Walker Evans
(American, 1903–1975)

All works *Untitled*, c. 1940
Gelatin silver prints
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Arnold H. Crane,
1978.25–34

In the 1940s, Walker Evans took these photographs on New York subway cars using a hidden camera. Evans caught his subjects lost in thought or observing their fellow riders, while he's secretly doing the same thing.

Sitting down opposite the artist, the passengers are unposed and unselfconscious. Evans wrote, "The guard is down and the mask is off, even more than when in lone bedrooms (where there are mirrors). People's faces are in naked repose down in the subway."

Dawoud Bey
(American, b. 1953)

Brooklyn, NY, 1988
Gelatin silver print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Don Kaul
and Barbara Bluhm-Kaul, 2013.29

In the 1980s, Chicago-based artist Dawoud Bey was living in New York City, where he began making black-and-white portraits of people he met while walking the streets. As Bey describes, he didn't know many of his subjects before he photographed them.

Toward the end of the decade, Bey moved away from using the portable black-and-white camera. Instead, he began shooting in a studio setting with a large-format Polaroid camera, partly to achieve a more collaborative, sustained process with the people he photographed.

Dawoud Bey
(American, b. 1953)

Syracuse, NY, 1983
Gelatin silver print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Don Kaul
and Barbara Bluhm-Kaul, 2013.28

Christian Boltanski
(French, b. 1944)

Tiroire, 1988
Gelatin silver print, tin drawer, wire mesh, clothing, and electric lamp
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift from The Howard and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.11.a–c

In this work, Christian Boltanski combined a metal drawer (*tiroir* in French), a black-and-white portrait, and a small light to evoke an altar or memorial. He copied the photograph from a newspaper or magazine and enlarged it until the face became blurred. This renders the child's identity illegible, leaving the viewer to imagine who this boy might be.

Boltanski intended to convey an impersonal sense of loss, mourning, or memory—a feeling that isn't tied to a specific person but might still be deeply moving. To achieve this, Boltanski often artificially ages the objects he uses. Similarly, the altered photograph contributes to the effect, perhaps regardless of whether the anonymous boy died young or not.

Michal Rovner
(Israeli, b. 1957)

Departure #1 (y), 1998
Laminated chromogenic development
print mounted on Plexiglas
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of the artist and
Rhona Hoffman Gallery, 1998.46

To produce this hazy, ominous image, Michal Rovner photographed a news broadcast on her television. With this gesture, the artist responds to the detached experience of watching a war unfold faraway. The setting is ambiguous and the group of figures is blurred—it could be anywhere and the shadowy crowd almost anyone.

An artist who divides her time between New York and Israel, Rovner made a similar series of photographs in 1991, during the first Gulf War. She made this work in 1998, as the United States and United Kingdom launched a subsequent four-day bombing campaign in Iraq, observing a history that seemed to repeat itself.

Kerry James Marshall
(American, b. 1955)

Mementos, 1998
Chromogenic development print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of the Susan and
Lewis Manilow Collection of Chicago
Artists, 2003.32

Mementos centers on heroic portraits of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy, all of whom were assassinated in the 1960s. Kerry James Marshall's photograph mimics the casual look of a snapshot and the artist is partially visible in the mirror, placing himself face to face with this national history of violence and loss.

Smaller black-and-white photos are tucked into the frame, adding mementos of other people who were also killed during the struggle for equal rights. Among them are the young victims of the Birmingham church bombing in 1963; three civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi in 1964; Malcolm X, the black nationalist leader assassinated in 1965; and members of the Black Panthers killed by police in 1969.

Dawoud Bey
(American, b. 1953)

The Birmingham Project: Mathes Manafee and Cassandra Griffin, 2012
Archival pigment prints mounted on Dibond
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, restricted gift of Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred J. Giuffrida, and Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2014.8

Dawoud Bey's *The Birmingham Project* looks back on the 1963 bombing of an African American church in Birmingham, Alabama, an act of racial terrorism that killed four young girls: Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Addie Mae Collins, and Carole Robertson.

These photographs are from a series of paired portraits, each depicting two generations of current Birmingham residents. The girl on the left is the same age as the victims of the bombing in 1963; the woman on the right is the age that they would be today.

Thomas Ruff
(German, b. 1958)

Porträt (C. Kewer), 1988
Chromogenic development print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, Gerald S. Elliott Collection,
1995.90

Thomas Ruff's large-scale portraits are intended to be as neutral and systematic as possible. This approach works against the conventional idea that a portrait can convey the essence or psychology of its subject. At this enlarged scale, Ruff's photographs expose the subject to an extra level of scrutiny as the smallest details become highly visible.

At the same time, Ruff's portraits are also reminiscent of official passport photos. In this respect, they are shadowed by the fact that governments use a similarly standardized approach to record, identify, and keep track of their citizens.

Larry Clark
(American, b. 1943)

Selections from *Tulsa*, 1963–71/83
Gelatin silver prints
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Herbert and Lenore Schorr,
1983.110.5, 12, 16; and 2002.85.2–3, 8, 12,
16–17, 20, 26, 30

In 1971, Larry Clark published a series of photographs in a book titled *Tulsa* that recorded the "outlaw life" of teenagers in Middle America. Depicting drug use, sex, and guns, the book was controversial at the time, but Clark's photographs neither clearly celebrate nor criticize the activities he records.

Clark knew the setting well. In the book's introduction he writes, "I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1943. When I was sixteen, I started shooting amphetamine. I shot with my friends every day for three years and then left town, but I've gone back through the years. Once the needle goes in it never comes out."

Andres Serrano
(American, b. 1950)

Nomads (Payne), 1990
Silver dye-bleach print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift from The Howard
and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.60

In his stylized portraits of homeless men and women, Andres Serrano portrayed individuals from a marginalized group in a manner more common to fashion magazines and advertising. Inspired by Edward Curtis's portraits of Native Americans on location at the turn of the twentieth century, Serrano set up a temporary portrait studio in the subway stations where he met his subjects.

"I didn't ask my sitters to look dignified or noble," he says. "The most I ever asked them was to look left or right. But I found that they gave me a very heroic response. I didn't add anything to what they already possess. I just provided the lighting."

Andres Serrano
(American, b. 1950)

Untitled (Knifed to Death I and II), 1992
Silver dye-bleach prints
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, restricted gift of Carol and
Douglas Cohen, Lynn and Allen Turner,
Ruth Horwich, H. Gael Neeson and
Stefan T. Edlis, and Gerald S. Elliott by
exchange, 1996.4

Andres Serrano's provocative photographs of dead bodies demand that you look closely at the corpse, even marvel at it, breaking a cultural taboo that assumes death is better kept out of sight.

In the morgue, bodies are brought in to be identified or claimed, but the dead are also temporarily stored, autopsied, or examined, as suggested here by the fingerprinted hands. Serrano plays on the idea of bodies being treated like objects by focusing on and enlarging certain details; you don't learn much about this person, but you can stare at his wounds.

Hal Fischer
(American, b. 1950)

Gay Semiotics, 1977/2014
Carbon pigment prints in handmade case with denim covering
Selections from set of 24 photographs
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Albert A. Robin by exchange, 2015.12.1–28

Hal Fischer's *Gay Semiotics* documents the street fashion of the gay community in San Francisco in the 1970s and catalogues the visual codes used by its members. Inspired by semiotics—the study of signs and symbols—Fisher added text to the photographs to label the key details.

Mimicking the systematic documentation and interpretation of a subculture, Fischer produced a tongue-in-cheek anthropological photo-essay. When he created this work thirty-nine years ago, it was a strong statement affirming his community.

Sharon Lockhart
(American, b. 1964)

Enrique Nava Enedina: Oaxacan Exhibit Hall, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 1999
Chromogenic development prints
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of George and Lori Bucciero, 1999.53.a–c

This triptych depicts a masonry worker as he repairs the tile floor of a museum in Mexico City. He is visible to any passerby but is enclosed by a glass barrier, appearing on display like the anthropological artifacts in the background. By presenting a sequence, rather than a single photograph, Sharon Lockhart's work hints at the time passing as the man works.

Lockhart's title acknowledges the man by name—Enrique Nava Enedina—urging the viewer to recognize him as an individual. Enedina looks out at the camera, a knowing participant in the making of these images; he is aware of being seen and returns the gaze.

Carrie Mae Weems
(American, b. 1953)

Ebo Landing from the *Sea Islands* series, 1992
Gelatin silver prints and text panel
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift from The Howard
and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.67.a–c

Carrie Mae Weems's photographs of a tranquil marsh and windblown trees reveal little of the location's significance or history. In the absence of visible traces, a separate text tells a story of slaves being brought ashore on this island in South Carolina and their final act of resistance.

Ebo Landing is part of a larger photographic series that the artist made after visiting the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina. These works stem from her search for the Gullah communities founded there by descendants of slaves from the rice-growing regions on the western coast of Africa.

Rineke Dijkstra
(Dutch, b. 1959)

Hel, Poland, August 12, 1998, 1998
Chromogenic development print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift from The Howard
and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.19

Rineke Dijkstra's portraits on the beach, like this one, are the record of the photographer's public encounters with young strangers. The girl depicted here seems at once vulnerable and confident as she poses for the artist.

Dijkstra's portraits reimagine a long-established practice of a photographer using the camera to catalogue different "types" of people. Dijkstra isn't interested in traditional categories, however, such as profession or ethnicity; instead she seeks out a common but more indefinite type: people in moments of transition, such as children on the cusp of adulthood.

Cindy Sherman
(American, b. 1954)

Untitled Film Still #9, 1978
Untitled Film Still #14, 1978
Untitled Film Still #29, 1979
Untitled Film Still #49, 1979
Gelatin silver prints
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Lannan Foundation, 1997.53–56

In her series *Untitled Film Stills*, Cindy Sherman played the role of various women—all modeled after common female characters in various movies, including film noir, melodramas, and art house films. Although Sherman appears in each photograph, they represent clichés or stereotypes come to life, not specific characters or the artist herself. More broadly, Sherman's photographs can be read as meditations on what it means to be seen, and the potential power of putting one's self in front of the camera and setting the terms.

Cindy Sherman
(American, b. 1954)

Untitled #153, 1985
Chromogenic development print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Gerald S. Elliott by
exchange, 1985.41

In this photograph, Cindy Sherman confronts viewers with an uncomfortable image of a woman lying in the dirt, recasting the viewer as the observer of a possible accident or violent crime.

Sherman steps in front of the camera to play the central role, as she did in her *Untitled Film Stills* (also on view). The subject, similarly, is presented as an anonymous woman, and not the artist herself.

Sophie Calle
(French, b. 1953)

The Striptease, 1988
Gelatin silver print and text
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift from The Howard
and Donna Stone Collection, 2002.15.a–b

In the photograph here, Sophie Calle places herself in center view, depicting her activities as a stripper at a club in Paris. As Calle later recalled, she began stripping as a self-imposed test: "I realized I feared being psychologically destroyed by the look of others. But why did I think it OK to be a nude model for artists?"

The framed text, however, introduces a different narrative, one that potentially changes how the photograph is perceived. Collapsing past and present, the paragraph describes a formative childhood experience, but it's not clear whether or not it reflects Calle's own biography.

Collier Schorr
(American, b. 1963)

Where are you Going?, 2013
Pigment print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Mary and
Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2014.39

This photograph by Collier Schorr portrays the performance artist boychild in a self-possessed pose. The portrait was first shown in *Eight Women*, an exhibition of Schorr's images of performers and models—subjects, the artist said, who "travel between being the object of desire and the enforcer of an identity crafted in that very moment."

"For queer and trans artists," theorist David Getsy observes, "to choose to be visible is a political act." boychild has said, "I think my physicality—my trans body form—is intrinsic to my art form. People are always drawn to my inherent androgyny." While noting the complexity of this kind of encounter between performer and viewer, she says her performances are "fundamentally about connecting with other people."

Jason Lazarus
(American, b. 1975)

Standing at the Grave of Emmett Till, day of exhumation, June 1st, 2005 (Alsip, IL), 2005
Archival ink-jet print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, restricted gift of Emerge, Aviva Samet and James Matanky, and anonymous donors, in memory of Andree Stone, 2012.18

In 1955, Emmett Till, an African American teenager, was brutally killed by two white men in Mississippi. Till's mother demanded a public funeral in Chicago, giving up her own privacy in mourning so that the world could see what had been done to her son. As poet and essayist Claudia Rankine has noted, "she made a decision that would create a new pathway for how to think about a lynched body. She requested an open coffin and allowed photographs to be taken and published of her dead son's disfigured body."

Till's killers were acquitted later in 1955, partially because the mutilated body couldn't be easily identified. In 2004, nearly fifty years later, the US Justice Department reopened the case. Jason Lazarus's photograph depicts the nondescript grave on the day Till's body was exhumed and given a proper autopsy.

LaToya Ruby Frazier
(American, b. 1982)

Home Body Series: Wrapped In Gramps' Blanket, In Grandma Ruby's Velour Bottoms, In Gramps' Pajamas, Covered In Gramps' Blanket, 2010
Gelatin silver prints mounted on cardboard in wooden frame
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2013.26.a–d

LaToya Ruby Frazier's photographs of her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania—a once prosperous steel town—blur the lines between social documentary photography and psychological portraiture. Frazier has often collaborated with her family, photographing her mother or her Grandma Ruby. "Between our three generations," she writes, "we not only witnessed, we experienced and internalized the end of industrialization and rise of deindustrialization."

In the *Home Body Series*, made after her grandmother's death in 2009, Frazier took a different approach to the idea of being a witness to the history of her family and hometown. Here she stepped in front of the camera in the now-empty apartment where her grandparents lived, and wore their clothes or draped herself in their blankets.

David Hockney
(British, b. 1937)

Gregory loading his camera, 1983
Photographic collage on paper
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Paul and Dedrea Gray, 1993.18

To produce this single photographic portrait, David Hockney combined dozens of 35 mm prints. To overcome a photograph's fixed point of view and reductive act of framing, he creates a more "complete" depiction of his subject by merging multiple viewpoints. In this case, Hockney's subject is loading a camera, preparing to make his own photographs.

Best known as a painter, Hockney spent part of the 1980s exploring this collage-based approach to photography. His method implicitly questions the reliability of singular photographs, which can seem like transparent recordings of the world and self-contained excerpts of reality.

Anne Collier
(American, b. 1970)

Negative (California), 2013
Chromogenic development print
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, gift of Marshall Field's by
exchange, 2014.11

Negative (California) began with a smaller photograph the artist bought on eBay. Anne Collier enlarged the found image to a monumental size and inverted the picture to give it the ghostly appearance of a film negative. These basic transformations produce a critical distance from the original photographic act: a nude woman walking into the ocean as someone with a camera looks on.

Collier's work is attuned to representations of women in the history of photography and to the related dynamics of looking. Some of her works, like this one, scrutinize existing photographs, drawing out an implicit male gaze. In other works, she rephotographs advertisements and film stills that depict women behind the camera—a crucial reversal of who's looking at whom.

Alfredo Jaar
(Chilean, b. 1956)

The Sound of Silence, 2006
Wood, metal, fluorescent tubes, LED lights, video projection, flash lights, and tripods, with software designed by Ravi Rajan
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, purchased jointly by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, with funds provided by the Pritzker Traubert Visionary Art Acquisition Fund and the Susan Devine Camilli Foundation, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, through the Committee on Modern and Contemporary Art, and with funds contributed by an anonymous donor, 2014.33

Alfredo Jaar's installation *The Sound of Silence* centers on the story of Kevin Carter, a photojournalist who won the Pulitzer Prize for a photograph he took of a child in Sudan. Jaar's work shifts attention away from the photograph itself to what happened before and after, drawing out the human implications and ethical concerns of taking a photograph like this.

Instead of displaying an image that can be viewed and absorbed quickly, the installation creates an enclosed environment in which a narrative unfolds gradually.