Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Phoenix Art Museum presents William Clift's visions of *Shiprock and Mont St. Michel*

Shiprock and Mont St. Michel: Photographs by William Clift *on view December 22– April 7*

PHOENIX (December 1, 2012) – On opposite ends of the globe, two soaring monoliths arise out of flat sands, and become centers of spirituality. These unrelated, distinct places are Mont St. Michel, an island abbey off the coast of Normandy, and Shiprock, a volcanic rock formation in northwestern New Mexico, near the Four Corners. They are the dual subjects of the photographic works of William Clift, the eponymous artist of Phoenix Art Museum's next exhibition of photography, *Shiprock and Mont St-Michel: Photographs by William Clift,* on view beginning December 22, 2012 through April 7, 2013.

William Clift, a self-taught photographer whose career has spanned nearly sixty years, photographed Shiprock and Mont St-Michel over the course of four decades, beginning first with Shiprock in 1973. Shiprock was formed during a dynamic geological period, when the American Southwest was alive with volcanic activity. "Shiprock is the remnant of a long-extinct volcano that erupted about 26 million years ago," explains Dr. Steve Semken, associate professor of geology at Arizona State University, who has studied Shiprock extensively. "That volcano erupted beneath the surface of the ground, and Shiprock is the 'underground plumbing,' or central neck, that led to a wide, shallow crater at the surface." The 1700 feet tall peak towers above the desert and resembles a clipper ship, the source of its name. It is a sacred place for many indigenous peoples, and plays a role in the mythology of the Navajo people, who call it *Tsé bit'á'í*, or "rock with wings."

While most visits to Shiprock will be solitary, Mont St. Michel, the other subject of the exhibition, draws nearly three million visitors a year. Clift first photographed the Romanesque-Gothic abbey over six weeks in 1977 and made many trips over the next 30 years, with his most recent trip in 2007. Enshrouded in the lore and legend of pilgrimages and crusaders, Celts and Romans, the abbey evokes visions of Shiprock through the its soaring steeples and spires, ascending suddenly from an island surrounded by a tidal bay that recedes into the English Channel, leaving behind an expanse of sand at low tide.

There is a mysterious, otherworldly quality to the photographs of these two monoliths, reaching heavenward from the low, surrounding earth. "Clift's photographs highlights the details, the silhouettes, and the human presence," observes Rebecca Senf, Norton Family Curator of Photography at Phoenix Art Museum. "What is most remarkable is that his sensitively seen and carefully printed images, which are tender and subtle evocations of these worlds, also evoke their power and strength." The exhibition will include more than 80 masterful prints, which will take the viewer on a journey through the powerful forms, subtle shadows, and beautiful vistas, rendered in a vast range of silvery tones. The exhibition is complemented by *Mont St. Michel and Shiprock*, a major publication of photographs that include poems by Paul Kane, professor of English Literature at Vassar College.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum's permanent collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. 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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