

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Strange and Familiar Places features contemporary photographs of rural subjects in far-flung parts of the United States, especially the Midwest, the South, and the West. Created by photographers who grew up or spent extended periods of time in the locations they depict, these works are rooted firmly in a sense of place. Some of the images may feel straightforward, showing us familiar scenes, people, and experiences, while others present a more surreal or surprising view. Many draw on elements of folklore, music, literature, history, or personal experience to convey the character of a place. With varied styles and approaches, these artists explore the relationship between a place and its people.

EXHIBITION CONTENTS

You will see 26 photographs taken by ten different artists. About half of the images are in color, and the others are in black and white.

The photographs are grouped by artist:

- **Terry Evans** (American, born 1944)
- **Rahim Fortune** (American, born 1994)
- **Elise Kirk** (American, born 1978)
- **Holly Lynton** (American, born 1972)
- **Laura McPhee** (American, born 1958)
- **Kristine Potter** (American, born 1977)
- **RaMell Ross** (American, born 1982)
- **Bryan Schutmaat** (American, born 1983)
- **Lara Shipley** (American, born 1980) and **Antone Dolezal** (American, born 1982)

GOOD TO KNOW

This exhibition is on view in the museum's photography gallery (L11). Most of the photographs measure at least 24 x 24 inches, and several are much larger, making it possible for 4-6 people to view a single image at one time. In addition to the exhibition itself, you may wish to view the adjacent photography rotation gallery (L10). There you will find a selection of works that span the history of photography and that portray rural places in the American Midwest, the West, and the South.

All works from the exhibition and the rotation can also be viewed online at the following links:

Exhibition: art.nelson-atkins.org/mycollections/6427/strange-and-familiar-places/objects

Rotation: art.nelson-atkins.org/mycollections/6428/photography-rotation-34/objects

As you explore the exhibition, you'll find select wall labels marked with this symbol:
Scan the work using the Smartify app to hear excerpts from interviews with the artists.



Discussion questions in this guide are categorized as:

Inquiring Eye – focused on the formal qualities of photographic images;

Art & Place – consider how photography can convey the character of a place;

Artist as Observer – activity prompts for student photographers.

BEFORE VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

Many of the photographs in this exhibition challenge our assumptions about the people and places they depict. Below are some of the locations pictured in *Strange and Familiar Places*. Ask students to choose one and brainstorm what they think they know about that place — what words, scenes, or people come to mind when they think of it? What would they expect to find if they visited that place?

- The Kansas prairie
- The Ozarks in southern Missouri
- Central Idaho
- The South

When students view the exhibition, they can look for photographs that depict those places. To what degree do the photographs align with or diverge from their preconceived ideas?

Strange and Familiar Places draws attention to the relationship between a location and the people who inhabit it. Discuss places that your students inhabit, such as their neighborhoods, cities, states, and/or nation. If they close their eyes and think of one of these places, what image comes to mind? How important have these places been in shaping their lives? How might their lives be different if they lived somewhere else?

FEATURED WORKS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Terry Evans (American, born 1944), *The Hay Meadow*, 2022

Inquiring Eye:

This composite image is constructed of multiple photographs taken of the same location at different times. Where do you see variations in light, color, and viewpoint as your eyes scan this scene?

Art & Place:

Terry Evans has been photographing the Kansas prairie for over 40 years. Of her subject, she says, “I keep looking at this land and it keeps revealing more of what it is.” Do you see that idea reflected in this photograph? If so, how?

Artist as Observer:

Think of a location that you frequent in your own life. How does it change over the course of a season, a year, or even a single day? Try taking multiple photographs of that place at different times and from different viewpoints, then combine them in a way that is meaningful to you.



Lara Shipley (American, born 1980) and Antone Dolezal (American, born 1982), *False Lights*, 2013

Inquiring Eye:

What visual elements within this photograph lead your eye to the light at the center of the image?

Art & Place:

Lara Shipley and Antone Dolezal were inspired by an Ozarks legend when staging this photograph. The central light is meant to suggest the Spook Light, a mysterious floating orb that is said to appear to nighttime travelers. How does this scene convey a sense of mystery and strangeness?

Artist as Observer:

See if you can stage a photograph that represents a legend or story that is associated with your own town or neighborhood. What impression of that place will your photograph convey?



Laura McPhee (American, born 1958), *Mattie with a Bourbon Red Turkey, Lavery Ranch, Custer County, Idaho, 2004*

Holly Lynton (American, born 1972), *Turkey Madonna, Shutesbury, Massachusetts, 2010*

Inquiring Eye:

These two photographs share the common elements of teenage girls and their turkeys. What are some similarities and differences you see in their visual qualities, especially when it comes to light, color, and composition?

Art & Place:

While these photographs were taken on different sides of the country — one in rural Massachusetts and one in a remote Idaho valley — they both suggest that raising animals is an important part of life in these locations. How does each photograph portray the relationship between the girl and her turkey?

Artist as Observer:

Some communities are closely associated with particular kinds of work. What jobs, chores, or other types of labor are common where you live? Take a photograph of someone doing that work.



RaMell Ross (American, born 1982), *TypeFace, 2021*

Inquiring Eye:

How would you describe the use of color and texture in this photograph? Imagine the photographer had chosen to zoom either closer in or further out on this scene. How might that change your impression of the image?

Art & Place:

Red dirt is synonymous with the American South, including Alabama's Hale County, which RaMell Ross captures here. Ross sees the African American experience as being deeply tied to the rural South, too, with its history of both racial oppression and resilience. Given these associations, what might Ross wish to convey by showing the word "Political" etched into the side of this dirt mound? (The image at right shows an edited version of the photograph with the word highlighted for greater legibility.)



Artist as Observer:

Take a photograph of a place that carries personal or cultural meaning for you. What words do you associate with that place? Think of a way to incorporate one of those words into your photograph.



Kristine Potter (American, born 1977), *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, 2016

Bryan Schutmaat (American, born 1983), *Dead Palms*, 2014

Inquiring Eye:

Compare and contrast the arrangement of lines and shapes within these two photographs. How does each artist create an image that is visually interesting?

Art & Place:

Looking at these two photographs, you might wonder: Why are there palm trees in the middle of a desert? How did this antique car get stuck in a ditch? Kristine Potter and Bryan Schutmaat were each thinking about possible backstories that could explain the scenes they captured. What do you think — what stories might be set in these two places?

Artist as Observer:

Think of a location that could serve as the setting for a story. When you take a photograph of that place, see if you can include enough details to suggest a story while still leaving the image with a sense of mystery.



Rahim Fortune (American, born 1994), *Rodeo Girl, Greenville, Mississippi*, 2016

Elise Kirk (American, born 1978), *Swan, Bunny*, 2014

Inquiring Eye:

Each of these photographs features a girl in a rural setting. But, one gives us a close-up of its subject while the other shows a more distant view, and one is black and white while the other is in color. Which image is more visually interesting to you? Why is that?

Art & Place:

In each photograph, what details help you identify the kind of place where it was taken? What mood does each photograph convey about that place and its people?

Artist as Observer:

Experiment with taking photographs of people in a particular place. Try using both black and white and color, and capture photos from different angles and viewpoints. How do these factors affect the mood of the images you create?



AFTER VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

If students attempted any of the *Artist as Observer* photography challenges, have them compare and discuss their resulting photographs with one another. Did any students photograph the same location? If so, how were their images, and their perspectives on that place, similar and different? Which locations did students find to be especially fruitful or inspiring to photograph? Which places posed more of a challenge?

Encourage students to research other contemporary photographers who make place a central theme in their work. Some examples that are represented in the photography collection of the Nelson-Atkins include:

- David Taylor, *Border Monuments* series ([book](#) available in the Educator Resource Center)
- Dawoud Bey, *In This Here Place* series
- William Christenberry, *Palmist Building* photographs (on view in the photography rotation gallery)
- Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, *Yosemite in Time* project (one is on view in the photography rotation gallery)

IMAGE CREDITS

Terry Evans, American (b. 1944). *The Hay Meadow*, June 2022. Series title: *Ancient Prairies*. Inkjet print, 30 1/8 × 32 11/16 inches (76.52 × 83.03 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Beckett Art Purchases Fund in memory of Samuel and Ethel Beckett, 2022.19. © 2024 Terry Evans

Lara Shipley, American (b. 1980) and Antone Dolezal, American (b. 1982). *False Lights*, 2013. Series title: *Devil's Promenade*. Inkjet print, 30 1/16 × 37 1/16 inches (76.35 × 94.13 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2015.43.13. © 2024 Lara Shipley and Antone Dolezal

Laura McPhee, American (b. 1958). *Mattie with a Bourbon Red Turkey, Lavery Ranch, Custer County, Idaho*, November 2004. Series title: *River of No Return*. Chromogenic print, 37 9/16 x 30 1/8 inches (95.41 x 76.52 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2013.20.2. © 2024 Laura McPhee

Holly Lynton, American (b. 1972). *Sienna, Turkey Madonna, Shutesbury, Massachusetts*, 2010; printed 2023. Series title: *Bare Handed*. Chromogenic print, 30 5/8 × 40 3/4 inches (77.79 × 103.51 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Beckett Art Purchases Fund in memory of Samuel and Ethel Beckett, 2023.29. © 2024 Holly Lynton

RaMell Ross, American (b. 1982). *TypeFace*, 2021. Inkjet print, 48 × 60 inches (121.92 × 152.4 cm). © 2024 RaMell Ross

Kristine Potter (American, b. 1977), *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, 2016. Inkjet print, 20 x 30 (50.8 × 76.2 cm) inches. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation, 2024.36.1. © 2024 Kristine Potter

Bryan Schutmaat (American, b. 1983), *Dead Palms*, 2014; .printed 2024. Inkjet print, 32 3/16 × 40 1/16 inches (81.76 × 101.76 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation, 2024.36.4. © 2024 Bryan Schutmaat

Rahim Fortune, American (b. 1994). *Rodeo Girl, Greenville, Mississippi*, 2016. Gelatin silver print, 21 15/16 × 17 7/8 inches (55.72 × 45.4 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Beckett Art Purchases Fund in memory of Samuel and Ethel Beckett, 2023.19.2. © 2024 Rahim Fortune

Elise Kirk (American, b. 1978), *Swan, Bunny*, 2014; printed 2024. Series title: *Mid—*. Inkjet print, 40 x 50 inches (101.6 x 127 cm). Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation, 2024.57.2. © 2024 Elise Kirk
