

# The Museum of Modern Art

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EUGENE BUECHEL, S.J.:  
ROSEBUD AND PINE RIDGE  
PHOTOGRAPHS, 1922-1942

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## WALL LABEL

Eugene Buechel came to South Dakota as a Jesuit scholastic in 1902, at the age of twenty-eight. Except for the years 1904 to 1906, when he was completing his studies at St. Louis University, Buechel spent the remaining fifty-two years of his life on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations as pastor, teacher, and superior at the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions.

In 1922, at the age of forty-eight, Buechel began making photographs. He used the simplest of adjustable cameras, estimated his exposures, and sent his film to a commercial studio for processing and printing. His 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.

Buechel photographed during an important transitional period on the reservations, when the white man's lifestyle was dominant and accepted. The romantic era was finished, the traditional way of life nearly invisible, and the shape of the future uncertain. Buechel understood that he was a witness to this change, and with his camera he chose and clearly rendered the people and landscapes he knew so well. Most of us look at Buechel's images as cultural, temporal, and geographical outsiders, but we do not see his subjects as anthropological oddities, 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

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generous photographs.

David Wing  
Grossmont College  
October, 1974

Eugene Buechel was born near Fulda, Germany, in 1874. He became an authority on the Lakota language and published A Bible History in the Language of the Teton Sioux in 1923 and the detailed Grammar of Lakota in 1939. His Dictionary of the Teton Dakota Sioux Language was completed after his death by Rev. Paul Manhart. Buechel also developed a small museum, which now bears his name, in St. Francis, South Dakota. In addition to Indian artifacts, Buechel made a complete botanical collection of plants found on the reservations, with four dried samples of each variety, one taken from each season. The Buechel Memorial Lakota Museum also houses his negatives, an archive of more than 12,000 images, from which this exhibition has been drawn.

This exhibition was prepared in a summer session photography workshop sponsored by Grossmont College, El Cajon, California, and directed by David Wing. A catalogue of this exhibition, "Eugene Buechel, S.J.: Rosebud and Pine Ridge Photographs, 1922-1942," is available in the Museum's bookstores.

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