



## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **CARLETON WATKINS**

#### **Discoveries**

5 November – 30 December 2009

*As specimens of the photographic art they are unequalled. Nothing in the way of landscapes can be more impressive.*

- *The New York Times* (1862); exhibition review of Watkins photographs at Goupil Gallery, New York

In the fall of 1979, Fraenkel Gallery opened with an exhibition of photographs by Carleton Watkins. Those works had been discovered a short time before and placed at auction, setting a world-record price for photographs. Prints from the gallery's first exhibition were acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among other institutions. Now, thirty years later, the gallery is pleased to announce **Carleton Watkins: Discoveries**, a group of twenty-four recently discovered photographs in uncommonly rich condition, made between the years 1865 and 1881. The photographs will be on view from November 5 to December 30, 2009.

Watkins is widely considered to be the most important American photographer of the nineteenth century. He spent the majority of his working years in San Francisco, where his "Yosemite Gallery" on Montgomery Street presented his photographs to the public. Much of his life's work, including all of his glass-plate negatives, was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, and thus any discovery of rare Watkins photographs is a notable event. The majority of the albumen prints on view were discovered in early 2008 in a small New England library. Several of these astonishing images are the only prints known to exist, and constitute a significant addition to the Watkins canon.

All of the photographs on view are contact albumen prints made from glass negatives that measured approximately 17 x 21 inches each. To achieve such images, Watkins hauled his cameras, tripods, darktents, glass plates and chemicals through difficult terrain and into treacherous situations, making exposures up to one hour long. The exhibition will include a strong selection of the Yosemite photographs that established Watkins's reputation in the 1860s, and which played a role in the setting aside of Yosemite as a national treasure. Other works include a unique diptych panorama of San Francisco made from Telegraph Hill (circa 1875); a portrait of a majestic oak in Menlo Park (1874); and a heretofore unknown photograph of deer grazing beneath a grove of trees in San Mateo County (1874), all the more astonishing for the fact of being arrested in time before the lens of the unwieldy mammoth-plate camera.

Four years after the earthquake and the loss of his life's work, Watkins was committed to the Napa State Hospital for the Insane. He died there six years later, a pauper, at the age of eighty-seven.

Fraenkel Gallery is located at 49 Geary Street, 4th floor, San Francisco.

Hours are Tuesday through Friday, 10:30 am - 5:30 pm, & Saturday 11:00 am - 5:00 pm.

For further information and press photographs, please contact Dan Cheek at 415.981.2661 or [dcheek@fraenkelgallery.com](mailto:dcheek@fraenkelgallery.com).

\*Carleton Watkins, *Mirror Lake and Reflections, Yosemite*, ca. 1872