



**Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture Department**

**Arts, Culture and Heritage Division**

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## **EXHIBITION PRESS RELEASE** **SACRED LEGACY: EDWARD CURTIS AND THE NATIVE AMERICAN**

Pretoria Art Museum  
20 January to 28 February 2010

*Sacred Legacy* is a unique photographic exhibition created expressly to celebrate the native peoples of the United States and their history and culture. The exhibition illustrates the broad and extraordinary diversity among the North American tribes, and pays homage to the famed photographer and ethnographer, Edward S Curtis.

Curtis was born in 1868 in rural Wisconsin in the North Central United States. He was well versed in the fundamentals of photography and became a serious and dedicated practitioner. In 1892 he acquired shares in a small photography studio in Seattle. He quickly positioned himself as Seattle's foremost studio photographer, and this success gave him a new-found level of financial freedom that allowed him to spend time away from the studio to pursue his love of the great outdoors. This exploration led him to encounters with small pockets of Native Americans who still maintained some vestiges of their traditional lifestyles.

In 1906 Curtis began an undertaking that would consume him for the next twenty-four years; *The North American Indian*, a twenty volume, twenty portfolio set of handmade books. Each set contains over 2 200 original photographs plus extensive text covering the western United States and Canada. The Native American subjects themselves are the principle reason Curtis's work has stood the test of time. Their powerful presence, dignity and emotional depth are all quintessential underpinnings of Curtis's photographs. That all these qualities come through so profoundly in his most compelling photographs is not only a testament to his technical and artistic mastery, but perhaps even more so a reflection of the subjects themselves.

On exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum is a selection of sixty of Curtis's most evocative images. Each image has been printed in a size and medium intended to most fully enhance the impact of the subject. The prints are extremely faithful to the look, feel and dimensions of Curtis's original, vintage prints. The images are representative of the diverse cultural geographic regions in which he photographed and illustrate his artistry in portrait, landscape and still life photography. A wide variety of print media were explored and employed for this exhibition.

*Sacred Legacy* is a collaborative effort of the Embassy of the United States of America and the Pretoria Art Museum.

Pretoria Art Museum  
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Open: Tuesday to Sunday: 10:00 - 17:00 Closed: Mondays and public holidays