

The Museum of Modern Art

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PROJECTS: MARTÍN CHAMBI & EDWARD RANNEY

Two photographers whose work offers complementary views of Peru--the monuments of its Inca past, social life in the 1920s and '30s, and the timeless landscape--will be the subjects of an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art from March 23 through May 3. PROJECTS: MARTÍN CHAMBI and EDWARD RANNEY, on view in the Museum's first-floor galleries, includes approximately 65 photographs by Chambi (1891-1973), a Peruvian photographer active in Cuzco from the 1920s until his death in 1973, and by Edward Ranney (1942-), who currently lives and works in New Mexico. The exhibition is being directed by Betsy Jablow, Newhall Fellow in the Department of Photography.

Martín Chambi worked both in a natural light studio, making portraits for the prominent families of Cuzco, and in the surrounding area documenting his native highland culture. Most of his work in this exhibition dates from the 1920s and '30s. Chambi offers an insider's view of a city distinguished by a strange mix of cultures--traditional Inca and Spanish colonial--and the complex network of relationships that such an inheritance engenders. As Ms. Jablow notes, Chambi's interest "in indigenous Peruvian culture ran counter to the prevailing view of 'culture' as something defined by European taste." Chambi's photographs of individual sitters and family groups, of weddings, parties, and traditional Indian festivities portray special occasions on two levels: first, the occasion that brought the subjects together and summoned the photographer, and second, the act of being photographed.

37

Edward Ranney, a photographer who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, first began taking photographs while studying in Peru in 1964. Since that time, he has travelled extensively in Mexico and Peru, published a book called Stonework of the Maya (1974), and devoted considerable time and effort to bringing Chambi's work to public attention, partly because it has influenced his own development as a photographer. But, as Ms. Jablow writes in her Wall Label for the exhibition, while Ranney's "early work in Peru was similar to Chambi's--straightforward documentation of Indian villages and people--he soon came to feel that as an outsider he could not depict the contemporary social life in any meaningful way." His photographs in the exhibition are part of a series on Inca shrines and architecture and the highland landscapes of Peru, the subjects to which Ranney turned as an alternative approach to the Inca past. Ranney's photographs give a strong sense of his feeling for the ruins and landscapes, and suggest the mysterious sacred power they contained for the Incas. "Looking at Edward Ranney's photographs," notes Ms. Jablow, "we are struck by the richness of Inca history that seems to emanate from the stones and landscapes. We cross the barriers of historic time to an earlier epoch when the palaces at Pisac, Ollantaytambo, and Machu Picchu were outposts of the sacred capital at Cuzco, the City of the Sun.... Ranney's feeling for the Peruvian landscape does much to overcome temporal and cultural barriers. To see his work with that of Martin Chambi gives a fuller sense of place, a more complete portrait of Peruvian life and history, than either one could give us individually."

All of the Chambi prints in the exhibition were printed by Edward Ranney and Víctor Chambi in 1978, and appear courtesy of Ranney and the Chambi family. Ranney's prints are on loan from the photographer.

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