

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## *Edward Ranney: The Lines and The Andean Desert Survey*

September 13 – November 4, 2017

Deborah Bell Photographs is pleased to announce an exhibition of photographs by **Edward Ranney**, opening Wednesday, September 13th. *The Lines and The Andean Desert Survey* will feature 17 photographs taken in Peru, where Ranney began photographing over 50 years ago. Included will be selections from his recently published book, "The Lines," which depict markings in the Peruvian desert made by the ancient Nazcas, a relatively small culture that flourished on Peru's southern coast from around the beginning of the Christian era until 600 AD. The purpose and meanings of these ancient geoglyphs, made by clearing the surface of the desert floor, or by creating paths of stones, remain mysterious and open to different interpretations by scholars. As Ranney explains in a preface to *The Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014):

*Just south of Peru's Ingenio River Valley there is a low hill alongside the Pan-American highway. Here one can overlook the vast, confounding space of the Nazca Pampa and make out some of the lines, or geoglyphs, etched on it by the Nazca culture some fifteen hundred years ago. The lines on the pampa, particularly the figural geoglyphs, have been documented in detail over the last sixty years by aerial photographs, which have given us a broader understanding of their unique qualities. Yet in spite of the information provided by aerial views, it seems to me there is still much to be gained by seeing and experiencing the lines on ground level, as their creators did. ... In addition to their perceptual qualities, the lines can be seen as a form of mapping, marking reference points and connections within the landscape, thereby transforming a harsh natural environment into an understandable, even intimate cultural space. ... Important ceremonies undoubtedly took place along and within these lines. ... It was also thought that the lines, trapezoids, and swept gathering places were sites of ceremonial processions and pilgrimages, and were renewed and reconfigured over many generations. It is unlikely we will ever know definitively what the geoglyphs meant to their creators. But what is clear is that they mark places – and times – of significance. This minimal landscape continues to reveal to us a fragile record of its human occupation. It is a record of elusive meaning, a unique evocation of the inalterable connection between humans and nature.*

The spare and succinct compositions of Ranney's photographs convey what Ranney refers to as the "palpable emptiness" of the desert. They suggest and relate visually to the earthworks and land art made by American artists such as Robert Smithson in the 1960s and 1970s. The art historian and critic Lucy Lippard eloquently describes Ranney's elegant eye and his luminous prints; however, she also explains that his motives should not be misunderstood:

*It would be a mistake to see Ranney's photographs merely as documents of the lines. They are integrated into his own form of abstraction and into very specific landscapes, seen from different perspectives, from hills, from hours of walking the lines on the pampas. ... It's a perfect match – the vast subtleties of the Peruvian desert and the meticulous understatement of Ranney's photography*

*(and printing). ... Knowledge of the Nazca lines and other earthworks around the globe fueled innovation in the 1960s, when artists were rejecting the notion that "high art" was an object divorced from lived experience, to be viewed in an obligatory "white cube." Studies of Andean cultures indicate that straightness carries power. ... Ranney has taken on the challenge of making the lines visually accessible as they were originally seen....*

The curator and art historian Peter Bunnell has written that Ranney's photographs convey a sense of **"this irrational, overwhelming space that seems to rise vertically before one. This complexity of seemingly simple spaces, and the fascination vastness holds for the human eye, has been central to Ranney's work. It implicitly reminds him how the legacy of expeditionary photography continues to be an important reference for some contemporary photographers such as himself."**

Edward Ranney (American, b. 1942), was raised in Illinois and has lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his family since 1970. He began photographing seriously while on a post-graduate Fulbright fellowship in Cuzco from 1964-65. Since then he has travelled on more than 20 occasions to photograph at ancient sites around Cuzco and on the coastal deserts of Peru and Chile. His initial work from the 1970s was published in 1982 as *Monuments of the Incas*, now in its third printing. Publication in 2014 of *The Lines* represents the first significant presentation of the body of work he calls The Andean Desert Survey, which includes pictures of monumental architecture dating from as early as 4000 BC, of extensive later sites along Peru and Chile's desert coasts, and terminates in the early 16th century with structures associated with the Inca occupation of western South America.

Ranney has also photographed in the American Southwest, particularly in New Mexico, where he lives. Other books featuring his photographs are *Stonework of the Maya; The Heights of Macchu Picchu; Prairie Passage; Down Country: The Tano of the Galisteo Basin; The New World's Old World; and Edward Ranney Photographs: The John B. Elliott Collection, Princeton University Art Museum*. He has written and lectured extensively on pre-Columbian and Peruvian culture, and on the work of the Peruvian photographer Martín Chambi, whose archive in Cuzco he has been instrumental in preserving.

Ranney's photographs have been exhibited internationally, and significant groups of them can be found in the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Princeton University Art Museum; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe; the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The New York Public Library; and the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, where his archive will eventually be housed. His work has been funded over the years by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts; The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation; the Fulbright Program; the Northern Arts Council of Great Britain; and the New Mexico Council on Photography.

**Gallery hours for the exhibition are Tuesday-Saturday 11-6. For further information or high-resolution scans please contact Leigh Blanchard at 212-249-9400 or by email at [info@deborahbellphotographs.com](mailto:info@deborahbellphotographs.com).**

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