

KEITH DE LELLIS
GALLERY

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUGAR & SALT

VINTAGE INDUSTRIAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY

HAROLD HALIDAY COSTAIN

NOVEMBER 29, 2018 – JANUARY 26, 2019

Keith de Lellis Gallery presents a solo exhibition of 1930s industrial photographs by Harold Haliday Costain, one of the leading American modernist photographers of his generation.

Harold Haliday Costain (1897–1994) had a thriving commercial studio in Scarsdale, New York when he produced some of his finest work photographing the inner workings of the sugar and salt industries. His dramatic and precisionist images of mines, factories, and warehouses were commissioned as publicity for the International Salt Company and the National Sugar Refining Company.

In 1934, his work for International Salt took him to the mines of Avery Island, where he photographed the mining and processing of rock salt into table salt. His studies of drilling and blasting made for glorious illustrations of heroic miners illuminated against the cavernous crystalline walls aglow with the photographer's strategically placed artificial light.

During the depression, the image of the American worker and workplace became a staple for the media and big businesses who exploited photography as a restorative antidote against the public's waning faith in national economic stability. *Fortune Magazine* played a significant role in this effort. Its lavish monthly publication was filled with beautiful photographs illustrating stories of a bustling American commerce. Costain's pictures of the salt mines were featured in the November 1934 issue of *Fortune* in an article titled "Salt of the Island...Oldest and most romantic of U.S. salt mines is the Avery, deep under the sea along the coast of Louisiana."

In a 1935 memo to the photographer, the National Sugar Refining Company stressed the importance of promoting an image of purity and cleanliness in all its advertising and publicity. The instructions to Costain were to "portray a plant which is spick and span in every respect and workers which are in clean clothing...all workers should be in white coats. This atmosphere is particularly important because we are showing the place where an essential food is produced".

Costain took the request to heart, making images of immaculate factory interiors, pristine in every way and lit so that every element would come alive. He thusly photographed the sugar operations of the Jack Frost Company in Long Island City, and its Edgewater, New Jersey plant. His pictures of workers at conveyor belts and managers weighing sugar sacks are treated with equal reverence in the solemn and efficiently run factories.

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Costain was world-renowned in the 1930s as a prolific and award-winning artist in salon exhibition photography. His professional and multi-faceted career had earlier engaged him as a cinematographer in silent films and later as an architectural photographer. His strength in both of these fields proved excellent training ground for the challenge of creating compelling images that emphasized both the drama and scale of workers in grand interior spaces.

Everything about Costain's pictures communicates a subtle message that the companies producing these essential products were organized and created quality goods with the utmost care in a perfect environment. Costain, a perfectionist himself, labored over every detail and created images that are an ideal marriage between art and industry.

Sugar & Salt will be on view at the Keith de Lellis Gallery through January 26, 2019.