



## *Farm Workers, South of Tracy, California, Dorothea Lange*

### **Farm Workers, South of Tracy, California**

Dorothea Lange  
American, 1938  
Gelatin silver print  
5 15/16 x 5 15/16 in.  
2000.43.4

#### **Questions for Teaching**

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

What do you notice about the people? What are they doing?

What are they holding? *(Both individuals are carrying baskets that look heavy. The basket on the left appears to hold produce.)*



What can you tell about the people by the way they are dressed? *(Their casual, worn clothing and work boots reveal that their job may involve hard labor outdoors.)*

What are they wearing on their heads? Why do you think they are wearing these things? *(They might be covering their heads to protect them from the sun.)*

What do you notice in the background? Where are they? What makes you say that?

What else catches your eye? What else does that tell you about the photograph?

What do you think the people are thinking?

#### **Background Information**

After picking produce from an expansive field farmed by machinery, these two figures carry their harvest to a scale. Despite the weight of their baskets, seasonal workers like the two pictured here were paid miserable **wages**. Dorothea Lange made this photograph in 1938 near Tracy, California, a stopping place for migrant laborers looking for work. At the time, hundreds of migrants were arriving in California every day. Many of the new arrivals had been working as tenant farmers in the Midwest until they were replaced by machinery. Others were victims of the

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Dust Bowl, a period of severe drought that struck the Great Plains of the United States in the early 1930s. Donning a cowboy hat and a large bonnet to keep the sun out of their eyes, Lange's anonymous subjects are shown making their way to the scale in identical strides. Her sharply focused image was meant to record the conditions of migrant laborers and to compel the government to institute reform measures.

### **About the Artist**

Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965)

*One should really use the camera as though tomorrow you'd be stricken blind. To live a visual life is an enormous undertaking, practically unattainable. I have only touched it, just touched it.*

Thus wrote photographer Dorothea Lange of her extraordinary life and career. She worked for Arnold Genthe in his **portrait** studio in New York and studied photography with Clarence White at Columbia University. In 1918 she began to travel around the world to make her living as a photographer. She found herself stranded in San Francisco, so she opened a photographic studio there. Paul Taylor, who would become her second husband, hired her to document workers in California.

In 1935 she began to work for a federal agency called the Resettlement Administration (later the **Farm Security Administration**). During this period, she made her most famous image, *Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)*, of Native American Florence Owens Thompson and her children in a peapickers' camp. Other less famous subjects included Japanese internment camps and scenes of workers in factories during World War II. Lange became the first woman awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, and she spent nearly ten years making photo essays for *Life* and other magazines. She also traveled extensively, making photo essays in Vietnam, Ireland, Pakistan, India, and elsewhere.