



LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Grandma Ruby and Me*, 2005

BACKSTORY

LaToya Ruby Frazier
Ron Jude
Guillaume Simoneau

July 18 – Oct. 6, 2013

Viewer's Guide

This guide was produced as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *BackStory: LaToya Ruby Frazier, Ron Jude and Guillaume Simoneau*, and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, and classroom activities. You may download this guide, which was created by Emilie Boone and Corinne Rose, from the museum's website at mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators.php. A PDF with images that can be projected for classroom use and a PDF with a curatorial essay and information about the exhibition and artists on view can also be found there. Aimed at secondary and post-

secondary students, this resource is aligned with Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts Incorporating the Common Core and can be adapted for use by younger students and integrated into a variety of fine arts and humanities curricula. To schedule a free docent-led tour of this exhibition see mocp.org/education/viewings.

The MoCP is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum is generously supported by Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP Advisory Board, individuals, private and corporate foundations, and government agencies including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

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BACKSTORY:

LaToya Ruby Frazier, Ron Jude and Guillaume Simoneau

Questions for Looking and Discussion

Teachers' note: There are many more questions here than can be addressed in one tour or class session. Select the ones that work best with your course goals and curriculum. We recommend that all viewers begin by addressing the general questions at the beginning of this section to ground their experience of the work before moving into more complex questions.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Look carefully at the works in one of the three bodies of work on view:

1. What do you see or notice? What pulls your attention? Why?
2. What can you tell about how these works were made?
3. What do we learn about the people represented in these works? How?
4. Can you tell where or when this work might have been made? If so how?
5. What do we learn about the places depicted? How?
In which images do we learn about a particular place? Which are more ambiguous? What effect does that have?
6. What is the mood or tone of the work? How is that expressed or established? Is the mood consistent?
7. What questions are raised for you in this work?
8. Do you feel any personal connections to any of these bodies of work? Describe.

Consider the exhibition as a whole:

1. Each of the bodies of work in this exhibition was included because it forms a visual narrative. What stories and types of stories are told? How are they constructed and revealed?
2. What similarities and differences do you notice among the stories these artists tell and in their approaches to constructing those stories?
3. What happens when these three bodies of work are shown together? Do you find yourself forming connections between the bodies of work? If so, describe.
4. The exhibition's title is "Backstory." What does the work in this show suggest about memory and how we recall and construct stories of our past?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. What are some different ways personal narratives can be recorded and told?
2. In what ways can photographs serve as a kind of autobiography? What are photography's strengths in telling the story of a person? What does photography not do well in this regard?
3. What connections and differences do you notice in how narratives are constructed using words and how they are constructed in pictures?
4. How can depictions of a place contribute to narratives about people?

Artist Specific Questions

LaToya Ruby Frazier

In a series started ten years ago when she was a teenager, LaToya Ruby Frazier creates photographs of her hometown Braddock, Pennsylvania, a deteriorating steel mill town that she, her mother, and grandmother have called home. Frazier, sometimes working with her mother, creates autobiographical images that form a narrative through confrontational portraits and social documentary photographs made within domestic settings and on the streets of Braddock. Each family member's

individual story is marked by different historic moments of decline in Braddock. What began as a prosperous town in her grandmother's day shifts to a place defined by the effects of deep poverty including depopulation, substance abuse, and poor health. Frazier serves as both participant and author of this series as she considers the impact and legacy of this place for three generations of her family.

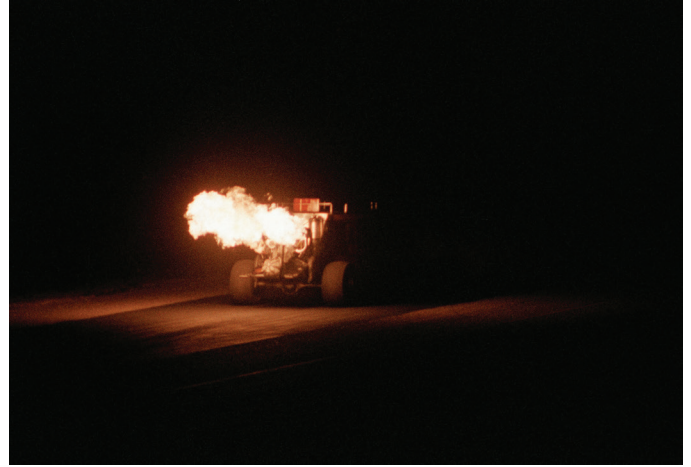


LaToya Ruby Frazier. *Self Portrait in Gramps' Pajamas*, 2009

1. What do these photographs suggest about family? About place?
2. What types of change are evident in Frazier's work? How is it shown?
3. In what ways is the presence of Frazier's mother and grandmother important to the development of the narrative?
4. Frazier's story features three generations of woman from the same family. What connections and differences do you notice among them? What connections and differences do you notice in how each woman is represented?
5. Can you tell who is doing the telling of the story of each image? Of the overall series? If so how? What do you notice about their "voice?"



Ron Jude. *Blue Girl on TV*, from *emmett*, 1984/2010



Ron Jude. *Grand Finale, Firebird Raceway*, from *emmett* 1984/2010

Ron Jude

In a trilogy that begins with *Alpine Star*, followed by *emmett*, and then *Lick Creek Line* Ron Jude investigates his own personal archive of memories and materials to create a narrative that evokes his home town and young life in remote Idaho. In *Alpine Star*, Jude sequenced images he culled from local newspapers and stripped of their captions to create a narrative on place. Jude taps into a more personal archive for his series *emmett*, as he reprints a collection of photographs he originally took as a teen in the 1980s. Lastly, *Lick Creek Line* offers a contemplative and fictitious visual story of a fur trapper at work and the outdoor landscape of Idaho he traverses on foot. Each series reflects Jude's changing relationship to memories, familiar places, and to the medium of photography as a tool for storytelling.

QUESTIONS:

1. In *Alpine Star*, Jude omits the original captions and context of the black and white images he appropriated from his hometown newspaper. What is lost when the image captions are removed? What is gained?
2. Why do you think he selected the images he chose? What does each add to the narrative? What do you notice about how Jude sequenced the work?
4. What pictorial elements or subjects repeat in Jude's series *emmett*? What affect does that have? Why do you think Jude made these choices?
5. In *Lick Creek Line*, which photographs seem intended to document or describe the landscape or setting? Which engage fantasy or fiction? How do they function together? Describe.



Guillaume Simoneau. *In Goa, India, September 11, 2001.*



Guillaume Simoneau. *Wearing Army Uniform for Me, 2008.*

Guillaume Simoneau

By selecting moments in Caroline Annandale's life between the ages of 16 and 25, Montreal-based photographer Guillaume Simoneau chronicles aspects of their love affair before, during, and after her military deployment to Iraq. Annandale left for Iraq just after having an intense but short relationship with Simoneau. Later, the young couple rekindled their romance following Annandale's service and failed marriage to someone else. The series includes images Simoneau took when they first met, along with photographs Annandale sent home from Iraq and photographs of handwritten letters and text messages attesting to the complexity and endurance of their romance. Sequenced in non-chronological order, these intimate images reflect the often disjointed experience of recalling personal memories, while considering the effects of military service and war on intimate relationships.

1. Are you able to tell that Simoneau's works are not presented in chronological order? If so, how?
2. How do the different kinds of images contribute to the development of the narrative? For example, what is the effect of text messages and handwritten notes on your understanding of the story?
3. The series includes photographs Annandale sent home from Iraq. What does the inclusion of these images contribute to the narrative?
4. Simoneau's work includes written correspondence in the form of text messages and a hand-written note.

What are differences and connections in each of these forms of correspondence and the associations we have with them? How did Simoneau use them in his work?
5. How might we think about each of the artist's work in this show as a kind of correspondence?

Activities

1. Create a Visual Autobiography Inspired by the Works in This Show

Look through the images and objects you have saved from your younger life. What memories, stories, places, times, and associations do they evoke for you? Select one small part of your autobiography that you might tell through some of these objects. Sketch out the story you would like to tell.

- What visuals from your collection could you use? Think about those images and objects like words in a sentence or sentences in a paragraph that will create meaning when combined.
- Take snapshots of those items, thinking about how to best make those images—such as will you photograph those things with hard or soft light and from what angle?
- Look at the images you have created. Select the ones that you feel are the most visually strong and that contribute important elements to your narrative.
- Play with sequencing your images until you are satisfied with the story they create.
- Jude created his story in three parts. Do you think your visual story works as one linear narrative or might it be better split into a few parts or chapters?
- Critique the work with your peers by asking them to “read” the visual narrative you have created. What story or stories did your sequence suggest to them?

2. Write the Story of the Pictures

The bodies of work on view in this exhibition were selected because they all present visual narratives based on personal experience. The artists include scenes and elements in the images that might help to determine the narrative, but ultimately the viewer will interpret the story for him or herself. There will be connections among viewers’ “readings” of the stories as well as differences since we all bring our individual knowledge and experiences to bear when we interpret any work.

Select an individual work or a series featured in this exhibition and write the story of the work. Decide from what voice or point of view you will tell the story. You could give the characters in the scenes pictured names, consider what might have happened before or after the image was made; what might be happening beyond the edge of the frame; or what you might see, smell, hear or feel if you were in the scene. Weave details from the image(s) into your story.

Do this activity as a group and share the stories you create. What did you notice? What did your stories have in common? How did they differ?

Variation: Write the Backstory of the Image

Back Story:

1. The experiences of a character or the circumstances of an event that occur before the action or narrative of a literary, cinematic, or dramatic work: At rehearsal, the actors developed backstories for their characters.
2. A prequel. Write the backstory of a photograph from the exhibition focusing on what might have happened before the image was made. If it is helpful to you to have a structure, you could use a frame such as writing about: What was this person doing or what might have happened in this place ten minutes ago? Ten months ago? Ten years ago at exactly this same time? Why do you think that?