

Museum views world from inside of lens

By T.E. FOREMAN
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When he took over as director of the California Museum of Photography at the University of California, Riverside, in 1981, Charles Desmarais said one of his ambitions was to make the museum internationally known.

Another was to make it better known right here in Riverside.

Neither ambition has been completely realized, he said recently, but progress is being made.

The national conference of the Society for Photographic Education will be held at the museum March 29 through April 1, an indication that the museum has achieved some prestige, he said.

The conference is expected to draw 1,200 to 1,500 college and university photo instructors, photographers and professionals in related fields. Nearly 100 talks and panels will be featured.

Also, the museum has received grants from the National Institute of Museum Services for \$22,400 and from the National Endowment for the Arts for \$33,080. Desmarais says that is a sign that the museum's program is being recognized at the national level.

In addition to the grants from

national organizations, the museum has received grants from the California Arts Council for \$18,762 and the Riverside Arts Foundation for \$5,950, along with \$25,000 from the Office of the President of the University of California to conduct a survey of all UC photographic resources to determine their uses, ways to enhance those uses, and conservation needs.

As to local recognition: "Attendance has increased about 40 percent each year for the last three years," Desmarais said. However, that attendance still comes to only about 14,000 a year — "and about half of that comes from out of town," he said.

The museum is housed in Watkins House, across Canyon Crest Drive from the main UCR campus. It is open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursdays until 7 p.m. Admission is free.

To increase local interest and widen the age group appeal, the museum is planning a special children's exhibit in June which will in effect transform the museum into a model of a huge camera. Children (and adults, who will also be welcome) will find themselves standing inside the camera, looking out through the lens, giving them a better understanding of just how the photographic process works.

"We think it will be an

exhibit that will have a lot of popular appeal for children, their parents and anyone else who is interested in photography," Desmarais said.

Meanwhile, the museum is continuing to mount a series of exhibits featuring both the old, historic, novel, unique or otherwise interesting cameras and equipment in its collection and prints from some of the numerous outstanding collections that have been loaned or donated to the museum during Desmarais' regime.

The current exhibit, "Urbi et Orbi," is an example of such a show. It consists of 19th-century photographs of the world's cities from the collection of Joseph Armstrong Baird Jr., a UC Davis professor, which has been donated to the museum. The 100 photographs in the exhibit, which represent only a part of the Baird collection, includes scenes from cities in all parts of the world, ranging from towering cathedrals to crumbling ruins.

The scenes include work of some of the leading photographers of the 19th century as well as some by unknown camera wielders.

Donations such as the Baird collection bring the museum's print collection to about 10,000 photographs from all periods of the history of photography. Among the major holdings are

the only set of prints in existence by Edward Weston for his book "Idols Behind Altars;" 50 albumen megalethroscope views by Carlo Ponti; a rare selection of 61 mostly unpublished photographs by Walker Evans; more than 400 native American portraits by Adam Clark Vroman; the largest collection (31 prints) in this country of pictures by the noted German photographer of the 1930s Albert Renger-Patzsch; 800 panorama negatives and 250 original prints by William Amos Haines and more than 800 prints by Francis Frith, including three important Middle East albums and 644 original Frith and Co. file prints.

Another major part of the museum's holdings is the Keystone-Mast Collection of about 250,000 stereographic negatives and 100,000 prints documenting 100 years of world history, 1860-1960. Acquired through the generosity of the Mast family of Davenport, Iowa, in 1977, the collection represents the entire surviving archive of the Keystone View Company, the turn of the century's leading distributor of stereo views.

The third major holding of the museum is the Bingham Collection of photographic apparatus, named for Dr. Robert Bingham, who launched the museum 10 years ago with a gift of cameras, lenses and related



Charles Desmarais

items. Today the museum has more than 4,000 cameras and other materials related to the technical history of photography. All periods of history since 1839 are represented.

The wealth of holdings accentuates one of the museum's major problems, lack of space in which to adequately display its possessions.

"We can only display a small part of our permanent collection at any one time," Desmarais said. "We need about four times the space we have for exhibition and other functions."

The space crunch has led the museum staff to forgo some human conveniences for the sake

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Film to be focus of educators

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More than 100 national and international educators in the visual and literary arts will present talks at the 1984 national conference of the Society for Photographic Education, March 29 to April 1 at the University of California, Riverside.

With a theme of "Hollywood and the West Coast: Recasting Our Role as Educators in a Society of Visual Imagery," the conference will also feature slide shows, panel discussions, exhibits, a job fair, print swap and a 5K fun run.

UCR's California Museum of Photography is host for the event.

The principal speakers will be Alfred Appel Jr., professor of English at Northwestern University and author of the current best seller "Signs of Life;" Herbert Schiller, professor of Communications at UC San Diego and

author of several books, including the pioneering volume "The Mind Managers," and William Klein, a photographer, filmmaker and painter, who compiled the photographic volumes "New York" and "Tokyo" and the film "Hollywood, California."

Appel will speak March 29 at 8 p.m. in University Theater. Schiller will speak at 8 p.m. March 30 and Klein at 8 p.m. March 31. Schiller's and Klein's talks will be outdoors in the UCR Commons area.

Admission to each of the three lectures will be \$5 for persons not registered for the conference.

More than 100 other lecturers and panelists also will discuss topics including "A Reconsideration of American Documentary," "The New Documentary," "Artists and Public Issues," "Pho-

tohistory" and "Issues in Criticism and Education, Tools and Technology" (including the use of computers) and Hollywood.

Among the participants will be UCLA photography professor Robert Heinecken, noted photohistorian Ulrich Keller and Colin Westerbeck, lecturing on Hollywood photos of the 1930s and '40s.

Most of the conference events will take place in University Commons.

Registration for the full conference is \$65 for SPE members or \$90 for non-members. For student SPE members the cost is \$50 and for student non-members it is \$70.

Tickets for single day's activities are \$32.50 per day.

Signups will be taken opening day or in advance. Information is available from Michael Elderman at (714) 787-4589.

Desmarais . . .

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of extra square feet. "We've torn out the men's room in order to have more room for the print collection," Desmarais said. "We all share one restroom."

Three possibilities for expansion are under consideration, but funds are not yet available for concrete planning. The possibilities are to enlarge the present museum facility, to build an entirely new building or to convert the old building from the original Citrus Experiment Station which preceded the university to museum use.

The relative newness of the museum — it celebrated its 10th anniversary in November — has its advantages, Desmarais believes.

Because the staff is not bound by a long, established tradition, "we're free to try some of the new ideas of what a museum could and should be in the 1980s," he said.

For instance, the museum wants to play a more active part in the community, educating people about photography's place in society. "We've been expanding our services to go beyond the university public," Desmarais said.

In addition to the children's exhibit this summer, permanent exhibits oriented to families, children's classes and the recruitment of volunteers to help take demonstrations into local schools are the future goals of an education program begun last year by Kathrine Diage, curator of education.

The museum already conducts 80 to 90 tours per year for students of photography from all over Southern California.

"We have a small staff of seven people, and everyone has to work hard. But when you look at what this dedicated group has accomplished with the help of our volunteers, it's almost incredible," Desmarais said.

"As exciting as the first 10 years have been, it's really been time spent in building a foundation. I don't think there's any question that the next decade will be 10 times more exciting."