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Cincinnati Art Museum presents Islands of the Blest at Mercantile Library; October 1–November 19, 2016

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(ArtfixDaily.com) **CINCINNATI** – Cincinnati Art Museum features photography of the American West in its first exhibition at The Mercantile Library, *Islands of the Blest*, October 1–November 19, 2016.

The exhibition is part of the 2016 FotoFocus Biennial celebration of photography held in more than 50 museums and galleries throughout Cincinnati and the surrounding region.

The roughly 25 photographs on view at The Mercantile Library depict the American West and were made between the 1870s and 1970s. The photographers range from the unknown to some of America's most distinguished, including Timothy H. O'Sullivan, William Henry Jackson and Dorothea Lange.



Dorothea Lange, Boundary County, Idaho, 1939. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Houston-based artist Bryan Schutmaat and art historian Ashlyn Davis sourced the images from digital public archives like the Library of Congress and the United States Geological Survey Library. The complete collection was published as a limited-edition book in 2014. For this presentation, Cincinnati Art Museum Curator of Photography Brian Sholis worked with Schutmaat and Davis to select the photos and design the installation with an eye toward telling a history of exploration, settlement and industrialization.

"The West's grip on the American imagination has inspired not only great photography, but also fantastic literature. I've been a Mercantile Library member since moving to Cincinnati, and I'm excited to present these pictures—drawn primarily from library collections—in one of Cincinnati's great shrines to the power of narrative," said Sholis.

John Faherty, director of The Mercantile Library, was integral to the development and organization of this exhibition, which will be accompanied by a September 30 opening reception and talk, with Schutmaat and Davis, as well as a book discussion on October 25, led by Sholis.

"These photos resonated so strongly with me that I couldn't wait for the Library to be a part of it. We're proud to host this exhibition and collaborate with the Cincinnati Art Museum in combining history and the visual and literary arts," said Faherty.

With this exhibition, The Mercantile Library, in The Mercantile Library Building at 414 Walnut Street, is one of several FotoFocus Biennial participating venues on the “arts corridor” along Walnut Street. During the biennial, the Taft Museum of Art and the Weston Art Gallery will also exhibit photographs inspired by the American West—creating a unique opportunity to discover the visual history of the region.

The Cincinnati Art Museum and the Mercantile Library produced this exhibition with funding from FotoFocus and private donors. *Islands of the Blest* is FREE and open to the public.

The Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the generosity of individuals and businesses that give annually to ArtsWave. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as our members.

General admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is always free. The museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.

The Mercantile Library, founded in 1835, maintains and expands its vast collection of books while presenting an expansive schedule of events. Full of visits by authors and writers, book discussions, workshops, and forums, there’s something on the schedule for everyone. Additionally, the Library is home to a diverse collection of artworks including portrait busts, paintings, and sculpture.

The Mercantile is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closing at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays), and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. For general information, call (513) 621-0717 or visit www.mercantilelibrary.com.

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