



The Big Picture features photographic works recently acquired by the Nelson-Atkins through a \$10 million gift from the Hall Family Foundation. This transformative gift allowed the museum to enhance areas of strength within the existing photography collection while expanding into new areas of interest. Photographs in *The Big Picture* present an array of time periods, styles, and subject matter in keeping with the medium's rich history and varied applications. Some of the most celebrated photographers in history, such as Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, Cindy Sherman, and Edward Steichen, are represented here.

EXHIBITION QUICK FACTS

This exhibition contains 99 photographic works by a wide variety of artists. The works included span the years 1826 to 2016.

Most of these photographs are black-and-white; a few are in color. Many of them measure at least 7 x 9 inches, making it possible for 3–4 students to examine a single image at the same time. Some of the older works are significantly smaller.

The exhibition includes a few images of nude or partially nude human figures.

KEY AREAS OF THE EXHIBITION

The Big Picture gives special consideration to a few key areas within the museum's photography collection:

Daguerreotypes – The first commercially successful form of photography.

Avant-garde photography – A stylistic movement that sought new forms of visual expression. It often emphasized energy, dramatic angles, and the questioning of traditional norms.

Conceptual photography – Photography that illustrates an idea, whether by documenting a performance art piece or communicating through visual symbols.

International contemporary photography – Works that represent contemporary experiences from around the globe.

IMAGE CREDITS | All works are gifts of the Hall Family Foundation.

Camille Dolard, French (1810–1884). *Self-portrait as hookah smoker*, 1845. Daguerreotype, 2017.44.5. | Gustave Le Gray, French (1820–1884). *Cavalry maneuvers, Camp de Châlons*, 1857. Albumen print, 2017.61.20. | Edward Steichen, American (born Luxembourg, 1879–1973). *William Merritt Chase*, 1906. Gum bichromate over platinum print, 2016.75.284. | Claude Cahun, French (1894–1954). *Self-portrait*, 1927. Gelatin silver print, 2016.75.26. | Robert Frank, American (born Switzerland, 1924). *Hoboken (Parade)*, 1955. Gelatin silver print (printed later), 2016.25.3. | Diane Arbus, American (1923–1971). *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, NYC*, 1962. Gelatin silver print (printed 1973), 2017.24.1. | Bernd and Hilla Becher, German: Bernd Becher (1931–2007), Hilla Becher (1934–2015). *Blast Furnaces, Frontal Views*, 1979–1986. Gelatin silver prints, 2016.75.1-9. | Thomas Demand, German (born 1964). *Vault*, 2012. Chromogenic print, 2017.61.9.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Over the years, photographers have experimented with many different processes and materials for creating images. Students can explore the steps involved in making daguerreotypes, cyanotypes, gelatin silver prints, and more by viewing short explanatory videos from the George Eastman Museum. Find the videos online at eastman.org/photographic-processes-video-series.

Many visual elements within a photograph work together to create meaning. Practice analyzing images by having students find photographs that interest them and asking them to consider the following:

- What do I notice first in this photograph? How was my eye drawn there?
- What lines, shapes, light, space, color, texture, and values do I see? Which elements seem especially important to this particular image?
- What people, places, objects, and/or activities are included in this image? What might the photographer have left out?

In choosing photographs to add to a museum's collection, curators have to consider many qualities that might make something worth acquiring. Discuss as a group: What do you think makes a photograph great? What qualities would you look for in a photograph destined to hang in an art museum?

DURING YOUR VISIT

As you explore *The Big Picture* with your students, keep an eye out for the following masterworks. Consider using the questions that have been provided to jump-start conversations at each key work.



Camille Dolard, *Self-portrait as a hookah smoker*, 1845

While photography was still in its infancy, Camille Dolard experimented with the new medium, building a camera from scratch and using it to capture self-portraits like this one. The sharp detail, use of pose and Middle Eastern theme, and contrast in tone make this daguerreotype a fine example of the medium's capabilities.

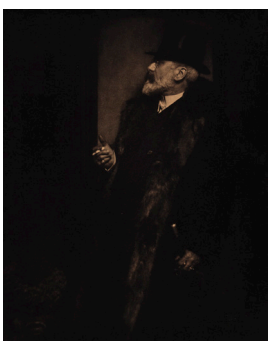
- Where do you see balance and emphasis in this image?
- How does this daguerreotype on a metal ground look different from nearby images printed on paper?



Gustave Le Gray, *Cavalry maneuvers, Camp de Châlons*, 1857

This Gustave Le Gray photograph, which shows the French army conducting routine military exercises, has been described as “haunting” and “otherworldly.”

- What elements within the image contribute to that effect?
- How might the picture be different if the photographer had gotten closer to his subject? If he had taken the photograph at a different time of day?



Edward Steichen, *Portrait of William Merritt Chase*, 1906

Edward Steichen was widely acclaimed as a portrait photographer. In this portrait of fellow artist William Merritt Chase, Steichen emphasized dark-on-dark tones, creating a lush and moody image. The expressiveness and soft focus of this work align with the values of Pictorialism, a photography movement that viewed the medium as a fine art on par with painting or sculpture.

- How would you describe the textures and values you see in this image?
- What might you infer about William Merritt Chase based on this portrait? Which aspects of the photograph led you to those conclusions?



Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, 1927

Avant-garde artist Claude Cahun used photography to question traditional ideas about the self and to explore her own gender identity. In her self-portraits, she dressed in androgynous clothing, creating the impression of a person unbound by gender. Today her photographs are exceptionally rare yet relevant to contemporary social issues.

- What choices has Cahun made regarding pose, setting, and clothing in this self-portrait?
- What do the photographs you take and share of yourself say about you?



Robert Frank, *Hoboken (Parade)*, 1955

Robert Frank captured this image in 1955 while traveling across the United States, photographing American people going about their daily lives. Photographs like this one proved to be hugely influential on other artists, who embraced Frank's "snapshot" approach to documenting the world around them.

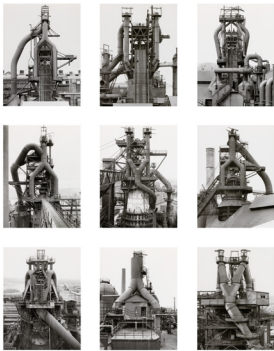
- Why do you think Frank chose to photograph the exact moment when one figure's face is completely obscured by the flag?
- What kind of message might this image suggest about American patriotism in the 1950s?



Diane Arbus, *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, NYC*, 1962

This photograph is celebrated for its psychological intensity. Photographer Diane Arbus created emotional tension by contrasting childhood innocence with the suggestion of violent rage – a fitting symbol for the early 1960s, when the United States was on the brink of great social and political turmoil.

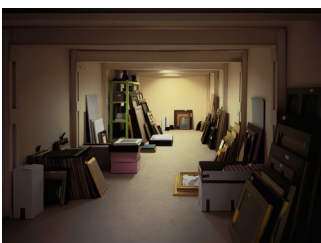
- How does the composition of the image direct your attention to the boy?
- What is the mood of this photograph? Which elements within the image account for that mood?



Bernd & Hilla Becher, *Blast Furnaces, Frontal Views*, 1979–1986; printed before 1987

Bernd and Hilla Becher photographed industrial structures like those shown here, emphasizing descriptive detail over expression. They were interested in the visual appeal of variation and similarity. The Bechers' analytical approach greatly influenced other German photographers.

- How might photographing a non-living subject be easier than photographing a living one? How might it be more difficult?
- What industrial or architectural structures in your own community might make for interesting photographs?



Thomas Demand, *Vault*, 2012

Contemporary photography often taps into philosophical questions about the relationship between reality and artifice. German photographer Thomas Demand explored this idea by photographing a paper and cardboard model that he had built to replicate an art storeroom.

- Before reading any information about this image, consider: what are you looking at here?
- Do photographs always necessarily tell the truth?

AFTER YOUR VISIT:

Encourage students to learn more about the four types of photography given special emphasis in this exhibition. Have each student select either a daguerreotype, avant-garde photograph, conceptual photograph, or international contemporary photograph, and instruct them to use the web to discover other artists associated with that category. Students can share what they learn with the class.

Return to your pre-visit discussion about what makes a photograph great. Now that students have seen the works included in *The Big Picture*, would they add or remove any criteria from their list of what to look for when acquiring photographs for an art museum?

Stop by the **Educator Resource Center** at the Nelson-Atkins to check out a copy of *The Big Card Game*, the interactive game produced to accompany *The Big Picture*. In this game, students sharpen their observation skills by selecting the best adjectives to describe photographs from the exhibition.
