

Getty Purchases 53 Works by Bravo

■ **Photography:** The acquisition of the group of classic images from the 1930s and '40s is hailed as 'a miracle.'

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A collection of 53 vintage prints by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, widely regarded as the leading Latin American photographer of the 20th Century, has been acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum. The group of classic images from the 1930s and '40s was purchased at a undisclosed price from an unidentified private collection.

The acquisition is "a miracle," said Getty photography curator Weston Naef. The works—which come from a collection that had remained intact for several decades—are in pristine condition, and the fact that the 90-year-old artist can recall how he made each one is an invaluable bonus to historians, according to the curator.

When Naef recently visited Bravo in Mexico City, the photographer said that a number of works in the collection are the only surviving prints of the images depicted. One special item is the only three-part-format print that Bravo made of "Good Reputation Sleeping" (1938-39), a well-known image of a bandaged female nude reclining on the roof of Mexico City's Academy of Fine Arts.

Among other notable works in the Getty's acquisition are "Pierced Grave" (1933), a picture of a cross encircled by a funeral wreath, and "The Crouched Ones" (1934), which portrays a seemingly headless group of men perched on stools that are chained together at a cafe counter. Known for a wide range of metaphorical Mexican imagery—from portraits and street scenes to landscapes and near-abstractions—Bravo has created an evocative body of work, often invested with a dream-like mood or twists of Surrealism.

"These rare and beautiful prints date from the classic period of Alvarez Bravo's work, around the time of the great Surrealist art exhibition organized by Andre' Breton for Mexico City in 1940," Naef said in a printed statement announcing the acquisition. "We collect only prints that are made as close in date as possible to the time of the negatives, and this group fits that priority perfectly."

The new acquisition also fits the space available in the museum's photography gallery, Naef noted. The Getty's first exhibition of Bravo's work is scheduled for



Bravo's "Pierced Grave," among the Getty acquisition: An evocative body of work, often invested with a dream-like mood or twists of Surrealism.

the fall season, and the artist is expected to travel to Malibu to discuss his work during the show.

Bravo, who turned 90 this month, began photographing in 1924. The son and grandson of artists, he was well-connected to Mexico's artistic intelligentsia, including the famed Mexican muralists, and to prominent artists in Europe and the United States. Photographers Tina Modotti and Edward Weston encouraged his work, while Paul Strand wrote of Bravo: "He is a man who has mastered a medium which he respects meticulously and which he uses to speak with warmth about Mexico as Atget spoke about Paris."

Bravo also had ties to the film world, including an acquaintance with Russian director Sergei Eisenstein during the filming of "Que Viva Mexico," and 16 years of work as a still photographer and camera operator for the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de Mexico.

Southern Californians have had an opportunity to view Bravo's work in depth in a traveling retrospective, "Revelaciones: The Art of Manuel Alvarez Bravo," which was organized by Arthur Ollman, director of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, with Nissan Perez, curator of photographs at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

The show appeared in 1990 in San Diego and more

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recently at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. A national tour will continue at the Comfort Art Gallery at Haverford College, Haverford, Pa. (March 6-May 3); the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla. (June 4-Aug. 2); the Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass. (Sept. 11-Nov. 6); the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah (Jan. 10-March 7, 1993), and the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Ariz. (March 29-May 10, 1993).

Los Angeles was not on the circuit for that major exhibition, but Galeria Nueva, at 912 E. 3rd St., Suite 402, has helped to fill the gap with a smaller show planned to celebrate Bravo's birthday. Gallery director Lorenzo Hernandez, a longtime photography collector, dealer and friend of Bravo, has assembled images covering about 65 years of Bravo's career.

A photograph of Hernandez and Bravo hangs near the entrance of the penthouse gallery, but the photographer's essence emerges more clearly in his photographs. Two pictures of Mexican painter and cult figure Frida Kahlo—one with an exhibition of Picasso's paintings—establish Bravo's art-world connections. Haunting portraits of ordinary Mexican people leave no doubt of his identification with his countrymen. Landscapes reveal his eye for the mysteries of nature, while street scenes convey the textures of an ancient culture. The exhibition continues to March 14. Information: (213) 613-1347.