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EMMET GOWIN PAIRS FIVE DECADES OF HIS PHOTOGRAPHS WITH TREASURES FROM THE MORGAN'S COLLECTIONS

Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan
May 22 through September 20, 2015

****Press Preview: Thursday, May 21, 10–11:30 AM****
RSVP: media@themorgan.org

New York, NY, April 20, 2015 — Emmet Gowin (b. 1941), one of the most original and influential photographers of his generation, is known for constantly reinventing his working methods along with his subject matter—and also for his sensitivity to the deep historical life of images. Beginning May 22, the Morgan Library & Museum will present a unique look at Gowin's wide-ranging work in relation to the museum's celebrated collections in a new exhibition, *Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan*.

On view through September 20, the show includes 59 images by Gowin and 55 objects from the Morgan, selected by the photographer in a celebration of affinities that transcend time and space. Gowin's work includes searching portraits of his wife, Edith, and their extended family; "working landscapes" where nature and humanity have shaped one another over centuries; aerial views of sites impacted by modern catastrophes ranging from volcanic activity to nuclear testing; and close-up portraits of nocturnal moths native to the rain forests of Central and South America. The Morgan objects span millennia—from



Emmet Gowin, *Edith, (Rain Droplets in a Web)*, 2004, Gold toned salt print on gelatin coated paper. Collection of Emmet and Edith Gowin. © Emmet and Edith Gowin, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery.

ancient seals and tables to medieval illuminations to master drawings by artists such as Botticelli, Rembrandt, and Mondrian.

“The collections of the Morgan are vast and varied, and it is an entirely new experience to view these treasures in relation to the unforgettable work of Emmet Gowin,” said Peggy Fogelman, acting director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “As we experience the evolution of his art and ideas over time we also see the creative and often surprising linkages with Morgan objects of widely different eras and artistic disciplines. The past is present in refreshing new ways when matched with Gowin’s photography.”

THE EXHIBITION

Gowin, the son of an evangelical minister, studied painting before taking up the camera. In an interview with curator Joel Smith in the exhibition catalog, Gowin remarks that working with the Morgan’s collection reminded him of one of his deepest early influences: frontal portraiture “in religious scenes of the Renaissance. I thought: Why doesn’t that happen in photography? Why can’t I make representations that include a cast of characters, with the spirit of storytelling these paintings have?” Ultimately, *Hidden Likeness* expresses his present-day feeling of kinship with artists of past times, rather than cataloguing their influences upon him. The exhibition’s message, in his words: “If I’d seen this when I was young, I would have been very influenced by it!”

Gowin’s earliest photographs focused on his wife, Edith, and their family in Danville, Virginia. In a dual portrait made in 1968, Edith holds their gleeful firstborn son, Elijah, upside down before her



Above: Emmet Gowin, *Edith and Elijah, Danville, Virginia*, 1968, Gelatin silver print. Collection of Emmet and Edith Gowin. © Emmet and Edith Gowin, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery. Right: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669), *Woman with a Child Descending a Staircase*, ca. 1636, Pen and brown ink, brown wash. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909, The Morgan Library & Museum.



while facing the camera with customary aplomb. “Kisses are among the vehicles I would use if I were not able to make pictures,” Gowin had written in a statement accompanying his graduate thesis project one year earlier. The portrait is paired with Rembrandt’s tender and keenly observed drawing of a young woman cradling a toddler in her arms. Gowin found an early hero in Rembrandt, whose swiftly rendered drawings describe the unmistakably intimate gestures and attitudes of family members in the comfort of their home.

Nearby hangs William Blake’s celebrated watercolor drawing (ca. 1805-10) for the Book of Job, featuring the monsters of land and sea, Behemoth and Leviathan. Pierpont Morgan acquired the drawing in 1909. Gowin remarks: “Blake identifies evil with energy and exuberance with life, and defines our task as the reconciliation of these apparent opposites. The energy that drives us is good; and the evil—energy—that drives us is as much a part of us as the good.” Beside the drawing hangs a photograph that appears to represent a sinister, inhuman face in profile. It is Gowin’s 1988 aerial photograph of a vast mound of copper ore tailing left behind by a nineteenth-century mine in Arizona. Like Blake’s fantastic vision, Gowin’s view hints at a destructive component that is inseparable from the human drive to create and produce.



Left: William Blake (1757–1827), *Behemoth and Leviathan* (illustration for the Book of Job), ca. 1805–10, Pen and black and gray ink, gray wash, and watercolor, over faint indications in graphite. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909, The Morgan Library & Museum. Right: Emmet Gowin, *Copper Ore Tailing, Globe, Arizona*, 1988, Toned gelatin silver print. Collection of Emmet and Edith Gowin. © Emmet and Edith Gowin, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery.



Left: Emmet Gowin, *Mariposas Nocturnas Index #25, Bolivia*, 2009, Archival digital inkjet print. Collection of Emmet and Edith Gowin. © Emmet and Edith Gowin, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery. Right: Simon Bening (1483/84–1561), *Annunciation*, Da Costa Hours, Ghent, Belgium, ca. 1515, MS M.399, fols. 129v–130r, Painting on vellum. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1910, The Morgan Library & Museum.

Since the late 1990s, Gowin has been working in the rain forests of Central and South America, photographing hundreds of species of moths. To provide backdrops for his insect portraits, he travels with a binder full of details scanned from beloved drawings, manuscripts, and other documents; each image records a miniature encounter between culture and nature. He assembles his portraits into grids of twenty-five creatures native to one location. In the exhibition, a grid from Bolivia hangs near a small Belgian book of hours (ca. 1515) that is open to a painting in which Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary she will conceive the son of God. The scene is bordered by meticulously rendered flowers and insects. Like Gowin's moths—an encoded plea for the value of wilderness—these painted species convey messages. The lilies stand for purity and chastity; the pink carnations, maternal love; and the butterflies are symbols of resurrection.

EMMET GOWIN

Emmet Gowin (b. 1941, Danville, Va.) received a BFA in Graphic Design from the Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University) in 1965 and an MFA in Photography from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1967. He taught in the Visual Arts Program at Princeton University from 1973 to 2009. He is represented in New York by Pace/MacGill Gallery.

Gowin's work has been included in exhibitions in the U.S. and abroad, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1971) and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1983). Gowin's first midcareer retrospective, organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, traveled to seven venues (1990–93). *Changing the Earth*, an exhibition of his aerial work organized by The Yale University Art Gallery, appeared at eight museums across the country (2002–04). A retrospective organized by the MAPFRE Foundation, Madrid, traveled to numerous venues internationally (2012–15).

Gowin is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (1974), two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1977, 1979), the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts from the State of Pennsylvania (1983), the Friends of Photography Peer Award (1992), and a Pew Fellowship in the Arts (1993).

Gowin lives and works in Newtown, Pennsylvania.

PUBLICATION

Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan is accompanied by a 64-page publication that includes 48 full-page plates of works in the exhibition, a conversation between the artist and curator Joel Smith, and an exhibition checklist.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

LECTURE

An Evening with Emmet Gowin

Photographer Emmet Gowin talks about his creative evolution over five decades, the genesis of the exhibition *Hidden Likeness*, and his experience integrating his art with the Morgan's collections.

Thursday, May 28, 7 pm*

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for Members; Free for students with valid ID

***The exhibition *Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan* will be open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.**

GALLERY TALK

Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan

Joel Smith, Richard L. Menschel Curator and Department Head,
Photography

Friday, May 29, 6:30 pm

All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

GALLERY TALK

Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan

Michelle Donnelly, Samuel H. Kress Interpretive Fellow

Friday, July 10, 6:30 pm

All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

DISCUSSION

A Terrible Beauty

Photographer Emmet Gowin is joined by other speakers on the perils and rewards of discovering beauty in disturbing and/or endangered places. This program is co-organized with *Cabinet Magazine*. For a complete list of speakers visit themorgan.org/programs.

Thursday, September 10, 6:30 pm*

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for Members; Free for students with valid ID

*The exhibition *Hidden Likeness: Photographer Emmet Gowin at the Morgan* will be open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

ORGANIZATION AND SPONSORSHIP

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The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, photography, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$18 for adults; \$12 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop, Café, or Dining Room.