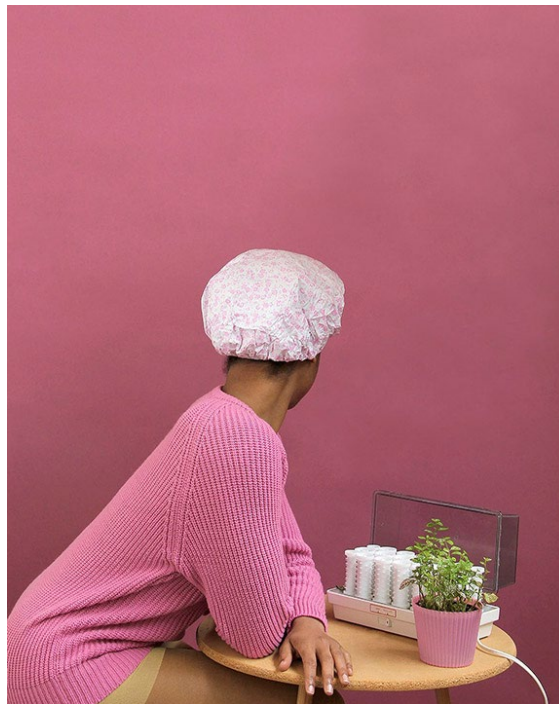


Portraiture and the Human Subject Print Viewing

This print viewing introduces students to a range of photographs with a focus on portraiture where visual information such as setting, clothing, body language, and facial expression speak to the identity of the subject. Choices made by the photographer such as use of vantage point, lighting, framing, timing and composition also impact the viewer's perception of the subject.



Self Portrait in Shower Cap, 2015

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techniques used to reproduce photographs. Through this endeavor, he became the first to outline a standardized mode of publishing art photographs and exhibiting them in a gallery setting. To see more images in the MoCP collection from Camera Work, please visit this [page](#).

Edward S. Curtis (United States, 1868-1952)



The Yuma, 1907

Edward Sheriff Curtis grew up in Cordova, Minnesota before moving to the Washington territory in 1887. In 1891 he bought into a photographic studio in Seattle, and by the turn of the century began to photograph Native American ceremonies and people. Curtis began his decades-long project *The North American Indian* in 1906. Funded by industrialist J. P. Morgan, the goal of the project was to create a document Indigenous life as customs and traditions were vanishing due to Western expansion and forced assimilation measures by European colonists. Yet, Curtis' vision was to portray the historic Native American rather than the people he actually encountered, and in so doing he downplayed or even ignored the contemporary elements already incorporated into their lives. Stylistic influence is notable in these pictures. The dark void that surrounds the face in *The Yuma* recalls the mid-nineteenth century Japanese woodblock prints so admired and emulated by twentieth century Pictorialists, demonstrating Curtis's penchant for injecting the photographs with his own notions of their past. The series was published as a set of books, concluding in 1930 with the twentieth and final volume. Each volume in the series has photogravures interleaved with the text and is accompanied by a folio of approximately thirty larger prints. The photogravures represented in the Museum of Contemporary Photography's collection are of the latter group.

Questions for looking:

- How would you describe this photograph to someone who could not see it? What details are the most significant? How would you describe the mood of the image? How would you describe the material qualities of the photograph?
- What can you assume about the subject of this photograph? What in the image makes you think that?
- Do you think it is important to look at work from the past that we may find problematic today? Why or why not?

James Van der Zee (American, 1886-1983)



A Member of Garvey's African Legion w/ His Family, 1924

In 1916, James Van Der Zee established the Guarantee Photo Studio in Harlem, New York. The studio brought him immediate commercial success as a portrait photographer, and over the next two decades he photographed numerous members of the community during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Van Der Zee portrayed his subjects as they chose to be represented and remembered through photography, often working with them to select clothing, objects, props, and elaborate backgrounds that reflect other things fashion trends, religious and political affiliations, and social standing. In addition to capturing individuals and families, he also photographed weddings, funerals, clubs, school groups, and celebrities. As the official photographer for Black activist Marcus Garvey, Van Der Zee captured numerous Universal Negro Improvement Association members posing in their military-like garb. His work prominently shows the emergence of a Black middle class in the early 20th century.

Questions for Looking:

- After closely looking at this image, what details stand out to you that speak to the time and place that the image was made?
- Think about the ease of taking portraits and self-portraits with new technologies today. What power does a portrait have in representing larger aspects of a society? What value do portraits add to society?

Deeper Reading: The Harlem Renaissance

Taking place in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City largely in the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was an artistic, intellectual, and social movement that produced some of the most prolific writers, musicians, and artists of the 20th century. Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Josephine Baker, and James Van Der Zee—among countless others—were all part of the Harlem Renaissance community, which still influences cultural producers today.

Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk, b.1964)



Mary Funmaker, from the Strong Unrelenting Spirits series

Tom Jones is an interdisciplinary artist who makes work about family traditions, communities, and histories. Jones is particularly interested in how Indigenous people have been portrayed in the past and works to counter ethnographic portraits taken by white photographers that represent native histories. In this series, Jones applies beading designs that are traditionally applied on clothing to his portraits of people in his tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin. The white beadwork that surrounds the subject represents their belief that one's ancestors follow and guide the living. As the title suggests, the work is not only about visualizing unseen spiritual guidance, but also about larger issues of visibility. The artist states: "I am interested in broadening the conversation of portraiture in mainstream art and to present a nation that is generally unseen in popular culture."

Questions for looking:

- How might you describe the differences in visual strategies between this photograph and the Edward Curtis photograph *The Yuma*? What are the implications of those differences for you?
- In earlier work we considered matters of power dynamics between photographer and portrait subjects, in part based on whether the photographer was an insider or outsider to the community in which they were working. What do you feel about that relationship in this photograph and what makes you say so?

Dawoud Bey (American, b. 1953)



Don Sledge and Moses Austin, from "The Birmingham Project," 2012

Dawoud Bey is interested in the portrait as a site of psychological and emotional engagement between the photographer and his model. In *The Birmingham Project*, Bey responds to tragic events in the history of Birmingham, Alabama. On September 15th, 1963 the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four African American girls. The same day, two African American boys were subsequently killed in an act of racial violence. In 2012, Dawoud Bey was commissioned by the Birmingham Museum of Art to create portraits in memory of the tragic and seminal day that became a pivotal point in Civil Rights history, nearing its 50th anniversary. Each diptych features a portrait of a child at the exact age of one killed in 1963 paired with a portrait of an adult at the age the child would be in the year 2013. Bey photographed in two significant places: Bethel Baptist Church, which served as the headquarters for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (1956-1961), and the Birmingham Museum of Art, where African Americans in the 1960s were only allowed to visit on one day per week, designated "Negro Day." The images call attention to the injustices of the past while also evoking the lives of the victims could have developed.

Questions for Looking:

- Without knowing anything about these two individuals, how do you think they relate to one another? Why do you think Bey choose to photograph them? Explain.
- Consider the body language and gaze of each figure. How does body language add to the narrative of these images?
- What value do images have in understanding historical events?
- Dawoud Bey was inspired by the work of James Van der Zee when he saw the 1969 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Harlem on My Mind*. Can you see any formal relations between the two artists, such as choices in posing, depth of field, lighting, etc.?

Jess T. Dugan (United States, b. 1986)



Jeans, 2014

Jess T. Dugan works within the bounds of portraiture, creating images of individuals, couples and themselves to address themes of identity, gender, intimacy, and community. In their series *Every breath we drew* (2011-present), Dugan carefully constructs images that address aspects of the complex processes through which individuals form and project identity. Interested in the fluidity of gender identity and varying incarnations of masculinity, Dugan's portraits become explorations into how we determine who we are and then represent that outwardly, through dress, body and posturing. Dugan creates intimate portraits of their sitters, often photographing them in their bedrooms and focusing on the private self. Yet the images of couples and their relationships speak to larger expressions of intimacy and desire. Using a large or medium format camera, Dugan's images are rich in detail, exposing a level of vulnerability between photographer and sitter. This translates to the viewer, who views the images from Dugan's vantage point.

Questions for Looking:

- What do you see in this image? What do you think the photograph is about?
- What does Dugan's use of lighting and framing seem to convey in this image?
- Would you describe this photograph as a portrait? What does the image say about the trace of existence of the people connected to those pants in this domestic space?

Aaron Turner (United States, b. 1990)



Untitled, from "Seen, of light and legacy" 2022



Untitled, from "Seen, of light and legacy" 2022

Aaron Turner presents multiple prints of US abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass (United States, 1818–1895), who was the most photographed person of the nineteenth century. Douglass understood the power of photography to shape stories and sat for 160 portraits during his lifetime. Turner's series features mediums from across the history of photography, ranging from a cyanotype to a daguerreotype.

Questions for Looking:

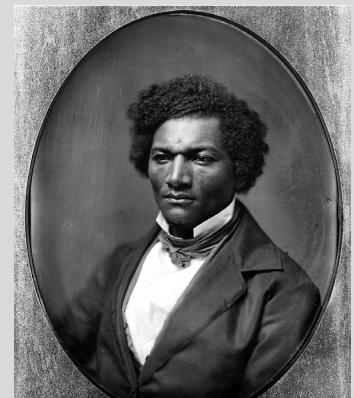
- Frederick Douglass could be considered the first person to promote the selfie. Why is self-representation important? What can we learn through looking at images of other people?
- Frederick Douglass noticed that the new medium of photography made it possible for people of all class backgrounds to "possess more perfect likenesses" of themselves. Do you think Douglass's vision for photography and representation was realized?

Deeper Reading: The Selfie



People have been creating images of their own likeness throughout human history. The stencils of hands, seen on left, were found in caves in Indonesia and believed to have been created approximately 40,000 years ago. In photography, Frederick Douglass noticed in 1861, shortly after the invention of the medium in 1839, that the new medium of photography made it possible to destroy stereotypes and empower through self-representation. Douglass sat for 160 portraits in his lifetime and can be considered the inventor of the selfie.

Consider these early markings and early selfies with the ways we document and share our lives now with technology and social media. Why are human beings compelled to trace their existences? What will the selfie look like in the future?



Photographer unknown, Frederick Douglass, c. 1848
Not in the MoCP collection or exhibition;
Collection of the Onondaga Historical Association.

Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke Crow, b. 1981)



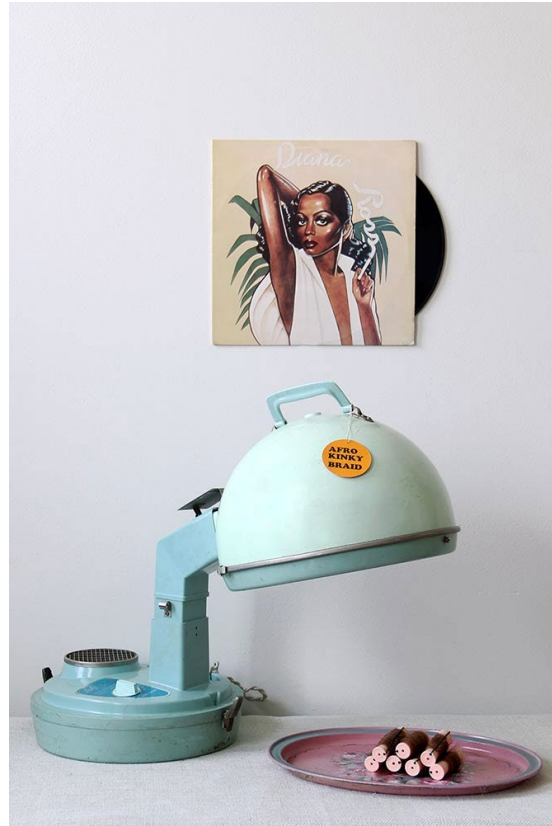
Her Dreams Are True (Julia Bad Boy),

Wendy Red Star works across multiple mediums, using photography, sculpture, video, fiber arts, and performance to explore Indigenous ideologies and to highlight how Native traditions and histories intersect with structures of colonialism. Raised in an artistically and culturally rich household on an Apsáalooke (Crow) reservation in Montana, Red Star examines her intergenerational heritage through extensive research into historical archives. The resulting images combine traditional Native American symbols and rituals with stereotypical elements, expressing multiple perspectives in a way that is enticing yet unsettling. The photograph that is featured in this piece was found in the archives of the National Museum of the American Indian of Red Star's great-great-grandmother, whose English name was Julia Bad Boy. The image is repeated and layered over a vivid star quilt pattern. Quilts, including those with this commonly used design, are considered sacred items that are shared and given away during ceremonial rites. However, quilting was brought to America with the colonialists and was taught to Native Americans by missionaries in the nineteenth century, as the blankets became replacements for traditional buffalo robes as the bison population diminished. Through the combination of Julia Bad Boy's portrait and traditional quilting patterns, Red Star expresses the complexity of Native cultural heritage and identity in the United States.

Question for Looking:

- The artist used a process called *chine collé*, which is a printmaking technique that involves transferring an image from a lithographic plate onto a delicate paper surface. Visually notice the texture of Red Star's mulberry paper. What is the artist trying to communicate by using this process with a photograph of her grandmother?

Nakeya Brown (United States, b. 1988)



Left to right: *Self Portrait in Shower Cap*, 2015, *Lovin', Livin', & Givin'*, 2014

In her *If Nostalgia Were Colored Brown* series (2013), Nakeya Brown considers the role that hair plays in relation to societal expectations of race and gender. Her still life pictures portray beauty products—such as curlers, domed hair dryers, headwraps, and relaxing creams—alongside vintage album covers and against candy-colored pastel backdrops. The images contemplate the political implications of natural hair while calling into question the dominant white standards of beauty in defining contemporary femininity.

Question for Looking:

- Does a portrait need a human subject in it?
- How important is the use of color in these images? How do they reinforce a theme that the artist is trying to convey
- In a studio setting you have complete control of your scene. How does Brown utilize these culturally specific items to talk about larger issues of race and gender?

Lisa Lindvay (United States, b. 1983)



My Dad Standing in the Flowerpot, 2009



Nick in his Old Room, 2007

Lisa Lindvay's ongoing series offers a highly personal look into the daily lives of her family members as they grapple with the effects of her mother's mental illness. Though we never actually see Lindvay's mother, her influence is felt by her family and the spaces they inhabit. Photographed over the past five years, the disheveled appearances of her father, sister, and two brothers is mirrored in the unkempt and chaotic appearance of their home. These scenes—including a bathroom sink that serves as an ashtray for a growing pile of cigarettes (Bathroom Sink, 2012); empty 2-liter soda bottles bursting out from underneath a bare bed bunk frame (Nick in His Old Room, 2007); and her father and two brothers looking despairingly at their fast-food meal of fries and hamburgers (Dinner, 2009) – show a literal deterioration of their home life while also serving as a metaphor for her mother's declining health.

Question for Looking:

- How able Lindvay to show but not tell the influence that plagues her family?
- How does the use of environment in these images help convey this larger understanding of homelife and the effects that mental illness can take hold of the self or the people around you?
- How do these images challenge our preconceived notions of class and mental health?

Priya Kampli (India, b.1975)



Eye (Muma and Maushi) from the Buttons for Eyes series, 2019

Born in India, Priya Kampli moved to the United States in 1993, at the age of eighteen a few years after the death of her parents, to pursue her education. For Kampli, photography is a means to bridge the gap between two cultures, coming to terms with the effects of displacement, and to illuminate connections between the past and the present. Kampli creates compositions that juxtapose older family pictures with artifacts she brought from home, along with her own recent photographs, using arrangements of multiple images to bring out visual and poetic correlations. In many of her compositions Kampli creates patterns within flour overlaid on top of archival images, recalling Indian saris and creating a visual bridge between now and then, here and there.

Question for Looking:

- How does the use of archival imagery allow for artists to tell their narratives?
- How does Kampli's use of technique and materials help affirm connections of past and present?
- In Kampli's work she uses artifacts brought from home and her own photographs. Does the use of specific objects hold a greater meaning to the photograph? What type of significance do these objects hold for the photograph?

Glossary of Terms

Framing or Composition: How one composes an image in the camera's viewfinder. Framing can also refer to how an image is finished for final presentation.

Point of View (or Vantage Point): Where a photographer stands in relation to the subject he or she is photographing. It can also refer to the photographer's view or opinion of that subject.

Scale: The relative size of an element within a composition. Scale can also refer to the size of the finished work.

Handheld amateur: A photographic or film camera designed to make tripod use optional, in that the operator may hold the device in their hands.

Pictorialism: An art style popular in the late 19th and early 20th century in which the artist embellishes photographs in the darkroom or more currently, digital processes, in the interest of foregrounding the emotional intent of the work ahead of its technical aspects.

Tonalist Painters: Artists working after the American Tonal style of the 1880s, whose practitioners applied an overall tone or mist to their landscapes in the interest of expressing and emphasizing a mood.

Photo-secessionists: A photographic movement begun in 1902 and led by Alfred Stieglitz and F. Holland Day. The Photo-Secession helped promote the acceptance of photography as an artform.