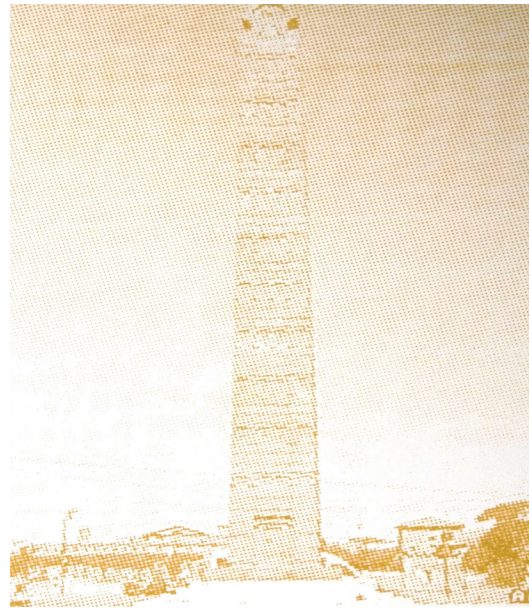




Larry Williams, *Rural Saturday Night*, 1973
Gelatin silver print, Museum purchase 1979:1



Zacharius Abubeker, *Obelisk*, 2011
Screenprint; Gift of Jan Tichy 2012:21

Viewers' Guide

1979:1 – 2012:21

JAN TICHY WORKS

WITH THE MOCP

COLLECTION

October 12 – December 23, 2012

Introduction

The Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago maintains a permanent collection of nearly 11,000 photographs. In 2011, the museum commissioned artist Jan Tichy to develop an exhibition based on the collection. One of Tichy's primary goals for this project was to create many different paths of access into the MoCP's collection and ultimately the project was comprised of many parts in addition to the physical exhibition of works that was displayed at the MoCP from October 12–December 23, 2012. This viewer's guide provides questions for looking and discussion and classroom activities, and additional texts to assist viewers in engaging the concepts, art works, and multiple parts that comprise Tichy's MoCP- based project.



Irving Penn
Two New Guinea Men Holding Hands, 1970/1979



Harold Allen
Subway Platform, from the portfolio "In Chicago" 1969, printed 1983



West Gallery view

1979:1 – 2012:21 **JAN TICHY** WORKS WITH THE MOCP COLLECTION

Project Overview

In the months leading up to the exhibition 1979:1 – 2012:21: *Jan Tichy Works with the MoCP Collection*, Jan Tichy assembled a group of graduate students in photography from institutions across Chicago to work with him to improve the museum's online collection interface with tagging applications and to help to update the MoCP web site's design. He also conceived a new Cornerstone Gallery in the museum's windows on Michigan Avenue and Harrison Street to display digital exhibitions of works from the collection organized by international curators, educators, students, and artists.

The project culminated in Tichy curating a physical exhibition of both collection works and his own, new video-based works and installations that were inspired by MoCP collection works. Tichy displayed pairings of collection images in the museum's west gallery in order to reveal the possibilities of experience that can be evoked both from individual objects and their relationships to one another. For the museum's north gallery Tichy created a piece organizing digital files of all 10,897 works in the MoCP collection (as of Summer 2012) according to luminosity. For the museum's east Gallery Tichy created an installation based on collection images by Aaron Siskind from his *Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation* series and his close-up, abstractions of walls.

Tichy asked museum staff members of more than five years to each provide him a list of their favorite collection works and displayed selections of these works in the museum's mezzanine gallery. From the staff lists of favorite works, Tichy selected Christian Boltanski, Barbara Crane and Andy Warhol and created new video works animating the MoCP's significant holdings of works by these artists. The museum's collection includes almost 500 images by Dorothea Lange including multiples of the same or similar frames. Tichy installed sets of multiples from Lange's depression-era work made for the Farm Security Administration in the museum's stairwell. This installation led into the museum's print study room where Tichy installed over 200 images from the Changing Chicago project, for which 33 photographers documented the people and places of day-to-day urban life in the city in the year 1987. Changing Chicago was inspired by the work of the Farm Security Administration photography corps and honored its 50th anniversary. Among the cacophony of Changing Chicago works displayed, Tichy interspersed seven of his own original video responses to Changing Chicago, inspired by the project as well as by his own experience of living in Chicago for the last five years.

Questions for Looking and Discussion and Classroom Activities

Jan Tichy as Artist, Curator, and Project Leader

Tichy sees the various roles he played in this project – artist, curator, project leader – as equal parts of his artistic practice. He says, “For me artistic practice is about looking at a theme, idea, or problem and thinking—what are the best ways to approach this? It might be to create an abstract image, or to manage a project and to work as a designer. In part, I am asking questions about how the museum uses and displays the collection.” By assuming many of the various roles involved in the production and dissemination of art, Tichy illuminates ways the meaning of an artwork is not only produced by the artist who creates it.

- How do curators contribute to or change the meaning of artworks?
- What about a web designer or project leader?
- Do you think that the roles that Tichy played as curator or leader of a project, such as redesigning the museum’s website, can be considered art? If so, how?

Using Digital Files as Source Material for New Artworks and Virtual Exhibitions

The museum’s online database, and now its Cornerstone Gallery and online exhibitions, bring a particular question into focus—what is the difference between a physical archive and a digital one? The works on view in the window galleries and online are digital representations of real collection works. Throughout the exhibition, Tichy created tension between physical art objects and their digital copies by freely manipulating and animating digital files in order to analyze certain aspects of the original photographs. Andy Warhol’s Polaroid portraits of posing people, for example, are animated until the frame speed per second has the effect of a flip-book or film strip, bringing his subjects to life and cinematically recreating aspects of their movements during actual photo shoots with Warhol. Tichy notes that we can’t ask Andy Warhol (he died in 1987) what he thinks of the new work created using the MoCP’s Warhol Polaroids, but he feels that a dialogue arises between Warhol’s artistic practice, which often manipulated appropriated imagery, and his own use of appropriation. Tichy considers the video works he created for this show to have interesting relationships to authorship, collaboration, ownership and the question, “Whose work is it?”

- How do the experiences of seeing a physical object and a digital file differ?
- What are some opportunities that arise from using digital files to make artwork?
- What connections and differences do you see between works made through appropriation by artists including Andy Warhol, Sherrie Levine, and Richard Prince and more contemporary artists who use digital technology to create works through appropriation?
- In what ways are the new collection-specific works and installations Tichy created for this exhibition collaborative?
- Who are the collaborators? Think broadly. Who do you consider the author(s) of each work? Why?

Activity: Browse, Describe, and Tag MoCP Collection Images

This activity is aimed at encouraging viewers to explore, interact with and consider the museum's collection of close to 11,000 images through its online collection database and website.

Go to the MoCP's collection web site at <http://www.mocp.org/collection.php>. Spend some time browsing the images and information on the museum's online collection database and check out the list of tagged phrases that appears on the Tagging Project page. Try different points of entry into the collection such as browsing names of artists unknown to you in the alphabetical list of names. Select an image that appeals to you and begin tagging single descriptive words in response to the questions below.

1. Tag the piece with elements that you see or notice when you look at the piece such as "dog, tree, shadow, yellow."
2. Tag the piece with words that describe the work's formal qualities such as light, dark, angles, symmetry.
3. What are the moods or feelings you associate with this work?
4. What traditions might this work connect to such as "portrait, still life, landscape, abstraction, documentary, or street photography?"
5. Tag with words that might describe what you think this work is about, "wealth, pollution, love, motherhood."
6. What can you tell about where and when this work was made? Think about eras and locations as well as words to describe relevant or distinctive cultural or historic context such as "southern, rural, civil-rights era."
7. What does this work look like or remind you of?
Keep a list of the words that you use as tags. Review them.
 - Do you think these words do a fairly accurate job of describing this image? Which words seem most or least important?
 - What questions does this process or list raise for you?
 - Is there something about the image that you selected that is not well described through these words? If so, why do you think that is?

As you browse through the MoCP's collection, can you find any other works that might fit under this same list of descriptors?

Remix Extension: Use the list of words that you generated and "remix" these descriptors into a new work in the media of your choice that includes or references many of the details, attributes, or contexts that you tagged. If you are doing this activity as a class, you could swap word lists to inspire new works.

Critique the new works you create and discuss the choices you made. Discuss the new work on its own, in comparison to the list of descriptive words and to the original work referenced. What changes between the three versions? What remains consistent?

Activity: Pairings of Collection Images

Interested in binary correlations, Tichy paired collection images in the museum's west gallery in order to reveal the possibilities of experience that can be evoked both from individual objects and their relationships to one another. Some of the pairs are based on fixed criteria, such as the biggest piece in the collection—Shi Guorui's *Shanghai 22-23 October, 2005*—and the smallest work—Walker Evans's *Untitled* (high contrast metal grate, abstract high angle view), 1928–29. Other pairings reflect Tichy's preferences and associations stemming from his perusal of the entire collection, as the pairs express doubling through subject matter, form, and concept.

For example, Tichy paired portraits of young women by artists Diane Arbus and Rineke Dijkstra. In addition to some obvious visual connections between the images, the women in both images appear awkward in front of the camera. Tichy says that historically, Dijkstra followed Arbus and in his opinion, these two women are the major portrait photographers of the twentieth century.

When the viewer considers Tichy's pairing of Jeff Gates's image depicting an aerial view of the gridded blocks of a suburban housing development with Diana Schoenfeld's typology of animal specimens, the formal connections between the images suggest fluidity among types of photography: both images could be considered aerial views or typologies and their titles seem almost interchangeable.

Tichy thinks of creating pairings as one of the most basic forms of curating, which is always about placing works side by side and creating formal and conceptual relationships. Many of the pairs are placed together because they represent the opposite ends of simple forms of categorization – largest and smallest, oldest and newest, lightest and darkest. Other works are pair to highlight formal and conceptual similarities, such as works by Czech artist Jaroslav Rossler and Chicagoan John Mahtesian.



Diane Arbus
American, 1923-1971
Two girls in matching bathing suits, Coney Island, N.Y., 1967

Rineke Dijkstra
Maya, Herzliya, Israel, November 21, 1999



Diana Schoenfeld
Rhythmic Arrangements: Specimens, 1979

Jeff Gates
In Our Path #4 (Aerial Photograph), from the "20/20" portfolio, 1983, printed 1985

In addition to having similar formal compositions, the works echo Jan's personal biography as a Czech citizen who has made his home in Chicago.

Look at some of the pairings of MoCP collection works that Tichy created and consider connections and differences between the images.

- What formal and conceptual connections do you see between the images in the pair?
- What new meanings and associations are created when you view these two images together?

Select a single image from one of Tichy's pairings. Browse through the MoCP's collection database and select a new image to pair with that piece. Tag that image using the protocol described above.

- Why did you select the image that you chose from Tichy's pairings?
- What did you learn about the image through researching the piece and the artist who made it?
- What new piece did you choose to pair it with? Why?
- What new meanings and associations are created when you place both images side by side?
- How does your new pairing differ from Tichy's pairing using that work?



Jaroslav Rössler
Czech, 1902-1989
untitled (construction figure), 1925



John Mahtesian
Marina Tower, c. 1960



Emmet Gowin
Mining the Coal Seam, Open Pit Strip Mine, Bohemia, Czech Republic,
1994

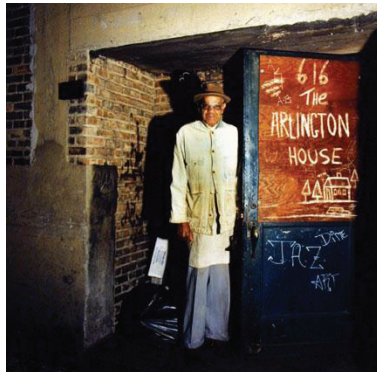


Nathan Lerner
Roundhouse, Chicago, 1936, printed later

Activity: Set a Stage, Observe and Record

Jan Tichy says that the photographers from the Changing Chicago project and the tradition of street photography in general connect to the tradition of “the decisive moment.” “The decisive moment” refers to a concept articulated by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) who said, “To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.”

Careful sensory observation of one’s surroundings and human interaction is important to artists working in all media. Tichy says that street photographers often set a stage: They select a specific location or event and duration of time and carefully observe and record fleeting occurrences and actions that unfold around them. The video works that Tichy created for this exhibition in response to the Changing Chicago project were made in this way, but Tichy’s films record a duration of time rather than freezing an instant. For this reason Tichy says these films capture not one, but several moments that unfold based on natural elements such as clouds moving through an area and the behaviors of the people in the scene.



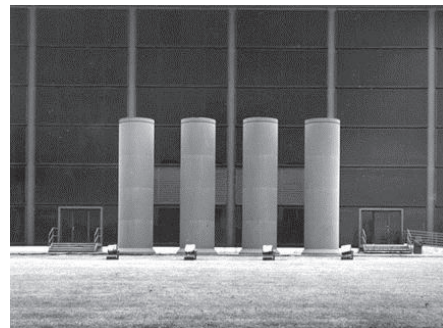
Wayne Cable
From the *Changing Chicago* project, 1987-1988
1995:391 / 1995:395



Jay Wolke
From the *Changing Chicago* project, 1987-1988
1995:615 / 1995:627



Peter Bacon Hales
From the *Changing Chicago* project, 1987-1988



Barbara Ciurej and Lindsey Lochman
From the *Changing Chicago* project, 1987-1988
1995:457 / 1995:460

To Do: Set a stage by selecting a particular location. Decide on the edges of your “frame” –the visual boundaries of the area that you will observe. Eliminate distractions such as your cell phone or music. Use a sound recorder, draw, or write freely to observe that location for a set period of time. After the period of observation, reflect on what you recorded.

- What pulled your attention? What did you see, smell, hear, think, feel?
- What elements, activities, or instances stood out to you? Why?
- How does the recording differ from your expectations of what you might experience then and there?
- Was there anything you wished you could record and couldn't? Describe.
- Why did you choose this particular location and time? What was interesting or surprising to you about this experience?

Activity: Changing Chicago: Research and Report

- Look at Changing Chicago image set. What types of people, places, things, and events do you see in the images in the Changing Chicago project?
- Taken as a whole, what does this project suggest about Chicago in the year 1987?

Research Chicago in the year 1987. What can you find out about the city at that time? What major events occurred in that year or around that time? Who was mayor? What ethnic and racial groups comprised the city's population? What else can you learn? What was happening in American culture and politics at that time? Who was president? What major issues did the country face? What music and movies were popular? What else can you learn? What references do you see to this information in Changing Chicago?

Jan Tichy has lived in Chicago for the past five years. He created new video works of Chicago, that he says are inspired by HIS Chicago, and displayed them alongside the Changing Chicago images in the exhibition.

Research Chicago today. What is significant historically, politically and culturally to Chicago in the year 2012? What is significant to YOU about Chicago in 2012? If you were to create new works in a media of your choice representing your Chicago in this time, what would you reference? What would you create? Why? How would you make these works? Extend this dialogue by creating that piece and critiquing it with your peers.

If you do not live in Chicago, complete this activity by researching images and information from your community in the year 1987 and today and create a new work.

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Museum installation of *Changing Chicago* project