

American photography in the 20th century both captured the details of everyday existence and expounded upon the country's visual arts traditions. While the camera increasingly contributed to the dissemination of information through scientific recording, photojournalistic reportage and advertisement, photography also developed as an artistic medium capable of expressive innovation. The camera provided a tool with which to not only expose elements of contemporary culture, but also convey the photographer's individual perspective. As artists turned their lenses outward and focused their creative vision inward, photographic practice vacillated between the dueling currents of documentation and aesthetic experimentation throughout the century.

The selected prints on view in *American Vision* are drawn from a recent donation of photographs to the Portland Museum of Art by longtime collectors and Maine philanthropists Owen and Anna Wells. As an ensemble, these prints reveal the two traditions of documentation and experimentation as they permeate eight decades of photographic practice in the United States. From intimate portraiture to formal studies of texture and color, the Wells' collection offers a glimpse into these coexisting tendencies as they diverge and overlap. *American Vision* follows the development of photography, both in theory and in practice, over the course of the 20th century through the lenses of some of the most important figures in American camera work.

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AMERICAN VISION

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTION OF OWEN & ANNA WELLS

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