



# DEPTH OF FIELD

Selections from the Bill Rhoades Collection of Northwest Photography



MARY RANDLETT, *Mountain  
Fragment: Mount. Baker*, 1996,  
gelatin silver print, 8.75 x  
13.25 inches, Bill Rhoades  
promised gift

On the cover:

TERRY TOEDTEMEIER, *Lost Boy  
Cave*, 2000, gelatin silver  
print, 16 x 20 inches,  
Hallie Ford Museum of Art,  
Willamette University, The Bill  
Rhoades Collection, a gift in  
memory of Murna and Vay  
Rhoades, 2010.008.032



# DEPTH OF FIELD

Selections from the Bill Rhoades Collection of Northwest Photography

## ROGER HULL

In the spring of 1998, Bill Rhoades sent a one-page letter, five paragraphs long, to Oregon colleges and universities, with a startling proposal: “I am writing to you in hopes of locating a school that would like to receive fine art donations. My objective is to promote art made in Oregon from 1930 to the present.”

The letter fell on fertile ground at Willamette University, where plans were underway for the opening of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art in October 1998. An emphasis of the new museum would be Pacific Northwest art, and Bill’s proposal to launch his donations with a work each by Louis Bunce, Jack McLarty, and John Stahl—major figures in Oregon modern art—fit perfectly with our collection-building goals. Works to follow, Bill suggested, would be by the likes of Mike Russo, Sally Haley, Manuel Izquierdo, George Johanson, Charles Heaney, Andrew Vincent, and others—all noted figures in the pantheon of Oregon art.

Of course, we responded to Bill’s letter with enthusiasm, and as it turned out, with our museum coming online, we were the regional institution that could best accommodate a growing art collection. The Bill Rhoades Collection at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University thus was inaugurated, and today it comprises more than 800 objects including paintings, prints, sculptures, Native American basketry—and photographs.

In recent years, in fact, photography has been the focus of Bill’s collecting for the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, this being a practical step (storage space is at a premium) and a matter of passion: Bill, himself a photographer, realizes that Pacific Northwest fine art photography is under-represented in regional collections. The exhibition *Depth of Field: Photographs from the Bill Rhoades Collection*

presents a curated sampling of the photographic riches that he has assembled for Willamette in the past few years.

Bill Rhoades was hooked on photography while still in high school and, thanks to his mother’s employment at the Meier & Frank department store in Portland, he was able to buy a Nikon camera at discount, though even at \$400.00 it was an extravagant purchase for a recent high school graduate. Bill, an avid outdoors man, admired and emulated the work of Ray Atkeson but also studied the *Time-Life* books on photography.



Bill Rhoades, *Self Portrait on the Deschutes River near Mecca, Oregon, 2017*



MINOR WHITE, *Front Street, Portland, Oregon*, 1938–1939, printed later, gelatin silver print from Oregon Historical Society negative, 10.5 x 13.5 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2006.035.007



DOROTHEA LANGE, *One of Chris Adolph's Younger Children*, 1939, printed later, gelatin silver print from Library of Congress negative, 10.5 x 13.5 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2018.008.013

In these, he learned of the work of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and other pioneers of photography as a fine art. It was the work of such individuals that introduced Bill to the realm of fine art in general: fine photography lured him toward an appreciation of innovative creativity in other media, and his collection at Willamette reflects the arc of his aesthetic interests.

Bill Rhoades builds his collection in a collaborative engagement with the artists. He is not a wealthy man and does not often collect in the usual manner of outright purchases. He acquires works through trade and the understanding that art will be placed permanently in a museum or university collection. His *modus operandi* is as follows:

Out of the blue, he will write to an artist—just as he wrote to Willamette University in 1998—with a straightforward proposal. Would you, dear artist, be interested in trading a work of art for something you would like to have in exchange? A Navajo rug? An Oriental rug? It was in a conversation with the sculptor Manuel Izquierdo that Bill learned that some artists like to trade: they are used to trading artworks with other artists, so why not tempt them in a trade for something else? Manuel said Bill could cite him as a reference in his letters of inquiry.

He sent his first letter to the painter Lucinda Parker, a friend of Manuel's, and she took on Bill's offer to trade a painting for a Navajo rug. The painting, *Cantabile* (1991), is now in the Rhoades Collection at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. Bill figures that he has contacted some 300 artists, about half of whom have responded favorably to his proposal (some aren't interested, some don't respond at all). He combs secondhand stores and antique shops for tradeable items; the most popular are Native American and Oriental rugs. But one artist asked for a stuffed antelope head, another for an Old Town canoe. Bill had the antelope head on hand, and located the canoe the same day it was requested.



ARNOLD RUSTIN, *Untitled (Stairs)*, 1986, gelatin silver print, 14 x 10.5 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2018.008.019

AL MONNER, *Manuel Izquierdo in His Studio*, 1967, gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2010.008.020



Bill Rhoades takes pride in his unorthodox methods. "I wanted to prove that you can build a serious collection without a fortune. I decided early on for a collecting model different from elite wealthy collectors. So I had to be an opportunist."<sup>1</sup>

He traces his photo collecting to his association with the legendary Washington State photographer Mary Randlett, known for her landscape photography and portraits of Washington and Oregon artists. Obtaining Randlett's address from his artist friend George Johanson, Bill wrote to her in about 2003, telling of his interest in photography, especially Northwest photography, and thus began an ongoing correspondence with the gregarious Randlett, a large selection of whose works has entered Bill's collection.

The photography in the Rhoades collection is wide-ranging yet much of it relates to several chapters in the history of Northwest photography: New Deal photographs from the 1930s, the Advanced Interim Workshop first led by Minor White during the Oregon Centennial in 1959, Portland's Blue Sky Gallery, established in 1975, and the Portland Photographic Workshop, established in 1982.

New Deal photography in Oregon is most famously associated with Minor White and his images of the cast-iron facades that once lined Front Street in Portland and his studies of the city's architectural infrastructure. Photographers who worked for the Farm Security Administration in Oregon included Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, and Arthur Rothstein. Prints of work by all these photographers are in the Rhoades collection.

White's presence and impact in Oregon continued when Arnold Rustin and other Portland photographers invited him to lead the so-called Advanced Interim Workshop in Portland during Oregon's centennial year of 1959. White led the Workshop for several years, after which others assumed leadership in a group that came to include Max Allara, Priscilla Carrasco, Marian Kolisch, Stu Levy, Al Monner, Don Normark (of Seattle but with Portland connections), and numerous others. The Interim Workshop linked





STU LEVY, *Bridal Veil Creek*, 1985, gelatin silver print, 10.5 x 13.75 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2015.051.017



CRAIG HICKMAN, *Man Jumping and PSU Homecoming Court*, 1967, printed 2017, archival pigment print, 11 x 16 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2017.026.025

Portland photographers with the world of California photography and helped establish a West Coast spirit if not a unified aesthetic that invigorated photographic art in the Pacific Northwest.

Stu Levy, a member of the Interim Workshop who also served as Ansel Adams's workshop assistant in California, and his friend Stewart Harvey were driving back from California "with all this enthusiasm, and we said, we have to keep this energy going. So we started the Portland Photographic Workshop, in 1982, doing workshops on the Oregon Coast. Our goal was to bring awareness to the photo-art community of ways to improve the craft and artistic aspects."<sup>2</sup> In addition to Levy and Harvey, the group came to include Dianne Kornberg, Jim Lommasson, and others.

Meanwhile, the Blue Sky Gallery, founded with alacrity by Robert Di Franco, Craig Hickman, Ann Hughes, Christopher Rauschenberg, and Terry Toedtmeier in 1975, from the beginning had gallery spaces that preceded its spacious present-day quarters on Northwest Eighth Avenue in downtown Portland. Some of us still have its early membership souvenirs, including the yellow plastic funnel that served as the "Official 1982 Blue Sky Gallery Membership Card."

For those of us newly arrived in Oregon in the early 1970s, the Blue Sky Gallery represented the cutting edge of vigorous new photography that intrigued with its combination of local/regional subject matter and aesthetic sophistication.

The Workshops, one established in 1959, the other in 1982, plus Blue Sky, together with unaffiliated photographers such as Cherie Hiser, Robert Miller, Gerald Robinson, and Michael Kenna, provide the foundation of the advanced photography movement in Oregon. The Bill Rhoades collection includes the work of many of the foundational figures from these several groups and movements, providing a significant body of work that helps anchor the tradition in a carefully assembled, museum-housed collection.



CHRISTOPHER RAUSCHENBERG, *St. Cloud*, 1998, silver gelatin print, 6 x 9 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2006.045.016



CHERIE HISER, *Self Portrait with Sandy*, 1974, gelatin silver print, 6.25 x 10 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades, 2014.013.012

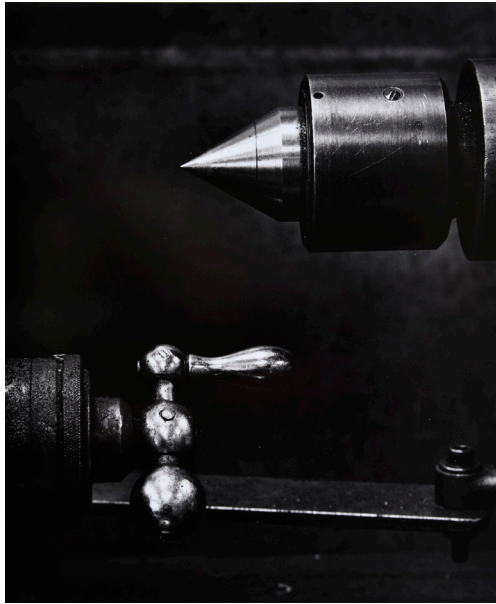
As this exhibition reflects, the various streams of advanced Oregon photography provide a rich diversity of imagery; at the same time, there is a coherence to all this work that results from an embrace of the basic assumptions of modern photography: directness of encounter with figure or form, compositional inventiveness yet clarity, clean technical processing, admiration of person and place. It is Bill Rhoades's gift that a group of works exists in one location so that this variety yet coherence can be recognized and appreciated, providing the foundation for the future of creative regional photography. (In a related project to preserve and promote regional photographic history, Bill helped establish the Pacific Northwest Photographers Archive at the University of Washington.)

Bill Rhoades's art-collecting project, including his acquisition of photographs, is a matter of personal significance: his collections honor the memory of his parents, and each object in his Hallie Ford Museum of Art collection carries the courtesy line "In memory of Murna and Vay Rhoades." Of his parents, Bill states: "they probably did not know a lot about fine art, but they were the world's foremost authorities on generosity." This quality is carried forward by their son, a donor of generosity unrivaled.

Roger Hull is a Professor of Art History emeritus at Willamette University.

#### Notes

1. Bill Rhoades, Zoom conversation with the author, August 17, 2021.
2. Claire Sykes with Stu Levy (interview). "Mental Landscape: A Conversation with Stu Levy;" *PFMagazine.com/Photographer's Forum/Fall 2013*, p. 28.



ROBERT MILLER, *Machine Parts*, 1988, archival gelatin silver print, 19 x 15 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, donated by Robert Miller and Bill Rhoades, 2017.012.031



MICHAEL KENNA, *Last Pier Posts, Pacific Beach, Washington, USA*, 2013 (printed 2018), gelatin silver print, 7.75 x 7.75 inches, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, The Bill Rhoades Collection, donated by Michael Kenna and Bill Rhoades, 2021.023.001

**Depth of Field: Selections from the Bill Rhoades Collection of Northwest Photography** was organized by the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Financial support for the exhibition and brochure has been provided in part by funds from the HFMA Exhibition Fund, and by general operating support grants from the City of Salem's Transient Occupancy Tax funds and the Oregon Arts Commission.



Hallie Ford Museum of Art  
Willamette University  
Street address: 700 State Street  
Mailing address: 900 State Street  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-370-6855  
[www.willamette.edu/arts/hfma](http://www.willamette.edu/arts/hfma)

Copyright©2022 by the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University

All rights reserved

Designed by Phil Kovacevich  
Editorial review by Sigrid Asmus  
Photography by Dale Peterson  
Printed by the Lynx Group LLC