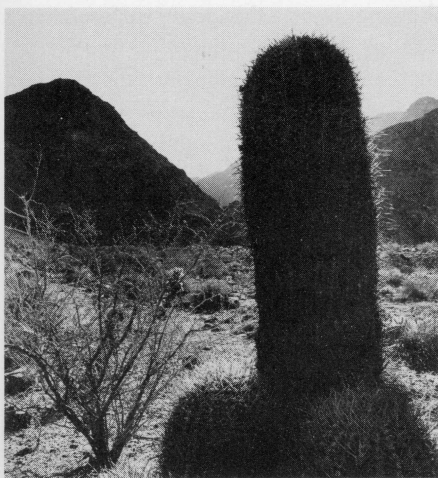


The California Museum of Photography

Charles Desmarais



It is appropriate that the editor of *Obscura* chose “Why Do We Have Two Eyes” for the cover of this issue, because the picture is wonderfully emblematic of the wealth of photographic resources in Southern California, and representative of the California Museum of Photography and its programs. It would be tough to keep to the traditional thousand words in enumerating all of these pictures’ allusions to cameras, education, the CMP’s collections, social history, and to vision itself—the *sine qua non* of the photographic endeavor.

The photograph reproduced is from the vast group of negatives and prints known as the Keystone-Mast Collection. Though this particular picture was made from a lantern slide negative, the great majority of Keystone-Mast materials are stereo views—thus our need for *two* eyes. The camera is a Graflex *Stereo Graphic*, one of the most popular professional tools in the commercial stereo industry after the turn of the century.

This year, the California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside, celebrates its tenth anniversary. Since its inception in 1973, the museum has become a resource unique in the West for scholars in many fields, and a major vehicle for sharing knowledge of photography and its cultural implications with the general public. My “essay” on the museum consists of two parts: a display of important, mostly unknown items from the permanent collection of the CMP, and a parallel commentary on the museum’s structure and programs.

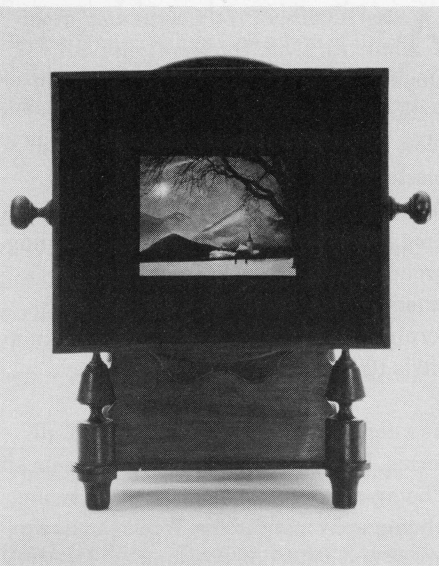


Ansel Adams, *Barrel Cactus and Mountain*, ca. 1965. Transfer from UCR Department of Biology (81.37.37). No collection of photographs would seem complete without holdings by the recognized master of modern American landscape, Ansel Adams. The CMP houses several hundred Adams prints, including an interesting group of 43 images made during Adams’s extensive survey of the University of California, commissioned as part of the University’s 100th Anniversary celebration.

As a department of the University of California, Riverside, the California Museum of Photography is in a unique position among photography institutions. While public programs and collection development are funded by private (non-University) donations and grants, the University supports collection conservation, research, and administration, as well as an outstanding academic curriculum in photography. Thus, a financial partnership between the private sector and the University is maintained.

Beyond this specific support, many other assets of the UC system are available to the museum. Among the most valuable of these is a superior faculty of experts in virtually every field of knowledge—a sort of “adjunct curatorial staff” of thousands. In recent years, the museum has had the benefit of the extensive involvement of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, art historians, and even biologists. The CMP also shares many of its resources with other UC units throughout the state.

Andre Adolphe-Eugene Disderi, *unidentified carte-de-visite*, ca. 1860 (82.55.1). This picture was published by the



man who introduced the nineteenth-century's wildly popular carte-de-visite format (though it was probably taken by one of his staff). It is particularly fascinating for the information it contains—and for the photographer's peculiar choice in framing. One wonders whether the photographer simply wanted to avoid moving his big studio camera closer to his subject (and thus kept the bulky monster where it ordinarily stood for adult portraits). Or perhaps he consciously filled half the picture with blank space to emphasize the drummer's diminutive size?

Education programming for children is only now being developed by the CMP staff, though a major exhibit intended for families is planned for May 1984. Adult educational activities, however, are a continuing service of the museum, coordinated by Curator of Education, Katherine Diage. These activities include group tours, an active lecture schedule featuring major photographers and scholars of the medium's history, special workshops and symposia, and a weekly film series. In addition, students and the general public are encouraged to use the collections in their research. (The telephone number for information on scheduled activities, and for tour and research appointments, is 714-787-4787.)

Megaethoscope, ca. 1870. Gift of Dr. Robert Bingham and the Western Photographic Collectors Association (80.33). Everybody's favorite instrument at the museum seems to be the megaethoscope. This should not surprise us: the great Italian photography firm of Carlo Ponti developed the gigantic viewer as a parlor entertainment in 1862. By printing

photographs on a thin paper surface, then painting the backs of the prints and piercing them to allow light to pass, the pictures are made to change dramatically when viewed under different lighting conditions.

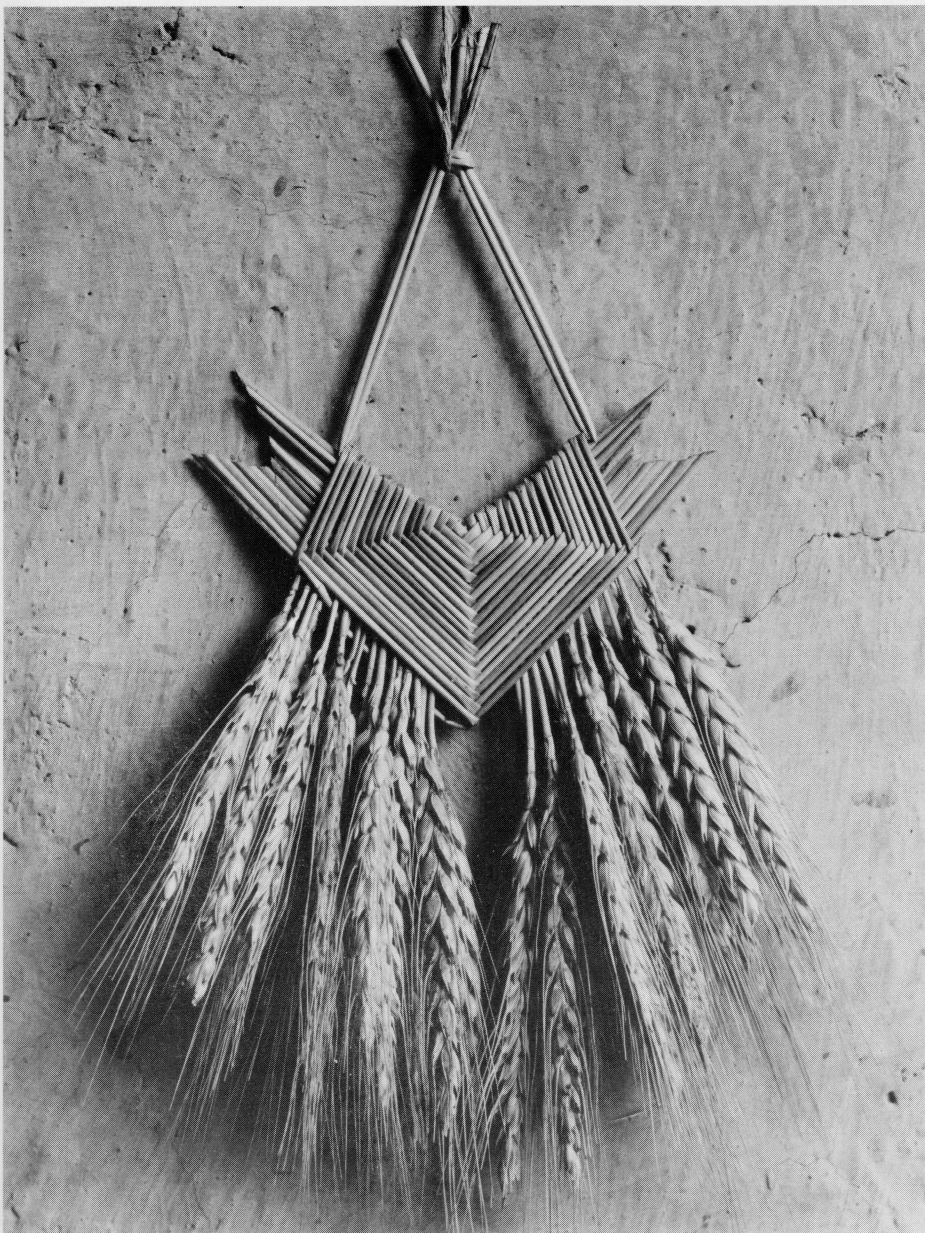
Using a system of doors and mirrors, light is reflected from the surface of the print, providing a "day" scene, or—as shown here—the light is transmitted through the back of the print, giving the illusion of night. In addition to the instrument itself, the CMP holds about 150 of the albumen megaethoscope views.

The California Museum of Photography, as a public museum, places a high premium on exhibits which reach broad audiences with the message of photography's pervasive influence. Though technologically it is completely different from today's television, the megaethoscope, with its TV-like screen and fascinating visual effects, provides an obvious link between our own lives and those of our grandparents.

Bessie [Elizabeth] Buehrmann, Sadakichi Hartmann, 1908. Wisteria Hartmann Linton Collection (UCR Library Special Collections). Hartmann gave this picture a backhanded compliment in a 1907 article for the *Photographic Times*:

When she took my portrait for the first time, she made five exposures. They were all failures. . . . Then I told her what I wanted, a portrait that would go with a book, gotten up somewhat in Japanese fashion with margin, illustrations, etc. She made four more exposures in the open, against a background of shrubbery; three of





them I never saw, but the fourth one was entirely satisfactory for the special purpose it was intended for.

Sadakichi Hartmann was a prolific writer and thinker often cited as photography's first critic. His professional archive, including manuscripts, portraits by notable Photo-Secession photographers, letters, and other materials are housed at the University Library. The Library works closely with California Museum of Photography staff in developing a collection of books, periodicals, and microform publications which complement and extend the usefulness of the original objects held by the CMP.

Library collections in photography, open for research to all, are among the most extensive in California. This is due, in part, to the designation of the UCR Library as a UC systemwide repository for photography books and materials.

Edward Weston, *Wheat Heart*, 1924-26. Extended loan of Hardie C. Setzer (33.79.9). This important photograph is one of a group of twenty-two rare images from Weston's Mexico period. The pictures were made in preparation for the book, *Idols Behind Altars*, by Anita Brenner. The CMP collection contains a number of Weston's best-known works, but this group of pictures—many of which were never used in the final publication of the book and were therefore “hidden” from public view—has a special significance. Not only are some prints the only ones known to exist, but they are printed in a high key tone reminiscent of Weston's earlier platinum work. Thus,

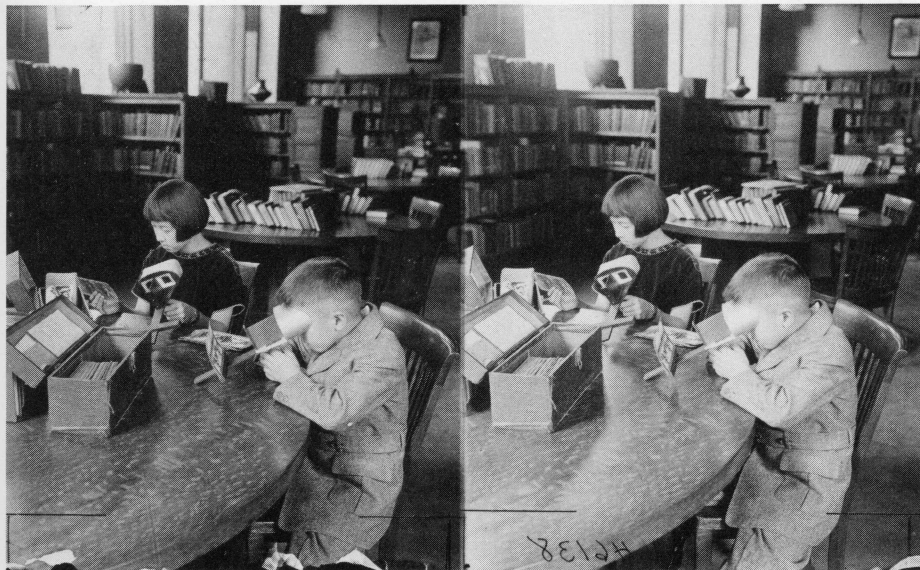


they may be especially helpful in tracing the development of his photographic technique.

California Museum of Photography collection policies reflect the broad range of needs the museum is called upon to serve. Particular attention has been paid to acquiring “representative examples” of work by prominent photographers, pictures from various important periods in the history of photography, photographs made by different processes or showing different social uses of photography, cameras and other objects which serve as clues to the technological history of the medium, and so forth. In addition, the museum continually adds non-exhibition items of research value. Particular attention here is paid to materials which relate to existing holdings (such as stereographic material), or which provide a different focus from the efforts of other American institutions.

Ruth Thorne-Thomsen, *Untitled*. Gift of the photographer (81.40.45). Ruth Thorne-Thomsen’s surreal pinhole photographs are an extraordinary blend of the contemporary and the historical. Working with paper cut-outs and toy props, Thorne-Thomsen transforms Chicago’s beaches into classical metaphors. This picture is part of a group of forty-eight photographs donated by twenty-three Chicago artists in 1981 as the “Chicago Gift” to Southern California.

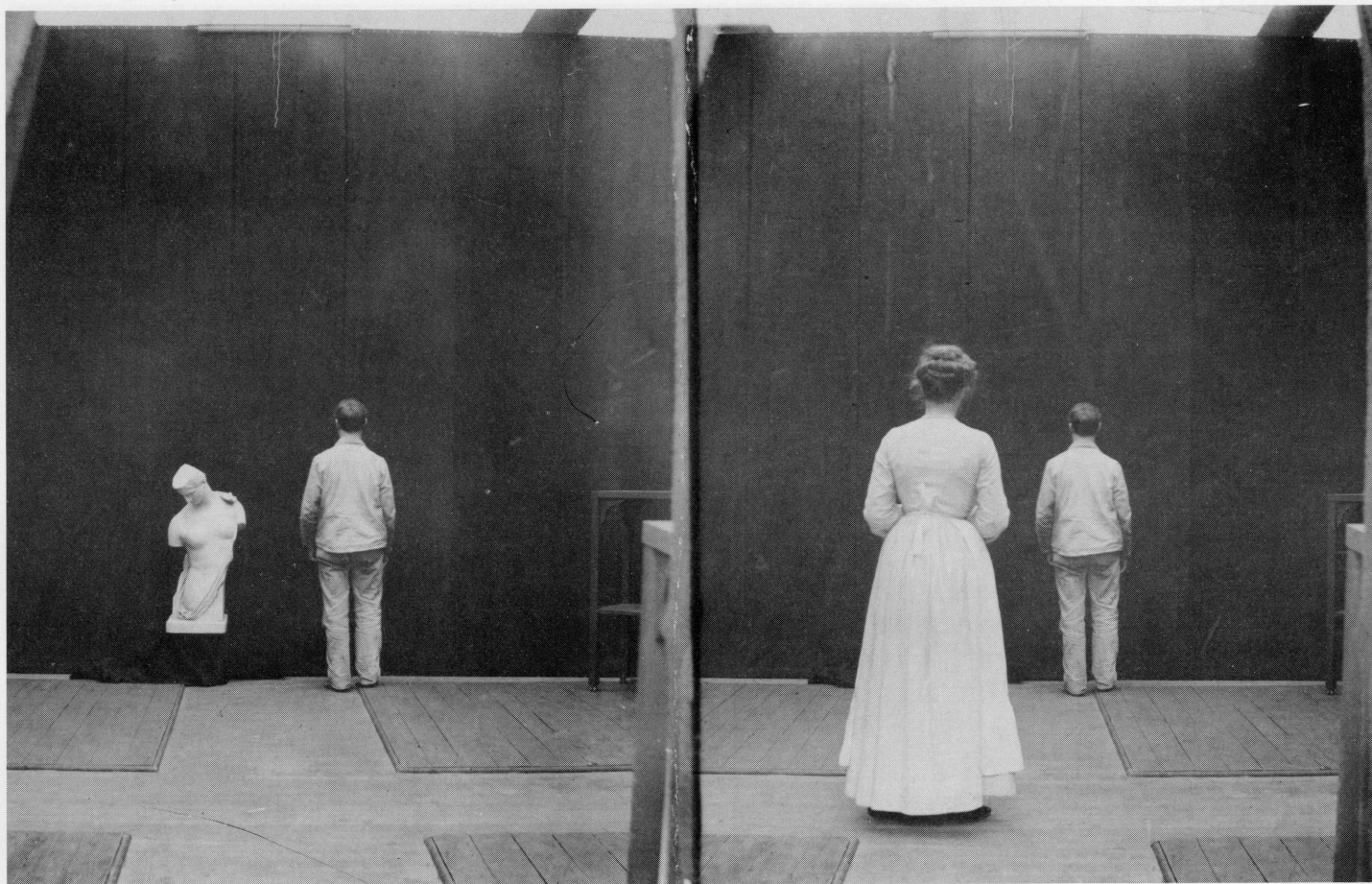
The CMP’s commitment to contemporary photography is apparent in its active exhibition program, as well as in an increasingly aggressive acquisitions effort. The function of any museum is, by definition, a conser-

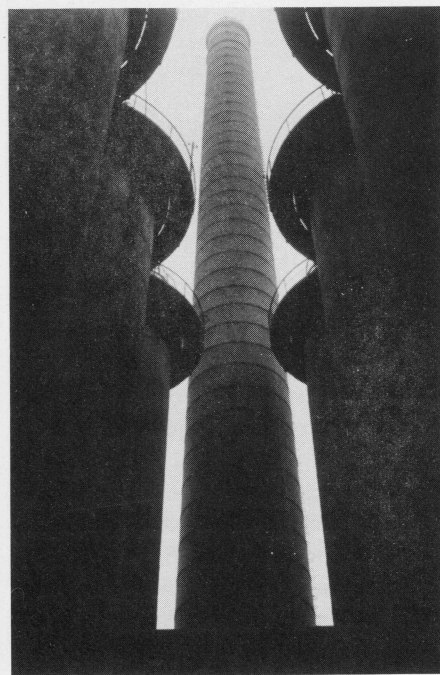
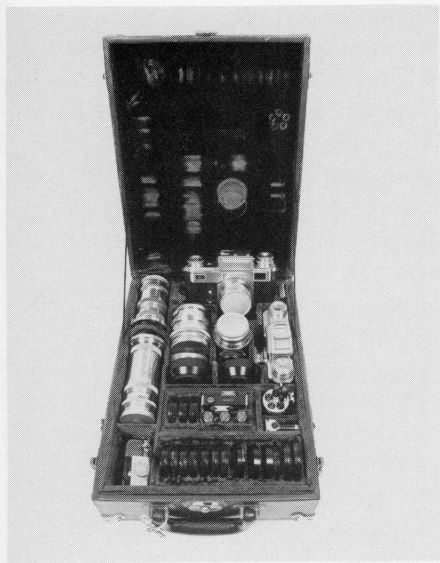


vative one: the museum's first task, after all, is to preserve material objects from our culture's past. But unless that conservative role is counterbalanced by an active—even *activist*—interpretation and assimilation of the lessons of our past, any museum will suffocate in a dull and sedentary boredom. By its ongoing attention to contemporary thought and current work in photography, the California Museum of Photography not only meets a responsibility, but maintains its very life.

Phillips, Keystone View Company, *Public Library, Stereoscopic Looking Room, Japanese Children*, Chicago, 1923. Keystone-Mast Collection (KU46138). The Keystone-Mast Collection is comprised of over 350,000 stereographic negatives and prints. The collection arrived at the University in 1979 from Meadville, Pennsylvania, the headquarters of the Keystone View Company from 1892-1965. In addition to photographs commissioned by the company, the collection, donated by the Mast family of Davenport, Iowa, also includes material from a number of competing companies whose negatives were purchased by Keystone. The collection includes works from several renowned publishers: Underwood & Underwood Company; B.W. Kilburn Company; H.C. White Company; Universal Photo Art Company (C.H. Graves); American Stereoscopic Company; W.H. Rau; and Berry, Kelley & Chadwick.

The original glass negatives by these publishers and by the Keystone View Company provide an invaluable resource for the study of the history of stereoscopic photography and an important trace of America's cultural history.





Professor Joseph Jastrow, Underwood & Underwood Company, *Untitled*, ca. 1905. Keystone-Mast Collection (90242). Readers who can “free view” stereographs, or who have access to a book-type stereo viewer, will recognize the ingenuity invested in this picture from the “Experimental Stereo” file of the collection. When viewed stereoscopically, the man and the room appear to be in three dimensions; the woman and the sculpture, though, blend and alternate in an ephemeral intermixture of real and idealized Woman.

As with so much material from photography’s past, one is tempted to apply today’s art-critical standards to many of the Keystone-Mast pictures. Professor Jastrow was the author of several textbooks in psychology published during the early part of this century. Though most of his published research investigated behavior, this photograph and others done by him for the Underwood & Underwood Company establish him as an early experimenter in perceptual psychology. The fact that he had a sense of humor and a penchant for metaphor is, of course, a bonus.

Contax III outfit, ca. 1937. Zeis-Ikon, Dresden, Germany, manufacturer. Gift of Robert Gach (81.67.1). This remarkable relic of pre-war German Technology and ingenuity was originally produced for the wealthy amateur market. The Contax III was made available just in time for the Berlin Olympics in 1936, and incorporated several features not available on the original Contax camera—notably a built-in exposure meter. The 35mm format of the Contax and its more popular predecessor/competitor, Leica, was ideal for sports

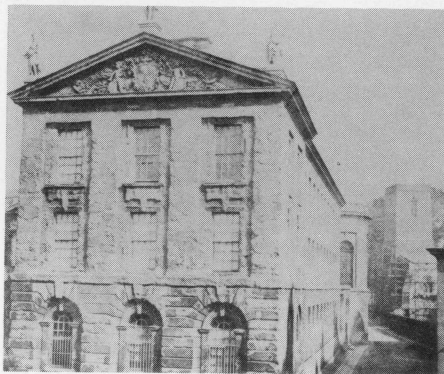
events such as the Olympics because the cameras were small, hand-held, and quickly operated. Of course, an outfit like this one (with its two bodies, eleven lenses, and over fifty accessories in hidden trays throughout a velvet-lined case) defeated many of the advantages of the miniature format.

An essential component of the overall program, the Bingham Collection of photographic apparatus now numbers over 4,000 items. It is universally recognized as one of the three great American public collections relating to photographic technology.

Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Lubeck Kalliper*, 1928. Setzer-Alexander Friends of Photography Collection (79.42.66). This picture is one of thirty-one by the great German photographer, Renger-Patzsch, now in the collection of the CMP. Probably the largest group of Renger-Patzsch photographs in an American public collection, the pictures offer a range of insights into the full span of his career.

The Renger-Patzsch collection is but a part of the former Friends of Photography collection. That group of some 600 items was transferred to the CMP through the generosity of private donors in 1979, when the Carmel-based Friends group committed itself to publishing and other services to the field. Issue number twelve of *Untitled*, the Friends of Photography quarterly journal, was devoted to the reproduction of the entire group of Renger-Patzsch photographs now held by the CMP.

Walker Evans, *Blank Bros. Inc. Shopfront*, ca. 1936. Gift of Howard H. Hays and Mead Kibbey (79.43.6). Among



the museum's sixty-one Walker Evans images one finds this fine example of his visual wit. This important group of mostly-unpublished Evans photographs stands at the core of CMP collecting policies. Photographer Joe Deal, the Museum's first Curator, instituted early on a collection design which would concentrate on photographers' working styles and thought processes, rather than existing merely as an album of "greatest hits."

William Henry Fox-Talbot, *Part of Queen's College, Oxford*, ca. 1844. Gift of the Western Photographic Collectors Association (80.14.1). This important picture by the inventor of photography was published as Plate I of his famous book, *The Pencil of Nature*. The museum collections are not unique in containing such early examples of the process—several major U.S. museums and libraries contain quite extensive records of the early history of photography. Still, on the West Coast the CMP is the only public entity engaged in a broad and concerted effort to form an encyclopedic collection representing the entire range of photography's own history.

Publishing has become an important part of the CMP's overall program, with three major books drawn from the Keystone-Mast Collection (the most recent, *The World As It Was*, was released by Simon & Schuster in 1980), and others on the way. Since 1981, the museum has published the *CMP Bulletin*, a bi-monthly journal distributed to libraries and universities around the world, as well as to members of the museum.

Clarance W. White, H.C. White Company
Payday at the Steel Works—Lines of

Men Approaching Pay Car, Homestead, Pa., ca. 1900. Keystone-Mast Collection (WX13149). Photography's relationship to history and art is problematical and complex: sometimes parasite, sometimes host, the medium's "life" spans many functions. Rather than artificially segregating the art of photography from its more vulgar manifestations, the CMP collects and preserves images which meet various cultural needs.

Thus, a clear description of the dress and demeanor of turn-of-the-century steelworkers—their payroll ritual, their working environment, their short-collared protection from a cold, damp day in Homestead—becomes, as a photograph, an artifact of importance in, and of, and for, itself. The fact that Clarence W. White is unknown to photography historians is irrelevant. That he applied a consistent technique and an energetic intelligence to numerous situations, leaving us hundreds of compelling records of everyday life in America, is more significant. But White acted at that instant when, oblivious to 300 other weather-chilled and bored workers waiting for their pay envelopes, a young boy stepped out of line.

The child stands there, staring down history. And by saving for us that simple event, White establishes a fragile link between our experience and that boy's.

We can never, of course, know more of this boy and this event than what we see in this abstract, imperfect image. But we do know something we could not know in any other way than by seeing it.

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