

View Finder:

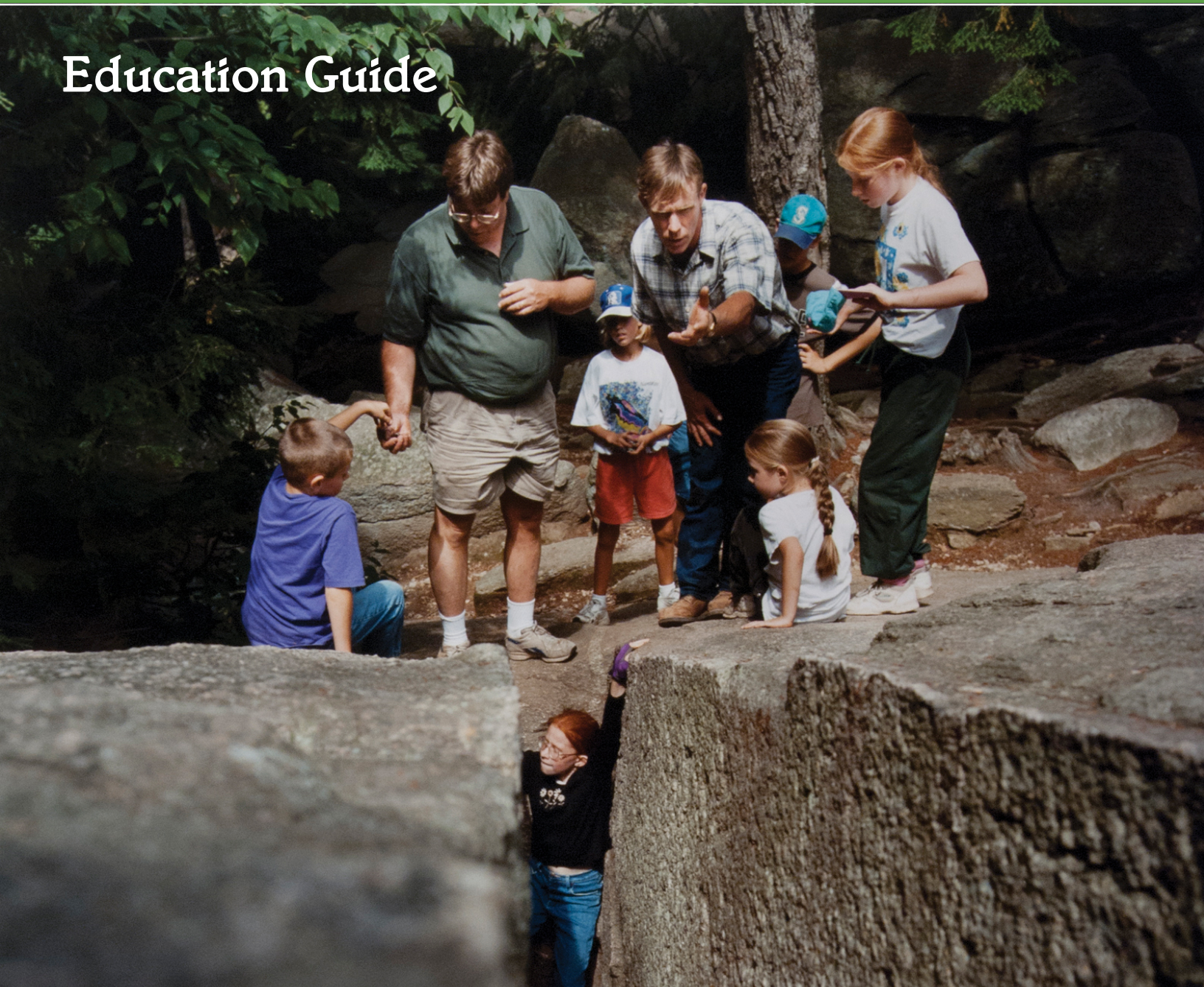
Landscape and Leisure in the Collection

mocp.org

MoCP
Museum of
Contemporary Photography

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Education Guide



Justin Kimball, *Purgatory Chasm, Massachusetts, 1998*

This guide serves as an educational supplement to the exhibition **VIEWFINDER: LANDSCAPE AND LEISURE IN THE COLLECTION** and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, and suggested readings. You may download this guide from the museum's website at mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators. To schedule a free docent-led tour, please complete the form here: mocp.org/education/tours-and-print-viewings

Guest Contributors for this Education Guide are: Joan Giroux, Associate Professor, Art and Art History at Columbia College Chicago, with students from the 2018 Special Topics in Studio Art summer class "eco monopolies in the Commons" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: Emily Gallaugher (BA, Art History); Joey Grisby (BA, Illustration); Alex Rixon (BA, Multimedia Journalism); and Bianca Roper (BFA, Fine Arts).

Featuring:

Ansel Adams

David Avison

Jonas N.T. Becker

Marilyn Bridges

Terry Evans

William Henry Jackson

Justin Kimball

Neal Slavin

Greg Stímac

Introduction:



Neal Slavin, *Grand Canyon National Park, National Park Service Grand Canyon, AZ 1979*

Photography has played a vital role in our understanding of the outdoors, allowing us to view natural spaces without being physically present in them. Parks fill a similar role, as they provide institutional access points and infrastructure into wild, natural spaces. In his book *Our National Parks* (1901), John Muir, cofounder of the Sierra Club, wrote:

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, overcivilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”¹

¹John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1901), 1.

Presenting a selection of historical and contemporary works from the MoCP’s permanent collection and the Midwestern Photographers Project, *View Finder: Landscape and Leisure in the Collection* considers the varied ways these designated outdoor spaces enhance human experience, from allowing for rest and refuge, to their ability to meet other, more subliminal needs.

William Henry Jackson (American, 1843–1942)



William Henry Jackson, *Glacier Point and South Dome, Yosemite Valley, California, 1898*

William Henry Jackson created some of the first photographs of the American West in 1871, when he participated in a federally funded expedition with geologist Ferdinand Hayden and a group of approximately thirty-five other men, including renowned painter Thomas Moran. The expedition covered areas in present-day Wyoming, Oregon, Colorado, and Utah that had previously remained unexplored by non-Native people to dispel claims that the West—rich with bubbling hot springs and spouting geysers—was hellish and to be feared. Jackson’s photographs and Moran’s paintings portrayed the remarkable beauty of the land and were included in a comprehensive report Hayden presented to the US Congress to argue against its sale at public auction. Their efforts were effective, and in 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Act of Dedication, establishing Yellowstone as the first National Park, protecting 2,219,789 acres of land as “pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”¹

¹Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park, Historical and Descriptive* (Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd, 1915), 345.

The Photochrom Process

Photochrom prints are created by using lithographic limestone plates to add color to black-and-white negatives with each color requiring its own plate. Used as the world’s first postcards, photochroms were cheaply sold, collected, and mailed, primarily from the late 19th century until the end of World War I. Adding color to Jackson’s images helped people further picture the unknown western landscape, though the colors are represented from memory—much like Moran’s idealized paintings.

LEFT: William Henry Jackson, *Falls in Nay Aug Park-Scranton, Pennsylvania, c. 1900*
RIGHT: William Henry Jackson, *Yucca Cactus at Hesperia, California, c. 1900*



William Henry Jackson (American, 1843–1942)



Thomas Moran, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1872, Collection of the Department of the Interior Museum



William Henry Jackson, *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1871

Photography, which was only invented in 1839, was still a bit of a novelty at the time of Hayden's expedition. In contrast to Thomas Moran's paintings—which could be viewed as overly romanticized interpretations—William Henry Jackson's photographs provided indisputable proof of the look of the landscape.

Using 8x10-inch plate-glass negatives, Jackson's equipment weighed around 300 pounds and had to be carried on the backs of mules. Each negative needed 45 minutes to set in his portable darkroom, making his task both arduous and time-consuming. The wet-plate collodion process was invented and used in the mid-19th century and was famously utilized by the photographers of the Civil War.

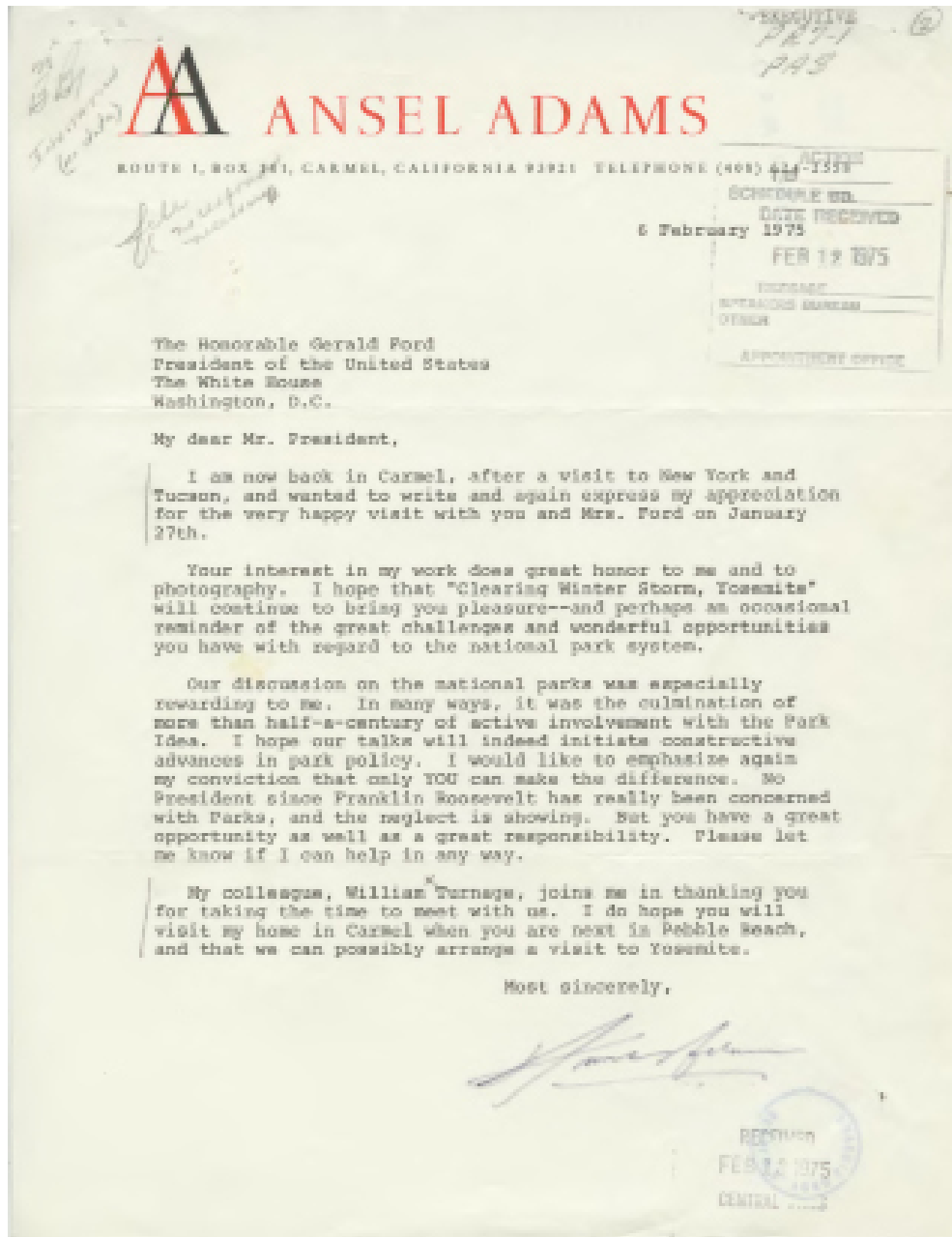


William Henry Jackson, *Pack Train on Mountain Road*, c. 1870

→ Questions for Looking

- Compare the popular modes of reproducing images of the parks for the public: photography and painting. Does one seem like a more “accurate” or “true” mode of representation than the other? Why or why not? What aspects of Moran's painting could be seen as overly exaggerated or romanticized?
- Does the inherent frame of a camera's viewfinder limit or expand the human perception of our place in the natural world? Would other types of media function differently?
- Imagine if Jackson and Moran had not joined the expedition to picture the landscape and the area was sold at public auction. What could Yellowstone and the American West look like today?
- Think about how images of a newly explored American West circulated through photochrom postcards and other reproductions. How has photography, and art more broadly, contributed to aestheticization of human interaction with and intervention in the environment?

Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984)



Letter sent to President Gerald Ford in 1975 regarding national parks

Ansel Adams worked tirelessly with the Sierra Club to successfully advocate for the government expansion of many national parks, including Yellowstone and Yosemite, and often brought his photographs to countless meetings with politicians and policy makers to fight for the land to remain undeveloped and wild. He gifted prints to U.S. Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan during in-person meetings, as an illustration to show what might be lost if our natural resources are not protected and preserved.

Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984)



Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite National Park, California, 1927

The Sierra Club

Adams served on the board of the Sierra Club for 37 years (1934-1971). The organization, founded in 1892, has the mission: “To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.”¹

¹“Policies.” Sierra Club. March 14, 2018. Accessed June 12, 2018. <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy>.

→ Questions for Looking

- Adams created his photographs as a way to advocate for the preservation of wild spaces. Yet, his images adversely promoted tourism to the parks, putting these spaces at more risk of development. Is photography another method of capturing, distilling, and consuming nature?
- How has colonization shaped the environment?
- Adams felt a special connection with Yosemite Park, as illustrated in the image above. “Yosemite” received its name from early European explorers who heard people of the native Miwok tribes repeating the word “Yohhe’meti.” The early colonizers assumed this was the name of the valley, yet, “Yohhe’meti” translates to “those who kill” and was instead identifying the men themselves. How are our behaviors and relationships to the environment reflected in language? What roles do socio-political forces play in understanding our relationship to environment?

Terry Evans (American, b. 1944)



Terry Evans, *MCAT, Trinity River, July 4, 2013*



George Caleb Bingham, *Jolly Flatboatmen in Port, 1857*,
Collection of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

In 2015, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art commissioned Terry Evans to document the Trinity River as it passed through the museum's hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. The resulting photographs were then presented alongside paintings and drawings by the mid-19th-century painter George Caleb Bingham. Bingham's paintings feature idyllic portrayals of daily life along the Missouri River during American westward expansion, differing from Evans's depictions of the same area over a century later. Mirroring Bingham's approaches to pose, gesture, and light, Evans illustrates the intimacy and conviviality of the riverbed as a gathering place for the nearby communities, even among a heavily engineered and polluted landscape.

→ Questions for Looking

Compare Terry Evans' photograph (left) to the George Caleb Bingham painting (right). How do the two pictures compare in form?

- How do clothing and props tell a larger story about the respective times and places?
- What is the mood or feeling of each picture? How is that conveyed?
- Evans' picture was taken 157 years after Bingham's painting was created. What events might have happened over that time to change the look and function of the river?

David Avison (American, 1937–2004)



David Avison, *North Avenue Beach, Chicago, 1988*, (top) *North Avenue Beach, Chicago, 1987* (bottom)

Using a hand-built panoramic camera, David Avison conveys the scope and density of the crowds along the beaches of Lake Michigan in Chicago. These pictures were included in the large-scale, 1987 documentary project *Changing Chicago*. One of the largest documentary photography projects ever organized in a US city, *Changing Chicago* commissioned thirty-three photographers to document life throughout Chicago's diverse urban and suburban neighborhoods. Avison's images show Chicagoans during the dog days of summer and reflect how communities naturally form when people are outdoors.

→ Questions for Looking

- What role do urban parks fill? Should green spaces be integrated into cities or should parks exist separately as an escape from more developed area with minimal human impact?
- In 1845, the phrase *manifest destiny* was coined by a journalist to extoll the expansionism of Western European settlers over the continent of North America. What phrase would describe current relationships between people, parks, and the natural environment?

THE MANY ROLES OF THE PARKS TODAY

Justin Kimball (American, b. 1961)



Justin Kimball, *Warren Dunes, Michigan*, 2003

In this series, *Where We Find Ourselves* (1996–2004), Justin Kimball returns to places he visited with his family as a child to photograph people vacationing in campgrounds, swimming holes, and state parks. Exploring the many ways that people relax individually or collectively outdoors, his pictures stray from idyllic representations of the land and rather show an everyday view of American leisure.

Greg Stimac (American, b. 1976)



Greg Stimac, *Badlands (Christian Bus Group)*, 2007

Greg Stimac is interested in idiosyncratic, but very specific American behaviors—from meticulously mowing lawns, to shooting a gun, to “peeling out” cars on a blacktop. One of the most frequent themes in Stimac’s pictures is the American road trip. On a trip to the Badlands, South Dakota, during one of Stimac’s cross-country drives, Stimac witnessed a group of tourists edging dangerously close to the side of a cliff, not noticing a fallen fellow traveler as he scrambles to return to safety. The image reveals individuals eclipsed by nature and struggling to experience it or contain it as a tourist experience.

→ Questions for Looking

- Do these images represent your own experiences in rural parks? How or how not?
- How do parks provide framework or infrastructure for people to experience the outdoors? Are these access points necessary or do they inhibit true interaction with nature?

Orit Siman-Tov (Israeli, b. 1971)



Eshkol Park, 2002

In her *Leisure Time in Israel* series (1997), Orit Siman-Tov documents people enjoying public leisure sites that have been stripped of cultural and natural markers and intentionally designed for universal appeal with only slight traces of the country evident around the edges of the frame. Though depicting leisure, the images convey an uncomfortable tension, as the act of establishing any park in a politically contested area is itself a marking of territory.



Mount Hermon, Israel, 1996

→ Questions for Looking

- How do Orit Siman-Tov's images of Israel differ from those you have seen in the media?
- What happens to parks in times and places experiencing war?
- What is the government's responsibility in providing access to or preserving nature?

Extended Resources/Further Reading

Gabriel, Nathaniel. "No Place for Wilderness": Urban Parks and the Assembling of Neoliberal Urban Environmental Governance." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 19 (2016): 278-84. doi:10.1016/j.ufug.2016.02.006.

Gabriel, Nate. "The Work That Parks Do: Towards an Urban Environmentalism." *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 2 (2011): 123-41. doi:10.1080/14649365.2011.545139.

Finney, Carolyn. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2014.

MoCP
Museum of
Contemporary Photography

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Museum of Contemporary Photography

Columbia College Chicago
600 S. Michigan Ave
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Telephone 312.663.5554

mocp.org | mocp@colum.edu

Free and open to the public

Monday through Saturday 10am-5pm
Thursday 10am-8pm
Sunday 12-5pm

The MoCP is generously supported by

Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP
Advisory Board, Museum Council,
individuals, private and corporate
foundations and government agencies.