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Denver Art Museum to Present *Modern Women/Modern Vision: Works from the Bank of America Collection* Exhibition of Photography in Spring 2022

Collection Features Works by the 20th Century's Most Celebrated Women Photographers

DENVER — Oct. 5, 2021—The Denver Art Museum (DAM) today announced *Modern Women/Modern Vision: Works from the Bank of America Collection*, an exhibition featuring more than 100 images by women artists, will be part of spring 2022 programming. The traveling exhibition, which has been loaned through the Bank of America Collection Art in our Communities® program, will be on view in the Hamilton Building's Anschutz Gallery May 1, 2022, through Aug. 28, 2022. The show celebrates the bold and dynamic contributions of women to the development and evolution of photography in the 20th century.

"The museum is delighted to present this outstanding collection of some of the 20th century's foremost photographers, including works by Berenice Abbott, Diane Arbus, Eva Besnyö, Imogen Cunningham and Barbara Morgan," said Christoph Heinrich, the Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the Denver Art Museum.

"Women embraced the medium early on, in part because photography had fewer barriers for female participation, compared with more traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture. We're delighted to share these images which, through their creative processes, reflect Modernist principles and tell stories of social, political and economic change."



"We believe that the arts matter as both a cultural and economic driver to our local community, with institutions like the Denver Art Museum performing a critical role in enriching and educating our society," said Raju Patel, President, Bank of America Denver. "We are proud to bring to Colorado an exceptional exhibition that celebrates women artists whose photography reflects on and documents America's history and evolution. We hope everyone viewing the show will come away inspired, educated and moved by their work."

Modern Women/Modern Vision presents the work of celebrated women artists in six thematic sections, including Modernist Innovators, Documentary Photography and

the New Deal, the Photo League, Modern Masters, Exploring the Environment and The Global Contemporary Lens to reflect the impact of female artists in the medium of photography.

Modernist Innovators

In the early 20th century, pictorialism—echoing the visual language of traditional painting—dominated photography in many countries. Photographers featured in the Modernist Innovators section of *Modern Women/Modern Vision* include Ruth Bernhard, Imogen Cunningham, Gertrude Käsebier and Barbara Morgan. These artists created images with soft focus and painterly effects—often by modifying negatives or employing creative printing processes. Also in this section, photographs by Eva Besnyö and Margaret Bourke-White emphasize innovative viewpoints, camera angles and lighting, creating a visual dynamism with elements including shape, texture and value. Bourke-White's work led her to new career territory for women, as she became the first woman to serve as a U.S. war correspondent and the first woman to have her photo appear on the cover of *Life* magazine.

Documentary Photography and the New Deal

Photographs in this section, documenting the series of public work projects and other reforms led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, highlight the persuasive and documentary powers of photography. The New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided financial relief to artists struggling during the Great Depression by commissioning new artworks. While Modernist principles of innovation and experimentation with technique continued, images in this section emphasize more progressive objectives to record and inspire social change. Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott were two of the artists assembled by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to fulfill President Roosevelt's desire for visual documentation of the effect of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl on everyday Americans. Under the leadership of Roy Stryker, photographers were provided extensive lists of subjects to capture on film and fanned out across the

country to record the challenging and often dire circumstances found in rural communities to help garner public support for New Deal programs to rebuild the U.S. economy. Other artists represented in this section include Berenice Abbott, Barbara Klemm and Tina Barney.

The Photo League

The Photo League, a cooperative of amateur and professional photographers, also played a significant role in the evolution of documentary and urban street photography. Active between 1936 and 1951, the organization offered classes, exhibition space, darkrooms and fellowship. During a time when women were excluded from many photo clubs, more than 100 women were members of the Photo League. Many members were young, predominantly Jewish, first-generation Americans from working-class neighborhoods. Similar to the FSA documentation of rural life, images in this section provide a similar record of urban existence and hardships during the 1930s and 1940s. More lightweight, 35mm cameras allowed for more mobility and the ability to capture images more unobtrusively.

Groundbreaking work in this section features spontaneous gestures and actions, as well as skillful framing, unexpected angles and dynamic compositions. Scenes from Harlem and the Lower East Side by Helen Levitt—known as New York's "visual poet laureate"—are featured in this section. Also in this section are images by Photo League members Esther Bubley, Sonia Handelman Meyer and Ruth Orkin.

Modern Masters

In the decades following World War II, straight photography continued as a dominant aesthetic; however, the previous focus on objectivity gave way to more subjective views grounded in artists' experiences or concerns.

Women contributed to these developments, and their work helped extend and evolve social documentary and photojournalism into viable means for personal expression. Capturing daily life unfolding in villages or

urban communities is evident in works by Gabriela Iturbide and Flor Garduño, whose images in this section portrayed life and rituals of Indigenous populations in Mexico and other countries in the Americas.

During the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, women photographers also used the medium to shift focus from capturing external environments and subjects to working more conceptually inventing spaces and environments. Works in this section by artists including Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman demonstrate the photograph as a vehicle for revealing and challenging stereotypes of femininity. Images by Sandy Skoglund recreate imagined scenarios designed for capturing on film, including works like *Revenge of the Goldfish*.

Exploring the Environment

Historically, social and cultural norms discouraged women from venturing to work in public unchaperoned. This gave male photographers an advantage in landscape photography, but women ultimately flouted those customs and began capturing images of the wider world toward the last quarter of the 20th century. Featured artists in this section include Terry Evans, who captured rare aerial points of view, as well as images by Berenice Abbot's apprentice, Lynn Davis. Scenes photographed by Virginia Beahan, Laura McPhee and Alejandra Laviada call attention to humanity's nuanced interactions with the land. Demonstrating the patience and stamina needed to photograph the environment, works by Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher await ideal weather conditions for the final image. Works by Neeta Madahar and DoDo Jin Ming in this section also stun with remote settings and unique angles.

The Global Contemporary Lens

The final section of *Modern Women/Modern Vision* features works by contemporary photographers from around the world, which extend the creative legacy established during the 20th century. Subjects range from portraiture, documentation and designed sets to completely imagined scenarios that could only exist through digital manipulation. Traditional techniques evolving to new ways of imaging—including

digital platforms, editing software and large-scale printing—are represented. Self-taught photographer Carol Espíndola crafted photo-based pieces that examine stereotypes of beauty, nudity and gender, while works by Nikki S. Lee present images from her immersion into various communities—skateboarders and senior citizens, for example—and images from months spent engaged with these groups include those captured by the members themselves to tell their stories. Using wit, satire and imagination, works in this section examine issues of identity, race, gender and class. Staged scenarios by Hellen van Meene appear spontaneous, but are meticulously choreographed, costumed and posed to evoke a certain emotion.



Images from Carrie Mae Weems' iconic *Kitchen Table Series* in this section of the show portray a woman engaged in daily domestic scenarios but are portrayed by actors. Similar to Weems, Ana Casas Broda and Karina Juárez turn the cameras on themselves. Broda's *Kinderwunsch* series explores the complexities and physicality of motherhood.

"Women working in photography today owe much to the generations who paved the way during the 20th century," said Eric Paddock, Curator of Photography at DAM and the local curator for *Modern Women/Modern Vision*. "The diverse styles, subject matter,

techniques and intentions exemplified by the artists in *Modern Women/Modern Vision* demonstrate the determination and inventiveness with which women pursued their craft.”

Modern Women/Modern Vision: Works from the Bank of America Collection has been loaned through the Bank of America Art in our Communities® program. This exhibition is presented with generous support from the donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign and the residents who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by 5280 Magazine and CBS4.

Art in Our Communities®

The Bank of America Art in our Communities Program was established in 2009 in order to share the company’s art collection with the widest possible audience. Comprising the art collections of the predecessor banks that are now part of Bank of America, the program offers museums and nonprofit galleries the opportunity to borrow complete or customized exhibitions at no cost. The public is able to enjoy new art installations at its local museums, while the museums themselves are able to generate vital revenue. Since 2009, more than 140 exhibitions have been loaned through this one-of-a-kind program.

COVID-19 Protocols

The safety of DAM’s visitors and staff remains a top priority, and the Museum is continually updating its COVID-19 safety and security protocols based on advice from the CDC and federal and local guidelines. Current protocols can be found at the Plan Your Visit section of the museum’s website.

About the Denver Art Museum

The Denver Art Museum is an educational, nonprofit resource that sparks creative thinking and expression through transformative experiences with art. Its mission is to enrich lives by sparking creative thinking and expression. Its holdings reflect the city and region—and provide invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the world. Metro residents support the Scientific and Cultural

Facilities District (SCFD), a unique funding source serving hundreds of metro Denver arts, culture and scientific organizations.

For museum information, visit www.denverartmuseum.org or call 720-865-5000.

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Image Credits:

Sandy Skoglund (American, b. 1946), *Revenge of the Goldfish*, 1981. Cibachrome print. Bank of America Collection. ©1981 Sandy Skoglund.

Carrie Mae Weems (American, b. 1953), *Untitled (Woman with daughter)*, from the *Kitchen Table Series*, 1990. Gelatin silver print. Bank of America Collection. ©Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.