

LACMA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION: *SEE THE LIGHT—PHOTOGRAPHY, PERCEPTION, COGNITION:
THE MARJORIE AND LEONARD VERNON COLLECTION*

ON VIEW: OCTOBER 27, 2013–MARCH 23, 2014

LOCATION: LACMA, RESNICK PAVILION

LACMA PRESENTS A NEW PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION SHOWCASING THE MARJORIE AND LEONARD VERNON COLLECTION

***SEE THE LIGHT* EXPLORES PARALLELS BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE SCIENCE OF VISION**



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 5)

(Los Angeles–October 17, 2013) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *See the Light—Photography, Perception, Cognition: The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection*, an exhibition celebrating an extraordinary collection and exploring parallels between photography and the science of vision. Since the invention of photography in the late 1830s, the medium has evolved in relation to theories about vision, perception, and cognition. The exhibition takes a historical perspective, identifying correlations between photography and the science of vision during four chronological periods. *See the Light* is comprised of 220 works by more than 150 artists, including Ansel Adams, Julia Margaret Cameron, Imogen Cunningham, William Henry Fox Talbot, Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, Minor White, and many more.

The exhibition draws entirely from the Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, a key collection within LACMA's Wallis Annenberg Photography

Department. Acquired in 2008, the collection represents the diversity of photographic processes from the medium's invention in 1839 to the 21st century. *See the Light* is accompanied by a free mobile-phone multimedia tour featured on mobile.lacma.org with commentary by the Vernons' daughter, Carol Vernon; curator Britt Salvesen; artist James Welling; expert in computational vision Pietro Perona; and others. A 208-page catalogue, published by LACMA and DelMonico Books/Prestel, includes an essay by Britt Salvesen with contributions from Todd Cronan, Antonio Damasio, Alan Gilchrist, Pietro Perona, Barbara Maria Stafford, and James Welling. A new web page features excerpts from LACMA's Vernon Oral History Project, an ongoing series of interviews with prominent artists, curators, dealers, and scholars who worked closely with the Vernons.

"Photography is often approached from either the artistic or the technological point of view, but these two aspects of the medium have been intertwined since its invention," said Britt Salvesen, Department Head and Curator of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department. "As a scientific instrument, the camera operates as an infallible eye, augmenting physiological vision, and as an artist's tool, it channels the imagination, recording creative vision. The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection offers unparalleled scope to the spirit of both science and art."

Designed by Frederick Fisher and Partners, *See the Light* marks the third exhibition collaboration between LACMA and the architecture firm, following the success of *Bodies and Shadows: Caravaggio and His Legacy* (2012) and *Hans Richter: Encounters* (2012).

The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection

Through a groundbreaking gift from Wallis Annenberg and the Annenberg Foundation, and with the support of Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin, LACMA acquired the Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection in 2008. Comprising of more than 3,600 prints by almost 700 artists, the Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection at LACMA constitutes one of the finest collections of photography spanning the 19th and 20th centuries. LACMA's acquisition of this collection makes it possible for the museum to represent photography's breadth in the context of its encyclopedic collections. Concurrent with the exhibition *See the Light*, prints from the Vernon

Collection are on view in *Little Boxes: Photography and the Suburbs* (through December 1, 2013); *Down to Earth: Modern Artists and the Land, before Land Art* and *Talk of the Town: Portraits by Edward Steichen* (both through December 8, 2013); *Compass for Surveyors: 19th-Century American Landscapes* (through December 31, 2013); *Masterworks of German Expressionism: The Golem and Its Avatars* (through January 19, 2014); and *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film* (through February 2, 2014).

Marjorie and Leonard Vernon were avid collectors in the Los Angeles and Southern California communities. The Vernons built their collection beginning around 1975, cultivating a group of works with global significance, with a special emphasis on West Coast photography of the early and mid-20th century. The collection grew over the years to include works by international photographers, with the earliest photographs dating from the 1840s and the latest to 2001.

Exhibition Organization

See the Light is organized thematically and traces the trajectory of advanced research on cognition and perception in relation to the art of photography. Four approaches within photography are identified: descriptive naturalism, subjective naturalism, experimental modernism, and romantic modernism.

Descriptive naturalism: Early advocates of photography (from the 1840s through around 1880) were eager to recruit the authority of science without sacrificing the romance of art. The notion that the camera could make a pure transcription of nature, undistorted by human error, took hold at precisely the moment with research in physiological optics revealed the complexities of the human visual system. The depiction of far-off landscapes was one of photography's key functions in its descriptive naturalist phase, as in Carleton Watkins's commanding views of the American West, which recorded the natural splendor of the landscape and its settlement.

Subjective naturalism: In the late 19th century, experimental psychology, a newly defined scientific discipline, addressed the progression of sensation into interpretation. At the same time, champions of artistic

photography introduced the possibilities of expression, ambiguous form, and abstraction into a medium previously valued for its descriptive functions. Heinrich Kühn's mastery of painterly techniques, for example, led to the creation of photographs on par with paintings or charcoal drawings. Ultimately Kühn's photographs depict dreams or memories as much as physical reality.

Experimental Modernism: After World War I, photography became a key tool for avant-garde artists determined to deploy technology in a positive rather than destructive manner, thus restoring balance within the individual psyche and within society at large. The abstract works of György Kepes, influenced by Gestalt psychology, represent a European version of this tendency, which he and other emigrés brought to the United States. A later heir to this tradition is Barbara Kasten, who uses photography to explore key interests including transparency, color, light, and structure.

Romantic Modernism: Inspired by nature, romantic modernism isolated moments of direct personal contact with the world, and explored the specific capabilities of photography. Despite an apparent divergence of art and science following World War II, photography was a site of connection. Ansel Adams believed in the artist's unique vision, while also advocating technical precision to realize it. Concurrently, scientists were focusing on contrast perception, the neurological mechanisms by which we distinguish objects and make sense of spatial arrangements. Scientists and photographers alike had to understand the visual system and its responses to black and white.

Related Programming

LACMA presents a series of multidisciplinary public programs considering photography and the science of vision in conjunction with this exhibition. Programs include a lecture by Marc Levoy, Professor of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering at Stanford University, discussing what Google Glass means for the future of photography and a series of conversations from December 2013 to March 2014 exploring perception, memory, and previsualization with Marvin Chun, Professor of Psychology, Yale University; Irving Biederman, Professor of Neuroscience, University of Southern California; Pietro Perona, Professor of Electrical

Engineering and Computation and Neural Systems, California Institute of Technology; Todd Cronan, Assistant Professor of Art History, Emory University; and artist James Welling. Carol Vernon and artist Anthony Hernandez will also provide an exhibition walkthrough.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and was made possible by a generous gift from Fredric Roberts, with additional support from the Annenberg Foundation. Additional funding was provided by the Alix Brotman Foundation.

The acquisition of the Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection by LACMA was made possibly be a major gift from the Annenberg Foundation, with additional support from Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography-and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, and innovative collaborations with artists, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

Location and Contact: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am-5 pm; Friday: 11 am-8 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 10am-7 pm; closed Wednesday

General Admission: Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

Free General Admission: Members; children 17 and under; after 3 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

Image captions:

(Left): Imogen Cunningham, *Magnolia Blossom*, 1925, Gelatin silver print, The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, gift of The Annenberg Foundation, acquired from Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin © 1925, 2013 Imogen Cunningham Trust

(Center): Charles Harbutt, *Triptych* (1978, printed 1978), Gelatin silver print, The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, gift of The Annenberg Foundation, acquired from Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin, © Copyright © by Charles Harbutt. All rights reserved, Courtesy Peter Fetterman Gallery.

(Right): György Kepes, *Balance*, 1942, Gelatin silver print, The Marjorie and Leonard Vernon Collection, gift of The Annenberg Foundation, acquired from Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin, © Juliet K. Stone Photo

Press Contact: For additional information, contact LACMA Communications at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

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