

# Nature Transformed: Edward Burtynsky's Vermont Quarry Photographs in Context

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## The Hood Museum of Art Presents Edward Burtynsky's Vermont Quarry Photographs in Context



*Nature Transformed* takes as its starting point a remarkable series of photographs by pioneering, internationally celebrated artist Edward Burtynsky (see image). His now signature pursuit of conceptual subjects—from oil extraction in the United States and in Azerbaijan to shipbreaking in Bangladesh—started in 1991 just fifty miles north of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, in the granite quarries of Barre, Vermont. One hundred years before Burtynsky encountered Vermont's quarries, stoneworkers emigrated here primarily from the ancient quarrying town of Carrara, Italy, as artists and artisans to contribute

their expertise to an industry in the throes of expansion. They brought along with them a love for opera, political activism, and strong values that made their assimilation into American society relatively easy. *Nature Transformed* considers a selection of Burtynsky's monumental photographs—seven of which Burtynsky is showing here for the first time, including two he took in the little-known but extensive underground quarries in Danby, Vermont—within this context of Vermont's social and cultural history as well as the much longer history of the geological formation of northern New England and its marble and granite deposits.

Interestingly, Burtynsky made the reverse journey of those Italian immigrants with his *Quarries* project—first he discovered the quarries in Vermont and then he was pointed toward Carrara by a quarry owner. This was in turn the artist's first international trip for his work and represents the genesis of the global exploration of nature and industry for which he is renowned today. *Nature Transformed* showcases several of his photographs from Carrara as well, signaling the geographical aspect of this story of human migration. The exhibition is on view from April 21 through August 19, 2012, and Edward Burtynsky will deliver a lecture at the museum on Friday, May 11, at 5:30 PM.

According to Michael Taylor, the Director of the Hood Museum of Art, "Burtynsky's powerful artistic vision of the interaction between humans and the environment is the guiding force behind the exhibition's conception." In the exhibition catalogue, co-curator Pieter Broucke writes, "Burtynsky subtly combines his instinctive appreciation for the powerful formal aspects of the quarries with his growing subjective awareness of the devastation that large-scale industrial quarrying has wrought on the landscape. The detritus of abandoned equipment, derricks, sheds, stairs, cables, tanks, discarded blocks and stones, and other litter becomes increasingly prominent in the photographs. The artist's initial impression of the monumental voids as formal presences inserted within the landscape gradually includes recognition of the quarries as ecological wounds inflicted upon the landscape."

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Searching out these monumental voids was indeed the idea that drove Burtynsky to Vermont in the first place, after he had spent time photographing ore mines. In an interview for the exhibition catalogue, he recalls, “I thought of our cities, which are made from stone that is kept intact . . . The type of excavation that resulted from dimensional stone seemed to indicate that there had to be a more orderly removal of the materials than at an ore mine. The idea I had was that I might be able to find the reverse of a skyscraper somewhere, an inverted pyramid where the blocks were being removed. So I pursued that.” The resulting images on display in *Nature Transformed* are often breathtaking in their scale and visual power.

Edward Burtynsky is known as one of Canada’s most respected photographers. His remarkable photographic depictions of global industrial landscapes are included in the collections of over fifty major museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California. Burtynsky links his early exposure to the sites and images of the General Motors plant in his hometown to the development of his photographic work. His imagery explores the intricate link between industry and nature, combining the raw elements of mining, quarrying, manufacturing, shipping, oil production, and recycling into eloquent, highly expressive visions that find beauty and humanity in the most unlikely of places.

This exhibition was organized by the Hood Museum of Art and generously supported by Raphael and Jane Bernstein / Parnassus Foundation, Laurie Jean Weil D.V.M. in honor of her parents, Jean and Bucks Weil, Dartmouth Class of 1935, the Marie-Louise and Samuel R. Rosenthal Fund, and the Ray Winfield Smith 1918 Fund.

## About the Hood Museum of Art

The Hood Museum of Art is dedicated to teaching and promoting visual literacy for all of its visitors. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 65,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

Additional images available upon request.

## Image caption

Edward Burtynsky, *Rock of Ages #7, Active Section, E. L. Smith Quarry, Barre, Vermont, 1991*. Photograph courtesy Howard Greenberg & Bryce Wolkowitz, New York / Nicholas Metivier, Toronto