

Santa Barbara Museum of Art:

Brett Weston's Photography comes Out of the Shadow

By **KERRY METHNER** / CASA

SHINING A LIGHT on nearly seven decades of work by Brett Weston, last week the Santa Barbara Museum of Art opened its doors for an insightful panel presentation moderated by Karen Sinsheimer, SBMA Curator of Photography along with a reception focused on the recently opened exhibit of Weston's work.

Brett Weston: Out of the Shadow, which will be on view through August 16th, was co-organized by The Phillips Collection and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art and curated by Stephen Bennett Phillips. As the largest retrospective of Brett Weston's work in over 30 years, the exhibit presents more than 130 photographs that range from early vintage prints made in Mexico and California in the 1920s and 1930s; East Coast images from the 1940s; to later landscape and nature photographs, as well as prints made shortly before his death in Hawaii in 1993.



Cactus, Santa Barbara, 1931 by **Brett Weston**. Silver gelatin print. The Brett Weston Archive, Courtesy, The Christian K. Keesee Collection

The opening panel included Ron Perisho, Collector; Scott Nichols, of the Scott Nichols Gallery; Merg Ross, Photographer and life-long friend of Brett Weston; and Jason Christian, Appraiser.

Each of the panelists talked of how they became interested in Brett Weston's work. Ron Perisho, who is a Brett Weston collector shared that before becoming acquainted with Brett's work, "I wanted photos of nature...I kind of credit Brett with taking me from collecting nice symmetrical photos to enjoying the joy of everyday abstract."

Merg Ross, a photographer who would go out shooting with Weston, shared, "It was incredible what he could see. He just lived it.

Photography was his thing, the one thing he did... This show is a testimony to how this man could see something in nothing."

Commenting on the incredible body of work by Brett Weston, Jason Christian, Appraiser, noted, "It is not uncommon for a Brett Weston to come through the door that you've never seen before... He did 70 years of shooting...It is a joy to get to know the work...The work is phenomenal. His technical abilities, the eye, it's a joy. [Brett] was an artist who was singularly obsessed with his work."

Moving on to his composition and place in the pantheon of American photographers, Scott Nichols, of the Scott Nichols Gallery noted, "Brett uses black in a positive way." That ability birthed abstract photos from day to day elements.

Sinsheimer's questions, that sparked the revealing conversation about the artist and his commitment to his art, moved the conversation from the personal and historical to critical aspects of Brett Weston's career. Her final comment was, "Brett was always there; always present; and always looking."

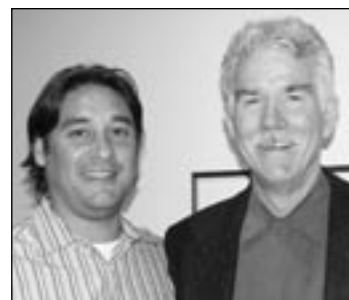
After the panel and a Q&A, invited guests entered the exhibition and discovered the exhibit also includes several Brett Weston sculptures.



Jerry Parent and Clarie Parent



Tim Walsh and Lorna Hedges



Henri Bristol and Scott Nichols

While the exhibition provides an unprecedented view of the form, composition, and contrast that remained constants in Weston's career, it also parallels the life of the artist, especially the familial and artistic relationship between Brett and his father, Edward, illuminating their influence on each other, and simultaneously freeing Brett from his father's shadow to take his own place in the pantheon of American photography.

Brett Weston seemed destined from birth to become a fine photographer. Born in Los Angeles in 1911, the second of four sons to photographer Edward Weston, he had perhaps the closest artistic relationship with his famous father.

In 1925, Edward took Brett to Mexico where the 13 year old became his father's apprentice. Brett's formal education was limited, and after attending school in Mexico for two weeks, he quit. It was then that he took to photography full-time and never considered doing anything else, working exclusively in black and white throughout his life.

Brett took his subjects from the natural world: dunes, rocks, and tide pools of the California coast, close-ups of bark and kelp, and water in its many forms. Never manipulated with additional lighting or props, his photographs are distinctly abstract but tied to the real world.

Evidence of the immense gratitude and respect that Brett had for both his father and the art of photography, came in 1991, when, at the age of 80, he burned some of his own negatives - catching the attention of the media, including the New York Times. Brett never printed his father's negatives after Edward Weston died, and by destroying his own negatives, sent the message that no one can print or interpret another artist's work.



Scott Nichols, Scott Nichols Gallery; **Jason Christian**, Appraiser; **Erica Weston**, Edward Weston's Daughter; and **Merg Ross**, Photographer & life-long friend of Brett Weston



Building Reflections, c. 1975 by **Brett Weston**. Silver gelatin print. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Gift of the Brett Weston Archive from the Christian K. Keesee Collection, 2006



Kathy Perisho, Edith Ross, and Ron Perisho, Collector



Karen Sinsheimer, SBMA's Curator of Photography with **Howard and Margaret Arvey**



SBMA Trustee **Mike Healy, Penny Jenkins**, and SBMA Trustee **Gregg Hackethal**



Jerry Jensen, Nancy Lieberman, and Joe Campanelli

The exhibit was co-organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. and Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, O.K. This exhibition was made possible through the generosity of Eric A. Skipsey, SBMA Museum Collectors Council, SBMA PhotoFutures, Alice Gillaroo and Susan Jorgensen, Susan Bower, Susan Bowey, Amy and Michael Mayfield, Stephanie and Fred Shuman, and Patricia and Richard Blake.

SBMA is located at 1130 State St. The Museum is open Tues - Sun 11am to 5pm. Closed Mon. Free every Sunday. Contact SBMA at 963.4364 or www.sbma.net.

People Photos by Kerry Methner / CASA