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**SFMOMA PRESENTS  
ROBERT ADAMS: TURNING BACK,  
A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL OF RE-EXPLORATION**

From September 29, 2005, through January 3, 2006, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Robert Adams: Turning Back, A Photographic Journal of Re-exploration*. Inspired by the bicentennial celebration of the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804–06), American photographer Robert Adams's most recent project offers a new and unsparing look at the territory the explorers opened for development. His pictures are also a clear-eyed meditation on hope.

"I started photographing where Lewis and Clark reached their goal, the Pacific, and then headed inland," Adams says. "My conviction was that the real frontier was and still is to the east, where we have to discover how to live in harmony."

Adams continues, "Because two hundred years ago the Northwest supported one of the world's great rain forests, I decided to focus on the condition of the region's trees as a way to look at the condition of the larger geography.

What I found as I entered representative samples of the Pacific Coast Range was a ruin. It had been ransacked. Where the great trees of the ancient forest had stood there were now vast landscapes of stumps. The indiscriminate violence suggested scenes from a war. What peace I found was at the edge of the high desert, where there were only a few trees but they were loved. I tried as best I could to express my gratitude for those trees."

Born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1937, Adams moved with his family to Madison, Wisconsin, and, at age fifteen, to Denver, Colorado; he has lived in the western United States ever since. He earned a PhD from the University of Southern California and returned to Colorado in 1962 as an assistant professor of English at Colorado College, with plans to pursue an academic career. Dismayed by the sudden transformation of the landscape in the Denver area, Adams began making photographs depicting the banal tract housing and strip malls of suburbia that had replaced the natural environment, described by Jack Kerouac less than a decade earlier as "like the Promised Land." Within a few years, Adams wrote, "the area's ruin would be a testament to a bargain we had tried to strike. The pictures record what we



Robert Adams, *Sitka Spruce, Cape Blanco State Park, Curry County, Oregon*, from the series *Turning Back*, 1999-2003; Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York; © Robert Adams

*more*

purchased, what we paid, and what we could not buy. They document a separation from ourselves and, in turn, from the natural world that we professed to love.”

Today Adams lives with his wife, Kerstin, in Astoria, Oregon, at the western end of Lewis and Clark’s route.

Adams’s work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and his pictures are in the permanent collections of leading museums throughout the world. His work was first shown in 1971 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and has been a major component of such groundbreaking exhibitions as 1975’s *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* at the International Museum of Photography in Rochester, New York, which defined a movement pioneered by Adams, and *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, organized by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art in 1978. A traveling retrospective of his work, *To Make It Home: Photographs of the American West 1965-1986*, was organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989, and the Tate Modern in London devoted an entire room to his photographs in *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth-Century Photograph*, a major survey that opened in 2003. Adams also has published numerous photographic books about the West, including *The New West* (1974), *What We Bought* (1995), and *California* (2000).

Organized by Sandra S. Phillips, SFMOMA’s senior curator of photography, *Robert Adams: Turning Back* features 164 black-and-white gelatin silver prints. “We are delighted to host this very important show of recent works by one of photography’s great living masters,” says Phillips. “This is, in my view, some of the very best contemporary art being made in this country.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 234-page catalogue, copublished by Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Titled *Turning Back*, the book features 164 tritone images that reveal environmental degradation but leave viewers with unmistakable notes of celebration and hope.

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**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year’s Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas.  
Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

**Admission prices:** Adults \$12.50; seniors and students \$7.50. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, not-for-profit institution supported by its members; individual contributors; corporate and foundation support; foreign, federal, state, and city government grants; and admission revenues. Annual programming is sustained through the generosity of Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Koret Foundation. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic. Reduced admission for seniors is sponsored by SBC.

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