ROOTS AGAINST THE SKY
Photographs by David Whitmire Hearst Jr.
May 8, 2012 - June 14, 2012

Curated by Jonathan Green

Roots Against the Sky is a project about the landscape. The sections in the exhibition correspond to motifs in a musical composition or stanzas in a poem. This poem is built around David Whitmire Hearst Jr.’s examination of the fabric, mesh, curtain and lattice the tree delineates in the landscape. The tree is thicket, trunk, branches, leaves, and roots against the sky. The tree is both a presence in the landscape and a marker of human perception. The tree is the loom on which both meaning and image are woven.

Part collector, part engineer, part artist, Hearst follows in the footsteps of almost two centuries of American photographers who have used the landscape as the essential subject, object, and platform for rigorous and conscious experimentation in aesthetic values, pictorial styles, and technological principles. As Hearst began to assemble his camera collection, he would acquire cameras not only as historical examples but also as instruments to test and use. His first concern is seeing the photograph produced and comparing and assessing how each camera and lens combination records and transforms the world. Photographs are made to see how a picture might look, rather than with the intention of reproducing reality. Hearst is interested in the signature and personality of the instrument at hand.

What began for Hearst as evaluative testing has now turned into active participation in the creative act of photographing. Hearst explores the image produced by the camera and its receptiveness to further modulation by the computer. Responding to the rhythms of his own vision, proceeding spontaneously and instinctively by eye, he then refines the camera’s image to suit his taste. His goal is first to see what the camera saw, and secondly to use the camera’s rendition as the basic condition for an altogether new object. He understands intuitively that the photographer’s challenge is to use the world spread out before the camera as the source of an image, but not to be so seduced by that world that the descriptive imperatives of the optical, mechanical, and digital processes become incidental to its recording.

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Jonathan Green, Executive Director, UCR ARTSblock