

# ANTHONY HERNANDEZ L.A. LANDSCAPES

The  
Nelson-Atkins  
Museum  
of Art

APRIL 19, 2019-AUGUST 18, 2019

## TEACHER GUIDE

Anthony Hernandez (American, born 1947) has spent nearly 50 years photographing the people and places of Los Angeles. An L.A. native who grew up in a working-class neighborhood, Hernandez avoids the glamour of Hollywood and focuses instead on the city's harsher, more mundane realities. Many of his photographs depict the buildings and streets that the average L.A. resident might encounter on a daily basis. Other images feature similarly overlooked aspects of city life, such as massive storm drains and the temporary spaces occupied by people experiencing homelessness. This exhibition presents works from the late 1970s to the present, demonstrating Hernandez's enduring interest in exploring urban spaces and our relationship to them.

### Exhibition Contents:

You will see 30 photographs, all taken by Anthony Hernandez between 1978 and 2012. Of those, 19 are color prints and 11 are black-and-white.

#### **The photographs are displayed in three sections:**

*Waiting, Sitting, Fishing, and Some Automobiles, 1978 – 1982*

In these early works, Hernandez focused on bus stops, recreation areas, parking lots, and other public spaces where L.A. residents went about their daily lives.

*Everything, 2002-2004*

These views of the Los Angeles River basin transform concrete storm drains into abstract geometric forms full of ominous mystery.

*Forever, 2007 – 2012*

To make these photographs, Hernandez visited encampments used by people experiencing homelessness, capturing spare and often poignant details of their living spaces.

## Good to Know:

This exhibition is on view in the museum's photography galleries (Galleries L10 and L11). The photographs in this exhibition measure at least 20 x 20 inches, making it possible for 7-10 people to examine a single image at the same time.

Discussion questions in this guide are categorized as:

- INQUIRING EYE – focused on the formal qualities of photographic images;
- ART & PLACE – how art can explore the relationships between people and their environments;
- ARTIST AS OBSERVER – activity prompts for student photographers.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Anthony Hernandez was born in 1947 to parents who had immigrated to the United States from Mexico. He grew up in a working-class area of Los Angeles, spending his childhood exploring the surrounding neighborhoods. His introduction to photography came in the form of a naval photography manual he received from a high school friend. Hernandez quickly embraced the art form, snapping photographs of the world he knew in L.A. as well as scenes of New York (where he stayed briefly after hitchhiking across the country) and Vietnam (where he served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1969). Largely self-taught, Hernandez sought artistic guidance from well-known photographers like Lee Friedlander, Lewis Baltz, and Garry Winogrand. He gained recognition as a street photographer in the 1970s and 1980s, and has spent the decades since producing numerous bodies of work and publications. Still actively engaged with his craft, Hernandez now divides his time between Los Angeles and Idaho.

## Before Your Visit:

Get to know Anthony Hernandez and his working methods by watching a short video of the artist at work on a shoot in the Mojave Desert. Produced by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the video is viewable at: [sfmoma.org/artist/anthony\\_hernandez](https://sfmoma.org/artist/anthony_hernandez).

After watching the video, discuss as a class:

- How would you describe the place Hernandez is photographing? Would it appeal to you as a site to take photographs? Why or why not? What reasons does Hernandez give to explain his interest in this location?
- What do you think Hernandez means when he talks about “peeling off the layers of this place”?
- Hernandez talks about looking at “places [...] that people are not looking at.” Can you think of places like that in your own community?

## Featured Works:



*Public Transit Areas #11, 1979*

### ■ INQUIRING EYE

What seems to be the focal point of this image? In composing the photograph, what did Hernandez do to draw the eye to that focal point? Pay special attention to the way lines, focus, and movement are used in the image.

### ■ ART & PLACE

A sprawling city built around freeways, Los Angeles is a difficult place to get around without an automobile. This was true even in the late 1970s, when Hernandez took this photograph. People who depended on public transit endured heat, boredom, and delays. Which details in this image suggest the importance of automotive transport in 1970s Los Angeles? Which details hint at the isolation felt by public transit riders?

### ■ ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Consider how the people in your life get around the city or town where you live. Are there others in your community who rely on a different mode of transit? See if you can take a photograph that captures what it feels like to use a particular form of transportation.



*Public Fishing Areas #29, 1981*

### ■ INQUIRING EYE

One technique that photographers use to create balanced and visually interesting images is known as the Rule of Thirds. In this approach to composition, the frame is divided into an imaginary grid with four crisscrossed lines that form nine equal sections. Important linear elements are aligned with one or more of the four lines, while points of visual interest are placed at the intersections of these lines. How closely does this image align with the Rule of Thirds?



### ■ ART & PLACE

While most of Hernandez's photographs depict urban settings, this image has more in common with a rural landscape. It shows one of the natural spaces carved out around Los Angeles for public use. How does this image suggest a sense of being outside or away from the city? Can you think of places in other cities that create the same effect? Why are such places important?

### ■ ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Hernandez photographed the side of L.A. that was familiar to him—working-class residents going about their ordinary lives. Consider the types of people, locations, and activities that you are most familiar with in your own hometown, and try to capture them in a series of photographs.



*Everything #3, 2004*

### ■ INQUIRING EYE

Where do you see balance and contrast in this image? Compare it to the other photographs from the series that are displayed around it. How does Hernandez create a sense of both unity and variety in these images?

### ■ ART & PLACE

For this series, Hernandez was drawn to the cavernous storm drains and concrete channels of the Los Angeles River, overlooked spaces where “everything” eventually washes up. Do you think these images successfully bring intrigue and interest to an otherwise mundane subject? Why or why not? What parts of your own local infrastructure might be overlooked or underappreciated?

### ■ ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Hernandez’s *Everything* photographs transform urban spaces into abstract, geometric compositions. Look for geometric patterns in your environment and see what interesting photographs you can take of them.



*Forever #34, 2011*

### ■ INQUIRING EYE

For this series of photographs, Hernandez put himself in the position of L.A.'s homeless residents, literally taking on their perspectives within the shelters they built for themselves. How would this photograph be different if Hernandez had taken it from a different angle, or if he had moved the object shown in the center of the image?

### ■ ART & PLACE

The encampments Hernandez visited are temporary by nature, and their inhabitants are often overlooked by society. Do you think this photograph does anything to oppose the anonymity and impermanence of homelessness? Why or why not?

### ■ ARTIST AS OBSERVER

This picture-within-a-picture is laden with emotion. See if you can take a photograph of a photograph that conveys similar emotional weight.



*Forever #43, 2010*

### ■ INQUIRING EYE

How does the size of this photograph affect your understanding of it? How would its meaning or impact be different if it was the size of a postcard?

### ■ ART & PLACE

In any city, some structures are built out of a desire to impress or stand the test of time, and some are built out of necessity or even desperation. How was Hernandez able to give this temporary cardboard shelter a sense of monumentality?

### ■ ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Spend some time taking photographs of structures in your community. Look for examples of both durable, long-term construction and creative short-term solutions to an immediate need.

## After Your Visit:

Explore more of Anthony Hernandez's work in the self-titled catalog of his photographs published in 2016. *Anthony Hernandez* is available for check-out in the museum's Educator Resource Center.

Have students examine the work of other photographers who focus on specific cities or regions. Examples include Terry Evans (the Midwest), William Eggleston (the South), and Helen Levitt (New York City). All three of these artists have works in the Nelson-Atkins' collections. How are they similar to or different from Anthony Hernandez's photographic studies of Los Angeles?



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*This exhibition is supported by the Hall Family Foundation.*

### **Image Credits:**

**All images by Anthony Hernandez, American (b. 1947).**

*Public Transit Areas #11*, 1979. Inkjet print, 28 1/16 x 40 1/16 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2012.53.18.

*Public Fishing Areas #29*, 1981. Inkjet print, 28 1/8 x 40 1/8 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2012.53.12.

*Everything #3*, 2004. Inkjet print, 20 x 20 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 201.68.63.3.

*Forever #34*, 2011. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2017.68.66.

*Forever #43*, 2010. Inkjet print, 40 x 40 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2017.68.69.

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