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# The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

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## THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART ANNOUNCES THE ACQUISITION OF INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED HALLMARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

*Collection's Iconic Images Span 165 Years of American and Photographic History*

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art has announced its acquisition of the complete Hallmark Photographic Collection, considered the most broad-ranging and important private collection of American photography. The many masterpieces included in this leading collection represent the full spectrum of artistic achievement and technical innovation that have distinguished the medium. The collection spans the entire history of photography, from 1839 to the present, with works by such renowned pioneers and masters as Southworth & Hawes, Carleton Watkins, Timothy O'Sullivan, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Alfred Stieglitz, Dorothea Lange, Harry Callahan, Lee Friedlander, Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman. Regarded as one of the last great private holdings of photography, the Hallmark Photographic Collection pioneered serious collecting in this area when it was begun in 1964. It now contains superb individual works by virtually all the key American photographers in history, as well as by a number of significant figures from outside the boundaries of the United States.



Charles Sheeler, *Criss-Crossed Conveyors- Ford Plant* (1927). Courtesy of the Hallmark Photographic Collection, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

Because of the Hallmark Photographic Collection's scope, it not only represents a comprehensive record of the innovations and advancements of photography as a medium but also provides a unique documentation of the growths, triumphs and tragedies of the American experience for the last 150 years.

The Nelson-Atkins' acquisition of the entire Hallmark Photographic Collection, more than 6,500 works by 900 artists, was completed through a combination of gift and purchase. Hallmark gifted a significant portion of the collection as part of its continued generosity to the Museum, and the balance was purchased by the Museum with funds donated to the Nelson-Atkins by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation. This acquisition establishes the Nelson-Atkins as one of the premier museums in the world for photography.

“Transferring the Hallmark Photographic Collection to the Nelson-Atkins is an important expression of Hallmark’s commitment to supporting the arts and Kansas City. The arts are essential to maintaining our cultural heritage, ensuring a high quality of life for our community, and inspiring creativity in all areas of society,” said Donald J. Hall, Hallmark Cards Inc. Chairman. “Our gift to the Nelson-Atkins

is a natural extension of these goals – ensuring that this world-renowned collection can remain in its entirety in Kansas City to inspire and edify all who see it.”

Hall, also a Nelson-Atkins’ Board Trustee, strongly supported Hallmark’s development of the collection over the years, fostering the creation of what is now considered one of the greatest collections of American photography.

“As we look to the future of the Nelson-Atkins and our community, it is brightened by the addition of this extraordinary collection to the Museum,” said Marc F. Wilson, Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell Director/CEO of the Museum. “The generosity of Hallmark and the Hall family will open horizons of discovery and enjoyment as people experience the amazing depth and breadth of these works in the inspiring setting of the upcoming Bloch Building.”

Since its visionary founding more than 40 years ago, the Hallmark Photographic Collection has been a tool for preserving, educating and promoting the legacy of fine art photography through internationally touring exhibitions, significant loans and seminal publications. The Nelson-Atkins’ strong institutional focus on education and research makes it an ideal place to expand this tradition. The Museum looks forward to using the collection as the foundation for a dynamic photography program of international significance.

This extraordinary gift comes at an important moment for the Nelson-Atkins, as it undertakes a campus-wide transformation that includes renovations to its original building, a new building by architect Steven Holl, collections reinstallation and a redesigned Sculpture Park. Opening in 2007, the new Bloch Building will provide the state-of-the-art gallery space and expanded facilities to ensure that the Hallmark Collection has a prominent place for installation, appreciation and public engagement.

Visitors to the Museum will have the opportunity to view a selection of works from the collection beginning January 13 through April 30. The preview exhibition *Celebrating a Grand Gift: The Hallmark Photographic Collection* will provide a snapshot of the collection’s remarkable breadth and quality.

### **Hallmark Photographic Collection Background**

As the nation’s oldest corporate holding of fine art photography, the Hallmark Photographic Collection has grown from, and flourished within, a long tradition of support for the visual arts by Hallmark.

Considered one of the last great photography collections in private hands, the Hallmark Photographic Collection includes some of the most iconic photographs ever made, and important examples by most of the pioneers and visionaries who have established its power as an art form. Extremely strong in its holdings of early American work (daguerreotypes), the collection includes many rare and often unique works by leading 19th- and 20th-century names, as well as a broad overview of the major currents of the past few decades. A celebration of the art of photography, the collection includes works originally made for the purposes of art, as well as others made in the realm of social documentary, photojournalism, science and commerce.

The Hallmark Photographic Collection was launched in 1964 with the acquisition of 141 prints by Harry Callahan, which were mounted in a one-man exhibition at the newly opened Hallmark Gallery in New York City. The space, dedicated to showing exhibitions at the Fifth Avenue store, featured a number of significant photographic shows in the following years, including *Henri Cartier-Bresson’s France* (1971), and *André Kertész: Themes and Variations* (1973).

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In 1979, Keith F. Davis was hired to oversee the corporation's fine art holdings, resulting in a period of steady growth. Under his tenure, the photographic collection grew from about 650 works by 40 photographers to a collection of tremendous scope. Included in this total are holdings in considerable depth by photographers such as Harry Callahan (320 works, believed to be the largest holding in the world), André Kertész (237), Todd Webb (161), Clarence John Laughlin (127), Dorothea Lange (88), and Carl Van Vechten (84). The collection also includes smaller portfolios of significant individual works by a great variety of other artists.

In the last 25 years, more than 60 exhibitions from the Hallmark Photographic Collection have been assembled and circulated to over 200 leading museums nationally and internationally, and numerous loans have been made to other significant exhibitions. Various facets of the collection have been documented in a series of publications including *An American Century of Photography: From Dry-Plate to Digital, The Hallmark Photographic Collection*, 2nd Edition (Abrams, 1999).

### **Donald J. Hall**

Donald J. Hall, Nelson-Atkins Trustee, is chairman of the board of Hallmark Cards Inc., Kansas City, Mo. He is only the second board chairman in the history of the company founded by his father, Joyce C. Hall, more than 95 years ago. Hallmark is known worldwide for greeting cards, personal-expression products and television's most honored dramatic series, the Hallmark Hall of Fame. Hall was President and Chief Executive Officer from March 1966 to June 1983, when he became Chairman. He gave up the position of Chief Executive Officer in January 1986.

Hall has served as Chairman and currently sits on the Board of Trustees of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. As a Museum Trustee, Hall led the initiative to found the Kansas City Sculpture Park. He has served as Chairman of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, and has been a Board Member of the Kansas City Symphony, the Missouri Repertory Theatre and the Lyric Opera. He also has served as Chairman of the Board of Midwest Research Institute in Kansas City and is a Founding Trustee of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

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### **The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art**

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of the nation's finest encyclopedic art museums. The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access and insight into its renowned collection of more than 34,500 art objects, and is best known for its Asian art, European paintings and modern sculpture. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region, and a national model for arts education. The Nelson-Atkins' campus transformation also is leading a field of new investments in local cultural infrastructure that is becoming known as Kansas City's "\$6 Billion Renaissance."

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak streets, Kansas City, Mo. Hours are Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Admission to the Museum's permanent collection is free to everyone. For Museum information, phone 816.751.1ART or visit its website at [www.nelson-atkins.org](http://www.nelson-atkins.org).