

John Gutmann: The Photographer at Work

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 Digital images available at www.creativephotography.org

Tucson, AZ – September 31, 2009 – A major retrospective of the artist John Gutmann (1905–1998) will be on view at the Center for Creative Photography October 23, 2009 – January 31, 2010, in the second exhibition of the “at Work:” series. Curated by Sally Stein, *John Gutmann: The Photographer at Work* will examine his prodigious photographic output in relation to his fascinating biography, which spans nearly the entire twentieth century and several continents, while also addressing his broad engagement with modern art in its diverse forms and traditions. Thanks to the spate of distinguished monographs published toward the end of his long life, Gutmann lived to see his reputation established as a major modernist photographer. It took the world half a century to begin to appreciate the distinctive imagery he produced during his first decade in the U.S. after emigrating from Germany in 1933. The posthumous transfer of Gutmann’s archive of photographs and correspondence to the Center for Creative Photography finally makes possible an in-depth treatment of his entire career.



John Gutmann, *The Artist Lives Dangerously, San Francisco, 1938.*
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 Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

Born in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland), Gutmann studied art in Breslau and Berlin, notably with Expressionist painter Otto Mueller. With the rise of the Nazi regime, he found himself prohibited from practicing art. He fled to the United States, settling in San Francisco in 1933. Seeking to earn a living in the midst of the Great Depression, Gutmann took up photography, relying in part on connections with the German periodical press but otherwise forging his own path.

Gutmann brought a fresh and fascinated eye to the American experience. A generation before Robert Frank, he toured the country by bus, capturing images of oddities such as outsized advertisements, graffiti, roller skaters, and car elevators. Perceptive, celebratory, and full of wonder, Gutmann’s America reflects his awareness of continental surrealism. His own status as an outsider—a Jew in Germany, a naturalized citizen in the United States—may also account for his sensitivity to groups on the periphery of society, both in the U.S. and abroad.

Gutmann’s work of the 1930s appeared in such publications as *U.S. Camera*, *Look*, *Life*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1936, he began a distinguished teaching career at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University), briefly

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interrupted by service as a photographer in the U.S. Army during World War II. In the 1970s, Gutmann re-evaluated his early work with the emergent market for fine-art photography in mind, applying poetic titles to images originally conceived to serve in more popular, editorial contexts. He died in San Francisco in 1998.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of *John Gutmann: The Photographer at Work*, an exhibition catalogue co-published by Yale University Press including a lead essay by Sally Stein, introduction by Douglas Nickel, and an overview of the Center's Gutmann archive by Amy Rule.

Gutmann was a teacher of art and photography, a filmmaker, painter, and photographer. He collected art and antiquities. The Gutmann archive documents these activities within the context of the San Francisco cultural scene, enriched by Gutmann's European friendships and connections. The archive holds potential for research around a range of diverse and compelling themes: European artists whose lives were uprooted by Nazi oppression, commercial photo agencies in the 1940's, the growth of academic photography programs, the spread of modernism on the West Coast, and the network of friendships among artists at mid-century.

John Gutmann: The Photographer at Work acknowledges Gutmann's place in the history of photography, revealing unfamiliar works and re-establishing contexts that have gone unnoticed in prior exhibitions. While the project focuses on Gutmann's photography, in keeping with his multidisciplinary background, it also draws links to his passionate interest in other visual arts, such as painting and filmmaking; his activity as a collector of non-Western art and artifacts; and his pedagogy.

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About the Center for Creative Photography

The Center for Creative Photography, part of the University of Arizona Libraries, holds more archives and individual works by 20th-century North American photographers than any other museum in the world. The archives of over 60 major American photographers—including Ansel Adams, Harry Callahan, W. Eugene Smith, Edward Weston, and Garry Winogrand—form the core of a collection numbering over 80,000 works. The Center for Creative Photography has an integrated program of preservation, access, and education that celebrates the history of photography and its contemporary practice.

For More Information: 520-621-7968 or <http://www.creativephotography.org>

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; weekends, 1 to 5 p.m.

Admission: Center for Creative Photography exhibitions, print room viewings, and education events are always FREE and open to the public.

Location: The CCP is located on the University of Arizona campus, Fine Arts Complex, 1030 N. Olive Rd., Tucson, AZ.

Parking: Parking is available at the Park Avenue Garage at the NE corner of Park and Speedway Blvd. The pedestrian underpass gives you direct access to the CCP. Parking directly behind the CCP (off 2nd Street) is free after 5 pm on weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday.

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