

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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The biographical sketches were written by
colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

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Emmet William Gowin



Emmet Gowin was born in 1941 in Danville, Virginia, the son of a Methodist minister. From the very moment, as a teenager, that he became conscious of the art of photography, he saw it as a spiritual vocation. He came to realize that that vocation was his when he was a student at the Richmond Professional Institute. Drawn to the work of Robert Frank, he sought his advice and followed it by attending graduate school at the Rhode Island School of Design to study under Harry Callahan, who became his mentor. There he encountered both Aaron Siskin and Frederick Sommer. The three became his elective guides in rigorously devoting his life to photography as an instrument of discovery.

However, the great influence on Emmet has been his wife, Edith Morris Gowin, whom he married in 1964. Throughout his career she has been the subject to which he returns again and again with intense love and wonder. The visual amazement he has felt in watching her is lavishly represented in his book *Emmet Gowin: Photographs* (2009). Much of this work was made in black and white with a large-format camera, often using an unmasked circular image, as if to allow the magical affinity of Edith, their children, or the landscapes he loves, to burn their radiance on the photosensitive paper as directly as possible.

After the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens, Emmet began to explore aerial photography, examining the surface of the Earth with the affection and surprise that he had learned in studying Edith. That work has continued in a series, *Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth* (2002), devoted to nuclear test sites and strip mining, seen from the sky. Most recently, he has turned to color to photograph moths and insects. The unifying thread in all his work is the sacredness of the image.

At Princeton University, Emmet is renowned as a charismatic teacher in the visual arts program recognized with the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1997 and the Howard T. Behrman

Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities in 2006.
Generations of photographers began their careers in his studio classes.