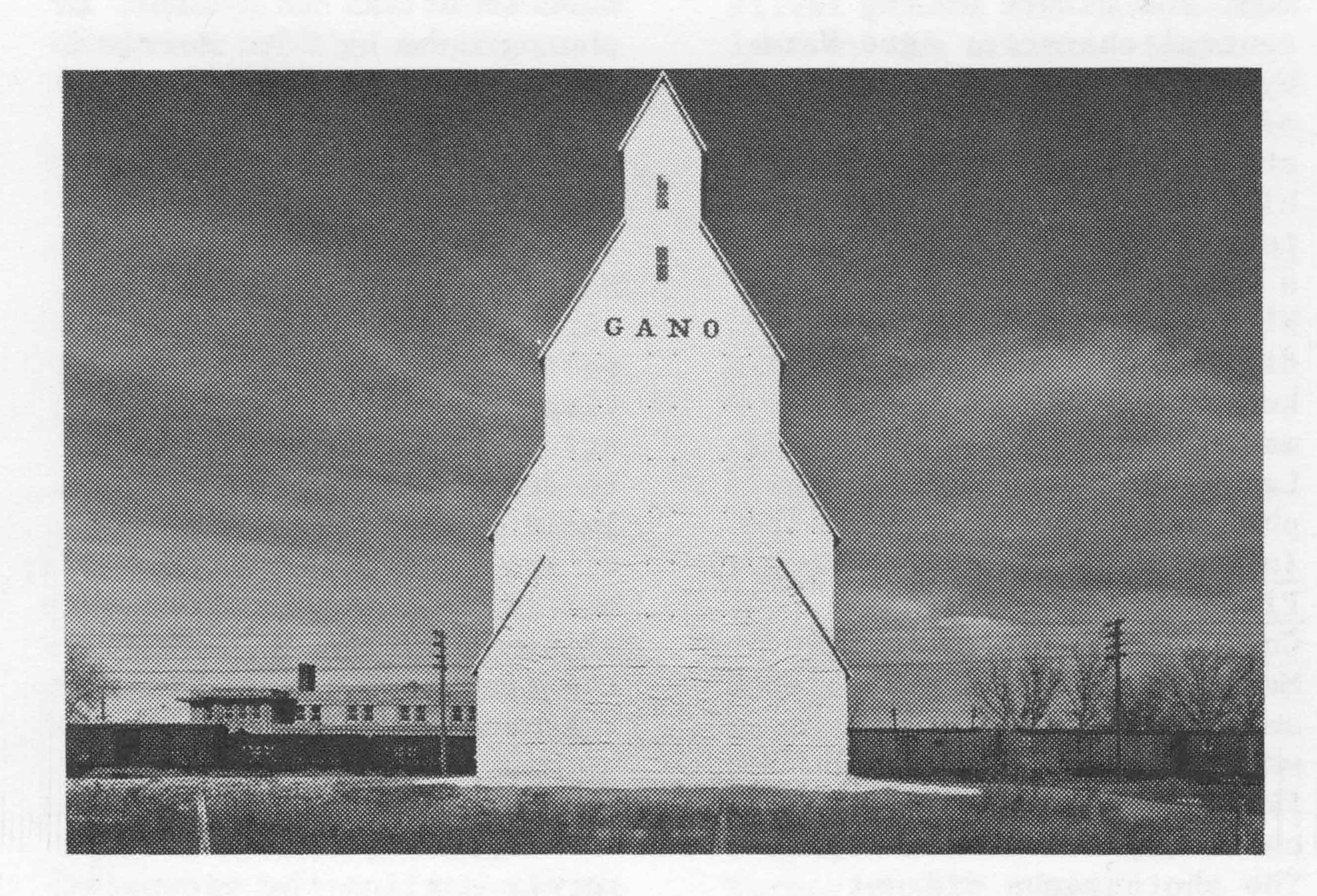
Gano Grain Elevator, Western Kansas, 1940



A renowned novelist, Wright Morris has been a pioneering spirit in combining the photographic image and the printed word. His synthesis of these art forms prefigured the current interest in narrative art, in which words are added to pictures or photographs. Employing a kind of "snapshot" aesthetic in an early novel The Man Who Was There (1945). Morris revealed the temperament and nature of the central character Agee Ward by describing the contents of Ward's photo-album. Morris struck a familiar chord with his audience, for the ubiquitous family album has become a token of American life. With this novel, Morris disclosed a sensitivity for homely details, and for the medium of photography itself. Later, in three unprecedented photo-text publications--The Inhabitants (1946) The Home Place (1948) and God's Country and My People (1968) --Morris paired his photographs and prose in a singular manner. Each photograph faced a page of text, so that one complemented the other. The photographs did not illustrate the text, nor did the text describe the subjects of the photographs. According to Morris, "They are two aspects of the same impression." (Wright Morris: Structures and Artifacts. Lincoln, University of Nebraska, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 1975, p. 112.) The majority of photographs in this MATRIX exhibition have been selected from these three photo-texts. Taken between 1936-1950, many of the images have received a great deal of exposure through various publications, but have rarely been seen as individual prints.

Morris holds a unique place

among photographers of the past century. His work documents a particular time in American history, similar in some ways to Eugene Atget's eloquent photographs of Paris at the turn of the century. Photographs by Morris have also been compared to those of Walker Evans, one of the Farm Security Administration photographers. An accute sense of composition and framing, and critical attention to detail is evident in photographs by both Morris and Evans. Evans, however, was a member of a propagandistic group which strove to expose the stark poverty and privation of the '30's. Morris, on the other hand, captures the spirit of a past "inhabitant" in the time-worn objects and structures that were common to daily living. Though his lucid images testify to some of the hardships of the '40's, Morris respects the integrity of his subjects, preserving the treasured memories that they contain.

Morris confronts the subjects of his photographs directly, rarely angling the viewpoint. He claims, "It was crucial that the photographs achieve both a particular and general statement. This may have led me to prefer the direct frontal stance--face to face to the fact--as in early daguerreotype portraits. No interpretations were necessary: it was sufficient to let the subject speak for itself." (Wright Morris: Structures and Artifacts. Lincoln, University of Nebraska, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 1975, p. 112.)

All of Morris' photographs are taken in natural sunlight. Structures photographed outdoors, such as Farmhouse in Winter, Near Lincoln, 1941,

are infused with the luminosity of vast Midwestern skies, a reference to the Nebraska countryside where Morris grew up. Many of the images are structured around specific geometric shapes such as a rectangular building, a circular basket of corn, or a square wooden chair. By focusing upon basic configurations within the landscape or a home, Morris invites the viewer to contemplate the vernacular character of the artifacts and structures he photographs.

Morris' image of Barber Chair, 1947, perhaps epitomizes his pictorial interests. The well-worn chair is open-armed and inviting. In his book In God's Country and My People, one learns that customers who sit in this chair are treated to a story about their progenitors by the barber Eddie Cahow. Rather than a discarded remnant from a forgotten age, the chair has become a mnemonic device, heavy with generations of buried family stories. Morris has often written about and photographed this chair, investing it with a sense of relevance and importance. As a result of his attention, Eddie Cahow's barber chair is now recognized as an icon--a valued symbol of the past--and is housed in a Nebraska museum.

Wright Morris was born in Central City, Nebraska in 1910. He has received three Guggenheim Fellowships (1942, 1947, 1954); the National Book Award (1956); and a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation (1967). Morris holds honorary doctorates from Westminster College (Missouri), the University of Nebraska and Pomona College (California), and

is a Senior Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He was a professor of literature at San Francisco State University from 1962-1975. Wright Morris and his wife Jo make their home in Mill Valley, California.

MKV

Works in MATRIX:

All photographs are gelatin silver prints and have been lent by the artist. Sight measurements are given in inches, height precedes width.

near Lordsburg, New Mexico;

Powerhouse and Palm Tree,

1940. $7 \frac{1}{4} \times 9 \frac{1}{4}$.

Church Facade, near Rahway, New Jersey; 1940. 6 5/8 x 8 5/8. Church and House, Virginia City, Nevada; 1941. 7 1/4 x 9 1/4. Two Store Fronts, Nebraska; 1947. 6 $3/8 \times 9 3/8$. Outhouse and Backstop, Nebraska; 1947. 7 1/8 x 9 3/8. Church, Near Milford, Nebraska; 1947. 7 1/8 x 9 1/4. Barber Chair, Chapman, Nebraska, Eddie Cahow's Barbershop; 1947. 9 3/8 x 7 1/4. Basket of Cobs, The Home Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; $1947. 8 1/8 \times 7 3/8.$ Corner of Bedroom with Bureau, The Home Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; 1947. $81/8 \times 73/8$. Bedroom Interior with Wash Stand, Southern Indiana; 1950. 9 1/4 x 7 1/4. Barber Pole and Hydrant, Needles, California; 1938. $15 \ 3/4 \times 13 \ 7/8$. Eroded Soil, near Oxford, Mississippi; 1940. 12 3/4 x 17 3/4. Gano Grain Elevator, Western Kansas; 1940. 11 7/8 x

17 3/4.

Ruined Store Fronts, Tombstone, Arizona; 1940. 13 1/4 x 17 3/8. Farmhouse in Winter, near Lincoln; 1941. 12 3/4 x 17 3/4. Straight-backed Chair by Door, The Home Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; 1947. 17 3/4 x 13 7/8. Dresser Drawer, Ed's Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; 1947. 13 7/8 x 17 1/2. View into Kitchen, Ed's Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; 1947. 16 3/4 x 13 7/8. Model T with California Top, Ed's Place, near Norfolk, Nebraska; 1947. 12 7/8 x 17 3/4. Juke Box, Roadside Cafe, Southern Indiana; 1950. $17 \ 3/4 \ x \ 13 \ 5/8$.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

New School for Social Research, NYC '40; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE '75 (traveling exhibition); Prakapas Gallery, NYC '77; Friends of Photography, Carmel, CA '79; Bennington College, VT '79.

The following selected bibliography by and about Wright Morris concerns those references which relate to photography. For an annotated bibliography and complete list of writings by Wright Morris please refer to: Knoll, Robert E., ed. Conversations with Wright Morris, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1977.

Selected bibliography by Morris:

"Landscape with Figures,"

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277.

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8, '46) p. 7.

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Art Gallery '75).

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