

## Robert Adams: The Place We Live A Retrospective Selection of Photographs



*Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1969.*  
Impresión de gelatina de plata  
14,3 x 15,1 cm  
Yale University Art Gallery, adquirida gracias a las donaciones de Sandra B. Lane, Trellis Fund y Janet and Simeon Braguin

<b>DATES:</b>	15 January – 20 May 2013
<b>PLACE:</b>	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid) Sabatini Building, 3rd floor
<b>ORGANIZED BY:</b>	Yale University Art Gallery in collaboration with Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
<b>CURATED BY:</b>	Joshua Chuang and Jock Reynolds
<b>COORDINATED BY:</b>	Rafael García
<b>ITINERARY:</b>	Josef Albers Museum Quadrat, Bottrop, Germany (June 23 – September 29, 2013) Jeu de Paume, Paris (February 10 – May 18, 2014) Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (June 6 – August 24, 2014)

*Are there affirmable days or places in our deteriorating world? Are there scenes in life, right now, for which we might conceivably be thankful? Is there a basis for joy or serenity, even if felt only occasionally? Are there grounds now and then for an unironic smile?*

R. Adams

For more than four decades Robert Adams (born 1937) has photographed the changing landscape of the American West. His pictures are distinguished not only by their economy and lucidity, but also by their mixture of grief and hope. On the one hand, they record an impoverishing loss of space and silence, and the inhumanity of what has been built. On the other hand, they celebrate the startling eloquence of trees, evidence of caring, and the redemptive power that sunlight has, even as it falls across suburbs.

*Robert Adams: The Place We Live* traces the photographer's evolving pursuit of beauty and balance amidst mankind's increasingly tragic relationship with the natural world. In their portrayal of subjects both ordinary and grand, Adams's austere black-and-white pictures resist simplification, rendering with delicate precision the complexities and contradictions of contemporary American life.

### **Exhibition Overview**

Surveying each of the photographer's major projects—most of which were originally conceived and seen as books—the exhibition begins with Adams's early explorations of rural space, buildings, and monuments (*The Plains; Late Hispanic Settlement; Ludlow*) in Colorado, the state where he lived and worked from 1962 to 1997. A visit to his wife's native Sweden in 1968 spurred Adams to recognize the significance of the insidious new urban and suburban developments being built along the Colorado Front Range. In his photographs of expanding commercial and residential structures set against a stark and glorious landscape, sunlight acts as a powerful, disinfecting force. *Eden* (1968), the first body of work to record this, was soon followed by *The New West* (1968-71) and *What We Bought* (1973-74)—two series that brought Adams's work to wide acclaim.

“To discover a tension so exact that it is peace,” Adams’s objective as an artist, is felt throughout his body of work, whether it be his views of suburbs after dusk (*Summer Nights*); grand landscapes marked by human intervention (*From the Missouri West*); people going about their daily lives in the shadow of a nuclear processing plant (*Our Parents, Our Children*); or a once-verdant paradise choked with smog (*Los Angeles Spring*). Also represented is a more lyric approach to the landscape, seen in his photographs of cottonwood trees and unheralded places in Colorado (*The Pawnee National Grassland; Along Some Rivers*), as well as in much of his later work in Oregon and Washington State (*The Pacific; Pine Valley; Alder Leaves; Sea Stories, This Day*). The deforestation of the Pacific Northwest, however, stirred Adams to embark on the epic series *Turning Back* (1999-2003), an undisguised protest unique in his life’s work.

Taken as a whole, the exhibition elucidates the photographer’s civic goals: to consider the privilege of the place we were given and the obligations of citizenship—not only in the western United States but also, by extension, in the wider world.

### **Biography**

Widely regarded as one of the most significant and influential chroniclers of the American West, Robert Adams was born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1937 and moved with his family to Denver, Colorado, at the age of 15. He earned a ph.d. from the University of Southern California and, intent on pursuing a career as a writer and academic, returned to Colorado in 1962 as an assistant professor of English at Colorado College. Disturbed by the rapid transformation of the Colorado Springs and Denver areas—the latter of which Jack Kerouac had likened to “the Promised Land” less than a decade earlier—Adams began photographing a cherished landscape newly replete with tract homes, highways, strip malls, and gas stations. “The pictures record what we purchased, what we paid and what we could not buy,” Adams wrote. “They document a separation from ourselves, and in turn from the natural world that we professed to love.” Books such as *Perfect Times, Perfect Places; Listening to the River*, and *Pine Valley* demonstrate that Adams has also been devoted to recording the glory that remains in the West. Additionally, he has written insightful and eloquent essays on the practice and goals of art, which have been collected in the volumes

*Beauty in Photography* (1981) and *Why People Photograph* (1994). Since 1997 he has lived in Oregon, the landscape of which has been the subject of his last 20 years of work.

Adams's relationship with the Yale University Art Gallery began in 2000 when the series of photographs *What We Bought: The New World* was acquired and exhibited in its entirety at the Gallery in 2002. Two years later the Gallery reached an agreement with Adams to archive a master set of his photographs, commencing a collaborative effort to catalogue his work and organize this retrospective. In 2009 the Gallery worked with Adams to revise and reissue three of his classic books—*denver*, *What We Bought*, and *Summer Nights, Walking*. And in the past year, the Gallery has issued three new books of Adams's recent photographs—*Sea Stories*, *This Day*, and *Skogen*.

Adams's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Denver Art Museum; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, as well as a major midcareer retrospective organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. Among the artist's many awards are two Guggenheim Fellowships (1973 and 1980), two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1973 and 1978), a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (1994), the Spectrum International Prize for Photography (1995), the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2006), and the Hasselblad Award (2009).

**For further information:**

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