

June 2008  
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# MOC P

Museum of  
**Contemporary Photography**

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## **A GREAT AMERICAN ROAD TRIP, SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF LEGENDARY PHOTOGRAPHERS**

***On the Road:***  
**Dave Anderson: *Rough Beauty***  
**Farm Security Administration**  
**Dorothea Lange**

September 5 — November 1, 2008

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**Chicago** — The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College Chicago, is pleased to present several coordinated exhibitions in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, part of a year-long campus-wide celebration of Beat culture. The centerpiece of this activity will be the original manuscript scroll of *On the Road*, on view at the Center for Book and Paper Arts.

### **Farm Security Administration**

This exhibition highlights the Museum's holdings of social documentary work commissioned by the U.S. government during the Great Depression. The project, under the History Section of the Farm Security Administration, was intended to convince the public that Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's various corrective plans under the Works Progress Administration were indeed necessary, instead of a government bailout as characterized by FDR's Republican opponents. It was started in

1935 and led by Roy Stryker who hired a crew of photographers, eventually numbering 17, who worked up to 1943. Beginning with Dorothea Lange, these photographers fanned out across the country and produced tens of thousands of negatives, now held by the Library of Congress.

These images were distributed to newspapers and magazines and passed around in town meetings across the country. Ironically, images of farmers forced off their land by foreclosure, dust storms and floods were later used as evidence of strong-willed Americans ready to go off and fight the Germans and Japanese. Many of these images document the exodus of jobless people, on the road from east to west, either to work as migrant laborers or on WPA sites such as the Grand Coulee and Fort Peck dams. This model of relocation and self-redefinition, both individually and nationally, well described by John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, is the background and subtext for Kerouac's *On the Road* describing his experiences of 1947, just a few years later.

The FSA, in the hands of Lange, Russell Lee and Walker Evans, served to establish the foundation of future American photographic journalism, social documentary, and art. The Museum of Contemporary Photography is fortunate to own a collection of over 400 FSA prints with virtually every important photographer in the project represented. We will be exhibiting a selection of this work during 2007 and 2008, the 70th anniversary years of its heyday.



### **Dorothea Lange**

The MoCP will also exhibit an expanded view of the work of Dorothea Lange, both during and after her work for the FSA. The Museum's collection of her work is the result of a major gift from her family.

### **Robert Frank: *The Americans***

Complementing these exhibitions are images from Robert Frank's book *The Americans*, published at the same time as *On the Road* and with an introduction by Kerouac. In a sense, the America that Kerouac — the native son and college student — saw, and Frank — the older Swiss immigrant artist — saw, was equally strange to them. Their ways of describing and interpreting what they each experienced, however, was quite different.

### **Dave Anderson: *Rough Beauty***

Between 2003 and 2006 Dave Anderson took over 50 trips to Vidor, Texas, and photographed the town and its residents. Known primarily for its long history as a KKK town, Vidor is a small community struggling with issues of extreme poverty and isolation in southeastern Texas. Anderson's pictures explore a place and its people as they cope with the burden of their past. The place is very reminiscent of the places that opened the eyes of Jack Kerouac and his friends to an America that unfolded in front of them as they drove or hitch hiked back and forth across the country.

## MoCP SPONSORS

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs of the MoCP are sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Mayer and Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The National Endowment for the Arts; the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs/After School Matters; American Airlines, the official airlines of the MoCP, and our members.

## ABOUT MOCP

The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP), a resident organization of Columbia College Chicago, is the only museum in the Midwest with an exclusive commitment to the medium of photography. By presenting projects and exhibitions that embrace a wide range of contemporary aesthetics and technologies, the Museum strives to communicate the value and significance of photographic images as expressions of human thought, imagination, and creativity.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

**Rod Slemmons** is the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago. From 1982 to 1996 he was the Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Seattle Art Museum, and from 1996 to 2002 he taught Photography, the History of Photography, and Graduate Museum Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle. He was the National Chair of the Society for Photographic Education from 1990 to 1994. He has served as a peer review panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts and as a grant reader and site evaluator for the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has organized numerous exhibitions including: *Diane Arbus* (1986); *Like a One-Eyed Cat*, a 30-year retrospective of the photography of Lee Friedlander (1989); *Shadowy Evidence: The Art of E. S. Curtis and His Contemporaries* (1989); *Persistence of Vision*, a retrospective of the digital work of Paul Berger (2003); and *Witness: Contemporary Mexican Journalism* (2004). His essays and reviews have appeared in dozens of publications including *Afterimage*, *Black Flash*, *image*, and *Reflex*.

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## IMAGES:

**1<sup>st</sup> page:** Dave Anderson, *Breeze*, from *Rough Beauty*, 2006

**2<sup>nd</sup> page:** Dorothea Lange, *Texas Tenant Farmer in California*, *Marysville Migrant Camp*, 1935