

# The Big Picture: Photography's Moment

November 19, 2022 – March 5, 2023

## A Guide to Looking

This guide offers a selection of works from the exhibition.

Look at the included artwork and then use the text to help build a deeper understanding of the artists, their process, and their works.



# Introduction to the Exhibition

Photography's ascent in the art world is an international phenomenon. *The Big Picture: Photography's Moment* spans the historical roots of the medium from small black and white works of Ansel Adams to large-format color works of such contemporary masters as Lalla Essaydi, Thomas Struth, and James Casebere, and tells the story of photography over 100 years. From the documentary to the painterly, images contained in this exhibition bear witness to the times and multiple genres through portraiture, landscape, science and photojournalism.

“Photography is a system of visual editing. At bottom, it is a matter of surrounding with a frame a portion of one's cone of vision, while standing in the right place at the right time. Like chess, or writing, it is a matter of choosing from among given possibilities, but in the case of photography the number of possibilities is not finite but infinite.”

– John Szarkowski (Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art)

Since 1839, photographs have documented this infinite number of possibilities, recording historical events, scientific discoveries, our changing environment, and personal visual expression. A photograph can be simply defined as an image created on a light sensitive surface, light being essential to make a photographic image. The word photograph comes from the Greek word photo for light, and graph, meaning to draw or write. Photography is an inherently democratic medium, providing an easy and inexpensive way for people of all ages and backgrounds to record the world.

Before photography, there was no easy way to make pictures of the visible world. Drawing and painting took skill, time, and money. In the 19th century, the invention of photography changed the way people viewed and interacted with the world, just as the invention of the computer changed our interaction with the world in the 20th century. In 1839, when the process for making photographs was invented, no one could have foreseen the impact this process would have. Photography offered a quick and inexpensive way to make pictures and altered the way we communicate information and remember people, places, and events. It also changed the way we communicate information and offered a new way to express ideas. The digital era has ushered in yet another stage in the evolution of photographic techniques, with the most faraway cultures and places just a click away, and helped us better understand the world we live in.

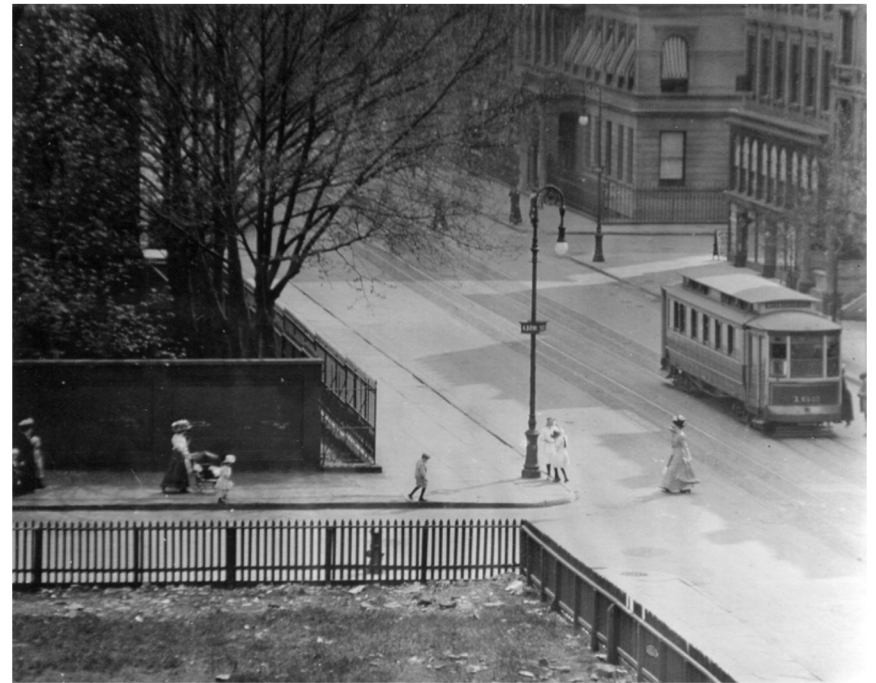
## Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946)

*Sunday Afternoon – From My Window, 1111 Madison Avenue, Looking South, 1901, ca. 1920s–1930s, Gelatin silver print mounted to board, 3 ½ x 4 ½ inches, Courtesy of Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York*

### Inspiration

Alfred Stieglitz was an American photographer and modern art promoter who was instrumental in making photography an accepted art form. Stieglitz tirelessly championed photography as a fine art in both his own work and in the work of numerous European artists including Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Auguste Rodin—and in his support of emerging

contemporary American artists such as Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Georgia O’Keeffe. His photography was in the style of *Pictorialism*, an art movement started in the 1850s, which took the medium of photography and reinvented it as an art form, placing beauty, tonality, and composition above creating an accurate visual record.



### In the Artist's Words

"I have a vision of life, and I try to find equivalents for it in the form of photographs."

### Take a Closer Look

This image combines aspects of both these methods of photography. Moving beyond a strictly reality-based depiction of a city street scene observed from his apartment on Madison Avenue, Stieglitz creates a quiet intimate aerial view of a city street with its static grid-like structure defined by the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines of the built environment. This ordered composition conveys stability and permanence while the implied movement of a streetcar and pedestrians traversing the urban landscape, create a quiet hushed moment of quotidian harmony.

### Something to Talk About

To be human is to face challenges... Think about a time when you needed to step back from a situation to see things more clearly and to gain a different perspective.

## Lalla Essaydi (b. 1956)

*Harem #10*, 2009, Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum and coated in laminate, 48 x 60 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York

### Inspiration

Lalla Essaydi is a contemporary photographer from Morocco. Her work is semi-autobiographical, reflecting the confines of her strict upbringing. As a young girl, Essaydi was forced into seclusion for an entire month inside one of her family's unoccupied homes as punishment for "stepping outside the permissible space." Her series *Harem*, to which this image belongs, addresses those childhood feelings of confinement.



### In the Artist's Words

"In my art, I wish to present myself through multiple lenses—as artist, as Moroccan, as traditionalist, as Liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite viewers to resist stereotypes."

### Take a Closer Look

This work explores the ways in which beauty standards are inscribed into the very essence of women, permeating their entire sense of self. Here, the subject quite literally blends into her surroundings, her existence shielded and subsumed by the patterns of her daily life. But there's also something rebellious about her subjects, as they engage directly with the viewer in an unwavering stare. Moreover, the writing on the skin of her subjects is symbolic of the way in which women persevere, in spite of societal restrictions, to find their voice and speak truth to power. Using a syringe, Essaydi creates all of the henna designs by hand, a painstaking process that can take up to nine hours to complete. As she writes, she converses with her subjects, incorporating personal stories and biographies into the text, while purposefully obscuring the meaning in the final image to maintain the model's privacy.

### Something to Talk About

What patterns make up your life (the routines of your day, the people you interact with, how you move about your world)? Are these patterns comforting or restricting? If you could, would you change them?

## Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962)

*Untitled, Summer of 2003 (Clover Street)*, from the *Beneath the Roses* series, 2003, Digital C-print, ed. 3 of 6, 64 ¼ x 94 ¼ inches, Courtesy of Jonathan R. Serko

### Inspiration

*Untitled, Summer of 2003 (Clover Street)* is a mysterious scene in which Crewdson casts the everyday world of American suburbia as something both ordinary and unsettling. The artist attributes the sense of mystery that permeates much of his work to his upbringing in Park Slope when his psychoanalyst father's office was in the basement of the family's brownstone. Crewdson recounts that sometimes he'd lie on the wide planks of the living-room floor and wonder about conversations below. "I always tried to imagine what I heard and make pictures out of it in my mind." Finding inspiration from the past to the present, Crewdson looks to artists with a similar approach to framing a story, such as Bruce Cheever, Edward Hopper, and Norman Rockwell. Crewdson's cinematic approach to image making can be attributed to his close relationships with many filmmakers including Noah Baumbach and Wes Anderson.



### In the Artist's Words

"My pictures must first be beautiful, but that beauty is not enough. I strive to convey an underlying edge of anxiety, of isolation, of fear."

### Take a Closer Look

Gregory Crewdson creates large-scale, elaborately constructed photographs by combining techniques of traditional photography, film production, and digital editing. Crewdson works with upwards of 100 cast and crew members and shoots each photograph on a set or on location in often desolate streets and homes, much like that of a major motion picture. Post production, Crewdson and his editors enhance colors, remove shadows, and combine elements from different photographs to create the desired effect. The large, immersive scale of *Untitled, Summer of 2003 (Clover Street)* invites us to step into Crewdson's constructed world, challenging the viewer to "decode" the setting, the relationships between the characters who inhabit his constructed worlds, and the larger story behind his photographs.

### Something to Talk About

Crewdson insists that his work must first be beautiful. Does this work conjure beauty for you? Does art have to be pleasing to the eye to be beautiful?

# Gallery Three

## Sarah Charlesworth (1947–2013)

*Levitating Woman*, 1992–93, Cibachrome print with lacquered wood frame, edition of 6 + 2 APs, 43 ½ x 53 ¼ x 1 ⅛ inches, Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, © The Estate of Sarah Charlesworth

### Inspiration

Sarah Charlesworth was a conceptual artist who was an integral part of what some scholars term “The Pictures Generation,” a consortium of photographers working in New York City, who all participated in the now famous *Pictures* exhibition of 1977. The group was interested in how images shape our perception and complicate the ways in which we exist in the world, rather than existing only to document reality.

### In the Artist's Words

“I’ve been trying to disrupt the neat distinction between order and chaos, conscious and unconscious, found and made.”

### Take a Closer Look

*Levitating Woman* is part of a series of photographs called *Natural Magic* where the artist explores the iconography of the occult and the concept of visual veracity—the idea that we must, in viewing both art and magic tricks, suspend our disbelief. The real magic here is in the lack of digital manipulation. Charlesworth created all of the images in this series using tried and true photographic methods, constructed in a studio setting. For this photo, the artist learned how to perform the classic levitation trick of stage magicians, photographing the moment without the presence of the magician herself. The dark background evokes the darkness of the subconscious, dreams, and nighttime, while the white gloves and shoes render the subject with an ethereal glow. The shape of the photo itself is reminiscent of tiny cameos and gems, with the lacquered wooden frame serving as its beveled edge.

### Something to Talk About

Sarah Charlesworth's photography often has a dreamlike quality, blurring the line between "conscious and unconscious." Have you ever experienced this feeling in your own life, where a moment or event felt surreal or dreamlike? What about that moment felt unreal to you?



## Man Ray (1890-1976)

*Noire et Blanche (Black and White)*, 1926, Posthumous print from the original internegative, 9 x 11 inches, Courtesy of the Man Ray Trust, New York

### Inspiration

As Man Ray scholar Wendy A. Grossman has illustrated, "no one was more influential in translating the vogue for African art into a Modernist photographic aesthetic than Man Ray." The appropriation of culturally significant artifacts from Western Africa (specifically, the countries of Gambia and Benin) speaks to the legacy of colonialism in so-called "Western" art. Objects with deep meaning and function within communities were removed and re-contextualized within the confines of western aesthetics, essentially stripping these figures of their meaning. Artists like Man Ray (and Picasso before him) were interested in the formal qualities and perceived exoticism of masks and figures from Africa, though they were seemingly less aware of how these objects functioned in their original settings. That said, these photographs and others like it offer viewers an opportunity to discuss the ways in which artists find inspiration and influence from a myriad of sources, and how popular opinion can shift over time.



### In the Artist's Words

"A camera alone does not make a picture. To make a picture you need a camera, a photographer and above all a subject. It is the subject that determines the interest of the photograph."

### Take a Closer Look

Man Ray elevated the photographic process through his use of stark contrast and dreamlike constructions. He applied the methods employed in Surrealist painting to the photographic medium. As he explained: "I do not photograph nature. I photograph my visions."

### Something to Talk About

What are some items or objects that are significant to your own history (on a personal, family, or community level)? How do you think the meaning might change or get lost if that material was moved to a totally new setting?

## Yang Yongliang (b. 1980)

*Peach Blossom Colony: Peach Blossom Colony No. 1*, 2011, Inkjet print, 33  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 92  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (Framed: 42  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 97  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches), Courtesy of the Artist

### Inspiration

Born in 1980 in Jiading, Shanghai, Yang Yongliang is one of the premier contemporary photography and video artists working in China today. Yang uses digital editing to create photographic representations of scenes from classical Chinese calligraphy and landscape paintings, recognizable through his use of scroll-like dimensions, delineated space, and foggy black and white imagery reminiscent of traditional ink and watercolor paintings. The concept of Peach Blossom Colony comes from a story written down by Tao Yuanming in 421 CE during a period of political unrest. "The Peach Blossom Spring," tells of the journey of a fisherman who discovers a utopia just beyond a spring surrounded by peach blossoms, where people live in perfect harmony with nature without concern for the outside world.



### In the Artist's Words

"Alongside with the rapid growth in modern society, materialism and consumerist culture are gradually filling up people's spiritual minds; as like concrete forests taking over the great nature. However, the dream of a Peach Blossom Spring will always exist in some of our minds."

### Take a Closer Look

In the Peach Blossom Colony series, Yang creates traditional compositions using modern imagery of urbanization, compiled to resemble natural features like mountains, hillsides, waterfalls, and riverbeds. He populates these photos with models dressed as literati and scholars, interacting with the industrial detritus as though they are unaware of the inorganic origins. In Peach Blossom Colony No. 1, a scholar looks out towards a rock formation, shrouded in mist. Upon closer inspection, however, the viewer can detect the true composition of the distant mountains: high-rises and skyscrapers packed together in a twisting cacophony of glass and steel.

### Something to Talk About

What are some of the ways that industrialization has changed our ecology? Are these changes positive or negative? How can technology help or hinder the protection of natural environments?

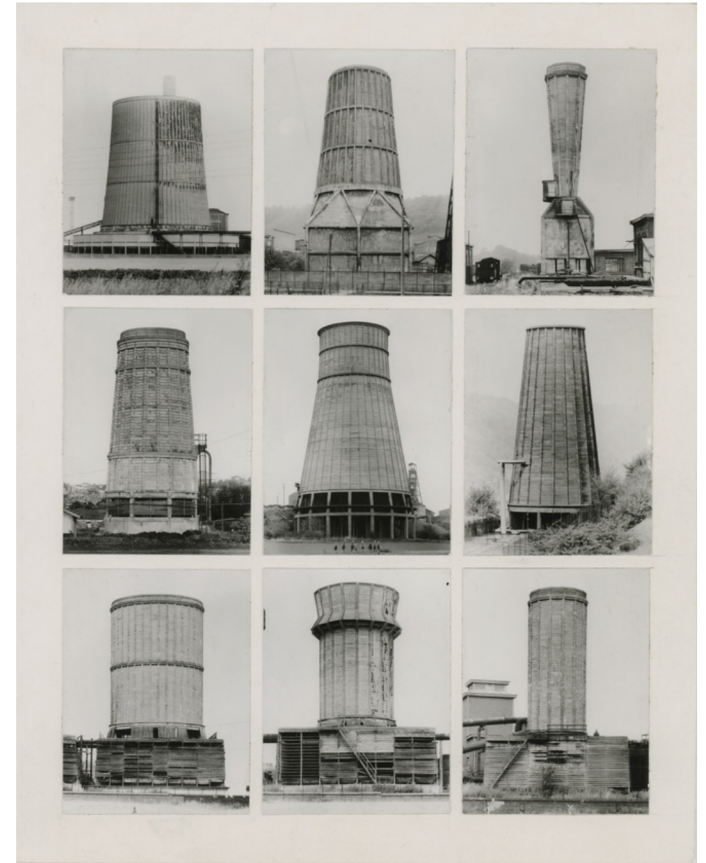


## Bernd and Hilla Becher (1931–2007; 1934–2015)

*Cooling Towers: Belgium, France, Luxemburg, 1967–71*, Nine gelatin silver prints mounted to a single board, 9 ¼ x 7 ¾ inches, Courtesy of Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

### Inspiration

In 1959, German artists Hilla Wobester and Bernd Becher joined forces to capture images of the disappearing industrial architecture of Western Europe and North America that fueled the Modern Era. Their minimalistic and conceptual art challenged the perceived gap between documentary and fine-art photography. Hilla worked with large-format photography to explore the sculptural aspects of industrial buildings. Bernd was originally interested in book illustration, typography, painting, and small-format photography. By the 1950s and 60s, there was a shift in the relationship between industrialized nations specifically in the coal and steel industries. The end of the Industrial Revolution was arriving quickly while the Bechers worked swiftly to capture the built environment before it was destroyed.



### In the Artist's Words

"One just has to select the right objects and fit them into the picture precisely, then they tell their own story all by themselves." – Hilla Becher

### Take a Closer Look

Many of their prints can be seen displayed in a grid-like format. These typographies urge the viewer to undergo a comparative analysis between the forms. These grid-like forms also put the works within the industrial vernacular of geometric forms. Rather than viewing the image as an individual structure, the viewer is seeing the form as part of the larger family of its built environment.

### Something to Talk About

The Bechers worked to document the structural elements of industrial buildings before their destruction. Can you think of a landmark or building that has been changed over time in your own life? Was it significant? How did it alter the landscape or built environment?

**Laurie Lambrecht (b. 1955)**

*Roy, Red Interior*, 1991, Archival pigment print, ed. 1 of 12, 24 x 24 inches, Courtesy of the artist

### Inspiration

Laurie Lambrecht is a Long Island photographer and fiber artist. A large part of her work begins with an observation of the natural world and the multiple and often subtle patterns, textures and color found in rocks and trees. Utilizing photography, printmaking, weaving, and knitting the artist creates fiber prints, large and small, of tree bark, handknitted covers for stones, rocks and trees, and weavings made of cut-up fabric from photographs of the landscape of Eastern Long Island. Her project, “Roy Lichtenstein in His Studio,” switched her focus from the natural environment to the studio environment.



### In the Artist's Words

“Art about art about art. I was reflecting on his work, which was about other people’s work.”

### Take a Closer Look

Paying close attention to color and surface, Lambrecht captures the creative thought process of Roy Lichtenstein in his studio. From the fragments of paper to the art materials, Lambrecht documents his process from start to finish while working as an administrative assistant to Roy Lichtenstein. Lambrecht captures the vibrant colors and flawless technique of Lichtenstein as he works meticulously on his *Interior with Red Wall*, 1991. This photograph transports Lichtenstein from his studio into the work itself, making it look as though he exists within this constructed space.

### Something to Talk About

Laurie Lambrecht's newer work is typically based on observations in nature. Before becoming an artist, Lambrecht worked as an event photographer working at weddings, theater performances, and dances. What are the different obstacles faced when photographing indoor versus outdoors? How do you think this project might have been different for Lambrecht?

**Thank  
You**

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