

THE DAYTON ART INSTITUTE



Edward Weston

EDWARD WESTON

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LOVE OF LIFE

EDUCATOR RESOURCE PACKET SPONSORED BY **BANKTONE.**

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INTRODUCTION

EDWARD WESTON (1886-1958)

Called "the quintessential American photographer of his time," Edward Weston is best known for his abstract close-ups from nature, portraits, and images of the human figure. Weston's work moved from the tonal delicacies of Pictorialism to precise, sharply focused modern images of form. Commitment to clarity and simplification are the hallmark of his mature, Modernist style, which conveys his interest in the purely formal qualities of mundane objects and everyday subjects. In addition, Weston was influenced by other art movements, and responded to Surrealism and Dadaism by juxtaposing incompatible objects in dreamlike, often ironic images. By the 1940's, his style had evolved toward looser compositions, with a focus on pattern, texture, and line. The works he created from 1920 through 1948 forever changed the course of photography.

Weston was born in Highland Park, Illinois and raised in an affluent neighborhood in Chicago. He received his first camera from his father (a medical doctor) in 1902, and at the age of 16 began taking photographs in his spare time. In 1906, he moved to California, where he worked as a door-to-door portrait photographer. He returned to Chicago in 1908 to attend the Illinois College of Photography. By 1909, Weston was back in California, where he opened his own portrait studio. Working in the popular soft-focus, romantic style of Pictorialism, he became a highly acclaimed portrait photographer. After seeing an exhibition of modern art at the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915, Weston became dissatisfied with his own work. By 1920, Weston was experimenting with semi-abstractions in a hard-edged style.



Glendale News Press Photo, *Edward Weston*, April 9, 1938, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L15.2002.22.

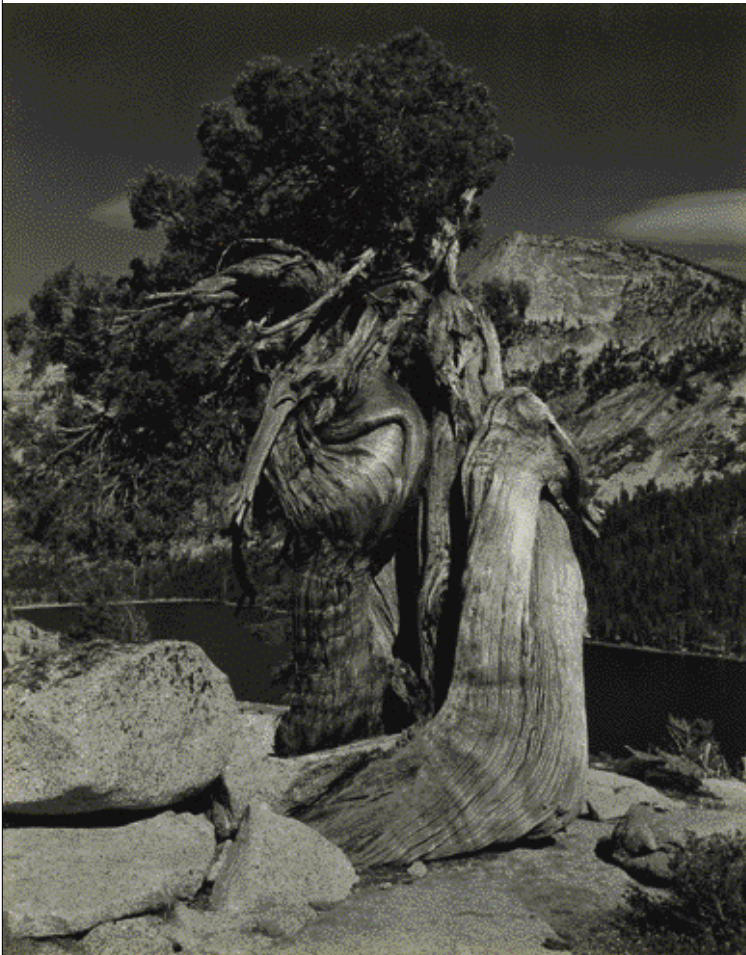
A trip to New York in 1922 provided the opportunity for Weston to meet Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, and Charles Sheeler, all important artists in the Modernist movement. The same year he took photographs of the ARMCO Steelworks in Middletown, Ohio that marked a turning point in his career. With this first move away from the Pictorialist style, Weston created true "straight" images.

Breaking away from a domestic life that included a marriage and four children, Weston spent two long periods in Mexico between 1923 and 1926 with his lover and studio apprentice, Tina Modotti. He felt the Mexican culture to be spiritually and aesthetically richer than his own. He met Mexican avant-garde artists Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot and José Clemente Orozco, who encouraged his new direction. A pivotal time in his career, Weston totally abandoned his Pictorialist techniques by 1924 and began his precise studies of natural forms. He returned to California in 1926. Accelerating his exploration of abstraction, between 1927 and 1937 he produced the work for which he is most famous – natural-form close-ups, nudes and landscapes.

While Weston's earlier work emphasized magnification and fragmentation, his work of the late 1930s and 1940s stressed the wholeness and inter-relatedness of things. In 1937 and 1938, Weston became the first recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship for Photography. This fellowship allowed Weston the freedom to travel and photograph the West and Southwest. Following the Guggenheim years, he was commissioned to provide illustrations for an edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Much of Weston's late work is bittersweet in mood and majestic in spirit.

THE EXHIBITION

Drawn from The Dayton Art Institute's permanent collection and the collection of Edward Weston's grandnephew, Jack Longstreth, long-time patron and trustee of the museum, this exhibition includes many of Weston's most famous and beloved images, as well as works never or rarely seen before. Longstreth's extraordinary collection was a result of Weston's great love for his older sister, Mary Weston Seaman, Jack Longstreth's grandmother. Weston sent Mary nearly 200 hundred photographs and hundreds of letters and postcards over the decades. A virtual survey of Weston's entire career, this exhibition includes more than 80 vintage gelatin silver exhibition prints and 10 brilliant color transparencies that were recently discovered. In addition, there are nearly a dozen rarely seen or published portraits and snapshots of Edward Weston and the Weston family, as well as a display of Weston's personal correspondence. The exhibition is on view from February 14 to June 13, 2004 before traveling to other venues.



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Juniper, Lake Tenaya*, 1937, Gelatin silver print, 9 1/4 x 7 1/4 inches, Initialed and dated on mount, Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gayle B. Price, Jr., L83, 2003.

EDWARD WESTON AND THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

From the scientific discoveries of the early nineteenth century that produced the ability to create a photograph to nearly one hundred years later, photography struggled to establish itself as an art form. Early photographers took pictures of exotic, faraway places, documented war and social conditions and made portraits, but their work was not respected as art. Photographers responded to their critics by using photography to imitate academic painting. Using darkroom techniques and gimmicks, they produced soft-focus images that resembled popular painting styles of the time. This Pictorialist style, arising around 1890, gained wide recognition for photography as an art form. However, by the early 1900s, the tide of Modernism began to influence a new group of avant-garde photographers. In addition, technological advances - the handheld camera in 1888 and 35mm photography in 1924 - also contributed to the dramatic changes about to take place in the course of photography.

Alfred Stieglitz, a founder of modern photography, championed Modernism in the United States. A photographer, publisher and gallery owner, his 291 Gallery in New York supported the avant-garde by providing a venue for exhibitions. He revolutionized camera work by stressing "straight" photography, that is, photographs that are not retouched. He also urged photographers not to mimic painting or resort to lens and lighting tricks. Stieglitz published his beliefs in his magazine publication *Camera Work*. Edward Weston was influenced by Stieglitz's magazine. A trip to New York in 1922 allowed Weston an opportunity to meet with Stieglitz. Of his visit, Weston said that he was grateful for the stimulation that Stieglitz had provided him.



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Gulf Oil, Port Arthur, Texas, 1941*, Gelatin silver print, 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$, Initialed, titled, dated, and © by Ltd. Ed. Club, Inc. on verso, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.92.

Weston approached "straight" photography with a pure aesthetic. His separate pursuits of abstraction and realism, united in the 1930s with his photographs of peppers, shells, and other natural forms, produced incredibly sharp, close-up images. These photographs, for which he is best known, make the viewer see the ordinary with new eyes. To achieve uniform detail, clarity and depth, Weston worked with the smallest possible camera lens opening, f/64. His success led to the formation, in 1932, of the West Coast society known as Group f/64, named for this smallest aperture. Other f/64 founders included Ansel Adams, Willard Van Dyke, Imogen Cunningham, and Sonya Noskowiak. Of the photographers of the time, Weston was probably the most successful in pursuing a path toward a pure American photographic style, which he described as a road to his self-discovery.

THE PEOPLE: WESTON'S PORTRAITS

Edward Weston began his career as a portrait photographer. He operated his own portrait studio in Tropic, California from 1911 to 1922, enjoying immediate and lasting success. After the studio closed in 1922, and throughout his life, he continued to take pictures of people for portraits (his means of livelihood for most of his life), as well as nude studies of the human figure. Although the subject matter of portraiture was always an interest, Weston's approaches changed drastically. Early Weston portraits were taken in a soft-focus, carefully posed Pictorialist style, as seen in *Ruth St. Denis* (included in the packet). However, Weston would soon discard the popular style of Pictorialism for a more Modernist approach.

Weston's experiments with abstracting portrait images began as early as 1920. In the years following, he traveled to Mexico, where he took many important portraits and nude studies of Tina Modotti, his travel companion, apprentice and lover. It was during this period that Weston moved completely away from Pictorialism to a truly pure form of photography. The portrait of *Diego Rivera, Mexico* (included in the packet) exemplifies the changes that occurred in Weston's portrait photography during the years of his Mexican journeys (1923-1926).

Weston seized the photographic moment through a shrewd and unusual technique. By pretending to shoot film for a period of time before actually taking the photograph, and then flashing the lens cap without the subjects' knowing, he cleverly guided them beyond "the pose," even allowing his sitters to wander freely about the studio.

Late in his career, Weston shared a passion for cats with his wife Charis. This led to a series of different kinds of portraits. Weston's photographs of cats are both whimsical and beautiful and resulted in a book, *The Cats of Wildcat Hill*, published in 1947.



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Untitled (Charis and Cats)*, 1944, Gelatin silver print, 9⁵/₁₆ x 3⁷/₁₆, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.117.

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Portraits

* All Curriculum Connections in this packet are designed to fulfill Academic Content Standards in a variety of disciplines set forth by the Ohio Department of Education. The Academic Content Standards are in italics after each activity.

WESTON AND ART

Weston's early Pictorialist photographs were heavily influenced by his formal training in studio portraiture, a technique that utilized long exposures, standard lighting techniques, negative and print retouching, and the time-honored concept of the portrait as an emanation of the subject's inner self. However, as early as 1908 Weston was keenly aware of what was happening in the world of photography through Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work*, a publication meant to validate and foster the development of photography and put it on par with painting. As Stieglitz broke away from his roots in Pictorialist traditions and moved toward a modernist aesthetic, so did the photography he was exhibiting in his *291 Gallery*, where he featured his own work as well as that of other photographers like Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler. An underlying link to painting and sculpture developed as these photographers looked to the work of Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Kandinsky, as well as Rodin and Brancusi for inspiration.

In addition to the influences of *Camera Work*, Edward Weston was jolted by a visit to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, where he saw a sampling of avant-garde artwork from Europe. Then, in 1922, he took a trip to New York, where he met Alfred Stieglitz and other important artists, including Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Charles Sheeler. Both experiences were profound and encouraged him to continue his exploration of Modernism. As Weston moved toward a more modern aesthetic, he was influenced by a wide variety of artists, like Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, Henri Matisse, and photographer Imogene Cunningham.

In the classroom:

Grades K – 4:

Look at some of Weston's portraits. What is a portrait? Why do artists create portraits?

Have the students create a portrait of someone they know.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection (K-4): A

Grades 5 – 8:

Look at the early Weston portrait *Ruth St. Denis* and the later *Diego Rivera, Mexico* (included in the packet).

Compare and contrast the two, discussing the elements and principles of art and the mood/feeling created by each. Have the students find magazine images of people that display a variety of moods/feelings. Discuss the techniques that photographers use to communicate emotions in their work.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Analyzing and Responding (5-8): A

Grades 9 – 12:

Look at portraits created by some of the artists that influenced Weston. Discuss why it is important for artists to look at the work of other artists and how the artwork of others can influence their own work. Stress the importance of knowing the difference between being influenced by someone or duplicating/copying something. Have the students select one of the artists who influenced Weston and then create a portrait influenced by that artist's style.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection (9-12): A

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Portraits (continued)

WESTON AND WRITING

Edward Weston was a prolific writer, keeping personal accounts of his experiences in journals (*Daybooks*), corresponding to his sister throughout his life, and writing articles for photographic publications. These writings provide insight into who Edward Weston was and how he became one of the most innovative and influential American photographers of the twentieth century. We can learn much about Weston by becoming familiar with the written legacy he left behind. For example, Weston credited his true influences to all art forms. In 1917, he wrote, "To increase one's art appreciation, literature, music, drama, and other arts are as important as the study of pictures, perhaps more so, for the former would not tend to influence one into merely copying other work." In his *Daybooks*, 1931, he wrote, "I feel that I have been more deeply-moved by music, literature, sculpture, painting than I have by photography, – that is by the other workers in my own medium... seeing, hearing, reading something fine excites me to greater effort,..."

In the classroom:

Grades K – 4:

Edward Weston corresponded with his sister Mary throughout his life. Much older than Edward, Mary was a mother-figure to him (their mother died when Edward was only five) and a major influence in his life. Edward's letters to his sister kept her informed of his activities when he was away. Have the students write a letter to someone important in their lives, informing them of their activities while at school.

English Language Arts Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Writing Application (K-2):C

Grades 5 – 8:

Weston wrote articles for many publications that expressed his beliefs and views about his modernist approaches. Have the students select a viewpoint on approaches to photography, either for Pictorialism and against modernism, or against Pictorialism and for modernism, and write a persuasive paragraph for their argument.

English Language Arts Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Writing Application (5-7):E

Grades 9 – 12:

Weston was greatly affected by what was happening in the world around him, particularly with other art forms. In the early 20th century, free verse and modernist poets like Robert Frost (1874-1963), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) were transforming poetry in America. Free verse poetry operates with few distinct rules or boundaries, free of conventional and traditional limitations in regard to structure and cadence (rhythm). The words don't usually rhyme but instead flow along in their own uneven pattern. Have the students select a Weston photograph to write a free verse poem about. It should be at least five lines in length and use two kinds of figurative language (metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, imagery, onomatopoeia, or hyperbole).

English Language Arts Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Writing Application (11-12):C

THE PLACES: WESTON'S TRAVELS

Edward Weston's travels throughout his career are reflected in the photographs he took. From his early Mexican journeys (1923-1926) to his late color photographs from along the Carmel coast and into Death Valley, Weston revealed the places he saw through his photographs. Factories, sand dunes, rusted automobiles, coastlines, and more were all subjects worthy of Weston's critical eye. These places became creative inspiration for Weston and he would take some of his most important photographs while traveling.

A turning point of Weston's career was in 1922, when he journeyed east to Middletown, Ohio, to visit his sister Mary. The photographs that he took of the ARMCO Plant represented a breakthrough in his work. Leaving behind the last remnants of Pictorialism, Weston began to explore the world in greater depth with a more refined and creative eye.

In 1923, Weston broke free from his domestic and professional life in California. He would travel, live and work in Mexico for the next three years. This new start for Weston offered an opportunity for him to take photographs in what he considered a more creative atmosphere. In Mexico, his range of subject matter broadened dramatically to include nudes, landscapes, still lifes, and portraiture. Here Weston learned how to stop and look at what was around him. When he returned to California, he would create the groundbreaking work for which he is best known – his peppers, shells, bananas, etc.

In later years, Weston continued to look for new inspiration. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship (1937 and 1938) that included a cash award of two thousand dollars. This allowed Weston a chance to at last make a complete break from his portrait studio work, which had continued to be his means of support, and concentrate solely on his art. His goal was to continue his "epic series of photographs on the West" as he moved through California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona. For the first time in his life he became a



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Untitled ('Use Loves Way')*, 1941, Gelatin silver print, 4 1/2 x 3 3/4, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.105 B.

full-time landscape photographer, and his style changed somewhat dramatically. The most striking quality of Weston's photographs of this time was the way they reveal the rhythmic patterns inherent in the landscape, and the life and vitality of them.

Next, a commission to illustrate a new edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1941) allowed Weston to travel through 24 states, from Arizona and Texas to Maine and Georgia. The results were photographs that represented a broad, inclusive look at contemporary America instead of a literal illustration of Whitman's work.

Finally, late in his career, Weston retraced his earlier steps along the Carmel coast and into Death Valley to shoot familiar scenes with color film as requested by the Eastman Kodak Company for promotion of their new transparency films.

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Travels

WESTON AND ART

Weston's photographs of the Armco Steel mill in 1922 were unlike any he had ever taken before. The subject matter was industrial and thoroughly modern with its vertical smokestacks, curving pipes and delicate telephone wires that were depicted in a crisp, clear manner. He felt that the soft, selective focus of Pictorialism to be inappropriate for modern architecture and machinery. Weston wrote in his Daybooks that the artist must respond to "the architecture of the age, good or bad—showing it in new and fascinating ways." Weston, along with a number of other artists, was looking to America's new industrial economy as subject matter, an aesthetic that would later be called Precisionism.

Charles Sheeler, a painter, photographer and contemporary of Weston's, was exploring similar imagery. In fact, the two artists met just after Weston had taken his Armco Steel mill photographs. Sheeler was an early proponent of modernism. Moving back and forth between photography and painting, his photographs of mundane subjects like plumbing fixtures helped to transform his style of painting to a smooth-surfaced approach. Around 1920, he began to paint urban subjects. Later he would be recognized as the finest painter in the Precisionist style. Weston's photographs of the ARMCO Steel mill placed him among a small number of photographers who were changing the course of photography. Soon the camera would be seen as a tool for the exploration of form.

In the classroom:

Look at Weston's *ARMCO Steel, Middletown, Ohio* and Sheeler's *Stacks in Celebration* (included in the packet). What are the similarities? What are the differences? What is each artist trying to communicate? Sheeler, a photographer and painter, painted this work from photographs that he took at a power plant in Massachusetts.

Grades K – 4:

Weston's photograph and Sheeler's painting are of outdoor industrial scenes. Similar to landscapes, they can be called cityscapes – outdoor scenes of urban environments. Create a cityscape of an outdoor area that you have visited.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (K-4): C

Grades 5 – 8:

Sheeler has simplified (abstracted) this industrial scene by using flat shapes for buildings and strong diagonal lines to break up the sky. Find a cityscape in a magazine and recreate it in a simplified/abstract style using paper collage.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (5-8): A

Grades 8 – 12:

What liberties might Sheeler have taken when creating *Stacks in Celebration*? Why would he want to transform a photograph into a painting? Would he want to change certain aspects of the photograph? Have the students use a camera to take a photograph of something from contemporary society or select a Weston photograph. Have them recreate the photograph in a painting, altering the image to emphasize their personal message.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (9-12): B

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Travels (continued)

WESTON AND CULTURE

Edward Weston was one of a small group of artists who chose to travel to Mexico, instead of Europe, to experience another culture. The revolutionary times in Mexico had given artists a central place in society during the 1920's and 1930's, and artists were encouraged by an appreciative audience. Regenerating, liberating and dangerous, revolutionary Mexico was a place Weston hoped would have a renewing effect on his personal life, as well as his professional creativity.

In the classroom:

Grades K – 4:

Study Mexican culture. Discuss Mexican cultural practices and how Weston's photographs reflect them. Compare Mexican culture to culture in the United States.

Social Studies Academic Content Standards Benchmark – People in Societies (K-2): A

Grades 5 – 8:

Look at the history of Mexico and the United States during the 1920's.

Have the students make a timeline that includes political and social events in Mexico and the United States during this time period. Compare and contrast the political and social conditions of Mexico and the United States during Weston's Mexican journeys. Why would Weston think that Mexico would provide a more creative atmosphere for the making of photographs? How did his work change during those years? What might have happened if he had stayed in California?

Social Studies Academic Content Standards Benchmark – People in Societies (6-8): A



Grades 9 - 12:

To better understand why Mexico provided Weston with a liberating environment, look at the post-World War I political environments in other parts of the world (United States, Russia, China, Europe).

Social Studies Academic Content Standards Benchmark – History (9-10): D

Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Dunes, Oceano*, 1936, Gelatin silver print, 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$, Signed and dated on mount; titled on verso, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.46.

THE THINGS: WESTON'S ABSTRACTIONS

When Edward Weston's Mexican journeys ended in 1926, he began the most productive and important phase of his career as a photographer. While in Mexico, Weston's style had developed into one that celebrated form, light, life, and simplicity. Now he was ready to accelerate his exploration of abstraction, looking for beauty in the natural world. He continued his work with nudes, but also began to look at objects from nature to further explore his interest in form. His close-up photographs of forms like shells, peppers, onions, eggplants, artichokes, and cabbages are sculptural in effect, influenced by the work of sculptor Constantin Brancusi. By using light and shadow, isolating and somewhat enlarging objects, and sometimes slicing them in half, Weston was able to reveal the significant patterns and irregularities of these objects. During 1927, Weston created fourteen negatives of shells alone. In his shell photographs, Weston's interest in experimentation and perfection led him to try "every conceivable texture and tone for grounds: Glass, tin, cardboard, – wool, velvet, even my rubber rain coat!"

That same year Weston took his first pepper photographs. He found peppers to be a nearly endless source of inspiration because of their "endless variety of manifestations, because of the extraordinary surface texture, because of power, the force suggested in their amazing convolutions." Weston believed his photographs of peppers to be a study in pure abstraction – the beauty of nature.

Weston often faced the challenge of having his work misunderstood, particularly these images of peppers, shells, and bananas. According to Weston, others often associated a sensuality to these images that was a complete misinterpretation. He was insistent that these photographs were only about his interest in the aesthetic qualities of form, and nothing more.

The photographs Weston took between 1927 and 1930 are recognized as his best and some of the most important photographs of the 20th century.



Edward Weston, *Shell*, 1927, Gelatin silver print, 9 1/4 x 7 1/4, Signed, dated, initialed and numbered (14/50) on mount; titled and dated on verso, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, 2001.70.

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Abstractions

WESTON AND ART

When Weston traveled to New York in 1922, he met the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, one of the pioneers of modernism, best known for her abstract paintings of enlarged flowers and plant forms. O'Keeffe was associated with Alfred Stieglitz, who she eventually married in 1924. Although Edward Weston never claimed to have been influenced by O'Keeffe, similarities between O'Keeffe's close-up abstractions and Weston's photographs of natural forms are remarkable. Furthermore, Weston did find inspiration in the paintings of his friend Henrietta Shore, a little known artist who was creating stylized, abstract paintings of shells, rocks and flowers. During the same time period, Imogene Cunningham – Weston's good friend - was photographing close-ups of agave desert plants and flowers.

O'Keeffe's paintings minimized detail and distilled her subjects to such a degree that they became abstracted. She frequently isolated and magnified natural objects and used arbitrary color as a formal element. O'Keeffe's paintings, like Weston's photographs, were deemed by critics to be of a sensual nature. She denied this interpretation, as did Weston.

Later in her career, Georgia O'Keeffe would settle in the Southwest, where she painted the desert landscape, capturing the stark beauty of the terrain. Interestingly enough, Weston was also exploring similar imagery in his travels during the Guggenheim years and the *Leaves of Grass* commission.

In the classroom:

Look at Weston's *Pepper*, 1929 and O'Keeffe's *Purple Leaves*, 1922 (included in the packet). Although they are using entirely different mediums, O'Keeffe and Weston both created abstracted images of objects from the natural world using close-up techniques. Both works focus on curvilinear, three-dimensional forms that have been created by the use of high contrast. Both works help the viewer see the ordinary in a new and unusual way. The similarities are notable, but how are the works different?

Grades K – 4:

Why does a close-up image of something make us see it in a new way? What other objects from nature could be enlarged to create an interesting artwork? Have the students select something from nature that is very small and create a large drawing of it, filling the paper with the object.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (K-4): A

Grades 5 – 8:

Have the students select an everyday, ordinary object and create an abstract drawing or painting of it. Be sure they enlarge the object to fill the picture plane and use high contrast to create three-dimensional form. If they are working with color, they should make arbitrary color selections.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (5-8): A

Grades 9 - 12:

Have the students select an everyday, ordinary object. Working with black, white, and grays, create a mixed media collage of the object, enlarging it to fill the picture plane. Use a variety of collage papers, transparent materials (tissue paper, cellophane, tracing paper) to create a wide range of values.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (9-12): A

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Abstractions (continued)

WESTON AND SCIENCE

Edward Weston's later work of the 1930s and 1940s often stressed the wholeness and inter-relatedness of things. An environmentalist at heart, his quest was simple, "My work-purpose, my theme, can most clearly be stated as the recognition, recording and presentation of the interdependence, the relativity of all things – the universality of basic form... In a single day's work, within a radius of a mile, I might discover and record the skeleton of a bird, a blossoming fruit tree, a cloud, a smokestack: each of these being only a part of the whole, but each – in itself, becoming a symbol of the whole, of life."

In the classroom:

Have the students interpret the Weston quote above. How does this quote apply to ecosystems and the inter-relatedness of living organisms within an ecosystem?

Grades K – 4:

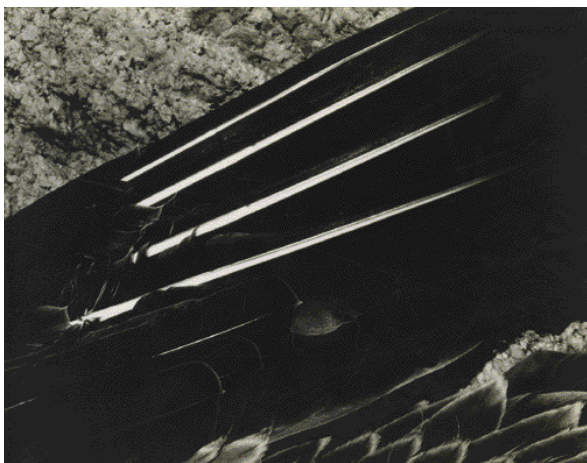
Have the students look at the different kinds of plants and animals that live in Ohio and the kind of habitats in which they live. Discuss why organisms can survive only in the environments that meet their needs. Compare how plants and animals adapt to the seasonal changes in their activities and appearances.

Science Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Life Sciences (K-2): B

Grades 5 – 8:

Have the students complete the following assignment to see how a wide diversity of plant life can be found in a small area of land. Take the students to an unmanaged part of the school grounds or a local park and have them find several different plant species. They should record their observations through close-up drawings and written notes. If possible, they can also collect actual samples (leaves, sticks, etc.). Man-made elements may also be recorded. Return to the classroom and have the students identify the different species they collected. Then assemble the drawings from the entire class into a collage of the ecosystem they just visited.

Science Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Life Sciences (6-8): C



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Pelican's Wing*, 1931, Gelatin silver print, 7^{7/8} x 9^{3/8}, Signed, dated, initialed, and numbered (4/50) on mount; inscription on verso: "To a sister from a brother who loves her - "Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.35.

Grades 9 – 12:

The students will see how human activities can impact the status of natural systems (ecosystems). Have the students research the general trend of the earth towards desertification (grasslands and other ecosystems change into dry wastelands). Have them look for causes (degradation of natural resources, global climate changes, effects of economic development, etc.) and find answers to reverse the process.

Science Academic Content Standards Benchmark – Life Sciences (9-10): G

THE TECHNOLOGY: WESTON'S COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS

The development of color photography was slow and arduous. Although the technology for color photographs began to develop in the late 19th century, it did not become widely available in snap shot form until the 1960s. During the 1920s, commercial color photography appeared, but it was expensive and the dyes unstable. The first modern color film, Kodachrome, was introduced by Kodak in 1936, soon to be followed by their Ektachrome film in 1941.

In 1947, Edward Weston was approached by the Eastman Kodak Company to take color photographs for a promotion of their transparency films, Ektachrome and Kodachrome. At this point in his life, Weston was living alone and battling Parkinson's disease. He still accepted the commission with little hesitation. Using color film challenged him to learn new ways of seeing. For Weston, color film was simply an alternative to black and white film, not a replacement.

Weston's explorations into color afforded him a new technique and vision, where he could discover the world again in a transformed way. The color transparencies taken by Weston in the late 1940s reflect his remarkable ability to open the eyes of the viewer to see the extraordinary in the world.



Edward Weston, 1886-1958, *Ghost Town, Rhyolite-Nevada*, 1938, Gelatin silver print, 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$, Signed and dated on mount; titled on verso, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Longstreth, L19.1993.80.

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Color Photographs

WESTON AND ART

The transparency film that Weston was asked to use is different than the more common and familiar negative film/positive printing process. In the negative film/positive printing process, a negative image is produced on the camera film. The negative image is then printed onto another light sensitive material (photographic paper) to make a positive image. With transparency film, the positive color image is created on exposed film by a reversal process. First the film is developed, then is either exposed to light or treated with a chemical a second time. The result is a positive image on the film. The films can then be printed using another reversal print process on specially made paper. This process, quite expensive and only done by a very few specialized photography labs, can produce prints of museum quality. There are other ways of producing prints from transparencies, like digital printing and producing a color negative by photographing the transparency, but the print quality is inferior.

In the classroom:

Grades K – 4:

Students will understand the word "transparency" by completing the following activity. Have the students create a tissue paper collage by gluing small pieces of tissue paper onto a large clear acetate background (Tissue paper may be layered). Display on a window or light box.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (K-4): A



Positive image.



Negative image.

"positive" images to create a collage.

Grades 5 – 8:

Students will understand the terms "negative" and "positive." Create a "negative" image – Have the students bring in a photograph (a high contrast photograph will produce more successful results). Make a black and white photocopy of the photograph, then use a photocopy machine and transparency film to make a transparency from the black and white copy. Place the transparency on sun print paper (pre-treated light sensitive paper) and place in a sunny location. Remove from the sun when complete (follow enclosed instructions of the sun print paper). The image on the sun print paper will be a "negative" image.

Create a "positive" image – Photocopy the sun print paper "negative." Then make a transparency of the photocopied "negative" on a photocopy machine. Place the transparency on sun print paper and place in a sunny location (follow enclosed instructions of the sun print paper). The image on the sun print paper will now be a "positive" image.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (5-8): D

Grades 9 – 12:

Have the students complete the above activity, then with the aid of a photocopy machine, use multiple copies of the "negative" and

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (9-12): B

Curriculum Connections: Weston's Color Photographs (continued)

WESTON AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Weston's early training as a portrait photographer implanted in him the importance of technical protocol. His philosophies on the procedures and processes—technique is all-important—remained unswerving throughout his career. As early as 1916, he was taking "straight" photography: that is, photographs free from embellishing the negatives or prints.

Weston saw every photograph already complete even before he started to make the exposure. He recognized the power of natural light as a determinant in the composition of the entire picture, never cropping a photograph, his respect for his subject too great. Weston rigorously controlled form through his selection of motif, exposure time, and the use of a large format camera. In this way he could pre-visualize his prints and eliminate the random effects of light, atmosphere, and moment, creating a timeless image.

Until 1947, Weston saw the world in color, but rendered it in black and white. This was the discipline of his life. His approaches and techniques were developed over a lifetime of seeing the world from this perspective. When Kodak presented him with the challenge of using color film, Weston had to learn new ways of seeing in order to capture the images he desired.

In the classroom:

Grades K – 4:

Discuss how Weston visually cropped his image before taking a photograph. Use viewfinders to facilitate understanding. Then have the students look out a window of their classroom. They may move closer to the window or farther away to "crop" their image where they like. Then have them return to their seats, record what they saw out the window, then create a drawing of the scene.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Creative Expression and Communication (K-4): A

Grades 5 – 8:

Have the students compare the black and white photograph *Grand Canyon, Arizona*, 1941 with the color photograph *Untitled Point Lobos*, 1947 (included in the packet). Find similarities and differences between the photographs. What problems would Weston have encountered when taking the black and white photograph? What factors are important when creating an image using only black, white and grays?

What problems would Weston have encountered when taking the color photograph? How did he have to change his approaches when using color film? Would he have to pre-visualize his photographs differently? What factors are important? How are they different from black and white photography?

Using photo-manipulative computer software, alter color images from color to black and white to demonstrate the differences. If a computer is not available, black and white photocopies of a color photograph will provide the same comparisons.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Analyzing and Responding (5-8): A

Grades 9 – 12:

Look at the development of color photography, from its beginnings in the late 19th century until the color snapshot was developed in the 1960s. Have the students record step by step the progress and the setbacks, emphasizing the problem solving experiments that moved the technology forward.

Visual Arts Academic Contents Standards Benchmark – Connections, Relationships and Applications (9-12): A

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GLOSSARY

Abstraction

Art in which elements of form have been stressed in handling the subject matter-which becomes less recognizable.All art exists on a continuum between total abstraction and full representation. Vassily Kandinsky is generally credited with having created the first purely abstract work in 1910.

Alliteration

The repetition of initial consonant sounds in 2 or more neighboring words.

Arbitrary color

The use of color that is not realistic or natural to the object rendered.

Avant-garde

Traditionally understood as those artists, critics or patrons who are leaders of taste, espousing innovative, unconventional or experimental concepts and techniques despite the opposition of established opinion.

Composition

The organization or arrangement of forms in a work of art.

Contrast

The relationship between areas of dark and light values in an artwork.

Dadaism

An international art movement in the fine arts, drama and literature that took shape in Zurich in 1916 and other major centers.The movement reflected the cynicism engendered by World War I in improvised,sarcastic expressions of intuition and irrationality. Dada artists include Marcel Duchamp, Jean Arp,Kurt Switters and Max Ernst.

Ecosystem

A community of organisms and their environment functioning as an ecological unit.

Hyperbole

The use of extravagant exaggeration.

Imagery

Figurative illustration, especially in literature.

Metaphor

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object is used in place of another to suggest a likeness.

Modernism

"Modern" was a term first applied to a time period beginning in the 1880s,when a radical change in artists' attitudes toward art took place.These artists built on what the Impressionists had begun in stepping away from traditions. Modern artists championed invention and innovation, along with their own individuality. Much modern art became strongly dependent on a pared-down vocabulary of lines, shapes, forms,colors and patterns.

Motif

Any prominent feature of the subject or form of a work of art.

Onomatopoeia

Words which are pronounced like the sound that they describe formation of a word by the imitation of a sound.

Personification

To represent an abstraction or thing as human or in human form.

Pictorialism

An early photographic movement characterized by a soft focused,romanticized image.

Precisionism

A realistic style in which the geometric analysis of style and economy of detail introduced by Cubism made a significant imprint. Precisionist works often depict industrial and technological prowess.Artists working in this manner include Stuart Davis, Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler.

Simile

A figure of speech comparing two unlike things often using "like"or "as."

Stylized

To represent or design according to a style or stylistic pattern rather than according to nature or tradition.

Surrealism

Originally a literary movement officially inaugurated in 1924, it incorporated stylistic and theoretical aspects of Cubism and Dada. Seeking to reveal the reality behind appearances,especially in a psychological sense, surrealism drew heavily on Freudian theories about the unconscious.Some major figures included Joan Miro, Salvador Dali,Yves Tanguy and Max Ernst.

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