

The Museum of Modern Art

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Eugene Buechel S. J.: Rosebud and Pine Ridge Photographs, 1922-1942, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 24 through February 8, 1976. The exhibition consists of 41 works by the Jesuit priest and scholar who spent fifty years on Indian reservations as pastor, teacher, and superior of the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions in South Dakota.

The current exhibition was organized in 1974 at a summer session photography workshop sponsored by Grossmont College, El Cajon, California, directed by David Wing, Instructor of Photography. Until now, Buechel's work has remained largely unknown -- his more than 12,000 negatives housed in the small Buechel Lakota Memorial Museum which he founded in St. Francis.

Although Buechel first went to South Dakota in 1902, it was not until 1922, when he was forty-eight, that he began photographing the people and landscapes he knew so well. He photographed during an important transitional period on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations: the influence of the white man was dominant and the traditional Indian way of life was all but invisible. To record this period of change Buechel used the simplest of adjustable cameras, estimated his exposures, and sent his film to a commercial studio for processing and printing. As David Wing writes in the wall label to the exhibition, "[Buechel's] maturity and his distance from the technology of photography may explain the directness of his images. They are not in any way about the photographic process, but about his subjects and his relationship to them. Probably without influence, Buechel made the purest of photographs: self-effacing, intuitive, and direct."

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Wing also notes that we do not see Buechel's subjects as anthropological oddities, but rather as living, whole people. "We have the distinct impression that these people have entrusted Buechel with their images, and that it is through his care that they are seen. These are respectful and generous photographs."

The Department of Photography gratefully acknowledges the support of its exhibition program by the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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