

JORDAN SCHNITZER
MUSEUM OF ART

STILL Photography
December 12, 2019 – June 14, 2020

Selections from the JSMA Permanent Collection

Thom Sempere
JSMA Associate Curator of Photography

Still

PHOTOGRAPHY

Still

Noun

Deep silence and calm; stillness. *The still of the night.*

An ordinary static photograph, especially a single shot from a movie.

A work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter, typically commonplace objects: still-life.

Verb

Make or become still. *She raised her hand, stilling their protests.*

Adverb

Up to and including the present or the time mentioned. *Even though it is digital, it is still photography.*

Adjective

Not moving or making a sound. *Her voice carried on the still air.*

Through years of study and use, we learn the nuanced nature of language, but have less formal training when considering how to read photographs. We might understand a single word differently based on whether it is spoken or written. Often, a definition includes multiple meanings. *Still* may be employed as a noun, verb, adverb or an adjective.

There are fewer collective 'rules' to apply when viewing photographs. Images may be used in a myriad of ways. Mute, and often caption-less, pictures are prone to misconstrued readings. What did their makers wish for us to know about their worlds? As viewers, we might consider the intent of the photographer and the context of the picture's making to try to interpret its meaning. Our interactions with and responses to images play an important role in the cycle of understanding. Yet, photographs say much when left on their own.

STILL Photography features works from the museum's permanent collection. First, wander through these pictures and simply look. Consider each individually, and then allow them to mingle and converse amongst each other. Try to apply different notions of *still* and see what comes in response. When reading photographs, sometimes the clarity of intended meaning matters. Just as often, a flexibility of interpretation is welcomed.



We invite you to learn more about the works on view by listening to insights from Thom Sempere, associate curator of photography, through Guide by Cell.

Minor White

Minor White was an influential photographer, educator, critic and theoretician. Born in Minneapolis, in 1938, White moved to Portland, Oregon and began his career by first joining the Oregon Camera Club, then taking on assignments from the Federal Works Progress Administration and exhibiting at the Portland Art Museum.

He served in the Army during WWII and spent two years studying aesthetics and art history at Columbia University and later followed aspects of Zen philosophy.

He became involved with a circle of photographers including, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams and Alfred Stieglitz all who had major influence on his life's work. Through those connections White developed a distinctive style that often gave mystical interpretations to his work emphasizing the spiritual possibilities of viewing images often placed in sequences or series.

In 1953 he moved to Rochester, New York and worked as a curator at George Eastman House, edited their magazine *Image* and taught at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

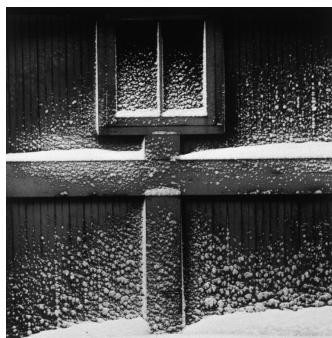
The picture here was made on a snowy day in Rochester, and is emblematic of White's mature style of art making.

Alfred Stieglitz (whose portrait by Imogen Cunningham is seen on the opposite wall) had introduced the concept that a photograph is somehow uniquely positioned to provoke many distinct readings depending on how a viewer may be willing to receive its message. This distilled concept became known as an Equivalent.

In White's words "*when a photograph functions as an equivalent, the photograph is at once a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol*" - akin to a metaphor.

Now, returning to the print, focus your attention and see that first, the image is a document of a lovely aesthetic impression, but allowing a different state of mind perhaps the forms, shapes and tones taken more internally and symbolically may be leveraged for a different and very *individual* interpretation

Guide by Cell 99#

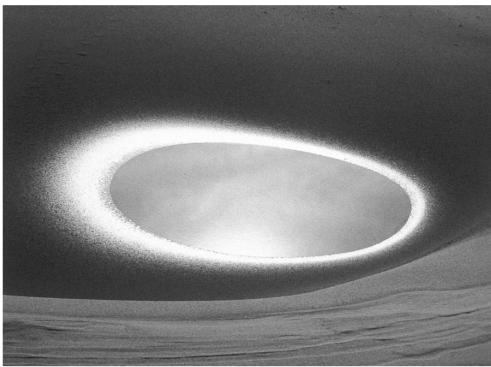




Dan Powell



Aaron Siskind



Claire Trotter



Sally Mann

Dan Powell

Dan Powell is an Associate Professor Emeritus of Art at the University of Oregon. During a European summer sojourn he found himself on the deck of a ferryboat traversing the Adriatic Sea. In a recent conversation when pressed to describe the experience of making this photograph he paused when asked of its meaning and offered up the word liminal- that rather rare state where something occupies a position on both sides of a boundary or threshold.

We see within the frame a swipe of tone from light to dark. A form emerges and simultaneously recedes and through that yin/yang existence a metaphor can be conjured up with implications of beginnings and endings, or the implying the very transition of life and death itself.

Aaron Siskind

Aaron Siskind was an influential photographer and educator who is best known for his innovative work creating abstract images. In the early 1940s he began photographing patterns and textures and isolated elements of mundane objects.

Removing himself from a documentary impulse, he developed his approach as an attempt to express his own state of mind in photography----rather than simply to record subject matter.

In a 1945 article *Drama of Objects* he said:

... we see in terms of our education. We look at the world and see what we believe is there. What we have been conditioned to expect. And indeed it is socially useful that we agree on the function of objects.

But as photographers, we must learn to relax our beliefs.

Move on objects with your eyes straight on... to the left...around on the right.

Watch them grow large as you approach, group and regroup themselves as you shift your position.

Relationships gradually emerge, and sometimes assert themselves with finality.

....And that's your picture

Sally Mann

Sally Mann, one of America's most distinctive photographers was born and raised on a family farm in Rockbridge County, Virginia. She then married, raised 3 children and continues to reside on that rural family plot with a slow paced river always floating by.

Mann's work always seems to turn to things personal- that which cannot be seen, but only felt. And she has written poignantly of her attachment to place.

I have loved Rockbridge County, Virginia, surely since the moment my birth-bleary eyes caught sight of it,

Living in the South means being both nourished and wounded by the experience. To identify a person as a Southerner is always to suggest not only that her history is inescapable and profoundly formative, but that it is also imperishably present.

Southerners live at the nexus between myth and reality where that peculiar amalgam of sorrow, humility, honor, loyalty, graciousness and renegade defiance plays out against a backdrop of profligate physical beauty.

So when we see Mann's work...or anyone else's for that matter realize that the subject of a photograph may be easily recognizable but the content or emotional core is often more hidden and may require a wider reading of an artist's life to reveal it's true identity.

Claire Trotter

Claire Trotter was a well-known artist from the Pacific Northwest and resided for many years here in Eugene.

While her work was published extensively in journals devoted to the arts, what truly mattered to Trotter was the now less traveled path of producing gelatin silver prints by hand. Even though photography was often labeled a mechanical medium, the truth is that with all the possible variables available each hand-processed print made is still quite unique.

In introductory thoughts from one of her earlier exhibitions she said:

To be sensitive to the beauty that is all around us enhances the quality of our lives. In the interplay between the form and moods awakened in the sensitive viewer, a response is evoked in which the viewer becomes the co-creator.

Guide by Cell 100#

Imogen Cunningham

A distinct and beloved character, Imogen Cunningham was one of America's most admired photographic artists with a career spanning more than 75 years, nearly half the history of photography itself. Born in Portland in 1883, she was named after the heroine in Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*. Always a standout in the community, she was highly individualistic and continuously challenged traditional thought.

Her early creative output embraced a romantic pictorialist style where soft focus lenses and metaphoric impulses were fore fronted. But by 1934, the date of this marvelous portrait, with the unfolding of a new Modernist century, her aesthetic compass had shifted dramatically.

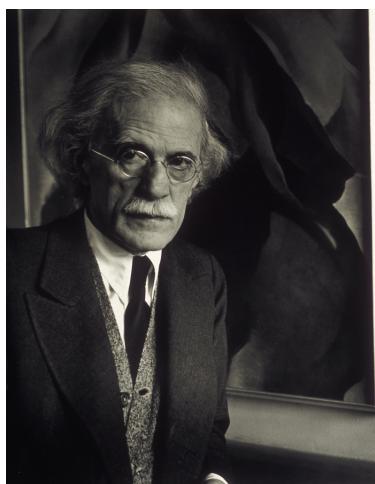
Also in 1934, Cunningham and fellow photographers Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Willard Van Dyke and others formed a loosely knit group they coined f/64. The name, taken from the lens opening that produces the sharpest picture on a view camera signified the group's move away from imprecise images toward a more straightforward approach of the new Modernist period where clarity and precision- basic elements of the photographic were embraced.

Her portraits ranged from cool, formal considerations to personal explorations revealing aspects of a sitter's personality and she captured some of the most influential personages of her age: Herbert Hoover, Upton Sinclair, Gertrude Stein, Martha Graham, Cary Grant and a host of others.

This portrait of Alfred Stieglitz was made in his gallery in New York when he was 70 and nearing the end of a remarkable 50-year career. He was an accomplished photographer and promoter of Modern art who introduced many avant-garde European artists to the U.S. including the first exhibitions by artists such as Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso. Stieglitz fought tirelessly to elevate the medium of photography from a tool of description to an expressive individual form as art.

Stieglitz was married to the painter Georgia O'Keeffe whose work may be seen looming in the background of this portrait.

Guide by Cell 92#



Lewis Hine

Close your eyes and imagine yourself 100 stories above the streets of New York City perched open to the elements on steel scaffolding with no safety harness or other means of security.

To capture such a picture the 57 year old photographer had himself suspended in a cherry-picker like contraption in order to get the best angle of view that might tell best the story of how skilled workers defied gravity to finish the job of constructing the Empire State building which stood for 40 years as the tallest skyscraper in the world.

Such tenacity was emblematic of Hine's approach to photographing and we celebrate him today for producing many of the most memorable images in the field of documentary photography.

Born in Wisconsin in 1874, his father died in an accident when Hine was 16 and Hine was forced to leave school to sustain his family. He began in the lowest paying factory jobs as a janitor and other entry level positions but eventually became a teacher and then a sociologist- a new concept for the time that understood that the unbridled industrialization of America required social reform.

For Hine, the photograph could be a tool for good- his early portraits of children – many taken surreptitiously inside factories helped demonstrate atrocious working conditions like no other method could and they helped clear the way for the establishment of child labor laws that were more just.

Hines pictures were pasted onto posters, collaged and used for graphic illustrations to foster positive change- they were never meant to be pictures for artistic purposes and seen in exhibitions like we do here, yet Hine's direct vision and his innate sense of making the most of what was found in front of his eyes we now celebrate independently as a fine accomplishment in its own right.

Three Riveters is an example of his later photography where workers are seen not through the eyes of exploitation, but as more heroic in their actions. The picture here was published in an early seminal book titled *Men at Work*- still considered a pioneering picture book.

Guide by Cell 93#



Raul Corrales

Raul Corrales is best known for documenting the Cuban revolution as Fidel Castro's official photographer during the seminal dates of the uprising in 1959-1961.

His pictures of Castro, Ché Guevara and guerrillas during and after the Revolution established him on the island as one of the best of a small group that became known as Cuba's "epic revolutionary photographers". He is considered a national treasure in Cuba, and his work has been exhibited internationally.

A gifted self-taught photographer, his first jobs in 1944 were as a photography assistant working for two newspapers run by the Socialist Party. Later in the 1950's his pictures were extensively published in newspapers and magazine where he often made photos of local events and from the perspective not only of town leaders, but also of poorer workers and farmers attending to their daily tasks.

Before the revolution, Cuba was open to travel and was a popular destination of the imagination for writers. Among Corrales' early subjects was Ernest Hemingway, who lived between Key West, Florida, and outside Havana.

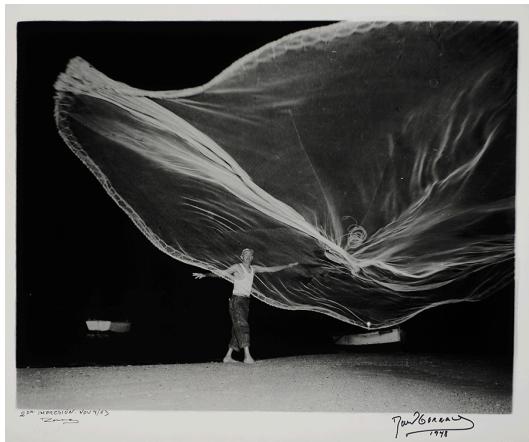
The "old man" of the Hemmingway's famous story *The Old Man and the Sea* was a fisherman and neighbor of Corrales, and the three men became regulars at the seafront bars.

The Fishing Net is an exuberant pictorial capturing of what would have been an everyday scene- a man tossing his net to clean and prepare for the next usage.

Taken in darkness probably with help of a flashbulb, the quick exposure grabs a fluid moment and through the isolation of time transforms the mundane into the poetic. The fisherman's outstretched arms take on the role of an imaginary dancer flinging a cape- the graphic tones enhance the shapes that are held in stasis.

Here the photographer intuitively grabs hold of life and stills the fluid moment allowing us forever to hang between what is and what will be.

Guide by Cell 94#



Mary Randlett

Mary Randlett was one of our regions best-known portraitists of artists, writers and notables in the arts. She photographed more than 500 individuals – including four of the artists in this gallery- with many of the images regarded as iconic and lasting documents of the Northwest cultural scene. Her landscape work was equally well received, and came from years of traversing the Pacific coast and mountains.

Hers was a long life of more than 9 decades, but the print here of the hand of Morris Graves' was made quite early, when she was just 25 and beginning her career. The session with Graves was one of her first and came through a family opportunity.

Randlett's mother Elizabeth Bayley was a pioneering museum director and curator and had forged personal connections with artists throughout the region. The story goes that Betty sensed that her talented but relatively untested photographer/daughter might benefit from meeting and photographing some artists.

So on a fine August afternoon under the excuse of needing to return paintings from a recent gallery showing, the two of them paid a visit to Graves' home and studio- and a fine series of pictures were the outcome.

Randlett's casual working method put her subjects at ease as she photographed them while they pursued their customary activities, - this was especially comforting to Graves, who did not want to pose.

Other photographs from that day- a number of which are also in the Museum's collection show Graves napping, walking his dog and sitting in his garden.

Photographs have a way of distilling moments- upon reflection, Randlett's spare composition brings together elements of Graves's work as an artist- His intimate connection to nature and the spiritual, the divide between the conscious and things unknown. One reviewer identified his painted abstractions as "*simultaneously earthbound and ethereal*".

We cannot from this distance of time, nor even at the moment of its making know precisely how a photograph will explain itself to each of us, yet the greater our investment, the greater our reward.

Guide by Cell 95#



Ruth Orkin

Ruth Orkin was an award-winning photojournalist and filmmaker. She was the only child of Mary Ruby, a silent-film actress and grew up in Hollywood as an avid fan of the movies during the heyday of the 1920s and 1930s. In retrospect it is easy to see how her career blossomed around the cinema and stage.

When she was 10 Orkin received her first camera and began by photographing friends and teachers at school. At 22 she moved to New York City where she worked as a nightclub photographer and eventually eased her way into the center of the performing scene ending up photographing many of the worlds' greatest musicians of the time.

From the late 1940's, through the 1960's, her black-and-white pictures of famous celebrities and life on the street appeared with regularity in the magazines of the day: Featured pieces were seen in Life, Look, Collier's, The Ladies' Home Journal and other national publications. Most were taken on assignment, but all reveal a keen eye for the emotional and a close attention to expression and gesture that provides insight into character.

This 1949 photograph that appeared in Life magazine came at the end of a very long days assignment documenting the opening of Carson McCullers play *The Member of the Wedding*, a breakthrough production that won the Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play that year.

Besides the author, entangled on the couch were Ethel Waters who frequently performed jazz, swing, and pop music on the Broadway and who notably was one of the first African-Americans nominated for an Academy Award, was the first to star on her own television show and the first African-American woman to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award.

Reaching for that cup of coffee was, from the sensation reviews received by the press in the morning --Broadway's newest young star, Julie Harris.

Guide by Cell 96#



Barbara Norfleet

Barbara Norfleet is an influential author, curator and professor who taught for decades at Harvard University in the Social Sciences Department and as a Senior Lecturer in Visual and Environmental Studies as well as being a curator at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. She received her Ph.D. in social relations in psychology from Harvard in 1951 and was one of only three women to earn a Ph.D. that year in any of the university's departments.

Norfleet is also a splendid photographer and has used her own images to explore a range of issues as a social documentarian. Her unique blend of intellect and aesthetic has given rise to projects that have yielded many distinctive results.

In the mid 1980's Norfleet spent a summer in Mississippi photographing images that would "*depict and explore long-established and near-mythical rituals that are particular to the advantaged class*".

One would think that cameras have been everywhere and seen everything, but some decades ago, before iphone selfies and the internet, much had yet to be self-exposed and access to the upper class was essential closed to outsiders.

Published in 1986 *All the Right People* included photographs by Norfleet with conversational first person interviews. The combination of text and image brought out many surprising juxtapositions and results.

Private House, Sumner, Mississippi provides us with a wealth of visual clues, hints at perhaps a few secrets, and like so many compelling images, gives the viewer endless time to analyze facts but will forever withhold what truths may be found outside the frame.

Guide by Cell #93



Jerry Uelsmann

Jerry Uelsmann is an innovator and experimenter and was an early exponent of photomontage. He champions the idea that the final printed photograph need not be tied to a single negative, but may be a composite from many negatives.

While today montage is easily produced through digital means with commercial products like Adobe Photoshop (which is also available to Uelsmann), he says that *"while I am sympathetic to the current digital revolution and excited by the visual options created by the computer, I feel my creative process remains intrinsically linked to the alchemy of the darkroom."*

He even coined a term for the process calling it post-visualization.

Uelsmann photographs with conventional cameras and film multiple scenes and subjects, makes hundreds of small prints and then mixes them until a vision of what might be a final work comes together. His lab has many enlargers, and separate negatives of the various parts are placed in each. A single sheet of printing paper is exposed successively as it is passed along the production line.

What results is a reflection of his imagination. It is also a direct subversion of our expectations of how photographs should depict reality. And while the combination print has been around since the origins of photography, it had been discouraged for serious work for much of the 20th century as a more 'pure' form of the medium was practiced.

Critics have recognized that Uelsmann's work helped redefine and expand the field of photography by challenging established norms.

Guide by Cell 98#

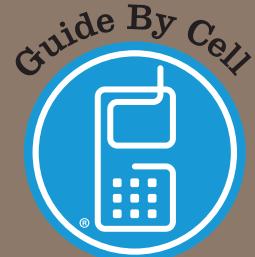


Richard Tuschman (American, b. 1956)

Woman and Man on a Bed, 2012

Pigmented inkjet print

Gift of Michael Yachnik and Michael Fleming; L2019:112:1



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Raúl Corrales (Cuban, 1925-2006)

La atarraya (Fishing Net), 1948, printed 2003

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Linda and Irwin Berman, in Memory of Linda; 2016:48.4



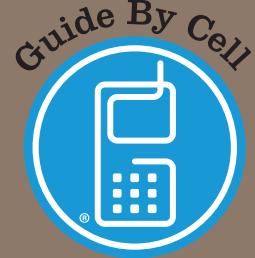
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Imogen Cunningham (American, 1883-1976)

Alfred Stieglitz at an American Place, 1934

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Patricia H. Noyes; 2004:1.1



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Mary Randlett (American, 1924-2019)

Morris Graves' Hand, 1949

Gelatin silver print

Gift of the Artist; 1999:3.3



For more on *Morris Graves' Hand*,

dial (541) 787-3003 95#

Lewis Wickes Hine (American, 1874-1940)

Three Riveters, Empire State Building, 1931

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Nina Rosenblum; 1997:8.2



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Jerry Uelsmann (American, b. 1934)

Untitled (The Philosopher's Desk), 1976

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Dr. Robert and Margaret Leary; 2012:18.12



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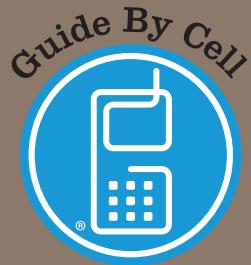
Minor White (American, 1908-76)

Snow on Garage Door, Rochester, New York, 1960, 1961

[Alternate title: **Steely Barb #13**]

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Gerald H. Robinson; 1965:9.65



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Ruth Orkin (American, 1921-85)

Opening Night Party of "Member of a Wedding"

- Ethel Waters, Carson McCullers, and Julie Harris, 1950

Gelatin silver print

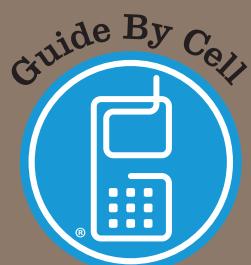
Gift of Dan Berley; 2001:1.4

Barbara Norfleet (American, b. 1926)

Private House, Sumner, Mississippi, 1984

Gelatin silver print

Gift of the Artist; 1986:171



Ruth Orkin dial (541) 787-3003 96#

Barbara Norfleet dial (541) 787-3003 97#

Clockwise, from top left:

Dan Powell (American, b. 1950)

Adriatic Sea, Near Vis, Croatia, 2001

Gelatin silver print

Photography at Oregon Acquisition Fund Purchase; 2007:3.1

Aaron Siskind (American, 1903-91)

Chicago 14, 1949

Gelatin silver print

Museum Purchase; 2008:2.1

Sally Mann (American, b. 1951)

Untitled from Southern Landscape, 2013

Platinum, palladium and gold print

Gift of Linda and Irwin Berman, in memory of Linda; 2016:48.19a

Claire Trotter (American, 1913-95)

Dunes Pool, ca. 1970

Gelatin silver print

Virginia Haseltine Collection of Pacific Northwest Art; 1974:31.172



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