

Dorothea Lange

Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota, 1939

silver gelatin print on paper
24.3 cm x 29.1 cm

Collection of the Vancouver Art
Gallery, Gift of Claudia Beck and
Andrew Gruft
VAG 2004.37.151



Dorothea Lange

Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota, 1939



Image source: www.wikipedia.com
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs
Division, reproduction number LC-DIG-fsa-
8b27245.

Artist's Biography

Nationality: American

Born: 1895-05-26, Hoboken, New Jersey

Died: 1965-10-11

Dorothea Lange (May 26, 1895 — October 11, 1965) was an influential documentary photographer. Lange is best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange's photographs humanized the tragic consequences of the Great Depression and profoundly influenced the development of documentary photography.

Born in Hoboken New Jersey, Lange began her career in New York, later migrating to San Francisco where she opened a portrait studio in 1918. With the onset of the Great Depression, Lange turned her camera lens from the studio to the street.

Her searing studies of homelessness immediately captured the attention of local photographers and led to her employment with the federal Resettlement Administration (RA), later called the FSA. From 1935 to 1940, Lange's work for the RA and FSA brought the plight of the poor and forgotten, particularly displaced farm families and migrant workers, to public attention. Distributed free of charge to newspapers across the country, her poignant images quickly became icons of the era.

Dorothea Lange's most famous. It supposedly depicts destitute pea pickers in California, centering on a mother of seven children, age thirty-two, in Nipomo, California, March 1936. The woman in the picture is actually Florence Owens Thompson, farmer, who was staying there until her friend and her boys came back with help for their broken down car.

Her most famous photograph, commonly known as Migrant Mother, was the sixth and last frame taken of Lange's haphazard visit to a migrant workers' campsite. She had initially passed the campsite, but twenty minutes later, she turned around on the highway to take another look. Rumor has it that the two younger children's faces are turned away from the camera because they were smiling and laughing during the picture, but none of the six frames shows them laughing or smiling. Lange had them turn away to give the image a more solemn, desperate mood. In 1960, Lange spoke about her experience taking the photograph:

I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.

In 1941, Lange was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for excellence in photography. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, she gave up the prestigious award to record the forced evacuation of Japanese-Americans (Nisei) to relocation camps in the American West.

On October 11, 1965, Lange died in San Francisco at the age of seventy.

Source: "Dorothea Lange," *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.
www.wikipedia.org. March 27, 2006.

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Artistic Context

Nationality: American

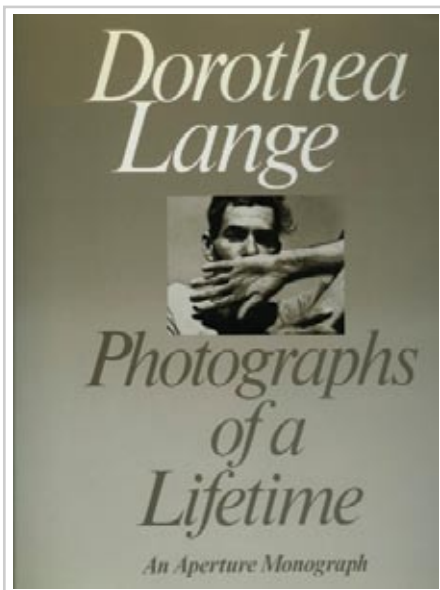
Training: New York Training School for Teachers; Columbia University

Peers: Walker Evans

Group: California State Emergency Relief Organization; Resettlement Administration; Farm Security Administration; Documentary photography; 20th century

Provenance: Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft

Subject: portraits; effects of economic decline



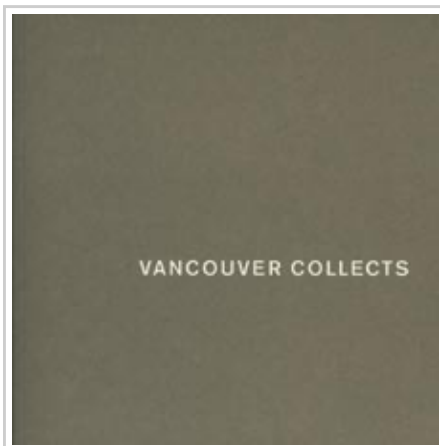
Bibliography

Dorothea Lange: Photographs of a Lifetime

Publication
1982

[transcription of excerpt]

South Dakota, 1939



Vancouver Collects

Publication
2001

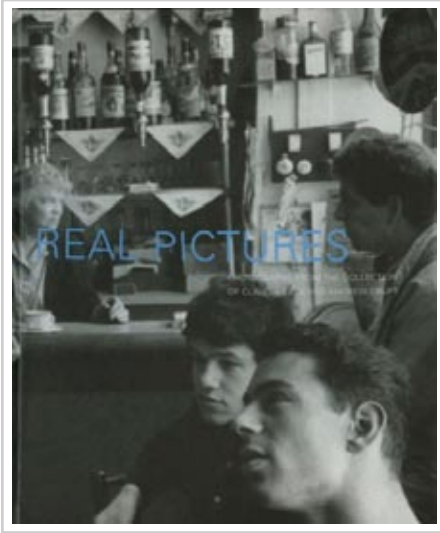
[transcription of excerpt]

Dorothea Lange is probably the second most famous photographer of the F.S.A. Her evocative *Drought Refugees at Sunday Prayer* of 1936 displays an intention that is as pictorial as it is documentary. While the musical composition of Lange's *Prison Work Detail, Outside Huntsville, Texas* (1936) is accomplished, its

human subjects are subordinated to a visual order. *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota* (1939) is closer to Evans' directness, but lacks his intensity and precision. Lange wasn't content to simply document things and wanted instead to direct the viewer in how to *feel* about the subject. It was Lange's heroic humanism that became the preferred style of the F.S.A.'s administrators in the end.

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Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft

Publication
2005

[transcription]

Dorothea Lange, *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota, 1939*
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Further Reading

Borhan, Pierre. *Dorothea Lange: the Heart and Mind of a Photographer*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2002.

Dorothea Lange: American Photographs. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994.

Durden, Mark. *Dorothea Lange*. London: Phaidon, 2001.

Keller, Judith. *Dorothea Lange: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002.

Meltzer, Milton. *Dorothea Lange: a Photographer's Life*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

Partridge, Elizabeth. *Dorothea Lange: a Visual Life*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Vancouver Collects: Sun Pictures to Photoconceptualism: Photography from Local Collections. September 28, 2001 - January 20, 2002.

Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft. January 28, 2005 - May 25, 2005.

75 Years of Collecting: Portrait of a Citizen. September 23, 2006 - January 1, 2007.

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Item	Description	Board Approval
1	Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting	DEC 15 2004
2	Approval of the report of the Finance Committee	DEC 15 2004
3	Approval of the report of the Collections Committee	DEC 15 2004
4	Approval of the report of the Exhibitions Committee	DEC 15 2004
5	Approval of the report of the Education Committee	DEC 15 2004
6	Approval of the report of the Fundraising Committee	DEC 15 2004
7	Approval of the report of the Marketing Committee	DEC 15 2004
8	Approval of the report of the Trustees	DEC 15 2004

Archival History

Board Minutes
Acquisition Record
2004-12-15

[transcription of excerpt]

SCHEDULE "A" Works Recommended for Acquisition from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft

Acquisition Meeting: December 14, 2004
Board Meeting: December 15, 2004

Submission

89. *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota* 1939
silver gelatin print
24.2 x 29 cm

Artist: Lange, Dorothea [39.4 in pencil]

Curatorial comments: Recommend acceptance

Committee Disposition: Approved unanimously

Board Approval: [DEC 15 2004 in blue ink]



Press Release
Miscellaneous History
2005-01-10

[transcription]

Vancouver Artgallery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, January 10, 2005

Vancouver Art Gallery acquires exceptional \$2 million photographic collection

Vancouver, BC The Vancouver Art Gallery has acquired a major art collection valued at \$2 million (CDN) consisting of over 460 exceptional photographic images by some of the world's most acclaimed photographers. The acquisition, from the collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft, comprises rare and vintage prints by some of the most recognized figures in the history of

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photography including Ansel Adams, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Margaret Bourke White, Julia Margaret Cameron, Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Andrea Kertesz, Dorothea Lange, Nadar, August Sander, Aaron Siskind, Alfred Stieglitz and Garry Winogrand.

In all, the acquisition, which is part gift and part purchase, comprises 463 prints by 155 artists, 128 of whom have been added to the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery for the first time. The collection spans key moments in the history of photography and captures a fascinating record of life from the invention of photography in the mid 19th century to the present. The works will be exhibited at the Gallery from January 29 to May 29, 2005 in *Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft*.

"The Beck/Gruft collection is one of the most significant privately held photography collections in Canada," said Kathleen Bartels, Director, Vancouver Art Gallery. "This acquisition provides an important historical grounding to the Gallery's already significant photography collection. As a gift to the Gallery, it is an expression of remarkable generosity by Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft."

The Beck/Gruft collection significantly expands the Gallery's photographic holdings and is the second major photographic acquisition by the Gallery under the leadership of Director Kathleen Bartels. In October 2002, the Gallery built the cornerstone for one of the most comprehensive contemporary photobased collections in North America with the acquisition of 60 works by 15 internationally acclaimed artists (valued at \$3.5 million CND) from the collection of Alison and Alan Schwartz. The Beck/Gruft gift establishes a solid foundation of historic photography that underscores the Gallery's existing collection and makes the Vancouver Art Gallery home to one of the most significant photographic collections in North America.

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Gallery Curator, Grant Arnold, commented, "The diversity and depth of the Beck/Gruft collection makes it a perfect fit for the Vancouver Art Gallery. It includes crucial images by artists whose importance in the history of photography is widely recognized, as well as historical and contemporary work that has specific connections to Vancouver and the Canadian West. This acquisition radically broadens the scope of the Gallery's existing collection of photography, a field that has taken on an unprecedented level of prominence in the art world over the past 30 years."

Highlights of the acquisition include rare examples of early developments in photography such as: *Charcoal Burners, 1845*, a calotype by the inventor of the negative positive process, William Henry Fox Talbot; *The Seven Stars, 1870*, possibly the only existing print of this image by the Victorian pictorialist Julia Margaret Cameron; and, two vintage prints made in 1949-51 by the French photographer Maxime Du Camp.

Other highlights include iconic images from key figures in the 20th century: two vintage prints by Lewis Hine, who first attracted attention for his work documenting the conditions of child labour in the United States; a compelling 1930 image of a tractor factory in the Soviet Union by the legendary photojournalist Margaret Bourke White; the only existing vintage print of *Labour 2, 1927*, by the acclaimed Mexican photographer Tina Modotti; and, a 1932 vintage architectural print by pioneering German photographer August Sander.

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Included in this important group of work are exceptionally raw and real images such as four works from Roman Vishniac's series documenting Jewish communities in Eastern Europe just prior to the Second World War; and, three important works from Aaron Siskind's Harlem projects of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Other highly significant images include: Andre Kertesz's widely published *Satyric Dancer, 1927*; Walker Evans' well known image *Main Street, Ossining, New York, 1932*; four works by the Mexican photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo, including one of his most well known images *Los Agachados, 1934*; Lisette Model's famous image of a gambler on the French Riviera, 1937; Robert Capa's images of combat and the liberation of Paris from the Second World War; Dorothea Lange's *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota, 1939* from her work for the Farm Security Administration during America's great depression; and, Richard Avedon's portrait of Andy Warhol's surgical scars taken in 1969 titled *Andy Warhol artist, New York City 8.20.69*. An outstanding component to the collection are nine works by Robert Frank, perhaps the most influential photographer of the 20th century, including seven from his seminal project *The Americans*, and five works by Henri Cartier-Bresson, cofounder of the Magnum Photo Agency, including his renowned image *Alicante, Spain, 1933*.

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The gift also encompasses work by lesser known figures such as Charles Mathers, Frederick Daily and William Notman, commercial photographers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who worked extensively in the Canadian west. Such work provides the Gallery with representations of early settler influxes and evidence of how this region was visualized in the public imagination at that time.

Since the early 1980s, the Vancouver Art Gallery has been actively acquiring photography from internationally renowned artists, particularly Vancouver artists. This gift includes significant photographs by artists based in Vancouver bringing to the collection new work by Vancouver based Roy Arden, Scott McFarland and Stephen Waddell. Other additions in the area of contemporary photography include work by U.S. and European artists such as Larry Clark, Robert Cumming, Judy Dater, Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld.

Over the past three decades, Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft have played an important role within the Vancouver art community. They have functioned as patrons, writers, occasional curators, critics, and proprietors of Nova Gallery, an influential commercial gallery specializing in photography that, between 1976 and 1982, was a nexus for artists, curators and collectors. Gruft came to Vancouver from South Africa during the 1960s, and Beck arrived from the United States in 1970. After meeting at the University of British Columbia, where they both taught, Beck and Gruft developed a shared passion for photographic imagery. They made their first purchase, a work by Vancouver based photographer Robert Minden, in 1975. Since that time they have been unwavering in their dedication; over the ensuing thirty years they have assembled a collection of historical and contemporary photography that is outstanding in its breadth and quality.

The Beck/Gruft collection provides the Gallery with an important legacy for future generations and a strong foundation upon which to continue building an exceptional collection of historical, modern and contemporary photography.

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Works from this acquisition will be on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the exhibition *Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft*, January 29 to May 29, 2005. All media are welcome to attend the opening celebration at 7pm on Friday, February 4, 2005.

end

Media contact: Julie-Ann Backhouse, Communications Specialist, 604 662 4722

The Vancouver Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, the Government of Canada through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Program and the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

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