

The Museum of Modern Art

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MINOR WHITE: THE EYE THAT SHAPES

April 27 - June 18, 1989

The first major retrospective of the work of American photographer Minor White opens at The Museum of Modern Art on April 27, 1989. MINOR WHITE: THE EYE THAT SHAPES was organized for The Art Museum, Princeton University, by Peter C. Bunnell, McAlpin Professor of the History of Photography and Modern Art at Princeton University, where he is also Faculty Curator of Photography at The Art Museum. The exhibition and catalogue have been supported by a grant from Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc.

After its New York showing, MINOR WHITE: THE EYE THAT SHAPES will travel to institutions in cities where White lived: Portland Art Museum, Oregon (September 19 - November 12, 1989); Minneapolis Institute of Art (January 20 - March 25, 1990); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (June 22 - August 19, 1990); George Eastman House, Rochester, New York (September 21 - November 25, 1990); and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (January - March 1991). The tour concludes in 1991 at The Art Museum, Princeton University (April - June 1991).

Drawn from the Minor White Archive at Princeton University, the exhibition consists of 185 photographs that demonstrate the full range of White's work from 1938 to 1976. Many of the works, including ten rare color photographs, have never been exhibited, and only one-quarter of them have been published previously.

Minor White (1908-1976) is recognized as one of the most important photographic artists active during the thirty years after World War II. Living during this period in San Francisco, then in Rochester, and finally near

Boston, he produced a singular body of imagery that assures his place in the history of twentieth-century photography. His was a pictorial achievement that helped shape a distinctly modern American photographic style that is characterized by luminous clarity, lyricism, and grace. His approach may be seen to be analogous to that of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, two of his early mentors, but it was the work of Alfred Stieglitz that most influenced White's attitudes regarding the expressive and creative methods in photography. His themes have a rich autobiographical content and relate to issues of identity and spirituality. His wide-ranging subject matter includes portraiture, studies of the nude, landscape, and architecture. Beginning with a deep interest in the reality of the depictive photographic image, his work evolved over several years into one of biomorphic abstraction and elaborate symbolic representation.

White was born in Minneapolis, and he was educated in science and poetry at the University of Minnesota. He began his photographic career in 1937 in Portland, Oregon, photographing architecture and gaining technical expertise in theater and landscape photography before being drafted into the army during World War II. After leaving the army in 1945, White went to New York City to learn museum curatorial procedures with Beaumont and Nancy Newhall at The Museum of Modern Art. He also studied art history under Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University.

In 1946 he joined Ansel Adams on the faculty of the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco and seriously resumed his photography, working in the San Francisco area. In 1952 White was part of a group that founded the progressive photographic journal Aperture and remained editor for the next twenty-three years. In 1953 he moved to Rochester, New York, to work with Beaumont Newhall at George Eastman House, leaving in 1956 to devote himself to

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his own creative work and to teaching at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He remained in Rochester until 1965 when he joined the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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PUBLICATION Minor White: The Eye That Shapes by Peter C. Bunnell. 232 pages. 285 black-and-white illustrations, including 175 full-page reproductions in a portfolio format, and 10 color plates. Selections from unpublished writings by Minor White. Chronology and two bibliographies. Published by the Art Museum, Princeton University.

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For additional information about the New York showing, contact Edna Goldstaub, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9755; for information about the exhibition's organization or travel schedule, contact Maria Pellerano, The Art Museum, Princeton University, 609/452-5827.