

CHESAPEAKE BAY MARITIME MUSEUM

Traveling Exhibition—“Robert de Gast’s Chesapeake”

June 15, 2016



A traveling exhibition, titled “Robert de Gast’s Chesapeake,” featuring the striking work of photojournalist Robert de Gast is offered by Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM). De Gast’s work—evocative, stark, and infused with a keenly abstract sensibility— ranges widely in subject and treatment. Whether his vibrant perspective on the places and culture of oystermen’s work, the sense of solitude that he sought in his solo voyages, or the abstract shapes and details of remote lighthouses, De Gast’s images are complex and informed by the modernist aesthetic. As he said to his photography students, “if you’re unhappy with the picture, you’re not close enough.”

De Gast’s black-and-white photography gained widespread attention with the publication of his 1970 book *The Oystermen of the Chesapeake*, a work that, according to Smithsonian curator Paula Johnson “builds a more nuanced, more atmospheric portrait. It is not a romanticized look at the work.” De Gast’s black-and-white photographic work, encompassing more than 10,000 images, is a key collection of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Born in Holland, de Gast (1936 – 2016) immigrated to the United States with his family after World War II. He volunteered for the US Army, which sent him to photography school. First stationed in Washington, DC, de Gast ultimately settled in Annapolis, where he briefly worked

with photographer Marion Warren before leaving to work as an independent photojournalist and commercial photographer. His work was published in *Skipper*, *Popular Boating*, *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Sail*, *The Rudder*, *Chesapeake Bay Magazine*, and *Smithsonian* from the 1960s to the 1980s. After *The Oystermen*, he went on to publish *The Lighthouses of Chesapeake Bay* (1973) and a journal of a cruise, *Western Wind, Eastern Shore: A Sailing Cruise around the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia* (1975).

The works in the exhibition are drawn principally from de Gast's first three books and his assignment photography for various periodicals. Although he never completed high school, de Gast also showed a gift for writing that is reflected in the essay in his first book as well as his subsequent books of photography and prose.

The exhibition is divided into three sections focusing on the photographer and writer's view of work on the water. Through de Gast's lens, the Chesapeake's distinctive landscapes and people are distilled into their essence. Watermen are captured up close yet unobtrusively, set against a vast Chesapeake Bay that is both setting and subject. Lighthouses become a palette through which to explore the intricate balance of light and texture. In broad vistas and close encounters with its edges, de Gast defines a singular vision of the Chesapeake captured in contrasts. The exhibition text reflects this unique perspective, drawing heavily on the photographer's own writings and from interviews with him.

The exhibition catalog includes essays by journalist Randall Peffer, with whom de Gast repeatedly collaborated, editor Robert Brugger, who guided the publication of several of his books, and exhibition curator Pete Leshner, who collected recorded interviews with de Gast toward the end of his life.

Exhibit Specifications

Contents:	80 framed black-and-white 11"x14" photographs, text panels, labels, and video
Supplemental:	Educational and promotional resources; catalog available for sale
Participation fee:	\$7,000 per 10-week booking period, plus outgoing shipping
Size:	Approximately 400 running feet
Security:	Moderate
Shipping:	Outgoing
Availability:	Beginning May 2018
Contact:	Pete Leshner, (410) 745-4971; plesher@cbmm.org

An inventory of exhibition images is available on request.