

THE HUNTINGTON
Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens
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NEWS

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**COLORADO RIVER PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREN HALVERSON
EXPLORED IN NEW EXHIBITION SPACE**

***“Downstream: Colorado River Photographs of Karen Halverson”
on View May 30-Sept. 28, 2009, in new Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art***



Karen Halverson, *Shafer Trail, near Moab, Utah*, from the *Downstream* series, 1994–95. Archival pigment print, 24 x 20 in. Courtesy of the artist.

SAN MARINO, Calif.—To celebrate the expansion and reinstallation of the Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens presents an exhibition of works from American photographer Karen Halverson’s Colorado River series, on view May 30 through Sept. 28, 2009. “Downstream: Colorado River Photographs of Karen Halverson” will be on display in the Scott Galleries’ Susan and Stephen Chandler Wing, inaugurating a new changing exhibition space that will highlight photography and works on paper that, because of the fragile nature of the medium, cannot be placed on permanent display.

The exhibition will feature 24 works from Halverson's *Downstream* series as well as a sampling of images from The Huntington's historic holdings related to the Colorado River region, including photographs from John Wesley Powell's pioneering expedition down the Colorado in 1871 and a snapshot album compiled in 1940 by Mildred Baker, one of the first women to successfully navigate the river from Green River, Wyo., to Boulder (now Hoover) Dam.

Halverson (b. 1941) says she woke one wintry morning in 1994 convinced that she needed to photograph the Colorado River. An accomplished landscape photographer who had already spent 20 years exploring the American West, she embarked on a two-year encounter with the vast terrain along the river's serpentine route.

The desire to explain, understand, and experience the 1,700-mile river—which originates in Wyoming and Colorado before converging in Utah toward its terminus in Mexico—has exerted a powerful influence on a long line of explorers, scientists, thrill seekers, writers, artists, and photographers. Once largely wild, the modern river has been tamed by dams built to slake the American West's thirst for water and power. Today the river's reservoirs supply 30 million people.

"In her resonant imagery, Halverson speaks both to this immutable, rugged past while confronting the river's complicated and often contested present," says Jennifer Watts, curator of photographs at The Huntington.

Lush green riverbanks frame a seemingly remote Colorado River in *Shafer Trail, Near Moab, Utah*—a dramatic departure from the river-turned-lake in *Wahweap Marina, Lake Powell, Arizona*, in which the setting sun illuminates a satellite dish, a trio of passersby, and a jumble of houseboats set against distant rock outcroppings. *Davis Gulch, Lake Powell, Utah* captures Halverson's voice especially succinctly: the power of nature in the form of a gigantic sandstone wall dwarfing a tiny group of plastic lawn chairs, lined up along the river bank, with not a soul in sight.

"In my travels along the Colorado," says Halverson, "sometimes I find beauty, sometimes desecration, often a perplexing and absurd combination."

Halverson's large-format color photography references the 19th-century era of exploration when the United States, still reeling from the Civil War, saw photographers fan across the West to make pictures for scientific and commercial ends. Many of these iconic views

by William H. Bell, John K. Hillers, Timothy O’Sullivan and others form the core of The Huntington’s superlative photography collection. Halverson consulted these works in preparation for her own trips.

The two years Halverson spent hiking, driving, and rafting along the Colorado brought her to a more profound understanding of the river and her relationship to it. During her travels, Halverson wrote, “I feel my place, small and finite in relation to space and time: I feel my self, expansive and trusting.”

Related Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a book *Downstream: Encounters with the Colorado River*, which includes an essay by Halverson and a foreword by William Deverell, professor of history at the University of Southern California and director of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West (University of California Press, 2008). Available in the Huntington Bookstore & More.

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About The Huntington

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