

Face to Face

150 Years of
Photographic
Portraiture



September 19, 2009—January 10, 2010

Doris and John Norton Gallery for the
Center for Creative Photography
Phoenix Art Museum

Face to Face

150 Years of Photographic Portraiture

Doris and John Norton Gallery for the Center for Creative Photography, Phoenix Art Museum

Reading a photographic portrait comes naturally: it involves skills we all engage daily as we observe the expressions and body language of the people around us. Portrait photographers move beyond this, using photographic elements such as scale and camera angle to exploit the expressive potential of clothing, gesture, pose, facial expression, and setting. In addition to visible elements, special knowledge—such as who the sitter is, the nature of the relationship between the photographer and subject, and technological innovations—can enrich our understanding.

Face to Face: 150 Years of Photographic Portraiture includes nearly 70 portraits by 58 different artists, and stretches from the earliest form of photography—the daguerreotype, used in the mid nineteenth century—to works made in the last few years. Portraiture was one of photography's earliest applications and has become the primary mode for capturing a likeness. Explored here are three sets of portraits from *Face to Face* in which knowledge of the personal, cultural, or professional relationship of photographer to subject influences how we understand the image. This investigation, in context of the larger exhibition, sharpens our ability to read a portrait and helps us see more in every picture of a person we view.

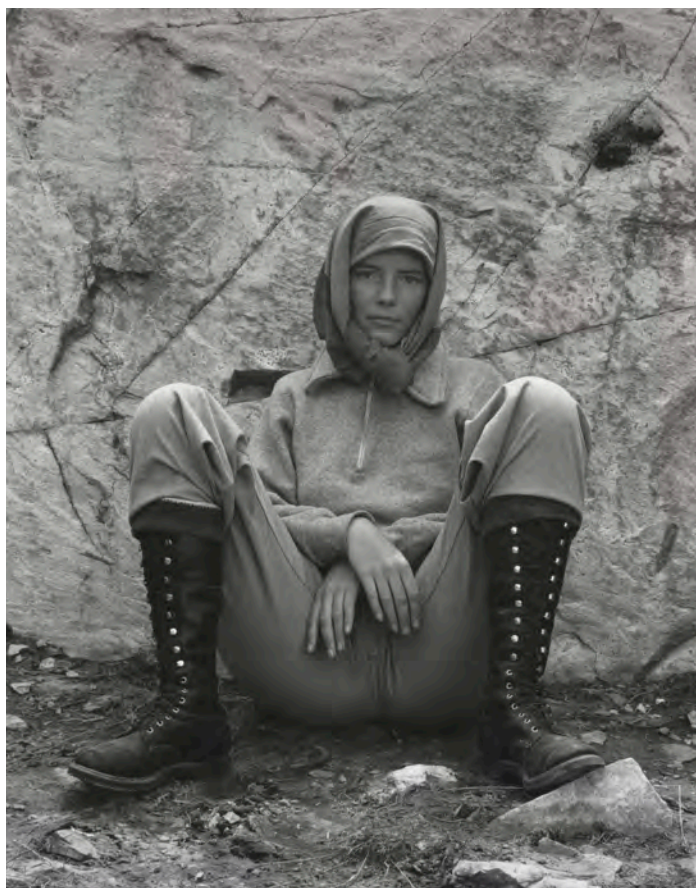
Personal Relationship

LOVER AND FRIEND

Among the twentieth century's most influential art photographers, Edward Weston (1886–1958) is widely respected for his many contributions to the field. Along with Ansel Adams, Weston pioneered a modernist style characterized by the use of a large camera to create sharply focused and richly detailed black-and-white photographs. Weston's dedication to artistic ideals made him a model for generations of photographers.

In July of 1937, Weston and his lover, Charis Wilson (who would later become his second wife), took an extended road trip through California, so that Weston could fulfill his Guggenheim Fellowship proposal to photograph the West. The pair traveled from San Francisco to the Yosemite studio of Ansel Adams, whom Weston had met in 1927.

Adams led a camping trip through the Sierra Nevada high country, during which Weston and Adams—two of the twentieth century's great photographers—created portraits of Wilson, one of the most evocative models in the history of photography. Scholars often characterize this portrait of Charis as the most sexually charged Weston ever made of her. She meets our gaze with tremendous openness, her face relaxed and calm. Her body is equally receptive, hands crossed and hanging between legs bent at the knees. Though she is completely covered against mosquitoes—tall boots meeting pant legs, sweater zipped up to meet a heavy scarf wrapped around her head and neck—her deep intimacy with the photographer allows her to present herself unguarded and figuratively bare.



LOVER

Edward Weston. *Charis, Lake Ediza*, 1937. Gelatin silver print. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona:

Edward Weston Archive 81.275.20. © 1981 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents.



FRIEND

Ansel Adams. *Charis Weston, Minaret Area, Sierra Nevada, California*, 1937. Gelatin silver print.

Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive 84.89.115.

© Trustees of The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

The intensity of Weston's portrait is all the more clear when contrasted with Adams's picture of Charis made the same day. Shot from a low vantage point, Adams looks up at her. Rather than the earthy, solid background upon which she sits in Weston's portrait, Charis is now placed against billowing summer clouds. With her gaze averted, she appears to lean away from the camera, and by extension, the viewer. The photograph is rich with descriptive detail—the sunlight from overhead defines the planes of her face, the surface of her sweater bunched into creases at her bent elbows, and her dark wide-wale corduroy pants. But this superficial information tells us little about her. Adams's picture of Charis describes her appearance, while Weston's portrait reveals her to us.

AN EQUAL AN INTIMATE AN IDOL

THREE VIEWS OF ALFRED STIEGLITZ

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) is a pivotal figure in photographic history and modern art, having played myriad roles as photographer, gallery owner, publisher, organizer, essayist, mentor, and advocate. Stieglitz initially made Pictorialist prints at the end of the nineteenth century and championed photography as an art form, bringing together like-minded practitioners in 1902 in a splinter group called the Photo-Secession. His gallery, Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (later known as 291), first promoted fellow photographers. It became the first place in the United States to exhibit Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and the drawings of Auguste Rodin. Inspired by these European artists, Stieglitz endorsed a modern direction for photography, breaking ties with his Pictorialist roots. In 1929 he opened another gallery, An American Place, where he showed primarily the work of American modernist artists, including his wife, Georgia O’Keeffe, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove. The gallery also exhibited some photography, including the work of Paul Strand and Ansel Adams.

Many photographers made portraits of Stieglitz. The three included in *Face to Face*—Paul Strand, Dorothy Norman, and Ansel Adams—offer dramatically different depictions. Paul Strand (1890–1976) made the earliest of these portraits. Strand was younger than Stieglitz by twenty-six years and met the older man when still new to the medium. Influenced by the European modernist art he saw at 291, Strand began to experiment with photographic abstractions. Stieglitz encouraged him by exhibiting his work at the gallery and featuring it in the last two issues of his journal *Camera Work*. During the 1920s the two men became closer—both socially, as Strand and his wife, Rebecca James, became intimate friends with Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, and professionally, as he assisted Stieglitz with commissions and publications.

AN EQUAL

Paul Strand. *Alfred Stieglitz, Lake George, New York*, ca. 1924.

Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona:

Paul Strand Collection / Purchase, 76.11.24.

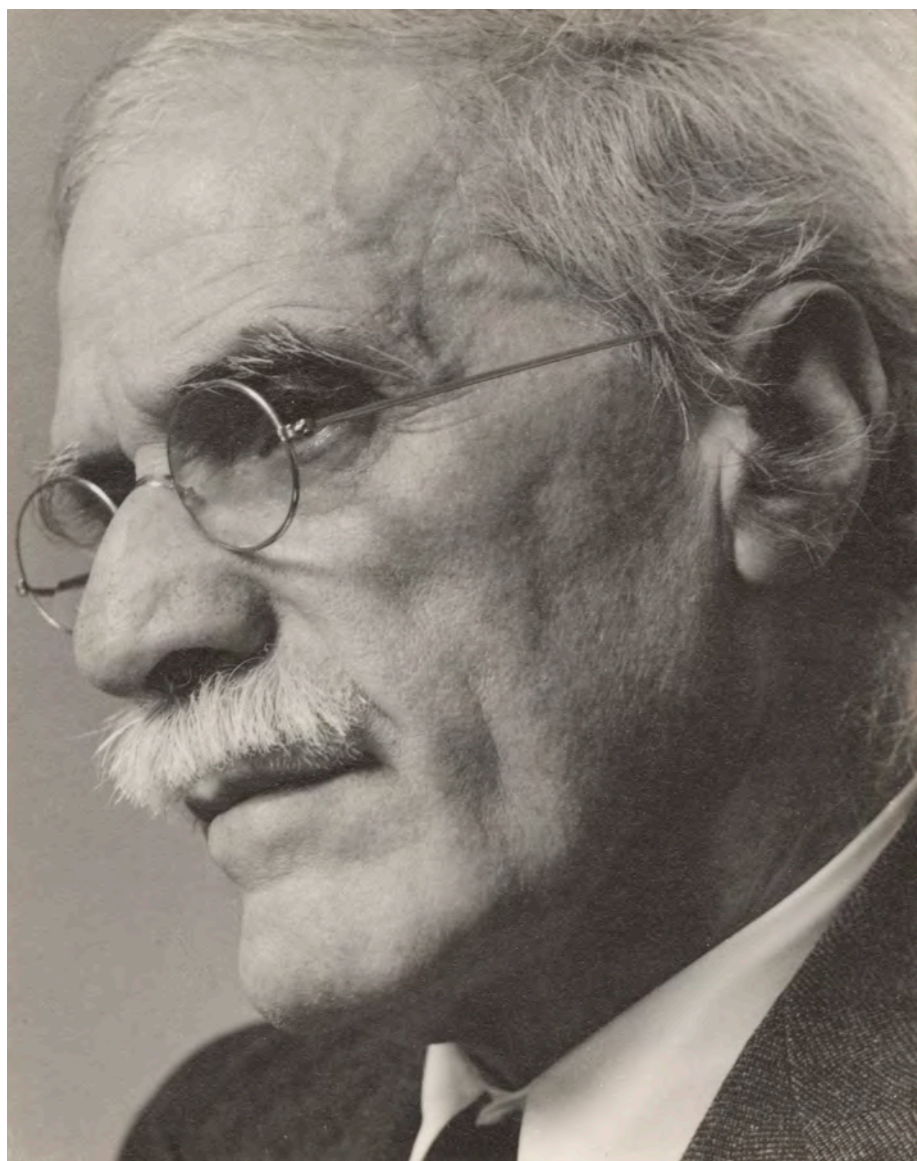
© Aperture Foundation, Inc., Paul Strand Archive.



Strand’s early 1920s portrait of Stieglitz is dominated by dark, rich tones. Stieglitz fills much of the frame and stands close to the camera. One hand grasps a film holder; the other sits upon an angled hip. Though his weight rests against his raised right arm, conveying some degree of relaxation, his pose suggests a secure and powerful man. Stieglitz blocks the space beyond him, creating a visual barrier, and meets our gaze directly. Strand represents Stieglitz as a photographer and as a commanding presence, both physically and in spirit. Although much of the way Strand presents Stieglitz reflects strength, Strand also places his camera directly across from Stieglitz, presenting him to the viewer at eye level, and suggesting a sense of equality. In this portrait, Strand conveys deep respect for his friend and colleague.

AN INTIMATE

Dorothy Norman. *Portrait, Alfred Stieglitz*, 1935. Gelatin silver print.
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Gift of Ansel and
Virginia Adams 76.341.1. © 1998 Center for Creative Photography,
The University of Arizona Foundation.



Dorothy Norman (1905–1977) met Alfred Stieglitz in 1927. She was twenty-two, he was sixty-three. Their friendship quickly evolved into a close and complicated relationship: they were lovers, he was her photographic mentor, and she worked for him, handling operations of An American Place gallery. Over the next two decades, she often photographed him and the gallery, chronicling the man who was at the center of New York's avant-garde art world.

This portrait of Stieglitz reflects their intimacy. We see just his face, quite close up. He has turned away and his face expresses relaxed contemplation. The piercing intensity of Strand's portrait is gone and instead we glimpse a private Stieglitz. The placement of his glasses, however, obscures his eye and prevents us from gaining a meaningful understanding of his expression.

Ansel Adams (1902–1984) met Stieglitz at An American Place in 1933, on a pilgrimage to show his work to the master photographer. Adams found Stieglitz’s commanding presence intense and nerve-racking, but in the end was not disappointed. Stieglitz looked closely at Adams’s photographs, and complimented Adams’s sensitivity. Inspired by the encounter, Adams returned to San Francisco and opened his own (short-lived) photographic gallery, attempting to replicate Stieglitz’s gallery space as hallowed ground for the consideration of photography as art.

Adams’s 1938 portrait of Stieglitz at An American Place reflects his deep appreciation for the man and the place. Adams depicts Stieglitz not as a photographer, but as a gallery owner, ensconced in his office and surrounded by the American modernist paintings that frequently hung there. We learn little about Stieglitz’s physical appearance—it is hard to discern his age, his expression, his attitude, or his health. Instead, Adams emphasized Stieglitz’s role as an art promoter by showing his environment as an extension of him.

AN IDOL

Ansel Adams. *Alfred Stieglitz, An American Place, New York*, 1938. Gelatin silver print.
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive 77.11.11.
© Trustees of The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.



PHOTOGRAPHING FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN

Photographs of American Indians have been a subject of great contention. There is a litany of complaints leveled against the work of early twentieth-century photographer Edward Curtis (1868–1952) in particular: he exploited his Indian subjects; he objectified Indian people; he propagated stereotypes; he commodified Indians, trading on their “exotic” appeal; and he corrupted Indian culture by staging photographs.

Although aspects of these claims may be true, a complicated history lies behind these thousands of photographs. Curtis was trained as a portrait photographer and operated a studio in Seattle, Washington. Late in the nineteenth century, he won accolades for photographs he submitted to various Pictorialist salons, whose juries prized compositions that emulated established painting traditions and prints that looked like etchings or drawings, with soft focus and matte surface.

Curtis’s desire to chronicle American Indians was kindled in 1900 when he observed hundreds of Blackfoot Indians in Montana gathering at the Piegan Reservation for a Sun Dance ceremony, an event he assumed would soon be a thing of the past. Curtis subscribed to the dominant belief that as Indians were forcibly assimilated into white culture, their “primitive” beliefs and practices would vanish in the face of civilization. This ideology was rooted in an idea of Manifest Destiny—that Anglos were destined to inherit the North American wilderness, justifying the genocide of the indigenous inhabitants.

Curtis saw the recording of North America’s Indians as a personal quest, and began a project that would last more than twenty years, destroy his marriage, render him bankrupt, and result in a massive ethnographic work, *The North American Indian*. The publication, begun in 1907 and completed in 1930, compiled Curtis’s photographs and field research into a series of twenty volumes, describing the practices and customs of each native tribe north of the Mexican border and west of the Mississippi River. Each book was complemented by a folio of about 35 additional images.

Over the decades Curtis spent on the project his appreciation for the complexity of the many native peoples he studied grew deeper. One example, *The Potter* (1906), from *The North American Indian*, demonstrates the difficulty in characterizing his work and intent. This photograph reflects the Pictorialist soft-focus style typical of his early Indian pictures. The shallow depth of field directs our attention to the Hopi woman’s hands at work, the pots in front of her, and the stone upon which she prepares paint. The woman’s downturned face, outside the field of focus, is bowed in concentration and shielded by her dark hair. The background detail is completely lost, creating a shadowy backdrop. Curtis has created a painterly, beautiful image, bathed in an ethereal wash of light.

A critical review of the print might accuse Curtis of presenting his Hopi subject as a type rather than as an individual person, for we see little of her unique appearance and the title simply calls her “The Potter.” That she does not meet the viewer’s gaze allows multiple interpretive possibilities. Is she subjected indefinitely to our voyeurism through the power of the camera’s recording lens? Or did Curtis protect her privacy by showing her with



WITHOUT

Edward S. Curtis. *The Potter*, 1906. Photogravure.
Center for Creative Photography, University of
Arizona: Gift of John A. Rollwagen 83.5.17.

WITHIN

downcast eyes? The caption that accompanies this image reads, "Every visitor at East Mesa knows Nampeyo, the potter of Hano, whose creations excel those of any rival. Strangers wander into her house, welcome though unbidden, but Nampeyo only works and smiles. In the plate her paint-stone occupies the central foreground." Here he provides the subject's identity, and though he praises her, his exaggerated and romantic tone could be read as condescending.

Curtis's photographs have attracted much derision in recent decades, perhaps in part because the prints had been separated from their original context, creating misunderstandings about the photographer's intent. In the end, this wealth of historical, visual, and textual information does not result in a clear way to read the picture. Instead it speaks of the great complexity embedded in a work tied, as it is, to deeply sensitive cultural concerns.

During Curtis's era, the Hopi people were not making photographs of themselves. Looking at more contemporary works, however, it is possible to move out of Curtis's social environment and into one where a young Hopi woman is photographed by a Hopi artist. Victor Masayesva, Jr. made *Butterfly Dancer* in 1982, when his father hosted a Butterfly Dance in honor of his sons' safe return from their service in the Vietnam War. In many ways it appears as the opposite of Curtis's picture; in this richly descriptive and sharply focused image the young woman meets our gaze, calmly, serenely. Though she may be about to dance, for the moment she responds only to being photographed. Her face dusted with cornmeal, she is festooned with bracelets, necklaces, and earrings.

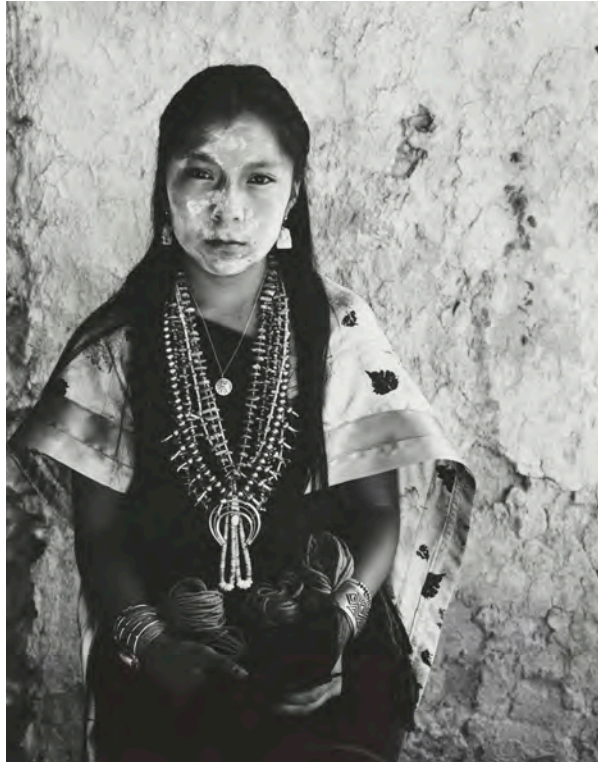
When Masayesva published this image as part of his 2006 book *Husk of Time*, he chose this photograph as the first to appear. He wrote eloquently about the portrait, weaving together the meaning of the Butterfly Dance, his experience of making this specific picture, and his understanding of photography's power in picturing Indians. "Up to the time [my father sponsored the Butterfly Dance] I had vowed never to be a portraitist in the manner of Edward Curtis and the many more recent photographers for tourist magazines that featured Indians posing in native costumes. Those images represented the epitome of stereotyping to me, and I would have no part of it."

He describes the process of making the picture with his four-by-five inch camera, composing it under a dark cloth, seeing the image upside-down on the ground glass. His excitement about the negative prompted him to develop and print the image immediately. Seeing the portrait appear, the photographer had an epiphany about Indians' passion for being photographed in their native clothing. "The stereotyping is in the eyes of the working ethnographer, while the Indian imagines himself, dressed in his costume, far beyond the moment...[in] a future where he or she is alive on his or her own terms." For Masayesva, the power lies not with the photographer, but with the subject. As he sees it, the camera does not dominate or impose, but empowers subjects, allowing them to project themselves beyond the making of the picture into our present.

Victor Masayesva, Jr. *Butterfly Dancer*, 1982. Gelatin silver print.

Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Purchase 91.8.1.

© Victor Masayesva, Jr. 1982.



Rebecca Senf, PhD

Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography

LECTURES

Alternate Views

October 28, 7 p.m.

Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography Rebecca Senf, PhD introduces *Face to Face*, discussing several key images in relation to their close variants, alternate croppings, or related printings, pulled from the Center for Creative Photography's archive.

What Was I Thinking?

December 2, 7 p.m.

Nick Kelsh, author of the popular "how to" series on creating successful family photographs, shares the life lessons he has learned from four decades of photography. He looks at the inspirations behind some of his most noted photos, which walk the fine line between humor and poignancy.

Sponsored by In Focus.

More information at <http://howtophotographyourbaby.com>

PHXARTKIDS DAY

A Portrait Is Worth 1,000 Words

September 26, noon–3 p.m.

Participatory art experiences designed for children ages 5–12 and their adult companions. PhxArtKids programming is generously supported by Thunderbirds Charities. Admission from noon to 3 p.m. is free for families of up to four children and two adults.



UNDER 21

Shutter Release

October 14, 6:30 p.m.

From webcams to cell phones to sleek digital cameras, photography is a part of our daily lives now more than ever. After visiting *Face to Face*, try out some techniques that turn snapshots into photographic portraits. Programs for the "over 12, under 21" set.

FILM

Karsh: The Searching Eye

October 25, 1 p.m.

Yousuf Karsh photographed the twentieth century's most esteemed political and cultural leaders, artists, actors, religious figures, and scientists—Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, Muhammad Ali, Indira Gandhi, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, and many more. This 1985 documentary reveals the glamour in his life and the modesty he maintained while being privy to many famous lives. Karsh himself is storyteller and guide as we view hundreds of his celebrated photographs. He is also seen at work, including a memorable session with the often-irascible Leonard Bernstein.

Presented by No Festival Required; sponsored by Shawna Leach and Reid Butler. Runtime: 80 minutes.



Michael Disfarmer. Untitled, ca. 1940. Gelatin silver print.
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona:
Gift of Dr. Mark Reichman 2007.38.20.

WORKSHOPS

En Plein Air

Thursday, September 17, October 1, 15, 22 and
November 12, 1 p.m.

In this five-part workshop, consider the history and merits of creating art inside versus outside the studio. *En plein air* (French, “in the open air”) art-making was revolutionary in the late 1800s when the Impressionists ventured out of their studios into nature to capture the effects of sunlight and different times of the day. With this concept in mind, explore the Museum’s collection, visit three special exhibitions, and capture effective images in a variety of locales.

Cost: \$65 for Museum Members, \$80 for non-members. This program is for adults aged 50+. For more information or to enroll, call ASU’s Lifelong Learning program at (602) 543-6440 or visit <http://lifelonglearning.asu.edu>.

The Art of People Photography

Option 1: October 14, 6–8 p.m. (Museum) &
October 18, 1–5 p.m. (Desert Botanical Garden)

Option 2: November 18, 6–8 p.m. (Museum) &
November 21, 1–5 p.m. (Desert Botanical Garden)

Instructor: Scott Salnas

For this two-part workshop, visit the work of master photographers at the Museum with Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography Rebecca Senf, PhD. Then, put the principles to practice at Desert Botanical Garden. Learn how to take better pictures of people in various settings, basic posing skills, use of available light and fill flash, and how to choose the appropriate camera features. Students should have a good understanding of their digital cameras and be able to navigate its menu and buttons. DSLRs or advanced point-and-shoot cameras are recommended.

Cost: \$70 Members, \$85 non-members. To register, call (480) 481-8146.

All programs included with Museum general admission unless otherwise noted.

Always free for Museum Members.

For information on these programs, please visit phxart.org.

A LANDMARK PHOTOGRAPHY PARTNERSHIP

In 2006, Phoenix Art Museum and the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona in Tucson inaugurated a highly innovative and unprecedented collaboration to bring the finest in photography to Phoenix Art Museum visitors. It established a vibrant new photography exhibition program at the Museum, while bringing the Center's world-renowned collections to new and larger audiences.

The Center for Creative Photography is one of the world's largest repositories of materials chronicling photography. Founded in 1975, it now houses 3.8 million archival items and 80,000 fine prints by photographers including Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Frederick Sommer, W. Eugene Smith, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, and Garry Winogrand.

One of the nation's leading art museums, Phoenix Art Museum presents international exhibitions of the world's greatest art and features a collection that spans the centuries and the globe—American, Asian, contemporary, European, Latin American, and Western American art, and fashion design. Not to be missed are the Thorne Miniature Rooms, the interactive family gallery PhxArtKids, great shopping and dining, and a variety of public events.

Now, through the combined efforts of these two organizations, Phoenix Art Museum visitors will experience unparalleled excellence in the field of photography in the Museum's Doris and John Norton Gallery for the Center for Creative Photography.

Phoenix Art Museum
1625 North Central Avenue
(North Central Avenue and McDowell Road)
Phoenix, AZ 85004-1685
602-257-1222
www.phxart.org

Center for Creative Photography
University of Arizona
1030 North Olive Road
P.O. Box 210103
Tucson, AZ 85721-0103
520-621-7968
www.creativephotography.org

Phoenix Art Museum

CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

COVER Diane Arbus. *Identical Twins, Cathleen (L.) and Colleen, Members of a Twin Club in New Jersey*, 1967. Gelatin silver print. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Purchase 76.2003.

Produced with support from In Focus.