

# Church Door, Hornitos

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**Artist:**

Edward Weston (American, Highland Park, Illinois 1886–1958 Carmel, California)

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**Date:**

1940

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**Medium:**

Gelatin silver print

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**Dimensions:**

Image: 19.3 x 24.3 cm (7 5/8 x 9 9/16 in.)

Mount: 34.5 x 39.6 cm (13 9/16 x 15 9/16 in.)

He made contact prints from his 4×5" or 8×10" negatives. The detailed, straight photography that the group espoused was in opposition to the pictorialist soft-edged methods that were still in fashion at the time. In 1937 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation awarded Weston a fellowship, the first given to a photographer. In 1939, he married his assistant, Charis Wilson, with whom he had lived since 1934.

Edward Weston began his independent professional photographic career in 1911 by opening a studio in Glendale, California. He soon developed a reputation for producing strikingly sharp portraits, a significant departure from the soft-focus painterly "pictorialist" images popular at the time. As Weston's stark "style" continued to evolve so did his subject matter. He is now recognized for his sensuous photographs of organic forms and natural landscapes.

*Church Door, Hornitos* is an approximately 8 X 10 black and white gelatin silver print. Presumably it is a contact print, as Weston was known to not re-touch or crop his images. The title of the photograph indicates that it is a picture of a church door in Hornitos, California.

This image appears to have been shot at a time of day when the sun was high in the sky and to the right of the viewer. The strong direct light creates shadows and highlights in the rough texture of the white painted wood of the structure. Weston's exposure and printing maintain details in both the shadows and highlights. The image is sharp from edge to edge. We know that this is not a new structure, there are signs of weathering and age.

Although we do not see the entire door, it is evident that it is in fact a door. There is a doorknob, panels, and latches to lock it shut. Most of the frame is filled with a portion of the door but the right quarter is comprised of 11 horizontal slats the run perpendicular to the elements of the door. This contrasts with the static vertical arrangement of the door and provides an interesting dynamic tension to the composition.

If it were not for the title, no one would know that this is a picture of a part of the outside of a church in Hornitos, California. In fact, I don't think Weston was photographing it as a church at all. In my view, neither the building nor the location is at all important. What this image shows me is the play of light across the surface features of a painted wooden structure that happens to be a door. The lines and textures produced by the strength and angle of the sunlight combined with the contrast of vertical and horizontal components depict a manmade edifice standing up to the forces of nature. Only a chosen few, those with the key, can take shelter within.

Technically, I feel that this is a very well-done photograph. It is sharp, the lines are straight, and the exposure/printing maintain details in the dark and light areas. While the graphic elements are strong and the composition provides visual interest, I don't find that this image generates much of an emotional reaction to its viewing by me. It leaves me a bit flat, but I would certainly say that it meets the standard for being called a work of art. Compare to a snapshot of the church below.

