

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Human/Nature: Photographers Constructing the Natural World

March 6 – August 31, 2015

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *Human/Nature: Photographers Constructing the Natural World*, an exhibition that examines how photographers in the 1960s and '70s approached “nature” and “culture” in their images not in opposition, but rather in dialogue. Up until then, landscape photography had mostly minimized evidence of human presence; indeed, the most renowned images in the genre presented pristine vistas that photographer Lewis Baltz wryly characterized as “the privileged world of pure nature.” The ten artists in *Human/Nature* play with and against this tradition, treating signs of humanity, and our activities, as essential elements of their image-making practice.



Against the modernist—some would say, romantic—tradition of canonical figures like Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, photographers in the 1960s and '70s began to focus on landscapes beyond “pure nature.” During this period, photography that included and even emphasized human alterations to the landscape became a legitimate avenue for artistic consideration. Lewis Baltz, whose studies of California tract houses exemplified this new approach, recalls that “my life very rarely involved going to Yosemite [National Park, CA]. My life was about going to shopping centers, being in a town, an urban situation, which seemed to me was also a landscape, but one that no one had any interest in looking at. But I was interested in looking at it.” Along these lines, Baltz, Victor Landweber, Robert von Sternberg, and others picture landscapes marked by urban and suburban life, tourism, and industry.

While such transformed landscapes are distinguished by their innovative subjects and their formal beauty, they also invite critical conversations around the impact of our interactions with the non-human world. In his *Auduboniana* series (1998–2001), Victor Landweber superimposes etched birds from John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827–1838) over modern urban architecture, creating suggestive

contrasts between pre-industrial and contemporary American life. *Passenger Pigeon, Federal Building, Oakland CA* (1998) is especially poignant. From a population of billions, over-hunting and habitat depredation drove the passenger pigeon to extinction in 1914. In another striking juxtaposition, the bright orange traffic cone that punctuates Robert von Sternberg's *Columbia Ice Field, Canada* (2009) may be a playful, unexpected splash of color in an otherwise stark landscape, but it is also a reminder of the many snow coaches that carry tourists as far as the remote Canadian Rockies.

A number of artists in *Human/Nature* explore a particular paradox: photographers must use uniquely human technologies in their representations of the non-human world. These artists revel in scenarios where the natural and the man-made meet and blend. Darryl Curran, Robert Fichter, Kenneth Josephson, and other artists place trees, plants, and vegetables in communication with innovative technical processes, from the flatbed scanner to the smartphone. The lush, tactile surface of the tree trunk in Kenneth Josephson's *Chicago* (1964) pays homage to Modernist formalism, but its nested composition is conceptually complex: *Chicago* is a picture of a tree within a picture of a tree within a picture of a tree. Josephson here probes the camera's mediating role between natural and human artistry. In his use of snapshots, Josephson also gestures to the proliferation of instant photography, most famously the Polaroid. In more recent years, Robert W. Fichter has photographed landscapes using another cutting-edge, instantaneous process with widespread appeal: the iPhone's Panorama mode.

Two artists in the exhibition, Darryl Curran and Jane O'Neal, use flatbed scanners to capture their compositions. Curran's flattened arrangement of colorful cabbage leaves, delicate baby's breath, thorny rose stems, and a serrated knife on the surface of the scanner links *Savoy Cabbage, Baby's Breath, Blade* (1995) to the photograms and cyanotypes of early photography, in which objects were arranged on photo-sensitive paper, and which likewise often featured a blend of natural and man-made artifacts. The inclusion of a knife among the cut leaves and stems signals human presence— and, perhaps, humanity's power to destroy as well as to construct.

From subtle to arresting, lyrical to critical, the photographs in *Human/Nature* present a world mediated by human activity. This exhibition is on view in the Museum's small rotating exhibitions gallery on the main level from March 6 through August 31.

Cited: Lewis Baltz, *Oral history interview, 2009 November 15-17, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*. Image credit on previous page: *Auduboniana: Passenger Pigeon, Federal Building, Oakland, CA, 1998*, Victor Landweber (American, b. 1943), Digital pigment print, 19 x 13 in. (48.3 x 33 cm), Norton Simon Museum, Gift of Alan, Shelley and Lucinda Stamm. PH.2010.3.2, © Norton Simon Museum

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$12 for adults and \$9 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** The City of Pasadena provides a shuttle bus to transport passengers through the Pasadena Playhouse district, the Lake Avenue shopping district and Old Pasadena. A shuttle stop is located in front of the Museum. Please visit www.cityofpasadena.net/artsbus for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.