

STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY

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1906 San Francisco Earthquake: Vintage Photographs: March 22 - April 29, Opening reception: April 6, 5:30-7:30

Mark Klett: After the Ruins: March 22 - April 29, Opening reception: April 6, 5:30-7:30

Stephen Wirtz Gallery presents two concurrent exhibitions of photography about the 1906 San Francisco earthquake on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of the disaster, the most photographed event of its time.

1906 San Francisco Earthquake: Vintage Photographs of Earthquake Sites presents a collection of photographs of scenes of destruction left in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake taken both during and after the subsequent fire that caused widespread destruction of the city. Noteworthy about this collection is that the photographs are almost exclusively the work of a number of fine professional photographers who were living in the city at the time and speak directly to the high level of individuality and experimentation of photographers working in San Francisco at the turn of the century, a distinction that continues in San Francisco today. These works present signature points of view and confident artistic expressions in addition to serving as documents of historical record.

The focus of this exhibition is primarily aesthetic rather than documentary. Unlike photographs of the 1906 earthquake which are familiarities in San Francisco family scrapbooks, or images which were made for insurance companies, the photographs in this exhibition are almost exclusively done by professionals who were responding to the artistic as well as the documentary quality of the altered cityscape. Most recognizable are the references to classical Greek and Roman ruins of architecture that would have been familiar to photographers at the turn of the century.

Mark Klett: After the Ruins presents photographs of juxtaposed imagery of past and present sites of the San Francisco 1906 earthquake by Arizona-based photographer Mark Klett (b.1952) in his signature style. For the past two years Klett has been collecting 1906 images from the Legion of Honor's Genthe archive, the Bancroft Library, and various web-based archives, resulting in the selection of 85 geographical sites. His fieldwork in recreating the historic shots covered the entire city of San Francisco, from Union Square to the Presidio, South of Market to the Marina Green, and Mission Dolores to Cow Hollow. The results are approximately 75 paired photographs depicting the city then and now, each showing that the two spaces and times are related. In Klett's words, "The photographs are more than a reminder of the power of nature or a warning to arrogance in the face of it. I also think they are a way to contemplate how we understand time and our relationship to the past."

Klett has been photographing the American West for over 25 years. He directed the Rephotography Survey Project in the late 1970s, which located and rephotographed the sites of images made by William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan, and other photographers surveying the West in the late 19th century. For the Dislocations project, which is also the subject of a book co-published by the Fine Arts Museums and UC Press, Klett chose to recreate historic photographs of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, the centennial of which is April 18, 2006.

Stephen Wirtz Gallery is located at 49 Geary St., 3rd Fl., San Francisco, CA 94108, (415) 433-6879. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-5:30, Saturday 10:30-5:30.

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