

Looking 101

The average museum visitor spends less than 30 seconds looking at a work of art.* It usually takes us far less than that to draw conclusions about what we see; the human brain seems to perform this work automatically and instantaneously. How do we slow down our looking habits to better understand the process of meaning-making? How do our individual backgrounds and lived experiences affect how and what we see?

We invite you to enter our teaching gallery and engage in a typical classroom activity: an exercise in close looking that can be used to analyze any work of art. We have intentionally excluded contextual and interpretive texts from the walls of this exhibition so you can begin your visit with direct observation of the artworks. Information about each

artwork and discussion prompts are available in the brochure holder and on our website. You can do this exercise on your own or in conversation with other visitors.

This exhibition supports Northwestern University's under-graduate curriculum with emphasis on first-year students. Works on view are from The Block's collection and were selected with the help of faculty members across campus to relate to themes in their courses.

*According to research conducted at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2016. Lisa F. Smith, Jeffrey K. Smith, and Pablo P. L. Tinio, "Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 11 (2017).

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LOOKING 101 GUIDE

There are many ways to interpret a work of art. This four-step guide is designed to help viewers observe carefully and think critically.* You can begin by looking around and selecting an artwork you are interested in.

1. Look and Describe

What do you see? Pause in front of a work of art and spend time looking carefully at it. List and describe everything you can see. Look again.

What materials and techniques were used to make this work?

What forms and/or figures do you see?

What can you say about the colors?

Light? Space? Perspective?

What more did you notice when you looked again?

2. Analyze

What is going on?

Build an initial analysis of the artwork based on your observations and personal responses.

What seems to be the focus?

Do you recognize the subject matter?

Is a place or action depicted?

How does the work make you feel?

How might your response be informed by your personal experience or background?

3. Research

What information is available about the artwork or the artist who made it?

You can learn more about the artwork in this gallery by reading the brochure or by scanning the QR code next to each work of art.

How does this information reinforce or change what you observed by looking carefully?

Is there anything in this information that you did not see or think about previously?

4. Interpret

What does it mean?

This final step brings together the observations you made by looking closely, your preliminary analysis, and the additional information from research, to consider what a work of art might mean.

* This guide has been adapted from the Learning to Look method, developed by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College.

STEP 3: Research

This brochure includes some of what The Block Team has learned about each artwork in this gallery through research, conversations with artists, and more.

You can also find this information on our website by scanning the QR code next to each work with your cell-phone camera.

Consider: How does this information reinforce or change the perspective formed through your own close looking? Is there anything in this information that you did not see or think about previously?

1

Alan Cohen (American, born 1943)

Now (Slave Plantation, St. John, Virgin Islands), 09-01

March 1995

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Sharon Cohen, 2003.9.2

In the 1990s, Chicago photographer Alan Cohen traveled to sites of historical trauma, including a sugar plantation on the island of St. John in the Caribbean.

Sugar plantations in the Caribbean were a major part of

the economy of the islands in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Most Caribbean islands were covered with sugarcane fields and mills for refining the crop. The main source of labor, until the abolition of chattel slavery, was enslaved Africans. After the abolition of slavery, indentured laborers from India, China, Portugal, and elsewhere were brought to the Caribbean to work in the sugar industry. These plantations produced 80 to 90 percent of the sugar consumed in Western Europe during this period.

Cohen's photographs from this series document the sites, but they provide little or no information about their histories. The photographs do not directly represent the pain and suffering associated with the historic sites, nor do they capture their broader meaning. It is primarily from the work's titles that we understand them as places that witnessed human exploitation and abuse.

2

Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000)

The March, from the series *The Life of Toussaint*

L'Ouverture

1995

Color screenprint

Gift of Evelyn Salk in memory of her husband Erwin A.

Salk, 2001.13.9

In his early 20s, Jacob Lawrence created a narrative series of paintings celebrating François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture, the most prominent leader of the 18th-century Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) (below). L'Ouverture and other self-liberated people sought to abolish slavery and to free Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, from French colonial rule. Lawrence created the series in the late 1930s in order to represent a crucial chapter in the history of Black liberation, one that had been excluded from his formal education. In the 1990s he returned to the theme, re-creating some of his original

compositions in the medium of screenprinting, which allows for larger editions and broader circulation. In *The March*, Lawrence visualizes the collective action required to enact a revolution: a group of soldiers becomes a singular mass through a layered repetition of bodies, hats, and rifles, whose angles suggest relentless forward momentum.

The Haitian revolution instilled fear into the hearts of American enslavers, who were worried that a similar revolt could happen in the United States. In fact, in 1811, an uprising of hundreds of enslaved people in Louisiana was suppressed by militia and federal troops—a rebellion that is rarely mentioned in textbooks.

Jacob Lawrence, *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, No. 20: General Toussaint L'Ouverture, Statesman and military genius, esteemed by the Spaniards, feared by the English, dreaded by the French, hated by the planters, and revered by the Blacks*, 1938.



Tempera on paper. Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans.

3

Omar Victor Diop (Senegalese, born 1980)

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, from the series *Project Diaspora*
2014

Inkjet print, pigment-based

Purchase with funds from the Irwin and Andra S. Press
Collection Endowment, 2016.9.1

In his series *Project Diaspora*, artist Omar Victor Diop poses as Africans who were portrayed by artists in Europe in the 15th–19th centuries. Here Diop stages a photograph based on the first known British portrait of an enslaved person, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (1701–1773), as depicted by artist William Hoare in 1733 (below). Diallo was a highly educated man from a family of high-ranking Muslim clerics in what is today Senegal. While on a journey to sell enslaved people he was himself captured and sold into slavery. Eventually sold to the owner of a plantation in Maryland, Diallo escaped and was subsequently jailed. While imprisoned, Diallo wrote a series of letters that convinced an official of the Royal African Company to send him to London, where he was hosted among the upper echelons of society before returning to Africa. Diallo is among very few enslaved Africans who were able to return to their homeland, making his story an exceptional one.

Diop's vibrant photograph brings Diallo's story vividly into the present. While representing himself in the guise of Diallo, Diop also holds a contemporary soccer ball.



William Hoare of Bath
(British, ca.1707–1792),
*Ayuba Suleiman Diallo,
Called Job Ben Solomon,*
1733. Oil on canvas.
Property of Qatar Museums
Authority.

4

Tonika Lewis Johnson (American, born 1979)
6720 South Ashland & 6720 North Ashland, Chicago,
from the series *Folded Map™ Project*

2019

Inkjet print, pigment-based (diptych)

Gift of Lisa Graziose Corrin and Peter Erickson in honor of the commitment to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion pledged in 2021 by The Block's staff and Board of Advisors, 2021.4.3-4

Organized by Chicago-based artist and activist Tonika Lewis Johnson, the *Folded Map™* Project connects residents who live at corresponding addresses on the North and South Sides of Chicago, which she calls "address pairs." In this pair, the photograph of 6720 South Ashland Avenue shows a two-story building with a boarded-up commercial space at street level next to a vacant lot. The corresponding photograph of 6720 North Ashland Avenue shows a single-family house with a manicured front lawn.

This series prompts viewers to consider the historical causes behind the discrepancies between Chicago's North and South sides. Much of the city is divided by

race, a fact that is in part the legacy of 20th-century redlining policies that denied home mortgages to African American applicants in certain neighborhoods, as well as the individual decisions of homeowners to reinforce segregation through individual actions.

While the project started as a photographic study, it soon evolved into a multimedia exploration, with portraits and video interviews of residents as well as a stage play and an action kit. According to Johnson, the goal of the project is “to challenge everyone to think about how change may be possible and to contribute to a solution.” ¹

To see interviews with participants in the *Folded*

MapTM Project, visit:

<https://www.foldedmapproject.com/map-twins-video>
or scan the code using your phone’s camera.

5

Laura Letinsky (Canadian, born 1962)

Untitled #49

2002

Inkjet print

Purchase funds provided by Lynn Hauser and Neil Ross,
2014.1k

Early in her career, Chicago-based artist Laura Letinsky photographed couples in the intimacy of their own homes, creating visual narratives about love and relationships. By the late 1990s, she stopped photographing people and replaced them with objects—stained napkins, orange peels, half-eaten bits of candy—that hinted at human presence. Especially influenced by still life paintings from 17th-century Holland and 18th-century France, Letinsky crafts tabletop vignettes that suggest larger themes, as she explains:

It's this idea that the narrative has already occurred; the meal has been eaten, the cornucopia has been consumed, something has been consummated, and this is what's left in the early morning light.²

Letinsky based this photograph on a 1768 oil painting by French artist Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Basket of Peaches, with Walnuts, Knife and Glass of Wine* (below).



Jean-Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779), *Basket of Peaches with Walnuts, Knife, and Glass of Wine*, 1768. Oil on canvas. Musée de Louvre, Paris.

6

Leonard Suryajaya (Chinese-Indonesian, born 1988)

Perennial Blossom, from the series *Parting Gift*

2022

Inkjet print

Gift of Leonard Suryajaya, 2022.7

Chicago-based artist Leonard Suryajaya uses a film camera to create large-format photographs that often include performative elements. *Perennial Blossom* is the result of a collaboration between The Block, Suryajaya, and a local flower design company, Flowerchild. The photograph features 13 Northwestern undergraduates from the Block Museum Student Associate program and one Block staff member as well as the artist's sister and mother. The idea of flowers as objects with rich and diverse cultural meanings was central to Suryajaya's vision.

In preparation for the work, Suryajaya tasked the students with thinking about their self-images by posing the following questions:

How do you want to be seen?

What aspects of your identity do you want to make visible or amplify?

How will you communicate this through your attire, skills, and objects that are meaningful to you that you already have or can access for free?

What role will flowers have to disrupt or embellish?

The project culminated in a day-long photo shoot outside The Block. The resulting photograph is a layered group portrait. Through what they wear and hold, the students celebrate aspects of their

identities—hobbies, talents, cultural backgrounds, religious faiths, genders, sexualities, and more.

To learn more about the Block Museum Student Associates program, visit:

<https://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/who-we-are/associates22-23.html> or scan the code using your phone's camera.



7

Jess T. Dugan (American, born 1986)

Oskar at Sunset, from the portfolio *Every Breath We*

Drew

2019

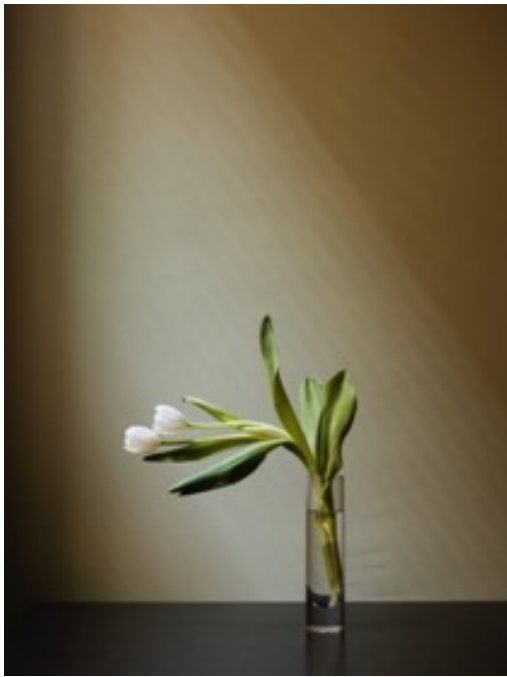
Inkjet print

Julie and Lawrence Bernstein Family Art Acquisition
Fund purchase, 2022.5e

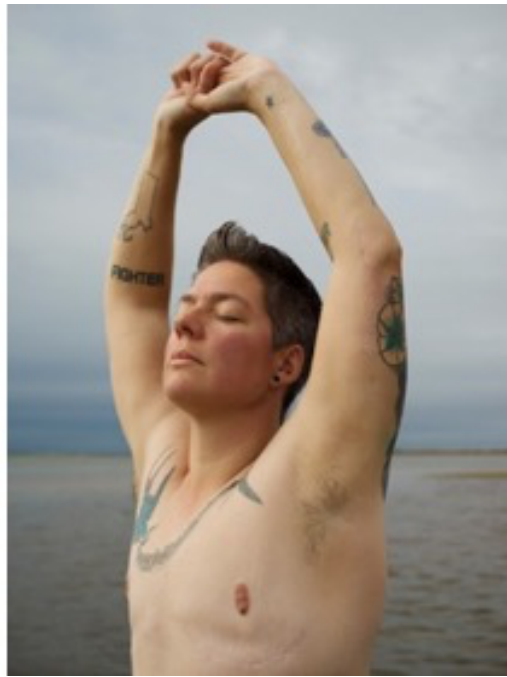
Photographer Jess T. Dugan has developed a body of work over a period of 15 years that is focused on portraits of their community, including many LGBTQ and gender nonconforming individuals. Describing this focus, they have shared, “from a very young age I felt compelled to make images of queer people, including myself, that were as nuanced and complex and beautiful as I knew these individuals to be.” *Oskar at Sunset* is part of a series titled *Every Breath We Drew*, which includes portraits of people whose gender expression falls along the spectrum of the masculine—including self-portraits of the artist (below, right)—as well as still lifes and interior scenes (below, left). Of the series, Dugan has stated:

By asking others to be vulnerable with me through the act of being photographed, I

am laying claim to what I find beautiful and powerful while asking larger questions about how identity is formed, desire is expressed, and intimate connection is sought.⁴



Tulips, 2020



Self-portrait (reaching), 2020

8

Chris Pappan (Kaw, Osage, Cheyenne River Sioux, born 1971)

Definition 1

2018

Graphite, map collage, and acrylic on 1925 Evanston municipal ledger

Purchase funds provided by the Andra S. and Irwin Press Collections Fund, 2021.10.1

Influenced heavily by what he calls “lowbrow art,” Chris Pappan makes work that often addresses themes such as colonialism, cultural appropriation, and the interpretation of history. In Pappan’s words, lowbrow art is “a genre of work where the technical ability is very precise, very illustrative, sometimes photorealistic, sometimes surrealistic. The subject matter is often lurid or lascivious.”⁵

Here Pappan has rendered a detailed drawing of a man's face on paper from a 1925 City of Evanston municipal ledger and a map of Gila River Indian Reservation lands in Arizona. The artwork addresses layered histories of place and is part of Pappan's series *21st Century Ledger Drawings*. Ledger drawings were an artistic practice developed by Indigenous people of the Plains region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The ledger paper, originally a means for settlers to keep inventories, served as a new medium for Indigenous artists to record everyday life and contemporary events. Pappan says he likes to blend his lowbrow aesthetic with the tradition of ledger art to assert the identity of Indigenous people as modern, rather than people consigned to history.⁶ He seeks to question our perceptions of what it means to be Native, asking:

How much information does the viewer need in order to categorize the subject as “Native”?

Is it the context in which the work is displayed?

Is it the substrate or materials used?

Is it within the heritage of the maker of the work?⁷

9

Fernando Bryce (Peruvian, born 1965)

Apollo 11/Luna 15

2019

Ink on wove paper in two parts (diptych)

Anonymous gift, 2022.1.2

Fernando Bryce creates his ink-on-paper drawings using a systematic process that he describes as

“mimetic analysis.” First he culls archives for print materials like advertisements, newspaper articles, and propaganda pamphlets. Using a light table, Bryce then reproduces a selection of these materials in his own hand-drawn style, usually arranging them in order to examine the ways historical events have been represented in printed media.

Bryce started using this method while studying in Berlin in 1997, when he discovered a 1930s propaganda packet by the Peruvian government and reproduced it. Much of his work continues to examine US-Latin American relations, colonialism, and Latin American politics.

The two panels of *Apollo 11/Luna 15* contain recreations of newspaper headlines and advertisements in English and Spanish, primarily relating to the American Apollo 11 and Soviet Luna 15 space expeditions of 1969. An article entitled “Armstrong y

Colón Juntos” (Armstrong and Columbus Together) draws the viewer to think about colonialism and the Cold War. Placed in the lower right corner like a footnote, a small headline reads *AMERICA: Nixon Hará hoy una Rápida Visita a Vietnam del Sur* (America: Today, Nixon Will Make a Quick Visit to South Vietnam), referring to the ongoing war in Vietnam.

10

Kameelah Janan Rasheed (American, born 1985)

Lazy Equation

2019

Inkjet print on paper

Purchase funds provided by the Julie and Lawrence Bernstein Family Art Acquisition Fund, 2019.18.2

Kameelah Janan Rasheed is an educator and self-described learner based in Brooklyn, New York. She focuses on curriculum design while bringing her

pedagogical expertise and interest in various learning styles to her practice as an interdisciplinary artist.

Rasheed works mainly with a photocopier, a tool for self-publication and DIY dissemination, to print diagrammatic poems or word compositions that are digitized and reprinted on vinyl, photo paper, and other surfaces.

In this work, Rasheed creates a comparison between the mathematical concepts expressed through ratios and equations and how the lives and experiences of marginalized communities are often reduced and simplified to signs, statistics, and symbols. The words included in her works are open to individual interpretation, as Rasheed explains:

Some people come to my work and read it like a book. One person said, “I went to

your show, and I googled every sentence, because I wanted to understand the source information.” And others say, “Girl, this is pretty. I just like the shape, and I don’t know what the words are, but I like how the text creates this shape on the wall.” All that counts as reading. Going into a space and trying to make sense of what’s there is a reading process. That’s the case for all art.⁸

Footnotes

¹ Tonika Lewis Johnson, “www.foldedmapproject.com,” <https://www.tonijphotography.com/projects/6836945>. Accessed July 26, 2022.

² Julie Farstad, “Laura Letinsky interviewed by Julie Farstad,” *Mouthtomouth* (Spring/summer 2004), <http://www.mouthtomouthmag.com/letinsky.html>. Accessed July 28, 2022.

³ “Jess T. Dugan,” *PBS News Hour*, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/brief/401343/jess-t-dugan>. Accessed July 26, 2022.

⁴ Artist statement, *Every Breath We Drew: Jess T. Dugan*, RedLine Contemporary Art Center, Denver (March 10–April 9, 2017),

<https://cpacphoto.org/everybreathwedrew/>. Accessed July 16, 2022.

⁵ Meredith Francis, “Artist Chris Pappan Explores the Contemporary Identity of Native Americans,” WTTW, December 3, 2020, <https://interactive.wttw.com/playlist/2020/12/03/artist-chris-pappan-explores-contemporary-identity-native-americans>. Accessed July 26, 2022.

⁶ “Through the denial of our history and through our erasure, we’re not seen as contemporary people.” Ibid.

⁷ “Chris Pappan: Artist Narratives,” Blue Rain Gallery.

⁸ Nicole Acheampong, “Kameelah Janan Rasheed on Learning and Unlearning,” *Art in America*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/kameelah-janan-rasheed->

interview-reading-learning-unlearning-1234597485/.

Accessed July 26, 2022.