



In 2012, Michael Lesy contacted the California Museum of Photography (CMP) with a proposition. He wanted to research in the museum’s famous Keystone-Mast Collection as the subject for his next book. The photographs, he asserted, would illustrate the ways that Americans saw the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. The curators at the CMP were intrigued. Most scholars who approach Keystone-Mast are interested in a small swatch of the collection: the photographs of the country, city, or peoples that occupy their scholarly or creative pursuits. Lesy, on the other hand, had spent his career in making meaning from visual archives. Whether facing the archive of a small-town Wisconsin photographer or a collection of restaurant menus, Lesy’s work has started with archival content and woven social histories that situate the materials within American culture. Tackling the whole of Keystone-Mast, therefore, struck us as a challenge that Lesy had been preparing for his whole career.

In 2013, Lesy won a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to take time away from his faculty position at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, come to Riverside, and examine the collection. He would visit for a week at a time, arriving early and looking through box after box of photographs. Within five weeks, he had viewed the entire collection. The book, *Looking Backward*, started as hundreds of pages of photocopied images that Lesy found interesting. He sorted through these images as he researched, culled, and ultimately arranged them into six categories: “the news,” “society,” “the new world and the old,” “the Middle East and the Holy Land,” “India and the Far East,” and “the natural world.” The exhibition remains true to these arrangements whenever possible.

Publishing books in stereo is a complicated, often challenging, pursuit. Viewing the image in three dimensions requires the intervention of a viewing device, and furthermore, necessitates the image to be printed with its stereo pair, reducing the size and detail of the overall image. In the book, *Looking Backward* foregoes these challenges by reproducing full-page images without their pair. This allows for the greatest richness of detail, and a volume unencumbered by the potential frustration of stereoscopic viewing. In the exhibition, on the other hand, the CMP’s photographic technology collection

presented an opportunity to experiment with the three-dimensional presentation of these images. Ranging from the Wheatstone viewer, a Victorian philosophical toy, to the View-Master, the humble staple of American childhoods, these images can be viewed in three dimensions, connecting them to the stereoscopic experience that Lesy describes so vividly in the book.

This exhibition is presented in tandem with the release of Lesy’s book, *Looking Backward: Images of the World at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, published by W.W. Norton in conjunction with the California Museum of Photography at UCR ARTSblock. Leigh Gleason, Curator of Collections at the California Museum of Photography, curated the exhibition. Aide Esquivel and Carter Seddon produced image scans from the original negatives. UCR’s College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences and the City of Riverside have provided support.

CAPTIONS TRANSCRIBED FROM STEREOSCOPIC CARDS
(Above left to right): “An old man carrying fagots home for fuel, Japan;” “A scene in New York City;” “Arab muscle dancers, Cairo, Egypt.” (Insert) “Americans of tomorrow - immigrants on deck of S.S. Amerika, New York.” (Cover) “San Francisco earthquake, 1906.” Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography

RELATED PROGRAMS

March 11

Lecture 4:30 - 5:30 PM

Book Signing 5:30 - 6:00 PM*

Reception 6:00 - 8:00 PM

Free admission to programs listed above

*The book, *Looking Backward*, will be sold exclusively at UCR ARTSblock until its official release in bookstores around the nation in mid-April 2017



MICHAEL LESY
LOOKING BACKWARD
MARCH 11 - JULY 15, 2017