

BARBARA VAN CLEVE: **Just Women's Work**
Exhibition Prospectus



© Barbara Van Cleve (b. 1935 –), *The Shepherd [Chew Ranch, Utah]*, 2000, pigment print, 13 ½ x 20", Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA

// **POINT OF CONTACT**

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// **EXHIBITION TOUR**

Available 2020 and on.

// **EXHIBITION CONTENTS**

Barbara Van Cleve: Just Women's Work consists of 78 black and white photographs taken from 1986 – 2014 when Barbara traveled to ranches across the West. This exhibition explores ranch life through the work of women, and serves to show that from sewing to branding, a women's work on a ranch is simply what needed to be done. Van Cleve wishes to share their stories and add to the history of the West, which has sometimes centered on the stories of men. Van Cleve has published several books on ranch life, including *"All This Way for the Short Ride"* (1997) with poet Paul Zarzyski. Barbara was inducted into the Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas in 1996 following her publication of *"Hard Twist: Western Ranch Women."*

// **INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS**

Text for: labels, introductory and supporting panels, and a gallery guide. A master list of photographs is also provided for easy reference.

// **SPACE REQUIREMENTS**

335 feet of wall space, with a wall height of 10 feet is recommended.

// **EXHIBITION FEE**

\$6,000 for 12 weeks.

// **ADDITIONAL COSTS**

Prorated share of packing and crating, shipping, and etcetera.

// **CREDITS**

Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA

// Exhibition Description

Barbara Van Cleve: Just Women's Work presents 78 black and white photographs of contemporary ranch life. Barbara follows her subjects as they work their daily chores on the ranch, showing that there is no part of ranch life in which women are not involved. Barbara Van Cleve wants to show the world that ranch life is not just men on the range and women in the house, *"What I simply wanted to do was give the women a voice and recognition."*

Barbara is no stranger to ranch life. She was born in 1935 near Big Timber, Montana, on the eastern slopes of Crazy Mountains to Barbara Lenore and Paul Ledyard "Spike" Van Cleve III. The eldest of four children, Barbara *"was on a horse when [she] was three,"* learning to ride from her father, and was moving cattle with him at six. Interested in the arts at an early age, Van Cleve's parents gave her a camera — a Brownie box camera — at 11.

The prospect of a career as a photographer initially concerned her family. Her mother encouraged Barbara to obtain a teaching certificate, while her paternal grandmother insisted she attend Duchesne College in Omaha, Nebraska. After graduating, Barbara briefly taught elementary school before taking Literature courses at Loyola University of Chicago. A true Renaissance woman, Barbara earned a master's degree in English Literature from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and taught Victorian Literature at DePaul University, where she served as Dean of Women. Her academic career spanned 25 years and includes teaching literature and photography at DePaul University, Loyola University and Mundelein College.

But ranch life was never far away. Every summer, Van Cleve would work her family's ranch, the Lazy K Bar, which was founded in the 1880s. Van Cleve says, *"I had nearly four months every year at [my] family's ranch. I was able to ride and rope and train the young horses. There was a lot of work, but I've always been a hard worker — it was something I grew up with."* The ranch welcomed guests from 1922–2007 as a popular dude ranch, and Barbara would run the corral program, take photographs and lead trips.

Barbara longed to fulfill a lifelong goal: to see if she could live and work as a professional photographer. In 1963, Van Cleve opened a stock photography agency in Chicago. In 1979, Van Cleve sold her business and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 1985, she approached the influential gallery owner Elaine Horwitch with a large framed piece. Impressed, Horwitch gave Barbara her first show, which was a huge success — almost every photograph sold.

Since then, Van Cleve has had over 50 solo exhibitions and over 100 group shows. She has published four books, and at present lives in Santa Fe during winters, and returns to Big Timber, Montana during summers. Throughout this exhibition, Barbara recounts meeting her young subjects and their early memories on the ranch, *"they love the life and, most often, after growing up and getting an education, will return to that life because they love it."*

// Subjects and Themes

Barbara Van Cleve moves seamlessly between documentary photography to wide, emotive landscapes of the American West. This exhibition features work from the artist's series: *Hard Twist: Western Ranch Women and Pure Quill*, with additional photographs and memoirs about her adolescent subjects. **Women Ranchers**, and their stories, are central to Barbara's work. Van Cleve traveled from Idaho to Montana to New Mexico to capture the lives of these **Woman Ranchers**, using a tape-recorder to interview nearly 50 subjects, including young women. Barbara says, *"I feel so strongly about the rest of the country knowing about these remarkable women."* In the artist's portrait of Gretchen Sammis she is shown cooking in her kitchen, but is also wearing worn work clothes, subtly capturing how **Women Ranchers** would work inside and outside the home, because on a farm or ranch, every hand is needed. Gretchen Sammis was the first woman to be president of the Northern New Mexico Livestock Association, first woman on the Cimarron School Board and first woman chair of the Colfax County Soil and Water Conservation District.



Gretchen Sammis In Her Two Stove Kitchen, Chase Ranch, Cimarron, NM, 1986, pigment print, 18 ¾ x 13 ¼", Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA



Shucking the Corn is Necessary Work [Katy Whitlock, Wyoming], 2001, pigment print, 13 ½ x 20", Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA

From sewing, churning butter, to driving a team of cattle, Barbara carefully records The **Daily Life** of ranchers with care and craft. Accompanying half of the photographs in the exhibition, the artist includes documentary notes. Katy's many skills, and those of her contemporaries, are highlighted throughout the exhibition. Barbara used her knowledge of ranch life to put her subjects at ease and gain entry to the various farms and ranchers she photographed. She says, *"When they realized I knew about ranching and that I understood the difficulties they're facing, I could literally see them let their weight down and relax, and then they'd open up."* In *Shucking the Corn*, a fifteen year-old Katy Whitlock is shown shoveling the corn used to feed the cattle. The wagon bed is hidden by the mounds of corn and Kathy is shown surrounded by just one of her many chores.



Cow Country: Wet Spring Grass, 2014, pigment print, 9 ½ x 19",
Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA

Van Cleve's photographs of **Ranching** document the care, labor, knowledge and skill needed to run a ranch. Barbara would often photograph from horseback, which allowed her to move quickly and create images with a unique point of view,



Riding Out at Dawn [Barmann Ranch, New Mexico],
1999, pigment print, 13 ½ x 20, Booth Western Art Museum
permanent collection, Cartersville, GA

as seen with *Cow Country: Wet Spring Grass*. The photograph overlooks a herd of cattle that disappear behind a ridge. Land and sky are equally balanced, and the height provided by shooting from horseback allows the artist to capture expansive scenes. She says, "Just give me my horse and saddle, some great open country, cattle and working cattle people, and I'll do my work quietly, in all conditions, from pure perfection to rain, mud, dust and freezing blizzards." Barbara perfected shooting while her horse was in a gallop, taking the photograph at the gallop's highest, stillest point, where all four legs of the horse are suspended midair.

Memory, rather than nostalgia, leads Barbara's work. In *Riding Out at Dawn*, Leslie Barmann, then 12 years old, rides with her mother Kim Davis and sister Kelly on their family ranch in New Mexico. Barbara follows the family throughout this day, recording how mother and daughters herd 300 cattle and prepare them from branding. Throughout this exhibition, Barbara recounts her first meetings with her young subjects, and recalls that even as they grew up and left home, "they love the life and, most often, after growing up and getting an education, will return to that life because they love it." In *KaDee Hopping Down From Swather*, then 17 year-old KaDee Chew hops off her family's farm equipment and excitedly moves on to her next task. Barbara recounts meeting KaDee's extended family, owners of Blue Mountain Ranch, Maybell Ranch, and Clark Ranch. Barbara recalls how KaDee enjoyed her life on her family's ranch, and when she grew up, how KaDee made sure that her home reflected her fond memories of ranching. In *Just Women's Work*, guests too will be able to share in similar stories and get to know the remarkable women who make ranching possible.



KaDee Hopping Down From Swather [Chew Ranch, Colorado], 2001, pigment print, 19 ¼ x 13 ½", Booth Western Art Museum permanent collection, Cartersville, GA