

November 18, 2004

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JOHN SZARKOWSKI: PHOTOGRAPHS TO OPEN AT SFMOMA

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) presents *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, the first public retrospective of Szarkowski's work, on view from February 5 through May 15, 2005. One of the most influential photography curators and critics of the twentieth century, Szarkowski held the position of director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 1962 to 1991.

He is also an accomplished photographer. This exhibition features seventy-five gelatin silver prints, including fifty of Szarkowski's early works—pictures of the Midwest dating from 1943 until he accepted the curatorial post in 1962—and twenty-five of his later works, many of which were made around his farm in upstate New York. Though they vary in subject and date, these prints as a total expression present a remarkable and consistent vision. They are gentle, sophisticated pictures informed by a humanist sensibility. They depict the lived landscape, both urban and rural, and impart a sense of history, place, and the way we as Americans once regarded land.



John Szarkowski, *From Country Elevator, Red River Valley*, 1957; gelatin silver print; collection the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Family of Man Fund; © John Szarkowski

Organized by Sandra S. Phillips, SFMOMA senior curator of photography, the exhibition will premiere at SFMOMA before traveling to several prominent venues into 2006. "We are proud to present this engaging and eloquent retrospective to the public," states Phillips. "John Szarkowski's photographic work is compelling and original, though less known and less generally acknowledged than its high quality merits."

Following its debut at SFMOMA, *John Szarkowski: Photographs* will travel to the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, June 11 through September 5, 2005; the Milwaukee Art Museum, September 30, 2005, through January 1, 2006; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 1 through April 30, 2006; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, June 18 through September 10, 2006.

Szarkowski was born in 1925 in Ashland, Wisconsin, where he spent his formative years in an environment characterized by the agricultural traditions of the Midwest. His interest in photography began at about the age of eleven. In 1943 Szarkowski went to Madison to attend the University of Wisconsin, where his studies were interrupted by U.S. Army service during World War II, and he received his BS degree with a major in art history in

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1948. After graduation, Szarkowski was hired to be the museum photographer for the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. A small institution, the Walker gave Szarkowski the opportunity to learn about contemporary art while experimenting with new ideas. At that time, there was a constant flow of paintings from New York to Minneapolis for exhibition, and Szarkowski remembers being profoundly affected by seeing ambitious art such as paintings by Barnett Newman and other Abstract Expressionists. The photographs he took in the year after he arrived at the Walker reflect this experience.

Like other photographers of the time, Szarkowski enriched his photographic knowledge through books, becoming familiar with the work of August Sander, Walker Evans, and Edward Weston, among others, and working through books to develop his own ideas. Szarkowski particularly admired Weston's mature photographs—which dealt with subjects from Weston's life—more complex than his more frequently recognized earlier work. He admired both their compositional elegance and their natural informality, which he deemed fresh and daring.

In 1949 Szarkowski had his first solo exhibition—a series of portraits—at the Walker Art Center. In 1951 he joined the staff of the Albright Art School in Buffalo, New York, and shortly thereafter began photographing Louis Sullivan's Prudential (Guaranty) Building. These photographs fueled his interest in creating a book about Sullivan, employing photography as a form of criticism, and he moved to Chicago to pursue this idea. In 1954, Szarkowski received a Guggenheim fellowship for the Sullivan project; this award, he says, was pivotal in his professional life. *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* was published in 1956.

Between 1958 and 1962, Szarkowski reestablished residence in northern Wisconsin and continued work on a variety of photographic projects. In 1958 he published his second book, *The Face of Minnesota*. In 1960 he was given a solo exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1961 he received another Guggenheim fellowship, which allowed him to work on a book about the value of the wilderness, specifically examining the Quetico-Superior area between northern Minnesota and Canada. Later that year he was offered the position of director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, succeeding Edward Steichen. Szarkowski accepted the position and moved to New York, assuming his new duties on July 1, 1962. During Szarkowski's twenty-nine years as director, the Department of Photography produced 160 exhibitions, many directed by Szarkowski. He also authored a number of books, including the classic work *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, published in 1973. In 1991, he retired from the Museum of Modern Art, becoming its photography director emeritus.

Szarkowski's personal photographic pursuits were limited and private during his tenure at MoMA, but he returned to photography full time after retiring from the museum. His later pictures examine the old apple trees and barn on his property in upstate New York and the changes of attitudes toward the land from the period after World War II to the present.

SFMOMA's Education Department will present an opening day program, entitled "The Lens on the Land," featuring Richard Benson, dean, School of Art, Yale University; Wes Jackson, president, The Land Institute; and Geoffrey James, artist, on Saturday, February 5, 2005, at 2 p.m. in the Phyllis Wattis Theater. Panelists will explore Szarkowski's appreciation of the interrelatedness of people and the land and how this is manifested in his photographs. A book signing with the artist will follow at 3:30 p.m. in the Museum's Haas Atrium. Tickets to the

opening program are \$12 general; \$8 SFMOMA members, students, and seniors. Tickets are available at the Museum or www.sfmoma.org/tickets. The book signing is free and open to the public. Additional program information is available on the Museum's Web site at www.sfmoma.org.

John Szarkowski: Photographs is accompanied by a fully illustrated book of the same title, published by Bulfinch Press. The 156-page hardcover volume features an introductory essay by Sandra S. Phillips, SFMOMA's senior curator of photography, a chronology; amusing and revealing excerpts from Szarkowski's personal correspondence, and eighty-four tritone photographs.

SFMOMA's presentation of *John Szarkowski: Photographs* is generously supported by Charlotte and David Winton.

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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: Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day.

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, 6 to 8:45 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.

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