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L.A. Photographer Anthony Hernandez the Subject of Curatorial Collaboration Between Vancouver Art Gallery Director and Renowned Photo-Based Artist Jeff Wall

VANCOUVER, BC – Vancouver Art Gallery director **Kathleen Bartels** and celebrated Vancouver artist **Jeff Wall** are co-curating the exhibition **Anthony Hernandez** on view from **May 30 to September 7, 2009**. Comprised of 70 photographs, this groundbreaking survey of Hernandez's work from 1970 to 1984 chronicles the unique urban life and spaces of the artist's native Los Angeles. From large-format, black and white city landscapes, to colour portraits of Beverly Hills shoppers, Hernandez's images are compositionally precise and formally beautiful. With a perceptive eye for relationships between individuals and their urban environment, the artist creates images that eloquently expose the economic and racial layers of one the North America's most diverse and complex cities.



Anthony Hernandez, *Los Angeles #2*, 1970, silver gelatin print, Courtesy of Anthony Hernandez and Christopher Grimes Gallery

“Anthony Hernandez's stark and deliberate depictions of Los Angeles' street corners, bus stops and plazas capture the heat, light and intensity of the city in a way that speaks powerfully to any urban dweller,” said Vancouver Art Gallery director Kathleen Bartels. “Each of his powerful works evokes a sense of presence specific to Los Angeles, which I experienced in my years living in that city. His work captures the alienated and the unexplored locals of LA beyond the cliché glamour of Hollywood to tell greater truths about urban life.”

Born in Los Angeles in 1947, Anthony Hernandez began his career in the late 1960s with no formal artistic training, taking highly intuitive photographs of street life using a pre-focused 35mm camera. Immersing himself in the jostling crowds of the city's sidewalks, the artist searched for interesting subjects to represent the urban character of his hometown. These early black and white images make up the first of six sections in the exhibition. They depict “decisive moments” of the urban streetscape, sharing the candid and clever qualities of Garry Winogrand's photographs from the same period shot on streets of New York City.

In the late 1970s and early 80s, Hernandez created more detached representations of LA's urban locals, imbuing them with elements of social criticism. Rather than venturing out into the city with his relatively light 35mm Leica, which allowed him to take quick reflexive photographs, Hernandez began making images using a large-format camera and tripod. Slowing down his process and setting up his equipment openly, he allowed life to take place around him while going largely ignored by those who passed in front of his lens.

For these photographs, Hernandez was drawn to transitional spaces throughout the urban landscape, revealing facets of city life which most urban residents

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disregard. The exhibition includes four series of photographs from this period, including *Public Transit Areas*, *Public Use Areas*, *Public Fishing Areas* and *Automotive Landscapes*. *Public Transit Areas*, the first project in this period, drew the artist to the city's bus stops. From the transit system, he moved on to photograph other urban environments frequented by working and underprivileged citizens. The series *Public Use Areas* is comprised of pictures of workers seeking comfort on their breaks in the inhospitable plazas between office buildings. *Public Fishing Area* illustrates the human desire to find leisure in the fragments of the natural environment remaining in the urban landscape. Finally, the images included in his series *Automotive Landscapes* capture the lots, wrecking yards and repair shops where cars are static and held captive by transactions of repair, purchase or rental.

The images from this stage in Hernandez's career represent an evolution in the modern street photograph. Producing much larger prints with greater precision and sharpness of detail, he opened his images to include entire settings rather than the just individuals or small groups of people, which dominate traditional street photography. In these larger format photographs, architectural backdrops and the voids of urban environments became increasingly important, creating new perspectives on the cityscape.

The exhibition concludes with a group of photographs taken in 1984 along Rodeo Drive, Los Angeles's famed high-end shopping district. Making his first colour images, the artist returned to using a small format camera to create pictures of shoppers and "scenesters" as they weave in and out of designer fashion and jewellery stores. Drawing attention to the often self-centred characters occupying the sidewalks, these pictures are the last taken by Hernandez with a small format camera.

Anthony Hernandez is accompanied by a 72-page catalogue, which includes a forward by Vancouver Art Gallery director, Kathleen Bartels and major essay by Jeff Wall.