

Education and Viewer's Guide

BEYOND THE FRAME

JULY 8 - OCTOBER 30, 2022



Ken Josephson, *New York State*, from the *Ken Josephson* portfolio, 1970; printed 1975

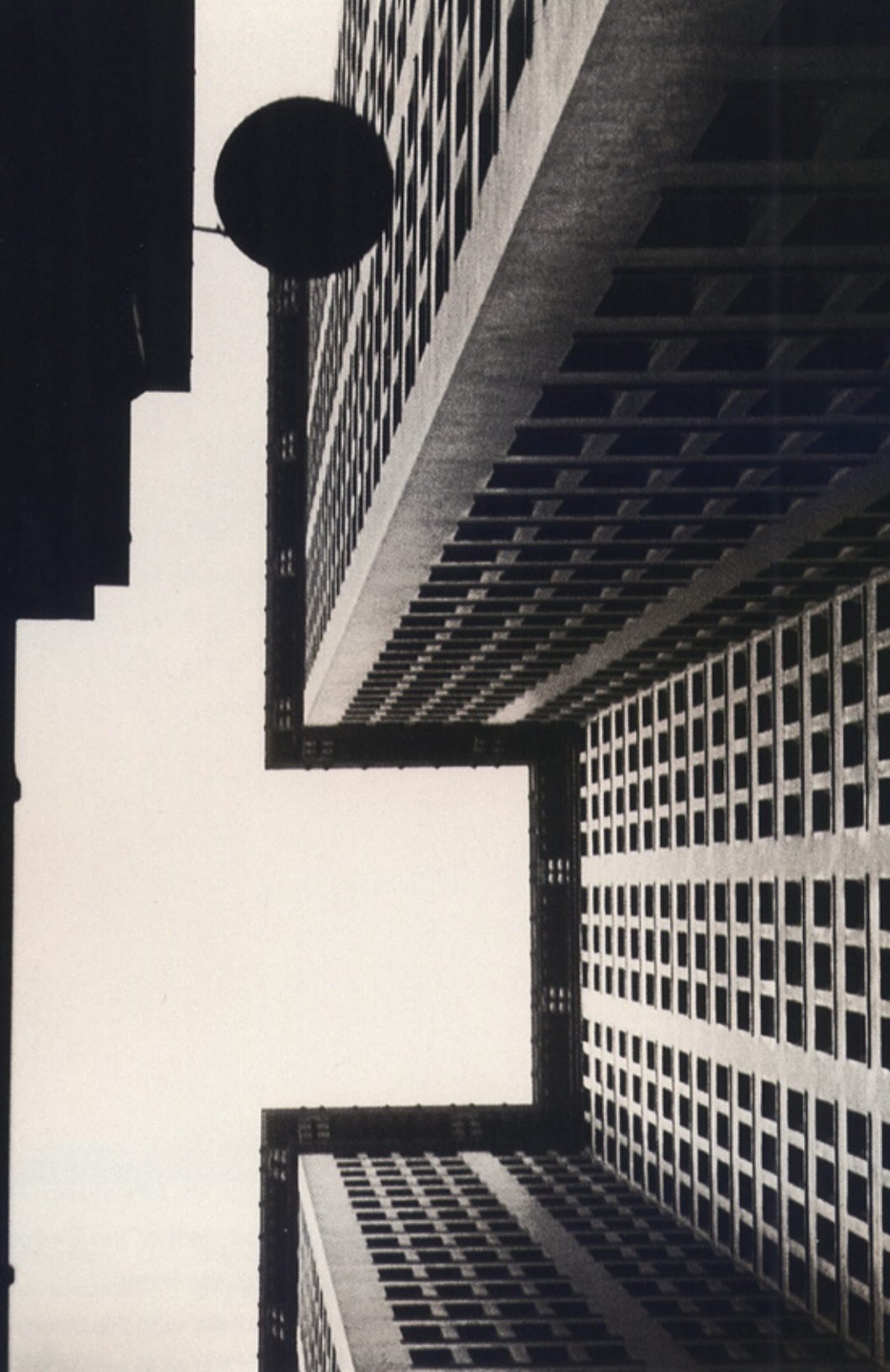
MoCP Museum of
Contemporary
Photography

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

This guide serves as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Beyond the Frame* and can be used for engaging with the exhibition virtually or in person. The guide includes information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, classroom activities, and suggested readings. You may learn more about educational programs at the MoCP [here](#). To schedule a tour of the exhibition or print viewing with your class, please go [here](#). This guide was created with contributions from Hillary Johnson, current Columbia College Chicago graduate student studying photography. Additional contributions come from Columbia students in the Art Discourse and Research course, under the guidance of Amy Mooney, associate professor of art history: James Laverghetta, Erika Martinez, Julianne Montgomery, Rebecka Ohrstromkann, Anna Pontius, Kate Stubbs, Giselle Torres, and Sheridyn Villarreal.

Beaumont Newhall

Chase National Bank, New York (detail), 1981



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The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP) is one of a small group of museums around the world dedicated exclusively to the medium of photography. Anyone who has visited the MoCP since its founding forty-six years ago, however, can attest to the slippery definition of this medium. Rather than focusing on the material attributes of photography, the MoCP strives to cultivate a deep understanding of the image and its influence in our world today. Visitors to the museum can see a range of work, from abstract, camera-less imagery to documentary works marking significant moments in history. One might wander upon looped video installations, works in fashion, three-dimensional sculptures, iconic portraits, or paintings layered with magazine pages. Images are never static, and their malleability is one of the central reasons they intrigue us.

This flexibility of material and conceptual approaches can be traced to the invention of the medium. During the early-to-mid nineteenth century, photography required capturing an image onto glass and various types of metal, a process performed only by those with a solid understanding of the necessary chemical properties. Even then, artists quickly began to experiment by layering images or adding oils to the lens to make their subjects appear optically perplexing or painterly and push the artistic merit of photography. Fast forward 150 years and billions of people hold a smartphone with a powerful digital camera in their pockets. Today anyone can be—and arguably is—a photographer. What was once an art form requiring a unique skillset and certain privileges of access has become integral to our everyday lives, and it is an understatement to say that we are all entrenched in images.

Because of the sheer number of images we encounter daily, it can be difficult to look thoughtfully. Images, unlike words, do not have fixed definitions. Few of us are taught to even consider how to read images, to slow down and notice the details that inform the narrative we see. *Beyond the Frame* is an exhibition that spotlights the MoCP permanent collection as a rich resource for harnessing visual literacy, something at the very core of the museum's values.

Each gallery features works that reflect on a critical topic that appears repeatedly in the history of the medium, including portraiture, landscape, and staged and constructed images. The groupings highlight the many ways that artists can interpret similar themes. Beyond reflecting myriad approaches and unique perspectives, however, the works seen together encourage us to recognize other factors that might influence how we interpret images, such as the context of when an image was made, the viewer's own background and experiences, or how an image is sequenced. Like text or a musical score, pictures take on new meaning depending on their placement. In displaying works by historical and contemporary, local and international artists together, we invite you to sit with the nuances that might shape your narratives. We invite you to look mindfully, and when you re-enter the image-saturated world beyond the museum's walls, to question and ponder the visual depictions you encounter.

There is always more to the story beyond the frame.

Kristin Taylor

Curator of Academic Programs and Collections

INTRODUCTION

This guide provides exercises that can help grow visual literacy skills through closely examining select photographs in the *Beyond the Frame* exhibition. The guide will help you navigate the key themes, highlighting specific works, however, many of the questions provided here can be applied to any photograph.



Guanyu Xu, *Parent's Bedroom*, 2018



Peter Cochrane
For Michael_, 2019



Peter Cochrane
For Michael, 2019

WHAT IS VISUAL LITERACY?

When we are young we are taught to read: to link words together and carefully consider the meanings, nuances, and impact of written language. Similar to words, photographs express human thought and emotion, record significant personal and historic events, and can influence our thoughts and actions.

Our interactions with images help shape our experience of the world. From storytelling to journalism, expressions of selfhood to shedding light on social issues, photographs have infinite capacities to engage, communicate, and convey. Yet the way we see an image reflects our individuality, our personal perceptions and histories. When we slow down and study a work, we can better notice the series of choices artists make in creating photographs, and how these decisions might influence the meanings we attach.



Tabitha Soren, *Katie's Vacation Photo II*,
from the *Surface Tension* series, 2018

WHY IS VISUAL LITERACY IMPORTANT?

When we carefully examine and discuss images, we expand our observation and reflective thinking skills, and can form connections to many aspects of human experiences. This process encourages awareness that an image is the result of a series of choices made by the maker, representing one possible interpretation of a given subject rather than a single “truthful” account. Growing in visual literacy can impact the ways navigate a culture where we are constantly bombarded with visual information.



Hyounsang Yoo

C, LC, VM, VLM, Y, LK, LLK, PK, and MK, 2014

–Key Theme–
DRAWING WITH LIGHT

First coined by scientist John Herschel in 1839, the word *photography* combines two Greek words: *phos* (light) and *graphê* (drawing or writing). Works featured in this section emphasize the intrinsic role light plays in the creation of photographs, and the ways light can be rendered to distort, emphasize, or conceal the subject.

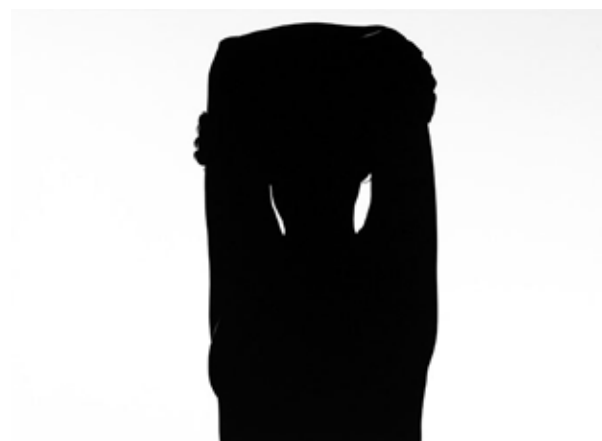
EXERCISE IN CLOSE LOOKING

Standing in the west gallery of the museum's first floor, slowly observe the three images below, while considering the questions listed here:

- What do you see? What do you believe to be true in each image?
- How would you describe the mood of each image?
- What do you observe about the light in each image? How is light being used to reveal the subject differently?
- How does the varying levels of light affect your impressions of the artwork?
- What kinds of feelings or themes do you associate with bright light? Dark lighting?
- What techniques or strategies might the artist have used to create each image?
- Notice how the two photographs titled *Eleanor* show the figure posed in a similar gesture. How does the light vary to reveal the subject differently? Do the images tell the same story?



Clockwise from left to right:
Roy DeCarava, *Man in Window*, 1978
Harry Callahan, *Eleanor*, 1947
Harry Callahan, *Eleanor*, 1948



NOW, SLOWLY REVEAL MORE CONTEXT

Roy DeCarava (American, 1919–2009) is well-known for his experiments with a dark tonal range, which served many conceptual and formal purposes. Formally, the dark prints encourage viewers to slow down and allow their eyes to adjust to—and then to see—the varying shades of black. Conceptually, the color black is a metaphor for the challenges of being seen as a person of color in America, as well as a comment on racism embedded in photographic technology itself.

Sheridyn Villarreal, art history major with a minor in visual arts at Columbia College Chicago observes: *The development of cameras and film from the 1940s until the 1990s was designed solely for white subjects, epitomized by Kodak's ubiquitous Shirley Card, which was used to calibrate color film and featured a white model as the standard for measuring skin tone.*¹ Recognizing this, DeCarava instead emphasized the darkest tones of his photographs, and utilized it to make images both strikingly beautiful and consciously Black. Contrary to the heightened drama that can be evoked by sharp contrast, the artist's use of subtle gradations of tonality imbues the image with a sense of repose and intimacy uncommonly afforded to Black subjects in the visual culture of the time.

1. For more information on Shirley Cards, please visit <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/lens/sarah-lewis-racial-bias-photography.html>

Harry Callahan (American, 1912–1999) experimented with light, shadow, and depth of field to transform his everyday subjects into elegant and minimal forms. Here his wife, Eleanor, poses twice with her arms cradled over her head. One image is cropped just below her neckline, and the other places her body in shadow with just a slight glint of light falling on her chest. These images demonstrate Callahan's ability—through careful cropping, use of perspective, and exposure times—to show a quiet intimacy and sensitivity where Eleanor, though nude, reveals only parts of herself to the camera.



Kodak Shirley Card, 1966; not in *Beyond the Frame*; image courtesy of Hermann Zschiegner

Knowing more information, consider this question:

- How does your understanding of each image change now that you know more context?
- Do you notice any additional details in the images that you may have skipped over the first time looking?

–Key Theme–
**PERCEPTION, ILLUSION,
AND PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH**

The images presented here question the tendencies we might have in trusting images to be factual representations, evidence, or unbiased depictions of places and moments. Each artist in this section plays with perception, allowing viewers to challenge their assumptions about images and asks us to consider the role photographs have in shaping the ways we see the world.

EXERCISE IN CLOSE LOOKING

**Look at this piece by Barbara Probst carefully,
while considering the questions listed below:**

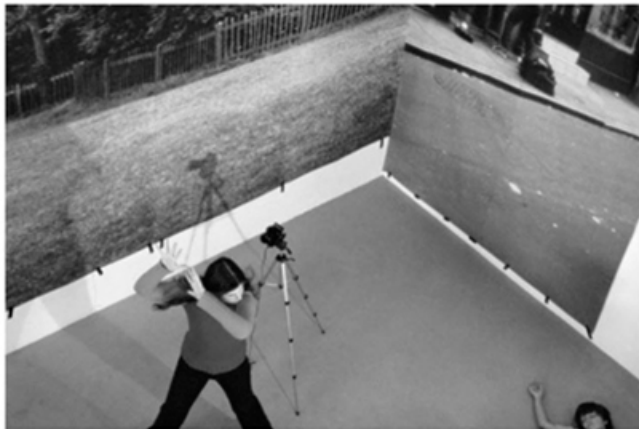


Barbara Probst, *Exposure #36: studio Munich, 09.26.05, 2:34 p.m., 2006*

- What do you think is happening in this series of images?
- What differences do you notice in light and color between the images?
- What associations might you be making between black and white and color images?
- Does each image look like it was made by the same photographer? Why or why not?
- These six photographs are called a polyptych, which means that they are several works that are meant to be viewed together as a whole. How does the divide between images impact your immediate understanding of the artwork?
- What visual strategies is the artist using to move your eye continuously between frames?
- How does the title of this piece, *Exposure #36: studio Munich, 09.26.05, 2:34 p.m.*, shape your idea of the narrative?

NOW, SLOWLY REVEAL MORE CONTEXT

In this series, Barbara Probst is photographing one scene from multiple perspectives at the exact same moment in time. Probst uses radio controls, synchronized cable releases, and photography assistants, many which can be seen in the details of the images. The pictures are intentionally diverse in style, atmosphere, and content, concretely demonstrating that photographs are highly selective interpretations of reality, and suggesting that many perceptions of a single moment exist. Through using black and white portraits, slightly blurry images, and color images, the artist appears to be photographing different scenes, until we recognize similarities in the photographs.



Knowing more information, consider this question:

- Are photographs truthful?
- What details show how the artist is asking us to question the role of time and vantage point in photography?
- How does perspective influence the photographic image?

–Key Theme–
**LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY
AND SOCIAL PRACTICE**

Many photographers create images to advance justice movements or activist causes. This selection of artworks expands on historical depictions of the landscape as pristine and untouched, and instead addresses environmental and social concerns.

EXERCISE IN CLOSE LOOKING

Standing in the small northwest gallery on the museum's first floor, slowly observe Raymond Thompson, Jr.'s photograph, *The Dust–Untitled #3*, and consider these questions:



- What do you believe to be true about this image? What in the image compels you to form this opinion?
- What might be the mood, gender, or age of the person depicted in the photograph?
- What might be the cloud covering the figure? Do you think it is dust, smoke, mist, particulate matter, steam, or something else?
- How does the photograph make you feel? How does the lack of information or connection to the figure's gaze make you feel?
- Do you think this image was documenting a moment in real time, or might the artist have staged this setting?

Raymond Thompson, Jr., *The Dust–Untitled #3*, from the *Appalachian Ghost, The Dust* series, 2018-19

Now take some time and let your eyes wander through LaToya Ruby Frazier's photograph, *Fifth Street Tavern and Braddock Hospital*, 2011.



LaToya Ruby Frazier,
Fifth Street Tavern and
Braddock Hospital, from the
Notion of Family series,
2011

- Objectively describe what you see. Use only nouns. Notice if it feels challenging to avoid adding adjectives and describing the emotional impact of the image on you.
- Next, try describing the formal characteristics of this image, such as lighting, composition, color, and scale.
- Taken together, how would you describe what is going on in the image? What is the story this picture is telling you? What is the overall feeling this photograph stirs in you?
- What is the artist's point of view? What do you think the artist wants to say with this image?
- Through these observations, what conclusions might you draw about the time, place, and environment in which this photograph was made?

NOW, SLOWLY REVEAL MORE CONTEXT

Raymond Thompson, Jr (American, b. 1978) created this series to reveal a hidden history about the construction of a three-mile-long tunnel in Fayetteville, West Virginia, in the 1930s that exposed the nearly 800 workers—the majority of whom were African American—to pure silica dust and eventually led to their deaths. The images were inspired by the poem *George Robinson: Blues* from *The Book of the Dead* by Muriel Rukeyser:

As dark as I am. when I came out at
morning after the tunnel at night
with a white man, nobody could have told
which man was white.
The dust had covered us both, and the
dust was white.

Thompson restages photographs he has found in archives, keeping the identities of his subjects intentionally obscured to highlight the workers who died without recognition. The resulting images convey the dark history of toxic mining practices and issues of environmental racism at large.

LaToya Ruby Frazier (American, b. 1982) also made work about the effects of industry on the health and wellbeing of residents and workers. From 2001 to 2014, Frazier extensively documented the economic and social struggles in her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania. Using her family members and hometown as subjects, Frazier's images portray the extensive industrial pollution and terminal illnesses caused by the presence of steel mills, and the economic catastrophe caused by their closures.

Knowing more information, consider this question:

- Although both artists have similarities in subject matter, how do their differing approaches impact the way you comprehend these histories?
- Raymond Thompson, Jr. chooses to make a mysterious and dramatic image from up close, in color, excluding any sense of horizon, while LaToya Ruby Frazier made her image from a significant distance, in black and white, clearly showing the horizon and a more expanded sense of place. How do these particular approaches each work effectively to communicate with the audience and impact our understanding of the context?

IN-GALLERY ACTIVITY



Place people into pairs. Blindfold one person and have the other lead them to a photograph in the exhibition. One person will describe a photograph in the exhibition to the person wearing the blindfold. They should start with where their eye goes first in the image, describing the details, and continue with where their eye goes next, until they have described every component of the image.

- After taking off the blindfold, how did the image compare in appearance to what they imagined based off the verbal description alone? How did it feel to experience an artwork without vision?
- What challenges did the speaker experience in using words alone to describe the picture? Did new details emerge in the image while attempting to find adequate words to describe it?

Repeat this exercise, switching places with the partner.

–Key Theme–
**PORTRAITURE AND
THE HUMAN SUBJECT**

Many artists working in portraiture attempt to convey the essence and depth of individuals, or to preserve lives into timeless visual records. Yet, artists working in this genre must also engage in a dance with the camera, which is both a tool and an obstacle between themselves and the person on the other side of the lens. Whether they show family members, self-portraits, or carefully staged studio portraits of others, these works convey a heightened sense of intimacy. Each photograph, in varying ways, prompts consideration of relationships and power dynamics between the photographer and the life photographed, and often the complicated and sublime outcomes of this interaction.



Deanna Lawson
Cascade, 2019

EXERCISE IN CLOSE LOOKING

Standing in the east gallery on the museum's first floor, slowly observe *Stranger (5)*, 1998 by Shizuka Yokomizo and *A Member of Garvey's African Legion with his Family*, 1924 by James Van der Zee.



Left to right:
Shizuka Yokomizo, *Stranger (5)*, 1998; James Van der Zee, *A Member of Garvey's African Legion with his Family*, 1924

Consider these questions as you look:

- What do you assume to know about the people in the images, based on their facial expressions, surroundings, and body language?
- What role does the gaze have in each photograph?
- Where do you think each photograph was made?
- What do you notice about the choices of color of the images? How does the color palette make you feel?
- How do you describe the mood of the people? What about the mood of the overall images?
- How do the two images compare and contrast?
- Can you make any assumptions about the relationship between the photographer and those in the photograph? What details in the images makes you think this?

NOW, SLOWLY REVEAL MORE CONTEXT

To create her *Stranger* series, Shizuka Yokomizo (Japanese, b. 1966) left the following letter in people's mailboxes:

Dear Stranger,

I am an artist currently working on a photographic project which involves people I do not know. I would be delighted if you could get involved in this project. The project may be exhibited in some exhibitions next year.

I would like to take a photograph of you standing in your front room from the street in the evening.

A camera will be set outside the window on the street. If you do not mind being photographed, please stand in the room and look into the camera through the window for 10 minutes on __/__/__ pm .

I will have come before __/__/__ pm and set up my camera. I will take your picture for 10 minutes and then leave.

* Instructions *

It has to be only you, one person in the room alone. Please turn all the lights on and stand at least 1~1.5m away from the window. If you are too close to the window, you will become just a shadow in the picture.

I would like you to wear something you always wear at home. Please do keep reasonably still and calmly look into the camera. 10 minutes is a very long time to keep still. Please try it as much as possible but you can relax from time to time. If you do not want to get involved, please simply draw the curtains to show your refusal.

I will NOT knock on your door to meet you. We will remain strangers to each other. However, I will send you a small print later on with my name, address and telephone number. If you do not want your photograph to be exhibited, you can then let me know.

I really hope to see you from the window.

Faithfully,

Artist

Shizuka Yokomizo's resulting photograph is a record of an encounter, centering on a brief collaboration between observer and observed. Because the hour selected to make the photograph is during the night, the person photographed can only discern Yokomizo as a dark silhouette. Although the disconnect between artist and subject strips away certain levels of intimacy, Yokomizo still gains a certain level of trust from the strangers. Her work prompts us to question power dynamics present between photographer and photographed, as well as what we expect from viewing images of others.

**Knowing more information,
consider this question:**

- How do the two pieces by Yokomizo and Van der Zee address the role of the author or artist?
- Each image addresses agency in photographic portraits in a different way. To you, how important is it that artists consider agency when photographing people?
- Yokomizo made this series from 1998 until 2000. How might the series feel differently now with image sharing software and social media? Do you think people would be more or less willing to participate?

James Van Der Zee (American, 1886-1983) photographed Black civic groups, entertainers, and artists in his Guarantee Photo Studio in Harlem in the early 20th century, illustrating Harlem's cultural vitality and growing prosperity in the 1920s and 1930s. Somewhat like Yokomizo, but in an entirely different way, Van Der Zee approached portraiture more as an art form than a straightforward visual record. He often introduced theatrical aspects and having people pose with elaborate props and backgrounds reminiscent of 19th-century photographs. These props reflected everything from fashion trends to religious and political affiliations. As the official photographer for the political activist and orator Marcus Garvey, Van Der Zee captured numerous Universal Negro Improvement Association members posing in their uniforms, as seen in this image.

The medium of portraiture continues the lifeline of those that came before, memorializing ancestors for future generations. Rather than being photographed by an outsider, Van der Zee's subjects held agency, choosing to be photographed on their own terms. Collectively, Van der Zee helped create a photographic record of the Black middle class while celebrating the Harlem Renaissance movement.

—Kate Stubbs, double major in art history and visual arts management, Columbia College Chicago

–Key Theme–

CONSTRUCTED AND STAGED IMAGERY

Artists featured in this gallery do not use their cameras to pause moments in time or record “real” events. Instead, they create entirely new imagery, either by building three-dimensional forms to translate into photographs, or by layering, altering, or stitching together many photographs into new forms with digital and analog technologies. In each artwork, the artist’s process serves both conceptual and material purposes. Their methods call attention to the medium’s unreliable and ephemeral character—and nudge the viewer to question the veracity of photographic images at large.

Finally, move up to the museum’s third level and observe *Making of Tiananmen* (by Stuart Franklin, 1989), 2013, by artist duo Cortis and Sonderegger (Swiss, b. 1979 and b. 1980 respectively).



Cortis and Sonderegger,
Making of Tiananmen (by Stuart
Franklin, 1989), 2013, from the
Iconen series

Consider the following questions as you look:

- What do you see in this image? Pay close attention to all of the details.
- What do you notice about the sense of scale?
- How do the various visual components of the image go together, or not go together?
- Is there anything familiar about this image? Have you seen it before?
If so, in what context do you think you have seen it?
- What do you notice about the artists’ choices in lighting, color, and composition?
Why might they choose to set the borders of the image in this way?
- What are three adjectives you would use to describe this image?

NOW, SLOWLY REVEAL MORE CONTEXT

Working in their studio, artist duo **Cortis and Sonderegger** (Jojakim Cortis, Swiss, b. 1979, and Adrian Sonderegger; Swiss, b. 1980) create painstakingly accurate miniature versions of some of the most widely published and iconic photographs in the world. Using regular household materials—such as cotton swabs, toothpicks, and paper scraps—they often take several weeks to craft and compose their sets, even replicating the lighting and vantage points. Yet they intentionally give away the staging of the photographs by including views of their studio tools, lamps, and props in the frame.

This image re-creates a famous image taken by the photojournalist Stuart Franklin of a protester during demonstrations in a public plaza in Beijing in 1989 in which the Chinese government opened fire on thousands of student protestors who were calling for free speech and democracy. This image of one person attempting to block a row of tanks from moving through the crowd became an iconic representation of the moment, but is heavily censored in China to this day.



Stuart Franklin/Magnum Photos, *The 'Tank Man' stopping the column of T59 tanks on 5th June 1989*. Photograph © Stuart Franklin/Magnum Photos. This image is for reference only, it is not in the exhibition *Beyond the Frame*.

Knowing more information, consider this question:

- Considering the original source photograph, do you notice a difference in how you view photographs in a museum versus in the news or in popular culture?
- Revisit the question posed earlier in this guide in reference to Barbara Probst's work. Are photographs truthful? After looking at more works in this exhibition, do you define photographic truth in the same way?

AT-HOME OR CLASSROOM VISUAL LITERACY EXERCISE:

Choose two images of the same person or place by different photographers that you can find in the news, on social media, in an advertisement, or in a magazine.



President Abraham Lincoln meets with Union army General George McClellan at his headquarters on the battlefield of Antietam in Maryland, October 1862.

This image is for reference only, it is not in the exhibition *Beyond the Frame*.

Image credit: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Abraham Lincoln, seated and holding a book, with his son Thomas (Tad) leaning on a table, 1865.

This image is for reference only, it is not in the exhibition *Beyond the Frame*.

Image credit: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009630691/>

As you look at the images for the first time, write down answers to the following questions:

- What do you see in the photographs?
- How do they make you feel?
- What are the photographers trying to communicate? Although the subject matter is the same, are they communicating the same message?
- What initial assumptions come to mind for you right away? What might be the roots of your assumptions? Are they things you may have heard, been told, seen or read somewhere?
- Considering how slowing down with images can expand our interpretations, what strategies might you use to be mindful of other assumptions in your daily life, such as while meeting new people, going to new places, etc.?

Extended Resources

VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES

Visual Thinking Strategies is a research-based education nonprofit that believes thoughtful, facilitated discussion of art activates transformational learning accessible to all. <https://vtshome.org/>

VISUAL LITERACY TODAY: TEACHING RESOURCES

Visual Literacy Today is an ongoing conversation about visual literacy, a field of study and practice that explores how we see and interpret images, how we use visuals to convey meaning and what it means to be literate in a digital age. <https://visualliteracytoday.org/teaching-resources/>

Illinois Learning Standards Addressed in this Guide

VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

VA:Re7.2.K–12 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K–12 Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K–12 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria.

VA:Cn11.K–12 Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

MEDIA ARTS STANDARDS

MA:Re7.1.PK–12 Anchor Standard 7 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Media artworks can be appreciated and interpreted through analyzing their components.

MA:Re8.1.PK–12 Anchor Standard 8 Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. Interpretation and appreciation require engagement with the content, form, and context of media artworks.

MA:Re9.1.PK–12 Anchor Standard 9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Skillful evaluation and critique are critical components of experiencing, appreciating, and producing media artworks.

SOCIAL SCIENCES STANDARDS

SS.H.8.9-12 Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically under- represented groups.

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