



Paul D'Amato, *Barber Shop Window*, Chicago, 1990

Photographing Chicago

This print viewing shows various ways that artists picture the culture, architecture, and communities of Chicago from the mid-20th century until today. The images range in style, medium, and approach to give a broad view of the city and its inhabitants.

Barbara Crane

(United States, 1928-2019)



Private Views, 1981-1984

For over 60 years, Barbara Crane created highly formal, often abstracted images of people and the urban and natural landscape. In *People of the North Portal* (1970-71), Crane photographed people exiting Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, recording a wide variety of expressions and reactions. Some full-body shots, others focusing simply on the faces of her subjects, the photographs beautifully depict a large spectrum of human experience. In *Peoplescape* (1974), Crane arranges multiple negatives in various directions that result in an almost DNA-like form to create experimental prints that blur the line between abstraction and representation. And in *Private Views* (1981-1984), Crane holds her camera at her hip while wading through large crowds to capture moments of touch.

Barbara Crane



Private Views, 1981-1984



People of the North Portal, 1970



Peoplescape, 1974

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- How would you describe the visual effect of repetition in Crane's work?
- These works were made many decades ago. Do they represent an accurate view of Chicago now?
- To you, what is Barbara Crane saying about life in the city? Does her point of view reflect your own experiences of an urban environment?

Ray Metzker

(United States, 1931-2014)



Chicago, 1959

Ray Metzker's images question the limits of the photograph and its ability to depict reality through the use of cropping, multiple imagery, and other formal innovations. Metzker's 1959 project, *My Camera and I in the Loop*, takes downtown Chicago as its subject, but renders it in experiments that talk more about photography than they do about the city. He states: "When you look at the multiples, you are aware of patterning and so forth," he said, "but there is still identifiable subject matter; frequently there are people there; there is a rhythm to those people."

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Compare and contrast the ways Metzker and Barbara Crane use repetition. Do they tell a similar or different story?
- What does this image tell us about the expansive potential—or limits—for photography and its ability to capture the movement of time?

Deeper Reading: Institute of Design

Ray Metzker and Barbara Crane both studied at the New Bauhaus, later called the Institute of Design (ID) at what is now the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). This was one of the most important schools of design and photography in America during the twentieth century. Founded in Chicago in 1937 by László Moholy-Nagy, the New Bauhaus aimed to train “the perfect designer” through a modernist and multi-disciplinary curriculum that encouraged experimentation and broke down the hierarchy between fine and applied arts and industry. A K-16 curriculum guide on the New Bauhaus can be accessed [here](#).



Perpetual Shadow, 2014

For her *City Space* series (2011–16), Clarissa Bonet observes and takes note of chance encounters and interactions she witnesses between strangers on the streets of downtown Chicago. Bonet later restages the moments, carefully setting up her location, lighting, and models to re-create the original scene. The resulting pictures portray mundane exchanges as dramatic, with individuals anonymously and solitarily navigating a confounding urban terrain.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Where does your eye go first when you see these images? What is Bonet doing in the composition to lead your eye there first?
- How has she used light and shadow? What impact does her use of light and shadow make to the overall mood or feeling?
- Do you consider these images to fall into the genres of “street” or “documentary” photography or something else? Explain.

Michael Wolf

(Germany, 1956-2019)



The Transparent City 06, 2008



The Transparent City 87A, 2009

In 2005, Michael Wolf visited Chicago for the first time to participate in a group exhibition for the Museum of Contemporary Photography. For the previous decade, Wolf was living and working in Hong Kong, attempting to capture the sheer density of people living on the two small islands that make up that city. Wolf examined the endless ranks of residential housing complexes in Hong Kong by removing the horizon line and flattening the space to a relentless abstraction of urban expansion. He noticed, however, that Chicago had an entirely different feel. While Hong Kong is built of endless rows of structures designed and built in a nearly identical style, Chicago has more experimental, unique buildings of many different styles.

While it has been common for photographers to glorify Chicago's distinctive architecture and environmental context, Wolf depicts the city more abstractly, focusing less on individual well-known structures and more on the contradictions and conflicts between architectural styles when visually flattened together in a photograph. His pictures look through the multiple layers of glass to reveal the social constructs of living and working in an urban environment, focusing specifically on voyeurism and the contemporary urban landscape in flux.

→ **Questions for Looking and Discussion:**

- Because of the large size of many of Wolf's prints, you can often see the details within homes by looking in the windows. How do you feel about the blurred line between private and public life depicted in Wolf's photographs?
- Notice the way the artist frames, or determines the edges, of his images. Are you able to locate where any of the buildings are? If so, what details in the images help you identify the specific location of a building? If not, how is the artist preventing you from knowing your exact place in the city?

Deeper Reading: Architecture in Chicago

After the Great Chicago Fire on October 8, 1871, which decimated over 17,000 buildings along a four-mile span, the city underwent a major building boom. Architects in the late 19th century, such as David Adler, Daniel Burnham, and Louis H. Sullivan, turned to steel frame construction and, in 1884, William Le Baron Jenney completed the world's first skyscraper on the corner of LaSalle and Adams street. At the turn of the twentieth century, architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright built upon the legacy of their predecessors, merging new technologies with modern aesthetics. Then, in 1938, Mies van der Rohe moved to Chicago and remained here until his death in 1969, creating a lasting reputation for the city as the world capital for modern architecture. The city continues to grow its rich skyline and built environment, as evident in the Aqua Tower completed by Jeanne Gang in 2009.

Though there are many more chapters to the story of architecture in Chicago, the buildings and homes are a reflection of the city's history, and a prominent muse for many photographers in the area.

Activity: Play Architectural Eye Spy



Richard Nickel, *Auditorium Building*, Chicago, Illinois, c. 1955

After your print viewing at the MoCP, visit and photograph three nearby structures by Adler & Sullivan, Mies Van der Rohe, and Frank Gehry. Consider how Michael Wolf photographed the famous Marina City towers designed by Bertrand Goldberg and how Richard Nickel photographed the Auditorium Building designed by Adler and Sullivan. With the works in this print viewing in mind, capture the buildings in this activity in creative ways.

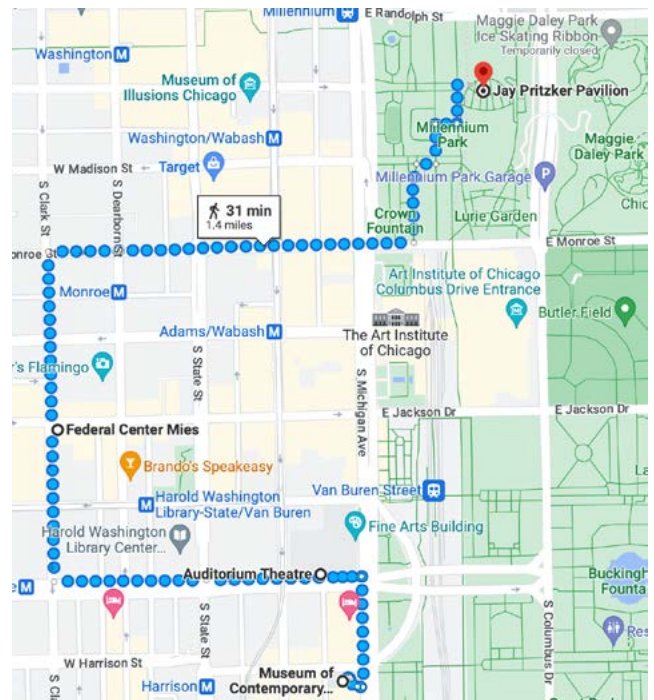
Activity: Play Architectural Eye Spy

→ Things to Consider:

- Do you want to photograph the entire structure or get close and examine the details? What is your vantage point?
- What qualities of the building do you want to stand out?
- Will you photograph in color or black and white?
In Landscape or Portrait mode?
- How can you bring your style of photographing into the pictures?
Try a different strategy on each structure and see how they compare.

→ Tips for Educators:

- Review the history behind each structure and building before your trip.
- Consider putting students into small groups and asking them to compare their photographs in small discussions.
- You can encourage more participation by keeping pictures anonymous. Post the pictures of the same building on a slide deck or online educational platform that students can access.
- You can access a virtual walking map [here](#).
- Feel free to customize this activity to any buildings of your choice.



The Auditorium Building

430 S. Michigan Ave

Designed by Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler and built in 1889



Images left to right: Adler & Sullivan, Auditorium Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1955, photographed by Richard Nickel; Auditorium Building, Chicago, Illinois, 2023, photographed by [Noah Fodor](#)

Your first stop is the Auditorium building just two blocks north of the MoCP. The structure was revolutionary at its time of completion as the first building ever built of mixed use, housing a theater, office spaces, and a hotel. As the last standing Adler & Sullivan project in the city, you can see some of the architects' distinctive features, such as vertical strips and large arched windows, decorative terra cotta panels, and a highly ornate cornice.

→ Questions for Looking:

- As you stand in front of the building, where is your eye drawn first? What details do you notice on the exterior of the building?
- What do you think occurs inside of the space? Do any details on the outside of the building help you form this understanding?
- What colors can you notice on the building and windows?

Chicago Federal Center

219 S. Dearborn Street

Designed by Mies Van der Rohe and built in 1974



Images courtesy of: [Noah Fodor](#); Not in the MoCP Collection

Moving northwest, the Chicago Federal Center is a key example of the aesthetic vision of Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe. This architect was a major figure in the modernist movement in Chicago and a great number of his structures remain—from the S.R. Crown Hall on IIT’s campus, to the 860-880 Lake Shore Apartments. A sleek building in all black with rectangular glass panes, the Chicago Federal Center is an open plaza that houses government offices, a courthouse, and a post office. These structures exemplify the “Miesian” approach through their simplicity, transparency, rectilinear forms, and a strong glass and steel structure that supports the roof.

→ Questions for Looking:

- Modernism in Chicago replaced the decorative aesthetics of Adler and Sullivan. Besides the lack of ornamentation, what other differences do you notice?
- What do you notice about the color and shapes of this building? What details can you find?
- How might it feel to live or work in this building?

Jay Pritzker Pavillion

201 E Randolph St, Chicago, IL 60601

Designed by Frank Gehry and built in 2004



Images courtesy of: [Noah Fodor](#); Not in the MoCP Collection

Now, walking northeast, you will find Frank Gehry's Jay Pritzker Pavilion as part of Millennium Park. Gehry has constructed numerous buildings all over the world, utilizing a "deconstructivist" style. This is an offshoot of the postmodern architectural movement that breaks the traditions of modernism. The Jay Pritzker Pavilion showcases key characteristics of Gehry's signature style, such as a fragmented design, flowing lines, organic and abstract shapes and forms that contrast each other, and surfaces ranging from titanium cladding to metal and steel.

→ Questions for Looking:

- How does this structure compare to the modernist aesthetic of Mies van der Rohe and the arts and crafts aesthetic of Adler & Sullivan? How might each built structure reflect the time period in which it was built?
- Which elements of the structure do you think are decorative and which are functional? Can you tell the difference?
- Which of the three buildings on this activity were your favorite and why?



Isela, Chicago, 1993



Barbershop Window, Chicago, 1990

Paul D'Amato draws on the tradition of street photography and the history of painting to create color photographs of urban human drama. Attracted to what he terms "the vividness of emotion," D'Amato has photographed extensively in diverse communities of Chicago, including neighborhoods that make up the second largest Mexican population in the United States.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- What do you notice about the colors in these images?
How might these images read differently in black and white?
- What details do you notice in the images? Why might the artist choose to keep these details in the frame? What do they add to the narrative?



Untitled, from *Changing Chicago*, 1988



Between 71st and Jeffery from *Changing Chicago*, n.d.

Stephen Marc documents and interprets history with a focus on Black life. As part of the *Changing Chicago* documentary project in the late 1980s, Marc recorded everyday life on the street on Chicago's south side. Marc's images for the project are made in the tradition of street photography, capturing ordinary moments—such as adults strolling along busy avenues and children playing in their neighborhoods. He composed each image with attention to careful framing, use of light and shadow, and the expressive gestures of his subjects.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- How do these images differ, stylistically and thematically, from the images of architecture? How might they be in conversation with each other?
- Why might Marc decide to photograph communities in ordinary moments rather than staged portraits of the subjects (that can often act as a collaboration between subject and photographer)?

Melissa Ann Pinney

(United States, b. 1953)



Bat Mitzvah Dance, Knickerbocker Hotel, 1991

Melissa Ann Pinney photographs the everyday lives of girls and women to illustrate the complex transformations in feminine identity. As part of *Changing Chicago* in the late 1980s, Pinney photographed crowded social situations that often serve as rites of passage, such as wedding receptions, middle school dances, and trips to the beauty salon. Quiet, intimate portraits of mothers and their daughters are also heavily represented in her early work.

Antonio Perez

(United States, b. 1963)



A Snake Dance is Held at a Wedding Reception at the Farolito Club in South Chicago, from Changing Chicago, 1987



A Group of Holy Communion Pass the St. Michaels Rectory on Their Way To Church, May 1, 1987, from Changing Chicago, 1987

A Group of First Holy Communion Pass the St. Michaels Rectory on Their Way to Church was made at 8200 South Shore Drive, a neighborhood that Antonio Perez has photographed on multiple occasions. This picture is not only a document of a particular moment in time, but as the nuns have since left St. Michael's, it has become a record of the institution's history. From one of the windows of the homes in the background, another photographer trains his camera on the same procession. The artist says: "This area has been my home since birth and has a rich family and work-ethic history. Through my photographs I hope to show its many hidden treasures, see in the expressions of the people."

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Antonio Perez is a staff photographer for the Chicago Sun Times. How might you read these images differently if you saw them in a newspaper instead of a museum?
- What might be the headline for these images if you were to see it in a news story? What in the images make you say that?
- Is there a difference between how these communities are represented in the news compared to in an arts context?
- Do you think it is important for the photographer to be a part of the neighborhood or community they are photographing? Why or why not?

Deeper Reading: *Changing Chicago*



Antonio Perez, *82nd Street Train Station, South Chicago*, from *Changing Chicago*, 1987

Stephen Marc, Melissa Pinney, and Antonio Perez were all part of one of the largest documentary photography projects ever organized in an American city, titled *Changing Chicago*. This project commissioned thirty-three photographers to document life throughout Chicago's diverse urban and suburban neighborhoods. It was launched in 1987 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the invention of photography and the 50th anniversary of the [Farm Security Administration \(FSA\) documentary project](#), which provides its inspirational model. *Changing Chicago* honors the tradition of the FSA project, but it moved away from its predecessor's ambition of inspiring social change towards the more general goal of providing a nuanced description of the human experience in a particular geographic area. The project was organized with the support of the Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Field Museum of Natural History, the Chicago Historical Society, and the Chicago Office of Fine Arts, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. In the spring of 1989, the five institutions mounted concurrent exhibitions featuring the photographs.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Imagine if you were organizing or creating a large-scale documentary of the city where you live. What would you photograph to capture the spirit of the place?
- How would you describe the styles of Stephen Marc, Antonio Perez, and Melissa Ann Pinney's photographs? Why do you think the organizers of *Changing Chicago* asked these three artists to contribute to the project?

Dawoud Bey

(United States, b. 1953)



Barack Obama, 2006

Dawoud Bey is interested in the portrait as a site of psychological and emotional engagement between the photographer and his model. This portrait of Barack Obama was taken in early 2007 after the MoCP commissioned Bey to create a portrait of a notable Chicagoan. Bey chose then Senator Obama, someone he had known for years but who also had, in Bey's words, a "growing air of expectancy" after his speech at the 2004 Democratic convention. Obama appears poised shortly before winning the presidency as the first Black American to hold the highest seat of political power.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- How would you describe the pose in this portrait?
- How different would the photograph be if the subject wasn't looking at the camera?
- How is this portrait of Obama different or similar to portraits you have seen of the former president in the news?



Chicago, 2003

Lee Friedlander's unique vision underscores the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and the potential for photographs to contain varying levels of reflection, opacity, and transparency. Friedlander's images of shop windows evoke a certain ambiguity, an oscillation between reflected and actual reality that invite inspection of the space and the meaning of the image. Similar responses are encouraged by Friedlander's street photographs, in which shadows of figures (usually Friedlander himself) and other subjects overlap in the photographic image. The projected outline of Friedlander's body as within the picture frame implies the notion that the photographer can be both behind the camera and in front of it. Interpreted further, Friedlander's shadow can be taken to represent the imposition of the photographer upon his world and his subject.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Is there a connection to be made between the ambiguity of these spaces found by Friedlander in the Chicago landscape and the ways in which a photographer can alter the final image for the viewer's perception?
- How else can you interpret the shadow or reflection of this photographer being an element in his images? How does it affect the image?



Chicago, IL, 2004

For over two decades, Brian Ulrich has captured many places that reflect American spending habits, exploring the roles we play as targets of marketing and advertising. His images range from documentations of people caught in a trance-state while shopping, to pictures of dead shopping malls and big box stores, to mountains of discarded objects in second-hand retail storage rooms.

→ Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- How would you describe the mood of this image?
How is the artist conveying this mood?
- Does this setting look familiar to you?
When or where might you have felt like the person pictured?

Activity: Create a Photo Essay about your Neighborhood



Take a walk around your neighborhood and make at least ten images of what you see. There are all kinds of ways to work. Some people like to move continuously, becoming part of the rhythm of the street, in flow with the moment. Others like to stake out a set space, like a street corner or a five or ten square foot area and stay there for a time to see what happens. Of course, there are other strategies you might employ, too. Think about what you want to say about your neighborhood and choose your strategies to enhance the narrative you create.

Activity: Create a Photo Essay about your Neighborhood

→ Before you photograph, consider these questions:

- Which artists did you enjoy the most in this print viewing? Are there any visual strategies they use (such as vantage point, color, framing, lighting, etc.) that you would like to try today?
- Are there things or aspects of this neighborhood which you already know that you would like to show through your photographs? Make a list of them. You do not have to follow your list exactly, but just keep it in case you get stuck.
- Are you an introvert or extrovert? Do you love talking with people, especially those you don't know, or does that feel scary or stressful? How you might find yourself on that spectrum can be a strength for you how make photographs.
- If you plan to photograph people up close, like Barbara Crane, you might want to have something already in mind for what you will say if you ask their permission. What will you say?
- Do you imagine your photographs in black and white or in color? If you are photographing in color, what colors best represent your neighborhood? Why?

→ As you photograph, consider these questions:

- What is immediately catching your eye?
- Where is the light coming from? How might this place appear in different times of day?
- How does your neighborhood make you feel? How can you capture that mood in your photographs?

Activity: Create a Photo Essay about your Neighborhood

→ Tips for Educators:

- This assignment has the potential to be a long-term project in a larger photography unit. Based on your preference and if you are allowed to take students off campus, students can produce photographs on their own or during class time.
- Encourage students to engage with contemporary artists who are exploring similar themes. The MoCP has a vast collection of imagery you can show your students. Check out the [online resources for educators](#) for more ideas and opportunities.



Students from Prosser Career Academy on a walking field trip with the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 2022

Illinois Standards for Learning Addressed in this Guide

Presenting

Introductory HS Levels VA:Cr3.1.I a. Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.

Intermediate HS Levels VA:Cr3.1.II a. Engage in constructive critique with peers, then reflect on, reengage, revise, and refine works of art and design in response to personal artistic vision.

Advanced HS Levels VA:Cr3.1.III a. Reflect on, reengage, revise, and refine works of art or design considering relevant traditional and contemporary criteria as well as personal artistic vision.

Responding

Introductory HS Levels VA:Pr6.1.I a. Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.

Intermediate HS Levels VA:Pr6.1.II a. Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.

Advanced HS Levels VA:Pr6.1.III a. Curate a collection of objects, artifacts, or artwork to impact the viewer's understanding of social, cultural or political experiences.

Connecting

Introductory HS Levels VA:Cn11.1.I a. Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Intermediate HS Levels VA:Cn11.1.II a. Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

Advanced HS Levels VA:Cn11.1.III a. Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.

Illinois Standards for Learning Addressed in this Guide

Connecting (continued)

Introductory HS Levels VA:Cr2.1.I a. Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.

Intermediate HS Levels VA:Cr2.1.II a. Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

Advanced HS Levels VA:Cr2.1.III a. Experiment, plan, and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.