Dartmouth’s Hood Museum of Art Receives Major Gift of Contemporary Photography from Nancy and Tom O’Neil, Class of 1979

Hanover, NH (December 3, 2014)—The Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College has announced a major gift of contemporary photography from Nancy and Tom O’Neil, a Dartmouth alumnus from the Class of 1979. This outstanding group of thirty-nine photographs by seventeen photographers substantially enhances the museum’s growing collection of recent photography, a flourishing medium for creative expression and social activism across the globe. Reflecting trends in late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century photography, including large-scale color work and the emerging field of environmental aerial imagery, the gift also presents traditional genres, such as portraiture, with non-traditional subjects, such as circus performers, refugees from civil wars, and adolescent students.

Featuring the work of internationally recognized photographers—including Guggenheim Fellowship recipients and the winner of a MacArthur Fellow award—as well as those who have more recently come into prominence, the O’Neil collection encompasses a range of subject matter and themes that will enhance the Hood Museum of Art’s teaching across academic departments and the curriculum. The images touch on topics as varied as controlled fires on farmland in the Midwest, manufacturing in Europe and China, the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in China, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and small mountain communities in the American West. Other works examine identity in relationship to place and history and include portraits of members of the embattled Karen minority of Myanmar in South East Asia, an Afghan from a refugee community in Pakistan, and descendants of Africans who were brought to Latin America in slavery. Still others deal with modern-day consumerism, photography and scientific experimentation, and monumental architecture. The gift contains superb examples of various genres in both black-and-white and color photography, including portraiture, landscape, still life, and photography with strong documentary roots.

“Nancy and Tom O’Neil have transformed the Hood’s growing contemporary photography collection with this gift, and along with it the museum’s ability to teach contemporary art and a wide swathe of subjects across the curriculum,” states Michael Taylor, Director, Hood Museum of Art. “We are particularly excited that this act of generosity on their part deepens our holdings of work by Ed Burtynsky, Abelardo Morell, and Fazal Sheikh, and also gains us our first examples of work by Dawoud Bey, Naoya Hatakeyama, and Richard Misrach, among others. We
are indebted to the O’Neils for their interest in the museum and strong support of its teaching mission.”

Longtime residents of Baltimore, Maryland, Tom and Nancy O’Neil have been collecting contemporary photography for over two decades, often developing substantial holdings of works by individual artists. They have cultivated a personal collection—driven by their responses to the visions of particular artists—that features works as diverse as David Goldes’s cool, scientifically inclined Water Balance to Brian Ulrich’s colorful documentary-style photograph of a teenager trying on shoes in Edinburgh, Scotland. A significant facet of this gift is a group of six works by the award-winning Canadian photographer Ed Burtynsky, including four images from China—two of the Three Gorges Dam under construction, and two manufacturing images, one of the exterior of an old aluminum factory in Jilin and another of an interior factory scene with workers assembling mobile phones in Zhejiang province. The fifth work, an aerial view of a BP oil spill, shows a jarringly diminutive Norwegian vessel REM Forza navigating through the floating skeins of oil from the Deep Horizons accident in 2011, and the sixth focuses on the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh in 2001. The O’Neils have collected Burtynsky’s work for many years, and this gift adds to the growing environmental photography collection at the museum, which was recently featured in a student co-curated exhibition “Looking Back at Earth: Contemporary Environmental Photography from the Hood Museum of Art’s Collection.”

“The Hood is a preeminent teaching institution and one of the Dartmouth community’s greatest assets,” the O’Neils observed. “We are excited that works by these exceptional artists will now enrich the Dartmouth curriculum. Hopefully, they will nurture disruptive interdisciplinary scholarship that considers these important topics of our time.”

In December 2013, the O’Neils also donated a significant group of twenty-four contemporary photographs by many of the same artists to the Baltimore Museum of Art; both museums plan to honor these gifts with a shared project once the Hood Museum of Art’s renovation and expansion is completed in 2019.

About the Hood Museum of Art
The mission of the Hood Museum of Art, as a teaching museum, is to create an ideal learning environment that fosters transformative encounters with works of art. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 70,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with original works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.
About Dartmouth
Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world’s greatest colleges and universities. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate and professional education with distinguished research and scholarship in the arts and sciences and its three leading professional schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

Media Contacts:
Hood Museum of Art
Nils Nadeau: (603) 646-2095 • nils.nadeau@dartmouth.edu

Dartmouth College Office of Public Affairs
(603) 646-3661 • office.of.public.affairs@dartmouth.edu