

The Museum of Modern Art

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY HENRY WESSEL, JR. AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

40 photographs by Henry Wessel, Jr., most of them made in California and New Mexico in 1971-1972, will be on view from October 3 through December 15, 1972, in the Steichen Galleries of The Museum of Modern Art.

The work of an avid traveler who has driven across the United States 20 times during the past five years, Wessel's photographs are closer in spirit to the Instamatic snapshots taken by tourists than to traditional topographical documents. While these pictures do show how today's West looks, they are primarily "subjective reports of what it felt like to travel through a certain region. They function as souvenirs, as aide-mémoire, which evoke the experience of confronting the peculiar juxtaposition of vast nothingness and clutter that is now the American West," says Dennis Longwell, Assistant Curator of Photography and director of this exhibition.

Casual, almost free-wheeling, the photographs of Henry Wessel are nevertheless the product of a rigorously formal eye. Considered individually, their subject matter, houses, hills, bushes, groves, and strange markings on the earth are puzzling and amusing. Collectively, observes Longwell, "through the alchemy of their formal placement, their circular forms merge to suggest a Platonic idea: the Ideal Circle known only to the contemplative mind."

Born in Teaneck, New Jersey thirty years ago, Henry Wessel, Jr. graduated from Pennsylvania State University, where he later taught photography for two years, 1967-69. He recently completed an M.F.A. at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester and the State University of New York at Buffalo. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1971, to make a "photographic documentation of U.S. highways and the adjacent landscape."

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Tel: (212) 956-7501 or 7296.
