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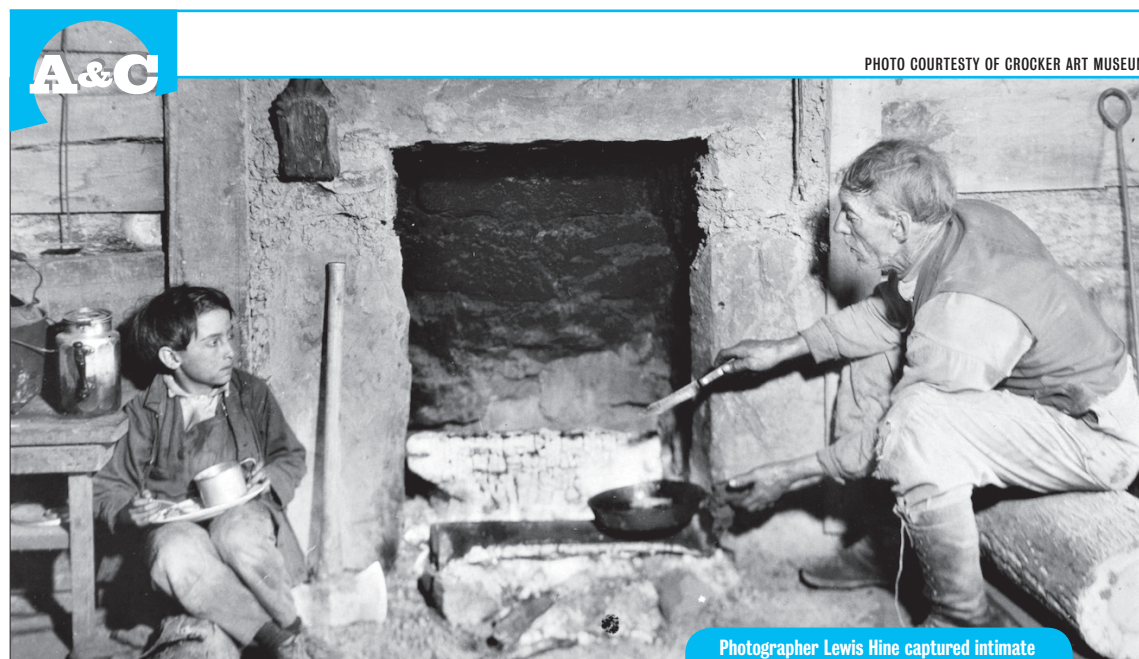
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The past is present

A new Crocker installation makes room for the Dust Bowl

BY PATRICK HYUN WILSON

A young boy sits tangent to a large fireplace, a dirt smudge on his chin, as he gazes across the flames to a hunched-over old man wearing dust-covered clothes. The man's skillet can't hold much, but he carefully leans it into the pitiful flames of a single log fire.

Lewis Hine was witness to that moment in 1931. The photograph he made of it is now hanging at Crocker Art Museum. According to the Library of Congress, Hine captioned the photo, "70-year-old grandfather cooking his Red Cross bacon over the fire for himself and his grandson."

Hine is one of a handful of photographers on display at the Crocker in a new installation space, designated for work from its permanent collection of more than 1,300 photographs. Associate Curator Jayme Yahr sought to find a place to show pieces from the permanent collection, which will change twice a year.

"My goal was to see if we could find a permanent home for at least a small portion ... of the collection before photography month so that we could kick it off in April and then continue on from there," Yahr said.

The first installation, titled *Dust Bowl. Home. Land.*, explores themes that Yahr believes to be relevant to the current time.

"I started thinking back to roughly 1930s," Yahr said. "The photographers who were hired to document America ... and the fact that they were employed by the government to do so."

Yahr said she curated the installation based on the question of whether there was a dichotomy between

working for the government as a documentarian, versus working as an artist.

Each of the photographers represent a unique approach to documenting the Dust Bowl, and represent different ways of contending with the government's allocation of documentary projects.

Brett Weston, favoring form over representation, worked entirely independent of a government body. Rather than documenting the human condition of the time, he instead focused his attention to the light playing off the windswept sand, capturing the rich tonality of a landscape devoid of human intervention.

Weston's photograph of the rolling dunes in California stands in stark contrast to the works beside it, including one by Farm Security Administration photographer Marion Post Wolcott.

Wolcott's photograph, captioned "Coal miner's child carrying home a can of kerosene, Scotts Run, West Virginia," captures a young girl from behind in the middle of her step.

The moment seems to disfigure the young girl's body, twisting her form beneath the dark coal trains and ramshackle, weed-covered houses that dominate the frame. Wolcott's choice of framing and timing creates the sense that the little girl is being crushed—literally and figuratively—by her environment.

"I think there's this interesting commentary on not only what we depend on ... but then what does that mean for the people actually enacting that," Yahr said. "It makes me think about today, some of our urban-rural divide, and are we really just reenacting times of the past?"

While each photograph on its own may have some individual meaning, by juxtaposing the work and drawing attention to the stark differences between each photographer's approach, the installation forms new meaning from them.

"One of the things I wonder about: These artists are by and large considered documentary photographers," Yahr said. "But where's the line between document and art, and can you do both at the same time?" □

Dust Bowl. Home. Land. runs through Aug. 1. Crocker Art Museum, 216 O St. For more info, visit crockerart.org.