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THE ART INSTITUTE UNCOVERS “THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR” OF PHOTOGRAPHER ABELARDO MORELL
First Retrospective in 15 Years Presents More Than 100 Images from 1986 to Present
Exhibition Premieres in Chicago Before Traveling to Los Angeles, Atlanta

Over the course of 25 years, Cuban-born American artist Abelardo Morell (b. 1948) has become internationally renowned for works that employ the language of photography to explore visual surprise and wonder. The Art Institute of Chicago—in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta—has organized a major retrospective that celebrates Morell’s inventive oeuvre. Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door, on view at the Art Institute from June 1 through September 2, 2013, showcases over 100 works created from 1986 to the present and is the first retrospective of Morell’s photographs in 15 years. Showing a range of works and series—including many newer color photographs never before exhibited—The Universe Next Door reveals how this consistently creative artist has returned to a photographic vocabulary as a source of great inspiration. In Chicago, the exhibition is being presented in both the photography galleries (Galleries 1–4) in the museum’s 1893 building as well as the Modern Wing’s Carolyn S. and Matthew Bucksbaum Gallery (Gallery 188). These two venues—one historical, one contemporary—are particularly appropriate for the work of an artist who employs photography’s earliest techniques to reveal new perspectives about today’s world.
Morell came with his family to the United States as a teenager in 1962. He received a scholarship to attend Bowdoin College in Maine, where he took his first photography course; he later completed an MFA in photography at Yale University, looking to street photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Frank for inspiration. After the birth of his son in 1986, he began making large-format pictures around his home, examining common household objects with childlike curiosity. As a professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, he experimented with optics in his teaching and initiated a series in which he turned an entire room into a camera obscura, photographing the projection of the outside world onto the surfaces of the room’s interior.

These twin poles—examining objects and images with fresh vision and exploring simple optics in myriad forms—have been consistent orientation points throughout his career. Morell has turned his camera on conveyors of cultural meaning such as books, maps, money, and museums in extensive series that explore the perception of images. He has experimented with techniques as varied as photograms, still-life tableaux, stop-motion studies, and most recently the tent camera—a kind of portable camera obscura that throws the image of a landscape upon the ground’s surface. Now, after decades of working exclusively in black and white, he has begun to embrace color, both returning to old themes and series to view them in a new spectrum and pioneering new ways to understand optical effects, nature, and picture making. Showcasing his ever-inventive practice, *The Universe Next Door* traces Morell’s innovative career as he continues to mine the essential strangeness and complexity of images.

*Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door* is accompanied by a 176-page catalogue with 40 color and 100 duotone illustrations. The catalogue includes an essay by Elizabeth Siegel, associate curator of photography at the Art Institute; a recent interview with the artist by Paul Martineau, associate curator of photography, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; and an illustrated chronology of Morell’s life and works by Brett Abbott, curator of photography and head of collections, High Museum of Art, Atlanta. *Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door* will be available at the Art Institute’s Museum Shop beginning June 1 for $50.00.

Following its presentation at the Art Institute, *Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door* will travel to The J. Paul Getty Museum (October 1, 2013–January 5, 2014), and the High Museum of Art (February 22–May 18, 2014).
Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago, in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. The exhibition is curated by Elizabeth Siegel, associate curator of photography at the Art Institute. Major support for Abelardo Morell: The Universe Next Door is generously provided by Joyce Chelberg. Funding for the exhibition catalogue has been provided by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Generous in-kind support for this exhibition is provided by Tru Vue, Inc. and Gemini Moulding.


For high-resolution images of the exhibition, please contact the Department of Public Affairs.

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The Art Institute of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the citizens of Chicago.