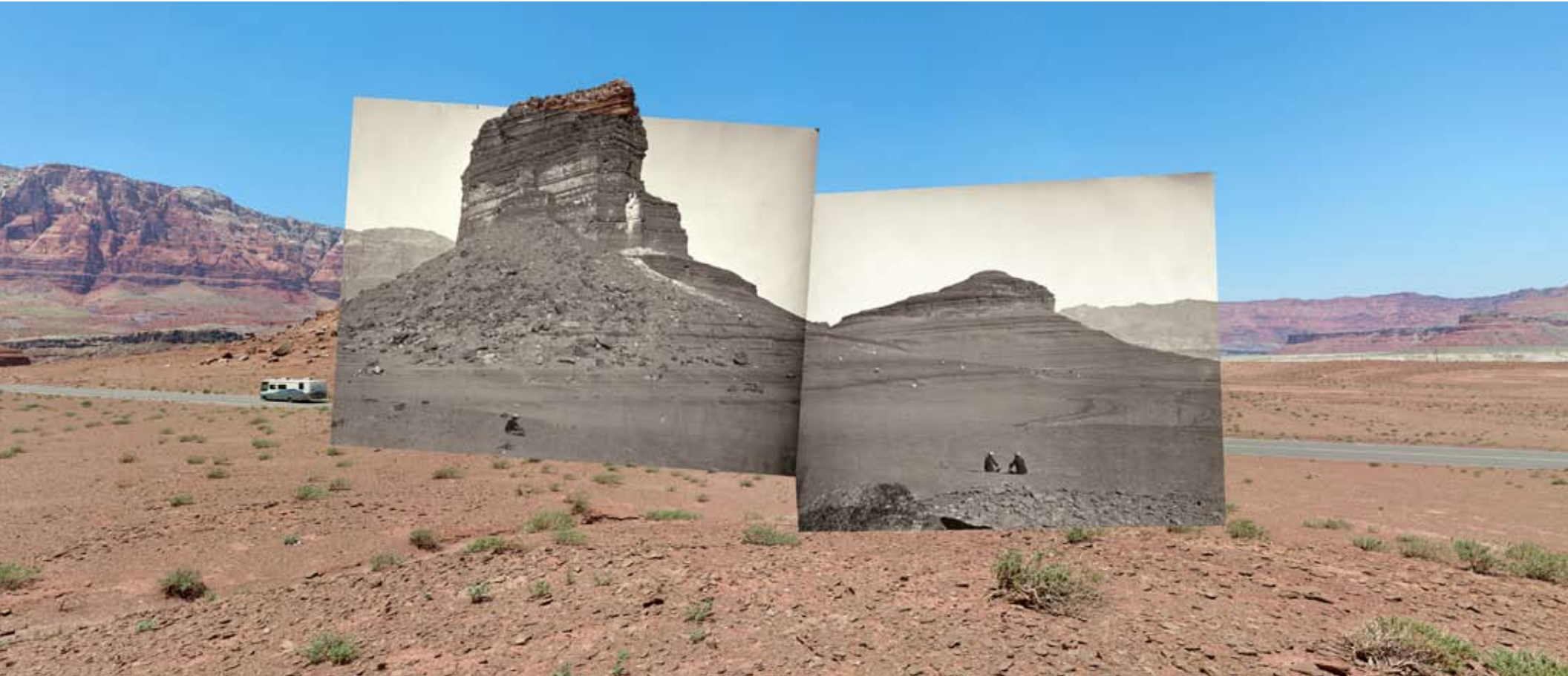


Charting the Canyon PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK KLETT & BYRON WOLFE



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March 21 to July 12, 2009

Doris and John Norton Gallery for the Center for Creative Photography, Phoenix Art Museum

Arizona's Grand Canyon—natural wonder, sacred land, national park, tourist attraction—is perhaps the world's best “photo op.” Hearing the name brings to mind vividly colored, striated rock, the earth dropping away to the Canyon's invisible depths. But what is the source of the image that springs into our imagination? Is it a nineteenth-century survey drawing of the Canyon's horizontal sweep? Or the black-and-white photographs Ansel Adams made in the 1940s? Perhaps it is the anonymous color postcard picked up at a souvenir stand, or a snapshot from a family vacation?

In 2007 photographers Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe headed to the Grand Canyon to grapple with the many image-makers who had visited the site before. Klett, a Regents

Professor at Arizona State University, and Wolfe, a former student of Klett's who is now a Lantis' University Professor at California State University at Chico, began rephotographing historic images together in 1997. In that year they worked on the project *Third View*, making new images at the precise locations from which government survey photographers worked in the nineteenth century. The resulting views, and a range of related oral histories and artifacts collected from those spots, document change. The photographs collapse decades, placing a scene from the 1870s next to one of our time. Analyzing the pictures raises questions—which environmental changes are man-made? Is change accelerating? Could our awareness of what the land once was impact future actions?

Together Klett and Wolfe have dramatically expanded their interpretation of rephotography. During two summers of field work at the Grand Canyon, they identified the exact locations portrayed in historic photographs and drawings. From those geographic points they created new photographs that incorporate the original view. Digital versions of the historic images are inserted within the contemporary photograph, creating sweeping panoramas that convey the big picture surrounding earlier artists' depicted views. Their research at the Grand Canyon led to another remarkable discovery: William Henry Holmes's drawing of the Canyon was so precise that new photographs made from his Point Sublime viewpoint could be matched and inserted to enliven the original work. Working collaboratively, Klett and Wolfe challenge one another to invent new ways to integrate the historic images they discover, and to explore the themes that intrigue them. *Charting the Canyon* reveals their combined invention, offering provocative ways to think about the land, its history, and our role in seeing it. Though the team feels the project is unfinished, and expects at least one more season of field work, this exhibition represents the most comprehensive showing of the Grand Canyon photographs.

UNWITTING COLLABORATORS

Klett and Wolfe analyzed the work of eight practitioners as well as that of numerous anonymous photographers. Unifying motivations group these image-makers into three categories: those on government surveys, those making commercial images, and artists. Following the U.S. Civil War, federally funded surveys assessed opportunities for mining, agriculture, transportation, and settlement. The survey teams were populated by scientists, including geologists and ethnographers, who wanted visual documentation to support their field observations. Despite incredibly

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challenging conditions, artist Thomas Moran, draughtsman William Henry Holmes, and photographers John K. Hillers and William Bell charted unknown territory, providing stunning views of the Canyon landscape. In our age of comprehensive, constantly available, and easily accessible resources it is hard to imagine how little was known about the Grand Canyon in the mid-nineteenth century. A single photograph of the flowing Colorado River taken from the Canyon's rim would have been seen as a valuable scientific document.

The development of the Canyon site over the next few decades prompted a new type of picture: those available for purchase. Stereographs, made with a dual-lens camera, were popular photographic collectibles in which two similar photographs were fastened to a card and then placed in a viewer that blocked peripheral vision. This encouraged the brain to merge the two pictures, creating a dramatic and entertaining three-dimensional effect. In addition to appearing on stereographs, the Canyon was also frequently depicted on photographic postcards. Commercial photographers pictured the Canyon to appeal to the tourist, rather than the scientist. In particular, the vacationer's fascination with the Canyon's edge can be seen through the wealth of postcard views depicting visitors peering over or defying the treacherous drop by engaging



Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *Seventy-one Years after Edward Weston's Storm, Arizona from Marble Canyon Trading Post*, 2007. Left: Edward Weston, *Storm, Arizona*, 1941 (courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson).

in stunts. The Detroit Publishing Company, which purchased many photographers' negatives, including William Henry Jackson's, was one such source for Canyon postcards, although there are vast numbers of diverse Grand Canyon commercial images.

Photographers also came to the Canyon with artistic ambitions, including Alvin Langdon Coburn, who visited in 1911, and

Edward Weston, who made photographs in 1941. When artists visited the Canyon they selected a view that spoke to them personally, and produced a work of art that reflected their engagement with the place. Ansel Adams was another creative photographer who came to the Canyon, although many of the images he made there were motivated by a special governmental commission. In

1941 Adams was hired by the Department of the Interior to create wall-sized murals of America's national parks. U.S. involvement in World War II cut the project short, and Adams sought grant funding to continue the project on his own. Depicting the Canyon as one of the nation's parklands, Adams's pictures highlighted the value of the Canyon as an awe-inspiring wilderness place.



Everywhere in these photographs we see edges, contrasts, narrow views settled within a larger context, and evidence of Klett and Wolfe themselves as they remind us that behind every camera is a decision-maker.



Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *One hundred and five years of photographs and seventeen million years of landscapes*, 2007; Panorama from Yavapai Point on the Grand Canyon connecting photographs by Ansel Adams, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and the Detroit Publishing Company. Left inset (two views): Ansel Adams, *Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona*, 1941 (courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography). Middle inset: Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Bright Angel Canyon*, ca. 1911 (courtesy of the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York). Right inset: Detroit Publishing Company, *The Grand Canyon of Arizona Across from O'Neil Point*, 1902 (courtesy of the Library of Congress). **PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *August sunrise* (left) and *June sunset* (right) near Mather Point, 2008.

Each of these earlier image-makers responded to the landscape before them, influenced by their particular motivations. Some had geology in mind, while others focused on the shifting light or the commercial development of the Western landscape. When Klett and Wolfe arrived on the scene, they responded to the earlier images in addition to the landscape. Consequently their Grand Canyon work is built up in layers, acquiring depth and complexity of meaning. Klett and Wolfe use photography (and their expanded methods of rephotography) to explore a number of compelling ideas that bind notions of time, place, and viewpoint.

Their process of inserting historic views within contemporary photographs, or linking a number of different historic views, emphasizes the possibilities of multiple interpretations of a single landscape. If we look at a photograph of the Grand Canyon, we bring to it our own cultural notions, myths, and memories, and read it based on our personal point of view. By bringing together images made throughout time, Klett and Wolfe remind us that any terrain is not only what we see and think about it in this present moment, but it is part of a long evolution of thought and use that includes the past and future, as well. The team's photographs present time as overlapping layers, much like the stratigraphic rock of the Canyon. This unconventional presentation encourages viewers to see time as a flexible construction.

Several particularly photographic concerns resonate in the pair's work. One is an exploitation of technology to enhance the ideas behind their artworks. Klett and Wolfe have recently begun to produce large-scale prints that retain sharp resolution. The photographs suggest the vast and panoramic scene from a distance, but closer inspection reveals seemingly infinite details. The photographers also have experimented with how to create a stereoviewer that can read works of great size. Using a viewing device placed in the center of the room, a wall-sized color photograph (40 by 70 inches) more than fifty feet away converges with its near double into a three-dimensional view. The artists harnessed new technologies and resources (some only available in the last few years) in the production of the work, allowing them to download historic images, create Photoshop mock-ups, and even print draft images, all while in the field.

One concept they discuss is "image density," the notion that image-makers frequently return to the same viewpoints. At the Grand Canyon, there are several places where past photographers have worked from a shared vantage point. Klett and Wolfe have layered images made across many decades, indicating where the frames overlap. This approach not only demonstrates the popularity of a particular vista, but also implies the convergence in

disparate image makers' experience and vision.

Another primary concern for Klett and Wolfe is that a viewer might uncritically approach a photograph as if it were simply a window into another world. For the team, it is essential that the audience understands how every image is the product of choices, and so they have made it impossible to take the process for granted. Everywhere in these photographs we see edges, contrasts, narrow views settled within a larger context, and evidence of Klett and Wolfe themselves as they remind us that behind every camera is a decision-maker.

Klett and Wolfe's work contains a pronounced diversity, a result of the collaborative process the artists have devised over the past decade. Klett commented on their method, "We're intentionally using playfulness as a way to extend ideas, a kind of free-form exploration that puts a premium on creative solutions to complex space and time problems. Many of the things we're trying to do seemed impossible at first—like merging several views of a scene from different times into a continuous space, or extending one photo's frame to include spaces from multiple vantage points." The pleasure the artists experience in the creative process comes through, making *Charting the Canyon* a joyful exploration. ■

Rebecca Sentf

Norton Family Assistant Curator of Photography

Charting the Canyon

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LECTURE

Layering Time | June 2, 7 p.m.

Klett and Wolfe discuss and illustrate their process.

WORKSHOPS

Digital Photography | March 14 & 15, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Learn about aperture, shutter, filters, flash, and composition to create images with better color and more visual impact. \$170 for Museum Members, \$200 for nonmembers. No experience necessary; materials included.

Book Covers: Twice as Nice | June 16, 10:30 a.m.

The Art Research Library considers artistic partnerships as seen in *Charting the Canyon* and works by other art-world pairs.

PHXARTKIDS DAY

Color, Glue, and Photos Too | June 21, noon – 3 p.m.

This Father's Day, bring a favorite family photo and make a photographic collage inspired by *Charting the Canyon*. (Polaroids and frames provided while supplies last!) For children ages 5 – 12 and their adult companions. Supported by Men's Arts Council.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.PHXART.ORG.



Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *Desert View: from the window of the Watchtower gift shop*, 2008.

COVER IMAGE: Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *Rock Formations on the Road to Lee's Ferry, Arizona*, 2008.

Left inset: William Bell, *Plateau North of the Colorado River near the Paria*, 1872 (courtesy National Archives).

Right inset: William Bell, *Headlands North of the Colorado River*, 1872 (courtesy National Archives).

A LANDMARK PHOTOGRAPHY PARTNERSHIP

In 2006, Phoenix Art Museum and the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona in Tucson inaugurated a highly innovative and unprecedented collaboration to bring the finest in photography to Phoenix Art Museum visitors. It established a vibrant new photography exhibition program at the Museum, while bringing the Center's world-renowned collections to new and larger audiences.

The Center for Creative Photography is one of the world's largest repositories of materials chronicling photography. Founded in 1975, it now houses 3.8 million archival items and 80,000 fine prints by photographers including Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Frederick Sommer, W. Eugene Smith, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, and Garry Winogrand.

One of the nation's leading art museums, Phoenix Art Museum presents international exhibitions of the world's greatest art and features a collection that spans the centuries and the globe—American, Asian, contemporary, European, Latin American, and Western American art, and fashion design. Not to be missed are the Thorne Miniature Rooms, the interactive family gallery PhxArtKids, great shopping and dining, and a variety of public events.

Now, through the combined efforts of these two organizations, Phoenix Art Museum visitors will experience unparalleled excellence in the field of photography in the Museum's new Doris and John Norton Gallery for the Center for Creative Photography.

Major support for this exhibition is provided by Lee and Mike Cohn, CFG Business Solutions, LLC.

CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

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