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Vancouver Art Gallery acquires exceptional \$2 million photographic collection

Vancouver, BC – The Vancouver Art Gallery has acquired a major art collection valued at \$2 million (CDN) consisting of over 460 exceptional photographic images by some of the world’s most acclaimed photographers. The acquisition, from the collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft, comprises rare and vintage prints by some of the most recognized figures in the history of photography including Ansel Adams, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Margaret Bourke-White, Julia Margaret Cameron, Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Andrea Kertesz, Dorothea Lange, Nadar, August Sander, Aaron Siskind, Alfred Stieglitz and Garry Winogrand.

In all, the acquisition, which is part gift and part purchase, comprises 463 prints by 155 artists, 128 of whom have been added to the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery for the first time. The collection spans key moments in the history of photography and captures a fascinating record of life from the invention of photography in the mid-19th century to the present. The works will be exhibited at the Gallery from January 29 to May 29, 2005 in *Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft*.

“The Beck/Gruft collection is one of the most significant privately held photography collections in Canada and is exceptional in its scope and quality,” said Kathleen Bartels, Director, Vancouver Art Gallery. “This acquisition provides an important historical grounding to the Gallery’s already significant photography collection and radically broadens the scope of the Gallery’s existing collection. As a gift to the Gallery, it is an expression of remarkable generosity by Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft who have played an important role within the Vancouver art community over the past three decades.”

The Beck/Gruft collection significantly expands the Gallery’s photographic holdings and is the second major photographic acquisition by the Gallery under the leadership of Director, Kathleen Bartels. In October 2002, the Gallery built the cornerstone for one of the most comprehensive contemporary photo-based collections in North America with the acquisition of 60 works by 15 internationally acclaimed artists (valued at \$3.5 million CDN) from the collection of Alison and Alan Schwartz. The Beck/Gruft gift establishes a solid foundation of historic photography that underscores the Gallery’s existing collection and makes the Vancouver Art Gallery home to one of the most significant photographic collections in North America.

Gallery Curator, Grant Arnold, commented, "The diversity and depth of the Beck/Gruft collection makes it a perfect fit for the Vancouver Art Gallery. It includes crucial images by artists whose importance in the history of photography is widely recognized, as well as historical and contemporary work that has specific connections to Vancouver and the Canadian west. It adds weight to the Gallery's collection in a field that has taken on an unprecedented level of prominence in the artworld over the past 30 years."

Highlights of the acquisition include rare examples of early developments in photography such as: *Charcoal Burners*, 1845, a calotype by the inventor of the negative-positive process William Henry Fox Talbot; *The Seven Stars*, 1870, possibly the only existing print of this image by the Victorian pictorialist Julia Margaret Cameron; and, two vintage prints made in 1949-51 by the French photographer Maxime Du Camp.

Other highlights include iconic images from key figures in the 20th century: two vintage prints by Lewis Hine, who first attracted attention for his work documenting the conditions of child labour in the United States; a compelling 1930 image of a tractor factory in the Soviet Union by the legendary photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White; the only existing vintage print of *Labour 2*, 1927, by the acclaimed Mexican photographer Tina Modotti; and, a 1932 vintage architectural print by pioneering German photographer August Sander. Included in this important group of work are exceptionally raw and real images such as four works from Roman Vishniac's series documenting Jewish communities in Eastern Europe just prior to the Second World War; and, three important works from Aaron Siskind's Harlem projects of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Other highly significant images include: Andre Kertesz's widely published *Satyrical Dancer*, 1927; Walker Evans' well-known image *Main Street, Ossining, New York*, 1932; four works by the Mexican photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo, including one of his most well-known images *Los Agachados*, 1934; Lisette Model's famous image of a gambler on the French Riviera, 1937; Robert Capa's images of combat and the liberation of Paris from the Second World War; Dorothea Lange's *Portrait of a Woman, South Dakota*, 1939 from her work for the Farm Security Administration during America's great depression; and, Richard Avedon's portrait of Andy Warhol's surgical scars taken in 1969 titled *Andy Warhol artist, New York City 8.20.69*. An outstanding component to the collection are nine works by Robert Frank, perhaps the most influential photographer of the 20th century, including seven from his seminal project *The Americans* and five works by Henri Cartier-Bresson, co-founder of the Magnum Photo Agency, including his renowned image *Alicante, Spain*, 1933.

The gift also encompasses work by lesser-known figures such as Charles Mathers, Frederick Dally and William Notman, commercial photographers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who worked extensively in the Canadian west. Such work provides the Gallery with representations of early settler influxes and evidence of how this region was visualized in the public imagination at that time.

Since the early 1980s, the Vancouver Art Gallery has been actively acquiring photography from internationally renowned artists, particularly Vancouver artists. This gift includes significant photographs by artists based in Vancouver bringing to the collection new work by Vancouver-based Roy Arden, Scott McFarland and Stephen Waddell. Other additions in the area of contemporary photography include work by U.S. and European artists such as Larry Clark, Robert Cumming, Judy Dater, Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld.

Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft are collectors who have functioned as patrons, writers, occasional curators, critics, and proprietors of Nova Gallery, an influential commercial gallery specializing in photography that, between 1976 and 1982, was a nexus for artists, curators and collectors. Gruft came to Vancouver from South Africa during the 1960s, and Beck arrived from the United States in 1970. After meeting at the University of British Columbia, where they both taught, Beck and Gruft developed a shared passion for photographic imagery. They made their first purchase, a work by Vancouver-based photographer Robert Minden, in 1975. Since that time they have been unwavering in their dedication; over the ensuing thirty years they have assembled a collection of historical and contemporary photography that is outstanding in its breadth and quality.

The Beck/Gruft collection provides the Gallery with an important legacy for future generations and a strong foundation upon which to continue building an exceptional collection of historical, modern and contemporary photography.

Works from this acquisition will be on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the exhibition *Real Pictures: Photographs from the Collection of Claudia Beck and Andrew Gruft*, January 29 to May 29, 2005. All media are welcome to attend the opening celebration at 7pm on Friday, February 4, 2005.

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