

WHITNEY

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Press Release

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WHITNEY TO PRESENT LANDMARK EGGLESTON RETROSPECTIVE ***November 7, 2008-January 25, 2009***



William Eggleston, *Untitled*, from *Los Alamos, 1965-74*. Dye Transfer Print. 12 x 17 3/4 in. (30.5 x 45.1 cm). Collection of Eric M. Ruttenberg.
© Eggleston Artistic Trust

NEW YORK, July 28, 2008 — Nearly fifty years of extraordinary image-making by the photographer William Eggleston will be presented in a major retrospective, *William Eggleston: Democratic Camera—Photographs and Video, 1961-2008*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art from Friday, November 7, 2008, through Sunday, January 25, 2009. Organized by the Whitney in association with Haus der Kunst, Munich, the exhibition is the most comprehensive yet devoted to Eggleston in this country. It is co-curated by Elisabeth Sussman, Whitney curator and Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, and Thomas Weski, deputy director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich, where the show travels (February 20–May 17, 2009), following its Whitney debut. The exhibition's lead sponsor is *W* magazine.

William Eggleston: Democratic Camera traces the artist's evolution from the beginnings of his career some 50 years ago to the present day, and includes more than 150 photographs, some never-before-exhibited, as well as the artist's rarely screened video diary of his legendary nocturnal wanderings, "Stranded in Canton." A key figure in American photography, Eggleston, who was born in 1939 in Memphis, is credited with almost single-handedly ushering in the era of color photography. The psychological intensity of the saturated color in Eggleston's pictures has had an enormous impact on the entire field of photography; as an influence, Eggleston has cited the Technicolor technique in the films of Alfred Hitchcock.

Co-curator Elisabeth Sussman notes, "Eggleston's sense of color and composition is impeccable. His work is marked by a deep concern with equal consideration and evenhanded treatment of all his subjects. He knows and loves his terrain: the new supermarkets, sidewalks, driveways, patios, shiny cars, dinner settings, gas stations, and houses of the middle class, the interiors of elegant old Southern homes, the bars and their habitués. He captures landscape and architecture in unexpected ways—for instance his famous view upwards to the ceiling in a red room, or the empty space of a green tiled bathroom. And, importantly, Eggleston, though not a portraitist in a traditional sense, has a cool, but not uncomplicated view of the people he often photographs in these environments."

"*W* magazine is extremely proud to be the lead sponsor of this exhibition at the Whitney Museum," says Nina Lawrence, Vice President and Publisher of *W* magazine. "Our sponsorship of the Whitney exemplifies our magazine's strong editorial commitment to the arts, and we look forward to further exciting collaborations with the Museum."

The show begins with Eggleston's early black-and-white photographs and covers his groundbreaking shift to color and his dye transfer work of the early seventies. Highlights from the last twenty years include selections from the "Graceland" series and "The Democratic Forest," Eggleston's anthology of the quotidian. An unparalleled chronicler of the American South, Eggleston has produced a veritable encyclopedia of the Southern vernacular. His focus has been primarily upon his native locales of Memphis, New Orleans, and the Mississippi River Delta, although his commissioned projects have taken him all over the world.

In the mid-1970s, Eggleston became famous as a photographer. His color photographs, printed in the rich dye transfer medium, were recognized by The Museum of Modern Art's curator John Szarkowski, who showed them in 1976 in a historic and controversial exhibition at the museum. With this one-person show and the accompanying book, *William Eggleston's Guide*, Eggleston emerged as the first color photographer of note in America, the first to make color an issue in an art photography context.

Eggleston's trademark photograph is snapshot-like. It is an intuitive response to a fleeting configuration of elements in the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson, whom he greatly admired and in whose credo of "The Decisive Moment" he has found a counterpart to his own life's work. As co-curator Thomas Weski writes in the exhibition catalogue, "In many of his early pictures, the observer gets the feeling that Eggleston composed the photograph only roughly and accepted everything that fell within the established frame. This approach led to prints that integrated the unpredictable into the picture and thus accepted the stroke of chance. For Eggleston, everything in front of the camera was basically worthy of a picture."

The exhibition includes Eggleston's cult video work, "Stranded in Canton." Eggleston and a friend had begun using film to document Fred McDowell, a well-known Delta blues musician, but they ultimately abandoned the film project. Eggleston later acquired a video camera and began using video to shoot in bars and in people's homes; sometimes he shot monologues of friends delivered for his video camera, most often at night. The result, "Stranded in Canton," recently rediscovered and re-edited, is a portrait of a woozy subculture that adds dimension and texture to the world of Eggleston's color photographs. As Sussman writes, "Though the epic, multi-episodic project *Stranded in Canton* cannot be described as a nocturnal work in its entirety, its mood is nonetheless established by the fact that many episodes were shot late at night. It is thus in contrast to the well-known color work, where the powers of color and light are absolutely keyed to Eggleston's daytime vision. In his video work, the photographer was able to give visual shape to a demimonde in which he was both participant and observer."

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color catalogue that provides new insight into the ways in which Eggleston's photography has influenced generations of American artists, filmmakers, writers, and public perceptions of art. It includes essays by co-curators

Elisabeth Sussman and Thomas Weski; Whitney Chief Curator and Associate Director of Programs Donna De Salvo; Senior Curatorial Assistant Tina Kukielski; and noted American music journalist Stanley Booth. The publication includes an illustrated chronology, checklist of the exhibition, list of publications, selected exhibition history, selected bibliography, and index. It is co-distributed by Yale University Press.

The Curators

Elisabeth Sussman, Whitney curator and the Museum's Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, recently curated the Whitney's acclaimed exhibition *Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure*. Her latest photography project was the celebrated 2003–04 *Diane Arbus: Revelations*, the first retrospective of this controversial and highly influential photographer since 1972; it opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), then traveled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad, including the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. She is currently organizing a Whitney exhibition on Paul Thek.

Thomas Weski is deputy director of the Haus der Kunst, Munich. As chief curator there from 2003 to 2008, his exhibitions included *Andreas Gursky* (2007); *Click Doubleclick – The Documentary Factor* (2006, in cooperation with the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels); and *Robert Adams: Turning Back*, which received the 2005 Deutsche Börse Award. Formerly, Weski was chief curator at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, where he was curator of the traveling exhibition *William Eggleston: Los Alamos* (2003); co-curator with Emma Dexter of *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph* (2003, co-organized with Tate Modern, London); and co-curator with Heinz Liesbrock of *How You Look at It: Photographs of the Twentieth Century* (2000).

Organization and Funding

This exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in association with Haus der Kunst, Munich.

Presented by **W**

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About *W* magazine

W magazine, published by Condé Nast Publications, is known for its cutting-edge, award-winning fashion photography, a deep commitment to the world of art, and compelling editorial documenting the fusion of fashion and culture, all presented in an impactful, oversized format.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th- and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes major works and materials from the estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in America today. First housed on West 8th Street, the Whitney relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and in 1966 inaugurated its present home at 945 Madison Avenue, designed by Marcel Breuer. The Whitney is currently moving ahead with plans to build a second facility, designed by Renzo Piano, located in downtown New York at the entrance to the High Line in the Meatpacking District.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

Polaroids: Mapplethorpe	Through September 7, 2008
Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe	Through September 21, 2008
Paul McCarthy: Three Installations, Two Films	Through October 12, 2008
Alexander Calder: The Paris Years	October 16, 2008-February 15, 2009
William Eggleston	November 7, 2008-January 25, 2009

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. Admission is \$15 for adults; free for members, children (ages 11 and under), and New York City public high school students. Senior citizens (62 and over) and students with valid ID: \$10. There is a \$6 admission fee for a pass to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6-9 pm. For information, please call 1-212-570-3600 or visit whitney.org