

RHIZOMATIC INTIMACIES

PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE COLLECTION OF
KEITH JANTZEN AND SCOTT BETH

GRINNELL COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

JANUARY 22 – MARCH 29, 2026

CURATED BY THE EXHIBITION SEMINAR, DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY,
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY MICHAEL MACKENZIE

Grinnell College Museum of Art

Foreword

Susan Baley, Director, Grinnell College Museum of Art

This publication, which showcases faculty-mentored student scholarship, encapsulates the vitality of campus art museums. The catalogue is the culmination of an exhibition seminar course taught by Professor of Art History Michael Mackenzie during the fall 2025 semester at Grinnell College. These triennial exhibitions bring together faculty, students, and museum staff in a dynamic dialogue that enriches us all.

Professor Mackenzie first approached me about his idea of working with the photography collection of Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth in early 2023, and I immediately found the idea compelling. Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth have been generous supporters of GCMoA for many years — serving on the Museum's leadership council and donating works of art to the collection. Professor Mackenzie's seminar topic provided students with an amazing opportunity to become acquainted with photography through the eyes of two contemporary art collectors. Listening to the stories about why people collect has been a passion of mine for many years because, like most museum visitors, it intrigues me to find out why works of art speak to the people who choose to live with it. I was fortunate to accompany the class when

they visited Keith and Scott's California home in August 2025. Watching the students delight in learning about the collecting process while enjoying Keith and Scott's warm hospitality was invigorating.

In addition to my administrative work, I teach the Introduction to Museum Studies course at Grinnell College. The class focuses on the ways museums are being reinvented in the 21st century — including transforming institutions by moving away from the traditional top-down organizational chart based on power inequities to a model focused on human-centered relationships. Therefore, I was thrilled by the class's collaborative way of working and their choice of the rhizomatic exhibition theme, which involves breaking down hierarchies. The student curators' questioning of the ways photographs have traditionally been categorized and displayed represents the type of change needed in the museum field. Princess Alexander, Ella Barnett, Kiele Calhoun, Sabina Clingerman, Aubrie Connell, Vivian Finch, Amy Kan, Sugi Lucas, Monica Park, Dorothea Qin, Kate Walker-Spencer, and Neva Zamil all give me hope for the future of the profession.

Students’ Acknowledgments

First, we would like to thank the staff of the Grinnell College Museum of Art, beginning with Director Susan Baley, who supported the exhibition and the catalogue and who has continued to foster a relationship with the collectors, and Associate Director and Curator of Exhibitions Daniel Strong, who helped with logistics, the installation, and catalogue production. We would also like to thank Director of Exhibition Design Milton Severe, who designed the installation and the lighting and who invited us to work with his model of the galleries. Thank you, Jocelyn Krueger, Collections Manager and Registrar, for working on logistics and for securing image reproduction rights, and Curator of Academic and Community Outreach, Tilly Woodward, who helped us organize our gallery talks and the visit of Johnnie Chatman. Thank you to Professor Michael Mackenzie for his guidance, organization, and support throughout this process.

The entire leadership and staff of Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco warmly welcomed us into their gallery spaces

and behind the scenes of their operation. The day we spent with them was transformative for our understanding of both the medium of photography and the business of its stewardship. Founder and Director Jeffrey Fraenkel was exceptionally generous with his time, his expertise, and his deep sensitivity for the medium and history of photography. President and Director Daphne Palmer and Director Christian Whitworth and all the staff generously shared their time, effort, and expertise with us.

Most of all, we would like to thank Keith Jantzen '80 and Scott Beth, for their enthusiastic and generous support of this project. Their hospitality in opening their home to us, offering us access not only to their collection, but to their shared lives as collectors, transformed our work from a classroom exercise into a defining, shared experience for us. The access that they generously offered us to their friends at Fraenkel Gallery and to the artist Johnnie Chatman were meaningful aspects of this experience for us.

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| Princess Alexander '26 | Amy Kan '27 |
| Ella Barnett '27 | Sugi Lucas '27 |
| Kiele Calhoun '26 | Monica Park '28 |
| Sabina Clingerman '27 | Dorothea Qin '26 |
| Aubrie Connell '26 | Kaitlyn Walker-Spencer '26 |
| Vivian Finch '26 | Neva Zamil '27 |

Collecting Intimately, Collecting Rhizomatically

Michael Mackenzie, Professor of Art History

Keith Jantzen '80 and Scott Beth have been collecting art together for more than 40 years, and photography is a strongpoint of their collection. When it was first suggested that their photography collection could be the subject of an exhibition curated by students in Grinnell College's upper-level seminar on exhibition planning, they invited the students into their home to see the art as they live with it. Keith and Scott gave the students a free hand in choosing the works to include in the exhibition and offered insights into what living with art means to them. The artwork on their walls:

... helps us — indeed even requires us — to look beyond the quotidian obsessions and concerns (both personal and more broadly) to something larger, more historical, and richer. For us, each piece that we display in our homes is a “way station” to stop and contemplate — the lives, the places, the ideas inherent in each work.¹

After a shared meal and long conversation, the students saw the artworks in a new way. Art unfolds at a different pace, depending on whether you encounter it in a museum; spend a semester looking at it, thinking about it, and researching it; or live with it over the course of a shared life together. As Keith and Scott say:

We are refreshed and energized by the stories that these pieces tell and the questions that they ask. Perhaps the most important feature of our art collection is that those questions are never really answered; and so we keep coming back to them with new ideas, theories, and appreciation that continues to build over time.²

The result of that visit is an exhibition of 38 photographs from the collection, a dozen of which had previously been

donated to the museum, while the rest have been lent for the show.

The 12 students in the course came up with the theme of the exhibition and its organization and then identified and wrote about the specific individual topics that emerged from classroom discussions. The twin organizing principles of the exhibition, intimacy and the non-hierarchical flow of meaning and significance — for which they chose the rhizome as a metaphor — capture essential qualities of Keith and Scott's practice as collectors. A rhizome is a type of plant root (for ginger, say, or bearded irises) that grows horizontally, asymmetrically, and that if cut will continue to grow in multiple directions.

As a metaphor, it indicates an interpretive and organizational strategy that is non-hierarchical, and that can be interrupted at any point and then picked up again at any other. It conveys the collectors' disinterest in the lineages, hierarchies, and taxonomies imposed by the art world.

It is interesting to see, for example, two photographs that face each other across their dining room table: one a portrait by Peter Hujar of fashion doyen Diana Vreeland from 1975 (plate 1), and the other a picture of four Southern ladies by William Eggleston (plate 3), taken sometime between 1965 and 1968. Hujar's is typically sensitive and intelligent and exquisitely ordered, while Eggleston's by contrast is wry and indifferently composed. Yet these two works speak to each other. And the metaphor of the rhizome also hints at something inherent in the works of many of the individual photographers that Keith and Scott have collected. Take, for example, another work by Peter Hujar, *Cupboard, Newark, N. J.* (plate 4), one of several photographs of interestingly textured rubbish that he took in an abandoned building on the far side of the Hudson River. Or one by Wolfgang Tillmans, *Carciofo* (p. 55, fig. 1, left), a gorgeous color documentation of a haphazard grouping of fruit and

vegetables that goes out of its way to avoid resemblance to a Golden Age Dutch still life. Both Hujar and Tillmans are well-known for photographing anything and everything (and everyone), without any apparent hierarchy. The essence of their photographic practices — and that of Eggleston, too, for that matter — is to give equal attention and weight to everything, leveling hierarchies of significance.

Yet there are some themes that Keith and Scott have clearly been drawn to in their collecting practice. Intimacy is, of course, one. Another is their environmental commitment (which has also led them to support the College's environmental studies program). Sebastião Salgado, one of the most important documentarians of environmental degradation and injustice of the last half century (until his death in 2025), is represented in their collection. Likewise, both Franco Salmoiraghi's important photograph of Edith Kanaka'ole (plate 15), a guardian of Hawaiian language, culture, and environmental wisdom, and a work from Richard Misrach's decades-long project of photographing in the desert of the American Southwest, his *Desert Cantos* project (plate 5), bear witness to their environmental engagement.

Another theme is certainly the representation of LGBTQ+ themes and artists — sometimes overtly, in other instances less so, as in Robert Mapplethorpe's lush, silvery studies of certain fleshy, tumescent flowers (plates 12-14). Another is the foregrounding of a Black presence. In the case of Johnnie Chatman, a young photographer whom Keith and Scott have collected in some depth, several of these themes converge in his ongoing series of self-portraits set in the iconic landscapes of the American West (plates 25-29).

Each of the essays in this catalog identifies a significant theme, elaborated with close readings of constellations of photographs from the exhibition. They do not correspond to discrete, traditional categories such as portraiture, the nude, landscape, and still life, with an implied hierarchy of

importance. Instead, they trace connections across such categories, allowing meaning and significance to flow. It is, we hope, a rhizomatic leveling of hierarchies and categories.

1 Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth, note sent to the author and the students in the Grinnell College Exhibition Seminar, November 13, 2025.

2 Jantzen and Beth, November 13, 2025.

Errant notes on rhizomatic intimacies

Amy Kan '27

“Rhizomatic,” a concept borrowed from botany and theorized by Deleuze and Guattari,¹ describes a root structure without beginning or end, where new offshoots can emerge anywhere. Unlike hierarchical or linear systems, units — here, photographs — can link in multiple ways, forming mutable sequences that can be dropped, resumed, or rerouted. “Intimacy” in this context denotes non-hierarchical entanglements: between subject, photographer, and viewer; between animate and inanimate; and between the perceiving subject and the world.

In this show, rhizomatic intimacy extends this logic to the imaging of the human subject — before, behind, or beyond the camera — surfacing in formal echoes and affective resonances that bind disparate elements. More than metaphor, it becomes a method for perceiving relations, exemplified in a case study of eight photographs I take on in this essay and in the gallery arrangement, where images lie beside one another, leveled and porous.



Ambient intimacy arises in works like those of Johnnie Chatman (b. 1990) and Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), who defamiliarize landscapes to reveal liminal presences and overlooked conditions. Both cultivate intimacy by alternately dispersing and cohering attention across atmosphere and environment, rather than concentrating on a single subject across a series.

In the series *i forgot where we were ...* (plates 25-29), Chatman places the Black body within vast natural expanses of the American West. Often the darkest form in frame and pushed to the compositional margins, the body nonetheless asserts itself, eroding the landscape. Though largely featureless, the figure maintains a clear racial identity: Chatman is Black, and these works are, mostly, self-portraits.² This tension between the everyman and the Black

man is precisely where intimacy arises, through the viewer’s simultaneous recognition and identification.

Stieglitz’s photograph of a cloudy sky in *Equivalent, Set C 2 No. 4 [216D]* (plate 6) reveals intimacy across banality, repetition, and resemblance. Looking up at the sky in a move either hopeful or despairing reveals nothing science cannot explain. No “big man upstairs,” no transformative revelation. Yet before the lens, the everyday sky becomes strange again: that tiny glowing marble of a sun, the feathered textures of cloud. His sprawling experiment³ transforms the banal into something newly intimate.



Directed intimacy acts through confrontation or experiential address. Both Peter Hujar (1934–1987) and Thomas Struth (b. 1954) present works deeply invested in the charged act of looking, an act close to the core of intimacy, where seeing becomes a form of both believing and being. Hujar’s lens focuses on the human and social, while Struth concerns himself with experiential looking.

Hujar’s *Man at the Piers* (plate 7) images a moment “of exchange,”⁴ an unmediated gaze that insists upon recognition. Standing defiantly in heeled sandals, left foot firmly planted on a loose plank, this unnamed figure acts as a modern-day sphinx guarding a series of receding doorways to the right. Though the space stretches onward, the image offers no narrative; there is no indication of movement, motivation, or unfolding action. Instead, what comes forward is the charged encounter between subject and viewer: he sees and is seen; everything else falls away.

In contrast, Struth’s *São Francisco Xavier, Brazil 2001* (p. 55, fig. 1, right)⁵ proposes a different form of directedness through immersion. Rather than adopting a distant, panoramic vantage, as is to be expected of the landscape mode, the camera nestles into dense undergrowth, making

the viewer a participant organism, just one body among many. To look forward is, here, to move forward, to live in and with the forest's density. Such immersion positions the viewer within a precise experiential vector: the image pictures a proximate world, and the viewer's gaze completes the scene.



Withdrawal may register as antithetical to intimacy, yet it is in fact revealing of its reach. Retreat appears differently in Lillian Bassman (1917–2012) and Vanessa Beecroft (b. 1969), who both picture female forms in states of flight. Withdrawal here functions not as isolation but as a mode of resistant opacity, positioning the female figure firmly outside the grasp of intimate legibility.

With Bassman's *Times Square: The Night Fantastic* (plate 8), the woman becomes symbol. High-contrast, blown-out blacks and whites render a robed female figure striding across a dappled New York sidewalk; both place and face blur with motion, leaving only a profile and the ambiguous fuzz of streetlight and signage. Rather than picturing a distinct woman in a knowable place, Bassman images the affect of New York nightlife — glamour sharpened through abstraction. There are no specific proper nouns here, but rather an overarching universalism.

Beecroft's *VB47.364.DR* (plate 20), a still from a performance,⁶ further atomizes the female figure into an anonymous collective. Female bodies, white and thin, are wholly exposed save for strappy nude heels and helmet-like masks that cocoon the head. Through these, identity is withheld; interiority is sealed; yet the individual subject is not absent so much as impenetrable. Hermeneutically closed, intimacy remains contained within the individual.



Networked intimacy acts on people, and ideas about people, across time and space. The intimacy of Man Ray (1890–1976) (and Kurt Seligmann [1900–1962]) and Peter Hujar (1934–1987) engages gregariously in the social sphere and its inscriptions of sexuality on the body. While Ray and Seligmann condemn, Hujar exults.

As part of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, the Seligmann mannequin, as photographed by Man Ray (plate 9), is bound — indeed, produced and posed — by her context. She is a martyr⁷ with hands bound by looping rope, a cross-knife hybrid piercing a mound atop her head, haloed in false foliage. Beneath the ominous *Rue de Tous Diables* sign, she stands as fallen woman, cocooned in a robe yet sullied by the structures that surround her.

Hujar, by contrast, networks intimacy through mutual, chosen relationality within queer culture. In *Christopher Street Pier #2 (Crossed Legs)* (plate 10), exuberance takes the form of an erotically charged look: the lens seems aimed toward the figure's crotch. A heavy work boot blocks full access, a gesture of defiance, while the companion boot, propped on a bent knee, hovers above a hazy background of another figure and a docked ship. Intimacy exceeds the frame, moving outward into a broader web of queer desire and sexuality,⁸ neither imposed nor contained, but lived.



This essay is an invitation, one of many possible entry points into the rhizome. We have traversed such dissimilar elements as the body — Black and female — sexualities, skies, natural and built environments, and bodies across types of intimacies that move inward and outward, both directed and dispersed. By framing four points of connection as sites of rhizomatic intimacy, I hope to have cast one of many ropes through the dense undergrowth of our show, tracing the beginnings of one path forward. As you move beyond these

pages, I leave you with a question: Where is your rhizome?
What paths, intersections, or attachments begin to emerge
for you?

- 1 Deleuze and Guattari put forth six principles of the rhizome and its behavior: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, a signifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. The conception of the rhizome in this essay, and in the exhibition, moves in an analogous manner to that of the Deleuzo-Guattarian model. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.)
- 2 Johnnie Chatman, "Johnnie Chatman: INSITE Conversations," *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, YouTube, at 2:21, August 25, 2023, youtu.be/sp3faD79GBk.
- 3 Stieglitz saw the *Equivalents* as a cumulative expression of his creative practice. All images in the series are of clouds apart from one image of horse genitalia. "Equivalents," *Art Institute of Chicago*, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, archive.artic.edu/stieglitz/equivalents, accessed December 2, 2025.
- 4 Oliver Shultz, quoted in Osman Can Yerebakan, "Peter Hujar's Illicit Photographs of New York's Cruising Utopia," *AnOther*, July 6, 2020, anothermag.com/art-photography/12659/peter-hujar-s-cruising-utopia-pace-gallery-exhibition, accessed December 2, 2025.
- 5 Of this series of images Struth notes, "Although they have a strong feeling of time, they are ahistorical. One sees a forest or a jungle but there is nothing to discover, no story to be told. They have more to do with the self. The viewing process is complicated, and the viewer becomes more aware of how he or she is processing the information, heightening an awareness of the here and now." He believes the images to be endowed with an intuitive quality influenced by his practice of Tai Qi. Thomas Struth, "New Pictures from Paradise," *Thomas Struth*, thomasstruth32.com/smallsite/photographs/new_pictures_from_paradise/index.html, accessed December 2, 2025.
- 6 Judith Thurman, "The Wolf at the Door," *The New Yorker*, March 10, 2003, [newyorker.com/magazine/2003/03/17/the-wolf-at-the-door](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/03/17/the-wolf-at-the-door). Parameters for Beecroft's performances are as follows: "DO NOT TALK / DO NOT INTERACT WITH ANYONE / DO NOT WHISPER / DO NOT SMILE / DO NOT LAUGH / DO NOT MOVE THEATRICALY / DO NOT MOVE TOO FAST / DO NOT MOVE TOO SLOW / BE NATURAL / BE DETACHED." "Vanessa Beecroft, Rules of Non-Engagement," *Jeffrey Deitch Los Angeles*, Exhibitions, deitch.com/los-angeles/exhibitions/vanessa-beecroft, accessed December 2, 2025.
- 7 See *Untitled* (1938) by Gaston Paris close-up photograph for an even holier image of the mannequin.
- 8 The Christopher Streer Pier was a historic cruising hub for gay men. Ken Lustbader, "Greenwich Village Waterfront," *NYC LGBTQ Historic Sites Project*, March 2017, nycgbtsites.org/site/greenwich-village-waterfront, accessed December 2, 2025.



Installation view, *Rhizomatic Intimacies: Photography from the Collection of Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth*

The Rhizome of Portraiture

Dorothea Qin '26 and Ella Barnett '27

Initially, portrait photography sought to capture the truth of a person in a single image. Several photographers in our exhibition, including Franco Salmoiraghi (b. 1942), Sheila Metzner (b. 1939), Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89), and Peter Hujar (1934–87), expand our definition of portraiture by challenging assumptions about subjects and objects, showing the vitality of context and complicating the idea of fundamental character. Traditional portraiture sought to fix identity by conveying likeness and capturing a subject's character in a singular moment.¹ Emerging in the 1820s with Henry Fox Talbot (1800–77), Joseph Nicéphore Niepce (1765–1833), and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851), photography quickly gained authority as a medium that “reveals truth.” Carte-de-visite studios popularized affordable likenesses, while mechanical precision ultimately freed painters from imitation demands and reshaped the portrait tradition. *Black Tulip* by Sheila Metzner, the three floral photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, and *Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole Chanting in the Koa Forest* by Franco Salmoiraghi depart from this tradition. We propose to consider the floral still lifes as a kind of portraiture, alongside the photograph of Edith Kanaka'ole, as a kind of portraiture beyond likeness and fixed identity. These photographs replace static depiction with presence, registering the interrelation between body and environment, human and non-human, singular moment and timeless memory. They propose a portraiture that blurs the subject and object binary and invites relational ways of seeing, functioning as a medium of connection that is rhizomatic, where individual relations create the whole.

Metzner's *Black Tulip* (plate 11) confronts the tradition that only humans can be worthy of portraiture, elevating a flower to the status of a sentient subject. Metzner's use of the early and now rarely used gum bichromate printing process gives the photograph a rich texture and presence unlike more conventional silver gelatin prints.² Against a

velvety ground, the tulip's curved petals emerge in deep purples and blacks, its stillness suggesting a quiet, inner life. Metzner photographs the bloom with the same reverence afforded a human sitter, the light revealing a sensuous spirit. As Estelle Jussim writes, Metzner finds “the magnificently beautiful,” a quality critics describe as a stillness that pauses “conventional time.” This sensibility aligns with her handcrafted printing process, a slow, layered labor that produces images of singular tactility such that each print is unique.³ *Black Tulip* becomes an encounter in which a non-human presence meets the viewer as an equal and destabilizes portraiture's human-centered hierarchy.

Robert Mapplethorpe engages a similar strategy in his floral photographs. In *Flowers (Jack in the Pulpit)* (plate 12), *Orchids* (plate 13), and *Lily* (plate 14), he isolates single blooms and poses them with the same sculptural clarity and psychological attention that he gives to human sitters. Together, these works propose that non-human subjects can also command the full dignity of portraiture.

If Metzner and Mapplethorpe broaden portraiture by granting subjecthood to the non-human, Salmoiraghi shifts it toward relational presence in *Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole Chanting in the Koa Forest, Valmona, Hawai'i* (plate 15), foregrounding human presence in dialogue with land, reverence, and the photographer's attentiveness. Edith Kanaka'ole was a central figure in the Hawaiian Cultural Renaissance, known for teaching chant, hula, and environmental knowledge.⁴ Only after nearly an hour of chanting in the koa forest at Kīpukapuāulu while Salmoiraghi watched, did Aunty Edith allow him to begin taking pictures.⁵ Aunty Edith stands mid-chant, head lifted toward the canopy, her body immersed in grass. Sunlight filters across her face and clothing, making her presence inseparable from the forest's textures, and from the cultural and spiritual histories embodied in the land. The photograph becomes a record

that honors Aunt Edith's agency in initiating the moment, the continuation of cultural practices, and the land's role in shaping the narrative. Salmoiraghi himself said, "That is the best photograph that I have ever made. Ever. And it's not because of me. It's because of her."⁶

Peter Hujar subverts objectification by emphasizing his subject's mental and formal aspects, while complicating the relationship between artist and model through his self-portraits and intimacy with his friends. Cynthia Freeland suggests that portraits may be inherently objectifying, in the literal sense, but they can still humanize through by adding inner depth.⁷ Amelia Jones argues that allowing for subjectivity and complexity prevents othering.⁸ Hujar himself followed the Pictorialist portrait photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79) who sought to portray her sitters' inner, mental states.⁹ "What I do isn't any different from what Julia Margaret Cameron did."¹⁰ *Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair)* (plate 16), for instance, depicts his fellow photographer in reverie, her curly hair falling in a striking pattern and echoing the structural minimalism of Davis' own images.¹¹ Hujar's portraits capture his subjects' pensive, introspective moods as they stare off, or look directly at the camera with calm but ambiguous expressions, as in *Richie, N.Y.C.* (plate 17).¹²

Self-portraiture, by blurring the lines between artist and model, also blurs the lines between subject and object.¹³ Hujar's *Self Portrait Standing* (plate 18) depicts himself in a similar format to his sitters, with one side in shadow and the other in light, and with a plain, studio backdrop. He wears only underwear, demonstrating a willingness to expose his own body. Self-portraiture eliminates questions of the distribution of power between photographer and subject.¹⁴ Sometimes self-portraits are "anonymous," and less about the artist's specific individuality.¹⁵ Johnnie Chatman's self-portraits fit this category; his facial features are indistinct and his clothing uniform. He initially intended to photograph others for this series but decided it would subject them to too much scrutiny. The choice to photograph himself still bears weight, specifically because he comments on the history of American visual culture through the Black American experience.¹⁶ In contrast, both Hujar's portraits of

his friends and of himself have an intensely personal intimacy, in which the sitter is the total subject of the photo.

Across these works, portraiture becomes less a record of isolated subjects and more a web of relations. Each image blurs the boundary between subject and object, inviting viewers into a rhizomatic field in which meaning arises through connections and the whole is formed from the interplay of individual presences.

- 1 Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 189.
- 2 Richard Farber, *Historic Photographic Processes* (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 150–176.
- 3 Estelle Jussim, "Time Stands Still," *Afterimage* 11, no. 8 (1984): 19.
- 4 Heidi Chang, "Edith Kanaka'ole Is the First Hawaiian Woman to Grace a U.S. Quarter," *NPR*, June 2, 2023, [npr.org/2023/06/02/1178874246/quarter-hawaiian-woman-edith-kanakaole-aunt-edith](https://www.npr.org/2023/06/02/1178874246/quarter-hawaiian-woman-edith-kanakaole-aunt-edith).
- 5 "Franco Salmoiraghi on the Best Photograph He Ever Made," *Honolulu Museum of Art*, June 23, 2025, honolulu.museum.org/franco-salmoiraghi-on-the-best-photograph-he-ever-made-b2zd. The title that Edith Kanaka'ole herself gave to the photograph was *Ulu A'e Ke Welina A Ke Aloha*, which translates as "the growth of love is the essence within the soul."
- 6 "Franco Salmoiraghi on the Best Photograph He Ever Made."
- 7 Cynthia Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007): 108, [jstor.org/stable/40208798](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40208798).
- 8 Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (2002): 952, [jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339641](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339641).
- 9 Roswell Angier, *Train Your Gaze: A Practical and Theoretical Introduction to Portrait Photography*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 104.
- 10 Harrison Adams, *Intimacy, Photography, Shame: 1969-1992* (London: Routledge, 2025), 94.
- 11 "Lynn Davis," *Edwynn Houk Gallery*, houkgallery.com/artists/35-lynn-davis, accessed November 23, 2025.
- 12 Osman Can Yerebakan, "Peter Hujar's Illicit Photographs of New York's Cruising Utopia," *AnOther*, July 6, 2020, anothermag.com/art-photography/12659/peter-hujar-s-cruising-utopia-pace-gallery-exhibition.
- 13 Ina Loewenberg, "Reflections on Self-Portraiture in Photography," *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 399, [jstor.org/stable/3178687](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178687).
- 14 Shearer West, *Portraiture*, 37; George Keyes, "Portraiture—Mirror or Mask?" *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 83, no. 1/4 (2009): 5, [journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/DIA23183268](https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/DIA23183268).
- 15 Loewenberg, "Reflections on Self-Portraiture," 401.
- 16 Johnnie Chatman, "Johnnie Chatman: INSITE Conversations," *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, YouTube, August 25, 2023, [youtu.be/sp3faD79GBk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp3faD79GBk).

Duality of the Nude: Intimacy and the Separation of Self

Kaitlyn Walker-Spencer '26

Intimacy is often framed as the revelation of what is typically hidden. Intimate garments lie closest to the skin, while an intimate moment is shared with only a select few. An intimate portrait, then, should reveal the essence of the subject, rather than simply a body. True intimacy requires that the subject remain a person and not an object, so the subject must be presented as a being, one who exists beyond a corporeal nature. Purely material representations cannot forge intimacy; therefore, any form that is objectified is one that will never be conducive to intimacy. Arnold and Beecroft showcase opposite sides of how intimacy is created or destroyed. Arnold reveals, while Beecroft removes.

Eve Arnold (1912–2012) is celebrated for the intimacy of her photographs, especially of film stars. She sought them out at their work and in their unguarded routines, moments when the sitter was not performing but simply existing.¹ The Italian performance artist, Vanessa Beecroft (b. 1969), by contrast, has spent her career staging performances, large-scale tableaux of women wearing little to no clothing, exploring concepts of the female body in relation to identity and society.² While Arnold's photograph of actress Marilyn Monroe on the set of *The Misfits* offers a rare glimpse into the interiority of the woman behind the public persona, Beecroft's work emphasizes the social machine that consumes and reproduces the female body as an object.³ Together, these approaches reveal a surprising proposition: In Beecroft and Arnold's work, nudity transforms into a mechanism of separation, while clothing — and even the performance of work — can become a conduit of intimacy.

In most representations of Marilyn Monroe, she appears as a blonde bombshell — alive, sexual, and strikingly confident. Her body, her voice, even her mannerisms become tools of performance. Gloria Steinem observes that this artificial woman called Marilyn could be switched on instantly. "She could turn it on or off in a minute," Steinem

said.⁴ This distance between Norma Jeane the person and Marilyn the public persona was both a survival strategy and detrimental to her being. "Her body became her prison."⁵ Yet it was precisely this defensive distance that Arnold managed to bridge.

Arnold spent a decade photographing Marilyn, slowly building a relationship grounded in trust. In *A Tribute to Eve Arnold*, art critic Sue Hubbard writes, "Such frank, intimate shots were then highly unusual, humanizing the subject and giving a glimpse behind the spangled mask ... her calm, unassuming presence gained Marilyn's confidence, resulting in some of the most intimate images of her on record."⁶ This intimacy culminated on the set of *The Misfits*, where Arnold spent two months shooting photos of Marilyn in the year before her untimely death. In *Marilyn – Studying Lines on the Set of The Misfits* (plate 19), the actress stands in flat shoes, a baggy sweater, and straight pants, the desert sun illuminating her hair. She studies her script with a furrowed brow, seemingly unaware of the camera. Here, the viewer is pulled toward her expression, not her body. The woman at work is practically unrecognizable as Marilyn, and, for a brief moment, we see beyond the facade. In describing this transformation, Arnold wrote, "These changes are only possible if the photographer has forged a relationship which permits an atmosphere in which the subject feels relaxed and safe, an intimacy that allows the person being photographed to be uninhibited."⁷ In this way, intimacy is equally tied to the subject and the photographer.

If Arnold restores individuality to a woman long consumed by her image, Beecroft performs the opposite operation. Beecroft is so adept at dissolving intimacy that author Alison Leedy compares *VB47.364.DR* (plate 20) to Marilyn Monroe's facade or "mask." She writes, "One Beecroft construction that literally embodies [feminist film theorist Laura] Mulvey's masked Marilyn is *VB 47* performed

at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.”⁸ In the live, one-day performance, *VB 47* (June 12, 2001), which was inspired by the metaphysical aesthetics of Giorgio de Chirico, rows of nude women stand in identical poses, their bodies stripped of any identifiers.⁹ Their heads are wrapped in pale gauze that allows them to see but hides their faces. Blending with the stark white walls, their bodies remain while their identities disappear. The viewer is forced to encounter them not as people, but as objects. Without faces, “persona” — which Giorgio Agamben reminds us originally means “mask” — cannot exist.¹⁰ Recognition is denied. In *VB 47*, Beecroft staged women without the conditions of personhood. Even the curator of the Castello di Rivoli museum, Marcella Beccaria, characterizes the work in these terms, describing the models as “metaphysical mannequins in the galleries of the museum.”¹¹ This word choice reinforces what the installation already communicates: bodies presented as objects, stripped of selfhood. Beecroft’s own statements affirm this. In an interview with *Flash Art*, when asked what the girls were to her, Beecroft responded, “Material ... A material in an almost pure state.”¹² The women, by her own definition, are something to shape, position, and display.¹³

Arnold’s *Marilyn* is clothed yet intimate; Beecroft’s models are nude yet inaccessible. Both images revolve around the female form, but only one preserves the *being* within the body. In Arnold’s photograph, intimacy emerges through recognition — through the fragile, flickering ghost of Norma Jeane behind Marilyn. In Beecroft’s work, intimacy is impossible because the self has been erased. Ultimately, these works show that nudity alone does not create intimacy. Intimacy requires personhood, recognition, and a mutual presence.

- 1 Eve Arnold, *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
- 2 Francis Summers, “Beecroft, Vanessa,” *Grove Art Online* posted October 12, 2000, doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T096699.
- 3 Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary, “Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (March 2006): 753–83, doi.org/10.1086/499083.
- 4 Gloria Steinem, *Marilyn* (New York: New American Library, 1986).
- 5 Steinem, *Marilyn*.
- 6 Sue Hubbard, “A Tribute to Eva Arnold, Halcyon Gallery,” 2010, *Sue Hubbard*, suehubbard.com/a-tribute-to-eva-arnoldhalcyon-gallery, accessed December 4, 2025.
- 7 Arnold, *Eve Arnold: In Retrospect*, 60.
- 8 Alison Leedy, “Entrapping the Gaze: A Look at the Suspension of Time in Photography through the Work of Vanessa Beecroft” (graduate paper, n.d.), *Academia.edu*, academia.edu/7984890/_Entrapping_the_Gaze_A_Look_at_the_Suspension_of_Time_in_Photography_Through_the_Work_of_Vanessa_Beecroft_, accessed December 4, 2025.
- 9 Melanie Renée Roll, *Performing the Image: The Tableaux of Vanessa Beecroft* (master’s thesis, Kent State University, 2014), etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=kent1416591151&disposition=inline.
- 10 Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024).
- 11 Marcella Beccaria, “Vanessa Beecroft,” *Castello di Rivoli*, castellodirivoli.org/en/artista/vanessa-beecroft/, accessed December 4, 2025.
- 12 Vanessa Beecroft, “Vanessa Beecroft,” interview with Massimiliano Gioni, *Flash Art*, November 29, 2016, flash---art.com/article/vanessa-beecroft/.
- 13 Beecroft, Interview.

Intimacy and Technical Choices

Kiele Calhoun '26

Photographs reflect not only what is physically present, but also the influence and perspective of the artist. Precise artistic choices decide the outcome of the photograph. From color and film size to medium and development technique, each choice determines how the photograph is produced and received. Art is rarely neutral, and photography is no exception; it is ultimately a product of the relationships between the subject, photographer, and viewer. Photographic choices actively shape intimacy and the relationship between photographer and subject, influencing viewers' interpretations and emotional response.

The photographs of Diane Arbus (1923–1971), Peter Hujar (1934–1987), and William Eggleston (b. 1939) show how photographic technique and format can shape intimacy. Their techniques span color, black and white photography, small and medium formats, and, in the case of Eggleston, color dye transfer printing. While Arbus focused on photographing marginalized groups on the fringes of society, Hujar documented artistic and queer communities and his personal circle of friends and family. Eggleston takes photos of daily life in the American South. Together, these contrasting approaches display how different techniques and subjects shape relationships and audience perception.

Hujar typically worked with a twin-lens reflex medium format camera, producing a deep tonal range and fine detail. Medium format cameras use larger negatives than the 35mm format familiar to amateurs and photojournalists, creating greater detail in small elements such as facial expressions. The relatively unfamiliar square format of the pictures they make draws attention to the geometry of the composition. In addition, the medium format camera typically requires slower and more deliberate shooting, giving the subject more time to relax. The photographer does not need to hold the viewfinder up to the eye, so their own face is not hidden behind the camera during shooting. The effect of all of this is

evident in photographs such as *David Wojnarowicz Reclining (III)* (plate 21) and *Christopher Street Pier #2 (Crossed Legs)* (plate 10), with careful balancing of weight, emphasis on symmetry, and attention to how akimbo limbs are fitted into the square frame. Hujar's portraits show comfortable subjects: relaxed, attentive, and present with the photographer himself. The images convey not just the person in front of the camera, but also their relationship with Hujar himself, inviting the viewer to engage in the emotional intimacy between Hujar and his subjects.¹

While Arbus also used a medium format camera later in her career, the photographs in this exhibition, *Miss Storme de Larverie, the Lady Who Appeared to be a Gentleman, N.Y.C.* (fig. 1); and *Three Transvestites in Evening Dress at a Lounge, N.Y.C.* (fig. 2) were both taken when Arbus was still using a 35mm Nikon camera. This choice created grainy, rectangular images. Instead of tonal smoothness or carefully balanced geometry, the grainy 35mm creates raw intimacy through tension. Her subjects, centered and confrontational, stare at the viewer with unsettling intensity. These techniques have sparked debate on whether the nature of her relationship with her subjects was empathetic or exploitative.²

In contrast, Eggleston employs a striking technique to capture everyday American banality. Though he uses both 35mm and medium format cameras in his work, his innovative dye transfer printing technique, created in the '70s, sets him apart from other photographers of the time. The dye-transfer process allows the photographer to actively shape how the subject is presented to the viewer. This technique empowers Eggleston to control saturation and tone, emphasizing certain colors and turning ordinary environments into intimate and emotionally evocative scenes. The resulting colors are more intense and present than in commercially printed amateur snapshots, and they are also much more stable over time, making the prints more suitable objects for art museums and



Fig. 1: Diane Arbus, *Miss Stormé DeLarverie, the Lady Who Appears to Be a Gentleman, N.Y.C., 1961, 1961*



Fig. 2: Diane Arbus, *Three Transvestites in Evening Dress at a Lounge, N.Y.C., 1961, 1961*

collectors. The slow, labor-intensive process demands precision and the intentional creation of each print, mirroring the photographer's personal engagement with the subject. This is in direct contrast to the apparent monotony of his subject matter. The care taken in each image is revealed through this laborious procedure. Intense observation is required to recreate the colors of the original scene. This results in photographs that convey a sense of shared presence between photographer and subject. They draw the viewer in, sharing in the subject's everyday routine and creating an emotional and personal bond.³ The untitled photograph in the exhibition comes from Eggleston's larger *Los Alamos* project (plate 3), in which he traveled throughout the American South photographing everyday spaces, private and public. Aside from the emotional resonance created by Eggleston's meticulous use of color, critics have debated the political detachment of these images.⁴

Color, as seen in Eggleston's work, intensifies the emotional presence of his subjects, but black and white photographs strip the image to its bones, generating intimacy in simplicity. Without color, viewers focus on composition and form, directing the eye to light and shadow, which create a dramatic or moody atmosphere. This medium emphasizes the subject's emotional and psychological presence, creating an intimacy based on detail and human presence.⁵ Although they were made with different cameras

and effects, both the Hujar and the Arbus photographs in the exhibition were made in black and white, and both photographers used the silvery emulsion to emphasize facial expressions, posture, and gesture. Hujar's portraits emphasize the trust and closeness of the photographer-subject relationship, allowing the viewers to see the consent embedded in the image. Many of the Hujar photos in the exhibition were taken in his studio, and of those in his personal circles.⁶ His use of black and white film adds to the already clear sense of familiarity that is essential in his content, a deeply personal glimpse into his subjects' lives. Similarly, Arbus employs black and white to draw attention to her subject's presence and individuality, creating tension between the subject and the viewer. She explores those who exist on the margins of society, whose appearance or behavior challenges social norms. By eliminating color, she forces the viewer to recognize her subject's humanity, creating discomfort from viewing those that they would typically overlook.

Choices in color, film format, and medium determine how subjects present themselves: relaxed, posed, or vulnerable. The technical and aesthetic choices these three artists consistently employ shape the intimacy between photographer and subject, and in turn influence how viewers emotionally engage with the image. Together, their work demonstrates that every choice cultivates these relationships, structuring both the creation and reception of these images.

1 Harrison Adams, "Peter Hujar: Shamelessness Without Shame," *Criticism* 63, no. 4 (Fall 2021): 319–53, [jstor.org/stable/10.13110/criticism.63.4.0319](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13110/criticism.63.4.0319).

2 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

3 Guy Stricherz and Irene Malli, "The Making of a Dye Transfer: William Eggleston," *David Zwirner Gallery*, YouTube, January 8, 2025, youtu.be/lyBJmQ3kf94.

4 Julia Friedman, "Reconsidering the Political Detachment of Eggleston's Images," *Hyperallergic*, May 10, 2018, hyperallergic.com/reconsidering-the-political-detachment-of-egglestons-images.

5 Thomas Weski, *William Eggleston: From Black and White to Color* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014).

6 Osman Can Yerebakan, "Peter Hujar's Illicit Photographs of New York's Cruising Utopia," *AnOther*, July 6, 2020, anothermag.com/art-photography/12659/peter-hujar-s-cruising-utopia-pace-gallery-exhibition.

The Intimacy of Detail

Sabina Clingerman '27

Many of the pieces in our exhibition are examples of straight photography, characterized by sharp focus and no darkroom manipulation. At a time when photography was struggling to be seen as “real art,” straight photography was used by modernists to emphasize techniques that were specific to the medium. Straight photography and modernism rose in opposition to the earlier Pictorialism movement that aimed to situate photography in the realm of art by using softer focus and image manipulation to emulate paintings.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) was one of the earliest advocates of photography’s integration into the fine art world. Initially a strong voice of the Pictorialism movement, Stieglitz later began to show more support for modernism and straight photography. His cloud photographs reflected this shift. Stieglitz’s first attempt at photographing clouds came as early as 1887, but at that time the orthographic emulsions used in photography rendered both the clouds and the sky behind them as the same tone of light gray. By the early 1920s, a new type of photographic emulsion enabled cameras to capture the contrast between clouds and the sky for the first time, and Stieglitz took advantage of this new technical capability. From 1922 to 1931, he photographed all manner of clouds, ranging from dark, roiling masses to thinly spun whorls pierced with light. These photographs avoided the darkroom manipulation common in Pictorialism, which Stieglitz had by this time grown to disdain. Instead, other techniques make the clouds in this series seem abstracted and unfamiliar. He called these dramatic, cloudy skies “Equivalents.” His notion was that, although they recorded natural, observable phenomena — namely the shapes and patterns of clouds — they could also be presented by photographer as “equivalents” of his own subjective, interior world.¹ Stieglitz photographed *Equivalent, Set C2 No. 4 [216D]* (plate 6), a work in our exhibition; it is one of several from the series that Stieglitz rotated 90 degrees from its

original orientation. In *Equivalent, Set C2 No. 4 [216D]*, horizontal waves of clouds are rendered as columns run through with veins of light, which crack open to reveal, at their center, the almost imperceptible circle of the sun.²

Clouds are also seen in one of our exhibition’s more recent pieces, “*The future is a luxurious contemplation for those who’ve figured out how to get through the day,*” *Tonopah Junction, Nevada* (plate 5), by Richard Misrach (b. 1949). The photograph is from a series called *The Writing on the Wall*, which Misrach created in response to the 2016 United States election, and which is part of the artist’s ongoing *Desert Cantos* project. “The future” shows a graffiti-covered wall and the cloudy sky behind it. The word “luxurious” seems made for the clouds that lie behind the wall — though not in focus, their rich texture is apparent. The gradient blue of the sky emphasizes the bright blue message of “I U” painted on the surface of the wall, which has been covered by the words of the title.

The fine details of *Equivalent, Set C2 No. 4 [216D]* serve to abstract a subject that is regularly in one’s periphery, and in doing so, quietly bring attention to it. On the other hand, “The future” forces the viewer to see the messiness of life, with the clouds serving as a jarring contrast to a landscape shaped by many human hands. Misrach presents clouds as distinct from reality, an embodiment of “the future” as described by the work’s title. The clouds are defamiliarized not because they look different from how clouds are expected to look, but because they are positioned as “other” against a human landscape.

Both works draw their power from the artist’s attentiveness to the world around them, capturing something that is both personal and connected to universal experiences. Paintings, sculptures, even Pictorialist photographs, are beautiful because the artist made them so. But Misrach and Stieglitz aren’t creating beauty or life in their

work; they are simply capturing a scene that held an already beating heart. In Steiglitz's essay, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds," he wrote, "Only some 'Pictorial photographers' when they came to the exhibition seemed totally blind to the cloud pictures. My photographs look like photographs — and in their eyes they therefore can't be art. As if they had the slightest idea of art or photography — or any idea of life. My aim is increasingly to make my photographs look as much like photographs that unless one has eyes and sees, they won't be seen — and still everyone will never forget them having once looked at them. I wonder if that is clear."³

In the same essay, Steiglitz wrote that he was drawn to the accessibility of clouds, saying, "Clouds were there for everyone — no tax as yet on them — free."⁴ This could also be said of Misrach's subjects — the layers of graffiti, all done in different handwriting, show an active palimpsest. Misrach said, "I want to make them [the photos] so beautiful that you have to look and think about them. To really slow down and consider and just think, this doesn't look right. Is it right?"⁵

Slow down, then, and look at the details within Misrach's photo: the crests of the clouds and the colors of the paint on the wall. As with all the photographs from *The Writing on the Wall*, Misrach is cautioning us about the future, but, like Steiglitz, he is also sharing his love for the world, the feelings that are too difficult to capture in words. Through their seemingly mundane subjects and rich levels of detail, these photographs utilize their medium to its fullest extent, exposing us to scenes that feel at the same time both vast and intimately personal.

1 Alfred Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds," *Amateur Photographer and Photography* 56 (1923), reprinted in *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000).

2 Daniell Cornell, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Equivalent: Reinventing the Nature of Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1999).

3 Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds."

4 Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds."

5 Rafael Salazar Moreno and Ava Wiland, "Never the Same: Richard Misrach," *Art21*, May 11, 2022, art21.org/watch/extended-play/richard-misrach-never-the-same.

To All Nights Fantastic: Philosophy, Performed Gender, and Characterizing Photography

Vivian Finch '26

Are things as they appear? For Descartes, they are most definitely not. His Representational Theory of Ideas posits that ideas represent things the way a photograph does: ideas are caused by real objects (think: the subject of the photograph), and can come in many forms (think: film vs. print); yet they still represent the same object at the end of the day.¹ The answers to the existential questions Descartes and many philosophers spent their lives pondering during the so-called “Enlightenment” period were crucial at the time, and included things such as, “How are thoughts formed?” “Where do ideas come from?” and “How is knowledge formed?” Thanks to modern advancements in fields such as neuroscience, these questions may not be ones we struggle to answer today. However, a more recently emerging field with research questions that parallel the wonder of the Enlightenment is that of gender studies.² This field raises inquiries including, “What is gender?” “Where does gender come from?” and “How is gender formed?” By examining gender through the medium of photography, we can bring ourselves back to wondrously exploring our realities.

In *Times Square: The Night Fantastic* (plate 8), a photograph by Lillian Bassman (1917–2012), the central feminine figure wears a gauzy dress, eye-catching as it swishes in her wake. The scene around her is fractured and soft-focus, framing her and drawing all attention to her. To me, the point here is not to depict an objective replica of the scene as it occurred in reality, but to portray a feeling, which Bassman has used the medium of photography to achieve. Upon viewing this print for the first time, I encountered a wash of nostalgia — this work reflects what my childhood self imagined it would feel like to be a young woman. Whether this print brings similar or different emotions to you, the crux of this photograph’s meaning lies in the figure’s central femininity. What does femininity mean here? To me, a wishful vision from my childhood. To Butler, perhaps we

are viewing an avatar of young womanhood. To you, perhaps it’s something else.

In evaluating the photographic process, Joel Snyder and his colleague Neil Walsh Allen note that photography itself includes the mechanical recording of nature via a human hand.³ They also point out that “It is difficult to find a term describing the relation between what was in front of the camera and the image which does not predetermine the results of any investigation into that relation.”⁴ They solve this dilemma with the concept and term that is “characterization.” *Characterization* does not diminish the concept of reality, the role of the subject, or the photographer’s hand. For Snyder and Allen, a *characterization* can refer to something anchored in reality or something that is not. We are encouraged to allow photography to exist in a space that is simultaneously real and unreal; meanwhile, the concept of characterization still allows us to evaluate and perceive a photograph.

The work of Judith Butler introduces a non-traditional understanding of gender, positing it as performance.⁵ Within their 1988 article titled “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler posits gender as a repeated, curated performance that exists within the context of a social temporality.⁶ The very title of *Miss Storme de Larverie, the Lady Who Appears to be a Gentleman* (p. 33, fig. 1), a photograph by Diane Arbus (1923–1971), nods to this aspect of gender as something that can be donned. The subject of this photograph seems confident and at ease within the armor of their chosen suit — perhaps, too, the masculinity that comes with it. However, crossed legs and angled shoulders hint at a level of reservation — we don’t have full access. Without the work’s title, and our knowledge that this *lady* is appearing as a *gentleman*, *Miss Storme de Larverie* may not be so different from the titular figure in the photograph by Peter Hujar (1934–1987) titled *Richie, N.Y.*

(plate 17). In *Richie*, the central figure is leaning against a car, hands in the pockets of a leather jacket. He, too, is turned to the side, portraying guarded body language, though his face is at rest gazing into the night. Gender expression becomes an immortalized illusion through photography, capturing a *characterization* of a specific gender performance, defying the passage of time and allowing it to reach a larger audience than its live contemporary.

In your viewing of *Rhizomatic Intimacies*, I encourage you to take your time with these immortalized moments. Seek what is real to you and what is not. Seek *characterizations*, seek performances.

- 1 Thomas Ainsworth, "Form vs. Matter," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, June 27, 2024, plato.stanford.edu/entries/form-matter.
- 2 Interestingly, Descartes himself has been cited by many feminist thinkers to advocate for women's education, as he did not gender the intellect. See Gary Hatfield, "René Descartes," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 23, 2023, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes.
- 3 Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision, and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (1975): 147, [jstor.org/stable/1342806](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1342806).
- 4 Snyder and Allen, "Photography, Vision, and Representation," 148.
- 5 Brian Duignam, "Judith Butler | Biography, Gender Trouble, & Facts," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 16, 2025, [britannica.com/biography/Judith-Butler](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Judith-Butler).
- 6 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *The art of art history: a critical anthology*, ed. D. Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 356.



Installation view, *Rhizomatic Intimacies: Photography from the Collection of Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth*



Walking the Tightrope: Intimacy and Exploitation in Nude Photography

Neva Zamil '27

The photography writer Harrison Adams once said, “The nude ... is an alibi to look in a desiring way in a socially acceptable, shame-minimizing manner.”¹ Under the guise of artistic interest, one is given permission to look, unabashedly, at the human body. The line between intimacy and exploitation in nude photography is determined by many factors, such as the agency and positionality of both artist and subject. Racialized, gendered, and sexual power dynamics determine who has the privilege of experiencing intimacy, and who is made to feel objectified and ostracized.

Goins and Cook (plate 22) by George Dureau (1930–2014) centers two Black men locked together in a naked, acrobatic embrace, an act of impressive strength that echoes across both bodies. As one man thrusts his companion into the air, his silhouette transforms into a map of sinuous lines that starkly contrast with the white studio background. Conversely, the second man is defined by angles: his arms form parallel triangles that battle gravity to lift his chest, and his calves echo the jagged line. Veins ripple down his engaged musculature, betraying the strain of the position. The dramatic pairing recalls Renaissance artist Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s bronze sculpture, *Hercules and Antaeus* (1470s), thereby subverting the whiteness of the art historical canon.² Although the New Orleans–based artist originally used portraiture for figurative reference in paintings, his interest turned to capturing the vibrant, diverse neighborhoods he called home and representing the marginalized people who inhabited them. Yet, Dureau, a wealthy white man, typically photographed lower-class Black men with whom he frequently had sexual relationships, thus casting moral ambiguity upon his work.³ The emphasized physical prowess and physiques of both subjects could read as the objectifying force of

a white gay man for whom Black men represent the physical manifestation of desire.⁴ This racial power disparity reproduces colonial structures ingrained in the earliest uses of photography, namely the creation of visual spectacle to document racial difference, figured by a dominant white culture as “lesser,” reducing individuals to their bodies. Despite the empathetic and loving gaze Dureau applies to his subjects, this sense of depersonalization manifests in the shadowed faces of the men whose physical form is prioritized over any individuality or autonomy to look back at the audience.

VB47.364.DR (plate 20), by Vanessa Beecroft (b. 1969), which similarly presents a conflicting depiction of nudity, questions agency and the impact of hypersexualization. Beecroft is best known for her controversial performance artworks, photographed for documentation. This specific work was staged at the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery in Venice, where she drew inspiration from the featured Italian artist Giorgio De Chirico’s enigmatic women.⁵ Rows of pink, naked women with emaciated bodies line up as if presenting themselves to the audience. The women are faceless, without identities, stripped down to idealized bodies that are barely distinguishable from each other. Despite the art historical reference, this fragmentation of form reduces women to mere body parts, creating an image reminiscent of the patriarchal fetishization associated with pornographic magazines.⁶ This pornographic connotation is further enforced by the heeled sandals donned by each model, which imply that a moment of undressing has occurred, a striptease that has yet to conclude.⁷ By denying them the vulnerability of complete nudity, a false semblance of control over their bodies has been returned to the subjects. Intentional nudity permits inspection. But it is not the subjects themselves inviting the consideration of their bodies, but the artist. Beecroft’s method relies on enforcing

almost sadistic levels of perfection: hours of waxing, bleaching, and body paint.⁸ She tests the limits of femininity and finds the breaking point, capturing women in the moment of dissolution. Perhaps this cycle represents the destruction of the oppressiveness of a sexualizing femininity — she creates and then destroys perfection. Yet in doing so, she becomes the enforcer of these gender norms. The female body seemingly cannot exist without scrutiny, whether that be self- or socially-enforced. Beecroft's solution to desexualize the female nude is to make it inhuman, faceless, and unpossessable. Yet within this tangled performance are pockets of resistance that affirm the mystery and appeal of the work. The gauze that obscures the models' faces allows them to see without being seen, thus subverting the voyeuristic gaze of the audience and bestowing it upon the subjects.

Finally, *David Wojnarowicz Reclining (II)* (plate 21), a portrait by Peter Hujar (1934–1987), stars Hujar's fellow artist, activist, and lover (1954–1992), whose relationship with Hujar readily translates to the photographic medium. Unlike previous works that limit the direct conversation between subject and viewer, Wojnarowicz gazes right at the camera with a familiarity that draws the viewer in. His unmasked, almost dazed expression — dreamy eyes and parted lips — is not directed at us, yet his trust for the man behind the camera encompasses the viewer as part of this romantic scenario and reveals their shared vulnerability. Rather than a sterile studio setting that casts the subject as a pawn in an artistic vision, we see Wojnarowicz as a lover might. The close perspective highlights details like the veins on Wojnarowicz's hands and the wrinkles on the sheets. Wojnarowicz's propped-up body and intentional hand placement displays his physical form in a way that dispels the notion that this could be a purely candid moment, but his ease and his awareness of the camera exemplify the consent

inherent to their relationship. Instead of the harmful aspects of the previous photos, subject and artist stand on equal ground, creating a sense of agency that abets the creation of a photographic intimacy.

At face value, nudes can be seen as an aesthetic and often sensual investigation of the human body. They represent and sometimes entice human desire. Yet, as these three artists demonstrate, far more is at stake than simple aesthetics. Nudes embody power structures. They have the ability to uplift, to change, or to objectify and harm. As voyeurs, the audience must critically evaluate the line between empowerment and destruction, and how one's own identity may shape this relationship.

1 Harrison Adams, *Intimacy, Photography, and Shame* (London: Routledge, 2025).

2 Michael Hatt, "Exposure Time," review of *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe*, by Allen Ellenzweig, and *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography*, by Emmanuel Cooper, *Oxford Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (1994): 132–137, [jstor.org/stable/1360585](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1360585).

3 Judith Still, "What Is a Man? Looking at the Traces of Men's Sexuality, Race and Class in the Work of Some Contemporary Photographers," *Paragraph* 26, no. 1/2 (2003): 123, [jstor.org/stable/43263718](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43263718).

4 Hatt, "Exposure Time," 136.

5 Melanie Renée Roll, *Performing the Image: The Tableaux of Vanessa Beecroft* (master's thesis, Kent State University, 2014), 31, etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=kent1416591151&disposition=inline.

6 Still, "What Is a Man," 123.

7 Martine Delvaux, "Writing and Nudity: Nelly Arcan's and Vanessa Beecroft's Girls," in *On the Nude: Looking Anew at the Naked Body in Art*, ed. Nicholas Chare and Ersy Contogouris (London: Routledge, 2021), 70.

8 Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary, "Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft," *Signs* 31, no. 3 (2006): 762.

Beyond the Barn: Recognizing Agency in Hujar's Animal Portraiture

Aubrie Connell '26 and Monica Park '28

Known for his intimate portrait photography, Peter Hujar (1934–87) captured the personality of his subjects in his work, allowing the vibrance of their individuality to shine through the black and white imagery. This intimacy, rooted not in projection but in sustained attention, can be traced back to the quiet observational skills gained during Hujar's formative years. Growing up, Hujar's father was absent, having abandoned him and his mother, while his mother was neglectful and verbally abusive. His grandparents took him in, raising him on their farm in Ewing Township, New Jersey.¹ The rural environment left him surrounded by nature, providing Hujar with the chance to be in close proximity to animals. This allowed him to observe them not as symbols, but as beings in their own right.

In his *New Yorker* piece, "The Animals That Captivated a Legendary Downtown Photographer" (2018), Chris Wiley explains that it is easy to view animal photography through an anthropomorphic lens.² Anthropomorphism reduces the subject down to a single human trait, forcing the animal subject into a narrative, such as a "silly goose" or a "scared rabbit."³ However, Hujar resists this tendency, and keeps the nuanced complexity of character alive within each of his animal portraits, just as he does with his human ones. In his animal portraiture, Hujar works against anthropomorphic condescension to capture the subjects' intrinsic nature as beings living alongside yet distinct from human life, cultivating a form of authority grounded not in performance but in presence.

In *Calf (II)*, *Hyrkin Farm* (plate 23), Hujar presents a direct challenge to this hierarchical mode of seeing that structures most human-animal encounters. As art critic John Berger argues, modernity often places animals at a visual and conceptual distance, further reinforcing their separation from human life.⁴ Hujar counters this alienation by placing the viewer at the calf's eye level, refusing the downward-angled

perspective typical of farm photography that symbolically recalls notions of human superiority. This encounter resists a hierarchical power dynamic as the calf returns the viewer's look with a steady, unselfconscious gaze, meeting us as an equal rather than an object of observation. This dynamic becomes even more compelling when the photograph is situated within the context of Hyrkin Farm. As discussed by the exhibition's donors, Keith Jantzen '80 and Scott Beth, Hyrkin Farm functioned as a private, family-owned property where many animals were raised with a level of affection and familiarity more closely associated with pets than with livestock.⁵ This intimacy registers in the details of the portrait, as the calf appears to be wearing a collar, and its ears remain unclipped—practices uncommon in larger, industrial farm operations. Through these markers of intimacy, Hujar emphasizes both the calf's presence as a sentient, autonomous being and the interconnected worlds animals actually live in, further resisting anthropomorphic condescension.

This reimagining of animal subjecthood becomes even clearer when placed in dialogue with Hujar's human portraits. Fashion columnist and editor Diana Vreeland's portrait, *Diana Vreeland (IV)* (plate 1), captures a highly curated setting that adds to her reputation in the fashion industry.⁶ She exudes a subtle confidence with her frontal gaze as she sits in a room of bold patterns and carefully arranged objects, embodying her unmistakable personal style. Nearly every element of the portrait contributes to an image of authority that Vreeland herself participates in constructing. In contrast, the calf's authority emerges not from performance but from presence, as its environment is unembellished and its posture uncalculated. Yet, the encounter feels just as charged and authoritative as Vreeland's because of Hujar's attentiveness to composition and detail. Ultimately, Hujar's intention to make the "sentience of his subjects palpable,"

animal or human, moves the calf beyond the status of a passive farm animal and instead positions it as a subject with its own quiet agency.⁷

Peter Hujar's attentiveness to animal agency extends to his exploration of domesticity, particularly in *Two Dogs, Westtown* (plate 24). The two dogs lounge inside a barn, and the photograph encapsulates Hujar's understanding of the human-animal relationship. When taking human portraits, Hujar jotted down notes revealing his ideas on how to print and crop his images, providing context for his intensely interactive portrait work (the print in the exhibition was made after his death, by Stephen Koch, the executor of his estate).⁸ The contact sheets read as "intimate pictorial narratives," reflecting his sensitivity to each of his subjects' individual personalities.⁹

Just like in those portraits, Hujar allows the animals he photographs to open up, as exemplified here with the two dogs mirroring each other in a comfortable, natural pose. However, the dogs lie on two different surfaces: one on a dirt floor and the other on a bale of hay. Both of these surfaces are natural elements that have been modified for human convenience. A pressed dirt floor is more durable than a loose dirt floor, and baled hay is much easier to store and transport than loose hay. In a sense, these pieces of nature have been domesticated; they have been tamed to fit the mold of human life. Interestingly, Hujar makes the stylistic choice to blend the dogs into the surface on which they rest. The dog on the hay has sunlight streaming onto it, making the tonality of the fur close to that of the hay. The dog's fur is shaggy, strengthening the parallel between the two. The dog on the dirt floor is darker than the shadows and has a curly coat that echoes the divots in the floor. However, the dogs stare out at the viewer, serving as a reminder of their consciousness. These animals are not the same as the objects they pose on, subverting the hierarchy inherently

created through domesticity.

Ultimately, Peter Hujar's animal photography presents subjects who exist without performing. It presents an intimacy rooted in attention rather than projection, one that acknowledges the animal's presence without imposing a narrative. By inviting viewers into these nonhierarchical encounters, Hujar's animal portraiture aligns with the broader framework of rhizomatic intimacy, in which relationships form through shared spaces, interconnectedness, and the recognition of one another's autonomous way of being.

1 Peter Schjeldahl, "The Bohemian Rhapsody of Peter Hujar," *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2018, [newyorker.com/magazine/2018/02/05/the-bohemian-rhapsody-of-peter-hujar](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/02/05/the-bohemian-rhapsody-of-peter-hujar).

2 Chris Wiley, "The Animals That Captivated a Legendary Downtown Photographer," *The New Yorker*, February 3, 2018, [newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-animals-who-captivated-a-legendary-downtown-photographer](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-animals-who-captivated-a-legendary-downtown-photographer).

3 Wiley, "The Animals."

4 John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 28.

5 Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth, conversation with the authors, September 25, 2025.

6 Scott Harper, "Land of the Vree," *The Rake*, February 2024, therake.com/us/stories/the-land-of-the-vree.

7 Harrison Adams, "Peter Hujar, The Naked and the Nude," in *Intimacy, Photography, Shame* (London: Routledge, 2024), 91.

8 Olivia McCall, "Peter Hujar's Contact Sheets: Record-Keeping and Ephemeral Proof," *The Morgan Library and Museum*, October 19, 2023, themorgan.org/blog/peter-hujars-contact-sheets-record-keeping-and-ephemeral-proof.

9 McCall, "Peter Hujar's Contact Sheets."

Privileges of Space and Place

Sugi Lucas '27

Landscape photography makes tangible our relationships with the environment around us, whether that relationship is intimate or estranged. Scholars of history in the Americas have long regarded landscape photography as a “patriarchal and colonial tool” that reinforces settler fantasies of an unpeopled, abundant natural landscape.¹ These idyllic visions “conceal the facts of genocidal violence” and further colonial narratives about settlers’ preordained right to land and resources — establishing colonial intimacy with and Indigenous estrangement from the land.² This violent interplay of ownership and erasure leaves its trace beneath the beauty of Western landscape photography.

The lush landscape photograph *São Francisco Xavier, Brazil 2001* (fig. 1, right) by Thomas Struth (b. 1954), from his series, *Paradise*, teems with life. Foliage glimmers in pale light, and a gleaming brook flows between trees. The baroque depth of the forest, the dazzling height of the trees — the forest’s abundance seems to swell into infinity. But who — and whose gaze — has access to this abundance? Struth’s work, part of his collection *Paradise*, furthers this lineage of colonial photography. While Struth is attentive to the verdant splendor of each far-flung jungle featured in *Paradise*, his unchanging attention absorbs each location into a decontextualized, homogenous utopia. Struth presents the Amazon with Edenic plenitude, virtuous in its wild, supposedly untouched, beauty, and claims that “There is no sociocultural context to be read or discovered,” in his jungle photos: they are “emptied to elicit a moment of stillness and internal dialogue.”³ But the rainforest is not untouched, nor is beauty its only virtue. For thousands of years, Indigenous people have derived their existence from the Amazon’s landscape, developing complex interdependent relationships with the environment. But Struth’s work empties Indigenous land in the white settler imagination, colonizing its beauty as an extension of the

viewer’s unconscious. Intimacy with the viewer comes at the expense of a longstanding intimacy between the land and its indigenous inhabitants — an intimacy colonization threatens to this day, leading to displacement and violence in contemporary Brazil.⁴

Where Struth’s photograph erases Indigenous presence, the series of self-portraits by Johnnie Chatman (b. 1990), *i forgot where we were...* (plates 25-29), ruptures the colonial gaze of Western landscapes, critically exploring ownership and exclusion. His works *reinsert* a largely forgotten or ignored Black presence into the spectacular, spectacularly empty landscapes that so often represent the colonial narrative of the American West. Chatman turns to the archives to find landscape images that valorize the American West, and takes care to “reintroduce the stories of Black people who were living in these places, of the Indigenous, of the Mexican, the Chinese railroad workers, who were all a part of constructing the American West ... but are not reflected” in portrayals of those landscapes.⁵ Though both the viewer and Chatman are looking out at the landscape, he asserts that “There’s not a guarantee that we’re looking at the same thing.”⁶ Who and what frames our view of a landscape? How do we perceive the value of a landscape? Who owns history, who owns the land, who determines value? Just as there is no photo without a photographer, there is no landscape without human influence. Chatman challenges his viewer to keep the framing in mind: to consider what is beyond the scope of our own gaze.

The division of value and ownership in the natural landscape is even more apparent in a city, where wealth and poverty materialize in the very structures that compose the cityscape. “Obscene concentrations of wealth” materialize in the dazzling heights of skyscrapers, glittering cascades of windows, and displays of structural innovation, forcing “the poor and the middle classes to the urban periphery, keeping



Fig. 1, left: Right: Thomas Struth, *São Francisco Xavier, Brazil 2001*, 2001.

their problems out of sight.”⁷ Photographs by Peter Hujar (1934–1987), *The World Trade Center at Night* (plate 30) and *From Rockefeller Center: The Equitable Building* (plate 31), train their gaze on the locus of such wealth. They extol these clusters of skyscrapers — themselves spectacular tributes to capitalism — just as Struth glazes the jungle into a glimmering fantasy. Viewed within the lineage of landscape photography as colonial tool, Hujar’s building photographs aestheticize and decontextualize the cityscape of New York, where racial and class tension is built into the very organization of the city. Hujar frames the buildings so that the ground is obscured; the skyscrapers arc up into infinity, so that the city feels boundless. Just as photography portrays the American natural landscape as “beautiful, ancient, and empty,” Hujar’s building photographs are

unpeopled, timeless, and gorgeously configured.⁸ These photographs, in the tradition of Western landscapes, perpetuate colonial myths of infinite opportunity and serene beauty unimpeded by sociocultural context.

In contrast to the unfolding immensity of Struth’s boundless paradise and Hujar’s limitless metropolis punching up from the horizon, the environment in the photograph by Richard Misrach (b. 1949), titled “*The future is a luxurious contemplation for those who’ve figured out how to get through the day*,” *Tonopah Junction, Nevada* (plate 5) is truncated. A heavily graffitied wall dominates the foreground of the photograph. Only the top left corner reveals the surrounding environment — blue sky strewn with clouds and a sliver of brown ground. The suggestion of depth only enhances the claustrophobic effect of the

looming concrete. In an extreme economy of space, an unknown graffiti artist has printed the titular quote over the work of many previous artists. Mistrach's photograph places us in the position of the graffiti artist; physical structures block us from the surrounding environment, symbolic of the social structures that hoard resources, keeping us trapped. Through graffiti, inhabitants assert their presence in an oppressive landscape where their "right to the city is increasingly unobtainable" — but even in this reclamation of space, the artist must obscure, even colonize, the area of another's art.⁹ The message of the graffiti reflects how a facet of reality — time — has become a commodity. Space, another facet, has become commodified as well; through Mistrach's choices in framing the graffiti, the photograph speaks to how our positionality determines our access to space.

Intimacy with the environment has become a privileged commodity in today's world, unrightfully possessed and unequally distributed, with photography as witness, accomplice, and assertion of presence.

8 Jarrod Hore, "Introduction: Dispossession in Focus: Between Ancestral Ties and Settler Territoriality," in *Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 1-14, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2ks6v8s.5.

9 Andrea Pavoni, Yiannis Zaimakis, and Ricardo Campos, "Introduction: Political Graffiti in Critical Times," in *Political Graffiti in Critical Times: The Aesthetics of Street Politics*, ed. Andrea Pavoni, Yiannis Zaimakis, and Ricardo Campos (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tsxk6z.4.

1 Christabel Devadoss, "Landscape Photography, National Parks, and Settler Colonial Nationalism," *GeoHumanities* 11, no. 1 (2025): 201-224, doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2025.2485199.

2 Jordan Reznick, "Native Land and Colonial Photography at Yosemite," *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, November 2023, sfmoma.org/essay/native-land-and-colonial-photography-at-yosemite.

3 Thomas Struth, "1000 Words: Thomas Struth talks about his 'Paradise' Series," introduction by Hans Rudolf Reust, *Artforum*, May 2002, 151, artforum.com/features/1000-words-thomas-struth-163873.

4 Aderval Costa Filho, "Traditional peoples and communities in Brazil: the work of the anthropologist, political regression and the threat to rights," *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology* 17 (2020), doi.org/10.1590/1809-43412020v17d450.

5 Johnnie Chatman, "Johnnie Chatman: INSITE Conversations," *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, YouTube, August 25, 2023,youtu.be/sp3faD79GBk; Johnnie Chatman, "Black Tales of the American West," interview by Elie Gordon, *Atmos*, February 28, 2021, atmos.earth/art-and-culture/johnnie-chatman-american-west-self-portrait-photography.

6 Chatman, "INSITE Conversations," at 2:46.

7 Nicolai Ouroussoff, "Reading Architecture in an Era of Globalization," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 50 (2022).



Installation view, *Rhizomatic Intimacies: Photography from the Collection of Keith Jantzen and Scott Beth*

The Way of the Mask: Surrealist Photography

Princess Alexander '26

Photography has long been understood as a medium that captures truth. Yet, as critics Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag remind us, photography is also a tool of performance, control, and storytelling. With this in mind, I will investigate the control photographers have in fabricating their subjects through formal aesthetic choices. I complicate this idea by examining how the various cultural thought patterns photographers inherit profoundly influence reception, sometimes overriding the artist's intent. To explore this tension, I will analyze works by Man Ray (1890–1976) and Sebastião Salgado (1944–2025).

In 1938, the Surrealists staged the International Surrealism Exhibition in Paris, which included a series of female shopwindow mannequins, each modified by one of the artists with an assemblage of found objects. The American photographer Man Ray, then living in Paris and a prominent Surrealist himself, photographed each mannequin. Our exhibition includes three of these, including one by the painter André Masson (1896–1987), all printed in the 1960s.¹ In *André Masson's Mannequin* (plate 33), Man Ray has further transformed the painter's sculptural assemblage through his own aesthetic choices, resulting in a doubly fabricated object. The photograph presents an uncanny female body as an object of desire. Its hand is posed with the two middle fingers extended, evoking sexual insertion. Two curved feathers frame the pubic area like an illustration of fallopian tubes, the chest is bare, and fake fur in the underarms is a jarring counterpoint to an otherwise hairless, idealized, sexualized body. However, Masson destabilizes this fantasy through his own interventions. The mannequin's head is trapped in a birdcage, and the face is controlled and hidden, the voice silenced, by a mask decorated with a flower, suggesting innocence and femininity, while the body stands exposed. Yet the overall assemblage is too strange and self-aware to operate as a purely erotic display. Masson

draws on familiar visual tropes of female representation only to undermine and distort them.

Man Ray then adds a second layer of distortion through his photographic choices. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes that the photograph “is always invisible: it is not it that we see.”² Man Ray's work foregrounds this invisibility. The photograph does not show objective reality; it adds another layer of construction through familiar symbols and stylistic choices curated to alter perception. Chiaroscuro lighting casts shadows that emphasize the birdcage lattice, reinforcing themes of confinement while heightening the theatricality, turning the body into a sign. His angled framing slows the viewer's reading of the image and prevents a direct exchange of gazes, extending Masson's commentary on agency and the suppression of female subjectivity. Man Ray directs attention toward the mask and cage, shaping how meaning unfolds. In fabricating the subject, he collaborates with and extends Masson's critique, showing how context and technique together construct the image's meaning.

In *Papua New Guinea* (plate 34) from Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* project, the figure is also theatrical and uncanny. Like André Masson's mannequin, the nameless human figure is altered by disturbing additions, and the uncanny effect is again deliberately heightened by the photographer's choices. These include the dramatic contrasts of light and dark values, emphasizing the mottled skin, frightening mask, and distended fingers, and not least the spectacular rainforest that serves as backdrop for the figure's theatrical pose.

For many years, Salgado documented the impact of global capital on the manual labor of resource extraction, on poverty and migration, and on environmental degradation, informed by his earlier advanced training as an economist and his work for the World Bank.³ The contradiction of these photographs was that, for all the degradation and misery

they depicted, they were arrestingly beautiful. As Susan Sontag argues, repeated exposure to photographed suffering “does not necessarily strengthen conscience ... [but] can also corrupt [viewers as] ... Images anesthetize.”⁴ Because “photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention,” humanitarian imagery can turn into spectacle or commodification.⁵ Salgado sought to overcome this contradiction through a more hopeful, even “healing” project, *Genesis* (2004–2011).⁶ He turned to photographing seemingly unspoiled landscapes and, often, people living in apparent harmony with them in premodern, even naked conditions, from the rainforests of Brazil to the Siberian tundra to the islands of the South Pacific.⁷ The intent was, in the words of his wife Lélia Wanick Salgado, the curator of an exhibition of the work in 2013–2014, to depict the world “as it existed for millennia before modern life accelerated and began distancing us from the very essence of our being.”⁸

Despite these intentions, though, his images extend problematic visual histories.⁹ Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann argues that *Genesis* often recalls “19th-century ethnographic expeditions ... the sublime ... or exoticism.” His “majestic,” “painterly” prints, achieved through long exposures and high-contrast lighting, give *Papua New Guinea* an icon-like quality; the masked subject appears mythic rather than individual.

Salgado’s technical mastery, rather than clarifying the subjects, reproduces a Western romantic lens. Even “documentary” photographs, then, are not free from fabrication.

The archaic figure haunting the streams and rainforests of *Papua New Guinea*, framed by mist and cascading light, conjures up the writings of the mid-century anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who imagined a “primitive” mind that made use of ritual masks and — like André Masson and the other Surrealists — assemblage and “bricolage,” the use of whatever was at hand, to express a kind of waking unconscious. Indeed, the figures in both photographs are encumbered by masks and display unreal, dreamlike qualities.¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss was himself profoundly influenced by the Surrealists, who in turn imagined that Indigenous peoples in the rainforests of the Amazon and Oceania spent

their waking lives in the dreamworld that, for the European, needed to be excavated from a repressed unconscious.¹¹ Salgado’s intentions are entangled with and complicated by such historical and cultural associations. Lévi-Strauss imagined underlying universal structures organizing all human thought and culture, with a clear hierarchy between unconscious and conscious. But a more rhizomatic flow reappears here in the surprising connections between Salgado the documentarian and Man Ray the Surrealist.

Taken together, these two examples show that realism is not something a camera simply discovers. It is something artists build. Man Ray proves this by using context and formal distortion to reveal how fragile and constructed the “visible” really is. Salgado, by contrast, reveals how even the most technically masterful image can be redirected or undone by the visual histories it evokes. In both cases, meaning emerges not from the world alone but also from the choices the photographer makes and the contexts that shape how their work is read.

1 “Resurrection des Mannequins,” *Getty Museum*, Collection, getty.edu/art/collection/object/1040M8#full-artwork-details, accessed December 5, 2025.

2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.

3 “Sebastião Salgado,” *International Center of Photography*, icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/sebasti%C3%A3o-salgado, accessed December 5, 2025.

4 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador USA, 2001), 15.

5 Sontag, *On Photography*, 8.

6 Chris Wiley, “Sebastião Salgado’s View of Humanity,” *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2025, [newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/sebastiao-salgados-view-of-humanity](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/sebastiao-salgados-view-of-humanity).

7 “Sebastião Salgado, *Genesis*,” *International Center of Photography*, icp.org/exhibitions/sebastiao-salgado-genesis, accessed December 5, 2025.

8 “Sebastião Salgado, *Genesis*.”

9 Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann, “Sebastião Salgado: *Genesis*,” *Studio International*, June 12, 2013, studiointernational.com/sebastiao-salgado-genesis.

10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); and *The Way of the Masks*, trans. Sylvia Modelski (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

11 A misguided and Eurocentric notion that, it should be said, did lead them to oppose European colonialism and extractive capitalism.



Plate 25: Johnnie Chatman, *Self-Portrait, Arches*, from the series *i forgot where we were...*, 2017



Plate 26: Johnnie Chatman, *Self-Portrait, Cascade Falls*, from the series *i forgot where we were....*, 2015



Plate 27: Johnnie Chatman, *Self-Portrait, Dinosaur Point*, from the series *i forgot where we were...*, 2016



Plate 28: Johnnie Chatman, *Self-Portrait, Grand Canyon*, from the series *i forgot where we were...*, 2018



Plate 29: Johnnie Chatman, *Self-Portrait, Waterhole Canyon*, from the series *i forgot where we were....*, 2019