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EDWARD WESTON - an exhibition of photographs made possible by grants from
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WALL LABEL

January 29 - March 30, 1975

For almost 150 years photography has been available as a medium for artists. During this time a small number of men and women have used the camera to produce enduring works of art. Edward Weston is one of these.

Born in Highland Park, Illinois, on March 24, 1886, Weston grew up during the time that photography was becoming available to increasingly large numbers of people. For the most part the camera was used to make family documents, but it also made possible valuable records of the American landscape, rural and urban, made with no intention of producing works of art.

In the beginning of his career Weston, like many other photographers, used his camera to earn his livelihood. His commercial portraits were excellent, but they were made to please his subjects, not himself, and perhaps in rebellion against the demands of his clients he began to assert his own artistic sensibilities. Some of his early pictures seem almost to insist upon recognition as works of art - and many of them are, but within a context made familiar by other media. Such photographs as Prologue to a Sad Spring, 1920, and Johan Hagemeyer, 1925, are elegantly composed and executed, but the compositions do not seem to arise out of the necessities of the subjects. One is reminded of Whistlerian composition and Japanese prints.

In 1922 Weston exhibited his photographs in Mexico City, where they were enthusiastically received, and in 1923 he moved to Mexico, intending

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to live and work there. During his stay he became friends with the Mexican artists of the revolutionary period: Diego Rivera, Carlos Merida, José Clemente Orozco, and Jean Charlot. Paradoxically, these painters' appreciative discussion of his work did much to liberate his photographs from painterly influences, and this liberation was encouraged by his discovery of the unselfconsciousness in folk art.

As he became more secure he was able to present his subjects with a minimum of the literary content that characterized his earlier work. He found radical ways of making pictures. His approach became basic, simple, forthright. One example is his assertive boldness in presenting the nude in Mexico, D.F., 1925. This symmetrical composition represents a distinct departure from the mode of Prologue to a Sad Spring. The direct deliverance of the subject is deceptively simple; it challenges the viewer to make his own interpretation. In his new pictures, the object is all there, complete within the confines of the frame; it is clearly what it is, a shell, a pepper, a woman's body. Yet it is more. Whatever it may be, it also partakes of all other things because Weston saw its universal qualities. Throughout his life Weston found forms that are repeated in nature (Cloud over the Panamints, Death Valley, 1937; Shell, 1927). Even a casual reviewer recognizes that he saw relationships between rocks, clouds, vegetables, shells, sand dunes, the human body.

Over a period of many years Weston photographed on Point Lobos. He returned time after time after time, searching, discovering, and rediscovering, and the photographs he made there are among his most satisfying. It was here that he learned to deal with what was specific and unique to his subject in its time and place, without qualification or reservation (Surf, China Cove, 1938). It was here that he matured as an artist. His asser-

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tiveness and self-conscious artistry gone, he was able to present the world with works that are among the finest photographs ever done.

Technical notes: Weston worked with simple equipment, an 8 x 10 view camera and a 4 x 5 Graflex. His negatives were developed in a Pyro-Soda formula which he varied according to the inherent contrast of the subject. Some of his early prints were made on platinum or palladium paper, but for the most part his negatives were printed by contact on silver bromide or silver chloride semiglossy paper developed in Amidol.

Willard Van Dyke
Director of the Exhibition

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