Terry Toedtemeier (1947-2008)

Terry Norman Toedtemeier was an Oregon photographer known for his images of the landscape and geology of the Pacific Northwest and for his long career as curator of photography at the Portland Art Museum.

Toedtemeier was born in Portland in 1947. He earned a bachelor's degree in earth sciences from Oregon State University in 1969 and began studying photography in the early 1970s. In 1975, he and fellow photographers Anne Hughes, Robert Di Franco, Craig Hickman, and Christopher Rauschenberg co-founded the Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, now one of the oldest fine arts galleries in the United States operating as a collective. He also taught photography and studio classes at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, where he was associate professor of art and history from 1980 until 1993.

From the beginning, Toedtemeier's photographs were informed by his study of geology. He traveled and photographed extensively through the Northwest, making landscape and aerial photographs of landforms and, in particular, basalt formations. His photographs can be found in the collections of the National Museum of American Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Seattle Art Museum. In 1995, the Art Gym at Marylhurst University mounted a retrospective exhibition of his work, *Basalt Exposures*.

In 1985, Toedtemeier was hired as the first curator of photography at the Portland Art Museum. He built the museum's photography collection from the ground up, amassing more than 5,000 works during his tenure there. His curatorial work included several major exhibitions, such as *The History of Photography: A Sesquicentennial Exhibition* (1989) and *A History of Oregon Photography* (1992). Toedtemeier also met his wife at the museum. He and Prudence Roberts, then the curator of American art, were married in 1995.

In 2002, Toedtemeier and John Laursen, owner of Press-22, a Portland book-design studio, founded the Northwest Photography Archive, a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding awareness of and access to the cultural heritage of the region through historically and artistically significant photographs. For the Archive's first project, the pair focused on early photography of the Columbia River Gorge. For six years, they gathered images by such photographers as Carleton Watkins, Fred Kiser, Lily White, and Ray Atkeson. The resulting volume, *Wild Beauty: Photographs of the Columbia River Gorge, 1867-1957*, was published in 2008. It received a Pacific Northwest Book Award in 2009 and was a finalist for an Oregon Book Award.

In October 2008, Toedtemeier mounted a major exhibition of Gorge photography, also entitled *Wild Beauty*, at the Portland Art Museum. He and Megan K. Friedel, then the photo archivist at the Oregon Historical Society, developed a companion exhibition at the Society, *Carleton Watkins: Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge*. Their work on that exhibit resulted in "Picturing Progress: Carleton Watkins's 1867 Stereoviews of the Columbia River Gorge," published by the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*; the article received an honorable mention for the Joel Palmer Prize in 2009.

Toedtemeier died suddenly in December 2008, shortly after giving a presentation on *Wild Beauty*, at the Columbia Center for the Arts in Hood River.

Written by Megan K. Friedel

Further Reading:

Toedtemeier, Terry, and John Laursen. *Wild Beauty: Photographs of the Columbia River Gorge, 1867-1957*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2008.

Toedtemeier, Terry. "Oregon Photography: The First Fifty Years." *Oregon Historical Society* 94:1 (Spring 1994), 36-76.

Toedtemeier, Terry. *Basalt Exposures*. Marylhurst, Ore.: Art Gym, Marylhurst College, 1995.

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