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“Picturing Faith: Religious America in Government Photography, 1935-1943”

By Casey T. Allen

Utah State University Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art

LOGAN—The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art at Utah State University opens a new photography exhibit, “Picturing Faith”, on February 1, 2008. The exhibit, originating from the University of Utah’s Department of History, will be available and open to the public through June 28, 2008. The final week of June 27-28 the exhibition will be part of the Mountain West Center’s *Mountain West Songfest & Symposium*, which has a theme this year of “Songs of Faith and Healing.”

Co-sponsored by the USU Department of History and the Religious Studies Program and the Mountain West Center for Regional Studies, “Picturing Faith” is a series of government-commissioned photographs about different religions and their place in American society during the Great Depression. Additional support is provided by the Utah Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

This exhibit shows the photographic work of such famous American artists as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Gordon Parks. The forty five black-and-white photographs not only show religious life in the 1930s and 40s but also how each photographer presented religion to meet their own goals.

Accompanying the photographs are explanatory materials that set the photographs in their historical, artistic and religious contexts. Viewers will have an opportunity to consider how religious images were used in the political agenda of the New Deal and how people during this period experienced the divine in their lives. Presenting a glimpse of American religions during a tumultuous time of our nation’s history, this exhibition challenges viewers to reflect on the ways that belief and ritual is visually represented.

“Picturing Faith” was initially created by the Material History of American Religion Project and is curated by University of Utah professor, Dr. Colleen McDannell. McDannell was first inspired to do this project from her 1998 book, “Material Christianity”, where she first used some of these photographs in her research. Once she used a sampling of photos, she thought they deserved more acute attention, resulting in the exhibit viewed today.

McDannell curated this exhibit in conjunction with her 2004 book of the same title in which she explores the photographs and how they chronicle the effects of the depression on rural American life. When asked why this exhibit is important to the public she said, “It provides a glimpse into American religious history and shows how diverse our country is even in the 1930s and 40s.”

She went on to say, “When the government decides to do something creative to address the economic problems in the country, the outcomes are exciting and unexpected.” A professor of History and Religious Studies, McDannell will be visiting the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art on April 17, 2008.

For more information or to schedule a tour of the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, call (435) 797-0165. The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art is on the USU campus at 650 North 1100 East, Logan, Utah, 84322, (435) 797-0163; fax (435) 797-3423. Information is also available at the museum’s Web site (<http://www.usu.edu/artmuseum>). The museum is open Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday, noon-4 p.m. The museum is closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays. Admission is free. The museum is accessible to persons with disabilities.

Parking for the museum is available in lot C3 to the west of the museum. The parking fee in this area is \$6 (\$3 will be refunded if parked for two hours or less). Parking is free after 5 p.m. and on weekends. Two dedicated stalls are available for museum members. Please call Rachel for reservations: 797-1414. Parking is also available in the USU Parking Terrace, located near the Taggart Student Center, for \$1.50/hour (\$7.50/day maximum). Free parking after 2 p.m. is available at lot B, located at the corner of 700 North and 1200 East (by Aggie Ice Cream).