ON THE COVER

Leslie Brack
Sunset, 2010
(see page 8)
Since 1993, the Johnson Museum has collaborated with Cornell’s Department of the History of Art to provide opportunities for interested undergraduates to gain direct museum experience by organizing an exhibition. This year, *enticing the eye / exploring the frame* explores how art is a simultaneous reflection of the artist and the viewer. Through this lens, the exhibition examines framing through abstraction, identity, and the medium itself in works from a wide range of periods and media in order to broaden understanding of the complex effect of framing on the viewer’s experience. The exhibition aims to convince the viewer that no aspect of a work of art is accidental. The focus of a photograph, the interaction between two lines on a canvas, each deep incision in a piece of marble—all demonstrate something unique, both about the work of art and the artist’s message.

The way subject and message are presented through a frame leads to a deeper understanding of the work itself. We look at a straightforward way of framing, through physical frames of architecture or the surroundings. We move to less tangible manipulations of the frame through abstraction and negative space. Some artists whose works have been chosen for *enticing the eye / exploring the frame* have structured their frame in a way that asks more of the viewer and does not always offer immediate gratification. The History of Art Majors’ Society urges visitors to be active viewers, constantly asking the question of how a piece of art is “framed”—both literally and within a larger context.

In addition to the exhibition, the Society has expanded its social media presence in efforts to engage with audiences on a new level. Through weekly blog posts at curatedhams.wordpress.com and an active Instagram @insta_hams, we have engaged the larger Cornell community, as well as art lovers and museums internationally, in our curatorial explorations. This has also helped our team to see what we are doing through a different lens. We are hopeful that these activities will not only stir excitement for the show but also help interested viewers to understand our process and engage with *enticing the eye / exploring the frame* from start to finish. We hope to forge connections with visitors who will respond to a work with an intense feeling—when this happens, you have shared a connection with the artist in a unique and personal way. You’ve shared a mind-set. You’ve shared a frame.

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Helen Frankenthaler was a pioneering artist in the color field movement from the 1940s and '50s. Frankenthaler’s *Air Frame* is an example of framing in abstract art. This work is first framed through its original context: surrounded by Frankenthaler’s contemporaries like Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg within the portfolio *New York Ten*, each of whom channels different facets of the '60s art movements through their work. Through the frame of different artists, Frankenthaler’s manipulation of color and form stands out and her message stands wholly clear; analogously, Frankenthaler’s work is framed by reference to other examples of different movements in this exhibition. In line with traditional color field technique, the work has flat, solid color planes that stain the paper and create a subject freed from its representational binds. Uncharacteristically for the abstract movement, the viewer is made distinctly aware of the representational context of the work. Frankenthaler bathes the work in a penetrating and bright blue, causing the purity of the color of the untouched paper below to create a frame that appears to gleam through to swathes of color. The way the absence of color seeps out from the blue of the sky creates a suffocating feel; it constructs the iconic airplane window. The untouched medium is a stand-in for the unnatural plastic that frames the beauty of the natural landscape within.

Frankenthaler’s frame uses the juxtaposition between color and medium to both construct a frame for the viewer to see through and pass criticism on what stands in her way of an unobstructed view from the sky. The ways works are framed in the abstract are variable and oftentimes difficult to understand. This exhibition aims to break down these barriers through examining the motivations of individual artists, both alone and in juxtaposition to one another. László Moholy-Nagy and Wassily Kandinsky explored framing in...
negative space, both based in the Bauhaus school but employing different techniques and media to convey their messages. Contemporary artists like Leslie Brack turn the representational abstract, and Sherrie Levine focuses on eliciting provocative emotions through her almost ready-mades.

Constructing a physical frame that choreographs both the work and the viewer is a crucial element not only to the works in enticing the eye / exploring the frame but also in our video symposium (see page 38), featuring works from the Goldsen Archive and special lectures by Cornell University professors. The threads that link this symposium with each of the larger themes of the exhibition can be read as three techniques: the artist in and through his/her work; architectural and abstract framing; and the framing of historical and political works. This last technique is often employed in photography—Sebastião Salgado’s manipulation of the camera in Gold Mine, Serra Pelada, Brazil to instigate a gut-wrenching reaction in the viewer. The dirt on the sides of the mine inch up the frame and invade the space of the viewer; there is no safe vantage point. To look at Salgado’s print is to be in the mine and to feel, to empathize, with the tortured condition of the miners.

The architectural construction, not only of the image itself but also by the lens of the artist, is what creates the powerful message. The way the stairs wind and twist almost manically in the etching from Giovanni Piranesi’s Prison Scenes, or the way an earlier engraving of a prison both places the viewer at a physical distance from the scene but still within the cell explore different notions of imprisonment: Of what has the subject been convicted? Is the viewer as innocent as the writhing, idealized men in chains? The figures in the back prying at the jailed window juxtaposed with the figure hanging from the ceiling—the Prison engraving creates an ambiguity within the physical walls of the prison cell that is heightened by including the viewer in the frame. A similar embodiment can be seen in Andy Warhol’s Jackie III, where four different yet equally poignant images of Jacqueline Kennedy are framed next to one another; each impacting the reading of the next image so that by the time the viewer sees Jackie smiling in the last image, the impact of the tragic, grieving images before permeate the happiness she shows.

The physical frame the artist employs, whether literal or by an abstract omission, changes the way one reads the image. The many ways the frame can be manipulated is the subject of this exhibition, as the History of Art Majors’ Society explores the importance and transformation of artistic frames through time, place, and medium.

—Margaret Merrell
László Moholy-Nagy’s Wie bleibe ich jung und schön? (How do I stay young and beautiful?) and Wassily Kandinsky’s Parallel Diagonals share certain abstract aesthetics of framing, as they are both related to the Bauhaus school. The Bauhaus operated in Germany in the early to mid-twentieth century. It pioneered a new approach to studying design, giving equal importance to art, craft, and technology. Kandinsky and Moholy-Nagy both taught at the first Bauhaus site in Weimar, Germany, and their works exemplify the ideals of the school.

Through the unification of art, craft, and technology, the Bauhaus produced an aesthetic that continues to influence architecture and design to this day. Specifically, the Bauhaus focused on geometric shapes and their relation to the human body. This aesthetic is present in both Kandinsky’s and Moholy-Nagy’s work, as they frame forms through positive and negative space.

In order to understand Wie bleibe ich jung und schön?, it should be approached from technical and aesthetic perspectives related to its Bauhaus origins. The composition, which consists of two figures and a thick circle that frames one of the figures, shows the balance of geometry and human form typical of the Bauhaus. The implied movement of the top figure balances the asymmetric placement of the circle on the page. Both figures interact with the circle, creating a unity between the three elements. The two figures could themselves be seen as geometric forms, as they frame each other in the abstract composition.

Because of Moholy-Nagy’s involvement with the Bauhaus, this work can be framed as both a commentary on youth and beauty, as the title of the piece suggests, and in terms of its technical elements, taken from the compositional fusion of geometric forms.

The title of the work suggests a narrative for Moholy-Nagy’s composition. The circle frames what appears to be an older, female figure, standing solidly, while a younger, athletic figure is in motion on the outside of the circle. It is uncertain whether the athlete is both young and beautiful, or if the female figure is the symbol for beauty. The circle can also garner both positive and negative connotations, as it can be seen as constricting the female figure inside, or as shutting itself from the outside figure, and
affirming the qualities of the one inside. Thus, the piece can be read in a number of ways, as Moholy-Nagy addresses the elusive concepts of youth, beauty, and eternity, the latter of which is perhaps symbolized by the solid geometric circle.

Moholy-Nagy’s work comes from his Fotoplastiken portfolio, meaning “photo-sculpture.” Thus, the piece can be related to the ideals of the Bauhaus, as the school believed the ultimate output of creativity to be a building. The two-dimensional photograph gains implied three-dimensionality as it plays with framing through flattened form, positive and negative space, and the relation of geometry and the human figure.

Kandinsky’s Parallel Diagonals also works with Bauhaus ideas of design, but to a lesser extent, as it does not involve the human figure. Kandinsky’s composition is balanced through its dichotomies of color, line, shape, and (positive and negative) form. The Bauhaus school’s curriculum relied on these elements in its Vorkurs, or preliminary course. Kandinsky’s work exemplifies the color and design theories taught to first-year students at the Bauhaus.

The title furthers its relation to Bauhaus aesthetics. The title focuses on the forms of the piece, just as the Bauhaus focused on the interaction of geometric shapes.

Kandinsky’s abstract work can be framed both through its technical elements of framing through lines, shapes, and forms, as well as its greater frame of Bauhaus design. Likewise, Moholy-Nagy’s piece is linked to Bauhaus ideals through its technical elements; however, unlike Kandinsky’s, its narrative composition allows for a more conceptual interpretation.

—Ekaterina Savelieva

Wassily Kandinsky
Russian, 1866–1944
*Parallel Diagonals*, 1923
Color lithograph on cream wove paper
Anonymous gift
96.035.011
© 2014 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris
“Abstract: Existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence.”

*Sunset* is a simple image with a hard edge of irony; a bittersweet, slightly cynical subject that characterizes the work of Leslie Brack. The Ithaca-based artist explores an element of abstraction inherent to every form of art, no matter how true to reality the artist’s subject may be. As accurate as the artist strives to be in his or her observations, art is inescapably representational due to the limitations imposed by the frame. The artist’s conversation with the viewer will always contain an element of abstraction, calling into question the validity of the frame and the nature of art itself.

*Sunset* invites the viewer to interpret quite simply by the layers of the frame, removing any ambiguity from the process. The emphasis on simplicity is most direct in the presentation of the television, which commands attention in the soft spotlight set against an impenetrable background. The artist’s decision to place the subject in the bottom half of the composition, rather than centering the subject, suggests the background holds meaning despite its lackluster appearance. The transition from black to gray draws the eye toward the television set in the hope of finding rescue from the cold, indifferent black that consumes the piece. The inherent loneliness of the screen in what appears to be an ambiguous space is discomforting and generates unease. The world is reduced to the screen before us, and without our consent we are the audience of this confined “window on the world.” The harsh framing effect of the background enforces her command to ignore the outside world and focus on the artificial one at hand. Even the mundane appearance of the set provides no escape from the commanding frame, and only serves to direct the eye inward.

The image shown on the television screen holds a relatively small physical space on the canvas, despite its centrality to the composition. The display captures a moment in nature that has the potential to stir powerful emotions in the observer. A sunset is the ultimate natural phenomenon, one that defies any attempts to be framed, and yet it is a classic subject of all forms of art. The desire to capture emotional experiences is natural, but the result will always be an abstract representation of reality. Subsequently, the sunset is an abstracted element of reality translated into a very realistic idea, but never anything more. The experience of observing a static image scaled down to a fraction of its true size is inevitably disappointing.

The narrative presented by *Sunset* is complex and full of tension; Brack defines the artist’s role as capturing reality, but makes it clear that art is no substitution for true experience. While the viewer knows awe and magnificence are communicated through the projection of the sunset, neither emotion is truly felt. Brack applies this abstraction of emotion to her own piece, putting the painting at odds with its own message. Framing reality is to frame another human’s interpretation of the world. The artist bravely frames her world and gives viewers a glimpse into her unique interpretation of reality, but the only form of sight that escapes abstraction is to see with one’s own eyes.

―Virginia Girard

**ON THE COVER**

Leslie Brack
American, born 1967
*Sunset*, 2010
Oil on panel
The Mary Lou Harriott Collection of Ithaca Artists
2011.022
Courtesy of the artist
Sherrie Levine specializes in appropriation, photography, and neoconceptual art. Levine began her career as a 1980s “Pictures Generation” artist, alongside Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, Joseph Kosuth, and Cindy Sherman, who are all known for utilizing their artistic voices to comment on pertinent societal themes such as originality, representation, and balancing the role between spectator and artist. Levine’s vision of appropriation is extreme, and she became well known after her controversial After Walker Evans exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1981, composed of twenty-two appropriated, unaltered Walker Evans photographs. Causing debate and renown, this exhibition propelled Levine onto the international artistic platform of innovation, feminism, and conceptualism.

Currently, Levine has transformed her appropriation work into a specialization: neoconceptualist sculpture. Although the medium and subject matters have evolved, her work continues to include the overriding theme of materiality. In addition, Levine now emphasizes the importance of the installation and physical presence of her work, as she provides context for her viewers and encourages them to emotionally and physically interact with it. For example, in her Mourning Mirrors exhibition, shown at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, in 2004, Levine exhibited twelve identical black mirrors composed of reflective black polished glass and framed in mahogany wood: “Here, as with much of her sculpture, Levine’s interest lies foremost with the physical presence of the object and the sensual quality of the materials used,” noted the gallery’s statement. Although the visual experience when encountering the twelve mirrors would be intense, when viewing one of the ominous mirrors individually, juxtaposed sharply against white gallery walls, it can still inflict a somber, raw, and heaving feeling upon the viewer. The opaque surface is daunting, yet the beautiful wooden frame softens its presence. The infinite black surface invites viewers into the mirror, and allows minds to be consumed by the deep and unlimited space in front of their eyes.

When asked about her contemporary work, Levine says: “I try to make art which celebrates doubt and uncertainty. Which provokes answers but doesn’t give them. Which withholds absolute meaning by incorporating parasite meanings. Which suspends meaning while perpetually dispatching you toward interpretation, urging you beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrine, beyond ideology, beyond authority.” Levine’s conceptual mantra for her work challenges the viewers as they attempt to decipher any intended meaning. Instead, viewers are left with a feeling that allows them to formulate their own meaning within their individual imaginations and thoughts, instead of being told how to feel.

Levine’s Mourning Mirrors series is powerful, sobering, and emotional. Levine confronts the viewer and literally asks the viewers to look at and within themselves, through the black mirror, and reach independent conclusions. Overall, the series is powerful and serves as a method of introspection and self-reflection, and Levine successfully achieves this important viewer-art exchange through her work.

—Alanna Klein

2 Ibid.
Criminals.
The scene of a crime.
Mug shots.
Prison cells.

A word that ties these words together is “framed.” The criminal is framed in a light that will display him or her as guilty, give the person a status of criminal, and capture the body through a label that will forever taint his or her future. The scene of a crime frames what exactly occurred—it frames the criminal, and it frames the emotions of the victims and witnesses, and changes the lens through which you look at the crime scene. A mug shot indicates a person was arrested for a crime; it forces direct eye contact with the camera as though facing an accuser. The idea of the mug shot could frame the human as an object of study. Prison cells frame the criminal body, yielding something other than what the person originally stood for.

In these two works, the human body is framed in a way that incorporates aspects of architecture, figures, and space. Piranesi attests to these aspects in *Scene with a circular tower*. He creates an extremely detailed image, incorporating different aspects of the building’s interior with bridges, towers, ropes, and archways. The perspective of the image seems to be from below, looking up into the multiple levels of a dark, oppressive prison. One ray of light shines through the center, framing the darkness and shadows surrounding it and leading the eye in search of figures that will bring more life to the scene. Tiny sketched figures can be made out in the shadows, signifying the prisoners and prison guards that inhabit this prison.
The Prison, on the other hand, by creating a simple architectural space that stands in contrast to the cavernous feeling of Piranesi’s work, switches the focus to the prisoners themselves. Here the architecture is simple: a window with a grid of iron bars in the wall of a cell. The artist chooses to focus on the muscular, classicizing figures that fill the room. The figures are framed by their attachments to the architecture, such as a heavy chain or rope. By extending the perspectival floor of the cell to the bottom edge of the print, the viewer is placed with the prisoners. Are viewers given permission to feel as though they are in the cell as well? In the back, the barred windows are the only source of contact with the world, yet there is no clear view out of the cell. The figure outside the bars is framed and stands upright, unlike any of the figures inside are able to do.

Ultimately, art is used as a source of information and documentation, as are these images from the Renaissance period, but one may still question the response that should come from looking at these images with framing in mind. When one creates a spectacle out of a human through their criminalization, this human is labeled and stigmatized for the rest of his life.

—Haley Knapp
Always stressing that the instinct to create great photography is casual and unstaged, Elliot Erwitt takes photographs in common daily settings. However, in thought-provoking ways, Erwitt also employs a unique sense of humor and irony in mundane settings.

In this photograph Erwitt seemingly murmurs, “Behold, Diana is drawing her bow, aiming at the man far away down the hallway,” setting viewers behind Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s bronze sculpture of a nude Diana in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This time, he allows the viewers to see and feel the world from the perspective that Diana owns.

Showing this decisive moment, Erwitt makes the connection between Diana and the real man plausible. The arrow connects one figure to the other, framing the man through the trajectory of the arrow. This furthers the connection between the fantasy and reality. Diana, known as the virginal huntress in classical mythology, is said to make men fall prey to their lust, and the visitors to the modern-day museum are no exception.

Space, especially within a museum, has the implication of containment or restriction in the application of a frame. The very existence of the doors reinforces an adjusted perspective that comes from choices in composition. Therefore, by framing Diana and the man in the same space, albeit through several doors, there is a foreshortening effect. Due to this effect, the man seems much tinier and forceless compared with Diana.

In fact, the bronze sculpture Diana was commissioned as a revolving finial to surmount the tower of Stanford White’s Madison Square Garden in New York. Known as the only female nude sculpture by Saint-Gaudens, Diana was given idealistically simple but elegant lines. But when the finished piece turned out much larger than the original plan, it was replaced by a smaller version.

Besides creating several dimensions of framing, Erwitt has chosen to present a view from behind Diana. Perhaps viewers can feel Diana’s loneliness, or hear a sigh from Erwitt, who knows that ultimately this Diana is not real. Framed in the museum, she is once again a museum piece. She is stiff and isolated, and her arrow is never released. The presence of physical frame broadcasts the signal of “representation,” notifying the viewers to read the specific area of space under a new set of rules rather than those derived from the real space.

Like a magician, Erwitt uses a physical frame as his magical instrument to add illusion to a realistic work. Through hanging this piece in a museum, the image that is set in one museum is framed by another museum as well. The frame then provides a space significant for establishing a dominating relationship between the viewer and the represented. The necessity of connection in this work implies the necessity of physical frame.

In Diana, Elliot Erwitt shows that art does not begin or end in a physical frame, but his capture of a framed Diana in the museum also contains black humor: “However hard Diana tries, her target will finally walk past her.”

—Yuanyuan Tang
This photograph presents a scene of a giant torii gate and the stairs leading to the Suwa Shrine in Nagasaki, with part of the temple’s roof behind the right pillar of the torii. This Shinto (“the way of god”) shrine was constructed in 1614, functioning to prevent people from converting to Christianity. Torii is Japanese sacred architecture built only near Shinto shrines, symbolically constructing a frame that distinguishes the divine space of the immortal and the profane world and functioning as a door into spirituality. The perspective with a vanishing point at the center visually produces a centripetal force, corresponding to how the sacred “door” invites secular beings to step in. Both the visual representations and the hidden religious intention of the picture emphasize one theme: the centrality of the composition.

The title of the photo in the lower right corner appears in English instead of Japanese, showing the souvenir nature of this product for foreign visitors, reminiscent of a present-day postcard. Indeed, when photography, so popular in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was introduced into Japan around 1855, commercial photographs of Japanese scenes became perfect tourist collectibles for foreign visitors. The brightness of the colors is not only artistic, it also attracts potential buyers. Interestingly, since it is a scene of sacredness, several uncolored figures, all positioned on the other side of the “door,” may represent the realization of the spiritual world. Before audiences realize that it is a scene about divinity, the peaceful and mysterious environment has already taken hold. A direct sense of tranquility is given by the use of albumen print, which produces photos with soft, sepia tones. The blurring between the boundaries of the elements function well with the misty and heavenly colors, with an effect of gradually disappearing images on both sides.

Besides the spiritual power, the photograph provides audiences with a sense of completeness and integrity by elements counterweighting each other to produce rhythmical balances. The panorama of the work can be seen as three horizontal layers: the white ground below the feet of the woman in yellow kimono; the richly colored middle layer filled with the main colorful elements; and the empty sky, which echoes the ground. Without the two vacancies, the picture plane would be overly stuffed with elements. A pair of white spaces lets the scene unfold, but also frames and accentuates the center, where six figures are colored in pairs and stand close together. Though the photo depicts a variety of objects, the compositional closeness clearly structures each part without any part overwhelming another.

While the figures are spread from the foreground to the background, they are all under the vertical space framed by the white pillars of the cardinal torii. An upright stripe-shaped space intersects with the central horizontal layer, creating a square scene with irrefutable centrality. The second torii assures that after thoroughly exploring the entire picture, every sight returns to the heart of this photograph. The perspective forms a slightly lower angle and magnifies the first torii to glorify its divinity, but the platforms between tiers of stairs become unseen, making the distances between the two torii immeasurable. The proportion between the woman with an umbrella and the person on the right side of the second torii indicates that the visually smaller torii is actually just as gigantic as the front one. This incapability to accurately frame and clearly see the mysterious spiritual world reveals an underlying religious sensitivity under the architecture.

—Evy Li
In the introduction to *Workers: Archaeology of the Industrial Age*, the book in which this work was first published, Sebastião Salgado frames his photographic series quite explicitly. “The images,” the artist writes, “offer a visual archaeology of a time that history knows as the Industrial Revolution, a time when men and women at work with their hands provided the central axis of the world.”

Salgado’s nostalgic, retrospective tone is matched by his high modernist style. This luminous monochrome photograph, with its geometry and visual contrast, an explicit, emphatic compassion for its subjects, and a simultaneously realist and surrealist style, is reminiscent more of earlier work by Margaret Bourke-White, Robert Frank, or W. Eugene Smith than of contemporary photojournalism.

Together, Salgado’s words and many of the formal elements he uses frame these photographs as windows into an alternate, vanished—or quickly vanishing—world. This attitude is perhaps somewhat inherent to photography, “a medium which makes spectres of its subjects,” eternalizing them only by ossifying them. It is certainly a common feature of the kind of photography Salgado makes, in which images from the developing world are transformed into fine art. As Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano notes, “Poverty is a commodity that fetches a high price on the luxury market,” predicated on the consumer’s ability to admire from a safe distance the “authenticity” of people who lack the means to participate in the global capitalist culture. Because commodities must be fixed, rather than ephemeral, entities; because viewers demand separation from the abject scenes they consume; and because, as anthropology scholar James Clifford notes, “authenticity in culture or art exists just prior to the present,” photographers such as Salgado are eager to position their pieces in the past, at a comfortable temporal distance from their audience.
Seen in this exhibition context, however, Salgado’s photograph has a substantially different tone. What is most striking about the work is that, in spite of the image’s similarity to nineteenth-century sweatshops, if not a Boschian dystopia, it captures a scene not from the distant past but, as the title matter-of-factly states, one from 1986 in Brazil.

Serra Pelada is a gold mine in which some fifty thousand workers haul sixty-kilo sacks of ore up ladders and mud slopes as many as sixty times a day, and are paid twenty cents for each sack. Salgado’s photograph of the mine forces the viewer to face a contemporary scene of vast preindustrial labor and exploitation which should have long been banished by the ahistorical, postindustrial society in which the First World likes to think it lives. Stripped of Salgado’s comments describing the photographs as “an homage to workers, a farewell to a world of manual labour that is slowly disappearing,” the retrospective aesthetic language of this work is deeply ironic; by invoking the imagery of the supposedly extinct industrial age, Salgado’s work is “a bringing of current realities up against the aesthetic norms and ideals of a yesterday which had promised a better tomorrow—it is a reminder of broken promises.”

Manual labor is not on the verge of oblivion; the Pastoral Land Commission of Brazil, for example, revealed in 1993 that the incidence of cases of forced or servile labor had increased tenfold, to twenty thousand cases, since 1988. Rather than being representatives of a dying way of life, the workers in Salgado’s photograph are the foundation of our modern capitalist system, and behind the increasing wealth of the world’s minority (the so-called “golden billion”) lay the ever-increasing numbers of impoverished laborers upon whose shoulders they stand. These two worlds, moreover, are becoming uncomfortably close, with a rise of low-income jobs and low-skill service work even in so-called developed countries, such that in Great Britain, for instance, the number of people living on less than half the average income has tripled since 1978. As art historian and curator Julian Stallabrass states, “Working people’s poverty and production is the source of the wealth of the minority, their fate may eventually become that of more and more people in the North.”

Salgado’s photograph, which gives the viewer no stable ground on which to stand, but rather threatens to throw him into the dizzying, infernal depths of the gold mine to join the men who toil away there, premonishes this. The work does not provide the safe distance, resulting in “simultaneous frisson and comfort, like listening to rain lashing the windows,” that is associated with typical developing-world imagery. Instead, it obliterates that distance, collapsing the frame that separates audience and artwork and confronting the viewer with the disorienting, harsh reality that his world and that of Serra Pelada are inextricably interdependent.

—Cameron Ewing

4 Stallabrass, 25.
5 Ibid., 24.
6 Ibid., 39.
8 Ibid., 114.
9 Stallabrass, 41.
10 Ibid., 30.
framing the artist / framing the viewer

Works of art are stimulating, pleasing, moving, thought provoking, and complex for a myriad of reasons. These reasons may be tied to a work’s composition, color, subject matter, and lines—or lack thereof—among many other elements. One of the most fascinating aspects of a work of art is how it frames the viewer and the artist. This framing may be visual, physical, metaphorical, or ontological and influences one’s interaction with the work and the way that one feels about that work, and often induces a phenomenological experience.

Images of the act of looking can induce an awareness of one’s own act of looking. For example, Doisneau’s *La Dame Indignée* draws the viewer’s eye first to the main figure in the photograph, who then directs the viewer’s eye to the framed painting on the left, at which the main figure is clearly aghast. Her directive gaze, as well as her placement outside of the space in which the viewer resides, forces the viewer to think about his or her own gaze, and consequently his or her role in the photograph and the space provided.

Doisneau’s use of space to make the viewer feel as if he or she plays an active role within the composition of the photograph is demonstrated by other artists in the exhibition. Ruth Bernhard’s photograph *In a Box – Horizontal* slices the space of the composition in half by placing a rectangular box in the lower half of the image. The strict lines and corners of this box are juxtaposed by the smooth and curvaceous body of a nude woman. Her bright femininity is shocking in the midst of the gray-hued photograph. The jarring nature of her presence, with one forearm escaping the confines of the box, makes the viewer think about the nude’s body, the existence and lack of boundaries, and his or her own body.

Although the artist and the viewer are often framed separately, the framing of one can lead to an awareness of the other. In Robert Frank’s *Venice 1964,*
the artist portrays a model facing away from the viewer into the lens of another photographer, also portrayed, who is photographing this model. The inclusion of this other artist immediately brings the viewer’s mind to the medium and the process of photography itself. The angle of Frank’s photograph places the viewer behind the model and questionably in the line of shot of the other photographer. The viewer may feel confused or uncomfortable about this composition, because he or she may feel as if he or she is a part of it. Once again an artist’s use of space and portrayal of the medium in action lends an awareness of the artist and the viewer, essentially framing them simultaneously.

The power of a work of art often lies in the power of the response it elicits in a viewer. A newfound awareness of the self, of the work, or of the presence of the artist can add an entirely new dimension to a work of art, and add to one’s appreciation of it. The concept of framing, occasionally literally but more often figuratively or metaphorically, brings many aspects of artworks to the fore that may have been previously unexplored. How the artist and the viewer play into the overall role of a composition and how they interact differs for every work. Roy Lichtenstein’s accusing finger and Sherrie Levine’s black mirror are more obvious examples than the aforementioned photographs of works that create self-awareness for the viewer and frame the viewer as an element of the work itself. The finger pointing directly at the viewer is inescapable, as is the feeling that washes over the viewer after looking in the black mirror and not seeing his or her reflection on its surface. These two examples give more attention to the framing of the viewer than Magritte’s *Dieu, le huitième jour*, which uniquely frames the artist by both portraying him as the subject while also concealing him with the materials of his work.

The concept of framing is a broad one, encompassing a range of artistic facets and idiosyncrasies, some of which are immediately visible and many of which require concentration alongside careful and directive looking. This type of framing, which more often than not falls outside of the literal frame of the work, adds a new dimension to that work of art. How a work of art remarks on the labor and presence of the artist and includes the viewer in its ontological existence is dependent on the artist as well as each individual viewer. When one comes upon a work of art that lends such an awareness of the artist or the self, the viewer is rendered entirely out of control and is resigned to the will of the artwork to do with the viewer what it may.

—Kathryn Solomon
Robert Doisneau, considered to be one of the pioneers of photojournalism, is best known for his portraits of Parisian street life. His work often contains a sense of contrast and ironic humor to depict the unexpected marvels of daily life. At first glance, Doisneau’s *La Dame Indignée* brings a playful and humorous juxtaposition to the eye of the viewer. The work portrays an older woman’s reaction to a painting of a nude displayed within a storefront window. Doisneau focuses on the contrasting relationship between these two women, and comments on the different notions of the role of women in his contemporary society.

In framing the roles of gender, Doisneau depicts the societal expectations of women in the public and private sphere and in age and youth. During World War II, women experienced a surge in liberty and freedom. Society after the war had to reconcile this newfound freedom with its previous conservative conceptions of women. It is important to note that the painting of the nude women is located indoors, within the front window of the store, while the older woman is outdoors, on the street. These locations can be respectively indicative of the private and public sphere. The viewer, who is within the store looking out, must harmonize the differing social expectancies of women in domestic and public settings. The young woman in the painting is in a clearly seductive stance; she is shown nude leaning over a table, completely exposed to the viewer. Her idealized body has flowing curves that are both erotic and seductive, while her face is not shown. This representation greatly differs from the depiction of the elder woman who is completely clothed, and the only visible part of her body is her face. She is dressed completely in black to further de-emphasize her figure and accentuate her face and features. The viewer has to focus on the elder woman’s humorous reaction in seeing an explicit painting meant for consumption within the private sphere displayed in public.

Doisneau offers a playful depiction of the collision between two different portrayals of women. He reframes one artist’s depiction in order to incorporate a duplicity of expectations. The painting of the nude represents societal expectations of women to be young, beautiful, and alluring, while the elder woman’s reaction represents expectations of women to be proper and modest. Doisneau utilizes the original erotic purpose of the painting and uses it to highlight a comedic event. This juxtaposition perfectly encapsulates his goal of displaying the unexpected surprises of everyday life.

—Eunice Yu
Francesca Woodman is best known for her black-and-white photographs that focus on the female body. Woodman committed suicide at twenty-two—a fact that must be taken into account to truly be able to view and understand the artist's work. Curator Corey Keller describes Woodman's body of work as "haunting and intimate, direct and visceral, her photographic explorations represent the unusually coherent vision of an artist who had barely entered adulthood." Part of this alludes to her short life and prolific, prodigal output in a career that lasted less than a decade. However, beyond the simple designation of "haunting," this specific body of work is disturbing, and jarringly enigmatic in all its essence—yet in that very regard, it remains oddly captivating.

The majority of her photographs feature Woodman herself. But this is not to say that Woodman is the actual focus of the work—rather, there seems to be a sort of power negotiation between the female body at hand and the space within which it is placed. As in this particular photograph, the female body is often juxtaposed with decrepit, barren, and eerie architectural settings. The woman—presumably the artist—faces a dirty, deteriorating wall. Her back is turned to the audience, and a hand is wrapped around the top of her head in a seeming act of distress or surrender. Yet although she does not behold a gaze of her own and appears to be pushed to the literal margins of the frame, the woman does not appear to be objectified. Rather, the work seems to suggest something more transcending in its raw counterpoise—the youthful silkiness and sexuality of the woman's back is neutralized and subsequently "dematerialized" by the location. In this regard, Woodman appears to play with ideas of the body in relationship to the space and context within which it is framed to renegotiate preexisting conceptions of tropes around the female body.

The enigmatic quality of the image furthers the debate as to what Woodman is trying to express in this image. Herein lies the most captivating aspect of the work—it remains hauntingly unsettling, yet it beholds a certain democratic quality in its juxtapositions. There appears to be a more complex aspect of the work that allows the viewer to remain ensnared by the raw, transcending pleasure of an unsolved mystery—a mystery that this photograph, and Woodman’s life as a whole, presents.

—Lara Abouhamad

Francesca Woodman
American, 1958–1981
*Untitled (New York, 1979–81)*, 1997
(print)
Gelatin silver print
Edition 9/40
Acquired through the generosity of Jennifer, Gale, and Ira Drukier
2000.006

2 Ibid.
Ruth Bernhard’s *In the Box—Horizontal* and Imogen Cunningham’s *Model in Monterey Co.* are comparable in many ways. Both photographers began their work in the early twentieth century, when photography was barely recognized as a legitimate field, and then stood at the forefront of their field. These two pictures were taken in the 1960s, during the peak of Bernhard’s career but after Cunningham was already established. By this time, they had lived through the women’s suffrage movement, prohibition, the Depression, and the two world wars. They were also witness to civil rights movements that swept through that decade. These experiences led the artists to create photographs which transcend time and space, while simultaneously bringing into conversation the struggles faced by the American people during their lifetimes.

Both artists use space to confine and frame the subjects. These pictures force the viewer to feel the claustrophobia experienced by both models by imagining themselves situated in these restricting spaces. However, these lines and enclosures add an elegance to the pictures as well. The clean-cut sides of Bernhard’s box emphasize the idealized female figure, while the curves of the rocky overhang mirror the muscles of the man in Cunningham’s photograph.

Using spatial framing to draw emotion from the viewer, these artists establish a platform from which they begin to address other, larger issues. In Bernhard’s photograph, the woman seems trapped in a space which is clearly too small for her body. This
photograph captures a moment when she begins to stretch, reaching her arm outside the box, perhaps for the first time. This could be representative of the many changes occurring for women during the period. In Cunningham’s photograph, the male model faces down, at first glance appearing to be quite relaxed. However, upon further examination, he seems anything but calm. His back and leg muscles are flexed, and his feet barely touch the ground. The sand around him is disturbed as though there has recently been a lot of movement, and the background is obscured in shadow. This adds a note of uncomfortable tension, an intentional discomfort that forces the viewer to think about problems facing not only this man, but many people at the time.

Bernhard and Cunningham idealize and perfect the representation of their subjects. Admiration and care are tangible in the way that the models are treated by the photographers. This connection adds to the deep intensity these pictures convey.

—Eva Morgan
René Magritte makes use of the photographic frame to explore themes of self-representation, identity, and contextualization. In these works, Magritte implements such surrealist ideas as the expression of the unconscious and dream imagery in the medium of photography as opposed to painting, for which he is much better known. In fact, many of these photographs would serve as visual aids for some of Magritte’s paintings.

In *Dieu, le huitième jour (God, the Eighth Day)*, Magritte himself poses holding a painting that obscures his body, with a cloth draped over his face and back. The paradox of anonymity and self-representation is important in how the artist chooses to frame himself for the viewer. By way of this surreptitious self-portraiture, Magritte is able to portray himself as defined solely by his art, without identifying distinguishable body characteristics. Additionally, the cloth is reminiscent of one that photographers would use, which serves to frame Magritte in the context of being a photographer and not only a painter.⁠¹

Magritte uses the medium of photography in a different way in *The Shadow and its Shadow*. Magritte poses behind his wife, Georgette, with their eyes aligned so that the viewer only sees one of Magritte’s eyes. This work frames the artist in the context of marital intimacy. Here we see the union of the two people in such a way, as the title references, that they are not only each other’s shadow but also the shadow of his or her shadow.⁠² Though Magritte was often skeptical of the world, he did see love embodying an indestructible quality, stating, “One cannot destroy love. I believe in its ultimate triumph.”³

In *L’oiseleur (The Fowler)*, Magritte is again portrayed in the photograph, this time staring pensively at his own reflected image in a glass door, framed within the door. By showing himself in this context, Magritte frames himself in this photograph in the same way he does within his paintings, through the use of
the motif of the multiple. By incorporating a motif from his paintings into this photographic self-portrait, Magritte further expands the framing of himself by way of his own art.

In *Les Voyantes (The Clairvoyants)*, Magritte explores similar themes to those found in his other works. However, it is the only work in this group that does not feature the artist himself. In this photograph, Georgette and Martha Nougé (the wife of one of the founders of Belgian surrealism, Paul Nougé) are seen behind a table filled with objects, staring blankly at them. This frames the women in such a way that makes them appear as curious children, bewildered by the grand size of the world around them. By only capturing their eyes and the tops of their heads, Magritte is able to frame both women within the context of being intrigued children staring at banal objects on a tabletop.⁴

In these photographs, framing, especially as it relates to self-representation, is a pervasive theme that defines how Magritte uses photography as self-documentation. Magritte is able to contextualize other subjects in new ways by using the photographic frame. Working within this medium, the ways in which Magritte uses photography to replicate some of the motifs from his paintings, such as the multiple and deception of representation, is inventive and shows the extraordinary prolific quality of works present in Magritte’s oeuvre.

— Piotr Pillardy

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2 Ibid., 65.
4 Roegiers, 62.
Known for an idiosyncratic way of framing photographs, Robert Frank broke out of the mold of the conventional photography in twentieth-century America. Influenced by other contemporary photographers such as Walker Evans, he captured ordinary people through various perspectives such as the subject’s process of producing their own form of work—in the sense of producing material intended for future display to others.

In *Venice 1964*, Frank creates a discontinuity of the female subject by cropping her lower torso and choosing not to capture the woman’s face. Her serpentine posture cuts through the unfocused Venetian architecture and casts shadows to further fragment her body into different segments. Frank experiments with framing in multiple ways. He frames the woman to capture neither her face nor her full body, and chooses a perspective that digresses from his other work and generates an authoritative mood, precluding the subject’s own gaze back at the viewer. Instead, he captures the female’s control as she contorts her body, highlighting her bone structure. Like Evans, Frank transforms the commonplace into the new modern. The ambiguous identity of the woman leads to the speculation that could be anyone; this generates the idea that any figure can become art through the manipulation and perspective.

Frank takes the opposite approach in *Untitled (Black artist)*, as the male subject gazes directly at the viewers. There is a reoccurrence of an authoritative mood in the photograph; Frank uses techniques such as cropping of the main subject’s torso to stress how the mind is the cornerstone behind the process of creating art (the head is the only body part that is not fragmented within the photograph). Unlike *Venice 1964* where the female is surrounded by the landscape, the black artist is embedded in his works. By choosing
this setting, Frank creates an interesting relationship between subject and artist, capturing an artist who is also surrounded by his own work. He frames the male subject by things that represent him—his artwork. The black artist takes a similar approach in the portraits he holds and the ones behind him. For example, he chooses to display one of his subjects in a refined indoor setting to emphasize the upscale nature of the portrait; in another one he surrounds a farmer with a fertile landscape to stress the farmer’s work ethic.

Frank continues to experiment with perspective in *Untitled (Lee Krasner)* as he chooses to frame the photograph by omitting whatever the American painter Krasner (1908–1984) is looking toward. By extending the photograph’s space within the viewer’s world, Frank creates an unspoken dialogue between Krasner and the viewer. It is the viewer’s job to determine what she is looking at. Although the exact date of this photograph is unknown, it could be after 1962, when Krasner suffered a brain aneurysm and took a hiatus from her artwork. The only thing to point out her trade as an artist is her easel, which is located directly behind her. The position of the easel signifies an absence of art, which now seems a part of her past. Her eyes suggest that whatever caught her attention, it has distracted her from her work—art.

Overall, Frank represents the subject engaging in a different form of art. By using the medium of photography, he is able to re-create a scene for the audience that depicts his view on the subject’s process of creating art. To him, art is all about perspective and how the viewer perceives it. In these photographs, Frank frames the space in order to communicate the methods to how the subjects pursue their individual work.

—Chinelo Onyilofor
The relationship between the written word and visual imagery is more complex than simple description and illustration. One neither defines nor limits the other. Text provides an opportunity to make connections outside of the image, beyond the gallery, and to extend the capabilities of visuality.

The concept of incorporating text into visual artwork is often associated with modern and contemporary movements, but the tradition has roots in the practice of designing religious prayer texts such as books of hours. Though not all books of hours are illustrated, they are generally known for their integration of image and text. Popular forms of devotional texts, books of hours were especially prominent in England, the Netherlands, and France, owned across classes, from lay people to ruling families, becoming a symbol of piety and honor. This exhibition includes a pair of leaves, or bifolio, from a fifteenth-century French book of hours. Presented with Robert Frank’s photograph Untitled (Letter from Jack Kerouac, Tennessee), they exemplify conceptual and visual framing through text, incorporating the written word into visual imagery to create both visual and linguistic references.

The leaves from the book of hours incorporate organic shapes, text, and religious painting into one image. The ink, egg tempera, and gold-leaf miniature depicts the Annunciation to the Shepherds. The text and the painted scene are separated by stylized, curling vegetation on facing pages. The written text occupies its own space, which is completely separate from the religious scene, yet unified through the high-intensity color palette. The curvilinear, organic lines found in the borders are integrated into the bold, capitalized letters, thereby connecting the stylized imagery and the text.

Frank’s playful composition erases the line between text and image. The image

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shows a worn postcard flattened on a dark surface. The card was penned by Jean-Louis (better known as Jack) Kerouac, the American writer and poet. It references a specific photograph, Frank’s *Platte River, Tennessee 1961*, which is also held in the Johnson Museum’s collection. This image features a man in silhouette centered within the picture. In the background, the Platte River sprawls and presses against the hills in the distance. A single cow roams between the man and the riverbank. Understanding the relationship between the photographs provides an environment and context for the viewer to receive the latter. Apart from the contextual significance, the written word in *Letter from Jack Kerouac* serves a visual function of its own. The text becomes the dominant element, allowing the script of the handwritten note to act simultaneously as the text and the visual imagery.

The fluid movements and natural shapes of the scripts in both the book of hours and the Frank photograph are visually engaging when separated from their linguistic significance. While the texts in captions, subtitles, and storybooks have made it customary to think of the written word as an explanation of, or a solution to, a visual puzzle, in these works, text may provide more questions than answers. Written language in these artworks may guide the viewer toward finding meaning, but it neither limits nor imposes interpretation. Text suggests, provokes, and encourages deeper thought beyond the physical, two-dimensional image, connecting the visual representation in the exhibition to outside ideas, characters, cultures, and worlds.

The artist creates and controls the visual composition and frames the image, allowing the viewer to see only what the artist has selected. The addition of text, however, introduces a less controllable aspect. To frame through text, an artist provides a starting point, but it is the viewer who reads, interprets, and ultimately writes the conclusion.

—Kayli Callahan

Robert Frank
American, born 1924
*Untitled (Letter from Jack Kerouac, Tennessee)*, 1961
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Arthur Penn, Class of 1965, and Marilyn Penn, Class of 1956
85.100.002
© Robert Frank; courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York
One of the key components to thinking about “the frame” is the idea of composition. In creating a painting or drawing, an artist often deliberately arranges the various elements to create a composition that is pleasing or meaningful. Even in some types of photography, such as portraiture, an artist will compose the scene. Photojournalism, however, does not have this freedom. Instead, photojournalism must truly utilize the frame. A photographer uses the limiting frame of the camera lens to highlight a particular part of a scene, using that part to represent the whole of a larger, important event.

This style of “frame” adapts particularly well to depicting historical and politically significant images. Some photographers will attempt to capture as much as possible in a single shot, trying to convey the entire event or moment. The far more powerful images, however, limit what is shown, accenting only one part of a larger scene. Complex, crowded images can be overly complicated, distancing viewers from incomprehensible events. War, famine, natural disaster, poverty—these concepts are simply too broad to be depicted on a large scale. But by utilizing a limited frame, composing the shot such that only a few simple but important elements are captured on film, a photographer makes these overwhelming scenes understandable and relatable to a wide audience. These images are more haunting, powerful, and resonant, and become the images that live on. Some of the most famous pictures in history don’t attempt to portray the whole, sweeping scene, to show the event on a massive scale, but instead focus on small, personal tragedies. By narrowing the scope, the photographer maximizes the power.

Several of the photographs in this exhibition demonstrate this effect. The photos of Gilles Peress stand out, not only for their beauty, but in their power, even to a viewer not familiar with the historical events captured. *Evacuation of the Jews*
depicts an event in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, not something many visitors would have a working knowledge of. But the power of the photo remains, as its highly focused subject resonates even without an understanding of its historical significance. The photograph illustrates a departure, and the pain of impending separation is collectively understood. By using a limiting frame to crop out all but the subjects’ hands, Peress makes the scene, the emotions, universal. In removing the subjects’ identities, the photograph becomes personal.

Another haunting image is *South Street, New York* by Walker Evans. Unlike Peress’s photograph, this image is not a singular, identifiable moment, but rather a depiction of a larger situation: life during the Great Depression. In one simple photo, Evans sums up poverty, loneliness, the overwhelming hopelessness of living in the city. Just as with Peress, Evans succeeds through the anonymity of his subjects. Unlike *Evacuation*, however, this isn’t because the photo becomes more relatable, but because the namelessness adds another level of tragedy to the scene. On top of all the other hardships faced by these men, they are forced to suffer the indignity of anonymity. Evans uses the same limited scope as Peress to personalize the suffering, but also places the frame such that the men seem to fade into the architecture, rather than being presented as the focus of the photograph. Once again, the frame not only narrows an overwhelming concept down to a comprehensible scale, but adds a story to the history.

The limiting frame need not be reserved only for photojournalism. Roy Lichtenstein’s screenprint features a hand, cropped at the wrist, pointing directly out. The tightness of the frame leaves much up to the imagination, and the pose echoes the American Uncle Sam and British Lord Kitchener posters, which, coupled with the title, triggers a reaction in the viewer. Nothing about what Lichtenstein has actually put on paper deems it historical, but the closely cropped frame, showing only the hand, places the piece in a canon of highly charged, historically significant images, giving it power through association.

Though a highly focused frame is not always the best choice—*Dead at Gettysburg (A Harvest of Death)*, for example, is so successful through its almost lack of frame, with a seemingly endless repetition of bodies—but some sort of frame is always present. History is always viewed through a lens, and how the artist chooses to depict history affects our understanding of the past. These images were created in the moment, and the artist had to make a decision on how to frame the scene around them, a decision that would forever impact how that time is remembered. Looking at these images helps us not only connect with important parts of history, but gain an understanding of the power and emotions in the exact moment of the picture’s creation.

—Hannah Schockmel
As art practices have evolved in the digital age, artists’ use of the physical frame has evolved from just a linear partition into a multifunctional element that both highlights a specific scene and adds further meaning to the overall composition. *Evacuation of the Jews, Skanderia, Sarajevo, Bosnia* by Gilles Peress and *Dining Car, Atlantic City* by Frank Paulin are two twentieth-century photographs that experiment with the multidimensionality of the physical frame.

Peress effectively uses the physical frame to document a historical event—the discrimination faced by Jews living in eastern Europe in the early '90s, and their subsequent emigration from a life of intolerance and hate. From 1972 onward, the Parisian-born photographer documented history, specifically immigration in Europe. His background studying foreign policy and interest in European political affairs manifests itself in a historical lens. In the composition of the photo, a bus window physically frames the hands of two passengers reaching toward the glass to a third figure’s hand, mirroring their gesture from outside of the vehicle. To the viewers, the frame suggests that the reaching of the hands through the window is an emotional display of a situational separation due to the economic or political constraints faced by evacuees. However, because of the angle at which the photograph is framed, the faces of the figures are not shown and, therefore, we are unable to identify the reaching hands with any specific people.
In contrast, *Dining Car, Atlantic City* speaks in a less urgent tone because of its location—a tourist attraction in southern New Jersey. Because of its abundance of casinos, beachfronts, and amusement parks, Atlantic City stood as a weekend mecca of fun for both city- and suburban-dwellers for years before the creation of Paulin’s photograph. In the image, the window of a train car frames a male, African American passenger seated in what appears to be first class. Paulin positions the frame in a way that highlights the fact that this single passenger is the sole occupant of the train car. The overall composition of this photograph sheds a shocking and almost surrealist light on race issues in 1950s America, as racial discrimination prevented most passengers—such as the one depicted—from traveling with elite access.

It is important to consider the vehicle itself—the structure containing the image—and how it adds even more narration to the photographs. In *Evacuation of the Jews*, the passengers’ yearning arms are framed by the window of an evacuation bus—a presumably government-issued rescue vehicle. The frame itself is saving these people from a life of hardship and discrimination imposed upon them by their own country. In *Dining Car, Atlantic City*, the frame highlights social distinctions in a more abrupt display of social rebellion. The physical frame in these two photographs serves to suggest different situations of discrimination and marginalization shows how elements of composition, can highlight these stark differences through different tones.

—Wylie Rechler

Frank Paulin
American, born 1926
*Dining Car, Atlantic City*, 1957 (printed later)
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Bruce and Silke Silverstein
2010.001.003
Andy Warhol, known as the leading figure of Pop art, remains a source of inspiration today. His art covers a wide range of topics, from images of everyday life to celebrity portraits. His screenprints featuring Richard Nixon and Jacqueline Kennedy are examples of his artistic engagement with political figures. Warhol frames his political agenda favoring the Democratic Party through the contrasting effects illustrated in the use of color and competition: a single image in bright colors versus rhymed repetitions in black and white.

In 1972, the year of the presidential election, Warhol produced a color screenprint of Richard Nixon. Although Warhol’s political position seems to be neutral or ambiguous, this portrait suggests his party leanings to some degree. This piece was commissioned by the Democratic National Committee, in support of the presidential candidate George McGovern, who was running against Nixon. In fact, portraits of celebrities with political power are a fascinating topic for Warhol, and he often chose exaggerated colors to frame his political claims. In this political image, Warhol depicts Nixon’s face with in acidic green and bilious blue, creating an evil expression. To make the viewers even more uncomfortable, Warhol highlights Nixon’s mouth, teeth, and eyes in bright yellow, contrasting with the blue skin. However, he matches the infernal eyes with a rosy pink jacket and a red tie, mocking this figure of power and fame. The large orange area completely collides with the subject in the front: the huge color contrast between background and foreground vivifies the figure. “Vote McGovern” is scrawled at the bottom. When working with a political subversion, Warhol creates the irony between supporting McGovern and presenting the opponent of him. Warhol does not distort Nixon’s portrait except for the intense color. It is enough for expressing a sense of satire, which could be seen as the reverse of what Warhol did in Jackie III, depicting her as a tragic figure. The
unnaturally colored face and the handwritten appeal leave no doubts as to Warhol’s position.

*Jackie III* was created during a decade of social and political change in America. Continuing his fascination with celebrity, fame, and power, Warhol began a *Jackie* series after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Unlike the Nixon work, this piece is not done for a commission but was an emotional and spontaneous response to such unexpected news. Through juxtaposition of four portraits of Jackie, the artist frames a national tragedy through the eyes of the famous first lady and grieving widow. He selects the pictures from the mass media and highlights the public image instead of the individual character. Except for the bottom right photo—taken when Jackie arrived in Dallas, with her radiant and charming smile—each image features a stunned, sad, yet calm expression, with the uniformed soldier standing by her side or during the funeral, seemingly strong and invulnerable. Warhol incorporates four flickering and fleeting moments both before and after the assassination, rhymed repetitions that can explain the variation of a person’s emotion in different stages of her life, which makes her more humane and appealing than a single image. Instead of using his iconic exaggerated color, Warhol makes *Jackie III* monotonic with an extreme contrast between light and dark, as he hopes to express the feeling of sympathy and loss. With such an unconventional way of portraying a celebrated woman during a catastrophe in her life, Warhol reflects that democracy in the United States was declining.

—Yichen Dong
Roy Lichtenstein was one of the frontrunners in America’s Pop art movement. The impersonal subjects of his iconic screenprints are what truly fascinated art critics and the general public during the 1960s and ’70s. *Untitled (Finger pointing)* was created in 1973. The artist’s renowned Ben-Day dot pattern, which gives the impression of machine-printed images, is a technique that was specifically attributed to his works. The technique calls attention to the mechanical process of mass production and also gives an artificial quality to his prints. The artist creates a multitude of evenly spaced colored dots to form the image. These dots are used to give the impression of depth by overlapping them, which creates a range of color tones. Though the artist was seemingly detached from the work he produced, considering almost all of it looked as though it was fresh off the printing press, Lichtenstein firmly stated that he did not believe that he was being impersonal when creating art.¹ This is a quality that sets him apart from his contemporary Andy Warhol. It is evident that Lichtenstein abided by his statement; this simple sign of a person’s hand provides necessary enrichment to society about American culture and politics of the time period.

The print is a visual transition of the saying, “Actions can speak louder than words.” Lichtenstein’s stylized image of a common hand gesture stops viewers in their tracks; the gesticulation is conveyed with great vigor, as if the artist wanted to teach someone a lesson. The hand frames its subjects in a critical manner as if they are being personally called out. Viewers have the power to make a choice: they can either confront the hand or remain discouraged by it. It is only a matter of time until the hand pins its next victim.

Lichtenstein’s print conveys a *sign* of a person’s hand gesturing, not an image of someone’s actual hand, which is an important characteristic to consider when analyzing his work. Signs are universal, and this one in particular is reminiscent of the iconic hand of Uncle Sam. As a personification of the U.S. government, Uncle Sam’s job was to recruit American citizens in hopes of recruiting them to join the army. Lichtenstein takes this sign of a person’s hand and stylistically detaches it from its affiliations to patriotism and militarism. Though the artist stylistically removed such associations, one cannot avoid the gesture’s historical undertones. Between the early 1960s to 1973, the United States was severely opposed to getting involved in the Vietnam War, and peace activists wanted to withdraw altogether. Propaganda was a necessary form of recruitment and, more importantly, general awareness. By replicating the sign of the hand on its own, the artist is able to move away from only framing male, American citizens. The gesture has developed into a frame that is truly universal.

During times filled with political tension and wars, his work was criticized for being almost too uncritical and unbiased. Though Lichtenstein remained neutral throughout the wars, one of which he even served in, he constructed this hand with hints of satire. The gesture can also be interpreted as a hand that is mocking America’s pessimistic approach to war.

This screenprint toys with the idea of framing not only through a historical lens, but through abstraction as well. Although the image depicts a precarious hand gesture, the gesture’s subject remains conceptual. The suspect that the finger is pointing at may or may not physically exist. We, as viewers, assume that each and every one of us is the potential target of the hand. Lichtenstein ultimately forces the viewer to take on the role of the victim; there is no escape.

—Lee Rice
The American flag itself, with its many connotations, ideals, and absolute physicality, underlie the significances and social commentary behind Emma Amos’s *Stars and Stripes*. It serves as the defining frame for the manifold meanings behind this extraordinary work of art. In addition, the interweaving and entwined associations, and its ultimate relatability, provoke a careful and studied reading. At first, it appears to be the artist’s rendition of the traditional American flag, but soon transforms into something quite altogether different. The hand-painted, red and white abstract stripes, which begin to blend in to one another, are interrupted by a subtle, yet clearly defined “X” in the center of the flag. The slightly curved lines of this sign leads the eye to the most marked difference from the original American flag: a blue-tinted photograph of six African American children with confused and blank stares, who gaze directly at the viewer. This ominous image replaces the stars on Amos’s American flag.

Although the flag provides the context, or “frame,” under which one views and understands the work, an examination of Amos’s biography provides an additional frame that further embeds the piece with meaning, and informs the choice behind this unique iconography. For a black female artist, breaking into the 1960s New York art scene was challenging often with very real prejudices against both African Americans and women. Amos once said that for a black woman artist, “to walk into the studio is a political act.” This statement is very telling not only for the myriad of meanings that it gives to *Stars and Stripes*, but also to understand the way Amos views her role as an artist. Initially resistant to the idea of “black art” under which her work habitually fell, Amos came to accept this categorization and its benefits when she joined the all-male civil rights art group, Spiral, in 1965. Members experimented with the notion that one’s minority status can and should contribute to the creative
process and one’s role as an artist. The subject matter and style of *Stars and Stripes* clearly shows this influence, though Amos remains hesitant to the categorization of her art as black, as all art contains traces of race, sex, class, and power, even if it is not implicit in the piece. In this respect, it is not only the imagery of the American flag that frames the intent, reception, and meaning behind the work, but the artist herself. Simply through the act of creation, Amos weaves herself into the piece, and attaches to it her own experiences of racial oppression in America.

The formal elements of *Stars and Stripes*—color, style, and medium—add an additional frame through which to view the piece, and is a critical aspect to its understanding. The red and white stripes, which are distinctly rendered in Amos’s own hand, are neither completely red, nor completely white: they become complex variations in shade and tone as they move across the paper. This purposeful mixing between red and white alludes to the complexities in race and the multifarious nature of skin color. The lack of clearly defined lines, which usually characterizes the American flag, furthers comments on the difficulties in creating and upholding racial divisions when the reality is, in fact, quite different. For Amos, color has always held a double meaning—representing both the elements of the rainbow and the politics of race. This manifests itself in all aspects of the work, as the colors of the flag take on an additional, more dynamic meaning. The photograph is also tinted a dark shade of blue, pointing again to the issues of race and color that continually arise in American society, but it further realizes the utter arbitrariness behind these complex racial divisions that often have far-reaching consequences. The photograph could just as easily be green or purple, depending on the context. This sense of subjectivity raises a host of questions to the viewer concerning the validity of perception and the idea of truthfulness. Amos plays with the idea that “the camera never lies”: “I love the irony of photography,” Amos once said, and the use of this device permeates every inch of *Stars and Stripes*. Even the title verges on the ironic. It commands the attention of the viewer, stopping them in their tracks. It presents a truth, a second version of the story, one that deeply questions the ideals, the morals, and the very foundation that America is built upon. With this, the components of the piece begin to come together: the hand-painted red and white stripes; the threatening “X” in the center; the blue-tinted photograph of six woeful African American children. Through these three frames—the American flag, the artist, and the style—it becomes clear that for this group of people, America did not deliver on its promise of freedom and liberty for all. The innocence of these children will soon be overshadowed by the threat of the “X”: racism and discrimination. At this moment, the stars and the stripes are disjointed, both stylistically and metaphorically, but Amos offers the hope that one day they will come together in true unity.

—Zoe Carlson

2 Ibid., 4.
4 Farrington, 4.
In an extension of **enticing the eye / exploring the frame**, the History of Art Majors' Society is excited to present "Screens of Dissent: Framing the Political in Video Art," a symposium with screenings from the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art at the A. D. White House on April 29, 2014. Throughout our exploration of framing in the practice, process, interpretation, and reception of art, our observations of multivalent frames—those in space, architecture, gender, the body, abstraction, and the art historical canon—frequently converged around a broader thematic questioning of the political frame of art. Drawing upon the rich resources available and referencing the legacy of experimental video in upstate New York, this screening and discussion will complement **enticing the eye / exploring the frame**, aiming to elucidate why video, as an artistic medium, is inherently both framed by and frames the political, and how it diversely reorients aesthetics toward an engagement with oppositional social praxes.

Video art emerged primarily in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s, a period marked by political instability. Coextensive with the turn to video art was the dominance and institutionalization of the television—a hegemonic, advertorial facade used to placate unrest after World War II and frustration due to the war in Vietnam through the seductive entertainment and leisure of watching the TV screen. Television’s permeation of sociopolitical structures was clearest in its global intrusion into the household, emblematizing the social anxiety afforded by the forced, postwar return to a false domestic cohesion. Media historian Lynn Spigel states that, “in the span of roughly four years, television itself became the central figure in the images of the American home; it became the cultural symbol par excellence of family life,” aptly describing the urgency of the television’s domestic takeover as an example of its multifaceted networking of social, sexual, and political control.

Counteracting its subjecting potential, video artists aimed to subvert television and cinema’s mappings of passivity, commodity, and discipline. Utilizing early forms of alternative documentary technology, such as the Sony Portapak, artists experimented with the agency and spatiotemporal fluidity of video’s moving image to construct works that often subsumed a political ethos. Video affords instantaneous capture and, in its frequent absence of editing, a new aesthetic of formalist automata is allowed, insubordinate to the premeditated manipulation and commodified institutionalization of the television. It is noteworthy that some of the earliest experiments in videographic media took place at the Experimental Television Center in Owego, just half an hour’s drive from Ithaca. This highlights the novel relation of video art to the cultural history of upstate New York and its ever-present relevance in our screening of work from the Goldsen Archive.

Yet, concurrent with the rise of video art was the forceful reification of political movements rooted in status of marginality, such as Black Power, women’s liberation, anti-imperialism, postcolonial studies, and gay liberation, conferring a mutualism between artists and activists through the use of video as an instrument of politics. Thus, video as an artistic medium, from its experimental, oppositional inception to its participatory social praxis, further blurs the boundary, if any still remains, between aesthetics and politics. With this symposium and screening of video art from the Goldsen Archive, the History of Art Majors’ Society aims to highlight video’s medium-specific link to the political frame of art, and the urgency and originality of video art that served to foreground further explorations of framing politics at the ideological and material juncture of art and technology.

—Carlos Kong

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enticing the eye / exploring the frame

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