MINOR WHITE: THE EYE THAT SHAPES
April 27 - June 18, 1989

The first major retrospective of the work of American photographer Minor White opens at The Museum of Modern Art on April 27, 1989. MINOR WHITE: THE EYE THAT SHAPES was organized for The Art Museum, Princeton University, by Peter C. Bunnell, McAlpin Professor of the History of Photography and Modern Art at Princeton University, where he is also Faculty Curator of Photography at The Art Museum. The exhibition and catalogue have been made possible by a grant from Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc.


Drawn from the Minor White Archive at Princeton University, the exhibition consists of 185 photographs that demonstrate the full range of White's work from 1938 to 1976. Many of the works, including ten rare color photographs, have never been exhibited, and only one quarter of them have been published previously.

Minor White (1908-1976) is recognized as one of the most important photographic artists active during the thirty years after World War II. Living
during this period in San Francisco, then in Rochester, and finally near
Boston, he produced a singular body of imagery that assures his place in the
history of twentieth-century photography. His was a pictorial achievement that
helped shape a distinctly modern American photographic style that is
characterized by luminous clarity, lyricism, and grace. His approach may be
seen to be analogous to that of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, two of his early
mentors, but it was the work of Alfred Stieglitz that most influenced White's
attitudes regarding the expressive and creative methods in photography. His
themes have a rich autobiographical content and relate to issues of identity
and spirituality. His wide-ranging subject matter includes portraiture,
studies of the nude, landscape, and architecture. Beginning with a deep
interest in the reality of the depictive photographic image, his work evolved
over several years into one of biomorphic abstraction and elaborate symbolic
representation.

White was born in Minneapolis, and he was educated in science and poetry
at the University of Minnesota. He began his photographic career in 1937 in
Portland, Oregon, photographing architecture and gaining technical expertise in
theater and landscape photography before being drafted into the army during
World War II. After leaving the army in 1945, White went to New York City to
learn museum curatorial procedures with Beaumont and Nancy Newhall at The
Museum of Modern Art. He also studied art history under Meyer Schapiro at
Columbia University.

In 1946 he joined Ansel Adams on the faculty of the California School of
Fine Arts in San Francisco and seriously resumed his photography, working in
the San Francisco area. In 1952 White was part of a group that founded the
progressive photographic journal Aperture, of which he remained editor for the
next twenty-three years. In 1953 he moved to Rochester, New York, to work with
Beaumont Newhall at George Eastman House, leaving in 1956 to devote himself to his own creative work and to teaching at the Rochester Institute of Technology. In 1965 White joined the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he created an innovative program in photographic education.

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For additional information about the New York showing, contact Edna Goldstaub, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9755; for information about the exhibition's organization or travel schedule, contact Maria Pellerano, The Art Museum, Princeton University, 609/452-5827.