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SFMOMA PRESENTS
Imposing Order: Contemporary Photography and the Archive

From September 2, 2006, through January 2, 2007, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Imposing Order: Contemporary Photography and the Archive*.

Since photography's invention, the medium's unique capacity to produce an exact and unmediated visual record has made it an extraordinarily useful tool for cataloguing objects. Museums, archives, and many other institutions have long relied on photography to record information that defies other forms of description. Primarily culled from SFMOMA's collection, *Imposing Order: Contemporary Photography and the Archive* will feature approximately 40 works by 20 different artists who share an interest in the way art, objects, and people are displayed, stored, preserved, and classified.

A number of the artists in the show, such as Candida Höfer, Louise Lawler, Thomas Struth, and Hiroshi Sugimoto, are specifically interested in the art-viewing experience. Photographing inside museums and galleries, they reveal the way context affects art and artifacts and confers objects with value and authenticity. In his extensive series *Dioramas*, for example, Sugimoto photographs natural history museum displays of prehistoric mammals in simulated native landscapes. By excluding all indications of their museum context, such as labels and glass casings, he invites viewers to perceive the dioramas as eerie but realistic glimpses into the past. As the artificiality of the mounted animals and painted backdrops becomes apparent, so does the transformation of historical reconstruction into fact.

At the core of the exhibition are pieces that examine the behind-the-scenes practices of museums and archives. These photographs are thematically united around the related ideas of counting, collecting, and cataloguing; they chronicle the elaborate and obsessive treatment art and artifacts often receive at the hands of museum professionals and historians.

For her 1998 series *Found*, Bay Area artist Nigel Poor set herself the year-long task of taking a walk every day and gathering one discarded object on each outing. She photographed each item against a black backdrop, then made exquisite black-and-white prints. By collecting and rendering precious what is, in essence, trash, Poor unexpectedly



Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Gemsbok*, 1982; Collection SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase; © Hiroshi Sugimoto

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applies activities associated with art preservation to things that have no inherent value. This gesture boldly reclassifies trash as treasure and speaks to the subjective nature of value.

Richard Misrach's series *Pictures of Paintings* considers the role photography plays in museums and academia. In his large-scale photograph *Phoenix, Arizona*, (1993), Misrach printed three details of a painting in the collection of the Phoenix Art Museum in a manner that highlights the way photo reproductions are used to catalogue and disseminate art.

The last section of the exhibition reaches beyond museological systems to look at photography's role in other institutional archives. For example, Deborah Luster's portraits of inmates in the Louisiana prison system consider the way people are catalogued when they become incarcerated. Richard Barnes also examines photography's relationship to criminology in his diptych *Unabomber Cabin*. Barnes pairs a photograph of the empty site in Montana where convicted terrorist Theodore Kaczynski lived in virtual isolation with a picture of Kaczynski's rudimentary cabin erected inside a crime laboratory warehouse. By contrasting the displaced cabin with its original setting, Barnes references photography's evidentiary value while underscoring the decontextualizing effect archives have on objects.

Organized by Erin Garcia and Terri Whitlock, curatorial associates in the photography department at SFMOMA, the exhibition affords the Museum the opportunity to present its photography collection thematically and to consider common threads among several of its recent acquisitions. According to their curatorial statement, "Many contemporary photographers have looked to museums and archives as appropriate sites to investigate photography's role as a tool for collecting data. This seems particularly relevant today as digital technologies provoke us to reconsider the nature of photography as well as our relationship to information in general."

Since its founding in 1935, SFMOMA has resolved to build a photography collection of international stature, and it is has the distinction of being one of the first American museums to recognize photography as a legitimate art form. With the advice and support of renowned Bay Area photographer Ansel Adams and a host of local practitioners and patrons, the Museum strengthened its commitment to the medium steadily over the decades, gaining momentum with the appointment of the first dedicated curator of photography in 1958 and the establishment of a distinct Department of Photography in 1980. Since then, SFMOMA's collection has grown to include nearly 14,000 photographs spanning the entire history of the medium, from its invention in the mid-19th century to the present day.

SFMOMA will present an educational symposium on September 21, 2006, in conjunction with the exhibition. Additional information is available on the Museum's Web site at www.sfmoma.org.

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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. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

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 \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 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 or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, nonprofit institution supported by its members, individual contributors, corporations, foundations, and government agencies. Major annual support is provided by the Koret Foundation Funds and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. 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.

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