



Brett Weston (American, 1911–1993), *untitled* [detail], ca.1985, vintage gelatin silver print. Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, gift from the Christian Keese Collection, 2018.13.48. © Brett Weston Archive

Block Museum receives major gift of photography by Brett Weston

Keese donates 50 prints by the influential 20th-century artist

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Images ranging from landscapes to botanical studies are among the 50 photographs by celebrated American photographer Brett Weston (1911–1993) given to Northwestern University's Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art by Christian Keese, who, in 1996, acquired the most complete collection of Weston's work directly from the photographer's estate. Keese has given a portion of the collection to several museums over the past decade.

Born in Los Angeles, Weston was the second of photographer Edward Weston's (1886 to 1958) four sons. Though he learned photography from his father and shared a similar reverence for the natural world, Weston developed his own singular vision. Coincident with the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s, he explored the creative possibilities of abstraction through photography. He also experimented with new silver papers that favored sharp focus and high contrast -- materials that he later introduced to his father.

Throughout his career, he has repeatedly photographed certain botanical subjects including tangled kelp, plant leaves and knotted roots during numerous photography trips to Europe, Japan, California, Oregon and Alaska, among other locations. He spent a considerable amount of time taking photographs in Hawaii during the 1980s, before his death in his home in Kona in 1993.

The 50 photographs represent five decades of Weston's career. Ranging from 1934 to 1985, this collection of photographs showcases the range of Weston's early work and his interest in photographic abstraction. Many feature his trademark close-ups and abstracted details in high contrast, reducing his subjects to exquisite pure form.

This gift is a significant addition to The Block's photography collection, strengthening the breadth and the depth of the museum's holdings of 20th-century photography.

"At The Block, this group of photographs by Brett Weston will be part of a collection that includes seminal works of 20th-century American photography such as Edward Steichen, W. Eugene Smith, Alan Cohen and the Farm Security Administration and the Office of War Information. They also will be seen alongside a growing collection of images by photographers working around the globe," said Kathleen Bickford Berzock, associate director of curatorial affairs.

"We are honored by this important gift of art from the Christian Keesee Collection, which recognizes the Block's increasing prominence as a university art museum committed to teaching with its collections across fields of study," said Lisa Corrin, the Block Museum's Ellen Philips Katz Director. "It highlights the value of the collection as a significant resource for faculty, students and the Chicago-area community. Collectors like Mr. Keesee know that giving works of art to The Block ensures that these treasures will be studied and appreciated, particularly by new generations of students, for many years to come."