

INTRODUCTION

Photography. To some, the word brings forth images of a strange cult: gadget buffs, pale people who spend hours of their waking days in darkened rooms. To others, the idea of photography is intimately related to the whole of twentieth century communications technology: film, television, even today's methods of printing, all have their basis in the photographic process. Still others think of photography as a descriptive and expressive tool which, not unlike literature, can be used in the service of art, the humanities, and the social sciences.

The present volume is the culmination of more than a year's effort by two Southern California institutions, the California Museum of Photography (CMP) and the Western Photographic Collectors Association (WPCA). Though the missions of the two are somewhat different, both share a basic philosophical tenet. That is, that photography—as a feat of engineering, art, science, and history—is worthy of study as an integrated whole; that the machines and technological processes used to record images of our world are, in some senses, inseparable from the pictures they produce. On November 11, 1983, the CMP and the WPCA co-sponsored a one-day symposium loosely organized around this central principle. Titled "Why photography? Its place in our culture," the event brought together noted historians from across the United States, representing a diversity of views. We are honored to present here the results of this important experiment in the interdisciplinary study of so elusive a subject.

We would like to acknowledge here the efforts of Katherine Diage, former Curator of Education at the CMP, who coordinated the symposium from the original proposal through final arrangements; William P. Carroll, President

of the WPCA, who provided extraordinary advice and assistance to the project; and Dan Meinwald, Registrar/Curator at the CMP, who very capably edited the lecture texts for publication and saw this book through all stages of production. And of course, the success of the project is finally due to the participants in the symposium.

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Front cover: Mrs. T.A. Ley, dressed as an advertisement for her husband's Palace Gallery, Woodland, California, ca. 1885. See "Photographic Archaeology: A Case for Regional Research," by Peter E. Palmquist.