



Contact: Katrina Carl
805.884.6430
kcarl@sbma.net



Dorothea Lange, *Roadside Ranch Camp*, 1936.
Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Museum purchase with funds provided by PhotoFutures.



Pirkle Jones, *Farm Worker Family, Bakersfield, CA*,
1957. Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of
Art, Gift of Pirkle Jones.

SBMA's *Taking Root* Documents History of California's Migrant Worker

**Collaborative Exhibition Presents Vital Dialogue Between Past and Present
April 22 – August 6, 2006**

January 11, 2006 – Part of a unique collaborative effort between the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission, the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *Taking Root: A Century of Migrant Workers in California* traces the history of one of our state's most valuable resources – the laborer. On view at SBMA are approximately 25 vintage prints by photographers from the 1930s to 1970s, spanning the time of the Works Progress and Farm Securities Administrations, *Life* and *Look* magazines, and images of Cesar Chavez's legendary march to Sacramento. Serving as counterpoint at Channing-Peake Gallery is the exhibition *The New Okies*, a photographic essay that pays tribute to the immigrant strawberry pickers of Santa Maria utilizing a comparative mix of historical images on loan from the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission, and contemporary photographs by *Santa Barbara News-Press* photographers made possible by a grant from the California Council for the Humanities. The exhibition at SBMA will open in April and both exhibitions will be on view simultaneously beginning May 19 in order to encourage visitors to make contrasts and comparisons between the historical and present-day California laborer.

The SBMA exhibition, *Taking Root*, represents early documentation of farm labor, a significant part of the documentary photographic tradition in the United States. Many of the renowned photographers of the 1930s and 1940s, including Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott, were retained by government agencies to document the farm workers' rural and small-town living and working conditions, and the progress of programs established to improve these conditions.

The result provided not only pictorial validation of the need for such programs, but also an intimate look at the lives of people, including their culture, their union organizing activity, and their labor leaders. From the extreme working conditions illustrated by Marion Post Wolcott's *Untitled (Children drinking water in a field)* and Dorothea Lange's *Roadside Ranch Camp*, 1936, to the conflict posed in Hansel Mieth's, *Sheriff and Deputized Farmers, Salinas Lettuce Strike*, 1936, to the tender moments of family life, depicted by Pirkle Jones' *Farm Worker Family, Bakersfield, CA*, 1957, *Taking Root* engages the viewer on emotional, political and socioeconomic levels and reveals both aesthetic and social significance in the roots of American photography.

Photographic Documentation: A Historic Perspective

The significance of this retrospective stems from the history of our state and the importance of agriculture and farm laborers in the development of our local and national economies. The concept of both migrant and immigrant workers in California dates back to just after the Civil War, when U.S. business began to expand and labor was needed to mine gold and silver, lay railroad ties, and do labor in the fields and orchards.

At the same time, Western businessmen were searching Asia and Latin America for raw materials and new markets for the U.S.'s growing industrial production. They did not just bring back tea, silk and valuable minerals, but also thousands of unemployed peasants to California.

The Great Depression and seven year drought of the Great Plains states in the 1930s pushed a wave of displaced farmers to California from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. Although the so-called "Dust Bowl" included many states, the migrants were generically known as "Okies," referring to the approximately 20 percent who were from Oklahoma. They joined the Mexicans and Philipinos already working in the agricultural industry.

As the Depression deepened, the growers slashed wages and laid off workers. Between 1929 and 1933, wages dropped from \$3.50 to \$1.90 a day. Farm workers had no choice but to walk out of the fields resulting in 50 strikes in 1933 alone.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt became President in 1933, his New Deal envisioned a number of government programs for combating rural poverty, including the development of the Resettlement Administration (RA) which granted low-cost loans and assistance for poor farmers and sharecroppers, erected regional model settlements for the resettlement of migrant farmers and farm workers, and recultivated eroded land.

Part of the establishment of the RA, later known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), focused on photographic and sociological documentation of the rural and small-town living conditions and the progress of these programs. At this point, photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott were appointed to carry out the work of documentation.

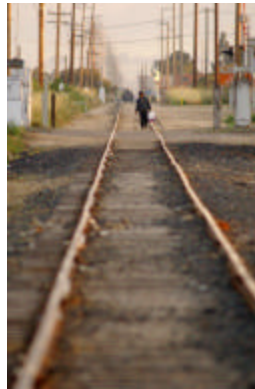
These, along with other prominent photographic figures of the time captured the lives of the migrant and immigrant worker, characterized by transience. In an attempt to maintain a steady income, workers had to follow the harvest around the state. When potatoes were ready to be picked, the migrants needed to be where the potatoes were. The same principle applied to harvesting cotton, lemons, oranges, peas, and other crops. For this reason, migrant populations were most dense in agricultural centers, typically ranging from as far south as El Rio, just north of Oxnard, to as far north as Yuba City, north of Sacramento. Therefore, many of the photographs depicted in *Taking Root* are concentrated in the San Joaquin Valley, including Bakersfield, Visalia, Salinas and Fresno.

***Taking Root* and *The New Okies*: Comparing Past with Present**



On View at SMBA

Hansel Mieth, *From Road to Nowhere*, 1936.
Gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum
of Art, Gift of Georgia Brown.



**On View at Channing Peake Gallery
and Betteravia Gallery in Santa Maria**

Mike Eliason, *Walking to work*, 2005.

In addition to the *Taking Root* exhibition at SBMA, the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission, is proud to present *The New Okies* as an exploration of the immigrant farm workers who journey to California today, following in the steps of the Dust Bowl refugees and Mexican "braceros" before them. Like their predecessors, they toil in public view but are often invisible in the mainstream of American life.

Most of the photographs in the exhibition are of Mixtecs from the Mexican state of Oaxaca who live and work in Santa Maria, drawn here by the booming strawberry industry. For comparison, the exhibition also includes photographs of Dust Bowl refugees taken in the 1930s on loan from the Library of Congress and the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission.

***Taking Root* exhibition on view:**

April 22 – August 6, 2006
Santa Barbara Museum of Art

***New Okies* exhibition on view:**

January 16 - May 5, 2006
Betteravia Government Center, Santa Maria

Satellite exhibits at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts and Education Center and CARES Inc. in Santa Maria

May 15 - August 25, 2006

Channing-Peake Gallery, County Administration Building

The logo for the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission. It features the text "SANTA BARBARA COUNTY" in a small, blue, sans-serif font above the words "Arts Commission" in a larger, blue, serif font.



The *Taking Root* exhibition has been made possible by The Dana and Albert R. Broccoli Foundation and the Wallis Foundation, with additional support from Susan and Donald Bowey.

This project is made possible in part by a grant from the CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES and is part of its statewide California Stories Initiative. The Council is an independent non-profit organization and a state affiliate of the NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES. For more information on the Council and the California Stories Initiative, visit www.californiastories.org.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net