

Press Release

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[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

City of Ontario
Ontario of Museum of History & Art

SMITHSONIAN TRAVELING EXHIBITION LOOKS BACK AT THE 1970S AND THE DOCUMERICA PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

Images of everyday life in 1970s America evoke disco dancing and inflation, protests and bell-bottoms, gas shortages and suburban sprawl. At a time when the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal wore on the national psyche, a burgeoning movement to protect the natural environment was gaining force.

A new Smithsonian traveling exhibition, “Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project,” takes a look at the 1970s using 90 remarkable color photographs taken for a federal photography project called Project DOCUMERICA (1971–1977). The exhibition, which is a collaboration with the National Archives and Records Administration, will open March 15, 2018 at the Ontario Museum of History & Art, and remain on view through April 22, 2018, before continuing on its 15-city national tour.

Created by the Environmental Protection Agency, Project DOCUMERICA was born out of the decade’s environmental awakening, producing striking photographs of many of that era’s environmental problems and achievements. Drawing its inspiration from the Great Depression-era Farm Security Administration photography project, DOCUMERICA photographers created a portrait of America in the early and mid- 1970s. About 70 well-known photographers, including John Corn, Lyntha Scott Eiler, Danny Lyon, Flip Schulke and John H. White, completed 115 separate assignments between 1972 and 1977. They took shots of small Midwestern towns, barrios in the Southwest and coal mining communities in Appalachia. Their assignments were as varied as African American life in Chicago, urban renewal in Kansas City, commuters in Washington, D.C., and migrant farm workers in Colorado.

Press Release

What emerged was a moving and textured portrait of America. Capturing a rapidly changing society with surprising resonances to the present, “Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project” is a sampling of images culled from a trove of thousands. DOCUMERICA photos include expected images of smog, polluted rivers and waste dumps. But the photos also capture the decade’s fashions, trends and lifestyles. From smokestacks to leisure suits, these images are a fascinating time capsule of 1970s America.

The exhibition’s three sections are named after popular songs of the time:

- **“Ball of Confusion”** documents the tumultuous environmental, political and social reality of the 1970s. The energy crises, slow economic growth and high unemployment were themes pursued by many of the photographers. They brought issues such as the future of cities, gender equality, abortion and gay rights into crisp focus.
- **“Everybody Is a Star”** showcases vibrant and diverse examples of self-expression — bell-bottoms, bare midriffs, mini dresses and bright colors — all were in stark contrast to the buttoned-up fashions and accompanying societal norms of the 1950s and early 1960s. The ethos of the 1970s was “do your own thing.” Some of the DOCUMERICA photographers were drawn to subject that emphasized growing appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity.
- **“Pave Paradise”** illustrates the fragmented landscape of America in the 1970s. Much as today, many Americans had romanticized notions of an idyllic life in small-town America. But small-town reality was often one of poverty, pollution and quickly dwindling populations. The photographers also exposed the stark differences between sprawling suburbs and crumbling inner cities of the 1970s. They trained their cameras on the great vistas and natural beauty of the American landscape, capturing the threat of development and environmental damage done in the name of progress.

Activities Conjunction with the Exhibition

Lecture: Documenting the 1970s

Saturday, April 7, 2018 (2:00 PM to 3:30 PM)

Join the Museum for a lecture with Emmy-winning filmmaker and historian Dr. Victor Silverman, professor in the History Department and American Studies program at Pomona College. Learn

Press Release

about the DOCUMERICA project featured in the exhibit *Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project*, its historical context in the crises of the 1970s, and how images from government-sponsored photography have been used in California and featured in his book *California: On the Road History*. Reservations Required. Free Admission.

On the Dance Floor: Disco Fever!

Friday, April 20, 2018 (6:00 PM to 7:30 PM)

Put on your dance shoes and join the Museum for an evening of disco classes with Clifford Breland from Bre Dance Studio. All levels of dance experience are welcome and participants are encouraged to dress up! Prizes will be awarded for best costumes. Space is limited. Reservations Required. Free Admission.



Young Woman, Lyntha Scott Eiler, Cincinnati, Ohio, September 1975. Photo is courtesy of National Archives, Records of the Environmental Protection Agency.



About the “Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project” Exhibit

“Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project” is a collaboration between [SITES](#) and the [National Archives and Records Administration](#), which now holds the original DOCUMERICA photographic materials and administrative records. The archival records and some 22,000 slides, in addition to negatives, prints and microfiche, are stored in the stacks of the National Archives in College Park, Md. Almost 16,000 of the DOCUMERICA images can be viewed on the Archives’ [website](#) and on [Flickr](#).

Press Release

About SITES

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for 65 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play. Exhibition descriptions and tour schedules are available at www.sites.si.edu.

About the National Archives

With more than 40 million still pictures, the [National Archives](http://www.nationalarchives.gov) is one of the world's great repositories of historical photographs. This ever-growing number of prints, negatives, slides, transparencies and digital images are held at the National Archives in College Park, Md., as well as in presidential libraries, museums and regional facilities around the nation.

About The Ontario Museum of History & Art

The Ontario Museum of History & Art is located at 225 S. Euclid Avenue, Ontario, California 91762. Gallery hours are Noon to 4 PM, Thursday through Sunday. Admission is free. For more information call (909) 395-2510, email at museuminfo@ontarioca.gov, or visit www.ontarioca.gov/museum. The Ontario Museum of History & Art is a public-private museum operated by the City of Ontario with support from the non-profit Ontario Museum of History & Art, Associates.

About the City of Ontario

The City of Ontario is *Building A Better Tomorrow* with urban lifestyle districts that create sustainable places to live, work and play. Located just 35 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, the City of Ontario is ideally situated as Southern California's gateway. With three major interstates, two railroads and the Ontario International Airport, Ontario offers direct access from Los Angeles to the rest of California, and to North America. With approximately 170,000 residents and residential development on the rise, Ontario looks to double its population in the next 20 years, making it one of the 100 most populated Cities in the nation. Complementing its business and residential core, Ontario dazzles with its amenities such as the Ontario Convention Center, Citizens Business Bank Arena, and the Ontario Mills Mall. To learn more about the City of Ontario, visit www.ontarioca.gov or call (909) 395-2000.

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