



Photo by Chip Simone

Atlanta Celebrates Photography, Jackson Fine Art, the Hagedorn Foundation Gallery, and Lumière Gallery generate a lot of energy around photography in Atlanta, but the cornerstone of the region's art scene is the High Museum of Art. This spring, a series of gifts to the museum further bolstered its photography initiatives. Lucinda W. Bunnen established the first dedicated space for photography at the museum; Paul Hagedorn gave \$500,000 to support photography acquisitions; and the Keough family donated \$2 million to endow the curator position. "It's a really exciting time for us," says **Brett Abbott**, the Donald and Marilyn Keough Family Curator of Photography. "These initiatives will ensure that photography remains here in a robust way."

A California native, Abbott was a curator in the Getty's photography department for nine years before coming to the High Museum in 2011. He grew up in Santa Barbara; his pediatrician father is also an amateur photographer who had a darkroom in the garage for a time. Abbott himself took pictures in high school, and after a few of them won a local contest they were displayed in a store window in town. They even caught the attention of a collector, who bought one for \$100.

But his career as a photographer was short-lived, and his path was shaped more

by an art history class he took in high school. "It was probably the hardest class I took," he says, "but I really liked it." He went to Stanford University, where he took more art history classes, then went directly to graduate school at Williams College in Massachusetts.

Courses with Jim Ganz, then the curator of prints and photographs at the Clark Art Institute, deepened his interest in photography, as did an internship at the National Gallery with Sarah Greenough, doing background research for her exhibition on Alfred Stieglitz. Abbott was hired at the Getty right out of Williams. He assumed he would eventually go on to get a PhD. "But before I knew it," he says, "I was doing all of the things I would want to do if I pursued a PhD. I learned a lot about connoisseurship and worked on some really great exhibitions projects."

His move to the High Museum, he says, involved a shift in perspective. "One of the things that I found appealing about coming here is it allows me to be entrepreneurial," he says. "I could really develop a program in a community that was relatively underserved." The museum's strengths are in American 20th-century photography and contemporary work, particularly Southern photography, and it recently acquired a large collection of William Christenberry's photographs. "It's almost like a history of color photography through one person's work," says Abbott of the acquisition. A series of back-to-back exhibitions over the last year reflect the strong curatorial program that Abbott has developed: an Abelardo Morell retrospective developed in collaboration with the Getty and the Art Institute of Chicago; *Wynn Bullock: Revelations*, on view through January 18; and later this fall, a show of work by Gordon Parks. "There was a lot of potential to build a program here that is as good as the best programs in the nation," says Abbott, "and I think we've done that. It's been really fulfilling for me to be part of taking us to that level."