

2017

## 15 Photographs 15 Curators

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**15 Photographs** 15 Curators  
Sheldon Museum of Art  
January 18–May 7, 2017

SHELDON  
MUSEUM OF ART

University of Nebraska, 12th and R Streets, Lincoln, NE 68588



**15 Photographs** 15 Curators

## 15 Photographs 15 Curators

### Sheldon Museum of Art

January 18–May 7, 2017

#### Sheldon's Academic Mission

The role of Sheldon as an academic art museum is to foster the acts of thinking, learning, experiencing, and creating.

To deliver on this we:

- curate our collections to generate and contextualize challenging conversations and promote intellectual exploration,
- cross disciplinary boundaries and connect diverse schools of thought to bring forth new understanding and multiple perspectives, and
- integrate our programming into the academic life of campus, from research to curriculum to scholarship to co-curricular engagement to the student experience.

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Welcome to Sheldon Museum of Art's "laboratory"

experiment investigating the transactional nature of photography. The fifteen photographs assembled for the exhibition and this accompanying publication are not intended to tell a definitive history of the medium; rather, they establish a social platform that engages us together in the exchange of stories, memories, experiences, and ideas brought on by images in Sheldon's collection.

The museum invited fifteen individuals from the university community—faculty, students, staff, administrators—to each choose a photograph from Sheldon's permanent collection and write a brief reflection on or response to the work. The selected images span history, genres, and styles, just as the participants represent diverse intellectual and creative interests on campus. Equally varied are the reflections themselves. Some participants describe qualities that have drawn them to particular images; others consider the ways art provides a fresh lens for their specialized work in other disciplines.

From the outset of the collaboration, we have wanted both the invited curators and you, the exhibition's viewers, to easily engage with a medium familiar to us all. The ubiquity of photography in our lives has resulted in most people being experienced and comfortable with photographic images. To that we add Sheldon's holdings in photography of nearly three thousand discrete objects spanning the history of the medium, assuring there is something for everyone participating in this project. As you explore the gallery and page through this catalog, consider your own interpretations of the photographs on display and, more broadly, the multitude of images in your daily life.

The creative, authentic voices expressed in *15 Photographs, 15 Curators* represent the diversity of perspectives within the University of Nebraska community and reinforce Sheldon's interest in collaboration and engaging all audiences—across disciplines, on campus, and beyond—in meaningful ways. This is your museum.

Support for this exhibition and its programming is provided by the Cooper Foundation and Sheldon Art Association.

Monte Gerlach  
*Rising Form*

While I cannot speak for Monte Gerlach's intention with *Rising Form*, I can say that the haunting metamorphosis he depicts speaks to the core of my being through a powerfully engulfing and emotive experience. The figure in the photograph, which seems to rise from a crouching position to a standing position during a long exposure, appears to be undergoing a very intense physical transformation evocative of the mythical phoenix rising from the ashes of that which preceded it. The imagery is as eerie and unsettling as it is inspiring, and thus simultaneously embodies both our fears and hopes. This transformation, a varied existence that speaks to the future as much as it does the present, captures my heart and captivates my interest so deeply

because it parallels changes in my own life as I grow into my true self.

Through Gerlach's expressive subject, I find inspiration and motivation to keep rising even if the going is tough and the journey ahead appears to be prolonged. This kind of message is especially poignant for the kind of transitional moment I am presently living. I am, in a sense, reinventing myself in terms of my own identity and expression. However, I feel the message of this imagery is also relatable for everyone in so far as we all experience a series of transformations while going about living, growing, and becoming ourselves. Perhaps one of the reasons why I am so drawn to this work is because it speaks to life, not just my own, but also to our collective existence as we keep moving.

**Matty Cunningham**  
Help Center Associate  
Information Technology Services

*... it speaks to  
life, not just my  
own, but also to  
our collective  
existence as we  
keep moving.*



Sarah Charlesworth  
**Candle**

*Iconic* is the word that sticks for me when thinking about Sarah Charlesworth's photograph *Candle*. What I had in mind, though, wasn't a lazy substitute for descriptors like *signature* or *definitive*. Charlesworth's image resists the easy categorization and recognizability of works by some of her Pictures Generation contemporaries, like Cindy Sherman's self-portraits in costume, or Barbara Kruger's black-and-white photography captioned by white-on-red Futura or Helvetica type.

Instead, *Candle* reminds me of a religious icon, the kind painted by Eastern Orthodox Christians. Charlesworth's photographed subject appears similarly flat, floating without a discernible horizon line and framed by a solid field of red like an icon's *riza*, a single sheet of decorative metal covering all but the painted portion of the icon to protect it from the smoke of burning candles and incense. Our eyes are drawn to the contrast of the

black wick and white flame in the upper center of the composition, the latter resembling the *ozhivki*, or bleach highlights of traditional painted icons.

So if *Candle* is iconic, what can be said of its iconography? Charlesworth described her *Neverland* series, to which this print belongs, as an exploration of the "boundaries between image and symbol," but she didn't prescribe meaning to her objects. Instead, she preferred to let "whatever power, whatever affect they have, work on its own."\* I'm fascinated by this ambiguity, how we can bring our own meaning to a piece, like a sort of spirituality.

*Peter Pan* author J. M. Barrie described Neverland as "always more or less an island," a different locus in each child's mind.† Here, Charlesworth captures the enigmatic candle-as-timepiece in a state of arrested development, surrounded by a sea of red, its flame never extinguished.

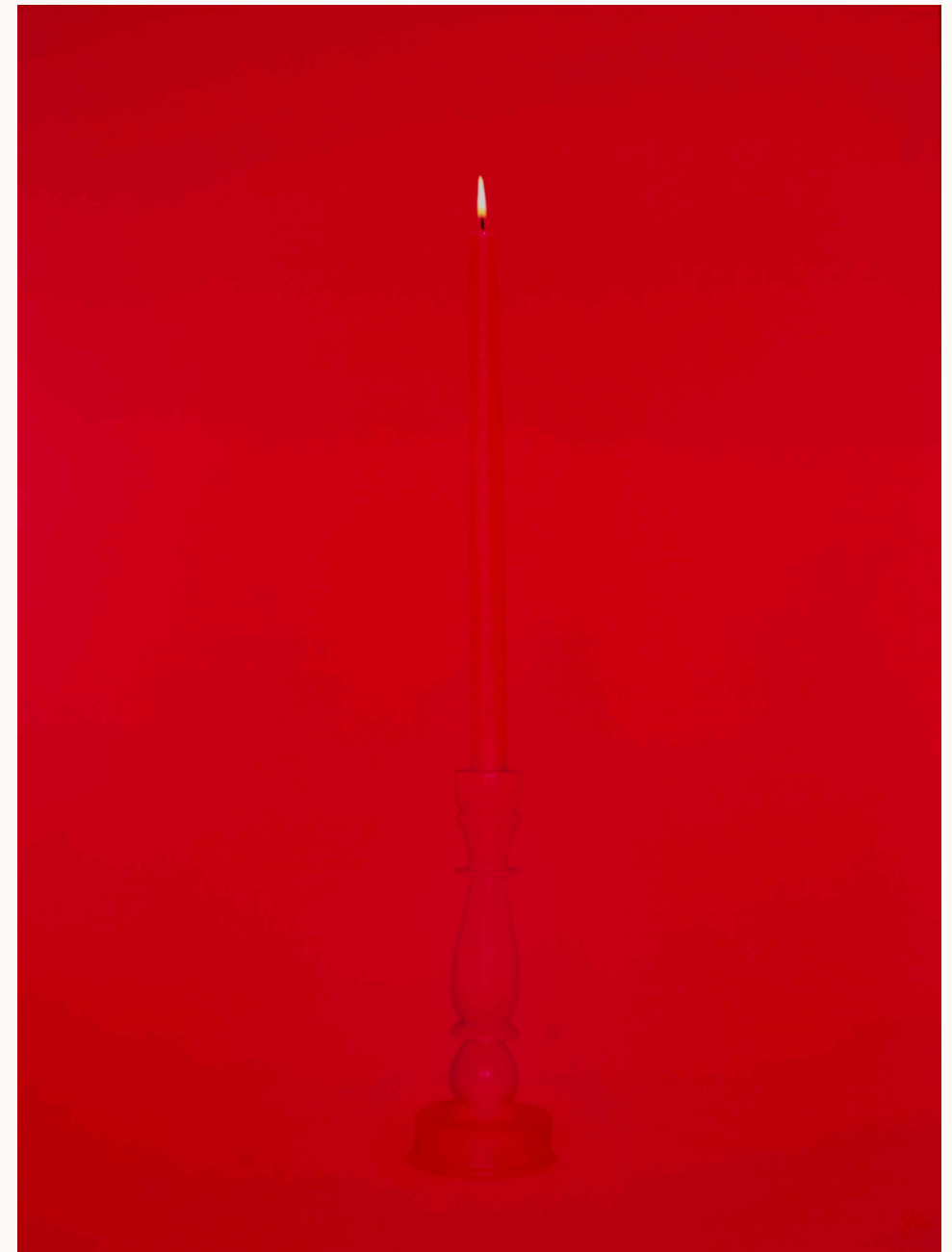
*I'm fascinated  
by this  
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meaning to a  
piece ...*

**Ryan Dee**

Senior Web Designer/Developer  
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\* [www.sarahcharlesworth.net/series.php](http://www.sarahcharlesworth.net/series.php)

† J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (100th Anniversary Edition), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003.



Stanley Truman  
*Joinery, Coloma, California*

I suspect most people are attracted to Stanley Truman's *Joinery, Coloma, California*, because of the geometry—the circular annular rings on the logs contrasting the manmade straight lines of the joint. Clearly, the artist intended to highlight these features given the composition and perspective.

For me, however, the attraction stems from professional and personal experience. From my perspective as

a mechanical engineer, I'm drawn to and admire the structural aspects of the joinery. The structure is simple, yet extremely strong. I'm also a woodworker and further appreciate the two angles of a double dovetail joint that hold the corner in both directions. I am a self-proclaimed tree hugger. I love trees at all stages of their existence, including the beauty of natural wooden logs in manmade structures. I would like to be in the place where this picture was taken.

*... as a  
mechanical  
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aspects of  
the joinery.*

**Shane Farritor**

Lederer Professor of Mechanical and Materials Engineering  
College of Engineering  
Founder, Nebraska Innovation Studio

Stanley Truman  
San Francisco, CA 1903–Walnut Creek, CA 1993  
*Joinery, Coloma, California*  
Gelatin silver print, 1967  
13½ x 9 inches  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln, gift of George W. Neubert  
U-3794:1985



Carrie Mae Weems  
*Kitchen Table Series*

I was moved by this image in so many ways. It reminded me of my childhood. It reminded me of wanting to grow up and be like the strong African-American women who surrounded me in my church and community. They were well dressed, committed to community, and worked hard. Having a strong work ethic wasn't an option—it was the default.

We work hard in church. We work hard in the home. And we work doubly hard in our professions. We have to. To hold on to jobs that test our physical strength and ability to manage on small salaries, we must always give 100 percent.

The little girl in Carrie Mae Weems's photograph is learning to commit to that challenge. It is being modeled here by a mother who wants her

daughter to be successful. The mother dreams of a future for her daughter where she can achieve great success and be recognized as a dignified citizen. Too often this mother has lived through discrimination and microaggressions that kept her feeling less respected than her white counterparts. She dreams of a new world for her little girl. She keeps dreaming and working.

She lives through a reality, however, that reminds her constantly that a larger change needs to happen in the community. She lives in a world (country, community) that needs a "come-to-Jesus" moment where people remember that we all desire to live out our right of the pursuit of happiness. Until that change comes, both mother and daughter will keep on dreaming, keep on working

*Having a  
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**Charlie Foster**

Interim Assistant to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs  
Office of Academic Success and Intercultural Services





Ansel Adams

***Ranch House Near Carson City, Nevada, Winter***

You know when you get part of a song stuck in your head and, no matter what you do, you just can't seem to think of anything else? After looking through the entirety of Sheldon's collection of photographs, Adams's picture of a run-down, average looking, pretty forgettable house remained foremost in my mind. At first, I couldn't figure out why a photograph of a dumpy house stuck with me over the thousands of others, featuring bustling cityscapes, captivating portraits, and beautiful expressions of light and texture. It took me a few weeks of thinking, off and on, before I realized what was going on.

As I look at this photograph, echoes of a poem run through my head. I'm currently studying to be an English teacher with a particular emphasis on teaching poetry. Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" is special

to me because it's one of the first poems I've had the opportunity to teach.\* As soon as I saw this picture, the two works, subconsciously, became inseparable; memories of Hayden's descriptions of "chronic angers" and "love's austere and lonely offices" colored my reading of this house, which I realize now is nearly indistinguishable from any of a hundred such houses I'd seen while growing up in the hills of western Nebraska, a land pockmarked with sandstone bluffs and ancient knurled cedar trees. The poem and picture also danced together through memories of my childhood, mornings when a fresh snow fell and chilled the house to its bones, mornings when my whisker-faced father would light the wood stove and we'd sit together in the warmth, not saying anything.

**Derrick Goss**  
Undergraduate Student  
College of Education & Human Sciences

*The poem  
and picture  
also danced  
together  
through  
memories of  
my childhood ...*



\* The poem may be read online at the Poetry Foundation website (©2016)  
[www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/46461](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/46461).

Harold Edgerton  
***Wes Fesler Kicking a Football***

If Jim Croce had really wanted to save time in a bottle, he should have taken a picture. Photography traps time in scales: erasing it by omitting the temporal, or freezing it in its *decisive moment*. This term is associated with photojournalism pioneer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who described the split-second of genius and inspiration needed to capture those fleeting moments. A half second too late or early greatly influences the image. While once this demanded a camera always at hand, the advent of new technology has elevated the challenge of trapping time, of seizing that decisive moment, to new levels.

Harold Eugene "Doc" Edgerton, a Fremont native raised in Aurora and educated at the University of Nebraska, approached the challenge of the decisive moment with invention. In 1987, *National Geographic* referred to Doc Edgerton as, "the man who made time stand still" because his invention of the high-speed flash tube

revealed for the first time what the eye had never seen: a bullet the instant it explodes through an apple, and a perfect coronet formed by a milk-drop splash. Both have become classics of modern art and science.\*

But it's this image of a football taking intense punishment I find most captivating. Edgerton explained in his book *Flash!*: "... the kicker is Wesley E. Fesler, onetime all-American star at Ohio State and their coach from 1947 to 1950, and the ball is inflated to the normal playing pressure of approximately thirteen pounds to the square inch. Measurements show that the boot penetrates at least half the diameter of the ball."<sup>†</sup> In this moment of frozen time, I see the dichotomy of before and after—wires used to make contact for the flash exposure, the dust suspended in midair as the rapidly accelerated ball launches. I can see 1/10,000 of a second. I am witness to the decisive moment.

**Richard Graham**  
Associate Professor  
University Libraries

*I can see  
1/10,000 of a  
second. I am  
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moment.*



\* Erla Swingle, "Doc' Edgerton: The Man Who Made Time Stand Still," *National Geographic*, 172 (October 1987): 464–483.

<sup>†</sup> Harold E. Edgerton and James R. Killian, Jr., *Flash! Seeing the Unseen by Ultra High-Speed Photography*. Boston: Charles T. Branford Co., 1954.

Dorothea Lange  
***Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California***

There is a quality to this photo that grabs my attention and makes it difficult for me to look away. It instantly evokes feelings of concern for those experiencing desperation, poverty, and vulnerability. We know from the title that it depicts a migrant family during the Great Depression. The starkness of the image, its subject matter, and the emotion it draws out create a timeless depiction of those forced—either by conflict or by economic conditions—to leave the stability and security of their homes in order to survive. The photo could easily portray a migrant worker, the poor and homeless in our cities, or refugees fleeing their homelands today.

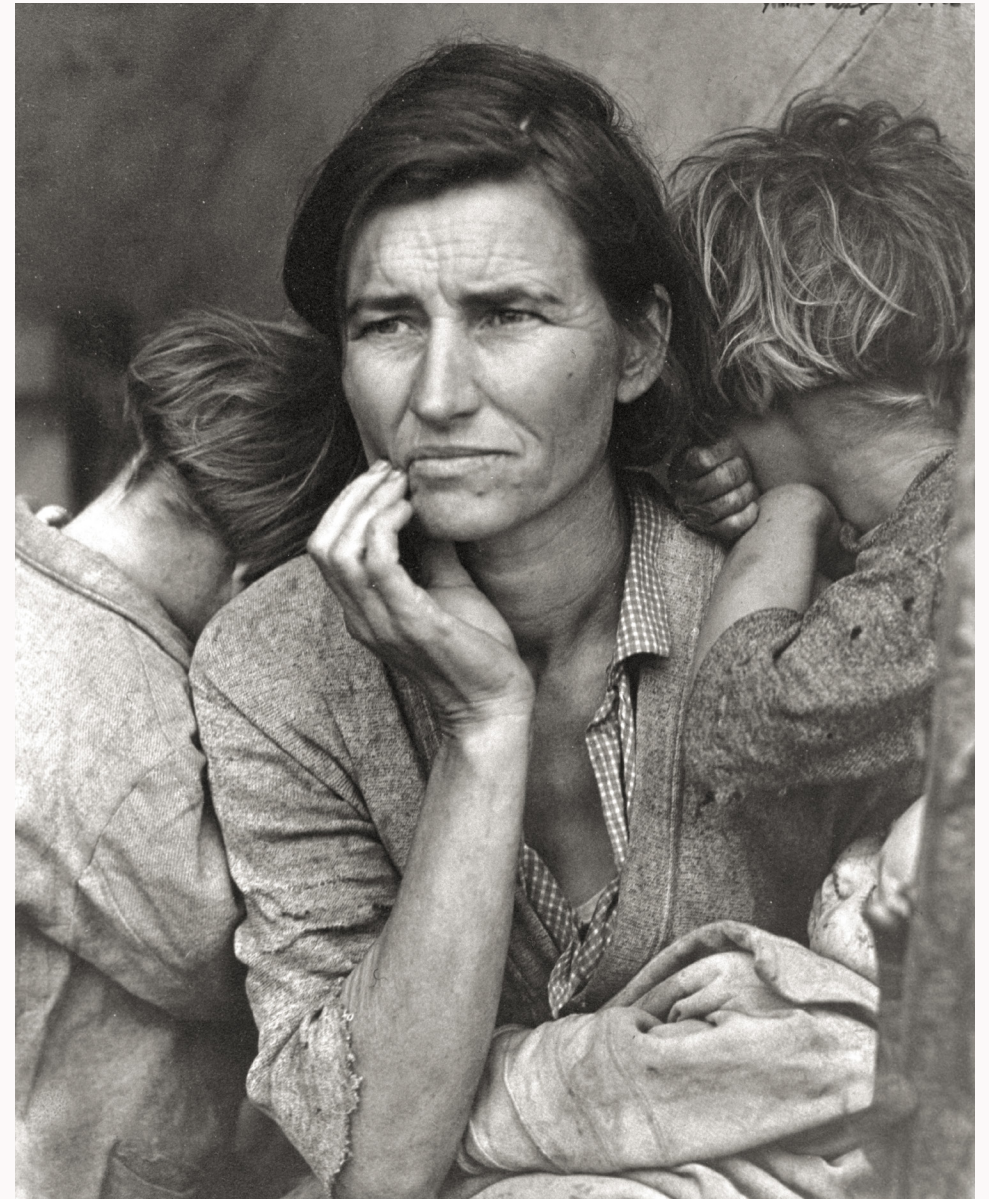
The migrant mother's face commands the central focus with features that

are simultaneously handsome and haggard, strong and soft. Her gaze is resolute, but filled with worry. She is framed by what must be the source of her concern, her children, whose sleeping bodies fold into the curves of hers so closely that we almost miss the muddied face of an infant tucked under one of its siblings. The weight the woman carries is both real and figurative. She is quite literally her family's home.

As a father, this image hits me at an emotional level, summoning the love and worry I have for my own children, while representing the precious innocence of children who are often the most vulnerable and marginalized in today's world.

**Pablo Morales**  
Head Coach, Women's Swimming  
Athletics

*She is quite  
literally her  
family's home.*



Frank Gohlke

***Landscape—Grain Elevator and Lightning Flash, Lamesa, Texas***

What makes a place? Is it the particular flora and fauna, land features, bodies of water, the weather—what we might more generically refer to as the topography and nature? Or, is it the people who inhabit, revere, develop, destroy, and otherwise mark the landscape—what is studied as cultural geography or the cultural landscape?

The answer to this question, the question itself for that matter, is probably more complex than what I am getting at here. Nevertheless, it is the idea of place that I find most compelling about the work of American landscape photographer Frank Gohlke. I've been interested in the cultural landscape ever since I took a class with a student of the geographer and cultural historian J. B. (John Brinckerhoff "Brinck") Jackson (1909–1996). Jackson studied vernacular landscapes and both wrote

and lectured on the social dynamics that shape the environment, that create places. His legacy informs how I regard parks to be more than simply sites of natural beauty, storefronts as not just frames for displaying goods, street grids as systems that move more than traffic. Each of these features in the landscape is a place created by people to negotiate cultural meaning and relations.

It would be remiss of me to not also confess that I'm drawn to Gohlke's sharp, precise rendering of textures, surfaces, forms, and light—and in this photograph, the vantage point. Being a native of the Midwest, I know places like this. I've experienced them much like Gohlke has presented this Texan landscape: from the road, watching tall elevator towers gradually rise above the flat landscape as I approach and then fall back into the horizon as I drive past and look into the rearview mirror.

*... it is the idea  
of place that  
I find most  
compelling ...*

**Carrie Morgan**

Curator of Academic Programs  
Sheldon Museum of Art

Frank Gohlke  
born Wichita Falls, TX 1942  
*Landscape—Grain Elevator and Lightning Flash, Lamesa, Texas*  
Gelatin silver print, 1975  
19 7/8 x 15 7/8 inches  
Nebraska Art Association, purchased with the aid of funds from  
the National Endowment for the Arts  
N-418.1976



Mark Ruwedel  
*Virginia and Truckee #1*

As a child born in the desert of West Texas, I have an affinity for photographs that can speak to the conflict in our desire for westward expansion with the indifference of its toll on the land. In this image from Mark Ruwedel's series *Westward the Course of Empire*, the pathway now sits scarred, unused by the train tracks intended for this site.

I imagine the nineteenth-century laborers and what they might have to say about the energy they expended in pursuit of the greater good. Would they be angry that their efforts have been discarded, or proud they played a

small role in the building of a new kind of empire?

Images like this imply a great deal about the dream and the folly of Manifest Destiny. I'm reminded of the work of photographer Daniel Shea in his *Removing Mountains* project, where companies were willing to literally blow up the entire top of a mountain in order to get to the coal it held. Because westward expansion was framed as a race, the effects on the land were an entirely secondary concern.

Still, we're left with a new kind of beauty in these traces of Manifest Destiny's failures.

**Walker Pickering**

Assistant Professor of Art, Photography  
School of Art, Art History & Design

*... I have an  
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**Robert Adams**  
***Colorado Springs, Colorado***

Robert Adams's photograph *Colorado Springs, Colorado* is one of contradictions.

If you were to read only its title, what would you expect to see — mountains or a grove of aspens, perhaps? Instead, we see a tract house that could be found in any mid-twentieth-century suburban neighborhood, anywhere in the US.

The composition, which is divided almost evenly into thirds, is simple, spare with no sense of movement. We see a clear, cloudless sky; a tract house with the address 812; and a brightly lit, well-groomed lawn. The light quality is not soft, romantic or seductive. Rather, it's glaring and gives the impression of hot, oppressive midday light. It's certainly not the light quality that one usually finds in landscape photography. Obviously, Adams is not trying to sell the beauty of this landscape.

We are given few details of this generic house, suggesting that

Adams isn't interested in its specific architectural features. The silhouette of an equally nondescript woman, caught in profile, becomes the focal point within the shadowed house.

One's eyes can't help but remain on this solitary figure, starkly surrounded by bright light, the unremarkable architecture, and manipulated landscape. But there is no engagement with her. She doesn't face us. She has been caught, frozen by the camera's shutter at the midpoint of her house and at the midpoint of the photograph. She is nothing more than an element of the bleak landscape.

Adams is clever in his construction and title of this photograph. We may think we should be viewing the dramatic beauty of the Colorado landscape, but instead we are presented with a numbingly sterile and isolated neighborhood that humankind has created there. There is no Rocky Mountain high here.

*One's eyes can't help but remain on this solitary figure, starkly surrounded by bright light, the unremarkable architecture, and manipulated landscape.*



**Judith Sasso-Mason**  
Financial Aid Specialist  
Scholarships & Financial Aid

Alan Cohen  
**Robert Morris 134-7**

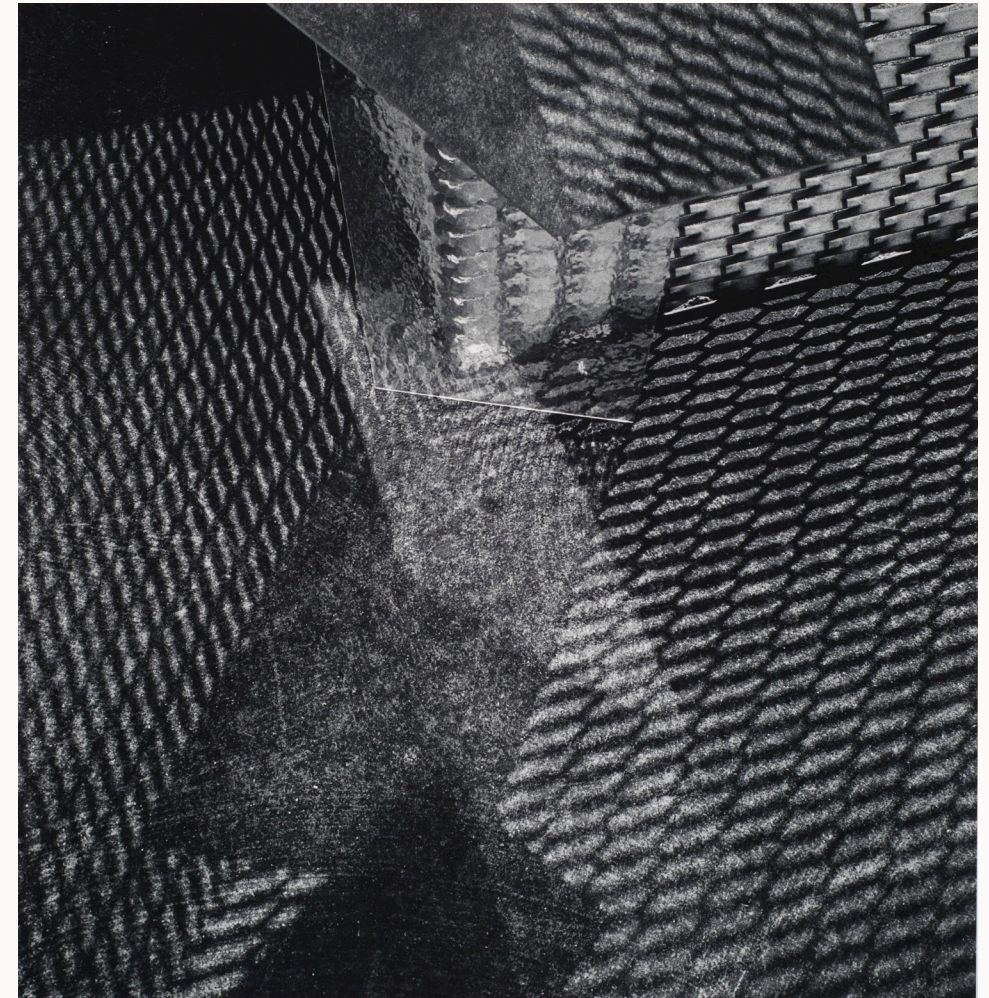
I was intrigued by the Alan Cohen photograph because it has interesting structural aspects that are similar to those encountered in various types of nanostructured materials. The length scale of features in nanoscale materials is the nanometer, which is one billionth of a meter, or the length of about four iron atoms lined up in a row. The photo has regions that could be called "grains," within which there are "building blocks" that are arranged in regular arrays. The several grains in the photo are separated by straight-line boundaries or interfaces.

All of these features are of great interest to those of us engaged in materials and nanoscience research. In this field we are creating new materials to solve many of the most pressing challenges facing mankind. Among these are renewable

energy sources, new methods for information processing and storage, environmental and health protection, and economic and defense security. In the case of nanostructured materials, the properties of the individual building blocks, the grains and the grain boundaries or interfaces all are crucial in understanding the behavior of the material, whether it is a magnet in a hybrid car or a structural material in an airplane wing. The control of all of these structural features is at the heart of many modern technologies.

The photo is stimulating because it invites us to ponder the spatial relationships and how the pieces fit together. It also is thought provoking because it makes us wonder about the optical techniques that were used in its production.

*The photo is stimulating because it invites us to ponder the spatial relationships and how the pieces fit together.*



**David J. Sellmyer**

George Holmes University Professor of Physics  
Director, Nebraska Center for Materials and Nanoscience  
Director, Nebraska Nanoscale Facility:  
National Nanotechnology Coordinated Infrastructure

Henry Holmes Smith  
***Death of Punch***

*It would be wrong to assert that this work is in a new tradition. Actually the product is an extension of an exceedingly early view that was the photograph was a work of both the physiochemical process and of the human being.*

—Henry Holmes Smith, 1962\*

Direct representation is noticeably absent in *Death of Punch* by Henry Holmes Smith. Interested in the expressive possibilities of the photographic medium but disinterested in exacting

reproductions of the world, Smith created work by manipulating photographic materials. He explored the aesthetic boundaries of the medium, tapping into its expressive and aesthetic possibilities.

Smith's *Death of Punch* offers the viewer something to contemplate, to gaze into, to interpret without being instructive or demanding. His open-ended, nonconformist spirit still resonates more than fifty years after this photograph was taken.

**Jamie Swartz**  
Graduate Student  
Textiles, Merchandising & Fashion Design

*... something to contemplate, to gaze into, to interpret without being instructive or demanding.*



\* Quoted in Howard Bossen, "Dialogue of Differences: The Writing of Henry Holmes Smith," *Camera Lucida. The Journal of Photographic Criticism* (1982): 13.



Gordon Parks

***Willie Causey and Family, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956***

Gordon Parks's photograph of Willie Causey and his family deeply moved me, speaking well beyond the proverbial 1,000 words. This image, like many others Parks produced during the 1950s, was his way of telling the segregation story and advocating for civil rights, which he did with profound dignity and sensitivity. I was drawn to this work because of my own commitment to social justice and human rights.

Parks definitely captured human emotion and the cultural context of the time. This photo is an important document of yesterday as well as an important message for today. While

there is greater awareness around diversity and fairness today, there remains much exclusion and injustice in our world.

I think photographs like this one can encourage us all to more deeply engage with others by inviting questions. Who are the people in this photo? What are their stories? What are they experiencing in this moment? What will happen in the future? This is the power of Parks's work; he was talented and sensitive, and his images tell important stories as well as bring understanding and context to who we are and where we come from.

**Sriyani Tidball**

Assistant Professor of Practice  
College of Journalism and Mass Communications

*I think  
photographs  
like this one  
can encourage  
us all to more  
deeply engage  
with others  
by inviting  
questions.*



Dorothea Lange

***Pathan Warrior Tribesman, Khyber Pass***

Perhaps it is the stillness of this image that holds me—the creases written across skin, the threads of the fabric woven in and out of view, the sliver of land frozen at the subject's shoulder. The Pathan warrior watches across decades and continents, and, behind him, I hear the wind sweeping through the Khyber Pass. I feel the breath of the Hindu Kush on the old caravan road, winding back and forth through the low-lying fields and arid hills, past the herbal arms of junipers, the reach of shale and limestone. Maybe the warrior pictured here heard the climbing of ibex, the cries of rock partridge, the verses calling for understanding drifting up from the shrine of the poet, Rahman Baba.

I think of the woman operating the camera's shutter, whose words and work ask us to see beyond ourselves, to understand other lives and lands. Dorothea Lange tells us: "The good photograph is not the object. The consequences of the photograph are the object ..."<sup>\*</sup> Like her images from years spent documenting migrant workers in the American West, the

photograph pulls me in and challenges me to imagine lives in a place I've never known. A place marked by the long echos of conflict—Persians, Greeks, Moghuls, British troops, and, now, American military convoys on the path linking Kabul and Peshawar. Lange's photograph of the Pathan warrior makes real for me what countless news reports on war, terrorism, and politics could not.

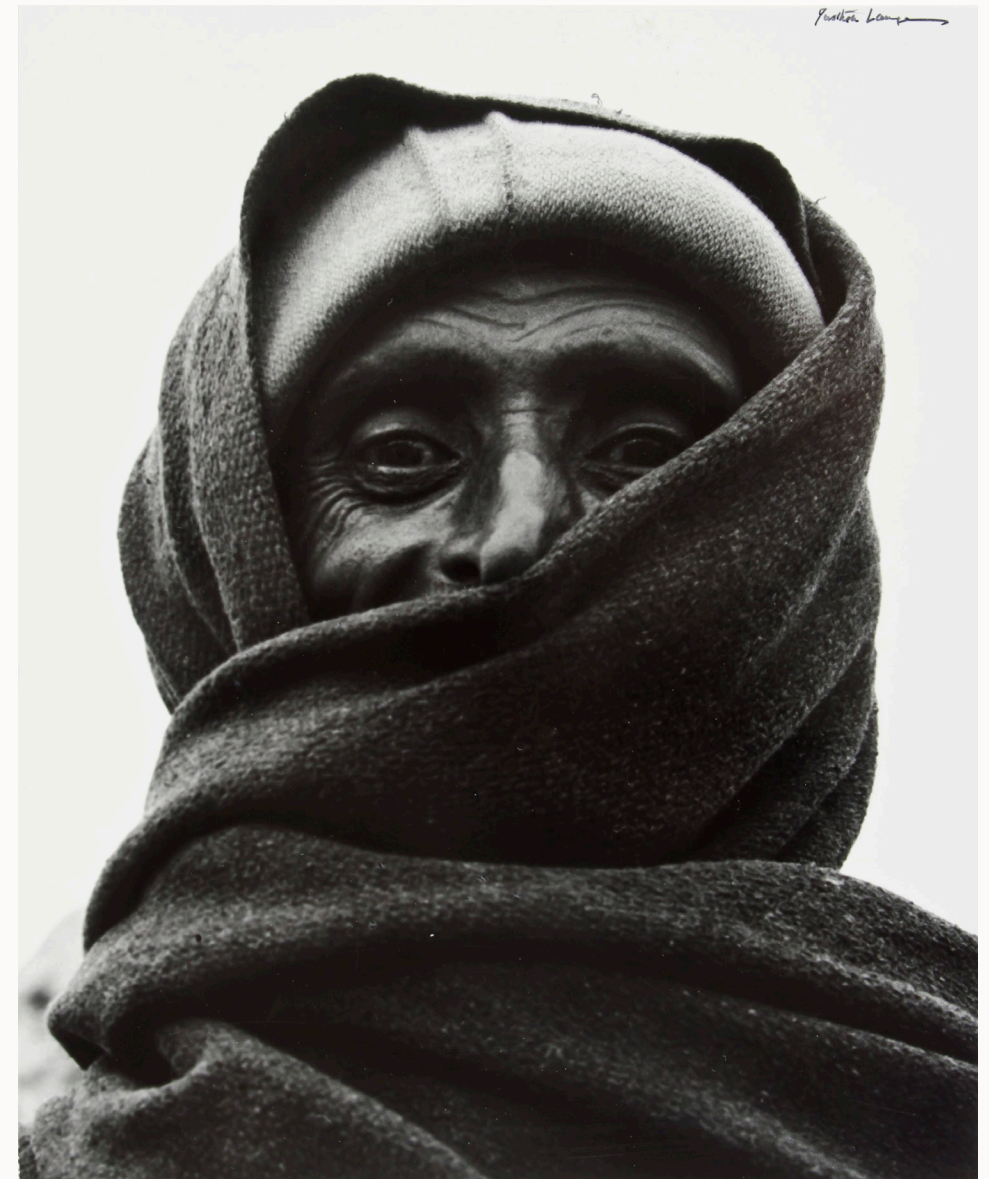
Images unremitently flood our days and screens telling the stories of migration, of warriors, of conflict, of people longing for home. And some, like this by Dorothea Lange, hold us long enough to open our minds, to ask us to listen, to let us care.

Will we be the people in whom Rahman Baba believed when he said:

*The heart that is safe in the storm  
Is the one which carries other's  
burdens like a boat.<sup>†</sup>*

I imagine them, the warrior and the photographer, looking across the lens, across languages, across cultures, and I hope.

*I think of  
the woman  
operating  
the camera's  
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work ask us  
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**Elizabeth VanWormer**

Assistant Professor of Practice  
School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

<sup>\*</sup> Ann Whiston Spurr, *Dorothea Lange's Photographs from the Field*, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

<sup>†</sup> Rahman Baba (1653-1711), *Sow Flowers* (poem).

Judy Dater  
***Kathleen Kelly***

Seductive, determined, strong, feminist, *Kathleen Kelly* captures the essence of a self-assured woman who values her independence and desires to be taken seriously. When I first viewed this photograph, I assumed it was old—perhaps from the 1920s. I saw the woman as flapperesque, given the style of her headscarf and hair and her confident, direct gaze. I imagined her to be a modern woman who challenged the era's societal norms with wild dancing, high hemlines, short hair, makeup, drinking, smoking, and a nine-to-five job.

As I spent more time with the image, the model's exotic presence grew increasingly familiar. I began to recognize her traits as consistent with

those of the women I grew up with in the 1970s. Although her appearance reflects a fashion and hairstyle revived from a previous generation, the strength of her facial expression and gesture reveal continuity in women's pursuit of independence.

I'm struck by the photograph's suggestion that history repeats itself. I wonder whether something as simple as the way the model holds her necklace is an indication that she, like generations of other women, has experienced conflict in her desire for self-determination as compared to traditional expectations and in wanting to be sexually provocative while also holding a strong faith.

*I'm struck by the photograph's suggestion that history repeats itself.*

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