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Exhibition of Photographs by Frederick Sommer and Friends Examines Continuities and Connections within the Artist's Work



Frederick Sommer, *Valise d'Adam*, 1949. gelatin silver print
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Frederick Sommer

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art explores the continuities in Frederick Sommer's varied body of work and demonstrates the influence of his friendships with fellow artists in the exhibition ***A World of Bonds: Frederick Sommer's Photography and Friendships***, on view in the West Building from June 16 to August 4, 2013. Drawn from the Gallery's significant holdings, which include a major 1995 gift from the artist himself, the exhibition showcases 27 works by Sommer, Edward Weston, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Aaron Siskind, and Charles Sheeler, including three pieces on loan from other museums and private collections.

"The Gallery is privileged to display this influential body of work, which illuminates Frederick Sommer's interactions with his fellow artists," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "In addition to photographs drawn from our permanent collection, we are grateful to the lenders who have assisted us in revealing the continuities in Sommer's broad range of work, as well as The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation for its generous support."

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. It is made possible in part through the generous support of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc.

About the Exhibition

The exhibition showcases the beauty and diversity of Sommer's striking images and places them in the context of his formative friendships with such prominent contemporaries as Edward Weston, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Charles Sheeler, and Aaron Siskind.

As an artist, Frederick Sommer notoriously defies classification. Over the span of more than 60 years, he created paintings, drawings, and photographs, as well as collages, musical scores, poetry, and theoretical texts. Today, Sommer is best known for his photography, the medium in

which he produced his most inventive visual experiments and which best suited the breadth of his visual interests. These ranged from disorienting desert landscapes to surrealist arrangements of found objects, and to abstractions that brought together drawing and photography.

"All rare things should be lent away / and I have borrowed very freely," Sommer wrote of his art. He also asserted that "the world is not a world of cleavages, it is a world of bonds." This exhibition examines both claims, offering a glimpse into the ways in which Sommer shared ideas with his contemporaries while simultaneously creating a body of work uniquely his own.

About the Artist

Just as he defied the bounds of medium and genre, Sommer, who lived in the small town of Prescott, Arizona, also never fully belonged to any artistic group or movement. His work reflects both wide-ranging personal interests and a broad scope of artistic affinities with artists as divergent as the surrealists and the members of the f/64 group of West Coast photographers.

Sommer's circle of close artist-friends and mentors helps explain his idiosyncratic sensibilities. This circle included the photographer Edward Weston, whose precise attention to the details of the natural world inspired Sommer's turn to photography. Equally important to Sommer, however, was his friendship with Max Ernst, the surrealist whose automatic painting techniques and uncanny imagery encouraged Sommer to reconfigure familiar objects into strange new creations. Aaron Siskind was yet another close friend and peer with whom Sommer shared a fascination with the abstract textures of everyday materials. Other artists represented in the exhibition who influenced Sommer's approach to photographing assemblages and his exploration of photographic abstraction include Man Ray and Charles Sheeler.

Exhibition Curator and Related Offerings

The exhibition is curated by Ksenya Gurshtein, A.W. Mellon postdoctoral curatorial fellow in the Department of Photographs, National Gallery of Art.

Gurshtein will present a series of 30-minute gallery talks about the exhibition at noon on July 5, 12, 26, and August 2. Offered free of charge and on first-come, first-served basis, the tours begin in the West Building Rotunda on the Main Floor.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/modern-art-during-renovation.html>.

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at

www.twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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