

The Museum of Modern Art

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS THE FIRST MAJOR DOROTHEA LANGE SOLO EXHIBITION AT MoMA IN 50 YEARS

Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures

February 9–September 19, 2020
Floor Two, The Paul J. Sachs Galleries
#DorotheaLange

NEW YORK, February 6, 2020 [Updated August 17, 2020]—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures***, the first major solo exhibition at the Museum of the photographer’s incisive work in over 50 years. On view from February 9 through September 19, 2020, *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* includes approximately 100 photographs drawn entirely from the Museum’s collection. The exhibition also uses archival materials such as correspondence, historical publications, and oral histories, as well as contemporary voices, to examine the ways in which words inflect our understanding of Lange’s pictures. These new perspectives and responses from artists, scholars, critics, and writers, including Julie Ault, Wendy Red Star, and Rebecca Solnit, provide fresh insight into Lange’s practice. *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* is organized by Sarah Meister, Curator, with River Bullock, Beaumont & Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, assisted by Madeline Weisburg, Modern Women’s Fund Twelve-Month Intern, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art.

Toward the end of her life, Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) remarked, “All photographs—not only those that are so-called ‘documentary,’ and every photograph really is documentary and belongs in some place, has a place in history—can be fortified by words.” Organized loosely chronologically and spanning her career, the exhibition groups iconic works together with lesser known photographs and traces their varied relationships to words: from early criticism on Lange’s photographs to her photo-essays published in *LIFE* magazine, and from the landmark photobook *An American Exodus* to her examination of the US criminal justice system. The exhibition also includes groundbreaking photographs of the 1930s—including *Migrant Mother* (1936)—that inspired pivotal public awareness of the lives of sharecroppers, displaced families, and migrant workers during the Great Depression. Through her photography and her words, Lange urged photographers to reconnect with the world—a call reflective of her own ethos and working method, which coupled an attention to aesthetics with a central concern for humanity.

“It seems both timely and urgent that we renew our attention to Lange’s extraordinary achievements,” said Sarah Meister. “Her concern for less fortunate and often overlooked individuals, and her success in using photography (and words) to address these inequities, encourages each of us to reflect on our own civic responsibilities. It reminds me of the unique role that art—and in particular photography—can play in imagining a more just society.”

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The exhibition begins in 1933, when Lange, then a portrait photographer, first brought her camera outside into the streets of San Francisco. Lange's increasing interest in the everyday experience of people she encountered eventually led her to work for government agencies, supporting their objective to raise public awareness and to provide aid to struggling farmers and those devastated by the Great Depression. During this time, Lange photographed her subjects and kept notes that formed the backbone of government reports; these and other archival materials will be represented alongside corresponding photographs throughout the exhibition. Lange's commitment to social justice and her faith in the power of photography remained constant throughout her life, even when her politics did not align with those who were paying for her work. A central focus of the exhibition is *An American Exodus*, a 1939 collaboration between Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor, her husband and an agricultural economist. As an object and as an idea, *An American Exodus* highlights the voices of her subjects by pairing first-person quotations alongside their pictures. Later, Lange's photographs continued to be useful in addressing marginalized histories and ongoing social concerns. Throughout her career as a photographer for the US Government and various popular magazines, Lange's pictures were frequently syndicated and circulated outside of their original context. Lange's photographs of the 1930s helped illustrate Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and her 1950s photographs of a public defender were used to illustrate *Minimizing Racism in Jury Trials* (1969), a law handbook published after Black Panther Huey P. Newton's first trial during a time of great racial strife.

This collection-based exhibition would not be possible had it not been for Lange's deep creative ties to the Museum during her lifetime. MoMA's collection of Lange photographs was built over many decades and remains one of the definitive collections of her work. Her relationship to MoMA's Department of Photography dates to her inclusion in its inaugural exhibition, in 1940 which was curated by the department's director, Edward Steichen. Lange is a rare artist in that both Steichen and his successor, John Szarkowski, held her in equally high esteem. More than a generation after her first retrospective, organized by Szarkowski at MoMA in 1966, *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* uses both historical and contemporary words to encourage a more nuanced understanding of words and pictures in circulation.

Contributors to *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* include artists and curators Julie Ault, Sam Contis, Sally Mann, Sandy Phillips, and Wendy Red Star; scholars and writers Kimberly Juanita Brown, Jennifer Greenhill, Christina Sharpe, Robert Slifkin, Rebecca Solnit, and Tess Taylor.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures*, edited by Sarah Hermanson Meister. Lange's photographs, some reproduced in their original published form, are accompanied by contributions from a distinguished group of contemporary writers, artists, and critical thinkers: Julie Ault, Kimberly Juanita Brown, River Encalada Bullock, Sam Contis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, Lauren Kroiz, Sally Mann, Sandra S. Phillips, Wendy Red Star, Christina Sharpe, Robert Slifkin, Rebecca Solnit, and Tess Taylor. 176 pages, 152 illustrations. Hardcover, \$55. ISBN: 978-1-63345-105-6. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and

Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

Also published in conjunction with the exhibition is *Last West: Roadsongs for Dorothea Lange* by poet Tess Taylor, an excerpt of which is featured in the exhibition catalogue. Taylor traces Lange's winding paths across California during the Great Depression and in its immediate aftermath. Taylor's hybrid text collages lyric and oral histories against Lange's own journals and notebook fragments, framing the ways social and ecological injustices of the past rhyme eerily with those of the present. 64 pages, 8 illustrations. Paperback, \$12.95. ISBN: 978-1-63345-109-4. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

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AUDIO TOUR:

This audio playlist invites you to consider the relationship between words pictures in Dorothea Lange's work. Hear from artists Sam Contis and Wendy Red Starr, poet Tess Taylor and Lange's granddaughter, filmmaker Dyanna Talor, as they explore Lange's capacity to capture the human condition. MoMA Audio is available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes, at moma.org/audio/playlist/304, and free of charge at the Museum.

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