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## Edward Weston: Akron Art Museum shows five decades of original prints by American master considered 'Picasso of photography'

### Akron Art Museum sells catalog for \$150

By Dorothy Shinn  
Beacon Journal art and architecture critic

Published on Sunday, Feb 15, 2009



Photographer Edward Weston's Nautilus Shell, a 1927 gelatin silver print, ()

Anyone interested in photography knows the pepper photos, those carnalicious capsicums whose contorted shapes and glowing forms secured the argument for photography as art.

The peppers and their relatives, the sensuous and silky vegetable closeups, are the hallmark images of Edward Weston, fine art photographer, co-founder of the photographers' group f/64 and, according to some, the Picasso of modern photography.

If you still aren't sure about his importance, just watch your e-mail. Even though he's been dead since 1958, his influence is ubiquitous and proliferating

exponentially. Anyone who's received a spoof image of a cheekily cropped body part that looks suspiciously sexual only to discover, when the entire image is seen, that it's really just the crook of an arm, a knee or a rounded shoulder, has experienced the reach of Weston's photography.

For it was Weston who made — in addition to the suggestive vegetable studies — partial views of the female nude one of his primary areas of focus.

While cheeky images may be among his progeny, they weren't his goal. He certainly wasn't oblivious to the provocative import of his images, but it was the search for the essence of things that drove his work.

He studied landscape the same way he studied the faces in the portraits he made, and he studied vegetables, shells, rocks and sand dunes the same way he studied the nude.

In fact, you could say he made the first, and perhaps the only, full frontal photograph of a nautilus shell. You could place some of his nudes side by side with some of his peppers, seashells or cabbages, and you can see that he viewed one with the same thoughtful intensity and insight as he did the other.

There is a Weston quote that says it all: "Life is a coherent whole: rocks, clouds, trees, shells, torsos, smokestacks, peppers are interrelated, interdependent parts of the whole. Rhythms from one become symbols of all."

This quote is on the main wall of an exhibit dedicated to Weston's work, on view through April 26 at the Akron Art Museum.

### Vintage photographs

*Edward Weston: Life Work* is a five-decade survey of this American master

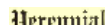


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entertainment ...

through 100-plus vintage photographs drawn from the collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg.

#### **Akron Zips:**

Predictions for MAC  
Tournament seeding

The exhibit, organized by art2art Circulating Exhibitions, includes 109 images ranging over seven areas of focus in six galleries, each laid out chronologically: Weston's early work, his sojourn in Mexico, portraits, nudes, still lifes, early landscapes and late landscapes.

#### **Browns Bulletin:**

Mock draft roundup

Born in 1886 in Highland Park, Ill., Weston was given his first camera, a Bull's Eye #2, at age 16 by his father.

#### **Tribe Matters:**

Breaking down the bullpen

Four years later, following the publication of his work in *Camera and Darkroom* magazine, he headed to California, where he worked odd jobs and hoped to make his mark in this relatively young medium. However, a first publication didn't lead to instant fame and recognition, and Weston returned home to study at the Illinois College of Photography before returning to California.

#### **Cleveland Cavaliers:**

Cavs Trades: Amar'e  
Stoudemire?

#### **Cleveland Browns:**

McDonald added to staff

He was at first employed as a retoucher, then a photographer in portrait studios, and he married his first wife, Flora Chandler, with whom he had four sons. In 1911, he opened his own photography studio and became successful working in a soft-focus, Pictorialist style.

#### **All Da King's Men:**

The Politics Of Fear

#### **Blog of Mass Destruction:**

A Grave And Gathering Storm?

"He became a Pictorialist because in those days, to be an artist and a photographer, one had to be a Pictorialist," said Barbara Tannenbaum, Akron Art Museum director of curatorial affairs.

#### **Akron Law Café:**

Free Ohio law resources on  
the web

His early images show a lot of manipulation, posing his subjects to evoke certain themes and ideas. "It was all about metaphor and illusion," Tannenbaum noted, "not about real life."

#### **Varsity Letters:**

Prep Talk for Feb. 12

He often used a particular lighting, called a high-key effect, because of the soft glow it gave his subjects.

#### **Kent State Sports:**

Heasley breaks school track  
record

"Pictorialists really distanced photography from its documentary, factual history in order to create art," Tannenbaum said.

#### **See Jane Style:**

Romantic Details

Weston is also considered to be one of the greatest photographic printers of the 20th century. Most of the images seen here are from Weston's family, for whom he reserved his best prints. And all are vintage photographs, meaning they were printed by the artist shortly after he shot the image, which is important, because they represent Weston's original vision.

#### **Car Chase:**

Lutz Retiring from GM

And while these images are all black and white, they are suffused with such textures and broad gradations and intensities of that distinct chromatic scale that one comes away feeling that something akin to color has been experienced.

#### **Ohio Travels with Betty:**

Becca is looking for Maui  
Sands Indoor Waterpark.

His daughter-in-law Dody Weston put it best when she wrote that his prints "shine with a mysterious inner light, arousing a sensuous response to their print quality alone: the blacks seemed rich as oil or deep as velvet, a thousand intermediate grays gleamed out — soft pewters, glinting silvers — and at the upper end of the scale were whipped cream, pearls and sunlight."

#### **CavsHQ: A Fan's View:**

All-Star Running Thoughts

#### **Sound Check:**

KISS FM removes Chris Brown  
from playlist

As important to his work as the search for the essence of things were the women in Weston's life. And of those there were quite a few.

#### **HRLite House:**

Putting the Public in Public  
Service: Book Review

"Throughout his life, women were his muses and mentors who introduced him to different aspects of art and life," Tannenbaum said.

#### **Akron Gamer:**

Innovations could spur video  
game evolution in '09

His sister, May, to whom Weston was very close, lived in Middletown, and it was there that Weston photographed *Armco Steel, Middletown, Ohio* when he visited her in 1922.

Shortly after that visit, Weston showed his portfolio to photographic pioneer and entrepreneur Alfred Stieglitz, who took one look at the *Armco Steel* image and told him that was the way he needed to go.

"The Italian actress Tina Modotti introduced him to the Hollywood scene and to the artists of the Mexican Renaissance: Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros and Jose Clemente Orozco, known as Los Tres Grandes, the 'Big Three' who revolutionized Mexican art," Tannenbaum said.

During his sojourn in Mexico, his images begin to lose their soft focus in favor of photographs that are crisp and crystal clear, more concerned with composition and geometry than the artistic manipulations of Pictorialism.

"It was here he began to learn to previsualize, to learn to read the tonal variations, to see the photographic gradations in a scene and to realize what the finished black-and-white print was going to look like," Tannenbaum said. "Previsualization is something you also hear about with Ansel Adams and the f/64 group."

A Ph.D. candidate, Anita Brenner, hired him to photograph indigenous Mexican culture, including *ollas*, the black clay pots used for storing *pulque*, a traditional beverage made from the fermented juice of an agave plant.

Among the 400 images he made for Brenner were many photographs of *ollas*, which started him looking at the possibilities of still life objects.

In the midst of his Mexico sojourn, Weston returned to Los Angeles for about 13 months, and while there he visited the Walter Arensbergs, who were at the center of an artists' group now known as the Arensberg circle.

"There's this great passage in the catalog where it talks about [Weston] jumping up in the middle of the night and taking an old bed pan and putting it on its end and photographing it from the side," Tannenbaum said. "If you don't know what it is, then you might think it's a sculpture. And then of course, there's the very famous image of the toilet."

From such humble objects as toilets, bedpans, peppers, cabbages, rocks, sands and clouds, great art is born.

So in looking at this exhibit, we are not only seeing the influences on Weston, but we're also seeing the progression of the important art movements of the first half of the 20th century.

This exhibit is a must-see, not only for anyone interested in photography, but also for those interested in the crosscurrents of 20th-century art.

There is a rather gorgeous catalog available, which is also rather expensive, but not as expensive as it would be elsewhere. *Edward Weston: Life Work* is \$149.95 at the museum store. Online at Amazon.com, it's \$195, and its regular list price is \$198.

"I was able to work with the publisher and get it down," said museum bookstore manager Laura Firestone. "This is really a gorgeous book. The images are reproduced in their original size, and different types of papers are used so that the images remain as true to the artist's original image as possible."

So not only a great show, but also a gorgeous catalog full of images suitable for framing. But who'd wreck a great book to do that?

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