creative Photography that deeply enriches the story.”

A Career Transformed in Mexico

Born in 1886, Edward Weston began his career practicing a popular photographic style called Pictorialism, creating portraits and nudes. The pieces with minimum contrast and soft-focus had a dream like quality. In 1923, an uninspiring and stagnate commercial portrait business prompted Weston to relocate to Mexico with Modotti. While there, he created innovative work exploring a modernist aesthetic characterized by sharp focused portraits, abstractions, and richly textured still lifes. Weston’s work was met with praise and recognition in the midst of the vibrant Mexican artistic culture.

Inspired by a Love Affair

Modotti played a crucial role in Weston’s Mexican experience. She had visited the country before their move and together Modotti and Weston set up a commercial portrait studio as an income source. They explored the cultural climate of their new country, making friends with leading political figures, artists, and writers. Modotti also served as a model for Weston; some of this exhibition’s most entrancing photographs are of Weston’s partner and muse. A small selection of Modotti’s own Mexico photographs will be featured in the exhibition as well.

While in Mexico Weston and Modotti produced photographs for Anita Brenner’s volume Idols behind Altars, a chronicle of Mexican history and culture. A special section of the exhibition explores this fascinating project, showing an example of Brenner’s 1929 publication and many prints made for the book.

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Exhibition Details

*Edward Weston: Mexico* is organized by the Center for Creative Photography and Phoenix Art Museum and is presented in the Museum’s Doris and John Norton Gallery.

Major support for this exhibition is provided by Robin and Ric Donnelley, Joanie and Rick Fox, and Alliance Bank of Arizona. Additional support is provided by Steve Woods Printing Company. Promotional support is provided by Latino Future Magazine, Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Yelp.com and Scottsdale, Glendale, Mesa, Chandler, and Phoenix Public Libraries.

Admission to the exhibition is included in general museum admission, which is $10 for adults, $8 for senior citizens (65+), $8 for full-time college students with ID, $4 for children ages 6-17 and free for children under 6 and for museum members. Admission is also free on Tuesdays from 3:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. and for everyone on First Fridays, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Phoenix Art Museum is located in downtown Phoenix at the corner of Central and McDowell Road.

Museum hours are Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. and Wednesday – Sunday from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. The museum is closed on Mondays and major holidays.

Public Events

The Museum is offering a full schedule of programs and events relating to the exhibition, including:

- **Edward Weston in Mexico (Artbreak Gallery Talk) - Tuesday, September 2, 7 pm**
  Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography Rebecca Senf gives an overview of Edward Weston’s Mexican sojourn from 1923 to 1926. Then the group moves into the galleries to explore selected works. *Presented in partnership with the Museum’s Latin American Art Alliance.*

- **Tina in Mexico (Movies at the Museum) - Sunday, October 5, 1 pm**
  This film follows the tumultuous and epic story of Tina Modotti: a revolutionary, bohemian spirit, renowned photographer and intimate companion of Edward Weston. It weaves archival footage, photographs, the murals of Diego Rivera, and lyrical reenactments to conjure the political, artistic and intimate spaces of their lives in Mexico during the 1920s. *Presented in partnership with the Museum’s Latin American Art Alliance.*

Additional information regarding public programs can be found on the Museum’s Web site, PhxArt.org.

A Landmark Photography Partnership

In 2006, Phoenix Art Museum and the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona in Tucson inaugurated a highly innovative and unprecedented collaboration to bring the finest in photography to Phoenix Art Museum visitors. It established a vibrant new photography exhibition program at the Museum, while bringing the Center’s world-renowned collections to new and larger audiences.

The Center for Creative Photography is one of the world’s largest repositories of materials chronicling photography. Founded in 1975, it now houses 3.8 million archival items and 80,000 fine prints by photographers including Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Frederick Sommer, W. Eugene Smith, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, and Garry Winogrand.

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About Phoenix Art Museum
Phoenix Art Museum is the Southwest's premier destination for world-class visual arts. Popular exhibitions featuring artists such as Rembrandt, Norman Rockwell, Annie Leibowitz and Monet are shown along side the Museum’s outstanding collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. A community epicenter for nearly fifty years, Phoenix Art Museum presents festivals, live performances, independent art films and educational programs that enlighten, entertain and stimulate. Visitors also enjoy PhxArtKids an interactive space for children, vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, the lushly landscaped Sculpture Garden, dining at Arcadia Farms at Phoenix Art Museum, and shopping at The Museum Store.

To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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