



## PANOPTICON GALLERY

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

#### HEIGHTS OF OBSERVATION

The Photographs of Vittorio Sella (1859 – 1943)

September 9 – November 8, 2010

Vittorio Sella began his photographic career in 1879 walking out his front door to climb and photograph the nearby Alps. His home was in Biella, Italy, and his camera was an 11x14 large-format field camera through which he captured his earliest images onto wet plate collodion glass negatives.

It sounds fairly simple; it was anything but. The hikes from his home to Alpine peaks took hours, the camera was big and cumbersome, and the glass plates were both heavy and fragile. He designed his own backpack to carry camera, plates and chemicals. In the early years, he had to set up a darkroom tent on the mountain so that he could coat the plates with light sensitive emulsion just prior to exposure. The earliest ascended peaks were fairly direct; gradually the peaks that Sella sought out became more and more difficult to climb, with numerous hazards, including weather and visibility, adding to the challenge of photographing them.

Sella's photography demanded that he be a world-class mountaineer, which he was. Predecessors within his family offered him training – both photographic and Alpine – enabling Vittorio to accomplish what he set out to photograph. His father had written the first treatise on photography in Italy. His grandfather, uncles and father were all skilled alpinists. Vittorio Sella took these skills to new levels and pursued his photographic passions.

The Duke of The Abruzzi, one of the great turn of the century explorer/adventurers recognized Sella's talents and hired him to document many of the expeditions he organized. By the turn of the 20th century, Vittorio Sella had climbed major mountains all over the world in Europe, the Caucasus, Karakoram, Sikkim, Africa, and North America, many of them first ascents. While accompanying the Duke on his unsuccessful attempt to summit K2 in 1909, the Duke's team set an altitude record of 24,500 feet on nearby Mt. Chogolisa – a record that would stand until 1922.

This exhibition, curated by Tony Decaneas, highlights a selection of photographs taken by Vittorio Sella and serves as a prelude to a major traveling exhibition. Sella was a consummate photographer who photographed the mountains he climbed as well as the flora, fauna, people and architecture that he encountered along the way. The scope of his

vision was unlimited. His photographic record has been largely preserved in his hometown of Biella, Italy.

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