

ELAINE MAYES

IN THE PRESENT: FIVE DECADES

SEPT. 20, 2018-JAN. 13, 2019

GRADES 6 - 12
CURRICULUM GUIDE



Elaine Mayes In the Present: Five Decades

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THIS EXHIBITION IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GIFT FROM MRS. ROBERT O. LEVITT

Inside cover: Elaine Mayes, installation view of the SCAD Museum of Art exhibition, *In the Present: Five Decades*

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The SCAD Museum of Art presents *In the Present: Five Decades*, featuring work by veteran photographer Elaine Mayes. Exploring works that span 50 years of her expansive career, the exhibition includes iconic photography from the 1960s and '70s as well as lesser-known recent work. The curatorial frame centers on Mayes' broader philosophy surrounding image-making, a credo that stems from her immersion in the moment and her production of imagery with a visual vocabulary that stands the test of time.

The investigations of "seeing" and documentary forms in photography are a central focus of Mayes' work. This interest led to a number of projects seeking out close-at-hand situations that became subject material for her photographs.

This exhibition consists of more than 90 works and includes examples from the black-and-white series *Autolandscapes*, which challenged traditional representation of the American landscape. For this collection of photographs, Mayes shot through the window of a moving car. These images manifest her experience of a proliferating mobile society and its increasing separation from the natural world. An earlier group of works, broadly known as *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, includes iconic portraits of both friends and strangers during the height of the 1960s countercultural movement. Here, Mayes is embedded in the scene that she records, unlike the more removed approach to *Autolandscapes*, which came later.

Travel, movement and everyday observations remained a steadfast source of inspiration for Mayes. One of her earliest projects, *El Camino Real*, was funded by the Federal Bureau of Public Roads and connects to her deep-rooted interest in the culture and land alongside the roadway. While appreciating how photography can show us the past, her approach ties together the need to work in ways connected to the present and a curiosity for discovering new aspects of the human experience. In turn, her photography became an exploration, a record of her often-nomadic life, and a reflection of her lifelong practice of documenting places in her world.

The exhibition also explores Mayes' lesser-known color works, such as examples from her National Endowment for the Arts Long Island Survey Project from the late 1970s. These images capture couples, families and groups on Jones Beach, New York. During her career, Mayes inscribed a particular subjectivity into a male-dominated, more objective approach to the medium. The first woman to teach film and photography at an American university, she was a true pioneer, educating students for more than 35 years.

The exhibition is curated by Storm Janse van Rensburg, head curator of SCAD exhibitions, and Susan Laney (SCAD B.F.A., photography, 1998), guest curator.

SCAD gives special thanks to Mrs. Robert O. Levitt for her generous support of the Elaine Mayes exhibition.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Artist Elaine Mayes within her SCAD Museum of Art exhibition, *In the Present: Five Decades*

Elaine Mayes has been an active visual artist since 1960. From 1961-68 she worked in San Francisco as an independent photojournalist primarily for magazines and graphic designers. During 1967-68, Mayes photographed the Summer of Love and the countercultural scene in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. A rock-and-roll photographer, one of her assignments was to shoot the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, which later formed the book, *It Happened in Monterey: Modern Rock's Defining Moment*.

Mayes taught photography for more than 35 years at colleges and universities including the University of Minnesota, Hampshire College, Bard College and New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Chair of the Tisch photography department from 1997 until her retirement, she remains a professor emerita, lives in New York's Catskill Mountains and actively continues to create photography.

Mayes' photography has been exhibited extensively, with recent shows connected to the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love and The Monterey Pop Festival. Exhibition locations include the de Young Museum, San Francisco; California Historical Society, San Francisco; The SFO Museum United Airlines Terminal; the Monterey Art Museum, California; The Grammy Museum, Los Angeles, California; Spazio Gerra, Reggio Emilia, Italy; and the Joseph Bellows Gallery in La Jolla, California.

The work of Elaine Mayes is represented in numerous collections including the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both in New York, New York.

ABOUT SCAD AND THE SCAD MUSEUM OF ART

Offering more degree programs and specializations than any other art and design university, SCAD is uniquely qualified to prepare talented students for professional, creative careers.

The SCAD Museum of Art is a premier contemporary art museum that features emerging and established international artists through commissioned works and rotating exhibitions; engages local communities with special initiatives reflecting an international scope; and serves as a resource for SCAD students and alumni during their academic careers and beyond.

ABOUT SCAD CURRICULUM GUIDES

SCAD curriculum guides enhance understanding of art and design through investigations that reveal relevant personal, historical and cultural connections while promoting cross-disciplinary links necessary for today's innovative careers. Designed for use within the museum's exhibition spaces and in classrooms, the guides provide learning opportunities that fulfill the requirements of national education standards.

Recognizing the guides' overall design excellence and ingenuity, the American Alliance of Museums' Museum Publications Design Competition and the Southeastern Museums Conference have awarded SCAD curriculum guides first- and second-place prizes, a medal and honorable mentions for three consecutive years.

This Elaine Mayes guide for middle and high school students follows the artist's statement that "seeing is a kind of thinking." Through schemas and prompts, the guide cultivates considered dialogues among students — reflective, evidence-based discussions of the artist's worldview and their own.

SCAD gives special thanks to The Hodge Foundation for its generous support of the university's award-winning curriculum guides.

Educational standards are listed on page 12.

Highlighted glossary terms are found on page 13.

Additional learning resources are located in the Curriculum Connections can be found on page 14.

Citations and image credits can be found on page 15.

1.

“ Seeing is a kind of thinking.
It is an act of engagement or consideration.”¹

Elaine Mayes is described as “a photographic omnivore,”² a reference to both the range of her subject matter and her boundless visual curiosity. Her dedication to the art of seeing is recognizable in the profound directness of her work and its expertly captured moments of clarity and precision.

Throughout her career, Mayes has sought to enlarge documentary photography’s capacity to communicate ideas. Although each of her photographs exists as an individual, stand-alone creation, Mayes often organizes related images into projects. These might focus on a time and place or — with her longer-running projects — concentrate on similar subject matter. She has spoken of these groupings as “**conceptual** documentaries”³ that bring broader understanding of an experience by revealing multiple viewpoints.



From left to right: Elaine Mayes, *Linda and Darcy Buskirk*, from the series *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, vintage silver gelatin print, 1968; Elaine Mayes, *Frank French (now a composer)*, 16, from the series *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, vintage silver gelatin print, 1968



Elaine Mayes, *Rebel, Age 25, Golden Gate Park*, from the series *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, Vintage silver gelatin print, 1968

“ See with your eyes, your heart and your mind ...
Learn to see more than you already see. ”⁴

1. Activity

Follow these prompts as they guide you through the process of engaging with and considering an image.

CONTENT

What is going on here? What subject, story or information does this work suggest?



Elaine Mayes, *Ruth Murphy*, from the series *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, digital print, 1968

ORGANIZATION

Make visual and written notes as you examine the work's composition by referring to the **elements and principles of design**.

Elements of design

line

shape

texture

value

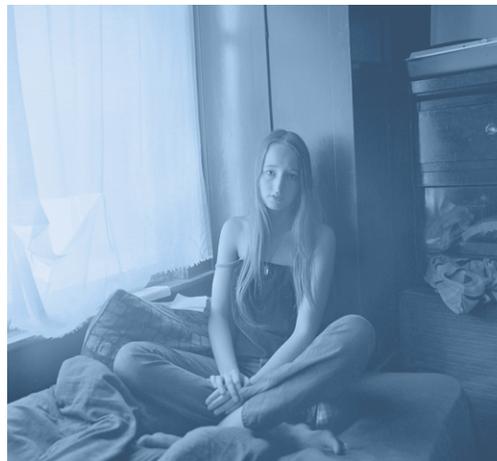
color

illusion of depth

illusion of motion



Vertical lines add emphasis to the figure.



Principles of organization

movement

balance

emphasis

economy

rhythm

variety

unity

proportion

scale





TECHNIQUE

Elaine Mayes describes how she created this series of photographs.

“I used a 2¼ Hasselblad on a tripod with the wide-angle lens all the way **stopped down** in order to get maximum **depth of field**. The tripod meant a slower working method with more time to compose and choose before shooting. Also, the tripod meant I looked like an ‘official’ photographer.”⁵

CONTEXT

Consider the time, place and culture in which the artist lived.

In 1968, Elaine Mayes was a professional freelance photographer living in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, the center of the previous year’s Summer of Love. Reacting to the nuclear threat of the Cold War, assassinations of political leaders and social activists, civil rights clashes and the Vietnam War, an estimated 100,000 mostly young people gravitated here to become part of a utopian movement embracing peace and love. Popularly known as “hippies,” their unconventional dress and lifestyle attracted national media attention.

INTENT

What was the artist’s goal?

“Early on in the Haight I had realized that the Summer of Love was a media-fueled idea ... I knew I wanted to make pictures that would show something other than the media version of Haight-Ashbury. I shifted from the photojournalistic approach that had served for my magazine assignments to making formal portraits of people I knew or met on the street.”⁶

Describe how the organization of *Ruth Murphy* contributed to your ideas about its content.

What evidence can you find in the photograph that aligns with Mayes' account of her techniques and the contexts of that time?

Discuss and compare Mayes' *Ruth Murphy* with other works in her Haight-Ashbury series. Note the variations and similarities that you find. What do they reveal about Mayes' intent and the "something other" that she wished to show? Record important ideas here.

2.

“I had learned from reading *Zen in the Art of Archery* that marksmanship was a skill that a photographer could learn, so I made pictures ... not by looking through the camera, but instead just aiming at what I saw.”⁷

Early in her career, Elaine Mayes read *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel. This book was one of the first to bring **Zen Buddhism** to the attention of Western audiences. The author, a Germany philosophy professor teaching in 1920s Japan, studied a form of archery that is practiced as a spiritual art. His training emphasized staying within the moment rather than focusing on the goal or target. Mayes has mentioned this book’s influence on the occasions when she chooses to “shoot from the hip” — responding intuitively and skillfully to a direct view of the scene — rather than looking through the viewfinder.



Elaine Mayes, *Greyhound Bus, Utah*, from the NEA project *Autolandscapes*, digital print, 1971

2. Activity

Contrast the photography techniques employed for social media versus an approach inspired by *Zen in the Art of Archery*. Choose a scene and photograph it, using the same techniques in framing, cropping and applying filters that you would use in preparing it for social media. Next, photograph the same scene by pressing the shutter button while looking at the scene instead of the screen.

Use the spaces below to sketch in the compositions created in your “framed” and “unframed” photographs.



Compare and comment on the resulting compositions. Discuss the benefits of working without a target or goal. What are the challenges? Describe situations where you would choose one strategy over the other.

Choose other scenes to photograph, and repeat this process until you notice a difference in your ability to capture a personally satisfying “from the hip” image. Write an informative, blog-style reflection, describing the techniques that improved your skill level. Explain how and why these methods brought about the results you sought.

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

Activity 1 – 6th through 12th grade

Responding 8.1

Anchor: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

6: Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

7: Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

8: Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

HSI: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

HSII: Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.

HSIII: Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

Activity 2 – 6th through 12th grade

Creating 2.1

Anchor: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

6: Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods and approaches in making works of art and design.

7: Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods and approaches in creating works of art or design.

8: Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate and take risks to pursue ideas, forms and meanings that emerge in the process of art-making or designing.

HSI: Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

HSII: Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.

HSIII: Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices, following or breaking established conventions, to plan the making of multiple works of art and design based on a theme, idea or concept.

COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Activity 2 – 3rd through 5th Grade

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-12.1

Text Types and Purposes: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

GLOSSARY

conceptual *adj.* In the visual arts, work that focuses on communicating ideas

depth of field *n.* In photography, the distance shown in focus from the nearest to farthest objects

Elements of design *n.*

color *n.* A visual response to varying wavelengths of light

illusion of depth *n.* The apparent distance from an object's front to back or the illusion of near to far

illusion of motion *n.* In a still image or series of images, a sense of time passing and figures or objects moving

line *n.* A point moving across a plane or through a space

shape *n.* An area defined by actual or implied boundaries

texture *n.* The surface character of a material

value *n.* The effects of light falling on a subject; the degree of lightness or darkness

Principles of organization *n.*

balance *n.* The distribution of visual weight in a composition

economy *n.* A restrained use of the elements of design

emphasis *n.* The creation of a focal point within a composition

movement *n.* Organization of a composition that leads the eye of the viewer across the work

proportion *n.* Relationships of size between parts of a single object or design

rhythm *n.* A methodical variation of strong and weak features, marked by regular recurrence of various elements

scale *n.* Relationships of size between objects

unity *n.* A sense of wholeness

variety *n.* A combination of elements that form complex relationships, creating visual interest

stop down *v.* In photography, the diameter of the aperture — the opening through which light travels to expose the film — is said to be “stopped down” when it is reduced

Zen Buddhism *n.* A spiritual practice that focuses on mindfulness as a path to enlightenment

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Scroll through a selection of more than 70 Elaine Mayes photographs.

josephbellows.com/artists/elaine-mayes2

This video discusses the art critique process and explores internet discussions as an arena for employing its constructive approaches.

youtube.com/watch?v=9neybpOvjaQ

Watch this depiction of the historical events and cultural contexts leading up to the Summer of Love.

pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/summer-love-chapter-1

Browse through a selection of excerpts from *Zen in the Art of Archery*.

goodreads.com/work/quotes/102584-zen-in-der-kunst-des-bogenschie-ens

Learn camera techniques that will improve your “hip shot.”

outdoorphotographer.com/tips-techniques/travel-photography/shoot-from-the-hip

SCAD Portfolios is a website featuring the work of SCAD students and alumni. Follow these links to a diverse selection of photographic approaches.

portfolios.scad.edu/gallery/14751367/S-P-L-I-T

portfolios.scad.edu/gallery/10603741/52-Years

portfolios.scad.edu/gallery/46117839/Art-History-Art-History



Elaine Mayes, installation view of the SCAD Museum of Art exhibition, *In the Present: Five Decades*

CITATIONS

¹ Connor, T. (1970, January 01). Elaine Mayes: From hippies to Hawaii. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from timconnor.blogspot.com/2007/04/elaine-mayes-from-hippies-to-hawaii.html

² Mayes, E. (2014). *Elaine Mayes: Recently*. Hillsborough, N.C.: Daylight Books.

³ Andrews, B. (1970, January 01). Q & A with Elaine Mayes, from blakeandrews.blogspot.com/2014/12/q-with-elaine-mayes.html

⁴ Jones, G. E. (2013, October 16). Interview with Elaine Mayes, photographer and educator. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from petapixel.com/2013/10/15/interview-elaine-mayes-photographer-educator

⁵ Andrews, B. (1970)

⁶ Manning, E. (2017, June 09). Striking portraits of counterculture teens in '60s San Francisco. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/3kbb4k/striking-portraits-of-counterculture-teens-in-60s-san-francisco

⁷ Jones, G. E. (2013)

RELATED PROGRAMS

SCAD prepares talented students for creative professions through engaged teaching and learning in a positively oriented university environment. SCAD offers more than 40 degree programs, including:

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SCAD enrolls more than 14,000 undergraduate and graduate students from more than 100 countries. The innovative SCAD curriculum is enhanced by advanced professional-level technology, equipment and learning resources, as well as opportunities for internships, professional certifications and collaborative projects with corporate partners. In 2018, the prestigious Red Dot Design Rankings placed SCAD as the No. 1 university in the U.S. and in the top two universities in the Americas and Europe. Career preparation is woven into every fiber of the university, resulting in a superior alumni employment rate. According to a recent study, 99 percent of Spring 2017 SCAD graduates were employed, pursuing further education or both within 10 months of graduation.

For more information, visit scad.edu.

Cover image: **Elaine Mayes**, *Russell*, from the series *Haight-Ashbury Portraits*, digital print, 1968



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