FRAMING IDEAS

Portraiture and Representation
Images from the collection of the MoCP for classroom use. This image set corresponds with a curriculum guide that can be found at http://www.mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators.php These resources were created with special support from the Terra Foundation for American Art.
Dawoud Bey
A Woman and Child In A Doorway, from the "Harlem" portfolio, 1975
Dawoud Bey

*Deas McNeil, The Barber*, from the *Harlem* portfolio, 1976
Dawoud Bey
A Woman Waiting In The Doorway, from the Harlem portfolio, 1976
Dawoud Bey

Sharmaine, Vicente, Joseph, Andre, and Charlie, 1993
Diane Arbus
Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y., 1967
Diane Arbus

_Lady at a masked ball with two roses on her dress, N.Y.C., 1967_
Diane Arbus

Hermaphrodite and a dog in a carnival trailer, Maryland, 1970
Diane Arbus
The Junior Interstate Ballroom Dance Champions, Yonkers, NY, 1962
Dennis Stock
Untitled, from James Dean: A Memorial Portfolio, 1955
Dennis Stock
*Untitled, from James Dean: A Memorial Portfolio, 1955*
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Seconds, 2003
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Untitled No. 11, 2003
Dawoud Bey
(American, b. 1953)

Dawoud Bey’s interest in photography was sparked when, at age 15, he attended the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition *Harlem On My Mind*, which included the work of such photographers as James VanDerZee. The experience became part of the inspiration for Bey’s very first series, *Harlem, USA*, begun in 1975. Completed in 1979, the *Harlem, USA* pictures constituted Bey’s first solo exhibition (at the Studio Museum in Harlem) and first publication. He revisited the series in 2005, working from original negatives and vintage prints to produce ten of the original images as a portfolio of carbon pigment prints. The new prints are the same size as those shown in 1979 at the Studio Museum, and this marks their first printing since their original exhibition.

Bey is interested in the portrait as a site of psychological and emotional engagement between the photographer and his model. The multiple panels of Bey’s signature style, evident in this 1993 Polaroid triptych, allow him to capture momentary changes in expression, fleeting gestures, and the subtle articulations of personality. Made during his 1993 residency at Columbia College Chicago as part of an educational outreach program organized by the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Bey engaged with Chicago’s urban youth through a series of workshops with students at Providence St. Mel School.

Bey’s photographs have earned him a variety of fellowships, awards, and commissions. Born in 1953 in Queens, New York, Bey received his BA from Empire State College, State University of New York (1990), and earned his MFA from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (1993). His work has been presented in one-person exhibitions at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Light Work, Syracuse, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, which toured a mid-career retrospective. Bey’s work is also included in the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Museum of the City of New York; and The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, among other institutions. Bey is a professor of photography at Columbia College Chicago.
If I were just curious, it would be very hard to say to someone, “I want to come to your house and have you talk to me and tell me the story of your life.” I mean people are going to say, “You’re crazy.” Plus they’re going to keep mighty guarded. But the camera is a kind of license. A lot of people, they want to be paid that much attention and that’s a reasonable kind of attention to be paid. – Diane Arbus

Among the most prominent and influential photographers of her generation, Diane Arbus is perhaps best remembered for her frank studies of marginalized groups and subcultures. Yet in addition to the nudists, transvestites, carnival performers, and the cognitively-impaired or developmentally-delayed residents of asylums, Arbus also photographed socialites, celebrities, and anonymous strangers passing through New York’s streets and parks. For instance, Arbus photographed regularly at Coney Island in the 1950s, producing such pictures as Two Girls in Matching Bathing Suits, Coney Island, N.Y. Made a decade later, the 1967 photograph A Woman in a Bird Mask, N.Y.C. is perhaps a less confrontational portrait, though just as revealing in its rendering of a costume askew. It was made in the same year that the Museum of Modern Art in New York showed the magazine and personal work of Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand in the exhibition New Documents organized by John Szarkowski.

Diane Nemerov, a sister of poet Howard Nemerov, was born in New York on March 14, 1923 and raised on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. In 1941 she married Allan Arbus, and the two began a joint career in fashion photography a few years later. By the mid-1950s she was photographing on her own, however, and separated from Allan in 1959. Around the same time she began to study with Lisette Model and fully develop the style she would become known for. There is a strong connection between her magazine assignments and her personal work, and many of her most famous images were created for or published in magazines. Her first published photographs appeared in Esquire in 1960, she was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in 1963 and 1966, and the Museum of Modern Art showed her work in 1964 and 1967. Arbus died in 1971. The next year her work became the first from an American photographer to be exhibited at the Venice Biennale. Retrospective exhibitions of her work (including Diane Arbus Revelations, the major touring show organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2003) have been shown throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, Canada, and Japan.
Dennis Stock  
(American 1928-2010)

The images in *James Dean: A Memorial Portfolio* were initially taken as a biographic photo-essay for *Life* magazine shortly before the actor’s death in 1955. Dennis Stock is a photojournalist who works primarily in the format of multiple-picture essays. In addition to having held the first exclusive photo rights on James Dean, Stock has extensively documented the behind-the-scenes milieu of Hollywood stars and jazz celebrities.

Dennis Stock was born in New York in 1928 and currently resides in Menerbes, France. Stock has been a member of Magnum Photos since 1951. His photographs have appeared in other major publications, including *Paris Match* and *Stern*. He has worked as a writer, director, and producer for television and film, and has exhibited his work at the Art Institute of Chicago; International Center of Photography, New York; Musée d’Art Moderne, Paris; Schirm Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
A simple kitchen table and an overhead lamp serve as the setting for the mother-daughter drama played out in Carrie Mae Weems’s untitled triptych. These pictures form a chapter of her larger Kitchen Table Series, a cinematic grouping of twenty photographs that stars the artist in an invented love story that revolves around a woman’s identity in relation to her male partner and child. Weems, known for her sometimes biting use of humor, employs narrative structures, a choreographed cast of props and characters, and a variety of media to explore and explode stereotypes of race and gender. Her resulting photographs, videos, and installations usually reconfigure old photographs, sculptures, and artifacts that comprise the physical record of African American culture in order to make new works that comment on racism and difficult topics seldom addressed in mainstream media.

Carrie Mae Weems was born in Portland, Oregon in 1953. She received her BA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (1981), her MFA from the University of California, San Diego (1984), and studied in the Graduate Program in Folklore at the University of California at Berkeley (1984-87). Since then Weems has been active as a teacher and an artist, and is the recipient of numerous fellowships and residencies. Weems’s photographs have been exhibited in one-person exhibitions at the Dakar Biennia, Dakar, Senegal; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Sarah Moody Gallery of Art, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Sally Mann  
(American, b.1951)

Sally Mann has used her 8 x 10 view camera to capture in fine detail, among other subjects, images of her children as they mimic and act out social and familial roles in the lush landscape of their rural Virginia home. For the series *Immediate Family* posed or simply arrested in their activity, Mann's children, who often appear nude, convey both primal and playful aspects of human behavior. The images in the series and subsequent publication *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (1988) capture the confusing emotions and developing identities of adolescent girls. *Candy Cigarette* is a striking example of Mann's distinctive combination of careful planning and serendipity. In this work Mann's daughter Jessie suspends her activity and gracefully balances a candy cigarette in her hand, the innocent miniature of a blonde and gangling twenty-something beauty. Mann’s expressive printing style lends a dramatic and brooding mood to all of her images.

As they reached adolescence, Mann shifted her camera away from her children (who are now adults) and has undertaken several projects that draw on historical processes and subjects. Accustomed to working with large format cameras, Mann began to experiment in 1999 with the wet collodion process, which was pioneered in the late 1850s and was the dominant photographic process used to document the battlefields of the American Civil War. Mann used the antiquated and labor intensive process to revisit the landscapes and sites where our country’s bloodiest war was fought, returning to the hallowed ground of her native land for a fresh appraisal. The wet collodion process entails the use of large glass plates that are made chemically sensitive to light in the field minutes before use, and then placed in the back of an 8 x10 view camera. In her goal of producing an interesting or mysterious image Mann was able to incorporate the flaws of the collodion process including chemical streaks and blotches and dust spots into the aesthetic of her work. The resulting images, which are flecked with marks and blemishes from the sticky collodion negative, are unnervingly similar to their historic counterparts. Where fences and bodies once punctuated dim fields, the trees overhead are still rendered in a blur owing to the long exposure requisite of collodion negatives.

Sally Mann was born in 1951 in Lexington Virginia, where she currently lives and photographs. Her work has been honored with numerous grants and awards, and has also been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the world, including "Hospice: A Photographic Inquiry," the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1996); "Picturing the South," The High Museum of Art, Atlanta (1996); "The Whitney Biennial," the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1991); and "Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort," The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1991).
Since 1975, Nicholas Nixon has photographed his wife and her three sisters producing a single photograph each year featuring the sisters in the same order (youngest to oldest from left to right) though at various locations along the East Coast. From left to right we see Heather, Mimi, Bebe (Nixon’s wife), and Laurie as they change and grow from year to year in image after image. The Brown Sisters series functions as an ever-evolving portrait of the siblings and their relationship to one another over time.

Although best known for his ongoing portrait series of his wife and her sisters, Nicholas Nixon addresses many traditional themes of documentary photography – the family, the elderly, the ill – essentially pictures of people of all and any type. Using an 8-by-10-inch camera, Nixon captures the essential textures, tonalities, and expressions of the people he photographs. The father/daughter portrait Yazoo City, Mississippi is from a series Nixon made of people on their front porches.

Nicholas Nixon was born in 1947 in Detroit. He studied American literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and photography at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Nixon has worked as an independent photographer since 1974. He is the recipient of two John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowships, three National Endowment for the Arts Photographer’s Fellowships, and a Massachusetts Council for the Arts “New Works” Grant. His photographs have been exhibited at many international museums and galleries, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and Museum of Modern Art, New York. Nixon teaches photography at The Massachusetts College of Art, Boston.
Tina Barney (American, b. 1945)

When people say that there is a distance, a stiffness in my photographs, that the people look like they do not connect, my answer is, that this is the best that we can do. This inability to show physical affection is in our heritage. – Tina Barney

Tina Barney is best known for her ongoing documentation of the lifestyles and relationships of her family and close friends, many of whom belong to the social elite of New York and New England. Barney’s style is part candid, part tableau; her subject matter raises in equal measure issues of privilege and the interaction of family members. While striving for the candidness of a snapshot, Barney became one of the first artists working in the 1980s to explore a “directorial” mode of making pictures. Her decision to direct her subjects stems in part from her choice to sacrifice the nimble freedom of a 35 millimeter camera (with which she began her photographic career) for the large format camera’s ability to deliver a more detailed rendering of the trappings of wealth so integral to depicting her subjects and their environment. Her direction ranges from posing her subjects to simply asking them to repeat a spontaneous gesture, and her style of working often includes careful lighting and the help of an assistant. The effect is an unexpectedly intimate access to her subjects.

*Marina’s Room* (1987) is exemplary of Barney’s early style while its companion, *Marina and Peter* (1997) reflects Barney’s later shift to a more direct and less directorial approach to portraiture. In the former picture, Marina and her father are pictured sharing a private moment while seemingly oblivious to the photographer’s presence. A narrative is suggested, but as the title implies, the picture is as much about the things found in the room, as it is about the people who occupy it. In the latter picture, the very same subjects have been photographed – again from across the bed – ten years later. In the course of a decade, Barney has brought her camera closer and closer to her subjects. Here, Marina and Peter acknowledge Barney and her camera; in return, Barney allows them to strike their own poses – to be themselves. In juxtaposition, these two photographs have much to say about changing relationships: of father and daughter, photographer and subject, and between families and friends.

Barney was born in 1945 to a wealthy family in New York. Her grandfather introduced her to photography when she was a little girl and at 26 she began collecting photographs, though she did not take up the practice herself until the mid-1970s. Her work is in such collections as the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York; Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut; Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She currently lives and works in Watch Hill, Rhode Island.
Nikki S. Lee  
(Korean/American, b. 1970)

After observing particular subcultures and ethnic groups, Nikki S. Lee adopts their general style and attitude through dress, gesture, and posture, and then approaches the group in her new guise. She introduces herself as an artist (though not everyone believes her or takes it seriously), and then spends several weeks participating in the group's routine activities and social events while a friend or member of the group photographs her with an ordinary automatic "snapshot" camera. Lee maintains control of the final image, however, insofar as she chooses when to ask for a picture and edits what photographs will eventually be displayed.

From schoolgirl to senior citizen, punk to yuppie, rural white American to urban Hispanic, Lee's personas traverse age, lifestyle, and culture. Part sociologist and part performance artist, Lee infiltrates these groups so convincingly that in individual photographs it is difficult to distinguish her from the crowd. However, when photographs from the projects are grouped together, it is Lee's own Korean ethnicity, drawn like a thread through each scenario, which reveals her subtle ruse.

Lee's projects propose questions regarding identity and social behavior. Do we choose our social groups consciously? How are we identified by other people? Is it possible for us to move between cultures? Lee believes that "essentially life itself is a performance. When we change our clothes to alter our appearance, the real act is the transformation of our way of expression--the outward expression of our psyche."

Born Lee Seung-Hee in Korea in 1970, Nikki S. Lee chose her American name when she came to New York in 1994. (The friend she asked to compile a list of American names used those appearing in that month's *Vogue*, thus Nikki S. Lee inadvertently named herself after another much-photographed and image-changing woman, model Niki Taylor.) As a child growing up in the small South Korean village of Kye-Chang, Lee was exposed to a variety of foreign cultures through the mediating vehicles of television, popular periodicals, and music. In spite of her isolation, she developed a certain empathy for other cultures, an ability to empathize with other people that is clearly integral to her projects now. Her work is also unmistakably informed by Asian notions of identity, where identity is not a static set of traits belonging to an individual, but something constantly changing and defined through relationships with other people.
Jennifer Davis
(American, b. 1978)

This portfolio of self-portraits by Jen Davis continues her work in self-portraiture, but its tenor has eased from the tense scrutiny of the early pictures to a more comfortable and wider-ranging exploration. With a sensuality addressed as much with rich color as with silky slips, the expanded territory features the domestic and the erotic as we see Davis watering plants, hanging panties on a clothesline, or sharing a couch with a half-dressed companion. Indeed, where the earlier pictures concentrated on their subject’s isolation, this body of work is increasingly aware of her movements and her interaction with her surroundings.

Jen Davis was born in Akron, Ohio. She received her BA in Photography from Columbia College Chicago (2002). She is the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award (2003), a Community Arts Assistance Program Grant through The Department of Cultural Affairs (2003), and two Albert P. Weisman Memorial Scholarships (2001 and 2002). Her recent exhibitions include Body Image at Schneider Gallery, Chicago; Soliloquies, John R. Grady Gallery of Photographic Art, Elgin, IL; 3rd Annual Joyce Elaine Grant Photography Exhibition at Texas Woman’s University Fine Arts Gallery, Denton, TX; and Self-Centered at Creative Artist Network, Philadelphia, PA. Her photographs are in the collections of the Columbia College Chicago Photography Department and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.