

communiqué /press release**For immediate release****EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PANORAMA
OF SAN FRANCISCO, 1850-1880****31 March to 25 July 1993**

Montréal, 30 March 1993 -- On 11 July, 1877, Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) announced in the San Francisco *Bulletin* the publication of a "Panorama of San Francisco from California Street Hill." The photographs had been taken from the tower of the Mark Hopkins mansion, then the highest point in San Francisco, 116 metres (381 feet) above the harbour, which commanded an uninterrupted, sweeping view of the entire city, its harbour, and San Francisco Bay. This panorama, which was marketed in two versions, measured seven feet in length. One year later, Muybridge re-photographed the view. This time he used a mammoth-plate camera, which took glass-plate negatives each approximately 61 x 50.8 cm, or 24" x 20". The resulting panorama (published as an album, comprising thirteen mounted albumen prints) exceeded seventeen feet in length when fully extended.

In 1990, the CCA acquired a copy of the Muybridge 1878 panorama and the extremely rare boudoir card version of the 1877 panorama. Together with the album version of the 1877 panorama (previously acquired), these panoramas provide the impetus for the exhibition **Eadweard Muybridge and the Photographic Panorama of San Francisco, 1850-1880**.

While Muybridge's three panoramas remain one of the supreme conceptual and technical achievements in the history of architectural photography, they were not unique, nor was his project an isolated event; rather, they represented the culmination of earlier attempts by such photographers as George Fardon (1807-1886), Charles L. Weed (1824-1903), and, most notably, Carleton Watkins (1829-1916), to photograph the city in panoramic form. As early as 1851, daguerreotypes (in the form of multi-plate panoramas) were made and, through the 1870s, at least fifty photographic panoramas of San Francisco were produced.

This exhibition provides a context for Muybridge's achievement by examining the representations of San Francisco (particularly in the form of panoramas) from 1850 to

1880, a period of phenomenal growth and development. Multi-panel daguerreotype panoramas, photographic panoramas (including sets of stereocards), photographic-view books and albums, lithographs, etchings, and steel engravings, along with a selection of pertinent maps and lithographic bird's-eye views, are included. The works are drawn from the CCA's collection and from public and private collections in the United States. All of the photographic panoramas in the exhibition were made from Nob Hill, within 100 metres of one another. When viewed in a chronological sequence, the panoramas record, in an abbreviated form, the accelerated pattern of San Francisco's urban development from a city of 35,000 in 1850 to one of 234,000 in 1880.

This sequence also allows one to follow, in some detail, the evolution of this particular photographic format and to see how various photographers used it to respond to the growth of the city. All of the photographic panoramas in the exhibition were constructed in the same way. From a fixed position, each photographer pivoted his camera through an arc, taking a succession of separate, slightly overlapping negatives. The prints from these negatives, trimmed and mounted, produced a horizontally extended view of a segment of the city. However, each photographer's conceptual decisions – the angle of vision and the amount of coverage – and technical ones – the choice of camera format and the size of negative resulted in different interpretations. Carleton Watkins' set of stereocards covering an 180° view, for example, visually organizes and represents the city on an entirely different basis from that of Eadweard Muybridge's 360° panoramas.

The historical significance of the panoramas rests as much upon their value as unique documentation as upon the insight that they now provide about how the city was represented during this period. As such, the panoramas invite different readings.

By their nature, photographic panoramas contain a seemingly inexhaustible amount of information: they describe in detail individual buildings and entire city blocks and situate these within the city's topography. Such information has become increasingly important to architectural and urban historians as a result of the earthquake and fires of April, 1906: virtually nothing of the nineteenth-century city depicted in the panoramas has survived. At the same time, the photographic panoramas were commercially motivated: they were specifically produced to present San Francisco in ways that were intended to flatter contemporary tastes. They served as objects of civic pride and commercial boosterism, celebrating the city (its hotels, public and commercial buildings, and remarkable houses), its unique topography, and its astonishing growth.

The exhibition is accompanied by a book, published in separate French and English editions, containing two essays and a fully illustrated catalogue of the objects in the exhibition. The essays derive from a close study of the panoramic representations of the city and present complementary interpretations of them. David Harris, Associate Curator

of the Photographs Collection of the CCA and curator of the exhibition, centres upon the history of and issues raised by this type of visual representation. The second, by Eric Sandweiss, an urban historian, analyzes the development of San Francisco.

-30-

Information: www.cca.qc.ca/press