

Dylan Yarbrough: Hello everybody. It's almost noon. So, we're about to get started. Before we get going, I just wanted to let everybody know that the best way to pose questions or to participate in the conversation during the "Photos at Zoom," event is to actually use the QNA portion, instead of the chat. If you use the chat function, I'm the only person that's going to be able to read that instead of the group. So, be sure to use the QNA button to participate.

Dylan Yarbrough: We were almost at noon... hit noon right then. So, we'll go ahead and get started now. Welcome to "Photos at Zoom."

Dylan Yarbrough: My name is Dylan Yarbrough, I'm a curatorial assistant at the Museum of Contemporary Photography and today we're going to be doing a "Photos at Zoom," print viewing over photography as a social practice.

Dylan Yarbrough: The MoCP is the world's premier College Art Museum that's dedicated to photography. Our institution provokes ideas among students, and artists, and diverse communities throughout the world with groundbreaking exhibitions and educational programming.

Dylan Yarbrough: Our mission is to cultivate a deeper understanding of the artistic cultural and political roles of photography in our world today.

Dylan Yarbrough: We began collecting in the 1980's and have since grown our collection to include over 16,000 photographic objects.

Dylan Yarbrough: Normally we offer a "Photos at Noon," event where we hold a public print viewing that allows the general public to view our collection up close and in person. But since we are all social distancing, we wanted to keep our museum guests inspired by bringing our collection right to your home and I love doing this.

Dylan Yarbrough: It's probably my favorite thing to do with the museum and sadly, I'm actually graduating in two weeks. So, this is one of the last print viewings I'll be doing as an official curatorial assistant.

Dylan Yarbrough: I'm going to try to work on a volunteer basis, to do a few more talks, but it's coming to a close with my time at the MoCP. So, it's very bittersweet. But I'm very happy to be here today and to do another discussion and to talk about some really wonderful artwork.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, before we get going, I wanted to just pose a question- and this is a great time to use that QNA chat function.

Dylan Yarbrough: What is the social power of photography today?

Dylan Yarbrough: It's a complicated question, but I would love to hear some feedback from the group that's participating. Do you feel like photography has power in our world today? And if so, are there any particular things that you can think of, or situations that you've found yourself in where you've seen that power of photography?

Dylan Yarbrough: So, I wanted to move along now. I got a couple of responses, having trouble with the QNA function. I'm not seeing any responses, but I've been reflecting about this idea of the power of photography in our world today a lot recently. I think, obviously, that the world is changing very rapidly and...

Dylan Yarbrough: See, yes. Okay. So, I'm seeing a response here from Christopher saying, "Yes, I believe photography is a very powerful tool."

Dylan Yarbrough: I was thinking about this idea. Recently, I couldn't help but think about how it was ironic that our latest exhibition at the MoCP was "In Real Life," and this exhibition was cancelled and taken down from the public right about the same time that everything was shut down due to COVID-19.

Dylan Yarbrough: And it's crazy that this exhibition, "In Real Life," happens to close down about the same time that our actual, real lives started to close down.

Dylan Yarbrough: And if we weren't already considering photography as it relates to technology in the world today. I think that we are all acutely aware of how unprecedented this pandemic has been. "In Real Life," presented photographs and videos and installations by seven contemporary artists that grappled with the increasingly fraught relationship between humans and technology.

Dylan Yarbrough: And the exhibition sought to examine the real-world impact of computer vision and the murky ethics of data- data collection and artificial intelligence technology. And undeniably, like this coronavirus pandemic has affected our life in unprecedented ways and almost every part of our lives. And social distancing has disrupted the social fabric of the

world, but since we're stuck at home, we're also consuming photographs and images and content like we'd never have before.

Dylan Yarbrough: I don't know about you, but a lot of my experiences look like this. Zoom has been a lifeline to the world. We've been staying connected at this time through zoom.

Dylan Yarbrough: I've never looked forward to a staff meeting more than I have during this time because seeing these smiling faces every week helps me keep a little bit sane while we're all isolated.

Dylan Yarbrough: And, you know, although that this new reality for us is not- has helped us connect during this time, it's also not 100% free from concern about some of the same ideas that we presented in our latest exhibition with data collection or privacy.

Dylan Yarbrough: If you Google Search COVID-19 you'll see that most of the image results are actually just the spiky ball that we see in the media. So, this is both with COVID-19 and Coronavirus. So, when you Google search that the results are predominantly this computer-generated graphic.

Dylan Yarbrough: And I'm sure that many of you have been flooded with images on your phone from social media or the news images of politicians or empty streets or workers that are on the front line or empty cities or visuals that like convey economic disarray. But one thing that we haven't seen a whole lot are images of the actual people affected by this pandemic.

Dylan Yarbrough: There was a recent article in the New York Times by Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, it was titled, "Where are the Photos of People Dying of COVID?" And then in this article the question was raised; what are we missing by not having images that represent the full impact of the coronavirus crisis? I'm going to check the chat really quick.

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, there's really good points.

Dylan Yarbrough: In this article, basically they talk about unfiltered images, revealing the stark conditions of hospitals as a matter of public health.

Dylan Yarbrough: There's a CNN commenter that says that "make note of what we can't see, that's the suffering that's happening inside hospitals." What does that mean? What are we not seeing in this crisis with our own eyes?

Dylan Yarbrough: And obviously, a lot of this is due to medical privacy laws in the United States because obviously these medical laws present obstacles in viewing this type of image.

Dylan Yarbrough: Instead, we see daily briefings of statistics with graphics and bar graphs and pie charts and basically every other type of image that convey the information.

Dylan Yarbrough: But statistics alone are not clear, and it historically has not been the way that has moved masses of people to action around a certain cause.

Dylan Yarbrough: There's actually an inverse relationship between high numbers and comprehension, and I think that we see this a lot today around social issues.

Dylan Yarbrough: How it's really hard to empathize with a really, really high number. But we can empathize with seeing people that are affected.

Dylan Yarbrough: And it's very hard to picture the tragedy that we are living in right now, especially when most of that imagery has been mediated through third parties like social media or the news.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, this article is really great. I would recommend that all of you read it because it does reflect on that question of what is the power of photography as it relates to social issues in our world specifically today and how we view photography today.

Dylan Yarbrough: You know, maybe if there were more images that showed the stark reality of this virus, there would be less images of people protesting on the street. I don't know, maybe not.

Dylan Yarbrough: But regardless, this article is lays out a really interesting argument, and it really just kind of proves the power of photography at specific times in history or the power photography has been seen to create social change.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, I just wanted to open up today's discussion and print viewing thinking about these ideas because the world is constantly changing. And as the world changes, photographers and artists have to adapt their practice and adapt the way that they create work to reflect this new world, right. So, now we're going to go through a survey of the collection.

Dylan Yarbrough: Our normal print viewing style, except for what I'm going to do is show you the work and tell you what I know about the work.

Dylan Yarbrough: Usually in our print viewings what we do is- it's more of a discussion-based platform where we tried to give the audience as much time to participate and talk as they can.

Dylan Yarbrough: But in this zoom style, it's a little bit more lecture based. So, I'm going to go through a large range of work. And then at the end, we're going to open up to questions and answers.

Dylan Yarbrough: And getting a note here from Judy Natal, "What about the responsibility of artists to address our time?" It's a really good question, Judy.

Dylan Yarbrough: I don't know if I have a definitive answer. I definitely have my own opinions and questions, but I think that the responsibility is on a spectrum of response. I think that by some people being on the front lines we're able to see very clearly some things that people can't see in their own lives, but also responding in a personal more nuanced way is also powerful.

Dylan Yarbrough: Seeing images of how people are responding to this time on their own and relating to their family or relating to their neighbors. So, I think there's a big spectrum of response and that varies with responsibility.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, to get started with the survey of the collection. I want to start with one of our most historical pieces that it relates to this idea.

Dylan Yarbrough: And it goes back to the very beginning of social documentary photography in its origins in the 19th century. So, this image is by Lewis Hine. It's "Ellis Island," from 1905.

Dylan Yarbrough: And when you look at social documentary photography mostly, we see a few, like a handful of notable photographers like Henry Mayhew, Jacob Riis, and Lewis Hine.

Dylan Yarbrough: They began to see the camera as an instrument of accusation against social injustice. Their work expanded the genre of a documentary photography by recording what the world looked like but with a social or environmental focus.

Dylan Yarbrough: They made photographs to draw the public's attention to ongoing social issues, showing the life of underprivileged or disadvantaged people.

Dylan Yarbrough: Post famously renowned for his groundbreaking social documentary work, Lewis Hine spent the majority of his life photographing American social issues, mostly about immigration, child labor, and the plight of the human workforce during industrial modernization.

Dylan Yarbrough: His photographs of immigrants at Ellis Island treated the new, often degraded citizens with respect, photographing the subjects in more formal poses instead of a huddled mass that was typically seen in the media.

Dylan Yarbrough: In the words of photographer, Louis Stettner, "Hine portrayed these people for us and for history as solemn and dignified carriers of sophisticated, rich in varied cultures from the old world."

Dylan Yarbrough: In 1908, the National Child Labor Committee hired Hine to document child labor in American industry.

Dylan Yarbrough: Hine was a sociology professor who saw the potential that photography had as an educational medium. Later in this life, Hine would publish thousands of photographs which grabbed the attention and empathy of the American people. Hine's photographs helped passed the law against child labor, known as the Owen-Keating Act. Sorry, Keating-Owen Act of 1916.

Dylan Yarbrough: And this was a really great example of how photography very specifically passed laws to protect children who are being affected by the environment of harsh labor.

Dylan Yarbrough: We saw social documentary beginning to take further form during the photographic practice of the New Deal's Farm Security

Administration from 1935 to 1944.

Dylan Yarbrough: Roy Stryker, the head of the information division of the FSA hired photographers to grow support for the federal aid initiatives by publicizing rural and small-town strife during the Great Depression in the United States.

Dylan Yarbrough: The FSA hired photographers and writers to document the situation of poor farmers whose economic existence was threatened and created a new style which photographic documentation of social problems. In this image by Dorothea Lange, we can see a selection of some of the "Thirteen Million Underemployed Fill the Cities of Early Thirties."

Dylan Yarbrough: Many of the well-known depression era photographers were hired by the FSA and included Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, Marian Post, and several other people that are really amazing. One of the goals of FSA was to introduce Americans to Americans during this time.

Dylan Yarbrough: Lange is best known for her work for the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression, but she also made very beautiful images all throughout her life.

Dylan Yarbrough: Her portfolio is really incredible to look through at the MoCP and I would highly recommend, if you haven't had the chance to do so, to look at Dorothea's work at the MoCP because we actually have a huge collection of her work.

Dylan Yarbrough: Lange approached documentary photography as a deeply personal practice. She believed in photography's ability to reveal social conditions, educate the public, and prompt action.

Dylan Yarbrough: And Lange thought of herself as an observer directly recording reality. Although, she also sought to portray moments with emotional resonance and to transform specific situations into symbolic images.

Dylan Yarbrough: One of her most notable images in our collection is the "Migrant Mother," during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, but because that print is often seen in other collections, we left it out of this presentation.

Dylan Yarbrough: Instead, I wanted to show you this image by Marion Post. This is from Alabama in March of 1939. Marion Post was born in New Jersey in 1910.

Dylan Yarbrough: Her parents split up when she was sent to boarding school and she spent most of her time at home with her mother in Greenwich Village when she was not at school.

Dylan Yarbrough: She trained as a teacher and went to work in a small town in Massachusetts, where she saw the reality of the Great Depression and the problems of the poor.

Dylan Yarbrough: She went back to teaching, but also continued her photography and became involved in an anti-fascist movement.

Dylan Yarbrough: At the New York Photo League she met Ralph Steiner and Paul Strand who saw her work and encouraged her to continue her practice.

Dylan Yarbrough: She was working at the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and when they kept sending her back over and over again to do what they quoted "ladies stories," Ralph Steiner took her portfolio to Roy Stryker; the head of the FSA, and wrote a letter of recommendation for her.

Dylan Yarbrough: Stryker was impressed by her photography and immediately hired her. I chose this image- although it doesn't show the same approach that Dorothea Lange did towards individual people. I thought it was really powerful to see this space and to actually see this text that says, "There is a happy land, not so far away," during a time that we're considering an economic collapse.

Dylan Yarbrough: We also then started to see this idea of photography and relating to social issues expand during the civil rights movement. Now this image is "March on Washington," by Danny Lyon in 1963.

Dylan Yarbrough: Danny Lyon's early documentary career was established and defined by his gritty photographer as participant approach. His photo journalistic style marked by a staunch pursuit of the unembellished moment.

Dylan Yarbrough: Lyon is known for wanting to reject the standard detachment of objectivity in favor of a more complicated subjective involvement. His first book, "The Movement 1964," involved his experiences as the staff

photographer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which is the SNCC during the civil rights movement.

Dylan Yarbrough: Also wanted to show this image.

Dylan Yarbrough: This image is many in the government believe in organized-sorry, "Many in the movement believe an organized effort is underway to depopulate black areas of the South". It's a little bit hard to read on this slide. So, I made notes to read it out loud to you.

Dylan Yarbrough: If you read the text it says, "Maids! Make from \$35 to \$65 a week. Jobs in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston. Free room and board with TV in your room, two days off a week, free uniforms, vacation pay, save all you make, jobs guaranteed, pay guaranteed. Don't delay write to King's employment agency."

Dylan Yarbrough: It's really, um, it's really scary to read this text and then to consider how manipulative it actually was because basically, what they were trying to do is remove African American people from these neighborhoods by enticing them with this low hanging fruit of the job opportunity. Offering stability in order to relocate them. And this was happening a lot and Danny Lyon was able to capture this image to show some of that.

Dylan Yarbrough: He also is present during the funeral procession root of the girls that were murdered in the 16th Street Baptist church bombing.

Dylan Yarbrough: If you know this history, it's a very, very dark part of our American history. In 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama, the Klu Klux Klan dynamited the 16th Street Baptist Church. We have several artists and exhibitions that have responded to this day, most notably with Dawoud Bey's project that was recently displayed.

Dylan Yarbrough: But we wanted to show this image. This image is difficult to look at, but it's nowhere nearly as visceral as some of the images that we saw during the civil rights movement.

Dylan Yarbrough: And while doing research about this work. I happened to find an education guide that included this quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that says that, "The world seldom believes the horror stories of history until they are documented."

Dylan Yarbrough: Also included, Darryl Cowherd, very familiar to Chicago. This is a portrait made in 1967.

Dylan Yarbrough: Darryl Cowherd played an essential role in Chicago's Black Arts Movement during the 1960's and 1970's.

Dylan Yarbrough: Photographing primarily in the south side of Chicago, Cowherd's photographs depict the city during its rise in the center of black culture.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, Cowherd was also involved with the creation of the "Wall of Respect," which is a mural design on the building at the corner of 43rd Street and Langley Avenue in Chicago's Southside. This mural incorporated art by 14 artists that contained images of notable African American figures from Harriet Tubman to Malcolm X. The wall functioned as a symbol of black liberation until 1971 when the building was burned down.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, really powerful community project that brought people together in the South Side.

Dylan Yarbrough: And a couple more of Darryl Cowherd's images. Seemed very drawn to capturing literally the writing on the wall. A lot of images that show writing in the neighborhood. In this one, it says, "The time is now. Be black. Be one. Be yourself," really powerful image from 1966.

Dylan Yarbrough: And then we also see this image, "Stop white police from killing us," St. Louis, Missouri 1967. Cowherd was very involved in very, very local struggles to Chicago as well.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, then we're going to look at this image by Susan Meiselas. This image is very stark and it's hard to look at for some audiences.

Dylan Yarbrough: But Susan Meiselas is a directly political and fiercely concerned with the revolution counter to American foreign policy of the day.

Dylan Yarbrough: Susan Meiselas' documentation of the atrocities and tragedies of daily life in the midst of political turbulence belong to a branch of concern photojournalism. The woman portrayed fleeing with a naked baby in tow in "Fleeing the Bomb to Seek Refuge Outside of Esteli," is tragic

but it's again, similar to Danny Lyon- doesn't go as far as some of the images did to reveal the violence or torture that was happening at this time.

Dylan Yarbrough: Meiselas operates under the photo journalistic principle of photographer as public conscience and the photograph as evidence of realities that most people would prefer not to look to.

Dylan Yarbrough: Her images are very powerful. And if you look at a deeper dive into her work. Sadly, this is the only image that we have in the MoCP collection. But if you look at her work, her projects really expand or contract, depending on the audience or the community or the people that she's dealing with.

Dylan Yarbrough: In certain situations, she chose to publish images that were sourced from the community themselves and not actually her as the author but her more as co-authoring the community's images. But she also has projects that are very fiercely photojournalistic.

Dylan Yarbrough: Also wanted to include these images by Kurt Weston. So, this is "Night Clubbing," from 1983 but recently printed in 2018.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, Kurt Western's snapshots of the 1980's underground culture explore sexuality, community, pride, power, and resistance to the socio-political systems that marginalized communities fall victim to.

Dylan Yarbrough: These photographs are an archive of the generation lost to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and shed light on the individuals who paved the way so that other queer people could live authentically. Kurt Weston is a legally blind photographer who lost his vision due to AIDS. And when he was close to death, he actually received an anti-viral medicine that saved his life.

Dylan Yarbrough: Kurt is obviously not the only artist at this time that was responding to this epidemic. There were many different artists, including Gran Fury and Mapplethorpe to a certain extent that were responding to this social event that was really tragic and affecting large, large portions of our society.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, another image by Kurt.

Dylan Yarbrough: I also wanted to share this image. So, "Don't Die for Love." This is Barbara Kruger, and this was made in 1992.

Dylan Yarbrough: Barbra Kruger's large, bold artworks assimilate information from the mass media and they usually critique gender roles and power structures.

Dylan Yarbrough: With the graphic punch of strong red's and black's, terse language, and aggressive design her artwork often confronts the viewers with provocative ideas and witty reversals.

Dylan Yarbrough: This image was developed by Y-core, in Chicago for Liz Claiborne Corporation. "Women's Work," was the title of the project. And it was a community-based arts program that designed artwork that would draw the attention to issues or the concerns of women and their families.

Dylan Yarbrough: With the goals of raising awareness about domestic violence and helping communities to respond to the needs of its victims'. "Women's Work," featured powerful instructive images by artists like Barbara Kruger, but also Susan Meiselas, Carrie Mae Weems, and Margaret Crane.

Dylan Yarbrough: "Don't Die for Love," was one of a number of pieces that were created for the project. And they were displayed on over 200 billboards and in transit shelters across San Francisco, Oakland, Miami, and Boston.

Dylan Yarbrough: This project means a lot to me personally.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think that the issue of domestic violence is a very tough topic to talk about, but it has affected me in my life and other people that I know and it's something that should be continued to talk about.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, the next image I wanted to share takes a quite a different approach than what we've seen a lot of these images.

Dylan Yarbrough: We've seen some photojournalistic images. We've seen some images that exist in the art world or was made to be seen in a gallery, museum, or educational purpose.

Dylan Yarbrough: And we've also seen some of the original straight documentary that began some of these conversations.

Dylan Yarbrough: This approach by Alfredo Jarr is very different and very interesting and raises a lot of questions that I think are also important to think about. So, Alfredo Jarr often makes work that responds to information that is very difficult to process. Most of the time people tend to avoid this information.

Dylan Yarbrough: Which would be the plight of refugee's, genocide, or ethnic or political violence.

Dylan Yarbrough: Rather than offering this information in an expected or familiar form- the way that we would normally see it presented- Jarr creates presentations that demand reflection. So, this installation, "Real Pictures," was commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary photography in 1995 and it shows no pictures but offers 100 archival photo storage boxes installed in rows and spotlight on the floor of the gallery.

Dylan Yarbrough: And each box is embossed with a text describing Caritas, a woman who survived the 1994 Rwandan massacre and subsequent retribution.

Dylan Yarbrough: In an age when images of atrocity have become commonplace, Jarr's installations raised questions about, does an oversaturation of media images of war lead to apathy?

Dylan Yarbrough: Or is this as Susan Sontag writes about in her book regarding the pain of others, a much more complicated question concerning the limits of human sympathy and how war is waged or understood or portrayed in our time. So, providing the viewer with only a written word to contextualize the unseen image, Jarr denies the viewers the visceral reaction most war images elicit and instead requires the viewer to read and to think about the political and historical context of the situation.

Dylan Yarbrough: This piece further raises questions regarding the rasiy of written and photographic description and it denies the viewer the ability to look at this image that we would normally see.

Dylan Yarbrough: Instead, we are left with the interpretation of this event through the text.

Dylan Yarbrough: It's a very powerful piece. I wish I could have seen the actual installation. We do have one of the boxes in our collection that we can still bring out. The boxes are sealed so you can't open to see the image, but it would have been powerful to see it in the original installation.

Dylan Yarbrough: Reading the chat here. I think we are dealing with these questions- all the information and images of suffering and hospitals. I think people are tuning out and can't absorb.

Dylan Yarbrough: Well, it's an interesting observation. I think that um, many of us fall on different sides of this conversation. There's many different approaches and it's a very difficult question, especially now.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, the next image that I want to show is "Block Party," by Carlos Javier Ortiz. So, in this work, illustrating socio economic patterns that pave the way for cycles of poverty and violence. Ortiz, in his project, "We All We Got," from 2014 documents the youth and families in Chicago. This project shows multiple perspectives over very many years.

Dylan Yarbrough: In 2018, there were 2,355 shooting incidents and over 530 gun related homicides in Chicago. Ortiz focuses on those affected by gun violence, casting light on the larger forces fostering reoccurring tragedies in our city.

Dylan Yarbrough: Moving beyond routine media coverage of the bloodshed, Ortiz's images illustrates both a street culture that glorifies aggressive gang activity and the overwhelmingly large toll of the losses, both individually and collectively within the families and neighborhoods.

Dylan Yarbrough: Extremely powerful series.

Dylan Yarbrough: Next, I wanted to talk about Zanele Muholi.

Dylan Yarbrough: This photographer is really, I think, important in contemporary art and I was very inspired to find her work at the MoCP.

Dylan Yarbrough: Zanele Muholi is a photographer and visual activist, she actually claims like when in her writings- when she speaks about herself- she prefers the term "visual activist." And she is working on an ongoing series of large format black and white photographs titled "Faces and Phases," which aims to address invisibility of lesbian and queer identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Dylan Yarbrough: Muholi counters conventional perceptions of lesbian and transgender communities which suffer from an epidemic of continuous assaults and even what they call corrective rape.

Dylan Yarbrough: By creating portraits of individual members that convey their dignity and empowerment she's able to reach into this community that she has been familiar with for so long and try to provide some level of dignity back to these community members. To date, she has made over 240 portraits, ensuring black queer visibility and assembling an archive of often invisible marginalized people for posterity. Muholi's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Guggenheim, Tate Modern, and of course the MoCP.

Dylan Yarbrough: Another image by Zanele.

Dylan Yarbrough: Next is David Schalliol and this is a photograph from his "Isolated Building Study." If you watched the color theory lecture, I gave a couple weeks ago we briefly mentioned David Schalliol's work in relation to color, but I wanted to show you a few more images of this project. So, David Schalliol photographs the vacancy of residential structures.

Dylan Yarbrough: As a sociologist and photographer, he questions the ever-changing urban landscape as it relates to larger issues of race and class inequities.

Dylan Yarbrough: He produced a feature length film in 2018 called, "The Area," and this film follows a community activist named Deborah Payne. In the film, Deborah fights a multi-billion-dollar freight company that is on a quest to buy and demolish over 400 homes owned by African American families in her Chicago neighborhood of Englewood.

Dylan Yarbrough: The film is paired with Schalliol's images of lone buildings centered between vacant lots appearing as shrines to disappearing neighborhoods.

Dylan Yarbrough: Schalliol says that "Instead of seeing one peculiar building, we see the legacy and immediacy of urban transformation. Instead of asking what happened to this house, we ask what is causing the phenomenon?"

Dylan Yarbrough: This is the last image here.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, we'll move on to Omar Iman.

Dylan Yarbrough: This work is from 2015. As a political refugee, Omar Iman uses irony and absurdism to address the violent events taking place in Syria and to also subvert inaccurate representations of Syrian refugees. For his photographic series "Live, Love, Refugee," 2015, he collaborated with displaced people living in the Lebanese refugee camps to reenact their heart wrenching stories and recreate their dreams as well as their nightmares; their love and their terror and their escape. The resulting staged photographs are surreal and reveal both remarkable resilience and the darkness of trauma.

Dylan Yarbrough: Omar Iman was part of our recent exhibition, "Stateless: Views of Global Migration," we're going to look at a couple of these images now.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, these basically are where Omar are working with the subject to recreate both their dreams and visions of the future; and they are very surreal in some cases.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, now I wanted to introduce this image by Kathryn Harrison. Kathryn's work deals with the complexities of addiction and disease and mental illness and how those forces have shaped the lives of her family members. I was personally drawn to this work.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think that mental illness is a category of socially related engaged photography that, I don't know, if it's often talked about. I know that there is the project- the "Too Tired Project," where Tara Wray is working with many different photographers that struggle with depression.

Dylan Yarbrough: But I found this series to be really beautiful and especially in the way that she handles the subject and the way that she collaborates and works with her family members to produce these images is really beautiful. So, in most of the cases, she's depicting her brother's struggle with schizophrenia and his use of opioids. And her work straddles this line between really uncomfortable boundaries of love and also the fallibility of the human body.

Dylan Yarbrough: Harrison is an MFA candidate at Yale and received her BFA in photography from Ringling College of Art and Design. She also recently won our 2018 Snider prize.

Dylan Yarbrough: So then to conclude the images- the survey of images here. I was going to land with this very recent work from 2019 by Stephen Foster. Stephen Foster was introduced to us recently through the Snider prize. He actually won our Snider prize in 2019 and had both images, photographs, and video. Stephan Foster is an interdisciplinary artist who works with film, photography, and poetry, sculpture, performance, and music.

Dylan Yarbrough: His ongoing series, "8," considers racial discrimination within the criminal justice systems in the United States and the ways that prisons exist as one of many spaces where black lives are dehumanized and erased for others to gain profit and power. Additionally, in his short films, they slow down moments and gestures into poetic dream spaces that reconstruct larger racial stereotypes. Foster completed his MFA in Rhode Island School of Design in 2019.

Dylan Yarbrough: So that concludes the image portion of this. And so, I just want to make a brief announcement and we'll get to the QNA portion.

Dylan Yarbrough: I'm really interested to hear your responses of some of these works and some of your opinions on their approaches.

Dylan Yarbrough: I know that many people have widely differing opinions and I'd love to get into that conversation. Real quick, I just wanted to let everybody know that soon we'll be doing a "Behind the Lens," session and this will be Friday, May 8th, so Priya Kambli. So, make sure you attend that. It'll be really great. That series has been going really well. It's been really awesome to see the artists' studios during this time, and to connect with artists while they're in their studio.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, this is an image here, 2019.

Dylan Yarbrough: Be sure to come and see that talk.

Dylan Yarbrough: And then also we'll be having another "Photos at Zoom," session next week over recent acquisitions and that will be Wednesday, May 13th.

Dylan Yarbrough: So now I'd like to open up to the QNA.

Dylan Yarbrough: So just reading earlier. We have a comment.

Dylan Yarbrough: And the comment was, "We're seeing all of these desolate photos of our great major cities. As we know, a lot of these people don't process a lot of words- like the governor's dense COVID-19 updates and a lot of people are in denial about the dangers and impacts of the virus which puts all of us in great danger. Yet, I think the average person absorbs the photos."

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, I just wanted to respond to that a little bit.

Dylan Yarbrough: You know, I can only respond in my own personal way, but I have family members, still- and an extension of my family friends that I see on Facebook that still don't quite believe that any of this is real.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, it's really difficult to talk sometimes and even use facts and statistics don't seem to reach some of these people and it's been a very difficult conversation to have. But I do think that in some way's photography and at least the image for good or for worse, has been impacting this whole scenario as it unfolds.

Dylan Yarbrough: Do we have any other questions about the artwork that we looked today?

Kristin Taylor: Hey, Dylan. I think you're missing a few QNA, do you want me to read them to you?

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, that'd be great. I think I'm only seeing portions from the chat.

Kristin Taylor: Sure, okay. So, I'll just read them to you. I'm starting at the top; Jasmine Kong was wondering if you know why Barbra Kruger chose clocks in her imagery?

Dylan Yarbrough: Clocks. Um, that's a great question. I'm actually not sure. I can't speak for Barbara Kruger on her choice of clocks.

Dylan Yarbrough: I'd love to investigate that a little bit more but thinking about it, like, just trying to unpack that a little bit.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think one of the things that's great about all these print viewings is normally you get a chance to, like, just look at the image and ask questions like what's going on in this photograph? Like, why are these symbols there? And so, if I were to try to unpack that. Just thinking about the work and thinking about the specific message of domestic violence and the way that this is being used I think that- I mean, it's obvious that Kruger is very intentional. So, she's wanting to use a clock to, I would think, signify time in some way.

Dylan Yarbrough: Personally, thinking about that issue. Time is, you know, it's very particular to domestic violence in the sense that sometimes you get stuck in those situations for much longer than you ever anticipated. I know that, personally, my family we were in a position where we couldn't leave so we were stuck for several years in a relationship like that.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, I'm- you know, I'm not sure exactly what Barbara Kruger had intended, but as a viewer, I can interpret it in a certain way that is significant, at least to me.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, hope that answers your question in some way.

Kristin Taylor: Another you have from Katrina Kirsch. And she says, "When photographing social issues, is there a line between capturing the stories you witness as is or posing people in a way to tell their stories?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Sure, could you read the question one more time?

Kristin Taylor: Sure. "When photographing social issues, is there a line between capturing the stories you witness as is or posing people in a way to tell their stories?"

Dylan Yarbrough: So, I guess that questions really getting at the objectivity of photography. And I guess to start answering that... I think that even if you're very, very pure with the photograph or other words to describe it- like a straight photograph in the sense that you're not trying to alter the photograph in any way. You still are going to come- you're still going to find yourself making subjective choices.

Dylan Yarbrough: And that starts with as simply as choosing to frame the photograph, like where are you going to place that rectangle to tell the story?

Dylan Yarbrough: So even in the most objective photographs, there's still some subjective choices being made on the behalf of the artist and so, I don't know if a photograph could ever truly be completely objective. But then on the other hand of that question, you're asking about something more about staging or working with the people or to in a sense collaborate with those people.

Dylan Yarbrough: And I think that in its own way that can also be extremely powerful. And sometimes it may be more powerful than showing us the reality of that moment because the deeper the collaboration between the photographer and the subject may lead to something that we never considered before.

Kristin Taylor: Mark Fellow is asking, he says, "There seems to be a distinction between the photographer and the unfortunate. How can this be bridged? Should this be bridged?"

Dylan Yarbrough: The distinction between the photographer. And what was that second word?

Kristin Taylor: The unfortunate.

Dylan Yarbrough: The unfortunate- distinction between the photographer and unfortunate. Yeah, I think that if you look back as far as the medium goes there has always been an impulse.

Dylan Yarbrough: Even if that impulse was not necessarily well thought out. There has always been an impulse to document or to share the stories of people that you would describe as being in that position of the unfortunate.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think that as we go forward with the medium, as contemporary practitioners, as people that are consuming images in our world today. We have to kind of reimagine that line.

Kristin Taylor: Getting a lot of them. I'm sorry you can't see them. We're adjusting to this new webinar format.

Kristin Taylor: So, um, Linda Saif says, "Do you see major directions or most promising trends of social practice photography today?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, I would. I think that we're definitely trending more that direction.

Dylan Yarbrough: It was interesting in this particular presentation; I really am interested in the more socially engaged in social practice work. Our collection doesn't have as many of those specific projects but one project that comes to mind made here locally that I just found incredible was the painted house series by Amanda Williams.

Dylan Yarbrough: That series was incredible, in the sense that it still used photography to document these houses. But the real art and the real creativity happened when the community came together to physically paint those houses and that active community and that active engaging your neighbors and peers, I think is incredibly powerful. And I would love to see more projects trend way.

Kristin Taylor: Judy Natal has asked, "How does visual activism move beyond Cornell Kappa's 'compassionate observer,' that defines social documentary?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Judy always there with the great questions and always there to put me on the spot. Thank you so much Judy for that question. I think that is a question that many artists are still grappling with. And I think to answer that question... I was recently reading a broadsheet on the website socialpractice.com and they work- and I, we can provide- this is actually one of the extended reading links that we're going to provide for this lecture.

Dylan Yarbrough: But they talked a lot about the idea of collaboration, and we hear that word a lot. Collaboration, that word is often used when talking about creative projects. But in this particular discussion, they were talking about points of exchange and the idea of how complicated can the points of exchange between an artist and a photographer go? And does that mean simply showing the subject the image? Or giving that image a gift print? Or returning multiple times to engage with that community? Then also time, we've seen all throughout the medium.

Dylan Yarbrough: Some people make projects very quickly and some people take very extended looks at these communities. Then also the simplicity or complexity of collaboration is really important because it's very easy to just sit down and to take a portrait. Or to kind of swoop in and get the image, but then, you know, the complexity of that collaboration can also make it more important, so how deeply are you actually engaging with that subject, engaging with that community. And I think also allowing yourself to surrender

your own voice, more and more and being more aware to the voices that you are supposedly trying to lift up.

Dylan Yarbrough: I hope that answers your question.

Kristin Taylor: You're getting a lot, a lot, of good ones and hard questions. One by Christopher Bond is, he says, "I found the presentation very interesting. Few things have the power to inspire creativity like photography. What do you think a common thread, if any, runs through the works you presented today?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Well, the works in this presentation are actually very different. The approaches are very different.

Dylan Yarbrough: That if you were to try to put them into genres or categories, they span from social documentary to photojournalism to artists that consider themselves activist and you know. So, there is a very wide range of work in this presentation, but I think that the thread that draws them all together is, I guess, just the basic human feeling of empathy. I think that some photographers succeed on a higher level to actually empathize with the subject than others.

Dylan Yarbrough: But I think that generally that these artists were truly empathetic towards the subject and wanted to work in a way that could elevate their life in some way.

Dylan Yarbrough: So, I think that would be how I'd respond to that.

Kristin Taylor: Barbra Akridge has asked, excuse me. She says, "The FSA had Roy Stryker who understood how to use photography to influence public policy. Is there a person or agency or institution in that position today?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Man, what a great question.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think... that not- to answer quickly, there's not as- not in the same exact way that the FSA functioned. Me and several photographers recently have been talking about how it almost feels like there's a need to revitalize the FSA.

Dylan Yarbrough: Or at least an institution like it. I would say that, as far as institutions go there are a few that are specifically working with

photography. But I think that more and more today, the nature of photography and the way that it relates to technology and especially the internet; we're finding that you don't necessarily need that institution as much as someone with a camera present in the situation. A lot of times, the information we gather doesn't even necessarily come from a trained artist anymore, but the fact that an iPhone or something was in the general area where things are happening. And so, the world is definitely a lot different than it used to be when Lewis Hine was working or when Dorothea Lange was working with Roy Stryker. And I think that we're seeing that photography and its ability to communicate has adapted because of that.

Kristin Taylor: One comment that's important, is Sheila Burton told us that Zanele Muholi prefers they/their pronouns. So, thank you for that. Sheila we'll make sure to update our language.

Dylan Yarbrough: Thank you for that.

Kristin Taylor: And then it relates a little bit to a question by Ron Carver. And he says, "Should the race or gender of the photographer have any bearing on the subject photographed?"

Dylan Yarbrough: I don't- sort of, should. I don't know necessarily should, but I think that it absolutely does. Like, I think that every project that you look at, you have to question on a case by case basis and try to understand the context of that situation.

Dylan Yarbrough: Is that photographer an insider or an outsider within that community? Obviously, like their place in the world is going to affect the way that they see the world.

Dylan Yarbrough: Their place within these communities are going to affect the way that they see the world. So, I would say that like it doesn't necessarily- I'm not sure about should, but I think that in most cases the identity or the personal narratives of that photographer is going to come out through the photography in some way.

Kristin Taylor: And someone anonymously wants to know your thoughts on the impact of different types of imagery on society and which is most effective. For example, photography, advertising, long form documentary, etc.

Kristin Taylor: And also, the idea of accessibility of art and museums versus the streets or articles or social media.

Dylan Yarbrough: It's a great question. I think accessibility is really a big question. And I can start with that one. I know that like, that's going to vary between the institutions that you're working with. So, in this case, like the MoCP, we have a collection of images that we- one of our biggest missions is to make it as accessible as possible.

Dylan Yarbrough: Which is why we, you know, we don't charge admission fees. We offer free tours and free print viewings and free events like this "Photos at Zoom," and I think that accessibility is obviously something to think about. Because not everyone has a subscription to New York Times or could afford that. Or not everyone can afford to enter a museum.

Dylan Yarbrough: Not everyone, you know, is on the same playing field when- in terms of receiving imagery or receiving content. So, I think that the institution does matter and- sorry Kristen, what was the second part of that question?

Kristin Taylor: Um, I believe about- sorry let me go back to it.

Kristin Taylor: About- I think the difference of where you find that information- in social media or a newspaper that type of...

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, I mean. Well, one of the things to think about is what accompanies the photograph when it's seen. You know, and I think that if you were to remove the text that would be seen with a photojournalist piece, you know, you're going to have a way different context. So, if you're seeing that in Time magazine versus seeing it on a gallery wall, that's going to be way different context of viewing the image. And as far as which one is more powerful.

Dylan Yarbrough: It's hard to say because I think that a lot of us experience images in a very personal way. I've had images that I've seen on social media, you know, impact me. I broke down and cried over breakfast one morning because of an article that I saw. But I've also been impacted very heavily by museums and seeing art in person at museums and I think it comes down to the individual experience. But within that individual experience. You're right. The accessibility to some of this content is going to be different for other certain people so I think that we all kind of draw or inspiration, where we can get it. And I think that we should all be more mindful of opening up accessibility within institutions.

Kristin Taylor: You have two questions that are similar one from Hillary Johnson and one from John Boris that are both asking about the trust of photojournalism right now as it's easy to paint the photojournalism as maybe being deceptive, or untrue. Can you talk about how photographers can address the skepticism?

Dylan Yarbrough: Yeah, um, you know, these are all- man just such great questions. And again, like these are, I can only answer these in a way where it's in my own personal relationship with photography.

Dylan Yarbrough: But one thing that I've been thinking about a lot is when I moved here to Chicago. Two years ago, I rented a couple of- checked out a couple books from the library, talking about the post truth era. Or this idea that we have moved beyond the ability to recognize fact in certain situations. Or the fact that even are- in a conversation, if someone that you disagree with provides a fact, our predetermined biases will enable us to shut down and just not... like we want- instead of being like, oh wow, that fact is true. Like, wow, you've convinced me, or you've changed my mind. We actually double down on our biases.

Dylan Yarbrough: A lot of this is being seen in the media where fact is no longer as relevant as it used to be. Alternative facts as you've heard recently in the media. So, I think that like in relation to photography, this question is always changing. And honestly, my opinion on it is changing, it seems, because of the state of the world right now. I know that there is a lot of skepticism. But I think that that basically, you know, requires us to be more diligent in our civic duty.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think that, you know, I had a conversation recently with a family member, and they were basically saying that, oh, I don't want to go home and watch the news and sift through articles to find the truth.

Dylan Yarbrough: And my response was, well, maybe then, you know, you shouldn't participate as much if you're not willing to do your civic duty to sift through the mess and to try to seek out as much factual information as you can on your own. And as that relates to photography, I don't think that a photo can be ever purely truth, but it can help us find more truth in the things that we care about. So that's- I think that's the best I can do to answer that question.

Kristin Taylor: We have one more. And it looks like you're almost out of time. And this is a good one by Pablo.

Kristin Taylor: He says, "If facts don't change people's mind, is presenting them with more facts in the form of images helpful? I'm curious about the idea of sympathy fatigue or people even pushing back and falling further into denial or conspiracy theories."

Dylan Yarbrough: Right, well this is talked a lot by writers like Susan Sontag, and you know, it's an ever-pressing question of if we're overwhelmed by images, if we see too many images, does that then take away our ability to empathize with real life?

Dylan Yarbrough: You know, it's a tough question. And I think that, for one thing, it's hard to- like I can't objectively tell you one way or another. I think that we can only persist in asking questions and being very vigilant about like, on a case by case basis, as these images come up into our culture. Be very critical, but also to be, you know, open enough to really go through and make our decisions.

Kristin Taylor: Okay, just got one more from Michael Preece. It says, "In connection to distrust, how can a biased photographer reach out across the divide?"

Dylan Yarbrough: Well... biased photographer reaching across the divide.

Dylan Yarbrough: I think that we are increasingly seeing a lot of very radical views.

Dylan Yarbrough: Within almost everything. Almost everything like, that we participate in our culture. We've seen, especially in politics, groups become more and more radical in beliefs. And I remember a TED talk, a long time ago that I watched that talked about this.

Dylan Yarbrough: This man that was basically involved in some of these very radical groups and then later in life, left the radical group and spent all of his life doing the opposite. Trying to do education and outreach to talk about how these radical groups can spawn hate or can spawn other really bad things like conspiracy.

Dylan Yarbrough: And he talked about the idea that a lot of these people are only wanting to identify to a group that will accept them. And I think that it is important to reach across the divide, because sometimes we have to remember that, although the ideals and things that they represent, some

people just need to be reached out to. And so, I hope that answers the question.

Dylan Yarbrough: I had a really great time putting together this PowerPoint. It's something I really care about and I hope that in some way raises questions about how photographers and artists today are responding to these questions.

Kristin Taylor: I think that's all of your questions Dylan, thank you.

Dylan Yarbrough: Thank you all so much for being here. I hope you enjoyed our "Photos at Zoom," event.