

March 17, 2005

Contact:

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org

Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org

Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org

SFMOMA PRESENTS EXTRAORDINARY PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION
Taking Place: Photographs from the Prentice and Paul Sack Collection

Features Works from Major Promised Gift

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Taking Place: Photographs from the Prentice and Paul Sack Collection* June 2 through September 6, 2005. Drawn from the Prentice and Paul Sack Photographic Trust at SFMOMA as well as a newly promised gift from the Sacks to the Trust, this extraordinary photography exhibition is one of the largest ever mounted at SFMOMA, celebrating an unparalleled collection that spans the history of the medium from 1840 to the mid-1970s.

The pictures on view are loosely united around the theme of architecture. Paul Sack, a real estate investor, assembled his collection using the criterion that each photograph depict a building that ostensibly could be bought or leased. What seems a simple pretext immediately proves much more complex in *Taking Place*.

On its own, each image reflects a powerful and distinctive sense of place. As a group, the pictures lend to our understanding of photography's complex role in articulating how the human hand has shaped the natural landscape, as well as how the built environment has shaped our perception of ourselves. The

powerful evocation of place generated by each of these pictures results from their distinctive physical locales as well as from the diverse art-making ideologies and practices of the photographers. A number of the pictures evidence the romantic nostalgia for the pre-industrial landscape, while others embody the modernist admiration for the sleek, functional forms of the industrial age. Montage is used to evoke the frenetic pace of the modern metropolis, while portraiture and street photography explore the ways in which our more immediate, intimate surroundings affect the way we live or reflect societal ideals.

A truly momentous project, *Taking Place*, which presents nearly three hundred of the Sacks' most significant pictures and spans the history of the medium from 1840 to the mid-1970s, is the fruit of the longtime friendship between Paul Sack and Sandra S. Phillips, senior curator of photography, SFMOMA. The exhibition was co-organized by Phillips and Corey Keller, assistant curator of photography.



Walker Evans, *South Street, New York City*; 1934; Collection of the Prentice and Paul Sack Photographic Trust; © Walker Evans Archive, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

more

This ambitious exhibition will highlight the collection's very important nineteenth-century holdings, including masterpieces by photographic pioneers such as William Henry Fox Talbot's *Paris* (1843). A highlight of the exhibition is Eadweard Muybridge's spectacular 1878 panorama, taken from the mansion of railroad baron Mark Hopkins on Nob Hill. Comprised of thirteen mammoth-plate albumen prints, the panorama is nearly twenty feet long, offering a sweeping view of old San Francisco. Other nineteenth-century photographers represented in depth include Edouard Baldus, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Francis Frith. Sack also has amassed an especially rich collection of photographs by Eugène Atget, whose work will be well represented in the exhibition.

The collection's twentieth-century holdings are equally impressive: Standouts in *Taking Place* include photographs by Walker Evans, whose *South Street, New York City* (1934) was the first photograph in Mr. Sack's collection, as well as other key works of American modernism by Charles Sheeler, Margaret Bourke-White, and Imogen Cunningham. The exhibition will also include important experimental photographs by such members of the European avant-garde as László Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Rodchenko, and Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Other twentieth-century photographers represented include Robert Adams, Robert Frank, William Klein, Helen Levitt, Ray Metzker, and Bill Owens.

Says Phillips, "It has been a distinct pleasure to work with Paul over the past sixteen years, to watch his collection grow and take shape, and to witness his irrepressible enthusiasm for the medium. We are very happy to have this opportunity to not only celebrate Paul's remarkable collection, but also honor his long-standing and generous support of SFMOMA and the wider Bay Area photographic community."

Not long after his retirement in 1992, Paul Sack spearheaded the organization of the SFMOMA's photography accessions subcommittee and became its first chairman. In 1996 Sack moved his business to a space in the 49 Geary Street building, among many of San Francisco's art galleries and near SFMOMA's new home on Third Street. This close proximity presented an opportunity for Sack to continue working closely with the Museum. In 1998 Sack originated an innovative trust arrangement with SFMOMA that put his pictures in the joint custody of him and the Museum. Sack, Phillips, and SFMOMA's director are the trustees, and the collection is at the Museum's disposal for exhibition, study, publishing, and lending. The Trust dramatically transformed SFMOMA's holdings, allowing the Museum to fulfill its ambition to represent the entire history of photography and ensuring that a high quality and broad



William Henry Fox Talbot, *Paris*, 1843;
Collection of the San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art, fractional gift
of Prentice and Paul Sack, and
collection of the Prentice and Paul Sack
Photographic Trust

range of pictures can be presented to the public. SFMOMA has just announced a new promised gift of 800 additional photographs to the Prentice and Paul Sack Photographic Trust at SFMOMA. This group of important photographs joins their 1998 gift of nearly one thousand photographs.

Since its founding in 1935, SFMOMA has been committed to building a photography collection of international stature, giving it the distinction of being one of the first American museums to recognize photography as a legitimate art form. With the advice and support of renowned Bay Area photographer Ansel Adams and a host of local practitioners and patrons, the Museum's commitment to the medium has grown steadily over the decades, gaining momentum with the appointment of the first dedicated curator of photography in 1958 and the establishment of the Department of Photography in 1980. Through the creation of

the Prentice and Paul Sack Photographic Trust at SFMOMA, the Museum's collection now encompasses nearly fifteen thousand photographs spanning the history of the medium, from its first invention in the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.

Taking Place: Photographs from the Prentice and Paul Sack Collection is accompanied by a richly illustrated 224-page catalogue, published by SFMOMA, with essays by curator Phillips, cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg, Corey Keller, and Douglas R. Nickel, director of the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona.

SFMOMA will present the opening day program *Taking Place: A Collector's Point of View* on Thursday, June 2, at 7 p.m. in the Museum's Phyllis Wattis Theater. One of the foremost photography collections in the United States, the Prentice and Paul Sack collection is unique in its focus on the built environment. In this opening program, catalogue contributors Alan Trachtenberg, professor emeritus of English and American studies at Yale University, and Douglas R. Nickel talk with Paul Sack about the evolution of his collection and explore the complex notions of place it evokes. Additional program information is available on the Museum's Web site at www.sfmoma.org.

Taking Place: Photographs from the Prentice and Paul Sack Collection is organized by SFMOMA. This exhibition is sponsored by Deutsche Bank and RREEF. Additional support is provided by Elaine McKeon, Nancy and Steven Oliver, Jane and Jack Bogart, and the George Frederick Jewett Foundation.

* * *

Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 8:45 p.m.; Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): open at 10 a.m.; Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas
Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m.
Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$10; seniors \$7; students \$6. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans and Caltrain. Hourly, daily and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, not-for-profit institution supported by its members; individual contributors; corporate and foundation support; foreign, federal, and state government grants; and admission revenues. Annual programming is sustained through the generosity of Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Koret Foundation. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic. Reduced admission for seniors is sponsored by SBC.

* * *