

# The Museum of Modern Art

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ANNOUNCES THE FIRST MAJOR DOROTHEA LANGE SOLO EXHIBITION AT MoMA IN 50 YEARS

**NEW YORK, April 22, 2019**—The Museum of Modern Art announces *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures*, the first major solo exhibition at the Museum of the photographer's incisive work in over 50 years. On view from February 9 through May 2, 2020, in The Paul J. Sachs Galleries in The David and Peggy Rockefeller Building, *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* includes approximately 100 photographs drawn entirely from the Museum's collection. The exhibition also uses archival materials such as correspondence, historical publications, and oral histories, as well as contemporary voices, to examine the ways in which words inflect our understanding of Lange's pictures. These new perspectives and responses from artists, scholars, critics, and writers, including Julie Ault, Wendy Red Star, and Rebecca Solnit, provide fresh insight into Lange's practice. *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* is organized by Sarah Meister, Curator, with River Bullock, Beaumont & Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, assisted by Madeline Weisburg, Modern Women's Fund Twelve-Month Intern, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art.

Toward the end of her life, Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) remarked, "All photographs—not only those that are so-called 'documentary,' and every photograph really is documentary and belongs in some place, has a place in history—can be fortified by words." Organized loosely chronologically and spanning her career, the exhibition groups iconic works together with lesser known photographs and traces their varied relationships to words: from early criticism on Lange's photographs to her photo-essays published in *LIFE* magazine, and from the landmark photobook *An American Exodus* to her examination of the US criminal justice system. The exhibition also includes groundbreaking photographs of the 1930s—including *Migrant Mother* (1936)—that inspired pivotal public awareness of the lives of sharecroppers, displaced families, and migrant workers during the Great Depression. Through her photography and her words, Lange urged photographers to reconnect with the world—a call reflective of her own ethos and working method, which coupled an attention to aesthetics with a central concern for humanity.

"It seems both timely and urgent that we renew our attention to Lange's extraordinary achievements," said Sarah Meister. "Her concern for less fortunate and often overlooked individuals, and her success in using photography (and words) to address these inequities, encourages each of us to reflect on our own civic responsibilities. It reminds me of the unique role that art—and in particular photography—can play in imagining a more just society."

The exhibition begins in 1933, when Lange, then a portrait photographer, first brought her camera outside into the streets of San Francisco. Lange's increasing interest in the everyday experience of people she encountered eventually led her to work for government agencies,

supporting their objective to raise public awareness and to provide aid to struggling farmers and those devastated by the Great Depression. During this time, Lange photographed her subjects and kept notes that formed the backbone of government reports; these and other archival materials will be represented alongside corresponding photographs throughout the exhibition. Lange's commitment to social justice and her faith in the power of photography remained constant throughout her life, even when her politics did not align with those who were paying for her work. A central focus of the exhibition is *An American Exodus*, a 1939 collaboration between Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor, her husband and an agricultural economist. As an object and as an idea, *An American Exodus* highlights the voices of her subjects by pairing first-person quotations alongside their pictures. Later, Lange's photographs continued to be useful in addressing marginalized histories and ongoing social concerns. Throughout her career as a photographer for the US Government and various popular magazines, Lange's pictures were frequently syndicated and circulated outside of their original context. Lange's photographs of the 1930s helped illustrate Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and her 1950s photographs of a public defender were used to illustrate *Minimizing Racism in Jury Trials* (1969), a law handbook published after Black Panther Huey P. Newton's first trial during a time of great racial strife.

This collection-based exhibition would not be possible had it not been for Lange's deep creative ties to the Museum during her lifetime. MoMA's collection of Lange photographs was built over many decades and remains one of the definitive collections of her work. Her relationship to MoMA's Department of Photography dates to her inclusion in its inaugural exhibition, in 1940 which was curated by the department's director, Edward Steichen. Lange is a rare artist in that both Steichen and his successor, John Szarkowski, held her in equally high esteem. More than a generation after her first retrospective, organized by Szarkowski at MoMA in 1966, *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures* uses both historical and contemporary words to encourage a more nuanced understanding of words and pictures in circulation.

The exhibition is accompanied by the catalogue *Dorothea Lange: Words & Pictures*, capturing this renewed consideration of Lange's work through the particular lens of its relationship to words. Contributors to the exhibition and the catalogue include artists and curators Julie Ault, Sam Contis (in collaboration with Tess Taylor), Sandy Phillips, Wendy Red Star, and Sally Mann; scholars and writers Kimberly Juanita Brown, Jennifer Greenhill, Christina Sharpe, Robert Slifkin, Rebecca Solnit.

#### **SPONSORSHIP**

The exhibition is supported by the Annual Exhibition Fund.

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