

News Release FROM THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

MICHIGAN AVENUE AT ADAMS STREET, CHICAGO 3, ILLINOIS, U. S. A.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Martha Bennett King, CE 6-7080

"Death of a Valley," a photographic study made by Dorothea Lange and Pirkle Jones, will be on exhibit at The Art Institute of Chicago from January 26 through March 3, 1963.

"Death of a Valley" is the story of the condemnation, evacuation and devastation of the Beryessa Valley in California. Chosen by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation as a necessary dam site, the valley's one town, scattered farm homes, grazing and grain fields, orchards and vineyards were leveled in 1956 for the benefit of surrounding communities.

Pirkle Jones and Dorothea Lange, concerned with the old rural community life that was part of the "California legend," and with the changing values of civilization which made that life expendable, focused their cameras on the people of the valley and the face of the land.

The 29 photographs in the exhibition are a deliberately understated, honest and moving testimonial to the fact that progress is never achieved without its price. In Dorothea Lange's words, the study is an attempt to show that "man is the active agent of both life and death."

Beginning with a series of photographs showing the valley in prosperity, the sequence moves on to the transitional time when homes and cattle are being moved to higher ground and graves disinterred. This is followed by a group of photographs showing the coming of the government men with their bulldozers and tractors -- uprooting, leveling, razing -- leaving, after the rape of the valley, a desolated wasteland to fill with the spring rains.

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Dorothea Lange, who was born in 1895, became a photographer in her early twenties. Working first as a portrait photographer, she gradually extended her scope to photographs of "man as he stood in his world." Her Depression studies caught the attention of Paul Taylor, an economist at the University of California, who was experimenting with the use of the camera as a research tool. Hired as an assistant, Dorothea Lange contributed photographs to a California state report on migrant labor, and later became a member of the photographic division of the Farm Security Administration. During the war she photographed the evacuation and imprisonment of Japanese-Americans from the Pacific Coast. Always her photographs concentrate on relationships: the relationships of people to each other, to their place in society, and to their place in time. Her work inspired Archibald MacLeish's book of "photographs illustrated by a poem," Land of the Free; Sherwood Anderson's picture book, Home Town; John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath; and was referred to in the filming of "The Plow that Broke the Plains."

Pirkle Jones was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1914, but spent his early life in Indiana and Ohio. After World War II, he attended school at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, where he later became a teacher. Jones has had one-man shows at Ansel Adam's Studio and at the George Eastman House; his work has been exhibited at the U.S. Information Agency in Berlin; and his exhibition (with Ansel Adams) "The Story of a Winery" is currently being circulated nationally by the Smithsonian Institution.