

Exhibit akron art museum
Photographs show genius of Weston
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Dunes, Oceano ("White Dunes," 47SO)

Edward Weston is a pillar of American photography.

He had the ability to strip an image to its essence by looking beyond the surface to find its core. His close-up studies of nautilus shells and his cropped nudes are in the canon of the greatest photographs ever produced.

A mythic aura, enhanced by a series of lifelong daybook journals, surrounds Weston's life and art. He personifies the artist-

visionary seeking a primal truth -- from his sojourn to Mexico with actress Tina Modotti to his travels through the American West with wife and model Charis Wilson.

Weston (1886-1958) began his career as a portrait photographer and pictorialist. Pictorialized imagery, which was fashionable at the turn of the 20th century, is often staged, softly focused and heavily manipulated.

A marked change in his work came in 1922, after he photographed the Armco Steel Co. in Middletown, Ohio. From that experience, a sharp-focus style emerged and continued for the rest of his life. A founder (along with notables such as Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham) of Group f/64 in 1932, he helped champion the idea of unmanipulated, straight photography.

"Edward Weston: Life Work," with more than 100 photos on view at the Akron Art Museum, is overwhelming. The exhibit is arranged in seven thematic sections ("Early

Work," "Mexico," "Portraits," "Nudes," "Still Life," "Early Landscape" and "Late Landscape"). The show walks viewers through his subjects and life.

Expected iconic images such as *Pepper No. 30*, *Nautilus Shell* and *Nude on Sand, Oceano (235N) (Charis)* are included, but many viewers are surely surprised by lesser-known images.

Simple, direct photos such as *Cloud, New Mexico* are stunning. In that photo, Weston captures a surprisingly broad tonal range found in a sweep of clouds.

Other landscapes and still-life works suggest anthropomorphic body parts. In *Dunes, Oceano ("White Dunes," 47SO)* and *Shell and Rock Arrangement*, the curvature of the land looks strangely like skin, legs and torsos.

The inward-looking work maintains an intense intimacy.

"The camera," Weston once said, "should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh."

So many of the photos are simply poetic moments of focused observation. They are timeless in that they tap a type of eternal instant in which natural forces reveal themselves.

Whether it's melting ice in *Iceberg Lake, Sierra Nevada* or the ribbed curvature in *Cabbage Leaf*, Weston's work powerfully reveals elemental truths.

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- "Edward Weston: Life Work" continues through April 26 at the Akron Art Museum, 1 S. High St. Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursdays. Admission: \$7, or \$5 for senior citizens and students, free for children 12 and younger. Call 330-376-9185.